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IN DEFENCE OF NEO-SCHOLASTIC ETHICS

A CRITIQUE OF FINNIS AND GRIZEZ’S NEW NATURAL LAW THEORY

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities

2015

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THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES/PHILOSOPHY
# Table of Contents

## 0 Introduction

0.1 Statement of Thesis  
0.2 Thesis Structure  

## 1 Finnis and Grisez’s Account of the Natural Law

1.1 Introduction  
1.2 The Origin of New Natural Law Theory and Its Principal Claims  
1.3 The Specific Method of Knowing the Basic Goods  
1.4 What Are the Basic Goods?  
1.5 Knowledge of the Basic Goods Comes from Inclination not Intuition  
1.6 The Nature of the First Principle of Practical Reason  
1.7 The First Principle of Morality and Its Necessity  
1.8 What Is the First Principle of Morality and the Modes of Responsibility?  
1.9 The Ideal of Integral Human Fulfilment  
1.10 The Incommensurability of the Basic Goods  
1.11 The Criterion of Morally Good Acts  
1.12 Conclusion  

## 2 The Basic Goods and Their Hierarchy

2.1 Introduction  
2.2 The Incommensurability of the Basic Goods: Finnis and Grisez’s General Argument  
2.2.1 The Dethronement of Happiness as Man’s Ultimate End  
2.2.2 Commitments, ‘Life-Plans’, and Person-Relative Hierarchies
2.2.3 Two Motivations for Holding the Basic Goods as Incommensurable

2.3 Incommensurability and Comparability of Value

2.3.1 A Problem for Finnis and Grisez

2.4 Goodness-for-Man: The Covering Consideration for Comparisons of Relative Value amongst the Basic Goods

2.5 Finnis and Grisez’s Objection Restated

2.5.1 Weak and Strong Ultimate Ends: A Distinction

2.5.2 Monolithic and Aggregate Conceptions of the Ultimate End: A Further Distinction

2.5.3 Does Aquinas Hold an Aggregate Conception of Happiness?

2.5.4 Aquinas’s Account of Weak Ultimate Ends

2.5.5 Aquinas’s Account of Strong Ultimate Ends

2.5.6 Two Clarifications: ‘Rational Desires’ and ‘Constituent Parts’

2.5.7 ‘Constituent Parts’

2.5.8 ‘The basic goods cannot be sought for the sake of happiness’: A Response

2.6 Aquinas’s Conception of Happiness: Its Essence and Properties

2.7 Conclusion

3 The Connatural Knowledge of the First Principles of Practical Reason

3.1 Introduction

3.2 ‘Inclinationism’ and ‘Derivationism’: A Distinction

3.2.1 Finnis and Grisez’s Three Objections to Derivationism

3.2.2 Derivationism is a Misinterpretation of Aquinas

3.2.3 Derivationist Accounts of the Natural Law Violate the Fact-Value Distinction

3.3 Inclinationism or Derivationism: A False Dilemma?

3.3.1 Maritain’s Notion of ‘Connatural’ Knowledge

3.3.2 Maritain’s Notion of ‘After-Knowledge’

3.3.3 Does Maritain’s Account of Connatural Knowledge Comport with Aquinas’s?

3.4 Connatural Knowledge: The Problem Stated
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.4.1 The Nature of Connaturality</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.2 Maritain’s Understanding of Connaturality</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.3 Aquinas and Knowledge through Natural Inclinations</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 The First Principles of Practical Reason: Their Logical Character</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.1 Self-Evidence</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Aquinas’s Epistemology of Essences</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.1 Aquinas’s Doctrine of Abstraction</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.2 Abstraction as a Rational Process</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.3 Knowledge of Natures</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.4 Sensible Singulars</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 The Estimative or Cogitative Power</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7.1 The Estimative Power: Its Role in Perception</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8 The Apprehension of the Goodness of the Basic Goods</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8.1 The Apprehension of the First Principles of Practical Reason: An Explanation</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8.2 Perceiving Evaluative Qualities</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8.3 The Experience of Our Natural Inclinations as the Occasion of Moral Perception</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8.4 Are the Basic Goods Ends That Befit Man?</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8.5 Knowledge of the Basic Goods is Connatural</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9 Conclusion</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 After-Knowledge of the First Principles of Practical Reason</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Introduction</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 The Gnoseological and Ontological Elements of the Natural Law</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Two Modes of Demonstration</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.1 Quia and Propter Quid Demonstrations</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.2 Quia and Propter Quid Demonstration: Two Examples</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.3 The Relationship between Quia and Propter Quid Demonstrations as the Basis of Subalternation</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 The First Principles of Practical Reason and Their Manner of</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.5 The Role of Functional Concepts in Aquinas’s Account of the Natural Law
5.5.1 Functional Concepts Explain What a Good Instance of a Kind Will Do
5.6 Conclusion

6 An Aristotelian Account of Functions
6.1 Introduction
6.2 Aquinas’s Account of Final Causation
6.2.1 What Is the Doctrine of Final Causation?
6.2.2 Final Causes Explain the Causality of Efficient Causes
6.2.3 Characteristic Powers
6.2.4 Characteristic Powers and Operations as Functions
6.2.5 Two Types of Function: ‘Weak’ and ‘Strong’
6.2.6 Aquinas’s Account of Self-Movement
6.2.7 The Scholastic Distinction Between Immanent and Transient Causation
6.2.8 Strong Functions
6.3 Bedau’s Analysis of (Strong) Functions
6.3.1 An Objection: Bedau’s Analysis of Functions Excludes the Possibility of Malfunctions
6.3.2 Bedau’s Analysis Further Reformulated
6.3.3 The Ascription of a Function Has Normative and Evaluative Elements
6.4 Conclusion

7 Conclusion
Bibliography

79,229 Words
Abbreviations

DA. Sententia super De Anima (Commentary on Aristotle’s De Anima)

PA. Sententia super Posteriora Analytica (Commentary on the Posterior Analytics of Aristotle)

SM. Sententia super Metaphysicam (Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics)

S.T. Summa Theologica
Abstract

The University of Manchester, Anthony Paul Wheatley, For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, *In Defence of Neo-Scholastic Ethics: A Critique of Finnis and Grisez’s New Natural Law Theory*, 2015

In a major contribution to Neo-Aristotelian ethics, John Finnis and Germain Grisez have argued that foundational moral principles – or ‘the first principles of practical reason’ – are self-evident and cannot be derived from facts about human nature. This claim sets Finnis and Grisez against the older, Neo-Scholastic interpretation of natural law theory, which states that fundamental moral truths can be derived from an Aristotelian philosophy of nature. More significantly, Finnis and Grisez have claimed that Aquinas accepted a version of the fact-value distinction and the impossibility of deriving normative conclusions from theoretical or factual premises later defended by Hume.

In this thesis, I argue to the contrary that the first principles of practical reason are grounded in truths of natural philosophy. Furthermore, I argue that, for Aquinas, morally significant truths can indeed be derived from a consideration of man’s faculties and their proper functioning. I also argue that, *pace* Finnis and Grisez, a Neo-Scholastic hierarchy of the basic goods is not incompatible with their incommensurability. It is my contention, then, that Finnis and Grisez’s new natural law theory constitutes a misinterpretation of Aquinas’s moral philosophy and the relationship between theoretical and practical reason in Aristotelian philosophy.

I argue that the first principles of practical reason are self-evident, but show that such self-evident truths are, for Aquinas, more akin to *a posteriori* necessary truths. Our grasp of a self-evident truth, then, will depend upon our prior grasp of the nature to which the self-evident truth refers. I then argue that, according to Aquinas, metaphysics and natural philosophy provide explanatory justifications for the first principles of practical reason. The Aristotelian will ground these first principles by reference to an Aristotelian philosophy of nature. I argue that, *pace* Finnis and Grisez, Aquinas holds that we can derive significant moral truths from facts about our faculties and about human nature in general.

I argue that Hume’s *no-is-from-ought* principle is not a general law of logic, which is applicable to any attempt to derive a normative conclusion from factual premises. Instead, I argue that it is licit to derive a normative conclusion from truths employing functional concepts. However, I also argue that functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals can tell us only what an instance of its kind must do if it is to count as a good instance. They cannot tell us whether we have reason to be a good instance of our kind. To answer that question, we must grasp that being a good human being is a means to acquiring the basic goods. Finally, I argue that the concept of a function has normative and evaluative dimensions. This view of functions is incompatible with Finnis and Grisez’s understanding of theoretical reason, according to which, theoretical reason is concerned with ‘bare facts’, where ‘bare facts’ are taken to exclude all normative and evaluative elements. I contend, then, that Finnis and Grisez err by assuming that all facts must, by their nature, exclude normative and evaluative elements.
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To my mother and father
0.1 Statement of Thesis

In a major contribution to Neo-Aristotelian ethics, John Finnis and Germain Grisez have argued that foundational moral principles – or the first principles of practical reason, to use the Thomistic terminology – are self-evident and cannot be derived from facts about human nature. This claim sets Finnis and Grisez against the older, Neo-Scholastic interpretation of natural law theory, which states that fundamental moral truths can be derived from an Aristotelian philosophy of nature. Finnis and Grisez claim that this Neo-Scholastic interpretation of natural law theory has its origins in the moral philosophy of Suarez, Vazquez, and the Baroque Scholastics rather than in the moral philosophy of Aquinas. Moreover, and more significant in terms of theory, Finnis and Grisez claim that the Aristotelian distinction between theoretical and practical reason mirrors the Humean distinction between fact and value. Hence, they hold that Aquinas accepted the impossibility of deriving normative conclusions from theoretical or factual premises. However, the exact logical relationship between truths of practical reason and truths of theoretical reason has remained unclear in Finnis and Grisez’s account of the natural law.

It is my thesis that the first principles of practical reason can be grounded in truths of natural philosophy. Moreover, this is the view that Aquinas defends. According to Aquinas, the truth of these first principles is explained and justified by truths concerning human nature. Furthermore, I contend that, for Aquinas, morally significant truths can indeed be derived from a consideration of man’s faculties and their proper functioning. This latter claim is incompatible with Finnis and Grisez’s
contention that Aquinas rejected the possibility of any such derivation, since in accepting a distinction between theoretical and practical reason, Aquinas was, in effect, accepting the distinction between fact and value later defended by Hume.

In what follows, I contend that Finnis and Grisez’s new natural law theory is mistaken as an interpretation of Aquinas’s moral philosophy and the relationship between theoretical and practical reason in Aristotelian philosophy. I argue that the first principles of practical reason are, indeed, self-evident, but show that such self-evident truths are, for Aquinas, more akin to a posteriori necessary truths. Our grasp of a self-evident truth, then, will depend upon our prior grasp of the nature of that to which the self-evident truth refers. Therefore, to see that some principle of practical reason is self-evidently true – e.g., that knowledge is to be pursued – we must first know that goodness is part of the nature of the thing to be pursued. I argue that seeing some thing or action as good forms the basis for the judgement that it is good. Such perceptions of things as good provide the genesis of the first principles of practical reason.

Furthermore, I argue that, according to Aquinas, moral philosophy is subalternated to metaphysics and natural philosophy secundum quid. This means that in the Aristotelian schema of the sciences, metaphysics and natural philosophy provide explanatory justifications for the first principles of practical reason. The Aristotelian, then, will ground these first principles by reference to an Aristotelian philosophy of nature, a philosophy which will appeal to man’s faculties and their proper functioning. I argue then that, pace Finnis and Grisez, Aquinas holds that we can derive significant moral truths from facts about our faculties and about human nature in general.
Moreover, I argue that such derivations of moral truths from facts concerning human nature do not violate any law of logic. Contra Finnis and Grisez, I maintain that Hume’s *no-is-from-ought* principle is not a general law of logic, which is applicable to any attempt to derive a normative conclusion from factual premises. I argue, along with recent philosophers such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Philippa Foot, that it is licit to derive a normative conclusion from truths employing functional concepts. However, I also argue that functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals can tell us only what an instance of its kind must do if it is to count as a good instance. They cannot tell us whether we have a reason to be a good instance of our kind. To answer that question, we must turn to our knowledge of the basic goods, and grasp that being a good human being is a means to acquiring the basic goods.

Finally, I argue that in order to distinguish functions from certain non-functions, we must first know whether the proposed function is good for the thing of which it is part. Thus, the concept of a function has normative and evaluative dimensions. But in that case the ascription of a function to human beings – or, indeed, to anything else – is an act of judgement with normative and evaluative dimensions. This view of functions is incompatible with the view implicit in Finnis and Grisez’s understanding of Aristotelian moral philosophy, according to which, an appeal to man’s functions can only ever be an appeal to ‘bare facts’, where ‘bare facts’ are taken to exclude all normative and evaluative elements. It is my contention, then, that Finnis and Grisez err by assuming that all facts must, by their nature, exclude normative and evaluative elements.
0.2 Thesis Structure

The thesis is structured in the following way:

Chapter 1

In Chapter 1, I present an account of the central features of Finnis and Grisez’s new natural law theory, as well as an account of the central features of their criticism of the traditional Neo-Scholastic understanding of the natural law. I highlight three claims, in particular: first, that certain foundational moral principles are self-evident (i.e., the so-called first principles of practical reason), and that these principles are not derived from any theoretical truths; second, that the ‘basic goods’ whose pursuit is enjoined by the first principles are incommensurable and do not form any hierarchy of goods; and third, that conformity to human nature is not the criterion of a moral act for Aquinas. All three of these claims are incompatible with the Neo-Scholastic account of the natural law, and they have been particularly controversial with many Aristotelians sympathetic to the traditional understanding of natural law theory.

Chapter 1 outlines these central claims. I offer an account of Finnis and Grisez’s understanding of the self-evidence of the first principles of practical reason and our knowledge of the basic goods. Then I provide an overview of their understanding of the incommensurability of the basic goods and why Finnis and Grisez take this incommensurability to entail an absence of hierarchy amongst these goods. Finally, I outline Finnis and Grisez’s claim that conformity with human nature is not the criterion of a moral act for Aquinas. I also explain how Finnis and Grisez’s understanding of the first principle of practical reason forces them to posit the existence of further moral principles in order to distinguish between moral and immoral acts.
Chapter 2

In Chapter 2, I present two arguments: one for the possibility of an evaluative hierarchy obtaining amongst the basic goods; the other for the claim that happiness is man’s final end or ultimate reason for action. Both of these claims were traditionally defended by the Neo-Scholastics, and both of them have been denied by Finnis and Grisez. In developing these arguments, I advance two claims. First, that Finnis and Grisez erroneously assume that incommensurability entails incomparability, and that, therefore, incommensurability rules out all forms of evaluative ranking. Against this view, I argue that incommensurability rules out only ranking goods according to some common cardinal unit of measurement. It does not rule out ordinal rankings of comparability. Such ordinal rankings proceed according to some ‘covering consideration’ or standard of comparison, and this covering consideration, I argue, is the standard of the good man and the role that the basic goods play in his flourishing.

Second, I argue that Finnis and Grisez erroneously take the basicality of the basic goods as being incompatible with the existence of happiness as man’s ultimate reason for action. That is, the nature of the basic goods as things which provide basic reasons for action is supposed to be incompatible with the existence of some further end for the sake of which the basic goods are sought. I argue that this is not the case, and that the basic goods provide basic reasons for action insofar as they are intrinsically desirable ends, whilst happiness is our ultimate reason for action insofar as it is the satisfaction of all our rational desires. On this view, the basic goods are constituent parts of that happiness which is sought by the virtuous man. I show that neither of the traditional Neo-Scholastic claims is incompatible with a correct reading of Aquinas.
Chapter 3

In Chapter 3, I provide my own competing account of *S.T. I-II*, q.94, a.2 and the apprehension of the basic goods. I argue that according to Aquinas, a self-evident truth is a kind of *a posteriori* necessary truth, and, for that reason, our apprehension of the truth of a principle concerning the goodness of a basic good depends upon our prior apprehension of the nature of that basic good (in particular, it depends upon our apprehension that goodness is part of the nature of the basic good). This account is incompatible with the account given by Finnis and Grisez, according to which we apprehend the goodness of the basic goods by attending to our reasons for action. I show, then, that Aquinas’s account of the apprehension of the first principles of practical reason has a greater metaphysical dimension to it than Finnis and Grisez would seem to allow.

Chapter 3, then, is devoted to developing this account. In particular, I develop Maritain’s account of ‘connatural’ knowledge and ‘after-knowledge’, in which Maritain distinguishes between ‘knowing that’ something is the case through connatural knowledge and ‘knowing why’ it is the case through after-knowledge. I follow Maritain in arguing that we have a knowledge of practical principles through a knowledge of our natural inclinations, but I distinguish my account of connatural knowledge from Maritain’s by arguing that, for Aquinas, connatural knowledge does not, primarily, involve knowledge of our felt desires. Rather, in connatural knowledge, what we know primarily is the nature of certain goods and of certain causal dispositions towards the pursuit of those goods. Finally, I argue that, for Aquinas, our judgement that some end is good is founded upon our perception of that end *as* good.
Chapter 4

In Chapter 4, I present a new account of the logical relationship between the first principles of practical reason and the truths of theoretical reason. I accept that the first principles are self-evident in the sense developed in my account of the knowledge of the first principles in Chapter 3. I then present an account of the relationship between practical and theoretical reason according to which theoretical reason provides explanatory justifications for the first principles of practical reason. I develop Maritain’s account of the ‘gnoseological’ and ontological elements of the natural law, and argue that the gnoseological element consists in our knowing that certain ends are good, whilst the ontological element explains why those ends are good.

Chapter 4, then, is devoted to developing an account of the logical relationship between metaphysics and natural philosophy on the one hand and ethics on the other in the Aristotelian schema of the sciences. I outline two types of Aristotelian syllogism, the quia and the propter quid. I then show how, for Aquinas, quias are concerned with evident facts (that such-and-such is the case), whilst propter quids provide explanations of those evident facts (why such-and-such is the case). The distinction between these two types of syllogism allows me to develop an account of the Aristotelian hierarchy of the sciences, and explain how a science that shows that such-and-such is the case is subordinate to a science that provides an explanation of why such-and-such is the case. Finally, I distinguish my account of the Aristotelian hierarchy of the sciences from Maritain’s, by arguing that, contra Maritain, ethics is subordinated primarily to metaphysics and natural philosophy, not theology.
Chapter 5

In Chapter 5, I present two arguments. First, I present an argument for the claim that we can, with qualification, derive knowledge of what constitutes man’s flourishing from a theoretical consideration of his natural capacities. This claim is incompatible with Finnis’s assertion that Aristotle’s function argument is an ‘erratic boulder’ at odds with the fundamental structure of Aristotle’s moral epistemology and methodology. It is also incompatible with the view of facts implicit in Finnis and Grisez’s understanding of theoretical reason, according to which theoretical reason is concerned with ‘bare facts’ that, by nature, are exclusive of any normative or evaluative dimensions. Second, I present an argument for the claim that it is licit to derive a normative conclusion from facts employing functional concepts or Aristotelian categoricals. I present this argument as a direct challenge to Finnis’s ‘bare facts’ view of theoretical reason, and argue that he is wrong to assume that all facts must, of necessity, exclude normative and evaluative content.

Chapter 5, then, is devoted to explaining two things: first, how traditional Aristotelian function arguments derive normative conclusions from a theoretical consideration of man’s natural capacities; and second, the role that functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals play in a traditional Neo-Scholastic account of the natural law. I argue, along with contemporary philosophers such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Philippa Foot, that it is licit to derive a normative conclusion from a factual statement employing functional concepts. But I depart from MacIntyre and Foot’s account, by arguing that all functional concepts can tell us is what a thing must do if it is to count as a good instance of its kind. They cannot tell us whether we have reason to be a good instance of our kind. To answer that question, we must turn to our knowledge
of the basic goods, and grasp that being a good human being is a means to obtaining those goods.

Chapter 6

In Chapter 6, I present an Aristotelian account of functions. I do this for two reasons: first, to show that an Aristotelian account of functions remains plausible and philosophically respectable; second, to show how the notion of a concept has normative and evaluative dimensions. By showing that an Aristotelian account of functions is plausible, I show that we need not reject the Neo-Scholastic account of the natural law on the grounds that it commits us to an untenable metaphysical thesis. And by showing that the notion of a function has normative and evaluative dimensions, I further show that Finnis and Grisez are wrong to assume that all facts must necessarily be devoid of any normative or evaluative content.

This final chapter, then, is devoted to providing an Aristotelian account of functions. In particular, I provide an account of Aquinas’s notion of self-movement or self-change – that is, change which occurs by the power of an organism and for the sake of the good of the organism. I then tie this account to Bedau’s analysis of a function, according to which, we must first know whether some operation is good for the thing of which it is a part if we are to distinguish between a function and certain non-functions, non-functions which, nevertheless, ought still to be classed as functions on the standard etiological analysis. I argue, then, that my development of Bedau’s analysis of a function provides us with a plausible account of Aristotelian functions in which to ground a contemporary account of the natural law. But if my argument is correct, then Finnis and Grisez cannot maintain that an appeal to man’s functions in a traditional function argument can only ever be an appeal to ‘bare facts’.
Chapter 1

Finnis and Grisez’s Account of the Natural Law

1.1 Introduction

Finnis and Grisez offer an influential and important criticism of the traditional Neo-Scholastic account of the natural law.¹ In this chapter I outline the central features of this criticism as well as the positive new natural law theory that they offer in its place. I shall explore three claims in particular, claims that are incompatible with the Neo-Scholastic account of natural law: that the first principles of practical reason are self-evident and not derived from any theoretical truths; that the basic goods are incommensurable and do not form a hierarchy of goods; and that conformity to human nature is not the criterion of a moral act. It is these three claims that have been particularly controversial with many Aristotelians sympathetic to the traditional account of the natural law, and it is these three claims I shall address in this thesis.

To that end, I provide three accounts in this chapter: an account of Finnis and Grisez’s understanding of the self-evidence of the first principles of practical reason and how the basic goods are known; an account of their understanding of the incommensurability of the basic goods and why Finnis and Grisez take this incommensurability to entail an absence of hierarchy amongst these goods; and an account of Finnis and Grisez’s claim that conformity with human nature is not the

¹ For two good examples of the Neo-Scholastic tradition see Austin Fagothy, Right and Reason (Saint Louis: C. V. Mosby, 1963), and Michael Cronin, The Science of Ethics, vol. I (Dublin: M. H. Gill & Son, 1909); but also see Charles Coppens, A Brief Text-Book of Moral Philosophy (New York: Schwartz, Kirwin, & Fauss, 1920), and Joseph Rickaby, Moral Philosophy: Ethics, Deontology, and Natural Law (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1918).
criterion of a moral act. Once we understand these three central features of Finnis and Grisez’s new natural law theory, we shall be in a better position to criticize their theory in the following chapters. I also explain Finnis and Grisez’s understanding of the first principle of practical reason, and show how this understanding forces them to posit the existence of further, moral principles in order to distinguish between moral and immoral acts.

1.2 The Origin of New Natural Law Theory and Its Principal Claims

Following Aristotle and Aquinas, Finnis, Grisez, and the new natural law theorists hold that there are certain things which are intrinsically good for man. As we shall see later, the new natural law theorists hold that these basic goods constitute human flourishing or, in terminology more typical of Finnis and Grisez, ‘integral human fulfilment’. One of the principal questions, if not the principal question, addressed by Finnis and Grisez is the question of how these basic goods are known. Contrary to whatever the Neo-Scholastics might claim, Finnis and Grisez argue, Aquinas did not claim that we derive our knowledge of what is good for man from propositions of natural philosophy concerning man’s nature. Rather, Aquinas held that our knowledge of the basic goods is non-derived and self-evident. The identity of these goods is not something which is grasped in an act of theoretical reason, but, rather, in an act of practical reason.

What is the origin of this new theory of natural law with its emphases on the self-evidence of the basic goods and their non-derivation from truths of theoretical reason? We can plausibly date the birth of new natural law theory to 1965 and the publication of Grisez’s article ‘The First Principle of Practical Reason: A Commentary
on the Summa Theologiae” in which Grisez lays out his revolutionary understanding of Aquinas’s theory of practical reason as found in Aquinas’s ‘Treatise on Law’. In the preface of his *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (1980), Finnis acknowledges his debt to Grisez’s interpretation of Aquinas, saying that the ethical theory and arguments advanced in parts of *Natural Law* are ‘squarely based on my understanding of his [Grisez’s] vigorous re-presentation and very substantial development of the classical arguments’. Speaking in that book in defence of the plausibility of natural law theory against its detractors, Finnis writes that

it is simply not true that ‘any form of a natural-law theory of morals entails the belief that propositions about man’s duties and obligations can be inferred from propositions about his nature’. Nor is it true that for Aquinas ‘good and evil are concepts analysed and fixed in metaphysics before they are applied in morals’. On the contrary, Aquinas asserts as plainly as possible that the first principles of natural law, which specify the basic forms of good and evil and which can be adequately grasped by anyone of the age of reason (and not just metaphysicians), are *per se nota* (self-evident) and indemonstrable. They are not inferred from speculative principles. They are not inferred from facts. They are not inferred from metaphysical propositions about human nature, or about the nature of good and evil, or about ‘the function of a human being’; nor are they inferred from a teleological conception of nature or any other conception of nature. They are not inferred or derived from anything.

The principal point of this passage is Grisez’s claim that Aquinas held that the first principles of practical reason, which specify the goods to be sought, are self-evident and not derived from any kind of theoretical knowledge. What seems to motivate this position – at least in part – is Finnis and Grisez’s belief that their re-interpretation of Aquinas renders his ethics more defensible. For it would appear to render irrelevant various common objections to natural law theory, objections which are based in doubts about Aristotelian natural philosophy and teleological and functional doctrines. For

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Finnis and Grisez, this self-evident knowledge of the basic goods provides a sufficient foundation for Aquinas’s ethical theory.

1.3 The Specific Method of Knowing the Basic Goods

What, though, is the exact means by which the basic goods are known? Finnis and Grisez claim that we can form a list of basic goods by attending to our reasons for action. A basic good, they argue, is something which is sought for its own sake. An instrumental good, on the other hand, is something which is sought either for the sake of another instrumental good or for one of the basic goods. When we consider our own reasons for action and the reasons of others, we find that there are certain things which we seek either wholly or primarily for their own sakes. These things are the basic goods, and they are basic just in that they are sought for their own sake. Furthermore, they are called intelligible by Finnis and Grisez because we understand them to be ultimate reasons for action proposed by practical reason itself. Basic reasons for action bring the explanation of why someone acted to an explanatory terminus. Once one has grasped that something is a basic good and, therefore, a basic reason for action, one cannot reasonably ask further, ‘Why did he do that?’ Pointing out that someone acted for a basic good should be sufficient to bring the explanation of any volitional act to an end.

1.4 What Are the Basic Goods?

Finnis and Grisez claim that their method of attending to our reasons for action uncovers a small number of basic goods for man. The apparently numerous and diverse reasons for action that people have and the goods they seek can, they argue, be classified under a small number of categories of basic goods. Finnis, Grisez, and
Boyle, in a jointly written survey paper of 1987,\(^5\) have proposed seven categories of basic goods, which are divisible into two groups: the *substantive goods*, and the *reflexive goods*. The first group contains those three categories of goods which, we might say, are good for man in a simple and direct way: those goods which pertain to man as an animate or living creature, such as life, health, and the maintenance thereof; those goods which pertain to man as a rational creature, such as knowledge and aesthetic experience; and those goods which pertain to man as both an animal and a rational creature, such as various ‘meaning-giving’ and ‘value-creating’ practices – for instance, excellence in both work and play.

The second group of goods, the reflexive goods, contains those four categories of goods which are kinds of harmony. Since man is the kind of agent that can avoid strife with himself and his neighbours through judicious deliberation and choice, the avoidance of personal and interpersonal conflict becomes a reason for action. These goods of the avoidance of conflict are divided up as: goods which are forms of harmony between individuals and groups, such as the good of living in peace with others, neighbourliness, and friendship; goods which are forms of harmony between one’s judgments and choices, such as inner peace; goods which are forms of harmony between one’s judgments and one’s behaviour, such as peace of conscience and ‘consistency between one’s self and its expression’; and goods which are forms of harmony between man and, as Finnis, Grisez, and Boyle put it, ‘some more-than-human source of meaning and value’, that is, ‘peace with God, or the gods, or some nontheistic but more-than-human source of meaning and value’.\(^6\)

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1.5 Knowledge of the Basic Goods Comes from Inclination not Intuition

As we have already seen, Finnis and Grisez claim that our knowledge of the basic goods is self-evident and not derived from propositions of natural philosophy. They have been adamant, however, in denying that our knowledge of the basic goods is knowledge through intuition. Rather, knowledge of the basic goods is grasped through acquaintance with certain data of human experience. As Finnis says in the *Fundamentals of Ethics* (1983):

> My method has been the method of practical understanding and reasoning itself. That involves attention both to one’s own inclinations and to the whole range of possibilities open to one. By an insight that is not an ‘intuition’ (because it is not made in the absence of data, nor by any ‘noticeable’ intellectual act) and not a deduction or inference from one proposition to another, one understands some of those inclinations as inclinations towards desirable objects, and some of those possibilities as opportunities rather than dead-ends.7

What are the data against which this practical grasp of the basic goods is supposed to take place? According to Finnis and Grisez, the data are the natural dispositions of man towards certain potentialities. Some of these dispositions are sensory, that is, appetites for and aversions from certain things; and some, so Finnis and Grisez seem to allow, are powers directed towards their manifestations. But both types of disposition are thought to motivate behaviour, often at a sub-rational level, and it is through this motivation of behaviour that one supposedly becomes aware of them. It is through this awareness of the dispositions that one grasps that the things to which one is disposed are the goods of human nature.

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1.6 The Nature of the First Principle of Practical Reason

Following Aquinas, Finnis and Grisez posit the existence of a first principle of practical reason: Do good and avoid evil. Like our knowledge of the basic goods, our knowledge of the first principle is supposed to be self-evident knowledge. The new natural law theorists, however, contest the Neo-Scholastic understanding of the first principle of practical reason. In his 1965 article, Grisez argued that we should not understand this principle as a moral imperative, but as a principle which regulates practical reason. As such the principle is supposed to regulate every act of practical reason, whether it be moral or immoral; for the function of the first principle of practical reason, according to Grisez’s interpretation of Aquinas, is to prohibit volitional acts which are pointless insofar as they are not directed to any end considered either good or worthwhile. In this respect, the first principle of practical reasoning is thought to mirror the first principle of theoretical reason – a thing cannot both be and not be at the same time and in the same respect – which prohibits inconsistency in theoretical reasoning. For that reason, the principle does not command the agent to act morally; it simply commands him to act for a worthwhile end, and even immoral acts can meet this condition insofar as they are directed to achieving some worthwhile end. If one wishes to know how to act morally, then – rather than merely rationally – one must consult further principles which enable us to distinguish between actions that are merely for the sake of a worthwhile end and actions that are both for the sake of a worthwhile end and are moral. These principles are the so-called first principle of morality and its determinants, the modes of responsibility.
1.7 The First Principle of Morality and Its Necessity

As we have seen, according to Finnis and Grisez, the first principle of practical reason is not a moral principle. Following Grisez’s understanding of the first principle as a regulating principle of practical reason rather than a moral imperative, Finnis and the new natural law theorists split practical reason into two parts: the practical and the moral. According to this account, the first principles of practical reason – for instance, ‘Health is to be pursued’ or ‘Friendship is to be pursued’ – are ‘pre-moral’, since they do no more than identify certain things as worthy of pursuit. Such principles are practical insofar as they specify ends worthy of pursuit, whilst the first principle is practical insofar as it excludes any pointless action as unreasonable.

They are not, however, moral since these practical principles do not exclude immoral means of pursuing the basic goods. Hence, if we had only these principles, there would be no means of distinguishing between what we usually take to be purposeful but immoral actions and those actions which are both purposeful and moral. To take an example given by one prominent new natural law theorist, George, one might have an intelligible reason for playing Russian roulette (i.e., the good of play), and an intelligible reason for not playing it (i.e., the good of life and all those goods attainable by the living). But we could never determine whether or not it would be right to play Russian roulette by appealing to the first principles of practical reason alone. 8 Hence, we require moral principles to allow us to distinguish between moral choices and merely purposeful choices. Such principles would allow us to determine

8 For this example and an explanation of the first principle of morality see Robert P. George, In Defense of Natural Law (Oxford: O.U.P., 1999), p. 49.
why playing Russian roulette is immoral, even though it is an instance of the good of play, and, as such, an intelligible reason for action.

1.8 What Is the First Principle of Morality and the Modes of Responsibility?

What, however, are these principles of morality according to Finnis and Grisez? As we have already said, they are the so-called first principle of morality and its determinants, the modes of responsibility. The first principle of morality is a moral imperative which forbids all choices incompatible with integral human fulfilment, a standard which requires a respect for all the basic goods. The modes of responsibility are particular moral imperatives forbidding choices incompatible with a respect for a specific basic good. For instance, ‘Never act in a manner incompatible with respect for the goodness of life’ might be one specification of the first principle of morality. Hence, to return to the previous example, playing Russian roulette is purposeful but immoral, since it involves a lack of respect for the goodness of life. One who pursues the good of play pursues a worthwhile end, and, therefore, acts in accordance with the first principle of practical reason. Such an agent is rational insofar as he follows the first principle of practical reason, but he could not be called fully rational if he ignored the stronger claim of the mode of responsibility that prohibits pursuing the good of play at the expense of the good of life. It is in such a manner that Finnis and Grisez derive specific moral norms from the first principle of morality.
1.9 The Ideal of Integral Human Fulfilment

As we have already seen, according to Finnis and Grisez, the actions of a moral agent are guided by the notion of integral human fulfilment. What, however, is integral human fulfilment, and what role does it play in Finnis and Grisez’s moral philosophy? Integral human fulfilment is the realization, so far as possible, of all the basic goods in all persons living in a state of harmony. Since, however, no course of action can bring about the realization of all the basic goods and all the possible instantiations of those goods, integral human fulfilment is an unrealizable ideal. Its purpose is to order the will towards the best possible instantiation of the basic goods. This is because the first principles of practical reason direct us towards all the basic goods as worthy of desire, even though it is not possible to possess every instantiation of a basic good in life. Happiness for Finnis and Grisez, then, is the best share of the basic goods for which one can hope, whilst willing only those choices which are moral. Happiness, however, is never the end for which we ultimately act, for if it were, Finnis and Grisez argue, the basic goods could not be ultimate reasons for action.

1.10 The Incommensurability of the Basic Goods

According to Finnis and Grisez, the basic goods are incommensurable. Each basic good provides a basic reason for action, and is the subject of its own, *sui generis* primary principle. Hence, the basic goods are not sought for the sake of some more fundamental reason for action. Furthermore, each basic good belongs to its own, *sui generis* category. Since these goods are heterogeneous in nature, they form no single kind of goodness. And since they form no such single kind, they cannot be measured by any single standard of measurement that would apply to all sub-classes of the kind.

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Therefore, the claim that the basic goods exist in an evaluative hierarchy is, so Finnis and Grisez argue, incompatible with Aquinas’s account of practical reason, as any such hierarchy would reduce the primary principles to secondary principles, or it would require that the diverse basic goods are, in fact, reducible to some single category of good. Thus, Finnis and Grisez claim that no basic good can be adjudged better than another.¹⁰

That the basic goods do not form an evaluative hierarchy, then, is taken to be a corollary of the truth of their incommensurability by Finnis and Grisez. Contrary to whatever the Neo-Scholastics might claim, any attempt to provide an evaluative hierarchy of goods is, for Finnis and Grisez, wrong-headed: first, because it is incompatible with their incommensurability; second, because it abandons the non-demonstrative method of knowing primary practical principles through a consideration of our inclinations; and third, because it erroneously tries to infer moral norms from facts of natural philosophy or metaphysics. For Finnis, not even Aquinas himself escapes the charge of confusing the deliverances of the practical reason with those of theoretical reason. He writes:

Thomas Aquinas, in his formal discussion of the basic forms of good and self-evident primary principles of practical reasoning … sets a questionable example. For he arranges the precepts in a threefold order … And his rationale for this threefold ordering (which all too easily is interpreted as a ranking) is that the self-preservative inclinations corresponding to the first category are common not just to all men but to all things which have a definite nature; that the sexual-reproductive inclinations corresponding to the second category of goods are shared by human beings with all other animate life; and that the inclinations corresponding to the third category are peculiar to mankind. Now all this is no doubt true, and quite pertinent in a metaphysical meditation … But is it relevant to a meditation on the value of the various basic aspects of human well-being? Are not speculative considerations intruding into a reconstruction of principles that are practical and that, being primary,

indemonstrable, and self-evident, are not derivable (nor sought by Aquinas to be derived) from any speculative considerations?\textsuperscript{11}

At times the new natural law theorists seem to deny that there exists in nature a hierarchy of the basic goods. At other times, they seem to assert that, even if such a hierarchy did exist, it would be of no consequence to moral philosophy, as Finnis seems to assert in the above passage. Finnis and Grisez do allow that people can and do order their lives according to some or other person-relative ranking of goods, but they maintain that no objective ranking can be posited without denying that each of the basic goods is a basic reason for action.

1.11 The Criterion of Morally Good Acts

Finnis and Grisez have contested the Neo-Scholastic claim that the criterion of moral action is conformity with human nature. According to Finnis, Aquinas never claimed that the goodness of an act is to be measured by its conformity, or lack thereof, with some theoretical account of human nature. On the contrary, says Finnis, Aquinas held that the goodness of an act is measured by its conformity to a standard of reasonableness. He writes:

for Aquinas, the way to discover what is morally right (virtue) and wrong (vice) is to ask, not what is in accordance with human nature, but what is reasonable. And this quest will eventually bring one back to the underived first principles of practical reasonableness – principles which make no reference at all to human nature, but only to human good.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11} Finnis, \textit{Natural law}, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{12} Finnis, \textit{Natural law}, p. 36.
According to Finnis, the idea of conformity with human nature as the measure of the goodness of human acts can be traced back to Vazquez’s *Commentary* (1605) and Suarez’s *De Legibus* (1612). He writes:

The ethical theory espoused by Vazquez and Suarez was constructed from terms quarried from the works of Aristotle and, above all, Aquinas. But it differed radically from the ethical theories actually maintained by Aristotle and Aquinas. Vazquez and Suarez maintained … that in discerning the content of the natural law, reason’s decisive act consists in discerning precepts of the form ‘Φ is unfitting to human, i.e. rational, nature and thus has the quality of moral wrongfulness’ or ‘Φ befits human, i.e. rational nature and thus has the quality of moral rectitude and, if Φ is the only such act possible in a given context, the additional quality of moral necessity or dueness’.  

As we have already seen, however, for Finnis the criterion of moral goodness is conformity to the first principles of practical reason. It is this conformity in which being practically reasonable consist.

Furthermore, argues Finnis, the differences between Aquinas’s theory of natural law and the theories of Vazquez and Suarez are significant:

The substantive differences between the theory of natural law espoused by Vazquez and Suarez (and most Catholic manuals until the 1960s) and the theory espoused by Aquinas are scarcely less significant and extensive than the better-known differences between Aristotelian and Stoic ethics. But ecclesiastical deference to a misread Aquinas obscured the former differences until well into this century [i.e., the twentieth century].

For Finnis and Grisez, then, any account of natural law that proposes conformity with human nature as its standard of morality will be a misrepresentation of Aquinas’s own account of natural law. Lying is not wrong because it does not befit a rational agent

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whose intellectual faculties are directed, essentially, to the promotion of truth. Lying is wrong because it shows insufficient respect for a basic good, namely, knowledge, a good which is specified by one of the first principles of practical reason.

1.12 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the central features of Finnis and Grisez’s criticism of the traditional Neo-Scholastic account of the natural law as well as the positive new natural law theory they offer in its place. In particular, I have shown how Finnis and Grisez believe we can uncover a number of basic goods by attending to our reasons for action, and how they regard this account of the knowledge of the first principles of practical reason as incompatible with the traditional Neo-Scholastic account, an account which holds that knowledge of the basic goods is derived from facts concerning human nature. I have also shown how Finnis and Grisez take the absence of a hierarchy of the basic goods to be entailed by their incommensurability and their nature as basic reasons for action. And I have explained Finnis and Grisez’s claim that the criterion of a moral act is conformity with the principles of practical reason, not conformity with human nature. Finally, I have shown how their account of the first principle of practical reason forces them to posit the existence of further, moral principles in order to distinguish between moral and immoral acts.

15 Fagothey and Cronin offer typical Neo-Scholastic versions of this form of argument. Fagothey writes: ‘That conduct is morally good which right reason shows to be befitting a rational animal’ (see Austin Fagothey, Right and Reason (Saint Louis: C. V. Mosby, 1963), p. 97). Cronin suggests that the basic goods are ends pursued through the proper operation of our faculties. He writes, ‘Now, the immediate natural end of any being depends upon the ends of its various faculties … For example, the immediate natural end of a tree is determined by the ends of its various vegetative functions. Its end is to grow and blossom and bear fruit, and shed its seed. The immediate natural end of man is determined by a consideration of the ends of all man’s functions – vegetative, sensitive, and rational’ (see Michael Cronin, The Science of Ethics, vol. I (Dublin: M. H. Gill & Son, 1909), p. 125).
In the next chapter, I shall address one of these central claims, namely, Finnis and Grisez’s assertion that the absence of hierarchy amongst the basic goods is entailed by their incommensurability. I shall argue that incommensurability, by itself, does not entail the impossibility of ranking the basic goods according to an evaluative hierarchy. In particular, I shall argue that incommensurability rules out only ranking according to some common cardinal measure; it does not rule out ordinal rankings of comparability. Finally, I shall provide an account of Aquinas’s understanding of the basic goods as constituent parts of happiness, before outlining Aquinas’s distinction between perfect and imperfect happiness. In doing so, I shall demonstrate how Aquinas’s concept of happiness is essentially hierarchical, distinguishing, as it does, between the essence of happiness (contemplation) and its properties (all the other basic goods).
2.1 Introduction

In the last chapter I outlined the central features of Finnis and Grisez’s criticism of the traditional Neo-Scholastic account of the natural law as well as the positive new natural law theory they offer in its place. I explored three claims in particular: that the first principles of practical reason are self-evident and cannot be derived from theoretical reason; that the basic goods are incommensurable and do not form any hierarchy of goods; and that conformity with human nature is not the criterion of a moral act for Aquinas. I shall now address the second of these three claims.

As we have seen, Finnis and Grisez claim that the absence of an evaluative hierarchy amongst the basic goods is entailed by their incommensurability. In what follows I shall argue that this claim is false. Specifically, I shall argue that incommensurability rules out only ranking goods according to some common cardinal standard of measurement. It does not, however, rule out ordinal rankings of comparability. I shall also argue against Finnis and Grisez’s claim that happiness is not our ultimate end or reason for action according to Aquinas. Instead, I shall provide an account of happiness in which the basic goods are constituent parts of our ultimate end. According to this account, the basic goods are basic reasons for action insofar as they are intrinsically desirable ends. But our ultimate reason for action is always the happiness of which they are constituent parts.
I begin the first half of this chapter by enumerating three reasons given by Finnis and Grisez for holding that incommensurability entails the absence of any evaluative hierarchy amongst the basic goods. I also explain why Finnis and Grisez hold that happiness cannot be man’s ultimate end, and outline their understanding of life-plans and person-relative hierarchies. Having laid this groundwork, I propose that Finnis and Grisez remain unclear about just what incomparability does and does not rule out. I argue that incommensurability does not rule out ordinal rankings of comparability, and that comparisons of value proceed according to some ‘covering consideration’ or standard of comparison. This covering consideration is, I argue, the standard of the good man and the role that the particular basic goods play in man’s flourishing.

In the second half of this chapter, I provide an account of happiness as an aggregate of the basic goods in order to show how happiness can be our ultimate reason for action, whilst the basic goods remain basic reasons for action. Following MacDonald, I distinguish between ends that are intrinsically desirable and capable of moving the will and ends that fulfil a moral agent’s every rational desire. I also distinguish between monolithic accounts of happiness, which hold that there is only one good for whose sake all deliberate, volitional actions are performed, and aggregate accounts, which hold that happiness is an aggregation of several intrinsically desirable ends. I then provide textual support for this account of happiness as an interpretation of Aquinas’s ethics. Finally, after clarifying what is meant by ‘rational desire’ and ‘constituent part’, I explain Aquinas’s distinction between perfect and imperfect happiness, showing how he regards contemplation as the essence of happiness and all the other basic goods as its properties. *Pace* Finnis and Grisez, then, Aquinas’s account of happiness is essentially hierarchical.
2.2 The Incommensurability of the Basic Goods: Finnis and Grisez’s General Argument

As we saw in the previous chapter, Finnis and Grisez claim that the basic goods are incommensurable and not ordered according to any hierarchy of value independent of one’s own choices. I shall now consider a key passage in Finnis and Grisez’s work, and analyse their understanding of the incommensurability of the basic goods. In particular, I shall explain why they take incommensurability to entail the absence of any person-independent hierarchy of goods. Consider the following passage:

Insofar as the basic goods are reasons with no further reasons, they are primary principles. Since they are primary principles, the goods of the diverse categories are incommensurable with one another. …

For, if they were commensurable, they would have to be homogenous with one another or reducible to something prior by which they could be measured. If they were homogenous with one another, they would not constitute diverse categories. If they were reducible to something prior, they would not be primary principles. Thus, they are incommensurable: No basic good consider precisely as such can be meaningfully said to be better than another.

