

*"Ethical naturalists, such as Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), claim that the moral properties of persons and situations depend on their nature. If so, moral qualities do not presuppose a God, though a perfectly wise and good God would approve all and only good and right things. Naturalism does not itself preclude God from playing an epistemic role in morality (telling us reliably what is morally good and bad) or a motivational role (providing divine incentives for moral behavior). **But naturalism does deny theism a metaphysical role.***

[Brink, "Autonomy," in *Cambridge Companion*, 152]



David O. Brink

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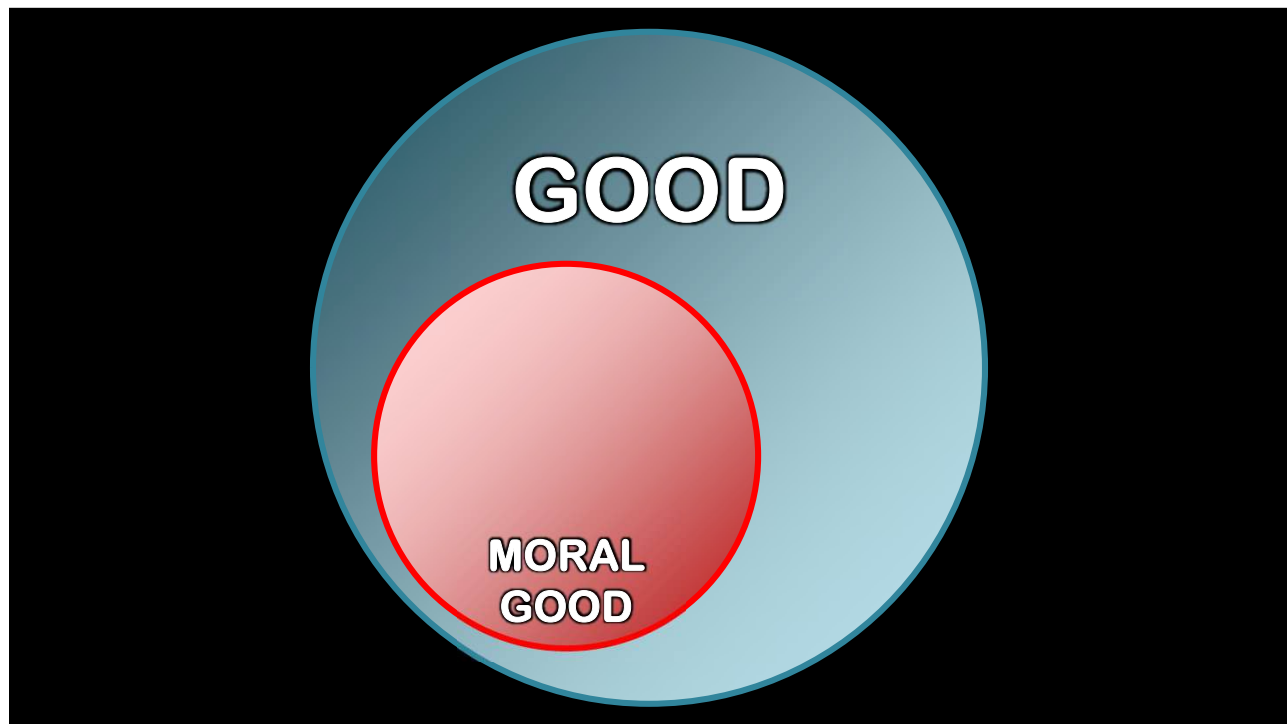
[Brink, "Autonomy," in *Cambridge Companion*, 152]

Given what we have said up to this point regarding the metaphysics of the convertibility of being and goodness, together with Aquinas argument that God is ipsum esse subsistens—subsistent existence itself—it should be clear that, for Aquinas, theism most definitely does play a metaphysical role in what it is to be good.

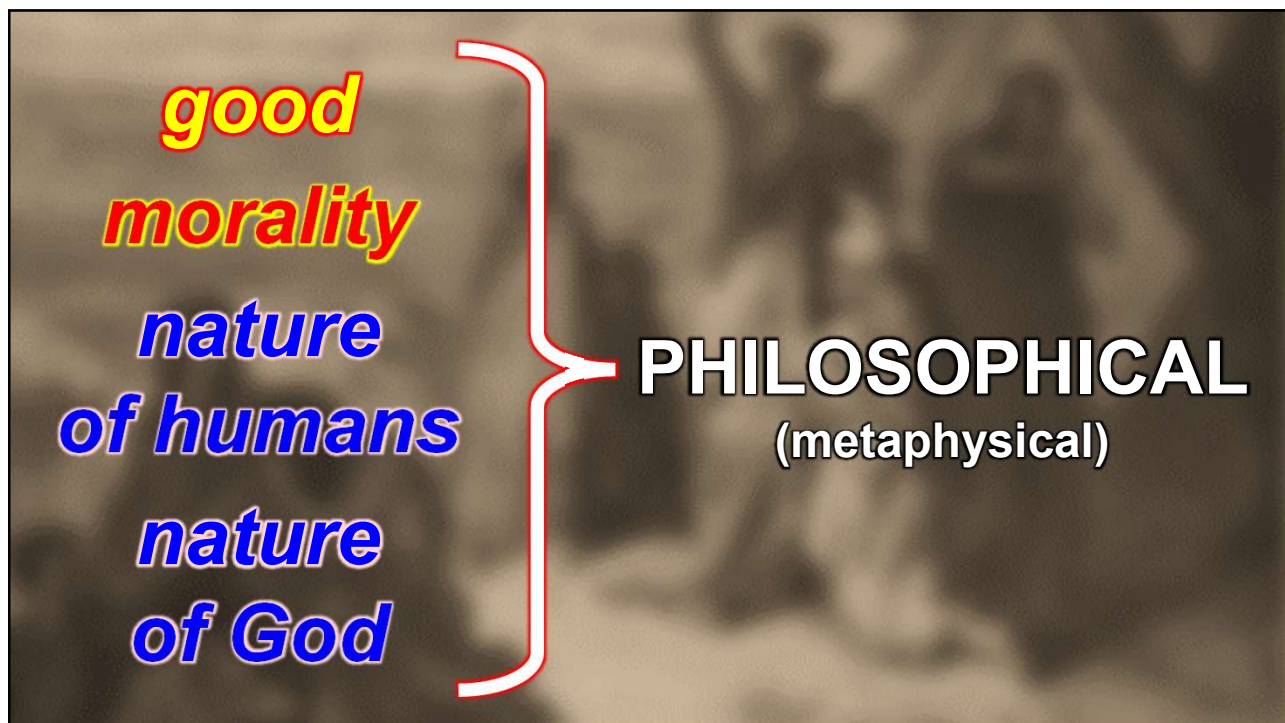
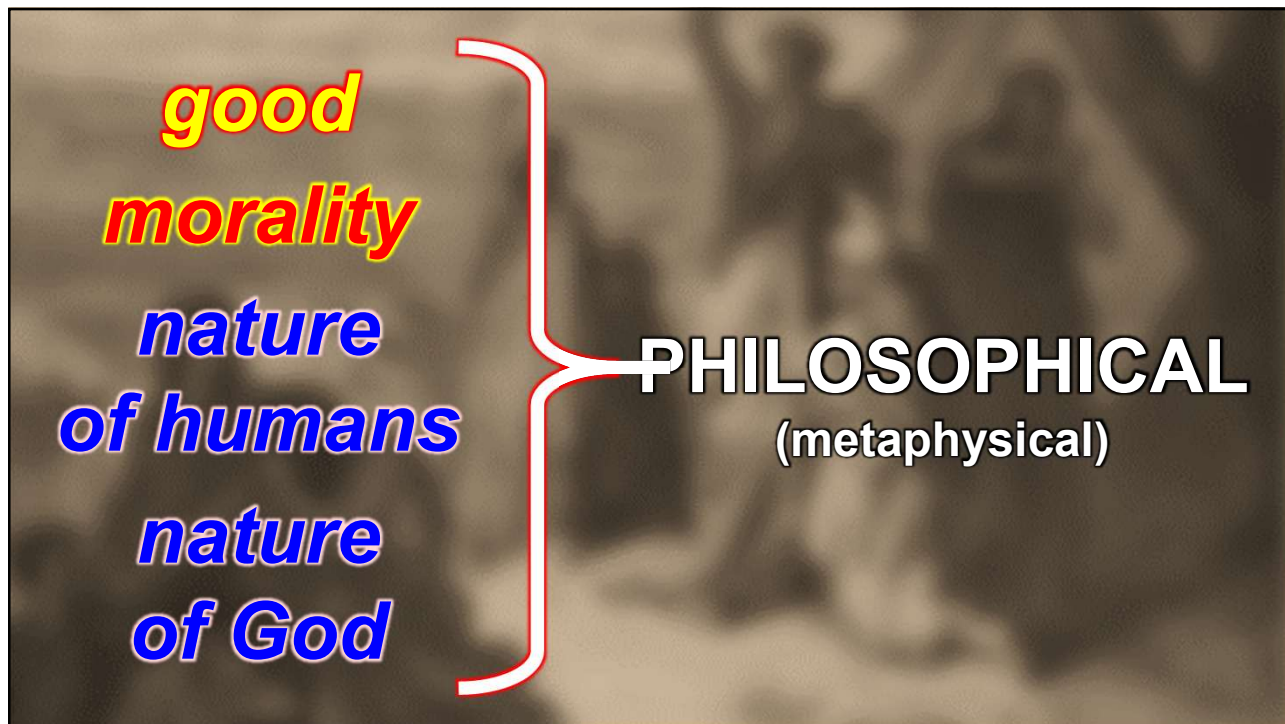
It remains to be shown how this "translates" into human morality.

Natural Law Theory (or Ethics) is the theory of human morality finding its philosophical kernel in the virtue theory of Aristotle and its zenith in Thomas Aquinas.

*Natural Law Theory is a philosophical and theological view of the **good** and human **morality** based on the nature of humans and the nature of God.*



*Natural Law Theory is a philosophical and theological view of the **good** and human **morality** based on the **nature of humans** and the **nature of God**.*



*"Ethical naturalists, such as Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), claim that the moral properties of persons and situations depend on their **nature**. ... "*

[Brink, "Autonomy," in *Cambridge Companion*, 152]



David O. Brink

"But naturalism does deny theism a metaphysical role."

[Brink, "Autonomy," in *Cambridge Companion*, 152]



David O. Brink

*"But naturalism does deny theism a **metaphysical** role."*

[Brink, "Autonomy," in *Cambridge Companion*, 152]



David O. Brink

But what is a nature if not metaphysical?

*"Ethical naturalists, such as Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), claim that the moral properties of persons and their actions depend on their **nature**. ..."*

[Brink, "Autonomy," in *Cambridge Companion*, 152]



David O. Brink

*"But naturalism does deny theism a **metaphysical** role."*

[Brink, "Autonomy," in *Cambridge Companion*, 152]



David O. Brink



Usage of the Term 'Nature'

- ❖ 'Natural' can be used in a relatively non-philosophical sense to refer to the way things generally act or appear.

For example, one might observe that lions are naturally ferocious carnivores while many birds are relatively skittish omnivores.

- ❖ 'Natural' can be used in contrast to 'supernatural'.

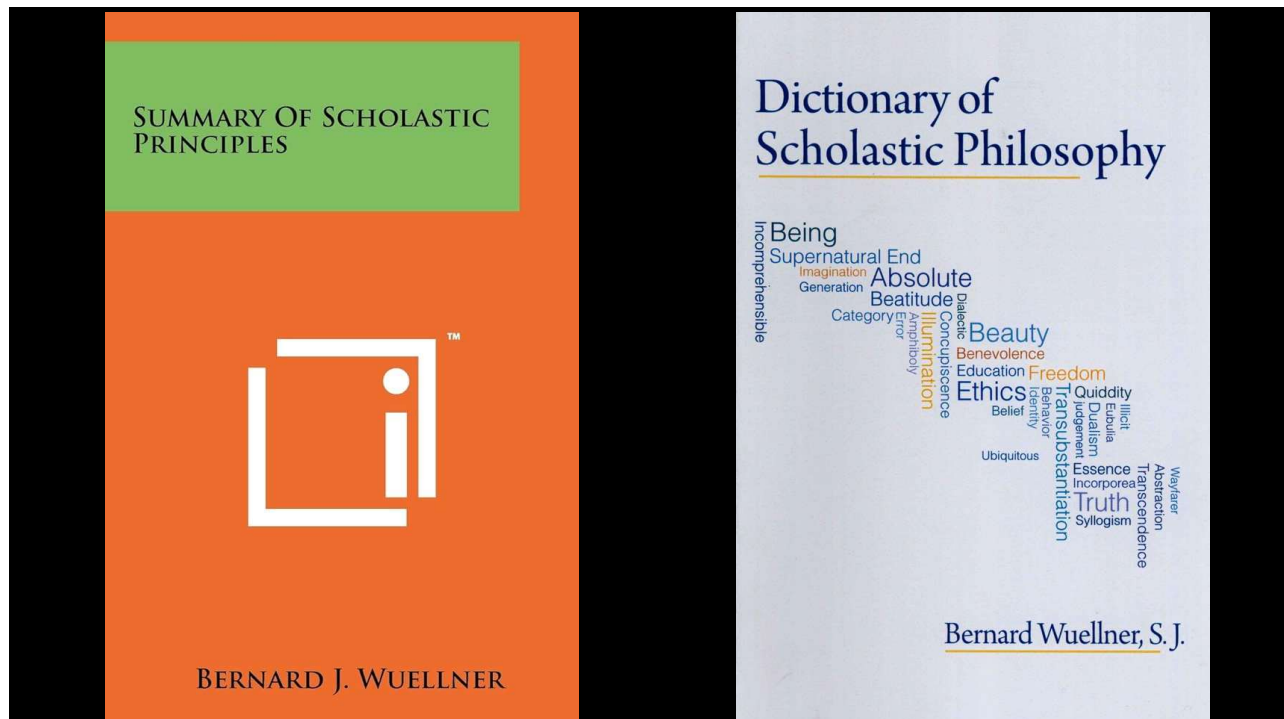
This usage follows the contours of the atheism vs. theism debate.

- ❖ 'Natural' can be used in contrast to 'artificial'.

This usage follows the contours of the evolution vs. intelligent design debate.

- ❖ 'Natural' can be used as a reference to the metaphysical nature of a thing.

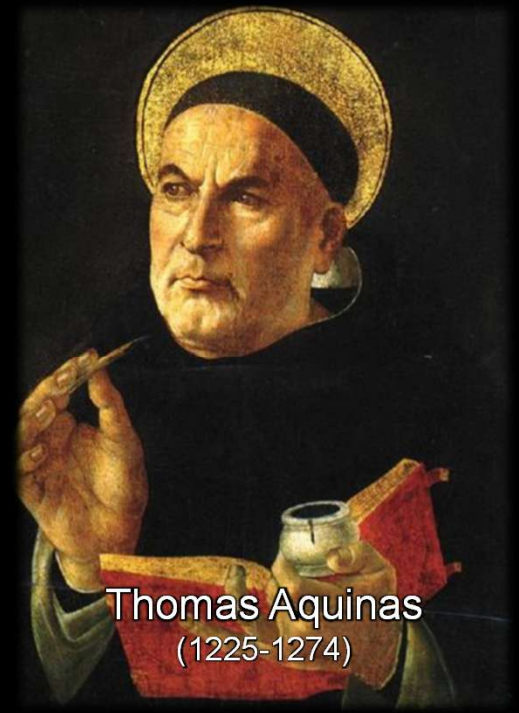
This usage follows the contours of classical metaphysics, especially Aristotle, who employed such metaphysical categories as form/matter.



Given that certain aspects of human morality are philosophical issues, Natural Law Theory maintains that such aspects of the good and moral good can be known by human reason apart from Scripture.

This is not to say that every aspect of such things is accessible by human reason. This is especially the case with man's eternal destiny.

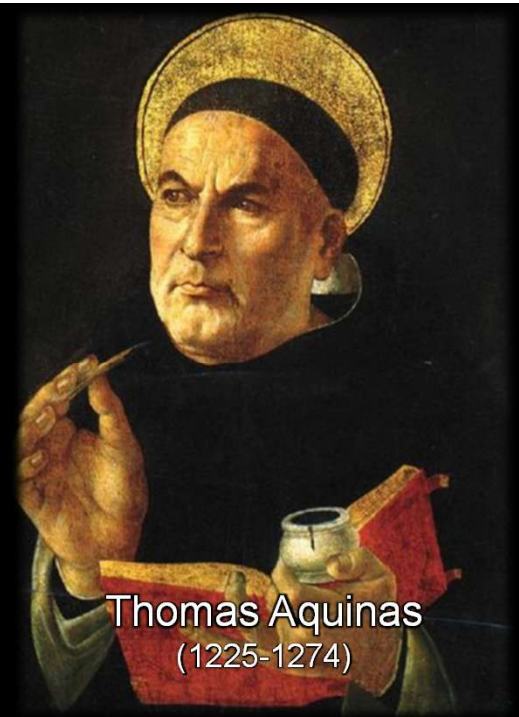
"It was necessary for man's salvation that there should be a knowledge revealed by God, besides philosophical science built up by human reason ... because man is directed to God as to an end that surpasses the grasp of reason. ..."



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"But the end must first be known by men who are to direct their thoughts and actions to the end. Hence it was necessary for the salvation of man that certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine revelation."

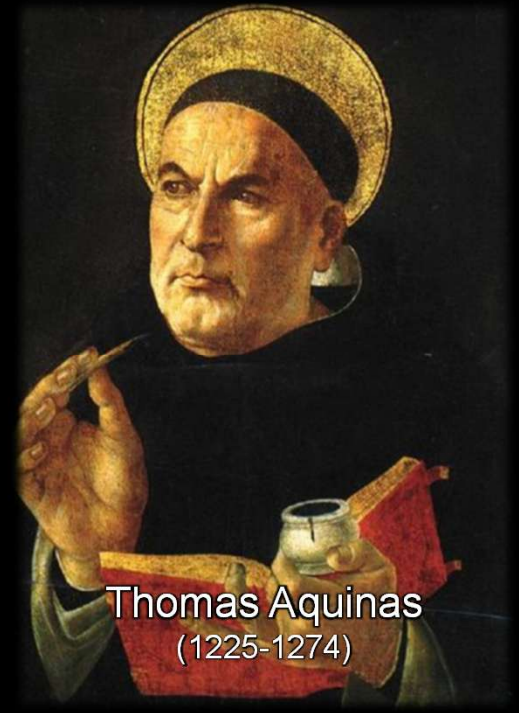
[Summa Theologiae I, 1]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"Now Scripture, inspired of God, is no part of philosophical science, which has been built up by human reason. Therefore, it is useful that besides philosophical science there should be other knowledge—i.e., inspired of God.

[Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, Q1, art. 1, trans. Father of the English Dominican Province (Westminster: Christian Classics), 1]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

*While I agree with Aquinas's metaphysics regarding the philosophical aspects of human morality and goodness in achieving our **end** in this life, as a Protestant Evangelical, I do not agree with him regarding how we gain that ultimate **end** in the next life.*

The Legacy of Thomas Aquinas¹

Richard G. Howe, Ph.D.

Preliminary Comments

My interest in philosophy grew out of an interest in Christian apologetics which itself grew out of a crisis of faith as a young Christian at university. As a student in the 1970s, it was the apologetics of several luminaries that helped me reaffirm my commitment in the integrity and infallibility of the Scriptures.² Besides the obvious purpose of apologetics to tear down intellectual roadblocks keeping the unbeliever from considering the claims of Christ, I came to appreciate what apologetics could do for one who was already a Christian. These luminaries might remind one of the role that Apollos played in bolstering the faith of the Jewish Christians who were new in their relationship with Christ and who were being stumbled by the intellectual unbelieving Jews. Acts 18:24 and following recount:

{24} Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. . . . {27} And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; {28} for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.³

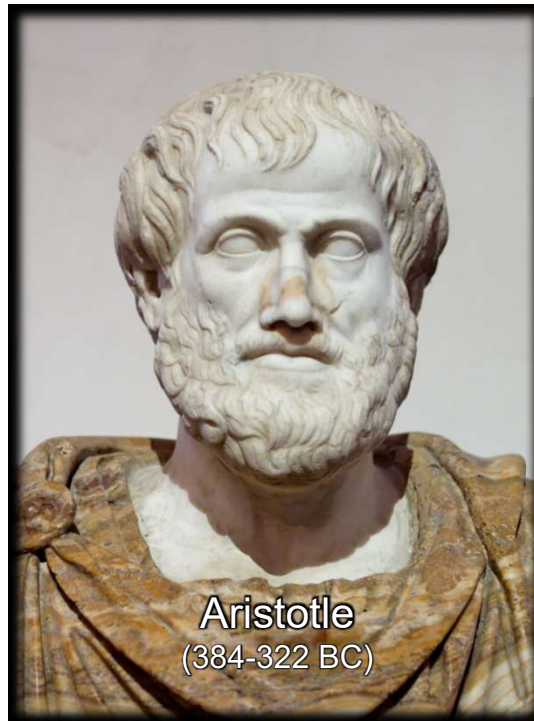
With a growing interest in apologetics, I discovered in the 1980s in the U.S. that there were few options to formally study the subject. I was able to venture to Dallas Theological Seminary and take what classes I could under the most renowned apologist of the day in the U.S., Norman L. Geisler. Sensing my interest in apologetics and my restlessness arising from the fact

¹ A nascent version of the paper was read at the Second Annual Theology and Philosophy Conference presented by the NP Van Wyk Louw Center of Alademia in Pretoria, South Africa on July 22, 2024.

² Among these are Norman L. Geisler (1932-2019, whom I mention later), R. C. Sproul (1939-2017), and Josh McDowell.

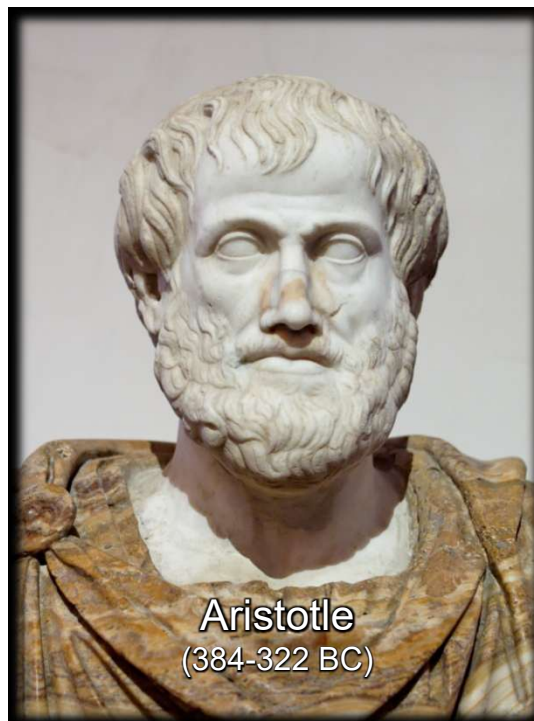
³ Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical citations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982).





Aristotle
(384-322 BC)

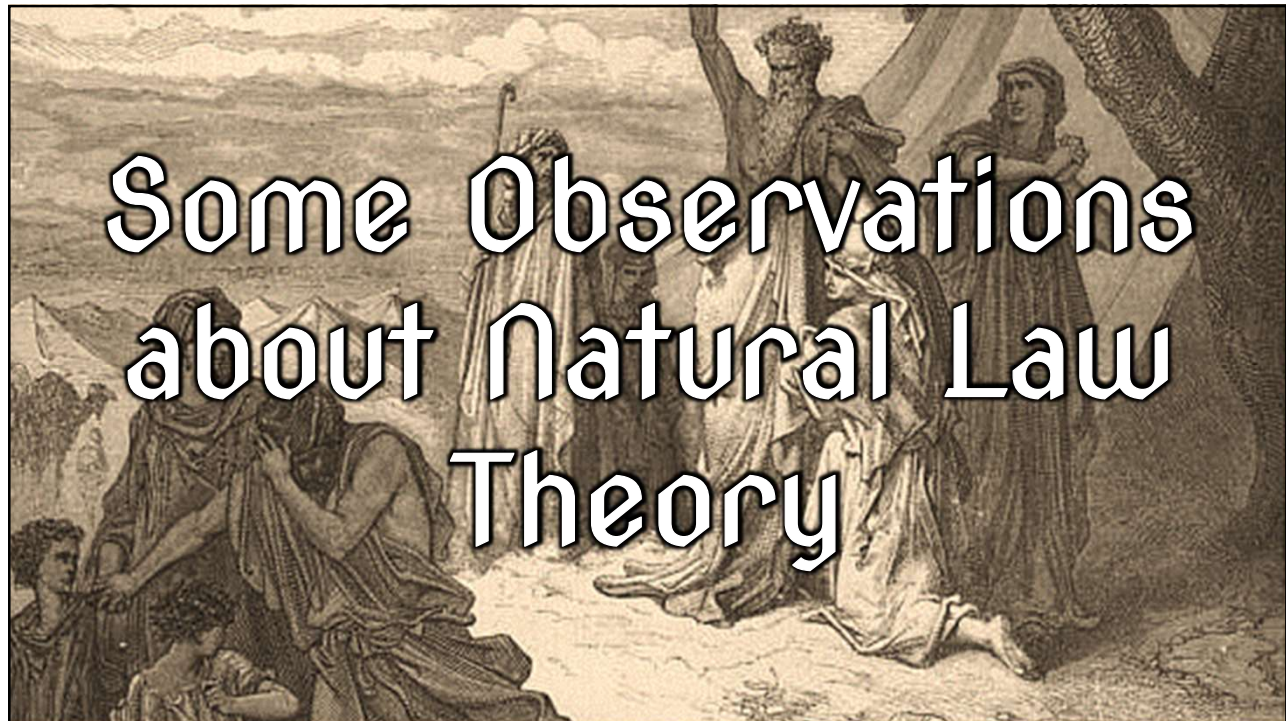
"Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject-matter admits of, for precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions. ..."



