

A Thomistic Account of Natural Understanding of the Human Good and Practical Truth

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Short Abstract

In this study I examine *how* the human being naturally comes to understand the human good and practical truth according to a Thomistic perspective. I begin with a claim that St. Thomas Aquinas draws from the Christian tradition as my starting premise: that the human being is created by God with an intellectual nature and natural intellectual aptitude to participate in God's understanding and loving.¹

In Part I, which includes chapters 1 and 2, I examine, broadly speaking, what are two poles of contemporary Thomistic discourse on natural understanding of the human good and practical truth, namely, the theories of John Bowlin and John Finnis. After concluding that each author articulates an overly determinative account of practical truth, I consider in Part II the implications of Aquinas' claim that practical thinking depends on speculative thinking.²

My approach in Part II takes three turns. First, I turn in chapter 3 to the topic of simple truth. I recognize that a Thomistic theory of practical truth relies on a clear account of how *simple* judgment of affirmation (i.e., *natural* assent) arises distinctly in act.³ I observe both a need for clarity in Aquinas' account and a tendency in Thomistic interpretations to conflate the operation's logical and natural species. Second, I turn in chapter 4 to consider Robert Sokolowski's *descriptive* account of human engagement in truth. In dialogue with Sokolowski, I realize that to explain how *simple* judgment arises, I need to distinguish it from another species of assent that is already a practical activity, namely, judgment of affirmation by inductive inference.⁴ Therefore, third, I turn in chapter 5 to clarify a Thomistic speculative account of simple judgment *in terms of its natural causal principles*, and then to articulate the beginnings of an account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth in terms of this.

¹ ST I, q. 93, a. 4; q. 14; q. 20.

² ST I, q. 79, a. 11. DV 14.4.

³ ST I, q. 16, a. 2.

⁴ ST I-II, q. 17, a. 6.

Long Abstract

In this study I examine *how* the human being naturally comes to understand the human good and practical truth according to a Thomistic perspective. I consider how this understanding arises both simply—when we understand the good of a human person as a reality to be affirmed⁵—and practically—when we understand the human good additionally as an end of human operation.⁶ I begin with a claim that St. Thomas Aquinas draws from the Christian tradition as my starting premise: that the human being is created by God with an intellectual nature and natural intellectual aptitude to participate in God’s understanding and loving.⁷ This is to say that the human being has an intellect (and a will). Then, I highlight an implication to guide my approach: that a consistent account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth cannot divide human thinking, willing, and acting from their grounding by natural participation in God’s understanding and love.

I suggest this topic is broadly relevant to Christian ethicists and moral theologians, at least given Aquinas’ presuppositions, because the very intelligibility of human freedom depends upon it.⁸ My claim is natural understanding of the human good and practical truth must arise, at least vaguely and in general, so that voluntary human decision and activity, love of friendship, and acquired virtue can have natural, intrinsic character or intelligible structure, at least in principle (even if one claims that love of friendship and virtuous activity cannot be realized in fallen humanity without grace).⁹

My motivating questions in this study are as follows: how does natural understanding of the human good and practical truth arise, and what theoretical groundwork is needed to give a

⁵ *ST I*, q. 14, a. 16; q. 29, a. 3 ad 2; *II-II*, q. 25, a. 7. Finnis, *Aquinas*, 176.

⁶ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 11; *DV* 14.4.

⁷ *ST I*, q. 93, a. 4; q. 14; q. 20.

⁸ *DV* 24.2. *ST I-II*, q. 13, a. 6.

⁹ *ST I-II*, q. 109, a. 2. White, *Wisdom*, xxv.

practically relevant, consistent account of this? In view of these questions, I approach this study in two parts and five chapters.

PART I: CHAPTERS 1 AND 2

In Part I, which includes chapters 1 and 2, I examine, broadly speaking, what are two poles of contemporary Thomistic discourse on natural understanding of the human good and practical truth: namely, the theories of John Bowlin and John Finnis. Bowlin proposes a relatively minimalist account of naturally knowable practical content, and Finnis offers a much more specified theory of knowable practical concepts and truths. While both adopt a broadly Thomistic account of human understanding and willing, I suggest that each grants an overly determinative role to one of these rational acts in his theory of practical truth, while diminishing the role of the other.

Chapter 1: John Bowlin and the Human Will

In chapter 1 I argue that Bowlin grants an overly determinative role to the human will in his theory of practical truth. Specifically, I critique Bowlin's claim that the human intellect apprehends the last end and its general parts as good *because* the human will is naturally disposed to them simply and absolutely.¹⁰ After examining possible interpretations of Bowlin's claim about the will's causality, I conclude that the human will can be neither the first efficient cause nor the formal cause of the intellect's apprehension of the human good according to a Thomistic perspective. Assuming Aquinas' claim that the human will is naturally determined to the good in general (apprehended as fitting), my response to Bowlin is that the will cannot move

¹⁰ Bowlin, 56.

the intellect until the intellect first apprehends a particular good (at least implicitly) and thus presents the will with its natural object.¹¹

My conclusion is that Bowlin's theory cannot provide a consistent account of formal understanding of the human good, and thus, that it is unable to prevent the contingency of the human good from going "all the way down."¹²

Chapter 2: John Finnis and the Practical Insight

In chapter 2 I argue that Finnis attributes an overly determinative role to the practical intellect (and the practical insight) in his theory of practical truth. Finnis' view of practical truth is that seemingly apart from any theoretical grasp of the already given and present good of things in reality—for, practical truth is true by anticipation and *not* by correspondence to reality¹³—and thus proceeding it seems entirely internally to the mind, the knowing subject comes to understand practical truth by *further* practical insight.

I think this account of practical truth raises the following questions: first, where does the knowing subject get the intelligibility of the practical good? Second, how is practical truth normative for human action? I suggest there is an epistemological gap and inconsistency in Finnis' view because, given his definition of practical truth, it is not possible to establish any conformity between one's theoretical and practical understanding of the good, except by inference or correlation.

¹¹ *ST I*, q. 82, a. 3-4.

¹² Bowlin, 130.

¹³ Finnis, *Aquinas*, 100, n. t.

PART II: CHAPTERS 3 TO 5

Without a compelling Thomistic account of practical truth yet in hand, I move in Part II to consider its theoretical requirements and then to articulate a third theory, which I suggest begins to answer the objections raised in Part I. My approach in Part II takes three turns.

Chapter 3: A Turn to Simple Judgment and Simple Truth

First, motivated by Aquinas' claim that practical thinking depends on simple thinking,¹⁴ I turn in chapter 3 to the topic of simple truth. Here, I recognize that a Thomistic account of practical truth relies on a clear account of simple truth—and, more specifically, on an account of *how* simple judgment of affirmation (i.e., natural assent) arises in the human intellect.¹⁵ After briefly examining Aquinas' discussion of the topic, I observe both a need for clarity and a tendency in Thomistic interpretations to conflate the operation's logical and natural species.

I identify at least two explanatory gaps that must be accounted for to explain how simple judgment proceeds naturally in the intellect according to a Thomistic point of view. Namely, we must account for the principle of understanding that specifies the operation's object *as an end*, and we must account for the principle of exercise that inclines the intellect to that particular end.

While there is a clear Thomistic case to be made, I suggest that more work is needed to explain how simple judgment arises distinctly in act in the context of actual thinking and in view of concrete human agency.

¹⁴ ST I, q. 79, a. 11.

¹⁵ ST I, q. 16, a. 2.

Chapter 4: Robert Sokolowski and the Agent of Truth

Second, without a clear sense of how simple judgment arises according to a Thomistic point of view, I turn in chapter 4 to consider Robert Sokolowski's *descriptive* account of human engagement in truth in his book *Phenomenology of the Human Person*. I dialogue with Sokolowski because he describes how human engagement in truth *arises* by judgment, which is what I seek to understand—and because his description is practically relevant to our everyday experience of naming and predicating together with others. Sokolowski does not claim to be a Thomist, but his starting premises are broadly consistent with a Thomistic ontology of the human person.¹⁶

In my brief, narrow analysis of Sokolowski's descriptive account of human judgment, I make a *practical* claim. My claim is that merely describing human judgment and its logical and material effects leaves the natural species of the operation ambiguous and underdetermined. Given a particular descriptive instance of human judgment in standard propositional form—and without a complementary theoretical analysis of its causal principles—I suggest we *cannot determine* the operation's natural species. For, there are at least two distinct possibilities: the human judgment could be either 1) a case of judgment of affirmation by simple understanding (i.e., by natural assent), or 2) a case of judgment of affirmation by inductive inference (e.g., by assent subject to our choice and command), which is already a practical activity.¹⁷

At the end of chapter 4, I conclude that because it cannot distinguish the above cases, Sokolowski's descriptive account of human judgment—at least narrowly on its own—cannot provide the grounding we need in simple truth for an account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth. This is a narrow *practical* observation: I do not examine Sokolowski's overall phenomenological approach.

¹⁶ Sokolowski, 1, 26-27, 176.

¹⁷ ST I-II, q. 17, a. 6.

With this conclusion in mind, I specify my thesis as follows: to articulate a relevant, consistent account of practical truth, we need to build upon an account of simple judgment *that specifies the operation in terms of its natural causal principles*.

Chapter 5: Simple Judgment and Understanding the Human Good and Practical Truth

My third turn is to consider a Thomistic *speculative* account of simple judgment and then of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth. If we are to distinguish judgment by inference as an effect of human practice from simple judgment as a partial, proximate cause thereof, then we must attempt to articulate a speculative account of simple judgment in terms of its natural causal principles, and then to articulate an account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth in terms of this. I claim that simple judgment is distinct from judgment by inductive inference insofar as it arises naturally by implicit apprehension and voluntary simple willing and not by secondary practical operation.

An account of simple judgment

My account of simple judgment is as follows. I begin with the premise that the human being is created by God with an intellectual nature and natural intellectual aptitude to participate in God's understanding and loving. This is to claim that the human being by nature has an intellect, which is a natural potentiality to universal *ens*.¹⁸ Then, I suggest that as we are loved and moved to understanding by things and especially persons in reality, concepts of *ens*, truth, and good fall in our intellect *implicitly* by apprehension. At this point, the intellect does not (and cannot) yet conform *itself* by judgment or assent to the things it cognizes (i.e., by its own interior principle of

¹⁸ ST I q. 78, a. 1; q. 79, a. 2.

movement), and thus, as Aquinas says, the intellect does not yet cognize truth, properly speaking.¹⁹

Nonetheless, my claim is that prior to judgment the intellect can still apprehend the true and the good *implicitly*—just not yet properly and explicitly. Here, in making a distinction between implicit and explicit apprehension, I attempt to clarify and to develop Aquinas' view in a manner consistent with his claims—while recognizing we need a way to explain simple judgment in terms of its natural causal principles. I suggest these *implicit* apprehensions arise in the intellect when it secondly and thirdly apprehends the nature of itself by virtue of its second and third immanent operations, after firstly apprehending *ens* and the nature of the exterior material thing that activates it by virtue of its first immanent operation. By its second immanent operation, the intellect secondly conforms to itself and thus apprehends itself conforming to *ens* (but not yet *conforming itself* to *ens* actively), and this is to apprehend the true implicitly. By its third immanent operation, the intellect thirdly apprehends itself inclining itself (passively) to its conforming to *ens* (but not yet *inclining itself* actively to its *own* conforming to *ens*), and this is to apprehend the good implicitly (but not yet practically).²⁰ I submit this is also to apprehend the nature of the human will implicitly. Once the intellect apprehends the nature of the will, I suggest the will is in the intellect somewhat distinctly (but not as a part) and that it can move itself voluntarily by simple willing to love the particular good apprehended implicitly, which the intellect presents to it as its object. This is to participate secondarily and voluntarily by immanent, active self-inclination in the movement of the intellect's original second and first immanent operations. To participate in the intellect's first immanent operation of conforming to *ens* additionally by simple willing is to move the intellect to exercise this operation additionally—and somewhat voluntarily and explicitly—by simple judgment.

¹⁹ ST I, q. 16, a. 2.

²⁰ See ST I, q. 16, a. 4 ad 2.

Significantly, it is thus “when the intellect begins to possess something proper to itself”²¹: when by *simple* judgment the intellect *conforms itself* to (or affirms) the thing apprehended *as an individual* by an *interior* principle of movement. When by its second immanent operation the intellect cognizes its *own* proper conformity to an intelligible thing by simple judgment, then first it apprehends truth, properly speaking.

An account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth

My second task is to propose the beginnings of an account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth in terms of the above speculative account of human judgment of simple truth. My claim is that we first understand the human good—and, indeed, the practical good and practical truth—properly speaking, when the intellect additionally apprehends (by its third immanent operation) the good of the truth of simple judgment. When the will moves the intellect to judge simply and then to cognize the true and the good, it moves the intellect to extend to secondary operation by self-inclination. Aquinas says that to consider the good practically is to consider it as an end of a motion or operation.²² I suggest the intellect first apprehends the good practically when it apprehends the *good of truth as an end of a voluntary, self-inclined operation of simple judgment*.

Conclusion

To apprehend the practical good includes apprehending the good of truth *simply*, which involves apprehending the *primary* good of the exterior substantial *ens* (a person) who first moves us to natural understanding by love.²³ Moreover it is to apprehend the good of truth additionally *as an end of my own voluntary self-movement and further practical operation (i.e., as an end simply*

²¹ DV 1.3.

²² DV 3.3 ad 9; 14. 4.

²³ ST I, q. 16, a. 4 ad 2; a. 1; I-II, q. 18, a. 1; I, q. 5, a. 1, 4.

loved by me that extends to operation). Once the intellect apprehends the practical good it becomes practical: it begins to direct what it apprehends to self-moved operation.²⁴ To apprehend the practical good is also to understand implicitly the practical truth about human operation in terms of it, which Aquinas says is the first principle of practical reason.²⁵ We might say that when the human being apprehends the practical good, she begins to understand herself (at least vaguely) as a primary subject of human love and practical operation. Once she apprehends the practical good, intention (love of friendship), practical reasoning, and acting can follow, but these are beyond the scope of the present study.

²⁴ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 11; *DV* 14.4.

²⁵ *ST I-II*, q. 94, a. 2; q. 64, a. 3.

Abbreviations

CEJF John Finnis, *Collected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

<i>De Ente</i>	<i>De Ente et Essentia (On Being and Essence)</i>
<i>DM</i>	<i>Quaestiones disputatae De Malo (Disputed Questions on Evil)</i>
<i>DT</i>	<i>Super Boetium De Trinitate (Commentary on Boethius's De Trinitate)</i>
<i>DV</i>	<i>Quaestiones disputatae De Veritate (Disputed Questions on Truth)</i>
<i>Ethic</i>	<i>Sententia libri Ethicorum (Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics)</i>
<i>Metaph</i>	<i>Sententia super Metaphysicam (Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics)</i>
<i>PA</i>	<i>Expositio libri Posteriorum Analyticorum (Commentary on Aristotle's Posterior Analytics)</i>
<i>Peryerm</i>	<i>Expositio libri Peryermenias (Commentary on Aristotle's De Interpretatione)</i>
<i>SCG</i>	<i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Summa Theologica</i>

The English translations I cite are those included in the bibliography.

Introduction

This study is about the human being's natural understanding of the human good and practical truth according to a Thomistic point of view. My starting thesis is that, naturally-speaking, human beings can understand—and, indeed, do understand, prior to any philosophical reasoning—something universally true about the human good and practical truth, at least vaguely, implicitly, and in general.²⁶ For example, many of us affirm human dignity and autonomy, even if we find it difficult to specify and defend the explicit truths involved. I seek to join an ecumenical conversation on the topic, which I suggest is relevant both to Christian ethicists and moral theologians in general and to Thomists in particular. To this audience, I propose a set of motivating questions: *how* does natural understanding of the human good and practical truth arise, and what theoretical²⁷ groundwork is needed to give a practically relevant, consistent account²⁸ of this?

I raise these questions in view of two contemporary theories of practical truth broadly situated in the Thomistic tradition, namely, the theories of John Bowlin and John Finnis. Each theory draws (to some extent) on the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, and each holds the thesis that human beings naturally understand the human good and practical truth. However, each answers our motivating questions differently. In Part I of this study, which includes chapters 1 and 2, I examine these two theories to clarify their answers to the above questions, to identify

²⁶ See *ST I-II*, q. 94, a. 6.

²⁷ Here I use the term “theoretical” or “theory” generally and *logically* to refer to any “philosophical science” of reason, whether speculative or practical (*ST I*, q. 1, a. 4). In this introduction and in chapter 5 I consider the grounding of a properly *speculative* theory by virtue of human intellectual understanding and simple judgment.

²⁸ I assume one theory of practical truth is more successful than another if it is 1) more relevant to everyday, pre-philosophical practical concerns, and if it is 2) more consistent analytically—both internally consistent and externally consistent with other explanatory theories (e.g., cognitive theory, philosophical anthropology, metaphysics, etc.). Regarding internal consistency, I focus especially on whether a given theory makes assumptions beyond the starting premises and claims it acknowledges and presupposes from the start. Regarding external consistency, I consider whether a theory can help reveal reasons (or better reasons) for defending its own starting presuppositions, including the claim that there are practical truths. See Stout's basic phraseology for “relevance” in Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 239.

their strengths, and to raise several concerns and objections. I critique, especially, what I think are inconsistencies in the theoretical underpinnings of each theory, which introduce epistemological gaps in each theory's account of practical truth and limit its practical relevance to everyday human action. In Part II of this study, I draw on the work of several interpreters of Aquinas to articulate a third theory, which I suggest begins to answer some of the objections raised regarding the other theories.

The second motivating question above focuses my approach in Part II. After raising concerns about the theoretical groundings of the two accounts I examine in Part I, I consider in Part II the implications of Aquinas' claim that practical thinking depends on speculative thinking.²⁹ I ask what kind of account of simple truth and human judgment is needed to articulate a practically relevant, consistent theory of practical truth. I raise this question in the context of examining a Thomistic account of human judgment in chapter 3 and Robert Sokolowski's description of human engagement in truth in chapter 4. As I step through the chapters of Part II, I add clarification and specification to this latter motivating question and my response to it.

My thesis entering chapter 5 is as follows: to articulate a relevant, consistent account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth, we need to consider speculatively the natural causal principles of simple human judgment of affirmation (i.e., natural assent). What I eventually argue is that human understanding first becomes practical when we apprehend the particular good of truth by simple judgment, properly speaking (this involves primarily apprehending the good of a person).³⁰ In dialogue with several interpreters of Aquinas, I attempt to offer the beginnings of a theory of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth to defend this claim.

Now, I briefly attempt to situate Aquinas' account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth in a Christian dialogue about the enduring goodness of human beings. I

²⁹ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 11. *DV* 14.4.

³⁰ See *ST I*, q. 16, a. 4 ad 2.

hope this discussion points to the relevance of the present topic for Christian ethicists and moral theologians and helps to clarify my use of the term “natural” according to the Thomistic tradition. After this, I discuss my overall approach and selection of interlocutors, and I offer preliminary thoughts on my use of the terms “human good” and “practical truth.”

Human good in the Christian tradition

The Christian tradition holds that God, who is simply and supremely Good,³¹ creates human beings in his own image and likeness and sees them as “very good” (Genesis 1:26-27, 31).³² And, while it speaks further of our turning away from friendship with God, our woundedness due to sin, and our need for the grace of Jesus Christ, the tradition consistently affirms the enduring goodness of creation and especially of human beings—albeit, in a diminished state after the fall from grace. In the fifth century, St. Augustine defends the natural goodness of human beings against Manichean dualism. Against the Manichean view that human beings have both a good nature and an evil one, he argues that evil is not a primary reality; rather, it is simply a privation or absence of what is good. Augustine writes that evil is nothing but “corruption, either of the measure, or the form, or the order, that belong[s] to nature.”³³ Thus, the goodness of nature does not end even when nature is diminished: “When incorrupt it is good; but even when corrupt, so far as it is nature it is good.”³⁴

The enduring goodness of human beings has special significance when we consider what it means to be created in the image and likeness of God in the Christian tradition. St. Paul writes that the Son of God “is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all

³¹ See *ST I*, q. 6, a. 2. St. Augustine, “Concerning the Nature of Good, Against the Manichaeans,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Albert H. Newman (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Company, 1887), Chapter 1. Augustine, *Eighty-three Different Questions: The Fathers of the Church*, trans. David L. Mosher (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982), q. 51. Luke 18:19.

³² C.f. 1 Timothy 4:4.

³³ Augustine, “Nature of Good,” Chapter 4, 352.

³⁴ Augustine, “Nature of Good,” Chapter 4, 352. C.f. Aquinas’ reference to Augustine in *ST I*, q. 5, a. 1.

things were created” (Colossians 1:15-16). Augustine distinguishes between the perfect Image of God in whom all things are created, namely the Son, and human beings, who are created in the image (or “to the image”) of God by way of participation in Him.³⁵ He also distinguishes between created things that share in God’s likeness to some limited degree—by existing, or even more, by existing and living—and human beings, who are properly created in the image of God. Human beings share most closely in God’s likeness: by existing, by living, and also by understanding, i.e., by way of participation in the wisdom of God.³⁶

In the thirteenth century, St. Thomas Aquinas adopts these ideas and affirms Augustine’s view that only intellectual creatures, properly speaking, are “made to God’s image,” for they alone are made to participate in the highest good by virtue of their intellectual nature.³⁷ Aquinas emphasizes use of the preposition “to” here, which “signifies a certain approach, as of something at a distance” and “imperfect.”³⁸ He specifies the term “image” as follows:

“While in all creatures there is some kind of likeness to God, in the rational creature alone we find a likeness of ‘image’ For as to the likeness of the Divine Nature, rational creatures seem to attain, after a fashion, to the representation of the species, inasmuch as they imitate God, not only in being and life, but also in intelligence.”³⁹

And, following Augustine,⁴⁰ Aquinas clarifies *how* human beings imitate God in intelligence:

Since the human being is “said to be the image of God by reason of his intellectual nature, he is the most perfectly like God according to that in which he can best imitate God in his intellectual nature. Now the intellectual nature imitates God chiefly in this, that God understands and loves Himself.”⁴¹

Here, we encounter what seems to be a primary meaning of the term “intelligence” or “intellectual nature” (or “rationality” or “rational nature”) in the Christian tradition, at least as

³⁵ Augustine, *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: The Fathers of the Church*, trans. Roland J. Teske (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 184. C.f. Augustine, *Eighty-three Questions*, q. 51.

³⁶ Augustine, *Eighty-three Questions*, q. 51.

³⁷ *ST I*, q. 93, a. 2. C.f. *ST I*, q. 26, a. 1-2.

³⁸ *ST I*, q. 93, a. 1; a. 6 ad 1. C.f. Colossians 1:20 and Romans 11:36.

³⁹ *ST I*, q. 93, a. 6. C.f. articles 2, 7, and 8.

⁴⁰ See Aquinas’ reference to Augustine in *ST I*, q. 93, a. 8.