It follows from this incommensurability that all basic purposes are alike only in being desired for some reason. They differ in desirability because there is no single reason underlying every purpose for the sake of which one acts. Hence, the basic goods of diverse categories are called ‘good’ only by analogy.16

We can discern three important claims in the above passage: first, the basic goods are incommensurable, because each basic good is the subject of its own primary principle of practical reason; and since, for Finnis and Grisez, the primary principles provide reasons for action which are sufficient to explain why anyone performed any

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16 Germain Grisez, Joseph Boyle, and John Finnis, ‘Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends’, American Journal of Jurisprudence 32 (1987): p. 110. This 1987 paper is, perhaps, the locus classicus of new natural law theory, since it is here that Finnis, Grisez, and Boyle synthesize their previous views in an attempt to present a unified and coherent account of the natural law as a response to their critics. For another defence of the incommensurability of the basic goods and their lack of a hierarchical ordering, see John Finnis, Natural Law and Natural Rights, (Oxford: O.U.P., 1980), Sec. IV.4.
deliberate, volitional act, it would be redundant to ask for any further reason for action which explained why someone acted for the sake of a basic good.\textsuperscript{17} Hence, the primary principles, and therefore the basic goods, cannot be reduced to some more fundamental principle or good for the sake of which the basic goods exist. Second, the basic goods are not commensurable, because they are not homogenous; nor does each basic good belong to some single category of thing to which they would, presumably, be subordinate as instance to kind. Insofar as Finnis and Grisez speak of the commensurability of goods in terms of homogeneity or membership of a single kind, they assume that the defender of any kind of evaluative hierarchy is committed to the homogeneity of the basic goods and their capacity for being measured according to some cardinal metric of value. Third, the incommensurability of the basic goods rules out their being sought for the sake of some ‘single reason underlying every purpose’ for which one acts, as every basic good is a sufficient reason for action. This claim is related to the first, but it differs from it in explicitly denying that the basic goods are sought for the sake of some more fundamental thing. As we shall see, a corollary of this claim is Finnis and Grisez’s rejection of happiness as man’s ultimate reason for action.

\textbf{2.2.1 The Dethronement of Happiness as Man’s Ultimate End}

For Finnis and Grisez, the basic goods are the ultimate reasons for action. Whatever one does – that is, whatever deliberate action one chooses to take – it will be done for the sake of one or more of the basic goods. Since, however, all deliberate, volitional acts are wholly explained by reference to the basic goods, it follows that we need not posit the existence of any further good or end for the sake of which all such deliberate,\footnote{Grisez, Boyle, and Finnis, ‘Practical Principles’, pp. 106-7.}
volitional acts are done. This view of the basic goods as being ultimate in the order of explanation commits Finnis and Grisez to a denial of the traditional interpretation of Aristotelian ethics, which states that all acts performed by a moral agent who is fully practically reasonable will necessarily be done for the sake of happiness or flourishing.

According to Finnis and Grisez, the idea of happiness or ‘integral human fulfilment’ guides and rectifies the will in the choosing of basic goods, but it does not provide morally good persons with their ultimate reason for action. Finnis, Grisez, and Boyle write:

The ideal of integral human fulfillment is that of the realization, so far as possible, of all the basic goods in all persons, living together in complete harmony.\textsuperscript{18}

But they go on to write:

Moreover, integral human fulfillment is not a basic good alongside the others, nor some sort of supergood transcending all other categories of goodness. For integral human fulfillment is not a reason for acting, but an ideal whose attractiveness depends on all the reasons for acting which can appeal to morally good people.\textsuperscript{19}

Since integral human fulfilment is not the good man’s ultimate reason for action, it cannot be the case that happiness or flourishing is the good man’s ultimate reason for action, either. On the contrary, for Finnis and Grisez, integral human fulfilment is only an object of the will in the sense that the good man will wish all other men to have all the basic goods to the degree that such a desire is possible. But any moral agent who is possessed of a good will and is practically reasonable will always act for

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Grisez, Boyle, and Finnis, ‘Practical Principles’, p. 131.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Grisez, Boyle, and Finnis, ‘Practical Principles’, p. 132.
\end{itemize}
the sake of one or more of the basic goods, and never for the sake of happiness itself. Therefore, Finnis and Grisez say, ‘Ideally, the fruit of such good will would be integral human fulfillment’, and, ‘a person of good will wishes … for the realization of this ideal, and this wish rectifies the will in choosing.’

2.2.2 Commitments, ‘Life-Plans’, and Person-Relative Hierarchies

Although Finnis and Grisez deny the existence of any kind of intrinsic hierarchy of value amongst the basic goods, they do accept that individual persons can order the basic goods according to some principle of ordering provided by a particular commitment or ‘life-plan’. Particular commitments and life-plans will impose particular orderings amongst the basic goods; and, presumably, particular commitments and life-plans will cause particular persons to privilege the pursuit of some of the basic goods, whilst disprivileging the pursuit of others. Finnis, Grisez, and Boyle give the example of a married couple who are committed to the rearing of their children; they go on to say:

Not every couple need have the purpose of raising children since not every couple has children. But for those who do, the requirements of basic goods to be realized in the children, together with the moral requirements of family solidarity, demand that the relationships of the woman and man to one another and to their children be chosen as a long-term ordering principle of their lives. This choice is a commitment. … So, this purpose is a moral principle in the sense that it is a source of integration in the lives of parents.

Each of the purposes in life established by a commitment organizes a significant part of a person’s life. Indeed, as experience teaches, the parts of one’s life organized in this way often overlap. Therefore, a good person, conscientious about fulfilling responsibilities, will try to work out a unified, rational plan of life so that anticipated benefits will be realized as fully as possible through actions which do not interfere with one another.

21 For an account of life-plans, see John Finnis, Natural Law and Natural Rights (Oxford: O.U.P., 1980), Sec. V.2.
The choice of the man and the woman to pursue the rearing of children as a purpose is a commitment which imposes upon the couple a responsibility to organize their lives in a way that is conducive to the pursuit of the basic goods involved in the rearing of children. But one ought not to suppose that Finnis and Grisez thereby accept commitments and life-plans as a kind of ultimate reason for action – that is, as a kind of conception of the good life for the sake of which all deliberate, volitional acts are done. Their commitment to the claim that we act for a plurality of reasons in the form of the basic goods rules this out. People, they claim, act for benefits which are often not part of any such life-plan, and they give the examples of the ‘mother who writes poetry in her free moments, [and] the pope who occasionally skis, [who] are engaging in humanly fulfilling activities which they need not direct to any of the purposes set by their commitments and which they can undertake without making any additional commitment’.  

2.2.3 Two Motivations for Holding the Basic Goods as Incommensurable

As we have seen, Finnis and Grisez claim that the incommensurability of the basic goods rules out their being ordered according to any hierarchy of value which is independent of a person’s particular commitments or life-plan. There are two principal concerns which worry Finnis and the opponents of a hierarchy of the basic goods: first, as already noted, there is the concern that any subordination of the basic goods to some proposed superordinate good is incompatible with their incommensurability; and second, there is the concern that the subordination of the basic goods to a superordinate good entails that the pursuit of the good will necessarily be dominated by the pursuit of the superordinate good, reducing the basic goods to little more than mere means to

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an end, and recommending to us a picture of the good life which seems ethically unbalanced. Accordingly, we can discern two claims which the defender of a hierarchy of value amongst the basic goods must address, namely, that incommensurability entails an incomparability of value – in other words, incommensurability rules out any kind of comparison of value amongst the basic goods – and that the subordination of the basic goods to a superordinate good commits us to counter-intuitive claims concerning the pursuit of the good and the value of all the basic goods.

2.3 Incommensurability and Comparability of Value

How may we respond to the claim that incommensurability entails incomparability of value? As we have already seen, Finnis, Grisez, and the new natural theorists hold that the incommensurability of the basic goods rules out their being ‘reducible to something prior by which they could be measured’. Hence, incommensurability rules out the possibility of the basic goods’ being measured according to some common unit of measurement, or, if one prefers, we might say that the incommensurability of the basic goods simply is the quality they possess of not being measurable according to some common unit of measurement. What, however, is neither clear nor evident is that this incommensurability rules out any kind of comparability of value that does not presuppose the existence of a common unit of measurement. The defender of a hierarchy of value amongst the basic goods must, therefore, begin his response to Finnis and Grisez with a request for clarification

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concerning exactly this disputed question of what kinds of comparison of value are necessarily ruled out by incommensurability.

However, Finnis, Grisez, and the new natural law theorists are insufficiently clear with respect to this very question. One might readily accept that incommensurability rules out measurement of the basic goods according to some common unit of measurement, such as that envisioned by classical utilitarianism, whilst doubting that incommensurability rules out all kinds of comparisons of value amongst goods.\textsuperscript{26} What incommensurability would seem to rule out specifically, then, is \textit{quantification by some cardinal unit of measurement}. For instance, knowledge cannot be reckoned ten units greater in quantity of goodness than play; play cannot be reckoned ten units greater in quantity than health; and knowledge cannot be reckoned twenty units greater in quantity than health. Therefore, if the basic goods are incommensurable, they cannot be measured by or compared according to any common unit of measurement of goodness.

Does incommensurability rule out comparability, then? I propose that a failure to distinguish between commensurability and comparability lies at the heart of Finnis and Grisez’s argument for the rejection of a Neo-Scholastic, person-independent hierarchy of goods. But incommensurability and incomparability are not the same thing; and neither does the one entail the other. We must, in fact, distinguish between things which are ranked \textit{cardinally} according to some common unit of measurement (i.e., the commensurable) and things which are ranked \textit{ordinally} – that is, on a list –

\textsuperscript{26} Oderberg has made the same point. If commensurability entails the quantification of goods according to some (cardinal) measure, and the basic goods are, in fact, incommensurable, then one basic good cannot be judged better than another by such a cardinal measure. This fact, however, does not entail that all relationships of comparability amongst the basic goods must be ruled out (see David S. Oderberg, ‘The Structure and Content of the Good’, in \textit{Human Values: New Essays on Ethics and Natural Law}, ed. David S. Oderberg et al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 147-8).
according to some standard of comparison (i.e., the comparable). Once we have made this distinction, we can then distinguish between the incommensurable and the incomparable. That is, between that which cannot be measured according to some common scale of units of value (i.e., the incommensurable) and that which cannot be compared according to some standard of comparison (i.e., the incomparable).²⁷

Incommensurability, then, does not entail incomparability, since a comparison of goods need not be a valuation of goods according to some common cardinal scale of units of value. Rather, goods or items can be compared and ranked ordinally. But to say that goods can be compared and ranked ordinally is to say that they can be ordered hierarchically, which is exactly what Finnis, Grisez, and the new natural law theorists often seem to deny with respect to the basic goods. But if goods can be compared and ranked ordinally, then the besetting fault of Finnis and Grisez’s account of the basic goods is the failure to distinguish between incommensurability and incomparability, as well as the general assumption that incommensurability necessarily rules out any kind of hierarchy amongst the goods which is not strictly relative to a person’s commitments and life-plans.

How, nevertheless, are we to understand these relations of comparability? One might reasonably assume that all relations of comparability are two-place relations of the form ‘A is – than B’. Such relationships would then be exhausted by three categories of evaluative relation: ‘better than’, ‘worse than’, and ‘equally good’. On this account of relations of comparability, two things are comparable if there exists some evaluative relation between them, according to which they can be ranked ordinally. ‘A is better than B’ ranks A above B; ‘A is not better than B’ gives no

ranking of A and B, since A might worse than B, or A and B might be equally good, and so on.²⁸

The comparison of goods, then, would seem to involve two-place relations of value such as: ‘the examined life is better than the unexamined life’, ‘a fresh salad is better than a fatty meal’, etc. Are relations of comparability two-placed, however? I propose that they are not. Rather, relations of comparability are three-placed relationships. That this is so can be seen when we consider how all evaluation implicitly proceeds with respect to some standard of evaluation. A is not better than B without qualification. A is always better than B with respect to some standard of evaluation, for instance utility, beauty, or virtue. Chang has defended just such an analysis of relations of comparability. She writes:

Comparability is a ‘three-place’ relation: X is comparable with Y with respect to V, where V is a covering consideration. When X is better than Y, all things considered, there is some set of values that are the things considered.²⁹

Comparability, then, always involves the ranking of things with respect to some standard of evaluation or, to use Chang’s term, ‘covering consideration’. Therefore, we might say that the examined life is better than the unexamined life with respect to happiness or the demands of virtue, and that a fresh salad is better than a fatty meal with respect to what is conducive to good health. In the same vein, Helen is better than Andromache with respect to beauty, but Andromache is better than Helen with respect to moral virtue. In every comparison of value, the comparison will be made

according to some standard of value or goodness which ranges over the two things being compared, and in virtue of which the two things are comparable.

2.3.1 A Problem for Finnis and Grisez

Thus far I have argued that incommensurability does not entail incomparability, and that an ordinal ranking of incommensurable goods is possible. If this is correct, however, Finnis and Grisez cannot maintain that the incommensurability of the basic goods rules out any kind of Neo-Scholastic hierarchy, at least insofar as that hierarchy is non-cardinal. Furthermore, since they themselves allow that the basic goods can be ranked according to person-relative commitments and life-plans, their own account of the basic goods implicitly accepts the possibility of ranking goods ordinally according to some or other standard of evaluation. 30 Thus, if, to use Finnis and Grisez’s example, a married couple who are committed to the rearing of their children can rank the education and formation of those children above the pursuit of knowledge through an academic career with respect to their familial commitments, then there can be nothing in the nature of such comparisons that would rule out ranking the basic goods according to some objective standard of human flourishing.

Now, I propose that we can discern in new natural law theory two distinct but related claims: first, a strong claim, which charges that incommensurability rules out any kind of objective hierarchy whatsoever; second, a weaker claim, which charges that comparability of the basic goods is only comparability with respect to a particular person’s commitments and life-plan. Perhaps Finnis and Grisez intend to defend only to the weaker claim. Such a defence would seem to be based on the thought that there is nothing in the nature of the basic goods which could possibly provide any basis for

30 For a related but distinct argument see Oderberg, ‘The Structure and Content of the Good’, p. 147.
Nevertheless, they often write as though they are defending the stronger claim, and that incommensurability necessarily rules out any person-independent hierarchy of goods. Since, however, Finnis and Grisez have failed to show that incommensurability rules out any and every kind of comparability, and since they themselves are not necessarily committed to that claim, the question that we must address is: Are the basic goods comparable only with respect to a particular person’s commitments and life-plan (or some such person-relative covering consideration); or are the basic goods comparable with respect to a broad covering consideration such as goodness or flourishing?

2.4 Goodness-for-Man: The Covering Consideration for Comparisons of Relative Value amongst the Basic Goods

It is my contention, then, that the basic goods are arranged – or, at least, could be arranged – ordinally according to some standard of evaluation such as goodness or flourishing. Is this position coherent, however? Consider the following objection voiced by Chang:

According to these philosophers, values stand in normative relations to one another in the abstract, as it were, and not relative to any substantive consideration. So, for example, the value of human life is greater than the value of delicious dessert with respect to ‘value’, and accomplishment is more important than pleasure with respect to ‘prudential value’, where both ‘value’ and ‘prudential value’ are not themselves values but mere names for particular groupings of considerations. It’s as if the heavens contain various books with abstract values listed in order of importance.\(^{32}\)

According to this objection, ranking things according to some general covering consideration of value is mistaken, since such a ranking assumes the existence of a

\(^{31}\) For such a view see Murphy, *Natural Law and Practical Rationality*, pp. 195-8.

hierarchy of ‘abstract values’. One cannot say, for instance, that accomplishment is necessarily better than pleasure with respect to value in the abstract. Rather, one can make a comparison only with respect to some definite covering consideration, such as a person’s conception of the good life. Hence, for someone who has a hedonistic conception of the good life, pleasure will be more important than accomplishment. It seems, then, that one cannot rank the basic goods according to some general standard of goodness; on the contrary, all comparisons of value must be made with respect to some specific covering consideration.

If one takes the view, therefore, that every specific covering consideration must be of a definite nature, then it appears that Finnis, Grisez, and the new natural law theorists are right about the nature of comparisons amongst the basic goods. For it would seem that every comparison of value between two basic goods must be made with respect to the kind of person-relative life-plan envisioned by Finnis and Grisez. Indeed, perhaps Finnis and Grisez would deny the existence of any person-independent ranking of the basic goods by claiming that any such hierarchy of value must illicitly appeal to a Platonic book of values. Since we supposedly ought not to appeal to any Platonic hierarchy of values, and since, according to Finnis and Grisez, practical reason does not grasp a hierarchy of value amongst the basic goods, it must be the case that if the basic goods can be compared, they can be compared only with respect to certain life-plans or individual commitments.

Is this objection correct, however? The answer to our question is, not necessarily; for the claim that a covering consideration must be either specific and person-relative or general and Platonic presents us with a false dilemma. There is a third position, namely, the Aristotelian position, which states that the covering consideration for comparisons of value between basic goods is the standard of the
virtuous man. According to an Aristotelian account of the hierarchy of the basic
goods, then, the value of a particular good in relation to another will be determined by
its role in the life of a good human being. If one accepts Aristotle’s claim that
theoretical reasoning is man’s highest function, and if one accepts that the operation
of man’s highest function is at the core, so to speak, of man’s happiness, then one will
accept that the good of theoretical contemplation is, all things being equal, better than
the other basic goods; or, to put it another way, that contemplation is a superordinate
good to which the other basic goods are subordinate.

On such an account, then, the covering consideration for comparisons of value
amongst the basic goods is indeed a general consideration, in that it applies to all
comparisons of value made by human beings and lacks a person-relative nature; but,
on the other hand, the consideration is not so general that it appeals to some all-purpose
conception of goodness. Indeed, the standard of goodness to which the Aristotelian
account appeals is specifically goodness-for-man, rather than some abstract standard
of goodness-in-general. This is so because of the nature of goodness itself and the role
that the term ‘good’ plays in our ascriptions of goodness. With the ascription of certain
kinds of quality in the English language, the sentence ascribing the quality can be
parsed in such a way that the noun and its adjective can be completely rendered
asunder without a loss of meaning. Hence, ‘x is a red car’ can be parsed as ‘x is red
and is a car’, without loss of meaning. The ascription of some particular qualities
cannot, however, be parsed in this manner. For instance, one cannot parse ‘x is a big
flea’ as ‘x is big and is a flea’, without loss of meaning. Nor can one parse ‘x is a
small elephant’ as ‘x is small and is an elephant’, without also a loss of meaning. But
goodness seems to be the kind of quality whose ascriptions cannot be parsed in the
first manner. Hence, we cannot parse ‘x is a good man’ as ‘x is good and is a man’, without a concomitant loss of meaning.

Geach, who was the first to recognize this linguistic and logical phenomenon, drew a distinction between predicative adjectives (as in ‘a red car’) and attributive adjectives (as in ‘a good car’). He writes:

But consider the contrast in such a pair of phrases as ‘red car’ and ‘good car’. I could ascertain that a distant object is a red car because I can see it is red and a keener-sighted but colour-blind friend can see it is a car; there is no such possibility of ascertaining that a thing is a good car by pooling independent information that it is good and that it is a car. This sort of example shows that ‘good’ like ‘bad’ is an essentially attributive adjective. … There is no such thing as being just good or bad, there is only being a good or bad so-and-so.33

Since ‘good’ is an attributive term whose ascriptions cannot be parsed into wholly separate terms without a concomitant loss of meaning, ‘good’ is not a term than can stand on its own. In a sentence such as ‘x is good’, some noun is implied that would stand as the word to be modified by the attributive adjective ‘good’. We ought, therefore, to read ‘x is good’ as ‘x is a good man’, for example. Hence, as Geach points out, there is no such thing as being just good or bad; anything that is good or bad is a good or bad so-and-so. And for that reason, the covering consideration for comparisons of value amongst the basic goods will not be some standard of goodness-in-general, but rather, a standard of goodness-for-man, since goodness is always goodness for something or other.34

34 For a recent defence of this attributive conception of goodness see Judith Jarvis Thomson, *Normativity* (Illinois: Open Court, 2008).
2.5 Finnis and Grisez’s Objection Restated

Thus far I have argued that Finnis and Grisez are wrong to claim that the incommensurability of the basic goods entails their incomparability. That the basic goods are incommensurable does not entail that they cannot be ranked ordinally according to some standard of comparison. For this reason, Finnis and Grisez cannot maintain that a Neo-Scholastic hierarchy of the basic goods is incompatible with Aquinas’s account of the first principles of practical reason at *ST.* I-II, q.94, a.2.

I have also shown how Finnis and Grisez deny that happiness is man’s ultimate end, since, for them, the basic goods are the ultimate reasons for action; and all deliberate, volitional acts are, necessarily, done for the sake of one or more of the basic goods. Hence, according to Finnis and Grisez, we need not posit the existence of any further end for the sake of which the basic goods are sought, as to do so would be to duplicate reasons for action needlessly. Furthermore, we have seen how, for Finnis and Grisez, it would be incoherent to say that the basic goods are sought as a means to some further end, since a basic good is, by definition, a good sought for its own sake. For these reasons, then, we may speak of a certain ‘incommensurability of reasons for action’, as according to Finnis and Grisez, a moral agent will always act for a number of different reasons that cannot be ultimately explained by reference to some single, fundamental reason for action, such as happiness, which would account for the motive and rational force of the primary precepts.

There is, therefore, a further question that a defender of the hierarchy of the basic goods must ask: Are Finnis and Grisez right to claim that Aquinas held that our basic reasons for action are incommensurable in the manner suggested by their account of the natural law? To put the matter another way, does the intrinsic desirability of
the basic goods and their nature as basic reasons for action entail that happiness cannot be man’s ultimate reason for action? In what follows, I shall argue that happiness’s being our ultimate reason for action is not incompatible with the intrinsic desirability of the basic goods. To that end, I shall distinguish between two types of ultimate end — weak and strong — and argue that weak ends are sought as constituents of strong ends, where a strong end can be thought of as an aggregate of basic goods that constitutes the happiness of a particular moral agent. Thus, as we shall see, Finnis and Grisez are wrong to claim that the intrinsic desirability of the basic goods is incompatible with happiness’s status as man’s ultimate reason for action, a status traditionally ascribed to it by the Neo-Scholastics.

2.5.1 Weak and Strong Ultimate Ends: A Distinction

Does Aquinas regard happiness as man’s ultimate end? I propose that, pace Finnis and Grisez, Aquinas both regards happiness as man’s ultimate end and the basic goods as basic reasons for action. To understand how this is possible, we must distinguish between what, following MacDonald, we might call weak and strong ultimate ends.35

We may begin by defining a weak ultimate end as any end capable of ‘moving the will’, an end desirable in itself.36 That is, a weak ultimate end is one whose intrinsic desirability provides a moral agent with reason to pursue it. Such ends ought to be contrasted with instrumental ones, since instrumental ends provide reasons for action only in virtue of the ultimate ends to which they are subordinated as means. (For instance, a train ticket to London is of no value to anyone who does not wish to travel

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36 For this definition see MacDonald, ‘Ultimate Ends in Practical Reasoning’, p. 45.
to London.) Hence, any end whose intrinsic desirability provides us with reasons to pursue it is, on Aquinas’s account, a weak ultimate end.

What, however, is a strong ultimate end? We may define a strong ultimate end as any end which completely fulfils the rational desires of a moral agent, and an end will be a strong ultimate end if and only if it fulfils all such desires. Not every weak ultimate end will be a strong ultimate end, since it is possible for there to be intrinsically desirable ends that do not fulfil every rational desire. But any strong ultimate end will also be a weak ultimate end, since it will be something desirable in itself.\(^{37}\) In summation, then, an ultimate end is weak if and only if it is intrinsically desirable and provides a reason for action. An ultimate end is strong if and only if it is capable of fulfilling all the rational desires of a moral agent.

**2.5.2 Monolithic and Aggregate Conceptions of the Ultimate End: A Further Distinction**

We must now follow MacDonald in making a further distinction, namely, that between *monolithic* and *aggregate* strong ultimate ends. We may class a strong ultimate end as monolithic if the end is a single good for the sake of which all deliberate, volitional actions are performed. As MacDonald has pointed out, hedonistic utilitarianism is the paradigm of a moral philosophy with a monolithic conception of man’s ultimate end. This is because pleasure (or the absence of pain) is the only end desirable in itself for the hedonistic utilitarian. All other ends are desirable only insofar as they are means to maximizing pleasure or minimizing pain. For the hedonistic utilitarian, then, pleasure is a strong ultimate end.\(^{38}\)

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We may, on the other hand, class a strong ultimate end as aggregate if that end is constituted by a number of weak ultimate ends. Any aggregate strong ultimate end, then, will be constituted by a number of intrinsically desirable ends. MacDonald has argued that Aquinas held this aggregate conception of a strong ultimate end, citing a passage at *ST*. I-II, Q.1 a.5. He writes:

He [Aquinas] suggests that we might conceive of a strong ultimate end not only as a single, determinate end such as pleasure but also as a sort of aggregate of determinate weak ultimate ends – in the case at issue, an aggregate of pleasure, tranquillity, the primary natural goods, and virtue. This conception might be called the aggregate conception of a strong ultimate end. The aggregate conception of a strong ultimate end is like the monolithic conception in allowing that a fully rational individual can have only one strong ultimate end, but it is unlike it in being non-reductive with respect to weak ultimate ends: the aggregate conception allows that an individual can have both weak ultimate ends and a strong ultimate end. The weak ultimate ends that make up an aggregate strong ultimate end are desirable in themselves, but only the aggregation of them completely satisfies all an agent’s rational desires.39

If this interpretation of *ST*. I-II, Q.1 a.5 is correct, Aquinas held that man has only one ultimate end, a strong one for the sake of which all deliberate, volitional action is ultimately performed. However, he understood this ultimate end as an aggregate of weak ultimate ends, which, taken together, fulfil all the rational desires of a moral agent.

Now, on this interpretation of Aquinas, the weak ultimate ends (which are constituent parts of the strong ultimate end) remain desirable in themselves, and therefore provide reasons for their pursuit; but only the strong ultimate end is capable of completely fulfilling all the desires of a fully rational moral agent. Such an account of man’s strong ultimate end is clearly non-reductive (as MacDonald points out), since it does not reduce weak ultimate ends to mere means to a further end such as the pursuit of

of pleasure. It does, however, claim that a moral agent can have only one strong ultimate end, for which the weak ultimate ends are sought as constituent parts. But it is this strong ultimate end which is sought ultimately. It ought to be clear, however, that such an account is incompatible with the account of the basic goods and the incommensurability of reasons for action developed by Finnis and Grisez. For if this interpretation of Aquinas is correct, and an end can be pursued for its own sake – that is, as intrinsically desirable – and yet also be pursued as a constituent of a strong ultimate end, then the fact that the basic goods are apprehended as being intrinsically desirable in the practical grasp of the basic goods does nothing to show that they cannot be sought as constituent parts of happiness.

2.5.3 Does Aquinas Hold an Aggregate Conception of Happiness?

As we have seen, Finnis, Grisez, and the new natural law theorists claim that the basic goods are the basic reasons for action; ultimately, the basic goods are sought because each of them is desirable in itself. As Finnis, Grisez, and Boyle have said of the epistemology of the basic goods:

> The most direct way to uncover the basic goods is by considering actions and asking, ‘Why are you doing that?’ and ‘Why should we do that?’ and so on. Persisting with such questions eventually uncovers a small number of basic purposes of diverse kinds. These purposes arouse interest because their intelligible aspects are instantiations of the diverse basic goods.\(^{40}\)

Since the basic goods, as intrinsically desirable ends, provide answers to the kinds of question posed by Finnis, Grisez, and Boyle, and since the basic goods apparently possess their own motive force and are capable of providing reasons for action without

need for reference to any further end, they are each taken to be individual ultimate ends in their own right.

Furthermore, Finnis and Grisez base this account of the basic goods as ultimate ends in their interpretation of *ST* I-II, Q.94, a.2, in which Aquinas presents his account of the practical grasp or apprehension of the first principles of practical reason. In that passage, Aquinas claims that we have a natural apprehension of certain ends as good, and therefore worthy of pursuit. He writes:

> hence it is that all those things to which man has a natural inclination, are naturally apprehended by reason as being good, and consequently as objects of pursuit, and their contraries as evil, and objects of avoidance.

According to Aquinas, we have reason to pursue the basic goods because of the goodness which we apprehend in them. But since Aquinas does not say anywhere in this passage that we pursue the basic goods for the sake of happiness, ought we not to conclude, along with Finnis and Grisez, that the basic goods are, after all, the only ultimate reasons for action? Perhaps, we might think, MacDonald is seeing a distinction between types of ultimate end where none exists. This, however, would be a mistake. Specifically, it would be the mistake of interpreting *ST* I-II, Q.94 a.2 and the ‘Treatise on Law’ (i.e., *ST* I-II, Q.90-108) in isolation from the rest of the *Summa Theologiae*, of which it is properly a part, and ignoring – or, at least, not placing proper emphasis upon – the ‘Treatise on Human Acts’, in which Aquinas develops his account of practical reason, and the ‘Treatise on Habits and the Virtues’, before moving on to the question of law. What evidence is there, however, for a distinction between types of ultimate end? And what evidence is there for the claim that Aquinas conceived of man’s strong ultimate end as an aggregate of weak ultimate ends?
2.5.4 Aquinas’s Account of Weak Ultimate Ends

We may begin with a consideration of Aquinas’s account of deliberate, volitional action in *ST. I-II, Q.1, a.1* right at the very start of the ‘Treatise on Human Acts’, in which he addresses the question of whether ‘it belongs to man to act for an end’. His three objectors respond to the question in the negative. The first objector denies that man’s acts are done for the sake of an end, and bases his objection on the grounds that the cause of an act is temporally prior to the act itself, whilst an end is not. The next two objectors deny that all acts are done for the sake of an end by providing apparent counter-examples to the claim. Aquinas responds to the question in the affirmative, saying:

> On the contrary, All things contained in a genus are derived from the principle of that genus. Now the end is the principle in human operations, as the Philosopher states (Phys. Ii, 9). Therefore it belongs to man to do everything for an end.

Aquinas is here arguing from a claim about the kind of thing that a human action is essentially. A human act – that is, an act proceeding from an act of deliberation and willing – is necessarily an act which an agent has chosen to do for some reason. And since each member of a genus will have the qualities it has and perform the operations it does in virtue of its nature – or in virtue of its own principle or formal cause – every properly human act will be done for the sake of some end, just as we might expect every healthy female mammal to have the power to lactate. Indeed, as MacDonald points out, once we understand Aquinas’s claim about the end-directed nature of human acts as the claim that every deliberate, volitional is necessarily done for the sake of some end, then the claim seems to be something of a conceptual truth.41

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According to Aquinas, then, a human act is a kind of act that is necessarily done for the sake of an end. And as we have said so far, all deliberate, volitional acts are done for the sake of some weak ultimate end, that is, an end which is desirable in itself. Have we any reason to think, however, that Aquinas regarded the ends to which all human acts are necessarily directed as things which are desirable in themselves? To answer this question, we must continue with our exegesis of *ST* I-II, Q.1, a.1, in which Aquinas argues further for the idea that all properly human acts are end-directed by appealing to the notion of the will as the ‘rational appetite’. He writes:

Now it is clear that whatever actions proceed from a power, are caused by that power in accordance with the nature of its object. But the object of the will is the end and the good. Therefore all human action must be for an end.

In a like manner, Aquinas is here arguing from a claim about the kind of thing that the will is essentially. As we have said, the will, for Aquinas, is the rational appetite, which manifests itself as a desire for those things which are presented as good by the intellect. The will, then, considered as a disposition to desire the good – or, at least, that which is conceived as being good – has as its object goodness. But if the will, by its nature, is the kind of thing that causes an agent to act for an apparent good, because it itself involves a desire for goodness, then all deliberate, volitional acts will, of necessity, be acts for the sake of some end considered good.

According to Aquinas, then, all properly human acts – that is, all deliberate, volitional acts – are done for the sake of some end considered to be good. And since goodness is what provides the will with the motive force necessary to move it to action, and because the goodness of any given end is what makes it desirable to a moral agent, all human acts are ultimately done for the sake of some end considered as good, and therefore as desirable in itself. Hence, we can see that Aquinas does indeed hold that
all deliberate, volitional acts are done for the sake of some weak ultimate end. Have we any reason, however, to think that Aquinas intended to introduce a further category of ultimate end – namely, that of the strong ultimate end – to his account of practical reason? On the one hand, Aquinas does not explicitly introduce any distinction between weak and strong ultimate ends at ST I-II, Q.1, a.1, as we might have expected him to do if he had thought the distinction necessary to his explanation of human action. But on the other hand, the distinction between the two proposed kinds of ultimate end will come into sharp relief once Aquinas begins to discuss the nature of happiness and man’s final end in the following articles. And it is to those articles that we must now turn.

2.5.5 Aquinas’s Account of Strong Ultimate Ends

As we have already seen, a strong ultimate end is an end whose achievement completely fulfils all the rational desires of a moral agent. What textual evidence have we, however, for the claim that Aquinas held this doctrine of strong ultimate ends? Let us begin with a consideration of ST I-II, Q.1, a.5. In this article Aquinas discusses the question of whether a man can have several last ends. His three objectors answer the question in the affirmative, arguing that a man can indeed have more than one last end. Aquinas, for his part, answers the question in the negative, arguing that a man can have but one last end. He writes:

I answer that, It is impossible for one man's will to be directed at the same time to diverse things, as last ends. Three reasons may be assigned for this. First, because, since everything desires its own perfection, a man desires for his ultimate end, that which he desires as his perfect and crowning good. Hence Augustine [says] (De Civ. Dei xix, 1): ‘In speaking of the end of good we mean now, not that it passes away so as to be no more, but that it is perfected so as to be complete.’ It is therefore necessary for the last end so to fill man's appetite, that nothing is left besides it for man to desire. Which is not possible, if something else be required for his perfection. Consequently it is not possible for the appetite so to tend to two things, as though each were its perfect good.
Aquinas claims that it is impossible for a man’s will to be directed to several diverse last ends at the same time. Such a situation is ruled out, he claims, by the fact that everything – and, therefore, every man – desires its own perfection. But how does desiring one’s own perfection rule out desiring several diverse last ends? The answer lies in the quote from Augustine: as Augustine says, the end of the good resides not in its passing away, but in its completion. And by the completion of the good, Aquinas understands a state in which every desire that a man might rationally have is fulfilled, since he possesses every end or good that he might reasonably desire as constituent parts of his happiness; that is, he is perfected in the sense that he is complete and lacks no goods that are proper to the kind of thing that he is. Indeed, Aquinas states that ‘it is therefore necessary for the last end so to fill man’s appetite, that nothing is left besides it for man to desire’. We might read this as the claim that a necessary condition of an end’s being a true last end is that it be an end which completely fulfils a man’s rational desires. But in that case, the ‘true last end’ seems to be a strong ultimate end, namely, an end that fulfils man’s every rational desire.

Moreover, that Aquinas held an aggregate conception of man’s last end can be seen from his response to the first objector of the same article. The first objector presents his objection to the claim that man can have only one last end thus:

It would seem possible for one man's will to be directed at the same time to several things, as last ends. For Augustine says (De Civ. Dei xix, 1) that some held man's last end to consist in four things, viz. ‘in pleasure, repose, the gifts of nature, and virtue.’ But these are clearly more than one thing. Therefore one man can place the last end of his will in many things.

For the objector, then, the fact that one might consider man’s last end to consist in four separate goods is itself a counter-example to the claim that man can have only one last
end as the object of his will at any given time. Or, to restate the objection, the claim that man can have but one strong ultimate end ‘cannot be true since a fully rational human being might have two or more distinct weak ultimate ends that are not subordinate to any other ends’. Aquinas responds to this objection thus:

All these several objects were considered as one perfect good resulting therefrom, by those who placed in them the last end.

According to Aquinas, then, each of the goods cited by the objector – pleasure, repose, the gifts of nature, and virtue – are to be understood as constituent parts of a single, perfect good or last end. Indeed, that Aquinas understands man’s last end in this way can be seen from the way in which he has the objector speak of holding ‘man's last end to consist in four things’, rather than having the objector speak of man’s having four last ends.

2.5.6 Two Clarifications: ‘Rational Desires’ and ‘Constituent Parts’

Thus far we have spoken of a strong ultimate end as that which fulfils every rational desire that a man might have. We have also spoken of weak ultimate ends as constituents of a strong ultimate end. What exactly, however, do we mean by these two terms? In short, can we explain what rational desires and constituent parts are, and how these two kinds of thing fit into Aquinas’s theory of practical reason?

Let us begin by asking what is meant by the term ‘rational desire’. We may define a rational desire as any desire that forms part of a fully rational agent’s conception of the best possible life for himself, a conception that is formed after reflection upon what constitutes happiness. Such conceptions of the best possible life ought, then, to be identified with strong ultimate ends, since a strong ultimate end will

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fulfil an agent’s rational desires. But these conceptions or life-plans will not incorporate all the desires that a rational agent might have. Furthermore, no single life-plan will incorporate all weak ultimate ends or basic goods, and a moral agent may have to abandon the pursuit of something he considered worthy of desire prior to reflection if the pursuit of that end is incompatible with his overall conception of the best possible life.\(^{43}\) It seems reasonable to say that no life can possibly instantiate every end or good that a person might possibly desire. Therefore, any one given person will have to choose to pursue a limited number of ends or goods to the exclusion or disprivileging of others; and this plan to pursue certain goods, whilst omitting to pursue others, will constitute an individual person’s conception of the best life for himself.

To see why this is so, consider the life of the Franco-German polymath Albert Schweitzer.\(^{44}\) In his life, Schweitzer had to choose between two incompatible conceptions of the best possible life. He could either pursue the life of a missionary physician or the life of a concert pianist. But he could not pursue both, as each of these conceptions is incompatible with the other. One cannot devote all one’s time to ministering to the sick abroad and, at the same time, devote it to becoming a superlative pianist. Hence, for Schweitzer to act rationally, he had to choose to pursue only one of these conceptions of the good life and the basic goods encompassed by that conception. Schweitzer chose the life of the missionary physician. But is his choosing thus incompatible with his continuing to hold the life of the concert pianist as intrinsically desirable and, therefore, a weak ultimate end?

\(^{43}\) For this identification of life-plans with strong ultimate ends see MacDonald, ‘Ultimate Ends in Practical Reasoning’, p. 57.

\(^{44}\) For this example see MacDonald, ‘Ultimate Ends in Practical Reasoning’, p. 57.
To answer this question, let us turn to what Aquinas has to say regarding the question of whether everyone necessarily acts for the same last end, at ST. I-II, Q.1 a.7. He writes:

I answer that, We can speak of the last end in two ways: first, considering only the aspect of last end; secondly, considering the thing in which the aspect of last end is realized. So, then, as to the aspect of last end, all agree in desiring the last end: since all desire the fulfillment of their perfection, and it is precisely this fulfillment in which the last end consists … But as to the thing in which this aspect is realized, all men are not agreed as to their last end: since some desire riches as their consummate good; some, pleasure; others, something else. Thus to every taste the sweet is pleasant but to some, the sweetness of wine is most pleasant, to others, the sweetness of honey, or of something similar. Yet that sweet is absolutely the best of all pleasant things, in which he who has the best taste takes most pleasure. In like manner that good is most complete which the man with well disposed affections desires for his last end.

Aquinas here draws a distinction between the ‘aspect of last end’ and the ‘thing in which the aspect of last end is realized’. All men, he says, are the same in that they seek the last end, since all men, by nature, cannot but seek their own perfection, that is, their happiness. But where men differ substantially is in their various conceptions of what constitutes the final end. Hence, as we have seen, every fully rational moral agent will pursue the fulfilment of their rational desires, that is, they will seek their strong ultimate end; but moral agents will disagree about what constitutes this strong ultimate end. Both of the examples provided by Aquinas of purported final ends are monolithic conceptions of a strong ultimate end; but the point about disagreement over the nature of man’s final end can be extended to aggregate conceptions of the strong ultimate end and disagreements concerning the purported constituents of that end.

In addition to the previous point, however, Aquinas makes a claim about moral epistemology. Just as the man who has a developed palate will be able to say which wine is sweeter, so too will the virtuous man be able to adjudge which end constitutes man’s final end and which does not. The desires of the man with well-disposed
affections will be a guide, then, to what end or ends constitutes man’s final end, and
the desires of the man with ill-disposed affections will, presumably, be unreliable. For
Aquinas, then, the question of what ends are desirable is not merely a question of what
ends happen to be desired by people in general. Rather, the question seems to be
primarily one of what ends are worthy of desire. If we were to speculate about what
Aquinas might consider a rational desire to be, we might propose the following
definition: a rational desire is a desire for an end worthy of desire, that is, an end that
is in some way good for man. Is this definition compatible with the one given above,
however?

Before answering this question, let us return to the case of Albert Schweitzer
and his moral dilemma. As we asked above, would it be irrational of Schweitzer to
continue to view a life devoted to music as intrinsically desirable after he had decided
to pursue the life of a missionary physician? Now, once Schweitzer has chosen this
life, should we still say of him that he desires a career in music? And if so, is this not
an odd claim to make, since Schweitzer has chosen to forgo pursuing such a career,
implying that he no longer finds it desirable? But if we ought not to attribute such a
desire to Schweitzer, how can we say that he still regards the life of a pianist as
desirable? We must, therefore, make a distinction between desiring some end E and
recognizing E as something worthy of desire. If Schweitzer is fully rational, he can
no longer desire the life of the pianist, since being a pianist is not part of the conception
of the good life he has chosen. This desire for a musical career cannot, therefore, be
of practical relevance to him, as his choice precludes this weak ultimate end from
being part of his strong ultimate end. Thus, for Schweitzer, the desire for a musical
career cannot be a reason for action. This, however, is not incompatible with

45 For this distinction see MacDonald, ‘Ultimate Ends in Practical Reasoning’, pp. 57-8.
Schweitzer’s continuing to regard a musical career as *worthy of desire*, and to recommend it to others as intrinsically desirable.

We can see, then, that a weak ultimate end cannot be a reason for action if it is not a constituent of a strong ultimate end. And a weak ultimate end cannot be a constituent of a strong ultimate end unless it figures in some conception of the best possible life. Can we, however, desire some end that is not a constituent of our conception of the good life and remain fully rational? It seems that we cannot, since an end that is not a constituent of a strong ultimate end cannot be a reason for action, as all weak ends are ultimately sought for the sake of the happiness which they constitute. A *rational desire*, then, is one that is encompassed by a moral agent’s conception of the best possible life for himself, a conception that comes after reflection.46 A rational desire will always be for some end which is a constituent of a strong ultimate end, since it is the strong end that fulfils all an agent’s rational desires. But a desire for an end that is not a constituent of a strong ultimate end cannot provide a reason for action, because it can play no part in bringing about a particular conception of the good life. Hence, it cannot be reasonable of Schweitzer to continue to desire consciously a career in music, even though he may continue to recognize that such a career as desirable. But to return to our previous question, how can this definition of a rational desire be reconciled with the one taken from Aquinas above?

We may answer this question in the following way: I have drawn a distinction between Schweitzer’s *desiring* a career in music and his *recognition* of such a career as desirable. There is a distinction, then, between *desiring an end* and *apprehending that an end is desirable*. But what exactly does that mean? We can explain the distinction more clearly by invoking our previous discussion of Aquinas’s moral

epistemology and the role that the judgement of the virtuous man plays in the identification of worthy ends. The virtuous man does not merely know what ends happen to be desired by the great mass of people. What he knows primarily is what ends are worthy of desire. Hence, we might say that what a fully rational Schweitzer knows is that a career in music is worthy of desire, even though he himself no longer desires it as a constituent of his happiness.

We may explain this idea further by speaking primarily in terms of the basic goods. If one allows that there are certain things that are objectively good for man, then one allows that there are certain things that could be worthy of desire. Such basic goods are worthy of desire, because they are the kinds of thing that, as we have seen Aquinas say, in some sense perfect man and fill his desires. Hence these basic goods are sought as constituents of the strong ultimate end, which fulfils man’s every rational desire. But since a man cannot possess every good in a single life, he must choose to pursue some of the basic goods, whilst omitting to pursue others. This means that there will be some basic goods that are not desired by some particular person, since they are not desired for the sake of a strong ultimate end. However, such basic goods remain worthy of desire, since they are the kind of end that could be desired as constituents of a person’s happiness. It, therefore, remains reasonable for a Schweitzer to say that a career as a concert pianist is something worthy of desire, as such an end could be sought as a constituent of a particular person’s happiness. Therefore, we might define a rational desire as a desire for something worthy of desire that remains as a desire after a fully rational agent has reflected upon the best possible life for himself.
2.5.7 ‘Constituent Parts’

Let us now turn to the question of what we mean when we say that weak ultimate ends are constituents of a strong ultimate end. In a sense, what we mean by this claim is obvious: if a thing is a constituent part of something else, then it is a part of that self-same whole; this constituent part and its fellow constituent parts, taken together, constitute the whole of which they are parts. Can we, however, give a more informative explanation of how, in the case of a strong ultimate end, the constituent parts are related to the whole? MacDonald has proposed the following explanation of constitutive relationships in an aggregate of weak ultimate ends:

Now consider a fully rational agent $R$ who has an aggregate strong ultimate end $S$ composed of weak ultimate ends $W_1$, $W_2$, and $W_3$. For $R$, each of $W_1$, $W_2$, and $W_3$ is desirable in itself. But none of these weak ultimate ends is such that it completely satisfies $R$’s rational desires since, given the satisfaction of $R$’s desire for $W_1$ (say), $R$’s desires for $W_2$ and $W_3$ remain unsatisfied. $S$, however, is not only desirable in itself for $R$ but also completely satisfies $R$’s rational desires. So for $R$, $W_1$, $W_2$, and $W_3$ are constituent parts of $S$, and so are desirable not only in themselves but for the sake of $S$. An action or an end which is subordinate to another end in this way might be said to be subordinate-as-a-constituent-part to it. On the aggregate conception of a strong ultimate end, then, weak ultimate ends are subordinate-as-constituent-parts to an aggregate strong ultimate end.\(^\text{47}\)

So, a weak ultimate end that is a constituent part of a strong ultimate end is subordinate-as-a-constituent-part to that strong ultimate end. However, the relationship between the parts and the whole is not only one of constituency and, perhaps, evaluative subordination, but also of subordination in the realm of practical reason, since, as MacDonald points out, the weak ultimate ends that constitute the strong ultimate end are not only sought as desirable in themselves, but also for the sake of the strong ultimate end of which they are parts. This is because it is the strong

\(^{47}\) Scott MacDonald, ‘Ultimate Ends’, p. 51.
ultimate end, and the strong ultimate end alone, that can satisfy all the rational desires of a fully reasonable moral agent. Hence, in the case of an aggregate strong ultimate end, we have ends that are, taken separately, desirable in themselves; but which are also, taken together, desirable for the sake of some other end, namely, that happiness which is the satisfaction of all a fully rational human being’s rational desires.

