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DOES PRACTICAL REASON START WITH GOOD OR WITH COMPLETE GOOD?

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QUINAS SAID THAT THE FIRST PRECEPT OF PRACTICAL REASON (FPPR) IS THAT “good” is to be done and pursued, and evil avoided.¹ What did he mean by ‘good’?²

According to Germain Grisez, he meant any kind of good. The precept directs one to do or pursue anything one recognizes as good. So taken, the FPPR is obvious (*per se notum quoad nos*) and underived: a starting point for any kind of practical reasoning, used both by persons who act well and by persons who act immorally. It bears comparison to the principle of non-contradiction (PNC), which is a starting point for any kind of reasoning at all and so is used not only by those who speak the truth but also by liars. They try to make their lies consistent.³

Ralph McInerny dissents from this interpretation of the precept, as part of a larger disagreement with the theory of natural law which Grisez has worked out in collaboration with John Finnis and others.⁴ McInerny thinks Aquinas meant a more definite “good” in the FPPR a good sufficient to make the precept the first principle of morality.

As McInerny’s disagreement with Grisez is still alive (and still recruiting partisans), it will be useful to revisit their quarrel. The present paper will rehearse both positions and then reach a verdict.

Aquinas sometimes said that what makes a human activity good in the moral sense is that it advances the doer towards the ultimate end of man.⁵ Aquinas often identified this end with man’s complete good.⁶ So McInerny thinks the FPPR is about this complete good. He writes:

The precept is formed by human reason and is meant to be directive of human action. The addressee is the human agent and the directive is: The perfection, the completion, the good in the sense of the ultimate end is to be pursued and whatever is incompatible with that end is to be avoided.

Any other directive, any other precept which is a natural law precept, will be in effect a particularization of this one.⁷

What McInerny means by particularization is explained as follows:

... the several precepts of natural law are directives aiming at constituents of the human good or ultimate end. The precepts are first: Pursue your good, your ultimate end, and avoid what is destructive of it. And then there are articulations of this in precepts which express constituents of that end: Rationally pursue self-preservation; rationally pursue the good of sex, reproduction, offspring; rationally pursue the good of reason itself, truth, in all its modes, and particularly truth about the most important things.⁸

Certain difficulties of the McInerny interpretation have already been pointed out by Grisez and Finnis.⁹ They point out, for example, that his version makes little or no sense of ‘to be done’:

But note, first of all, that in Thomas's formula "Good is to be done and pursued," whereas in offering his interpretation, McInerny drops "to be done" and focuses on "to be pursued." This suppression of *offaciendum* certainly facilitates the interpretation of *bonum as ultimus finis*. For either the last end is not done (though it may include doing), or, if the last end is done, it is done only when one rests in it and is no longer guiding action by reason toward it.¹⁰

Also, they argue that McInerny's interpretation damages the parallel between the FPPR and the PNC:

Thomas holds that the absolutely first principle of practical reasoning is to its domain as the principle of noncontradiction is to the domain of thinking in general. If this is so, the first principle must govern the practical reasoning of people who do evil. The Don Juan considers fornication a good to be pursued. This consideration is not simply irrational and it is action-guiding; thus Don Juan's immoral reasoning is governed by the first principle of practical reason. But he is acting against, not towards, the ultimate end of man.¹¹

These two objections are sufficient to raise doubts about the McInerny interpretation, but it is not clear that they are strong enough to refute it.¹² McInerny might say that *+facere+* is a general pro-verb, which could stand in for *+possidere+*, *+frui+* *+atingere+*, or the like. The conduct of Don Juan, he might say, is not "simply irrational" in the sense of having no object of pursuit; but it is "simply unreasonable" and so violates the FPPR in a way analogous to how incoherence violates the principle of non-contradiction.

A third objection leveled by Grisez and Finnis goes deeper. They find no evidence in Aquinas that man's ultimate end has the constituents which McInerny wants to give it:

... it is by no means clear or even likely that Thomas considers all the goods to which man is naturally inclined ... to be constitutive of man's ultimate end. Indeed, what Aquinas does say about the ultimate end [1-2 qq. 1-5, esp. q. 3, a. 8] seems quite unlike McInerny's view that basic human goods are "constitutive of" man's end. This view seems closer to Vatican II and to some things Grisez has said about the end of man than to the doctrine of Thomas.¹³

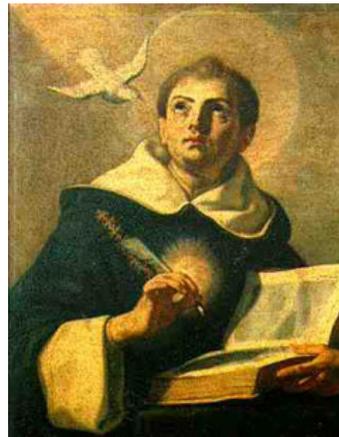
Yet this objection, too, is indecisive, thanks to the baffling complexity of what Aquinas had to say about man's ultimate end. It can be shown that Aquinas used *+ultimus finis+* in three distinct senses. In one sense, the ultimate end of man is that which is willed for its own sake in every human undertaking, i. e. happiness (*beatitudo*).¹⁴ In a second sense, the ultimate end is the best kind of performance of the activity (*operatio*) proper to man, which is to understand the why of things.¹⁵ In the third sense, man's ultimate end is the Heaven for which Christians hope, whose central ingredient is the *Visio Dei*.¹⁶ Though distinct,¹⁷ the three senses are related.¹⁸

It is obvious that the goods to which man is naturally inclined cannot be "constituents" of our ultimate end in Thomas's second sense (the best operation), though attainment of them would provide various requisites for that operation.¹⁹ Likewise, Grisez and Finnis are correct that those goods cannot be "the constituents" of St. Thomas's third (revealed) sense, since the constituents of Heaven, as listed in 1-2 qq. 3-4, include many things to which we are not naturally inclined²⁰ and lack some things to which we are so inclined (like reproduction).

But there remains Aquinas's first sense, the happiness which is willed in every human action. Our happiness as we naturally understand and desire it in this life might have several aspects, each corresponding to a good to which we are naturally inclined, so that McInerny could be right about this sense of 'ultimate end'.

Moreover, Prof. McInerny would appear to have a counter-punch. He could certainly point out that "first principles" in Aquinas are of different kinds, so that everything depends on what a first principle "of practical reason" is supposed to do. That in turn depends on what "practical reason" does, according to Aquinas. Well, what

practical reason does is deliberate (what else could it do?). And the first thing in deliberation, which guides everything else in deliberation, is the end. So why shouldn't the "first principle" of practical reason say something about the end of man, which is his "complete good," according to the very first question of the *Secunda Pars*? And if what it says about the end is not what it



St. Thomas Aquinas

consists in (which would be a material principle of moral theology) but that it should be pursued, it will be a genuinely formal principle which directs every step in the logic of decision-making, as the PNC directs every step in the logic of discourse in general.

So it appears to the present writer that McInerny's interpretation needs a rather fuller answer than the above quick hits deliver. The remainder of the present paper will show that a fuller answer can be made. Indeed, McInerny's position fairly bristles with difficulties, if he really means what he seems to be saying, namely, that the FPPR is about a definite good, and not good-in-general. I shall present five difficulties and argue that they are sufficient, at least cumulatively, to make the position untenable.

Let us begin with a difficulty which is both basic and simple to confirm textually.

I. THE WRONG RATIO

The *ratio boni* is one thing, according to Aquinas, and the *ratio ultimi finis* is another. Aquinas says that the FPPR is based entirely on the *ratio boni*. Grisez's interpretation bases the FPPR on the *ratio boni*, while McInerny's bases it on the *ratio ultimi finis*. Therefore McInerny's interpretation is wrong. The proof of each premise follows.

In the *Prima Pars*, there is a little treatise on the good in general, consisting of the six articles of q. 5. In it we are told that the *ratio boni* is *quod aliquid sit appetibile*, and we are told that this is why Aristotle said that good is *quod omnia appetunt*.²¹ To make out what these dicta mean, two remarks are in order.

First, the *ratio* of a term, say 'f', is the reason anything is called f. Well, what is the reason we should call anything f? Answer: it has what it takes to be f. And what is involved in having what it takes to be f? Answer: try to define 'f'; a good definition will unfold what we mean to say about a thing when we describe it as f, and that in turn will indicate what it takes for something to verify the description.²² Thus the *ratio boni* is what it takes for anything to be good; and in that sense, it is the reason anything is called good.