⁴¹ *ST I*, q. 93, a. 4; q. 14; q. 20.

articulated by Augustine and Aquinas: to be an intellectual being is to be created to God's image and likeness to participate in God's understanding and love of Himself.

Aquinas on natural human participation in the fallen state

The above specification of what it means to be an intellectual creature leads to the following question. Namely, in what sense does speaking of the enduring goodness of human beings in the Christian tradition imply their enduring participation in God's understanding and love after the fall from grace—that is, after their turn away from friendship with God?

This question is clearly relevant to Aquinas because after specifying how human beings imitate God intellectually, he immediately distinguishes three ways in which the image of God is manifest in human beings. First, we see the image of God in human beings inasmuch as they possess a "natural aptitude for understanding and loving God."⁴² This aptitude is by nature: it consists "in the very nature of the mind [or intellect]," which is common to all human beings.⁴³ The second way we see the image of God in human beings is insofar as they actually and habitually know and love God, though imperfectly. Aquinas says that "this image consists in the conformity of grace."⁴⁴ Finally, the third way is inasmuch as human beings know and love God perfectly, and "this image consists in the likeness of glory."⁴⁵

Now, the topic of this study concerns the first way Aquinas identifies above. Aquinas clearly says that human beings cannot return from a state of fallenness to a state of justice without grace.⁴⁶ He says that fallen human beings need grace both to be healed from sin and to be sanctified for life everlasting.⁴⁷ He also says that meritorious understanding and love of God

⁴² *ST I*, q. 93, a. 4.

⁴³ *ST I*, q. 93, a. 4, 6.

⁴⁴ *ST I*, q. 93, a. 4.

⁴⁵ *ST I*, q. 93, a. 4.

⁴⁶ *ST I-II*, q. 109, a. 7.

⁴⁷ *ST I-II*, q. 109, a. 2, 5.

“can be in us only by grace.”⁴⁸ Nonetheless, while affirming the complete loss of original justice after the fall, Aquinas makes two claims about the enduring goodness of human nature. First, he claims that the human being’s natural aptitude for understanding and loving God—which includes “the principles of which nature is constituted, and the properties that flow from them, such as the powers of the soul”—is “neither destroyed nor diminished by sin.”⁴⁹ Second, he claims that the human being’s natural inclination to virtue is diminished but not destroyed by sin. Here, we encounter Aquinas’ use of Aristotelian philosophical language to articulate certain distinctions he thinks are significant. I briefly speak to some of these distinctions further below.

Note that Aquinas speaks of the fallen human being’s natural aptitude for understanding and loving God not merely in terms of possibility but also as proceeding actually and habitually by nature, albeit in a limited manner. He writes, citing Augustine:

“Yet there is a certain natural knowledge and love.... in which sense we have already said that the image of God abides ever in the soul; ‘whether this image of God be so obsolete,’ as it were clouded, ‘as almost to amount to nothing,’ as in those who have not the use of reason; ‘or obscured and disfigured,’ as in sinners; or ‘clear and beautiful,’ as in the just; as Augustine says (*De Trin.* xiv, 6).”⁵⁰

Indeed, Aquinas says plainly that human beings can understand truth naturally by participation after the fall (but only with God’s help moving us to understand). He says that to understand truth is a use or act of intellectual light (i.e., a use or act of intellection by participation in God’s understanding).⁵¹ However, he clarifies that this understanding is obscured by sin and wounded by ignorance and weakness, and subject to many errors (though not directly regarding its simplest apprehensions and judgments, as we shall see).⁵² Furthermore, although he says the natural inclination to virtue is diminished, Aquinas claims that natural human understanding by aptitude and inclination remains sufficient to instill general, habitual understanding of certain first

⁴⁸ *ST I*, 93, 8 ad 3.

⁴⁹ *ST I-II*, q. 85, a. 1. C.f. *ST I*, q. 93, a. 8.

⁵⁰ *ST I*, q. 93, a. 8 ad 3.

⁵¹ *ST I-II*, q. 109, a. 1.

⁵² *ST I-II*, q. 85, a. 3; q. 78, a. 1, ad 1. *ST I*, q. 85, a. 6; q. 94, a. 1, ad 3; q. 1, a. 1.

principles of knowledge (simple truths) and action (practical truths)—at least vaguely, implicitly, and somewhat confusedly⁵³—which he says are “the nurseries of intellectual and moral virtues.”⁵⁴

Aquinas’ reasons for defending the enduring goodness of natural human understanding and love

Aquinas offers both speculative and practical reasons to defend his view on the enduring goodness of fallen human beings. His speculative reason for claiming that the natural aptitude for understanding and loving God is neither diminished nor destroyed by sin is simply that “sin does not diminish nature”: it cannot take away that the human being is a rational creature created in the image of God.⁵⁵ And, his speculative reason for saying that the natural inclination to virtue is diminished but not destroyed by sin is related to the same reason. For, while the inclination to virtue can be diminished indefinitely by obstacles that might impede it from attaining its term, it cannot be destroyed entirely because its root remains by nature.⁵⁶

Aquinas also has a practical defense of the enduring goodness of human nature. He says that human fallenness can neither destroy the good of the natural inclination to virtue nor take away the good of human rationality—because then the human being would “no longer be capable of sin,”⁵⁷ which is to say, he would no longer be capable of turning away from God. On this, Aquinas quotes Augustine, who writes that “evil does not exist except in some good.”⁵⁸ And, what is clearly presupposed here—and what is presupposed whenever the Christian tradition speaks about turning away from friendship with God—is the necessity of human free will or free decision. Practically speaking, human beings must have free will, because, as Aquinas says,

⁵³ *ST I*, q. 85, a. 3.

⁵⁴ *ST I-II*, q. 63, a. 1; q. 51, a. 1. C.f. *ST I*, q. 85, a. 6; q. 79, a. 12; *ST I-II*, q. 94, a. 6.

⁵⁵ *ST I-II*, q. 85, a. 1-2.

⁵⁶ *ST I-II*, q. 85, a. 2.

⁵⁷ *ST I-II*, q. 85, a. 2.

⁵⁸ *ST I-II*, q. 85, a. 2. Aquinas cites Augustine, *Enchiridion* xiv.

“otherwise counsels, exhortations, commands, prohibitions, rewards, and punishments would be in vain.”⁵⁹

Therefore, what we can gather from Aquinas’ practical defense is that the free decision to turn away from God cannot destroy the enduring good of the human being’s natural aptitude or freedom to do so. Neither, it seems, can sin destroy what it means to turn to God freely as a human being, at least in principle and in general by natural participation—for, we are created to God’s image.⁶⁰ This is not to claim, however, that any actual turning to God can be awakened or realized in fallen human nature without God’s help.⁶¹

A few distinctions

What I attempt to do now is to sketch briefly what distinctions need to be made if we are to preserve the natural intelligibility of free decision and voluntary human activity in human beings, according to Aquinas. Here is where the primary topic of this study becomes directly relevant. Here is also where Aquinas’ use of Aristotelian philosophical language helps to articulate somewhat explicitly certain distinctions that might otherwise remain vague or implicit.

To begin, suppose we say that a human being performs a particular act voluntarily. And, suppose what we mean by this is that the human being performs the act simply and unqualifiedly by self-determination and self-movement.⁶² This is to say that the human being determines interiorly both *what* is done (by specification of the act) and *that* it is done (by exercise of the act) and, thus, that the particular act proceeds according to a fully intrinsic principle of movement.⁶³ In other words, the claim is that no exterior principle (i.e., no exterior cause, agent, or subject of

⁵⁹ *ST I*, q. 83, a. 1.

⁶⁰ *ST I*, q. 93, a. 8.

⁶¹ *ST I-II*, q. 109, a. 6. Thomas Joseph White, O.P., *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2016), xxv.

⁶² *ST I-II*, q. 6, a. 1 ad 1; I, q. 83, a. 1 ad 3.

⁶³ *ST I-II*, q. 6, a. 1. *DM* 6. *DV* 24.2.

activity) determines the human being's individual performance of the act. Aquinas says that voluntary acts are properly called "human" acts.⁶⁴

Assuming these presuppositions, then, we need to be able to specify a particular voluntary, self-determined act. We need to specify the act, first, to distinguish it from not acting at all. For, as Aquinas says, "if the agent were not determinate to some particular effect, it would not do one thing rather than another: consequently in order that it produce a determinate effect, it must, of necessity, be determined to some certain one."⁶⁵

Second, we need to distinguish the self-determined act from any other particular act of a human being that is exteriorly determined, either, 1) by nature or natural instinct (e.g., a reflex, or any other determinate natural or biological process, however complex), or 2) by some exterior cause or subject of activity (e.g., a parent may sometimes move a sleeping child without the child's voluntary involvement).⁶⁶ In each of these cases of exterior determination, there is no voluntary act because there is no simple, unqualified self-determination; rather, each act is determined by some other principle or cause outside the acting subject. Therefore, as soon as each exteriorly determined act is fully specified and exercised, it proceeds according to its proper operation (assuming no obstacles).

Now, according to the Christian tradition, God determines all things to Himself: "For from him and through him and to him are all things" (Romans 11:36). How, then, is human self-determination properly distinguished? How can we find space for simple, unqualified self-determination in the acting human subject? Aquinas' answer is that voluntary self-determination proceeds interiorly only in an intellectual creature, who is created to participate in God's understanding and love of Himself as a moved self-mover (and as a determined self-determiner).⁶⁷ For Aquinas, to act voluntarily involves determining oneself explicitly "for an

⁶⁴ *ST* I-II, q. 6, prologue and a. 1; q. 1, a. 1.

⁶⁵ *ST* I-II, q. 1, a. 2.

⁶⁶ *ST* I, q. 83, a. 1. C.f. *DV* 24.2.

⁶⁷ See *ST* I, q. 18, a. 3; q. 83, a. 1; I-II, q. 1, a. 8; q. 6, a. 1. C.f. *DV* 24.1.

end.”⁶⁸ Whereas non-rational animals are said to apprehend and to move themselves to sensible objects determinately by instinct (because the principles of their actions for ends are imprinted on them), the human being is said to understand and to move herself voluntarily “for an end,” in part, because she can understand an end precisely *as an end*⁶⁹—that is, according to “the nature of an end”⁷⁰ and as good.⁷¹ She can propose the end to herself and then move herself freely to it.⁷²

All of this is to say that, for Aquinas, human beings have a natural aptitude to act voluntarily for an end, in part, *because they have a natural aptitude to understand the good as an end*—at least in a vague, obscure, and clouded manner in our fallen state. Furthermore, to understand the good as an end of human operation is, for Aquinas, to understand the human good practically.⁷³ Here, I suggest, we identify one significant reason why natural understanding of the human good and practical truth is broadly relevant to Christian ethicists and moral theologians, at least given Aquinas’ presuppositions. The topic is relevant because of the claim that freedom is rooted in the human being’s natural understanding of the good and practical truth.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ ST I-II, q. 6, a. 1.

⁶⁹ ST I-II, q. 6, a. 1.

⁷⁰ ST I-II, q. 1, a. 2.

⁷¹ ST I-II, q. 1, a. 4. I say “in part” because voluntary human action also depends on love in the human will (ST I-II, q. 13, a. 6; DV 24.6 ad 3). C.f. Michael Sherwin O.P., *By Knowledge and By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 34, 52. The will is the principle of exercise (i.e., the efficient cause) of voluntary human activity (DM 6).

⁷² ST I, q. 18, a. 3. C.f. ST I, 59, 3; q. 83, a. 1; DV 24.2.

⁷³ ST I, q. 79, a. 11. C.f. DV 14.4.

⁷⁴ DV 24.2. ST I-II, q. 13, a. 6. C.f. Sherwin, 34, 52. By analogy, see John 8:32.

Doctrinal and practical considerations at stake

Assuming the claim that voluntary human action depends on natural understanding of the good and practical truth, there are both doctrinal and practical considerations at stake for Christian ethicists and moral theologians.

A doctrinal consideration

A doctrinal consideration arises regarding the distinction and relation between nature and grace. The Christian tradition clearly affirms the reality of human free will. For, as we hear in the Book of Genesis, human beings turn away from friendship with God by an act of free will—and, indeed, sin is attributed to human beings and not to God (Genesis 3). The Christian tradition also affirms that an act of free will is required and presupposed (but insufficient) for human beings to rise from sin,⁷⁵ as St. Paul seems to indicate: “Therefore it is said, ‘Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light’” (Ephesians 5:14). Attempting to interpret this point according to the Christian tradition, Aquinas clarifies that the human being turns to God by free will, but that free will “can only be turned to God, when God turns it.”⁷⁶

Given the reality of human freedom in the Christian tradition, several doctrinal implications seem to follow. The first implication is that it warrants articulating an account of human nature and free will: to speak of the human being’s genuine distinction from and freedom for the gift of God’s grace. The second implication is that it warrants articulating an account of grace as both operative of and cooperative with human free will: in a way that presupposes, preserves, heals, and elevates it. Indeed, Aquinas quotes Augustine as follows: “[God] operates that we may will; and when we will, He cooperates that we may perfect.”⁷⁷ Third, assuming the claim above that voluntary human action depends on natural understanding, the implication is

⁷⁵ *ST I-II*, q. 109, a. 7 ad 1.

⁷⁶ *ST I-II*, q. 109, a. 6 ad 1; a. 7 ad 1; a. 6.

⁷⁷ Aquinas cites Augustine, *De Gratia et Lib. Arbit.* xvii in *ST I-II*, q. 111, a. 2. C.f. Matthew 5:48.

that the Christian tradition needs an account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth to give an adequate account of human freedom, even if this natural understanding is vague, obscured, and insufficient. Indeed, Aquinas says, “for faith presupposes natural knowledge, even as grace presupposes nature, and perfection supposes something that can be perfected.”⁷⁸

A practical consideration

Finally, consider the following practical reason Christian ethicists and moral theologians can benefit from a theory of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth. Practically speaking, I suggest it is often difficult to make sense of the judgments we hear and consider as acting persons. Indeed, sometimes judgments seem epistemically or morally ambiguous and semantically underdetermined at first, especially when we hear or consider them in isolation. Which judgments are reasonable and fair, and which are unreasonable or biased? Which judgments are true, and which are not? Which judgments are of one’s own making, and which are of divine inspiration or command? And, to whom is a judgment accountable, especially when it is made using various intermediary instruments or tools (e.g., a machine learning or artificial intelligence model)?

I suggest such ambiguity arises, in part, because many—*but not all*—of the judgments we hear and consider are already the products of practical human activity.⁷⁹ Now, Aquinas says that an external practical operation can sometimes be ordered to several possible ends.⁸⁰ An implication of this is that unless we know the principles and end of an acting person’s external act (i.e., unless we know an agent’s reason for acting), the nature of that particular act may appear underdetermined to us.⁸¹ This ambiguity can arise even for sentences that sound like simple

⁷⁸ *ST I*, q. 2, a. 2 ad 1.

⁷⁹ And, of course, choosing to express a judgment is a practical activity.

⁸⁰ See *ST I-II*, q. 1, a. 3 ad 3; q. 18, a. 7.

⁸¹ Note the nature of a human act is not underdetermined absolutely speaking insofar as it is voluntary.

statements of fact (e.g., “This is an image of a human face”—here, I have the possibility of a so-called “deep-fake” in mind), precisely if such expressed judgments are the product of observation and voluntary inductive inference or hypothesis, which are practical activities. Likewise, ambiguity can arise for judgments that rely on testing or reasoning from hypothesis to conclusion, because these are also practical activities. The ambiguity can arise even in the domain of logical reasoning—because the exercise is already practical, I suggest, if its first principles rely on inductive inference or hypothesis.⁸²

What can we do about the apparent ambiguity that arises in practical human judgment? My point is simply that if we assume voluntary activity is self-determined, and if we assume natural understanding of the good intervenes in voluntary judgment, then seeking to articulate an account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth can help us consider our practical judgments and actions in terms of their causal principles and ends. And, this exercise may help us, albeit in a limited manner,⁸³ think more clearly about the natures of the judgments we hear and express. It also may help us consider questions of transparency and accountability concerning our judgments.

In what follows, I attempt to offer the beginnings of an account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth according to a Thomistic point of view. One of the claims I defend is that practical human judgment and activity (including natural human love of friendship and the life of acquired virtue) are rooted in a structurally prior natural understanding of the good, at least vaguely and in general. It is, in part, because of this natural understanding by participation that voluntary human activity is properly of an *individual* human person.⁸⁴

⁸² Recall n. 27 and my reference to *ST* I, q. 1, a. 4. It is possible to reason logically (or theoretically) according to a *practical* philosophical science.

⁸³ Aquinas says that whatever we do in this life as fallen human beings falls short of our natural human good and cannot merit eternal life (*ST* I-II, q. 109, a. 2).

⁸⁴ See *ST* I-II, q. 109, a. 1-2; q. 63, a. 1; q. 85, a. 1-2; I, q. 76, a. 1; q. 79, a. 4.

APPROACH

As I mention above, to understand the human good practically is, for Aquinas, to understand the good as an end of human operation.⁸⁵ My question in this study is about how the human being naturally comes to understand the human good practically according to a Thomistic point of view—such that practical thinking and voluntary operation are naturally possible. Below, I approach the topic in two primary parts. Before describing these parts, I think it is helpful to contextualize my overall approach in view of the above dialogue.

In this study I consider how natural understanding of the human good and practical truth arises in relation (or, in reference) to us (*quoad nos*)—that is, according to our epistemic perspective as human beings and subjects of intellectual understanding.⁸⁶ Much of what I discuss in this study is about human understanding *quoad nos*. However, a method I use to guide this study—and a method I use to evaluate the consistency of the accounts I examine and articulate—may be likened, at least in some sense, to what Aquinas calls the way of judgment. Aquinas says that by way of judgment, we can judge of temporal things in light of some understanding of what is eternal (universal in causing).⁸⁷ The implication of Aquinas' claim seems to be that we can approach some understanding of temporal things as they are in themselves (*quoad se*) when we consider them in light of what we understand of the eternal (albeit imperfectly)—by faith, revelation, and sacred doctrine or theology, and even analogically by philosophical wisdom (metaphysics) and natural theology.⁸⁸

Given the Thomistic point of view articulated above on the enduring goodness of human beings, I begin this study with following premise: the human being (*per se*) is created by God with an intellectual nature and natural intellectual aptitude to participate in God's understanding and

⁸⁵ ST I, q. 79, a. 11. C.f. DV 14.4.

⁸⁶ *Metaph* I.2, 46. C.f. Jan A. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 161. White, *Wisdom*, xxix.

⁸⁷ ST I, q. 79, a. 8-9.

⁸⁸ ST I, q. 1 (esp. a. 6); I-II, q. 57, a. 2; q. 66, a. 5. C.f. ST I q. 88, a. 2 ad 1. C.f. *Metaph* I.1. White, *Wisdom*, xxix. Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 161.

loving. Another way to speak about this natural intellectual aptitude is to say that the human being by nature has a human intellect. My approach below is to consider how natural understanding of the human good and practical truth arises *quoad nos*—at least vaguely and in general—given this premise about the human being *quoad se*.⁸⁹

It is worth mentioning that, naturally speaking, I suggest we do not *merely* assume the above premise for the purposes of our theory. Rather, I suggest there is a way for us to reason to this premise, at least in principle, from what we first understand implicitly *quoad nos*—by what Aquinas calls the ways of discovery and judgment.⁹⁰ Therefore, naturally speaking, when we begin with this premise, we are not merely hypothesizing; instead, we are also attempting to state somewhat explicitly by judgment (*quoad se*) what we can, at least in principle, come to discover by reasoning from our understanding *quoad nos* (however, Aquinas says such reasoning is difficult, time-consuming, and subject to many errors, and that divine revelation is necessary⁹¹). Indeed, the goal is to defend the relevance and consistency of a theory of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth—and the possibility of voluntary human activity—and thereby to identify reasons to affirm that the starting premise is, in the first instance, not merely assumed but also discoverable from what we first understand implicitly *quoad nos*. If we can make a case for natural understanding of the human good and practical truth *quoad nos* given the starting premise, then this can lend normative support both to the first premise and to the proposed theory, which at first presumed it.⁹²

⁸⁹ I say this while affirming the necessity of grace in our fallen state, even to heal our natural human capacities. See *ST I-II*, q. 109, a. 2, 5. C.f. White, *Wisdom*, xxv.

⁹⁰ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 8-9.

⁹¹ *ST I*, q. 1, a. 1. C.f. *ST I*, q. 12, a. 12; *I-II*, q. 85, a. 3; *I*, q. 85, a. 6; *I*, q. 94, a. 1 ad 3; *I-II*, q. 78, a. 1 ad 1.

⁹² It also suggests that what we are doing is not merely logical or scientific reasoning but also metaphysical reasoning. See White, *Wisdom*, xxx.

Using the terms “human good” and “practical truth”

Although I focus largely on human understanding *quoad nos* in this study, it is important to mention that we can define terms such as “human good” and “practical truth” both with respect to human understanding *quoad nos* and *quoad se* (and both modes of definition refer to the same reality *quoad se*). To offer preliminary definitions of these terms *quoad nos*, for example, I follow Aquinas in saying that to understand the good naturally is to understand a thing according to the “aspect of desirableness,”⁹³ which also implies “the aspect of an end.”⁹⁴ And, thus, we might say that to understand the good of a human being—or, to understand the human good—naturally and simply (not practically) *quoad nos* is to understand the human person as simply desired to an end. Here, I am talking about understanding the dignity or worth of the human person *quoad nos* (however vaguely or implicitly) as a reality to be acknowledged and affirmed.⁹⁵ Furthermore, I follow Aquinas in saying that to understand the human good practically (or, to understand a practical proposition or practical truth in terms of it) *quoad nos* is to understand the human good *additionally* as an end of human operation (we also understand human goods additionally as means to an end).⁹⁶ I develop these definitions further in later chapters.

Considering a *quoad se* perspective, I follow Aquinas in saying that God’s love causes all things and causes the goodness of all things: “the love of God infuses and creates goodness.”⁹⁷ Therefore, we might say that when we understand the good of a human being (or the human good) naturally and simply *quoad nos* (however vaguely), what we understand by natural participation *quoad se* is the human being according to the aspect of God’s love of that individual person to Himself (of course, when we understand the human good *quoad nos* at first, we do not

⁹³ ST I, q. 5, a. 1.

⁹⁴ ST I, q. 5, a. 4. C.f. Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 299-303.

⁹⁵ See ST I, q. 29, a. 3 ad 2; II-II, q. 25, a. 7. C.f. John Finnis, *Aquinas: Moral, Political, and Legal Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 176. Sherwin, 93.

⁹⁶ ST I, q. 79, a. 11. DV 14.4.