The matter of a weak ultimate end’s being subordinate to a strong ultimate end is one of importance for our assessment of new natural law theory. As we have already seen, Finnis, Grisez, and the new natural law theorists claim that the basic goods cannot be subordinate to happiness qua final end or some other proposed superordinate good, since the basic goods are things which are desirable in themselves, and as such are themselves ultimate ends. There is, on this view, an ineradicable incommensurability of reasons for action, in which every basic good is sought for its own sake, and never for the sake of some further end such as happiness. To say otherwise, the proponents of this view would claim, is to do violence to the nature of the basic goods as basic goods, and to risk reducing these fundamental goods to mere means to an end, which is, in effect, to deny their status as basic goods. Therefore, the basic goods cannot subordinate to happiness in the way described.

We can, however, see that this view is mistaken once we make explicit the necessary distinction between ends that are subordinate as a means and ends that are subordinate as constituent parts. The assumption on the part of Finnis, Grisez, and the new natural law theorists seems to be that if the basic goods are subordinate to happiness as man’s final end, then they must be subordinate as means. But as I have argued, we must take care to understand the difference between something’s being subordinate as a means and its being subordinate as a constituent part. To take an example provided by MacDonald, undergoing a painful medical treatment might be a
means to good health; Kate’s taking a bus to the site of her triathlon might be a means
to completing that triathlon; and competing in the triathlon might be a means to raising
money for charity. In all these instances, the action is subordinate-as-a-mean to some
other end thought to be worthy of desire. But none of these actions realize – either
partially or wholly – the end to which they are subordinate. Thus we can distinguish
between being subordinate as a means and being subordinate as a constituent, since it
is possible for some end to be a means without also being a constituent of the end
ultimately sought.48

An end that is subordinate to some other end as a means, then, is an end that is
the cause of or preliminary means to an end which is the effect or product of that
means; such subordinate ends ought to be distinguished from ends that are subordinate
as parts, since being a means to something and being a constituent of something are
distinct phenomena. But a further distinction must be drawn between two kinds of
end in the subordinate-as-means category: first, purely instrumental ends, that is, ends
that are means simpliciter; and second, ends that are means but also weak ultimate
ends. One might, for example, think that a cloak, horse, and house are all purely
instrumental means with respect to what is useful for human beings; but on the other
hand, one might think that the virtues are both means to an end (i.e., happiness) and
desirable in themselves. An intellectual skill or virtue such as analytic perspicacity is
surely necessary for the sake of understanding certain problems, and is therefore a
necessary means to certain kinds of knowledge; but analytic perspicacity is also, one
might think, an end desirable in itself, since reasoning with analytic perspicacity is
part of what a properly functioning rational animal will do. Hence, when addressing
the question of the nature of the basic goods, we must be alive to the fact that a good

may be subordinate to something else in at least three ways; something that is subordinate to something else is not necessarily subordinate as an instrumental end to some further good.

2.5.8 ‘The basic goods cannot be sought for the sake of happiness’: A Response

Armed with our tripartite division of the relations of subordination, we can respond to one of Finnis and Grisez’s major claims concerning life-plans and their supposed uncomprehensive nature with respect to all the basic goods sought by any fully rational moral agent. As we have already seen, Finnis and Grisez claim that people will organize their pursuit of the basic goods according to individual person-relative life-plans and commitments. But, they argue, not every basic good that a person pursues will necessarily be pursued for the sake of achieving some or other life-plan. For Finnis and Grisez, however, pursuing a basic good that is not a constituent part of some life-plan is not evidence of a lack of prudence or practical wisdom, since, we must remember that, according to their account, the basic goods are not sought for the sake of happiness or as constituents of a life well lived, but for the sake of themselves alone, that is, as ultimate ends. Hence, returning to a key passage, we find Finnis, Grisez, and Boyle saying the following of life-plans and the reasons and ends for which people act:

For such persons, living according to their plan of life and enjoying the benefits of doing so is a significant part of the happiness for which they are prepared to settle. …

Yet a happy life in this sense does not comprise every benefit which will be sought by a good person. Play often is the sole reason for choosing a morally acceptable action. The mother who writes poetry in her free moments, the pope who occasionally skis, are engaging in humanly fulfilling activities which they need not direct to any of the purposes set by their commitments and which they can undertake without making any additional commitments of the sorts considered thus far.
For this very reason, such activity and the benefits enjoyed in it often are considered of little moral significance, and the good of play often is considered a rather odd sort of basic good. Still, without being tightly integrated under one’s life plan, play – and other goods as well, at times – can significantly contribute to the happiness of a good life.49

According to Finnis and Grisez, then, people pursue their own life-plans, and pursuing these life-plans is part of the partial happiness for which they are prepared to settle. These life-plans, however, do not cover every basic good that a person might seek. There are basic goods that one might seek for the sake of those basic goods alone; and these goods can be sought without their being integrated into a person’s life-plan, without their being considered part of that life-plan, and, presumably, without their being sought either as a means to achieving the life-plan or as a constituent part of the life-plan. The paradigm case with which we are provided is that of the good of play. The good of play, Finnis and Grisez claim, is often sought solely for its own sake, and not for the sake of some other end. Are they right to claim this, however? Is play an example of a good that often remains unintegrated with the life-plans of moral agents, who, nonetheless, remain fully rational in their pursuit of the basic goods?

First of all, it ought to be noted that we have returned to the question of whether reasons for action are ineradicably incommensurable or whether there is some single reason for which we ultimately act, and whether this single reason is the ultimate explanation of why a fully rational agent will act for certain ends. Insofar as we have already addressed this question, it will be sufficient to restate my reasons for rejecting the purported incommensurability of reasons. In short, I reject the claim that reasons for action are ineradicably incommensurable, because it is wholly reasonable to claim that there are some ends or basic goods which are both desirable in themselves – in

the sense that they are apprehendable as things worthy of desire – and also desirable as constituent parts of man’s happiness, which is the end for which all fully rational moral agents will act, and whose attractiveness to all fully rational moral agents explains why those agents act for any end at all.

More specifically, with respect to the example of the good of play given by Finnis and Grisez, we ought to recognize that, contrary to what might be claimed, the example is not one of a good’s being sought, whilst necessarily not being sought for the sake of happiness. In the case of the mother who writes poetry in her spare time, for example, the good in question may indeed not be integrated with the mother’s life-plan, insofar as her life-plan is a conception of motherhood and the life that such a state entails; but it is integrated, at least implicitly, with her conception of what constitutes a good life, and her pursuit of both motherhood (as well as the things that being a good mother entails) and writing poetry strongly implies that she views each of these goods as constituents of her happiness. The same can be said for skiing popes. Skiing may not be integral to being a good pope, and, therefore, a skiing pope may fail to integrate his pursuit of the good of skiing with his conception of what constitutes living the life of a good pope. But both skiing and being a good pope may constitute elements of the best possible life for some particular person, namely, Pope John Paul II. Hence, we should not regard the example of the good of play as a counter-example to the claim that all fully rational moral agents will ultimately act for the sake of happiness.
A second major reason for rejecting the claim that basic reasons for action are ineradicably incommensurable is that Aquinas himself seems to reject the claim. But if Aquinas does indeed reject this claim, then Finnis and Grisez’s account of the basic goods as ultimate reasons for action will be erroneous, at least as a proposed interpretation of Aquinas’s theory of practical reason. Does Aquinas, then, reject such an account of the basic goods as providing incommensurable reasons for action? At ST. I-II, Q.1, a.6, the first objector states his objection to the claim that every deliberate, volitional action is done for the sake of a single end thus:

It would seem that man does not will all, whatsoever he wills, for the last end. For things ordained to the last end are said to be serious matter, as being useful. But jests are foreign to serious matter. Therefore what man does in jest, he ordains not to the last end.

The second objector then proceeds to state his objection as follows:

Further, the Philosopher says at the beginning of his Metaphysics that speculative science is sought for its own sake. Now it cannot be said that each speculative science is the last end. Therefore man does not desire all, whatsoever he desires, for the last end.

Aquinas then responds to his objectors in the following manner:

Actions done jestingly are not directed to any external end; but merely to the good of the jester, in so far as they afford him pleasure or relaxation. But man's consummate good is [nothing other than] his last end.

The same applies to speculative science; which is desired as the scientist's good, included in complete and perfect good, which is the ultimate end.

Fortuitously, it seems as if both Aquinas and Finnis and Grisez are considering the same good as a proposed counter-example to the claim that all acts are ultimately done for the sake of happiness, since the making of jests is presumably a kind of play.
Finnis and Grisez’s sympathies, however, seem to be more in line with the position of the objectors than they are with that of Aquinas himself. For his own part, Aquinas claims that jests are not made for the sake of any external end, but that they are made for the sake of providing pleasure or relaxation to the person making the jests; and such pleasure or relaxation is, Aquinas says, ‘merely to the good of the jester’. However, since man’s consummate good – that is, his perfect good or happiness – is nothing other than his last end, the making of jests is ultimately for the sake of his happiness, as happiness is that end in which man’s every rational desire is sated by the attainment of some good (in this case, the goods of pleasure and relaxation). Furthermore, as Aquinas goes on to say, knowledge of the sciences is desired by the scientist ‘as the scientist's good’, which is ‘included in [the] complete and perfect good, which is the ultimate end’. Knowledge of the sciences, then, is not sought for some end other than happiness; rather, it is sought as the good of the scientist, which is part of his perfect good, namely, his happiness.

In both of the examples provided by Aquinas, then, we have a good that appears to the objectors to be sought for its own sake, that is, the end appears as desirable in itself. Like Finnis and Grisez, the objectors seem to assume that this means that the end cannot be sought for the sake of some other end. But Aquinas disagrees. In each case, there seems to be an end that is recognized as desirable in itself, but which is, upon further analysis, recognized as a constituent part of man’s perfect good or happiness. Aquinas does not, of course, speak explicitly of the goods in question as being subordinate-as-a-parts, since, like Aristotle, he speaks only of ends sought for the sake of another and ends sought for their own sakes; but it seems plausible to say that the distinction between being subordinate-as-a-part and subordinate-as-a-means is implicit, even if inchoately, in Aquinas’s talk of scientific
knowledge’s being the good of the scientist, which is, in turn, included in his complete and perfect good. As Aquinas himself says in the above article, whatever man desires is ultimately desired for the sake of his last end, which is nothing other than happiness itself.

Before we conclude our discussion of whether the basic goods are necessarily sought for the sake of happiness, let us consider one last passage from Aquinas. At ST. I-II, Q.1, a.4, Aquinas discusses the question of whether ‘there is one last end of human life’. His three objectors respond to the question in the negative, arguing that there are an infinite number of goods for which we can act, and that human acts extend over time as an infinite series of ends, having no definite terminus. Hence, they argue, human acts cannot be for the sake of one last end of human life. Aquinas, however, responds to the question in the affirmative, saying:

I answer that, Absolutely speaking, it is not possible to proceed indefinitely in the matter of ends, from any point of view. For in whatsoever things there is an essential order of one to another, if the first be removed, those that are ordained to the first, must of necessity be removed also. Wherefore the Philosopher proves (Phys. viii, 5) that we cannot proceed to infinitude in causes of movement, because then there would be no first mover, without which neither can the others move, since they move only through being moved by the first mover. Now there is to be observed a twofold order in ends – the order of intention and the order of execution: and in either of these orders there must be something first. For that which is first in the order of intention, is the principle, as it were, moving the appetite; consequently, if you remove this principle, there will be nothing to move the appetite. On the other hand, the principle in execution is that wherein operation has its beginning; and if this principle be taken away, no one will begin to work. Now the principle in the intention is the last end; while the principle in execution is the first of the things which are ordained to the end. Consequently, on neither side is it possible to go to infinity since if there were no last end, nothing would be desired, nor would any action have its term, nor would the intention of the agent be at rest; while if there is no first thing among those that are ordained to the end, none would begin to work at anything, and counsel would have no term, but would continue indefinitely.
Aquinas makes the distinction between what he calls the order of intention and the order of execution. In the order of intention, the principle of the ordered series – that is, the starting point or cause of the series – is the reason for which a moral agent decides to act. And as we have already seen, Aquinas addresses the question of whether man can have more than one last end in the following article – that is, Article 5 – and he responds in the negative, claiming that man can have but one end. Hence, the ultimate principle in the order of intention would seem to be man’s perfect good, namely, that strong ultimate end for the sake of which all weak ultimate ends are sought. As we have already said, then, the weak ultimate ends or goods that are sought by a particular person are sought for the sake his happiness, which is the fulfilment of his every rational desire. Those weak ultimate ends or basic goods that remain desirable in themselves are recognized by the fully rational moral agent as ends worthy of desire, even though a particular moral agent may not desire them as constituents of his own happiness. But any weak ultimate end or basic good that is actually desired by a fully rational moral agent is desired for the sake of happiness. Therefore, for Aquinas, happiness would seem to be the ultimate principle in the order of intention, which is to say that, for Aquinas, every basic good is ultimately sought for the sake of happiness.

Finnis, Grisez, and the new natural law theorists are, therefore, wrong to claim that the basic goods cannot possibly be subordinate to happiness on account of their nature as ultimate ends. They are also wrong insofar as their account of the basic goods as ultimate reasons for action implies an incommensurability of reasons for action. This is because it is simply inadequate to point to the fact that the basic goods are desirable in themselves to show that they cannot possibly be sought for the sake of something else. As we have seen, a good can be both the kind of thing that is desirable
in itself – or, we might say, the kind of thing that is worthy of desire, because it is something that is in some way good for us, and, therefore, worthy of featuring in the life-plan of any fully rational animal – and, at the same time, a constituent of man’s perfection or complete good, that is, his happiness. We have also seen the way in which a weak ultimate end or basic good can be both sought for its own sake and for the sake of happiness, which is the fulfilment of every rational desire that a man might have. Hence, there is nothing incoherent in the claim that the basic goods are both desirable in themselves and are sought for the sake of happiness; and we ought not to assume that such a claim does violence to the nature of the basic goods as ultimate ends, since the subordination postulated in such a claim is not one of subordination as means.

2.6 Aquinas’s Conception of Happiness: Its Essence and Properties

Thus far we have discussed the way in which the basic goods are, on an aggregate conception of happiness, subordinate as parts to that happiness which is the fulfilment of man’s every rational desire. We have also discussed the way in which the basic goods – and, therefore, the constituent parts of happiness – are comparable and capable of being ranked ordinally according to some standard of relative value or worth. What, however, is that standard or hierarchy of relative value or worth, according to Aquinas? Furthermore, did Aquinas actually hold the aggregate conception of happiness rather than the monolithic conception? In order to answer these two questions, we must understand the distinction that Aquinas makes between perfect and imperfect happiness.

At *ST. I-II, Q.5, a.3*, Aquinas addresses the question of whether man can be happy in this life. His three objectors respond in the affirmative, arguing that man can
indeed be happy in this life. Aquinas responds by making a distinction between the kind of happiness that can be had in this life and the kind that can be had only in the next. He writes:

I answer that, A certain participation of Happiness can be had in this life: but perfect and true Happiness cannot be had in this life. This may be seen from a twofold consideration.

First, from the general notion of happiness. For since happiness is a ‘perfect and sufficient good,’ it excludes every evil, and fulfils every desire. But in this life every evil cannot be excluded. For this present life is subject to many unavoidable evils; to ignorance on the part of the intellect; to inordinate affection on the part of the appetite, and to many penalties on the part of the body …

Secondly, from a consideration of the specific nature of Happiness, viz. the vision of the Divine Essence, which man cannot obtain in this life, as was shown in the I, 12, 11. Hence it is evident that none can attain true and perfect Happiness in this life.

In this life man can participate in happiness, but he cannot possess perfect happiness, since the possession of true happiness excludes every evil, and the present life is, Aquinas says, subject to many unavoidable evils. Moreover, the specific nature of happiness is, Aquinas states, the vision of the Divine Essence, which cannot be possessed in this life.

Earlier, at ST. I-II, Q.4, a.5, Aquinas had addressed the question of whether the body is necessary for man’s happiness. His six objectors answered the question in the affirmative, arguing that the body is indeed necessary for man’s happiness, whilst Aquinas answered it in the negative, arguing that the body is not necessary. He writes:

I answer that, Happiness is twofold; the one is imperfect and is had in this life; the other is perfect, consisting in the vision of God. Now it is evident that the body is necessary for the happiness of this life. For the happiness of this life consists in an operation of the intellect, either speculative or practical. And the operation of the intellect in this life cannot be without a phantasm, which is only in a bodily organ … Consequently that happiness which can be had in this life, depends, in a way, on the body. …
… Now it is evident that the Divine Essence cannot be seen by means of phantasms … Wherefore, since man's perfect Happiness consists in the vision of the Divine Essence, it does not depend on the body. Consequently, without the body the soul can be happy.

Aquinas again makes the distinction between the happiness that we can possess in this life and the happiness that we can possess only in the next. He refers here to happiness as a two-part good, and draws a clear distinction between the imperfect happiness of this world and the perfect happiness of the next that consists solely in the possession of the beatific vision of God. In this world, Aquinas argues, the body is indeed necessary for happiness, as man’s imperfect happiness consists in the operation of his intellect, and this operation depends upon the operation of the senses through which we perceive the intelligible objects of this world. Possession of a body and functioning senses is, therefore, a necessary condition of man’s happiness in this world, that is, it is a necessary condition of his imperfect happiness. It is not, however, a necessary condition of man’s perfect happiness; for according to Aquinas, the beatific vision of God is not acquired through the use of the senses, but by some non-natural means.

We can now see that Aquinas regards the happiness to which the virtuous man directs all his actions as a kind of two-fold end or good. Our discussion of this two-fold happiness ought, however, to raise certain questions. As has already been noted, we have thus far spoken of happiness as an aggregate of ends or basic goods, and we have even quoted Aquinas in defence of this aggregate conception of happiness. But what Aquinas says above about the nature of both perfect and imperfect happiness would, if anything, seem to support a monolithic conception of happiness; for he speaks of perfect happiness as consisting solely in the beatific vision, and of imperfect happiness consisting in the operation of the intellect. Where he does speak of the body, he seems to speak of it only as a purely instrumental means to the proper
functioning of the intellect. Hence, if we were to judge Aquinas’s position on the nature of happiness by the two passages quoted above alone, we should have to conclude that Aquinas has a highly monolithic conception of the nature of happiness. It would then seem that the basic goods could be no more than instrumental goods for Aquinas. Is this understanding of Aquinas’s conception of the nature of happiness right, however?

I propose that it is not. That the monolithic interpretation is wrong can be seen more clearly once we direct our attention to the passage that directly follows the one just quoted from *ST* I-II, Q.4, a.5. At this point in the text, Aquinas introduces another distinction. This time between the two ways in which a thing can belong to man’s perfection or happiness. He writes:

> We must, however, notice that something may belong to a thing’s perfection in two ways. First, as constituting the essence thereof; thus the soul is necessary for man’s perfection. Secondly, as necessary for its well-being: thus, beauty of body and keenness of perfection belong to man's perfection. Wherefore though the body does not belong in the first way to the perfection of human Happiness, yet it does in the second way.

So a thing may be part of man’s perfection in two ways: either as that which constitutes its essence or as that which is necessary for its well-being. Aquinas says that the soul is necessary for man’s perfection, since the soul is presumably necessary for the operation of the intellect and necessary, therefore, for his perfection or happiness; but Aquinas also says that beauty of body and ‘keenness of perfection’ belong to man’s perfection as things necessary for its well-being. As Kreeft says in a gloss on this passage, the well-being of a thing consists in its ‘[f]lourishing or fullness of all its proper accidents. An essence can be present even when some of its proper accidents
are hindered (e.g., a rose with unopened petals, or even a rose bush with its flowers cut off).  

So we might say that a man who possesses the use of reason, but lacks beauty of body, has something of the essence of his perfection, even though he lacks what is necessary for his overall well-being. Hence, Aquinas seems to make a distinction between happiness in a narrow sense, which refers only to the intellect in an act of contemplation, and happiness in a much broader sense, which includes the possession of all those qualities necessary for man’s overall well-being. It is this broader conception of happiness in this life that includes all the basic goods as constituent parts. Furthermore, Aquinas even seems to regard perfect happiness as an aggregate of all goods, since at ST. I-II, Q.3, a.3 he writes:

Perfect happiness, such as the angels have, includes the aggregate of all good things, by being united to the universal source of all good; not that it requires each individual good. But in this imperfect happiness, we need the aggregate of those goods that suffice for the most perfect operation of this life.

Perfect happiness, then, is the aggregate of all good things, insofar as those who possess perfect happiness in the beatific vision also possess all goods by being united God, who, for Aquinas, is the source and cause of all perfections or goods. But as Aquinas goes on to say, with respect to imperfect happiness, man still needs the aggregate of goods that suffice for the most perfect operation of man in this life.

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored Finnis and Grisez’s claim that the absence of a hierarchy amongst the basic goods is entailed by their incommensurability. I have also explored their claim that happiness cannot be man’s ultimate end or reason for

50 Peter Kreeft, Summa of the Summa (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990), p. 385 n.75.
action, since the basic goods, by their nature, provide basic reasons for action. I have argued, however, that these two claims are false.

I have shown, then, that incommensurability rules out only ranking according to some common cardinal standard of measurement. It does not rule out ordinal rankings of comparability. It is possible, then, that the basic goods might be ranked ordinally according to some covering consideration. I have also argued that the covering consideration by which our comparisons of value proceed is the standard of the good man and the particular roles basic goods play in man’s flourishing. Contrary to whatever Finnis and Grisez might claim, then, the Neo-Scholastic notion of a hierarchy of the basic goods is not incompatible with Aquinas’s account of the basic goods as incommensurable ends.

Furthermore, I have shown that happiness, for Aquinas, is an aggregate of the basic goods, and that we seek the basic goods as constituents of our happiness. Happiness is, therefore, our ultimate reason for action, but the basic goods remain basic insofar as they are each intrinsically desirable and capable of providing basic reasons for action. I have also explained how Aquinas distinguishes between the essence of happiness and its properties. Contemplation is the essence of happiness, whilst all other basic goods are its properties. Aquinas’s conception of happiness is, therefore, hierarchical, with contemplation as a superordinate good. Contrary, once again, to whatever Finnis and Grisez might argue, the Neo-Scholastic notion of happiness as man’s ultimate end is not incompatible with Aquinas’s account of the basic goods as basic reasons for action.

In the following chapter I shall turn my attention to Finnis and Grisez’s claim that the basic goods are self-evident and not derived from theoretical reason. In
particular, I shall provide my own competing account of the apprehension of the basic goods and the first principles of practical reason. In so doing, I shall argue that, for Aquinas, our apprehension of the first principles is dependent upon our apprehension of the natures of the basic goods, goods which are the objects of ‘connatural’ appetites or inclinations. I shall also argue that our judgement that some end is good is grounded in our perception of that end as good.
Chapter 3

The Connatural Knowledge of the First Principles of Practical Reason

3.1 Introduction

In the last chapter I addressed the second of Finnis and Grisez’s three claims, namely, that the basic goods are incommensurable and do not form any hierarchy of goods. I argued that incommensurability rules out only ordering according to some common cardinal standard of measurement; it does not rule out ordinal rankings of comparability.

I shall now address the first of Finnis and Grisez’s three claims, namely, that the first principles of practical reason are self-evident and cannot be derived from theoretical reason. In particular, I shall provide my own competing account of *ST. I-II*, q.94, a.2 and the apprehension of the basic goods, and argue that, for Aquinas, a self-evident truth is a kind of *a posteriori* necessary truth. For this reason, I argue that our apprehension of the goodness of the basic goods depends upon our apprehension of the natures of the basic goods. Contrary to whatever Finnis and Grisez might argue, then, we do not apprehend the goodness of the basic goods by merely attending to our reasons for action. Indeed, as I shall demonstrate, Aquinas’s epistemology of the first principles of practical reason is more metaphysical than Finnis and Grisez’s interpretation of *ST. I-II*, q.94, a.2 would imply.

I begin this chapter by distinguishing between ‘inclinationist’ and ‘derivationist’ accounts of the natural law, and suggest that this contemporary
distinction presents us with a false dilemma. I then provide an account of Maritain’s notion of ‘connatural’ and ‘after-knowledge’ as a third alternative to inclinationism and derivationism. I follow Maritain in arguing that we have a knowledge of practical principles through our natural inclinations. But I distinguish my own account of connatural knowledge from Maritain’s by arguing that, for Aquinas, connatural knowledge does not, primarily, involve knowledge of our felt desires. Rather, connatural knowledge is primarily knowledge of causal dispositions towards certain goods. I then provide an account of Thomistic self-evident truth as a kind of *a posteriori* necessary truth which depends upon a knowledge of natures. Given this point, I explain Aquinas’s epistemology of essences, and argue that his epistemology does not rule out the common man’s having knowledge of moral truths. Finally, I provide an account of Aquinas’s notion of the cogitative faculty, and argue that, for Aquinas, our judgement that some end is good is grounded in our perception of that end *as* good.

### 3.2 ‘Inclinationism’ and ‘Derivationism’: A Distinction

Finnis, Grisez, and the new natural law theorists deny that the first principles of practical reason are derived from facts about human nature. They also deny that Aquinas ever held that these principles were to be derived from such facts. Aquinas, they say, held that the first principles were strictly self-evident and indemonstrable in nature; and any account of the natural law that claims to derive these principles from facts of nature – especially those accounts of the early modern period (such as the account given by Suarez) and the accounts of the Neo-Scholastic revival of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – is therefore deeply mistaken and a distortion of Aquinas’s philosophy.
Let us begin, then, by drawing a distinction between two types of account of the natural law: ‘inclinationist’ accounts and ‘derivationist’ accounts. On the one hand, we have inclinationism, which holds that the first principles of practical reasoning are strictly self-evident and indemonstrable in nature. As we have already said, this is the view of Finnis and Grisez; and according to their account, the first principles are known through a wholly non-inferential grasp of their truth. For the inclinationist, not only are the first principles underived, but they are also incapable of being derived from any set of facts concerning human nature.

On the other hand, we have derivationism, which holds that the first principles of practical reason are, in fact, derived from some set of fundamental truths of human nature. A derivationist, then, will deny that the first principles are strictly self-evident, or he may claim that they are taken as self-evident by a moral agent engaged in an act of practical reasoning. For the derivationist, the first principles of practical reasoning are first principles in the sense that they are the truths from which all practical reasoning starts. According to derivationism, then, the first principles of practical reasoning – in other words, truths concerning the goodness of certain ends – are derived or deduced from certain fundamental truths of theoretical reason, in particular, from certain fundament truths of an Aristotelian philosophy of nature concerning the nature of man. On this view, knowledge of the basic goods comes first in the order of practical reason only. If we have apprehended the proper order of the sciences as set out by Aristotle, the derivationist will claim, we shall understand that the first

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31 For instance, a derivationist will hold that the first principles are derived from theoretical reason, but he might allow that they are ‘self-evident’ – or something like this – insofar as they are presuppositions of any practical reasoning. Hence, although the first principles are derived from truths of theoretical reason, they are treated by all practically wise persons as if they were self-evident, and all practical reasoning will proceed from them. Henry B. Veatch and Mortimer Adler are two relatively recent exponents of derivationism whom Finnis has criticised. For an example of their position see Henry B. Veatch, *Aristotle: A Contemporary Appreciation* (London: Indiana University Press, 1974), pp. 94-127.
principles of practical reason are subordinate to the truths of the philosophy of nature and, in the end, metaphysics, from which all truths are ultimately derived. Finnis, Grisez, and the new natural law theorists attribute this kind of view to the scholastics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as well as to the Neo-Scholastics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; and it is this kind of view to which they regard their own account of practical reasoning as a remedy.

### 3.2.1 Finnis and Grisez’s Three Objections to Derivationism

We know, then, that Finnis, Grisez, and the new natural law theorists reject derivationism. Why, however, do they do so? What reasons do they give for rejecting the derivationist account of natural law? In a key passage Finnis writes:

Another of the three ‘decisive issues’ formulated by Stone was this: ‘Have the natural lawyers shown that they can derive ethical norms from facts?’ And the answer can be brisk: They have not, nor do they need to, nor did the classical exponents of the theory dream of attempting any such derivation.

... On the contrary, Aquinas asserts as plainly as possible that the first principles of natural law, which specify the basic forms of good and evil and which can be adequately grasped by anyone of the age of reason (and not just by metaphysicians), are per se nota (self-evident) and indemonstrable. They are not inferred from facts.\(^{52}\)

Finnis later goes on to say that ‘the objection that Aquinas’s account of natural law proposes an illicit inference from ‘is’ to ‘ought’ is quite unjustified’.\(^{53}\) And it would seem that, according to Finnis, ‘Aristotle and Aquinas would readily grant that ought cannot be deduced from is’.\(^{54}\)

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53 Finnis, *Natural law*, p. 34.
54 Finnis, *Natural law*, p. 47.
We can perceive two distinct claims in the above passage and in numerous passages throughout Finnis and Grisez’s corpus: first, we ought to reject derivationism as an account of Aquinas’s theory of natural law, since Aquinas himself rejects it; and second, we ought to reject derivationism because it violates Hume’s fact-value distinction. We can also discern a third, ancillary claim in Finnis’s statement that the first principles of practical reason can be known by anyone who has reached the age of reason, and not just by metaphysicians who possess a philosophical account of human nature. The argument would seem to be that accepting derivationism would lead to the absurd conclusion that only the most learned could ever possess moral knowledge, since only someone with a knowledge of Aristotle’s philosophy of nature would possess the necessary theoretical knowledge from which to draw practical conclusions. But this seems patently absurd – at least to anyone who is unwilling to embrace what might be called ‘eudaimonistic elitism’ – for it would seem that there have been many unlearned persons who have been virtuous, whilst lacking any formal understanding of natural philosophy. Hence, Murphy says, ‘As Finnis bluntly asserts in his defense of inclinationism, the basic principles of the natural law are such that they can be grasped by everyone, “not just metaphysicians” … elsewhere he remarks that they are “per se (not per metaphysicam) nota”.55

3.2.2 Derivationism is a Misinterpretation of Aquinas

The first of Finnis and Grisez’s two claims is based upon their reading of ST. I-II, q.94, a.2, the key text for their interpretation of natural law theory. In this passage, Aquinas addresses the question of how many precepts are contained in the natural law. And it is at ST. I-II, q.94, a.2 that he explains that the first principles of practical reason are

self-evident (*per se nota*), and that they are apprehended in a non-inferential manner through a knowledge of man’s natural inclinations. Aquinas writes:

> ... the precepts of the natural law are to the practical reason, what the first principles of demonstrations are to the speculative reason; because both are self-evident principles. …

> Now as ‘being’ is the first thing that falls under the apprehension [of theoretical reason] … so ‘good’ is the first thing that falls under the apprehension of the practical reason, which is directed to action: since every agent acts for an end under the aspect of good. Consequently the first principle of practical reason is one founded on the notion of good, viz. that ‘good is that which all things seek after.’ Hence this is the first precept of law, that ‘good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided.’ All other precepts of the natural law are based upon this: so that whatever the practical reason naturally apprehends as man’s good (or evil) belongs to the precepts of the natural law as something to be done or avoided.

> Since, however, good has the nature of an end, and evil, the nature of a contrary, hence it is that all those things to which man has a natural inclination, are naturally apprehended by reason as being good, and consequently as objects of pursuit, and their contraries as evil, and objects of avoidance. Wherefore according to the order of natural inclinations, is the order of the precepts of the natural law.56

Aquinas makes three claims in this passage that are important for our understanding of Finnis and Grisez’s account of practical reason: first, Aquinas claims that the first precepts of the natural law are self-evident principles, just as the first principles of theoretical reason are also self-evident and principles; second, he claims that ‘good’ is the first thing that ‘falls under the apprehension’ of practical reason, and hence that the first principle of practical reason is, ‘good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided’; and third, he claims that we naturally apprehend all those things to which we have a natural inclination as good and worthy of pursuit.

Given the first of these three claims, Finnis, Grisez, and the new natural law theorists conclude that derivationist interpretations of Aquinas’s theory of practical

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56 *ST. I-II*, q.94, a.2.
reason are wrong. Aquinas’s second and third claims form the basis of Finnis and Grisez’s notion of a ‘practical grasp’ of the basic goods. According to Finnis, Grisez, and Boyle, the first principles of practical reason are insights grasped through the experience of certain natural inclinations. They write:

Human persons have natural dispositions toward what will fulfill their potentialities. Some of these dispositions are natural appetites – that is, dispositions of a person’s various parts or powers toward their own actualizations. Others are sensory appetites (including aversions) – that is, emotional responses. Both types of dispositions sometimes motivate behavior more elemental than intelligently guided actions, and one thus becomes aware of them. These natural dispositions, insofar as they are experienced, provide data for the insights in which one knows the first, self-evident principles of practical knowledge corresponding to the substantive goods.  

Like Aquinas, then, Finnis and Grisez hold that we naturally apprehend those things to which we have a natural inclination as goods, and that goods are to be pursued. This apprehension, however, occurs in a wholly non-inferential act of understanding, in which the objects of certain inclinations are gasped as being good and worthy of pursuit. It is important to understand, however, that Finnis and Grisez do not intend to claim that knowledge of the goodness of certain ends can be inferred from the fact that human beings have inclinations to certain ends; for such an account of the basic goods would itself be a form of derivationism.  

Rather, for Finnis and Grisez, the correct method for determining what is good for man does not begin with a theoretical inquiry into his nature; as Finnis puts it, we do not begin ‘by understanding this nature from the outside, as it were, by way of psychological, anthropological, or metaphysical observations and judgments defining human nature, but by experiencing one’s nature, so to speak, from the inside, in the form of one’s inclinations’.  

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58 See Finnis, Natural law, p. 34.
59 Finnis, Natural law, p. 34.
then, experiencing certain inclinations is merely a necessary condition of coming to grasp that the ends of those inclinations are goods to be pursued, and that grasp is always wholly non-inferential in nature.

3.2.3 Derivationist Accounts of the Natural Law Violate the Fact-Value Distinction

The second of Finnis and Grisez’s two claims – that we ought to reject derivationism because it violates the fact-value distinction – is grounded in Finnis and Grisez’s acceptance of Hume’s claim that there is a real and fundamental distinction between fact and value, that is, that facts and values are essential two very different kinds of thing, and that the latter cannot be derived from the former. In a key passage, Finnis writes of Hume’s account of the fact-value distinction thus:

The first and standard interpretation treats Hume as announcing the logical truth, widely emphasized since the later part of the nineteenth century, that no set of non-moral (or, more generally, non-evaluative) premisses can entail a moral (or evaluative) conclusion.60

It is a truth of logic that a conclusion cannot contain anything that is not already contained in its premises. Therefore, one cannot validly infer a conclusion with normative content from a set of premises whose content is strictly non-normative. From this truth of logic, Finnis and Grisez conclude that one can never validly infer any fundamental truth of practical reason from facts concerning man’s nature, since such an inference, they assume, would violate this principle by trying to derive a normative proposition from a set of propositions that are essentially and necessarily non-normative. Hence, it would be highly embarrassing for Aquinas if his theory of natural law were shown to depend upon the making of such inferences, as we should

60 Finnis, Natural law, p. 37.
have to ascribe to Aquinas the making of a highly remedial error of logic. Finnis, therefore, claims that we can see the distinction between fact and value employed in Aquinas’s distinction between theoretical and practical reason: ‘Aquinas’s Aristotelian distinction between “speculative” and practical reason corresponds so neatly with the modern (but not only modern!) distinction which we (roughly!) indicate by contrasting ‘fact’ and ‘norm’ or ‘is’ and ‘ought’. In short, we ought never to favour a derivationist account of the natural law, since all derivationist accounts necessarily employ logically invalid inferences.

3.3 Inclinationism or Derivationism: A False Dilemma?

We have seen, then, that we can distinguish between two types of account of the natural law. We have also seen that Finnis and Grisez pit their inclinationist account against derivationist accounts, arguing that any attempt to derive the first principles of practical reason from facts of human nature will be both a misrepresentation of Aquinas’s theory of practical reason and will necessarily involve the making of patently invalid inferences. Hence, it seems that contemporary philosophers of the natural law are caught upon the horns of a dilemma: they may either accept that the first principles of practical reasoning are wholly indemonstrable and self-evident, risking – according to Finnis and Grisez’s critics, at least – separating the natural law from a robust account of human nature, in which the practical principles can be grounded; or they may deny the validity of Hume’s fact-value distinction, and claim that the first principles of practical reason are indeed ultimately derived from facts about human nature, risking the plausibility of their account as an interpretation of Aquinas’s theory of practical reason.

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61 Finnis, *Natural law*, p. 36.
Are we, however, really faced with such a dilemma? Could it be the case that the usual way of dividing up theories of the natural law in the contemporary debate is flawed? Could it be that we are, in fact, facing a false dilemma, and that a third option is available to us? One way of answering these questions is to ask whether any such third way has ever been considered in the history of Scholasticism. And we may answer our own question in the affirmative. Maritain famously held that our knowledge of the principles of practical reason were known to us both through practical reason by what he called ‘connatural’ knowledge and through theoretical reason by what he called ‘after-knowledge’.

3.3.1 Maritain’s Notion of ‘Connatural’ Knowledge

What, then, is ‘connatural’ knowledge? Unfortunately, Maritain does not give us a clear definition; but by this term Aquinas seems to mean a kind of knowledge that is acquired through a direct acquaintance with the thing known. In such knowledge, we know whatever we know about the nature of a certain thing, not by way of scientific demonstration, but by possessing, in some sense, the thing known. To see what is meant by this claim, it would be useful to begin our inquiry by considering what Maritain has to say about moral virtue and the two ways in which we can judge of things pertaining to moral virtue.

According to Maritain, then, Aquinas distinguishes between two ways of judging things pertaining to moral virtue at ST. II-II, q.45, a.2.\textsuperscript{62} In the first case, we possess knowledge of a moral virtue by possessing knowledge of the science of ethics. In other words, one can have a systematic and conceptual knowledge of a virtue such as fortitude, and, therefore, be able to infer from this knowledge truths pertaining to

the practice of the virtue of fortitude. Such knowledge, says Maritain, produces in us ‘merely intellectual conformity with the truths involved’, and were we to be asked a question concerning virtue, we should give ‘the right answer by merely looking at and consulting the intelligible objects contained in our concepts’. In the second case, we possess knowledge of a moral virtue by possessing the virtue itself. As Maritain says:

On the other hand we can possess the virtue in question in our own powers of will and desire, have it embodied in ourselves, and thus be in accordance with it, or co-natured with it, in our very being. Then, if we are asked a question about fortitude, we shall give the right answer, no longer through science, but through inclination, by looking at and consulting what we are and the inner bents or propensities of our own being. A virtuous man may possibly be utterly ignorant in moral philosophy, and know as well – probably better – everything about the virtues, through connaturality.

In the case of connatural knowledge, then, whatever is known connaturally is known by possessing the thing in question, by being co-natured with it, to use Maritain’s expression. Such knowledge is essentially non-inferential. We do not know whatever it is we know connaturally through deductive reasoning, but ‘through inclination’ and by consulting the ‘inner bents and propensities of our own being’.

What, then, has connatural knowledge to do with knowledge of the first principles of practical reason? As we have already said, Maritain holds that these principles are known not by the deductions of either theoretical or practical reason, but by connatural knowledge or, as he sometimes calls it, ‘knowledge through inclination’. Of the knowledge of practical principles he writes:

My contention is that the judgments in which Natural Law is made manifest to practical Reason do not proceed from any conceptual, discursive, rational exercise of reason; they proceed from that connatural or congeniality

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64 Maritain, ‘On Knowledge through Connaturality’, p. 474.
through which what is consonant with the essential inclinations of human nature is grasped by the intellect as good; what is dissonant, as bad.  

Later he writes:

being known through inclination, the precepts of Natural Law are known in an undemonstrable manner. Thus it is that men are unable to give account of and rationally to justify their most fundamental moral beliefs; and this very fact is a token, not of the irrationality and intrinsic invalidity of these beliefs, but on the contrary, of their essential naturality …

Like Finnis, Grisez, and the new natural law theorists, Maritain holds that practical principles are grasped by practical reason through a knowledge of natural inclinations. It is through such a knowledge of our natural inclinations that we grasp the truth of certain fundamental practical principles. Furthermore, like Finnis and Grisez, Maritain holds that this connatural grasp of practical principles through inclination is essentially non-discursive or non-inferential in nature. The precepts of the natural law – that is, the principles of practical reason – are known in a wholly indemonstrable manner. Since they are apprehended thus, Maritain finds it unsurprising that we are often unable to justify our most basic moral beliefs; but, for Maritain, this is not evidence of their irrationality, but of their fundamentally natural character.

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3.3.2 Maritain’s Notion of ‘After-Knowledge’

However, if we are unable to provide justifications for our most fundamental beliefs concerning morality, what role could theoretical reason possibly play in the understanding of the natural law? If practical principles are indemonstrable for Maritain, how does his account of the natural law differ substantially from that of Finnis and Grisez? The answer to our questions resides in Maritain’s concept of ‘after-knowledge’. For Maritain, moral philosophy is essentially a kind of reflective knowledge, that is, an ‘after-knowledge’. He writes:

Philosophers and philosophical theories supervene in order to explain and justify, through concepts and reasoning, what from the time of the cave-man men have progressively known through inclination and connaturality. Moral philosophy is *reflective* knowledge, a sort of after-knowledge. It does not discover the moral law. The moral law was discovered by men before the existence of any moral philosophy. Moral philosophy has critically to analyze and rationally elucidate moral standards and rules of conduct whose validity was previously discovered in an undemonstrable manner, and in a non-conceptual, non-rational way; it has also to clear them, as far as possible, from adventitious outgrowths or deviations which may have developed by reason of the coarseness of our nature and the accidents of social evolution.67

Moral philosophy, then, has as its essential task the systematic explanation and justification of those moral principles that are known connaturally through the experience of our own natural inclinations. Its role is to analyse and elucidate those principles of the natural law that are already known to man through his natural grasp of those principles. According to Maritain, it must also correct any errors in moral reasoning that may have developed throughout the history of mankind. We ought to say, therefore, that moral philosophy and theoretical reason, insofar as they attempt to provide a grounding for the first principles of practical reason, have as their goal the

provision of explanatory justifications, whose role is to explain what makes the first principles of practical reason true.68

3.3.3 Does Maritain’s Account of Connatural Knowledge Comport with Aquinas’s?

Has Maritain correctly understood Aquinas’s notion of connatural knowledge? To answer that question let us turn to ST. II-II, q.45, a.2, which Maritain cites as the place in which Aquinas draws his distinction between knowledge of a virtue known through science and knowledge of a virtue known through connaturality. At ST. II-II, q.45, a.2, Aquinas is addressing the question of whether the gift of wisdom is ‘in the intellect as it subject’. His three objectors answer the question in the negative, offering three arguments against wisdom being in the intellect as its subject. Aquinas answers in the affirmative, responding to his objectors thus:

68 Following Dummett, we may distinguish between two kinds of argument: suasive and explanatory. In a suasive argument, we start from premises already accepted as true, and proceed to a conclusion whose truth was previously contested. In an explanatory argument, we start from a conclusion, and proceed to provide the most plausible explanation of the truth of the conclusion we have already granted (see Michael Dummett, Truth and Other Enigmas (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 296). I propose that Maritain’s after-knowledge is a system of explanatory arguments or justifications. See also Burnyeat on the difference between knowing ‘the that’ and knowing ‘the because’ (Miles F. Burnyeat, ‘Aristotle on Learning to Be Good’, in Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 69-92). It ought to be noted that Finnis and Grisez sometimes allow that theoretical reason can be employed in a defence of practical principles. For instance, they say, ‘theoretical studies of human persons, including empirical psychology and philosophical anthropology, uncover the natural inclinations. … [and] the body of material taken as a whole testifies to natural inclinations to stay alive and healthy, to know, to do good work and to play [etc.] … Accepting the list of basic goods is supported by the data; rejecting it is at odds with the data’ (see Germain Grisez, Joseph Boyle, and John Finnis, ‘Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends’, American Journal of Jurisprudence 32 (1987): p. 113). This admission is problematic, however. Given Finnis and Grisez’s acceptance of the fact-value distinction, and given Finnis’s view of theoretical reason as concerned only with ‘bare facts’ which have no normative or evaluative dimensions (see Chapter 5 for details), it is hard to see how any appeal to such observable facts as ‘Human beings have a natural inclination to stay healthy’ could provide a defence for the principle ‘Health is good’, if all facts by nature exclude any normative and evaluative elements. Furthermore, such appeals to theoretical reason leave open the question of the exact relationship between theoretical reason and the first principles of practical reason. Finnis and Grisez provide us with no explanation of how such appeals to empirical psychology and philosophical anthropology fit into the highly structured Aristotelian schema of the sciences. I shall fill this lacuna in Chapter 4.
I answer that, As stated above (Article 1), wisdom denotes a certain rectitude of judgment according to the Eternal Law. Now rectitude of judgment is twofold: first, on account of perfect use of reason, secondly, on account of a certain connaturality with the matter about which one has to judge. Thus, about matters of chastity, a man after inquiring with his reason forms a right judgment, if he has learnt the science of morals, while he who has the habit of chastity judges of such matters by a kind of connaturality.

Accordingly it belongs to the wisdom that is an intellectual virtue to pronounce right judgment about Divine things after reason has made its inquiry, but it belongs to wisdom as a gift of the Holy Ghost to judge aright about them on account of connaturality with them: thus Dionysius says (Div. Nom. Ii) that ‘Hierotheus is perfect in Divine things, for he not only learns, but is patient of, Divine things.’

Now this sympathy or connaturality for Divine things is the result of charity, which unites us to God, according to 1 Corinthians 6:17: ‘He who is joined to the Lord, is one spirit.’ Consequently wisdom which is a gift, has its cause in the will, which cause is charity, but it has its essence in the intellect, whose act is to judge aright, as stated above (I-II, 14, 1). 69

According to Aquinas, then, wisdom is indeed in the intellect, since ‘wisdom’ denotes a certain kind of rectitude of judgement. Now, as Aquinas says, rectitude of judgement is essentially a twofold thing, that is, it can be divided into two parts: that rectitude of judgement which comes from the perfect use of reason; and that rectitude of reason which comes from ‘a certain connaturality with the matter about which one has to judge’. Hence, Aquinas says that a man will form a correct judgement concerning matters of chastity if he has studied the science of morals, that is, he will exhibit rectitude of judgement on account of his perfect use of reason concerning questions of chastity and what that virtue entails. On the other hand, a man who possesses the virtue of chastity will judge of matters pertaining to that virtue by a ‘kind of connaturality’, that is, he will exhibit rectitude of judgement on account of a certain kind of practical wisdom that is possessed by him in virtue of his possession of the habit of chastity. But all this would seem to comport well with Maritain’s own

69 ST. II-II, q.45, a.2.
interpretation of this passage, so we cannot fault his account of connatural knowledge in this respect.