Aristotle
(384-322 BC)

"For it is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits."

[Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 3, 1094^a11, 25, trans. W. D. Ross in Richard McKeon, ed. *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941), 936]



Natural Law Theory accounts for human good, human morality, and human law within a broader context of God, His law, and His superintendence of mankind within His creation with regard human nature.

*It stands in stark contrast to the view of God
and morality commonly found in
contemporary Evangelical apologetics.*



*This is especially true regarding the view
commonly found among contemporary
Christian **analytic philosophers**.*



ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY APPROACH

By the use of the tools, methods, and categories of analytic philosophy:

ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY APPROACH

By the use of the tools, methods, and categories of analytic philosophy

In addition to the characteristics listed here, analytic philosophy, generally speaking, avoids employing the categories of classical metaphysics.

ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY APPROACH

By the use of the tools, methods, and categories of analytic philosophy:

1. Carefully define the term or concept, e.g., 'perfect'.
2. On the basis of this definition, identify what "perfect making properties" must constitute a "perfect being."
3. Since God by definition is a "perfect being," then conclude that God must possess these "perfect making properties."
4. Any property that does not "clearly" appear in the Bible and/or is clearly not "perfect making" must be denied of God.

CLASSICAL PHILOSOPHY APPROACH

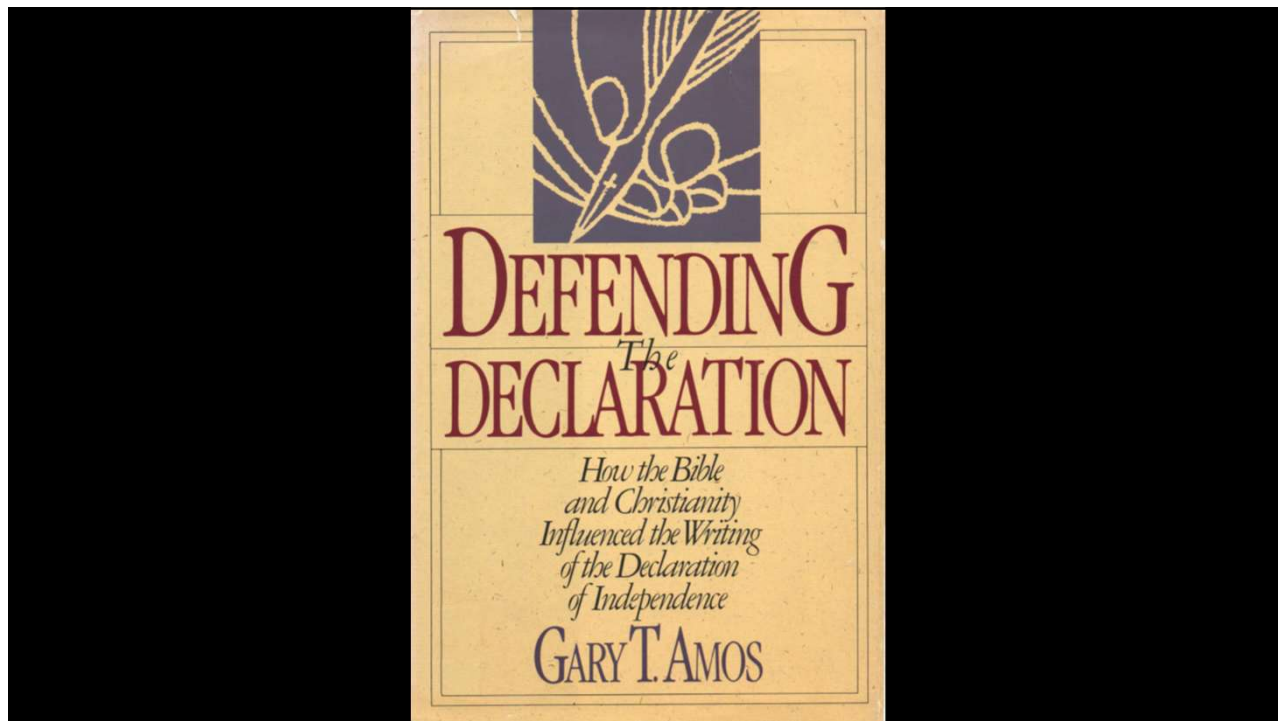
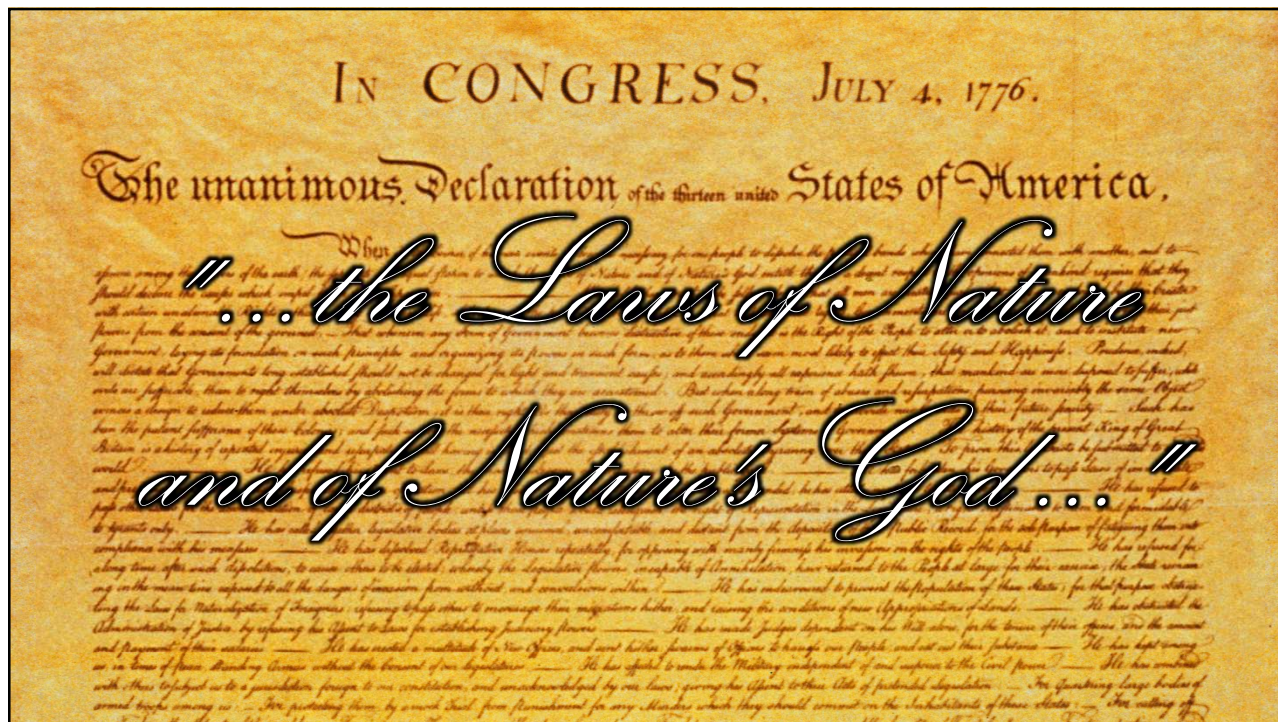
By the use of the tools, methods and categories of classical philosophy:

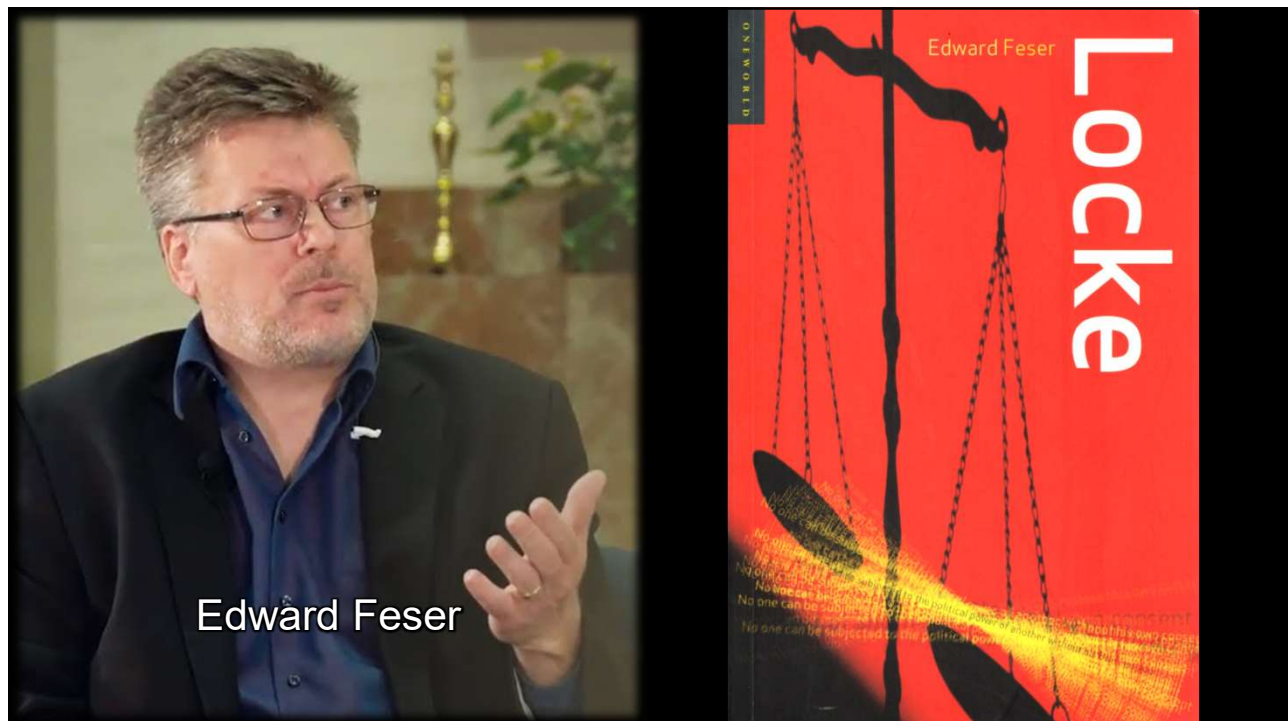
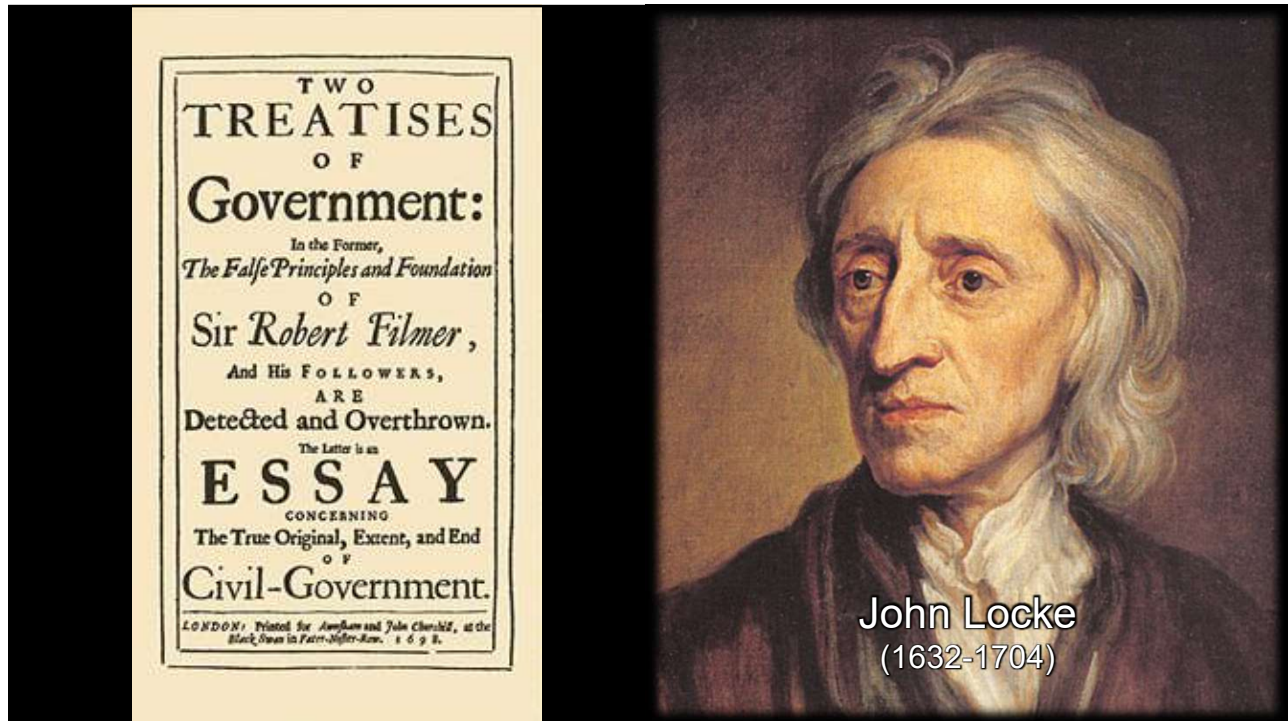
1. Carefully discover what the nature of God must be like as the First Cause.
2. On the basis of this discovery identify what attributes must be true of God.
3. Identify those attributes as the definition of what it means to be ultimately and infinitely perfect.

**Natural Law
Theory is grounded
in classical
metaphysics.**

As a model of morality that follows the contours and categories of Ancient Greek and Medieval Philosophy, Natural Law Theory traffics in certain fundamental concepts, most of which themselves need to be unpacked, including:

law nature / natural human nature
nature vs. function substance vs. accident
act / potency teleology existence
God as Being and Goodness itself
good and evil good and moral good
obligation the Transcendentals
convertibility of 'being' and 'good'







Hon. Clarence Thomas

Laurence H. Tribe

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The New York Times
Monday, December 15, 2008

Opinion

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Clarence Thomas and 'Natural Law'

By LAURENCE H. TRIBE
Published: July 15, 1991

What is really at stake in the nomination of Judge Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court? While any candidate nominated to replace Justice Thurgood Marshall would likely accelerate the Court's rightward trend, Judge Thomas's adherence to "natural law" as a judicial philosophy could take the Court in an even more troubling direction.

Most conservatives criticize the judiciary for expanding its powers, "creating" rights rather than "interpreting" the Constitution. These critics talk of returning issues like abortion to democratically elected and politically accountable bodies.

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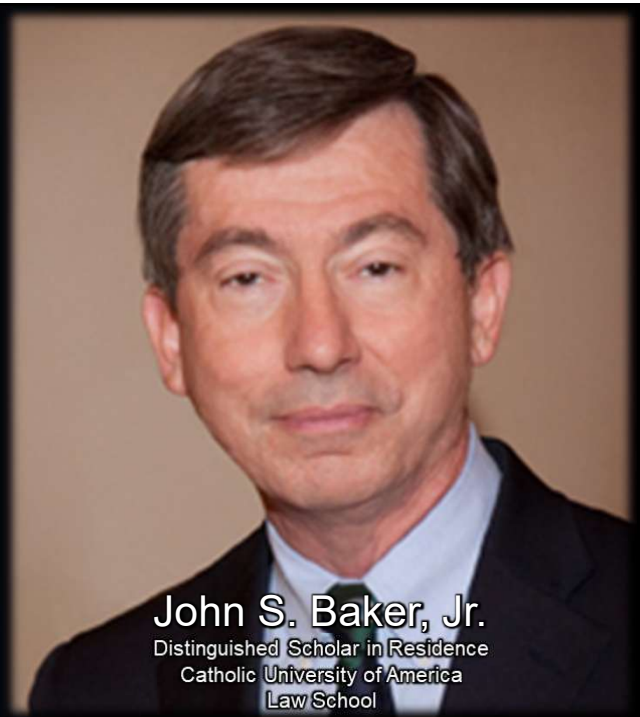
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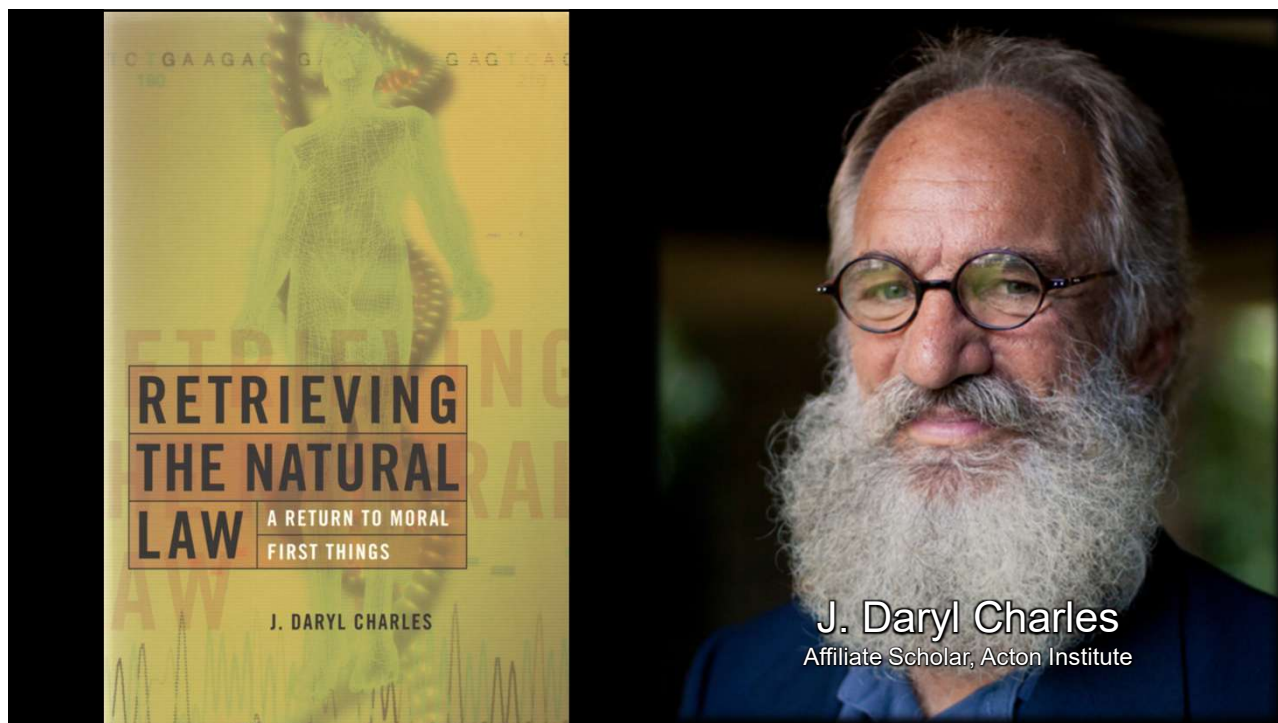
"The anxious questions asked by the Senators about natural law and the nominee's disavowal that natural law would have any role in his decision of actual cases evidence a pervasive lack of understanding or acceptance of natural law."

[*"Natural Law and Justice Thomas," Regent University Law Review (1999-2000): 471*]



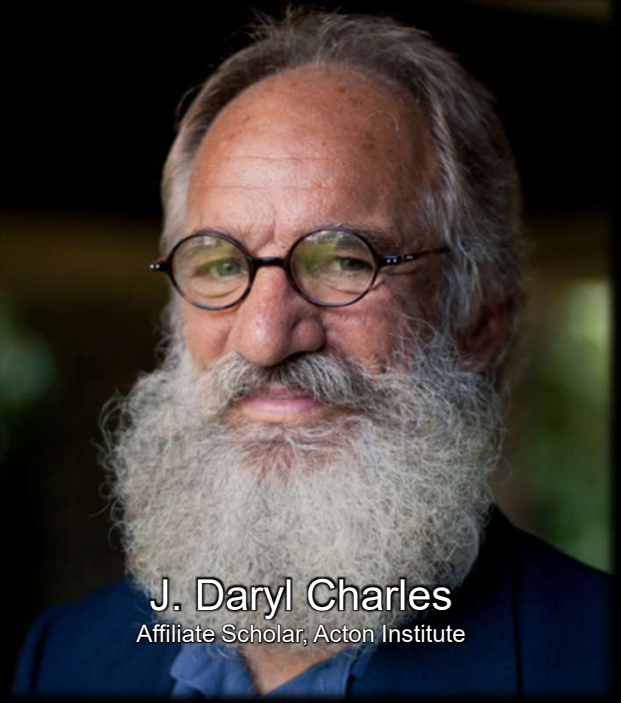
John S. Baker, Jr.
Distinguished Scholar in Residence
Catholic University of America
Law School

Isn't Natural Law Theory Catholic?



"It is difficult ... to make generalizations about Protestant theology. ... Nevertheless, people who otherwise have very little in common theologically find common ground in their opposition to natural law."

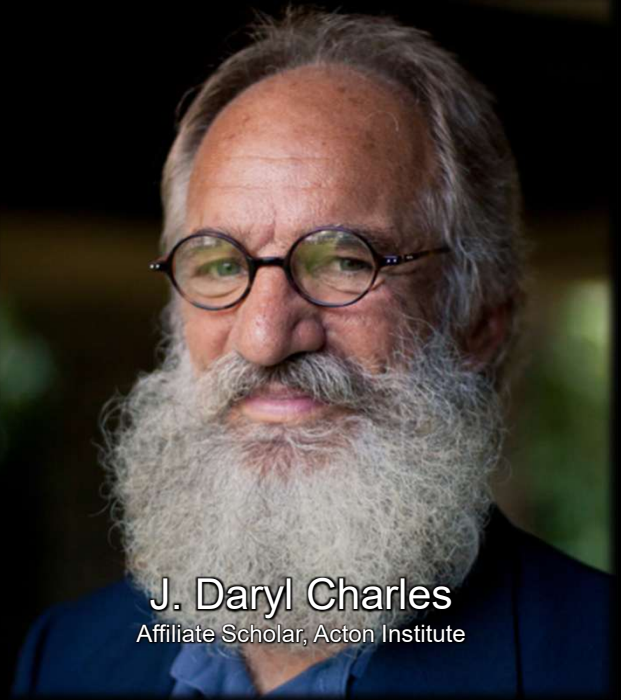
[Retrieving the Natural Law: A Return to Moral First Things, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 111]



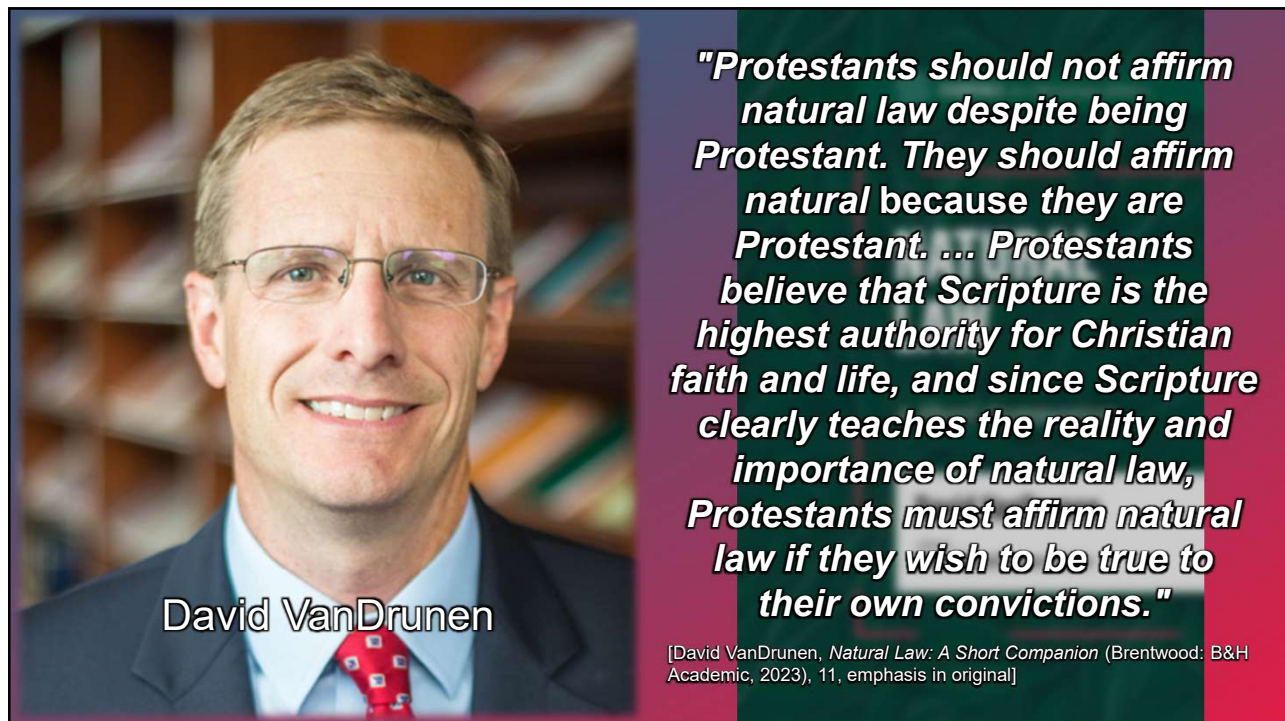
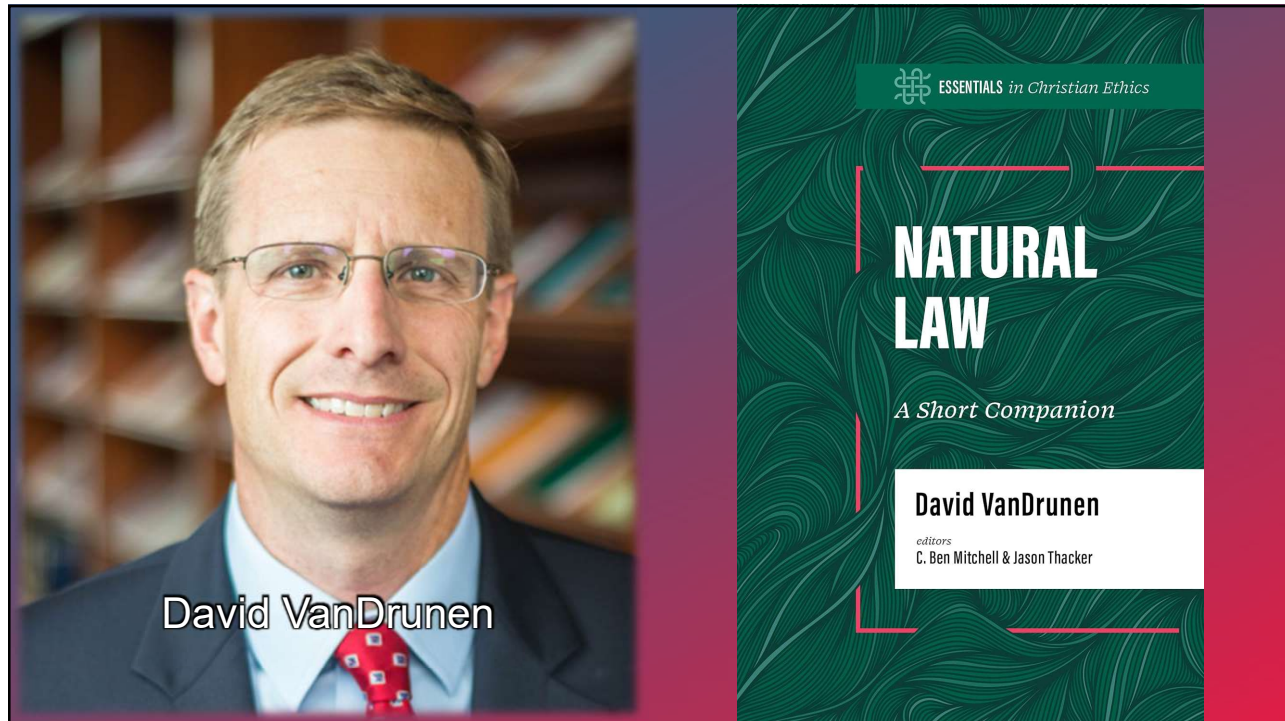
J. Daryl Charles
Affiliate Scholar, Acton Institute