⁹⁷ ST I, q. 20, a. 2; q. 44, a. 4 ad 3. Aquinas cites Wis. 11:25.

realize that we understand this).⁹⁸ Furthermore, I follow Aquinas in saying that the natural law is “the rational creature’s participation of the eternal law,”⁹⁹ and that the eternal law is “the type of Divine Wisdom, as directing all actions and movements.”¹⁰⁰ Therefore, we might say that to understand the human good practically *quoad se* is to understand the human good *additionally* insofar as we participate both by simple willing in God’s love of the human person to Himself and by practical understanding in God’s wisdom of ordering the human being to Himself (again, at least vaguely and in general)—such that we can participate secondarily and voluntarily both by natural human love and by practical thinking in ordering our practical activity to that end (as determined self-determiners and as moved self-movers).¹⁰¹ Again, I develop these thoughts further in later chapters, especially in chapter 5.

Note that to claim the human being naturally understands the human good and practical truth at least vaguely and in general is not to claim that this understanding proceeds without God’s help in moving us.¹⁰² Furthermore, it need not imply that natural human love of friendship or virtuous human activity in our fallen state can be awakened or realized without the gift of grace, which is needed to heal our natural capacities. The important claim for our purposes is that natural understanding of the human good and practical truth proceeds at least vaguely and in general such that voluntary human activity is possible, and such that love of friendship and acquired virtue have natural, intrinsic character or intelligible structure, at least in principle.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ We might also say that when we understand the human good *simply* we participate (speculatively, *quoad nos*) in God’s *practical* understanding of his human creature whom He loves to Himself. Indeed, human *speculative* thinking depends on God’s *practical* knowledge of creation. See *ST I*, q. 14, a. 16.

⁹⁹ *ST I-II*, q. 91, a. 2.

¹⁰⁰ *ST I-II*, q. 93, a. 1.

¹⁰¹ See *ST I*, q. 47, a. 1-2; q. 77, a. 2; q. 15, a. 2.

¹⁰² *ST I-II*, q. 109, a. 1.

¹⁰³ *ST I-II*, q. 109, a. 2. White, *Wisdom*, xxv.

A general strategy

What the above discussion begins to reveal, I think, is that our starting premise about human understanding *quoad se* has an implication, which suggests a strategy for examining any theory of human understanding *quoad nos* given this premise. The implication is that a relevant, consistent theory of human understanding *quoad nos* cannot divide human thinking, willing, and acting from their grounding by natural participation in God's understanding and love. Furthermore, as I attempt to show and to examine in what follows, because our simple willing of the good participates in our simple understanding of the good, and because our practical understanding of the good and voluntary human activity participate further in these—and because all of these naturally participate in God's understanding and love—a successful theory of natural human understanding *quoad nos* must preserve the unity (by participation) of simple and practical thinking in human understanding and the unity (by participation) of understanding and willing in human action. If any theory of knowledge completely divides human understanding from the above first premise or from an account of natural intellection by participation, then I suggest such a theory is simply talking about some other subject matter—e.g., a different kind of cognition or judgment, perhaps that of an estimative capacity or inference engine—and not about the natural human aptitude of intellectual understanding (i.e., the human intellect) identified above. However, following Aquinas, I doubt that simple, unqualified voluntary activity can arise without a natural intellectual aptitude.

It is worth mentioning here that I do not apply this strategy or the account below to articulate any specific practical principles or precepts. Furthermore, this project is not meant to be a textual study of Aquinas' works, nor is it a historical study of interpretations of Aquinas. Rather, I attempt to write a constructive thesis, both speculative and practical, that develops Thomistic thinking on natural understanding of the human good and practical truth in a manner consistent with Aquinas' claims.

With the above general strategy in mind, I now turn to summarize how I structure this study into two main parts and five chapters.

Part I: Chapters 1 and 2

In Part I, which includes chapters 1 and 2, I examine two contemporary theories of practical truth broadly situated in the Thomistic tradition, namely, those of John Bowlin and John Finnis. My reasons for selecting Bowlin and Finnis as primary interlocutors are as follows. First, while both are well-recognized thinkers in the Christian ethics community who draw on a broadly Thomistic perspective, their positions represent vastly opposing views on what (how much) human beings can know about the human good and practical truth naturally. Bowlin posits a relatively minimalist account of naturally knowable practical content, while Finnis proposes a much more specified theory of knowable practical concepts and truths. Later, in Part II of this study, I attempt to articulate a third theory of practical truth situated somewhat moderately between the two.

Second, while Bowlin and Finnis commonly assume a Thomistic ontology of the human person and affirm that human beings perform acts of intellectual understanding and willing, I suggest that each articulates an overly determinative account of one of these rational acts in his theory of practical truth, while underemphasizing the role of the other. More specifically, I attempt to show that Bowlin posits an overly determinative role for the human will in his theory of practical truth, while Finnis posits an overly determinative role for the practical intellect (and the practical insight) in his. In each case, I suggest the author's overly determinative account introduces an epistemological gap in his theory of practical truth that prevents both the unity of simple and practical thinking in human understanding and the unity of understanding and willing in human action.

In Part II I claim that practical truth is determined interiorly neither by the human will nor by the practical insight. Rather, I suggest that, according to a Thomistic point of view, the human person comes to discover and understand practical truth by her intellectual and voluntary engagement with natural things in the world and especially with other human beings. I submit that this third theory preserves the theoretical unity of simple and practical truth and the unity of human action, and that it begins to answer some of the objections raised regarding the other theories.

Part II: Chapters 3 to 5

Chapter 3: A Turn to Simple Judgment and Simple Truth

My approach in Part II takes three turns. First, in chapter 3 I turn from the topic of practical truth to discuss simple judgment of affirmation (i.e., natural assent) and what Aquinas calls theoretical or speculative truth (I also call it simple truth). I attempt to locate this turn in a contemporary Thomistic discourse on practical thinking in the context of concrete human agency.

One might ask why I focus at length on an account of judgment of affirmation and simple truth in a study of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth. My answer is I think articulating a consistent account of the latter depends on articulating a clear account of the former and practical thinking's relation to it. Aquinas clearly says that practical thinking depends on speculative thinking.¹⁰⁴ And, as I mention in Part I, both Bowlin and Finnis acknowledge this dependency *generally*.¹⁰⁵ However, I suggest these authors do not sufficiently consider the nature of this dependency, nor do they examine *how* simple understanding becomes additionally practical by "extension to operation," as Aquinas claims.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 11. *DV* 14.4.

¹⁰⁵ See John Bowlin, *Contingency and Fortune in Aquinas's Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 97 n. 21. *CEJF* I.1, 32-33.

¹⁰⁶ *DV* 14.4. *ST I*, q. 79, a. 11.

One might ask, further, why I do not simply presume an existing Thomistic account of speculative truth and then attend only to how speculative thinking becomes practical in the present study. My provisional answer is that I have not encountered a Thomistic account of simple judgment that gives what I think is sufficient attention to *how it arises distinctly in act*.¹⁰⁷ In the chapter I observe both a need for clarity in Aquinas' account of how simple judgment arises and a tendency in Thomistic thinking to conflate the operation's logical and natural species. Given Aquinas' claim that our understanding of the good depends on our understanding of the true,¹⁰⁸ which we first cognize when we judge,¹⁰⁹ my thesis is that we need a clear account of how simple judgment arises to give a clear account of how natural understanding of the human good and practical truth arises.

Chapter 4: Robert Sokolowski and the Agent of Truth

Second, without a clear sense of how simple judgment of affirmation arises distinctly in act according to a Thomistic perspective, I turn in chapter 4 to consider Robert Sokolowski's *descriptive account* of human engagement in truth in his book *Phenomenology of the Human Person*. I dialogue with Sokolowski because his topic is what I seek to understand, namely, how human engagement in truth *arises* by judgment, and because his description is practically relevant to our everyday experience of learning to name and predicate in conversation with others. Although Sokolowski does not claim to be a Thomist, he both acknowledges premises that are broadly consistent with a Thomistic ontology of the human person and affirms human acts of intellectual understanding and willing (like Bowlin and Finnis).¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ However, there is much existing work in the Thomistic tradition to draw on to begin to articulate such an account. In chapter 5 I draw especially on the work of Jan Aertsen on Aquinas' doctrine of the transcendentals and the work of Lawrence Dewan and Michael Sherwin on natural love and free choice in Aquinas' *De malo*.

¹⁰⁸ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 4 esp. ad 2.

¹⁰⁹ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2.

¹¹⁰ Robert Sokolowski, *Phenomenology of the Human Person* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1, 26-27, 176. Note Sokolowski does not offer an account of practical truth in this book. He has

To motivate my approach, I consider Sokolowski's description of judgment in view of his claim that using language in speech signals the rationality of the speaker.¹¹¹ My initial concern with this claim is that, *practically* speaking, Sokolowski's *description* of human learning and predication *appears* loosely to fit a *description* of the logical and material effects of machine learning and artificial judgment,¹¹² namely, language use and sentence expression. Note that in this chapter I do *not* attempt to compare practical human and machine judgment somehow *speculatively*; rather, I make only a *practical* comparison in terms of common logical and material effects and practical causes.¹¹³

In my brief analysis I find that Sokolowski's descriptive account does not offer the clarity I seek, at least narrowly on its own (I do not examine his overall phenomenological approach). However, engagement with Sokolowski helps to clarify my understanding of the present task and my approach. Building on my prior analysis in chapter 3, I recognize that to explain *simple* judgment of affirmation, I need to distinguish it from another kind of human judgment. That is, I need to distinguish judgment of affirmation *by simple understanding* (i.e., *simple* judgment of affirmation or *natural* assent) from what I call judgment of affirmation (or assent) *by inductive inference*,¹¹⁴ which is already a practical activity.¹¹⁵ My observation is that if we are given only a

written other works on moral action and psychology: see Robert Sokolowski, *Moral Action: A Phenomenological Study* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1985).

¹¹¹ See, for example, Sokolowski, 84.

¹¹² Here, I refer to the machine (or artificial) judgment of a machine learning (ML) or artificial intelligence (AI) model, or more specifically, of a large language model.

¹¹³ I consider the case of machine judgment of a model for at least three practical reasons: 1) because a description of its logical and material effects (e.g., language use and sentence expression) can *appear* to fit a description of the effects of human judgment, practically speaking; 2) because the case has significant contemporary relevance: there is much discussion today about the difference between human and artificial "intelligence"; and 3) because identifying the case's initial practical causes is a relatively straightforward task (even though interpreting a model's particular judgments can be difficult).

¹¹⁴ Note when I use the term "judgment by inference," I refer specifically to *judgment by inductive inference*, which is made or induced (i.e., commanded and exercised) by practical activity based on evidence (or observation, data, probability—or based on the advice of others, consensus, etc.). This judgment can be made directly by a human being (e.g., by use of her cogitative power) or by some other proximate *practical* "subject" of human use (e.g., a ML model). In any case, the judgment is commanded and exercised, in at least the first instance, by a human person's practical intellectual activity—when her intellect becomes practical by extension to operation (*ST I-II*, q. 79, a. 11) (and by participation in the will's act, see *ST I-II*, q. 17, a. 1).

¹¹⁵ See my discussion of *ST I-II*, q. 17, a. 6 in chapter 3.

practical, descriptive account of human judgment and its logical and material effects, then the operation's species remains ambiguous and underdetermined. Indeed, the above species of judgment can have identical material effects and can be expressed identically in practice. Thus, for example, given only the expressed sentence "This is a human person," we cannot know whether the proposition it signifies is the product of judgment by understanding or by inference.

Therefore, I further specify my thesis above as follows: to articulate a relevant, consistent account of practical truth, I need to build upon a *theoretical* account of simple judgment of affirmation *that specifies the operation in terms of its causal principles*—such that we can clearly disambiguate the above species and explain how simple judgment of affirmation arises distinctly in act. This thesis motivates my approach in chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Simple Judgment and Understanding the Human Good and Practical Truth

Finally, third, I turn in chapter 5 to propose a *speculative* account of how simple judgment and natural understanding of the human good and practical truth arise according to a Thomistic point of view.¹¹⁶ My working claim is that simple judgment (i.e., natural assent) is a partial, proximate cause of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth, which is a specifying cause of human practice, and that human practice is a cause of judgment by inference—and thus the latter is distinct from the former in terms of this causal dependence.

Thus, my first goal in chapter 5 is to apply a broadly Thomistic approach to articulate a speculative theory of human judgment of affirmation by simple understanding (i.e., an account of simple truth) in terms of its causal principles. My second goal is to suggest the beginnings of an account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth in terms of the first. I attempt to examine *how* judgment of affirmation of simple truth becomes additionally practical (and how we apprehend, by addition and extension, the practical good).

¹¹⁶ See ST I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

Again, in a study on practical truth, the reason I discuss a Thomistic account of judgment by understanding of simple truth in Part II (rather than presume one) is because the account of practical truth I propose in chapter 5 closely depends on my claim that the human being's first simple judgments are both natural and simply voluntary. Much of the work in chapter 5 involves articulating a Thomistic account of how simple judgment of affirmation arises naturally and voluntarily as simply moved by the will (secondarily, in response to the good of a person)—which involves specifying the operation in terms of its natural causal principles—such that it can be further apprehended as true and good and, indeed, as practically good.

Part I

Chapter One: John Bowlin and the Human Will

In this chapter I examine John Bowlin's claim in his book *Contingency and Fortune in Aquinas's Ethics* that the contingency of the human good in practical thinking and acting is *limited*.¹¹⁷ The contingency of the human good "cannot go all the way down," he writes.¹¹⁸ Bowlin offers a practical reason for his claim: anyone who "assume[s] a minimalist account of our common humanity and a provisional treatment of those goods that distinguish human agency...must distinguish rationality in action from madness."¹¹⁹ To defend his claim, Bowlin argues that human beings have *formal* knowledge of the human good (or formal knowledge of the natural law) *because of the human will's natural determination*.

In the study below, I offer an extended analysis and critique of one key claim of Bowlin's argument, as I understand it (below, I refer to it as claim four). While Bowlin often cites and interprets Aquinas, I examine only Bowlin's view here: I do not attempt to examine his interpretation of Aquinas. Admittedly, the focus of my study is on a sub-argument of Bowlin's book that is secondary to his primary thesis. However, I think the sub-argument raises several key issues upon which the success of his larger argument depends. Indeed, I think the questions and issues Bowlin addresses are significant.

THREE SIGNIFICANT PREMISES

To examine Bowlin's epistemology of the human good, I begin by identifying three significant premises of his argument that I think are relevant for the following discussion. Bowlin does not

¹¹⁷ Bowlin, 119, 130.

¹¹⁸ Bowlin, 130.

¹¹⁹ Bowlin, 130 n. 98.

directly highlight these claims as such, but he does discuss related points in his text. I think the following premises underlie his argument, which I discuss further below.

First Premise

The first premise to highlight is Bowlin's claim that insofar as human beings act *rationally*, we have natural, habitual, general—i.e., *formal*—knowledge of the ends or goods characteristic of human nature and human agency.¹²⁰ There is a practical reason for the necessity of formal knowledge: "Because knowing the human good is a prerequisite for acting rationally for the sake of it."¹²¹ Similarly, he writes, "...knowledge of the most general character of the human good is the most basic prerequisite for rational, and thus human, action."¹²² Bowlin's claim here is that acting rationally requires both having formal knowledge of the human good and acting according to this knowledge.¹²³

Although his topic is *natural* knowledge of the human good (and knowledge of the *natural* law), Bowlin appeals to theology to specify his use of the terms "formal" and "rational":

"Thus to say that human beings act according to the natural law is above all a statement about the formal character of human agency, created by God and governed by His Providence. It is to say, on the one hand, that it is knowledge of the ends to which we are naturally inclined by God's eternal law that moves us to act in ways that are characteristically human. On the other, it implies that human agency is rational precisely because of this knowledge, this judgment we share in common with God about our good."¹²⁴

Bowlin's view, as I understand it, is that God's creatures act practically for the sake of certain ends because they participate in the eternal law in certain ways (according to their kinds), "as directed by God's judgment and bound by His law."¹²⁵ What distinguishes the agency of humans from that

¹²⁰ Bowlin, 123-124.

¹²¹ Bowlin, 124.

¹²² Bowlin, 124. See Bowlin, 123-124.

¹²³ Bowlin, 124.

¹²⁴ Bowlin, 123-124. He references *ST* I-II, q. 91, a. 2.

¹²⁵ Bowlin, 122. Bowlin cites *ST* I-II, q. 91, a. 2; *SCG* III.4-5.

of other creatures is both the “particular collection of ends” to which God’s practical judgment naturally and necessarily directs human beings, and the “manner in which we pursue those ends according to God’s law.”¹²⁶ Human beings pursue their natural ends by acting with knowledge, which Bowlin says, “entails knowing the ends we are inclined to pursue in a manner that permits deliberation over the means.”¹²⁷ Referencing Aquinas, Bowlin writes that deliberation (*consilium*) over the means (preceding choice, *electio*) is “both the principal mark of rational human action and the telling sign of its formal indeterminacy”¹²⁸—an indeterminacy “not found in creatures...that act without knowledge.”¹²⁹ He explains the significance of this *formal indeterminacy* as follows: “And since the ability to deliberate, to compare one course of action with another, entails a certain indeterminacy of action, we are not bound by God’s eternal law to pursue any one of our natural ends or choose any particular course as a means to any particular end.”¹³⁰

Now Bowlin admits that while deliberation and choice distinguish human agency and point to its relative indeterminacy, “they do not by themselves tell us how far this indeterminacy extends.”¹³¹ The extent of human agency’s indeterminacy depends on the indeterminacy of the human being’s rational powers. Referencing Aquinas, Bowlin claims that the human intellect is “in potentiality to all things knowable” and that the human will is “in potentiality to all things desirable.”¹³² He writes, “Aquinas insists that the practical intellect and the will share a common object in what is (*ens*), and differ only in how they consider it, either knowable or desirable.”¹³³ Although Bowlin does not elaborate his point further, he seems to suggest that the natural domain of the practical intellect and will—and, thus, the natural domain of human agency—is the

¹²⁶ Bowlin, 122.

¹²⁷ Bowlin, 122. Bowlin cites *ST* I-II, q. 6, a. 1-2; q. 91, a. 2.

¹²⁸ Bowlin, 57. Bowlin cites *ST* I-II, q. 1, a. 1.

¹²⁹ Bowlin, 122-123.

¹³⁰ Bowlin, 122. Bowlin cites *ST* I-II, q. 10, a. 1; q. 14, a. 1.

¹³¹ Bowlin, 57-58.

¹³² Bowlin, 58. Bowlin cites *ST* I-II, q. 50, a. 4 ad 1-2; q. 9, a. 1.

¹³³ Bowlin, 55. Bowlin cites *ST* I, q. 79, a. 11 ad 2; I-II, q. 8, a. 1; q. 19, a. 3 ad 1.

universal context of the created order, created by God and governed by His Providence. In later chapters, I discuss at length the implications of Aquinas' claim that the human intellect is a potentiality to universal *ens*.¹³⁴

In sum the first premise is Bowlin's claim that human beings who act rationally have formal practical knowledge of general human goods. Rational human action is formally indeterminate by virtue of this formal practical knowledge. Throughout this chapter, I use the term "formal knowledge" to refer to Bowlin's understanding of the term—and to distinguish formal knowledge from knowledge that is otherwise contextual, perceptual, estimative, or less-than-universal.¹³⁵ For Bowlin, human beings have formal practical knowledge because we participate in God's practical judgment about our proper human ends.¹³⁶

Second Premise

Bowlin's second premise, which I think is implied in the first, is that our formal knowledge of the human good—including our knowledge of the first precepts of the natural law—is *non-inferential*. This means that our formal knowledge "does not depend upon inference from something else that we know."¹³⁷ Bowlin explains, "This does not mean that it is knowledge that stands by itself, unrelated to everything else that we believe. It is not immediate in this sense. Rather, it is immediate only insofar as it is not mediated by inference."¹³⁸ He gives an example:

"Thus, for example, physical existence can be known as a basic good without inferring that knowledge from something else that is known. That said, this knowledge does presuppose knowing what sort of thing physical existence is and how it differs from other sorts of things."¹³⁹

¹³⁴ ST I q. 78, a. 1; q. 79, a. 2.

¹³⁵ Bowlin distinguishes between judgments that arise in a cognitive context constituted by right reason and judgments that arise in some other cognitive context (Bowlin, 52).

¹³⁶ Bowlin, 121-123.

¹³⁷ Bowlin, 97 n. 21.

¹³⁸ Bowlin, 97 n. 21.

¹³⁹ Bowlin, 97 n. 21.

These comments arise in Bowlin's discussion of Aquinas' understanding of the *per se nota* character of the first practical precepts of the natural law, e.g., in *ST* I-II, q. 94, a. 2, as interpreted by John Finnis, Jean Porter, Ralph McInerny, and others.¹⁴⁰

Here Bowlin suggests that basic formal knowledge of the human good cannot be inferred because it is the simplest formal practical knowledge we have. All other secondary formal practical knowledge depends on this knowledge. Recall Bowlin's earlier claim that formal knowledge of the human good makes human action at least minimally rational and thereby distinguishable from madness.¹⁴¹

I discuss the non-inferential character of our basic formal knowledge of the human good in later chapters. While the term "inference" can be used to mean different things (e.g., it can be used to mean deduction, induction, estimation, etc.) depending on one's definition of the term "knowledge," broadly-speaking it can be understood to refer to movement from some kind of existing knowledge (e.g., premises, data, or experience) to some new knowledge (e.g., a conclusion).¹⁴² Indeed, following Aristotle, Aquinas argues that not all knowledge can be derived by reasoning in some way from other knowledge. For, otherwise, how could knowledge get started?¹⁴³

Third Premise

Bowlin's third premise is that formal knowledge of human goods is not innate. That is, contrary to Plato's view,¹⁴⁴ the human intellect does not have innate knowledge of ideas.¹⁴⁵ On the indeterminacy of the intellect, Bowlin cites Aquinas directly, who references Aristotle: "before it

¹⁴⁰ Bowlin, 97, 109.

¹⁴¹ Bowlin, 130 n. 98, 125-126.

¹⁴² *PA* "Forward," I.1. C.f., *CEJF* I.Introduction, 2.

¹⁴³ *PA* I.7.

¹⁴⁴ See Aquinas discussion of Plato's view in *ST* I, q. 84, a. 1; q. 85, a. 1 ad 1-2. C.f. Bowlin, 100 n. 75.

¹⁴⁵ *ST* I, q. 84, a. 3. *PA* I.3.

acquires particular habits of knowing, the intellect 'is at first like a clean tablet on which nothing is written.'"¹⁴⁶

Bowlin's point is that human beings by nature have a *potential* to understand formal knowledge (i.e., we have a natural capacity to understand, to learn, to reason, etc.), but that we do not have this knowledge *actually* (and somehow innately) at first. The human being begins life not with actual formal knowledge but with a capacity for formal knowledge of all things knowable: "in potentiality to all things knowable."¹⁴⁷

An implication

What the above claims imply, I think—but, which I do not think Bowlin actually says—is that if human beings who act rationally have formal practical knowledge of the good (the first premise), but if we do not have this knowledge innately (the third premise) or by inference (the second premise), then, assuming human beings begin to act rationally at some point, we must be moved to apprehend this knowledge (or be given to understanding or, perhaps, be impressed with intelligibility so as to understand¹⁴⁸) by something exterior to the human intellect, at least in the first instance of practical knowing.¹⁴⁹ In other words, assuming the intellect begins as a "clean tablet," the implication is that sometime between a human being's creation and his or her beginning to act rationally, the intellect must be moved by something exterior to it to apprehend formal practical knowledge in at least the first instance, according to Bowlin's view.