### 3.4 Connatural Knowledge: The Problem Stated

Thus far I have drawn a distinction between inclinationist and derivationist accounts of the natural law; and I have explained the three reasons given by Finnis and Grisez for rejecting derivationism. I have also shown how Maritain’s account of connatural and after-knowledge provides us with a third position concerning the first principles of practical reason and their relation to theoretical reason.

Now, as we have seen, Maritain speaks of the possessor of connatural knowledge as being ‘co-natured’ with the object of his knowledge. Whatever connatural knowledge is, then, it would seem to be a kind of knowledge acquired through a direct acquaintance with the thing known. What, however, does it mean to speak of someone’s being co-natured with something? I shall now address the nature of connaturality. Specifically, I shall consider that with which we are co-natured as an object of a natural appetite or power. In particular, I shall argue that Maritain’s account of connaturality differs from Aquinas’s by focusing upon the desires we experience for these objects, and I shall show that, for Aquinas, connaturality is primarily a causal disposition towards some end that befits us, not some felt desire.

#### 3.4.1 The Nature of Connaturality

If we are to explain the nature of connatural knowledge, then, we must first explain the nature of connaturality. What, therefore, is connaturality? According to Aquinas, connaturality is a kind of love or ‘concupiscible power’ that moves a thing towards an object of desire. At *ST* I-II, q.26, a.1, he addresses the question of whether love is ‘in the concupiscible power’, and responds in the affirmative. Aquinas writes:
I answer that, Love is something pertaining to the appetite; since good is the object of both. Wherefore love differs according to the difference of appetites. For there is an appetite which arises from an apprehension existing, not in the subject of the appetite, but in some other: and this is called the ‘natural appetite.’ Because natural things seek what is suitable to them according to their nature, by reason of an apprehension which is not in them, but in the Author of their nature ... And there is another appetite arising from an apprehension in the subject of the appetite, but from necessity and not from free-will. Such is, in irrational animals, the ‘sensitive appetite,’ which, however, in man, has a certain share of liberty, in so far as it obeys reason. Again, there is another appetite following freely from an apprehension in the subject of the appetite. And this is the rational or intellectual appetite, which is called the ‘will.’

Now in each of these appetites, the name ‘love’ is given to the principle movement towards the end loved. In the natural appetite the principle of this movement is the appetitive subject’s connaturalness with the thing to which it tends, and may be called ‘natural love’: thus the connaturalness of a heavy body for the centre, is by reason of its weight and may be called ‘natural love.’ In like manner the aptitude of the sensitive appetite or of the will to some good, that is to say, its very complacency in good is called ‘sensitive love,’ or ‘intellectual’ or ‘rational love.’ So that sensitive love is in the sensitive appetite, just as intellectual love is in the intellectual appetite. And it belongs to the concupiscible power, because it regards good absolutely, and not under the aspect of difficulty, which is the object of the irascible faculty.\footnote{ST. I-II, q.26, a.1.}

Love is a kind of appetite, since, for Aquinas, the object of an appetite is something that is, in some sense, apprehended as good, and the proper object of love is the truly lovable or good. Love, however, can be divided into three kinds according to the ‘difference of appetites’, which Aquinas classifies as the ‘natural appetite’, the ‘sensitive appetite’, and the ‘intellectual appetite’. Furthermore, he says that, with respect to the natural appetite, the principle or cause of the subject’s movement towards its good is the subject’s ‘connaturalness with the thing to which it tends’. And such appetitive movement is called ‘natural love’.

What exactly, however, is a ‘natural appetite’? Aquinas says that a natural appetite is an appetite that ‘arises from an apprehension existing, not in the subject of
the appetite, but in some other’; and that ‘natural things seek what is suitable to them according to their nature, by reason of an apprehension which is not in them, but in the Author of their nature’. He then cites the tendency of a heavy body to move towards the centre of the earth as an example of natural love and connaturalness.

How are we to understand such statements? At *ST* I-II, q.23, a.4, Aquinas says of the appetites that ‘in the movements of the appetitive faculty, good has, as it were, a force of attraction, while evil has a force of repulsion. In the first place, therefore, good causes, in the appetitive power, a certain inclination, aptitude or connaturalness in respect of good: and this belongs to the passion of “love”’. Appetitive powers, for Aquinas, then, are inclinations to, aptitudes for, or connaturalities with certain goods. In the case of natural appetites, a thing’s appetites will be its natural inclinations towards certain objects or ends. We can understand this further, if we remind ourselves of Aquinas’s example of a heavy body moving towards the centre of the earth. According to Aquinas, the heavy body has a tendency to move towards the centre, because it has a natural inclination to do so. Such an account of the movements of heavy bodies obviously presupposes Aristotle’s doctrine of ‘natural places’, according to which the change in spatial location of certain things is explained by their tendency to move towards the places at which they are naturally at rest. Hence, a heavy body will move towards the centre of the earth because that is the object’s natural place; and, again, fire will move upwards because the heavens are the natural resting place of fire.

We need not, however, take Aquinas’s account of natural appetites as committing him to a doctrine of natural places, even though he uses the example of the movements of heavy bodies as a paradigmatic illustration of the operation of natural appetites. On the contrary, we can express the notion of a natural appetite in a
far more familiar way, by merely stating that a heavy body will move towards the
centre of the earth because it is causally disposed to do so. We can, therefore,
understand natural appetites as kinds of causal dispositions or powers. But although
some appetites involve sensible affections of the kind that we usually now associate
with terms such as ‘desire’, ‘appetite’, and ‘love’, we ought not to assume that every
kind of appetite necessarily involves such affections for Aquinas. On the other hand,
certain dispositions or natural appetites may well be accompanied by certain sensible
affections. For instance, human beings have a natural disposition to seek nourishment,
but that disposition is often accompanied by a certain sensible affection, namely,
hunger. However, we should not attribute to Aquinas the kind of illicit mentalism
with which Hobbes charges Aristotelianism. For there is no reason to assume that
by attributing appetites to heavy bodies, Aquinas intends to attribute sensible
affections to them.

To return to our original question, then, what is connaturality? Connaturality
is, for Aquinas, a kind of love or appetite; but it is not the kind of appetite or desire
that is necessarily of a sensible or felt nature. On the contrary, natural appetites are
essentially of a causal or dispositional nature. How, then, is this notion of
connaturality related to Maritain’s account of connatural knowledge?

71 Hobbes makes the following disparaging remarks concerning Aristotelian natural appetites: ‘If you
desire to know why some kind of bodies sink naturally … the Schools will tell you out of Aristotle, that
the bodies that sink downwards, are heavy; and that this heaviness is it that causes them to descend.
But if you ask what they mean by heaviness, they will define it to be an endeavour to go to the centre
of the earth. … Or they will tell you the centre of the earth is the place of rest … and therefore they
[heavy bodies] endeavour to be there: as if stones and metals had a desire, or could discern the place
they would be at, as man does; or loved rest, as man does not; or that a piece of glass were less safe in
the window, than falling into the street (see Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan: Or the Matter, Forme and
p. 444). Geach argues that Hobbes’ witticisms do nothing to show the falsity of traditional Aristotelian
teleological explanations, since Aristotle does not mean to attribute felt desires to inanimate objects
3.4.2 Maritain’s Understanding of Connatural Knowledge

Maritain speaks of connatural knowledge as a kind of knowledge in which both the intellect and the sensitive appetite are employed. He writes:

In this knowledge through union or inclination, connaturality or congeniality, the intellect is at play not alone, but together with affective inclinations and the dispositions of the will, and is guided by them. It is not rational knowledge, knowledge through the conceptual, logical and discursive exercise of Reason. But it is really and genuinely knowledge, though obscure and perhaps incapable of giving account of itself, or being translated into words. ⁷²

He later expands upon this thought specifically with respect to moral knowledge:

Finally moral experience offers to us the most wide-spread instance of knowledge through connaturality. As we have noticed, it is in the experiential – not philosophical – knowledge of moral virtues that Thomas Aquinas saw the first and main example of knowledge through inclination or through connaturality. It is through connaturality that moral consciousness attains a kind of knowing – inexpressible in words and notions – of the deepest dispositions – longings, fears, hopes or despairs, primeval loves and options, involved in the night of the subjectivity. When a man makes a free decision, he takes into account, not only all that he possesses of moral science and factual information, and which is manifested to him in concepts and notions, but also the secret elements of evaluation which depend on what he is, and which are known to him through inclination, through his own actual propensities and his own virtues, if he has any. ⁷³

One thing about Maritain’s account of connatural knowledge ought to strike the reader immediately, namely, the fact that Maritain appears to regard connatural knowledge as something that necessarily involves the experience of a whole host of emotions and sensible desires. He speaks of ‘longings, fears, hopes or despairs, primeval loves and options’, which are ‘involved in the night of the subjectivity’. On the other hand, he also speaks of ‘the secret elements of evaluation which depend on what he is, and

which are known to him through inclination, through his own actual propensities and his own virtues’.

How are we to understand Maritain’s description of the acquisition of connatural knowledge, then? Before we answer that question, a caveat ought to be issued concerning the aforesaid description. Now, Maritain claims that connatural knowledge is neither rational nor conceptual. He also claims that it is not acquired through the ‘logical and discursive exercise of reason’. If by the latter claim, Maritain means to say that connatural knowledge is essentially non-inferential knowledge, then we can happily assent to his claim, since we have already acknowledged that Aquinas holds that the first principles of practical reason are known in a non-inferential manner. But it is not so obvious, however, that we ought to countenance the existence of a kind of knowledge that is neither rational nor conceptual in nature. In fact, as I shall argue, our knowledge of the first principles of practical reason is both rational and conceptual in nature since it is derived from a knowledge of the objects of our natural inclinations and their essences.

With that concern duly noted, what can we now say about Maritain’s description of the acquisition of connatural knowledge? For Maritain, connatural knowledge is a kind of knowledge through inclination. Whatever one knows in an act of connatural knowledge one knows through inclination. As Maritain says, a man’s free decisions take into account ‘the secret elements of evaluation which depend on what he is, and which are known to him through inclination, through his own actual propensities and his own virtues’. Such elements are dependent upon his nature, and Maritain speaks of ‘inclination’, ‘propensities’, and virtues. Connatural knowledge, then, would seem to involve a knowledge of a human being’s natural appetites or dispositions; but whereas connaturality itself, considered as a causal disposition, is not
essentially of a sensible or felt nature, connatural knowledge would also seem to involve the sensitive appetite.

### 3.4.3 Aquinas and Knowledge through Natural Inclinations

For Maritain, then, connatural knowledge involves a knowledge of both our natural appetites or inclinations and our felt desires. What, however, does Aquinas specifically say about our natural appetites or inclinations in relation to our knowledge of the basic goods?

Let us return to *ST*. I-II, q.94, a.2, the key text upon which Finnis, Grisez, and the new natural law theorists base their interpretation of Aquinas’s ethics, and where Aquinas discusses the first principles of practical reason and their knowledge. He writes:

> Since, however, good has the nature of an end, and evil, the nature of a contrary, hence it is that all those things to which man has a natural inclination, are naturally apprehended by reason as being good, and consequently as objects of pursuit, and their contraries as evil, and objects of avoidance.\(^{74}\)

According to Aquinas, we naturally apprehend the goodness of those ends to which we have a natural inclination. He goes on to list three kinds of inclination, all of which he takes as basic:

> Because in man there is first of all an inclination to good in accordance with the nature which he has in common with all substances: inasmuch as every substance seeks the preservation of its own being, according to its nature: and by reason of this inclination, whatever is a means of preserving human life, and of warding off its obstacles, belongs to the natural law. Secondly, there is in man an inclination to things that pertain to him more specially, according to that nature which he has in common with other animals: and in virtue of this inclination, those things are said to belong to the natural law, ‘which nature has taught to all animals’, such as sexual intercourse, education of offspring and so forth. Thirdly, there is in man an inclination to good, according to the nature of his reason, which nature is proper to him: thus man has a natural

\(^{74}\) *ST*. I-II, q.94, a.2.
inclination to know the truth about God, and to live in society: and in this respect, whatever pertains to this inclination belongs to the natural law; for instance, to shun ignorance, to avoid offending those among whom one has to live, and other such things regarding the above inclination.\textsuperscript{75}

The three basic types of natural inclination, for Aquinas, then, are as follows: first, an inclination to preserve human life; second, an inclination towards those ends whose pursuit man shares with other animals (according to Aquinas, man pursues such ends \textit{on account} of his animal nature, and the inclination that he uses as an example is the inclination towards the begetting and rearing of children); and third, the inclination towards those ends that he pursues \textit{on account} of his rational nature (Aquinas’s examples here are the inclination towards pursuing knowledge of God and the inclination towards living in society with one’s fellow rational animals).

In addition to claiming that we have a natural apprehension of the goodness of the objects of our natural inclinations, Aquinas also claims that we naturally apprehend the truth of the first principle of practical reason, which states that the ‘good is to be done and pursued, and evil avoided’. He writes:

Now a certain order is to be found in those things that are apprehended universally. For that which, before aught else, falls under apprehension, is ‘being,’ the notion of which is included in all things whatsoever a man apprehends. Wherefore the first indemonstrable principle [of theoretical reason] is that ‘the same thing cannot be affirmed and denied at the same time,’ which is based on the notion of ‘being’ and ‘not-being’: and on this principle all others are based … Now as ‘being’ is the first thing that falls under the apprehension simply, so ‘good’ is the first thing that falls under the apprehension of the practical reason, which is directed to action: since every agent acts for an end under the aspect of good. Consequently the first principle of practical reason is one founded on the notion of good, viz. that ‘good is that which all things seek after.’ Hence this is the first precept of law, that ‘good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided.’ All other precepts of the natural law are based upon this: so that whatever the practical reason naturally

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{ST}. I-II, q.94, a.2.
apprehends as man’s good (or evil) belongs to the precepts of the natural law as something to be done or avoided.\textsuperscript{76}

Aquinas draws a comparison between the apprehension of the first principle of theoretical reason and that of the first principle of practical reason. According to Aquinas, the first principle of theoretical reason is grasped as true in an immediate manner, because it is, in some way or other, ‘based on the notion of “being”’. This notion is the first concept to be apprehended by man, and Aquinas holds that the notion is included in whatsoever is apprehended. In a like manner, the first principle of practical reason is also grasped as true in an immediate manner, because it is ‘founded on the notion of good’. ‘Good’ is the first notion to be apprehended by man in the operation of practical reason, and Aquinas explicates the good as ‘that which all things seek after’.

Two kinds of thing, then, are naturally apprehended by us as true in the operation of practical reason: first, that the objects of our natural inclinations are good; and second, that the good ought to be pursued and its contrary shunned. But how are such things so apprehended, we might ask? We already know that Maritain regards our knowledge of the principles of practical reason as involving a certain interplay of our natural inclinations and our felt desires. On Maritain’s account of our knowledge of the principles of practical reason, reason apprehends the truth of particular principles through a certain kind of primal grasp of basic natural truths. We know such things to be true, because we feel such things to be true, as it were. The problem with such an account, however, is that the proposition ‘I desire such-and-such’ does not entail the proposition ‘Such-and-such is worthy of desire’. Furthermore, we might

\textsuperscript{76} ST. I-II, q.94, a.2.
suspect Aquinas of making a simple invalid inference if we understand him as trying
to derive ‘I ought to pursue ends E₁, E₂, and E₃’ directly from ‘All men seek ends E₁,
E₂, and E₃’. We must, therefore, say more about our apprehension of the goodness of
the basic goods if we are to avoid interpreting Aquinas as a kind of Neo-Humean
sentimentalist, or ascribing to him the most basic of logical errors. What, however,
can we say?

3.5 The First Principles of Practical Reason: Their Logical Character

We have seen, then, how Aquinas regards connaturality as a kind of disposition
towards certain ends, ends that are suitable to our nature. And we have seen how
Maritain’s account of connaturality differs from Aquinas’s by laying emphasis upon
our sensible desires for the objects of these dispositions. We have also seen that the
ends apprehended as good by practical reason are the objects of three kinds of
inclination or natural appetite. Finally, we have seen that according to Aquinas, we
naturally apprehend the truth of the first principle of practical reason in an immediate
manner, and that this apprehension is related to our apprehension of the notion of the
good.

Now, it ought to be remembered that Aquinas, Finnis, and Grisez would all
claim that the first principles of practical reason are self-evident, since they are
apprehended in an immediate manner. This claim, however, might seem wholly
unconvincing at first. For even if we accept the principle ‘The good ought to be
pursued’ as self-evident and reducible to some form of tautology (such as ‘You ought
to do what you ought to do), then it still remains to be seen how propositions such as
‘Knowledge of God is good, and ought to be pursued’ and ‘Living together in society
is good, and ought to be pursued’ can be regarded as self-evident. Such claims will
be considered by many as properly being the conclusions of arguments, arguments that are long and perhaps controversial. I shall now explain what Aquinas means by self-evidence, and argue that, for Aquinas, self-evident truths are more akin to *a posteriori* necessary truths. Once we understand this fact, we shall see that self-evidence and the practical grasp of the basic goods depends upon an apprehension of essences.

### 3.5.1 Self-Evidence

What, then, does it mean to call a principle self-evident, according to Aquinas? Let us return to our key text – *ST. I-II, q.94, a.2* – in which Aquinas outlines the self-evidence of the first principles of practical reason. He writes:

> I answer that … the precepts of the natural law are to the practical reason, what the first principles of demonstrations are to the speculative reason; because both are self-evident principles. Now a thing is said to be self-evident in two ways: first, in itself; secondly, in relation to us. Any proposition is said to be self-evident in itself, if its predicate is contained in the notion of the subject: although, to one who knows not the definition of the subject, it happens that such a proposition is not self-evident. For instance, this proposition, ‘Man is a rational being,’ is, in its very nature, self-evident, since who says ‘man,’ says ‘a rational being’: and yet to one who knows not what a man is, this proposition is not self-evident. For instance, this proposition, ‘Man is a rational being,’ is, in its very nature, self-evident, since who says ‘man,’ says ‘a rational being’: and yet to one who knows not what a man is, this proposition is not self-evident. Hence it is that, as Boethius says … certain axioms or propositions are universally self-evident to all; and such are those propositions whose terms are known to all, as, ‘Every whole is greater than its part,’ and, ‘Things equal to one and the same are equal to one another.’ But some propositions are self-evident only to the wise, who understand the meaning of the terms of such propositions: thus to one who understands that an angel is not a body, it is self-evident that an angel is not circumscriptively in a place: but this is not evident to the unlearned, for they cannot grasp it.77

Aquinas makes two major claims here: first, that the first principles of practical reason are self-evident; and second, that a proposition can be self-evident in one of two ways, namely, ‘in itself’ or ‘in relation to us’.

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77 *ST. I-II, q.94, a.2.*
Let us first ask what it means to say that a proposition is self-evident ‘in itself’. As Aquinas explains, a proposition is self-evident in itself if its predicate is contained in the notion of the subject. Put that way, such talk of self-evidence naturally brings to mind the notion of an analytic truth. Hence we might imagine that Aquinas has in mind such analytic truths as ‘All bachelors are unmarried men’, since the predicates of analytically true propositions are always contained within their subjects as a matter of conceptual necessity. However, the example that Aquinas gives of propositions that are self-evident in themselves is ‘Man is a rational being’. This example makes the interpretation of such a class of self-evident principles as analytic truths problematic, for one might reasonably suppose that the question of man’s nature is an empirical matter, rather than a matter of grasping the content of a concept or term. It seems unlikely, then, that Aquinas has analytic truths in mind when he is discussing propositions that are self-evident in themselves.

But if Aquinas is not referring to analytic truths when he speaks of propositions whose predicates are contained in their subjects, to what, exactly, is he referring? To answer that question we must turn to Aquinas’s epistemology and his account of the abstraction of essences from the deliverances of the senses. It should be noted that, according to Aquinas, the intellect is able to grasp the nature of a thing by abstracting its essence through repeated observations of the instantiations of a kind. On this account, we have a natural – though often partial – understanding of things and their essences. For example, we apprehend through repeated experience that man is the kind of being that uses concepts, language, and reasons discursively. We grasp, therefore, that rationality is part of the essence of man; and when we are presented with the proposition ‘Man is a rational being’, we naturally assent to its truth.
For Aquinas, then, the self-evidence of certain propositions is explained by two things: first, the way in which certain terms succeed in referring to actual essences, essences that are instantiated by the sensible singulars of experience: and second, our natural capacity for grasping those essences through the perception of sensible singulars. Propositions that express truths about such essences are, furthermore, of an underived nature, since the truths they express are apprehend directly in experience.

What, however, does it mean to say that a proposition is self-evident ‘in relation to us’? Aquinas, citing Boethius, says that there are two types of self-evident proposition: first, those propositions that are known to all, because the terms of the propositions are understood by all; and second, those propositions that are known only to the wise, because only the wise understand the terms of the propositions. Now, as I have already indicated, understanding the essence of a natural kind to which a term refers is a necessary condition of apprehending the truth or falsity of a proposition that predicates something of the term in question. Hence, as Aquinas says, someone who does not know what man is will not grasp as self-evident the truth that man is rational. Therefore, any term that requires special knowledge for its understanding will be a term that cannot stand as the subject of a self-evident proposition, so far as the unlearned are concerned. Thus, Aquinas says that only the wise understand that an angel, being non-corporeal, is not located within space, since the unlearned cannot grasp the meaning of the proposition’s terms. Yet such a proposition is self-evident in itself to the wise, so the matter of what is and is not self-evident in relation to us is determined by the knowledge of individual persons. At any rate, Aquinas holds that the first principles of practical reason belong in Boethius’s first category of self-evident propositions, and that they are knowable to those who have experienced the basic goods to a sufficient degree.
We can now see that, for Aquinas, a necessary condition of seeing a proposition as self-evident is the apprehension of the essence to which the subject-term refers. But in that case, it seems that when he speaks of self-evident truths, he means to speak of necessary truths, or of what we should now usually call, following Kripke, *a posteriori necessary truths*. Such truths have ‘rigid designators’ or terms that pick out natural kinds as their subjects, and the truth of their predicates follows necessarily from the nature of the things to which their subject-terms refer. Furthermore, we can see that the things predicated of a subject in an *a posteriori* necessary truth are true only when we have conducted sufficient empirical investigations. Hence, ‘Water is H$_2$O’ is an *a posteriori* necessary truth, since being H$_2$O is either the essence or part of the essence of water, and water cannot fail to be H$_2$O whilst remaining water. That water is H$_2$O is, on Aquinas’s account, then, a self-evident truth. It is also, presumably, a truth that is only self-evident in relation to the wise, as the inner structure of water is something that can be known only through the method of the natural sciences. At any rate, the inner structure of water does not seem to be something that we can grasp through our everyday acquaintance with water.

It would seem, then, that Aquinas’s notion of self-evidence is founded upon an epistemology of the grasp of essences and, in turn, upon an ontology of essences. This appears to be a problem for Finnis and Grisez. To be sure, contra the strict derivationists, the first principles of practical reason are not derived by syllogisms from the truths of natural philosophy or metaphysics; but the immediate apprehension of the first principles would seem to depend upon either the immediate apprehension of the natures of the basic goods or upon the apprehension of the nature of man, in particular upon an apprehension of those inclinations that are proper to his nature. Aquinas’s account of self-evidence, then, does seem to commit Finnis and Grisez to
the existence of essences, at least if they wish their account of the practical grasp to be understood as a straightforward explication of Aquinas’s doctrine of the apprehension of the basic goods. On the other hand, Finnis and Grisez could maintain that the first principles of practical reason are self-evident in the sense that they express the basic beliefs from which all practical reasoning begins. Such basic beliefs would be the ‘brute facts’ of ethical discourse; but it is not obvious that Finnis and Grisez would be entitled to claim that this interpretation represents Aquinas’s own account of moral knowledge.

A greater problem, at least so far as the defender of Aquinas is concerned, is that Aquinas’s account of self-evidence will seem unconvincing as an account of our apprehension of primary principles, if knowledge of those principles presupposes a posteriori knowledge of a thing’s inner structure, as in the case of water. For Aquinas holds that we have a natural habit, which he calls ‘synderesis’, that enables us to grasp the first principles of practical reason with certainty, as can be seen at ST I, q.79, a.12. And it is not obvious how we could ascribe any such habit to the common man, if our knowledge of the first principles were to depend upon the knowledge of a thing’s inner structure. If we are to show, then, the plausibility of his doctrine of synderesis, if only from the viewpoint of Aquinas’s philosophy, we must explain his account of our knowledge of essences.

3.6 Aquinas’s Epistemology of Essences

We have seen, then, that for Aquinas, apprehending some proposition as self-evidently true depends upon an apprehension of the essence to which the proposition refers. I have also argued that such self-evident propositions resemble a posteriori necessary truths. If I am correct, our apprehension of the truth of the first principles of practical
reason will depend upon our apprehension of the essences of the basic goods. That is, it will depend upon an apprehension of the essences of the objects of our inclinations or connatural appetites. My interpretation of *ST*. I-II, q.94, a.2 might seem to lead to a eudemonistic elitism, then, if knowledge of essences depend upon knowledge of a thing’s inner structure. I shall now argue that this is not the case, and that a certain grasp of essences can be had through everyday experience. I shall explain how, for Aquinas, knowledge of essences is known through the deliverances of our five senses. Once we have addressed this, we can turn our attention to the question of how we apprehend that goodness is part of the nature of the objects of our connatural appetites.

### 3.6.1 Aquinas’s Doctrine of Abstraction

To understand Aquinas’s account of our knowledge of essences, we must understand the relationship between perception and the role of the active intellect in the apprehension of essences and the formation of concepts. In particular, we must understand his account of the abstraction of universals from particulars, and the way in which that process of abstraction is dependent upon the experience of sensibilia. However, for Aquinas, the question of how we know essences or universals is answered primarily by an explanation of our cognitive powers, rather than by an account of formal epistemic rules. In his *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics*, at *PA*. II, 20, 14, Aquinas writes:

> For it is clear that sensing is properly and per se of the singular, but yet there is some how even a sensing of the universal. For sense knows Callias not only so far forth as he is Callias, but also as he is this man; and similarly Socrates, as he is this man. As a result of such an attainment pre-existing in the sense, the intellective soul can consider man in both. But if it were in the very nature of things that sense could apprehend only that which pertains to particularity, and along with this could in no wise apprehend the nature in the particular, it would not be possible for universal knowledge to be caused in us from sense-apprehension.
Then he [Aristotle] manifests this same point in the process which goes from species to genus. Hence he adds: ‘Again in these,’ namely, in man and horse, ‘the mind lingers in its consideration, until it attains to some thing indivisible in them, which is universal.’ For example, we consider such an animal and another one, say a man and a horse, until we arrive at the common item, ‘animal,’ which is universal; and in this genus we do the same until we arrive at some higher genus. Therefore, since we take a knowledge of universals from singulars, he concludes that it is obviously necessary to acquire the first universal principles by induction. For that is the way, i.e., by way of induction, that the sense introduces the universal into the mind, inasmuch as all the singulars are considered.  

Sensing is ‘properly of the singular’, in that whenever we perceive any sensible thing, the object of our perception is always a particular, individual thing: this man, this horse, this tree, and so on. And yet we also seem to have knowledge of universal essences: ‘manness’, ‘horseness’, ‘treeness’, and so on. As Aquinas indicates, the intellect can consider man both in the particular and the universal. We can cognize Callias and Socrates both as particular men and as instances of the kind ‘man’. Hence, experience would seem to show that sensing, though properly of the singular, is also, in a sense, of the universal. Indeed, that this is so seems to be a necessary condition of our obtaining any knowledge of universals from sense perception.

How exactly, though, do we gain knowledge of essences or universals from particulars, according to Aquinas? The answer: By a process of ‘abstraction’ caused, in turn, by a process of ‘induction’. ‘Abstraction’, according to Aquinas, is the process by which the intellect abstracts a universal essence from a ‘phantasm’ or image produced in the perception of a sensible object. ‘Induction’, on the other hand, is nothing more than the process of the mind attending to the singular objects of perception. It ought to be noted that by the term ‘induction’ Aquinas does not mean ‘inductive argument’, which is how we should normally understand the term today.

78 PA. II, 20, 14.
Rather, induction is a process in which the intellect is moved to grasp the universal essences contained in the particular objects of the senses. This grasp is *caused* by the intellect attending to several instances of a kind. Hence, if a person perceives several dogs, and gives sufficient attention to these instances of dogness, his ‘active intellect’, to use Aquinas’s terminology, will abstract the essence contained in the various phantasms or mental images of dogs that reside in the ‘passive intellect’, images that have been acquired through the operation of the senses. At any rate, Aquinas is not claiming that such a process of attending to sensible singulars is identical to that type of inferential generalization which nowadays we should label ‘inductive argument’.

### 3.6.2 Abstraction as a Rational Process

Abstraction, then, is the process by which a universal essence is abstracted from the perception of sensible singulars. However, the account of abstraction that we have just given is largely an account of the intellect and the operation of its powers. Can we say anything about abstraction considered as a formal rational process? At *ST I*, q.85, a.1, ad.1, Aquinas says that such abstraction can occur in two ways:

First, by way of composition and division; thus we may understand that one thing does not exist in some other, or that it is separate therefrom.

Secondly, by way of simple and absolute consideration; thus we understand one thing without considering the other. Thus for the intellect to abstract one from another things which are not really abstract from one another, does, in the first mode of abstraction, imply falsehood. But, in the second mode of abstraction, for the intellect to abstract things which are not really abstract from one another, does not involve falsehood, as clearly appears in the case of the senses. For if we understood or said that color is not in a colored body, or that it is separate from it, there would be error in this opinion or assertion. But if we consider color and its properties, without reference to the apple which is colored; or if we express in word what we thus understand, there is no error in such an opinion or assertion, because an apple is not essential to color, and therefore color can be understood independently of the apple. Likewise, the things which belong to the species of a material thing, such as a stone, or a man, or a horse, can be thought of apart from the individualizing principles which do not belong to the notion of the species. This is what we mean by abstracting the universal from the particular, or the intelligible species from
the phantasm; that is, by considering the nature of the species apart from its individual qualities represented by the phantasms.79

We can, then, abstract a thing’s nature from particular perceptions of it in the following two ways: first, ‘by way of composition and division’, in which we adjudge that some quality is or is not predicable of a certain subject. Hence, we adjudge that ‘is a mammal’ is predicable of tigers, whilst we adjudge that ‘is a vegetable’ is so not. Second, ‘by way of simple and absolute consideration’, in which we consider a particular essence wholly apart from its non-proper accidents (if it be a substance) or apart from the substance of which the thing is a modification (if it be a quality). Hence, we can understand being coloured apart from being an apple, without falling into error, since we know by experience that being an apple is separable from being coloured, and that appleness is in no way part of the essence of colour. Or, on the other hand, we can understand the nature of man wholly apart from the non-proper accidents present in any given mental image or phantasm of a particular man. For instance, we might have a mental image or perception of a man that is six feet tall, but since being six feet tall does not seem to be part of the essence of man, we can abstract that particular quality away from our notion of man’s essence. By contrast, however, we cannot abstract being a body – and, therefore, having a certain height – away from the nature of man, since being an animal and, therefore, having a body seem to be part of man’s essence. Aquinas’s method of abstraction, then, presupposes the existence of essences and proper and non-proper accidents. For according to Aquinas, it is by means of these ontological categories that we classify the objects of our perception.

79 ST I, q.85, a.1, ad.1.
3.6.3 Knowledge of Natures

Aquinas’s account of abstraction, then, is dependent upon his metaphysics and natural philosophy. In particular, it relies upon his commitment to an Aristotelian philosophy of essences and natural kinds, and of proper and non-proper accidents. According to Aquinas, natural substances have essences or natures. Furthermore, natural substances can be classified according to Aristotle’s taxonomy of genus and species, and definitions formulated according to Aristotle’s two-term system state the essences of those things to which we refer by the names of natural kinds. Hence, to take the usual example, the term ‘man’ refers to a real nature – we might say that it ‘rigidly designates’ an object having a real nature – and the definition ‘rational animal’ explicates the nature of the essence to which the term ‘man’ refers (man is both rational and animal, and everything else that flows from his rationality and his animal nature).

Any systematic and extensive knowledge of a natural kind will, of course, involve a lengthy process of induction. Such a process may occupy a whole lifetime and take into account the observations of previous generations of observers. Nevertheless, induction, as it operates in everyday circumstances, is sufficient to give the ordinary man a limited knowledge or grasp of the objects of his experience. A small child may well lack a complete understanding of the nature of dogs; but he can, by attending to the limited instances of dogs that he has experienced, grasp something of the quiddity of dogness. He can know, for instance, that dogs bark and that they are warm and furry. He might also know that his pet dog is brown, and that it wags its tail in greeting. On the other hand, the child may not know which of these qualities, if any, are essential to dogs as a natural kind; but this is something that will, in the normal case, be refined by further experience. The child will come to learn that not
all dogs are brown, and that not all dogs are friendly; and he will learn that dogs are the kind of thing that competent users of the English language call ‘animals’.

### 3.6.4 Sensible Singulars

For Aquinas, then, our knowledge of essences depends upon the active intellect and its power of abstraction. Abstraction, in turn, depends upon the process of induction, which essentially consists in the repeated observation of sensible, singular objects. What, however, are these sensible singulars? Or, to put the matter another way, what kinds of thing can be sensible singulars? At *ST I*, q.12, a.4, Aquinas addresses the question of whether any human being might perceive the essence of God by his own natural powers. He answers the question in the negative, arguing that man knows primarily only that which ‘exists in individual matter’. Aquinas writes:

> Therefore what exists only in individual matter we know naturally, forasmuch as our soul, whereby we know, is the form of certain matter. Now our soul possesses two cognitive powers; one is the act of a corporeal organ, which naturally knows things existing in individual matter; hence sense knows only the singular. But there is another kind of cognitive power in the soul, called the intellect; and this is not the act of any corporeal organ. Wherefore the intellect naturally knows natures which exist only in individual matter; not as they are in such individual matter, but according as they are abstracted therefrom by the considering act of the intellect; hence it follows that through the intellect we can understand these objects as universal; and this is beyond the power of the sense.\(^{80}\)

Later, at *ST I*, q.85, a.1, Aquinas explains the relation between knowledge of essences and the perception of sensible singulars in greater detail. He writes:

> the object of knowledge is proportionate to the power of knowledge. Now there are three grades of the cognitive powers. For one cognitive power, namely, the sense, is the act of a corporeal organ. And therefore the object of every sensitive power is a form as existing in corporeal matter. And since such matter is the principle of individuality, therefore every power of the sensitive part can only have knowledge of the individual. There is another grade of cognitive power which is neither the act of a corporeal organ, nor in any way

\(^{80}\) *ST I*, q.12, a.4.
connected with corporeal matter; such is the angelic intellect, the object of whose cognitive power is therefore a form existing apart from matter: for though angels know material things, yet they do not know them save in something immaterial, namely, either in themselves or in God. But the human intellect holds a middle place: for it is not the act of an organ; yet it is a power of the soul which is the form the body ... And therefore it is proper to it to know a form existing individually in corporeal matter, but not as existing in this individual matter. But to know what is in individual matter, not as existing in such matter, is to abstract the form from individual matter which is represented by the phantasms. Therefore we must needs say that our intellect understands material things by abstracting from the phantasms; and through material things thus considered we acquire some knowledge of immaterial things, just as, on the contrary, angels know material things through the immaterial.\textsuperscript{81}

According to Aquinas, then, whatever we know by means of our natural powers, we know primarily through the perception of individual corporeal things (Aquinas, however, admits of indirect, inferential knowledge, which can be acquired through the consideration of sensible things; for instance, he allows that we can know something of the nature and existence of God through a consideration of the natural world). Since, however, all natural knowledge of corporeal things is acquired by means of the five senses according to Aquinas, every sensible singular will necessarily be seen in virtue of the five sensitive powers, as traditionally understood. Hence, if Socrates sees Plato standing in the Agora, he sees him in virtue of his power of sight. He also sees him properly \textit{qua} sensible singular; but as we have already stated, perception of a sensible singular is also, in some sense, perception of a universal (therefore, Socrates is also capable of seeing Plato as an instance of manness).

We might, however, think that there is a problem with this account; for if it is the case that whatever is seen is seen in virtue of the power of the five senses, then how is it that we can perceive the essences of particular, unified objects such as

\textsuperscript{81} \textit{ST} I, q.85, a.1.
Socrates and Plato? For the direct object of each of the five senses is the particular kind of sensible quality proper to each sense, namely, those qualities that are visible, audible, tangible, and capable of being tasted or smelt. Since, however, qualities such as ‘being a man’ or ‘being Socrates’ are not the object of any particular faculty of sense, how can Aquinas justify his claim that we have knowledge of such qualities through the mere operation of the senses?

### 3.7 The Estimative or Cogitative Power

Thus far we have seen how, for Aquinas, essences are abstracted through a process of induction or attention to the objects of our experience. We have also seen how abstraction is dependent upon the deliverances of the five senses. According to Aquinas, then, whatever is known is known through the five senses. This, however, might seem to pose a problem for my interpretation of *ST* I-II, q.94, a.2 and our apprehension of the basic goods. For it raises the question of how we could ever perceive goodness. And if we cannot perceive goodness, we cannot perceive that it belongs to the nature of an object of a connatural appetite. I shall now argue that, for Aquinas, goodness – and other evaluative qualities – are apprehended through the operation of the ‘estimative power’, a power which presents certain things to us as good.

#### 3.7.1 The Estimative Power: Its Role in Perception

As we have seen, Aquinas held that whatever is known is known through the five senses. It is through these senses that we are able to perceive colours, flavours, smells, sounds, and tactile sensations. But what of such qualities as being Socrates or being good? Of which sense could these qualities be the proper objects? Now, according to an empiricist sense-data theory of perception, the senses deliver bare sensory data.
That is, all we ever perceive are the discrete empirical qualities that are the proper objects of the five senses. We see a patch of colour here and a shape there, but we never perceive qualities such as ‘being Socrates’ or ‘being man’.

Furthermore, according to this theory of perception, all our fundamental concepts are derived from the perception of such sense-data. For every concept that is not derived from some set of more basic concepts there exists some empirical datum that is the correlate of the concept. Hence, for instance, the redness of the rose is the empirical correlate of my concept ‘red’, and the sweetness of the honey is the empirical correlate of my concept ‘sweet’. It is on account of such a sense-data theory of perception and knowledge that the empiricist tradition has been sceptical of the notion of essence, since there exists no empirical datum to which the concept of essence obviously corresponds. Should Aquinas be equally sceptical of the notion of essence, and should he be sceptical of evaluative concepts such as goodness, since there exists no obvious empirical data to which these concepts can be correlated. In short, does Aquinas’s epistemology exclude the possibility of our perceiving the goodness of the basic goods?

The answer to our question, however, is that Aquinas is not committed to any such scepticism by his account of perception. To be sure, Aquinas holds that the proper objects of the five senses are the sensibilia proper to each sense, in other words, those qualities that are visible, audible, tangible, and capable of being tasted or smelt.

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82 Though the matter is more complex. Locke, for instance, grants that we can have knowledge of essences in mathematics and ethics, but he denies that we can have knowledge of the essences of physical substances. This is because, for Locke, our idea of an essence (i.e., a nominal essence) must correspond to a thing’s actual essence (i.e., its real essence). Locke thinks we can only ever know that a nominal essence conforms to a thing’s real essence in the realm of mathematics and ethics, where, he argues, the definition of a mathematical or moral idea constitutes both the nominal and real essence of a thing (see John Locke, *The Works of John Locke in Nine Volumes*, vol. 2, 12th ed. (London: Rivington, 1824), Bk. IV, Chps. IV & VI).
as we have already indicated. Yet he distinguishes between these ‘exterior’ senses, whose role it is to receive the sense-data provided by the external world, and the ‘internal’ senses that both operate upon the deliverances of the external senses and receive cognitive content through their operation. Writing of the division of the internal senses at ST I, q.78, a.4, Aquinas describes both the external and internal senses in the following manner:

Thus, therefore, for the reception of sensible forms, the ‘proper sense’ and the ‘common sense’ are appointed … But for the retention and preservation of these forms, the ‘phantasy’ or ‘imagination’ is appointed; which are the same, for phantasy or imagination is as it were a storehouse of forms received through the senses. Furthermore, for the apprehension of intentions which are not received through the senses, the ‘estimative’ power is appointed: and for the preservation thereof, the ‘memorative’ power, which is a storehouse of such-like intentions. A sign of which we have in the fact that the principle of memory in animals is found in some such intention, for instance, that something is harmful or otherwise. And the very formality of the past, which memory observes, is to be reckoned among these intentions.83

According to Aquinas, then, the internal senses can be divided into three: the imagination, or power of ‘phantasy’, the estimative power, and the memory. The imagination is appointed for the ‘retention and preservation’ of the deliverances of the ‘proper’ and ‘common’ senses (both powers of the exterior senses), which consist of ‘sensible forms’. The estimative power, on the other hand, is appointed for the apprehension of intentions ‘which are not received through the senses’, whilst the memory is appointed for the preservation of such intentions. And what is the content of these intentions or cognitive likenesses, according to Aquinas? The examples he gives are of something’s being harmful or otherwise, two qualities having an evaluative or normative content, and which seem to lack any single, correlated sense-datum that might be apprehended by any one of the five senses.

83 ST I, q.78, a.4.
To understand further Aquinas’s notion of the estimative power and its operations, we must turn our attention to the paragraph that proceeds the one just quoted above (ST I, q.78, a.4). Here Aquinas explains why we ought to attribute such a power to animals, and describes its operation. He writes:

Again we must observe that if an animal were moved by pleasing and disagreeable things only as affecting the sense, there would be no need to suppose that an animal has a power besides the apprehension of those forms which the senses perceive, and in which the animal takes pleasure, or from which it shrinks with horror. But the animal needs to seek or to avoid certain things, not only because they are pleasing or otherwise to the senses, but also on account of other advantages and uses, or disadvantages: just as the sheep runs away when it sees a wolf, not on account of its color or shape, but as a natural enemy; and again a bird gathers together straws, not because they are pleasant to the sense, but because they are useful for building its nest. Animals, therefore, need to perceive such intentions, which the exterior sense does not perceive. And some distinct principle is necessary for this; since the perception of sensible forms comes by an immutation caused by the sensible, which is not the case with the perception of those intentions.84

According to Aquinas, then, animals need to apprehend more than the pleasing or disagreeable qualities of a thing, if they are to function well. It is not enough that they should be caused to act for the sake of a thing, because it is pleasant, or that they should shirk from a thing, because it is disagreeable. Animals must also be able to distinguish, in some sense, between that which is advantageous or useful and that which is disadvantageous. This would seem to involve perceiving particular things as this-or-that’s, and Aquinas gives the examples of a sheep’s perceiving a wolf as an enemy and a bird’s perceiving sticks as useful. Such intentions or perceptions are not, however, delivered by the external senses, whose operations can be explained by changes or immutations in perceivers, changes that are caused by the actions of sensible objects on a perceiver’s senses.

84 ST I, q.78, a.4.
Aquinas allows, then, that we can have perceptions of qualities that are not the proper objects of any of the five senses. In particular, his positing of an estimative sense would seem to allow that we can perceive moral qualities, since the intentions formed by the estimative power are of a distinctly evaluative nature. Indeed, such a claim would seem to place him outside of the tradition of classic empiricism to which the British empiricists belonged; and Aquinas seems to have held that our knowledge of the world in general surpasses the knowledge of mere sense-data. At *ST* I, q.78, a.4, ad 4, responding to the claim that the intellect knows nothing above that which is perceived by the external senses, he writes:

> Although the operation of the intellect has its origin in the senses: yet, in the thing apprehended through the senses, the intellect knows many things which the senses cannot perceive. In like manner does the estimative power, though in a less perfect manner.  

Having a perception of something through the operation of the external senses would seem to be a necessary condition of the operation of both the intellect and the estimative power. However, what is apprehended by these powers is not limited to those percepts or concepts that are correlated to individual sense-data, as the sense-data theory of perception and knowledge would hold.

Moreover, human perception is not limited to the perception of discrete bundles of qualities according to Aquinas. On the contrary, the ‘cogitative power’, which is Aquinas’s term for the estimative power in rational animals, allows us to perceive individual objects as objects, and, therefore, allows us to perceive them as individual substances instantiating particular kinds. As Lisska has pointed out, for Aquinas, the operation of the cogitative power is a necessary condition of the operation

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85 *ST* I, q.78, a.4, ad 4.
of the active intellect and its abstraction of an essence from a percept. Were the cogitative power not to present the deliverances of the external senses as unified objects in the possible intellect, then the active intellect would not be aware of the presence of individual objects; and if the active intellect were not aware of the presence of individual objects, then it could not conceive of such objects as particular things instantiating particular kinds. According to Aquinas, then, perception is more than just the sensing of particular sensibilia, and what we can know is more than the sum of all the sensible qualities in the world and those concepts that can be correlated with them. Nevertheless, how can the estimative or cogitative power form perceptions of qualities that are insensible?

At DA. II, chp.VI, lec.13, Aquinas explains how a thing may be said to be sensed ‘incidentally’. He writes:

Having seen how we should speak of the absolute or essential sense-objects, both common and-special, it remains to be seen how anything is a sense-object ‘incidentally’. Now for an object to be a sense-object incidentally it must first be connected accidentally with an essential sense-object; as a man, for instance, may happen to be white, or a white thing happen to be sweet. Secondly, it must be perceived by the one who is sensing; if it were connected with the sense-object without itself being perceived, it could not be said to be sensed incidentally. But this implies that with respect to some cognitive faculty of the one sensing it, it is known, not incidentally, but absolutely. Now this latter faculty must be either another sense-faculty, or the intellect, or the cogitative faculty, or natural instinct. I say ‘another sense-faculty’, meaning that sweetness is incidentally visible inasmuch as a white thing seen is in fact sweet, the sweetness being directly perceptible by another sense, i.e. taste.

