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IMPERFECT HAPPINESS AND THE FINAL END OF MAN: THOMAS AQUINAS AND THE PARADIGM OF NATURE-GRACE ORTHODOXY

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THE TWO MOST influential paradigms in modern theology concerning the relationship of grace to nature are at opposite extremes of the spectrum, and yet the extremes touch in their criticism of Thomism as it is exposited in the classical Dominican tradition.

On the one hand, there is the influential view of Karl Barth, whose radical vision of the extrinsic transcendence of grace to nature was paired with an equally radical—some would say dialectical—disavowal of any predisposition or potential inclination in human nature for the gift of divine life. On the other hand, there is the vision of Henri de Lubac in his *Surnaturel*, which charts out the idea of an inclination toward the supernatural inscribed in the human spirit from its creation, such that we are always and everywhere animated by a latent natural desire for the gratuitous gift of supernatural beatitude, the vision of God. One paradigm sees in man no natural point of contact (*Anknüpfungspunkt*) upon which grace might act to elevate him beyond his own natural capacities (such that grace must itself create in human nature the very conditions for its own reception).[1] The other sees in man's natural capacities an innate, we might say inherent, inclination toward divine life, a life that is provided by grace alone, such that man is an enigma

[1] See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1/1, English trans. by G. W. Bromiley (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2003), 27-36.

or paradox of natural desiring for that which grace alone can disclose and resolve.[2]

There are nuances to the positions that both Barth and de Lubac developed on these matters over the course of their careers. Both paradigms, however, maintain important forms of opposition to the classical Dominican tradition, and not least because of the Aristotelian character of its interpretation of Aquinas on the matter of the final end of man. The Barthian paradigm perceives with distrust the attempt by Thomists to demonstrate a natural openness to God by way of the philosophical ascent to God through metaphysical analysis of created being and through a corresponding reflection on the natural final end of man as made in some real way for the contemplation and love of God.[3] The other paradigm sees this same metaphysics and anthropology as, if not theologically illicit, then at least as potentially misleading, particularly as interpreted by figures such as Thomas de Vio Cajetan, Sylvester of Ferrara, and Domingo Báñez.[4] The reason for this is that it risks formulating the notion of an autonomous human nature, knowledge of God, and natural beatitude that have their own rational integrity in distinction from (and therefore over and

[2] Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Études historiques* (Paris: Aubier, 1946), 231-60, 433-34; "Duplex hominis beatitudo (Saint Thomas, I-II, q. 62, a. 1)," *Recherches de science religieuse* 35 (1948): 290-99; *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Herder and Herder, 1998), 55-56, 140-66.

[3] On Barth's mistrust of the analogy of being as the "invention of the anti-Christ," see *Church Dogmatics* 1/1:xiii, 40-42, 69, 119-20, 239-40; see also Bruce L. McCormack, "Karl Barth's Version of an 'Analogy of Being': A Dialectical No and Yes to Roman Catholicism," in Thomas Joseph White, ed., *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Anti-Christ or the Wisdom of God?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2010), 88-144; Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909-1936* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[4] See, for example, *Surnaturel,* 153-54. 174-75, 437; *Mystery of the Supernatural*, 68-74, 157-59, 194. One can identify common themes in texts of Dominican commentators on Aquinas such as Cajetan's commentary on *STh* I, q. 78, a. 1, n. 5 (Leonine ed., 5:252); *STh* I-II, q. 3, a. 8 (Leonine ed., 6:36); Sylvester of Ferrara's commentary on *ScG* III, c. 51 (Leonine ed. 14:140-43); Domingo Báñez, *Scholastica commentaria in primam partem*, q. 12, a. 1 (Valencia: Biblioteca de Tomistas Españoles, 1934; pp. 248-51). Despite the nuances between these diverse thinkers, the conceptual continuity between them on this topic offers enough unity to form what might be called a theological "tradition," followed in turn by subsequent Thomist commentators. De Lubac himself presupposes the existence of a conceptual continuity between these diverse authors, with whom he takes issue.

against) a uniquely supernatural explanation of the final end of man (the grace of the beatific vision) that alone explains the deeper meaning of the structure of human nature.[5] By contrast, de Lubac is famous for claiming that human nature is ultimately unintelligible and existentially inexplicable except in reference to grace.[6] He contrasts Cajetan the Aristotelian with Aquinas on this point. Cajetan argued—following Aristotle—that every nature is inclined to a proportionate natural end, while Aquinas saw that our human nature is naturally ordered toward the formally supernatural as such.[7] It follows from Aquinas's viewpoint that human beings cannot come to know their natural end by means of philosophical analysis or argument, but only through the medium of divine revelation, since it is a supernatural mystery.[8]

We might note here the extreme difference between these two positions. While one side condemns the tradition of Aristotelian-inspired anthropology for its excess of ambition regarding natural knowledge and love of God, the other side

[5] See, for instance, *Surnaturel*, 101-28, 226-92.

[6] *Mystery of the Supernatural*, 54-55: "For this desire [for supernatural beatitude] is not some 'accident' in me. It does not result from some peculiarity, possibly alterable, of my individual being, or from some historical contingency whose effects are more or less transitory. *A fortiori* it does not in any sense depend upon my deliberate will. It is in me as a result of my belonging to humanity as it is, that humanity which is, as we say, 'called.' For God's call is constitutive. My finality, which is expressed by this desire, is inscribed upon my very being as it has been put into this universe by God." Note that the call of grace is constitutive of human nature in concrete human history.

[7] Ibid., 154-59.

[8] *Mystery of the Supernatural*, 208-9: "But is the desire for the beatific vision really, in its full nature and force, able to be known by reason alone? This I do not believe. . . . I want to remain firmly within theology. I am not trying to establish a philosophical thesis, but to study a dogmatic thesis and all that it implies. . . . I do not say that the knowledge gained by reason of a natural desire, outside any context of faith, 'proves strictly that we are called to the beatific vision,' and that therefore we can naturally attain 'the certainty that we have been created for that end'; on the contrary I say that the knowledge that is revealed to us of that calling, which makes us certain of that end, leads us to recognize within ourselves the existence and nature of that desire." Note the claim here that the final natural end of man is the beatific vision as such, and therefore it cannot be known except by way of divine revelation. As Lawrence Feingold has noted (*The Natural Desire to See God according to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* [Naples, Fla.: Sapientia Press, 2010], 307-9), de Lubac had changed his position on this point, arguing earlier in *Surnaturel* (467-69 n. D) that the supernatural end of the human person was in some sense philosophically demonstrable. I will return to the significance of this issue below.

condemns it for its inherent deficit or lack, since the natural inclination is seen to be ordered only to a naturally proportionate end and not to supernatural beatitude as such. One side argues, then, that the Thomistic tradition cannot account sufficiently for the *extrinsic* transcendence of grace to nature while the other side claims that it does not account sufficiently for the *intrinsic* directedness of nature to grace. What these two specifically opposed extremes share by way of a common genus of presupposition is a conviction that the classical Thomistic tradition fails to safeguard a balanced sense of grace-nature extrinsicism and nature-grace intrinsicism.

In this essay I would like to argue that both these approaches have failed to perceive the balance and integrity of the Thomistic grace-nature paradigm, and that its unique strength can be identified by way of the points of emphasis these other traditions seek themselves to safeguard, each in mutual opposition to the other. That is to say, Barthians attempt rightly to uphold the transcendence and gratuity of grace vis-à-vis all natural dispositions or inclinations in human persons, while de Lubacians rightly wish to underscore the deeply congruent rapport of nature's inner aspirations and the teleological promptings of grace, sealed within one concrete economic providence of God with respect to spiritual creatures. Both appeal to divergent extremes of Augustinian notions of grace: the sheer gratuity of salvation with regard to any human effort versus the theme of the restless heart that can only be healed and saved by grace. But both of these respective truths need to be corrected in correlation to each other and are capable of being harmonized precisely by recourse to a certain kind of *philosophical* reading of Aquinas regarding the final end of man.

In order to analyze and argue for this point of view, I will in this essay focus in particular upon Aquinas's interpretation of Aristotelian contemplation of God via natural causes as a form of "imperfect natural happiness." I will argue that by his treatment of the *philosophical* demonstrability of the imperfection of this form of happiness, Aquinas makes clear two corresponding points. First, the natural desire for the vision of God is a rational, philosophical desire and is distinct from the

hope for the beatific vision inspired by infused theological virtues, but *just for this reason*, the latter grace is not extrinsic to the former natural disposition and desire. Here Aristotelianism allows Aquinas to avoid a pure grace-nature extrinsicism of the kind de Lubacians can rightly criticize in Barthians. Second, yet for this very reason (i.e., because a teleological openness to God is inscribed in our nature), the pursuit of our natural end is not indicative of any natural inclination toward the formally supernatural as such. Grace remains entirely transcendent of our natural powers, innate inclinations, and proportionate ends. Here Aristotelianism allows Aquinas to avoid a pure grace-nature intrinsicism of the kind Barthians might rightly be concerned about in the writings of De Lubac. Thomism is not an eccentric form of Catholic theological teaching with respect to the paradigm of grace-nature orthodoxy. Rather, this form of Aristotelian-influenced Christianity is also deeply Augustinian: it stands at the core of the tradition and best articulates its diverse tensions in a congruent unity.

I. Aquinas on Imperfect Happiness and Aristotelian-Inspired Christianity

What precisely Aristotle understands to be the perfect happiness proper to human nature is among the most historically contested topics of ancient philosophy, subject to a subtle variety of interpretations.[9] Nevertheless, despite all the

[9] Denis J. M. Bradley offers a helpful introduction to the scope of interpretive problems of Aristotle on the subject of happiness in *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 369-423. See also Carlo Natali, *The Wisdom of Aristotle* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 2001), who offers a helpful survey of contemporary literature. A classic interpretation that remains pertinent may be found in René Antoine Gauthier and Jean Yves Jolif, *L'Éthique à Nicomaque: Introduction, traduction et commentaire* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain; Paris: Éditions Béatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1959), 1:26-88; 2:848-66, 873-99. For interpretations of Aristotle that stress the potential continuity between Aristotle's own affirmations and Aquinas's Aristotelianism, see Ralph McInerny, *Ethica Thomistica: The Moral Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1997), 12-34; Kevin Flannery, "Can an Aristotelian Consider Himself a Friend of God?" in *Virtue's End: God in the Moral Philosophy of Aristotle and*

interpretive ambiguities, Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (book 10) clearly identifies philosophical contemplation as the greatest source of happiness for the rational being that man is and interprets this happiness as the act of the highest human virtue, that of wisdom (book 6; see also *Metaphysics* 1 and 12).[10] It is for this virtue that the moral and political virtues exist and it is by it that human beings are turned toward the consideration of the highest truth, namely, that pertaining to the perennial reality of God and the separate substances. Consequently, happiness, for Aristotle, consists not only in an activity that we should desire for its own sake (the act of knowledge that comes by way of contemplation) but in an activity tending toward that which is most true and sovereignly good: the goodness of God himself. Happiness therefore has both a subjective element in the person who is happy and an objective element stemming from the beatifying reality that the person loves. That is to say, it is something within us that characterizes the immanent operation of reason, but it is

Aquinas, ed. Fulvio Di Blasi, Joshua P. Hochschild, and Jeffery Langan (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 2008), 1-12.