¹⁴⁶ Bowlin cites *ST I*, q. 79, a. 2 in Bowlin, 58. There, Aquinas cites Aristotle, *De Anima* III.4. Bowlin also points to *ST I-II*, q. 50, a. 6.

¹⁴⁷ Bowlin, 58.

¹⁴⁸ "Being moved" in some way to understand does *not* necessarily mean "being impressed with intelligibility" so as to understand. I critique this latter view below.

¹⁴⁹ See *ST I*, q. 79, a. 2.

Indeed, Aquinas's view, in part, is that the human being's possible intellect is initially "made to understand actually" by something outside it.¹⁵⁰ There is much more to Aquinas' view and many nuances involved; I discuss some of these points further in later chapters.

The epistemic authority of formal knowledge of the human good: How is the human intellect moved naturally to understand formal practical knowledge of the human good?

However, what is not immediately implied by the above claims—because it is not wholly the subject matter of a theory of human cognition—is *how* the human intellect is moved by something exterior to understand formal practical knowledge of the human good, at least in the first instance. To examine this question, it seems we need to consider a discipline (a science) whose subject matter is broader than that of cognitive theory. This is indeed what we find in Bowlin's approach. While Bowlin turns in certain respects to philosophical anthropology and metaphysics to consider the question, he turns especially to theology to find an explanation for formal practical knowledge of the human good.

As I mention above, Bowlin locates the independent character of formal practical knowledge of the human good (and understanding of moral truth) ultimately in God's eternal law. Interpreting Aquinas, Bowlin says the epistemic authority of our most basic practical "assumptions"¹⁵¹ is grounded in our minimal rational participation in the eternal law, which is called the natural law.¹⁵² He writes, "Providence makes demands upon rational creatures by giving them natural and habitual knowledge of the ends characteristic of their kind."¹⁵³ We participate in the eternal law by acting with this knowledge, and, for any freely chosen human

¹⁵⁰ ST I, q. 79, a. 2; q. 77, a. 3; q. 78, a. 3; q. 84, a. 3.

¹⁵¹ See Bowlin, 126-127. Practically speaking (not theoretically speaking), perhaps Bowlin might say that practical "assumptions" are those assumptions about natural human ends for which we have no reason to doubt in practical deliberations. See Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 35–36. Bowlin references Stout in Bowlin, 119.

¹⁵² Bowlin, 123.

¹⁵³ Bowlin, 123. See Bowlin, 121-123.

action, “our participation in the eternal law remains sufficient to guarantee that our actions remain minimally rational and thus characteristically human.”¹⁵⁴

Note that Bowlin’s argument here is about the human being’s *natural* formal practical knowledge. That is, his argument is primarily about human nature and not about grace. It is about a formal practical knowledge that is proportionate, at least in principle, to the human being’s natural capacities as given. With this point in mind, we can state our primary question as follows: how does Providence give human beings *natural* formal practical knowledge in Bowlin’s view?

ANALYSIS: HOW DOES PROVIDENCE GIVE HUMAN BEINGS FORMAL PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE HUMAN GOOD NATURALLY?

While Bowlin does not consider at length in his book *how* Providence gives human beings formal practical knowledge naturally, he does make several relevant claims, which I attempt to discuss below. There is some ambiguity in Bowlin’s position. However, his claims provide an opportunity to discuss several related approaches and concerns.

In the following section, I specify what I understand Bowlin’s view to be (or, at least, I propose a theory that I think, by extension, is consistent with Bowlin’s view). Then, I consider the relevant claims and examine specifically the fourth claim.

Bowlin’s argument for natural formal practical knowledge of the human good

As I understand it, Bowlin’s argument to explain natural formal practical knowledge of the human good involves four key claims. First, the human being, as created by God and governed by His

¹⁵⁴ Bowlin, 125. Bowlin cites Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 93, a. 2, 6.

Providence,¹⁵⁵ has a human will that is determined simply and absolutely¹⁵⁶—i.e., with “nature’s necessity”—to desire happiness, which is the human being’s last end.¹⁵⁷ Second, there are certain general goods that are necessary parts of happiness (e.g., physical existence,¹⁵⁸ knowledge of the truth, etc.).¹⁵⁹ These natural goods are necessary for (imperfect) happiness because without them happiness cannot be attained.¹⁶⁰ Bowlin’s third claim is his conclusion from the first two claims: the human will is simply and absolutely determined with nature’s necessity to desire (volitionally) both happiness and the general parts of happiness.¹⁶¹ Fourth, the intellect *apprehends* the last end and its general parts as good precisely *because* the will is naturally disposed to desire happiness (the last end) and its general parts simply and absolutely.¹⁶²

An observation

I begin my analysis with a brief observation. Note in the above argument Bowlin does *not* suggest that Providence directly impresses the human intellect with formal practical knowledge. He likely avoids this possibility because he accepts the third premise above that the human intellect naturally begins as a clean tablet. For, to suggest that Providence impresses the intellect with formal practical knowledge of the human good at creation would be to argue for innate

¹⁵⁵ Bowlin, 123. See Bowlin, 121-123.

¹⁵⁶ Bowlin is clear that simple, absolute determination of the will bears upon simple volition and not intention. “Volitionally determinate with respect to some goods, the will remains intentionally indeterminate” (Bowlin, 58).

¹⁵⁷ Bowlin, 58. Bowlin writes, “the will is determined with nature’s necessity to some ends, principally happiness, which is our last end” (58). Bowlin cites Aquinas as follows: *DV* 22.5; *ST* I-II, q. 10, a. 1; q. 10, a. 2 ad 3; q. 94, a. 2.

¹⁵⁸ Bowlin writes “physical existence” (Bowlin, 58), but Aquinas says, “to be” and “to live” in *ST* I-II, q. 10, a. 1; a. 2 ad 3, both of which Bowlin cites.

¹⁵⁹ Bowlin, 58-59. He refers to “happiness and its general parts” (58).

¹⁶⁰ As I discuss further below, the present topic is *imperfect happiness*. Perfect happiness does not consist of parts (*ST* I-II, q. 3, a. 8). See *ST* I-II, q. 10, a. 2 ad 3, which Bowlin cites in Bowlin, 58.

¹⁶¹ Bowlin, 58-59.

¹⁶² Bowlin writes, “the last end must be apprehended as good before it can be willed as such, and yet the intellect apprehends it as good precisely because the will is naturally disposed to desire it” (56). Similarly, regarding our possible knowledge of particular goods, Bowlin writes, “the intellect is oriented toward truth first and is able to apprehend some object as good only because the will is already disposed toward the basic features of the human good that fall under the last end, simply and absolutely” (56).

knowledge. And, to suggest that Providence directly impresses the human intellect with formal practical knowledge sometime after creation would be to suggest that this knowledge is given by grace rather than by nature, which is not the present topic of study.

Presumably, these considerations influence Bowlin's decision to turn to the human will to find a *natural* explanation for formal practical knowledge—as given by Providence. Since he claims that the human will is *naturally determined* to happiness (the first claim above), perhaps he thinks this approach can work.

A caveat and an implication regarding Bowlin's third claim

In addition to this observation, consider a caveat and an implication regarding Bowlin's third claim. Again, his third claim is that the human will is simply and absolutely determined with nature's necessity to happiness and the general parts of happiness. Recall from above Bowlin also says that the human will is in potentiality to all things desirable and is thus indeterminate.¹⁶³

Bowlin attempts to clarify what appears to be a discrepancy between these two claims by adding a significant caveat regarding the human will's natural indeterminacy. Namely, pointing to David Gallagher's treatment of Aquinas, he writes, "the will is indeterminate *before* it acquires particular habits of affection that simply and absolutely dispose it to some particular goods and not others [my emphasis]."¹⁶⁴ I am not aware of Bowlin explaining how this process of habit acquisition might work, prior to practical apprehension and simple willing; however, the implication seems to be that once the will acquires certain habits of affection as governed by Providence, then the third claim generally applies. Despite its "simple and absolute determination to the general features of the human good," Bowlin emphasizes that the human

¹⁶³ Bowlin, 58.

¹⁶⁴ Bowlin, 58. Bowlin cites *ST* I-II, q. 50, a. 5 and ad 3. He also references David M. Gallagher, "Thomas Aquinas on the Will as Rational Appetite," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 29, no. 4 (October 1, 1991): 582.

will nonetheless remains indeterminate with respect to *particular* goods and actions.¹⁶⁵ He explains this point as follows: “[Providence] determines us to *general classes of ends* while remaining thoroughly agnostic about particular ends and specific means. We have noted this must be so if we are to act with knowledge, if our participation in the eternal law is to consist in knowing its demands and acting for the sake of what is known [my emphasis].”¹⁶⁶

I cannot examine all of Bowlin’s claims here. For now, I would like to point out an additional implication that arises regarding Bowlin’s third claim. Namely, if the human will is simply and absolutely (volitionally) determined to classes of human ends, as Bowlin claims, then each of these classes requires some interior specification in the will, in order to distinguish the will’s determination to one class from its determination to another. Furthermore, if the human will is determined to *general* classes of ends, such that each class is relevant and determinate according to the common context of the universal created order, then the specification required interiorly in the will for each class must be precisely *formal*. In other words, if the will is determined to a *general* class of human end or feature of the human good (or, synonymously, to a *universal, necessary, simple, or absolute* genus or species of the human good¹⁶⁷), then its determination to this class must be distinctly specified interiorly according to some universal (or common) form.

To summarize, only formal specification can distinguish (interiorly and categorically) the will’s determination to one general class of human good from its determination to another in a common, absolute context. That is, only if the specific difference that distinguishes one class of human good from another is specified precisely according to a universal form does each class

¹⁶⁵ Bowlin, 58.

¹⁶⁶ Bowlin, 124.

¹⁶⁷ It is unclear whether Bowlin thinks each general class of end is a species of the genus human good or whether he thinks each is some kind of ultimate genus/category. See Brock’s critique of the idea that “human good” is a genus having various species in Stephen L. Brock, “Practical Truth and Its First Principles in the Theory of Grisez, Boyle, and Finnis,” *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (2015): 321–24.

remain distinct, applicable, and intelligible according to a universal context.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, we can distinguish the rational human appetite (i.e., the human will) from the sensitive human appetites insofar as the natural object of the former is apprehended according to a universal form, while the natural objects of the latter are perceived according to some qualified, less-than-universal sensitive or perceptive apprehension (or estimation), which we might call a contextual percept or sortal (e.g., according to what tastes good, what feels safe, what appears pleasing, what seems conducive for survival, etc.).¹⁶⁹

So, if Bowlin claims that the human will is naturally determined, simply and absolutely, to general classes of ends, then, it seems, he also must claim that these classes are absolutely specified in the will according to distinct universal forms. Elsewhere, I critique Bowlin's third claim regarding the human will's natural determinacy to general classes of ends.¹⁷⁰ I cannot discuss this critique at length here. Below, I limit the scope of my study to Bowlin's fourth claim, which is his key epistemological claim.

¹⁶⁸ See, for example, *PA* II.16. C.f. Brock, "Practical Truth," 318-23.

¹⁶⁹ See *ST* I, q. 80, a. 2, esp. ad 2. C.f. Brock, *Philosophy*, 73-74. Daniel D. De Haan, "Moral Perception and the Function of the *Vis Cogitativa* in Thomas Aquinas's Doctrine of Antecedent and Consequent Passions," *Documenti e Studi Sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale* XXV (2014).

¹⁷⁰ In an earlier draft of this chapter, which I subsequently trimmed to meet word limits, I critically examine Bowlin's third claim. I argue, contrary to Bowlin, that the human will is naturally determined simply to the good in general (without initial interior determination to categories of human goods). Aquinas says the will is in the intellect (*ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 2 ad 3). I suggest that the human will cannot be naturally and interiorly determined to distinct general categories of ends, unless the human intellect is likewise naturally and interiorly determined to apprehension of their respective forms—and, this is contrary to the third premise above, which claims there is no innate knowledge in the intellect. I argue that only insofar as forms are apprehended interiorly by the intellect—that is, only by understanding—can the will's natural desire for the good in general (*ST* I-II, q. 10, a. 1) be formally and interiorly specified and distinguished. Significantly, while Aquinas says that the human will desires happiness by natural, absolute necessity (*ST* I, q. 82, a. 1-2)—and, while he says that will wills "naturally not only the object of the will, but also other things that are appropriate to the other powers" (*ST* I-II, q. 10, a. 1; q. 10, a. 2 ad 3)—he does not say that the human will wills by natural, absolute necessity whatsoever is ordained to happiness (that is, in the present life, apart from first understanding *that* something is necessarily ordained to the last end). Rather, he clearly says the contrary: "But there are some things which have a necessary connection with happiness, by means of which things man adheres to God, in Whom alone true happiness consists. Nevertheless, until through the certitude of the Divine Vision the necessity of such connection be shown, the will does not adhere to God of necessity, nor to those things which are of God" (*ST* I, q. 82, a. 2).

PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE FOURTH CLAIM: THE INTELLECT *APPREHENDS* THE LAST END AND ITS GENERAL PARTS AS GOOD PRECISELY BECAUSE THE WILL IS NATURALLY DISPOSED TO DESIRE HAPPINESS (THE LAST END) AND ITS GENERAL PARTS SIMPLY AND ABSOLUTELY

Practical apprehension, according to Bowlin

To begin to examine what I call Bowlin's fourth claim, it is helpful to clarify what Bowlin seems to mean by "apprehension"—in this case, *practical* apprehension—and then to draw several distinctions. He briefly hints at what he means by the term but does not discuss it at length.

Bowlin says apprehension (*apprehensio*) is an "act of the practical intellect" distinct from deliberation (*consilium*).¹⁷¹ It is an act by which an object or end is known under the aspect of good.¹⁷² Referencing Aquinas, Bowlin notes that "an end must be apprehended before it can be willed as the intended end that guides deliberation."¹⁷³

Practical apprehension precedes simple (practical) willing

When he discusses the steps involved in practical thinking, Bowlin suggests that practical apprehension not only precedes intention in the will but also precedes the first act of the will, which he calls simple volition or simple willing.¹⁷⁴ Simple willing for Bowlin is "the will's response to our most basic judgments about the good as end."¹⁷⁵ In simple willing, according to Bowlin, we acknowledge simply and absolutely what we have generally judged as good, before intending to pursue any concrete instances of these goods as ends of activity.¹⁷⁶ Practical apprehension is the intellectual act preceding simple willing that informs our general practical judgments. According to Bowlin, by practical apprehension, we apprehend the last end as good and the general features

¹⁷¹ Bowlin, 55.

¹⁷² Bowlin, 55.

¹⁷³ Bowlin, 55-56. Bowlin refers to *ST* I-II, q. 15, a. 3.

¹⁷⁴ Bowlin, 43, 56. Bowlin writes, "It is indeed one thing to apprehend knowledge as a good, one thing to will it simply as a result of that apprehension..." (101).

¹⁷⁵ Bowlin, 43, 58.

¹⁷⁶ Bowlin, 43.

of the human good.¹⁷⁷ And, as I understand Bowlin by implication—although I am not aware of Bowlin explaining the precise relationship between apprehension and general judgment—these general features (as apprehended) become the terms of our most basic general judgments about the good as end.¹⁷⁸

There is another significant implication to mention here. Given our discussion of formal knowledge above, it seems impossible, I think, for apprehension to depend entirely on *assumption* (or inference), at least in the first instance of practical thinking. This conclusion seems implicit in Bowlin's discussion of natural law and the limits of the contingency of the human good, even though he says that "the first principles of the natural law are *assumed* in all human action [my emphasis]."¹⁷⁹ Bowlin hints at this conclusion, for example, when he twice introduces a caveat concerning the will's dependency on the intellect: he emphasizes that the will is determined with nature's necessity to the last end and to whatever general goods it includes.¹⁸⁰ Indeed, underlying Bowlin's practical explanation, it seems, is the implicit claim that our most basic "assumptions" about the human good in human action are in fact *not* assumed *in the first instance* but are understood habitually and indeed formally, even if only vaguely and implicitly. Again, Bowlin writes, "our knowledge of the first precepts of the natural law is non-inferential."¹⁸¹

Thus, as I argue below, if there is to be naturally-known general (formal) knowledge of the natural law, at least minimally and in principle, as Bowlin claims, then apprehension cannot be merely assumption, at least in the first instance. Rather, I argue that apprehension must begin

¹⁷⁷ Bowlin, 56. I question what Bowlin means here by apprehending the last end.

¹⁷⁸ Bowlin, 56. As I understand Bowlin, simple willing is preceded by both apprehension and a general judgment about the good as end (42-43, 101). It is unclear to me in Bowlin's view whether apprehension is this general judgment or whether the general judgment follows apprehension, i.e., that a general judgment is made in terms of the apprehended good. The former possibility may be what Bowlin has in mind when he writes the following: "the distinction between deliberation over means and simple apprehension of the end is merely conditional" (56). I dispute the claim that an act of simple apprehension is the same as an act of judgment.

¹⁷⁹ Bowlin, 127.

¹⁸⁰ For example, see Bowlin 56, 58. C.f. Gallagher, "Will as Rational Appetite," 581.

¹⁸¹ Bowlin, 97 n. 21.

with understanding ordered to truth, even if only implicitly. This point is one of my key conclusions in this chapter—a conclusion that I think is at least implicit in Bowlin’s view.

Below, I shall consider whether Bowlin’s theory of apprehension allows for minimal understanding of the natural law, at least in principle, such that practical deliberation and judgment are at least minimally rational and characteristically human, and such that the contingent good of the will’s objects does not go all the way down, as Bowlin claims.

My approach: Several options to attempt to explain Bowlin’s fourth claim

I now move to discuss the substance of Bowlin’s fourth claim. Namely, I shall examine *whether* and *how* natural apprehension of the last end and its general parts as good is possible precisely *because* the will is naturally disposed to desire happiness (the last end) and its general parts simply and absolutely.

To the extent that I understand Bowlin’s somewhat brief discussion of the matter, I have been unable to identify with confidence what I think is his specific answer to this question. Thus, I propose below three possible answers that I think *could* be consistent with Bowlin’s view, at least by implication and by extension from what he says. Then, I attempt to examine critically each possibility.

OPTION 1: FROM PARTICULAR TO GENERAL: THE WILL AS A NATURALLY DETERMINED EFFICIENT CAUSE DIRECTS THE INTELLECT TO APPREHEND AND TO MAKE GENERAL JUDGMENTS ABOUT PARTICULAR GOODS

The first possibility is as follows. Assuming Bowlin’s claim that the human will is naturally determined to happiness and its general parts, then perhaps in moving the practical intellect to exercise its first apprehensive act,¹⁸² the will simply directs (prior to simple willing, and prior to

¹⁸² Bowlin says that “the will precedes the practical intellect and moves it to its act” (Bowlin, 56). He cites *ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 1 ad 3.

any voluntary intention or choice) the practical intellect to apprehend and to judge implicitly and generally as good certain things it encounters in experience.¹⁸³ According to this view, by guiding the practical intellect to apprehend as good certain things that the intellect cognizes—and more fundamentally, by moving the practical intellect to exercise its first apprehensive act—the will, as an efficient cause, reveals implicitly to the practical intellect what is naturally and generally good. What the naturally determined will moves the practical intellect to consider in this pre-volitional stage, the practical intellect apprehends and judges as generally good. And, what the practical intellect is not moved to consider, it does not apprehend as good.

In other words, according to this first possibility, the practical intellect is directed to exercise its apprehensive act in a determined way, as moved by the naturally determined will. Given Bowlin admits that practical truth depends on theoretical truth,¹⁸⁴ then perhaps according to this view, apprehension in the intellect proceeds in two stages. First, the (theoretical) intellect apprehends the nature of a thing it encounters in experience. Second, the practical intellect, as directed by the naturally determined will, additionally apprehends that thing as simply and generally good. Thus, by apprehending various kinds of things as generally good, the practical intellect implicitly apprehends general categories of human good. For, by secondarily apprehending as good what the intellect initially apprehends as a being with a nature, the practical intellect implicitly apprehends general categories of good that correspond to—and are formally specified and distinguished by—the natures first apprehended. For example, assuming the theoretical intellect first apprehends a human being as a friend, then, as guided by the naturally determined will, perhaps the practical intellect secondarily apprehends this friend as good (which implicitly is also to apprehend the general good of friendship). Also, secondarily, so

¹⁸³ See Gallagher's focus on the will exercising the intellect "to consider an object one way and not another" in David M. Gallagher, "Free Choice and Free Judgment in Thomas Aquinas," *Archiv Für Geschichte Der Philosophie* 76, no. 3 (1994): 277.

¹⁸⁴ Recall Bowlin, 97 n. 21.

the argument goes, the practical intellect implicitly understands the general practical principles (general judgments) that correspond to the general practical goods it apprehends.

In Bowlin's view, after practical apprehension and general practical judgment, simple willing follows.¹⁸⁵ According to Bowlin, simple willing is the will's determined response to and acknowledgement of our most basic judgments about the good.¹⁸⁶ In simple willing, we acknowledge simply and absolutely the goodness of all those things that we apprehend and generally judge good—that is, “we acknowledge their general goodness naturally and in every instance.”¹⁸⁷ According to Bowlin, in simple willing, the will is *volitionally determined* to the general features of the human good.¹⁸⁸ How can the will be volitionally determined if its simple willing depends on the prior act of the intellect? Bowlin explains, “when the will follows the intellect and consents to its judgments it is motivated by what it already wills naturally.”¹⁸⁹

Thus, according to this view, we can distinguish between 1) the will as *naturally determined* to (or as naturally disposed to desire) general human goods and 2) the will as *actively desiring* (volitionally) these general goods in the act of simple willing. The former is a naturally given disposition, and the latter is a secondary operation determined by the disposition. As I understand the view, the former determines the latter by means of the instrumentality of the practical intellect and its apprehensive and judicative acts. Bowlin's statement as follows generally seems to support this conclusion: “...we will the good itself by nature, and consequently we will simply and absolutely [by simple willing] all those things that we judge good.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁵ Bowlin, 43, 56. Bowlin cites Aquinas as follows: “every act of the will is preceded by an act of the intellect” (*ST* I-II, q. 4, a. 4 ad 2 as cited in Bowlin, 55).

¹⁸⁶ Bowlin, 43.

¹⁸⁷ Bowlin, 43.

¹⁸⁸ Bowlin, 58.

¹⁸⁹ Bowlin, 56.