But, speaking precisely, this is not in the fullest sense an incidental sense-object; it is incidental to the sense of sight, but it is essentially sensible. Now what is not perceived by any special sense is known by the intellect, if it be a universal; yet not anything knowable by intellect in sensible matter should be called a sense-object incidentally, but only what is at once intellectually apprehended as soon as a sense-experience occurs. Thus, as soon as I see anyone talking or moving himself my intellect tells me that he is alive; and I can say that I see him live. But if this apprehension is of something individual, as when, seeing this particular coloured thing, I perceive this particular man or

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beast, then the cogitative faculty (in the case of man at least) is at work, the power which is also called the ‘particular reason’ because it correlates individualised notions, just as the ‘universal reason’ correlates universal ideas.  

The ‘absolute or essential sense-objects’ are the objects of the exterior senses. An incidental sense-object, on the other hand, is a sense-object that is ‘connected accidentally’ with an absolute sense-object. The examples of such accidental connections that Aquinas gives seem somewhat curious, but his point seems to be that we perceive certain things in virtue of our perception of certain absolute sense-objects. Hence, I see the sweet thing in virtue of my perceiving its whiteness.

According to Aquinas, however, seeing the sweet thing in virtue of seeing its whiteness is not a true case of perceiving an incidental sense-object, since the sweetness of the sweet thing is an absolute sense-object of one of the other senses. A true incidental sense-object is one that cannot be perceived by any of the external five senses; and Aquinas divides the perception of such sense-objects into two classes: first, perceptions of universals; and second, perceptions of individual things. Regarding the perception of universals, he says only that which is ‘at once intellectually apprehended as soon as a sense-experience occurs’ ought to be considered as a true incidental sense-object. The example that Aquinas gives of such an immediate intellectual apprehension is of our grasping that someone is alive in virtue of our perception of his self-movement. The thought would seem to be that we immediately perceive that someone is living as soon as we perceive his self-movement. And it is in virtue of perceiving this incidental sense-object that we can place something under the classification ‘living thing’. Hence, as Aquinas says, ‘as

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87 DA. II, chp.VI, lec.13.
soon as I see anyone talking or moving himself my intellect tells me that he is alive; and I can say that I see him live’.

Regarding the perception of individual things, however, he says that it is the cogitative faculty, rather than the intellect, that is at work. Again, the examples given by Aquinas are somewhat curious, but the point seems to be that we perceive this particular thing as a man and that particular thing as a beast in virtue of certain sensible qualities or absolute sense-objects. This apprehension of particular things as this-or-that’s is achieved by the correlation of ‘individualized notions’, and Aquinas is careful to draw a comparison between the operation of the cogitative power, which he also calls the ‘particular reason’, and the operation of the active intellect, which he also calls ‘universal reason’. The idea would seem to be that whereas the active intellect brings particular objects under certain universal categories, the cogitative power brings particular objects under certain particular categories or notions. Presumably such individualized notions could be captured by phrases such as ‘This living thing’ or ‘That useful thing’ and can be contrasted with universals such as ‘living thing’ and ‘useful thing’. At any rate, it would seem that both the active intellect and the cogitative power perceive things the way that they do on account of their disposition to ascribe certain qualities to things in virtue of those things’ sensible qualities.88

88 Geach, it may be noted, realized the importance of the active intellect in concept-formation and the central role it played in Aquinas’s epistemology. He writes, ‘In accepting the comparison whereby the intellectus agens, the mind’s concept-forming power, is likened to a light that enables the mind’s eye to see the intelligible features of things, as the bodily eye sees colours, Aquinas is careful to add that this comparison goes on all fours only if we suppose that colours are generated by the kindling light – that the light is not just revealing colours that already exist in the dark’ (see Peter Geach, Mental Acts: Their Content and their Object (London: Routledge, 1971), p.130). Aquinas’s comparison is somewhat obscure, but the idea seems to be that the active intellect has an active role in the formation of concepts. For Aquinas, the mind appears to form concepts that go beyond the mere deliverances of the five external senses, even though the operation of those senses is a necessary condition of the formation of such concepts.
3.8 The Apprehension of the Goodness of the Basic Goods

As we have seen, Maritain holds that we have a connatural knowledge of practical principles through a knowledge of our inclinations. In such acts of knowing, the knower is, in some sense, co-natured with the object of his knowledge. We have also seen that, for Aquinas, connaturality is a kind of causal disposition towards an object suitable to a thing’s nature. I have argued that Maritain’s account of connaturality differs from Aquinas’s in that it focuses upon the desires we often feel for the objects of our natural inclinations. I have also shown how, according to Aquinas, the basic goods are the objects of such inclinations or connatural appetites. In addition to this, I have argued that the notion of self-evidence employed by Aquinas at *ST.* I-II, q.94, a.2 resembles that of an *a posteriori* necessary truth, and that the apprehension of the first principles depends upon an apprehension of the essences of the basic goods.

Furthermore, I have argued that, for Aquinas, essences are known empirically by attending to the objects of our perceptual experiences. And I have shown how Aquinas’s empiricism does not preclude the possibility of perceiving evaluative qualities such as goodness. I shall now explain how we ought to understand the apprehension of the first principles of practical reason, and I shall argue that this apprehension involves the perception of moral qualities. In particular, I shall argue that seeing the object of a natural inclination as good provides the basis for a judgement of its goodness. I shall also argue that the experience of our natural inclinations provides the occasion of such perceptions, and that, *pace* Finnis and Grisez, Aquinas regards the basic goods as ends which befit man’s nature. Understanding these matters will enable us to see how Finnis and Grisez’s understanding of *ST.* I-II, q.94, a.2 differs radically from Aquinas’s.
3.8.1 The Apprehension of the First Principles of Practical Reason: An Explanation

How, then, are we ultimately to understand Aquinas’s account of the apprehension of the basic goods? With respect to the interpretation of Aquinas’s doctrine of the self-evidence of the primary principles of practical reason, I propose the following account.

When Aquinas claims, at *ST. I-II, q.94, a.2*, that the first principle of practical reason is ‘founded on the notion of good’, he means to say that if we know the nature of the good, then we shall also know that the good is worthy of pursuit and that it forms the object of a natural appetite. To see that this is so, consider Aquinas’s definition of the good as ‘that which all things seek after’, and consider also his remark that practical reason apprehends the concept of the good, because ‘every agent acts for an end under the aspect of the good’. Furthermore, recall that, according to Aquinas, a thing’s natural appetites are directed to certain ends, because God in his wisdom apprehends that those ends are good for it. Hence, on Aquinas’s account, things act for certain ends either because they take those ends to be good (as in the case of rational creatures, who estimate this or that end to be worthy of pursuit) or because God, apprehending the goodness of certain ends, ordains that they should act for those ends (as in the case of non-rational animals, plants, and inorganic things).

For Aquinas, then, goodness has the nature of an end in two respects: first, as an object of pursuit, whose pursuit is explained by the fact that a rational agent apprehends it as worthy of pursuit or desire; and second, as the object of a disposition or natural appetite. If, therefore, we apprehend that it is in the nature of the good to be worthy of pursuit and desire, we shall also naturally and immediately apprehend the truth of the principle ‘The good ought to be pursued’. In this respect, it seems as if the first principle of practical reason can be reduced to some form of tautology such
as ‘What is worthy of pursuit is worthy of pursuit’ or ‘What ought to be done ought to be done’. On the other hand, what is not tautological is the claim that the good is the object of a disposition or natural appetite, and the claim that we naturally apprehend the good as such will seem considerably more controversial.

Let us now turn to the question of how we know the goodness of the basic goods. It will be remember that at *ST. I-II, q.94, a.2* Aquinas describes the apprehension of the basic goods thus:

> Since, however, good has the nature of an end, and evil, the nature of a contrary, hence it is that all those things to which man has a natural inclination, are naturally apprehended by reason as being good, and consequently as objects of pursuit, and their contraries as evil, and objects of avoidance.

Here Aquinas seems to be relying upon the claim that being an object of a natural appetite is part of the nature of the good, and, therefore, whatever is such an object is good and worthy of pursuit. For this reason, our apprehension of the basic goods and the first principles of practical reason will be dependent upon our apprehension of our natural appetites and their natures. Hence, if we understand that the begetting and rearing of children are objects of a natural appetite, we shall also understand that they are good and worthy of pursuit. Indeed, any good that would fall under one of Aquinas’s three fundamental categories of basic goods would be apprehended in this manner.

Apprehending some end as good, then, is dependent upon apprehending its nature as the object of a natural appetite or disposition. But apprehending what is and is not the object of a natural appetite would seem to be dependent upon apprehending what is and is not a natural appetite of man. But in order for the common man to achieve this, it appears as if we need something like Maritain’s account of connatural
knowledge, which would allow us to have a practical grasp of our nature, apprehended through experiencing the operation of our natural appetites.

3.8.2 Perceiving Evaluative Qualities

We have now seen how Aquinas’s account of the self-evidence of the first principles of practical reason ought to be understood. Can we, however, say more in defence of the claim that we have an apprehension of such first principles? In particular, can we give an account of how the goodness of the basic goods is seen? That is, how do we see that such-and-such a thing is good or has the quality of being good? The answer, I propose, is that we perceive the moral or evaluative qualities of a thing in virtue of its non-moral qualities. In other words, we possess a kind of moral perception.

It will be remembered that Aquinas distinguishes between absolute and incidental sense-objects at DA. II, chp.VI, lec.13. It will also be remembered that, for Aquinas, an absolute sense-object is the object of one of the five external senses, and he gives as examples the qualities of being white and being sweet. A true incidental sense-object, on the other hand, is one that is seen only in virtue of other, absolute sense-objects. Aquinas claims that universals are perceived in this manner, as well as the ‘thisness’ or ‘thatness’ of individual objects. So, we see that a particular thing is an instantiation of the kind ‘living thing’ in virtue of seeing its self-movement; and we see that this particular thing is this beast or this man in virtue of one or more of its absolute qualities, such as being coloured.

It is because of this power to perceive incidental sense-objects, then, that the active intellect can perceive essences and the cogitative power can receive perceptions of an individual object as useful or harmful, or as a particular this-or-that. As we have already seen, Aquinas says specifically that a true incidental sense-object is ‘only what
is at once intellectually apprehended as soon as a sense-experience occurs’ (DA. II, chp.VI, lec.13). This perhaps indicates that what Aquinas has in mind is a process of a largely non-propositional nature. That is, it is not necessarily the case that I see an object with such-and-such qualities, and infer, therefore, that it belongs to some specific class or kind. Now, it may well be the case that I do sometimes reason in this way, and that, in those circumstances, I form the judgement that a particular object belongs to a certain class based on its possessing certain qualities. But in the usual case of the perception of an incidental sense-object, it might be that we immediately perceive a thing as a such-and-such, on account of some disposition of the mind to form such a perception, when presented with the presence of certain sensible qualities.

Hence, when Aquinas says, ‘Thus, as soon as I see anyone talking or moving himself my intellect tells me that he is alive; and I can say that I see him live’ (DA. II, chp.VI, lec.13), we ought to read him as saying that two things happen in the perception of an incidental sense-object: first, I perceive a particular thing as a such-and-such; and second, on the basis of this perception, I form the judgement that this particular thing is an instantiation of the kind ‘such-and-such’. It is, then, by such operations of both the intellect and the senses that I am able to place particular individual objects under certain universal categories. To say that ‘I can say that I see him live’ is to say that I can form the judgement that he is an instantiation of the kind ‘living thing’, and then make a verbal assertion upon that basis.

In the case of the functioning of the cogitative power, a similar set of operations seem to be taking place. I see this particular thing as a beast or as a man, on account of the mind’s disposition to form such perceptions, when presented with the presence of certain sensible qualities. I also see this particular thing as useful or as disadvantageous, or as a natural enemy and as dangerous. These perceptions can,
presumably, be captured by such demonstrative phrases as ‘this useful thing’ and ‘this
natural enemy’. And, presumably, the objects of such perceptions can be placed under
certain universal categories by the intellect to form judgements of the kind ‘This is an
instance of a useful thing’ and ‘This is an instance of a natural enemy’. If we have
such a disposition to form perceptions of incidental sense-objects, then this will be the
means by which we form perceptions of moral or evaluative qualities. That is, it will
be the means by which we see something as good and worthy of pursuit or as bad and
worthy of avoidance. And seeing something as good or bad, or as having goodness or
badness as part of its nature, will be the basis of our judgement that certain things are
good and certain other things bad.

As we have already said, this process of attributing moral qualities to an object
in virtue of its non-moral qualities need not be propositional in nature. To see that this
is so, consider a common example of seeing an object as such-and-such in virtue of
its sensible qualities or some set thereof, namely, the example of seeing a particular
human being as a particular person. If Peter sees Paul, and his vision is in no way
impaired or obstructed, then Peter immediately sees Paul as Paul. Peter may then, on
the basis of this perception, form the judgement that the person he sees before him is
Paul. Were we to ask Peter what the sensible qualities were in virtue of which he
attributed the quality of being Paul to the object before him, Peter might point out
some noticeable feature of Paul’s physiology, for instance, his baldness. But it seems
reasonable to suppose that Peter’s attribution of the quality of being Paul to the object
before him is made in virtue of a whole host of qualities perceived by Peter. If Peter
were asked to enumerate these qualities, however, he would, most likely, find it
difficult to provide a comprehensive list.
Now, we do, of course, sometimes attribute a certain quality to a particular object in a more conscious and propositional manner. For instance, if Peter sees Paul approaching, but his vision is in some way impaired or obstructed, then Peter may not immediately see Paul as Paul. If the road is dark, he may see the figure before himself as a dark, shadowy shape, and mistake Paul for a bandit. But as Paul draws closer, and as his features become more visible in the moonlight, Peter will be able to see certain features in virtue of which he is able to attribute the quality of being Paul to the approaching figure. In such circumstances, the attribution of a quality may indeed be more propositional in nature. Peter may see certain features of the figure before him and debate whether or not to assert mentally that the figure is Paul. He may see a particular feature of the object and judge that the figure before himself is Paul, even before Paul is close enough for Peter to see Paul as Paul. Since we do sometimes make such attributions in a propositional and discursive fashion, there is perhaps a temptation to say that the attribution of all insensible qualities is made in this fashion. This would seem to be the more parsimonious explanation. We can, however, respond by pointing out that an explanation ought to explain all the relevant features of a phenomenon, and that making all such attributions of insensible qualities propositional in nature does not seem to do justice to the phenomenology of perceiving an object as a such-and-such.

3.8.3 The Experience of Our Natural Inclinations as the Occasion of Moral Perception

We have seen, then, that evaluative qualities are incidental sense-objects according to Aquinas. That is, evaluative qualities are the subject of percepts which are perceived in virtue of the perception of other, absolute qualities. I have also argued that perceiving something as good in virtue of its other qualities is an act largely non-
propositional in nature. Hence, when I perceive some virtuous act as good, my perception is not explained by an inference from some set of qualities perceived by me.

What relation, however, does this account of moral perception bear to Maritain’s account of connatural knowledge? It will be remember that, according to Maritain, we have a knowledge of practical principles through a natural, immediate knowledge of our inclinations. It will also be remembered that, according to Aquinas, we have certain natural appetites that are directed to particular objects. These appetites have a certain connaturality with their objects, in the sense that they are proper to them and to the human animal as a whole. We have also seen how, for Maritain, connatural knowledge appears to involve both an awareness of these natural appetites and the felt desires that accompany the pursuit of their connatural objects. To return to our question, then, what relation does our account of moral perception bear to Maritain’s account of connatural knowledge?

Let us begin our response to this question by considering the following point: if the Neo-Scholastics are right and the basic goods are the objects of our natural appetites, and if the common man is to have any knowledge of these goods, then there must exist some kind of practical grasp of our nature and natural appetites. This practical grasp of our nature must differ, if only by degree, from the manner in which the natural philosopher usually determines the nature of a thing; for were it otherwise, every moral agent would need to be a natural philosopher in order to act deliberately for the actual good. As Haldane has written:

It is a principle of Aristotelian methodology that acts are specified by their objects, powers by their acts, and agents by their powers. In other words, if you want to know what a thing is, identify its capacities, and to know what capacities it has, look at what it does, and to see what it does, observe how it
interacts with its environment. An understanding of the nature of the thing is arrived at by studying its characteristic operations. In many cases this will be a form of speculative or theoretical knowledge. When you observe chemistry experiments you see how substances interact. You work out whether some have corrosive powers with respect to others. On the basis of those, you then define as acids or as alkalis. But in the case of the practical mode, where you are yourself the acting substance, finding out what you are about is not generally a matter of observing yourself in that way. It is found out in and through doing. This is part of what Maritain has in mind when he talks about connaturality: a nature expresses itself and its orientation to the good through its activities.\(^\text{89}\)

In the case of the Aristotelian natural philosopher, knowledge of a thing’s nature – that is, of its characteristic operations and qualities – is acquired through repeatedly observing the thing in question and other instances of its kind. At the most theoretic level, such a programme of observation may be the kind that we should expect to see in the empiriological practices of the natural sciences. But in the case of the practical grasp of our own nature, knowledge is acquired through the experience of our own operations and tendencies. How does such experience of our own operations and tendencies fit into our account of moral perception, however?

The answer to our question is that such experiences provide the occasions for acts of moral perception. I observe myself doing some kind of particular act, and I perceive it as being good or as being befitting to the kind of thing that I am. I may perceive someone else doing a similar act, and I also perceive that act as good or befitting; or I may note that I and others of my kind have a tendency to act in a particular way or for a particular end, and, again, I perceive this tendency and end as good or befitting. Two kinds of quality, then, are perceived in the experience of our own operations and tendencies: first, the quality of something’s being befitting or natural; and second, the quality of something’s being good. Hence, I perceive a certain

act as natural or befitting, and this perception is the basis for my judgement that the act is natural for or befitting to me. In the same way, I perceive an end for which I characteristically act as good, and this perception is the basis for my judgement that this end is good.

Consider the following example of seeing some human act as good: I see a mother attending to her child; I see her feeding the child and taking care to make it comfortable. Now, not only do I see the sensible aspects of the act, I also see its moral qualities. Indeed, I see the act as good. In particular, I see the specific types of goodness instantiated by the act, that is, I see the act as both loving and caring. We might offer similar examples for the perception of the badness of a thing. Perhaps I see a man kicking a small dog in anger, and I see the act as cruel; or perhaps I see some children tormenting some other, unfortunate child, and I immediately see the act as vindictive. It is upon such perceptions of the goodness or badness of an act that I form judgements about the moral value of an act and the end to which it is directed. In the case of the loving mother, I see her acts as good and as constituting part of a larger good, namely, the good of caring for one’s offspring; and it is upon this basis that I judge the caring for one’s offspring to be a basic good.

3.8.4 Are the Basic Goods Ends That Befit Man?

Now, thus far we have spoken of apprehending certain operations and tendencies as natural or befitting to human beings. It will be remembered, though, that Finnis, Grisez, and the new natural law theorists deny that the principles of the natural law ought to be understood as specifying acts and ends that are befitting to man. As we have already seen, Finnis claims that such an understanding of the natural law is alien to Aquinas, violates the is-ought distinction, and should rightly be attributed to
Vazquez, Suarez, and the Neo-Scholastics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Therefore, my claim that we perceive certain goods as befitting of man in the practical grasp of the basic goods is incompatible with Finnis and Grisez’s interpretation of *ST*. I-II, q.94, a.2. Is their interpretation correct, however?

To answer this question, let us consider what Aquinas has to say at *ST*. I-II, q.94, a.3, on the matter of whether every virtuous act is prescribed by the natural law:

For it has been stated that to the natural law belongs everything to which a man is inclined according to his nature. Now each thing is inclined naturally to an operation that is suitable to it according to its form: thus fire is inclined to give heat. Wherefore, since the rational soul is the proper form of man, there is in every man a natural inclination to act according to reason: and this is to act according to virtue.⁹⁰

It ought to be noted that this article directly follows the key text in which Aquinas discusses the first principles of practical reason and their apprehension (*ST*. I-II, q.94, a.2). Therefore, when he speaks of the content of the natural law as being ‘everything to which a man is inclined according to his nature’, and then says that this has already been stated, Aquinas is presumably referring to his previous discussion of the practical grasp of the basic goods. This fact would seem to warrant considerable attention, since Aquinas’s comments here on the content of the natural law appear to be a development of his earlier account of the basic goods. According to this development, ‘each thing is inclined naturally to an operation that is suitable to it according to its form’. Aquinas illustrates this idea that things have inclinations towards operations that are suitable to their forms or essences by giving the example of fire’s disposition to produce heat. Continuing in this vein, he says that since the rational soul is the proper form or essence of man, man has a natural inclination to act according to reason.

⁹⁰ *ST*. I-II, q.94, a.3
What can we say about Aquinas’s idea of natural inclinations and suitable operations, then? Although Finnis, Grisez, and the new natural law theorists claim that Aquinas’s theory of natural law is not dependent upon Aristotelian functional arguments and appeals to the notion of the proper functioning of a faculty, Aquinas himself seems quite comfortable here with speaking of an operation’s suitability to its form or essence. Now, if we were to judge what Aquinas has to say about the apprehension of the basic goods upon the text of *ST* I-II, q.94, a.2 alone, we might conclude that the matter is open with respect to whether, in speaking of ‘inclinations’, Aquinas means to refer the dispositions of man’s faculties or whether he has something else in mind. Since he does not explicitly refer to the proper functioning of the various faculties in his discussion of the basic goods, we might conclude that this doctrine of Aristotelian natural philosophy is irrelevant to Aquinas’s account of natural law. But when we consider his account of the practical grasp in conjunction with *ST* I-II, q.94, a.3 and Aquinas’s doctrine of natural appetites and their proper objects, it seems less reasonable to assert that when Aquinas speaks of ‘inclinations’, he does not mean to refer to man’s natural appetites and their proper objects. This becomes clearer when we consider his assertion that fire is naturally inclined to the production of heat in virtue of its form, and that, in the same manner, man is inclined to live in accordance with reason in virtue of his form; for both these claims seem to appeal to a functional account of a thing’s and their proper powers. In other words, Aquinas does indeed speak of man’s natural inclinations and their proper objects in terms of their suitability to or their aptness for man’s nature.

### 3.8.5 Knowledge of the Basic Goods is Connatural

Our knowledge of the basic goods is connatural, then, in two respects: first, the knowledge that we have in the apprehension of the basic goods is knowledge of certain
ends that are perceived by us as being the objects of certain natural inclinations; such ends are, according to Aquinas, the proper objects of our natural appetites; second, the knowledge of the basic goods is knowledge that we have through being co-natured with those goods, in the sense that we know the goods through, as it were, possessing them in experience. Since we normally love that which we perceive as lovable, and since such a love is usually experienced by the lover as a felt desire for the beloved, it ought to be no surprise that we often experience felt desires for the objects of our natural inclinations, as indicated by Maritain. We may, for instance, have a deep yearning for a family; or we may have a deep yearning for union with God or, perhaps, with the transcendent or supermundane, if we are unsure of God’s existence. At any rate, since we apprehend that whatever is good is worthy of desire and pursuit, we naturally apprehend that the basic goods are worthy of pursuit in virtue of their goodness.

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the apprehension of the goodness of the basic goods and the self-evidence of the first principles of practical reason. In particular, I have provided my own competing account of ST. I-II, q.94, a.2 and the apprehension of the basic goods. I have followed Maritain in arguing that we have a connatural knowledge of practical principles through knowledge of our natural inclinations. But I distinguish my account from his by arguing that, for Aquinas, the connatural knowledge of practical principles is, primarily, knowledge of causal dispositions towards certain ends apprehended as good. It does not depend upon some intuition of the source of our felt desires in the way implied by Maritain. I have also argued that for Aquinas, a self-evident truth is a kind of a posteriori necessary truth whose apprehension depends upon the prior apprehension of the nature to which the truth refers. Contrary to
whatever Finnis and Grisez might argue, then, we do not apprehend the truth of the first principles of practical reason by merely attending to our reasons for action. Indeed, as my account of *ST.* I-II, q.94, a.2 shows, Aquinas’s epistemology of the first principles is far more metaphysical in nature than Finnis and Grisez’s interpretation would imply. Finally, I have argued that, for Aquinas, our judgement that some end is good is grounded in our perception of an end *as* good. Furthermore, according to Aquinas, our apprehension of the goodness of the basic goods is dependent upon our apprehension of goodness as part of the natures of the basic goods.

In the following chapter, I shall address the second element of Finnis and Grisez’s first claim. That is, I shall address the question of the logical relationship between the first principles of practical reason and the truths of theoretical reason. I shall argue that, for Aquinas, theoretical reason provides explanatory justifications for the first principles. Following Maritain I shall distinguish between the ‘gnoseological’ and ontological elements of the natural law, and argue that the gnoseological element subsists in our knowing *that certain ends are good,* whilst the ontological element explains why those ends are good. I shall then provide an account of two kinds of Aristotelian syllogism, the *quia* and the *propter quid,* and show how, for Aquinas, *quias* are concerned with evident facts, whilst *propter quids* provide explanations of those evident facts. I shall also provide an account of ‘subalternation’ in the Aristotelian sciences, and explain how a science concerned with one set of *quias* or evident facts is subalternated (or subordinate) to the higher science providing explanations of those facts. Finally, I shall address Maritain’s claim that the science of ethics is subalternated to theology *simpliciter.* I shall argue that it is primarily subalternated to natural philosophy and metaphysics, and in so arguing I shall show the specific manner in which ethics is subordinate to the higher Aristotelian sciences.
Chapter 4

After-Knowledge of the First Principles of Practical Reason

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I addressed the first of Finnis and Grisez’s three claims, namely, that the first principles of practical reason are self-evident and not derived from theoretical reason. In particular, I explored the claim that the first principles are self-evident, and I argued that, for Aquinas, a self-evident truth is a kind of *a posteriori* necessary truth. For that reason, we can grasp the truth of the first principles of practical reason only once we have apprehended the natures to which such truths refer. Furthermore, I argued that we perceive certain ends *as* good, and that this perception forms the basis of our judgement that goodness is part of the nature of the basic goods.

Contrary to the claims of Finnis and Grisez, then, we do not know the identity of the basic goods by merely attending to our fundamental reasons for action. Rather, we know that certain ends are good through an apprehension of their goodness, an apprehension which is given in experience.

In this chapter I shall address the second element of Finnis and Grisez’s first claim. That is, I shall address the question of the logical relationship between the first principles of practical reason and the truths of theoretical reason. I have already conceded that the first principles are self-evident according to Aquinas (though not in the way understood by Finnis and Grisez), and that they are, therefore, underven from theoretical reason. But the question of the exact logical relationship between the first principles of practical reason and theoretical reason remains to be elucidated.
In what follows I shall argue that, for Aquinas, theoretical reason provides explanatory justifications for the first principles of practical reason. Following Maritain I distinguish between the ‘gnoseological’ and ontological elements of the natural law, and argue that the gnoseological element subsists in our knowing *that certain ends are good*, whilst the ontological element *explains why those ends are good*. I then provide an account of two kinds of Aristotelian syllogism, the *quia* and the *propter quid*. I show how, for Aquinas, *quias* are concerned with evident facts, whilst *propter quids* provide explanations of those evident facts. I also provide an account of ‘subalternation’ in the Aristotelian sciences, and explain how a science concerned with one set of *quias* or evident facts is subalternated (or subordinate) to the higher science providing explanations of those facts. Finally, I address Maritain’s claim that the science of ethics is subalternated to theology *simpliciter*. I argue that, *pace* Maritain, ethics is primarily subalternated to natural philosophy and metaphysics, and in so arguing I show the specific manner in which ethics is subordinate to the higher Aristotelian sciences for Aquinas.

4.2 The Gnoseological and Ontological Elements of the Natural Law

As we saw in Chapter 3, Maritain distinguishes between two types of knowledge: connatural knowledge and after-knowledge. It is through connatural knowledge that we know the truth of certain practical principles. But, according to Maritain, we can also know of those same principles through after-knowledge. Now, Maritain draws a further distinction: that between the ‘gnoseological’ and ontological elements of the natural law. The gnoseological element is that which is known through connatural knowledge, namely, in the case of ethics, primary principles. The ontological element, on the other hand, is the Aristotelian ontology of essences and causes that makes those
practical principles true, and it is this element that is known through after-knowledge by the philosopher.

What specifically, then, does the philosopher know through after-knowledge? Maritain claims that we know two things: first, that man has an essence; and second, that the natural law is grounded in this essence. He writes:

Any kind of thing existing in nature, a plant, a dog, a horse, has its own natural law, that is, the *normality of its functioning*, the proper way in which, by reason of its specific structure and specific ends, it “should” achieve fulness of being either in its growth or in its behaviour.

... 

What I am emphasizing is the first basic element to be recognized in natural law, namely, the *ontological* element; I mean the *normality of functioning* which is grounded on the essence of that being: man. Natural law in general ... is the ideal formula of development of a given being ... Let us say, then, that in its ontological aspect, natural law is an *ideal order* relating to human actions, a *divide* between the suitable and the unsuitable, the proper and the improper, which depends on human nature or essence and the unchangeable necessities rooted in it.91

For Maritain, then, a *natural law* states the way in which an instance of a particular kind ought to develop or behave. Such laws are dependent upon an Aristotelian notion of proper functioning, according to which what does and does not constitute the proper functioning of a thing is determined by the thing’s essence. Maritain goes on to say that the natural law provides an ‘ideal formula of development’ or an ‘ideal order’, which distinguishes between actions that are suitable to and actions that are unsuitable to human nature. It is this ideal order of development and behaviour that constitutes the ontological element of the natural law.

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We can see, then, that for Maritain how a thing ought to develop or behave is governed by a natural law which states the ideal pattern of development for that particular thing. Thus, if man is, by nature, a social animal, then the natural law that gives his ideal pattern of development will state that he ought to live in harmony with his fellow human beings. And for that reason, the practical principle ‘Man ought to live in harmony with his fellow human beings’ will be true. There is, then, an explanatory relationship between Maritain’s natural laws and practical principles. It is the natural law which states man’s ideal pattern of development and behaviour that explains why a particular practical principle is true. For that reason, I propose that connatural knowledge of practical principles is knowledge *that some principle is true*, or *that some end is good*. After-knowledge of the ontological element of the natural law, on the other hand, is knowledge of *why a practical principle is true*, or *why some end is good*. If I am right, then, there exists an explanatory relationship between the first principles of practical reason and the philosophy of nature in which they are grounded.

4.3 Two Modes of Demonstration

We have seen, then, that Maritain distinguishes between the gnoseological and ontological elements of the natural law. Furthermore, I have proposed that this distinction maps onto a distinction between knowing *that* something is so and knowing *why* it is so. Can we, however, find such a distinction in Aquinas’s philosophy of the sciences? I shall now provide an account of two kinds of syllogism: *quia* and *propter quid* demonstrations. In doing so, I shall show how, for Aquinas, *propter quid* demonstrations provide explanations – or ‘reasoned facts’ – for the evident facts with which *quia* demonstrations are concerned.
4.3.1 *Quia* and *Propter Quid* Demonstrations

Aquinas distinguishes between two modes of demonstration. At *ST*. I, q.2, a.2, whilst addressing the question of whether God’s existence can be demonstrated, he writes:

I answer that, Demonstration can be made in two ways: One is through the cause, and is called ‘*a priori,*’ and this is to argue from what is prior absolutely. The other is through the effect, and is called a demonstration ‘*a posteriori*’; this is to argue from what is prior relatively only to us. When an effect is better known to us than its cause, from the effect we proceed to the knowledge of the cause. And from every effect the existence of its proper cause can be demonstrated, so long as its effects are better known to us; because since every effect depends upon its cause, if the effect exists, the cause must pre-exist. Hence the existence of God, in so far as it is not self-evident to us, can be demonstrated from those of His effects which are known to us.\(^{92}\)

There are two modes of demonstration, then: the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*. Aquinas does not, however, employ these two terms in the way that philosophers since the time of Kant have tended to do. For Aquinas, an *a priori* demonstration proceeds from ‘what is prior absolutely’. In other words, an *a priori* demonstration proceeds from a premise concerning a thing’s cause. The demonstration is *a priori* in the sense that its starting-point refers to something metaphysically fundamental, namely, a cause, which is metaphysically prior to its effect. An *a posteriori* demonstration, on the other hand, proceeds from ‘what is prior relative only to us’. In other words, an *a posteriori* demonstration proceeds from a premise concerning some effect. Such a demonstration is *a posteriori* in the sense that its starting-point refers to an effect, which is metaphysically dependent upon its cause. It is often the case, however, that a thing’s effects are more knowable to us than its cause, and in such cases we reason from the effects to the existence of the cause.

\(^{92}\) *ST*. I, q.2, a.2.
There are two modes of demonstration, then, according to Aquinas. These two modes are also called *propter quid* and *quia* demonstrations respectively. At *PA*. I, lec.23, Aquinas discusses in greater detail how *propter quid* and *quia* demonstrations differ within the context of a single science. He writes:

He [Aristotle] says therefore first that … demonstration is a syllogism causing scientific knowledge and proceeds from the causes both first and immediate of a thing. Now this is to be understood as referring to demonstration *propter quid*. But there is a difference between knowing that a thing is so and why it is so. Therefore, since demonstration is a syllogism causing scientific knowledge, as has been said, it is necessary that a demonstration *quia* which makes one know that a thing is so should differ from the demonstration *propter quid* which makes one know why. Consequently, this difference must be considered first in the same science and later in sciences that are diverse.

In one and the same science each of the above is said to differ in regard to the two things required for demonstration in the strict sense – which causes knowledge of the why – namely, that it be from causes and from immediate causes. Hence one way that scientific knowledge *quia* differs from *propter quid* is that it is the former if the syllogism is not through, immediate principles but through mediate ones. For in that case the first cause will not be employed, whereas science *propter quid* is according to the first cause; consequently, the former will not be science *propter quid*.

As we have already noted, *a priori*, or *propter quid*, demonstrations proceed from a premise stating the cause of an effect. Aquinas, however, here introduces a further distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* demonstrations, that is, an *a priori* demonstration gives us knowledge of *why* something is the case, whereas an *a posteriori* demonstration merely gives us knowledge *that* something is the case. But a further distinction can be made between the two types of knowledge provided by these two modes of demonstration, that is, between ‘the fact’ and ‘the reasoned fact’. There is, then, an epistemological difference between *propter quid* and *quia* demonstrations. For Aquinas, the former play an explanatory role greater than that

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93 *PA*. I, lec.23.
played by the latter. That is, the former provide us with explanations of or the why of the latter.

4.3.2 Quia and Propter Quid Demonstration: Two Examples

What would constitute examples of such propter quid and quia demonstrations, though? Further along at PA. I, lec.23, Aquinas gives us an example of a quia demonstration provided by Aristotle. He writes:

He says therefore first … that demonstration quia is through an effect if one concludes for example that the planets are near because they do not twinkle. For non-twinkling is not the cause why the planets are near, but vice versa: for the planets do not twinkle because they are near. For the fixed stars twinkle because in gazing at them the sight is beclouded on account of the distance. Therefore, the syllogism might be formed in the following way: ‘Whatever does not twinkle is near; but the planets do not twinkle: therefore, they are near.’ Here we let C be the planets, i.e., let ‘planets’ be the minor extreme, and let B consist in not twinkling, and A ‘to be near’ be the major extreme. Then the proposition, ‘Every C is B,’ is true, namely, the planets do not twinkle. Also it is true that ‘Every B is A,’ i.e., every star that does not twinkle is near. However, the truth of such a proposition must be obtained through induction or through sense perception, because the effect here is better known than the cause. And so, the conclusion, ‘Every C is A,’ follows. In this way, then, it has been demonstrated that the planets, i.e., the wandering stars, are near. Consequently, this syllogism is not propter quid but quia. For it is not because they do not twinkle that planets are near but rather, because they are near, they do not twinkle.  

We might formulate Aristotle’s argument thus:-

Quia Demonstration:

Major: Non-twinkling heavenly bodies are near heavenly bodies (principle).

Minor: The planets are non-twinkling heavenly bodies (effect).

94 PA. I, lec.23.
Conclusion: Therefore, the planets are near heavenly bodies (cause).

This demonstration is *quia* because its conclusion proceeds logically from *the fact*, or, rather, from an observable effect, instead of from the cause. It is this observable effect to which the middle term of the syllogism refers, whereas the major term refers to the cause, namely, the nearness of the planets. Furthermore, as Aquinas says, the truth of the major premise is ‘obtained through induction or through sense perception’. It through such observation that I can come to know that non-twinklingness and nearness are co-present in certain objects. In other words, I perceive that whenever I see a non-twinkling heavenly body, I see that the self-same body is also a near heavenly body. Hence, I can reason from this principle that if non-twinklingness and nearness are always co-present in certain heavenly bodies, then nearness will be predicable of the planets, since the planets are also non-twinkling heavenly bodies.

Later on at *PA*. I, lec.23, Aquinas shows how Aristotle’s previous *quia* demonstration can be converted into a *propter quid* demonstration:

Then he [Aristotle] teaches how a demonstration *quia* is changed to a demonstration *propter quid*. And he says that ‘it is possible to demonstrate the one through the other,’ i.e., to demonstrate that they do not twinkle, because they are near. Then the demonstration will be *propter quid*. Thus let C be the wanderers, i.e., let ‘wandering star’ be the minor extreme; let B consist in being near, i.e., let ‘to be near,’ which was the major extreme above, be the middle term; and let A consist in not twinkling, i.e., let ‘not to twinkle,’ which above was the middle term, now be the major term. Therefore, B is in C, i.e., ‘Every planet is near’; and A is in B, i.e., ‘Any planet which is near does not twinkle.’ Wherefore, it follows that A is in C, i.e., ‘A planet does not twinkle.’ In this way we have a syllogism *propter quid*, since it rests on the first and immediate cause.  

95 *PA*. I, lec.23.
We may formulate Aristotle’s second, *propter quid* argument thus:

**Propter Quid Demonstration:**

Major: Near heavenly bodies are non-twinkling heavenly bodies (principle).

Minor: The planets are near heavenly bodies (cause).

Conclusion: Therefore, the planets are non-twinkling heavenly bodies (effect).

This demonstration is *propter quid* because it proceeds logically from the *reasoned fact*, rather than from the *fact*. And the middle term in a *propter quid* demonstration refers to an essence (near heavenly body) rather than to an effect, whereas the major term now refers to an effect (non-twinklingness) rather than a cause. The essence to which the middle term now refers is the cause or explanation of the effect in the following way: if, after a period of sufficient observation, we conclude that non-twinklingness is a property of near heavenly bodies – that is, non-twinklingness is a quality that flows necessarily from the essence of a near heavenly body – then we can also conclude that non-twinklingness is a property of the planets, since the planets are, by nature, near heavenly bodies.

The example employed by Aquinas to illustrate *propter quid* demonstrations tends to obscure the nature of this mode of demonstration, as the example relies upon Aristotle’s cosmology of fixed heavenly spheres and cycles. One might reasonably think that the manifestation of a given planet’s disposition to appear as twinkling to an observer will be dependent upon the relative position of an observer within the universe. But the nature of a *propter quid* demonstration can be made clearer if we attend to an example from biology. Let us suppose that I begin reasoning from some
observable fact (*quia*). I perceive that whenever I see a furry animal, I see that the self-same animal is also a mammal. I also observe that my cat is furry. I conclude, therefore, that my cat is a mammal, since my cat is also furry, and experience tells me that being a mammal and being furry are two qualities that are usually co-present in the same object. Having observed a significant number of animals, and having come to the realization that all observed furry animals are also mammals, I conclude that being a mammal is, plausibly, the cause of being furry. I then present my argument for this claim as a *propter quid* demonstration, and I reason as follows: all mammals are, *by nature*, furry animals; but my cat is a mammal; therefore, my cat is, *by nature*, a furry animal. It is through such *propter quid* demonstrations that we are supposedly able to give a true demonstration of a thing’s cause. Being furry is a property of mammals, and for Aquinas and Aristotelians in general, properties flow from their essences in the sense that they are caused or explained by those essences. It is in this way, then, that the non-twinklingness of the planets is explained by the nearness of those self-same heavenly bodies, since Aristotle argues, near heavenly bodies are, *by nature*, non-twinkling heavenly bodies.

The notion that *propter quid* demonstrations have such an explanatory nature will, no doubt, strike many as odd, given common modern ideas about demonstration derived from seventeenth-century rationalism. But as Durbin points out:

After Descartes it has become necessary to distinguish Aristotelian ‘syllogismus’ and ‘demonstratio’ from a Cartesian, rationalist ‘deduction.’ Aristotle and St Thomas do not begin with self-evident principles and derive conclusions therefrom in a rationalist-deductive mode (even though *Posterior Analytics* is often interpreted this way); rather, they begin with a statement to be justified (it will become the ‘conclusion’ only in a formal restatement of the argument) and ‘reduce’ it back to its ultimate explanatory principles.96

According to Durbin, then, we must not conflate Aristotelian syllogisms or demonstrations with the kinds of deductive inference introduced by Descartes and the rationalists. We ought not to imagine that, in making deductions, Aristotle and Aquinas were necessarily attempting to derive conclusions from self-evident truths in the way that one might derive a conclusion from the truths of mathematics or geometry. Rather, as Durbin says, the conclusion of a demonstration starts off as a statement for which the inquirer is seeking an explanation, and it is the job of that inquirer to ‘reduce’ the conclusion back to the principles that will stand as its explanatory justification.

4.3.3 The Relationship between Quia and Propter Quid Demonstrations as the Basis of Subalternation

What, however, is the significance of Aquinas’s distinction between propter quid and quia demonstrations? What relevance has this distinction to the relationship between the first principles of practical reason and natural philosophy? At PA. I, lec.25, Aquinas discusses how quia demonstrations differ from propter quid demonstrations, ‘when the former pertains to one science, and the latter to another’. He writes:

First, he [Aristotle] states his proposition, saying … that in a way other than the above the propter quid differs from the quia due to the fact that they are considered in diverse sciences, i.e., that the propter quid pertains to one science and the quia to another.

Secondly … he elucidates his proposition. First, he elucidates it in sciences one of which is under the other. Secondly, in sciences one of which is not under the other … Concerning the first he does two things. First, he shows how those sciences are related, one of which is under the other and to one of which pertains the quia and to the other the propter quid. Secondly, he shows how in these sciences the quia pertains to one and the propter quid to the other …
Then ... he shows that even the subalternated sciences state the *propter quid*, not of its subalternating science but of some other science. Thus, optics is subalternated to geometry, so that if we compare the one with the other, optics states the *quia* and geometry the *propter quid*. But just as optics is subalternated to geometry, so the science of the rainbow is subalternated to optics, for it applies to a determinate matter the principles which optics hands down absolutely. Hence it belongs to the naturalist who treats of the rainbow to know the *quia*, but to the expert in optics to know the *propter quid*. For the naturalist says that the cause of the rainbow is the convergence of a visual line at a cloud arranged in some relation to the sun; but the *propter quid* he takes from optics.

Then ... he shows how *quia* and *propter quid* differ among sciences that are diverse but not subalternate. And he says that many sciences which are not subalternate are nevertheless related, i.e., in such a way that one states the *quia* and the other the *propter quid*. This is true of medicine and geometry. For the subject of medicine is not subsumed under the subject of geometry as the subject of optics is. Nevertheless, the principles of geometry are applicable to certain conclusions reached in medicine: for example, it belongs to the man of medicine who observes it to know *quia* that circular wounds heal rather slowly; but to know the *propter quid* belongs to the geometer, whose business it is to know that a circle is a figure without corners. Hence the edges of a circular wound are not close enough to each other to allow them to be easily joined.  

According to Aquinas, then, there are two ways in which a science can be subordinate to another: first, a lower science can be subalternated to a higher science in virtue of the fact that the subject-matter of the lower science is subsumed under the subject matter of the higher science; second, a lower science can be subalternated to another, higher science in virtue of the fact that the higher science is related to the lower as form to matter. As an example of the first kind of relation, Aquinas says that since an animal body is a kind of natural body, the science of animal bodies is subsumed under the science of natural bodies. As an example of the second kind of relation, he says that optics is subordinate to geometry, since optics is concerned with particular, visible lines, whilst geometry is concerned with lines and quantities abstracted from matter.

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97 *PA*. I, lec.25.
For Aquinas, then, the sciences are ordered in such a way that the higher sciences provide the propter quid’s for the quia’s of the lower sciences. But even those sciences that are subalternated to other subalternated sciences provide the propter quid’s for the quia’s of a further subalternated science. Hence, Aquinas says that just as optics is subalternated to geometry, so too is the science of the rainbow subalternated to optics. Furthermore, he says that the naturalist knows that ‘the cause of the rainbow is the convergence of a visual line at a cloud arranged in some relation to the sun’ (quia), but that the propter quid or reason for this phenomenon is provided by optics (by this remark, Aquinas presumably means that it is the job of optics to explain why a convergence of a visual line at a cloud in some relation to the sun causes just such a visual phenomenon).

With respect to those sciences that are not, strictly speaking, subalternate to another, they are still related in such a way that one science will provide the propter quid’s for the quia’s of another. This state of affairs is, Aquinas says, true of geometry and medicine; for even though the subject-matter of medicine is not subsumed under the subject-matter of geometry, still it is the case that the principles of geometry are applicable to the findings of medicine. As an example of this claim, Aquinas says that the man of medicine knows through observation that circular wounds heal more slowly than rectilinear wounds. Such knowledge is knowledge of the fact (quia); but knowledge of the reasoned fact (propter quid) properly belongs to the geometer, since it is he who through his knowledge of the geometry of wounds knows why rectilinear wounds heal more quickly than circular ones.
4.4 The First Principles of Practical Reason and Their Manner of Subalternation

We have seen, then, that Aquinas distinguishes between two types of demonstration: *quia* and *propter quid*. We have also seen how a *propter quid* will provide the explanation – or ‘reasoned fact’ – for some evident fact presented by a *quia* demonstration. I have also shown how the relationship between *quia* and *propter quid* demonstrations provides the basis for distinguishing between the lower and higher disciplines in an Aristotelian account of the sciences.

I shall now provide an account of the first principles of practical reason and their subalternation to metaphysics and natural philosophy. I shall begin with an account of the nature of the definitions used in the first principles, and then describe how Aquinas’s metaphysical account of goodness is used to explain the goodness of the basic goods. Furthermore, I shall argue that this explanatory appeal to metaphysics is not incompatible with the self-evidence of the first principles of practical reason.