Second, ⁺*appetitus* and ⁺*appetibile* are broad terms. The former means any sort of tendency or inclination

whatsoever.²³ Correspondingly, the appetibile is anything which has what it takes to satisfy any sort of inclination of any sort of being.²⁴ So in the dictum at hand (*ratio boni est quod aliquid sit appetibile*), Aquinas is saying that, vis-à-vis any kind of thing, say, humans, an object or state having what it takes to satisfy an inclination found in humans is good to (or for) humans. This account coincides with Aristotle's saying that *bonum est quod omnia appetunt*, on the supposition that Aristotle was offering a contextual definition of the idea conveyed by 'good of', as in 'the good of man'. For then he was saying that, for all things x, the good of x = what x seeks or tends toward.²⁵



Notice that the instrumental sense of 'good', as found in 'pots are good for cooking', is set aside by Aristotle and Aquinas as another (and secondary) affair. For pots do not seek cooking; rather, we seek them for that purpose. So the focal and primary sense of 'good' is the sense in which a benefit is good to a beneficiary. This is why the *ratio boni* lines up with the *ratio finis*. The sought benefit is an end, and the end is a sought benefit. In 1-2 q. 1, a. 1, Aquinas speaks of what it takes for anything to be willed, and there he lines up being-a-good with being-an-end.²⁶ This is why everything willed as an end is willed as a good, and this is why all human actions are for the sake of an end (*proper finem*).

But quite different is the *ratio ultimi finis*. Not every end is an ultimate end. As a result, whether all human actions are for the sake of an ultimate end, and what it takes for anything to be willed as an ultimate end, are further issues, which Aquinas resolves only in articles 4-6 of 1-2 q. 1. There we read that in order for a person to will x as his ultimate end, he must will x as the complete good fulfilling to himself (*bonum perfectum et completivum sui ipsius*); it must leave nothing naturally sought outside of itself.²⁷ Then we read that this description, 'the perfect or complete good', is the *ratio ultimi finis*.²⁸

So the two *rationes* are not the same. The *ratio ultimi finis* contains the *ratio boni*, but not vice-versa. Hence the *ratio ultimi finis* presupposes the *ratio boni*, but not vice-versa. The *ratio ultimi finis* adds to the *ratio boni* a note of completeness which the *ratio boni* itself does not contain (and could not contain without rendering ⁺*bonum*

secundum quid⁺ unintelligible).

Faced with this disparity, one has to ask: upon which ratio does Aquinas say the FPPR is based? One need only read the text of 1-2 q. 94, a. 2 to discover the answer.

Just as the first thing that falls under apprehension of any kind is “being,” so the first thing that falls under the apprehension of practical reason, which is ordered to doing, is “good.” For every agent acts for an end which has what it takes to be “good” (*qui habet rationem boni*). And so the first principle in practical reason is the one based on the definition of “good” (*quod fundatur supra rationem boni*), which is that the “good” is what anything seeks. This, then, is the first precept of law: good is to be done and pursued, and evil avoided.²⁹

Aquinas could hardly have been more explicit that the FPPR is based on the *ratio boni*. Grisez’s interpretation preserves this point. By making the FPPR speak generically of any and every sort of good, he makes it say, in effect, that whatever has the *ratio boni* is to be done and pursued. Equivalently, one can say that Grisez’s interpretation makes the FPPR articulate the primordial connection between “good” and “end” (which is the subject matter of 1-2 q. 1, a. 1) rather than the subsequent and derivative connection between “complete good” and “end” (which is the subject matter of 1-2 q. 1, a. 5).

McInerny, by trying to make the FPPR articulate this latter connection (the good in the sense of the ultimate end is to be pursued), is trying to base the FPPR on the *ratio ultimi finis*. Hence McInerny’s interpretation is in open conflict with the text of St. Thomas.

II. LOSS OF PRIMACY

An immediate consequence of the difficulty just discussed is that McInerny’s version of the FPPR (let’s call it the Mc/FPPR) loses the status of a first principle. A genuine “first principle” should not be deducible from a prior principle. Grisez’s version of the FPPR (the G/FPPR) meets this test, while McInerny’s does not. How does it not? In the simplest imaginable way, McInerny’s version is deducible from Grisez’s.

To be precise, the Mc/FPPR is deducible from the G/FPPR plus exactly one extra premise, but the extra premise is tautologically true. It is the premise that

complete good is good. Watch:

If “good” is to be done and pursued, and evil avoided [G/FPPR]
and complete good is “good” (and what is incompatible with it, evil),
then complete good is to be pursued (and what is incompatible with it, avoided). [Mc/FPPR]

This easy derivation shows the importance of the fact that the *ratio ultimi finis* contains and presupposes the *ratio boni*, as noted above. This relation between the two *rationes* means that having what it takes to be the ultimate end includes having what it takes to be good. Why? Because being-the-ultimate-end is a way of being willed, and anything having what it takes to be willed has what it takes to be apprehended as good. Or if one prefers: the definition of “ultimate end” includes the definition of “good” because the definition of “ultimate end” is “complete good,” and there is no way to define “complete good” without defining “good.” Or still differently, if one prefers: since ‘good’ appears in ‘complete good’, the proposition conveyed by ‘complete good is good’ is a tautology; and since ‘complete good’ expresses the definition of ‘ultimate end’, the proposition conveyed by ‘the ultimate end is good’ is true *per se* in the first mode of *per se*.³⁰ Thus the *per se* truth which deprives McInerny’s version of the FPPR of first-principle status, making the Mc/FPPR derivable from the G/FPPR, is a simple reflection of the containment relation between the two *rationes*.

Of course, the reader literate in logic will have noticed that the derivation given above was not a proof. The corresponding proof would be a case of *modus ponens* looking like this:

- (1) **if** G/FPPR and T, **then** Mc/FPPR
- (2) G/FPPR and T
- (3) Mc/FPPR,

with T standing for the tautology. Thus McInerny can escape the loss of first-principle status by denying that the premise

- (2) G/FPPR and T

is true. But it has emerged that, since T is a tautology, McInerny can deny (2) only by denying the truth of the G/FPPR. Does McInerny deny the truth of Grisez’s

version of the FPPR? He has not said so. If McNerny thinks that Grisez's interpretation yields a *false* proposition (rather than just a different proposition from the one which McNerny thinks Aquinas had in mind), he has not said so.

III. LOSS OF DIRECT ENTAILMENTS

Immediately after a passage quoted above, which concludes with his statement of the FPPR, Aquinas indicated how he understood other precepts to follow from it. He wrote:

And upon this all other precepts of the natural law are based, so that, in other words, there are natural law precepts covering all those things to be done (or avoided) *which practical reason naturally apprehends to be human goods [or evils].*³¹

And a sentence later he added:

... reason naturally apprehends as good *and therefore as to be pursued by action* all those things to which man has a natural inclination, and [reason naturally apprehends] their opposites as evil and to be avoided.³²

In these two texts, the emphasis added by the present writer calls attention to the route of derivation which Aquinas was indicating. From a recognition that x is good, one passes through the "first precept" that good is to be pursued (and evil avoided), to a conclusion which is a further precept: x is to be pursued (and its contrary avoided). Man's natural inclinations do not appear along this route. They are not mentioned in any premise. Their service is rather to provide the recognition from which the derivation departs.

More on the nature of this service (providing recognition of certain things as good) emerges from the points with which Aquinas chose to begin the *Respondeo* of 1-2 q. 94, a. 2. He began with the point that natural law precepts are *per se nota*. Then he added that they are all *per se nota secundum se* (which means that their predicate belongs to the *ratio* of their subject). Then he added that the first and most common precepts are *per se nota quoad*

nos omnes (which means that virtually everybody, rather than just the scholar or the specialist, understands the *ratio* of their subject well enough to realize that their predicate belongs to it).

Given these points, it must be the case that the very first precept of all is *per se notum quoad nos omnes*; virtually everybody must understand what 'good' means well enough to realize that 'to be pursued' belongs to its meaning. This is easy to concede because: (1) the idea expressed by ⁺*appetunt*⁺ or ⁺*appetibile*⁺

is about the same as that expressed by 'pursue' or 'pursuit-worthy', and so the predicate in question appears in the *ratio* of good; and happily (2) everybody knows that when you call something "good," you are recommending it as to be had or gotten or seen or tasted or performed or perused or (in short, with whatever verb is appropriate) done. Everybody knows that the good stuff is what you go for.

But now, if there are to be any further precepts which proceed from the first precept by the route sketched above, and which are also to be *per se nota quoad nos*

omnes, then there must be objects x such that 'good' belongs to the commonly known *ratio* of x. For if there are such objects, then some propositions of the form

x is good

will be *per se nota quoad nos omnes*; and if there are no such objects, there will be no such propositions. Unless there are such propositions, one cannot pass through the first principle, attaching the predicate expressed by 'to be pursued' to the subjects of those propositions, and thereby arriving at new precepts of the form

x is to be pursued

which are *per se* known to us all. So, if there are to be any further such precepts, there must be objects to whose widely known *ratio* 'good' belongs.

The service of man's natural inclinations is to provide such objects. They do this by so coloring our


"Everybody knows that when you call something "good," you are recommending it as to be had or gotten or seen or tasted or performed or perused or (in short, with whatever verb is appropriate) done. Everybody knows that the good stuff is what you go for."


apprehension of their objects that goodness is included in our understanding of them. The result is that, if O is such an object, then ‘O is good’ expresses a proposition whose predicate is understood to be included in its subject. Aquinas thought that ‘Staying alive is good’, ‘Progeny is good’, and ‘Knowledge is good’ expressed examples of such propositions. And that is why, in the *corpus* of 1-2 q. 94, a. 2, he bothered to tell us that we have natural inclinations to staying alive, having progeny, etc., and to tell us that the objects of natural inclinations are what reason “naturally apprehends as good.”