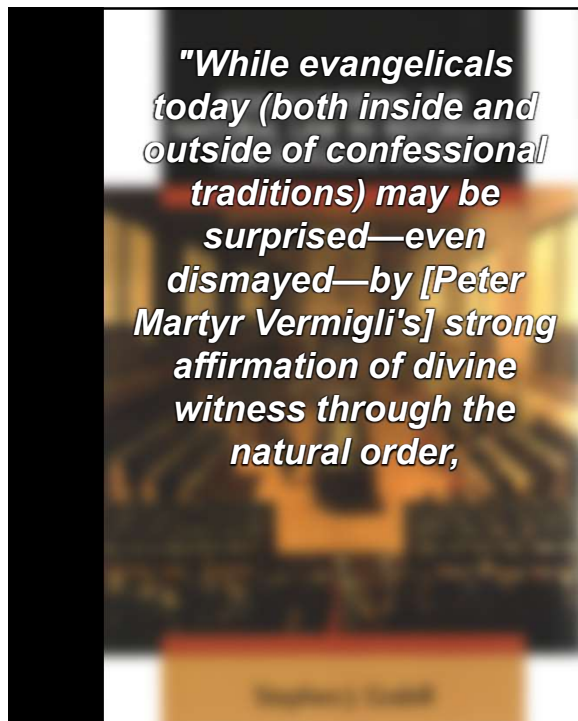
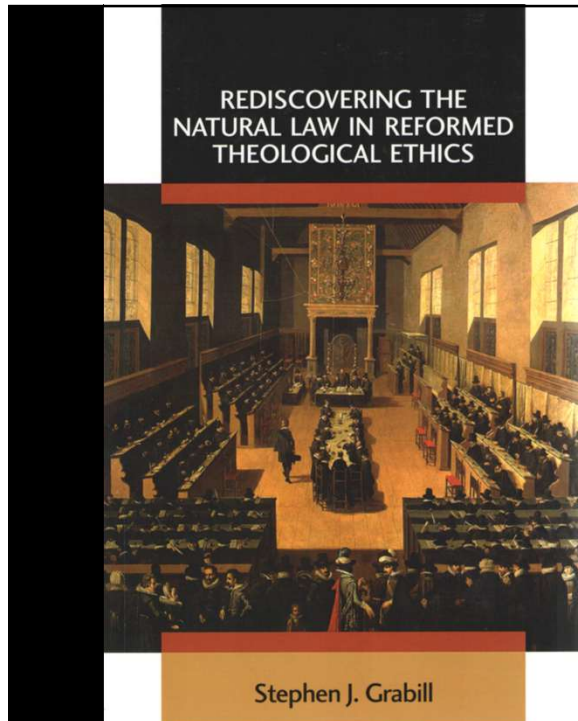
"One is hard-pressed to identify a single major figure in Protestant theological ethics who has developed and defended a theory of natural law."

[Retrieving, 112]



J. Daryl Charles
Affiliate Scholar, Acton Institute



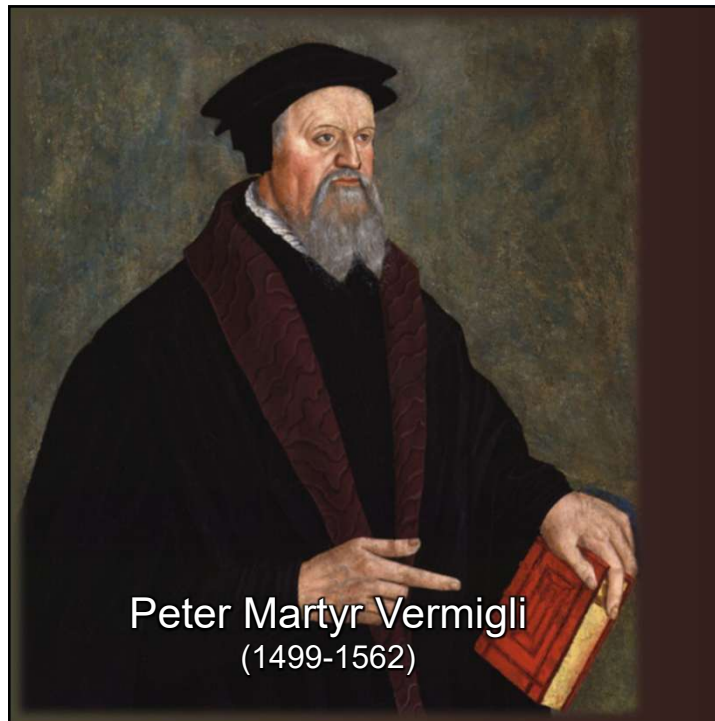


"the older magisterial Protestant tradition (Lutheran and Reformed) not only inherited but also passed on the doctrines of *lex naturalis* and *cognitio Dei naturalis*, especially the idea of an implanted knowledge of morality, as noncontroversial legacies of patristic and scholastic thought."

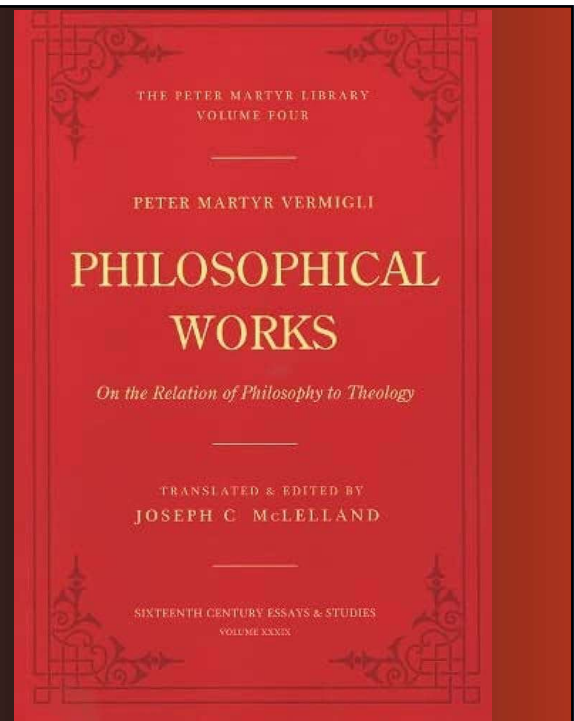
[Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 11]

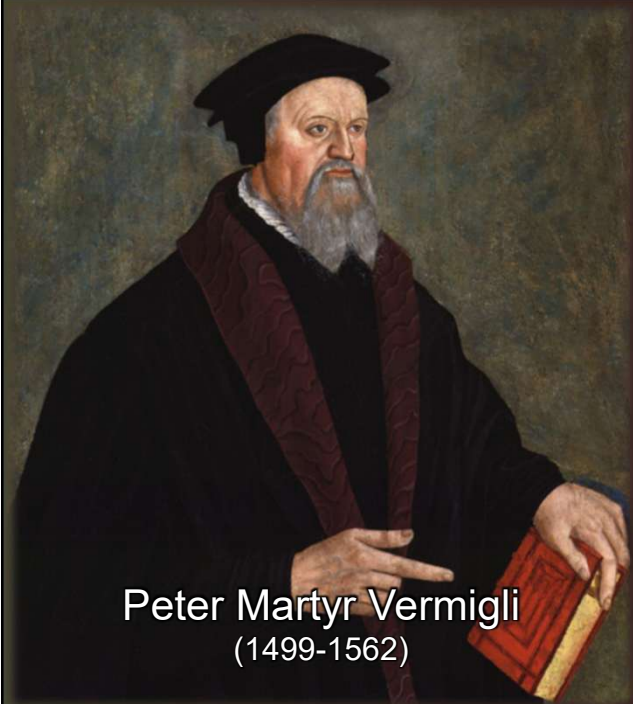


Stephen J. Grabill
Acton Institute and
Grand Rapids Theological Seminary



Peter Martyr Vermigli
(1499-1562)

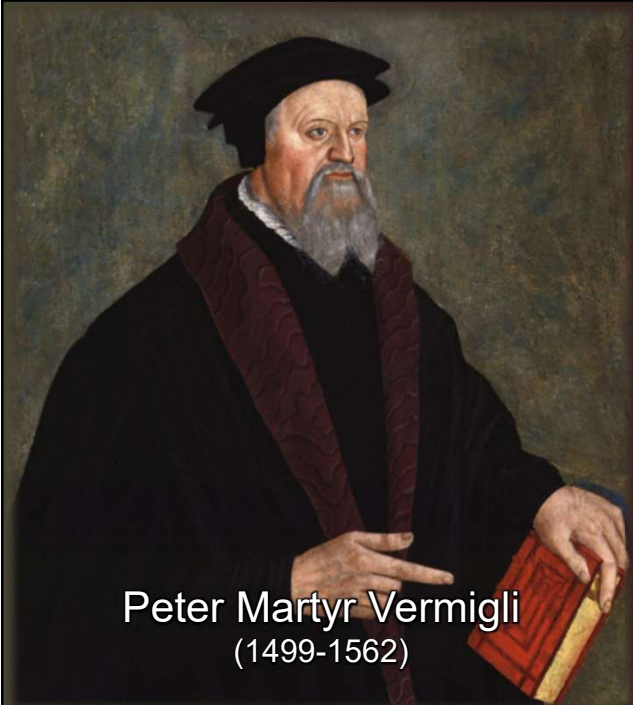




Peter Martyr Vermigli
(1499-1562)

"With such words [from Col. 2:8] he seems to frighten Christians away from the study of philosophy. But I am sure that if you properly grasp the meaning of the Apostle's statement you will not be disturbed. Since true philosophy derives from the knowledge of created things, and from these propositions reaches many conclusions about the justice and righteousness that God implanted naturally in human minds, it cannot therefore rightly be criticized: for it is the work of God, and could not be enjoyed by us without his special contribution."

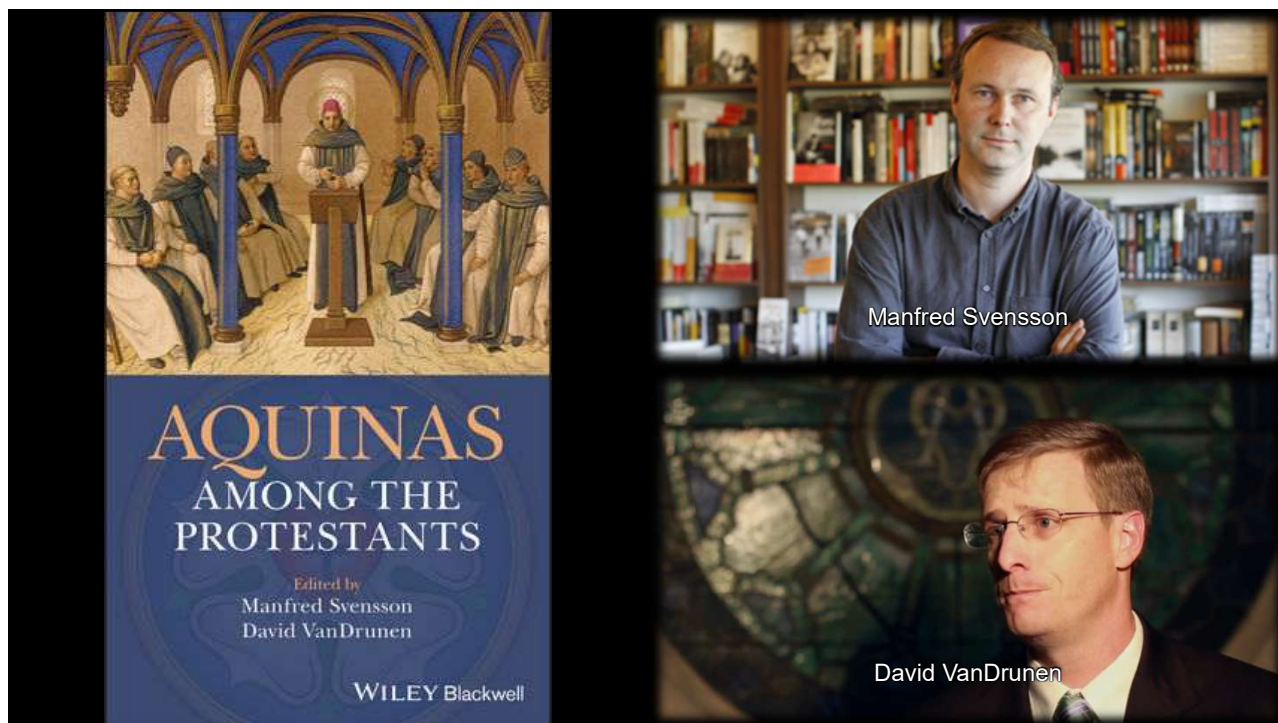
[Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Introduction to the Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, in *Philosophical Works: On the Relation of Philosophy to Theology*. This is vol. 4 of *The Peter Martyr Vermigli Library*, trans. and ed. Joseph C. McLelland (Moscow: The Davenant Press, 2018), 13-14]

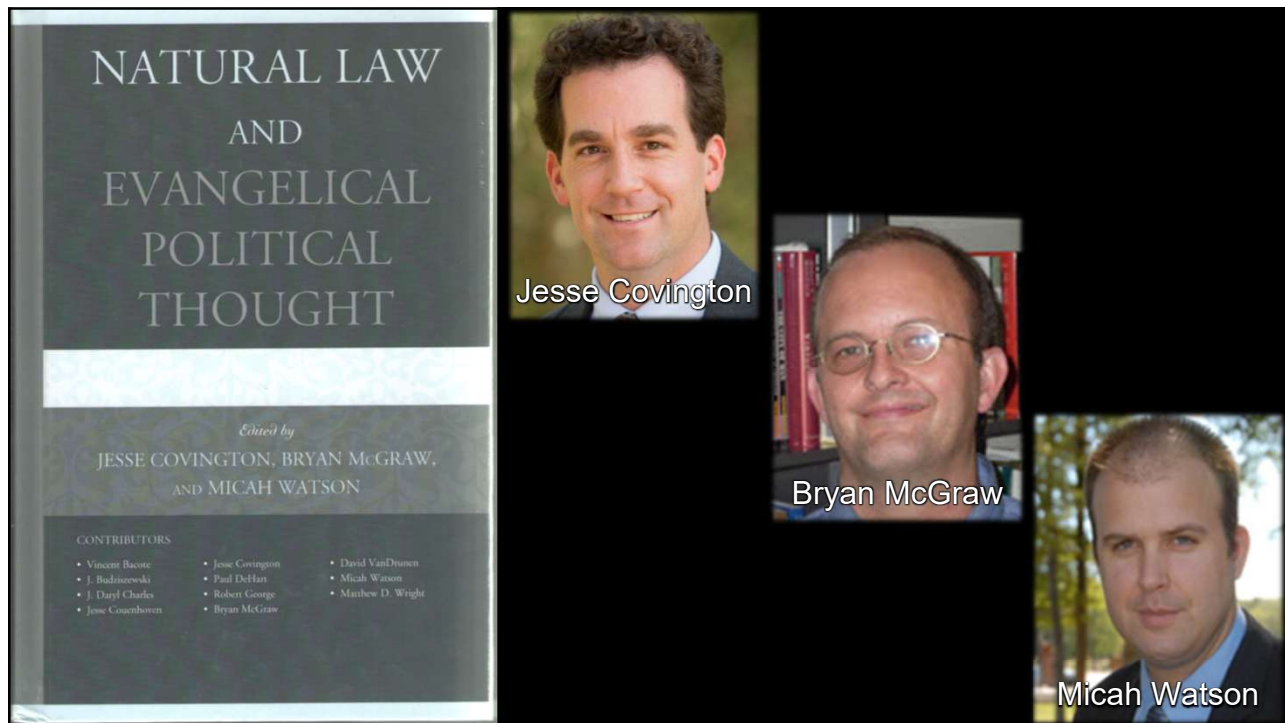
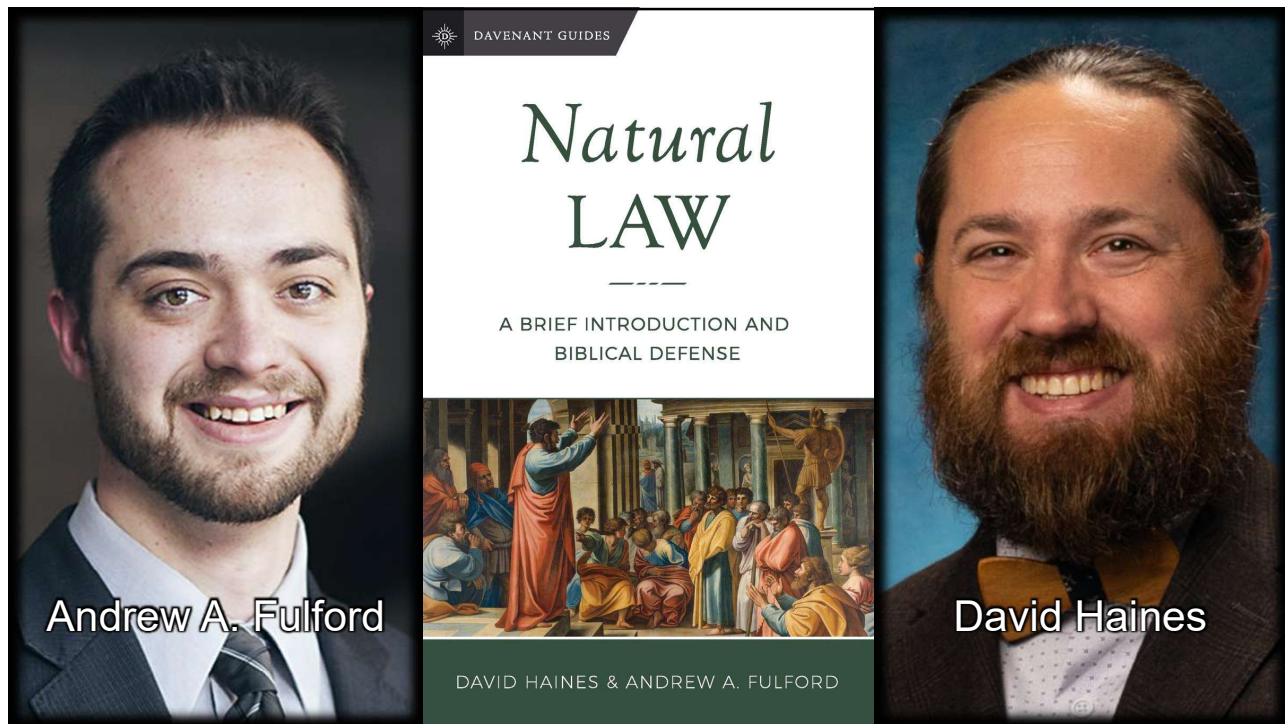


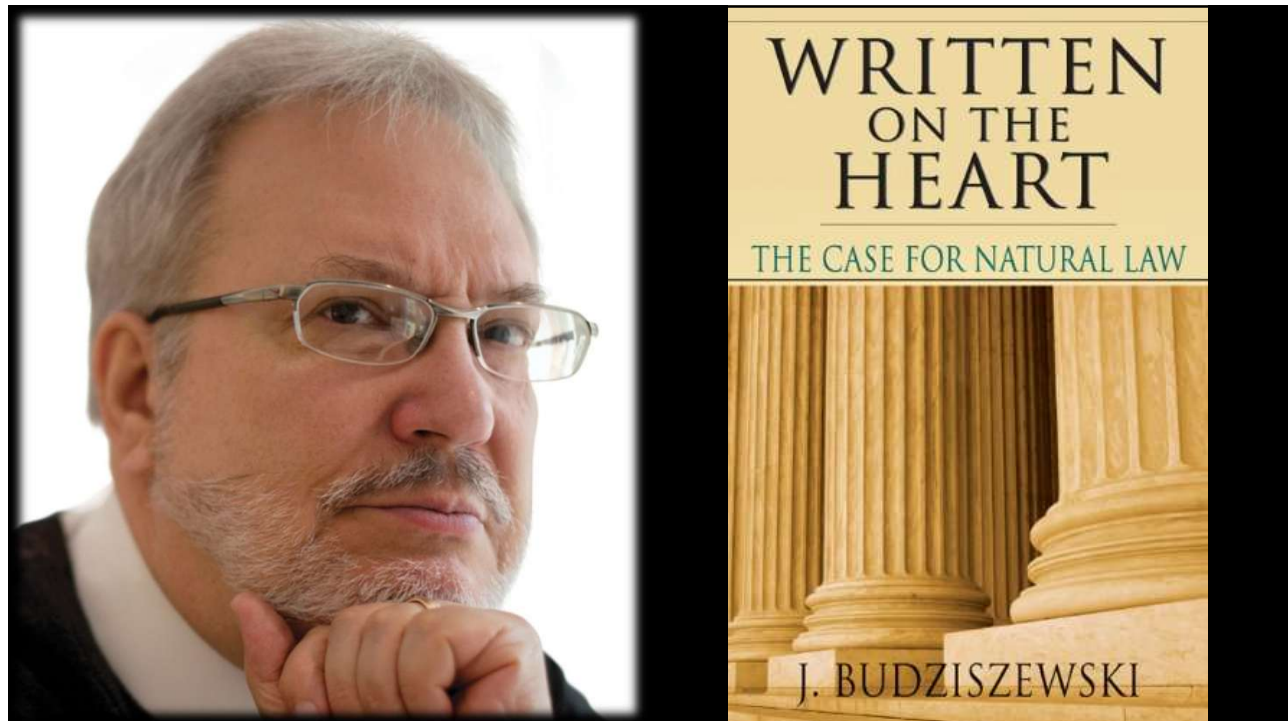
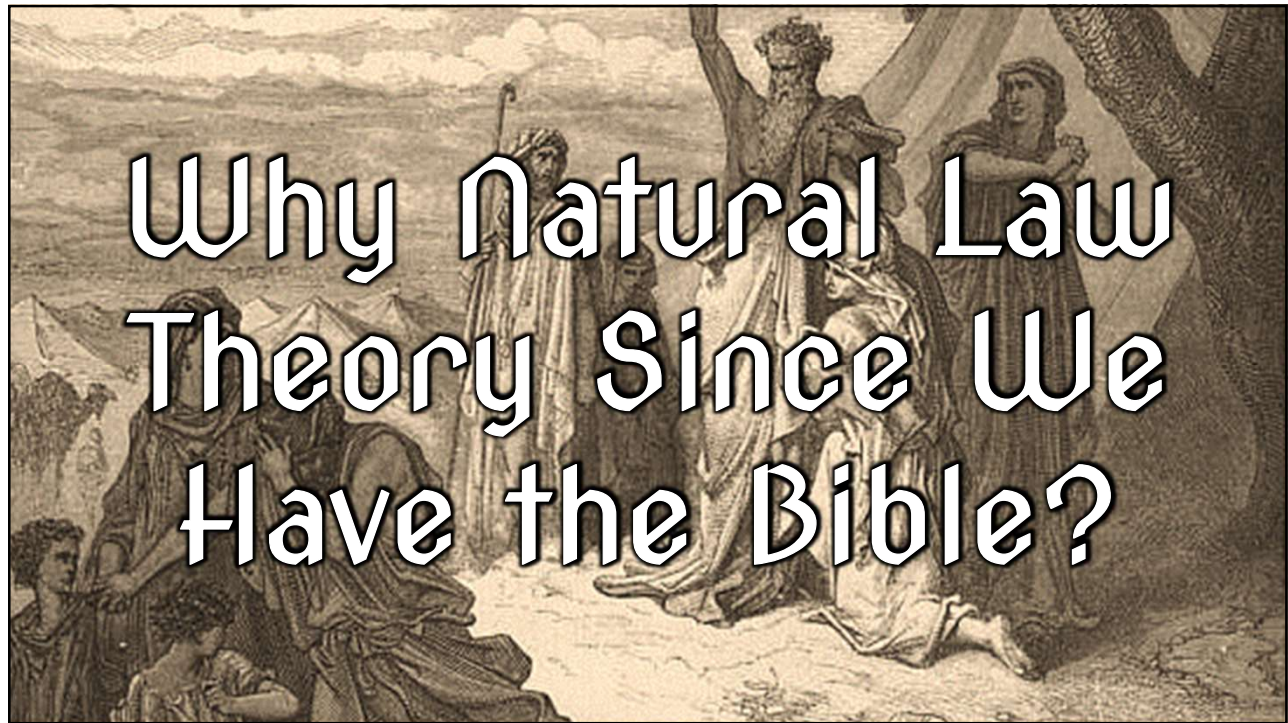
Peter Martyr Vermigli
(1499-1562)


"The goal of philosophy is that we reach that beatitude or happiness which can be acquired in this life by human powers, while the goal of Christian devotion is that the image in which we are created in righteousness and holiness of truth be renewed in us, so that we grow daily in the knowledge of God until we are led to see him as he is, with face uncovered."

[Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Introduction to the Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, 15]













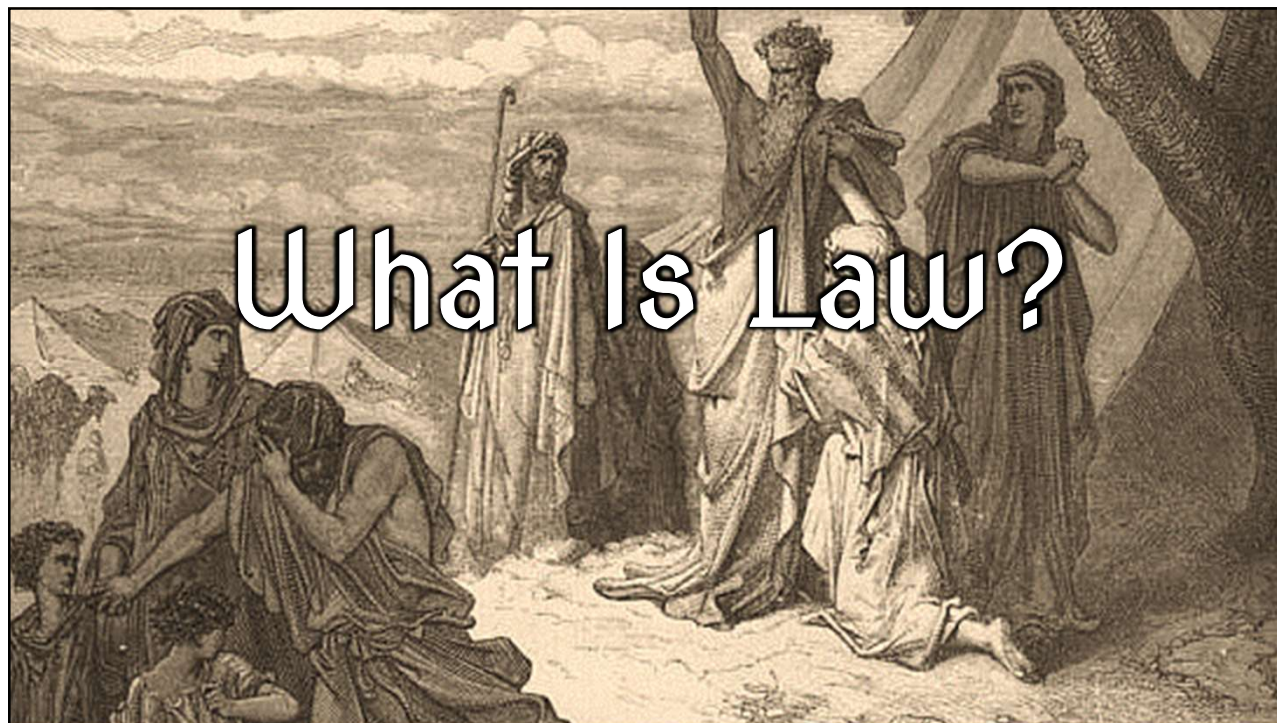
"Now it may be asked why a Christian should be interested in natural law at all. If one already has the Bible, what use is it? At best it would merely repeat in cursive a small part of what God had already written in great block letters."

[Written on the Heart: The Case for Natural Law (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 180]

Biblical Morality or Morality?



	<p><i>a righteous individual as part of a heavenly community</i></p> <p>↻ Romans 4:4-5 ↻ <i>Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. {5} But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.</i></p>	 <p>our good in the next life</p>
<p>natural</p>		 <p>our good in this life</p>
	<p>↻ Romans 12:17-18 ↻ <i>Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. {18} If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.</i></p> <p><i>a righteous individual as part of a heavenly community</i></p>	



"Thus from the four preceding articles, the definition of law may be gathered; and it is nothing else than **an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by him who has care of the community, and promulgated."**

[*Summa Theologiae* (hereafter ST) I-II, Q. 90, art. 4, trans. *St. Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologica: Complete English Edition in Five Volumes*, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981)]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)



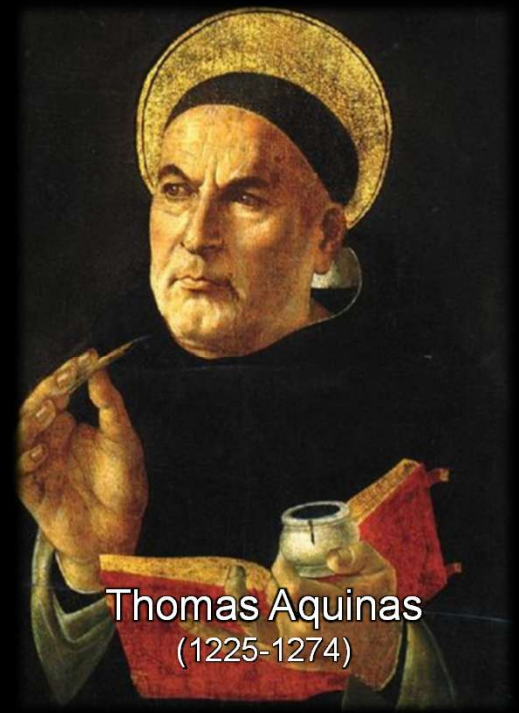
Kinds of Law

ETERNAL LAW

*God's providential working
of the universe*

*The plan by which God
governs creation*

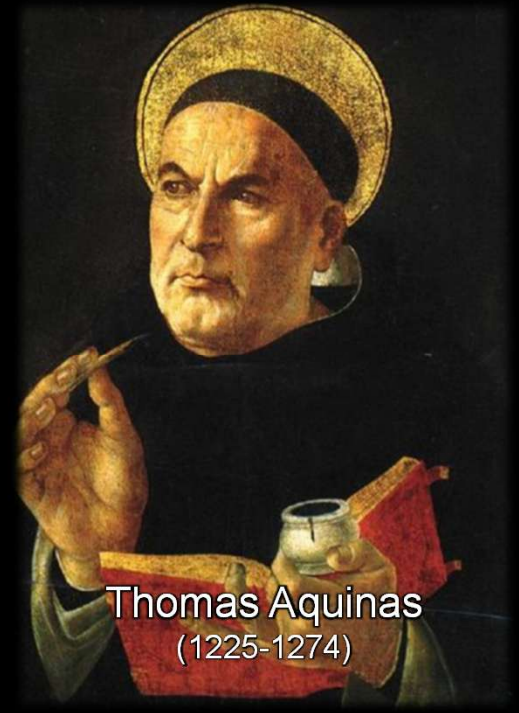
"It is evident, granted that the world is ruled by Divine Providence ... that the whole community of the universe is governed by Divine Reason. Wherefore the very Idea of the government of things in God the Ruler of the universe, has the nature of a law.



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"And since the Divine Reason's conception of things is not subject to time but is eternal, according to Prov. viii, 23, therefore it is that this kind of law must be called eternal."

[ST HI Q91, Art. 1]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

NATURAL LAW

*the participation in Eternal Law
by rational creatures by virtue
of being rational*





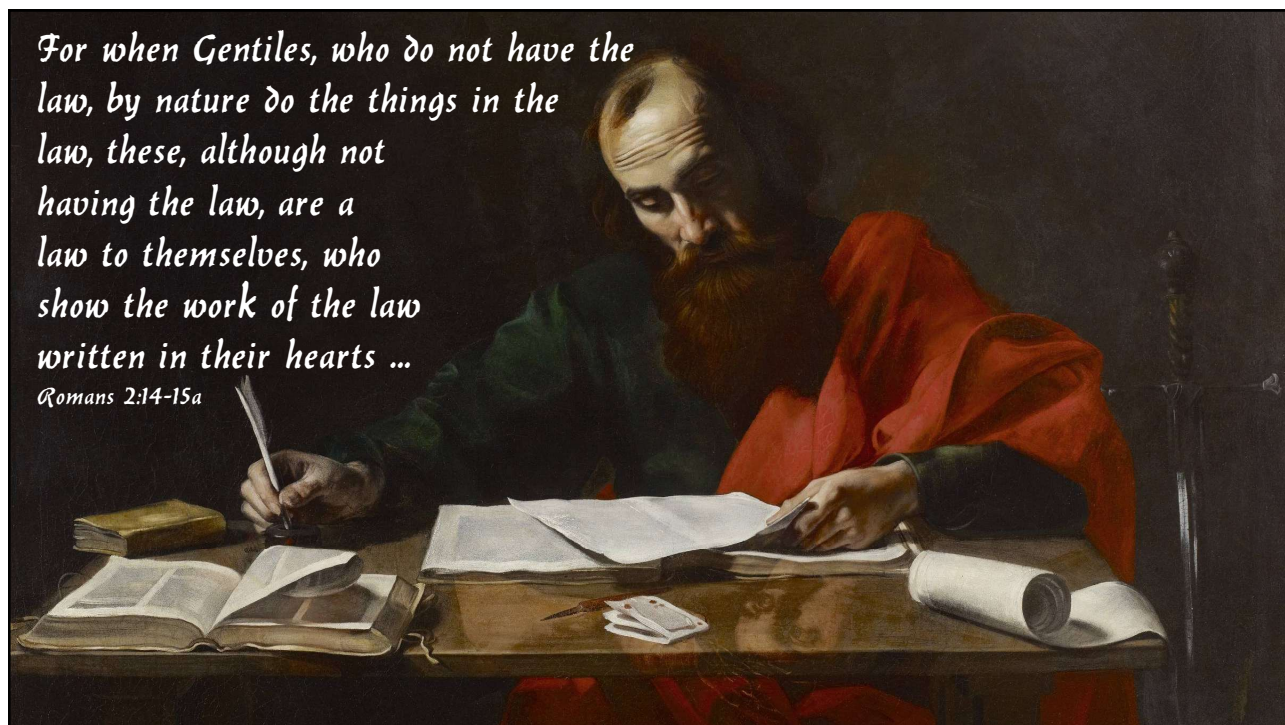
NATURAL LAW

that aspect of the Eternal Law whereby the Creator governs and guides the moral actions of humans such that, when obeyed, it leads humans to their proper end in this world



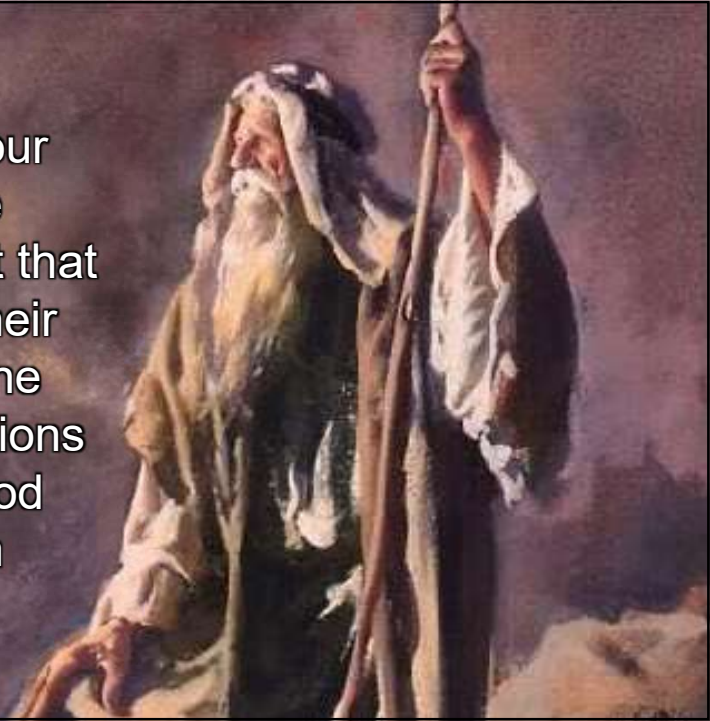
NATURAL LAW

*that aspect of the Eternal Law whereby the Creator governs and guides the **moral actions** of humans such that, when obeyed, it leads humans to their **proper end in this world***

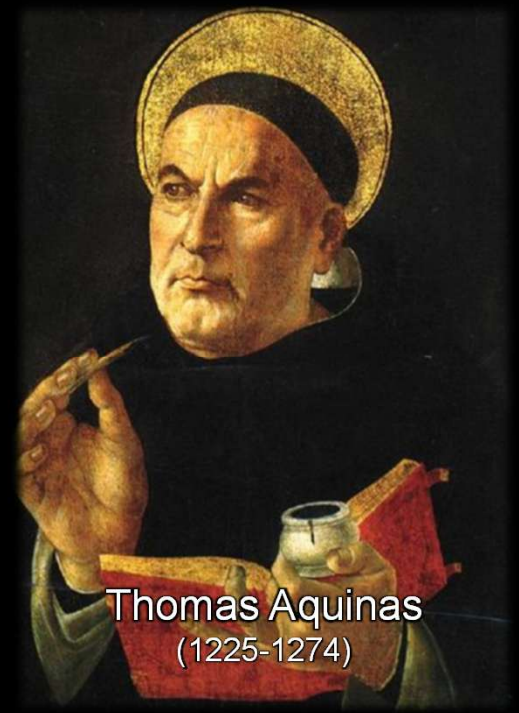


☞ Deut. 9:5 ☞

"It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God drives them out from before you."

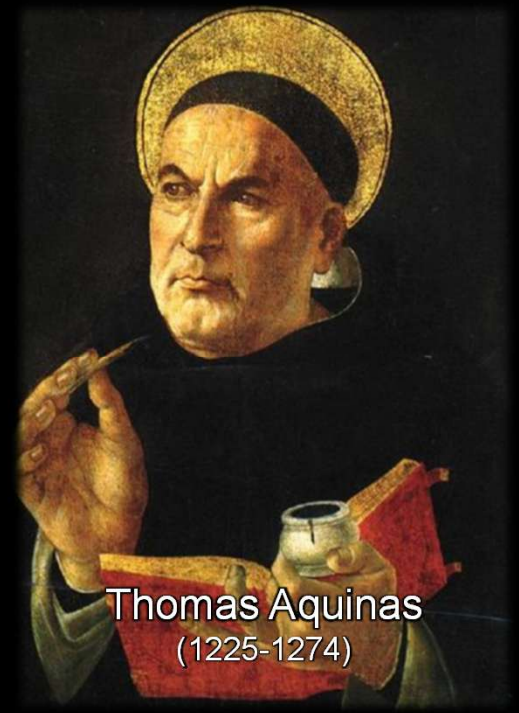


"It is evident that all things partake somewhat of the eternal law, in so far as, namely, from its being imprinted on them, they derive their respective inclinations to their proper acts and ends."



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

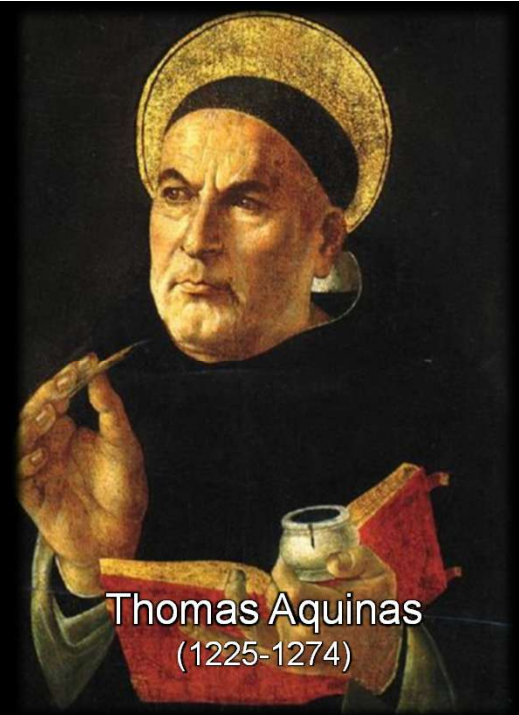
"Now among all others, the rational creature is subject to Divine providence in the most excellent way, in so far as it partakes of a share of providence, by being provident both for itself and for others."



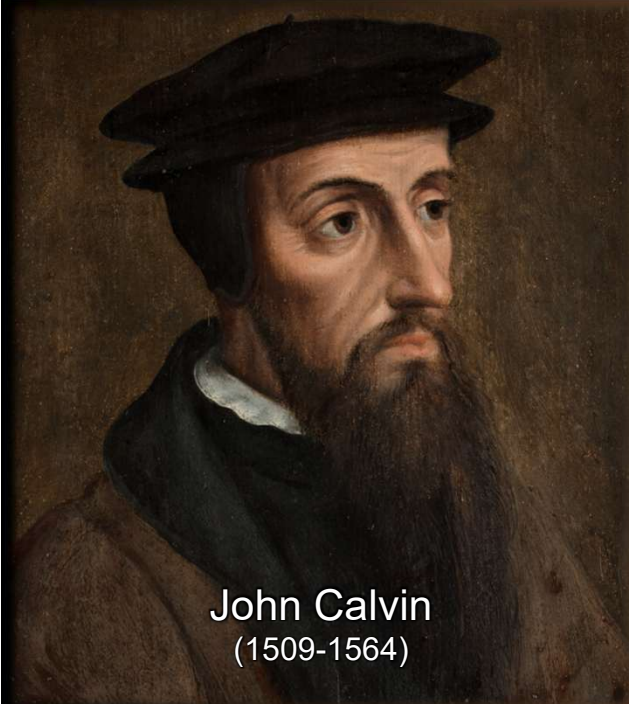
Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"Wherefore it has a share of the Eternal Reason, whereby it has a natural inclination to its proper act and end: and this participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called the natural law."

[ST-II Q91, Art. 2]



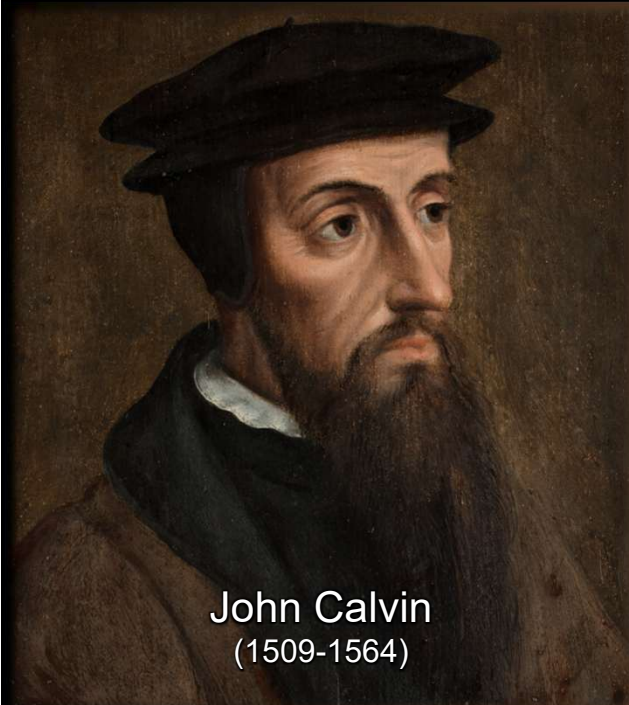
Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)



John Calvin
(1509-1564)

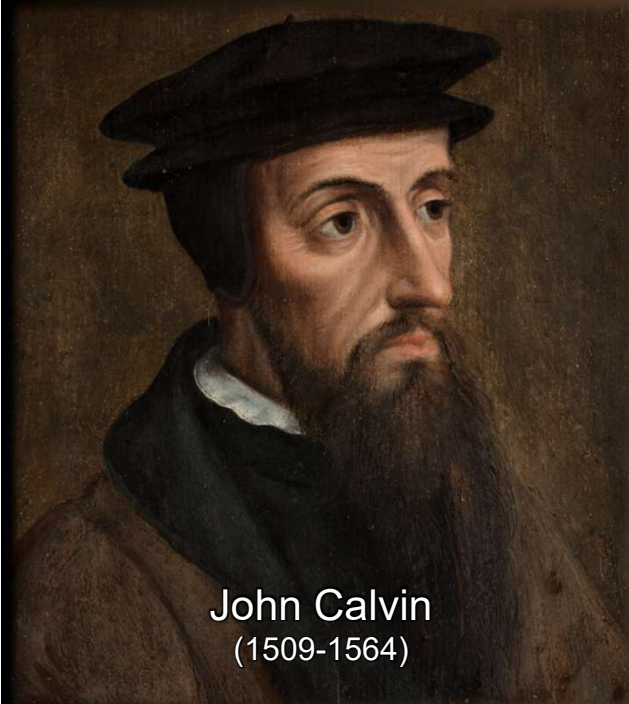
"Nothing, indeed, is more common, than for man to be sufficiently instructed in a right course of conduct by natural law, of which the Apostle here speaks [in Rom. 2:14-15]."

[Institutes of the Christian Religion, 2 vols. trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), Bk. II, Chap. 2, §22, p. 241]



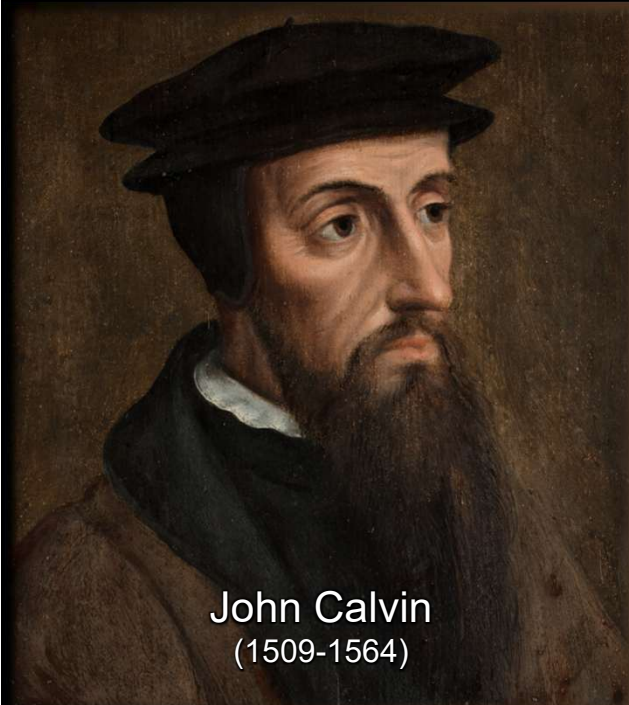
John Calvin
(1509-1564)

"Since man is by nature a social animal, he is disposed, from natural instinct, to cherish and preserve society; and accordingly we see that the minds of all men have impressions of civil order and honesty."



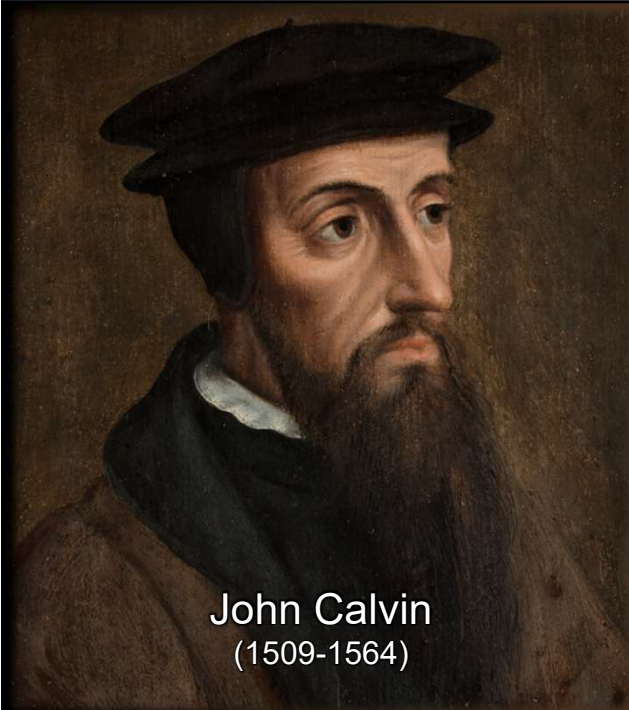
John Calvin
(1509-1564)

"Hence it is that every individual understands how human societies must be regulated by laws, and also is able to comprehend the principles of those laws."



John Calvin
(1509-1564)

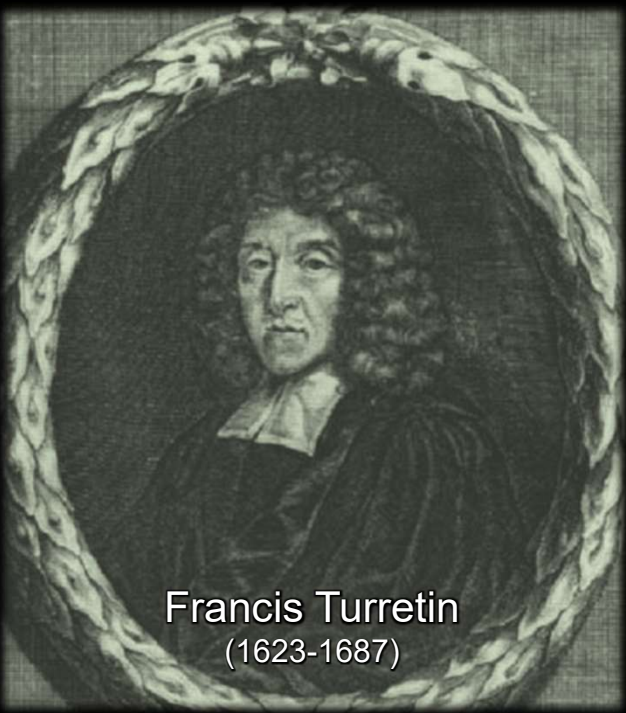
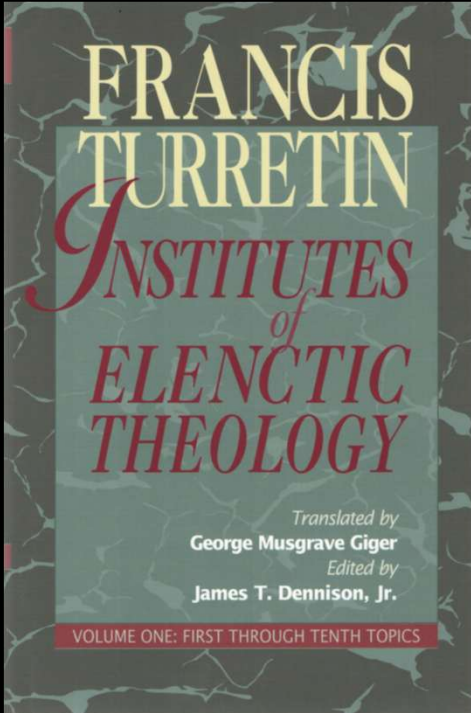
"Hence the universal agreement in regard to such subjects, both among nations and individuals, the seeds of them being implanted in the breasts of all without a teacher or lawgiver. ... It is true, that some principle of civil order is impressed on all."