4.4.1 The First Principles and the Nature of the Definitions Employed

Now, we have seen that the first principles of practical reason are self-evident. We have also seen that, for Aquinas, a self-evident proposition is a kind of *a posteriori* necessary truth whose apprehension depends upon the apprehension of a subject-term and the nature to which the term refers. Furthermore, practical principles such as ‘Knowledge is good’ predicate goodness of a certain end and thus attribute goodness to the nature of that end. Hence, practical principles give us definitions of a kind. But what kind of definition is ‘Knowledge is good’ according to Aquinas? And what kind of definition is ‘The good is desirable’?
To answer these questions, let us return to *ST*. I-II, q.94, a.2, the key text upon which Finnis and Grisez base their account of the natural law, and where Aquinas discusses the apprehension of the first principles of practical reason. In that text Aquinas, it will be remembered, claims that the first principles of practical reason are both self-evident and indemonstrable. He also claims that the first principle of practical reason is founded upon our notion of the good, a notion which is apprehended by practical reason through experience. He writes:

Now as ‘being’ is the first thing that falls under the apprehension simply, so ‘good’ is the first thing that falls under the apprehension of the practical reason, which is directed to action: since every agent acts for an end under the aspect of good. Consequently the first principle of practical reason is one founded on the notion of good, viz. that ‘good is that which all things seek after.’ Hence this is the first precept of law, that ‘good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided.’ All other precepts of the natural law are based upon this: so that whatever the practical reason naturally apprehends as man's good (or evil) belongs to the precepts of the natural law as something to be done or avoided.\footnote{ST. I-II, q.94, a.2.}

According to Aquinas, the notion of the good upon which the first principle of practical reason is founded is, ‘Good is that which all things seek after’. This definition of the good is acquired through experience, since we observe that every agent acts for an end ‘under the aspect of the good’ (or, we might say, every agent acts for an end under the belief that the end is, in some respect, good or desirable). Furthermore, if the good is that which all men seek as worthy of desire, then it follows that whatever is apprehended as good is worthy of desire and, therefore, worthy of pursuit. It is upon this notion of the good, then, that the first, self-evident and indemonstrable principles of practical reason are founded.

Now, as we have previously shown, a principle is self-evident for Aquinas if it expresses something like a Kripkean *a posteriori* necessary truth. Hence, if I know
that being \( H_2O \) is part of the essence of water, I know that the statement ‘Water is \( H_2O \)’ is necessarily true. Or if I know that man is, by nature, a rational animal, I also know that man is necessarily rational and necessarily animal. For that reason, whenever I encounter the statement ‘Man is rational’ or ‘Man is animal’, the truth of both statements will be self-evident to me in virtue of my knowledge of the subject-terms and the natures to which they refer. As self-evident principles, then, the first principles of practical reason are founded upon an apprehension of certain subject-terms and the natures to which they refer. The subject-term upon which the first principle is founded is ‘the good’, and the nature to which it refers is ‘that which is sought after’. The subject-terms of the other principles would be terms such as ‘the preservation of life’, ‘the education of offspring’, ‘the knowledge of God’, and ‘living in society with others’. What is apprehended as part of their nature and, therefore, predicated of all these subject-terms is goodness. Hence, when we say that the preservation of life is good, we see the self-evident truth of this statement in virtue of the fact that we directly perceive the goodness of this kind of act through experience. And since we know that whatever is good ought to be pursued, we immediately recognize that the preservation of life ought to be pursued.

4.4.2 Three Kinds of Definition

What kind of definition is ‘The good is that which is sought after’, though? To answer this question we must consider three types of definition traditionally accepted by the scholastics, namely, the **essential**, the **causal**, and the **accidental**. An **essential definition** is one that defines a thing according to its genus and specific difference. This type of definition is regarded as fundamental with respect to explanation, because such definitions give the essence of a thing in terms of its metaphysically fundamental parts, in other words, its genus and species. Hence, ‘Man is a rational animal’ is an
essential definition, since it states man’s essence in a binomial form specifying genus and specific difference. It ought to be noted, though, that the term ‘essence’ here has a rather narrower meaning than the terms ‘nature’ and ‘quiddity’, if by such terms we merely mean the ‘whatness’ of a thing. These latter two terms can, in some cases, be used to refer to a thing’s nature in general, that is, ‘nature’ and ‘quiddity’ can be used to refer to a thing’s properties and accidents as well as its genus and specific difference. The essence to which an essential definition refers, however, is always its genus and species alone.

What are causal and accidental definitions, then? A causal definition is one that defines a thing according to its external causes, namely, its efficient or formal causes. Hence, we might define a dwelling-house either as a particular kind of artefact made by a brick-layer or as a particular kind of building for living in. An accidental definition, on the other hand, is one that defines a thing according to some characteristic accident, either proper or non-proper. Hence, we might define man as ‘two-legged’ or as ‘risible’. In neither of these cases is the quality in question part of man’s essence in the narrow sense of the term. Being two-legged is a property that, presumably, flows from – or is caused or explained by – man’s animality; and being risible is a property that, presumably, flows from man’s rationality. In both of these examples, we can know that a certain quality is a property of man, and, at the same time, know something of his essence without necessarily knowing the entirety of that essence.
4.4.3 Aquinas’s Definition of the Good: The Nature of the Good and the Nature of Its Definition

To return to our question, then, what kind of definition is ‘The good is that which is sought after’? At ST. I, q.5, a.1, Aquinas addresses the question of whether ‘goodness differs really from being’. He answers in the negative, arguing that goodness and being are really the same, differing only ‘in idea’. He writes:

I answer that, Goodness and being are really the same, and differ only in idea; which is clear from the following argument. The essence of goodness consists in this, that it is in some way desirable. Hence the Philosopher says … ‘Goodness is what all desire.’ Now it is clear that a thing is desirable only in so far as it is perfect; for all desire their own perfection. But everything is perfect so far as it is actual. Therefore it is clear that a thing is perfect so far as it exists; for it is existence that makes all things actual … Hence it is clear that goodness and being are the same really. But goodness presents the aspect of desirableness, which being does not present.99

Aquinas presents an argument that seems to consist of four claims:

1. Goodness is the desirable.
2. The desirable is the perfect (or perfective).
3. The perfect is the actual.
4. The actual is the existent.
5. Therefore, goodness is the existent (i.e., actual being).

According to Aquinas, then, the good is that which is in some way desirable. Again, we know this through experience, since we observe that all men seek the good as something worthy of desire in one respect or another. But whatever is desirable is also perfective of the agent that desires it; and this is another thing that we know through experience, since we apprehend that whatever an agent seeks, he seeks it as being

99 ST. I, q.5, a.1.
perfective of himself in one way or another. Furthermore, whatever is perfective of an agent must, of necessity, be an actuality – that is, actual being. This is because, according to Aquinas, a perfective good – i.e., a basic good – is always the actualization of some potency or power. Hence, knowing some truth about the world in an operation of the intellect, for instance, consists essentially in the actualization of the intellect’s power of knowing truth through its operation. Or, to take another example, living in peace with one’s fellow human beings is an actualization of man’s capacity for living in society. It is for this reason that Aquinas concludes that goodness and being are really the same. The good is really some or other actuality that is perfective of the natural kind for which it is good. Where goodness and being differ is in the fact that the notion of goodness ‘presents the aspect of desirableness’, whereas the notion of being does not. This is the essence of Aquinas’s claim that goodness is ‘convertible with’ being, since for Aquinas the difference between goodness and being is only perspectival.¹⁰⁰

It ought to be noted that Aquinas says that the essence of goodness consist in its being desirable. But the term that has been translated here as ‘essence’ is ‘ratio’,

¹⁰⁰ Arguably, the besetting feature of Finnis and Grisez new natural law theory is the failure to link their account of the basic goods to an account of the classical Aristotelian understanding of the good. As MacIntyre has complained:

Germaine Grisez interprets the principium [‘Good is to be done’] in the light of a post-Humean fact-value distinction. Neither refers us to the Platonic and Aristotelian understanding of ‘good’ and it is perhaps because of this that Grisez can say in the course of distinguishing his account from Maritain’s that ‘Aquinas does not present the natural law as if it were an object known or to be known; rather, he considers the precepts of practical reason themselves to be the natural law,’ the perhaps unintended implication of which is that the precepts of practical reason cannot themselves be objects of knowledge.

Grisez’s account of the natural law implies, perhaps unintentionally, that natural law is not concerned with knowledge of a goodness that exists beyond the realm of practical reason as an independent object of knowledge (see Alasdair MacIntyre, Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry (London: Duckworth, 1990), pp. 133-4).
which is the same term that was translated as ‘notion’ at *ST*. I-II, q.94, a.2 (as in ‘the notion of the good’). Therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest that we might render ‘the essence of goodness consists in this …’ as ‘the notion of goodness consists in this …’. Why is this important? To answer that question, we must introduce a further distinction, namely, the distinction between a thing *in its formal nature* and a thing *in its formal effect*. A thing *in its formal nature* is simply a thing as defined according to its essence, that is, a thing as defined by an essential definition. A thing *in its formal effect*, on the other hand, is thing defined according to some effect that flows in an immediate and necessary manner from the formal cause or essence of a thing. Such a thing is, therefore, something defined by an accidental definition, since the thing in question is being defined in virtue of some characteristic property.

Now, in light of Aquinas’s claim that goodness and being are really the same, and that the good is perfective being, it seems reasonable to advance the thesis that Aquinas has provided us with two different definitions of the good. According to this interpretation, ‘Good is perfective being’ states the formal nature of goodness, that is, it give an essential definition of the essence of goodness. ‘Good is the desirable’ or ‘The good is what all men desire’, on the other hand, give goodness in its formal effect, that is, they define the good in virtue of some effect or quality that flows directly from the essence of goodness. That effect would be the quality of being desirable or the quality of being pursued by men as desirable, and the quality of being desirable would be a property that is explained by the perfective nature of the good.

On the other hand, if we reject the claim that ‘The good is that which is sought after’ is an accidental definition, and instead claim that it is an essential one, it is still possible that we might demonstrate something about the nature of the good from its essence. Hence, if we observe that whatever is desirable is also a perfective actuality,
we know the fact that whatever is desirable is also a perfective actuality (quia). We might reason thus:

Major: Whatever is desirable is a perfective actuality (principle).

Minor: The good is desirable (effect).

Conclusion: Therefore, the good is a perfective actuality (cause).

The next step in our Aristotelian scientific method will be to ask why desirability and perfective actuality are co-present in the same objects (propter quid). And our proposed answer might be formulated thus:

Major: Every perfective actuality is desirable (principle).

Minor: The good is a perfective actuality (cause).

Conclusion: Therefore, the good is desirable (effect).

This propter quid demonstration answers the question of why desirability and perfective actuality are co-present in the same objects by positing perfective actuality as the cause of a thing’s desirability. Hence, it is because perfective actualities are worthy of desire that men naturally apprehend such actualities as desirable. Furthermore, it ought to be noted that such a propter quid demonstration does not violate the self-evident and indemonstrable character of the first principle of practical reason. This is so because what is self-evident and indemonstrable is that the good is desirable. Now, any attempt to prove that desirability is part of the essence of goodness through the use of a middle term in a demonstration would violate the self-evidence and indemonstrability of the principle. But no such violation has occurred here, since the demonstration attempts to show that whatever is desirable is, by nature,
also a perfective actuality. It does not attempt to show that the good is, by nature, desirable.

4.4.4 The Convertibility of Goodness and Being: A Truth Consistent with the Self-Evidence of the First Principles

I propose, then, that demonstrating whatever is good is also a perfective actuality does not violate the self-evident nature of the goodness of the basic goods. There is nothing in the claim that being and goodness are ‘convertible’ that is inconsistent with the claim that the first principles of practical reason are self-evident. To see that this is so, let us consider the example given by Aquinas at PA. I, lec.25. It is there that he gives us the example of the man of medicine who knows that circular wounds heal more slowly than rectilinear wounds, but does not know why this should be the case. In this scenario, the man of medicine knows the *quia* (i.e., the fact), but he does not know the *propter quid* (i.e., the reasoned fact). The provision of the *propter quid* belongs, so Aquinas claims, to the role of the geometer, since it is the geometer who is able to explain that the quality of slow healing is a property that flows from – or is explained by the circularity of the wound. He writes:

For the subject of medicine is not subsumed under the subject of geometry as the subject of optics is. Nevertheless, the principles of geometry are applicable to certain conclusions reached in medicine: for example, it belongs to the man of medicine who observes it to know *quia* that circular wounds heal rather slowly; but to know the *propter quid* belongs to the geometer, whose business it is to know that a circle is a figure without corners. Hence the edges of a circular wound are not close enough to each other to allow them to be easily joined.

Now, we need not concern ourselves here with the truth or falsity of Aquinas’s understanding of the science of wounds and their healing process. Our primary concern is with the understanding of the logical relationship between the sciences that
is expressed by Aquinas in the example that he provides. As we have just said, the
propter quid demonstration provides the explanation of the quia, that is, it is because
‘the edges of a circular wound are not close enough to each other to allow them to be
easily joined’ that circular wounds heal more slowly than non-circular wounds. For
Aquinas, then, the quality of healing slowly is explained by the quality of being
circular. Hence, it seems that any wound that is circular will also be slow healing,
since it is in the nature of circular figures to close more slowly than non-circular ones.

We ought, however, to be at pains to understand that the geometer has not
attempted to provide a demonstration of any self-evident truth by providing the
aforementioned propter quid. On the contrary, we might imagine that the nature of a
circular wound is self-evident to the man of medicine who knows the nature to which
the term ‘circular wound’ refers. For instance, if we define a circular wound as a
‘lesion of the skin having a circular shape’ for sake of argument, and I know that the
term ‘circular wound’ refers to such lesions, then it will be self-evidently true to me
that a circular wound is both a lesion of the skin and circular. I may know the fact that
the quality of healing slowly is co-present in certain objects with the qualities of being
a lesion and being circular, but I may not know that healing slowly is a quality that
flows from being circular. It is this causal or explanatory connection that is elucidated
by the geometer, but the demonstration of this truth ought not to be confused with a
demonstration of the truth that a circular wound is both a lesion of the skin and circular.
To take another example, I might know that a body is a thing that has three dimensions.
In which case, the statement ‘A body has three dimensions’ will be a self-evident truth
for me; but I might not know that every body necessarily has a certain spatial location.
This truth is something that can be made manifest by the metaphysician, whose role it
is to explain that having a certain spatial location is a quality that flows from having three dimensions.

We can see, then, that providing a *propter quid* for the *quia* of a subordinated science does not entail that a subordinated science can have no self-evident proper principles, since explaining why a certain quality is always or usually co-present in the same kind of object is not the same as providing a demonstration of a self-evident truth or principle concerning a particular natural kind. Nor do we attempt to provide a demonstration of any such self-evident truth or principle when we demonstrate that having such-and-such a quality necessitates having some other particular quality. Hence, there is nothing incoherent in the claim that the first principles of practical reason are self-evident in the sense intended by Aquinas and, at the same time, that the science of ethics is a subordinate science, in one way or the other.

The moral philosopher – and, indeed, any moral agent – knows in a self-evident manner that the good is that which is sought after or worthy of desire. Nevertheless, it does not follow from this fact that he must also know, at least initially, what it is that accounts for such desirability. What he might know is that whatever is pursued as good is also the perfection of some capacity or power. Or, to put it another way, he observes that the quality of being desirable and the quality of being a perfective actuality are co-present in the same objects, i.e., the objects that are pursued as good by moral agents. In which case, we ought to say that he knows some *quia* or fact that as yet requires an explanation. It is the role of the metaphysician or philosopher of nature, then, to explain why this is the case, and, as we have already shown, he does so by arguing that the intrinsic worth of a perfective actuality is the cause of its being apprehended as desirable.
Or, to take another example, the moral philosopher may know that knowledge, friendship, and the education of one’s offspring are all basic goods that are intrinsically desirable and worthy of pursuit. Given this knowledge it is practically reasonable for him to act in accordance with these self-evident truths, and the moral philosopher need not necessarily wait upon the judgements of the metaphysician and natural philosopher before he adjudges some particular end as worthy of pursuit. This does not mean, however, that the metaphysician and natural philosopher cannot provide informative explanations of the desirability of the basic goods. They could, for instance, explain that knowing truths is intrinsically desirable because it perfects or completes man’s capacity for knowledge, a capacity that is explained by man’s rationality. Or they could explain that both friendship and the education of offspring is intrinsically desirable because they perfect certain capacities that are explained by man’s nature as both a rational and social animal.

4.4.5 The Logical Relationship between *Quia* and *Propter Quid* Demonstrations

We have seen, then, that Aquinas distinguishes between two kinds of demonstration: *quia* demonstrations and *propter quid* demonstrations. We have also seen how a *propter quid* demonstration will provide an explanation of a *quia* or some evident fact. Furthermore, we have seen how Aquinas might demonstrate the ‘convertibility’ of goodness and being, and thus show that the basic goods are perfections of man’s capacities. And in providing such a demonstration, the Aristotelian explains why the basic goods are good and worthy of pursuit, namely, they are worthy of pursuit because they fulfil man’s nature.

What, however, is the exact logical relationship between *propter quid* and *quia* demonstrations? Given that we have thus far elucidated this relationship in terms of
facts and the provision of explanations, it would seem reasonable to state that the logical relationship between these two types of demonstration is that between the *explanans* and the *explanandum*. Once we understand this fact, some of the comments made by Aquinas at the contested *ST. I-II, q.94, a.2* become more transparent with respect to their meaning. It will be remembered that Aquinas says the following concerning the apprehension of the basic goods:

> Since, however, good has the nature of an end, and evil, the nature of a contrary, hence it is that all those things to which man has a natural inclination, are naturally apprehended by reason as being good, and consequently as objects of pursuit, and their contraries as evil, and objects of avoidance. Wherefore according to the order of natural inclinations, is the order of the precepts of the natural law.\(^\text{101}\)

Immediately prior to these remarks about good having the nature of an end and evil the nature of a contrary, is the place where Aquinas makes his claim about the apprehension of the first principle of practical reason and the subsequent apprehension of the further first principles. It will be remembered that the first principle is based upon the apprehension of the good as that which is desirable and therefore worthy of pursuit. All the other practical principles are based upon the apprehension of the basic goods as individually desirable and worthy of pursuit. Given, therefore, that Aquinas has already explained the concepts or terms upon which the first principles are based, why does he bother introducing the notion of good specifically as an end and, furthermore, specifically as the end of a natural inclination?

If my understanding of the relationship between the higher and lower Aristotelian sciences is correct, and if that relationship consists primarily in the

\(^{101}\) *ST. I-II, q.94, a.2.*
relationship between the discipline that provides the *explanandum* and the discipline that provides the *explanans*, then Aquinas is here interjecting a little natural philosophy into his moral philosophy in order to explain why it is that certain things are apprehended as good. It is for this reason that he says, ‘Since, however, good has the nature of an end … hence it is that all those things to which man has a natural inclination, are naturally apprehended by reason as being good’. Man apprehends the basic goods as being desirable because they are the ends towards which his natural inclinations are directed. Furthermore, it is because the Aristotelian natural philosopher knows that our natural inclinations or appetites have a certain ontological order that the natural philosopher knows also that the basic goods have a certain ontological order or hierarchy. In neither case is it necessary to assume that Aquinas has forgotten his own theory of scientific knowledge and momentarily erred in attempting to provide a demonstration of first, indemonstrable principles. On the contrary, what we have here is, on the one hand, an explanation of the desirability of the basic goods, and, on the other, a demonstration – or, at least, an indication – that the basic goods are capable of being organized according to some kind of hierarchy, a hierarchy that is grounded in an ontological hierarchy or ordering discovered by the natural philosopher.

To return to Maritain’s distinction between the gnoseological and ontological elements of the natural law, then, the gnoseological element consists of practical truths known connaturally. The ontological element, on the other hand, is the ontology that grounds the practical principles. Hence, what we know connaturally is *that* certain practical principles are true, or *that* certain ends are good. What we know through after-knowledge, however, is *why* certain principles are true, and *why* certain ends are good. Thus, if my account of the Aristotelian sciences is correct, connatural
knowledge provides us with certain explananda, whilst after-knowledge provides us with explanans of those explananda.

4.5 Is the Science of Ethics Subalternated to Theology?

Thus far I have followed Maritain in drawing a distinction between the gnoseological and ontological elements of the natural law. I have also proposed that the distinction between knowing the gnoseological element and knowing the ontological element through after-knowledge maps onto the distinction between knowing that something is so and knowing why it is so. I shall now distinguish my account of the relationship of these two elements from Maritain’s in two ways. First, pace Maritain, I shall contest that ethics is not primarily subalternated to theology. Rather, ethics, for Aquinas, is a science subalternated primarily to metaphysics and natural philosophy. Second, pace Maritain again, ethics is not subalternated to its subalternant science simpliciter. As we shall see, this fact is of importance to the matter of the self-evidence of the first principles of practical reason. For according to Aquinas, no science that is subalternated to another simpliciter can proceed from its own self-evident principles.

4.5.1 The Modes of Subalternation

Maritain distinguishes between two ways in which a science can be subalternated to another. He writes:

In the second mode of subalternation (as to principles), a science is purely and simply (simpliciter) subalternated to another when it derives its principles from this other science, which discloses them to it. So that the subalternate science does not resolve its conclusions by itself (ex se) in naturally known or self-evident principles. Should a science perchance resolve its conclusions in principles naturally known, and yet occasionally borrow some principles from another science, it is said to be subalternate in a certain respect (secundum quid) to this science.

In the third mode of subalternation (as to subject) the subject or object of the subalternate science adds a difference that is accidental relative to the subject
or object of the subalternate science. Thus, acoustics, a subalternate science to arithmetic, has for its subject *sounding* number; optics, a subalternate science to geometry, the *visual* line.

Whenever there is subalternation as to subject there is always subalternation as to principles; but it is possible to have subalternation as to principles without subalternation as to subject. And as Cajetan (and the whole Thomistic School with him) has so forcefully pointed out, that which comprises the essential in subalternation consists in this: that a science receives its principles from another science without making them evident by its own powers.\(^{102}\)

According to Maritain, then, a science can be subalternated to another either with respect to principles or with respect to subject-matter. Later he quotes Cajetan, who says that a science is subalternated to another with respect to principles when the subalternant science provides the *propter quid* for the *quia* of the principles of the subalternated science. And as Maritain says, a science whose conclusions are not resolved in, or do not terminate in, naturally known or self-evident principles is a science that is said to be subalternate *simpliciter*. As to subalternation with respect to subject-matter, a science is subalternate in this manner if it shares it subject-matter with the subalternant science, yet considers its subject-matter in a certain respect, rather than in general. Hence, as Maritain points out, the subject-matter of acoustics is *'sounding* number’, rather than number in general; and the subject-matter of optics is *visual* line, rather than line in general. Maritain’s account of the subalternation of sciences, then, is essentially the same as that given by Aquinas at PA I, lec.25, where he discusses both subalternation with respect to subject-matter and subalternation with respect to principles, which Aquinas likes to the relation between form and matter.

Now, in which of these two ways is the science of ethics a subalternate science according to Maritain and his interpretation of Aquinas’s philosophy of the Aristotelian sciences? And to what science is the science of ethics subalternated? According to Maritain, ethics is a science subalternated to moral theology. His reasoning for this claim is as follows:

Moral philosophy adequately considered is subalternated to theology by reason of principles only. It is not a materially philosophic and formally theological science, but a formally philosophic science subalternated to theology. It has an essential need of subalternation to theology, because it is from theology that it obtains its idea of man's true last end, and because in the practical order ends play the role of principles. We may say, therefore, that *moral philosophy adequately considered* is subalternated *simpliciter* to theology. On the other hand, it is because of the existential conditions in which the human subject happens to be, it is *gratia materiae*, that philosophy must thus be subalternated to theology when it enters the practical realm. Hence we may say that *philosophy* is subalternated to theology *secundum quid*; I mean, of course, when it enters the practical order and is adequate to its object therein.103

According to Maritain, then, moral philosophy is subalternated to theology with respect to principles alone, since it is from theology that we obtain our knowledge of man’s ‘true last end’. But what does Maritain mean by this claim? In what way do we supposedly obtain knowledge of our true last end from theology? In order to answer this question we must remember that for Aquinas, the essence of happiness or flourishing consists in the attainment of the highest good; and that good, according to Aquinas, is no less than the contemplation of the divine essence in the beatific vision, which is a gift granted by the grace of God alone. Now, since we can have knowledge of this end through revelation alone, as no one could possibly infer the existence of

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such an end through the use of natural reason by itself, it follows, so Maritain claims, that moral philosophy must be subalternated to theology *simpliciter*. This is because the ends for which we act are, for practical reason, the principles from which all moral reasoning begins. Hence, if all practical reasoning proceeds from a principle directing us to the attainment of the beatific vision, and if all the conclusions of the science of ethics are resolved in this one divinely revealed end, then it must be the case that ethics is a science strictly subalternated to theology with respect to principles.

Is Maritain right, however? Before answering that question, it will be necessary to distinguish between two separate questions that are implicit in Maritain’s claim that ethics is a science subalternated to theology. First of all, there is a question of the logical relationship between the science of ethics and the science to which it is subalternated, whatever science that may be. As we have already seen, this is primarily a question of whether moral philosophy is a subalternate science with respect to both subject-matter and principles or with respect to principles alone. Second, there is the more substantial question of whether Aquinas’s theory of practical reason is heavily dependent upon the science of divine revelation in the way that Maritain’s understanding of Thomistic moral philosophy would seem to imply. My interest here is primarily in the substance of the first question, though I shall argue that Maritain is wrong to claim that theology is the subalternating science of ethics.

Let us begin our response to Maritain by addressing the question of the logical relationship between ethics and its subalternating science first. Maritain claims that moral philosophy is subalternated to theology with respect to principles *simpliciter*, since the principle to which all its conclusions are reduced is the true last end of man, a principle that is provided by theology alone. It does not take much, however, to see that this claim conflicts with what Aquinas has to say about the self-evidence of the
first principles of practical reason at *ST. I-II*, q.94, a.2. Furthermore, at *ST. I*, q.1, a.2, when addressing the question of whether theology is a subordinate science or not, Aquinas says the following:

> We must bear in mind that there are two kinds of sciences. There are some which proceed from a principle known by the natural light of intelligence, such as arithmetic and geometry and the like. There are some which proceed from principles known by the light of a higher science: thus the science of perspective proceeds from principles established by geometry, and music from principles established by arithmetic.\(^{104}\)

According to Aquinas, then, the principles of a science are either naturally known – that is, they are self-evident to the intellect without the aid of God’s grace – or they are received from some higher science, in which case the science is either subalternate with respect to principles *simpliciter* or it is subalternate with respect to both subject-matter and principles, as we have already seen. Now, as Finnis and Grisez rightly point out, the first principles of practical reason are *naturally* known according to Aquinas, as well as being self-evident. Therefore, Aquinas could not possibly have held that ethics was subalternated to theology in the manner that Maritain suggests, whilst at the same time remaining consistent with the principles of his own philosophy of the sciences.

If this criticism of Maritain is true, however, does it not also apply to the account of the relationship between the Aristotelian sciences that I have presented thus far? After all, if an Aristotelian science can proceed only from self-evident principles – in which case it is autonomous – or from principles provided by a higher science, it seems that there is no manner in which an Aristotelian science can both proceed from its own self-evident principles and present *quias* for which a higher science can

\(^{104}\) *ST. I*, q.1, a.2.
provide the *propter quids*. Or to put the matter in another way, even if we accept that there is nothing incoherent in the account of the relationship between *quias* and *propter quids* that I have presented above, one might still object that my account cannot possibly be Aquinas’s account, for the reason already stated.

### 4.5.3 Subalternation Simpliciter vs. Subalternation Secundum Quid

Is this true, however? Does Aquinas’s insistence that an Aristotelian science must proceed either from self-evident, naturally know principles or from principles provided by a higher science necessarily rule out the account of the sciences that I have laid out above? The answer is that it does not. In order to see this, let us remind ourselves of what Maritain says above about the two ways in which a science can be subalternate with respect to principles, namely, subalternate *simpliciter* and subalternate *secundum quid*. We have already discussed what it means for a science to be subalternate with respect to principles *simpliciter*. But we have not discussed what it means for a science to be subalternate with respect to principles *secundum quid*.

It will be remembered that Maritain says that a science is subalternate with respect to principles *secundum quid*, should a science ‘perchance resolve its conclusions in principles naturally known, and yet occasionally borrow some principles from another science’.\(^{105}\) In the case of such a science, the science is said to be ‘subalternate in a certain respect’.\(^{106}\) The manner of subalternation that Maritain is describing here is essentially the same as that described by Aquinas at *PA*. I, lec.25, when he discusses the way in which the ‘diverse sciences’ are subordinate to others.

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It would be useful to remind ourselves of what it is exactly that Aquinas has to say on this matter. He writes:

Then … he [Aristotle] shows how *quia* and *propter quid* differ among sciences that are diverse but not subalternate. And he says that many sciences which are not subalternate are nevertheless related, i.e., in such a way that one states the *quia* and the other the *propter quid*. This is true of medicine and geometry. For the subject of medicine is not subsumed under the subject of geometry as the subject of optics is. Nevertheless, the principles of geometry are applicable to certain conclusions reached in medicine …

According to Aquinas, then, there are ‘sciences that are diverse’ that are not, strictly speaking, subalternated to any other science. Such sciences are, however, related in such a way that one provides the *quia* whilst the other provides the *propter quid*. After stating the above, Aquinas then goes on to give the example of how geometry provides the *propter quid* for the *quia* provided by the man of medicine, an example that we have already discussed at length. Now, part of the point that Aquinas seems to be making here is that a science *can proceed from naturally known, self-evident principles* and, therefore, be an autonomous science that is not subalternate with respect to principles *simpliciter*, whilst at the same time *being subordinate or subalternate in a more limited way*. And we have already seen the way in which the science of ethics is subalternated to either metaphysics or the philosophy of nature in this limited sense of providing *propter quids* for the *quias* provided by moral philosophy. If the science of ethics is a subalternate science, then, it is subalternate in the more extenuated sense of the term, that is, it is subalternate *secundum quid*, and not subalternate *simpliciter*.

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107 *PA. I, lec.25.*
4.5.4 Ethics Is Not Subalternated to Theology Simpliciter

What can we say, then, in response to Maritain’s claim that the science of ethics is subalternated to theology? Now, that we have established the exact manner in which ethics is subalternate, we can show where Maritain’s argument has gone astray. It will be remembered that at ST I-II, q.94, a.2, Aquinas says that knowledge of God is one of the basic goods and, hence, one of the first principles of practical reason. Does this mean that practical reason is dependent upon a divinely revealed truth for Aquinas? That this is not the case ought to become clearer once we remember that Aquinas regards the existence and, to some small degree, the nature of God as things that can be known through natural reason, namely, through the arguments of natural theology, which ought to be distinguished from the divinely revealed truths of positive theology. Furthermore, Aquinas regards his five proofs for the existence of God as formal formulations of arguments that are naturally grasped by man as being valid. Hence, for Aquinas, we can know independently of revelation that God exists and that we ought to seek knowledge of him, since it is in God’s nature to be the source and cause of all goodness and every perfection.

For this reason alone, it is wrong to suppose that Aquinas’s theory of practical reason is heavily dependent upon positive theology in the way that Maritain’s subalternation of ethics would imply. Indeed, one might worry that were the science of ethics subalternated to theology with respect to principles simpliciter, then moral philosophy would be at risk of collapsing into moral theology. In that case, all practical reasoning would seem to be dependant ultimately upon the truths of theology, and it would be hard to see in what sense natural law theory could be said to be natural at all. Furthermore, Maritain’s own theory of after-knowledge and the distinction between the gnoseological and ontological elements would seem to imply that the
science of ethics is subalternated primarily to both metaphysics and the philosophy of nature with respect to principles *secundum quid*, since it is these sciences that will provide the ontological element, i.e., the *propter quids*, that will explain the gnoseological element of the natural law.

Now, if the highest good that we can obtain is indeed the contemplation of God’s essence in the beatific vision, then it seems that in addition to being subalternated to metaphysics and natural philosophy *secundum quid*, the science of ethics will also be subalternated to theology; but it will be subalternated *secundum quid* rather than *simpliciter*. It is because of this kind of subalternation that Aquinas introduces his discussion of the beatific vision as being that which alone can satisfy our notion of the ultimate good at *ST*. I-II, q.2, a.8. What we can see Aquinas doing here, if my interpretation is correct, is introducing some truth concerning ethics from positive theology. This truth provides the moral philosopher with information that expands on the knowledge of the goods that is apprehended naturally in the operation of practical reason. In other words, if Christian revelation is true – and, of course, Aquinas is someone who believes it is – then not only is it the case for Aquinas that the essence of happiness consists in the natural contemplation of God’s essence as the cause and explanation of the world, it also will eventually consist in the direct, supernatural contemplation of His essence that the sanctified will obtain in heaven. Now, my principle concern here is not to address whether any such supernatural end exists, or whether Christian revelation is veridical. On the contrary, my principle concern is to show that a science can be subalternated *secundum quid* to several of the higher sciences at the same time, since any of the higher sciences could, in principle, supply numerous truths and *propter quids* to the science of ethics. Hence, on the account I have developed here, we can say that Maritain is right to say that ethics is...
subalternated to theology at least in a qualified sense, and that, furthermore, there is no tension between my account of the subalternate sciences and Maritain’s account, once his account has been modified in the above manner.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have addressed the first of Finnis and Grisez’s three claims, namely, that the first principles of practical reason are self-evident and not derived from theoretical reason. In particular, I have addressed the question of the logical relationship between the first principles of practical reason and theoretical reason. I conceded that the first principles are self-evident (though not in the manner assumed by Finnis and Grisez), but argued that the relationship between the first principles and theoretical reason is that between explananda and explanans.

I began the chapter by following Maritain in drawing a distinction between the gnoseological and ontological elements of the natural law, and argued that knowledge of these elements mapped onto a distinction between knowing that something is so and knowing why it is so. I then provided and account of quia and propter quid demonstrations, explaining how the distinction between these two types of syllogism provides the basis for distinguishing between the lower and higher disciplines in an Aristotelian account of the sciences. In addition to this, I explained how Aquinas’s account of goodness as ‘convertible with’ being provides an explanation of why the basic goods are good and worthy of pursuit. Finally, I distinguished my own account of the relationship between the gnoseological and ontological elements of the natural law from Maritain’s by arguing that ethics is not subalternated primarily to theology, and that it is not subalternated simpliciter. Rather, I argued, ethics is subalternated primarily to metaphysics and natural philosophy, and its mode of subalternation is
secundum quid, not simpliciter, since no science subalternated simpliciter can proceed from its own self-evident principles.

In the next chapter I shall address the third of Finnis and Grisez’s three claims, namely, that conformity with human nature is not the criterion of a moral act for Aquinas. In particular, I shall address the question of whether any significant moral conclusions can be derived from an Aristotelian account of human nature, or whether all arguments that appeal to man’s functions must be regarded as invalid on the grounds that they adduce ‘bare facts’ from which no normative conclusion could possibly be derived. To that end, I shall consider Finnis’s reasons for rejecting Aristotle’s function argument as incompatible with Aristotle’s own account of practical reason and the practical grasp of the basic goods. I shall argue that, once properly understood, traditional Aristotelian function arguments are neither incompatible with Aristotle’s account of the practical grasp of the basic goods nor guilty of employing any kind of invalid inference. Moreover, I shall show how Aristotle’s function argument ought to be understood as providing an explanatory justification for the traditional Aristotelian claim that the contemplation of theoretical truths is man’s highest good.

Furthermore, I shall address Finnis and Grisez’s claim that Hume’s no-ought-from-is principle is a universal law of logic that rules out deriving any normative conclusion from any set of facts. I shall argue that, contra Finnis and Grisez, we can validly derive normative conclusions from certain kinds of fact, namely, facts that concern functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals. However, I shall argue that functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals can tell us only what an instance of its kind must do if it is to count as a good instance. They cannot tell us whether we
have a reason to be a good instance of our kind. To answer that question, we must turn to our knowledge of the basic goods, and grasp that being a good human being is a means to acquiring the basic goods.
Chapter 5

Aristotelian Function Arguments

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I addressed the first of Finnis and Grisez’s three claims, namely, that the first principles of practical reason are self-evident and not derived from theoretical reason. In particular, I addressed the question of the logical relationship between the first principles of practical reason and the truths of theoretical reason. I conceded that the first principles are self-evident, but argued that metaphysics and natural philosophy ought to be understood as providing explanatory justifications for the first principles of practical reason. To that end, I gave an account of how, for Aquinas, a higher science will provide the propter quid or explanans for the quia or explanandum of a lower science.

Furthermore, I explained how Aquinas’s account of goodness as ‘convertible with’ being provides an explanation of why the basic goods are good and worthy of pursuit. Finally, I distinguished my own account of the relationship between the gnoseological and ontological elements of the natural law from Maritain’s by arguing that ethics is not subalternated primarily to theology, and that it is not subalternated simpliciter. Rather, I argued, ethics is subalternated primarily to metaphysics and natural philosophy, and its mode of subalternation is secundum quid, not simpliciter, since no science subalternated simpliciter can proceed from its own self-evident principles.
In this chapter, I shall address the third of Finnis and Grisez’s three claims, namely, that conformity with human nature is not the criterion of a moral act for Aquinas. In particular, I shall address Finnis and Grisez’s claim that Aristotle’s function argument is an ‘erratic boulder’ at odds with the fundamental structure of Aristotle’s moral epistemology and methodology. It will be remembered that according to Finnis, Aristotle and Aquinas never intended to claim that what is good for man can be known by attending to some theoretical account of human nature. Rather, we know what is good for us through a practical grasp of the basic goods. I grant that our knowledge of what constitutes man’s flourishing is known primarily through the practical grasp of the basic goods, but I shall now argue that if we accept the Neo-Scholastic explanation of the basic goods as perfections of man’s natural capacities, then we can reason that whatever is a perfection of such a capacity is also a basic good. And it is in this way that a theoretical account of human nature can provide a criterion of goodness for man. Furthermore, I shall show how Finnis rejects Aristotle’s function argument on the grounds that it supposedly attempts to derive normative conclusions from ‘bare facts’.

In the second half of this chapter, I shall address the question of whether all facts are necessarily ‘bare facts’ devoid of any normative content, as envisaged by Finnis and Grisez, or whether some facts might have normative or evaluative content. To that end, I shall provide an account of functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals as developed by MacIntyre and Foot. And, following MacIntyre and Foot, I shall argue that functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals have evaluative elements. For that reason, factual statements about functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals can have evaluative content. Contra MacIntyre and Foot, however, I shall argue that we cannot derive obligations from functional concepts and
Aristotelian categoricals alone. All that functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals can tell us is what a thing will do if it is to count as a good instance of its kind. We grasp the desirability of being a good human being once we grasp the desirability of the basic goods and understand that being a good human being is a means to attaining those goods.

5.2 Finnis’s Criticism of Aristotle’s Function Argument

In his *Fundamentals of Ethics* (1983), Finnis speaks of Aristotle’s function argument thus:

> The ‘function’ argument is not the deep structure of Aristotle’s ethical method; it is an erratic boulder. The whole argument of the *Ethics* concludes to a proposition about what is natural to man, in the sense of truly appropriate to and fulfilling for human beings; but that is the conclusion, or a way of expressing the conclusion, and the arguments are found for it elsewhere. Where?

> Time and time again Aristotle appeals to what ‘everyone would say’, or ‘no one would say’ …[^108]

For Finnis, then, Aristotle’s function argument is an ‘erratic boulder’ that does not reflect the ‘deep structure of Aristotle’s ethical method’. What, however, does Finnis mean by this claim, and what is the real ‘deep structure’ of Aristotle’s moral philosophy?

Now, it will be remembered that the first principles of practical reason are naturally known, self-evident, indemonstrable principles, according to Aquinas. Furthermore, as Finnis points out, Aristotle’s methodology for uncovering the goods to be pursued in Aristotle’s *Ethics* is one of appealing to what everyone would or

would not say concerning the goodness of certain ends. On both Aristotle and Aquinas’s accounts, then, we seem to have a practical grasp of the goodness of certain ends, and as I have already argued, such a grasp ought to be understood as being founded in our ability to perceive the goodness of certain ends.

Finnis, however, associates Aristotle’s appeal to what everyone would say concerning the goods to be pursued with Nozick’s ‘experience machine’ thought experiment, and he credits Nozick with unintentionally re-introducing an element of Aristotle’s moral philosophy to contemporary Anglo-Saxon philosophy. Finnis writes:

Suppose you could be plugged into an ‘experience machine’ which, by stimulating your brain while you lay floating in a tank, would afford you all the experiences you choose, with all the variety (if any) you could want: but you must plug in for a lifetime or not at all. Would one choose to plug in for the sake of a lifetime of (nothing but) ‘pleasures’ …? When we realize that we would not plug in for the sake of that sort of experience, we realize that ‘pleasure’ is not the point of human existence; the life of pleasure cannot count as a life of fulfilment.\textsuperscript{109}

For Finnis, then, it is by means of such thought experiments that we can come to identify those ends that are goods to be pursued as fulfilling of human beings. And it is in such a manner that we can come to have knowledge of the basic goods without recourse to any form of theoretical reasoning. According to Finnis, then, this is the mode of practical reasoning employed by Aristotle in the \textit{Ethics}, and it is, by extension, the mode of practical reasoning outlined by Aquinas at \textit{ST. I-II, q.94, a.2}. It is this mode of reasoning, therefore, that is the real ‘deep structure’ of Aristotle and Aquinas’s moral philosophy on Finnis’s understanding of natural law theory. We

\textsuperscript{109} Finnis, \textit{Fundamentals of Ethics}, p. 37.
know the identity of the basic goods not by appealing to arguments concerning man’s function, but by identifying our fundamental reasons for action. For this reason, Finnis regards the function argument as inconsistent with Aristotle’s supposedly proto-Nozickian ethical methodology.

5.2.1 Finnis’s Primary Objection

As we have seen, then, Finnis rejects Aristotle’s function argument as incompatible with Aristotle’s own methodology for identifying the basic goods. Can we, however, say more about the nature of this argument and Finnis’s reason for rejecting it?

Writing of the function argument, Finnis says:

> I hasten to add that there is in the *Nicomachean Ethics* an argument of Aristotle’s that has something of the ‘theoretical’, i.e. non-practical character which Adler and Veatch make decisive for ethics. It occurs as one part of the famous argument about man’s *ergon*, function or characteristic activity … Aristotle’s concern to identify the human function is treated with much more sympathy by contemporary philosophers that it was by the philosophers of the last few generations. But there is one part of it that is rightly found unacceptable, and that is the very part or moment which is unequivocally ‘theoretical’, non-practical. The one purely theoretical moment of the argument is where Aristotle says we should be looking not merely for man’s function or characteristic activity but, more narrowly, for man’s *peculiar* characteristic activity, i.e. the function he does not share with any other being.¹¹⁰

The argument to which Finnis is referring, then, is Aristotle’s argument that a thing’s function – or, at least, its highest function – is determined by that function which sets it apart from other members of its genus. In other words, it is the thing’s particular characteristic activity or operation that constitutes its *ergon* or specific function. Furthermore, what constitutes a thing’s flourishing or proper functioning is ultimately

determined by the nature of the characteristic operation of the thing. Hence, if the ergon or characteristic operation of a knife is cutting, then the proper functioning of a knife – or its flourishing, if we can properly apply that term to an artefact – will consist in its ability to cut well. And if the ergon or characteristic operation of man is contemplation, as both Aristotle and Aquinas claim, then the proper functioning or flourishing of man will consist ultimately in his ability to contemplate the truths of the cosmos well.

Now, as we have seen above, Finnis thinks that Aristotle and Aquinas’s moral philosophy proceeds from truths or principles that identify the basic goods. And these truths are acquired through something like Nozick’s experience machine though experiment. For Finnis, then, practical reason proceeds from a grasp of whether certain ends are worthy of pursuit. Or, to put it another way, practical reason proceeds by asking whether we have good reasons to pursue this or that end. It does not, however, answer such question by consulting some Aristotelian theory of man’s nature. On the contrary, practical reason answers such questions by running its own Nozick-like though experiment, which enables us, in some way or other, to identify those ends that are ultimately worthy of pursuit and those that are not.

Aristotle’s function argument, on the other hand, proceeds not from truths acquired through a practical grasp of the basic goods, but from a purported truth concerning the nature of a thing’s proper functioning. As such, it proceeds from a truth of theoretical reason; but the operations of practical reason are paradigmatically practical, and its mode of reasoning cannot, according to Finnis, proceed from theoretical truths or principles. This, then, is Finnis’s primary objection to Aristotle’s function argument, namely, that it attempts to derive moral truths from truths about
our highest function, and that such an attempt violates Aristotle’s own doctrine that knowledge of the basic goods is acquired through a consideration of the ends that all reasonable human beings regard as worthy of pursuit.

5.2.2 Finnis’s Secondary Objection

Finnis’s primary objection to Aristotle’s function argument, then, is that it is incompatible with Aristotle’s own proto-Nozickian methodology for identifying the basic goods. Finnis, however, presents another, secondary objection to Aristotle’s argument. He writes:

But, *pace* Aristotle, we should not suppose that the most important characteristics of humanity are to be identified by identifying those that distinguish us from all other kinds of being. For one thing, the argument would lead to a conclusion which Aristotle does not want; for he wants all his arguments to support his view that the ultimate *telos* of man is *theoretical* contemplation; but contemplation is not peculiar to human beings; it is a characteristic which, on Aristotle’s own account, we share with the gods.\(^{111}\)

In other words, what constitutes our flourishing cannot be determined by our characteristic operation, which according to Aristotle is the contemplation of the ultimate truths of the cosmos. Or, we might say, if our flourishing is so determined, it cannot be the case that contemplation is our characteristic operation or *ergon*, since according to Aristotle, we share that operation with the gods. The implication of Finnis argument here would seem to be that we ought to reject the function argument in any case, as it is incoherent even on Aristotle’s own terms.

Is the function argument incoherent in the manner Finnis implies? The answer is that it is not. We can see this by noting that Finnis incorrectly describes the nature

\(^{111}\) Finnis, *Fundamentals of Ethics*, p. 15.
of a specific difference. According to Finnis, a specific difference or important characteristic is something that will ‘distinguish us from all other kinds of being’. This, however, strikes me as false. A more standard definition of a specific difference is this: a specific difference is an essential characteristic that distinguishes a species from other species within the same proximate genus. Hence, for Aristotle and Aquinas, the quality of being rational distinguishes the species ‘man’ from every other kind of species in the genus ‘animal’, since only man possesses the power of conceptual thought.