[10] *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7.1177a11-1178a8. "If happiness is activity in accordance with excellence [virtue], it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest excellence; and this will be that of the best thing in us. Whether it be intellect or something else that is this element which is thought to be our natural ruler and guide and to take thought of things noble and divine, whether it be itself also divine or only the most divine element in us, the activity of this in accordance with its proper excellence will be complete happiness. This activity is contemplative" (1177a11-18). Note the allusion to the contemplation of the divine as the highest good of man. Aristotle interprets such speculative wisdom as the highest virtue in *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.7.1141a9-1141b22. Similarly, in *Metaphysics* 1.1-2 wisdom is identified with the speculative knowledge of the highest causes and principles, namely, God and the separate substances. Aristotle returns to this viewpoint at the end of his inquiries, in *Metaphysics* 12.7 and 9, where he treats of the life of God as pure actuality and subsistent contemplation. The intellectual life of God is thus analogous to but also different from the act of human speculative understanding. See, for instance *Metaphysics* 12.7.1072b24-30: "If, then, God is always in that good state in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder; and if in a better this compels it yet more. And God *is* in a better state. And life also belongs to God; for the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality; and God's essential actuality is life most good and eternal. We say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this *is* God." Translations of Aristotle are taken from *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

necessarily directed to something that transcends us which is the most noble ontological reality itself.[11]

We can note at least three distinct goals that Aquinas has in mind when he comments upon Aristotle on this subject. First, he wishes to acknowledge the delineation of Aristotle's own arguments as they are inherent to the logical progression of the Stagirite's reasoning, beginning from his own first principles. This form of analysis is most expressly evidenced in Aquinas's commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but it is also adopted for his own argumentative use in many other settings, where Aristotelian arguments are employed with the presupposition that they have an integrity and lucidity of their own that has an enduring import.[12]

Second, Aquinas is concerned to show by way of his own reformulation of these arguments the truth of what Aristotle teaches, that the human being is naturally inclined to seek a given form of perfection and end that is proper to his rational nature and that this end is in some sense indicative of the kind of nature that the human being possesses, a human nature capable of happiness through the contemplation of God.[13] Certainly Aquinas follows Aristotle in arguing that there is a distinctly natural, philosophical wisdom proper to man that is

[11] I follow on these points the interpretations of Sir David Ross (*Aristotle* [London: Meuthen; New York: Barnes & Nobles, 1966], 232-34), which are seemingly Christianizing but also eminently defensible. See more recently, Aryeh Kosman, "Metaphysics *Λ*, 9: Divine Thought," in *Aristotle's* Metaphysics *Lambda*, 307-26, ed. Michael Frede and David Charles (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), especially 308-12.

[12] For Aquinas's analysis of Aristotle's notions of happiness and contemplation, see most notably I *Nic. Ethic.*, lect. 9-18 (Marietti ed., 103-223); X *Nic. Ethic.*, lect. 9-12 (Marietti ed., 2065-125). "[T]he highest of human activities is contemplation of truth; and this is evident from the two reasons by which we judge the excellence of activity. First, on the part of the faculty that is the principle of the activity. This activity is obviously the highest, as the intellect is the best element in us. Second, on the part of the object determining the species of the activity. Here too this activity is the highest because, among the objects that can be known, the suprasensible—especially the divine—are the highest. And so it is in the contemplation of these objects that the perfect happiness of man consists" (X *Nic. Ethic.*, lect. 10 [Marietti ed., 2087]; trans. C. I. Litzinger, O.P. [Chicago: Henry Regnery Press, 1964]). Aquinas has recourse to the arguments found in these and other texts of Aristotle in the *Summa contra Gentiles* and the *Summa Theologiae*, a point I will return to below.

[13] The idea is underscored especially clearly in *ScG* III, c. 37. See also *STh* I-II, q. 3, aa. 3-4; II-II, q. 180, a. 4.

the highest accomplishment of his human nature, whereby he can attain a unique form of happiness or beatitude that is superior to that achieved by way of the moral virtues, but which presupposes the latter as its base and foundation of support.[14] Philosophical wisdom and the happiness that accompanies it are not illusory and do reveal to us something profound about the inner character or essence of what it is to be human, something far from trivial and which holds true not only for non-Christians who lack explicit revelation of God, but for Christians as well who, though children of God, also remain by nature rational human beings.[15] In fact, one could rightly argue that, due to the grace they receive, Christians are more likely to uncover philosophically this natural potency for God that Aristotle himself rightly but only imperfectly identified.[16]

God, however, in this scenario is not understood in a strictly Aristotelian fashion but also according to the tradition of classical patristic and medieval Christian monotheism. Aquinas imports much of what Aristotle demonstrates metaphysically regarding God, while also expanding and altering the arguments in light of his own distinctive metaphysics of creation and creative analogical reflection on the names or attributes of God.[17] Furthermore, it is certainly the case that the separate substances are not understood in an identical way in the two authors, as Aquinas reinterprets the doctrine of the contemplation of the living prime movers in light of the Christian doctrine of the angels, who are now understood in light of the metaphysics of the real distinction between *esse* and essence, the metaphysical composition that is the congenital sign of their

[14] See *STh* I-II, q. 3, a. 5, which in turn references arguments from *Nic. Ethic.* 10.7 and 8.

[15] *STh* I-II, q. 3, a. 6. Aquinas analogously also speaks about the natural contemplation of God in angels in *STh* I, q. 56, a. 3.

[16] Consider in this regard the suggestive texts of *ScG* I, cc. 4-5; *STh* I, q. 1, a. 1; and *In Ioan*. 17, lect. 2 (Marietti ed., 2195); lect. 6 (Marietti ed., 2265).

[17] See the helpful, subtle analyses of the Christian reinterpretation of Aristotle in Aquinas's metaphysics by Aimé Forest, *La structure métaphysique du concret* (Paris: Vrin, 1931), esp. 133-66; and by Jan A. Aertsen, *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas' Way of Thought* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1987).

creation from nothing.[18] Philosophical wisdom as a natural virtue exists for Aquinas, then, assuredly in continuity with that of Aristotle but reformulated within a Christian epoch and interior to a development of philosophy that is harmonious with Christian revelation.

Third, then, Aquinas reinterprets Aristotle's notion of the natural human happiness that is attained by way of philosophical contemplation of God. He does so in light of his Christian and Augustinian understanding of the grace of the beatific vision of God as the ultimate final end of man, a final end that transcends the limited happiness that human nature can procure for itself.[19] He therefore argues, on the one hand, that the happiness procured by natural contemplation of God is something real, and that it is proper to man.[20] On the other hand, however, he argues that as genuine as this form of happiness is, it is nonetheless constitutionally imperfect and open from within to a yet greater or more perfect completion, by way of the vision of God.[21] The reason for this is that the soul of man is naturally animated by a desire for a yet more

[18] The point is made forcefully in *STh* I, q. 3, a. 4; and I, q. 50, a. 2, ad 3. See the remarks on Aquinas's angelology in relation to Aristotle's theories of separate substances in Leo Elders, "St. Thomas Aquinas' Commentary on the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle," in *Autour de St. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: FAC Éditions, 1987), 134-38.

[19] *STh* I-II, q. 3, a. 2, ad 4; I-II, q. 3, a. 8.

[20] *STh* I-II, q. 3, a. 6, corp. and ad 1.

[21] *STh* I-II, q. 3, a. 5: "[T]he last and perfect happiness, which we await in the life to come, consists entirely in contemplation. But imperfect happiness, such as can be had here, consists first and principally in contemplation, but secondarily in an operation of the practical intellect directing human actions and passions, as stated in *Nicomachean Ethics* X, 7, 8." I-II, q. 3, a. 6: "[M]an's happiness is two-fold, one perfect, the other imperfect. And by perfect happiness we are to understand that which attains to the true notion of happiness; and by imperfect happiness that which does not attain thereto, but partakes of some particular likeness of happiness. . . . Accordingly perfect happiness cannot consist essentially in the consideration of speculative sciences . . . the entire consideration of the speculative sciences cannot extend farther than knowledge of sensibles can lead. Now man's final happiness, which is his final perfection, cannot consist in the knowledge of sensibles. . . . Consequently it follows that man's happiness cannot consist in the consideration of speculative sciences. However, just as in sensible forms there is a participation of the higher substances, so the consideration of speculative sciences is a certain participation of true and perfect happiness." Translations of the *Summa Theologiae* are taken from *Summa Theologica*, trans. English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1920; repr. 1947).

perfect knowledge of God, a desire even, if possible, to see the essence of God immediately.[22]

Here indeed is where the complexity enters in, in the form of a series of questions which have received varying answers over the years. Does the natural desire for the vision of the essence of God as Aquinas understands it necessarily imply in the rational soul of man an innate inclination toward or orientation to the supernatural grace of the beatific vision? Or does it correspond instead to a natural desire for unmediated knowledge of the first truth that is proper to man's rational faculties and therefore is it something *philosophically* discernible in prescinding from the consideration of the work of grace as such? Correspondingly, in arguing for the relative perfection of natural contemplative happiness and its relative imperfection in light of the desire to see God, does Aquinas seek to analyze contemplative happiness by means of philosophical arguments as such, or is his analysis of imperfect natural happiness formally constituted by theological reflection?

Answers to these questions depend in part upon how one reads de Lubac's claims. There are good reasons to see in his arguments the affirmation of an innate natural inclination toward the grace of supernatural beatitude as such.[23] If this is the case then Aquinas's arguments regarding the final end of man and the imperfection of natural happiness pertain to the consideration of a theological mystery as such, one understood or known of only because of divine revelation, and which must remain transcendent of the natural powers of human reason.

[22] *STh* I-II, q. 3, a. 8: "If the human intellect, knowing the essence of some created effect, knows no more of God than *that He is*, the perfection of that intellect does not yet reach simply the First Cause, but there remains in it the natural desire to seek the cause. Wherefore it is not yet perfectly happy. Consequently, for perfect happiness the intellect needs to reach the very essence of the First Cause. And thus it will have its perfection through union with God as with that object, in which alone man's happiness consists."

[23] De Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, 55: "My finality, which is expressed by this desire, is inscribed upon my very being as it has been put into this universe by God. . . . In other words, the real problem, if problem it is, involves the being whose finality is 'already,' if one can say so, wholly supernatural—for such is the case with us." Ibid., 76: "Upon this being he has given me, God has imprinted a supernatural finality; he has made to be heard within my nature a call to see him."

Thus, like Scotus, Toletus and Soto before him, de Lubac understands there to be an innate natural inclination for the beatific vision inscribed in man, but one he can only know about by grace (thus understanding the teleological structure of his own nature fully only in light of divine revelation).[24] The nature of the human being is in this respect an unintelligible paradox decrypted only by revelation in Christ.[25] Denis Bradley, in keeping with de Lubac's perspective, therefore argues that the critique Aquinas makes of Aristotelian natural happiness as "imperfect" is itself a merely dialectical argument regarding the limits of any non-Christian, naturalistic conception of human ends.[26] What emerges from this treatment of the question is a kind of Blondelian reading of Aquinas: philosophy operates apologetically under the influence of theology, to show itself open from within to the specific aims of a higher science, that

[24] For a helpful study of the history of this position, see Lawrence Feingold, *Natural Desire to See God according to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters*, especially chaps. 4, 10, and 14. De Lubac insists on the alignment of his views with the historical positions of Scotus, Soto, and Toletus, as his numerous citations of their positions in both *Surnaturel* and *The Mystery of the Supernatural* make clear.

