

## ON THE COMMON GOODS

Indeed, everyday life forces us almost constantly to consider the manner in which we act toward others. However, it seems that our attention is brought to the political common good only in extraordinary times. It is more remote from our experience and less available for reflection. Second, in relation to friendship the common good is much more complex. It involves numerous aspects of human relations, of which friendship is just one. A consideration of the common good would seem to include necessarily considerations of justice, law, obligation, authority, economics, etc. Third, in moral philosophy ethics precedes politics, as the more known precedes the less known. But the study of friendship belongs to ethics. Therefore, it would seem to be more easily grasped than the common good.

Thus, I suggest that a consideration of friendship can serve in a similar way that the consideration of a living body does in elucidating the nature of the common good. For, as the relation between an organic whole to its parts illustrates how the good of the whole is the good of each part, so also friendship illustrates how coordination of virtuous lives is an ultimate end of human life. But I will leave this as only a suggestion, having established, I hope, that there is a need for an aid in understanding the political common good and that such an aid is readily found in the works of Aristotle and St. Thomas.

## THE SIN OF MOSES

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As we follow the Exodus of the Israelite nation out of the slavery of Egypt into the land of Promise, a land flowing with milk and honey, we are not surprised to find God losing patience with them. Their complaints begin almost from the beginning. They complain against Moses when Pharaoh increases their burdens after Moses' request that he (Pharaoh) let the Lord's people go. (Ex. 5:21) They complain when they see the Red Sea before them and the Egyptian chariots behind them. (Ex. 14:11-12) They complain that they have no food (Ex. 16:3), they complain that they have no water (Ex. 17:3), they complain that they are sick of the food God does give them (Num. 11:4-6), they complain that the inhabitants of the Promised Land are too great for them to overcome (Num. 14:1-4), they complain that Moses is too long on the mountain. . . . (Ex. 32:1) And we see in several places that God's patience is wearing out. He resolves, so he says to Moses on Mount Horeb, to wipe out this stiff-necked people (Ex. 32:7-10). But apparently out of love for Moses, he relents. Moses intercedes for the people of Israel, and stays the wrathful hand of the Lord. (Ex. 32:11-14).

Just as it is clear that the Israelites are wearisome to the Lord, so it is clear that He has a special love for Moses. This is manifested not only in the miracles that He performs through

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Moses, but in his defense of Moses against the rebellions of Miriam and Aaron, and of Korah, even inflicting upon the latter a punishment that seems to be of Moses' own choosing. (Num. 16) The depth of His love is revealed in more intimate moments such as when He tells Moses His name, which he had not done for even Abraham (Ex. 6:3). And God says to him, "You have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." (Ex. 33:17) This intimacy leads Moses to ask God to show him His glory. Though He cannot show Moses the fullness of his glory ("man shall not see my face and live," Ex. 33:20), yet he shows Himself to the extent that Moses' unglorified human nature can bear.<sup>1</sup> And, what is in a way more surprising, He opens his thoughts to Moses, and is influenced by him in a way that is very like what happens between two close friends: He speaks to Moses face to face, as to a friend.<sup>2</sup> (Ex. 33:11)

Given all this, it would not have been surprising if God had not allowed the Israelites to enter Canaan. It is not surprising that he did not let the generation that departed Egypt from entering. In fact, if we did not know that he possessed a divine patience, it would have been shocking, in a way, that He let any of them enter. But it is shocking that He does forbid en-

<sup>1</sup> "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand upon the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen." (Ex. 33:21-23) All biblical translations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from *The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*, San Francisco, 1966.