¹⁹⁰ Bowlin, 43.

Critique of Option 1

If we tentatively assume that the naturally determined will moves the practical intellect to make apprehensions and general judgments about the good, a question readily arises as we begin to examine the argument. Namely, what is the epistemic source of the intelligible form that specifies the intellect's apprehensions and general judgments regarding the *truth of the good*? If we assume as Bowlin does that the object of the intellect is truth considered absolutely,¹⁹¹ and if we maintain that formal knowledge of practical truth is possible, then even if the intellect is moved by the will to consider and to exercise certain practical apprehensions and general practical judgments, the intellect nonetheless needs to be able to apprehend the formal relation by which simple truth is related by addition to the truth of the good—and to practical truth. This must be the case if the intellect is to make general practical judgments that “track the [truth of] human good,” at least vaguely.¹⁹² Indeed, if, as Bowlin claims, the will moves the intellect in such a way that it can perform its natural and proper operation,¹⁹³ which is to understand the truth of things knowable,¹⁹⁴ including the truth of the good, then this must be the case. In other words, if “the object of the intellect is truth considered absolutely,”¹⁹⁵ then the intellect, in principle, must be able to apprehend the truth of the relation between theoretical and practical truth, if it is to understand practical truth precisely as true.

Thus, we have identified a criterion for the above theory: for the argument to work, the will must direct the practical intellect in such a way that it can apprehend and make general judgments regarding the human good naturally according to its proper operation. That is, the practical intellect must be able to understand the practical good precisely as true. Recall that for Bowlin the intellect begins naturally as a blank slate. With this starting point in mind, how might

¹⁹¹ Bowlin, 58.

¹⁹² Bowlin refers to “courses of action that track the human good as it is characterized in the eternal law” in Bowlin, 125.

¹⁹³ Bowlin, 56. Here, Bowlin cites *ST I-II*, q. 9, a. 1 ad 3.

¹⁹⁴ Bowlin, 58.

¹⁹⁵ Bowlin, 58.

the will as naturally determined move the practical intellect to perform its natural and proper operation?

Again, presently, we are working under Bowlin's fourth claim that the intellect apprehends the general features of the human good precisely *because* the will is naturally determined to the last end and to whatever general goods it includes. If the intellect is to understand the good both precisely *as true* and precisely *because of the will's natural determination*, then this implies that the intellect must understand something true about the will's natural determination to the good, at least vaguely, implicitly, and in principle, to apprehend the practical good. For, only if the intellect understands the truth of the will's natural determination to the good does it have reason to judge that what the will moves it to apprehend practically is indeed truly good.

Variation A

If it begins as a clean tablet, how might the intellect gain this understanding of the truth of the will's natural determination to the good? One possibility is that the will reveals to the intellect the truth of its natural determination to the good, such that the intellect can understand this truth, at least vaguely, implicitly, and in principle. For example, perhaps the will somehow reveals a proposition like the following to the intellect: "The will is naturally determined to the general human good." At a minimum, this proposition posits some kind of normative determinate relation between "the will" (the subject of the proposition) and "the human good" (the predicate of the proposition).

But, again, we quickly encounter a similar concern: no matter what proposition the will might reveal to the intellect, the intellect cannot understand or assent to it precisely *as true* without both apprehending the formal referents of the terms involved and understanding the truth of the judgment by which the proposition is made. Indeed, before the intellect can

understand the truth of the proposition, it must formally apprehend something about what is meant by “the will” and “the general human good” and the relation between them. It seems that the intellect needs more than a proposition revealed by the will to understand the practical truth of the human good.

Variation B

There is a second possibility and variation of the theory to consider. Perhaps the human intellect is determined by nature to apprehend and to judge as good what the will directs it to consider. In other words, perhaps Bowlin’s fourth claim is primarily a statement about the nature of the practical intellect and its natural determinacy. That is, just as the will is naturally determined to desire happiness and its general parts, which is Bowlin’s third claim, perhaps the intellect is naturally determined to apprehend and to judge as good what the will directs it to consider. What is implied in this case is that by nature the intellect’s understanding of the truth of the good is relative *not* to that which is understood (i.e., to the object of understanding, which is understood as true and good); rather, its understanding of the good is relative to and determined by the will.

There are two significant implications of this approach. The first implication is that the intellect understands two kinds of truth: first, the truth simply, and second, the truth of the good. According to this view, the intellect’s understanding of the former is relative and accountable to the subject matter that is apprehended and judged (i.e., the intellect’s knowledge of truth is related by operation to that which is understood). By contrast, the intellect’s understanding of the latter is relative and accountable to the will and its natural determinations. The second implication, which is directly related to the first, is that the human intellect is a different kind of cognitive capacity from that which Bowlin claims it to be. Pointing to Aquinas, Bowlin says, “the object of the intellect is truth considered absolutely, and thus the intellect is in potentiality to all

things knowable.”¹⁹⁶ But, according to the present view, the human intellect is not an intellectual capacity *in potentiality precisely to all things knowable*, as Bowlin claims.

This is because the intellect’s understanding of the good in this case is determined instrumentally by the will rather than by that which is understood to be true and good. In this case, there is at least one truth—namely, the truth as to whether it is good for the intellect’s knowledge of the good to be determined by the will—that is seemingly unknowable to the intellect, even in principle. Indeed, according to the present view, it seems beyond the intellect’s power to consider and to judge whether the will is a trustworthy authority in such matters. But, is not the truth of every good something knowable, at least in principle? Here, the intellect is *not* in potentiality to this knowable truth (i.e., the truth of the practical intellect’s relation to the will), even in principle. Thus, we can distinguish in theory between two different intellectual capacities: one whose understanding of the truth of the good is determined by the will (the present view), and another whose understanding of the truth of the good is related by operation to that which is understood (i.e., to the good thing itself, as understood).¹⁹⁷

Given Bowlin’s claims both 1) that the intellect is in potentiality to all things knowable, and 2) that the will moves the intellect in such a way that it can perform its natural and proper operation,¹⁹⁸ then it seems reasonable to conclude that this second variation of our first theory (Variation B) does not provide a successful account of formal knowledge of the human good.

Preliminary conclusions regarding option one

Having discussed two possible ways that the human will as naturally determined might move the practical intellect to apprehend and to make general judgments about the human good as an efficient cause, we have been unable to identify an epistemic source of the formal content

¹⁹⁶ Bowlin, 58. Bowlin references *DV* 24.7; *ST* I-II, q. 50, a. 4 ad 1 and 2.

¹⁹⁷ See *ST* I, q. 85, a. 2.

¹⁹⁸ Again, see Bowlin, 56, 58.

needed to specify the intellect's apprehensions and judgments concerning the truth of the good and practical truth.

Indeed, even if the will is an efficient cause of the intellect's understanding of the good, the intellect still needs a formal cause of this understanding. For, understanding practical truth is neither reducible to truth simply, nor to the will moving the intellect to consider and to exercise its act. Thus, it appears that option one does not prevent the contingency of the human good from going "all the way down." Thus, I move to examine a second possible option, which posits the human will as a formal cause of the intellect's apprehension of the human good.

OPTION 2: FROM GENERAL TO PARTICULAR: THE WILL AS A NATURALLY DETERMINED FORMAL CAUSE IMPRESSES GENERAL CLASSES OF HUMAN GOOD UPON THE INTELLECT

Another option to consider is that perhaps the human will, by its natural determination and participation in the eternal law, simply reveals and impresses formal specification of general classes of human good upon the human intellect, such that the practical intellect grasps habitual knowledge¹⁹⁹ of these forms (or intelligible species). Perhaps the human will can impress the intellect as such—so this theory goes—because God in his Providence naturally determines and moves the human will to do so *instrumentally*, as a formal principle or cause (and perhaps also as an efficient principle) of the intellect's practical apprehension and general practical judgment. That is, as determined by God to be the natural instrument of his Providence and to participate at least minimally in his eternal law, perhaps the will impresses directly upon the intellect general intelligibility of the human good, such that the practical intellect can grasp these universal goods naturally according to its proper operation in its apprehensions and general judgments.

If this option is defensible, perhaps it could overcome the primary problem attributed to the first option above. Recall our critique of the first option: we could not establish epistemic

¹⁹⁹ Bowlin refers to habitual knowledge of general judgments about human goods in Bowlin, 42, 58.

grounding for the formal content involved in the practical intellect's first apprehensions and general judgments (of truth simply and much less of the truth of the good). But, if the naturally determined will instrumentally impresses forms of general human goods upon the practical intellect, such that the intellect acquires habitual knowledge of them, then perhaps concepts involved in the practical intellect's apprehensions and judgments could refer to or instantiate these general forms and thereby track the truth of the good, at least vaguely and in principle. Could this theory provide the beginnings of an epistemology that is missing in option one? The impressed forms in the intellect are ordered to practical truth—again, so the argument goes—because, although they are impressed mediately, instrumentally, and secondarily by the will, they are given primarily by Providence, who is first cause of all that is and of all that is true and good.

My approach: to consider this option's implications for actual practical thinking

To begin to examine this option, one of the first questions to consider is whether the human will can be naturally determined to distinct classes of human good (i.e., by habits of affection²⁰⁰), such that it can naturally impress the practical intellect with formal ideas (or intelligible species) of these classes of goods. As I mention above, I do not think the human will can be naturally determined as such. Elsewhere, I critique Bowlin's third claim above regarding the human will's natural determination to general classes of ends.

Here, I discuss a more immediate concern regarding this option as it relates specifically to Bowlin's fourth claim, which remains the present topic of study. Namely, I discuss below what I think is an intractable problem with the present view given its implications regarding practical apprehension and general practical judgment. That is, regardless of whether or how the will's impressing of habitual knowledge of general human goods upon the intellect might work, I think a

²⁰⁰ Bowlin, 58.

significant issue arises when attempting to apply the present theory to actual practical thinking about general features of the human good.

Before considering the critique below, it is helpful to recall the primary criteria for a successful practical argument in Bowlin's view. To satisfy Bowlin's primary claim that contingency does not go all the way down in practical thinking, we need to identify a theory of practical truth that guarantees rational practical thinking about human goods tracks the truth, at least minimally. Indeed, Bowlin claims that our rational participation in eternal law with respect to practical thinking "remains sufficient to guarantee that our actions remain minimally rational and thus characteristically human."²⁰¹ What Bowlin's claim implies, as I discussed above, is that if practical thinking is to be minimally rational, then our practical apprehensions and general practical judgments must be unqualifiedly *formal* (i.e., they must proceed by cognitive participation in universal forms of human good), at least minimally and vaguely. The question below is whether the present theory can defend this claim.

Three points to frame the critique

Before proceeding to the critique of option two, I begin by making three related points.

First point: Practical apprehension and general judgment are particular acts (or operations)

My first point is that any practical apprehension or general practical judgment is a *particular* interior act of practical thinking, given Bowlin's claims and the analysis above. Indeed, Bowlin himself seems to suggest this, for, citing Aquinas, he writes that apprehension (*apprehensio*) is an "act of the practical intellect [my emphasis]."²⁰² The point here is simply that Bowlin regards practical apprehension to be an *act*. And, there is an implication that follows from this claim,

²⁰¹ Bowlin, 125. Bowlin cites Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 93, a. 2, 6. C.f. Bowlin, 56.

²⁰² Bowlin, 55-56. Here, Bowlin cites Aquinas: *ST I-II*, q. 15, a. 3.

although I am not aware of Bowlin stating this implication directly. Namely, as I explain further below, if apprehension proceeds interiorly as an operation, then it must be something *particular*. Furthermore, by the same argument, general practical judgment, which can follow simple apprehension, is likewise a particular interior operation of the intellect.

The argument is as follows. First, if there is an act or operation of practical apprehension, then there is an individual human person, who, as the subject of intellectual activity, is actually thinking about and understanding something. For, indeed, apprehension is an operation of an individual thinking subject. Second, if there is an act of apprehension, then there is an individual object of apprehension: that is, there is something the thinking subject is apprehending or thinking about by virtue of that operation. The object of apprehension, as to its principle or moving cause, is the particular thing apprehended.²⁰³ And, the object of apprehension, as to its corresponding interior expression or representation, is the individual cognitive likeness or concept of the thing apprehended interiorly in the cognitive subject's intellect.²⁰⁴

All of this is simply to say that, if there is an individual cognitive subject who actively apprehends something (even an abstract object of thought), then that subject apprehends by a particular interior operation of apprehension, which proceeds in the subject as specified by a certain object of apprehension. Similarly, if the cognitive subject then makes a certain judgment in terms of that apprehension, then that judging is likewise a particular operation (even if the judgment is about a general object of thought). That is, even if an apprehension expresses a general concept, or even if a judgment is made in terms of a general concept (e.g., a general judgment that friendship is good), such acts of simple apprehension or general judgment are particular precisely insofar as they proceed as interior cognitive operations of an individual cognitive subject.

²⁰³ *ST I*, q. 77, a. 3.

²⁰⁴ *ST I*, q. 14, a. 1; q. 4, a. 3; q. 85, a. 2. C.f. Brock, *Philosophy*, 64.

Second point: Distinguishing habitual and actual formal knowledge

Having argued that simple apprehensions and general judgments are particular cognitive operations, my second point is to make a distinction relevant to the critique below. Namely, given the present view, we can distinguish two modes of knowing the general form of a human good in the intellect, as impressed by the will. First, there is knowing the general form *habitually*,²⁰⁵ that is, apart from any actual thinking by virtue of it. Second, there is knowing the general form as conceived and expressed in a particular operation of thinking (e.g., in an act of simple apprehension or general judgment). Assuming a human subject is not always actually thinking about a certain human good,²⁰⁶ then, indeed, according to the present view, we must be able to distinguish a subject's habitual knowledge of general classes of human good (as impressed by the will) from her conceiving of and expressing a concept of a human good (by virtue of one of these habitually known forms or intelligible species) in an individual act of simple apprehension or general judgment. I return to this distinction in the critique below.

Third point: Natural formal knowledge is general and not exhaustive

There is a third point to make regarding the epistemic content of forms of human good in the practical intellect, according to the present view. For Bowlin, we know that impressed formal species do *not* include perfect, exhaustive knowledge of the human good. We know this because Bowlin explicitly says, following Aquinas, that the human will is naturally determined to the good *in general*: he does not say that the human will is naturally determined specifically and exhaustively to every particular good in the universal context of human goods.²⁰⁷ Therefore, given the present view, if the naturally determined will is what impresses formal intelligibility of

²⁰⁵ Bowlin, 58.

²⁰⁶ See ST I, q. 85, a. 4.

²⁰⁷ Bowlin, 58. See ST I-II, q. 10, a. 1.

human good upon the intellect, then this impressed formal intelligibility in the intellect must likewise be general, and, thus, it is neither perfect, nor fully specified, nor exhaustive.²⁰⁸

Critique

Given the tentative claim that the human will impresses formal species of human good upon the intellect, I think the present theory (option two) leads to several intractable epistemic concerns. Below, I briefly attempt to highlight several of these concerns. The basic thrust of my critique involves two related aspects. First, I argue that according to the current view, the human cognitive subject cannot know whether any apprehension or general judgment instantiates an impressed formal species of the good. Second, I argue that neither can the cognitive subject know whether practical judgments about particular goods instantiate an impressed species.

First Critique: We cannot know whether practical apprehensions and general judgments about classes of human goods track the truth

The first critique is as follows. If, according to the present theory, the human subject's intellect is impressed by the will with formal species of classes of human good, and if these forms are classes of human good *in general*, which do not include comprehensive specification of all possible distinctions and instances of each class, then, when the subject apprehends or judges by an act of thinking, I suggest there is no formal basis by which the subject can know whether any given operation of practical thinking—even an operation whose object is a general logical category—instantiates, participates in, or refers to an impressed formal species or class of human good. In other words, assuming our intellects have habitually-known, impressed formal species of human good, I argue we cannot know whether any particular act of thinking participates in (or refers to,

²⁰⁸ See *ST I*, q. 85, a. 3. C.f. *ST I*, q. 14, a. 6; q. 57, a. 2; q. 86, a. 2 ad 2; q. 89, a. 1, 3. C.f. Simon, *Knowledge*, 142–45.

etc.) the formal intelligibility of these impressed species.²⁰⁹ Therefore, according to the present view, we cannot know whether any act of practical thinking tracks the truth with minimal certainty. Even more, we cannot know whether rational practical thinking by virtue of these impressed species is even possible.

This is because, according to the present view, we cannot distinguish practical thinking by virtue of an impressed form from practical thinking by virtue of some other logical notion, which may not track the truth.²¹⁰ Indeed, we cannot distinguish *rational* practical apprehension and judgment by virtue of formal knowledge from non-rational practical apprehension and judgment according to some other mode (e.g., by inference, as I discuss in later chapters). For, if habitual formal knowledge impressed by the will is of the good *in general*, then we do not know with any minimum degree of certainty what particular acts of thinking about general human goods look like—and, we do not know how to distinguish practical thinking by virtue of formal classes of human good from practical thinking by virtue of other logical categories of good.

In sum, I do not think the present theory can limit the contingency of the good in practical thinking, as Bowlin intends.

Preliminary conclusions given the first critique

Thus, according to the present theory, I do not think human subjects can apprehend and judge in abstract, in such a way that the general concepts they conceive and express simply refer to habitual knowledge of impressed species of the good. In the beginning, human beings do not have the requisite formal self-knowledge to make such references intelligible. Rather, I suggest (attempting to follow Aquinas) the human being begins to realize *that* she understands by virtue of intelligible species only *secondarily*,²¹¹ by reflecting on particular operations of apprehension

²⁰⁹ See *ST I*, q. 14, a. 11.

²¹⁰ See Bowlin's discussion of the distinction between acting according to rational and irrational judgment in Bowlin, 34-35.

²¹¹ *ST I*, q. 85, a. 2.

and judgment in experience. However, this point is contrary to Bowlin's view, which seems to suggest that general judgments about the basic features of the human good precede particular judgments.²¹²

The implication is we cannot think explicitly about formal classes of human goods and make simple apprehensions and general judgments directly about them *in abstract* (in a way that formally tracks the truth), prior to beginning to understand more explicitly and secondarily by reflection *that* impressed formal species of the good are present—so the theory goes—because implicitly they are that by which we can make particular apprehensions and judgments about particular goods in a way that tracks the truth, at least vaguely and in principle. Herein lies another assumption, however—i.e., that particular apprehensions and judgments can track the truth—which I shall address below. Indeed, the impressed formal species proposed by this theory are disconnected from actual thinking until there is a way for us to think concretely by virtue of them—that is, until there is a way for us to refer to or to instantiate them in our general concepts and particular acts of thinking in a way that tracks the truth, at least vaguely and in principle.

To conclude this first critique, since option two does not provide a way to guarantee that our operations of understanding share minimal likeness with the formal species impressed by the will, then we cannot say that our general judgments are certain to track the truth, at least minimally. Indeed, according to this theory, our general judgments may in fact be merely inferences (they may, in fact, be “irrationally constituted,” to adopt Bowlin's phrase²¹³). More significantly, given the present theory, I think it is impossible for practical thinking to be anything but estimation or inference, even if impressed formal species of the good are present in the intellect (again, assuming intelligible species are impressed in general and not exhaustively). This

²¹² See Bowlin, 42-43, 56-57, 61.

²¹³ Bowlin, 52.

is because particular acts of thinking about practical truth cannot get started if the impressed formal species proposed by this theory are disconnected from actual thinking.²¹⁴

An implication (and dependency) relevant for the second critique: Knowledge of the truth of the good presupposes knowledge of simple truth

As I mention above, Bowlin admits that knowledge of the truth of the good presupposes prior knowledge. More specifically, Bowlin suggests that formal specification of the good seems to depend upon other simpler truths, including, for example, some prior specification of the kind or nature of a thing that exists.²¹⁵

There seems to be a logical requirement involved in this dependency, which is relevant to the second critique below. Namely, to understand something about a species of good in general, one must first understand something in general about that which is understood to be good. That is, one must understand something in general about the formal nature of that which is good. This logical requirement suggests that the idea of the good is a complex notion, which depends for its intelligibility upon additional, simpler ideas.²¹⁶ And the relevant implication for this theory is as follows: if a formal species of the good is impressed upon the intellect, and if the species, for its specification and intelligibility, depends on formal specification of other species, kinds, or natures of things, then formal specification of these species must likewise be included in specification of the formal species of the good. Or, they must be separately impressed upon the intellect by some cause prior (at least logically prior) to specification of the good by the will. Again, this is because the intellect begins as a blank slate. Thus, for example, if we are to understand something about the good of friendship in general, then we must also understand something about what friendship is—that is, we must have some formal understanding of the nature of

²¹⁴ Again, see *ST I*, q. 84, a. 7.

²¹⁵ Bowlin, 97 n. 21.

²¹⁶ See *ST I*, q. 87, a. 3 esp. ad 1; *ST I*, q. 16, a. 4; *ST I*, q. 82, a. 4. C.f. Lawrence Dewan, “St. Thomas, Our Natural Lights, and the Moral Order,” in *Wisdom, Law, and Virtue* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 205-6.

friendship, at least vaguely and in principle. Without some understanding of what friendship is, then friendship as good is simply unintelligible. Whether specification of the nature of friendship is impressed by the will or by some other cause does not impact the logical dependency implied here.

Second Critique: We cannot know whether practical judgments about particular goods track the truth, because knowledge of the truth of the good depends on knowledge of simple truth

My argument in this second critique is that, according to the present theory in option two, we cannot know whether our practical judgments about particular goods track the truth. Thus, the theory cannot prevent the contingent goodness of the will's objects from going all the way down, as Bowlin intends. The reason for this involves the implication just discussed. *Given Bowlin's premise that knowledge of the truth of the good depends on knowledge of simple truth, we need a reliable way to understand simple truth for the present theory to work.*²¹⁷

As already mentioned, Bowlin does not offer an epistemology for simple truth. However, even without this epistemology, I suggest we can critique the present theory simply in terms of the epistemic dependency involved. Recall the logical requirement discussed in the implication above: to understand something about a species of good in general, one must first understand something about the nature of that which is understood to be good. With this requirement in mind, it seems logically impossible according to the present theory to know whether any nature one might come to understand by some epistemologically defensible means is formally the same as the nature that already specifies (or is needed to fully specify) a species of good impressed by the will.

Consider again the example of friendship. Suppose by some epistemologically defensible means (by some cause other than the will) one's intellect is able to grasp the nature of friendship

²¹⁷ Again, see Bowlin, 97 n. 21.

and then to understand that *this* particular relation between two existing human persons is formally an instance of the nature of friendship. Suppose, further, that one's naturally determined will impresses the species of the good of friendship upon the intellect, but before it can do so, it needs to specify this species of the good according to the simple nature of friendship. In this case, even if we suppose the intellect grasps something about the nature of friendship by some epistemologically defensible means, there is no logical basis for knowing whether the nature that helps to specify the species of the good of friendship, which the will impresses upon the intellect, is the same as the nature of friendship already grasped by the intellect.