[25] De Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, 167: "We are creatures, and have been given the promise that we shall see God. The desire to see him is in us, it constitutes us, and yet it comes to us as a completely free gift. Such paradoxes should not surprise us, for they arise in every mystery; they are the hallmark of a truth that is beyond our depth." De Lubac is making a twofold claim here: (1) that we cannot be fulfilled in the innate tendencies of our natural inclinations except by a supernatural good and (2) that we cannot know this about ourselves except through faith in the supernatural revelation of Christianity. It follows from this that our deepest *natural* constitution and inclination is not discernible or ultimately intelligible except in light of faith and divine revelation. Were there natural arguments for this uniquely supernatural end, there would be the possibility of a purely rational demonstration of a revealed mystery, an idea that, as we have noted above, de Lubac unambiguously disavows in his later work.

[26] Bradley, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good*, 395-404; 424-81. The radicality of Bradley's views fully emerges at the end of the book (ibid., 514-34). "Is Aquinas's argument for the endlessness [i.e., purposelessness] of human nature philosophically cogent? The Thomistic argument is 'dialectical': it begins with an Aristotelian tenet about nature, that a nature must be able to attain its proper end and satisfaction, but it demonstrates that, in fact, human nature cannot reach its own ultimate perfection or completion in any naturally attainable end. The conclusion of the Thomistic argument is not that man actually has a supernatural end but that human nature has no ultimately satisfying natural end and that unless a supernatural end (the vision of God) is possible and can be achieved men are creatures made 'in vain.' Human nature, so Aquinas reasons, has no satisfying end and, in that sense, no ultimate natural end; it is, in other words, naturally 'endless'" (ibid., 520).

of divine revelation.[27] The *méthode d'immanence* of Blondel was employed to demonstrate that certain philosophical questions, when pursued loyally, can only be answered theologically, and even reveal the hidden presence of grace evoking in philosophical reason an implicit search for the supernatural. At that point, as both Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange and John Milbank have rightly noted (with differing value judgments), the distinction of the natural and the supernatural begins to break down because there is no more specifically *natural* ultimate term of the human intellect.[28] The natural question of human

[27] The argument is particularly pronounced in Blondel's thesis, from 1893. See Maurice Blondel, *Action (1893): Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*, trans. O. Blanchette (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univeristy of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 357: "Absolutely impossible and absolutely necessary for man, that is properly the notion of the supernatural. Man's action goes beyond man; and all the effort of his reason is to see that he cannot, that he must not restrict himself to it [i.e., natural reason]. A deeply felt expectation of an unknown messiah; a baptism of desire, which human science lacks the power to evoke, because this need is itself a gift. Science can show its necessity; it cannot give it birth. Indeed, if we have to found a real society and cooperate with God, how could we presume to succeed in doing so without recognizing that God remains the sovereign master of his gift and of his operation? A necessary admission, but one that ceases to be efficacious, if we do not call on the unknown mediator or if we close ourselves off from the revealed savior." One should note that this conclusion is offered as the term of a *philosophical* argument.

[28] See John Milbank, "*The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005); Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *De Revelatione* (Paris: J. Gabalda; Rome: F. Ferrari, 1921), 1:125-32. Interestingly, twenty-five years before *Surnaturel* was published, Garrigou-Lagrange restates the position of Blondel in terms that closely mirror later positions of de Lubac: "The new Apologists answer: our aspiration toward the supernatural order is not found in our nature as such, abstractly considered, but in man as he is established de facto and in the concrete with an orientation toward a supernatural end. For man in this world is not in a merely natural state but—even if he does not possess habitual grace or supernatural faith—he is preceded by and stirred up by actual grace that he might turn toward God the author of salvation. Nor is it necessary that the aspiration toward Christianity be perceived in one's consciousness as properly supernatural in reference to his end. It suffices that we be conscious of our incapacity to fulfill the higher desires of the soul, and that we recognize that the fulfillment of these aspirations is found in Christianity. We can experience this restlessness according to the statement of St. Augustine, 'our hearts are restless until they rest in thee'" ("Respondent novi Apologetae: aspiratio nostra ad ordinem supernaturalem non invenitur in nostra natura secundum se et abstracte considerata, sed in homine qualis de facto et in concreto conditus est cum ordinatione ad finem supernaturalem. Nunc enim homo non est in statu mere naturali, sed, etiam si non habeat gratiam habitualem nec fidem supernaturalem, praevenitur et excitatur a gratia actuali ut sese convertat ad Deum auctorem salutis. Nec necesse est aspirationem ad Christianismum conscientia percipi ut proprie supernaturalis est suo fine, sufficit ut simus conscii *incapacitatis* nostrae ad

happiness is philosophically unresolvable and terminates only when that same question attains to specifically theological forms of information. It is in becoming theology, we might say, that philosophical ethics attains some kind of resolution from its inherent restlessness and constitutional irresolution.

But is this true? One way of treating the question is to return to Aquinas's treatments of natural contemplation of God as a form of imperfect happiness in the *Summa contra Gentiles*. By making a few precise observations we can offer an alternative and more classical interpretation of the question.

II. A Philosophical Treatment of Imperfect and Perfect Happiness

In book III, chapter 24 of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, Aquinas begins what is undoubtedly his most protracted treatment of human beatitude and the final end of human existence, "That to understand God is the final end of every intellectual substance."[29] This chapter prepares the reader for Aquinas's treatment of happiness as he goes on in chapters 26-36 to identify what ultimate human happiness does not consist in (pleasures of the flesh, honor, glory, riches, power, the goods of the body, the moral and artistic virtues, even the virtue of prudence). All of this is antecedent to his treatment of contemplation as happiness in chapter 37, where he argues that "the ultimate felicity of man consists in the contemplation of God." He then in chapters 38-63 conducts an extensive treatment of what, ultimately, the most perfect contemplation of God consists in, approximately half of which deals with the grace of the beatific vision as the ultimate source of human

superiores tendentias animae implendas, et ut agnoscamus satisfactionem harum aspirationum in Christianismo inveniri. Possumus nostram inquietudinem experiri secundum illud S. Augustini: 'Irrequietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te'" [Garrigou-Lagrange, *De Revelatione*, 1:130]). This resembles the affirmation of de Lubac that human nature only ever exists in a historical economy of grace in such a way that the human being is constituted in his or her "concrete" historical nature as ordered toward the supernatural end of grace. See de Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, 54-56, 76.

[29] English translations of *ScG* III are taken from *Summa contra Gentiles*, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).

happiness (chaps. 51-63). For our purposes, it is essential to focus not only on chapter 37, but also chapters 39 ("That human felicity does not consist in the knowledge of God gained through demonstration") and 48 ("That man's ultimate felicity does not come in this life"), for here we see Aquinas's "Aristotelianism" in its most overt form, employed at the service of his Christian Augustinian conception of the final end of man.

In chapter 37 Aquinas argues that the ultimate felicity of man consists in the contemplation of God. Here indeed he employs a procedure of argument that is taken from Aristotle. On the one hand, the inferior goods (wealth, pleasure, honor, and even moral virtue and prudence) cannot account of themselves for the happiness of man. That which does is something proper to the human person as such: the contemplation of the truth. "Indeed, this is the only operation of man which is proper to him, and in this he shares nothing in common with the other animals" (para. 2). Therefore it is that to which all other goods and acts of virtue are ultimately oriented. Why is this? Speculative knowledge alone can make use of the other inferior, "relative" ends that are proper to our nature while directing them to their ultimate term (paras. 3 and 7). It has a directive and assimilative capacity that alone can subordinate *all that is in* the human person to that which is *most specific to* the human person.[30]

Second, as Aristotle also argues, this is a form of life that allows man to resemble in the highest part of himself that which is most noble in the order of being as such: God and the separate substances (paras. 4 and 5).[31] Likewise, because this is the most interior of activities, it is that which is least subject to

[30] *ScG* III, c. 37, para. 7: "In fact, all other human operations seem to be ordered to this one, as to an end. For, there is needed for the perfection of contemplation a soundness of body, to which all the products of art that are necessary for life are directed. Also required are freedom from the disturbances of the passions—this achieved through the moral virtues and prudence—and freedom from external disorders, to which the whole program of government in civil life is directed. And so, if they are rightly considered, all human functions may be seen to subserve the contemplation of truth." The argument resembles the reasoning of Aristotle in *Nic. Ethic.* 10.7.1177b1-26.

[31] See the similar reasoning of *Nic. Ethic.* 10.7.1177b27-1178a8.

the whims of external fate and threat from loss of external goods (para. 6).[32] Lastly, the contemplation of the truth in question provides happiness due to the truth that is contemplated:

> it is not possible for man's ultimate felicity to consist in the contemplation which depends on the understanding of principles [i.e., the habit of understanding], for that is very imperfect. . . . nor does it lie in the area of the sciences which deal with lower things, because felicity should lie in the working of the intellect in relation to the noblest objects of understanding. So, the conclusion remains that man's ultimate felicity consists in the contemplation of wisdom, [and] only in the contemplation of God. (Ibid., paras. 8 and 9)[33]

Whether these arguments work or not depends in some sense upon the arguments that have preceded them: the idea that human happiness is a kind of activity,[34] that it is an operation of an intellectual substance,[35] that various forms of operations can be excluded as providing ultimate happiness,[36] and so forth. Furthermore, there are anthropological claims that have been argued for in book II of the *Summa contra Gentiles* that seemingly are presupposed: that there are in human persons spiritual faculties of intellect and free will that imply an immateriality of form and which are therefore incorruptible as spiritual faculties,[37] and that these are ordered toward the true and the good and capable of seeking the first truth and the absolute good.[38] The order in which the claims are made is controversial, as is the validity of some of the arguments made along the way. However, whatever we make of all these claims and their order, there can be little doubt that the arguments Aquinas is employing in this chapter are of Aristotelian provenance. Clearly, in fact, almost all of them are found in

[32] See the similar reasoning of *Nic. Ethic.* 10.8.1178a9-1178b7.
[33] Cf. *Nic. Ethic.* 10.7.1177a15; *Metaphys.* 12.7.1072b25-26.
[34] *ScG* III, c. 26.
[35] *ScG* III, c. 25.
[36] *ScG* III, cc. 27-36.
[37] *ScG* II, c. 79.
[38] See, for example, the theories of created intellect in Aquinas's reflections on what is common to men and angels in *ScG* II, c. 91.

virtually identical form in books I, VI, and X of the *Nicomachean Ethics* where Aristotle discusses the activity of happiness, the virtue of wisdom, and the final end of contemplation, respectively. What is more, the same arguments can be identified in Aquinas's own commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, precisely at these points.[39] In arguing that the natural final end of man is the happiness attained through the virtue of wisdom, that is to say, through the contemplation of God by way of natural knowledge of God, Aquinas is arguing *philosophically* as a medieval Aristotelian, or in light of what he takes to be the truth that stems from perennially valid Aristotelian philosophical principles.