<sup>2</sup> This is brought out beautifully in his rebuke of Miriam and Aaron: "If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in vision, I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house. With him *I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in dark speech; and he beholds the form of the LORD*. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" (Num. 12:6-8, emphasis added)

trance to Moses, the one man who has been constant to Him throughout the forty years of wandering, even when, at the very end of his life he asks rather pathetically to be allowed to enter. (Deut. 3:23-26)

This exclusion is, we know, a punishment for sin. Near the end of their sojourn in the desert, the people again complained that they have no water; God commanded Moses to bring forth water from a rock, as he had done earlier, and he did so. But afterwards, God accosted him with the name rebel, and punished him by not allowing him to enter the Promised Land. That Moses has sinned we know by divine authority, that it is rebellion we know from the same source. Exactly how he has rebelled, however, is not so clear.

Let us take a look at the passage in which this event is related:

Now there was no water for the congregation; and they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. And the people contended with Moses, and said, "Would that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! Why have you brought the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we and our cattle? And why have you made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is no place for grain, or figs, or vines, or pomegranates; and there is no water to drink." Then Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tent of meeting, and fell on their faces. And the glory of the LORD appeared to them, and the LORD said to Moses, "Take the rod, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water; so you shall bring water out of the rock for them; so you shall give drink to the congregation and their cattle." And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him.

And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?" And

Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his rod twice; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their cattle. (Num. 20:2-11)

Now, if we stop here, there is nothing particularly remarkable. It follows a motif we have seen repeatedly throughout the Exodus: the people complain, Moses goes to God, God relieves the people. And many of the details here are the same as in the similar miracle at the beginning of the Exodus. (ch. 17) In fact, the place receives the same name as the earlier place: Meribah, or Contention. In spite of these similarities, however, we are confronted in the very next verse with this pronouncement of the Lord: "Because you did not believe in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." (Num. 20:12) Moses, then, did not believe in God. His sin is further elaborated for us a little later when it comes time for Aaron, who has been implicated in Moses' sin, to die: "Aaron shall be gathered to his people; for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the people of Israel, because you rebelled against my command at the waters of Meribah." (Num. 20:24)

How, then, has Moses rebelled? Here are a couple of answers to this. The first is that the sin was a sin against faith. This is supported by God's own words "Because you did not believe in Me", and then again by Moses striking the rock twice. This interpretation explains Moses' actions thus: he strikes the rock once, expecting the water to come forth, but it does not; then, faltering in his faith, strikes it again, as if saying to God, You said you would give water, why have you not? The other suggestion is that Moses (and Aaron) have decided that they are going to use this as an opportunity to raise themselves to the status of demigods in the eyes of the Israelites, or at least in some way make themselves authors of the miracle. This arises from the question that Moses asks before striking the rock: Shall we [not God] bring forth water for you? And from the fact that though God has told Moses

to speak to the rock, he uses his staff, which he thinks has come to be seen as a sign of *his* own power. Now, neither of these are wholly unreasonable, and each contains, I think, something of the truth, but, to my mind, they are both open to one fundamental objection: Moses just wouldn't do that!

Let us first consider the position that Moses waivers in his faith that God will provide for the Israelites as He has said he would. This episode occurs near the end of the Exodus, and so for close to forty years Moses has been conversing with God face to face, as he has with no other man, even, apparently Noah and Abraham. During that time, Moses has had repeated experience of God providing for the Israelites in miraculous ways. He has seen him inflict plagues upon the Egyptians, send them food from heaven which is unlike any earthly food (manna, i.e., what is it?). He has kept the peoples' shoes and clothing from wearing out during their trek in the desert. Not once has He failed them. Moses' intimacy with God is such that his skin continually glows, such that he wears a veil over his face except when he is before the Lord or relating His commands to Israel. (Ex. 34:29-35) Now, as they are approaching the end of their journey, is Moses going to lose his faith in God? God has told Moses that He will bring forth water from the rock. Is it really possible for Moses to doubt that He will?

Could Moses have decided to use this opportunity to claim for himself what is due to God, namely credit for bringing forth water to save the people? If this were so, it would require the sudden appearance of an appetite for glory that, though human enough, seems to be utterly lacking in Moses. When God calls him to be his instrument in leading the Israelites from Egypt, Moses tries repeatedly to convince God that He would be better off with someone else. (Ex. 3:11-4:17) Four times he asked to be excused, and it is only when God gets angry, and gives him Aaron as his mouthpiece, that he relents.