"And this is ample proof that, in regard to the constitution of the present life, no man is devoid of the light of reason."

[*Institutes*, Bk. II, §13, pp. 234-235]

John Calvin
(1509-1564)



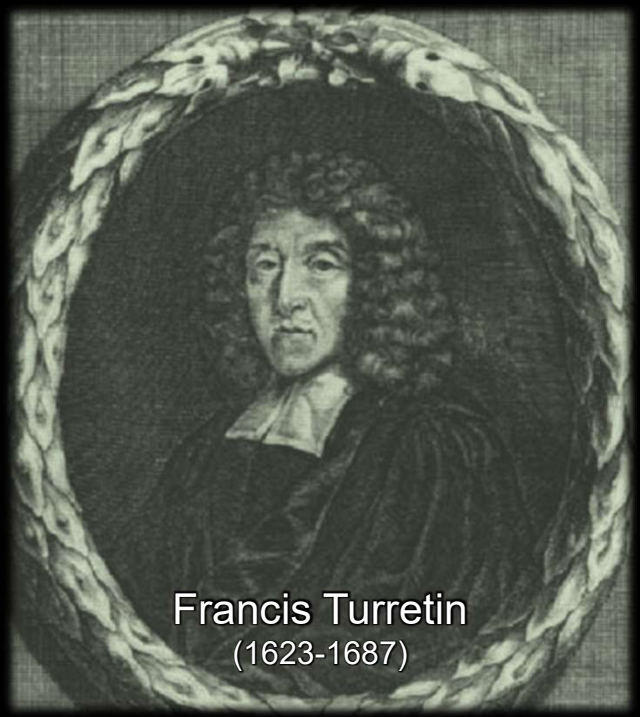
FRANCIS
TURRETIN
*I*NSSTITUTES
of
ELENCTIC
THEOLOGY

Translated by
George Musgrave Giger
Edited by
James T. Dennison, Jr.

VOLUME ONE: FIRST THROUGH TENTH TOPICS

Francis Turretin
(1623-1687)

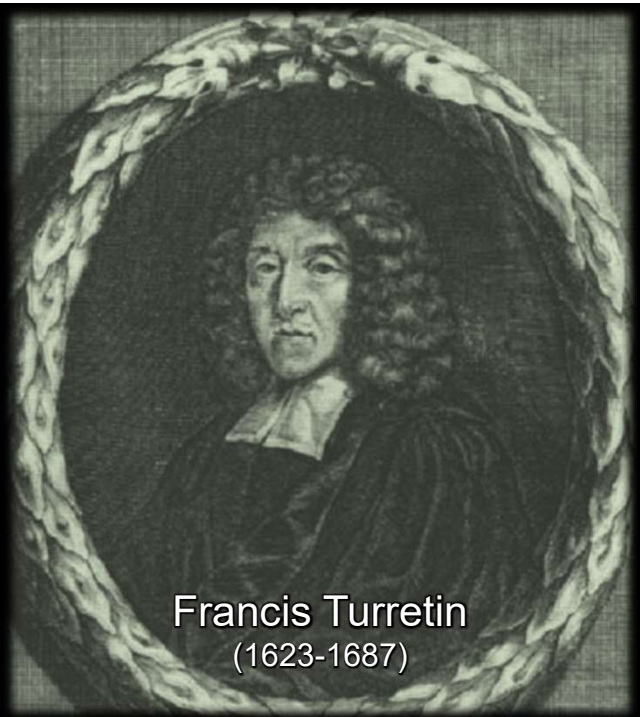
"Natural law is taken strictly and properly for the practical rule of moral duties to which men are bound by nature. ... The orthodox ... affirm that there is a natural law ... arising ... from a divine obligation being impressed by God upon the conscience of man in his very creation ... drawn from the right of nature itself, found both on the nature of God, the Creator ... and on the condition of rational creatures themselves



Francis Turretin
(1623-1687)

"(who, on account of their necessary dependence upon God in the genus of morals, no less than in the genus of being, are bound to perform or avoid those things which sound reason and the dictates of conscience enjoin upon them to do or avoid)."

[Institutes of Elenctic Theology, First Topic: Theology, Q. XI, §§V, VII, IX, trans. by George Musgrave Giger, (Phillipsburg: P & R, 1992, vol. 2, pp. 2, 3]



Francis Turretin
(1623-1687)

"One may well ask, 'How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?' The answer is found in the fact that there are two types of laws: there are just laws, and there are unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that 'An unjust law is no law at all.' Now, what is the difference between the two? How does one determine when a law is just or unjust?"

Martin Luther King, Jr.
(1929-1968)

*"A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law, or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas, an unjust law is a human law **that is not rooted in eternal and natural law**. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust."*

[Martin Luther King, Jr. "Letters from Birmingham Jail," April 12, 1963]

Martin Luther King, Jr.
(1929-1968)

"In regard to Thomas and Calvin on natural law, therefore, one seems safe in saying that Calvin could appeal to natural law without thereby placing himself definitively in one medieval school or another [regarding the debate between the realists and the voluntarists]."



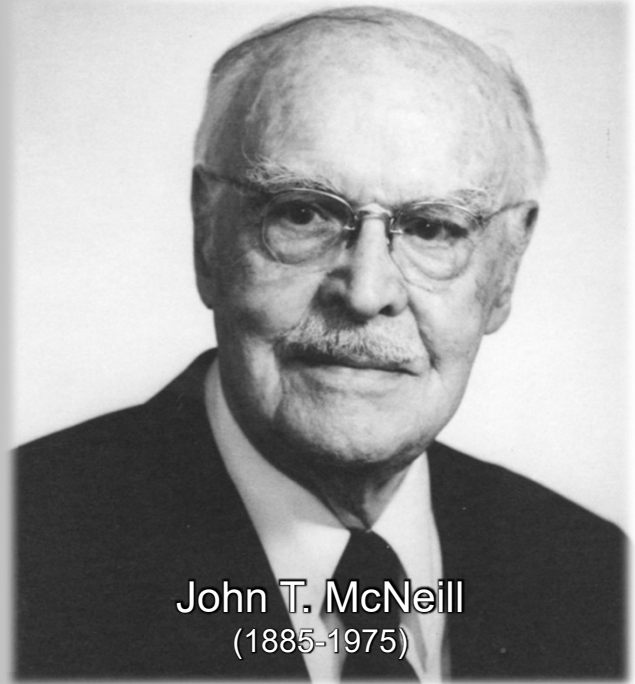
"Indeed insofar as ideas of natural law were intimately woven into the fabric of the European ius commune of which Calvin the law student would have imbibed in his youth, he had no reason to consider his reference to natural law as anything out of the ordinary."

[David VanDrunen, "Medieval Natural Law and the Reformation: A Comparison of Aquinas and Calvin," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 80 (2006): 77-98]



"There is no real discontinuity between the teaching of the Reformers and that of their predecessors with respect to natural law. Not one of the leaders of the Reformation assails the principle. Instead, with the possible exception of Zwingli, they all on occasion express a quite ungrudging respect for the moral law naturally implanted in the human heart and seek to inculcate this attribute in their readers."

[John T. McNeill, "Natural Law in the Teaching of the Reformers," in *The Journal of Religion* 26, no. 3 (July 1946): 168-182. The citation is from p. 168]

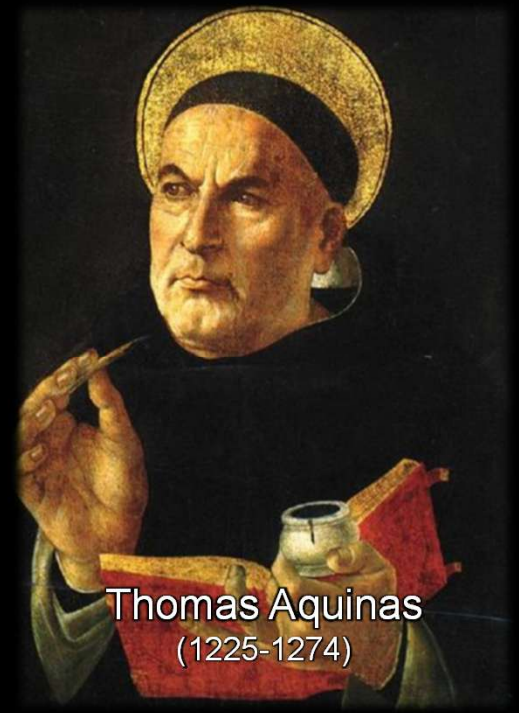


John T. McNeill
(1885-1975)

HUMAN LAW

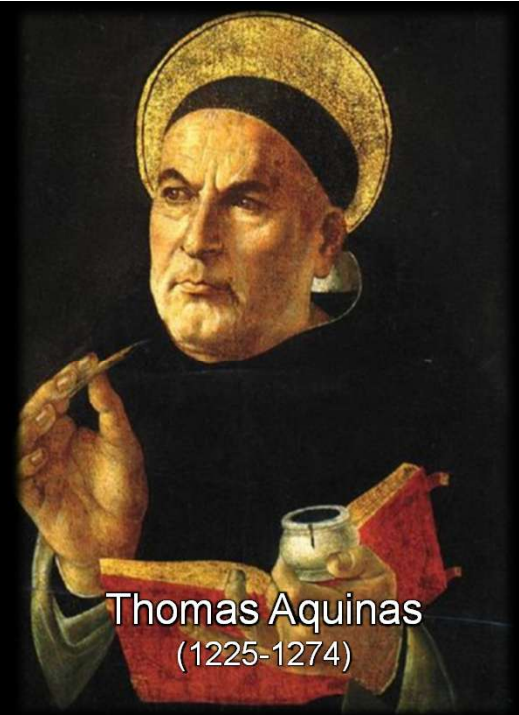
*a particular application of
natural law to local communities
imperfect*

"Just as, in the speculative reason, from indemonstrable principles, we draw the conclusions of the various sciences, the knowledge of which is not imparted to us by nature, but acquired by the efforts of reason,



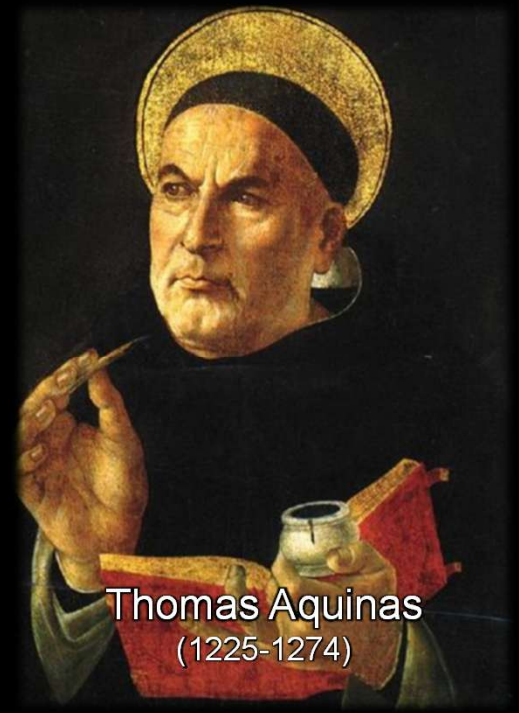
Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"so too it is from the precepts of the natural law, as from general and indemonstrable principles, that the human reason needs to proceed to the more particular determinations of certain matters.



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

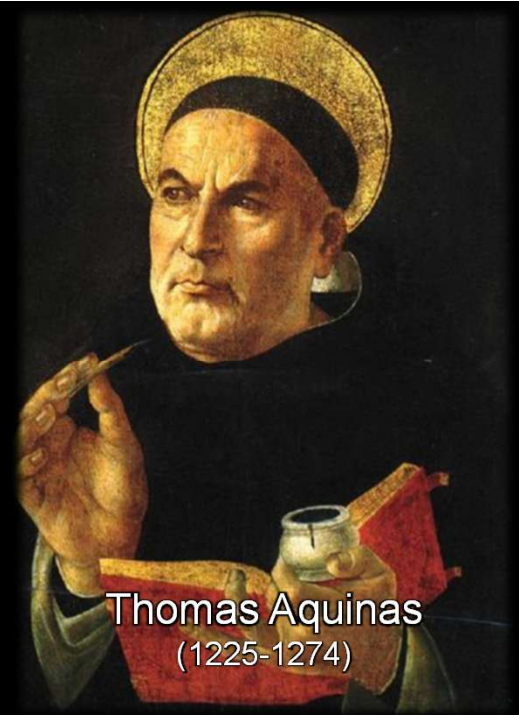
"The practical reason is concerned with practical matters, which are singular and contingent: but not with necessary things, with which the speculative reason is concerned."



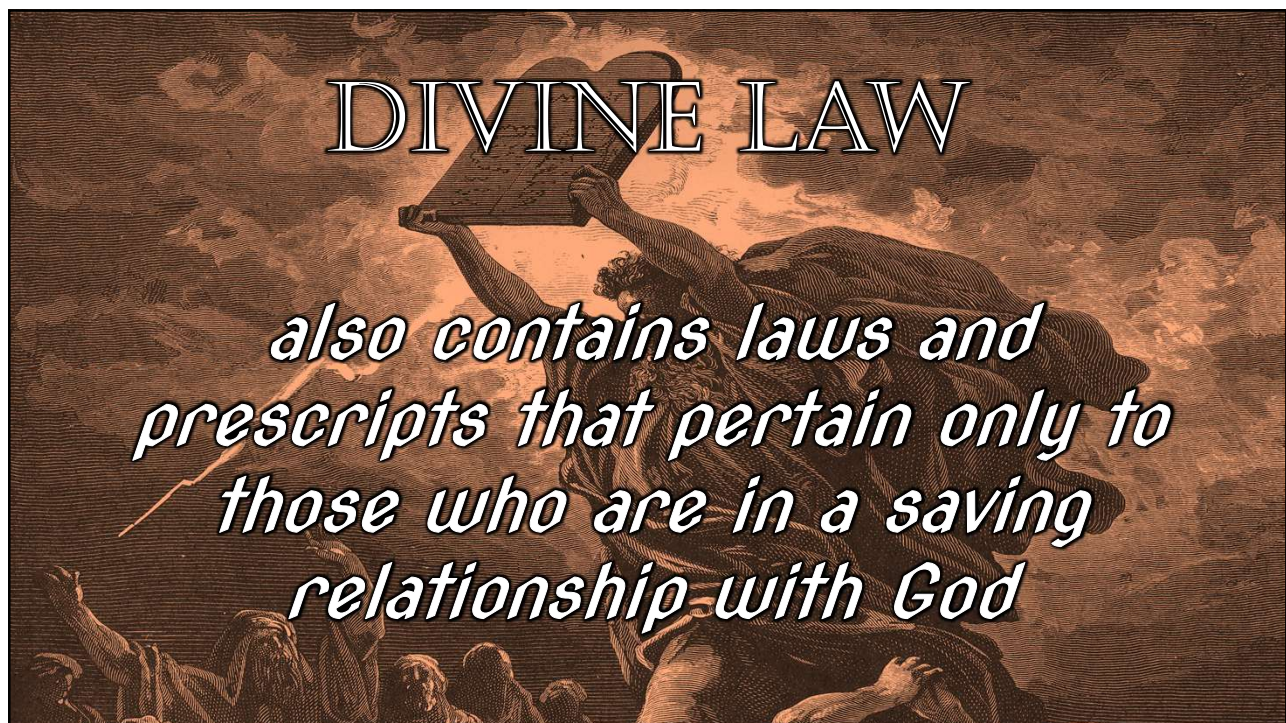
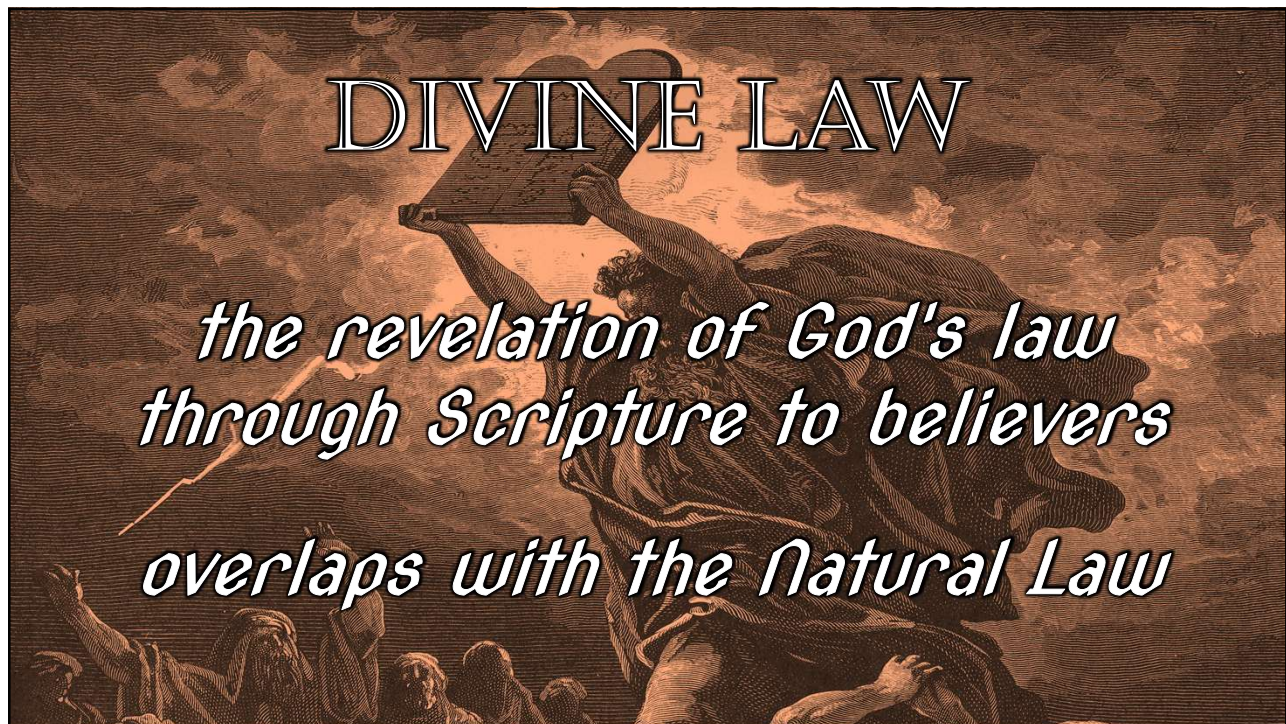
Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"Wherefore human laws cannot have that inerrancy that belongs to the demonstrated conclusions of sciences."

[ST-II Q91, Art. 3, ad. 3]

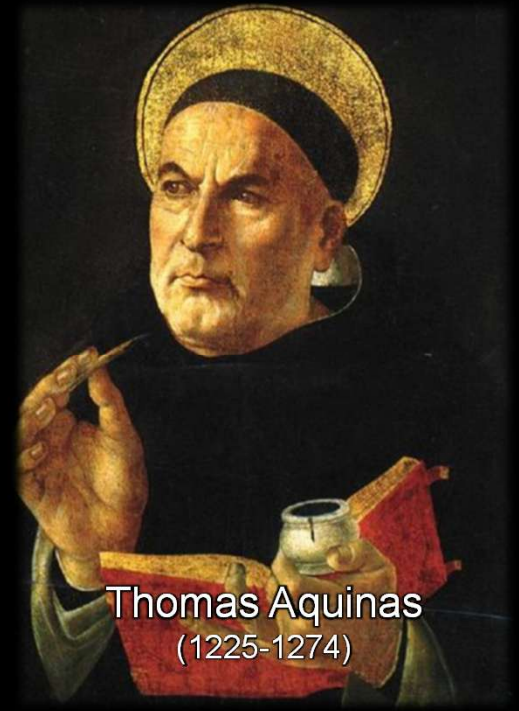


Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)



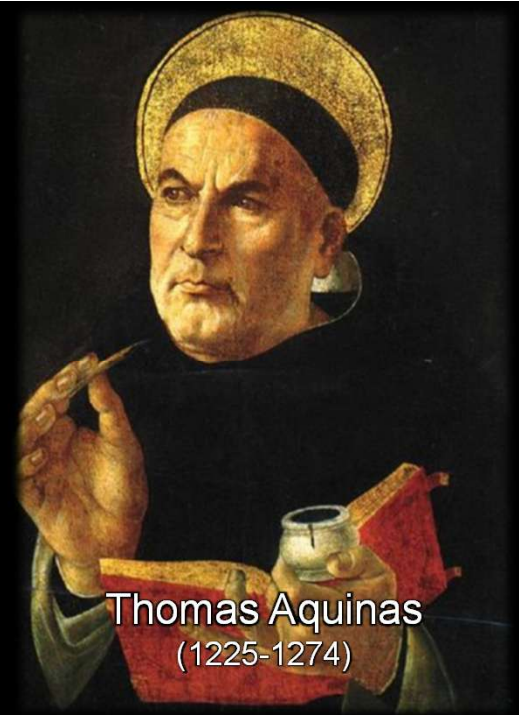
"It was necessary for the directing of human conduct to have a Divine law. ... If man were ordained to no other end than that which is proportionate to his natural faculty, there would be no need for man to have any further direction on the part of his reason, besides the natural law and human law