But the gods are not, presumably, a species of animal, even though they may have the power to take on a corporeal form. They do not, therefore, belong to the genus ‘animal’, and there is nothing incoherent in Aristotle’s claim that rationality is the specific difference of man and that, at the same time, the gods have the power of conceptual thought. There is, then, nothing in Aristotle and Aquinas’s morphological account of taxonomy that precludes the specific difference of one species being possessed by another species in a separate genus. Hence, for Aquinas, both men and angels are rational, but angels do not belong to the same species as man, since they are not a kind of animal, but, rather, incorporeal beings. Needless to say, Aristotle’s morphological taxonomy is a matter of controversy within the contemporary science of biology. My point here, however, is merely that Finnis cannot dismiss the function argument on the grounds that it is incoherent even by Aristotle’s own account of taxonomy, since, as we have just seen, it is not.

5.3 Finnis’s Primary Objection Revisited

We have seen, then, that Finnis’s secondary objection to Aristotle’s function argument fails. This is because Finnis’s objection rests upon an inaccurate definition of a
specific difference. What, however, can we say in response to Finnis’s primary objection? Is Aristotle’s function argument incompatible with his account of the grasp of the basic goods, an account which states that the basic goods are known not by an appeal to metaphysics or natural philosophy, but by an appeal to what all reasonable human beings find worthy of desire? As Finnis writes:

But the main thing wrong with Aristotle’s ‘unique function’ argument is that it adduces a bare fact (the alleged fact that we are unique in such and such a respect). Though this may be a fact of great significance for a description of the universe, it has no significance for practical understanding, i.e. for an understanding of what is good in human life. The argument is a piece of bare ‘physics’, from which nothing of this sort follows for ethics.\textsuperscript{112}

If Finnis is correct, then, the fundamental problem for the function argument is that it ‘adduces a bare fact’, a fact that may be of great significance for ‘a description of the universe’, but which, nevertheless, has no significance for practical understanding. Furthermore, Aristotle’s function argument proceeds from a ‘piece of bare physics’, and, therefore, nothing of ethical significance can be derived from it. Are these claims true, however? Does Aristotle’s function argument cite ‘bare facts’ from which no normative conclusion can be derived?

5.3.1 Finnis’s Criticism of the Function Arguments of Adler and Veatch

Finnis, it ought to be noted, presents his criticism of Aristotle’s function argument against a backdrop of his criticisms of the Neo-Aristotelian philosophies of Adler and Veatch. According to Finnis, Adler and Veatch both erroneously suppose that the truths of ethics can be derived from theoretical truths or principles. Furthermore, both these thinkers erroneously suppose that they are following the methodology of

\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Finnis, Fundamentals of Ethics}, p. 15-6.
Aristotle and Aquinas in attempting to found moral philosophy on such theoretical underpinnings. As Finnis explains, Adler considers the truth of a practical judgement to consist in its conformity with right desire. If a judgement of practical reason agrees with right desire, then it will be true. But a desire, for Adler, is right only when it is a desire for a real good, rather than a mere transient want. And such goods are the objects of desires that are natural to and inherent in human nature.

Finnis, however, objects to this picture of practical reasoning. He writes:

A need is, says Adler, a desire that is natural, i.e. ‘inherent in our common human nature’. The judgement that a desire is natural is a purely ‘descriptive or factual proposition’: in Humean or neo-Humean terms it is an ‘is’ not an ‘ought’. Thus, for instance, the judgment ‘I ought to seek knowledge’ is the conclusion of a piece of practical reasoning in which the first premise is the normative principle ‘Real goods ought to be desired’ and the second premise is the factual truth that ‘Man has a natural desire for knowledge’ …

The fact is [however] that Aristotle is not a neo-Aristotelian who believes that ethical truths are attained by an inventory (or any other description) of aspects of human nature.¹¹³

Now, there are two claims embedded within this criticism of Adler’s moral philosophy and, by extension, of Aristotle’s function argument. The first is that any attempt to derive a normative conclusion from non-normative premises will violate Hume’s is-ought distinction. On this view, one can never derive a truth of ethics from a ‘descriptive or factual proposition’ or from a ‘piece of bare physics’, to use Finnis’s other expression. Hence, we can never infer from the fact that man has a natural capacity for knowledge that we ought to seek knowledge. I shall address the validity of Hume’s is-ought distinction later in this chapter. At the moment, however, I wish to address the second of the two claims embedded within Finnis’s criticism of Adler.

That claim states that Aristotle and Aquinas did not believe that ‘ethical truths are attained by an inventory (or any other description) of aspects of human nature’. In other words, not only is it supposedly fallacious to attempt to derive a normative conclusion from a proposition such as ‘Man has a natural capacity for knowledge’, but it is also methodologically foreign to the moral philosophy of Aristotle and Aquinas.¹¹⁴

5.3.2 Finnis’s Criticism of Adler and Veatch Addressed

Are appeals to natural functions foreign to the ethical methodologies of Aristotle and Aquinas, however? We may answer this question by saying that in one respect they are, and in another they are not. As we have already said, for Aquinas, practical reasoning proceeds from naturally known self-evident, indemonstrable principles. And for Aristotle, practical reasoning proceeds in a similar way from a dialectical consideration of the ends that the practically wise regard as worthy of pursuit. In this respect, then, the methodology employed by Adler and Veatch is indeed foreign to both Aristotle and Aquinas, since both Aristotle and Aquinas did not regard practical

¹¹⁴ Such claims place Finnis and Grisez at odds with those Neo-Aristotelians who are more sympathetic to the traditional interpretation of Aristotle and Aquinas’s ethics. As MacIntyre has said:

Grisez, Finnis, and other exponents of their position emphasize that their view – that our knowledge of human goods is not and cannot be derived from our knowledge of human nature, but rather is knowledge of what is self-evident to intelligent persons – does not mean that the goods of which they speak are not fulfilling of human nature. But they do repudiate all arguments of the form: Human nature’s essential and ordered inclinations are such-and-such; the achievement of so-and-so would be the achievement of that to which human nature is inclined and ordered; therefore so-and-so is a good for human nature; and therefore we ought to respect and achieve so-and-so. Thomists, by contrast, assert what Grisez and Finnis deny, that there are sound arguments of this form, arguments whose conclusions coincide with those uninferred and evident judgments that, in Aquinas’s view, every rational person makes for himself, judgments concerning the truth of the precepts of the natural law.

reason as deriving its conclusions primarily from principles expressing theoretical truths. Hence, Finnis is right to claim that Aristotle and Aquinas did not, in this respect, derive the truths of practical reason from an inventory of man’s capacities or powers.

On the other hand, there is a sense in which Aristotle and Aquinas did derive at least some ethical truths from the kind of theoretical truths adduced by Adler and Veatch as fundamental premises of an Aristotelian moral philosophy. To see how this is so, we must remember that, as I have argued, the science of ethics is subalternated to metaphysics and natural philosophy with respect to principles secundum quid. And as I have shown, being thus subalternated to these two sciences means that metaphysics and natural philosophy are able to provide explanations for certain truths of practical reason; or as we might otherwise say, the higher, subalternant science has the ability to provide an explanans for certain facts apprehended as true by practical reason. But being subalternate secundum quid is not only a matter of being subordinated to a higher science with respect to the provision of explanations; for Aquinas, it is also a matter of the higher sciences having the capacity to demonstrate certain things about both the nature of the good and the basic goods.

Now, we have seen how Aquinas might formulate a propter quid demonstration of the cause of the desirability of the basic goods. In short, we begin with the observation that whatever we perceive as worthy of desire is also a perfective actuality. That is to say, we perceive that the qualities of being desirable and of being a perfective actuality are co-present in the same objects. This observable fact provides the quia for which we shall provide a propter quid. And our propter quid proposes that being a perfective actuality is the cause of a thing’s being desirable. That is to
say, according to this account, the quality of being desirable is a property that flows from the quality of being a perfective actuality. But if we know that a thing has the quality of being worthy of desire if and only if it is a perfective actuality – or a means to a perfective actuality – then we know that being worthy of desire necessitates being a perfective actuality. In which case, we have now demonstrated something concerning the nature of the good, namely, that all basic goods are perfective actualities. But if every basic good is a perfective actuality, and every perfective actuality is necessarily a basic good – since its desirability flows from its being a perfective actuality – then we ought to pursue every perfective actuality.

It is in this respect, then, that Aristotle and Aquinas derive ethical conclusions from theoretical premises. But they do so by working backwards, as it were, from the first principles of practical reason. That is, the Aristotelian methodology, when properly understood, proceeds from two things. First, it proceeds from a knowledge of the nature of the good, namely, the good is that which is worthy of desire, and for this reason it is pursued by all men – or, at least, by all practically reasonable men. Second, it proceeds from the knowledge that certain ends are good, and by extension, therefore, worthy of desire. But knowing *that* the good is that which is worthy of desire is not the same as knowing *why* the good is worthy of desire. Furthermore, and more important for our present point, knowing that goodness has the quality of being desirable is not the same as knowing every quality possessed by goodness. Now, it is by the method just described that the Aristotelian is able to demonstrate certain things concerning the nature of the good. But once such a demonstration has been given, it is hard to see why its conclusion could not serve as a premise in an argument of moral philosophy.
In other words, if we know that every perfective actuality is a basic good, through the use of the above method, we can then ask ourselves the following question: What are the actualities that perfect man? Or, to put it another way: What are the kinds of activity that fulfil man’s capacities? Once we answer this question, we shall have an inventory of man’s capacities and the kinds of activities in which those capacities are exercised or fulfilled. And since we know that every perfective actuality or activity of this kind is worthy of desire, we also know that whatever activities are included in our inventory will be worthy of desire, too. In which case, we are deriving practical conclusions from theoretical truths; but, pace Finnis, it is not clear that this type of inference commits any kind of inferential fallacy. Nor is it clear that such inferences are incompatible with Aristotle and Aquinas’s methodology of moral philosophy, since the starting-point for this kind of argument ultimately resides in the first principles of practical reason.

Now, Finnis says that in Adler’s argument the first premise is ‘Real goods ought to be desired’, a premise which he recognizes as normative in nature. And the second is ‘Man has a natural desire for knowledge’, with the conclusion being that ‘Man ought to seek knowledge’. Finnis’s objection to the second premise, however, is that it is purely descriptive. It is, for Finnis, a ‘bare piece of physics’ from which nothing of any significance to ethics can be derived. I shall not treat directly of Adler’s argument here; but I do wish to say that the argument as laid out by Finnis strikes me as a rather uncharitable reconstruction of this kind of Aristotelian function argument. A more reasonable reconstruction of such a function argument would be as follows:

Major: Whatever is good is worthy of pursuit.

Minor: Knowledge is good.
Conclusion: Therefore, knowledge is worthy of pursuit.

Proof of the Major: The good is, by nature, worthy of desire; and whatever is worthy of desire is also worthy of pursuit. Therefore, the good is worthy of pursuit.

Proof of the Minor: Knowledge is a perfective actuality; but whatever is a perfective actuality is a good. Therefore, knowledge is good.

Before proceeding any further with our investigation, it would be useful to note that my primary concern here is not with the truth of the premises in the above demonstration. On the contrary, my primary concern at the moment is with the validity of the demonstration’s inference, and with Finnis’s claim that there is something amiss with the structure of Aristotle’s function argument and of those arguments that follow in its footsteps. But it is by no means obvious that there is anything wrong with the inference in the above argument. And contrary to what Finnis, Grisez, and the new natural law theorists often imply, those who deploy Aristotelian function arguments do not necessarily attempt to derive normative conclusions from bare facts, that is, from truths of theoretical reason that have no normative content of their own. A more charitable – and, indeed, more plausible – interpretation of claims such as, ‘Knowledge is the object of a natural inclination; therefore, you ought to pursue it’ would understand it as an enthymeme or abbreviated form of the argument given above. In which case, we ought to understand that everything necessary for the proving or defence of its premises will be left unsaid, and it may be the case that many of Aquinas’s early modern commentators, and even some of his Neo-Scholastic followers, assumed that their readers had a knowledge of the kind of methodology that I have already outlined above. It does Finnis no good,
therefore, to point out that from ‘Man has a natural desire for knowledge’ we cannot directly and validly infer that we ought to pursue knowledge, since, in its most defensible form, that is not what this kind of function argument attempts to do.

5.4 How to Understand Aristotle’s Function Argument

We have seen, then, how function arguments such as those employed by Adler and Veatch can be given a charitable interpretation, an interpretation that renders them consistent with the self-evidence of the first principles of practical reason and the unmediated apprehension of the basic goods. On this interpretation, we explain the goodness of the basic goods by an appeal to their nature as the fulfilment of certain natural capacities. Once we have explained the basic goods in this manner, we can then reason that whatever is the fulfilment of a natural capacity must also be a basic good and, therefore, worthy of desire. It is in this manner that the Aristotelian derives normative conclusions from truths concerning human nature and the proper functioning of our faculties. What, however, can we say in defence of Aristotle’s own version of the function argument? Aristotle, it will be remembered, argued that the operation which marks man off from other members of the genus ‘animal’ is man’s highest function or ergon. It will also be remembered that Finnis objects to such arguments on the grounds that they adduce ‘bare facts’ from which no normative conclusion can be derived. Can Aristotle’s function argument be reconciled with the claim that ethic truths are derived from an unmediated knowledge of the basic goods, a knowledge which is acquired by a consideration of what all reasonable human beings regard as worthy of pursuit?

In order to answer that question, let us remind ourselves of what a moral agent knows concerning the basic goods through the operation of practical reason. First, as
we have already said, he knows that the good is, by nature, worthy of desire; and that it is, therefore, worthy of pursuit. He also knows that certain ends are good and worthy of pursuit. Furthermore, if we consider what Aquinas has to say at ST. I-II, q.94, a.2 when he speaks of the first principles of practical reason following an ordering of natural inclinations – an ordering that follows his Aristotelian hierarchy of souls, which runs from the vegetative to the sensitive to the rational – then we might suppose that Aquinas thinks that man also has a practical grasp of the hierarchy that exists amongst the basic goods. Hence, our moral agent will also apprehend that in a conflict between goods, the goods of nutrition and health will, for instance, outrank the good of play. And if Aquinas is right, a moral agent will also apprehend that the life of reason outranks a life devoted to the lower of the basic goods alone.

Now, as we saw in Chapter 2, Aquinas argues that perfect happiness is that which will satisfy all our rational desires. In its broadest sense, then, worldly happiness or flourishing consists in the possession of as many of the basic goods as possible. But in its narrowest sense, happiness consists in the operation of the intellect in an act of contemplation (and for Aquinas, our ultimate destiny is to contemplate the essence of God directly in the beatific vision). This is because, for Aristotle and Aquinas, man is primarily rational. And because he is primarily rational, the other basic goods are, in one respect, for the sake of the operation of the intellect, since it is by the operation of his other natural powers that man is able to live and use his power of reason in an act of theoretical contemplation. Now, if Aristotle and Aquinas are right, then they have provided an explanation of our apprehension – or, at least, of the apprehension of the practically wise man – that the operation of the intellect in an act of contemplation is the highest good.
Finnis, however, does recognize that Aristotle’s function argument can be understood in a manner somewhat like the one mentioned above. Speaking of Veatch’s treatment of the function argument, he writes:

The argument appeared to set out, unpromisingly, by asking what ‘all men do strive for’, an ethically barren question of ‘physics’. And the question what is a ‘full and proper existence for a human being’ seemed to be being asked in a purely theoretical way. But as the argument unfolds, we can see that it works, i.e. induces understanding and knowledge of what is a full and proper human existence, precisely by getting you to ‘imagine yourself in a situation where you would be … ’, and asking ‘Would you settle for this?’

According to Finnis, then, the problem with Veatch’s reconstruction of Aristotle’s function argument is that it proposes to demonstrate what is good for man by proceeding from premises about what all men strive for by nature. The argument, however, does not deliver on this promise, and resorts instead to asking the reader to consider what kind of life he would settle for. But, as Finnis indicates, such a methodology employs a practical grasp of the good life, rather than a theoretical understanding of it. But if we restate the function argument as the kind of explanation that I have described above, then it seems as if Finnis could reasonable claim that I have conceded his point in granting a merely explanatory or heuristic role for Aristotle’s function argument, since, on my account, the argument merely explains what is already known as true by the operation of practical reason.

What can we say in response to such a possible criticism? First, we can say that we happily accept that Aristotle’s function argument has, on this account, less of a demonstrative character than might at first be assumed. This is because the Aristotelian ought to accept Aristotle’s dictum that one cannot teach ethics to a man

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who does not already have some grasp of the nature of the good. Now, let us imagine some circumstance in which we are discussing the identity of the highest good with a person who has at least some grasp of what constitutes a life well lived, and let us also imagine that this person denies that contemplation is the highest good. In such a case, what would we possibly do to convince him otherwise? The answer is that we could appeal to arguments such as those given by Aristotle and Aquinas in an attempt to provide an explanatory justification for what we have already asserted. Such a justification could not be counted as a deduction of the truth of the claim that contemplation is man’s highest good, but it would provide rational grounds for asserting that the claim is true.

The second thing that we can say in response to Finnis’s criticism is that it would be prudent to distinguish between what we might call Aristotle’s ‘highest function argument’ and ‘function arguments’ in general. In the first argument, Aristotle’s aim is to show that contemplation is man’s highest good, as we have already seen. General function arguments, such as those given by Adler and Veatch, on the other hand, attempt to show either that the object of a certain capacity is good or that the objects of all natural capacities are good. Highest function arguments attempt to justify the claim that contemplation is man’s highest good by appealing to a hierarchy of goods amongst the constituent parts of happiness. General function arguments, by contrast, attempt to show that some end is good and worthy of pursuit by appealing to the doctrine that the basic goods are the fulfilment of natural capacities.

The important point, however, is that once we are clear about the exact logical relationship between the first principles of practical reason and truths of theoretical
reason, we can see that Aristotle’s function argument is no ‘erratic boulder’ sitting within his otherwise coherent account of practical reason. That Aristotle’s argument appears this way to Finnis and Grisez is a result of their failure to understand the exact relationship that obtains between the science of ethics and its subalternating sciences (i.e., metaphysics and natural philosophy). But if the account of subalternation that I developed in the previous chapter is correct, then, we can provide an interpretation of Aristotle’s function argument that renders it both logically valid and consistent with Aristotle’s account of practical reason.

5.5 Finnis on the Fact-Value Distinction

Thus far I have addressed Finnis’s claim that the function argument is incompatible with Aristotle’s account of practical reason and the practical grasp of the basic goods. I have shown why Finnis’s two objections to this argument fail, and in doing so I have explained the manner in which Aristotelians validly infer normative conclusions from truths concerning the proper functioning of man’s faculties. I have also shown how we ought to understand Aristotle’s ‘highest function’ argument as an attempt to provide an explanatory justification for the claim that contemplation is man’s highest good. Therefore, Finnis and Grisez cannot maintain that function arguments of the type we have discussed so far are logically invalid and incompatible with Aristotle and Aquinas’s accounts of practical reason.

Nevertheless, could it not be claimed that the traditional account of the natural law is at odds with the truth of Hume’s dictum ‘No ought from is’, since the traditional account must ultimately rest upon some derivation of value from fact? In this last part of this chapter, I shall address the nature and validity of Hume’s fact-value distinction. I shall do two things in particular: first I shall canvass the standard Neo-Aristotelian
responses to the claim that no *ought* can be derived from an *is*; and second, I shall provide a new account of the role of functional concepts in natural law theory. In doing this, I shall show how my account of the role of functional concepts differs from other recent accounts, in particular those of MacIntyre and Foot.

5.5.1 Finnis’s Interpretation and Acceptance of the Fact-Value Distinction

In *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (1980), Finnis accepts the existence of a fact-value distinction, whilst denying that Aquinas violates this distinction by attempting to derive norms of conduct from the facts of human nature. He reminds us of Hume’s famous complaint against the moralists of his day, which criticises them for supposedly eliding illicitly from statements of fact to statements of moral obligation. Hume writes thus:

> In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark’d, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surpriz’d to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, ’tis necessary that it shou’d be observ’d and explain’d; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it.116

Finnis says that there are two plausible interpretations of this passage: first, the standard interpretation, which interprets Hume as elucidating a truth of logic; and second, the historical interpretation, which interprets Hume as responding to the eighteenth-century rationalists regarding the perception of moral qualities and their relation to the question of moral motivation.

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Finnis, however, is concerned only with the substance of the first, standard interpretation. He writes:

The first and standard interpretation treats Hume as announcing the logical truth, widely emphasized since the latter part of the nineteenth century, that no set of non-moral (or, more generally, non-evaluative) premisses can entail a moral (or evaluative) conclusion. … While the second interpretation has more to commend it as an interpretation, there is no harm in accepting the first, since if Hume is not to be credited with announcing the logical principle in question, somebody else is to be; and the important thing is that the principle is true and significant.¹¹⁷

Hume, then, ought to be credited with the discovery of a logical principle, a principle that is, according to Finnis, both true and significant. This principle states that one cannot derive a conclusion with normative content from premises with non-normative content. Since Finnis accepts this principle as a law of logic, and since he also seems to accept that a fact can have no evaluative content, he is understandably eager to extricate Aquinas’s moral philosophy from any understanding of natural law ethics that would claim that moral principles are derived from facts about human nature.

5.5.2 Vazquez and Suarez: The Authors of Derivationism

Now, as we saw in Chapter 1, Finnis claims that the picture of natural law ethics that preoccupies the modern imagination owes its existence to the moral philosophies of Vazquez and Suarez, rather than to the theory of practical reason advanced by Aquinas. The philosophies of these two early modern Scholastics have done much, so Finnis claims, to obscure the true nature of Aquinas’s theory of natural law. Moreover, for Finnis, the major misunderstanding of Aquinas’s theory of natural law is that it violates the fact-value distinction by attempting to derive normative principles from facts about human nature. And it is these two Baroque Scholastics to whom such

derivationist accounts of the natural law owe their existence. Thus, in a key passage replying to Stone, Finnis writes:

Another of the three ‘decisive issues’ formulated by Stone was this: ‘Have the natural lawyers shown that they can derive ethical norms from facts?’ And the answer can be brisk: They have not, nor do they need to, nor did the classical exponents of the theory dream of attempting any such derivation.

…

Thus it is simply not true that ‘any form of a natural-law theory of morals entails the belief that propositions about man’s duties and obligations can be inferred from propositions about his nature’. Nor is it true that for Aquinas ‘good and evil are concepts analysed and fixed in metaphysics before they are applied in morals’.  

According to Finnis, then, Aquinas cannot be charged with attempting to derive ‘ethical norms from facts’, since he and his classical exponents never intended to perform any such derivation. Finnis goes on to stress that, for Aquinas, the principles of the natural law are not derived from the facts of metaphysics or, indeed, from any propositions of theoretical reason. Nor are they derived from theoretical propositions about the nature of good and evil, or from theoretical propositions about ‘the function of a human being’ or any ‘teleological conception of nature’.  

Furthermore, Finnis does not claim only that Aquinas avoided committing the logical error of attempting to derive an _ought_ from an _is_, he also claims that the Aristotelian distinction between theoretical reason and practical reason marks the distinction between facts on the one hand and norms on the other. Hence, the domain of theoretical reason, on this account, is properly _that which is_, whereas the domain of practical reason is _that which ought to be done_.

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118 Finnis, _Natural Law and Natural Rights_, p. 33.
119 Finnis, _Natural Law and Natural Rights_, pp. 33-4.
120 See Finnis, _Natural Law and Natural Rights_, p. 36.
5.3 The Fact-Value Distinction: MacIntyre’s Response

We have seen, then, that Finnis claims that there is a logical distinction between propositions expressing an *is* and propositions expressing an *ought*. The distinction is such that one can never logically infer an *ought* from an *is*. Furthermore, according to Finnis, Aristotle and Aquinas recognized the logical gulf between these two types of proposition, and thus drew a distinction between theoretical reason and practical reason. Is Finnis right to assume, however, that such a logical gap must necessarily obtain between every kind of factual statement and all normative propositions? Or, to put it another way, is it always logically impossible to derive a practical or moral conclusion from a set of factual premises?

One influential response to the claim that a fact-value distinction obtains is MacIntyre’s appeal to ‘functional concepts’. According to MacIntyre’s account of the Enlightenment and its attempt to provide justification for moral precepts, a change occurred in the character of moral philosophy during the eighteenth century as philosophers moved away from the claim that moral precepts are connected to the facts of human nature. Even though a number of eighteenth-century philosophers endeavoured to ground their own moral philosophies in this or that aspect of human nature, the general trend was towards a more and more unrestricted version of the claim that one can never validly infer a moral or normative conclusion from factual premises alone. As MacIntyre says:

Hume still expresses this claim in the form of a doubt rather than a positive assertion. … And he then goes on to demand ‘that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it’. [However] The same general principle, no longer expressed as a question, but as an assertion, appears in Kant’s insistence that the injunctions of the moral law cannot be
Hume may have been sceptical of the claim that we can derive moral conclusions from factual premises, but he at least seems to allow the possibility that someone might be able to show how such a demonstration might be effected. But by the time we reach the moral philosophy of Kant, the connection between moral precepts and the facts of human nature has been thoroughly severed.

Furthermore, as MacIntyre goes on to say, later philosophers would go beyond Kant’s claim that moral precepts cannot be derived from the facts of human nature to the assertion that one can never validly derive a moral conclusion from any set of factual premises alone. He writes:

Some later moral philosophers have gone so far as to describe the thesis that from a set of factual premises no moral conclusion validly follows as ‘a truth of logic’, understanding it as derivable from a more general principle which some medieval logicians formulated as the claim that in a valid argument nothing can appear in the conclusion which was not already present in the premises. And, such philosophers have suggested, in an argument in which any attempt is made to derive a moral or evaluative conclusion from factual premises something which is not in the premises, namely the moral or evaluative element, will appear in the conclusion. Hence any such argument must fail.\(^{122}\)

Now, the claim that no moral conclusion can ever validly follow from factual premises alone is, as we have seen, the same claim advanced by Finnis, Grisez, and the new natural law theorists. And, as MacIntyre explains, the principle that one can never derive an *ought* from an *is* is taken to be derivable from the more general principle that

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\(^{122}\) MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 67.
nothing can validly appear in the conclusion of an argument that is not already present in its premises. Is this principle of ‘no ought from an is’ true, however?

MacIntyre argues that it is not. Wherever an is statement employs a functional concept, we can validly infer an ought statement as a conclusion. As MacIntyre says, citing Prior:

A. N. Prior’s counter-example to this alleged principle illustrates its breakdown adequately; from the premise ‘He is a sea-captain’, the conclusion may be validly inferred that ‘He ought to do whatever a sea-captain ought to do’. This counter-example not only shows that there is no general principle of the type alleged; but it itself shows what is at least a grammatical truth – an ‘is’ premise can on occasion entail an ‘ought’ conclusion.123

But how is it that we can derive a conclusion such as ‘He ought to do whatever a sea-captain ought to do’ from a factual premise such as ‘He is a sea-captain’? The answer, MacIntyre says, resides in the particular nature of concepts such as ‘sea-captain’. For this kind of concept is what is known as a ‘functional concept’; and such concepts define things in terms of their characteristic functions. Hence, as MacIntyre says, ‘We define both “watch” and “farmer” in terms of the purpose or function which a watch or farmer are characteristically expected to serve’.124 And given that functional concepts have normative elements as part their descriptive capacities, it follows that ‘the concept of a watch cannot be defined independently of the concept of a good watch nor the concept of a farmer independently of that of a good farmer’.125 For MacIntyre, then, the error of the defenders of the ‘no ought from is’ principle resides in their apparent assumption that moral arguments never employ functional concepts. But since natural law ethics and the ethics of those within the Aristotelian tradition in

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123 MacIntyre, After Virtue, p. 68.
124 MacIntyre, After Virtue, p. 69.
125 MacIntyre, After Virtue, p. 69. I shall examine a version of this claim in more detail in the next chapter (Chapter 6), and argue that the concept of a function has normative and evaluative elements.
general do employ functional concepts – primarily the concept ‘man’, which is understood as expressing his characteristic functions – one cannot reject these moral philosophies simply on the grounds that they commit a logical fallacy, as they do not. On the contrary, a would-be critic of natural law theory must reject the broader philosophical tradition that underpins the use of such functional concepts if his criticisms of Aristotelian ethics are to be effective.

5.4 The Fact-Value Distinction: Foot’s ‘Aristotelian Categoricals’

According to MacIntyre, then, Hume’s dictum ‘No ought from is’ does not hold universally, since we can logically infer normative conclusions from a certain kind of fact, namely, facts that can be stated through the use of functional concepts. This is because functional concepts have normative elements essentially. It is in the nature of a functional concept to state the function which a token of the type to which the concept refers must fulfil if it is to be counted as a good instance of its kind. Functional concepts, therefore, would seem to allow the Neo-Aristotelian to derive ethical truths from an account of human nature, an account which would provide the content for the functional concept ‘man’.

Another appeal to functional concepts is developed by Foot in terms of the notion of an ‘Aristotelian categorical’. Like functional concepts, Aristotelian_categoricals – which refer to natural kinds such as ‘rabbit’ or ‘cat’ – have normative content essentially. Foot, following Thompson, notes that propositions such as ‘S’s are F’s’ – where S refers to a species and F to a quality predicated of it – are logically unquantifiable. She writes:

He [Thompson] points out, referring back to an early article by Elizabeth Anscombe, a peculiarity of the logical form of the first pair of sentences: that they are logically unquantifiable. They do not speak of an individual rabbit, though the same verbal form can of course be used with that reference, as when
the conjurer says to his wife ‘The rabbit does not look well.’ Nor, of course, do the propositions that interest Michael Thompson predicate something of every member of the species: ‘Cats are four-legged but Tibbles may have only three.’ Elizabeth Anscombe’s original example concerned the number of teeth that human beings have – which is 32, though most human beings have lost quite a few and some never had the full complement. It is arguable that if ‘The S is F’ (understood in this way) is true then at least some S’s must be F. But even if this is so, ‘Some S’s are F’ is clearly not the whole of what such a proposition asserts.  

Foot’s general point is that propositions such as ‘Rabbits are herbivores’ and ‘Cats have four legs’ cannot be parsed logically as cases of either existential or universal predication. That is, ‘Cats have four legs’ means neither ‘There exists an x, such that x is a cat and has four legs’ nor ‘For every x, if x is a cat then x has four legs’. That the proposition ‘Cats have four legs’ cannot be taken as a case of universal quantification is clear from the fact that, as Foot indicates, a particular cat can have less than four legs – through an accident or birth defect, for instance – and yet remain a cat. On the other hand, the proposition ‘Cats have four legs’ clearly indicates more than the fact that some particular cat happens to have four legs. Rather, the proposition tells us what is normal for cats. In other words, Aristotelian categoricals tell us the way a member of a species will behave or develop in normal or ideal conditions.

A proposition of the form ‘S’s are F’s’, then, will tell us what a normal member of a natural kind will be like, or, if we are dealing with an abnormal member, it will tell us what it ought to be like under normal or ideal conditions. Hence, it would seem that Aristotelian categoricals are a form of functional concept, since the way in which these categoricals define a species is inextricably tied to a consideration of what counts as a good member of that species. For, to say that a cat ought to have four legs is to say that a good cat will have four legs. An abnormal cat, on the other hand, may have

less than the four legs that it ought to have; and for this reason, it will be an instantiation of its kind that falls short of a standard of ontological goodness, a standard that is picked out by a set of Aristotelian categoricals (though it would not, for that reason alone, fall short of a standard of moral goodness; this is because rational creatures – and, by extension, sub-rational creatures – are not morally culpable for non-deliberate and non-volitional actions).

Therefore, if we can validly infer a conclusion with normative content from a functional concept, then we can also infer such a conclusion from an Aristotelian categorical, since, as we have just said, such categoricals would seem to be a form of functional concept. Furthermore, one cannot object to such a derivation on the grounds that it attempts to derive a conclusion with normative content from a truth or fact lacking any normative element, since both functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals do possess such normative elements. It would seem, then, that both functional concepts and Aristotelian categorical provide the Neo-Aristotelian with a way of deriving ethical truths from an account of human nature. For it is an account of human nature that would provide the content for the Aristotelian categorical ‘man’.

5.5 The Role of Functional Concepts in Aquinas’s Account of the Natural Law

Thus far I have presented an account of two major Neo-Aristotelian responses to the claim that a Humean Fact-Value obtains. Both MacIntyre and Foot claim the existence of a kind of fact with normative content, namely, either functional concepts or Aristotelian categoricals. Since facts belonging to these categories have normative elements essentially, they seem to provide the Neo-Aristotelian with a set of facts from which he can validly infer ethical truths concerning human conduct. And since functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals need content, a role for philosophical
anthropology appears to have opened up, since it is such anthropology which will provide the content for the Neo-Aristotelian’s functional concepts. For these reasons, the Neo-Aristotelian moral philosophy of MacIntyre and Foot would seem to be a kind of derivationism. That is, MacIntyre and Foot’s account of natural law or virtue ethics holds that we can derive fundamental truths concerning man’s good from an anthropological study of his nature.

In what follows, I shall explain the way in which normative conclusions can be drawn from functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals, and the way in which they cannot. In particular, I shall argue that functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals explain what an instance of a particular kind must do if it is to count as a good instance. They do not, however, show by themselves that it is good for an instance of a kind to be a good instance of its kind. Hence, they cannot tell us that an instance of the kind ‘man’ ought to be a good instance of that kind. To know that, we must first know the identity of the basic goods. And we must know that being a good instance of the kind ‘man’ is a means to obtaining those goods.

5.5.1 Functional Concepts Explain What a Good Instance of a Kind Will Do

As we have seen, then, MacIntyre and Foot claim that we can derive normative conclusions concerning the types of action that an instance of a certain kind ought to do from functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals. Hence, following Prior, we can say that if Edward is a sea-captain, then Edward ought to do whatever is proper to sea-captains. It is my contention, however, that for Aquinas, functional concepts only stipulate the way in which an ideal instance of some particular kind will behave. Functional concepts do not tell us that an instance of a kind ought to behave as a good instance of its kind.
For instance, for Aquinas, we cannot infer from the fact that I am a cat-burglar that *I ought to be a good cat-burglar*. In fact, we might think that I have good reason to be a bad cat-burglar if by being a bad cat-burglar I am less able to engage in theft. By extension, we cannot infer from the fact that I am a human being that I ought to be a good human being. Hence, we cannot infer from functional concepts alone the existence of an obligation for an instance of a kind to be a good instance of its kind. For that we require a further argument.

Now, as I have argued, for Aquinas, it is our apprehension of the goodness of the basic goods that provides us with reasons for action. We act for the sake of the basic goods, since we apprehend that they are both intrinsically desirable and worthy of pursuit. It is my apprehension that the ends $E_1$, $E_2$, and $E_3$ are good and worthy of desire and pursuit that gives me reason to pursue them. And it is my apprehension that those same ends are good and worthy of desire and pursuit that motivates me to pursue them. Hence, for Aquinas, I pursue the goal of being a good instance of the kind ‘man’, because being a good man is a means to the goods which constitute my happiness. But if I am to know that being a good man is thus worthy of pursuit, I must first know the identity of the basic goods, and this is something I know primarily through the apprehension of the goodness of the basic goods.

As we have already seen, however, it is possible to appeal to facts concerning man’s proper functioning to provide explanatory justifications for the claim that certain ends are good for him. For that reason, we can also appeal to functional concepts in order to explain why certain types of behaviour are good for human beings, whilst others are not. Hence, I can appeal to man’s nature as a social animal in order to provide an explanatory justification for the claim that neighbours ought to live in peace. And in making such an appeal, I employ functional concepts or Aristotelian
categoricals that state the ideal pattern of behaviour for the kind ‘man’. For the practically wise, however, such truths are self-evident in the sense employed by Aquinas.

If I am right in my interpretation of Aquinas, however, then the mode of deriving an *ought* from a functional concept or Aristotelian categorical ought to be understood as follows:

1. A good sea-captain will Φ and ψ.
2. Therefore, if I have reason to be a good sea-captain, I must also Φ and ψ.
3. I have a reason to be a good sea-captain.
4. Therefore, I must Φ and ψ.

An argument for man’s obligation to be a good man can be formulated in a similar way:

1. A good man will Φ and ψ.
2. Therefore, if I have reason to be a good man, I must also Φ and ψ.
3. I have reason to be a good man.
4. Therefore, I have reason to Φ and ψ.

Aquinas would presumably justify (3) by claiming that I ought to do whatever is necessary to pursue the basic goods, and that being a good instantiation of the kind ‘man’ in necessary for the pursuit of the basic goods. But what is important to note here is that, for Aquinas, all knowledge of the identity of the basic goods is obtained primarily through practical reason and the practical grasp of the basic good. For that reason, it is not until we know the identity of the basic goods, and that being a good human being is a means to their pursuit that we also know that we have a reason to be a good instance of the kind ‘man’.
So, we can derive normative conclusions from functional concepts, since functional concepts have normative content built into them. But the conclusions that we can derive are conclusions concerning only what an instance of a kind must do if it is to constitute a good instance of its kind. Thus, we can say that a good instantiation of kind \( K_1 \) will have the qualities \( Q_1, Q_2, \) and \( Q_3 \); it will also perform operations \( O_1, O_2, \) and \( O_3 \). But we cannot infer from the fact alone that \( x \) is an instantiation of \( K_1 \) that \( x \) must have \( Q_1, Q_2, \) and \( Q_3 \), as well as perform \( O_1, O_2, \) and \( O_3 \). For according to Aquinas, that some end is intrinsically worthy of desire and pursuit is a fact first apprehended in our practical grasp of the basic goods. It is my perception of the basic goods as good which forms the basis of my judgement that they are good. If Aquinas’s account of the apprehension of the basic goods is correct, then, we derive our knowledge of what is good for human beings not from functional concepts or Aristotelian categoricals, but from an unmediated apprehension of the goodness of certain ends. MacIntyre and Foot are right to claim that functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals are a kind of fact with normative content, since both functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals state how a good instance of a kind will behave and develop. But if Aquinas is correct, such concepts and categorical do not, by themselves, state why an instance of a kind ought to be a good instance of its kind.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I addressed the third of Finnis and Grisez’s three claims, namely, that conformity with human nature is not the criterion of a moral act for Aquinas. In particular, I addressed Finnis and Grisez’s claim that Aristotle’s function argument is an ‘erratic boulder’ at odds with the fundamental structure of Aristotle’s moral epistemology and methodology. I granted that our knowledge of what constitutes
man’s flourishing is known primarily through the practical grasp of the basic goods, but argued that if we accept the Neo-Scholastic explanation of the basic goods as perfections of man’s natural capacities, then we can reason that whatever is a perfection of such a capacity is also a basic good. And it is in this way that a theoretical account of human nature can provide a criterion of goodness for man. Furthermore, I showed how Finnis rejects Aristotle’s function argument on the grounds that it supposedly attempts to derive normative conclusions from ‘bare facts’.

In the second half of this chapter, I addressed the question of whether all facts are necessarily ‘bare facts’ devoid of any normative content, as envisaged by Finnis and Grisez, or whether some facts might have normative or evaluative content. To that end, I provided an account of functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals as developed by MacIntyre and Foot. And, following MacIntyre and Foot, I argued that functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals have evaluative elements. For that reason, factual statements employing functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals can have evaluative content. Contra MacIntyre and Foot, however, I argued that we cannot derive obligations from factual statements employing functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals alone. All that functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals can tell us is what a thing will do if it is to count as a good instance of its kind. We grasp the desirability of being a good human being once we grasp the desirability of the basic goods and understand that being a good human being is a means to attaining those goods.

In the following chapter, I shall address two questions: first, whether the Aristotelian notion of a function is plausible and, therefore, capable of providing an account of proper functioning in which to ground a contemporary account of the natural law; and second, whether the ascription of a function has any normative or
evaluative dimensions. I shall provide a brief account of Aquinas’s notions of final causation and self-movement, notions which are important to Aquinas’s understanding of a function. I shall then argue that Bedau has provided us with a plausible contemporary Neo-Aristotelian analysis of a function, though I contend that his analysis ought to be reformulated in order to make reference to both natural kinds and powers. Finally, I shall develop an argument suggested by Bedau, namely, that in order to distinguish a function from a non-function, we must first know whether the supposed function is good for the thing of which it is a part. If Bedau is right, the ascription of a function to a thing involves a judgement with normative and evaluative dimensions. Contra Finnis and Grisez, then, an appeal to man’s capacities or functions is never an appeal to ‘bare facts’ devoid of any normative or evaluative elements, and Finnis and Grisez are wrong to suppose that any appeal to man’s nature – or to any account of nature in general – must necessarily be an appeal to ‘bare facts’.
6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I addressed the third of Finnis and Grisez’s three claims, namely, that conformity with human nature is not the criterion of a moral act for Aquinas. In particular, I addressed Finnis and Grisez’s claim that Aristotle’s function argument is an ‘erratic boulder’ at odds with the fundamental structure of Aristotle’s moral epistemology and methodology. It will be remembered that according to Finnis, Aristotle and Aquinas never intended to claim that what is good for man can be known by attending to some theoretical account of human nature. Rather, we know what is good for us through a practical grasp of the basic goods. I granted that our knowledge of what constitutes man’s flourishing is known primarily through the practical grasp of the basic goods, but I argued that if we accept the Neo-Scholastic explanation of the basic goods as perfections of man’s natural capacities, then we can reason that whatever is a perfection of such a capacity is also a basic good. And it is in this way that a theoretical account of human nature can provide a criterion of goodness for man.

Furthermore, I showed how Finnis rejects Aristotle’s function argument on the grounds that it supposedly attempts to derive normative conclusions from ‘bare facts’. I then addressed the question of whether all facts are necessarily ‘bare facts’ devoid of any normative content, as envisaged by Finnis and Grisez, or whether some facts might have normative or evaluative content. To that end, I provided an account of functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals as developed by MacIntyre and Foot. And, following MacIntyre and Foot, I argued that functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals have evaluative elements. For that reason, factual statements employing
functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals can have evaluative content. Contra MacIntyre and Foot, however, I argued that we cannot derive obligations from functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals alone. All that functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals can tell us is what a thing will do if it is to count as a good instance of its kind. We grasp the desirability of being a good human being once we grasp the desirability of the basic goods and understand that being a good human being is a means to attaining those goods.

In what follows, I shall address two questions: first, whether the Aristotelian notion of a function is plausible and, therefore, capable of providing an account of proper functioning in which to ground a contemporary account of the natural law; and second, whether the ascription of a function has any normative or evaluative dimensions. I shall begin my analysis of functions by distinguishing between two types of function: functions which are operations characteristic of a kind (weak functions), and functions which are operations both characteristic of a kind and for the sake of the kind-instantiation of which they are a part (strong functions). For the sake of drawing this distinction, I shall provide a brief deflationary account of Aquinas’s understanding of the doctrine of final causation, and argue that, at its core, the doctrine holds that things have powers, and that those powers receive their identity from their manifestations. On this account, any power that could be considered as characteristic of a particular kind will count as a weak function.

Next, I shall consider Aquinas’s notion of self-movement and the Scholastic distinction between immanent and transitive causation, and argue that the notion of a strong function resembles the traditional notions of self-movement and immanent causation. I shall then argue that Bedau’s etiological analysis of a function resembles Aquinas’s notion of self-movement and the Scholastic notion of immanent causation.
This analysis, I contend, provides us with a plausible—though controversial—reconstruction of the traditional Aristotelian account of functions. I shall argue, however, that Bedau’s analysis of functions ought to be reformulated in order to make reference to both natural kinds and the Aristotelian account of powers that I have developed.

Finally, I shall follow Bedau in arguing that in order to distinguish a function from a non-function, we must first know whether the supposed function is good for the thing of which it is a part. Hence, if Bedau is right, the ascription of a function to a thing involves a judgement with normative and evaluative dimensions. Contra Finnis and Grisez, then, an appeal to man’s capacities or functions is never an appeal to ‘bare facts’ devoid of any normative or evaluative elements. Thus, Finnis and Grisez are wrong to suppose that any appeal to man’s nature—or to any account of nature in general—must necessarily be an appeal to ‘bare facts’, where ‘bare facts’ is taken to exclude all normative and evaluative elements.

6.2 Aquinas’s Account of Final Causation

As we have seen, then, Finnis rejects Aristotle’s function argument on the grounds that it attempts to derive a normative conclusion from ‘bare facts’. Both Finnis and Grisez seem to assume that any fact must, by nature, exclude any normative or evaluative content. Now, as we have also seen, this claim is false, since there can be facts with normative or evaluative content derived from functional concepts and Aristotelian categoricals, concepts and categoricals which have normative and evaluative elements and are not a piece of ‘bare physics’, as envisioned by Finnis.

It is this assumption, then—that all facts are necessarily ‘bare facts’—which provides the basis for Finnis and Grisez’s acceptance of the fact-value distinction.
This same assumption provides the basis for their claim that we can never derive a normative conclusion from facts about our natural capacities or functions. And according to Finnis and Grisez, Aquinas never made the mistake of thinking that we could derive such normative conclusions from a theoretical account of human nature. The Neo-Scholastics, on the other hand, grounded their accounts of the natural law in an Aristotelian philosophy of nature, a philosophy of nature which freely appeals to the Aristotelian notion of a function.

Can we, however, make sense of this Aristotelian notion of a function? I shall now address the question of the nature of a function. As I have already said, I shall draw a distinction between two types of function: weak and strong. And I shall argue that weak functions ought to be identified with a kind’s characteristic powers. What, however, do we mean by ‘characteristic power’? In order to answer that question, we must first grasp Aquinas’s understanding of Aristotle’s doctrine of final causation, and how this doctrine relates to an Aristotelian account of powers.