This is all said with respect to the relative *perfection* of natural happiness. What about its relative *imperfection*? Aquinas will argue for the insufficiency of the happiness procured by natural knowledge for human beings in chapters 39 and 48 of book III. Here in particular, Aquinas's genuine creativity as a medieval *philosophical* developer of Aristotelian thought begins to shine through in acute ways. He self-consciously employs arguments or observations of Aristotle from the *Metaphysics* and the *Ethics* regarding the inherent instability and limitations of the felicity procured by natural knowledge of God in such a way as to move beyond the explicit arguments employed by Aristotle himself. In other words, Aquinas is seeking to analyze in Aristotelian terms the limits of the natural happiness of any created intellect so as to make room philosophically, so to speak, for the perfection of happiness that is granted by the beatific vision alone, which he will treat in chapters 51-63.[40]

[39] See I *Nic. Ethic.*, lect. 10 on happiness as an activity of man; VI *Nic. Ethic.*, lect. 5 and 6 on wisdom as speculative knowledge of divine things and the highest science; and X *Nic. Ethic.*, lect. 9-13 on contemplation as the highest form of happiness.

[40] The philosophical character of Aquinas's arguments on this topic is emphasized helpfully by Adriano Oliva in "La contemplation des philosophes selon Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 96 (2012): 585-662, esp. 631-41. Oliva's erudite and important essay demonstrates conclusively by a thorough analysis of numerous texts that Aquinas affirmed unambiguously the existence of a philosophical contemplation of God, which is naturally perfective of the human intellect. Furthermore, Oliva argues convincingly that the text of *ScG* III, c. 48 has a philosophical character, even if the argument is used eventually to demonstrate the fittingness of the philosopher's receptivity to supernatural revelation. The historical

In chapter 39, then, we find Aquinas arguing for the imperfection of human happiness procured from the knowledge of God attained "by way of demonstration" (i.e., through the philosophical virtue of wisdom). The seven arguments he enunciates here have all to do in some way with the inevitable potency for perfect knowledge in human reason that remains nonactualized or inoperative, even once philosophical demonstrative knowledge of God and his attributes has been attained. The first argument is based upon the very form of the knowledge of God attained through philosophical demonstrations. Following Aristotle, Aquinas argues that this knowledge employs a posteriori forms of demonstration: it begins from effects that we know directly in order to infer the necessary existence of a transcendent cause of those effects that we do not know directly.[41] But in this case we can say only *that* God is and *what* God is not, since he is not like the effects that depend upon him:

> [W]e reach a proper knowledge of a thing not only through affirmations but also through negations. . . . But there is a difference between these two modes of proper knowledge: through affirmations, when we have a proper

context is that of the dialogue between the theologians and the faculty of arts at the University of Paris, with Aquinas attempting to refute Averroist interpretations of Aristotle while trying to show that philosophical argument at its summit, by its own lights and principles, can detect reasons for being open to the mystery of divine revelation. *Sacra doctrina* is respectful, then, of the integral reflections of sound philosophy and can assimilate the latter without violence to the integrity of philosophy as a discipline. "The 'philosophical' doctrine elaborated by Aquinas presupposes that reason *by means of creatures* might aim toward the contemplation of God [in himself] and that it can attain even to the affirmation that such contemplation [of God *in se*] is possible, but above all this philosophical contemplation implies that the first cause should fittingly reveal itself and unite itself to the creature" (ibid., 639-40). Oliva's interpretation of the natural desire for God in Aquinas contrasts in various respects with the one offered in this essay. Oliva does avidly defend de Lubac's interpretation of Aquinas on this topic. Nevertheless, because he underscores strongly the *philosophical mode of demonstration* in Aquinas's argument, Oliva seems to me to differ significantly from de Lubac.

[41] This is the point Aquinas is famous for making later on in *STh* I, q. 2, aa. 1-2, regarding the "demonstrative arguments" for the existence of God, where he distinguishes his own approach from that of Anselm's Ontological Argument. Aquinas's demonstrations seek to move from created effects to their hidden cause (God), while Anselm argues that one can infer the very necessity of the existence of God from the conceptual definition of God (a view Aquinas rejects). See on this point, Rudi te Velde, *Aquinas on God* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2006), 37-48.

knowledge of a thing, we know *what* the thing is, and how it is separated from others; but through negations, when we have a proper knowledge of a thing, we know *that* it is distinct from other things, yet what it is remains unknown. Now this is the proper knowledge that we have of God through demonstrations. Of course, this is not sufficient for the ultimate felicity of man.[42]

Aquinas gives a list of names of God that are based primarily upon negative knowledge by comparison with creatures: He is "immutable, eternal, incorporeal, altogether simple, one," and so on.[43] Here Aquinas's Dionysian apophaticism is undergirded by his Aristotelian approach to the knowledge of the divine. Due to its indirect and mediated character, the knowledge we have of God in this life is primarily negative in character. But in this case, because this knowledge is so deeply imperfect and radically indirect, the happiness it procures, while real, is also fundamentally incomplete. Such knowledge leaves the potential of the intellect for beatifying knowledge of God only imperfectly actuated.

The other arguments employed in chapter 39 are congruent with the former one: the knowledge of God attained by means of demonstration is difficult and most men are unable to attain to it in the course of their lives (para. 2). The history of thought shows that different philosophers discover different truths about the divine. Thus any one thinker's understanding should be seen to remain in potency to a further perfection (para. 3).[44] Such knowledge can co-exist with admixture of errors and with other forms of unhappiness and is consequently imperfect (para. 4). This form of knowledge, because of its difficulty, is tinged with uncertainties of various sorts indicative of an imperfect form of knowledge (para. 5). It is a form of knowledge that leaves us still hoping (restlessly) for yet greater knowledge and con-

[42] *ScG* III, c. 39, para. 1.

[43] Ibid.

[44] *ScG* III, c. 39, para. 3: "But this sort of knowledge of God, acquired by way of demonstration, still remains in potency to something further to be learned about God, or to the same knowledge possessed in a higher way, for later men have endeavored to add something pertinent to divine knowledge to the things which they found in the heritage of their predecessors. Therefore, such knowledge is not identical with ultimate felicity."

sequently is imperfect (para. 6). Knowledge through habitual consideration of various objects, such as is inevitable to human nature in this life, is necessarily of such a kind as to leave a spiritual well of nonactualized potency in remainder, so long as we are considering one object alone and not another that we could be considering alternatively. Therefore the forms of knowledge we enjoy in this life by means of abstraction and habitual rational reflection, however noble, simply cannot actualize all the potency of the intellect as such (para. 7).[45]

In chapter 48 Aquinas argues that man's ultimate felicity does not come about in this life. Here, again, he employs Aristotelian arguments in view of trans-Aristotelian ends. The chapter contains several arguments, but a number of them in particular appeal directly to observations from Aristotle himself in order to argue that the imperfect happiness of this life cannot be considered the most ultimate resting place of the natural desire for the contemplation of God. The first of these (in para. 3) appeals to book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1.10.1100b5). Aristotle notes that an initially evident characteristic of happiness would seem to be its stability and rest, and the fact that it is impervious to potential turns of bad fortune. But as Aquinas notes, no contemplative happiness procured by this life, however perfect, is entirely impervious to the sadness stemming from bad fortune. Second (in para. 4), Aquinas appeals to book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (10.7.1177a11), where Aristotle claims that happiness consists of perfect operation in accord with the highest virtue. But as Aquinas notes, the virtue of speculative wisdom is attained only at the term of a long ascent, with great difficulty, and lasts only for the short time of one's older age in life. Therefore it is not a perfect, that is, enduring

[45] *ScG* III, c. 39, para. 7: "Now, our intellect is in potency to all intelligible objects, such as was explained in Book II (c. 47). But two intelligible objects can exist simultaneously in the possible intellect, by way of the first act which is science, though perhaps not by way of the second act which is consideration. It is evident from this that the entire potency of the possible intellect can be reduced to act at one time [in principle]. So, this is required for its ultimate end which is felicity. But the aforesaid knowledge of God which can be acquired through demonstration does not do this, since, even when we possess it, we still remain ignorant of many things. Therefore, such knowledge of God is not sufficient for ultimate felicity."

and stable, form of happiness. Third, Aristotle observes in book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (2.6.1106b24) that even in the virtuous man, there is at times the passionate impulse that causes him to overstep the mean of virtue. In noting this (para. 5), Aquinas is making an implicit reference to the truth of the fallen character of human existence and to the inevitability of occasional grave sin even in the virtuous pagan, if that person be without the implicit recourse to the help of grace.[46] But serious sin, in however noble a soul, is necessarily a cause of sadness and so Aristotle himself philosophically alludes to the precariousness of happiness in every human being in this world, including those who strive to be virtuous.

Fourth, Aquinas offers an argument (in para. 9), that he articulates elsewhere, and that he presumes to be taken directly from book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1.10.1101a14-20). Aristotle there argues that human beings only attain to happiness by way of internal virtues, but in dependence upon certain external goods that support a life of virtue. Even if we live in amenable circumstances at a particular time, this stability is relative and depends upon precarious external circumstances. As the future unfolds, there is the possibility of bad fortune undermining our human happiness. So even in the midst of the speculative contemplation of the highest realities and our practice of ennobling moral virtues, an inherent fragility remains endemic to the human situation. Consequently, the highest contemplative happiness that nature affords is attained by human persons only imperfectly, and in a less perfect way than in the higher intelligences, namely, God and the separate substances. According to Aquinas, this is why Aristotle says that human persons can attain some form of happiness, but only *in their manner as men*: imperfect in comparison to the immaterial realities they seek to imitate.[47]

[46] See in particular *STh* I-II, q. 109, a. 8: "Whether man without grace can avoid sin?" On the notion of pagan virtue in Aquinas, see the exchange between Brian J. Shanley, "Aquinas on Pagan Virtue," *The Thomist* 63 (1999): 553-77; and Thomas M. Osborne, Jr., "The Augustinianism of Thomas Aquinas's Moral Theory," *The Thomist* 67 (2003): 279-305.

[47] *Nic. Ethic.* 1.10.1101a14-20: "Why then should we not say that he is happy who is active in conformity with complete excellence and is sufficiently equipped with

Interestingly Aquinas speaks both here (in para. 9) and in the *Summa Theologiae* (I-II, q. 3, a. 6) of the natural virtue of wisdom as an imperfect "participation" in the beatitude of heaven. Participation language is generally eschewed by Aristotle because he associates this language with that of the forms of Plato.[48] However, Aquinas is seeing rightly that Aristotle himself saw *philosophically* that there must exist a more perfect form of contemplative happiness in the higher life of God and the separate substances, one which we seek to imitate and that we gravitate toward in natural contemplation of God.[49]

We can complete these observations by noting briefly one more Aristotelian form of argumentation, employed by Aquinas in chapter 50, where he argues "that the natural desire of separate substances does not come to rest in the natural knowledge which they have of God." Here (in para. 3 and 4), he employs arguments for the imperfection of natural knowledge in any creaturely intellect. These arguments are drawn from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (1.2.982b12) and his *Posterior Analytics* (2.1.89b22). The first argument given here is based on the observation from the text in the *Metaphysics* that all men desire by nature to know, and that they seek knowledge of causes. In other words, the work of creaturely intellectual life is to explore causes, passing from effects to the origination of those effects.