One sees the same service of natural inclination and the same route of derivation in the next article, 1-2 q. 94, a. 3. There the issue was whether the acts of the virtues pertain to the natural law, and Aquinas answered yes for the following reason. All the virtues are strengths for acting in accord with reason; acting in accord with reason is good (as is *per se notum quoad nos omnes* because the will itself is a natural inclination to being-in-accord-with-reason); therefore acting in accord with reason is to be done and pursued, etc.; therefore acts of the virtues are to be done and pursued, etc. In other words, if an action of type A is an act of the virtue V, then

Actions of type A are to be done and pursued,
and the opposite type of action avoided

is a schema for further precepts of the natural law. Whether every such precept is *per se notum quoad nos omnes* will depend upon whether every virtue is universally recognized. If some virtues are recognized only among the more civilized peoples (or only among the wise of any people), then some of the a. 3 precepts will be *per se nota* only to these wiser or more civilized persons (*apud sapientes*).³³

Well, the right version of the FPPR ought to allow what Aquinas says follows to, in fact, follow in the way he says. Again, Grisez’s version meets this test, while McInerny’s does not.³⁴ To see how Grisez’s version works, observe that if

good is to be done and pursued, and evil avoided [G/FPPR]

is the first precept through which one passes, then from the recognition *per se* known to us that

staying alive is good,

there follows at once and as *per se* known to us a new precept, that

staying alive is to be done or pursued (and dying avoided).

And so it will go for the other specific goods which Aquinas mentions in the *corpora* of aa. 2 and 3.

By contrast, McInerny’s version cannot yield further precepts of this kind by the direct route. Rather, by the direct route, the Mc/ FPPR can yield only a precept bearing upon that which is or delivers complete good-happiness as a whole or that in which it “*consistit*.”³⁵ For example, if it were *per se notum quoad nos* (at least *apud sapientes*) that

The Vision of God is complete good,

then the Mc/FPPR would yield the entailment that

The Vision of God is to be pursued

as a natural law precept - which of course it isn’t.³⁶

Setting aside that example, then, and remaining in the sphere of the naturally knowable, McInerny could turn to two Thomistic possibilities as noted above (pp. 342-4 and footnotes 17 and 18). First, the wise know that man’s good in the sense of his ultimate end is found in supreme intellectual achievement (taken together with the conditions that support it). Second, everybody knows that the good we want in the sense of the ultimate end is to be happy (which is to be well-off or “flourish”). McInerny may have had a different opinion of his options, but it looks as though the option he has chosen is very close in substance to what was listed just now as the second. It looks as though staying alive, reproducing, gaining knowledge (and the like) will be “constituents” of being happy, for McInerny.

This option does allow McInerny to deal with matters *per se nota quoad nos*, and mostly *quoad nos omnes*, in the opinion of the present writer. Who does not know that staying alive is part of being happy, as we spontaneously understand and desire being happy? Likewise for family life, knowledge of reliable information, and various popular forms of will-power. But McInerny’s option for happiness under its common *ratio* as the sense of

'ultimate end' does not change the fact that one cannot derive the precepts Aquinas wanted by the route the Common Doctor indicated. To the initial principle

complete good is to be pursued (and what is in compatible with it, avoided) [Mc/FPPR]

one will still have to add a premise which predicates complete good, like

happiness is complete good,

in order to get a new precept by the direct route:

happiness is to be pursued (and what is incompatible with it avoided).

No, if one seeks to derive a "particular" precept (to be frank, an informative precept), which deals with some aspect or "constituent" of happiness, one has no choice but to fetch in additional premises-premises which not only fail to lie along the route Aquinas indicated but also fail to appear in his text. For example, suppose one tries to derive

staying alive is to be pursued, etc.

from what McInerny thinks the FPPR says plus what anyone can see is present in the text (of 1-2 q. 94, a. 2) and relevant to the task. One will have

complete good [or happiness] is to be pursued, and what is incompatible with it avoided

and

staying alive is an object of natural inclination.

It is obvious that these points do not connect. McInerny seeks to make them connect *via* his talk of constituents. But to make sense of that talk, one needs to fetch in

(1) every object of natural inclination is a constituent of complete good [or happiness]

and

(2) every constituent of complete good [or happiness] is to be pursued, and what is incompatible with it avoided.

Then one can move forward. From (1) plus the point that staying alive is an object of inclination, one gets the lemma that

staying alive is a constituent of complete good [or happiness];

and from this lemma plus (2) one gets the precept wanted:

staying alive is to be pursued, etc.



The difficulty is that neither (1) nor (2) is in St. Thomas's text. Nor is there any sentence in his text which looks likely to contain either of them as implicit information. If one suggests that he was relying on them implicitly anyway, one says in effect that the Angelic Doctor made a hash of his exposition. For in this article he purported to be showing how further precepts are derived from the FPPR; and if McInerny is right, he forgot or suppressed premises indispensable to any such derivation.

Can one plead that the fetched-in premises (1) and (2) were such obvious parts of the derivation as to need no mention? Hardly. Look at

(2) every constituent of complete good [or happiness] is to be pursued, and what is incompatible with it avoided,

for example. Why should it be an obvious part of the argument that every constituent of complete good is to be pursued? One cannot say: because every constituent of complete good must be good. For by that line of argument, these constituents should be pursued *because* they are good, and that reason cannot be worth anything unless the G/FPPR is already conceded. One cannot say: because every such constituent is a start towards complete good. For if every start towards complete good is to be pursued, every perceived good is to be pursued, according to 1-2 q. 1, a. 6,³⁷ and the G/FPPR will be conceded again. One cannot say: because complete good is to be pursued, and every constituent of its indispen-

sable to attaining it. For that line of argument opens a can of worms; it threatens to cast doubt on the other fetched-in premise, claiming that every object of natural inclination is a constituent of complete good. After all, we have a natural inclination to reproduce, but neither sex nor progeny is exactly “indispensable” to attaining happiness. Why, then, unless the G/FPPR is true in any case, should these constituents be pursued? The present writer can think of no plausible answer, unless it is one invoking wholes and parts. Perhaps it is a principle of practical reason (perhaps a hitherto undiscovered first principle) that if a whole is to be pursued, every one of its parts is to be pursued. For example, if making mistakes is part of growing up ...

What about the other premise? Why should it be an obvious part of the derivation of natural law precepts, too obvious to need mention, that

(1) every object of natural inclination is a constituent of complete good [or happiness]?

Grisez and Finnis offer evidence that St. Thomas did not think (1) was true. As pointed out above, their evidence is taken from the revealed *ratio* of complete good (or *beatitudo*) which discloses wherein it *consistit*, and there is reason to think that a different ratio is the relevant one for present purposes. The present writer has suggested that the ratio under which happiness is naturally known and willed could be the one under which McInerny thinks it “has” (for Aquinas) these “constituents.” But if one tries to follow this suggestion, one still confronts the need for proof. Where is the evidence that St. Thomas accepted, as part of the derivation of natural law precepts, the premise that

(1-) every object of natural inclination is a constituent of complete good [or happiness] as naturally known?³⁸

When one searches the text of 1-2 q. 94, a. 2, one finds only one universal statement about the objects of natural inclination. It does not say that they are constituents of anything, however. It merely says that reason naturally apprehends them as good:

... *omnia illa ad quae homo habet naturalem inclinationem ratio naturaliter apprehendit ut bona ...*

Dare one quote the rest?

et per consequens ut opere prosequenda.

This statement is a clue to McInerny’s case in the same sense in which a bomb is a clue to a building: it is a clue to why the building isn’t there. McInerny’s case isn’t there, in the text where Aquinas derives natural law precepts, because being-a-constituent-of-complete-good has nothing to do with that derivation. It has nothing to do with the derivation because being-a-constituent-of-complete-good is not the reason why things are to be pursued. They are to be pursued because they are good: *bona et per consequens ... prosequenda*. If the derivation of precepts is really that direct, then the FPPR of Thomas is the G/FPPR, not the Mc/FPPR.

IV. WRONG PLACE TO START DELIBERATION

It was suggested above that Prof. McInerny seemed to have a counterpunch. Many readers may be inclined to agree with his position, or to think there must be some merit to it, because of the role which the ultimate end of man plays in the will and in deliberation. They might find the following line of argument persuasive.