Summary

To summarize, what the above critiques argue is that the present theory (option two), which claims that the will impresses species of the good upon the intellect as a formal cause, cannot prevent the contingency of the good from going all the way down—neither for general judgments about human goods nor for singular judgments about particular goods. In each case, intractable issues arise 1) when attempting logically to link impressed species of the good to the formal natures of simple truth upon which their general specifications necessarily depend, and 2) when attempting to understand actually—in a way that tracks the truth at least minimally—whether any object of thought (either a general notion or a particular thing apprehended and judged in experience) is necessarily an instance of one of the impressed species of the good.

Given these intractable concerns, I suggest that the present theory cannot guarantee that a thinking subject's general or singular practical judgments about the good minimally track the truth.

OPTION 3: NO INTEGRATION WITH CONCEPTUAL THINKING IS POSSIBLE OR NECESSARY

So far, I have examined and critiqued two possible options for how the intellect might apprehend the human good *because* of the will's natural determination, as Bowlin claims.

There is third and final option to discuss regarding the present claim. Namely, perhaps the apprehensions and judgments by which we first understand the practical good simply do not involve concepts (nor, do they involve particular operations of thinking by virtue of concepts). Perhaps knowing the practical good and the natural law involves understanding a non-conceptual kind of knowledge that is different from the conceptual knowledge involved in understanding simple truth.

As I understand it, this is the view put forward by Jacques Maritain, whom Bowlin references, in his article "Knowledge Through Connaturality."²¹⁸ In this article, Maritain distinguishes between two kinds of moral knowledge: 1) rational, conceptual, scientific moral knowledge, and 2) non-conceptual moral knowledge *through* connaturality or inclination. According to Maritain, these two kinds of moral knowledge are understood according to two distinct ways of judgment. Pointing to Aquinas,²¹⁹ Maritain distinguishes between conceptual, logical, discursive judgment about moral virtue, which he calls moral science, and non-conceptual, non-discursive judgment about moral virtue by connaturality or inclination.²²⁰

Maritain claims that *the human good and the natural law are understood initially and practically according to this second kind of judgment*. He writes, "My contention is that the judgments in which Natural Law is made manifest to practical Reason do not proceed from any conceptual, discursive, rational exercise of reason; they proceed from that connaturality or

²¹⁸ Jacques Maritain, "On Knowledge Through Connaturality," *The Review of Metaphysics* 4, no. 16 (June 1951): 473. See Bowlin's references to Maritain in Bowlin, 227.

²¹⁹ Maritain references ST II-II, q. 45, a. 2 in Maritain, 474.

²²⁰ Maritain, 474.

congeniality through which what is consonant with the essential inclinations of human nature is grasped by the intellect as good; what is dissonant, as bad.”²²¹

Maritain describes this non-conceptual knowledge through connaturality or inclination as follows:

“In this knowledge through union or inclination, connaturality or congeniality, the intellect is at play not alone, but together with affective inclinations and the dispositions of the will, and is guided and directed by them. It is not rational knowledge, knowledge through the conceptual, logical and discursive exercise of Reason. But it is really and genuinely knowledge, though obscure and perhaps incapable of giving account of itself, or of being translated into words.”²²²

We can gather at least two main points about Maritain’s view from the above citations. First, practical knowledge of the human good and natural law is understood without concepts and without discursive reasoning. Second, this practical knowledge is understood through the guidance and direction of the affective inclinations and dispositions of the human will. Maritain emphasizes that the inclinations of human nature are “essentially human, and therefore, reason-permeated inclinations.”²²³

Given Maritain’s claims regarding non-discursive practical understanding of the human good, we might ask: what is Maritain’s natural epistemology for this non-discursive practical knowledge? That is, in Maritain’s view, how do we come to understand knowledge of the human good and natural law precisely *through* connaturality or inclination? Maritain’s reply is that the human intellect understands this knowledge by *listening* to the affective inclinations and dispositions of the will. He writes,

“[N]o conceptual and rational exercise of human reason intervenes in its knowledge of Natural Law, so that human reason knows Natural Law, but has no part, either in causing it to *exist*, or even in causing it to *be known*. As a result, uncreated Reason, the Reason of the Principle of Nature, is the only reason at play not only in *establishing* Natural Law (by the very fact that it creates human nature), but in *making Natural Law known*, through the inclinations of this very nature, to which human reason listens when it knows Natural Law [original emphasis].”²²⁴

²²¹ Maritain, 478.

²²² Maritain, 474.

²²³ Maritain, 478.

²²⁴ Maritain, 479-480.

Before discussing the relevance of Maritain's approach for Bowlin's argument, I begin by highlighting several of its features.

Three features of Maritain's approach

There are several points to highlight in Maritain's approach. First, if we accept Maritain's claim that practical knowledge of the good is non-conceptual, then much of the critique I discuss above regarding option two is no longer a concern. That is, if, as Maritain claims, thinking practically does not proceed from any conceptual exercise of reason,²²⁵ then there is no epistemic gap to consider between a formal species impressed upon or abstracted by the intellect and one's active practical thinking conceptually by virtue of that species.

Second, Maritain's distinction between non-discursive and discursive knowledge is clearly relevant. The premises and terms involved in an act of discursive, scientific (syllogistic) reasoning clearly depend on prior understanding. That is, they depend on knowledge known prior (at least logically prior) to such reasoning. Presumably, such prior knowledge is acquired either by a previous act of discursive reasoning or by some other previous act of non-discursive understanding. Given this dependence—and, because knowledge cannot depend on prior acts of discursive reasoning in perpetuity—then, if there is knowledge at all, it seems we need some non-discursive, non-scientific (Aquinas says, "immediate") mode of understanding, at least in the first instance of knowing.²²⁶ We might also say that non-discursive understanding is relatively simpler than the more complex knowledge gained by discursive reasoning.

Maritain identifies at least two kinds of non-discursive knowledge. The first, as already mentioned, is *practical knowledge (of the good) through connaturality or inclination*. The second is what Maritain refers to as the grounds of conceptual and rational knowledge (i.e., theoretical knowledge of truth simply), which, in the case of metaphysics, he says, implies the "intellectual

²²⁵ Maritain, 474.

²²⁶ PA I.4.

intuition of being *qua* being.”²²⁷ Maritain does not elaborate on this second kind of non-discursive, “intuitive” knowledge in the article I examine here. However, the topic of immediate understanding is particularly relevant in later chapters of this study, and I return to it then.

Finally, third, I think Maritain’s distinction between so-called affective or connatural knowledge and purely speculative knowledge is also significant. I discuss affective knowledge and how it relates to knowledge of the good in chapter 5.

Analysis and critique

Despite these features, I have several concerns regarding Maritain’s approach.²²⁸ The simplest point to make is that I do not think Maritain’s view applies to Bowlin’s main argument, given Bowlin’s premises. As I just mentioned, Maritain distinguishes between rational moral knowledge and non-conceptual moral knowledge *through* connaturality. He argues further that knowledge of the natural law proceeds according to this latter, non-rational type of knowing: “[N]o conceptual and rational exercise of human reason intervenes in [the human intellect’s] knowledge of Natural Law.”²²⁹

However, Bowlin clearly refers to the *rational* character of practical reason (e.g., to “reasons that make our actions intelligible”²³⁰), to apprehension and judgment,²³¹ to the *rational*

²²⁷ Maritain, 481.

²²⁸ For example, it seems to me that practical thinking—or “real, genuine” practical knowledge (see Maritain, 474)—cannot proceed actually without a corresponding interior concept or cognitive likeness. Unless we make room for the interior concept in our analysis (as the interior object of the intellect’s immanent operation), it seems we cannot distinguish between having habitual knowledge of an intelligible species (e.g., habitual knowledge of a formal species of human good, which might be impressed or abstracted) and having actual formal understanding of a thing (by intellective operation) by virtue of that intelligible species (see *ST I*, q. 85, a. 2). For the human being to relate to things by practical operation, knowingly and voluntarily—i.e., for the human being to love another person rationally—it seems to me that she must be able to understand actually (by rational operation). See Dewan’s critique of Maritain in Lawrence Dewan, “Jacques Maritain and the Philosophy of Cooperation,” in *Wisdom, Law, and Virtue* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 214, 217.

²²⁹ Maritain, 479.

²³⁰ Bowlin, 124-125.

²³¹ Bowlin, 56.

character of practical action,²³² to the practical syllogism,²³³ and to the “formal character of human agency.”²³⁴ Bowlin says that Providence determines us to “general classes of ends,”²³⁵ and as I have mentioned above, one of his central claims is that “our participation in the eternal law remains sufficient to guarantee that our actions remain minimally *rational* and thus characteristically human [my emphasis].”²³⁶

Given these and other such examples from his text, it is clear Bowlin thinks our knowledge of the natural law is at least minimally *rational* in practical thinking and acting. Thus, according to Maritain’s categories of moral knowledge, it appears Bowlin’s argument is working, at least in part, according to Maritain’s first category, which is what he calls *rational* moral knowledge. However, both Maritain and Bowlin seem to agree that natural dispositions of the human will play a role in revealing knowledge of the natural law to the intellect.

All of this is to say that, given Bowlin holds that practical thinking involves at least some minimal amount of rational knowledge of the general features of the human good, it seems he cannot respond to the critiques raised above—e.g., regarding option two, that there is an epistemic gap between the formal species impressed upon or abstracted by the intellect and one’s active practical thinking by virtue of that species—by claiming, as Maritain does, that practical thinking does not proceed according to any rational or conceptual exercise of reason. As Maritain himself admits, his theory of practical reason simply removes our knowledge of natural law from the plane of rational knowledge.²³⁷ Indeed, Bowlin cannot respond to the above critiques using Maritain’s claim because he seeks to defend the minimally rational character of every human act of practical thinking and acting.²³⁸

²³² Bowlin, 125.

²³³ Bowlin, 42-43.

²³⁴ Bowlin, 123.

²³⁵ Bowlin, 124.

²³⁶ Bowlin, 125.

²³⁷ Maritain, 481.

²³⁸ Bowlin, 125.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

In the above discussion, we have been unable to defend Bowlin's argument for natural, formal practical knowledge of general human goods. Specifically, we have been unable to defend what I call Bowlin's fourth claim: that the intellect *apprehends* the last end and its general parts as good precisely *because* the will is naturally disposed to desire happiness (the last end) and its general parts simply and absolutely.²³⁹ Given the above critiques, I do not think Bowlin's theory of practical truth guarantees that human practical thinking and acting "remain minimally rational and thus characteristically human."²⁴⁰

I do not suggest that the human will's natural determination is irrelevant to the intellect's ability to apprehend the human good. Indeed, as I argue in chapter 5, I think the human will has an essential role to play as an interior principle of voluntary exercise, which moves the intellect to return to *ens* as good (to understand and to contemplate), to make judgments, to reason, to think practically, etc. Rather, what I suggest is that, while the will can move the intellect interiorly to exercise its act, the will cannot be the *first* mover of the intellect's understanding of the good. That is, the human will cannot move the intellect to apprehend the good in the first instance.²⁴¹

Furthermore, although I suggest in chapter 5 that the will participates secondarily in moving the intellect to apprehend the practical good, the will cannot be the epistemic source or formal cause of the intellect's practical understanding. In part, this is because to attribute such formal causality to the will is incompatible with the nature of the intellect (as I discuss in chapter 5). In addition, despite the will's natural determination to the good in general (apprehended as fitting), the will cannot operate until the intellect moves the will by presenting its natural object to it as an end.²⁴² Therefore, naturally speaking, the will cannot move the intellect to additional understanding (and, similarly, the human being cannot be a voluntary self-mover of his or her

²³⁹ Bowlin, 56.

²⁴⁰ Bowlin, 125.

²⁴¹ *ST* I, q. 82, a. 4 ad 3.

²⁴² *ST* I, q. 82, a. 4.

own understanding) until the intellect first apprehends the good (at least implicitly) and can thus present the will with its natural object.²⁴³

Finally, recall Bowlin offers a *practical* reason to support his claim that the contingency of the human good “cannot go all the way down.”²⁴⁴ He writes that anyone who “assume[s] a minimalist account of our common humanity and a provisional treatment of those goods that distinguish human agency...must distinguish rationality in action from madness.”²⁴⁵ Now, insofar as Bowlin explains this distinction in view of his claim that every human action follows “from knowing and willing the good that is characteristic of our kind,”²⁴⁶ it is reasonable to claim, as Bowlin does, that human beings act practically in view of certain general ends because we are “governed” according to law.²⁴⁷ However, to say that human beings act in terms of practical knowledge of general ends is not to say whether human beings act precisely as *rational* subjects of activity. For, as I discuss in chapter 4, *practically speaking*, artificial “agents” also make judgments and operate in terms of certain logical categories of ends *as governed* (i.e., as governed according to commands by human users). My point is we cannot assume that human beings act *rationally* (or intellectually) simply because of Bowlin’s claim that human beings act *practically* in view of certain general ends or goods.

²⁴³ ST I, q. 82, a. 3 esp. ad 2.

²⁴⁴ Bowlin, 130.

²⁴⁵ Bowlin, 130 n. 98.

²⁴⁶ Bowlin, 125.

²⁴⁷ See, for example, Bowlin, 121.

Chapter Two: John Finnis and the Practical Insight

According to John Finnis, the metaphysics of the human person is “normally left unarticulated, outside the focus of advertence” in practical thinking.²⁴⁸ But, this is not to say that practical thinking for Finnis is left without any understanding of the human person. Rather, in place of a metaphysics of the human person in practical thinking, Finnis writes, is “first, the understanding, intrinsic to the initial grasp of first practical principles, that basic goods such as knowledge, life, and friendship are good not only for me or thee, but for ‘anyone.’”²⁴⁹ Finnis makes a similar point elsewhere, referring to “one’s originally childish insight into the practical truth that those opportunities are opportunities for me *and anyone like me*” [original emphasis].²⁵⁰ As Finnis explains, “each of the first practical principles picks out and directs us to a good which it identifies, in its initial, not fully reflective formulation, as a good ‘for me and anyone like me.’”²⁵¹

In the present study, I seek to examine several of the conceptual and epistemological details and implications of this important claim. Indeed, in his Postscript to the second edition of *Natural Law Natural Rights*, Finnis emphasizes that formulating the initial grasp of first practical principles in terms of goods “for me and anyone like me” is to “state a key premise” for what he calls the master or first principle of morality.²⁵² I am particularly interested in the *conceptual content* of this premise as grasped by initial practical insight. In Finnis’ view, does it involve some understanding, at least vaguely and implicitly, of the good of human persons (and some understanding of related ideas such as human dignity; the good of added perfections, such as virtue; and the good of persons as directed to human fulfillment²⁵³)? Examining these and related questions, I think, both 1) provides context for examining more broadly the epistemological

²⁴⁸ CEJF I.1, 35.

²⁴⁹ CEJF I.1, 35.

²⁵⁰ CEJF I.1, 39. C.f. John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, Second Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 451.

²⁵¹ Finnis, *Natural Law*, 451.

²⁵² Finnis, *Natural Law*, 451.

²⁵³ See ST I, q. 6, a. 3, ad 3.

relationship between theoretical and practical understanding in Finnis' view and 2) reveals at least two concerns—one linguistic (or practical) and the other epistemological—about Finnis' understanding of practical truth.²⁵⁴

Finnis calls the initial grasp of first practical principles by practical insight the “originally childish insight” to distinguish it from the enhanced “practical-cum-theoretical understanding”²⁵⁵ that follows one's chosen commitments to pursue basic goods, where reflection and “mutual reinforcement of theoretical and practical insight” deepen the original childish insight.²⁵⁶ Finnis discusses at some length both the intelligible content and eventual reach of practical-cum-theoretical awareness. Regarding conceptual content, there arises by practical-cum-theoretical awareness among other ideas 1) the deepened understanding of human nature by reflective application of the epistemological principle²⁵⁷; 2) the supervening, “enhanced practical understanding of the *worth* of the person [original emphasis]”²⁵⁸; and 3) the reflective understanding of concepts such as common good and integral human fulfillment. Regarding reach, there arises by reflection and practical-cum-theoretical thinking the broadened awareness of the applicability of the “for me and anyone like me” premise: it is understood eventually and more explicitly to encompass “any human person.”²⁵⁹

But, what is perhaps less clear in Finnis' discussion (at least upon first inspection) is the conceptual content of the “originally childish insight.” Does this initial insight, like deepened practical-cum-theoretical awareness, also include (albeit vaguely and largely implicitly) some parallel understanding of basic ideas such as human nature, the worth of the person, and human

²⁵⁴ C.f. Brock, “Practical Truth.”

²⁵⁵ *CEJF* I.1, 36. Going forward, I use the phrase “practical-cum-theoretical *awareness*” rather than “practical-cum-theoretical understanding” to emphasize that this awareness does not arise by some kind of third type of insight. Rather, the understanding that arises by mutual reinforcement of theoretical and practical insight is either theoretical or practical.

²⁵⁶ *CEJF* I.1, 39.

²⁵⁷ Finnis, *Aquinas*, 90-94. C.f. John Finnis, *Fundamentals of Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 20–23.

²⁵⁸ *CEJF* I.1, 39.

²⁵⁹ Finnis, *Natural Law*, 451. C.f. *CEJF* I. Introduction, 2-3. John Finnis, “Reflections and Responses,” in *Reason, Morality, and Law: The Philosophy of John Finnis*, ed. John Keown and Robert P. George (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 474.

fulfillment—such that the initial insight’s conceptual content and universal reach are the same in kind as those of the more developed, more explicit practical-cum-theoretical awareness, and such that differences between the two understandings are merely a matter of epistemological or reflective degree and explicitness? With references to Finnis’ texts, I shall argue affirmatively in response to this question. As I understand Finnis’ account, the deepened awareness arising by mutual reinforcement of theoretical and practical insight involves a fleshing out of basic concepts and a coming to understand more explicitly by reflection what was previously grasped implicitly.

THE THEORETICAL INSIGHT

To appreciate the significance of the “for me and anyone like me” premise that the child (you, me) understands by initial practical insight in Finnis’ view, we need to examine the phrase’s related conceptual content. Given that the practical insight relies, in part, upon the analytically prior theoretical insight, I turn, first, to what seems to be related conceptual content arising in the child’s understanding by initial theoretical insight. Indeed, while Finnis formulates the initial grasp of opportunities by practical insight in terms of goods “for me and anyone like me,” he suggests somewhat similarly and analogously that the initial grasp of possibilities by theoretical insight “brings into view (that is, into one’s understanding) a double reality” of real subjects and objects of possibility in the world.²⁶⁰

Consider Finnis’ discussion of the “double reality” brought into view by the child’s theoretical grasp of the proposition that *knowledge is possible*:

“*Knowledge* is, for the child, a new concept, and acquiring the concept is an essentially simple insight. The acquisition brings into view (that is, into one’s understanding) a double reality: a world, so to speak, of knowables, of truths, and of realities, getting the truth about which is or would be knowledge; and among those realities are me, the child, and my parents and teachers and playmates, all of whom are or can be anticipated to be bearers—knowers—and sources of knowledge. And this is not a bare concept, but a proposition incorporating it: knowledge is possible and to some extent also actual.”²⁶¹

²⁶⁰ CEJF I.Introduction, 2-3.

²⁶¹ CEJF I.Introduction, 2-3.

Although much could be examined here regarding Finnis' understanding of the conceptual content grasped by theoretical insight, I limit my discussion to several key points that are particularly relevant for my analysis below of the practical insight.

As I understand the above passage, once one understands (at least implicitly²⁶²) the concept of knowledge and the proposition "knowledge is possible" by theoretical insight, one also understands (again, at least implicitly) that there are 1) knowable objects—both real objects (things) in the world and objects of thought in the mind (e.g., abstracted logical or mathematical concepts)—about which truths can be known, and 2) real knowing subjects in the world (i.e., one understands that you, I, and other human persons exist as knowing or potentially knowing subjects).

In addition, according to the above passage, the concept of knowledge seems to specify (implicitly at first, and more explicitly after further reflection) some kind of intelligible, logical relation of possibility between these two realities as understood: a logical relation of possibility between the knowing subject and the knowable object (thing).²⁶³ Indeed, as discussed previously, theoretical truth for Finnis, which is specified according to a concept of knowledge,²⁶⁴ is found in an indicative proposition's conformity to the reality of the thing signified by its subject-matter.²⁶⁵ In other words, for a person (a knowing subject) to understand theoretical truth about a thing in the world is for the person to grasp (by affirmation and judgment) that her theoretical understanding of the thing—as specified by an indicative proposition and its related concepts—conforms to the reality of the thing in the world (the knowable object): there is "adequation of

²⁶² See Finnis, *Natural Law*, 72.

²⁶³ See SCG I.72; DV 21.1.

²⁶⁴ Finnis says that knowledge is "of truth"; it is "warranted and true belief" (CEJF I.Introduction, 3). He writes, "Now 'knowledge', unlike 'belief', is an achievement-word; there are true beliefs and false beliefs, but knowledge is of truth.... one can just as easily speak of 'truth for its own sake' as of 'knowledge for its own sake'.... we want the truth when we want the judgments in which we affirm or deny propositions to be true judgments" (Finnis, *Natural Law*, 59–60).

²⁶⁵ Germain Grisez, Joseph Boyle, and John Finnis, "Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends," *The American Journal of Jurisprudence* 32, no. 1 (1987): 116.

mind to reality.”²⁶⁶ As such, the knowing subject grasps conformity of cognitive self and thing—or, as Aquinas says, “conformity of intellect and thing.”²⁶⁷ The intelligibility of this relation as cognitively grasped is precisely what is conceived of and specified by the concept of knowledge for Finnis. Much more could be said about this.

To extend Finnis’ point to theoretical propositions of possibility more generally, we might say that understanding any possibility brings into view some understanding of both the real objects and subjects of possibility. It also brings into one’s understanding some kind of intelligible, logical relation of possibility—a logical relation between real subjects of possibility and real objects of possibility. The subject is myself or some other person for whom some possibility is possible. And, the object is some possibility or end of activity that is potentially realizable in or by the person as subject. Thus, to understand possibility by theoretical insight is to understand, at least implicitly, that I and other subjects like me exist as subjects of activity (as subjects of movement from potentiality to actuality) in a world of real objects (which can be the ends of our activity).

Before moving to discuss the practical insight, there is an additional relevant point to mention. In the above citation from Finnis, it is perhaps unclear what “brings into view (that is, into one’s understanding)” means in context. In Finnis’ view, is the child’s understanding of real subjects and objects of knowledge brought about precisely *by the same* theoretical insight by which the child grasps the concept of knowledge (and understands that knowledge is possible)? I am not in a position in my analysis to discuss this question at length—I will return to this topic in later chapters. But, tentatively, I think that, for Finnis, there is one sense in which subjects and objects are *already* understood generally and vaguely—i.e., “what they are” is already understood to some extent (by apprehension)—*prior to the understanding of possibility* by theoretical insight. And, there is another sense in which particular objects and subjects of

²⁶⁶ Grisez, Boyle, and Finnis, “Practical Principles,” 115–17. C.f. DV 1.1.