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external goods, not for some chance period but throughout a complete life? . . . Certainly the future is obscure to us, [and yet] happiness, we claim, is an end and something in every way final. If so, we shall call blessed those among living men in whom these conditions are, and are to be, fulfilled—but blessed *men*." *ScG* III, c. 48, para. 9: "For, in regard to the full understanding of truth, men can attain it only through enquiry, and they are utterly deficient in regard to objects which are most intelligible in their nature. . . . And so, felicity in its perfect character cannot be present in men, but they may participate somewhat in it, even in this life. . . . Hence [Aristotle] in *Nic. Ethics* I, where he asks whether misfortunes take away happiness, having shown that felicity consists in the works of virtue which seem to be most enduring in this life . . . concludes that those men for whom such perfection in this life is possible are happy as *men*, as if they had not attained felicity absolutely, but merely in human fashion."

[48] See Aristotle's criticisms of the Platonic theory of forms in *Nic. Ethic.* 1.6; *Metaphys.* 12.3-5.

[49] See on this point Oliva, "La contemplation des philosophes selon Thomas d'Aquin," 638-39.

> Therefore, the desire to know, which is naturally implanted in all intellectual substances, does not rest until, after they have come to know the substances of the effects, they also know the substance of the cause. The fact then, that separate substances know that God is the cause of all things whose substances they see, does not mean that natural desire comes to rest in them, unless they also see the substance of God Himself. (Para. 3)

The second argument recasts this observation in terms of the text from the *Posterior Analytics*. Here Aristotle pairs up the four basic scientific questions that characterize human inquiry. Asking "whether something is the case" (factually) is paired by Aristotle with the question "why it exists." Likewise the question "if something in particular exists" is related to asking "what that something is." If something is the case, we ask why it is so. If something exists, we ask what it is. Aquinas goes on to comment:

> Now, we observe that those who see *that something is so* naturally desire to know *why*. So, too, those acquainted with the fact *that something exists* naturally desire to know *what this thing is*, and this is to understand its substance. Therefore, the natural desire to know does not rest in that knowledge of God whereby we know merely *that He is*. (Para. 4)

Rather, our intellect aspires naturally by virtue of the fact that it knows that God exists, to know what he is—that is to say, to see him as he is in himself.

In both these arguments from chapter 50, the Augustinian theme of the inherent restlessness of the natural desire of the created intellect is given an Aristotelian philosophical articulation.[50] The inherent (we might say intrinsic) inclination of the intellect for the immediate knowledge of God is rooted in the natural desire to know the cause, not only through the mediation of the effects of the cause, but also in itself. This inclination is manifested through an express desire of human nature, one that springs naturally from the knowledge of God

[50] The theme of the restless heart in Augustine can be interpreted in two ways: in relation to the dynamic natural tendency of reason to seek the knowledge of the first cause, and in terms of the operations of the human soul under the effects of infused grace. Here I am considering only the first idea, in accord with Aquinas's clearly philosophical manner of argumentation in *ScG* III.

that is proper to angelic and human natures. The imperfect character of our natural knowledge of God, then, is not only a certain kind of beatitude that truly does perfect human nature. It is also precisely because of its relative perfection, and therefore corresponding imperfection as an end, the necessary occasion for the rendering explicit of a desire for a yet higher perfection of knowledge. This higher end is indeed one that nature cannot procure for itself.[51] Therefore, the natural desire for the immediate knowledge of God is inscribed in us by nature insofar as we are innately ordered toward the search for the truth about causes and are capable of indirect, mediated knowledge of the first cause. For this same reason we are capable of an inefficacious desire for a knowledge of God that is immediate, one that surpasses our human powers and that our native capacities cannot procure. That is to say, we are naturally capable of the desire to see God.

III. A Theological Treatment of Imperfect and Perfect Happiness

Despite the suspicions one might have to the contrary, there can be little question that the form of argumentation employed by Aquinas in the above-mentioned chapters of book III of the *Summa contra Gentiles* is in fact philosophical and rational in nature and not one that is derived directly or immediately from revealed first principles as such, nor from Christian theology. Apart from the internal logic of the arguments themselves (which are based upon Aristotelian principles), this is evident from the context in which they are employed. It is true that the arguments presume the awareness of the givens of revealed faith. However, Aquinas frames such arguments, not to clarify views of dogmatic theology per se, but to show from principles of Aristotelian natural reason that various rational (properly philosophical) objections to the Christian revelation of the

[51] Aquinas offers quite clear arguments to this effect in *ScG* III, c. 52: "That no created substance can, by its own natural power, attain the vision of God in his essence."

beatific vision are themselves philosophically untenable.[52] These objections sprang from the Latin Averroism of Aquinas's time, a form of rationalist Aristotelianism that sought to oppose the natural final end of man to his purported Christian end, to oppose Aristotelian ethics and Augustinian teleology. So it is often thought that Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia, in particular, argued that human happiness consists of a natural union of the human philosopher with the agent intellect of the separate substances and God: effectively a kind of natural philosophical contemplation of the separate substances. This Averroist stance was eventually criticized in the Parisian condemnations of Aristotelian rationalism in 1277.[53] It is clear that Aquinas is arguing against just such a position in book III of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, chapters 41-45.[54]

[52] Writing on this section of *ScG* III, Oliva remarks: "It is important to note that the arguments which ground the reasoning of Thomas are borrowed explicitly from the Philosopher, as if to underscore that he conceives of his reasoning as a coherent extension of the Aristotelian doctrine" ("La contemplation des philosophes selon Thomas d'Aquin," 636).

[53] See Dag Nikolaus Hasse, "Influence of Arabic and Islamic Philosophy on the Latin West," in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/arabic-islamic-influence/): "In 1277, several philosophical theses concerning human happiness and the good life were condemned: that happiness is to be had in this life and not in another (art. 176), that there is no better state (of life) than studying philosophy (art. 40). These articles are apparently directed at masters of arts at the university of Paris, among them Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia. As we know from fragments of Siger's treatise *On Happiness* (*De felicitate)*, he embraces Averroes' thesis that all intellects are made blessed through the conjunction with the active intellect. In Siger's interpretation, human beings in such a state think God by an intellection which is God himself. There are many indications that Siger was convinced that the knowledge of the separate substances and thus the attaining of human happiness is possible in this life. Boethius of Dacia is also convinced that human happiness can be reached in this life, which is a happiness proportioned to human capacities, whereas the highest kind of happiness as such is reserved to the afterlife (in his treatise *De summo bono*). Boethius appears to be inspired by Arabic theories of intellectual ascension, but does not endorse a theory of conjunction, as does Siger. His conviction that the philosopher's life is the only true life echoes the very self-confident and elitist stance taken by the major Arabic philosophers."

[54] On Latin Averroism at the time of Aquinas, see Fernand Van Steenberghen, *Introduction à l'étude de la philosophie medievale* (Louvain: Publication Universitaires; Paris: Beatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1974), 531-54. See more recently Jörn Müller, "*Duplex beatitude*: Aristotle's Legacy and Aquinas' Conception of Human Happiness," in *Aquinas and the Nicomachean Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 52-71. Müller shows how Aquinas wishes to interpret Aristotle to show philosophically that any happiness afforded by indirect knowledge of God, while real, is imperfect, and therefore inherently open to the perfect happiness made possible by the supernatural

How does Aquinas treat this question, meanwhile, in an unambiguously theological context? In other words, does he employ the Aristotelian *philosophical* arguments we have been studying above within a specifically doctrinal *theological* context, and if so, why? Toward this end, we should consider briefly two related texts in the *Summa Theologiae*. The first of these is question 12, article 1 of the *Prima pars*, where Aquinas considers philosophical objections to the possibility of the vision of God in a specifically theological context. The second is question 3, article 6 of the *Prima secundae*, where Aquinas considers the imperfect character of natural contemplative happiness in comparison with the beatific vision that is promised in faith.

The first text (*STh* I, q. 12, a. 1) asks, "Whether any created intellect can see the essence of God." The objections that Aquinas notes stem in large part from reasonable claims regarding the transcendence of God with respect to the human intellect. God is infinite (obj. 2), surpasses the intelligibility of all created existents (obj. 3), and thus surpasses the proportionate range of human understanding that is native to the creaturely intellect of man (obj. 4). The arguments are not unreasonable. Aquinas responds with two arguments, the first of which is theological (based upon the premises of faith in divine revelation) and the second of which is philosophical. The first is based upon the *auctoritas* of the *sed contra* in the article: "We shall see him as He is" (1 John 2:2). Revelation teaches us that, by the grace of Christ's paschal mystery, we are called to the vision of God. Commenting on this, Aquinas explains that the pure actuality of God is what is most intelligible in itself, even if this superabundant intelligibility naturally transcends the native power of understanding of every created intellect. Yet the human intellect is created to seek to understand what is most intelligible in itself and to acquire beatitude or happiness through the stable possession of knowledge of this object.

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grace of vision. He does so not only in contrast to Averroist positions, but also in part in contrast to the reading of the *Nicomachean Ethics* offered by Albert the Great, who did not seek to identify in Aristotle a rational foundation for the argument that man has a natural desire to see the essence of God.

Consequently, if the human intellect is ordered toward happiness by way of the knowledge of God (which revelation says it is), then this same intellect would lack some inherent actuation and perfection of happiness were it not to come to see God face to face. Therefore, theologically, it is fitting to understand the beatific vision as the supernatural end of man.

Aquinas goes on in this same article, however, to say that the objections of the article are also contrary to reason, and here he repeats an argument similar to that which we saw in the *Summa contra Gentiles* (*ScG* III, c. 50, paras. 3 and 4), based upon the *Metaphysics* (1.2) and the *Posterior Analytics* (2.1):

> For there resides in every man a natural desire to know the cause of any effect which he sees; and thence arises wonder in men. But if the intellect of the rational creature could not reach so far as to the first cause of things, the natural desire would remain void.