Whenever you engage in practical reasoning, you deliberate. Whenever you deliberate, you are trying to reach a decision. You can’t reach a decision without knowing what you want. What you want is your end (1-2 q. 1. a. 1). So you can’t reach a decision without knowing what your end is. This end either is your ultimate end, or it isn’t. If it isn’t, it is willed for the sake of your ultimate end (1-2 q. 1, aa. 4-6). So, either way, you can’t reach a decision without willing your ultimate end. But nothing is willed unless it is known. Therefore, you can’t reach a decision without knowing your ultimate end. So whenever you deliberate, you need to know your ultimate end. Now the ultimate end is the first thing willed or intended. In 1-2 q. 1, a. 5, we are told that the starting point in the process of willing is the ultimate end:

[J]ust as the starting point in the process of reasoning is what is naturally known, so the starting point in the process of rational appetite, which is willing, has to be what is naturally desired.... But the starting point in the process of rational appetite is the ultimate end.³⁹

Surely the first principle of practical reason should be about the first thing willed or intended. For as Aquinas says, the FPPR is about the first thing that practical reason apprehends. What can this first-thing-apprehended be but the first-thing-intended? Therefore, the “good” about which the FPPR speaks should be the complete good. For complete good is the last end and the first intended.

Well, the above argument contains several misleading steps, but the last is flatly wrong. Apprehending is in fact quite different from intending and has to be prior to it.⁴⁰ So complete good cannot be intended unless it is first apprehended; and however pre-deliberate or “natural” this rather special apprehension may be, it is still a case of rational apprehension and hence a case of understanding. Well, it is unintelligible how one is supposed to understand “complete good” without having understood “good.” That is why plain “good” or good-in-general can (and must) be the first thing apprehended by practical reason, even if it is not the first thing intended by the rational *appetitus*.⁴¹

Now, what about the content and structure of deliberation? Do Aquinas’s remarks on this subject lend support to the argument sketched above?

If the argument is intended to conclude that the topic of one’s ultimate end must actually be considered in every deliberation, it is certainly wrong, according to St. Thomas. One of the objections he considered said that whenever you order something to an end, you think about that end, and the Common Doctor disagreed. Although a person does everything he does for the ultimate end,

it is not necessary that a person always think about the ultimate end, whenever he pursues or does anything.⁴²

True, a defender of McInerny’s position might reply, but continue the quotation just begun. See why he said explicit thought or consideration is not always necessary:

the influence of one’s first intention, which bears upon the ultimate end, remains in any pursuit of anything, even if the ultimate end is not actually being thought about.⁴³

So while the topic of one’s ultimate end need not actually be considered in every deliberation, that consideration is habitually present.

Well, if this amended claim is supposed to mean that consideration of one’s ultimate end must have taken place previously, so that while it is habitual now, it was once actual, e.g., at the dawn of one’s moral life or conscience, it is certainly wrong again, according to St. Thomas. His account of a person’s first moves in the use of practical reason give a very different picture. Let us look at a text from 1-2 q. 89, a. 6. It has become notorious for theological reasons pertaining to grace, implicit

faith, and the salvation of unevangelized persons. But those issues do not concern the present inquiry. Let us read the text solely for what it says about deliberation, the first moves of the moral life, and a person’s first thoughts of an end.

When a child begins to have the use of reason, he is no longer completely excused from the guilt of venial and mortal sin.

But at that time the first problem that comes up for the person is to deliberate

about himself. If he orders himself to a due end, he will secure by grace the remission of original sin. But if he does not order himself to a due end, as best he can discern at that age, he will be sinning mortally [in that he is] not doing what is in him.⁴⁴

This passage is from the *corpus*, and the sentence italicized is further explained in the ad 3 as follows:

For the first thing that occurs to a person using reason is that he should think about himself. For he will order other things to himself as to an end, and the end comes first in forming an intention.⁴⁵

In other words, from the natural priority of the end over the means in the formation of an intention to act, St. Thomas concludes that the first topic to come



*Ralph McInerny as Christendom College’s
2008 Commencement Speaker*

up in practical reasoning is the *finis cui*, not the ultimate *finis quod*. McInerny's theory makes the FPPR refer to "the perfection, the completion, the good in the sense of the ultimate end." Unquestionably, this completion or "complete good" is the ultimate *finis quod*. If the Thomistic account of the order or structure of deliberation is to invest McInerny's theory with any merit, St. Thomas must make the first topic for deliberation be the ultimate *finis quod*. In fact, he does not. He makes the first topic the *finis cui*, and the tradition of the Thomist school has understood this fact quite well. For on this topic indeed on the texts just quoted—there is a highly interesting commentary by Cajetan. Leaving out certain purely supernatural matters with which the text was also dealing, let us pause to read it.

vi. In this same a. 6 of q. 89, two doubts arise about the words, "the first problem that comes up for the person is to deliberate about himself." The first doubt is whether this means what does happen, or what *should* happen. To a person *just* starting to have the use of free *will*, does this thought in fact occur first, or does the text mean only that it should occur first, because the person is obligated to think this?

- Suppose it means to assert what does in fact happen. Then:

(1) it represents a false assumption at the outset; for the first thing that comes up is "good," which is naturally desired.

(2) unless the claim is being advanced arbitrarily, the reason for it is the one given in the *ad 3*, namely, that an end is prior in intention, and the person himself is an end, to whom he orders other things. But this answer doesn't yield any such conclusion. It is false that he himself is the end, since he is for the sake of something else; and if he does occur to himself as an end, it still doesn't follow that there is deliberation about himself.

(3) finally, we have no experience in our own lives that this thought occurs to us first.

So suppose it means to assert only what should happen. This would still have to be proved. If the proof is supposed to be what is advanced in the text (in the *ad 3*), then a second *cui* doubt crops up.

The second doubt is whether the text means that the person himself comes up first as an end, or *for* an end. If it means that he comes up first *as an end*, he doesn't have to deliberate about

himself... If it means that he comes up *for an end*, the words in the *corpus*, "to deliberate about himself," make sense, but the explanation given in the *ad 3* is worthless. And since no other explanation is put forward, the whole business is left with no rational grounding.⁴⁶

The difficulties Cajetan was raising certainly make sense, especially when one recalls that deliberation is supposed to be about means, not ends. How, then, can Aquinas *both* say that the person engaged in practical reasoning first takes himself or herself as the end *and* say that the person first deliberates about himself or herself? Cajetan unravelled the matter as follows.

vii. Both doubts can be answered together.

The text means to speak not only of what should happen but also of what does happen in fact, and it means to say that the person thinks about himself both as an end, in a certain way, and for an end, in a way. To get this clear, note that when an end first comes up for thought, two things are found: (1) *what is wanted* [*quod appetitur*], and (2) *for whom it is wanted* [*cui appetitur*]. The first is loved with desire [*concupiscentia*]; the second, with friendship. And because "the good is lovable, but each finds his own so" [Aristotle, *Ethics* viii, 2, 2], and "things friendly to others derive from what is friendly to oneself" [*Ibid.* ix, 4, 1], the first one for whom some good is sought is the seeker himself. And because what is loved with desire is ordered to the one loved with friendship, and not the other way around, the absolutely first end that occurs to the one seeking is himself. He is the end of all the objects of desire [*concupisibilia*], and all those objects are naturally ordered to him. Therefore, since the end is prior in intention, and the child himself is the end first loved with friendship-love and is as a matter of fact the first beneficiary of his own desirings, it must follow that the first thing to in fact confront the child's will is himself, to whom he orders the rest.

When this natural thought process, in which the child naturally wills for himself good and happiness, is finished, what follows is that he *should* be at once concerned about the main thing which it has already occurred to him to love, namely himself. He should be concerned about what he should go after [*quid ei appetendum*], because upon this depends what he should do [*quid operandum*], what he should worry about, what he

should endure, and whatever else is within his discretion. And since he is more loved (by himself) as a whole than in this or that part or partial self-definition, it follows that the first thing to concern the child is to deliberate about what to go after for himself-as-a-whole, and not for himself in-this-or-that-respect. Well, what is this but (a) to deliberate about himself, and (b) to order himself to an end? For what he decides to go after for himself (as mainly loved) as a whole is the end to which he orders himself. Hence, if he decides that he should go after an upright good [*bonum honestum*] (in the vague way usual at that age) he will have deliberated about himself well, placing his end in true happiness, however imperfectly and inchoately; for no more is required of a child. But if he does not, he will be guilty of an omission, as the text says in the *ad 3*.

viii. From these points an answer to the objections raised against the first interpretation [n. vi] emerges: one can reasonably see why in actual fact, during the time when a good is first sought, the person himself comes up as the end loved with friendship. For everything desired is desired for someone; if not for someone else, then for oneself.-Likewise, it is proved that, as far as the order of things is concerned, the person himself does in fact come up as matter for deliberation, since he is the one principally loved. And since the order of things is not at that point twisted by any guilt, the series of thoughts, as they come up, follows the order of nature. It is true, however, that the will does not necessarily embrace such thoughts but can omit and not-think, as the text says.

Hence, no objection can be made out of the fact that good or happiness comes up first, since they each come up as an object of desire [*ut concupiscibile*]. Nor can any objection be made out of the person's coming up first as an end. For this is the very reason why the text is not speaking arbitrarily. For the end is what is mainly loved, and concern about it follows first; and so since the person is the end loved with friendship, it follows that he is the first matter for deliberation [*primum deliberabile*]; for he is an end in such a way that he can be unto another end. Thus it is not false that he himself is

an end, nor is it irrelevant to the conclusion sought in the text. From these points the answer to the rest of the objections is obvious.⁴⁷

Six points in this delightful commentary deserve to be stressed.