It is interesting also, and one who is supporting the position we are opposing would probably point out, that God also says

to him that he will be as God to Aaron. This is an important point, but it seems the intent of the passage to ascribe Moses' assent to God's anger, not to an appetite for glory. This comes out more clearly a little later when, after the first failure with Pharaoh, Moses again tries to get out of the job. When God sends him back to Pharaoh, he asks what good is to be gained by his going, since he is a man "of uncircumcised lips" (Ex. 6:12; 6:30). The use of the term 'uncircumcised' is striking, for it shows that Moses is clearly of the opinion that he is *unworthy* of the task that God is setting before him. It is again interesting that God's response to the second instance of him saying this is to say, "I make you as God to Pharaoh". (Ex. 7:1)

This humility continues even as Moses grows in the experience of being the instrument of God's power. In fact, he even finds it overwhelming and asks God to relieve his burden. God helps him by taking "some of the spirit which is upon" him and putting it upon others. (Num. 11:17) When Moses summoned seventy of the elders to receive this spirit, two did not answer, but remained in the camp. Nevertheless, the spirit came upon them, and they prophesied. Joshua informed Moses of this and exhorted him to forbid them. But Moses responded, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!" (Num. 11:29) (A prayer that will be answered after Pentecost!)

We see again his humility when Miriam and Aaron complain against him: "Has [the Lord] not spoken through us also?" (Num. 12:2) Moses does not respond; rather, it is God Himself Who intervenes, chastising them and afflicting Miriam with leprosy. When Aaron begs Moses to intercede for her, he does so at once. It is during this episode that the narrator breaks in to inform us that "the man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth." (Num. 12:3) Even in the face of the rebellion of Korah, Moses is intent on putting the Lord before all. He reminds them that it is not against him, but God that they

have gathered together (Num. 12:11), and when he is about to call down punishment upon Dathan and Abiram, his emphasis is upon the Lord. "Hereby," he says, "you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, and that it has not been of my own accord." (Num. 16:28) Thus, although Moses is aroused to anger here, it is not out of jealousy for his position, but for the Lord, that His power and leadership be acknowledged.

Moses is, then, not the man to lose faith in God, nor to try to set himself up as God. And yet, we are told that he rebelled against God by not believing in Him. If neither of these interpretations are tenable, how are we to understand the Lord's accusation? There is a part of the charge that God brings against him for which neither of the above positions is able to account. God does not simply chastise Moses for not believing in Him. He says: "Because you did not believe in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." (Num. 20:12, emphasis added) There is, stuck in the middle of this the odd infinitive: to sanctify me. How are we to read this? Now, the most natural way is to take it as an infinitive of purpose, that is to understand it to say: you did not believe in me *in order that* you might sanctify me. This, of course, is only the most natural reading as long as you don't attend to the sense! What could this mean? And that it is not a slip on God's part is clear later on, when God is about to gather Moses to his people. He takes him up upon the mountain of Abarim to see the Holy Land, and reminds him that he will not enter it "because you rebelled against my word in the wilderness of Zin during the strife of the congregation, to sanctify me at the waters before their eyes." (Num. 27:14) Here again we have this odd infinitive "to sanctify me", and the most natural reading again seems to be to take it as modifying the verb 'rebelled' by indicating purpose.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Though I do not read Hebrew, that the infinitive is so intended is corroborated by the translation of the LXX, which uses an infinitive of

Robert Alter, in his commentary on this text remarks on the “loose syntax” of the sentence, and then tries to understand it as modifying “my word”:

The sense of the somewhat loose syntax of this sentence is: My instruction, against which you rebelled, was to sanctify Me through the water (that is, by making manifest that it was I bringing forth water from the rock rather than claiming the deed for yourself and Aaron as you struck the rock).<sup>4</sup>

This reading is taking the infinitive in apposition to “my word”, but understanding it to express the purpose of the word rather than the word itself, which was to speak to the rock to bring water forth from it. Now, the reason for calling the syntax ‘loose’ is because of the difficulty in understanding the infinitive to modify the word rebelled. Also, his reading is based on the interpretation of the sin as an attempt to claim for himself (Moses) credit for what God has done, an attempt to usurp God’s glory.<sup>5</sup> If one is not guided by that thought, it does seem to me that one would be inclined at first sight to take it as modifying ‘rebelled’.