What is Aquinas saying here? Clearly he is referring to philosophical premises, as he says himself, and yet at the same time he is arguing in view of a theological revealed truth, represented by the citation of the First Letter of John in the *sed contra*. Is he attempting to prove by natural reason a doctrine of faith—one that we are given to know uniquely by revelation? Does he really think that philosophical reason can demonstrate the existence of a revealed mystery? This seems unlikely, since he is quite clear about the fact that the mystery of the Trinity cannot be known by any effort of unaided natural reason, and since the vision of the Holy Trinity does in fact constitute the final supernatural end of man.[55] Consequently, it seems that one of two possibilities must obtain in this case. (1) A theologian

[55] Most notably, Aquinas is explicit about the fact that the principles of revealed faith can only be known by way of divine revelation (*STh* I, q. 1, a. 2); that the mystery of the Trinity, which is the deifying mystery of the vision of God, is utterly unknown to natural human reason (*STh* I, q. 32, a. 1); and that the inclination to the supernatural vision of God is not innate to the human person, but rather that this vision is something "neither eye has seen nor ear heard," and thus transcends our native human conceptions (*STh* I-II, q. 62, a. 3). It bears mentioning that this stress on the transcendence of supernatural mystery to all forms of natural knowledge and rational demonstration was underscored vividly in the First Vatican Council (*Dei Filius*, 1870) against the tenets of nineteenth-century Catholic "rationalism," which sought to argue, beginning from natural premises, for the inherent rationality of belief in the mysteries of the faith.

reflecting upon the revealed truth of the beatific vision of the Holy Trinity is employing a philosophical argument in order to show (from the standpoint of natural reason) the *mere possibility* of a theologically revealed truth. (2) A philosophical argument is being made that shows the *rational fittingness* or *natural plausibility* of a theological article of faith, but does not demonstrate conclusively the reality of that object (which can be known only through faith). In the end, it seems to me likely that Aquinas is assuming both of these truths: philosophical argument can be employed to argue that an object of faith made known by way of divine revelation is something that is, philosophically speaking, not metaphysically impossible, but rather existentially appropriate.

Based on these considerations, we can conclude with certitude two things. First, Aquinas is here employing philosophy in the service of a principle of *sacra doctrina* as he provides for in question 1, article 5 of the *Prima pars*, where he argues that philosophy can serve as a subordinate science to theological faith, allowing the latter to partake of the intelligibility of the conclusions of the former.[56] Just as when Aquinas offers philosophical arguments for the nature of the soul in the context of his theological treatise on the original creation of man and woman, so here he is making use of philosophical argument in the context of a specifically theological treatment of the final end of man.[57] Second, then, the philosophical argument in question, *in this context* can only be considered an argument of *fittingness* and not a rational demonstration.[58] The

[56] *STh* I, q. 1, a. 5, ad 2: "This science [*sacra doctrina*] can in a sense depend upon the philosophical sciences, not as though it stood in need of them, but only in order to make its teaching clearer."

[57] *STh* I, qq. 75-79.

[58] This is the interpretation of Aquinas given by the classical Dominican commentatorial tradition, which takes into account what he says about the revealed character of the supernatural end of man in texts such as *STh* I-II, q. 62, a. 3. The faith is congruent with demonstrations of reason, but the truths of the faith are not derivative from rational arguments. See for example Sylvester of Ferrara's commentary on *ScG* III, c. 51, n. III (Leonine ed., 14:141), in which he discusses the argument in *STh* I, q. 12, a. 1; and Báñez, *Scholastica commentaria in primam partem,* q. 12, a. 1 (Valencia ed., 249) who argues that *ScG* III, c. 50 presents philosophical arguments that man naturally desires to see God if this were somehow possible, but does not of course seek to demonstrate a natural human capacity to attain effectively to the beatific vision.

human person naturally desires to know the first cause immediately. Reason can show, then, the potential openness of the human intellect to completion through the perfect happiness of the grace of the beatific vision. It cannot demonstrate the existence of this grace and this final end by arguments of natural reason alone. In fact, such a grace is strictly speaking not even intelligible in its essence except by virtue of supernatural faith for, as a mystery, its character eludes the understanding of natural reason considered within the limits of its innate boundaries and possibilities of understanding.

One should note that if this is the case, then the arguments in chapter 50 of book III of the *Summa contra Gentiles* and question 12, article 1 of the *Prima pars*, though identical in structure philosophically speaking, can be interpreted in two very different ways. In the former text, philosophy is being employed to show a natural desire to know God immediately, not a natural desire for the object of supernatural faith as such. The argument is to be considered rigorously demonstrative. This would especially make sense if Aquinas is writing against the philosophical claims of Averroism, in order to defend the potential harmony of the truths of faith and natural reason.[59] In the latter text, the same demonstrative argument is being used not as a way of demonstrating the existence of the revealed supernatural end of man, but as an argument of fittingness showing that this end revealed in Christ is not something alien or contrary to, but rather in harmony with the natural aspirations of the human person, albeit on a higher plane made possible only by grace.

A complementary form of reasoning is found in question 3, article 6 of the *Prima secundae*, a text that presents a suitable place to conclude our consideration of Aquinas's teaching on imperfect happiness. Here Aquinas is considering what happiness, or beatitude, is from a theological point of view, and in article 6 asks specifically, "Whether man's happiness consists in the consideration of the speculative sciences." That is to say,

[59] See Müller ("*Duplex beatitude,*" esp. 67-69), who interprets the argument in a similar sense.

does it consist in the exercise of the Aristotelian virtue of wisdom, the activity of the natural contemplation of God?

Aquinas rehearses several of the arguments we saw above in book III of the *Summa contra Gentiles*. First he alludes to a previous discussion (*STh* I-II, q. 3, a. 2, ad 4) of the imperfect character of human happiness in this life, making the point that the contemplation of God that is available to human reason is frail and can only be exercised periodically, rather than in an enduring and ever-present way. He goes on to make the point that all natural knowledge of God obtained in this life is derived from sensible realities and does not permit an immediate knowledge of God in himself. Therefore it stirs up in us a desire for knowledge of something that we cannot attain to perfectly. Such knowledge stems from a natural desire for God that only grace can fulfill.[60] Yet, Aquinas does go on to conclude that this natural knowledge of God by means of indirect contemplation of God through his effects *does* constitute an imperfect form of beatitude, one that is a true "participation" in the more perfect happiness of the blessed, albeit in a uniquely natural and limited way. "[J]ust as in sensible forms there is a participation of the higher substances, so the consideration of speculative sciences is a certain participation of true and perfect happiness." A gloss on this idea is found in article 2, response to the fourth objection, where Aquinas makes clear that there are analogous forms of happiness:

> Since happiness signifies some final perfection; according as various things capable of happiness can attain to various degrees of perfection, so must there be various meanings applied to happiness. . . . Wherefore the Philosopher, in placing man's happiness in this life (*Nic. Ethics* I, 10), says that it is imperfect and after a long discussion, concludes: 'We call men happy, but only as men.'

[60] *STh* I-II, q. 3, a. 6: "Now the first principles of the speculative sciences are received through the senses, as the Philosopher clearly states at the beginning of the *Metaphysics* (I, 1), and at the end of the *Posterior Analytics* (II, 15). Wherefore the entire consideration of the speculative sciences cannot extend farther than knowledge of sensibles can lead. . . . Now it has been shown that man cannot acquire through sensibles the [immediate] knowledge of separate substances, which are above the human intellect. Consequently, it follows that man's happiness cannot consist in the consideration of the speculative sciences."

But God has promised us perfect happiness, when we shall be 'as the angels . . . in heaven (Matt. 22:30).

The key point is that Aquinas does acknowledge an authentic perfection in the happiness accorded by the natural knowledge of God. That happiness can be known even philosophically and rationally to be imperfect (as the Philosopher himself admits). Consequently, this same philosophical sense of the yet greater perfectibility of man can be employed *theologically* to show, by an argument of fittingness, that the theological promise of the vision of God is not only not absurd but also that, if real, it pertains to the greatest possible good available to man. Reason does not prove the existence of the supernatural vision of God, which is known only by grace, but the revelation of the perfect happiness of the vision does speak to the deepest desires of the human heart for happiness through contemplative knowledge of God, even immediate knowledge, and it surpasses those desires even as it fulfills them.

Unlike Blondel, Aquinas has succeeded in maintaining the distinction and integrity of the philosophical order as distinct from the theological. Philosophical contemplation provides a genuine form of beatitude that pertains to human reason and that is not reducible to a moment within an apologetics in view of theology or Christian ethics. And yet, this relative beatitude is imperfect and inherently open from within to a further completion. Thus, Aquinas has also avoided an extrinsicism that would employ philosophy against the claims of Christian Augustinian teleology (as with Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia) or that would appeal to Christian theology against any claims to a philosophical knowledge of the natural structure and end of man (as found in Barth). Rather, philosophical reasoning, while not identical with theological understanding, does show by various signs that the revealed claims of theology are not only not unreasonable, but also genuinely attractive to what is most rational in us, even as they surpass natural reason.

Can we speak here, then, of philosophical contemplation of God as an imperfect end? Aquinas does not usually employ this language, and typically reserves the notion of the final end only

for the immediate knowledge of God. (See, however, *STh* I-II, q. 62, a. 3, where he does clearly speak of imperfect beatitude as the "connatural end" of man.) However, even if we do concede this linguistic point, Aquinas does discuss this imperfect beatitude in teleological terms and, of course, it is only because there is a relatively consistent beatitude accessible to natural human reason that the final end of immediate knowledge of God even becomes philosophically accessible to natural human reason. Consequently, the perspective of Aquinas is balanced on a clear but delicate edge: if we affirm too one-sidedly a merely natural end that is *not* constituted by the immediate knowledge of God (but 'merely' by an indirect philosophical contemplation of God) we lose sight of the intrinsic natural orientation of the human spirit toward God in himself. If we emphasize the latter inclination exclusively, so as to emphasize man's natural desire for the vision of God, then we will be obliged to deny that indirect philosophical contemplation of God is a truly teleological form of beatitude. In doing so, however, we will be obliged to negate the philosophical and rational intelligibility of the claim that the immediate knowledge of God constitutes the final end of man, since this claim can only be made based on the premise of the real but imperfect beatitude accorded by natural contemplation.

IV. Navigating between the Extremes: Neither Intrinsicism nor Extrinsicism

In the previous two sections of this essay, I have attempted to delineate how Aquinas, in two of his main works, clearly interprets Aristotle's understanding of natural happiness in such a way as to show the inherent openness of the human person to the beatific vision by grace. The intrinsic ordering of the human person toward contemplation of God—and even the immediate vision of God—does not amount to a natural inclination toward supernatural grace as such. In fact, Aquinas explicitly disavows the idea that there exists in the intellectual creature an innate inclination of the intellect toward the grace of faith or the *lumen gloriae*.

> [T]he theological virtues direct man to supernatural happiness in the same way as *by the natural inclination man is directed to his connatural end*. Now the latter happens in respect of two things. First, in respect of the reason or intellect, in so far as it contains the first universal principles which are known to us by the natural light of the intellect, and which are reason's starting-point, both in speculative and in practical matters. Secondly, through the rectitude of the will which tends naturally to good as defined by reason. But these two fall short of the order of supernatural happiness, according to 1 Corinthians 2:9: "The eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him." Consequently in respect of both the above things man needed to receive in addition something supernatural to direct him to a supernatural end. First, as regards the intellect, man receives certain supernatural principles, which are held by means of a Divine light: these are the articles of faith, about which is faith. Secondly, the will is directed to this end, both as to that end as something attainable—and this pertains to hope—and as to a certain spiritual union, whereby the will is, so to speak, transformed into that end—and this belongs to charity. *For the appetite of a thing is moved and tends towards its connatural end naturally; and this movement is due to a certain conformity of the thing with its end*.[61]

One can observe right away the anti-Pelagian tenor of this argument. The human intellect is not naturally oriented toward the supernatural faith which alone gives us knowledge that the vision of the Holy Trinity is the final end of man. The human will is not naturally inclined to the revealed object of supernatural faith. For all of this, the infused virtues of faith, hope, and love must be given.