(1) Cajetan thinks it natural and inevitable that the first end a person thinks about and worries about is himself or herself. Hence the *finis cui* (oneself as beneficiary) is the first "end" consciously entertained.

(2) In naturally and inevitably taking oneself as this first end, one already desires good and happiness for oneself. One thus has already some understanding (apprehension) of what-to-get-for-oneself.

(3) But what needs consideration (and must be deliberated as soon as possible, on pain of a morally culpable omission) is what-to-do-with-oneself, that is, what to apply oneself or "devote" oneself to pursuing. This question is morally significant because it amounts to asking what I should make of myself in the whole

sense. What should I be? What sort of person should I make of myself?

(4) This question (as soon as one does not omit to face it, and however vaguely one understands it) is one's *first problem for deliberation*, precisely because an answer to it is not obvious. No answer lies in one's mind already, to be skimmed off the surface, so to speak, of what one inevitably knows and desires. Hence "I should apply myself to getting the goods" is too trivial to be an answer, and "I should make myself a happy person" is no better.

The kinds of answers between which one hesitates (and so deliberates) are substantive answers like these:

- (a) I should be nice and fair to everybody
- (b) I should have all the fun I want
- (c) I should be smart enough to get what I want
- (d) I should be brave, no matter what, and tough enough to take whatever comes
- (e) I should please everybody I can
- (f) I should do what's right and not just what I feel like doing.

Deliberation begins when, and only when, one


"If he decides that he should go after an upright good, he will have deliberated about himself well, placing his end in true happiness, however imperfectly and inchoately."


sees that two or more alternatives like these are attractive, that they conflict, and that a choice must be made.

(5) With such deliberation, a young person finally “begins” his or her moral life, and the beginner will have deliberated well if, and only if, the outcome is a choice which (however vaguely or inchoately) involves applying the self to an upright good (*bonum honestum*), such as (a), (d), or (f) above, but not (b) or (c).

(6) Aquinas was explicit in distinguishing the upright goods from the complete good which is last end,⁴⁸ and it is perfectly safe to assume that Cajetan knew the distinction. Therefore, the commentator (along with the Dominican tradition after him) was being explicit at this point that the morally serious exercise of practical reason can begin and end well without substantive knowledge or even guess-work about the ultimate end of man and hence without commitment to any morally instructive theory of that end.

At this point, a defender of McNerny’s position may object: knowledge of the ultimate end is not absent from the deliberation but is presupposed, and the present writer (following Cajetan) has admitted as much already, in point (2) above.

I answer: what is admittedly presupposed is the natural knowing of “good” and the natural intending of “complete good.” But such advertance to one’s ultimate end as nature makes inevitable is not substantive knowledge. It is not morally instructive in such a way as to rule out immoral ways of pursuing it. For what is willed in every human choice is willed in every morally wrong choice as well as in every right one. This simple and obvious point brings us to the final difficulty for McNerny’s position.

V. NO GAIN IN MORAL STRICTNESS

McNerny complains that the G/FPPR “splits the difference” between the moral and the non-moral senses of ‘good’.⁴⁹ Grisez and Finnis reject McNerny’s way of putting the matter, but their point serves only to clarify the difference between him and them, which is quite real. McNerny wants the FPPR to direct a person to the moral good alone, as one would think a “first precept of the law” should do. Grisez and Finnis take the FPPR as directing a person to the whole range of good and thus to the moral good as well as the other kinds (*bonum delec-*

tabile, bonum utile, pre-moral or “ontic” good, etc.).⁵⁰

It is standard Thomistic doctrine, of course, that everything a person seeks is sought “as good.” The sinner is no different. The sinner seeks what he seeks as a good, i.e., as an immediate benefit for himself. But there is a difference between what the sinner seeks or does and what the morally good person seeks or does. What the sinner seeks/does is good in some respect (and so sought) but falls short of being good in some other respect, while that which the morally good person seeks/does is good in every respect.⁵¹ So the issue between Grisez and McNerny can be put like this: should the first precept of the natural law (the FPPR) direct persons to all pursuits which are good in at least some respect, or should it direct persons only to those pursuits which are good in every respect?

If (with Grisez) one says the former, one is saying in effect that the FPPR permits sins. The present writer suspects that this is the main reason why McNerny and many others are uncomfortable with the G/FPPR.



Grisez and Finnis point out calmly that there are many precepts of the natural law besides the first. Morally wrong actions conform to some such precepts but not to all.⁵² Many actions compatible with the first precept are ruled out by others, such as those directing one to acts of justice, integrity, etc., and away from their opposites. So the fact that an action like Don Juan’s womanizing is “permitted” by the first precept, taken in isolation from all the others, doesn’t mean that it is permitted *simpliciter*. Moreover, Grisez would say that unless an action conformed at least to the first precept, the choice of it would be unintelligible. If the action were not good in some way, no one would be inclined or even tempted to perform it.

Exactly why McNerny is dissatisfied with this response has not been made clear.⁵³ But dissatisfied he is. McNerny wants practical reasoning to be morally correct reasoning from the beginning. He assumes that if the *first* principle of practical reasoning directs one to “the good in the sense of the ultimate end,” one *will* be directed to morally correct choices and to such choices alone, from the beginning.

Well, there is in Aquinas at least one sense of ‘ultimate end’ under which McInerny’s assumption would be correct. This is the revealed sense, disclosing where the ratio of man’s ultimate end (“complete good”) is to be found *de facto* and *per gratiam*.⁵⁴ Every choice which advances one towards God in Heaven is a morally good choice, and every choice compatible with getting to God is morally good. So, if the Mc/FPPR said

Getting to see God is to be pursued; and what is incompatible with getting there, avoided,

the Mc/FPPR would certainly have the moral content McInerny wants it to have. Moreover, if it said this, the Mc/FPPR would have almost the whole of the *Secunda Pars* as its further explication and “particularization,” since the *Secunda Pars* is a work of *sacra doctrina*, primarily and overarchingly devoted to the topic of reaching our “last end” in this sense. As already mentioned, however, the revealed sense of ‘ultimate end’ transcends the horizon of natural law, and (to McInerny’s credit) the Mc/FPPR is not intended to say anything about getting to Heaven or enjoying the supernatural Vision of God in the company of the saints.⁵⁵

In the present writer’s opinion, there is also in Aquinas (as an inheritance from Aristotle and as a tool of Christian apologetics) another sense of ‘ultimate end’ under which McInerny’s assumption would be correct, or probably correct. This is the sense in which unassisted reason answers the question of where (thanks to our rational nature) the *ratio* of man’s ultimate end is to be found. The end of each species is found in its proper operation,⁵⁶ which in man’s case is understanding; what is most perfect in this kind of operation (contemplating divine things) delivers (and so in a sense *is*) man’s ultimate end.⁵⁷ But in man’s case, insofar as we can know it by reason alone in this life, this supreme intellectual achievement depends upon the moral virtues (which quiet the passions in the interior life and secure tranquility in the public life) and upon sufficient prosperity for life and health.⁵⁸ Thanks to these dependencies (one can argue, and perhaps correctly for Aquinas), every choice which advances one towards the supreme intellectual achievement is a morally good choice, and every choice compatible with achieving it is compatible with the life of virtue and hence morally good. So again, if the Mc/FPPR said

Supreme intellectual achievement (together with its moral and material conditions) is to be pursued,

and what is incompatible with it (or its conditions) avoided,

the Mc/FPPR would probably have (in Aquinas’s opinion) the moral content McInerny wants it to have. Nevertheless, the Mc/FPPR is not intended to say this. McInerny does not agree with those of us who hold that Aquinas or Aristotle held this definite and intellectualist conception of “some one goal or course of action that all men should pursue.” He writes:

Many critics of the view of ultimate end that Thomas took over from Aristotle have seen in it the absurd claim that over and above birdwatching, carpentry, and practicing law there is some specifically human task that we should all perform and which is such that to perform it well makes one a good human being. Grisez and Finnis are refreshing in their gentle insistence that the natural law view is precisely the view that there is an all but numberless variety of ways in which men can attain their completeness or perfection as men.⁵⁹

In fact, Grisez and Finnis do not profess to find their “refreshing” view in Aquinas, nor in Aristotle, but that point is not relevant at the moment. What matters is that McInerny is not advocating the FPPR in the above sense either.

Rather, McInerny wants the FPPR to direct us to our ultimate end in a sense of ‘ultimate end’ in which every object of natural inclination in man is a “constituent” of the end. McInerny does not tell us where he finds such a sense in Aquinas, but the following account would be correct (in the opinion of the present writer) and supportive of McInerny’s wish for such a sense. Aquinas⁶⁰ took from Boethius the definition, *beatitudo est status omnium bonorum aggregatione perfectus* (happiness is the state made perfect by compresence of all the goods).⁶¹ The Common Doctor thereby accepted a definition which is both (a) equivalent to “complete good” and (b) subject to being filled in with reason’s natural apprehensions as to what things are human goods hence a statement subject to being filled in with the objects of man’s natural inclinations. If the writer may try his hand at a little Latin, the Boethian definition, filled in according to the letter of 1-2 q. 94, aa. 2-3, would go something like this:

beatitudo est status vitae, prolis, scientiae, sociorum virtutumque aggregatione perfectus.