²⁶⁷ ST I, q. 16, a. 2. C.f. DV 1.

possibility in the world are understood additionally in a new way—i.e., by singular judgment of their existing reality as true—both *in this same act of insight*, and also subsequently by other acts of judgment as informed by this initial insight.²⁶⁸

For Finnis (and Aquinas), it seems, understanding possibilities by theoretical insight is not the *first* cognitive act by which the child grasps both something intelligible and some implicit understanding of herself as subject. Rather, as Aquinas says in the following passage often cited by Finnis, “that which is *first* known by the human intellect is an object of this kind [that is, ‘the nature of a material thing’—i.e., what a thing is], and that which is known *secondarily* is the act by which that object is known; and through the act the intellect itself is known, the perfection of which is this act of understanding [my emphasis].”²⁶⁹

All of this is to say that, in Finnis’ view, the theoretical proposition that *knowledge is possible* is a universal proposition of first-order (theoretical) thinking. As understood by a given subject (an existing person), it specifies an intelligible, logical relation of possibility (called “knowledge”) between oneself as a knowing subject (and other knowing subjects who exist like me) and real, knowable objects in the world. If understanding this proposition brings into view a “double reality” of subjects and objects of knowledge, then these real subjects and objects also must be understood (like the universal proposition itself) according to some first-order theoretical understanding.

Finally, I think Finnis would say, following Aquinas, that the initial theoretical insight by which the child grasps the possibility of knowledge is not an abstract, isolated cognitive act. Rather, the initial theoretical insight occurs in the act of making a singular judgment in truth about some particular thing in the world (indeed, it is the child’s first judgment in truth), such that what is affirmed and understood *primarily* (the object of attention) is the real existence of *this*

²⁶⁸ Finnis points to the *already understood* reality of the self (“I—this human being”) in his discussion of self-knowledge in Finnis, *Aquinas*, 177. He cites *I Sent.* d. I, q. 2, a. 1 ad 2. C.f. *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2 and *DV* 1.

²⁶⁹ *ST I* q. 87, a. 3. Finnis often cites this article to explain the “epistemological principle.” See Finnis, *Fundamentals*, 21 n. 22. C.f. Finnis, *Aquinas*, 29 n. 29 or 177 n. 210.

particular thing with a nature (that is, the subject judges that *this* individual being exists with a definite, intelligible manner of existing and acting, a nature, which she at least vaguely understands),²⁷⁰ and what is understood *secondarily and implicitly* (by implicit self-awareness) is the knowing subject's (the child's) conformity in truth to the reality of *this* particular thing.²⁷¹ Thus, it is by the same cognitive act of judgment that the child understands both 1) explicitly, the existing reality of the thing itself, and 2) implicitly, *that* it is understood.²⁷² This second implicit understanding is, I suspect for Finnis, precisely the initial theoretical insight by which the child originally understands the possibility of knowledge. Furthermore, as I understand Finnis, in grasping the possibility of knowledge, the child also understands vaguely and implicitly something about her own way of being or nature (and that of others like her),²⁷³ which eventually, by reflection, practical-cum-theoretical awareness, and application of the epistemological principle, she can conceive of more explicitly—and perhaps even consider philosophically—according to a concept of human nature.²⁷⁴

To make more sense of this view, I think it is helpful to draw a number of distinctions, for example, between understanding by apprehension and understanding by judgment, between singular and universal propositions, between implicit and explicit understanding, etc. I attempt to make some of these distinctions in later chapters. For now, I move to discuss how the practical insight builds upon the conceptual content grasped by theoretical insight.

²⁷⁰ On nature as a determining principle of existence and operation in Aquinas, see Robert William Schmidt, *The Domain of Logic According to Saint Thomas Aquinas* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), 280. On judgment of a thing's existence in the second act of the intellect and the debate among scholars about which act of the intellect grasps existence, see Therese Scarpelli Cory, *Aquinas On Human Self-Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 75 (esp. n. 24), 187, and see John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 23–33. C.f., Lawrence Dewan, *Form and Being: Studies in Thomistic Metaphysics* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 229–47. C.f. Schmidt, 212–213, 278–282.

²⁷¹ Recall *ST I* q. 87, a. 3.

²⁷² *ST I*, q. 85, a. 2, esp. ad 2.

²⁷³ The child understands implicitly that she and others like her are the kind of beings for whom knowledge is possible. The child grasps this intelligibly as a universal form (in this case, of human nature). Indeed, as Aquinas says, “For if many singulars are taken which are without differences as to some one item existing in them, that one item according to which they are not different, once it is received in the mind, is the first universal, no matter what it may be” (*PA II.20* (100a4)). C.f. Schmidt, 279 n. 179.

²⁷⁴ For Finnis' view on understanding the concept of human nature, see Finnis, *Aquinas*, 90–94.

Given the theoretical insight logically (analytically) precedes the practical insight in Finnis' view, presumably the child's initial grasp of basic goods as good "for me and anyone like me" by practical insight is informed in some way by the child's prior understanding of real subjects and objects of possibility by theoretical insight. Indeed, Finnis writes, "Everyone who understands the relevant sense of the word 'good' understands it in the sense of 'good for', 'beneficial for', 'more or less perfective of.'" ²⁷⁵ And, clearly, after the preposition "for" in relevant practical propositions follow terms signifying the personal subject (i.e., "me and anyone like me") for whom an object of opportunity is "good."

But, the following question readily arises: in Finnis' view, are the subjects (e.g., the child, myself, or anyone like me) referred to in this initial grasp of first principles by practical insight understood merely according to the intelligibility of their existing reality (existence according to a nature) as grasped by prior theoretical insight, or are the subjects understood in this practical insight according to some *further* intelligibility—according to a new concept—namely, according to their good as subjects?

To begin to address this question, it is helpful to recall what it means to understand a good or opportunity by practical insight in Finnis' view. As discussed above, to understand by practical insight is to understand practical truth. And, practical truth is signified not by "is" but by "is to be." Practical knowledge is true not by conformity to human nature or to any existing reality; rather, it is true "by *anticipating* the fulfilment whose realization is possible through actions in conformity with those principles." ²⁷⁶ This fulfilment when considered practically according to its ideal intelligible extension is what Finnis calls integral human fulfillment (even though the concept's content and reach are not understood explicitly as such at first, but initially

²⁷⁵ Finnis, *Aquinas*, 91, including n. 143.

²⁷⁶ Finnis, *Aquinas*, 100, n. t. Grisez, Boyle, and Finnis, "Practical Principles," 116.

are understood only vaguely and in a more limited sense as “for me and anyone like me”).²⁷⁷

Finnis suggest that integral human fulfillment is an ideal end but not a goal that can be practically attained by human action.²⁷⁸ For example, according to Finnis, the practical proposition “knowledge is to be pursued and realized” is true not by first knowing both the essence and good of perfect knowledge, but rather by anticipating the fulfillment to which the practical good of knowledge is directed.

Analysis

Insofar as practical knowledge is true by anticipating *fulfilment*, it seems clear that the “for me and anyone like me” included in the initial grasp of first practical principles cannot refer merely to the existing reality of real subjects. While logical relations of possibility indeed are intelligible with respect to the existing reality of subjects (i.e., it is intelligible to speak of an existing subject of possibility in logical relation to an existing object of possibility), logical relations of opportunity are not intelligible merely as such. Rather, logical relations of opportunity seem to depend not only on understanding the existing reality of subjects but also on some *further* understanding of their fulfillment. That is, some anticipatory understanding of the subject’s fulfillment (in addition to some understanding of related ideas such as the desirable and the perfective²⁷⁹) is needed to make sense of terms like “opportunity,” “good,” or “for” that may appear in practical propositions.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷ Finnis, *Natural Law*, 451.

²⁷⁸ Finnis, *Natural Law*, 451. C.f. Grisez, Boyle, and Finnis, “Practical Principles,” 111, 131–33.

²⁷⁹ See *CEJF* I.1, 29 n. 21

²⁸⁰ Indeed, the preposition “for” seems intelligible only if the object of the preposition is either some end (as object) or the fulfillment (of some subject). Perhaps this is why Finnis does not include the phrase “for me and anyone like me” in the initial grasp of propositions by theoretical insight. Rather, he speaks of a “double reality” of objects and subjects of possibility that is brought into view. Perhaps the phrase “in/of me or anyone like me” could be posited of the understanding of possibilities by theoretical insight (albeit somewhat awkwardly). Thus, perhaps one could speak intelligibly and consistently of possibilities *in/of* a subject and opportunities *for* a subject.

Given the above, the *is-to-be* of real objects of opportunity only makes sense in logical relation to the *is-to-be* of real subjects of opportunity (such that our conceptual understanding of subjects anticipates their fulfillment). The *is-to-be* of objects of opportunity does not make sense in logical relation merely to the *is* of subjects. For, indeed, as Finnis says, “the already existing reality of persons simply does not depend upon human action.”²⁸¹ To repeat, then, it does not make sense to speak of logical relations between objects of *opportunity* and subjects of *possibility*, but only between objects and subjects of *opportunity*—understood under the same aspect.

Thus, it seems clear that the child understands real subjects of opportunity by initial practical insight according to some *further* intelligibility (beyond that understood by theoretical insight)—according to a new concept—that is, according to some practical understanding of the fulfillment of these subjects. Finnis admits as much, I think, in the following:

“[T]he goods to which practical reason’s first principles direct us are not abstract, ‘ideal’ or ‘quasi-Platonic forms’. They are perfections, aspects of the *fulfillment*, flourishing, completion, full-being, of the flesh-and-blood human beings (and the palpable human groups or communities) in whom they can be instantiated.... In the principles which state the basic reasons for human choice and action, ‘good’ refers to a possible perfection—at least partial, *pro tanto* fulfillment—of a human person or community [original emphasis].”²⁸²

An Initial Conclusion

It is at this point that we can consider, perhaps, why Finnis regards the “for me and anyone like me” to be a “key premise.” As already cited, Finnis writes, “the goods to which practical reason’s first principles direct us are not abstract, ‘ideal’ or ‘quasi-Platonic forms’.”²⁸³ The basic goods (the *is-to-be*’s of practical understanding) do not somehow exist in isolation; neither are they

²⁸¹ Grisez, Boyle, and Finnis, “Practical Principles,” 115.

²⁸² Finnis, *Aquinas*, 91-92.

²⁸³ Finnis, *Aquinas*, 91.

intelligible in isolation.²⁸⁴ They do not make sense apart from some understanding of fulfillment, and this fulfillment only makes sense with respect to a subject. Therefore, there needs to be both theoretical understanding of the existence of real subjects and practical, anticipatory understanding of their fulfillment in order for the basic goods (understood as opportunities by anticipation of this fulfillment) to be initially intelligible. Thus, while the concept of integral human fulfillment is certainly not understood fully and explicitly by initial practical insight, practical intelligibility of first principles in Finnis' view nonetheless seems to depend on having a vague, less-extended, largely implicit understanding of the concept from the beginning. This initial practical, anticipatory understanding of fulfillment is what I think Finnis has in mind when he uses the phrase "for me and anyone like me."

It is worth emphasizing the following implication of Finnis' view: it is only because the practical insight makes directedness of the basic goods and fulfillment of human subjects initially intelligible that one is able to seek a more complete, more explicit understanding of integral human fulfillment. In other words, there would be no intelligibility to "a more complete and coherent guidance-by-reasons-for-action" if the directedness of basic goods toward fulfillment (as considered one by one) were not initially understood.²⁸⁵

We can clarify as follows, then, the meaning of "for me and anyone like me" in Finnis' view according to the relevant concepts involved. The meaning is *not* "This good/opportunity is to be pursued for me [per my existence] and anyone like me [per his/her/their existence]." Rather, the meaning is "This good/opportunity is to be pursued for me [per my practical fulfillment/good (implicitly understood) in view of integral human fulfillment] and anyone like me [per his/her/their practical fulfillment/good (implicitly understood) in view of integral human fulfillment]." Of course, the child's grasp of the *existence* of real objects and subjects of

²⁸⁴ As already mentioned, Finnis says that the link between "good" and "aiming" (or acting for an end) "goes through the concepts of the desirable (*appetibile*) and the perfective [that which makes better-off and is thus opportunity]" (*CEJF* I.1, 29 n. 21). On this, Finnis points to Aquinas, *ST* I, q. 5, a. 1.

²⁸⁵ Finnis, *Aquinas*, 106.

opportunity in the world (as brought into view by initial theoretical insight) is already built into the key premise's meaning precisely because the practical insight depends on the prior theoretical insight.

Preliminary Evaluations

At this point in our analysis, it is helpful, I think, to pause and consider whether an anticipatory understanding of practical principles and the flourishing of human subjects provides sufficient conceptual content for thinking about human goods and reasons for action. On one hand, it seems that everyday practical thinking offers support for the above view. For, as already discussed, when looking for basic reasons for purposeful action, it is broadly possible (at least in many cases) to identify "a small number of basic purposes of diverse kinds."²⁸⁶ And, it can be argued that we are generally intellectually satisfied when a person explains to us her reasons for action in terms of the basic goods. However, as I now proceed to discuss, Finnis' understanding of practical truth also raises at least two concerns, I think: one linguistic (or practical) and the other epistemological—about how practical understanding relates to theoretical understanding in everyday thinking.

TWO CONCERNS ABOUT PRACTICAL TRUTH

A linguistic or practical concern

First, if we reflect on our discussion so far, I think it is reasonable to say we are in need of additional vocabulary (and associated concepts) beyond those made intelligible solely by practical insight to speak about human goods in ways that accord with everyday language use. For example, consider the human good of friendship. Indeed, there is a place in everyday language

²⁸⁶ Grisez, Boyle, and Finnis, "Practical Principles," 107.

for speaking about the practical good of friendship. That is, we can clearly speak about fostering friendship with another person according to a practical principle like the following: Take as a reason for action “the [practical, anticipatory] good of the other person(s) as worth pursuing and respecting as an end in itself.”²⁸⁷ Speaking practically about the good of *this* friend (by anticipating her fulfillment in view of integral human fulfillment) gives us a reason to act: we act to contribute to our friend’s fulfillment.

But, in what way can we speak about the present (or already given) good of real friendships using indicative propositions? Everyday language, it seems, demands that indicative propositions like the following be intelligible: “This [person] is my good friend”; or “That friendship [between those two persons] is good and healthy”; or “This act of gift-giving between friends is good.” And, when we express such propositions, we often intend to communicate more than merely 1) the “is-to-be” of friendship (as a practical principle) or 2) the “is good” of friendship strictly as an instance²⁸⁸ of what “is-to-be.” In many cases, we also intend to communicate the present “is good” of friendship precisely as a reality to be acknowledged. For example, we might seek to affirm the present good of *this* particular act of friendship performed by this person (here and now) for her friend;²⁸⁹ or we might seek to affirm the good of *this* moral virtue of friendship habitually present in this person’s will, which disposes him (here and now) to think and act for the good of his friend;²⁹⁰ or we might seek to affirm the good of active, abiding complacency (love) in this person’s will (here and now) for her friend.²⁹¹ In each of these examples, to use Aquinas’ terminology, I refer to the good of particular secondary beings (or accidents or perfections of being)—that is, I refer to the good of *this* action, habit, or passion,

²⁸⁷ Finnis, *Aquinas*, 112.

²⁸⁸ Finnis sometimes uses the term “instance” to refer to real instantiations of possibility or opportunity in the world. See Finnis, *Natural Law*, 62.

²⁸⁹ Aquinas calls this act “love of friendship” or benevolence (*dilectio*). See *ST* I-II, q. 27, a. 3; q. 26, a. 3.

²⁹⁰ On friendship as a virtue or habit, see *ST* II-II, q. 23, a. 3, ad 1 and I-II, q. 26, a. 3.

²⁹¹ Aquinas calls this kind of love a rational passion. Here, I’m using Aquinas’ term “passion” to refer to the effect an action has in a subject who is being acted upon (see *Metaph* V.9). On one’s complacency for the beloved in the will, which precedes love of friendship, see *ST* I-II, q. 28, a. 2 and *ST* I-II, q. 26, a. 2.

respectively—present in *this* existing person as realities to be acknowledged. Of course, there is also need in everyday language to speak about the intrinsic good of existing persons themselves (the primary substantial beings and personal human subjects in whom accidents inhere), who knowingly and freely choose to enter friendships with each other. I reserve my discussion of the intrinsic good of persons to a later section below.

Obviously, any friendship between human persons in this life is not yet perfect and fully realized²⁹², but this does not negate the real (albeit imperfect) good of present friendships between existing persons. A present, abiding friendship between persons is not merely understood as good by anticipation; it is also understood as good according to what it is now. Indeed, a friendship's present goodness would be lost if the persons involved ceased to act in view of the practical good of friendship. Accordingly, the *is* good (as a reality to be acknowledged) and the *is-to-be* good (as grasped by practical insight) are related. But, conceptually and propositionally, the ideas informing our understanding of these goods are not entirely the same. One might say that a good friend (as given) is one who consistently acts for the *is-to-be* good of another. Indeed, Finnis, following Aquinas, calls friendship "harmony ('fittingness of order') among human persons," and in this description both the *is-good* of friendship as given (e.g., the already-present good of *this* virtue or act of friendship) and the *is-to-be good* of friendship (e.g., the *is-to-be* good of *these* objects and subjects of friendship) seem intelligible.²⁹³ With this in mind, we might ask how Finnis attempts to reconcile different notions of the good of friendship that arise in everyday language. How does Finnis speak about a thing's good not only in view of anticipated fulfillment but also according to its present good as a reality to be acknowledged?

²⁹² Recall from above the reason practical truth cannot have its truth by conformity to what is known, Finnis writes, is that "human beings do not find and know initially by non-practical knowledge the possible fulfillment to which the *is-to-be* of practical knowledge points" (Finnis, *Aquinas*, 100, n. t).

²⁹³ Finnis, *Aquinas*, 111-112 (including n. 37 on harmony). See *ST* II-II, q. 44, a. 7 and q. 114, a. 1.

Thus, my first concern with Finnis' view is that, at least as thus far examined, it does not seem to provide sufficient conceptual content for speaking about the present (already given) "is good" of things, especially that of existing virtues, actions, passions, and objects (and not to mention the inherent "is good" of personal human subjects). Furthermore, neither does it seem to relate such conceptual content to one's practical understanding of the basic goods. Finnis sometimes speaks of particular objects of opportunity in the world as good "instances."²⁹⁴ But, everyday language suggests, I think, that it is meaningful to speak about existing virtues, actions, and passions (inhering in a personal subject) as more than instances of practical goods—such that what we communicate is an understanding of *this* good not only *by anticipation* but also *by acknowledgement* of what it already is, that is, by cognitive conformity in truth to the real and present goodness of the thing. I do think Finnis is thinking about practical truth and how it relates to our understanding of the intrinsic good of existing beings (especially persons), and I shall discuss this topic further below after mentioning a second concern.

An epistemological concern

If we put aside concerns of realist skepticism, one might say that grasping truth by theoretical insight has the epistemological advantage that what is understood is simply what is seen to be the case in reality (as observed through the senses). According to this realist perspective, things in the world reveal themselves (specifically, they reveal their intelligibility, order, and formal structure) to knowing persons through activity (either actively or passively, as acted upon by another). Knowing persons grasp this revealed intelligibility cognitively and then begin to understand and think about things in the world by forming concepts and propositions about

²⁹⁴ See, for example, Finnis, *Natural Law*, 61; *CEJF* I.1, 39; and Grisez, Boyle, and Finnis, "Practical Principles," 103. Note Finnis does suggest that a basic good like knowledge is an "*intrinsic* good" (Finnis, *Natural Law*, 62), but it is important to remember that "intrinsic" in this context does not refer to anything understood by theoretical insight. Rather, "intrinsic" here is intelligible by anticipation of the *ideal* end of integral human flourishing (which is unrealizable as a practical goal according to Finnis' practical epistemology).

them. Therefore, it is real things themselves (and their intelligibility as revealed) that are the initial objects of and norms of the knowing person's understanding.

But, practical understanding for Finnis does not work like this. Yes, *prior* to practical insight, the knowing subject already understands the truth of possibilities by theoretical insight (as grasped from the data of experience). And, yes, this prior theoretical understanding for Finnis involves a number of related ideas. First, as already discussed, there is the subject's understanding that real subjects and objects of possibility exist in the world. Second, there is the subject's understanding of both possibilities and the proximate actualization of these possibilities (Finnis often uses the word "instance" to refer to such proximately actualized possibilities). In Finnis' view, for example, having already noticed in experience that questions can get answers, the child grasps by theoretical insight that "knowledge is possible and to some extent also actual."²⁹⁵ Third, there is the subject's grasp of related theoretical concepts, which make the concept of possibility and its proximate actualization intelligible: theoretical concepts such as movement, desirability, relative perfection, etc.²⁹⁶ Finally, fourth, in addition to what is understood by theoretical insight, there is the subject's experience of inclinations. *All of these* (except perhaps the experience of inclinations²⁹⁷) are prior to any practical understanding in Finnis' view.²⁹⁸

It is only with these above so-called inputs in mind that we can begin to speak intelligibly about the practical insight. Finnis' view (at least as I understand it) is that given these inputs, but seemingly apart from any theoretical grasp (by acknowledgement) of the already given and present good of things in reality—for, practical truth is true by anticipation and *not* by

²⁹⁵ *CEJF* I.Introduction, 3.

²⁹⁶ *CEJF* I.1, 29 n. 21.

²⁹⁷ See Finnis, *Natural Law*, 440. Here, Finnis references Stephen L. Brock, "Natural Inclination and the Intelligibility of the Good in Thomistic Natural Law," *Vera Lex* 6, no. 1–2 (2005): 57–78.

²⁹⁸ Indeed, Finnis says, "Understanding basic goods is a matter of insight into the data of understood possibilities and experienced inclinations" (Finnis, "Reflections and Responses," 467).

correspondence to reality—and thus proceeding it seems entirely internally to the mind, the knowing subject comes to understand practical truth by *further* practical insight.

I think this account of practical truth raises the following epistemological question: where does the knowing subject (entirely internally within her intellect or mind) get the intelligibility of the practical good? I can see how the knowing subject may be able to grasp logical relations, proportions, or harmony²⁹⁹ between possibilities and their relative actualizations or instantiations in the world (as understood by theoretical insight). Even more, although this is less clear, I can see how the knowing subject might be able to grasp similar proportions between possibilities and a conceived or imagined ideal like perfect or integral human fulfillment (as understood inductively by some kind of cognitive projection or extension). But, as Finnis agrees, understanding these ideas and related concepts is *not* to grasp the good, for understanding the good must be according to a new concept that is grasped by *further* insight.³⁰⁰ Thus, my question is how does the knowing subject come to understand these proportions or relations of reason precisely under the aspect of the good?