One would be ill-advised to treat such a text as merely a conceptual outlier or eccentric addition to Aquinas's normative thought. On the contrary, the anti-Pelagian tenor of his mature theology is thematic and profound. Most notably, Aquinas insists that the theological virtues give the spiritual faculties of the intellect and will new "species" or "objects" of knowledge and love.[62] Consequently, the object known and desired by the

[61] *STh* I-II, q. 62, a. 3; emphasis added.

[62] *STh* I-II, q. 62, a. 2: "habits are specifically distinct from one another in respect of the formal difference of their objects. Now the object of the theological virtues is God Himself, Who is the last end of all, as surpassing the knowledge of our reason. On the other hand, the object of the intellectual and moral virtues is something comprehensible to human reason. Wherefore the theological virtues are

supernatural inclination of the will toward the beatific vision (in faith) simply cannot be the same object willed by the philosophical or natural desire to see God. The subject may be identical (God in himself) but the formal object by or through which the reality is desired is utterly distinct.

It follows from this that there are infused moral virtues that accompany the infused theological virtues and that elevate the ordinary exercise of the cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance) so that these may now attain to the formal objects of the theological virtues as such:

> Effects must needs be proportionate to their causes and principles. Now all virtues, intellectual and moral, that are acquired by our actions, arise from certain natural principles pre-existing in us, as above stated (I-II, q. 51, a. 1): instead of which natural principles, God bestows on us the theological virtues, whereby we are directed to a supernatural end, as stated (I-II, q. 62, a. 1). Wherefore we need to receive from God other habits corresponding, in due proportion, to the theological virtues, which habits are to the theological virtues, what the moral and intellectual virtues are to the natural principles of virtue.[63]

This very distinctively Thomistic thesis (which was not universally accepted and which was typically questioned by several great Franciscan thinkers) would make little sense at all if the spiritual faculties of man were "always, already" naturally inclined toward the formally supernatural objects of faith, hope and love as such.[64]

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specifically distinct from the moral and intellectual virtues." See also *STh* I-II, q. 54, a. 2, corp. and ad 1, to which Aquinas refers in this article I have cited here. He is categorical about the fact that supernatural virtues have formal objects that specify them, and that our natural powers may not attain to these objects by their own powers.

[63] *STh* I-II, q. 63, a. 3.

[64] Duns Scotus argues that strictly speaking, God could give a subject the theological virtues without the accompanying infused moral virtues. See on this point, for example, *Questiones in III Sententiarum* d. 36, unica, esp. n. 28; *Ordinatio* III, suppl., d. 36, a. 3. See the helpful commentary on this point by Allan B. Wolter, *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 90-91. Such a viewpoint seems to contrast necessarily with that of Aquinas. Analogously, Duns Scotus and William of Ockham both argue in different ways that God could in principle dispense a person even from the necessity of infused virtues as a precondition for salvation. See the pertinent remarks on this subject by Thomas Williams in "Scotus on Virtue," in *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, ed. T. Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), esp. 365-66.

We see another reflection of this concern in Aquinas's treatment of grace (in question 110 of the *Prima secundae*) as a quality of the soul that is not merely reducible to the infusion of new habitual virtues.[65] Grace must be something "deeper" in the soul than a set of new habits. Why? Because grace cannot simply qualify the teleological orientation of pre-existing spiritual powers. These powers are not naturally inclined in and of themselves toward formally supernatural ends. Consequently, grace must act from "deeper within" the human subject, elevating the spiritual powers toward formally supernatural ends, and this new inclination is something prior to the "mere" infusion of new supernatural habits into the pre-existing inclinations of natural powers. Grace, then, is a quality infused into the essence of the soul, one that serves as the ontological condition for the possibility of infused virtue.[66] If, by contrast, the soul's faculties were already naturally inclined toward the formally supernatural objects of faith, hope, and love as such, it would not be necessary that grace operate at this "level" of the human person. Instead, it could simply heal and perfect the faculties in keeping with their own natural orientations or inclinations, and there would be no need to elevate them from within toward a new supernatural object.

Given this Thomistic emphasis on the necessity of grace to orient the soul toward the *lumen gloriae*, it is also not surprising that Aquinas should insist that the natural faculties and powers, such as those of the intellect and will, can only tend toward ends that are proportionate to their own natures, ends that their natures can attain to by their proper created powers.

> The reason and will are naturally directed to God, inasmuch as He is the beginning and end of nature, but in proportion to nature. But the reason and will, according to their nature, are not sufficiently directed to Him in so far as He is the object of supernatural happiness.[67]

[65] *STh* I-II, q. 110, a. 2.

[66] See *STh* I-II, q. 110, aa. 3-4.

[67] *STh* I-II, q. 62, a. 1, ad 3. For other examples of this often invoked principle of Aquinas, see, likewise, *De Verit*., q. 14, a. 2; q. 22, a. 5; *STh* I-II, q. 15, a. 4; q. 25, a. 2.

Supernatural beatitude as known and desired by grace is a good that remains wholly disproportionate to the natural powers and inclinations proper to intellectual creatures. Aquinas is quite explicit about this:

> *Now no act of anything whatsoever is divinely ordained to anything exceeding the proportion of the powers which are the principles of its act*; for it is a law of Divine providence that nothing shall act beyond its powers. *Now everlasting life is a good exceeding the proportion of created nature*; since it exceeds its knowledge and desire, according to 1 Corinthians 2:9: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man." And hence it is that no created nature is a sufficient principle of an act meritorious of eternal life, unless there is added a supernatural gift, which we call grace.[68]

One can note from such observations that there is a serious conceptual price to pay for conforming Aquinas's texts too hastily to a reading that insists abruptly upon there being in his thought the affirmation of a "natural desire for the supernatural." One could lose sight completely of the thematic, multi-dimensional character of Aquinas's anti-Pelagian teaching regarding the way that grace specifies and elevates the spiritual faculties of man by means of new and distinctly supernatural objects and inclinations.[69]

However, if all that I am saying here is true, does this not conflict with what I argued in the previous section of this

[68] *STh* I-II, q. 114, a. 2; emphasis added.

[69] Note how significantly the affirmations of Aquinas that we have been considering differ from de Lubac's claims about his thought in *Surnaturel*, 451-52 (regarding *STh* I, q. 23, a. 2): "St. Thomas speaks here in general of two sorts of ends: one which is entirely beyond the proportion of all created nature and which consists in the divine vision, the other which is proportionate to the nature and its powers. He does not say that man, or that the rational creature has a two-fold finality. His doctrine . . . is . . . that 'natural' things have an end of the second sort, interior to nature, while spiritual beings have an end of the second kind, beyond all nature" (my translation). De Lubac is claiming that Aquinas's talk of proportionate inclinations does not apply to spiritual realities, but only to natural ones. It is true that Aquinas speaks more commonly (almost exclusively) of a twofold "beatitude," not a twofold "end." But he does affirm that the supernatural object of faith is utterly transcendent of the proportionate end of human nature. Furthermore, Aquinas never contrasts the spirit and nature in the way that de Lubac proposes. Rather, it is simply natural for the human intellect to desire to see God immediately. This natural desire in not identical to a proportionate inclination to the formally supernatural as such. It is this last point that de Lubac's defenders typically fail to see.

article? After all, the human being has a natural desire to see God immediately. Is this not a natural desire for the supernatural? We should note that two affirmations are being underscored by Aquinas that are in no way incompatible: (1) The human soul has a natural desire to see God immediately, one that is even philosophically demonstrable; and (2) the human soul is in no way naturally inclined to the supernatural object of faith as such, an object of knowledge that orients the soul toward the supernatural vision of the Holy Trinity.

The first of these affirmations is admittedly quite nuanced. The natural inclination toward contemplation of the truth about God *indirectly* derived from creatures does allow the intellect to desire naturally and rationally by its own powers a yet more immediate knowledge of God. We should note in this regard that Aquinas speaks differently of "inclinations" and "desires." Our inclinations remain proportionate to our human nature. However, our desires, which stem from our natural inclinations, can attain to those realities that we cannot procure by our own power. It is in this sense that we can understand Aquinas's clear affirmation that there is inscribed in the human intellect an innate desire to see God.[70] The desire to see God is an expression of our deepest human inclination to know the truth about the first cause, and at the same time, this desire clearly reaches out beyond that which it is in our proportionate power to accomplish or achieve. It is not a desire for the formal object

[70] *De Virtutibus*, q. 1, a. 10: "But just as man acquires his first perfection, that is, his soul, by the action of God, so too he has his ultimate perfection, which is his perfect happiness, immediately from God, and rests in it. Indeed this is obvious from the fact that man's natural desire cannot rest in anything save in God alone. For it is innate in man that he be moved by a desire to go on from what has been caused and inquire into causes, nor does this desire rest until it arrives at the first cause, which is God" ("ita et ultimam suam perfectionem, quae est perfecta hominis felicitas, immediate habet a Deo, et in ipso quiescit: quod quidem ex hoc patet quod naturale hominis desiderium in ullo alio quietari potest, nisi in solo Deo. *Innatum est enim homini ut ex causatis desiderio quodam moveatur ad inquirendum causas; nec quiescit istud desiderium quousque perventum fuerit ad primam causam, quae Deus est*" [emphasis added; Ralph McInerny, trans., *Disputed Questions on Virtue* [South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 1999]).

of supernatural beatitude as such, which can only be obtained by grace.[71]

Later Thomistic Scholastics like Sylvester of Ferrara and Domingo Báñez would refer to this desire as "an elicited desire to see God."[72] Once the human intellect attains to the elicited (explicit) knowledge of the existence of a transcendent cause (God) through God's effects, it is natural that the mind should still wish (were it possible) to know that cause directly and immediately. Therefore there is a natural desire to see God that arises at the term of the human philosophical quest for the ultimate explanation of reality. But that desire is inscribed in our human nature not in reference to the supernatural as such (formally specified by grace), but rather in reference to the truth about the first cause and final end of all things (formally specified by the natural search for causes). It is for this reason that such commentators also speak of the natural desire to see God as *conditional*. It is true that the human spirit remains fundamentally unfulfilled as regards its own final end if the human intellect does not come to see God. Consequently, it would be most good to know who or what God is in some immediate way, if that were possible. An absolute, resolute hope of seeing God face to face is only possible, however, supernaturally, by grace, once we come to know by faith in divine revelation that such a possibility has really been accorded to us.[73]

[71] *STh* I-II, q. 62, aa. 1-3.

[72] Thomistic commentators classically speak of an "elicited desire" to know God immediately that is stimulated by limited natural knowledge of God as the first cause, and of the "conditional" or "inefficacious" character of this more ultimate desire. I am alluding to the interpretation of Aquinas on the "natural desire to see God" that is characteristic of the Dominican commentatorial tradition (Cajetan, Sylvester of Ferrara, Báñez, and others). On the development of this tradition and the textual foundations for its interpretations, see Feingold, *Natural Desire to See God according to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters*, chaps. 8-9, 11-12.