Still, how are we able to understand Moses’ actions as rebellion, and moreover, how could that rebellion have as its end the sanctification of the Lord? If we look a little closer at the details surrounding the story, perhaps it will come to light.

It is because the Israelites find themselves again without water in the desert that they are again complaining, and it is against Aaron and Moses, not God, that they direct their complaints: “Would that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! Why have *you* brought the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we

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purpose, like the English, and the Latin of the Vulgate, which uses a purpose clause. Both of these translations, moreover, make it clear that Moses is the subject of the infinitive and God the object.

<sup>4</sup> *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary*, New York, 2004, p. 829

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 783.

and our cattle? And why have *you* made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place?” (Num. 20:4–5, emphasis added) Of course, this is nothing new. Their complaint was similar in the earlier episode at Horeb at the beginning of the Exodus: “the people found fault with Moses, and said, ‘Give us water to drink.’ And Moses said to them, ‘Why do you find fault with me? Why do you put the LORD to the proof?’ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people murmured against Moses, and said, ‘Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?’” (Ex. 17:2–3) Just as before, Moses turns to God to ask His help, and he is again told to bring forth water from the rock. However, this time Moses speaks to the Israelites before turning to the rock, and his words are not very kind: “Hear now, you rebels”. He has not spoken thus to them before, calling them rebels, and it is particularly ironic given that Moses’ actions here will bring down the same charge upon him. This is followed by the question, “Shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?” Those who see Moses’ sin as claiming credit for the miracle see in this question a boast, but if it is spoken with a different intonation, it could just as well be read as a disavowal of that credit: shall *we* bring forth water . . . with the clear intent to convey the idea that they cannot.<sup>6</sup> Is there reason to think that this is how he said it?

Between the two productions of water, there are a few episodes that shed light on Moses’ words. The first is the worship of the golden calf, which comes about during Moses’ absence on Mount Horeb. Then there is the construction of the tabernacle and the subsequent journey toward the promised land, the rebellion of Miriam and Aaron, the failure to enter the promised land, the rebellion of Korah. And before Miriam and Aaron contest Moses’ leadership, there is Moses’ request of the Lord to raise up helpers to him (which we have men-

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<sup>6</sup> This interpretation is confirmed by the translations of both the LXX and the Vulgate, which introduce the question with particles that show Moses is expecting, or wanting, a negative reply.

tioned earlier). If we ask ourselves what we can glean from these events, how things stand between Moses and Israel at the time of his sin, it is that Moses stands as God to them. Recall that God Himself had said that Moses would stand as God to Aaron and then again to Pharaoh. It seems that He intends this toward the Israelite nation as well. The worship of the golden calf shows, among other things, that the Israelites feel the need to have something divine and yet visible before them. It seems that the Lord recognizes this and so gives Moses a rather divine appearance. It is after his return from Sinai with the second set of tablets of the Law, that his skin began to glow. This clearly gave him a rather divine aspect: recall the brilliant appearance of Christ at the transfiguration. The veil also likens Moses to the Holy of Holies, which is separated from the people by a veil, and only approached once a year by the high priest.

The connection between Moses and the divine becomes more pronounced after the construction of the tabernacle and the tent of meeting. Moses is then seen entering to converse with God and returning with face unveiled and brilliant to speak the words of the Lord to the people.