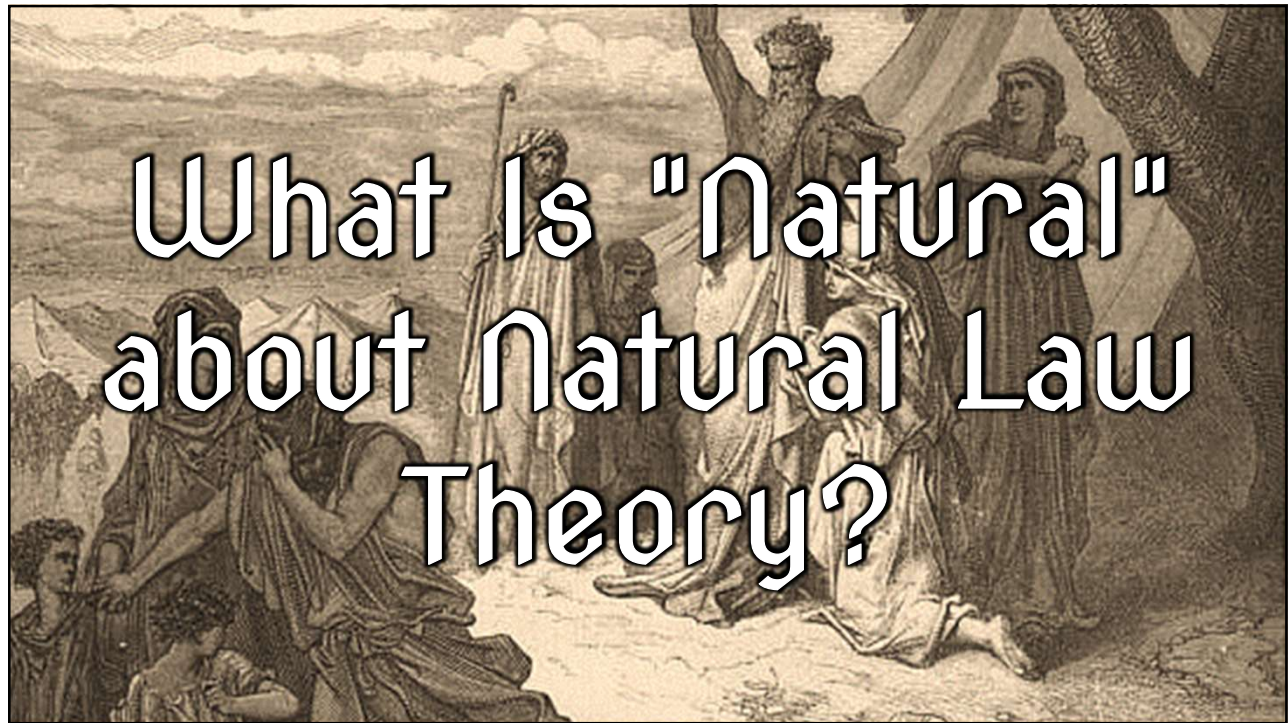
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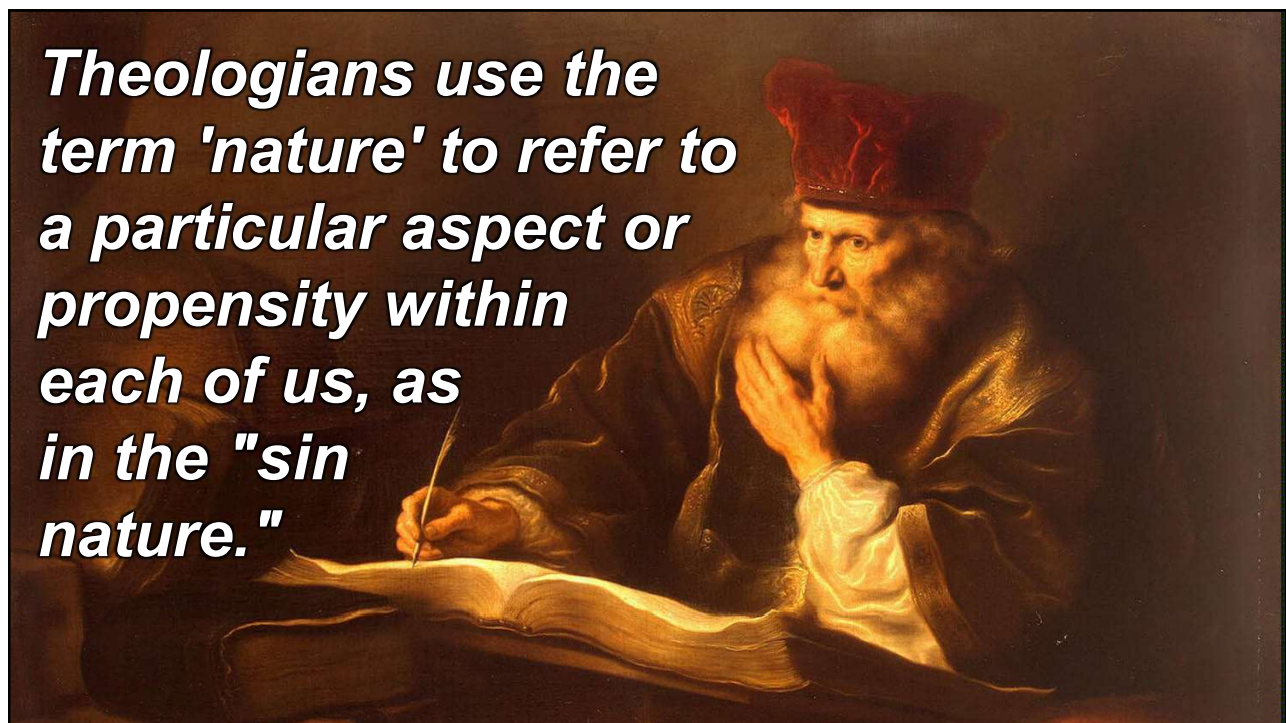
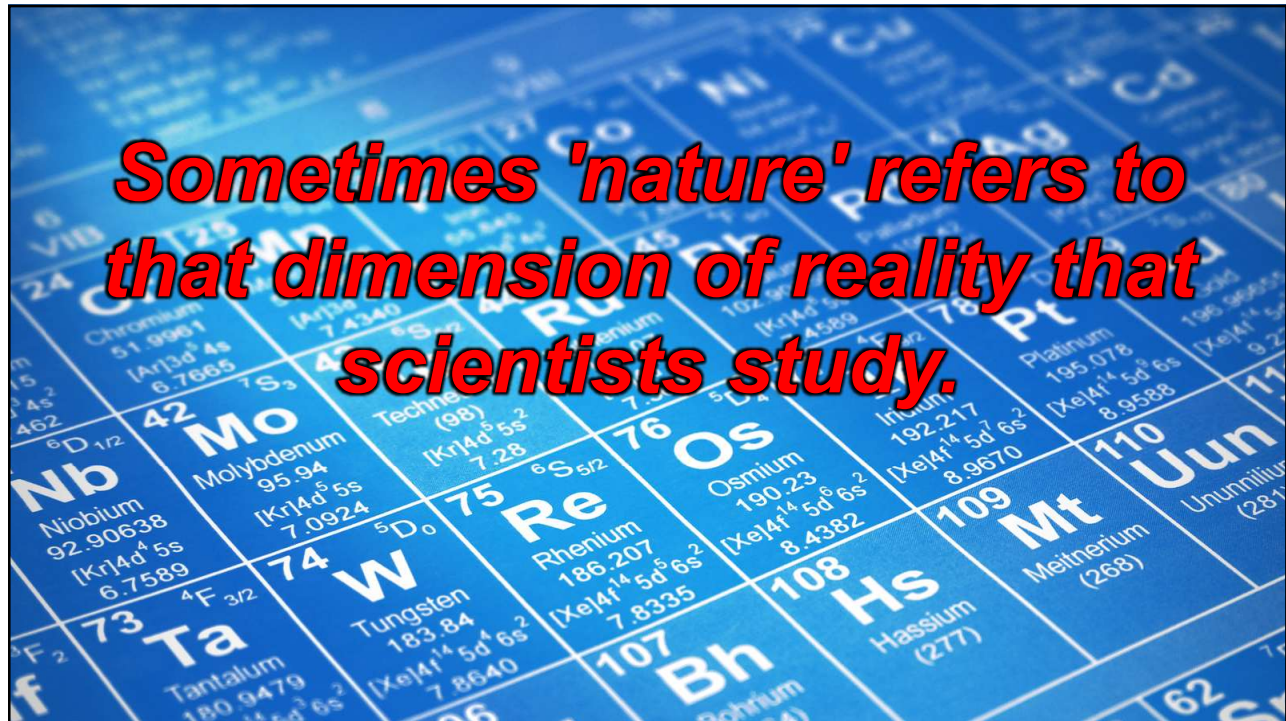


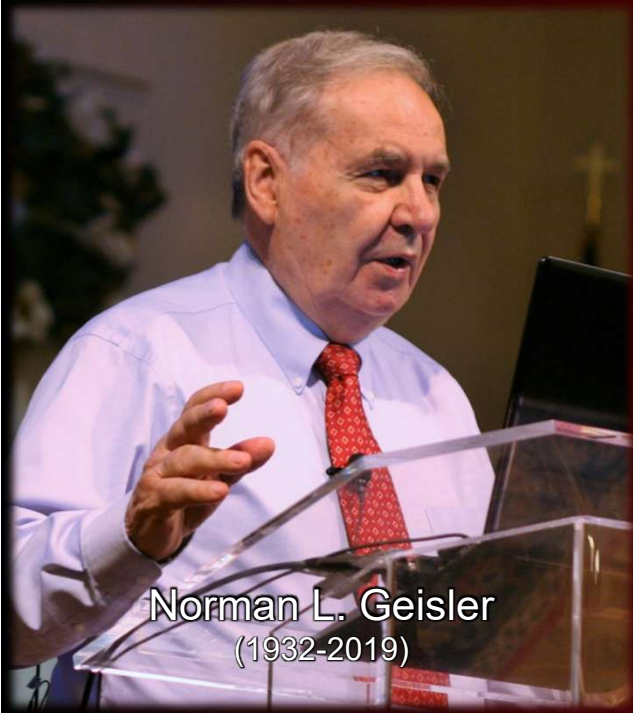
"But since man is ordained to an end of eternal happiness which is inproportionate to man's natural faculty ... it was necessary that, besides the natural and the human law, man should be directed to his end by a law given by God."

(ST I-II Q91, Art. 4)





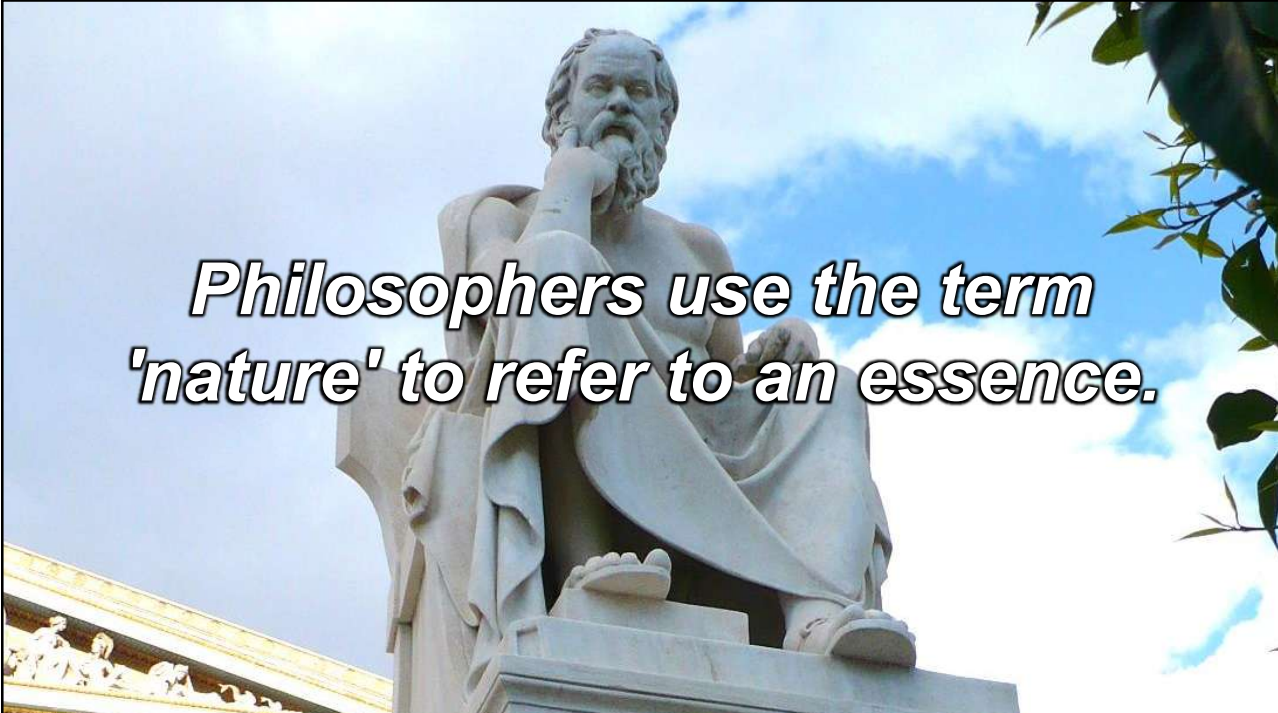




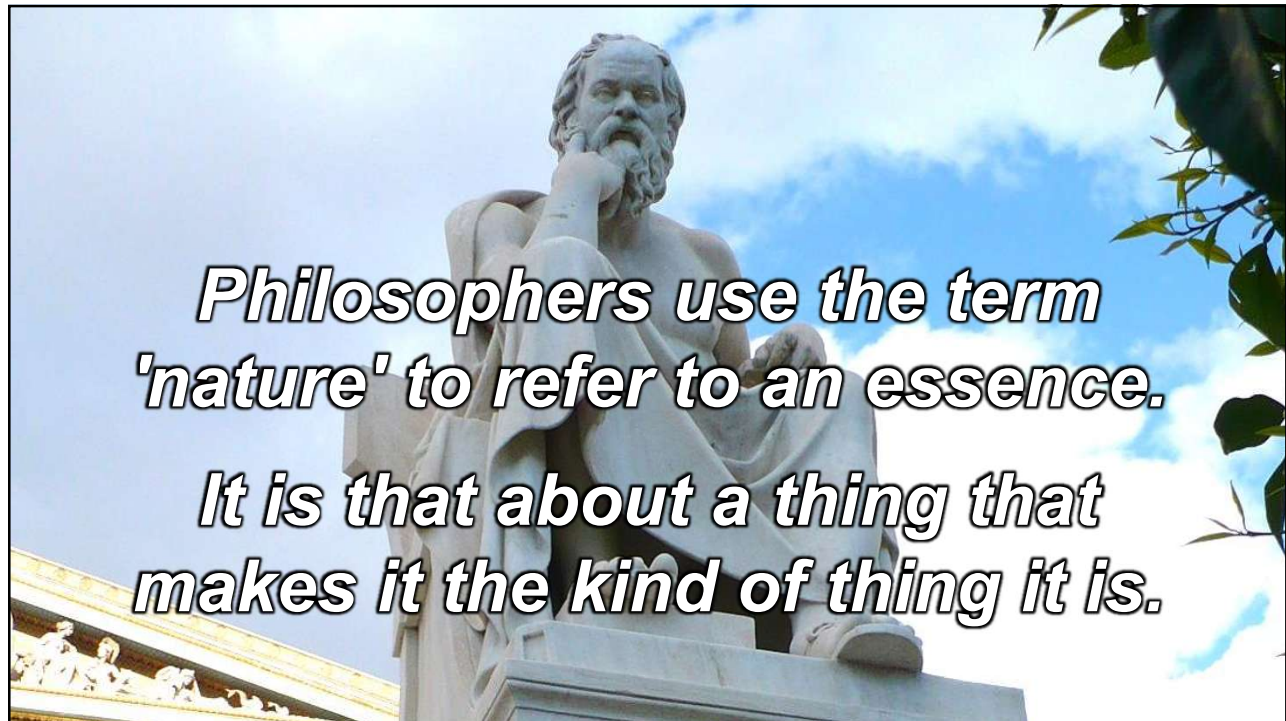
Norman L. Geisler
(1932-2019)

"Everyone who is naturally generated from Adam—every human—inherits a sinful nature from him. ... Being sinners by nature, short of and without salvation, we inevitably are and do what comes naturally: We sin."

[Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology: Vol. Three: Sin Salvation* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2004, 125.)



Philosophers use the term 'nature' to refer to an essence.



"What-ness"

with respect to a thing's operations:

Nature

with respect to a thing's matter:

Form

with respect to a thing's accidents:

Substance

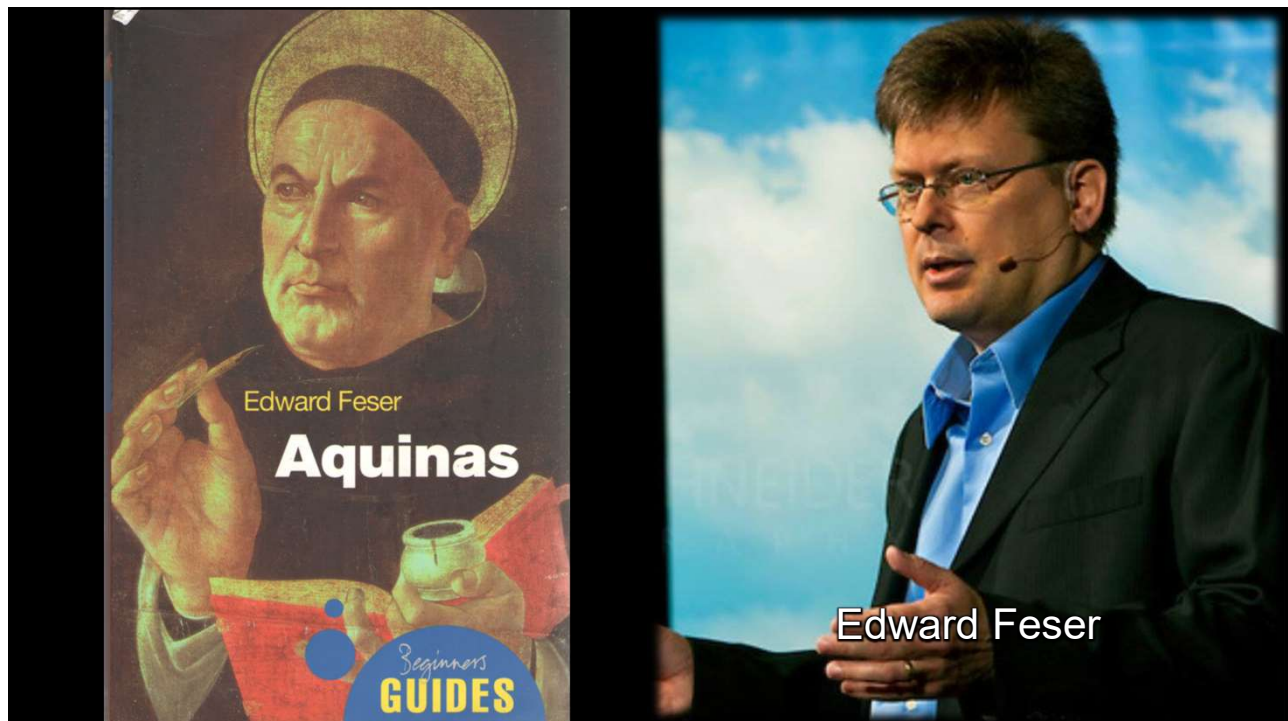
with respect to a thing's intelligibility:

Quiddity

with respect to a thing's existence:

Essence

The 'natural' in Natural Law refers to the fact that human beings are what we are because we possess a human nature.



"It is widely assumed that the analysis and justification of fundamental moral claims can be conducted without reference to at least the more contentious issues of metaphysics."



Edward Feser

"Nothing could be further from the spirit of Thomas, for whom natural law ... is 'natural' precisely because it derives from human nature, conceived of in Aristotelian essentialist terms."

[Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide (Oxford: One World), 174]

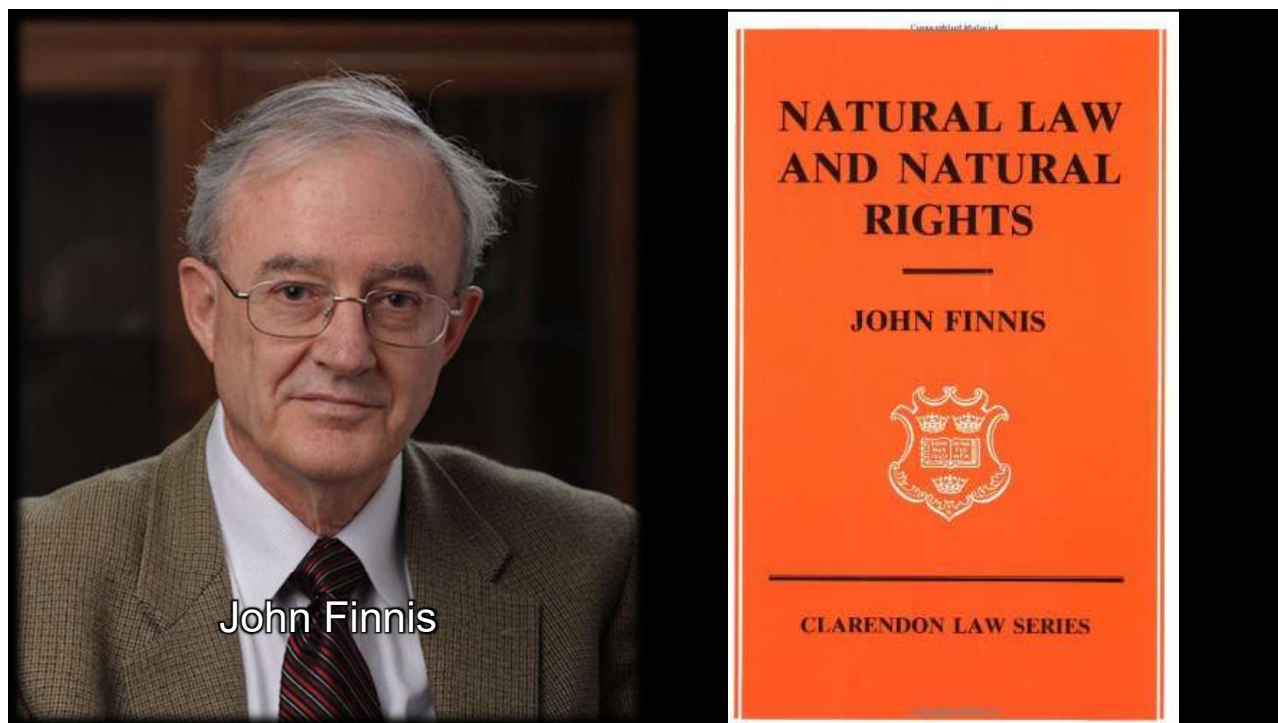


Edward Feser



John Finnis

Germain Grisez
(1929-2018)



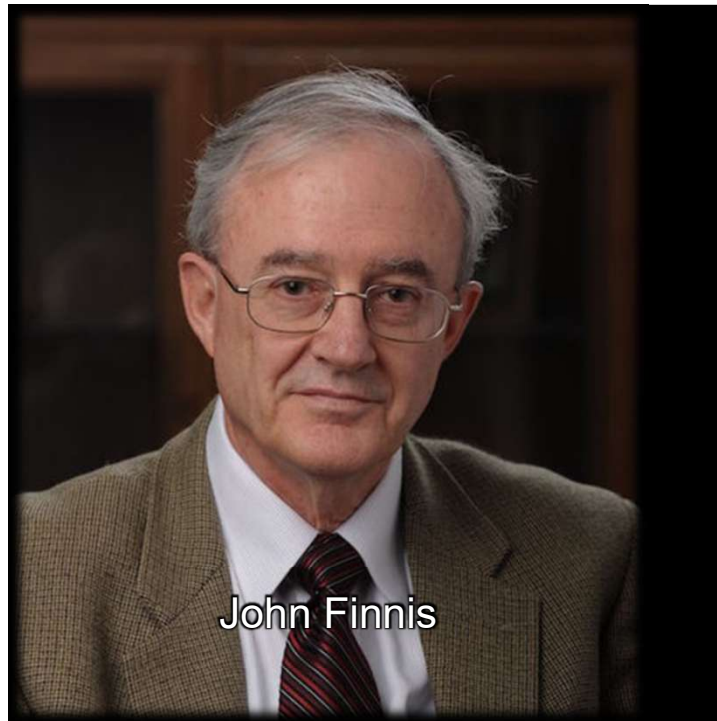
John Finnis

**NATURAL LAW
AND NATURAL
RIGHTS**

JOHN FINNIS



CLARENDON LAW SERIES

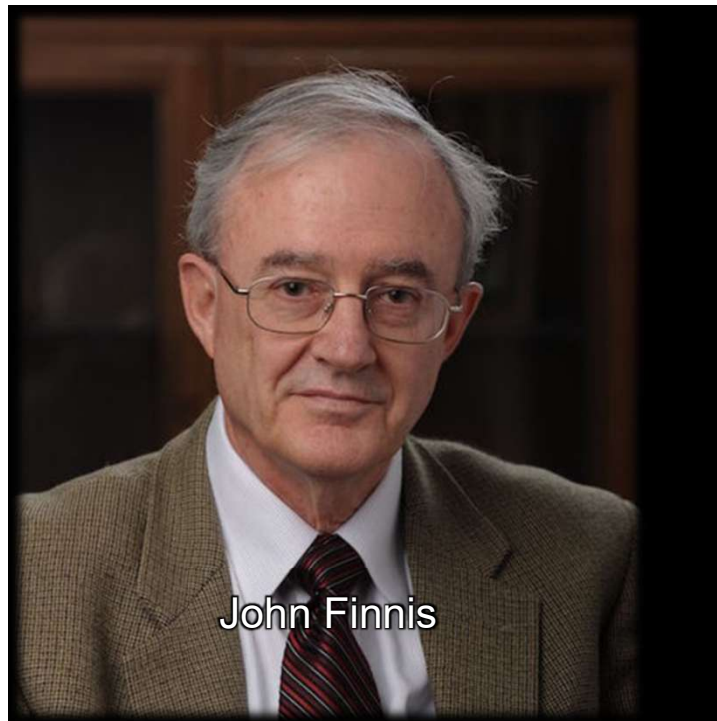


John Finnis

"Nor is it true that for Aquinas 'good and evil are concepts analysed and fixed in metaphysics before they are applied in morals'.³² On the contrary, Aquinas asserts as plainly as possible that the first principals of natural law, which specify the basic forms of good and evil and which can be adequately grasped by anyone of the age of reason (and not just by metaphysicians), are per se nota (self evident) and indemonstrable.³³

³²D. J. O'Connor, *Aquinas and Natural Law* (London: 1967), p. 68.

³³Aquinas, *in Eth*, V, lect. 12, para. 1018; S.T. I-II, p. 94, a. 2; q. 91, a. 3c; q. 88, aa. 4.c, 5c.



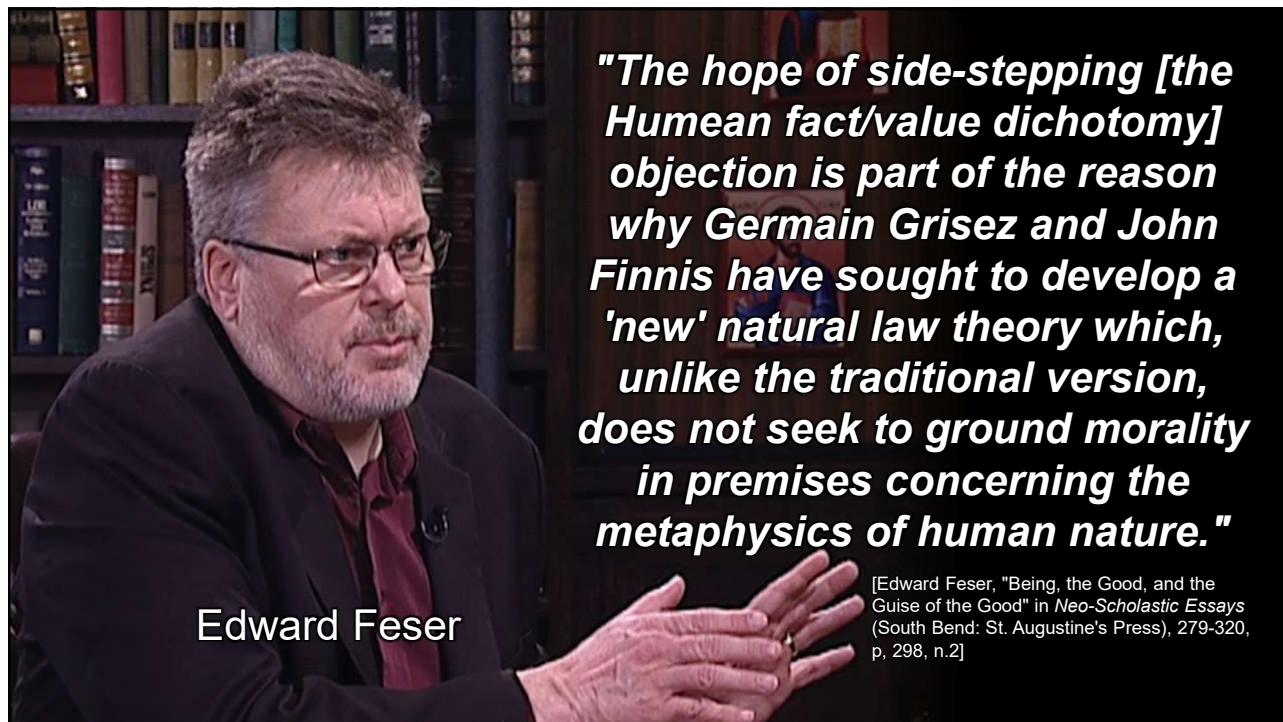
John Finnis

They are not inferred from speculative principles. They are not inferred from facts. They are not inferred from metaphysical propositions about human nature, or about the nature of good and evil, or about 'the function of a human being'³⁴ nor are they inferred from a teleological conception of nature or any other conception of nature. They are not inferred or derived from anything."