It would be analytically true, I think, that the state made perfect by compresence of all the goods is “complete good,” and so, when one replaces ‘all the goods’ with

he list of things per se known to us as good, the result should be a state so described as to be per se known to us as complete good. Moreover, Boethius' definition was what Aquinas meant by the *ratio communis* of happiness,⁶² and this happiness is very definitely one of the senses in which Aquinas uses 'ultimate end.'

So McInerny is right, in the present writer's opinion, that there is room in Thomism for the sense of 'ultimate end' which he wants to introduce into the FPPR.⁶³ But he is quite wrong in thinking that this sense, once introduced there, makes the FPPR direct us to those and only those choices which are morally correct.

Because this common *ratio* of happiness is known to all, it is known to all sinners. Because it is desired and sought (somehow) by all, it is desired and sought (somehow) by sinners. Because it is willed necessarily and by the very nature of the will,⁶⁴ it is willed in every human choice, including every morally wrong choice. The rakish Don Juan pursues as his ultimate end precisely this happiness, with just these naturally known constituents, as he climbs through the window of his next conquest.

What is wrong, then, with the Don's volition? It is just possible that McInerny thinks the Don is willing some of the naturally known goods but not willing all of them, and that this failure to will them comprehensively is the very reason why the Don is not pursuing "the completion, the good in the sense of the ultimate end." McInerny may even think that he is thereby agreeing with some early views of Grisez on the difference between moral and immoral choosing. If this hypothesis is correct, then McInerny may think his position is closer to Grisez's than the previous sections of this paper have supposed. Perhaps, when McInerny introduced the talk of our ultimate end into the FPPR, he meant only the whole set of naturally known goods or "all the basic goods." In that case, the difference between Grisez and McInerny would narrow down to this: Grisez would be giving the FPPR in open form, while McInerny would be giving a cap-bound form,

x (x is good) is to be done, etc.

The relevant difference between the interpretations would then

amount to "any basic good" vs. "the whole set of basic goods," and McInerny may think that this difference is precisely the moral difference.

So far as the present writer can tell, however, Grisez has never thought that the whole difference between immoral and moral choosing could be explained in terms of the basic goods and the set of them, e.g. as a difference between willing a basic good and willing them *all*, or willing any and willing *every*. For Grisez, the difference has always been more subtle. Don Juan's defect is not that he wills (as his last end) the wrong set of goods but that he wills the right set wrongly. To begin with, he wills the constituents of happiness for himself but not for everyone, certainly not for the ladies he will seduce and abandon (nor their husbands). And then he wills the constituents of happiness with a measure of partiality, in that he is willing to violate some (now and then, temporarily) in order to enjoy others. Thus he is willing to lie and violate the good of justice (temporarily) in order to enjoy the conjugal good.

It is much to Grisez's credit, in the present writer's opinion, that he has seen the difference in this more subtle way. For thus he can allow the whole set of basic human goods to be willed as the dimensions or "constituents" of happiness and still discern a difference between this ultimate end *quod appetitur* and what must be in one's manner of willing, if one's willing this ultimate end is to be such that only morally good choices are compatible with it or conducive to it. This latter manner will include willing all persons as the *finis cui* and will include willing the goods without partiality. Hence, in his more recent works, Grisez has given to this object-cum-manner of will a separate name-integral human fulfillment-the better to distinguish it from the happiness which everyone wills as ultimate *finis quod*.⁶⁵

It is quite possible that McInerny is trying to have the benefits of this "integral human fulfillment" without taking the trouble to introduce it. He is trying to locate those benefits already in the "complete good" and "last end" which Aquinas makes the first and natural object of intention.⁶⁶ But McInerny cannot have it both ways: he cannot have the advantages of natural volition and the advantages of ex-



Dr. William Marshner

cluding immorality. *No last end whose volition excludes immorality can be naturally and necessarily willed in every choice.*⁶⁷ If this point was not obvious to McInerny, he could have learned it, as was seen above, from Cajetan.

CONCLUSION

Five difficulties afflicting McInerny's interpretation of the FPPR have been presented. Of these, the first, second, and third are sufficient individually to render his interpretation untenable. For the first shows its flagrant textual conflict with Aquinas; the second shows

that the interpretation is inconsistent with the FPPR's being an underived (and therefore first) principle, and the third shows that the interpretation is inconsistent with the FPPR's being a source of further precepts in the way Aquinas proposed to derive them. The fourth and fifth difficulties show that McInerny's hopes for the superiority of his interpretation over Grisez's are not (and cannot be) well founded in Aquinas. It follows *a fortiori* that the difficulties presented are sufficient cumulatively to render the McInerny interpretation untenable.



NOTES

1Bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum, *Summa Theologiae* 1-2 q. 94, a. 2. This work will be cited hereafter by part number alone: 1, 1-2, 2-2, or 3. The *Summa contra Gentiles* will be cited as *SCG*.

2 Tarski thought that single quotes were used to form the name of a linguistic expression. Thus 'good' would be the name of an English word, referring to that word and allowing one to mention it rather than use it. On Tarski's interpretation, it would make no sense to ask what Aquinas meant by 'good', since the Angelic Doctor did not write in English.

My single quotes are used in a non-Tarskian way. They are not forming the name of any word but abbreviating the phrase, "the word or expression for . . ."

Thus, the claim that 'cat' has three letters means that the word for a cat has three letters (a claim true in some languages and false in others). When I want to mention a word in the Tarskian manner, I shall put it in comers like this, 'cat'. By these conventions, the fact that ⁺*bonum*⁺ was Aquinas's word for good is precisely what allows me to ask what he meant by 'good' in the precept cited in the previous footnote.

3 Germain Grisez, "The First Principle of Practical Reason," *Natural Law Forum* 10 (1965):168-201.

4Ralph McInerny, "The Principles of Natural Law," *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 25 (1980): 1-15. This article will be cited hereafter as *McI*.

5Cf. 2-2 q. 145, a. 3 ad 3, etc.

61-2 q. 1, a. 5 is the central text.

7*McI*, 4.

8*McI*, 5. This list of constituents (self-preservation, reproduction, truth) is derived from some remarks in 1-2 q. 94, a. 2, about man's natural inclinations and their objects.

9Germain Grisez and John Finnis, "The Basic Principles of Natural Law: A Reply to Ralph McInerny," *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 26 (1981): 21-31. This article will be cited hereafter as *G/F*.

10*G/F*, 26.

11*G/F*, 27.

12McInerny has made no public response to *G/F* and has republished *McI* unchanged in his book *Ethica Thomistica* (CUA Press, 1982). The present writer can only speculate, therefore, as to how McInerny thinks he can answer these and other arguments from *GIF*.

13*G/F*, 26-27. For the doctrine of Vatican II, the authors cite *Gaudium et spes*, sections 38-39. For the allusion to some ideas of Grisez, they cite his article, "Man, the Natural End of" in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 9 (1967), 137-138.

14 1-2 q. 1 preface, and articles 4-7, etc.

15 *SCG* 3, c. 25, arg. 2; *Compendium theologiae* c. 103; *Quodlibet* 8, a. 19; 1-2 q. 3, a. 2; 3 q. 7, a. 1, etc.
16 1 q. 1, a. 1; 1-2 q. 3, a. 8, etc.

17 The *operatio* of understanding is not willed in every human undertaking, and so the second sense is distinct from the first. Likewise, the supernatural *Visio Dei* is not willed in every human undertaking (though perhaps it should be willed in every choice of a Christian), and so the third sense is distinct from the first. Finally, the third sense is distinct from the second (even if, as some think, it includes the second) because the eschatological *Visio* includes various supernatural arrangements which support, circumstance, and transform the human operation of understanding. Hence even if that operation is an object of natural desire (the *desiderium naturale videndi Deum* was explained by St. Thomas as a desire to understand the deepest why of things), it does not follow (*pace* Lubac and Gilson) that the supernatural *Visio* is an object of natural desire.

18 Summarily speaking, they are related as follows. The happiness which all humans seek in everything they choose is a general ideal of complete good (or “a state made perfect by compresence of all the goods”). All humans desire this, but they do not all know where such a good state is to be found (1-2 q. 1, a. 7, and q. 5, a. 8). This is the problem of wherein beatitudo consistit.

It is quite crucial to realize that “consistit in” as an idiom in the Latin of Aquinas did not mean to express identity, as ‘consists in’ expresses today in a number of modern languages. This point emerges from many quite clear texts. For example, in 1 q. 11, a. 1, Aquinas said, “esse cuiusque rei consistit in indivisione.” He most certainly did not mean that existence is indivision. A more wholesale slaughter of Thomistic metaphysics would be hard to imagine, than one which took this passage as a license to identify *esse* with indivision, and thereby (amidst smiles of vindication on the faces of neo-Platonists) to reduce being itself to being-one. Rather, Aquinas meant that each thing’s existence depends upon its being undivided and is delivered to it only so long as it is not broken up. Likewise, in 1-2 q. 52, a. 3, Aquinas said, “usus habituum in voluntate hominis consistit.” The use of the habits is not identical to a man’s will. Rather, each use of a habit is an act of his will. So the use of the habits depends on his will and is delivered in the workings of that faculty.