Moses seems to recognize that God is setting him up as God to the people, for when Moses goes to God and complains that his burden is too heavy, he says: "And why have I not found favor in thy sight, that thou dost lay the burden of all this people upon me? Did I conceive all this people? Did I bring them forth, that thou shouldst say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries the sucking child,' to the land which thou didst swear to give their fathers?" (Num. 11:11-12) Considering the way in which this people arose, springing from a couple old and sterile and beyond the hope of conceiving a child, it is only God who can be said to have done this. God acknowledges this when He has Moses, in his dealings with Pharaoh, speak of Israel as His first-born (Ex. 4:22). Thus Moses' complaint can be understood as him saying that being as God to this people is too great a burden for him.

What follows upon this complaint is first the distribution of the spirit of Moses, which would seem to help make Moses less of the focal point for divine favors. But then a series of challenges to Moses' leadership arise, first from Miriam and Aaron (Num. 12), then from the people as a whole (except for Joshua and Caleb; this occurs after they have spied out the land of Canaan and their hearts fail; they say among themselves: let us choose another captain to lead us back to Egypt, Num. 14:4), and finally by Korah and his followers (Num. 16). Each of these is met with punishment from God. First, Miriam's leprosy, which is healed through Moses' prayer. Then the spies were struck with a plague and the army suffered defeat, as Moses had warned them. When it became Korah's turn, the Lord created something new. At Moses' word, the earth opened and swallowed the rebels, who went alive into Sheol. The people complained yet again that *Moses* has caused this to happen, bringing a plague upon themselves, which is only stopped, after the death of fourteen thousand of them, by Moses commanding Aaron to carry incense into their midst. He stood between the dead and the living and so stopped the plague. The intent was certainly to establish Moses as the undisputed leader of Israel, but it did so by giving the impression that Moses himself was able to effect these wonders. Hence, there is reason for Moses to fear that he is not only standing as God to Israel, but is in fact coming to be viewed as actually a god to Israel.

If this is so, then the exchange between God and Moses, when he asks a second time for water for the people, takes on an interesting light. When the people had clamored for water at the beginning of the Exodus, God told Moses to take the rod with which he had performed all the wonders against Egypt and strike the rock at Horeb. He (God) would then bring forth water from the rock. And so it happened. In this instance, however, God alters the plan somewhat. He tells Moses to take the rod and assemble the people, but instead of striking it, Moses is to "tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water". (Num. 20:8) One might wonder why God

tells him to take his rod, but then does not tell him to strike the rock with it, but rather to speak to it. Perhaps he is to take it simply as a sign of his authority; but perhaps it is also a test.

If Moses is concerned about the people regarding him as a God, then the Lord's command to Moses would only aggravate that fear. Note how he is to do it: to simply speak to the rock and have it bring forth the water. One cannot help but to think back to the beginning of Genesis, when God said let there be light, and there was light! In other words, if God had wanted to make it look like Moses was God, he could not have chosen a better way! As long as Moses was using the rod, one could think that the power was in the rod, put there by God, and so the power Moses used was not his own, but if his very words could bring water from the rock, then it appears even more that the power, a clearly divine power, is his own. Think of the centurion in the Gospel, who in recognizing the divine power in Christ says to him, "only speak the word". One can imagine that if Moses was concerned about the people having the impression that he was a god, as he was assembling the people, this would look less and less like a good plan.

But because the Lord had commanded him to take the rod, he found himself with the means to correct this problem. Since God had told him to speak to the rock in order to bring forth the water, there was no reason to think that any would come forth by striking it. Yet the people had come to associate the rod with his power, so he could, before actually bringing forth the water, easily show them his own powerlessness by striking it and having no water come forth!