³⁴Cf. the objections of Margaret MacDonald, 'Natural Rights' in P. Laslett (ed.), *Philosophy, Politics and Society* (Oxford: 1956), 35 at p. 44.

³⁵Pace Strauss, *Natural Right and history*, pp. 7-8.

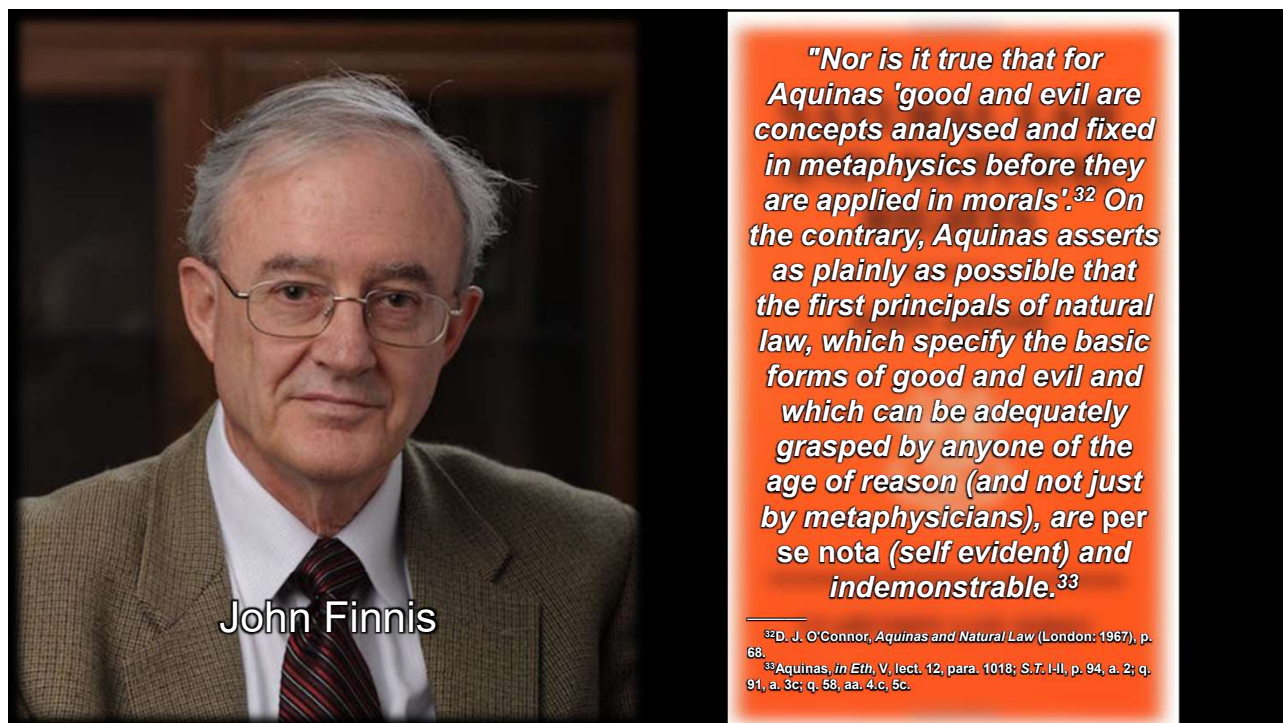
[John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, 33-34)]



Edward Feser

"The hope of side-stepping [the Humean fact/value dichotomy] objection is part of the reason why Germain Grisez and John Finnis have sought to develop a 'new' natural law theory which, unlike the traditional version, does not seek to ground morality in premises concerning the metaphysics of human nature."

[Edward Feser, "Being, the Good, and the Guise of the Good" in *Neo-Scholastic Essays* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press), 279-320, p. 298, n.2]



John Finnis

"Nor is it true that for Aquinas 'good and evil are concepts analysed and fixed in metaphysics before they are applied in morals'.³² On the contrary, Aquinas asserts as plainly as possible that the first principals of natural law, which specify the basic forms of good and evil and which can be adequately grasped by anyone of the age of reason (and not just by metaphysicians), are per se nota (self evident) and indemonstrable.³³

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³³Aquinas, *in Eth*, V, lect. 12, para. 1018; S.T. I-II, p. 94, a. 2; q. 91, a. 3c; q. 58, aa. 4.c, 5c.

But we are not claiming that good and evil have to be analyzed and fixed **BEFORE** they are applied in morals.

This is a confusion of the epistemology of morals with the metaphysics of morals.

"Nor is it true that for Aquinas 'good and evil are concepts analysed and fixed in metaphysics before they are applied in morals'.³² On the contrary, Aquinas asserts as plainly as possible that the first principals of natural law, which specify the basic forms of good and evil and which can be adequately grasped by anyone of the age of reason (and not just by metaphysicians), are per se nota (self evident) and indemonstrable.³³

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Just because we can know X before we know anything about the metaphysics of X does not mean that there is no metaphysics of X.

Nor does it mean that the metaphysics of X should never come into the discussion when the reality of X is in dispute.

"Nor is it true that for Aquinas 'good and evil are concepts analysed and fixed in metaphysics before they are applied in morals'.³² On the contrary, Aquinas asserts as plainly as possible that the first principals of natural law, which specify the basic forms of good and evil and which can be adequately grasped by anyone of the age of reason (and not just by metaphysicians), are per se nota (self evident) and indemonstrable.³³

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A person may know that God exists even if he never considers the metaphysical aspects of God.

But it can become critical to introduce the metaphysical issues in a dispute about the existence of God.

"Nor is it true that for Aquinas 'good and evil are concepts analysed and fixed in metaphysics before they are applied in morals'.³² On the contrary, Aquinas asserts as plainly as possible that the first principals of natural law, which specify the basic forms of good and evil and which can be adequately grasped by anyone of the age of reason (and not just by metaphysicians), are per se nota (self evident) and indemonstrable.³³

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³³Aquinas, *in Eth*, V, lect. 12, para. 1018; S.T. I-II, p. 94, a. 2; q. 91, a. 3c; q. 88, aa. 4.c, 5c.

Finnis is missing Aquinas's point. Aquinas maintains that it is the **DOING** of good and evil that is self-evident and indemonstrable, not the **BEING** of good and evil.

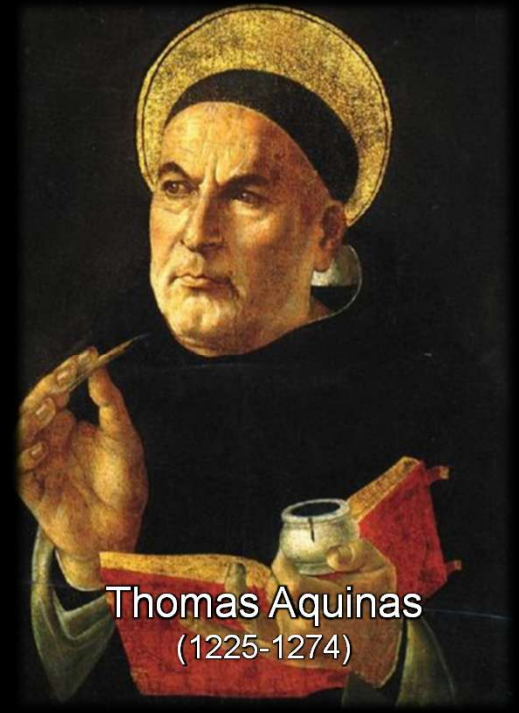
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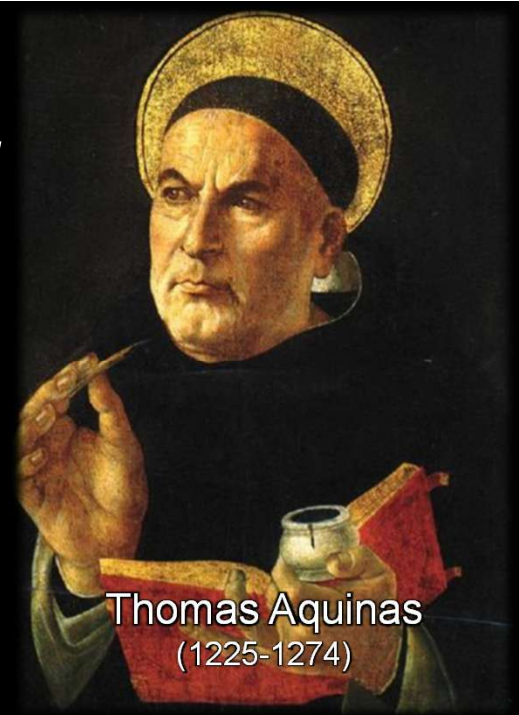
³³Aquinas, *in Eth*, V, lect. 12, para. 1018; S.T. I-II, p. 94, a. 2; q. 91, a. 3c; q. 88, aa. 4.c, 5c.

"Good is the first thing that falls under the apprehension of the **practical reason**, which is directed at action."

[ST II, Q94, art. 2]



"Hence, this is the first precept of law, that: **bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum.**"



"Hence, this is the first precept of law, that: good is to be done and pursued and evil avoided."



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

Second, Aquinas maintains that there is a difference between something being self-evident in itself though not to us and self-evident in itself and to us.

"Nor is it true that for Aquinas 'good and evil are concepts analysed and fixed in metaphysics before they are applied in morals'.³² On the contrary, Aquinas asserts as plainly as possible that the first principals of natural law, which specify the basic forms of good and evil and which can be adequately grasped by anyone of the age of reason (and not just by metaphysicians), are per se nota (self evident) and indemonstrable.³³

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³³Aquinas, *in Eth*, V, lect. 12, para. 1018; S.T. I-II, q. 94, a. 2; q. 91, a. 3c; q. 58, aa. 4.c, 5c.

"A thing can be self-evident in either of two ways; on the one hand, self evident in itself, though not to us; on the other, self-evident in itself, and to us."

[ST, I, 2, 1]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

For example, the equation $2 + 2 = 4$, though self-evident in itself (in as much as the predicate '4' is contained in the subject '2 + 2'), will not be self-evident to a child learning arithmetic who has yet to learn what the equal sign means.

"Nor is it true that for Aquinas 'good and evil are concepts analysed and fixed in metaphysics before they are applied in morals'.³² On the contrary, Aquinas asserts as plainly as possible that the first principals of natural law, which specify the basic forms of good and evil and which can be adequately grasped by anyone of the age of reason (and not just by metaphysicians), are per se nota (self evident) and indemonstrable.³³

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Thus, for Aquinas it is a first principle of law that the good is to be done and evil avoided.

This, however, says nothing against the case for and the relevance of the metaphysics of what it is that makes something good or evil.

*"Nor is it true that for Aquinas 'good and evil are concepts analysed and fixed in metaphysics before they are applied in morals'.³² On the contrary, Aquinas asserts as plainly as possible that **the first principals of natural law, which specify the basic forms of good and evil and which can be adequately grasped by anyone of the age of reason (and not just by metaphysicians), are per se nota (self evident) and indemonstrable.**"³³*

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³³Aquinas, *in Eth.*, V, lect. 12, para. 1018; S.T. I-II, q. 94, a. 2; q. 91, a. 3c; q. 88, aa. 4.c, 5c.

Third, there is a difference between whether they are inferred from speculative principles **BEFORE** they are employed in action, and whether they can, in fact, be inferred from speculative principles.

They are not inferred from speculative principles. They are not inferred from facts. They are not inferred from metaphysical propositions about human nature, or about the nature of good and evil, or about 'the function of a human being'³⁴ nor are they inferred from a teleological conception of nature or any other conception of nature. They are not inferred or derived from anything."

³⁴Cf. the objections of Margaret MacDonald, 'Natural Rights' in P. Laslett (ed.), *Philosophy, Politics and Society* (Oxford: 1956), 35 at p. 44.

³⁵Pace Strauss, *Natural Right and history*, pp. 7-8.

[John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, 33-34)]

For example, one does not have to infer from speculative principles that God exists before one is able to believe that God exists.

They are not inferred from speculative principles. They are not inferred from facts. They are not inferred from metaphysical propositions about human nature, or about the nature of good and evil, or about 'the function of a human being'³⁴ nor are they inferred from a teleological conception of nature or any other conception of nature. They are not inferred or derived from anything."

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[John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, 33-34)]

"There is nothing to prevent a man, who cannot grasp a proof, accepting as a matter of faith, something which in itself is capable of being scientifically [i.e. rationally] known and demonstrated."

[ST, I, 2, 1]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

This, however, is not to say that the existence of God cannot be so inferred from speculative (i.e., metaphysical) principles.

They are not inferred from speculative principles. They are not inferred from facts. They are not inferred from metaphysical propositions about human nature, or about the nature of good and evil, or about 'the function of a human being'³⁴ nor are they inferred from a teleological conception of nature or any other conception of nature. They are not inferred or derived from anything."

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³⁵Pace Strauss, *Natural Right and history*, pp. 7-8.

[John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, 33-34)]

The same point applies to morality, as I hope will become clear as we go along.

Thus, it would seem that Finnis's view is not aligned with Aquinas's.

They are not inferred from speculative principles. They are not inferred from facts. They are not inferred from metaphysical propositions about human nature, or about the nature of good and evil, or about 'the function of a human being'³⁴ nor are they inferred from a teleological conception of nature or any other conception of nature. They are not inferred or derived from anything."

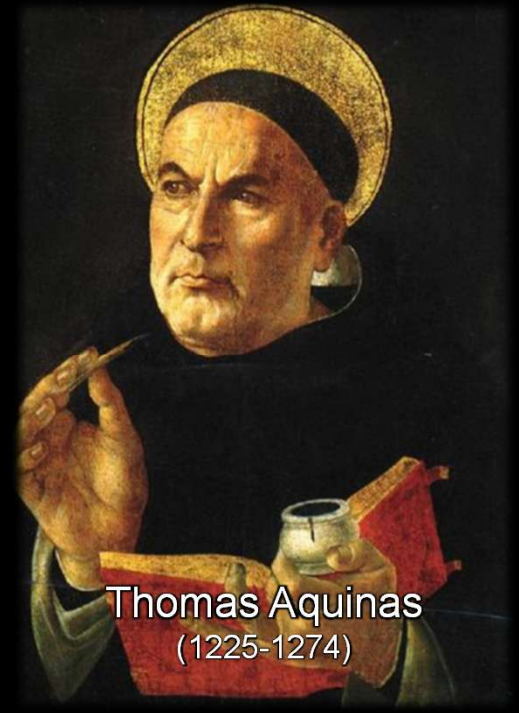
³⁴Cf. the objections of Margaret MacDonald, 'Natural Rights' in P. Laslett (ed.), *Philosophy, Politics and Society* (Oxford: 1956), 35 at p. 44.

³⁵Pace Strauss, *Natural Right and history*, pp. 7-8.

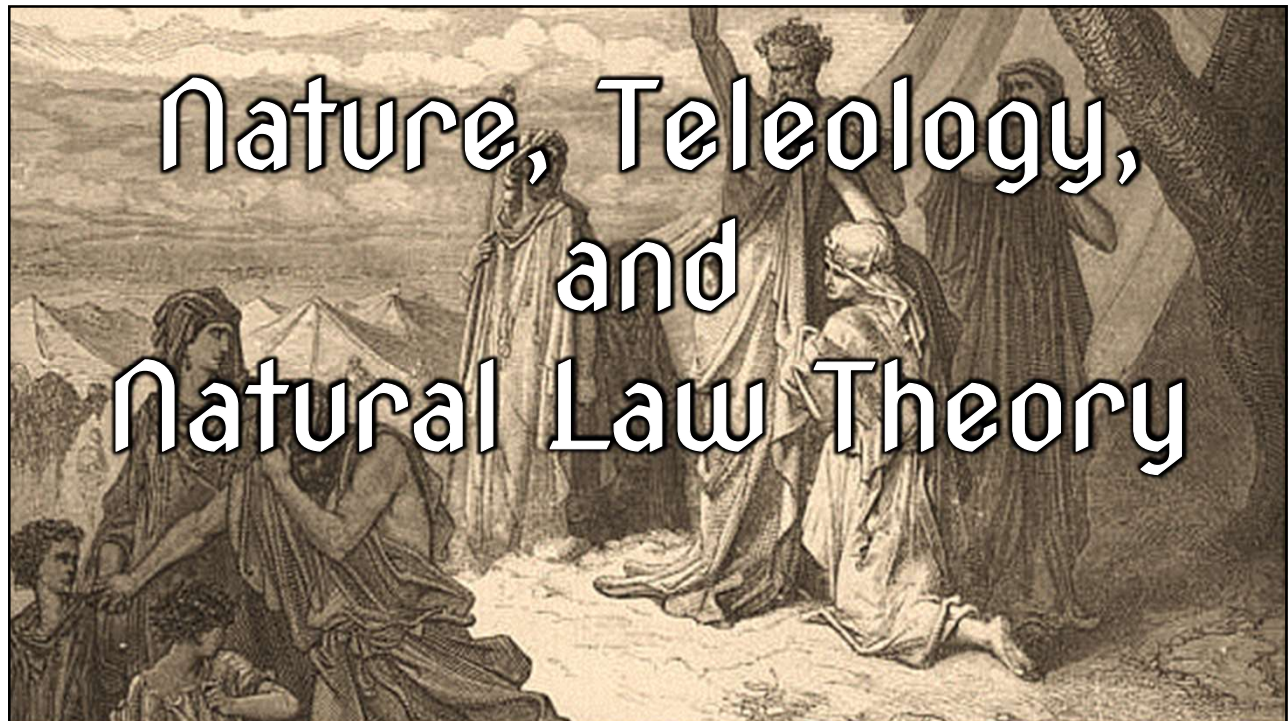
[John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, 33-34)]

"Whenever things have such a definite nature ... the operation appropriate to a given being is a consequent of that nature. Now, it is obvious that there is a determinate kind of nature for man. Therefore, there must be some operations that are in themselves appropriate for man."

[SCG III, 129, §4, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (University of Notre Dame Press Edition) vol. 3:II, p. 163. Reprint of *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith* (Garden City, NY: Hanover House, 1956)]

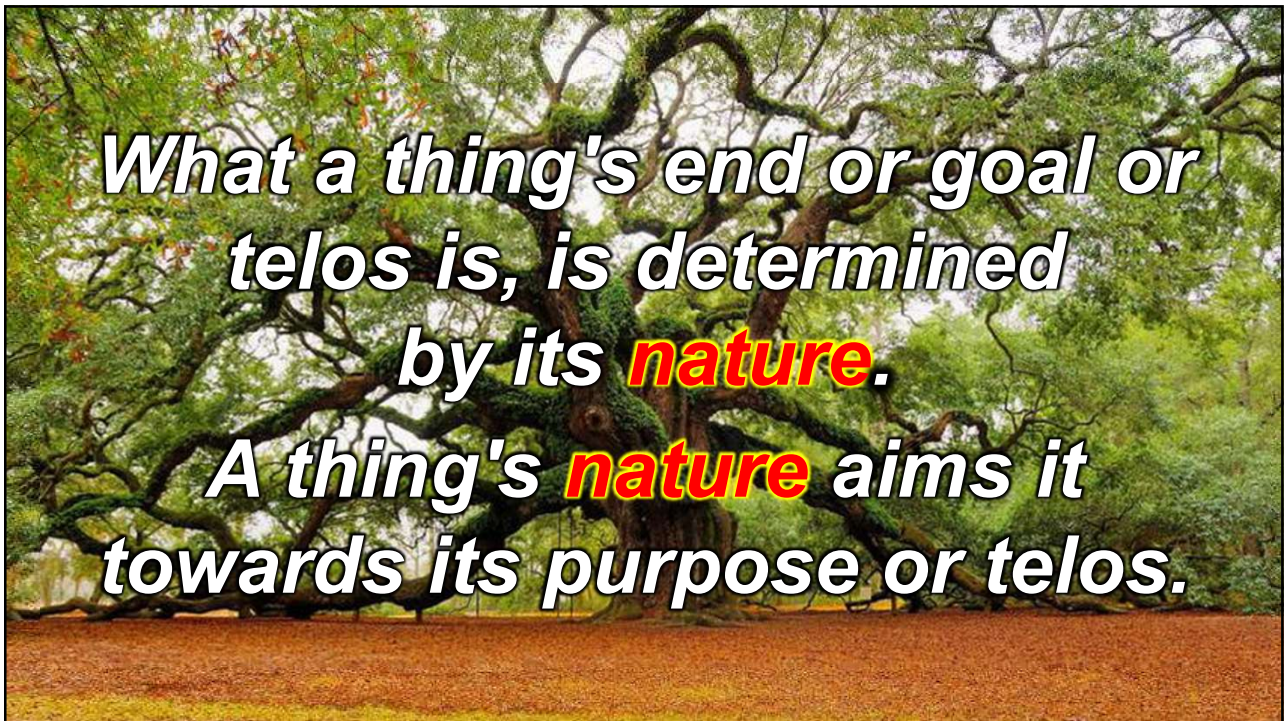


Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)





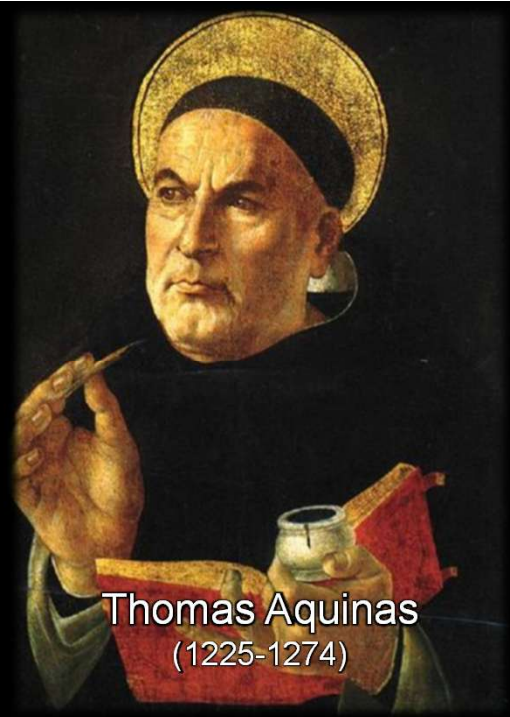
As a living thing grows and matures, it does so, if unimpeded, towards its proper end or goal or telos.





"Whenever things have such a definite nature ... the operation appropriate to a given being is a consequent of that nature. Now, it is obvious that there is a determinate kind of nature for man. Therefore, there must be some operations that are in themselves appropriate for man."

[SCG III, 129, §4, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (University of Notre Dame Press Edition) vol. 3:II, p. 163. Reprint of *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith* (Garden City, NY: Hanover House, 1956)]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

*"Whenever things have such a definite nature ... the operation appropriate to a given being is a consequent of that nature. Now, it is obvious that there is **a determinate kind of nature for man**. Therefore, there must be some **operations** that are in themselves appropriate for man."*

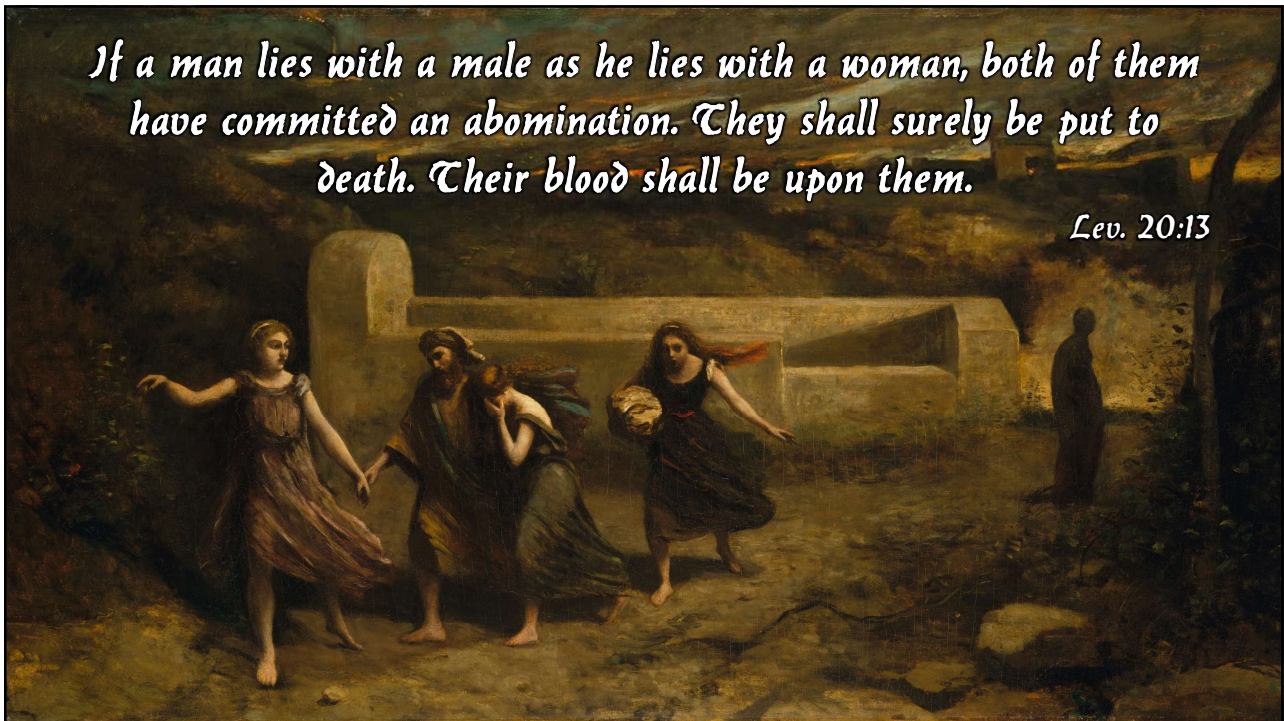
[SCG III, 129, §4, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (University of Notre Dame Press Edition) vol. 3:II, p. 163. Reprint of *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith* (Garden City, NY: Hanover House, 1956)]

'Nature' here is not merely a reference to the human body.