### 6.2.1 What Is the Doctrine of Final Causation?

What, then, is the Aristotelian doctrine of final causation, and how does it relate to an Aristotelian account of powers? According to Aquinas’s commentary on the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle’s final causes are the ‘cause of causes’. At *SM. V*, Lec.3, he writes:

Moreover, it must be noted that, even though the end is the last thing to come into being in some cases, it is always prior in causality. Hence it is called the cause of causes, because it is the cause of the causality of all causes. For it is the cause of efficient causality, as has already been pointed out … and the efficient cause is the cause of the causality of both the matter and the form, because by its motion it causes matter to be receptive of form and makes form
exist in matter. Therefore the final cause is also the cause of the causality of both the matter and the form.\textsuperscript{127}

Earlier, at \textit{SM. V, Lec.2}, Aquinas had written about the relationships that exist amongst Aristotle’s four causes. He writes:

Now it must be borne in mind that, although four causes are given above, two of these are related to one another, and so also are the other two. The efficient cause is related to the final cause, and the material cause is related to the formal cause. The efficient cause is related to the final cause because the efficient cause is the starting point of motion and the final cause is its terminus. There is a similar relationship between matter and form. For form gives being, and matter receives it. Hence the efficient cause is the cause of the final cause, and the final cause is the cause of the efficient cause. The efficient cause is the cause of the final cause inasmuch as it makes the final cause be, because by causing motion the efficient cause brings about the final cause. But the final cause is the cause of the efficient cause, not in the sense that it makes it be, but inasmuch as it is the reason for the causality of the efficient cause. For an efficient cause is a cause inasmuch as it acts, and it acts only because of the final cause.\textsuperscript{128}

So, for Aquinas, efficient causes are related to their final causes, since efficient causes are the starting-point of motion (i.e., of change), whilst final causes are the terminus of that motion (i.e., they are the effects brought about by the change initiated by the efficient causes). How, though, are we to understand Aquinas’s claim that final causes are the cause of efficient causes, or that a final cause is ‘the reason for the causality of the efficient cause’?

\textbf{6.2.2 Final Causes Explain the Causality of Efficient Causes}

In what sense, then, is a final cause the cause of its own efficient cause? And in what sense is a final cause the reason for the causality of its efficient cause? The answer is this: a final cause is the cause of its own efficient cause in the sense that it provides

\textsuperscript{127} \textit{SM. V, Lec.3.}  
\textsuperscript{128} \textit{SM. V, Lec.2.}
the explanation of the causality of the efficient cause. But final causes do not bring their efficient causes into being in the way that an efficient cause brings its final cause into being. Hence, as Aquinas says, the final cause is the cause of the efficient cause ‘not in the sense that it makes it be, but inasmuch as it is the reason for the causality of the efficient cause’.

How, though, does a final cause provide an explanation for the causality of its efficient cause? The answer to this question is, perhaps, unclear from the text itself. But I propose the following interpretation of Aquinas’s claim. For Aquinas, there exists an intrinsic necessary or productive relationship between cause and effect, power and manifestation.\(^{129}\) It is the existence of this relationship that, for Aquinas, justifies us in considering A as the cause of B, when A does in fact cause B. This is to be contrasted with a situation in which B follows A either because A-events are related to B-events by some extrinsic relationship (for instance, some extrinsic divine fiat) or because B-events regularly follow A-events as a matter of mere happenstance. For Aquinas, then, the existence of an intrinsic non-contingent relationship between a cause and its effect would seem to be a necessary condition of the cause’s being a real cause.

Aquinas would presumably argue that if the Humeans are right, and that what we take to be causation is no more that the constant conjunction of distinct events,
then all the Humean has shown is that we live in a world without any real causation, not that causation is, in fact, the mere constant conjunction of distinct events. We need not, however, defend this aspect of Aquinas’s account of final causation here. What is important, though, to my account of functions are the following claims: first, that things have powers; second, that there exists a non-contingent relationship between a cause and its effect, a power and its manifestation; and third, that it is only by reference to a manifestation that we can specify a power.

To take a standard example, for Aquinas and Aristotelians in general, the solubility of salt crystals in water is to be explained by the water’s power to dissolve salt crystals. In particular, it is to be explained by water’s capacity to break the molecular bonds between individual sodium crystals. Now, for the Aristotelian, the salt crystals have a passive potency for solubility, that is, they have a capacity for receiving change. In particular, they have the capacity to become dissolved. But this is a capacity that is manifested only when the salt crystals are exposed to a suitable stimulus or efficient cause, in this case, the solvent water. Water, however, has the capacity to actualize the salt crystals’ potency for solubility only in virtue of its power as a solvent, a power which, according to Aquinas, is ‘directed towards’ the dissolution of soluble substances. For the Aristotelian, then, there are two things that can be drawn from this account of causation. First, change is explained by the operation of powers, and the operation of powers is explained by the non-contingent productive relationships that hold between powers and their manifestations. Second, powers receive their identity from their manifestations. It is because the power of dissolution is connected by such a non-contingent productive relationship to the dissolution of soluble substances as a type of act that the power of dissolution is classified as such at
all. Hence, for the Aristotelian, it is by referring to a power’s manifestation or final cause that any given power receives its specification.

6.2.3 Characteristic Powers

Thus far, I have argued that according to Aquinas’s understanding of the doctrine of final causation, cause and effect are related to each other by a non-contingent causal relationship. I have also argued that, for the Aristotelian, things have powers, and that those powers receive their specification from their manifestations. For the Aristotelian, then, when we investigate causal phenomena, we are essentially investigating natural kinds and their characteristic powers. This picture of scientific investigation can be contrasted with a more Humean picture according to which it is the business of the natural sciences to catalogue observable regularities. As Geach has said concerning Hume’s regularity theory of causation and its relation to the natural sciences:

Since Hume, the opinion had been widely held that the task of science is to establish uniformities of the form ‘every event of the kind P is followed by an event of the kind Q’ or ‘any event of the kind Q is preceded by an event of the kind P’. To be sure, the progress of science has brought into prominence ‘uniformities’ in which the attributes of the earlier and the later event are not determinately specified, but instead the one attribute is asserted to stand in a definite functional relation to the other; however, for our present purpose this makes little difference. It would still be held that science aims at establishing uniformities which are, so far as we can see, merely matters of fact …

For the Humean, then, the laws of nature express observable uniformities of the form ‘every token of event type $E_1$ is followed by a token of the event type $E_2$’. And such uniformities of nature are merely ‘matters of fact’, to use Geach’s term. That is, for the Humean, the fact that tokens of $E_1$ are regularly followed by tokens of $E_2$ is only a

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matter of that which can be observed to obtain regularly. What we cannot say, however, is that such regularities obtain in virtue of some necessary or productive relation between these causal events.

But as Geach has pointed out, the notion that the natural sciences aim at establishing uniformities of nature is mistaken:

This opinion, I think, is radically wrong: the laws that scientists aim at establishing are not *de facto* uniformities, either necessary or contingent. For any alleged uniformity is defeasible by something’s interfering and preventing the effect; to assert the uniformity as a fact is to commit oneself to a rash judgment that such interference never has taken place and never will. Scientists do not try to describe natural events in terms of what always happens. Rather, certain natural agents – bodies of certain natures – are brought into the description, and we are told what behaviour is proper to this set of bodies in these circumstances.\(^{131}\)

The natural sciences, therefore, cannot aim at establishing uniformities of nature; for it is in the nature of things that some intervening cause may always prevent a cause from producing its effect. What the natural sciences actually do is describe natural kinds and the types of operations that are proper to them in this or that set of circumstances. Geach develops this Aristotelian notion of a law of nature by appealing to Aquinas’s notion of an *inclination* or ‘natural appetite’. Now, as we saw in Chapter 3, a natural appetite is not some kind of conscious desire for a thing. A natural appetite is a tendency or causal disposition towards some end or operation. In that respect, then, a natural appetite is a power or capacity understood as being directed towards a certain end or effect. Talk of natural appetites ought, therefore, to be understood as talk of powers and their ‘directedness’ towards their final causes or effects. But given this understanding of Aquinas’s notion of a natural appetite, we can see how Geach develops his account of causation and the laws of nature. For according to Aquinas,

\(^{131}\) Anscombe and Geach, *Three Philosophers*, p. 102.
natural kinds perform certain characteristic operations, and these characteristic operations are to be explained by reference to a particular kind’s proper powers, that is, the powers that an instantiation of a natural kind has in virtue of its membership of that particular kind.

Now, Geach’s understanding of the laws of nature – an understanding which says that casual phenomena ought to be explained in terms of natures and their characteristic powers – is essentially Aristotelian. Indeed, it was this kind of explanation that the early moderns wished to replace by talk of ‘laws’, laws which claimed to describe only observable occurrences. According to Cartwright, for the early moderns, talk of laws of nature was meant to banish the Aristotelian appeal to natures from our accounts of the natural world:

Most modern accounts in the philosophy of science take that the attempts of the scientific revolution to banish natures from science were successful. The idea of natures operating in things to determine their behaviours was replaced by the concept of a law of nature. …

… this story is distorted, at least as it applies to modern experimental science. We have not replaced natures by laws of natures. For our basic knowledge – knowledge of capacities – is typically about natures and what they produce. Instead what we have done is to replace occult powers by powers that are visible, though it may take a very fancy experiment to see them.\footnote{Nancy Cartwright, The Dappled World: A Study of the Boundaries of Science (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1999), pp. 79-80.}

Contrary to the expectations of the early moderns, then, science has not banished reference to natures and their characteristic capacities or powers from our account of nature. This is because our knowledge of capacities is typically knowledge of kinds and the effects that they characteristically produce. For the Aristotelian, then, things not only have powers which are related to their manifestations by non-contingent
relationships, things also have powers which can be regarded as characteristic of or proper to them.

6.2.4 Characteristic Powers and Operations as Functions

We have seen, then, how according to Aquinas, powers are related to their manifestations by non-contingent relationships. And we have seen how such powers are thought to receive their specification only by reference to their manifestations. In addition to this, I have shown how, on an Aristotelian account of the laws of nature, the natural sciences describe natural kinds and their characteristic powers.

For Aquinas, then, it is the existence of these non-contingent relationships that explains why a particular thing causes just the effects that it does rather than some other effect or set of effects, or no effect at all. Thus, on the Aristotelian account of powers and causation, water’s ability to act as a solvent – and so cause the dissolution of soluble substances rather than, for instance, their hardening or further solidification – is explained by the productive relationship between the water *qua* efficient cause and the manifestation of solubility *qua* effect. On this account of causation, *pace* Hume, A’s being the cause of B is not a mere matter of regularity or constant conjunction. Hence, when we say that A is the cause of B we are not merely saying that A is regularly followed by B. Rather, we are saying that A has an intrinsic power to cause B, and that this power obtains in virtue of the existence of a non-contingent productive relationship between A and B.

Now, we observe that different types of thing have different powers. Water has the power to dissolve salt; and fire has the power to heat a cooking-pot, whereas dry ice has the power to cool and flash freeze foods, for instance. Insofar, then, as certain things will have the power to produce one type of effect or set of effects rather
than some other effect or set of effects, we can speak of the powers and operations that are characteristic to all normal instances of a particular kind.\textsuperscript{133} Of course, a normal or ideal instantiation of a particular kind may have – indeed, probably will have – more than one power and characteristic operation.\textsuperscript{134} So, all normal or ideal instantiations of the kind $K_1$ might have a set of powers $S_1$, where $S_1$ includes the powers $P_1$, $P_2$, and $P_3$; whereas all normal or ideal instantiations of $K_2$ might have the set $S_2$, where $S_2$ includes $P_4$, $P_5$, and $P_6$. In these two cases, $S_1$ would comprise all those powers and operations that would be considered characteristic of $K_1$, and the same would be true of $K_2$ and its set $S_2$.

We can, then, speak of a thing’s characteristic operations, that is, we can speak of those things that an instantiation of a particular kind will tend to do under normal or ideal circumstances. But if we can speak of a thing’s characteristic operations, then perhaps we can also speak of a thing’s particular functions. Now, from a consideration of the English language alone, it is by no means obvious that this usage would be unsuitable, since the word ‘function’ originally meant any proper operation or manner of acting. Furthermore, the word itself is derived from the Latin ‘fungi’, which means simply ‘to perform or execute’. Hence, there would seem to be nothing unnatural about speaking of acts of dissolving as being one of water’s functions, in the sense of its being one of water’s characteristic operations. Given this application of the term

\textsuperscript{133} That is, the reason a match produces flame when struck, rather than the scent of roses or a nuclear explosion, is that phosphorous, by nature, has the power to produce this particular effect when exposed to the correct stimulus. For the Aristotelian, it is not the case that the match produces flame merely because match-striking events are regularly and contingently followed by flame producing events (see Edward Feser, \textit{Scholastic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction} (Heusenstamm: Editiones Scholasticae, 2014), Chp. 2.2.1).

\textsuperscript{134} By ‘normal or ideal’ I do not mean ‘statistically usual’. Take, for example, the ‘life history’ of a frog. In the case of the \textit{normal or ideal} development of a frog, the frog will develop from tadpole to mature frog. But such a pattern of development is statistically unusual, since most tadpoles will be eaten by other tadpoles. By ‘normal or ideal’, then, I mean ‘in accordance with the pattern of development or behaviour given by an Aristotelian categorical’ or, perhaps, in the case of inorganic substances, ‘how a thing will behave in experimental conditions, with all interfering factors excluded’.

230
‘function’, then, to say that something has a function is merely to say that it has a characteristic power, a power that is related to its manifestation by a necessary or productive relationship. If this is all that the Aristotelian means by the claim that things have functions, then his account of final causation and functions will be relatively deflationary.

6.2.5 Two Types of Function: ‘Weak’ and ‘Strong’

We have seen, then, that a function might be understood as no more than a characteristic operation belonging to a certain kind. Nevertheless, it might be objected that, etymology aside, the ascription of a function to something involves more than the ascription of some characteristic power or operation to it. The thought would be that a function is not only a power to do something, but also a power to do something for the sake of something else. The standard example would be that of the heart and the way in which it functions to keep the animal of which it is a part alive by the circulation of its blood. In this example, it appears that the heart not only has a particular characteristic power and operation – i.e., the power of pumping blood – but that this power also operates for the sake of the organism of which it is a part. It is this quality of operating for the sake of a whole that would seem to distinguish the functionality of a bodily organ such as the heart from the functionality of water or dry ice. If, then, we are to speak of both water and hearts as having functions, we must distinguish between weak functions – such as those exhibited by water and dry ice – and strong functions – such as the functions exhibited by bodily organs.

6.2.6 Aquinas’s Account of Self-Movement

We must, then, distinguish between strong and weak functions if we are to distinguish between characteristic operations which are for the sake the thing of which the
operations are a part, and characteristic operations which are not. Does Aquinas’s account of causation recognize such a distinction, however? To answer this question, we must turn to Aquinas’s account of the essence of life, and the distinction between self-movement and non-self-movement. Speaking of the distinction between living and lifeless things at ST. I, q.18, a.1, Aquinas writes the following:

I answer that, We can gather to what things life belongs, and to what it does not, from such things as manifestly possess life. Now life manifestly belongs to animals … We must, therefore, distinguish living from lifeless things, by comparing them to that by reason of which animals are said to live: and this it is in which life is manifested first and remains last. We say then that an animal begins to live when it begins to move of itself: and as long as such movement appears in it, so long as it is considered to be alive. When it no longer has any movement of itself, but is only moved by another power, then its life is said to fail, and the animal to be dead. Whereby it is clear that those things are properly called living that move themselves by some kind of movement, whether it be movement properly so called, as the act of an imperfect being, i.e. of a thing in potentiality, is called movement; or movement in a more general sense, as when said of the act of a perfect thing, as understanding and feeling are called movement. Accordingly all things are said to be alive that determine themselves to movement or operation of any kind: whereas those things that cannot by their nature do so, cannot be called living, unless by a similitude.135

According to Aquinas, then, if we are to draw a distinction between the living and the lifeless, we must start our analysis of life with a consideration of those things which are paradigmatic cases of life, namely, animals.136 We can then determine that quality

135 ST. I, q.18, a.1
136 The claim that animals are a paradigmatic case of life, and that we ought to start our analysis of life with animals will, no doubt, strike modern readers as strange. For, it will be objected, animals possess powers that other living things do not. It seems more reasonable, then, to begin our analysis of life with simple organisms, and avoid confusing life with other, higher order, qualities possessed by animals. Aquinas’s view, however, is somewhat different. For Aquinas, self-movement is the essence of life; and self-movement is, as we shall see, self-change. Self-change is any change that occurs by the power of an organism and for the sake of that organism. Now, locomotion is an obvious instance of self-change, whereas the self-change carried out by plants is less obvious to the casual observer. Hence, for a pre-modern observer lacking certain observational apparatus, it might seem natural to begin an analysis of life with those things that most obviously exhibit self-change. Aquinas’s claim that animals are the paradigmatic case of life ought not, however, to be understood as committing him to the claim that only those things that are capable of locomotion are alive.
in virtue of which animals are said to be living, and use its presence as a criterion of life. What, however, is this quality? Aquinas says that it is the quality of self-movement. All things, he says, are said to be alive that ‘determine themselves to movement or operation of any kind’, whilst whatever is lifeless is, of its own nature, incapable of this self-movement. Living things move themselves in virtue of their own intrinsic power. Lifeless things, on the other hand, are moved only by some power extrinsic to themselves, as a rock is moved by a stick, and the stick is moved by the hand. According to Aquinas, therefore, self-movement is a necessary condition of the presence of life.

How, then, are we to understand Aquinas’s claim that self-movement is the criterion of life? First, it ought to be noted that by movement or motus, Aquinas does not mean only locomotion or change in spatial location. Movement or motus means change of any kind. Self-movement, on the other hand, is any change that occurs by the power of an organism and for the sake of the organism of which the power is a proper part. So, on this understanding of self-movement, the heart’s function of pumping blood for the sake of the animal of which it is a part is an instance of self-movement. Second, since self-movement is really self-change for the sake of an organism, the conversion of light energy into chemical energy by plants in photosynthesis is also an instance of self-movement. Once we understand that self-movement is self-change of the kind that I have just described, it ought to be clear that Aquinas does not consider locomotion as the criterion of life, as is sometimes assumed from his examples and use of the term ‘movement’.

This self-movement or self-change, then, is to be contrasted with the kind of change suffered by inanimate objects. A living dog, by its nature, has parts or faculties which cause changes within itself for the sake of the dog as a whole. A dead dog, on
the other hand, by its nature, lacks any such power of self-change. If I move the dog’s carcass with a stick, the change in spatial location undergone by the carcass is an effect brought about by my agency rather than any power within the dog. If the carcass is consumed by maggots, this change is, again, one that is brought about by external agents or causes. Moreover, even if we grant that part of the decomposition of the carcass is to be explained by the operations of the flesh *qua* decomposing matter – that is, if we say that the flesh decomposes because it is rotten flesh, and decomposing is what rotten flesh does by nature – decomposition certainly does not seem to be an operation that could be considered as being for the sake of the carcass as a whole, distinct entity.

### 6.2.7 The Scholastic Distinction Between Immanent and Transient Causation

We have seen, then, that Aquinas distinguishes between self-movement and non-self-movement. That is, he distinguishes between that which changes by its own power, and for the sake of itself, and that which does not. Traditionally the Scholastics have categorized this distinction as the distinction between *immanent* and *transient* causation (or sometimes ‘transeunt’ causation).

Immanent causation is traditionally described as causation that begins within an organism and remains within that organism for the sake of its perfection or flourishing. Hence, an effect is the product of immanent causation if and only if its cause is some power that is a proper part of the organism, and the effect produced by that power is also for the sake of the organism of which the power is a proper part. It is recognized, of course, that immanent causes can also have effects that are external to the organism whose powers produced them, and that are also in no sense for the sake of that organism. For instance, if I sneeze to expel some foreign matter or
pollutant from my nose for the sake of my health, it may happen that in acting thus I cause some passer-by to catch a cold. But the catching of a cold by the passer-by can hardly be considered an effect that is for the sake of me *qua* whole organism, even though his catching a cold is the result of an action that was for the sake of me *qua* whole organism.

Transient causation, on the other hand, is traditionally described as causation that begins in or proceeds from one thing and ends in another. Transient causes are typically understood as causes that, *qua* agents, impart change to other things, *qua* patients. Hence, when I pound my fist into a lump of fresh clay, I cause it to receive a change in the way that the lump of clay is spatially arranged, namely, I cause it to receive the imprint of my fist. We might describe such causation as, employing a common term, ‘billiard ball causation’, since it essentially involves objects with certain powers interacting causally with objects with other certain powers.

What can we say, then, of our distinction between weak and strong functions and its relation to the Scholastic account of immanent and transient causation? Given what we have said concerning these two types of causation, it ought to be clear that weak functionality should be identified with transient causation, whilst strong functionality should be identified with immanent causation. For it is the apparent strong functionalities of bodily organs that seem both to proceed from some power or faculty that is a proper part of the organism, and also to be for the sake of that organism of which the power or faculty is a proper part. The weak functionality of water and dry ice, on the other hand, is clearly not an instance of Aquinas’s self-movement or immanent causation, since the effects produced by such substances *qua* causal agents are typically produced outside of the agents themselves. And even if these effects were not produced outside of the agents, such effects could not obviously be described
as effects that were for the sake of the agents producing them. For instance, we do not usually think of water’s dissolution of a lump of salt crystals as being, in any respect, for the sake of the water that is acting as a solvent.

6.2.8 Strong Functions

Thus far, I have argued that we must distinguish between two types of function, namely, strong and weak functions. Furthermore, I have argued that this distinction can be seen in Aquinas’s distinction between self-movement and non-self-movement, and in the traditional Scholastic distinction between immanent and transient causation. If my interpretation of these traditional distinctions is correct, then strong functionality ought to be identified with self-movement and immanent causation, whilst weak functionality ought to be identified with non-self-movement and transient causation.

Now, I take it that the existence of what I have called weak functions is relatively uncontroversial, at least amongst power theorists. The existence of strong functions or immanent causation, however, is bound to be more controversial. I shall now provide an account of Bedau’s analysis of functions. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate two things: first, the plausibility of Bedau’s analysis and, therefore, the plausibility of the notion of a strong function; and second, that the ascription of a strong function has normative and evaluative elements.
6.3 Bedau’s Analysis of (Strong) Functions

What, then, is the analysis of functions presented by Bedau? Bedau analyses a function as an action which is for the sake of the thing of which it is a part. His analysis of functions is, therefore, a neo-teleological or Neo-Aristotelian one, and in this respect it greatly resembles Aquinas’s notion of self-change or immanent causation. Now, Bedau’s analysis is etiological in nature. That is, like many standard accounts of biological functions, Bedau’s claims that x has some function F, if and only if x’s F-ing tends to produce some effect E; and the production of E partly explains why x F’s. As Bedau himself has pointed out, his analysis of functions is essentially a modification of Wright’s standard etiological analysis. But where Bedau’s account differs significantly from standard etiological accounts is in his claim that a third, ‘value condition’ must be added to the two conditions given by the standard analysis. According to Bedau, standard etiological accounts of function cannot distinguish between real functions and certain cases where no real function seems to exist, and yet the standard account would imply that a certain non-function ought to be classified as a real function. Bedau’s analysis of functions, then, is non-standard and controversial for this very reason. But it is also controversial since it asserts that biological functions can never be naturalized. There is no space to

139 That is, functions can never be naturalized if naturalism is taken as necessarily excluding goodness from its account of nature. As Bedau says, ‘Although the naturalistic umbrella contains ample room for divergent views, it is widely agreed to exclude moral and, more generally, evaluative matters. A naturalistic theory must be “nonnormative,” as Ruth Millikan insists, erecting some form of a relatively rigid fact/value distinction and banishing “transcendent standards of value” (to use D. M. Armstrong’s words) from nature’ (Mark Bedau, ‘Can Biological Teleology be Naturalized?’, The Journal of Philosophy 88 (1991): p. 647). It ought to be noted, however, that if this view is taken to imply that
canvass these objections here, but in what follows I shall explicate Bedau’s analysis as a plausible, if controverted, account of functions.

Now, as we have already said, what distinguishes Bedau’s analysis of functions from standard etiological accounts is his addition of a third, ‘value condition’. As Murphy puts it, for Bedau, ‘no analysis of such [functional] judgments that fails to include some sort of evaluative condition can succeed’.\(^{140}\) We might think, along with Wright, that the ascription of some function \(F\) to \(x\) is valid if \(x\)’s \(F\)-ing tends to produce some effect \(E\) and the existence of \(E\) partly explains why \(x\) \(F\)’s. On such a view, these two conditions – the \textit{goal-productivity} condition and the \textit{etiological} condition – are taken to be jointly sufficient for a valid ascription of functionality, an ascription of functionality that can be captured by statements such as \(A\) does \(B\) \textit{in order to} attain \(C\). Hence, on this account we can validly ascribe functionality to the heart and its operations, and the statement ‘The heart pumps blood \textit{in order to} maintain life’ turns out to be true. This is because the heart pumps blood, and this pumping of the blood causes, in part, the maintenance of life in the animal that possesses the heart.

The first condition of an ascription of functionality, then, is fulfilled, since we have an instance of \textit{goal-producing} activity in the operation of the heart. But in the case of the heart and its operations, the second, etiological condition is also satisfied. This is because what the operation of the heart produces – namely, the maintenance of goodness, if it exists, must necessarily be some sort of queer, non-natural quality, then the Aristotelian will disagree. Bedau’s analysis of functions is also at odds with the kind of functional analysis developed by Cummins. Cummins functional analysis, which is non-etiological, aims to explain a system’s capacities by reference to the simpler capacities of its parts. The capacities of the parts are then ultimately explained by laws of efficient causation. Thus, to have a function is to play some causal role within a system. Cummins analysis, therefore, is fundamentally reductionist in nature, since functions are ultimately explained in terms of chains of efficient causation (see Robert Cummins, ‘Functional Analysis’, \textit{The Journal of Philosophy} 72 (1975): pp. 741-65).\(^{140}\)

life – must, of necessity, obtain for the normal functioning of the heart to occur. In other words, the heart’s pumping of blood causes, in part, the maintenance of life; but the heart could not pump blood were it not for the maintenance of life caused by the circulation of the blood. Thus, the maintenance or existence of life is part of our explanation of why the heart pumps blood. Now, as I have already said, we might think, along with Wright, that this analysis of teleological functionality has provided us with two jointly sufficient conditions of a valid ascription of functionality. Bedau, however, would deny that this is so. For according to Bedau, a thing could satisfy both the first goal-producing and second etiological conditions, and yet fail to be an instance of something’s acting in order to obtain some goal.

To illustrate his point, Bedau gives the example of a stick that floats downstream, brushes against a rock, and, as a result, becomes pinned there by the backwash it creates. Now, as Bedau says, the stick creates the backwash because of a number of considerations, including the flow of the water, and the shape and mass of the stick. But part of the explanation of why the stick creates the backwash will be that the stick is pinned to the rock by the water; and the explanation of why the stick is thus pinned to the rock is the fact that the stick is creating a backwash. Hence, as in the case of the operation of the heart, we have an instance of some x’s F-ing, an F-ing that tends to produce some effect E. But part of the explanation of why x F’s is that the production of E enables x to F. It would seem odd, however, to say that the stick, in pinning itself to the rock, is acting in order to create a backwash. It seems, then, that we must add a further condition for the ascription of such in-order-to functions. But what could that condition be?

As we have already said, Bedau argues that it is his ‘value condition’. That is, whatever E might be, it must be for the sake of the good of whatever is producing it,
if the faculty producing E is to count as a function. The pumping of blood, then, counts as a function, whilst the creation of the backwash does not. This is because the pumping of blood is good for the creature possessing the heart, whereas the generation of the backwash is not good for anything. In addition, then, to our two previous conditions – the goal-producing and the etiological – we can add a third, necessary condition, namely, that if x’s F-ing tends to produce E, E must be good for x if F is to be considered a function of x.

This addition of a value or good-for condition enables Bedau to distinguish between different grades of teleology or functionality. Now, Bedau distinguishes between three grades of teleology or functionality; but what enables him to so distinguish is his employment of the good-for condition in addition to the goal-producing and etiological conditions. With grade 1 teleology, both the goal-productivity and good-for conditions are satisfied. With grade 1 functions, it will always be the case that x’s F-ing tends to produce some effect E, and that E is good for x. The etiological condition, however, will not be satisfied, as the goodness of E is not part of our explanation of why x F’s in the first place (note Bedau’s example of the swimmer whose swimming keeps him fit, but whose swimming is not brought about by his good health). With grade 2 teleology, all three of our conditions are satisfied. So, in the case of grade 2 functions, x’s F-ing will tend to produce some effect E; the production of E will, in part, explain why x F’s; and E is something that is good for x. In the case of grade 3 teleology and functions, all three conditions are satisfied.

again, satisfied. But in addition to the satisfying of those conditions, the goodness of E is the cause of x’s having the faculty of F-ing.

Now, Bedau denies that anything in nature exhibits grade 3 teleology, as the mechanism of natural selection is supposed to be blind to the goodness of the traits that it selects. For that reason, although we can say, plausibly, that the maintenance of life is good, and that such maintenance partly explains why the heart pumps blood, we ought not to say that the goodness of life caused animals to acquire or develop organs that pump blood. Our interest, then, will be with grade 1 and 2 teleology and functions. These two grades of teleology closely resemble the Scholastic’s conception of immanent causation, whilst being sensible to the findings of modern biology. And since they resemble immanent causation, they also come under my category of strong functions. Let us, then, turn now to a discussion of grade 1 and 2 teleology and functions.

6.3.1 An Objection: Bedau’s Analysis of Functions Excludes the Possibility of Malfunctions

We have seen, then, the three conditions laid down by Bedau for the ascription of a function to something. We have also seen that the satisfaction of all three conditions is necessary for the ascription of grade 2 and 3 teleology; and that the satisfaction of the goal-productivity and good-for conditions is necessary for the ascription of grade 1 teleology. I shall now turn my attention to an objection to this account and its subsequent reformulation in light of that objection.

Given what we have seen of Bedau’s analysis so far, we might offer the following account of what it is for something to have a function. The function of A is
to B only if there is some state of affairs C, such that A B’s in order that C obtains.\textsuperscript{143} Thus, the heart has the function of pumping blood if and only if there is some state of affairs – in this case, the circulation of blood – such that the heart pumps blood in order that state of affair might obtain. Such an account of functionality may at first seem plausible; however, it is open to an objection articulated thus by Murphy:

Unfortunately, this first approximation falls short. The reason for this is that it is possible for A to have the function of B-ing yet fail to do B. One noteworthy feature of things with functions is that they can malfunction, that is, they can fail to do what it is their function to do. It is the function of my heart to pump blood; yet I may have a heart attack. The heart does not lose its function the moment I have a heart attack; rather, it is failing to perform its function. Whatever else is necessary for a successful account of what it is to have a function, it should not logically exclude the possibility of malfunction.\textsuperscript{144}

Whatever our account of functioning is, then, it cannot be one that excludes the concept of malfunctioning. For it simply is not obvious that we ought to say that an x which normally F’s does not possess the function of F-ing whenever it fails to F. On the contrary, it seems natural to say that x has F even when x fails to carry out F, and that x’s normal capacity to F has merely been frustrated.

How, then, does Murphy propose to reform Bedau’s analysis? Murphy suggests that we can incorporate the concept of malfunctioning into our analysis of functioning by appealing to the notion of a kind. He proposes the following reformed analysis:

A function of A is to B if and only if there is a state of affairs C such that A is the kind of thing that B-s in order that C might obtain.\textsuperscript{145}

\textsuperscript{143} See Murphy, \textit{Natural Law and Practical Rationality}, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{144} Murphy, \textit{Natural Law and Practical Rationality}, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{145} Murphy, \textit{Natural Law and Practical Rationality}, p. 28.
On this reformed analysis, it remains the function of the heart to pump blood even when it stops pumping on account of a heart attack. This is because a heart is the kind of thing that pumps blood under normal circumstances. The notion of a function, then, will be closely related to that of a kind; but the notion of a kind will also be closely related to that of a function. This is because, as Murphy notes, these two concepts appear to be interdefinable, as, for instance, are the concepts of necessity and possibility. Hence, one will find that if he attempts to define some kind – for instance, the heart or the eye – he will inevitably do so by employing functional notions.

We can, therefore, use Murphy’s reformed analysis to explicate what constitutes a function in each of Bedau’s three grades of teleology. With grade 1 teleology, \( x \) has some function \( F \), if and only if \( x \) is an instantiation of some kind \( K \), and \( K \) by nature \( F \)’s; \( x \)’s \( F \)-ing produces \( E \); and \( E \) is good for \( x \). With grade 2 teleology, \( x \) has some function \( F \), if and only if \( x \) is an instantiation of some kind \( K \), and \( K \) by nature \( F \)’s; part of the explanation of why \( x \) \( F \)’s is that \( F \)-ing produces \( E \); and \( E \) is good for \( x \). Whilst with grade 3 teleology, \( x \) has some function \( F \), if and only if \( x \) is an instantiation some kind \( K \), and \( K \) by nature \( F \)’s; part of the explanation of why \( x \) \( F \)’s is that \( F \)-ing produces \( E \); \( E \) is good for \( x \); and the goodness of \( E \) is the cause of \( x \)’s having the function \( F \).

6.3.2 Bedau’s Analysis Further Reformulated

We have seen, then, that Bedau’s analysis of functions adds a third, value or good-for condition to the two etiological and goal-productive conditions of the standard etiological account of functions. We have also seen how Murphy has reformulated Bedau’s analysis to include reference to the notion of a kind. I shall now argue that Murphy’s reformulation of Bedau’s analysis ought to be reformed further to include
reference to powers, or, at least, it ought to be so reformulated if we accept the kind of powers account of causation outlined throughout Section 6.2.

Now, whilst I think Murphy is right to say that the notions of function and kind are closely related, I think it is also important to recognize that the notion of a function is closely related to that of a power and, by extension, final causation. For surely when we say that it is the function of a heart to pump blood, we do not mean to say that a heart will pump blood, unless it happens not to do so. That is, to ascribe a function to some object is not to say that the object happens to perform a certain kind of operation, except when it does not. Rather, to ascribe a function to an object is to ascribe a certain kind of power to it. When we say that the heart has the function of pumping blood, we are saying that the heart has the power of pumping blood, a power that will be manifested in normal conditions. A malfunction, on the other hand, is that which happens to a functional power when, for whatever reasons, its power is frustrated by some intervening cause. When this occurs, the power is unable to manifest itself, and the functionality of the object possessing the power is impaired.

A function, however, could be a single power or it could be a cluster of related powers. Take, for example, the human digestive system. The process of digesting food would seem to involve many interrelated powers and organs as bearers of those powers. When I place a piece of food in my mouth, the process of digestion begins with the food being broken up both by mechanical and chemical means – that is, by means of the mechanical action of the teeth and the chemical action of the saliva. The food then makes its way down my throat and oesophagus until, at last, it reaches my stomach, where it is further broken down by the chemical action of the stomach acid. Whatever nutrients are present in the food are then absorbed through the small
intestine, after which the discards pass through the large intestine before they are finally expelled from the body as waste.

Now, it seems natural to speak of the digestive system as having a function, namely, the compound function of breaking down food, extracting nutrients, and expelling waste. But even if such an ascription is valid, it ought to be noted that the function is dependent upon a number of interrelated organs and the powers possessed by those organs. And part of an organ’s having a function is its having a certain kind of power. Indeed, a single organ could have a function to which its parts contribute in virtue of their possessing certain powers or sub-functions. Moreover, if the Aristotelian account of causation that we outlined throughout Section 6.2 is correct, a thing’s possession of a power will be explained by the necessary or productive relationship that exists between it qua causal agent and the effect that it typically produces. Hence, a full account of functions would include an account of powers and the necessary or productive relations that exist between the possessor of a power and the power’s manifestations.

If a Neo-Aristotelian account of powers is correct, then, Bedau’s analysis of functions will need to be reformulated to reference powers. Hence, we might say that x has some function F, if and only if x is an instantiation of some kind K, and instances of K, in virtue of being K, have by nature some power, P, to F; part of the explanation of why x F’s is that P’s manifestation of F-ing produces E; and E is good for x. In the case of the heart, then, and its function of pumping blood, the heart has the function of pumping blood, because it has the power to pump blood; the manifestation of that power causes the maintenance of life within the animal; the maintenance of life within the animal explains why the heart continues to pump blood; and the maintenance of life is good for the animal whose life is thus maintained. Such an analysis is, I propose,
a plausible account of Aquinas’s notion of self-change or immanent causation, and, therefore, it is a plausible account of what I have called strong functions.

6.3.3 The Ascription of a Function Has Normative and Evaluative Elements

What, then, can we draw from my reformulation of Bedau’s analysis of functions? What relevance does this analysis have to Finnis and Grisez’s new natural law theory? The answer to these questions is twofold. First, if Bedau’s analysis of functions is plausible, then it may be possible to ground a contemporary account of the natural law in my reformulation of his analysis. For that reason, if Finnis, Grisez, and the new natural law theorists are wary of tying Aquinas’s ethics to Aristotelian function arguments, they need not be. For as we have seen, Bedau’s analysis of functions provides us with a plausible Neo-Aristotelian account of functions.

Second, if Bedau’s analysis of functions is correct, and knowing whether a certain operation is good for the thing of which it is part is a necessary condition of knowing whether that operation is a function of that thing, then the ascription of a function will always possess normative and evaluative elements. In that case, pace Finnis, an appeal to man’s functions in a traditional Aristotelian function argument is never just an appeal to ‘bare facts’. As with appeals to functional concepts, and Aristotelian categoricals, an appeal to functions is an appeal to something that is more than ‘purely descriptive’, where ‘purely descriptive’ is taken as necessarily excluding all normative and evaluative elements. Hence, although for Aquinas we do not derive our knowledge of the basic goods primarily from a theoretical account of human nature, Finnis and Grisez are wrong to assume that all such accounts are necessarily devoid of any normative and evaluative elements. They are also wrong, therefore, to
assume that we can never derive any conclusions with normative or evaluative content from an Aristotelian philosophy of nature.

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have addressed two questions: first, whether the Aristotelian notion of a function is plausible and, therefore, capable of providing an account of proper functioning in which to ground a contemporary account of the natural law; and second, whether the ascription of a function has any normative or evaluative dimensions. I began my analysis of functions by distinguishing between two types of function: functions which are operations characteristic of a kind (weak functions), and functions which are operations both characteristic of a kind and for the sake of the kind-instantiation of which they are a part (strong functions). For the sake of drawing this distinction, I provided a brief deflationary account of Aquinas’s understanding of the doctrine of final causation, and argued that, at its core, the doctrine holds that things have powers, that powers and manifestations are related by non-contingent relationships, and that powers receive their identity from their manifestations. On this account, any power that could be considered as characteristic of a particular kind will count as a weak function.

Next, I considered Aquinas’s notion of self-movement and the Scholastic distinction between immanent and transitive causation, and argued that the notion of a strong function resembles the traditional notions of self-movement and immanent causation. I then argued that Bedau’s etiological analysis of a function resembles Aquinas’s notion of self-movement and the Scholastic notion of immanent causation. This analysis, then, has provided us with a plausible reconstruction of the traditional Aristotelian account of functions. I argued, however, that Bedau’s analysis of
functions ought to be reformulated in order to make reference to both natural kinds and the Aristotelian account of powers that I have developed.

Furthermore, I developed Bedau’s argument that in order to distinguish a function from a non-function, we must first know whether the supposed function is good for the thing of which it is a part. Hence, if Bedau is right, the ascription of a function to a thing involves a judgement with normative and evaluative dimensions. Once again, contra Finnis and Grisez, an appeal to man’s capacities or functions is never an appeal to ‘bare facts’ devoid of any normative or evaluative elements. As with appeals to functional concepts, and Aristotelian categoricals, an appeal to what I have called strong functions is an appeal to something more than a ‘bare fact’. And it is for that reason, that traditional Neo-Scholastic accounts of the natural law – accounts which appeal to an Aristotelian philosophy of nature – cannot be regarded as flawed on the grounds that they appeal to ‘bare facts’ and ‘bare physics’ in an attempt to ground the goodness of the basic goods.
Conclusion

In this thesis, I have defended the claim that the first principles of practical reason are, for Aquinas, grounded in the truths of an Aristotelian philosophy of nature. That is, according to Aquinas, the truth of the first principles of practical reason is explained and justified by truths concerning human nature. Furthermore, I have argued that, for Aquinas, morally significant truths can indeed be derived from a consideration of man’s faculties and their proper functioning. As I have shown, this latter claim is incompatible with Finnis and Grisez’s interpretation of natural law theory, an interpretation which holds that Aquinas rejected the possibility of any such derivation of a normative conclusion from facts concerning human nature. For according to Finnis and Grisez, in accepting the distinction between theoretical and practical reason, Aquinas was, in effect, accepting the distinction between fact and value later defended by Hume.

It has been my contention throughout this thesis, then, that Finnis and Grisez’s new natural law theory is mistaken as an interpretation of Aquinas’s moral philosophy and, in particular, as an interpretation of the relationship between theoretical and practical reason in Aristotelian philosophy. I have argued that the first principles of practical reason are, indeed, self-evident, but I have also shown how, for Aquinas, the self-evident truths of practical reason are more akin to a posteriori necessary truths. Since, then, the first principles are a kind of a posteriori necessary truth, our grasp of them will depend upon our prior grasp of the nature to which the practical principle refers. Thus, I have shown how seeing the truth of a practical principle – for instance, that knowledge is to be pursued – requires that we first apprehend that goodness is
part of the nature of the thing to be pursued. I argued that seeing some thing or action as good forms the basis for our judgement that it is good, and that such perceptions of things as good provide the genesis of the first principles of practical reason.

Furthermore, I argued that, according to Aquinas, moral philosophy is subalternated to metaphysics and natural philosophy secundum quid. This means that in the Aristotelian schema of the sciences, metaphysics and natural philosophy provide explanatory justifications for the first principles of practical reason. The Aristotelian, then, will ground these first principles by reference to an Aristotelian philosophy of nature, a philosophy which will appeal to man’s faculties and their proper functioning. I also argued that, pace Finnis and Grisez, Aquinas holds that we can derive significant moral truths from facts about our faculties and about human nature in general.

Moreover, I argued that such derivations of moral truths from facts concerning human nature do not violate any law of logic. Contra Finnis and Grisez, I maintain that Hume’s no-is-from-ought principle is not a general law of logic, which is applicable to any attempt to derive a normative conclusion from factual premises. Rather, along with some contemporary philosophers such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Philippa Foot, I argued that it is licit to derive a normative conclusion from truths employing functional concepts or Aristotelian categoricals. However, I also argued that, contra MacIntyre, functional concepts tell us only what a thing must do if it is to count as a good instance of its kind. They do not tell us whether we have a reason to be a good instance of our kind. To answer that question, we must turn to our knowledge of the basic goods, and grasp that being a good human being is a means to attaining those goods.
Finally, I argued that in order to distinguish functions from certain non-functions, we must first know whether the proposed function is good for the thing of which it is part. Thus, the concept of a function has normative and evaluative dimensions. But in that case the ascription of a function to mankind – or, indeed, to anything else – is an act of judgement with normative and evaluative dimensions. This view of functions, as we have seen, is incompatible with the view implicit in Finnis and Grisez’s understanding of Aristotelian moral philosophy, according to which, an appeal to man’s functions can only ever be an appeal to ‘bare facts’, where ‘bare facts’ are taken to exclude all normative and evaluative elements. It has been my contention, then, that Finnis and Grisez err by assuming that all facts must, by their nature, exclude normative and evaluative elements.

I have shown, then, that Finnis and Grisez cannot maintain that the Neo-Scholastic interpretation of natural law theory which they reject is wholly incompatible Aquinas’s own account of the natural law. In particular, they cannot maintain that in accepting the self-evidence of the first principles of practical reason and the distinction between theoretical and practical reason, Aquinas was, in effect, accepting Hume’s distinction between fact and value. This is because, for Aquinas, theoretical reason is not concerned merely with ‘bare facts’ that, by nature, have no normative or evaluative dimensions. On the contrary, if the Aristotelian is correct, metaphysics and natural philosophy make appeals to functional concepts, Aristotelian categoricals, and natural functions, all of which have normative and evaluative dimensions. Whatever Finnis and Grisez might hold, then, for the Aristotelian, theoretical reason is not a realm of ‘bare facts’ or ‘bare physics’. If the Neo-Scholastic is correct, it is by appealing to an account of man’s functioning that we can provide a grounding for the first principles of practical reason.
Furthermore, Finnis and Grisez cannot maintain that Neo-Scholastic accounts of the natural law are incompatible with Aquinas’s own account on the grounds that the incommensurability of the basic goods in Aquinas’s account is incompatible with the hierarchical nature of the basic goods in the Neo-Scholastic account. This is because, as I have shown, incommensurability does not entail incomparability. It is wholly possible for the basic goods to be both incommensurable – that is, not capable of being measured according to some common cardinal unit of measurement – and comparable – that is, capable of being ranked ordinally according to some standard of comparison.

In addition to this, Finnis and Grisez cannot maintain that happiness is not man’s ultimate reason for action according to Aquinas. As we have seen, Finnis and Grisez reject the traditional Neo-Scholastic view of happiness as man’s ultimate end. This is because they maintain that the nature of the basic goods as basic reasons for action is incompatible with the existence of happiness as man’s ultimate reason for action. I have shown, however, that this incompatibility is only apparent. For it is wholly possible for the basic goods to be intrinsically desirable, weak ultimate ends and, at the same time, ends that are sought as constituents of the happiness that constitutes man’s strong ultimate end. For this reason, Finnis and Grisez must accept that the existence of a non-person-relative hierarchy of the basic goods is not incompatible with Aquinas’s account of the basic goods as incommensurable. Hence, on this point also, they cannot reject Neo-Scholastic interpretations of the natural law as misrepresentations of Aquinas’s theory of natural law.

Finnis and Grisez’s interpretation of Aquinas’s theory of the natural law has been highly influential in the contemporary study of natural law theory. And their concern to show that, for Aquinas, the first principles of practical reason are self-
evident has done much to draw the attention of contemporary philosophers to a study of Aquinas’s theory of practical reason and the practical grasp of the basic goods. We can, then, thank Finnis and Grisez for this contribution to contemporary Neo-Aristotelian philosophy. We ought, however, to reject their attempt to tie Aquinas’s theory of practical reason to a Neo-Humean distinction between fact and value. Indeed, I hope to have shown throughout this thesis that the central claims of more traditional interpretations of Aquinas’s philosophy remain philosophically respectable.
Bibliography