Now, assuming this to be so, we can then imagine the scene as occurring in some such way as the following. Moses has doubts about the wisdom of God's plan; he decides to add to it by using the rod he finds in his hand to show the Israelites that he is in fact no God, and then calls them together. They come and show him some adulation that is bordering on idol-

atry. Moses' jealousy for God is aroused, and so he addresses them in anger, calling them rebels—that is, accusing them of turning away from the true God. He then asks the question, do you think that *we* can bring forth water from this rock? Look! He strikes the rock, and as he expects—but contrary to the expectation of the people—no water comes forth. He then looks out upon the people as if to say, 'See, I am powerless to bring forth water.' To make this point even more emphatically, he strikes it again. This time, though, much to his horror, water does come forth. God then comes to him with punishment for his disobedience: "because you did not believe in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore, you shall not bring this assembly in the land which I have given them." Now the infinitive makes good sense: you did not believe in me, that is, you did not trust me to be leading you as I ought, and so acted other than I commanded in order to sanctify me, or to show Israel that it is I and not you that takes care of them. Because of this you shall not enter the promised land. Moses had failed the test. In other words, though Moses' intent was to sanctify the Lord in the eyes of the Israelites, he has in fact failed to do so in his own heart, and so the Lord says to him later as He is about to lead him to his death, that this punishment came to him "because you did not revere me as holy in the midst of the people of Israel." (Dt. 32:51) Compare this to the incensing of the tent by Aaron's sons, which seems to be the problem of priests taking it upon themselves to determine how God is to be worshipped (Lev. 10:1-3).

This account, I think, makes sense of the details of the story. I think that it also helps to understand a couple of details that come after it. In Deuteronomy, Moses recounts the story of the Exodus, and complains a number of times that "the Lord was angry with me *on your account*." (Dt. 1:37, 3:26, emphasis added) If this befell him because of a simple lack of faith on his part, or by him attempting to set himself up as God, then such a complaint would be ingenuous at best. If, however,

he were led into a fault by their actions toward him, then it makes sense.

Moreover, Moses really feels this punishment, and asks the Lord to allow him to enter: "I besought the Lord at that time [after the defeat of the Amorites] saying, 'O Lord God, thou hast only begun to show thy servant thy greatness and thy mighty hand; for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do such works and mighty acts as thine? Let me go over, I pray, and see the good land beyond the Jordan, that goodly hill country, and Lebanon.'" (Dt. 3:23-25) The Lord, of course, cannot grant this. Yet He does do something to satisfy this longing: He takes him to the top of a mountain and lets him gaze upon the land from afar. Then Moses dies, and God gives him the singular honor of taking him and burying him Himself in a place that no one knows. (Dt. 34:5-6) If Moses was faithless or arrogant, such honors would not be fitting—especially given the way the Lord has dealt with others guilty of similar faults. But if he was acting, at least according to intention, for God, then such acts of generosity on God's part would be quite fitting. He was in fact a rebel, but a rebel whose intent was to build up, rather than cast down that against which he rebelled.

This account of Moses' sin is, of course, tentative. It has, however, this strength in particular: it ascribes to him a sin that is compatible with a deep, though yet imperfect, love of God. Or in other words, it is a fault that seems at least allowable for someone who had reached a high degree of spiritual perfection. In fact, it could well be the very heights of perfection to which Moses had reached that allowed him to fall in this way. To see this, one may ask, why would God command Moses to do things that would give the impression that he was himself divine? The Israelites were a carnal people. That is why whenever they find themselves in hardship, their thoughts return to the fleshpots of Egypt. That is also why, I think, that after only a forty days' absence of Moses at the foot of Mount Sinai, they exhort Aaron to make for

them a god. (It may have been an awareness of this carnality that led Gideon to erect the ephod in the time of the Judges, Jdg. 8:27). Their minds and hearts are not yet capable of rising above the world of sense to the world of spirit. They do not yet have eyes to see and ears to hear. Though they are circumcised in the flesh, they are yet uncircumcised in their hearts, and so they are in need of something or someone that they can see and hear (Dt. 10:16; 29:4; 30:6). That is, they are in need of an incarnation of the divine to help them turn their hearts from the love of the carnal. God knows this, but one wonders if Moses, who does have such eyes and ears, might have forgotten this and so seen a danger of idolatry arising right where God, through Moses' own meekness, was preventing it.<sup>7</sup>