[73] *STh* II-II, q. 17, a. 2: "the hope of which we speak now, attains God by leaning on His help in order to obtain the hoped for good. Now an effect must be proportionate to its cause. Wherefore the good which we ought to hope for from God properly and chiefly is the infinite good, which is proportionate to the power of our divine helper, since it belongs to an infinite power to lead anyone to an infinite good. Such a good is eternal life, which consists in the enjoyment of God Himself." This passage displays unambiguous theoretical unity with *STh* I-II, q. 62, a. 1, emphasizing the need

One may legitimately contest the language of "elicited desire" and of the "conditional" character of our innate tendency to want to see God immediately. Clearly this terminology as such is not present in Aquinas's texts and it does evolve within the context of subsequent disputes between Thomists and Scotists. Aquinas does not himself speak of the natural desire to see God in these terms. Nevertheless, what is noteworthy is that Aquinas does think that there is a rational basis for arguing *philosophically* that the human intellect desires naturally to see God immediately. Furthermore, this argument is developed through the medium of an appeal to the imperfect express knowledge of God attained by natural contemplation, and which itself indicates the natural desire for a yet more complete knowledge of God. One may speak of this awakened desire (indicative of an innate tendency) in terms other than that of elicited desire.[74] However, one can readily understand what this term seeks to express: the human being is awakened by knowledge of God to a tendency in himself that nature provides but cannot fulfill, and, at the same time, this tendency is not an inclination toward the supernatural mystery of Christ, formally revealed as such. The latter grace comes gratuitously to act upon the intrinsic desire of the human person in a way that simultaneously fulfills and utterly transcends the innate tendencies of the human heart.

If this vision of Aquinas is correct, as I have argued based upon his philosophical analysis of human happiness, then it follows that *pace* both Barth and de Lubac, a positive Thomistic

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for grace precisely because of the limited capacities of natural proportionate inclinations.

[74] Oliva, "La contemplation des philosophes selon Thomas d'Aquin," 647-49, offers trenchant criticism of the notion of an "elicited desire" to see God as something alien to Aquinas's own views, insisting instead on the innate character of the natural desire to see God in the created human spirit. Oliva does affirm, however, that the innate inclination toward the vision of God becomes manifest through the rational (philosophical) desire to know the first cause. That is precisely why this desire can be analyzed by means of rational argument, as Oliva insists. Consequently, there is a natural mediate knowledge that expresses or manifests in more explicit terms a deeper innate tendency to wish to know the complete truth about God perfectly. Yet none of this should commit us to a natural inclination toward supernatural objects of revelation as such, or a natural desire for the graced knowledge and love of the Holy Trinity per se.

reading of Aristotle cannot rightly be accused of being either one-sidedly extrinsicist or intrinsicist. Clearly the former is not the case. The natural desire for the vision of God, as Aquinas defends it philosophically (in texts such as *ScG* III, c. 50 and *STh* I, q. 12, a. 1), is a rationally intelligible desire and is therefore necessarily utterly distinct from the hope for the beatific vision inspired by infused theological virtues. But *just for this reason*, the grace of the vision is not purely extrinsic to the natural disposition and desire. If we return to Aquinas's reasoning, the argument is simple. We can truly know *something* of the primary cause of creation through his effects (the creatures we experience immediately), and therefore natural contemplation of God is possible for us. Because God is the most intelligible and sovereignly good of all realities, knowledge of him even by way of the mediation of his effects constitutes a genuine form of happiness, however imperfect. So this knowledge is a certain kind of final end for the human person. However, precisely because this knowledge is achieved only through the mediation of effects, it is imperfect and therefore inchoately suggests the possibility of a higher fulfillment to be desired. In other words, the natural desire to see God, or to know God intellectually in himself, is rooted not in an innate inclination for the supernatural, but in an innate natural inclination to seek the truth through explicit and perfect knowledge of causes.[75] This inclination to wish to know God in himself is rooted in us structurally (merely naturally), and therefore, the grace that invites us to come to know God immediately by vision is not something wholly alien to our human nature. Karl Barth is famous for claiming in his debates with Emil Brunner regarding natural theology that there is no natural point of contact in the soul wherein grace is received and to which the righteousness of faith is not wholly alien and other.[76] Grace is given gratuitously by God independently of

[75] Aquinas, I *Nic. Ethic.*, lect. 2: "Naturale desiderium nihil aliud est quam *inclinatio inhaerens rebus ex ordinatione primi moventis*, quae non potest esse supervacua" (emphasis added).

[76] See, for example, Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1/1:27-36, 41.

any natural inclination toward God.[77] On this point, it does seem clear that Aquinas's Aristotelianism contrasts with the views of Barth. One might suggest that Barth's Kantian anthropological presuppositions are not entirely different in this respect from the rationalism of Siger of Brabant.[78] The extremes of anti-revelatory rationalism and dialectical revelatory actualism share something profound in common, something to which Aquinas's Aristotelian realism offers us an alternative. His philosophy allows him to avoid a pure grace-nature extrinsicism of the kind de Lubacians might criticize rightly in Barthians and in philosophical rationalists alike.

Yet at the same time, for this very reason (because a natural openness to the possibility of the supernatural is inscribed in our nature) our natural end is not indicative of any natural inclination toward the supernatural as such. Grace remains entirely transcendent of our natural powers, innate inclinations and proportionate ends. Yet without the natural capacity to know God and the corresponding capacity to desire the felicity of perfect happiness, the grace-inspired supernatural hope of seeing God would itself be wholly unnatural and alien to human nature. No grace could substitute itself or supplement per se for such a natural absence, and indeed the aims of grace would in this case necessarily be opposed to those of nature. Therefore this natural, philosophically identifiable dimension of human nature is the ontological presupposition for the possibility of an economy of grace ordered toward the *lumen gloriae*, or the vision of God. Here Aristotelianism allows Aquinas to avoid a pure grace-nature intrinsicism of the kind Barthians might rightly be concerned about in the theology of de Lubac. However, it also suggests a deeper irony: in the absence of a rigorous anthropology of Aristotelian natural teleology, de

[77] Ibid., 1/1:238-42. Grace comes to human nature in such a way as to create the conditions for its own reception *sans appui* in human nature as we find it in its fallen state. This gift is radically alien and makes the analogy or likeness to God in us possible only due to the work of grace itself and in differentiation to all that is natural in us as such.

[78] On the influence of Kantian epistemology on Barth's theology, see McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 43-49, 129-30, 155-62, 218-26, 245-62.

Lubac's theology fails in fact to articulate the true grounds for a legitimate integralism or intrinsicism. By risking the collapse of the natural and supernatural orders into one another, or by not distinguishing them adequately, de Lubac's theology in fact risks running the same ultimate course as that of Barth. There is no natural point of contact, no natural term of human reason, having its own integrity and structure, to which grace addresses itself and which is elevated by grace.[79] Instead, *either* man has a uniquely supernatural destiny *or* a destiny of *natura pura*.[80] A dialectic of either/or reminiscent of Jansenism is inscribed into the heart of the human being. The world is either all for grace or disordered by the turn toward nature alone without grace.

This viewpoint is clearly dissimilar from that of Aquinas, who states that human beings ought to love God above all things naturally, and that this distinctly natural order toward God is distinct from, but also the structural (not temporal) presupposition for, the gift of charity.[81] Were this not the case, then the mystery of charity as a grace given to human beings that they might love God above all things would be unnatural, alien and violent to human nature.[82] The orders of natural and supernatural love are not identical with one another, but neither are they in any way extrinsic to one another. Likewise, the ordering toward contemplative happiness that is natural to man

[79] See the criticism to this effect by Steven A. Long in his *Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), chap. 1. I have offered analogous reflections in "The 'Pure Nature' of Christology: Human Nature and *Gaudium et Spes* 22," *Nova et Vetera*, English ed., 8 (2010): 283-322.

[80] This is why de Lubac insists continually on the *concrete* and *historical* economic state of man as fallen and addressed by grace, in order to defend the idea that the supernatural end of man is his unique end, and that therefore he does not exist in a state of pure nature! Man's natural intellectual activity is ultimately specified by the object of faith as such (leading eventually to the vision), or so one might conjecture, given the nature of the defense being made. See, for example, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, 54-56.

[81] *STh* I-II, q. 109, a. 3.

[82] *STh* I, q. 60, a. 5: "Since God is the universal good, and under this good both man and angel and all creatures are comprised, because every creature in regard to its entire being naturally belongs to God, it follows that from natural love angel and man alike love God before themselves and with a greater love. Otherwise, if either of them loved self more than God, it would follow that natural love would be perverse, and that it would not be perfected but destroyed by charity."

is not identical with the inclination to the beatific vision that is an effect of grace, and cannot procure it as such. But the latter gift of grace is not given in such a way as to remain wholly extrinsic to the natural desire for knowledge of the truth, and especially to the "philosophical" natural desire for the immediate knowledge of God. This natural inclination and desire cannot procure the grace-inspired inclination toward, and hope for, the beatific vision as such. But the latter gift elevates and fulfills a pre-existing teleological structure in man. Because of this irreducible duality and simultaneous profound harmony, an authentic Christian culture can and must maintain a vital interest in natural speculative knowledge of God, even while habitually placing such knowledge in the service of Christian life and theological contemplation.

Conclusion: Aquinas's Christian Aristotelianism and Augustinian Orthodoxy

I have argued that the natural desire for the vision of God is a rational, philosophical desire that arises from man's reaching an imperfect beatitude of the natural contemplation of God, and as an outcropping of that beatitude. Therefore, (1) when grace promises us a yet higher beatitude of seeing God face to face, it does not act extrinsically to our natural end; and (2) nature is not intrinsically ordered toward the objects of supernatural revelation as such, but is surpassed by the higher order of divine life even as it is fulfilled by it. Both arguments make the same point in two distinct ways.

Against Barth and with de Lubac, there exists a natural point of contact in us such that grace is not alien to human nature and can lead human nature without violence through the ascent upward into the supernatural life of God. It does so in profound accord with nature's own highest inclinations and through an accomplishment of those aspirations that nature cannot realize for itself. Aristotelian philosophy thus vindicates Augustinian theology. An Aristotelian sense of the imperfection of natural happiness disposes us to see the ways that the restless heart of

man in the economy of God's grace can be elevated to find its most perfect rest only in the supernatural life of God.

Against de Lubac and with Barth, grace is something wholly transcendent of our human nature to which ordinary human reasoning and willing are not innately and naturally inclined or proportioned. One might say, instead, that there is an analogy between the natural end (which implies the desire to see God immediately) and the formal object of revelation (which elicits theological hope in the vision of the Holy Trinity) without an identification of the two. Beatified human beings thus remain forever mere creatures who are structurally incapable of any intrinsic possibility of self-divinization, and the work of salvation in us always stems from the ontologically prior, entirely free initiative of God. An Aristotelian philosophical realism regarding the imperfection of human natural capacities for happiness redounds to a deepened Augustinian sense of the sheer gratuity of grace and supernatural beatitude, a life beyond what any human eye has seen, ear has heard, or heart imagined.

Seen as the nuanced and coherent encounter of these two truths, Aquinas's Aristotelian Christianity appears for what it is: not an eccentric teaching located at the periphery of Catholic doctrine regarding nature and grace, but rather a form of theology that stands at the core of the Catholic tradition and articulates its diverse elements in a sufficiently intricate, unified way, with a normative value that is irreplaceable and a doctrinal integrity that is unsurpassed.