Similarly, when Aquinas asked whether happiness or complete good *consistit* in x, he was no longer asking what happiness was or contained but what it depended upon in the real, or what would deliver it in the real world. Supreme intellectual achievement (the best kind of performance of man’s proper *operatio*), taken together with the internal forms of virtue and the external forms of prosperity necessary to support such achievement, is the naturally knowable answer, Aquinas thought, to this problem (*SCG* 3, c. 63). The supernatural Vision of God in Heaven is the revealed (and not naturally knowable) answer to the same problem (*De Malo* q. 5, a. 3).

For apologetical purposes, Aquinas so stressed the congruity between the naturally knowable answer and the revealed answer that some doubt has been created as to whether he thought of them as two answers (picking out a natural end of man and a supernatural end, respectively) or as two parts of the same answer (reflecting just different levels of knowledge about the unique end of man). McNerny and Grisez are agreed, I think, in holding the first view, while the late Cardinal Henri de Lubac took the second.

19 Taken in itself, the *operatio* has no constituents other than itself, its object, and the faculty whose act it is.

20 Henri de Lubac claimed that man is naturally inclined to the supernatural *Visio* and hotly denied that our potency to it is only “obediential.” See *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (New York: Herder, 1967). To make his case, Lubac had to get past certain texts in Aquinas (*De Potentia Dei* q. 6, a. 1, *De Malo* q. 5, a. 3, *Compendium Theologiae* c. 104, etc.) and had to discredit the arguments advanced by Cajetan in his commentaries In *Primam Partem* q. 1, a. 1, and q. 12, a. 1, and in his opusculum *De Potentia Neutra*. The present writer is among those who think that Lubac did not succeed: see William H. Marshner, *Natural Desire and Natural End*, unpublished S.T.D. thesis, the Pontifical John Paul II Institute (Washington, D.C., 1999).

21 1 q. 5, a. 1 corpus. The allusion to Aristotle is to *Nicomachean Ethics*, book I, chapter 1.

22 Cf. 1 q. 13, a. 1: *ratio quam significat nomen est definitio*. Since a Thomistic definitio is not just a rule of usage but, where appropriate, a grasp of the real, the ratio of a term can point to the real aspect of a thing whereby it corresponds to the term’s sense and so fits or verifies the definition. Thus 1 q. 5, a. 2: *Ratio enim significata per nomen est id quod concipit intellectus de re et significat illud per vocem*.

23 Aquinas takes “*appetitus*” so broadly as to include even gravitational or inertial phenomena. The heavy object “inclines” to the low places.

24 Among these potential satisfiers, Aquinas counts mainly objects external to the being, such as food, shelter, etc., but sometimes he counts internal states as well. For instance, in rational creatures, the will is inclined to a harmony with the intellect (1-2 q. 94, a. 3).

25 To confirm that this is how Aquinas took the saying of Aristotle, see 1 q. 6, a. 1 ad 2.

26 “Actions arising from a given faculty are caused by the faculty in accordance with what it takes for anything to be an object of that faculty [*secundum rationem sui objecti*]. [What it takes for anything to be] an object of the will is [that it be] an end and a good.”

27 1-2 q. 1, a. 5.

28 1-2 q. 1, a. 7. This *ratio* itself is contrasted with the information as to what verifies it; that is, the bare notion of “complete good” is contrasted with insight into where it is to be found (*consistit*). So long as one looks only at the bare *ratio* itself, all human beings are pursuing the same ultimate end, the ideal expressed by ‘complete good’. But if one looks at where they think this good is to be found, they are pursuing very different ultimate ends. Some seek wealth as delivering “complete good”; others, pleasure; others, something else.

29 Sicut autem ens est primum quod cadit in apprehensione simpliciter, ita bonum est primum quod cadit in apprehensione practicae rationis, quae ordinatur ad opus: omne enim agens agit propter finem qui habet rationem boni. Et ideo primum principium in ratione practica est quod fundatur supra rationem boni, quae est quod bonum est quod omnia appetunt. Hoc est ergo primum praeceptum legis, quod bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum.

Here and subsequently, the translations from Aquinas or Cajetan are the work of the present writer.

30 A proposition is true *per se, primo modo*, when its predicate appears in the definition of its subject.

31 1-2 q. 94, a. 2: Et super hoc fundantur omnia alia praecepta legis naturae: ut scilicet omnia illa facienda vel vitanda pertineant ad praecepta legis naturae, quae ratio practica naturaliter apprehendit esse bona humana.

32 ... omnia illa ad quae homo habet naturalem inclinationem ratio naturaliter apprehendit ut bona, et per consequens ut opere prosequenda, et contraria eorum ut mala et vitanda.

33 For the concept of propositions “*per se* known among the wise,” see 1 q. 2, a. 1; 1-2 q. 94, a. 4.

34 This point has been hinted at already in *G/F*, 30, but the following pages will attempt to make the point explicit.

35 A precept to pursue complete good would most naturally be taken as a directive to pursue what delivers it—the activity or state *in quo beatitudo consistit*—but it could conceivably be taken as a directive to pursue the whole of what ‘complete good’ is known to include in its meaning. We shall explore both options.

36 ‘The Beatific Vision is that which delivers complete good’ is not *per se notum quoad nos*; indeed, it is not even open to philosophical discovery; it is only known by revelation (*SCG* 3, c. 3; 1 q. 1, a. 1; *De Malo* q. 5, a. 3). In a key text, St. Thomas cites the fact that man has been called to an end beyond his rational comprehension as the very reason why the natural law has had to be supplemented with revealed law (1-2 q. 91, a. 4). So the precept to pursue that end is not a natural law precept. A few remarks on this point may be in order.

Given that human persons have an allotted last goal (whether a uniquely best activity, as Aristotle thought, or something beyond this life, as the Bible teaches), to bring one’s own choices (including one’s chosen goals) into line with one’s allotted last goal becomes a central problem of the examined life. This is the problem with which the *Secunda Pars* primarily deals. Aquinas claims that the problem is insoluble without divine revelation, and he gives a reason: the allotted last goal of human persons is beyond human comprehension. This practical problem, which thus turns out to be a religious one, must be kept distinct from the basic problem of moral living, or else Thomism collapses. Here is why.

Given that human persons have an objective happiness (the “complete good” which all desire and which reason can to some extent elucidate), to bring one’s own choices into line with this elucidated happiness is the central problem of the moral life. To say that this problem is insoluble without divine revelation would be to repudiate the entire program of natural-law ethics. For the basic assumption of the natural-law program is that man can determine by natural reason what his common happiness requires of him—what virtues to acquire, what precepts to follow—and that through these requirements man can determine by the same natural reason the moral rightness or wrongness of his choices. Well, one cannot reason from the unknown. One cannot determine by natural reason the requirements of reaching a destiny unknown to natural reason. So the viability of the natural-law program depends on this: that

the rationally elucidated happiness of man be distinct from any unknown destiny or unknown allotted goal.

Aristotle never had to face up to this point, because the allotted goal of mankind, as he saw it, was not unknown. It was a demonstrably “best” activity in this world, achieved by being a contemplative sage; it was allotted to man by the nature of things (by the nature of man’s own best operation), not by a free divine volition. So if Aristotle slipped up by identifying this allotted goal too tightly with the elucidated happiness, he did not have to pay for his mistake by forfeiting the natural-law character of his ethics. He just made his ethics a bit too intellectualistic.

Aquinas was in a more dire position. He had to take the Vision in Heaven as the allotted goal of mankind. It had been unknowable until revealed. So for Aquinas, if his embrace of the natural-law program was not to be a futile maneuver, ending in fideism, the allotted goal had to be very distinct indeed from the elucidated happiness. And then the need to put one’s choices into line with the goal had to become a religious problem, distinct from (even if building upon) the one that natural law addresses.

37 *Quidquid homo appetit, appetit sub ratione boni. Quod quidem, si non appetitur ut bonum perfectum, quod est ultimus finis, necesse est ut appetatur ut tendens in bonum perfectum: quia semper inchoatio alicuius ordinatur ad consummationem ipsius.*

38 Depending on the extent to which Aquinas accepted the intellectualist teleology of Aristotle, he may well have thought that (1-) was false and was known to be false *apud sapientes*.

39 ... sicut in processu rationis principium est id quod naturaliter cognoscitur, ita in processu rationalis appetitus, qui est voluntas, oportet esse principium id quod naturaliter desideratur.... Principium autem in processu rationalis appetitus est ultimus finis.

40 Aquinas applied the principle that nothing can be desired or intended unless it is first known or apprehended to all rational beings. He applied it to God as well as to creatures: *SCG* 3, c. 98. In rational creatures he applied it even to their natural desires. See 1 q. 75, a. 6, where he applied it to the natural desire to preserve one’s being.