If this is so, then perhaps we can understand more determinately the nature of Moses' sin. If God were using Moses to become more 'incarnate' before Israel, to become more sensible to them, and so to give them someone that they could more faithfully follow—a sign of what He was Himself to do for them when He would send His Only-begotten Son—then Moses' rejection of God's plan here was implicitly a rejection of His plan to become Man Himself. But Christ affirms that He is the Way to eternal life, to the true promised land. Thus, in rejecting this plan of God's, Moses is rejecting the very Way by which God had ordained that we are to enter into the promised land (he was not wholly unlike, then, those who, following the spies, refused to go and take the land, and were condemned to die in the desert). Thus, like that earlier generation, of which he was a part, Moses, because he shrank from the Way into the Holy Land, was denied entrance to it. His punishment was, not surprisingly, a fitting one.

<sup>7</sup> This would also add more poignancy to Moses' prophecy that the Lord will "raise up another prophet like me from among you" (Dt. 18:15); this 'prophet' will not only be a lawgiver, but will be an incarnation of the divine—in fact, of God Himself.



## THE SIN OF MOSES

One final thought. God's habit of punishing wrongdoers is for the sake of the wrongdoer, to lead him to perfection. Is there any evidence that Moses has grown more perfect through this punishment? I cannot defend this strongly now, but it seems to me that the Book of Deuteronomy is evidence that he did. It is a book of lofty spiritual doctrine that transcends that of the 'first law' given on Sinai. It is here that we find the command to "love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Dt. 6:5); and Christ uses its teaching to turn away the temptations of the devil (Mt. 4:4-10). There is also this text, which I think shows growth in Moses. As he is recounting the Lord's watchful care of them during the Exodus, he says: "And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good *always*, that he might preserve us alive, as at this day." (Dt. 6:24, emphasis added) In his confession that the commands of the Lord were "for our good always," it seems that he is acknowledging that God is worthy of perfect love and obedience in a way that his actions earlier did not. Finally, there is Moses' appearance at the Transfiguration, together with Elijah, which may point to his bodily assumption into Heaven.<sup>8</sup> Thus, though his fault may have kept him from entering the Promised Land, the growth in love that it effected may have allowed him to enter the True Promised Land. O felix culpa!

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<sup>8</sup> This is also suggested by the text in the Letter of Jude (1:9), which alludes to a fight over the body of Moses between St. Michael and Satan. If the victor, St. Michael, were to return to heaven with it, which would explain why no one knows where Moses was buried, it would presumably be reunited with his soul.

## THE BEAUTY OF REASONING: CONSIDERATIONS ON BOOK V OF EUCLID'S *ELEMENTS*

*Christopher O. Blum*

"What an exercise in logical precision it is," said John Henry Newman, "to understand and enunciate the proof of any of the more difficult propositions in Euclid."<sup>1</sup> Newman knew from first-hand experience the high value of the study of Euclid's *Elements of Geometry*. When he first arrived at Oxford, in the fall of 1817, he found himself faced with a demanding mathematics tutor who quizzed him about his preparation. "I believe, Sir, you never saw Euclid before?" Newman replied that he had "been over five books," but added "I could not say I knew them *perfect* by any means." The skeptical tutor asked Newman "what a point was, and what a line, and what a plane angle," and upon the student's correct answers, told him he should come "with the other gentlemen at 10 o'clock with the 4th, 5th, and 6th Books." "And today," Newman triumphantly told his mother, "after I had demonstrated a tough one out of the 5th Book, he told me I had done it very correctly." Indeed, Newman became so confident in his mastery of the material that when given a choice of texts on which to be examined at the end of the term, he picked "the 5th Book of Euclid, the hardest book of Euclid . . . the

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<sup>1</sup> John Henry Newman, "Discipline of Mind," in *The Idea of a University*, ed. Martin J. Svaglic (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 378.