Rather the nature involves that nature with respect to the operations.

If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them.

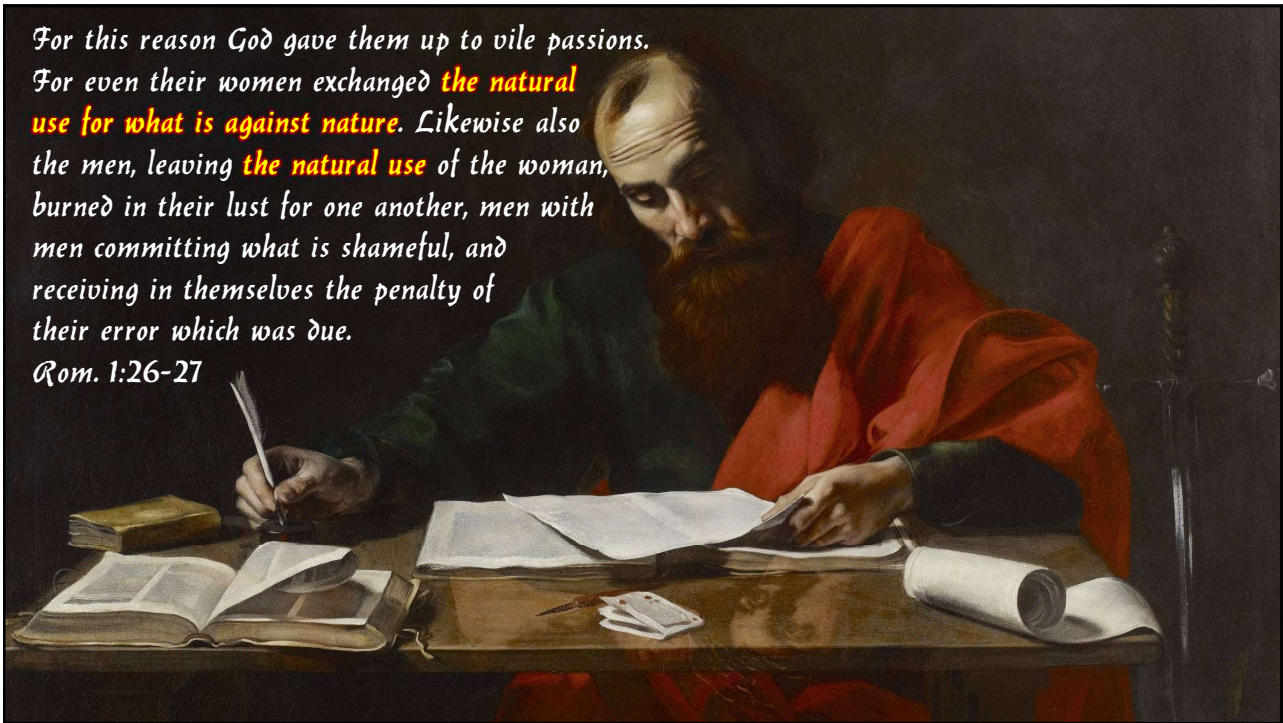
Lev. 20:13



For this reason God gave them up to vile passions.

For even their women exchanged **the natural use for what is against nature**. Likewise also the men, leaving **the natural use** of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

Rom. 1:26-27



Unlike plants or other animals, humans possess **rationality and **free will** which allow us to choose either in accordance with or in opposition to our proper end.**

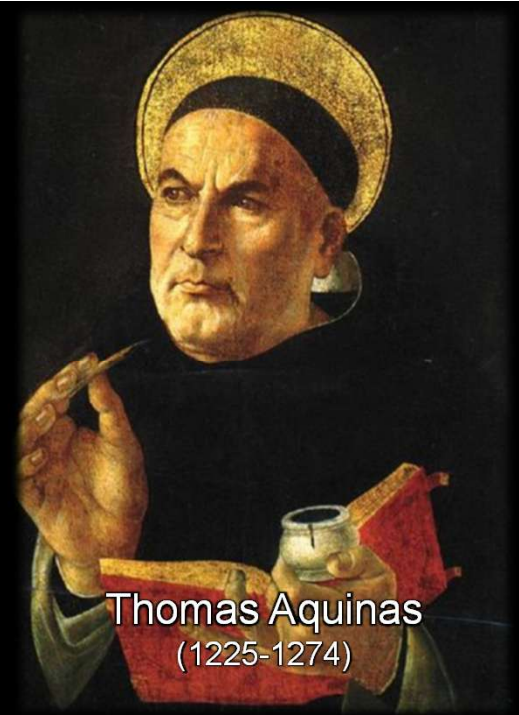
***These enable us to choose,
not merely among particular
goods, but to pursue the
good as such.***

***But these will also allow us to
choose against our own
natures and against our
proper telos (end) which
is our good.***

When we chose in accordance with our proper end, we actualize our good or perfection, i.e., we cause them to come into existence and be made real.

"Those acts are properly called human which are voluntary because the will is the rational appetite, which is proper to man."

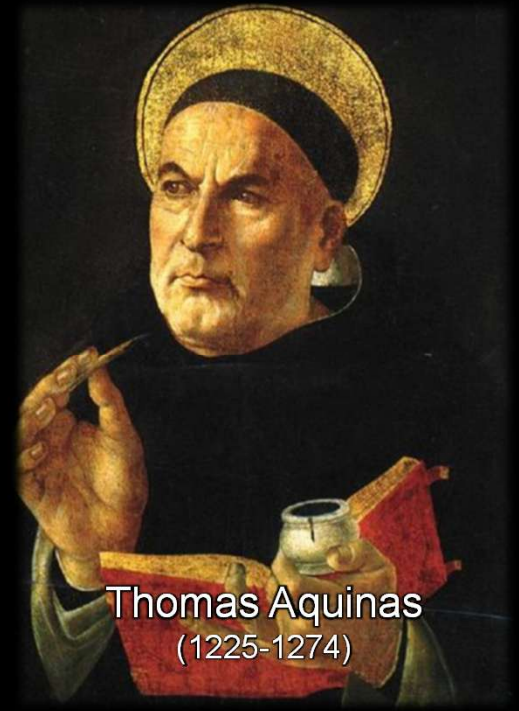
[ST I-II, Q6, introduction]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

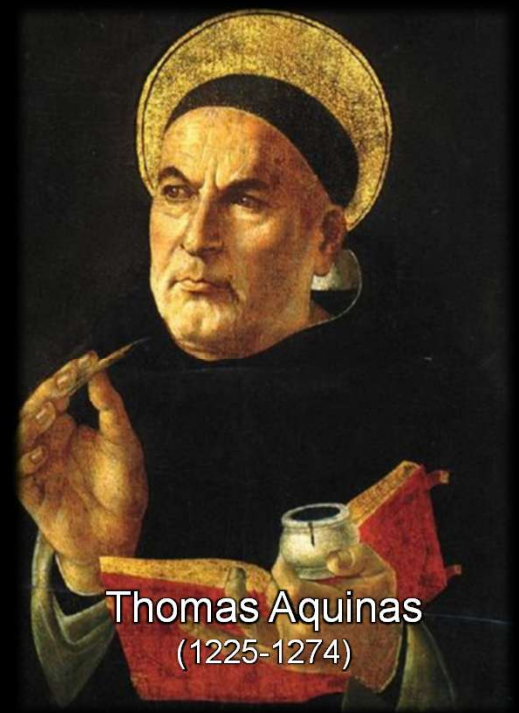
"Man determines himself by his reason to will this or that, which is true [good] or apparent good."

[ST I-I, Q9, ad. 3]



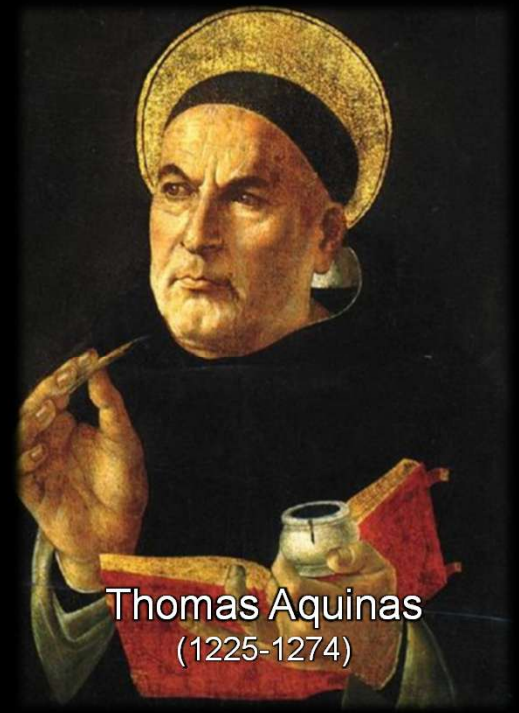
Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"Evil may be considered either in a substance or in an action . . ."



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

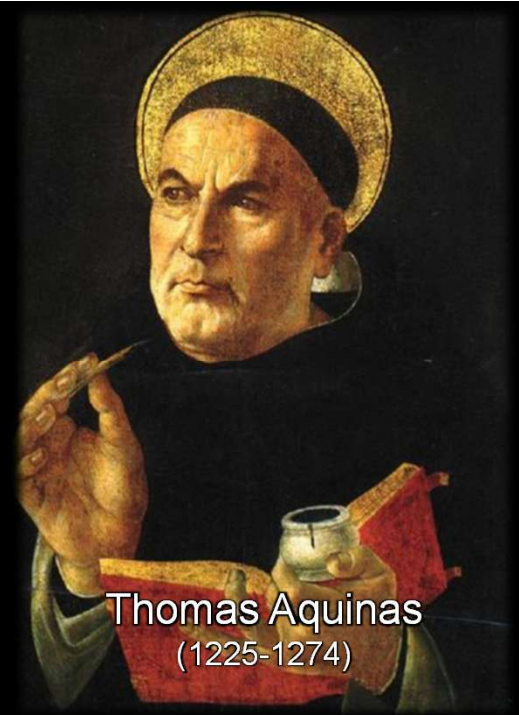
"Moral fault is found primarily and principally in the act of the will only . . . so . . . an act is moral because it is voluntary. . . ."



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"The root and source of moral wrongdoing is to be sought in the act of the will."

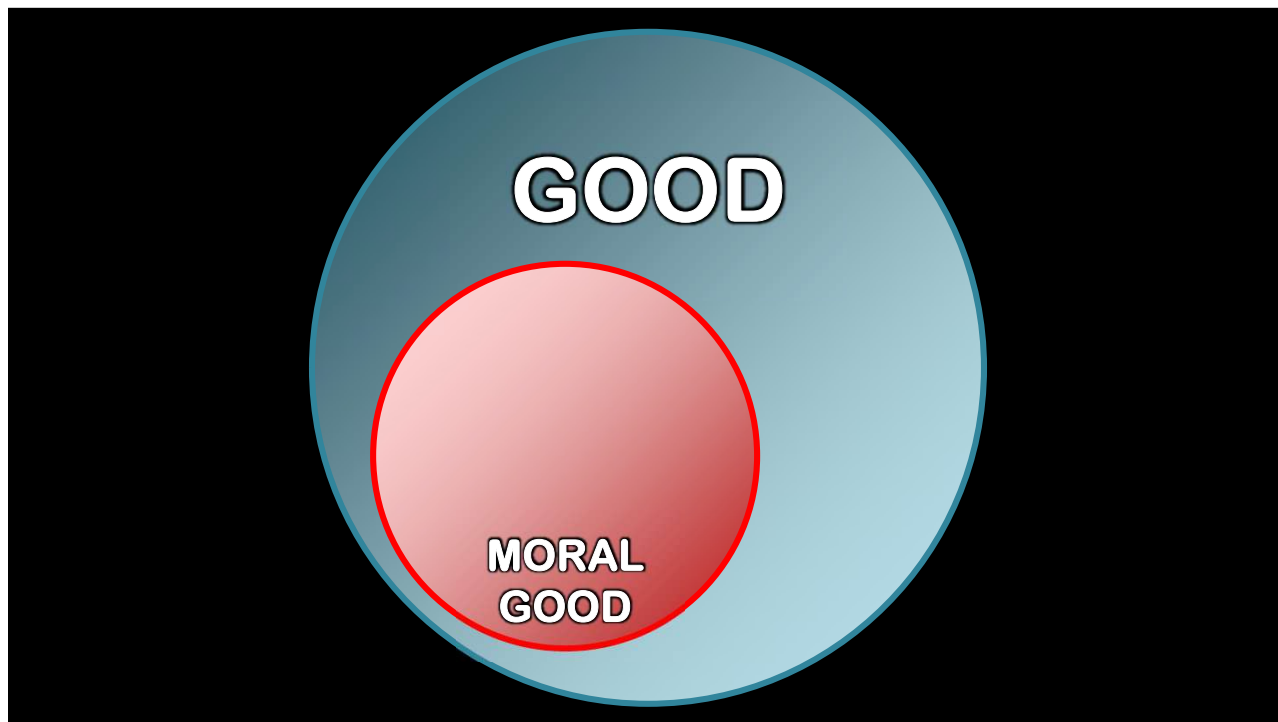
[*Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 10, §13]



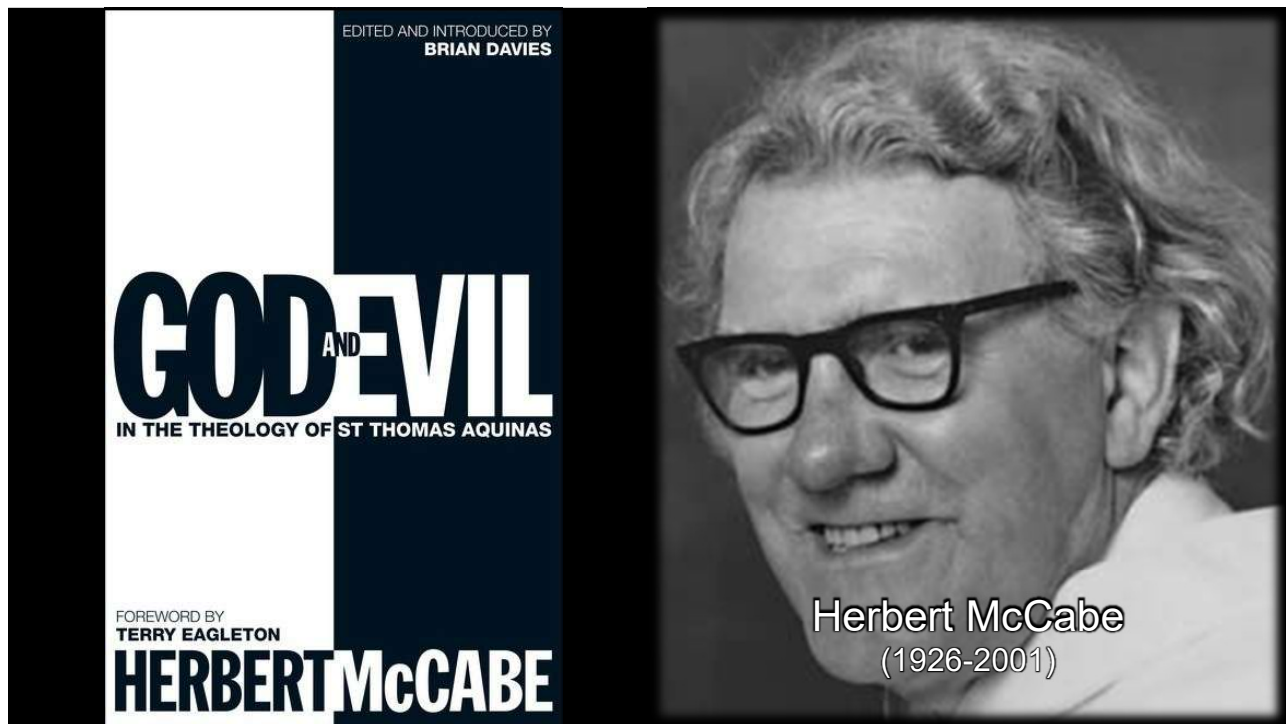
Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

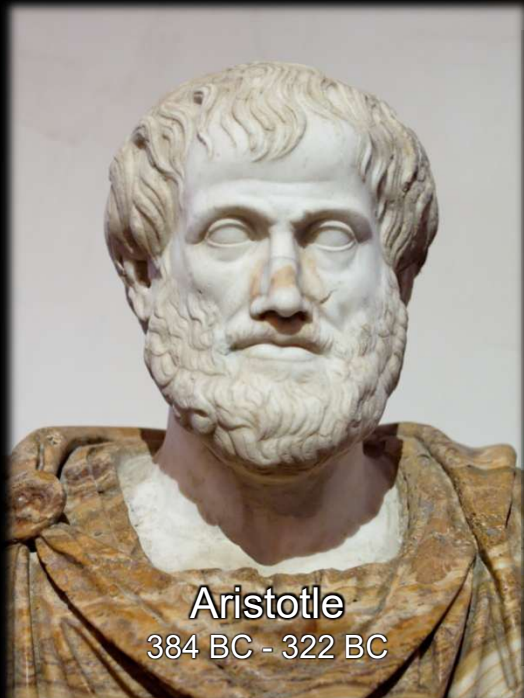
With this, one should see why, in an important sense for the Thomist, God is not a moral being since He does not choose actions that lead to His telos or perfection.

In addition, one should see why the Thomist cringes when he hears a Christian apologist respond to the problem of evil in terms of God's "morally sufficient reasons" for allowing evil and suffering.







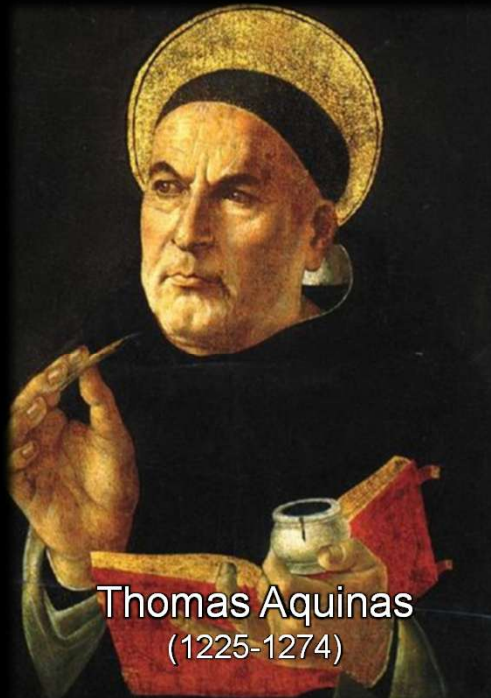


Aristotle
384 BC - 322 BC

"Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has been rightly declared to be that at which all things aim."

[Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 1, 1094a1-2, trans. W. D. Ross in Richard McKeon, ed. *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941), 935]

"The essence of goodness consists in this, that it is in some way desirable."

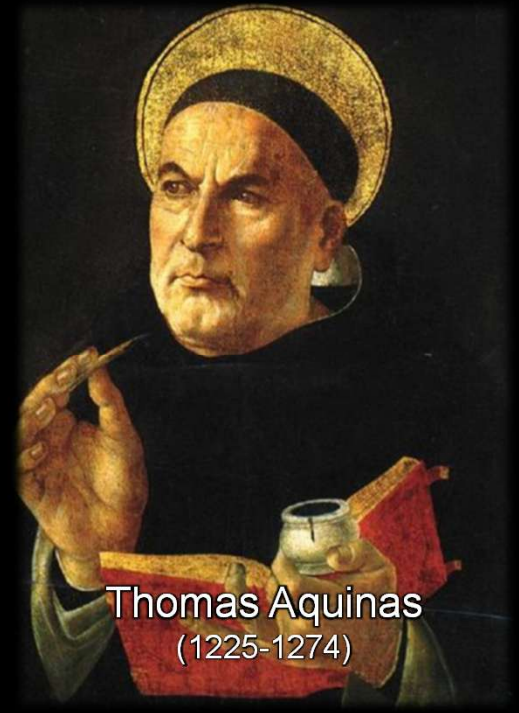


Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

[*Summa Theologiae* I, Q5, art. 1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province in *St. Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologica: Complete English Edition in Five Volumes* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981), 23]

***"Goodness
signifies
perfection which
is desirable."***

[ST I, Q5, art. 1]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

**As the intellect aims toward
that which is considered true,
the will aims toward that which
is considered good.**

As something may be considered true that is not really true, something may be considered good that is not really good.

True is that which corresponds to reality.

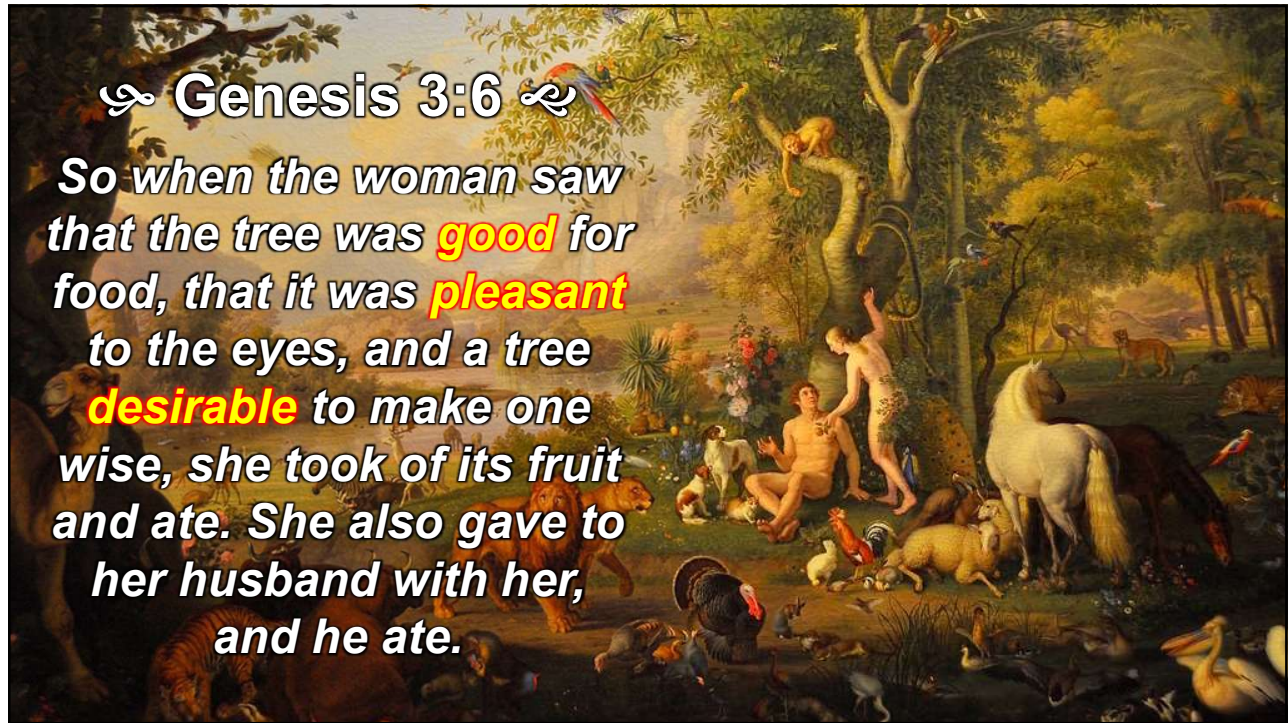
Good is that which actualizes a thing's telos, which is to say good is that which perfects the thing.

For a thing's telos to be actualized is to say that the potencies in the thing take on being (existence).

The good toward which our will aims may be our real good (when we act morally) or something mistakenly perceived as a good but which substitutes for our real good (when we act immorally).

✧ Genesis 3:6 ✧

So when the woman saw that the tree was **good** for food, that it was **pleasant** to the eyes, and a tree **desirable** to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.



✧ Judges 17:6 ✧

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was **right** in his own eyes.



☞ Proverbs 12:15 ☞

*The way of a fool is **right in his own eyes**, but he who heeds counsel is wise.*

☞ Proverbs 21:2 ☞

*Every way of a man is **right in his own eyes**, but the LORD weighs the hearts.*

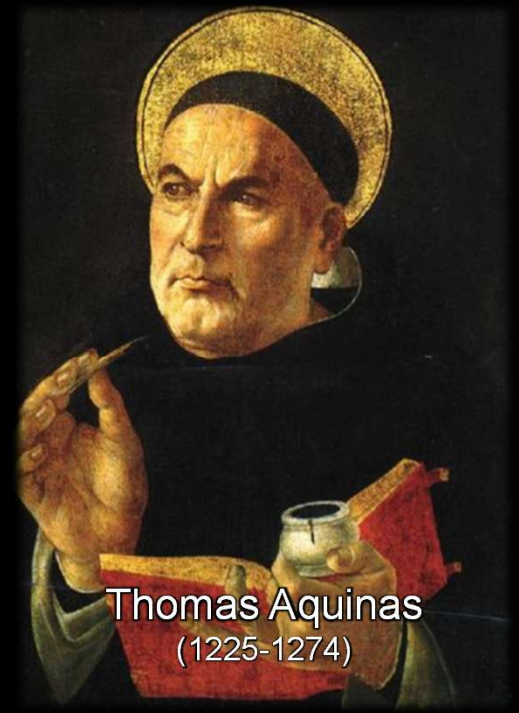


☞ 1 Kings 15:5 ☞

*... because David did what was **right in the eyes of the LORD**, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.*

"Never, therefore would evil be sought after, not even accidentally, unless the good that accompanies the evil were more desired than the good of which the evil is the privation."

[ST I, 19, art 9]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)