41 It is quite possible that, for Aquinas, the *cognitum* which is good-in-general in the intellect becomes the first *volitum* in the will. The good naturally known by abstraction is formally universal. In any such universal, one must distinguish between three things: (a) the sense abstracted, (b) the range of referents from which it is abstracted, and (c) the range of things to which it can or should be applied. As to (a), the sense of ‘good’ is ‘pursuit-worthy (*appetibile*),’ and this is grasped as referring to (predicable of) anything already recognized as pursuit-worthy. This *bonum intellectum* becomes an object of the will by becoming an end, and perhaps this end is ... to have everything pursuit-worthy. This end is no longer just an abstraction but a guiding ideal. See 1 q. 80, a. 1 ad 2; q. 82, a. 3; in a. 4 one reads: *bonum intellectum est objectum voluntatis et movet ipsum ut finis* (emphasis added). The reason to think that something like this might be the case is that one can understand an abstraction, but one cannot will it as such. Rather, what one wills (in correspondence to the formally universal good one understands) is a broad ideal. Perhaps ‘complete good’ reflects that ideal. Nevertheless, the notion of complete good is formed in the intellect and, in order to be formed, depends upon the primordial *cognitum* which is good-in-general. So nothing conceded in this footnote casts any doubt on the priority of apprehending good over conceiving or willing complete good.

421-2 q. 1, a. 6, obj. 3: *quicumque ordinat aliquid in finem aliquem, cogitat de illo fine. Sed non semper homo cogitat de ultimo fine in omni eo quod appetit aut facit. Non ergo omnia homo appetit aut facit propter ultimum finem. ad 3: non oportet ut semper aliquis cogitet de ultimo fine, quandocumque aliquid appetit vel operatur ...*

431-2 q. 1, a. 6 ad 3: ... *sed virtus primae intentionis, quae est respectu ultimi finis, manet in quolibet appetitu cuiuscumque rei, etiam si de ultimo fine actu non cogitetur.*

441-2 q. 89, a. 6: *Cum vero usum rationis habere inceperit, non omnino excusatur a culpa venialis et mortalis peccati. Sed primum quod tunc homini cogitandum occurrit est deliberare de seipso. Et si quidem seipsum ordinaverit ad debitum finem, per gratiam consequetur remissionem originalis peccati. Si vero non ordinet seipsum ad debitum finem, secundum quod in illa aetate est capax discretionis, peccabit mortaliter, non faciens quod in se est.*

451-2 q. 89, a. 6 ad 3: ... *Primum enim quod occurrit homini discretionem habenti est quod de seipso cogitet, ad quern alia ordinet sicut ad finem: finis enim est prior in intentione.*

46 *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici Opera Omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P.M. edita, vol. VII* (Roma, 1892), 147. This edition will be referred to henceforth as the Leonine.

47 Leonine, VII, 147.

48 2-2 q. 145, a. 1.

49*McI*, 10.

50*G/F*, 27-28.

51 1-2 q. 18. See W. H. Marshner, "Aquinas on the Evaluation of Human Actions," *The Thomist* 59 (1995): 355-378.

52*G/F*, 27.

53It was not made clear in *McI*, and as noted above, McInerney has made no response to *G/F*.

54Respondeo dicendum, quod de ultimo fine possumus loqui dupliciter: uno modo secundum rationem ultimi finis, alio modo secundum id in quo finis ultimi ratio invenitur: 1-2 q. 1, a. 7.

55It is also to McInerney's credit that he does not try to smuggle this theology into the FPPR by "transcendental" metaphysics. Some interpreters have argued that, in Thomas, to grasp the good abstractly is already to will God. According to these interpreters, our intellect is open to know across the whole range of being; therefore it is oriented to being without restriction; but God alone is unrestricted Being; therefore man's intellect is intrinsically oriented to God. And as a rational creature, man is able to conceive the good in full generality, thanks to his abstractive power; so man's will is naturally ordered to "the good" without restriction; so man naturally wills the unrestricted good; but God alone is unrestricted Good; therefore man's will is intrinsically oriented to God. (Among others, see Pierre Roussetot, S.J., *L'Intellectualisme de St. Thomas d'Aquin* [Paris: 1922]; E. Brisbois, "Le desir de voir Dieu et la meta-physique du vouloir selon saint Thomas," *Nouvelle revue theologique* 63 [1936]: 978-998; 1089-1113.)

This interpretation is far too sloppy to be accurate Thomism. First, it reasons sloppily from the whole of being (*ens commune*) to unrestricted or infinite Being (*Esse subsistens*). Second, it reasons sloppily in the same way, from good in general to unlimited Good. But even if these cases of sloppiness were excused, the interpretation would not reach the conclusion it was meant to reach about man's ultimate end. If the first case of sloppiness were excused, the argument would show at most that there is a real identity between something man automatically knows (being in general) and God; it would not show that man automatically knows God. For a real identity between x and y does not carry the consequence that if x is known y is known (see Aquinas *In II Sent.* d. 38, a. 2, where the text shows that the Angelic Doctor would have understood Bertrand Russell's famous example about King George, who knew Sir Walter Scott but not the author of *Waverley*.) Likewise, if the second case of sloppiness were excused, the resulting argument would show at most that there is a real identity between something man automatically wills (complete good) and God; it would not show that man automatically wills God. For again, a real identity between x and y does not carry the consequence that if x is willed y is willed. A consequence about what is willed can follow only if the identity is known: *nil volitum nisi praecognitum*. There is thus no "transcendental deduction" of eschatological happiness from the concept of complete good. Likewise, there is no "ontological argument" from the concept of complete good to the existence of a Good Thing that satisfies the concept in one exhaustive Instance.

56So Aristotle said in *De Caelo et Mundo* ii, 3.

57*SCG* 3, c. 25: propria operatio cuiuslibet rei est finis eius; est enim secunda perfectio ipsius ... Intelligere est autem propria operatio substantiae intellectualis. Ipsa igitur est finis eius. Quod igitur est perfectissimum in hac operatione, hoc est ultimus finis.

58*SCG* 3, c. 37. While other cases of high intellectual achievement do not depend upon the moral virtues (or not very crucially), the supreme achievement of contemplating divine things does depend on them because it is not just a case of scientia but one of sapientia, in which theoretical and moral knowledge come together. Cf. 1 q. 1, a. 6

59*MI*, 7.

601 q. 26, a. 1, and many other places.

61*De Consolatione Philosophiae*, book III, *prosa ii*.

62For the *ratio communis* is the one which has to do with the fact that 'happiness' means complete good, and it is opposed to any *ratio specialis* defining 'happiness' in terms of where it is to be found; see 1-2 q. 5, a. 8 and *De Malo* q. 5, a. 3 ad 1.

63One can only speculate about why Aquinas himself made no moves to occupy this room, or at least no moves outside of 1-2 q. 94.

641-2 q. 5, a. 8 ad 2: "Beatitudo ergo potest considerari sub ratione finalis boni et perfecti, quae est communis ratio beatitudinis; et sic *naturaliter* et ex *necessitate* voluntas in illud tendit . . ." This text is one of many which make it clear that the naturalness with which man wills his complete good is not just the soft naturalness whose opposite is

the supernatural but the hard naturalness whose opposite is the voluntary.

65 See Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus, vol. I, Christian Moral Principles* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983) chapter 7, qq. E-F, 183-188.

66 Let the reader recall that the “good in the sense of the last end” which McInerny is trying to introduce into the FPPR must be the complete good which is the natural object of intention, because no other sense of ‘last end’ could be put into the FPPR and still preserve that precept’s character as *per se notum quoad nos omnes*, which Aquinas said it has.

67 At best, there can be a rational process from the concept of ‘good’ to the common *ratio* of happiness, and from there to the ideal of integral human fulfillment. The formal universality of “the good” puts a constant rational pressure on the constitution of “all I want”—a pressure to make the scope of my desire for complete good as broad and encompassing as I understand ‘human good’ itself to be as a predicable. The concept of human good thus tells against any putative happiness that is arbitrarily narrow. Spelling out happiness in terms of its naturally desired constituents helps me to see this; it reminds me that there are goods of the mind that I want, as well as goods of the body, and goods or assets of my own character that I want, as well as goods of companionship and intimacy with others. Next, this adequately filled-in concept of happiness puts a constant rational pressure on the further constitution of “all I want”—a pressure to make the scope of my wishes for the good of others as broad and encompassing as I understand my own “complete good” to be. This (plus a rational pressure against wishing good for only an arbitrary selection of others) tells against willing incomplete happiness for anyone.

If this is roughly correct, so that what has just been said is (at least roughly) how the good-which-man-first-apprehends and the happiness-which-man-naturally-desires point toward a first principle of morality, then one can say that what a human being naturally/necessarily intends has what it takes to found an objection to any immoral choice. But this is far different from prohibiting such a choice or making the ground for objecting to it explicit, as the concept of integral human fulfillment and the precept to pursue that fulfillment would do.