Additionally, one might question the epistemological basis for the implicit, anticipatory ideas of fulfillment (integral human fulfillment) and directiveness that inform the initial practical insight—and that make the term “opportunity” intelligible. As already discussed, these concepts are built into the very intelligibility of the basic goods. But, it is unclear to me how any anticipatory understanding of the basic goods is possible cognitively by practical insight without some theoretical grasp (by acknowledgement or correspondence) of what is already good (at

²⁹⁹ Finnis uses the term “harmony” for example to describe friendship: “harmony among human persons” (Finnis, *Aquinas*, 111-112).

³⁰⁰ Joseph Raz explains this well: “The problem is that saying, e.g. that friendship is good because it is a (formally) harmonious relationship is empty for it amounts to saying that friendship is good because it is a relationship that is as it should be” (Joseph Raz, “Value: A Menu of Questions,” in *Reason, Morality, and Law: The Philosophy of John Finnis*, ed. John Keown and Robert P. George (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 17). And, Finnis agrees: “I agree with him [Raz] that it would be a mistake to think that harmony ‘explains what is the good of’ the basic goods of friendship, practical reasonableness and religion, and even more mistaken to think of it as the one basic value. If harmony earns a mention in relation to some of the items in a list of basic human goods, it does so ‘only in the context of something else’ [p. 16]: of the relations, for example, between persons, or between the parts of one’s psychological make-up” (Finnis, “Reflections and Responses,” 462).

least proximately or imperfectly good)—that is, without some understanding by insight of the already present (albeit limited) goodness of things in reality, including, in particular, the already present good both of subjects themselves and of the actions, passions, and virtues (and other secondary perfections) that inform one’s conceptual understanding of the desirable and the perfective.³⁰¹ More fundamentally, how do I know whether what is practically good for me is (or ever becomes) actually good for me, given that practical truth is intelligible only in terms of an ideal end, and not in terms of a present good to be acknowledged or a goal to be attained? And, related to this, do I need to understand some correspondence between my good now (as a human person with capacities and desires for fulfillment) and my anticipatory understanding of fulfillment to make sense of practical truth?

And, finally, I mention a related theological and metaphysical point. As already discussed, while Finnis suggests that practical truth, unlike theoretical truth, is true by anticipation and not by conformity, he does say that practical truth is analogically related to theoretical truth, for ultimately there is “conformity of the human mind, and its objects, with the mind of God.”³⁰² But, given the above discussion, the following question arises: how does the human mind naturally have epistemological access to practical truth as it conforms to the mind of God—which, in Finnis’ view, ultimately secures practical truth’s epistemological status as objective knowledge—apart from any conformity to created reality (which mediates God’s creative Wisdom), and apart from innate knowledge (which Finnis rejects) or divine revelation (which involves divinely revealed premises rather than naturally revealed premises)?³⁰³

Could there be what we might call an “epistemological gap” in Finnis’ account of practical truth? I’m inclined to think there is. Recall, Aquinas says, “in the present state of life whatever

³⁰¹ *CEJF* I.1, 29 n. 21. Epistemologically, we understand relations of perfectibility as logical relations (or relations of reason). See *DV* 21.1. C.f. Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 100.

³⁰² Finnis, *Aquinas*, 100, n. t. Grisez, Boyle, and Finnis, “Practical Principles,” 117.

³⁰³ Indeed, Finnis discusses at length God’s communication of moral precepts by divine revelation. But, here, I’m referring specifically to Finnis’ view regarding human understanding of practical truth by practical insight.

we understand, we know by comparison to natural sensible things.”³⁰⁴ Following this line of thinking, I am inclined to maintain that, epistemologically-speaking, one’s initial, objective understanding of the good (including one’s understanding of the practical good) must proceed cognitively (albeit perhaps largely implicitly) through some theoretical grasp (in truth) of the good of *this* particular existing thing in reality (with a nature). I expect Finnis might posit an “explanatory gap” rather than an “epistemological gap” in the above account of practical truth, as I have thus far discussed it. And, I suspect he thinks this “explanatory gap” can be largely overcome by further explanation, as I proceed to discuss in the next section below.

Preliminary conclusions and next steps

There are a number of rival epistemological theories of practical knowledge (e.g., inferentialist approaches,³⁰⁵ various Thomistic interpretations,³⁰⁶ etc.) that challenge various aspects of Finnis’ account of practical truth (and his related claims about the self-evidence of practical principles). Although I do not discuss these alternate views in this chapter, I venture to suggest that many of these critiques emerge, at least in part, because of concerns related to the “epistemological gap” issue just discussed. For example, consider the following line from Joseph Raz’s critique of Finnis’ account: “self-evidence as a source of knowledge or as a fundamental justifying condition does not provide an understanding of value. Rather it presupposes such an understanding.”³⁰⁷

In response to such critics, how does Finnis propose to resolve concerns about the epistemological grounds of practical truth and its relation to theoretical truth? As already mentioned, Finnis recognizes the relevance of this question, and I expect he might point to an explanatory gap in the above analysis as thus far presented rather than acknowledge any

³⁰⁴ ST I, q. 84, a. 8.

³⁰⁵ For example, see Stout, *Democracy*.

³⁰⁶ For example, see Bowlin, *Contingency and Fortune*. C.f. Russell Hittinger, *A Critique of the New Natural Law Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989). C.f. Brock, “Practical Truth.”

³⁰⁷ Raz, “Value,” 20. Finnis replies to Raz’s critique in Finnis, “Reflections and Responses,” 460.

legitimate epistemological gap. Therefore, I proceed to discuss Finnis approach to resolve the explanatory gap as I think he sees it. Then, I consider whether this answer satisfies the linguistic (or practical) and epistemological concerns raised above.

FINNIS' APPROACH TO RESOLVE THE EXPLANATORY GAP

Finnis seems to acknowledge a legitimate explanatory gap in his view of practical truth *when it is examined abstractly in isolation* (which is how I think I have explicated his view thus far). More specifically, he grants that something more is needed “to make sense of the normative force, the [integral] directiveness of the principles of practical reason.”³⁰⁸ And what is needed in Finnis' view? He points specifically to the need for an *awareness of human value or worth*. Finnis writes,

“We need some such awareness of human value if we are to make sense of the normative force, the directiveness of the principles of practical reason, the directiveness which they have when taken, not one first principle after another in isolation from each other and from the need to make particular choices, but in their integral directiveness under the architectonic, regulatory directiveness of the good of practical reasonableness itself—that is, when taken as *morally* normative.”³⁰⁹

Similarly, Finnis refers to “the dependence of practical reason and its directiveness upon a responsive awareness of the value that human beings have and can enhance and diminish by their own responsiveness to it.”³¹⁰

And, what is this awareness of human value in Finnis' view? He briefly suggests it is the supervening “enhanced practical understanding of the *worth* of the person” that arises on “deepened knowledge of possibility” by “mutual reinforcement of theoretical and practical insight.”³¹¹ This “deepened knowledge of possibility” arises for Finnis when the “originally childish insight into the practical truth that these opportunities are opportunities for me *and anyone like me*” is “reinforced by knowledge of the *capacity* of myself and others to make the

³⁰⁸ CEJF I.1, 36.

³⁰⁹ CEJF I.1, 36.

³¹⁰ CEJF I.1, 36.

³¹¹ CEJF I.1, 39.

efforts, commitments, self-disposing devotion to others, and so forth.”³¹² Earlier in the same article, Finnis mentions similarly,

“Our interest in multiply-grounded attributions of responsibility signifies this sort of practical-cum-theoretical understanding that our existence is as beings capable of mattering now because of our subsisting individual identities each with a past as well as a future. Such transcendence of the material, in both the benefits we envisage and the personal subjects we know are open to being so benefited, is part of what warrants the thought that each of us matters.”³¹³

Analysis

How might awareness of human value help to resolve the explanatory gap in the above account of practical truth? My analysis of Finnis’ approach proceeds in three steps. First, I examine what awareness of human value amounts to when the concept of the good by which it is specified is grounded solely in initial practical insight (in isolation)—that is, apart from any reflection and practical-cum-theoretical awareness. Second, I examine what “enhanced practical understanding of the worth of the person” amounts to conceptually as deepened by reflection and mutual reinforcement of theoretical and practical insight. Third, I examine whether this enhanced practical understanding of human worth can bridge the explanatory gap in the above account of practical truth.

1 – Awareness of human value based solely on initial practical understanding

First, I begin by analyzing one’s grasp of human value as understood by initial practical insight in isolation. Recall, again, that practical understanding according to Finnis is true and intelligible by anticipating the ideal of integral human fulfillment (anticipating, we might say, in the sense of asymptotic approach to the ideal). Thus, practical understanding of any present good, such as *this* object of opportunity or *this* human subject of opportunity, is always an anticipatory

³¹² CEJF I.1, 39.

³¹³ CEJF I.1, 36.

understanding in view of the ideal. When we say, “this human being is good,” according to practical understanding, we are saying that this person is good presently as a subject of opportunity in anticipation of the integral human fulfillment of which this person’s participative fulfillment is a part. However, in isolation from any theoretical understanding of the good of the person, we are not saying that this human being is good as a reality to be acknowledged. Rather, we are saying something more like, “this human being is good as the instantiated subject of is-to-be opportunities in anticipation of the ideal of integral human fulfillment.”

Now, given human beings through their own skillful actions or “fortunate disposition of means” cannot reach the ideal of integral human fulfillment in this life, as Finnis maintains,³¹⁴ to speak about the present good of any existing finite object or human subject according to practical understanding alone, I think, seems to risk unintelligibility. For, to speak about a person’s present good based solely upon practical understanding is to situate our understanding of this person’s actual good ultimately in terms of an unrealizable ideal. By theoretical insight, we can speak about the *existence* of real objects and subjects of possibility and opportunity. And, by practical insight, we can speak about their good by anticipating the ideal of integral human fulfillment, but *we cannot speak about their present good as a reality to be acknowledged, even in a limited or finite sense*. For, practical truth, as Finnis defines it, is true not by conformity to what is (including the good of what is) but by anticipation of what is-to-be.

What is missing from a solely practical account of the good of the person is any acknowledgement of the unique good of *this existing person in particular*. If someone is understood to be good only by anticipating an ideal, then the individual is understood to be good merely as an existing subject-instance of anticipatory understanding—not as a “person” in the full sense of the term, I suggest. The “is good” of practical understanding alone is a “*just so happens to be* ‘is good.’” A subject-instance in another possible world who existed instead of the original

³¹⁴ Furthermore, citing Aquinas, Finnis says that “fulfillment in some other, say future, life ‘goes beyond anything we can find out by inquiry and reasoning’” (Finnis, *Aquinas*, 105). C.f., Finnis, *Natural Law*, 419.

individual and who likewise was understood to be good practically and merely by anticipation would simply be *just as good*. But, does the fact that you or I presently exist rather than any other hypothetical subject-instance have any unrepeatable universal significance or worth?³¹⁵ I think virtually everyone would agree that everyday language is full of references to the significance of our relationships or friendships with *this* or *that* person. Indeed, everyday language seems to demand the ability speak intelligibly and meaningfully about the present good of *this* person in particular.

Preliminary conclusions on practical understanding of the good of subjects

The above discussion is certainly not to say that practical understanding of human goods is irrelevant. On the contrary, without practical understanding, we cannot think reasonably about performing good human acts and pursuing the active life of virtue and practical reasonableness.³¹⁶ Rather, my point is that we cannot collapse everything we might want to say in everyday language about human good or worth into that which is understood practically.³¹⁷ More specifically, I suggest that while acting according to basic practical principles in view of human flourishing is good and intelligible, judging the goodness of existing things (and especially persons) *only in terms of this understanding* lacks intelligibility, especially given that integral directedness of practical principles is understood to be an ideal end and not an attainable goal of human activity. Furthermore, if practical understanding in isolation is susceptible to the

³¹⁵ In theological terms, is *this* child good because God willed *this* individual child personally into existence, or would any child who otherwise existed be just as good? Here, I am referring not primarily to the equal dignity or goodness shared by every member of the human species, although this is certainly significant and related, as I discuss below. Rather, here I am referring *in particular* to the intelligible goodness of *this* unique, unrepeatable human person as loved by God.

³¹⁶ Finnis writes, “[Aquinas] never treated the life of practical reasonableness and virtue as mere means to a fulfilment found essentially in a state of contemplation paralleling as closely as possible, in this life, the contemplation of God. That is to say, it is clear that for Aquinas the life of practical reasonableness and virtue is itself always somehow *beatitudo*, albeit *imperfecta*” (Finnis, *Aquinas*, 109).

³¹⁷ I am not claiming here that Finnis seeks to reduce all talk of human good to practical understanding, as I explain further below.

epistemological or explanatory gap mentioned above, then we might say that any understanding of human good or worth which depends solely on practical understanding is likewise susceptible to this critique.

Finnis agrees that practical thinking is not meant to consider theoretical truths. He writes, "In reflecting on first practical principles and basic goods, we are seeking neither conceptual (second order) nor metaphysical (first order) truth, but rather truths of the third order...truths, that is to say, about what brings order into our choices and actions so that they bear appropriately on human fulfilment."³¹⁸

With the above point in mind, it is helpful here to restate the present goal of this analysis. My primary goal is not to examine the limitations of practical thinking independent of other orders of understanding. Rather, I aim principally to demonstrate the epistemological need for something more than practical understanding 1) when thinking and speaking adequately about human worth or value, especially the good of existing persons (and when making sense of ordinary language in terms of the human good), and 2) when attempting to make sense of and to provide sufficient epistemological grounds for understanding the integral directiveness of the principles of practical reason. The issue at hand continues to revolve around Finnis' account of practical truth.

What is needed beyond an initial practical understanding of human value?

Considering these points leads directly to the following question: when Finnis refers to the need for "some such awareness of human value" to "make sense of the normative force, the directiveness of the principles of practical reason," is he referring merely to practical understanding of human value? Similarly, one might ask whether it is even possible to make further explanatory sense of the directiveness of the principles of practical reason by referring to

³¹⁸ Finnis, "Reflections and Responses," 462.

practical understanding of human value, given that both practical understanding of the directiveness of practical principles and practical understanding of human value are grounded in the same concepts as grasped by the same practical insight. Is this not a case of circular thinking? Is such explanatory thinking helpful?

Finnis seems to think that some circular explanations can be both acceptable and helpful when it comes to making sense of basic goods. He says he agrees with Raz's claim about circular explanations as follows:

"As he [Raz] says, it is possible that basic, irreducible goods can be explained, for although such explanations 'will be circular in that they will explain evaluative concepts using evaluative concepts', the fact is that 'the fundamental concepts all thought relies on cannot be explained in a non-circular way, but some wide circles have explanatory power.'" ³¹⁹

It is perhaps in the context of this statement about "some wide circles [having] explanatory power" that we can examine, in Finnis' view, the role of reflection and practical-cum-theoretical awareness in bringing about supervening "enhanced practical understanding of the worth of the person." ³²⁰

2 – Enhanced practical understanding of the worth of the person: the cognitive contributions of reflection and practical-cum-theoretical awareness

Perhaps reflection and practical-cum-theoretical awareness in Finnis' view help to fill-in some of the intelligible gaps in our initial practical understanding? Finnis explains the contribution of practical-cum-theoretical awareness as follows:

"I think this mutual reinforcement of theoretical and practical insight is pervasive. So one's originally childish insight into the practical truth that those opportunities are opportunities for me *and anyone like me*, or into the opportunity of being a friend by valuing and willing the good of another or others for their own sake, is reinforced by knowledge of the *capacity* of myself and others to make the efforts, commitments, self-disposing devotion to others, and so forth.... On all this deepened knowledge of

³¹⁹ Finnis, "Reflections and Responses," 459-460. Here, Finnis cites Raz, "Value," 18.

³²⁰ *CEJF* I.1, 39.

possibility there supervenes the enhanced practical understanding of the *worth* of the person for whom or by whom such acts of will and communication are possible.”³²¹

As I read the above statement, there are three main parts to Finnis’ argument here. First, presuming the human subject in this scenario is already acting practically according to practical understanding, practical-cum-theoretical awareness provides deepened knowledge of one’s own possibilities and capacities and those of others. That is, mutual reinforcement of theoretical and practical insight deepens (and makes more explicit) one’s initial understanding of possibilities by theoretical insight.³²² This deepened knowledge of possibilities includes, especially, deepened “knowledge of the *capacity* of myself and others to make the efforts, commitments, self-disposing devotion to others, and so forth.” Second, this deepened knowledge of possibilities and capacities reinforces one’s initial understanding of opportunities by practical insight. Third, “on all this deepened [theoretical] knowledge of possibility”—accompanied by reinforced practical knowledge of opportunity—“there supervenes the enhanced practical understanding of the *worth* of the person for whom or by whom such acts of will and communication are possible.”³²³

Consider the following example. By attempting to be a good friend to someone and by aiming to learn from my apparent successes and mistakes in this endeavor, I might begin to appreciate more deeply and explicitly by practical-cum-theoretical awareness—that is, by repeated theoretical insight amidst acting for the good of friendship and observing and reflecting—what friendship is and the kinds of friendship that are indeed possible. Accordingly, practical-cum-theoretical awareness refines, sharpens, and deepens my understanding of

³²¹ *CEJF* I.1, 39.

³²² Recall that human possibilities for Finnis are grasped initially by theoretical insight, such that basic concepts and propositions involving these possibilities we understand theoretically to be true by grasping their conformity to real things in the world. Furthermore, recall that our understanding of these concepts and related propositions is childish, hazy, and in “not fully reflective form” at first—i.e., our understanding of them at first is largely implicit. Finnis uses terms like “childish,” “hazy,” and “not fully reflective” form to refer to our original understanding by initial insight in works such as the following: *CEJF* I.1, 39; *CEJF* I.Introduction, 4; and Finnis, *Natural Law*, 451. Indeed, in these works, Finnis is generally talking about the initial practical insight, but the terms, I think, are likewise relevant for talking about the initial theoretical insight.

³²³ *CEJF* I.1, 39.

friendship: it provides intelligible content that deepens my theoretical understanding of the concept of friendship (and the proposition incorporating it) beyond that grasped originally (as a child) by initial theoretical insight. And, by understanding more deeply both what friendship is and the kinds of friendship that are possible for me and others like me, my understanding of human nature as a way of being and acting likewise deepens. I understand more deeply what human beings are by understanding more deeply what they are capable of. Finnis, I think, seeks to make a parallel point about practical understanding. Mutual reinforcement of theoretical and practical understanding not only deepens my understanding of possibilities, but it also deepens and makes more explicit my practical understanding of basic goods and the integral directiveness of these basic goods.³²⁴ As my practical understanding of basic goods and integral human fulfillment deepens, my practical, anticipatory understanding of the good of subject-instances—who are the subjects of deepened opportunities and whose fulfillment we can understand by anticipation to participate in the ideal of integral human fulfillment—likewise deepens.

Analysis and preliminary conclusions on reflection and practical-cum-theoretical awareness

How do we interpret Finnis' argument? Indeed, what we might call epistemological fruits certainly seem to arise by reflection and practical-cum-theoretical awareness. But, importantly, as I read Finnis, while understanding by insight introduces new basic concepts, reflection and practical-cum-theoretical awareness do not introduce new *basic* concepts. Rather, these latter cognitive activities simply deepen one's initial (largely implicit) understanding of basic concepts—adding and reinforcing content and making one's understanding of already-grasped basic

³²⁴ See Finnis, *Natural Law*, 451, including Finnis' citation from *CEJF* I.14, 215. Similar to what I suggested above concerning theoretical understanding, I presume in Finnis' view that amidst continuing to act, to observe, and to reflect (including reflection upon deepened understanding of possibilities following repeated theoretical insight), one's understanding of opportunities continues to deepen by repeated practical insight. As Finnis suggests, there is "mutual reinforcement of theoretical and practical insight" (*CEJF* I.1, 39).

concepts more defined and explicit.³²⁵ Finnis often employs terms like “deepened,” “enhanced,” and “reinforced” to describe the benefits of practical-cum-theoretical awareness.³²⁶ He suggests, as already discussed, for example, that reflection helps one understand the “true extent and rationale” of the “anyone like me” initially grasped by practical insight, namely, “any human person.”³²⁷ With this conceptual point in mind, I turn to the third step of our analysis: an examination of whether enhanced practical understanding of human worth successfully bridges the explanatory gap in the above account of practical truth.

3 – Whether enhanced practical understanding of human worth can bridge the explanatory gap in the above account of practical truth

As I understand Finnis, given the above point, reflection and practical-cum-theoretical awareness cannot add conceptual content about the human good that is different in basic kind from that grasped initially by practical insight. In other words, since the initial grasp of the human good by practical insight is understood practically (as practical truth), reflection and practical-cum-theoretical awareness can only deepen this practical understanding. Practical understanding deepened by reflection and practical-cum-theoretical awareness cannot approach, for example, any kind of theoretical understanding of the good of human persons as a reality to be acknowledged. Neither can such understanding have anything to say about the present, already given, acknowledgeable *good* of a person’s virtues, actions, passions, or other instances of proximately actualized possibilities (however deeply by reflection these instances or secondary perfections are understood). Furthermore, recall that to speak about *this* person’s present good based solely upon practical understanding is to situate any understanding of the person’s *actual*

³²⁵ I suggest (and I think Finnis would agree) that reflection and practical-cum-theoretical awareness also aid our reasoning when forming new, more complex concepts. Notably, however, these are not *basic* concepts.

³²⁶ *CEJF* I.1, 39.

³²⁷ Finnis, *Natural Law*, 451.

good ultimately in terms of a practically unrealizable ideal—again, I think this risks unintelligibility.³²⁸

Accordingly, I do not see how practical understanding of human worth, even as deepened and enhanced, provides any new conceptual understanding to “make sense of the normative force, the [integral] directiveness of the principles of practical reason.” I do not see how practical understanding alone can make sense of or explain itself. Thus, are we nonetheless left with an awareness of human value that, although informed by deepened knowledge of human possibilities and made more explicit by reflection and practical-cum-theoretical awareness, is merely a practical truth about the good of subject-instances of is-to-be opportunities grounded in practical (anticipatory) understanding?

Another possibility

There is another possibility. One of Finnis’ main points in the above citation, I think, is that *acting* according to one’s *practical* understanding of human goods can deepen one’s *theoretical* understanding of human possibilities and capacities—deepening and making more explicit the theoretical understanding of related concepts and propositions.³²⁹ Given this point and the other

³²⁸ Indeed, Finnis says that integral human fulfillment is “not a practical goal at all” in this life (*CEJF* I.10, 167). Rather, its place in practical reasoning, he says, is “as the ideal that provides the content of the first principle of morality” (167). However, Finnis does say that integral human fulfillment is the human being’s *true last end* as understood by faith. He writes, “It is faith, not philosophy, that proposes that that ideal may be realized, by divine power and grace. Its realization would be, I suggest, a state of affairs that would not be, formally, a human act, nor, formally, a human possession, though it would involve both activity and enjoyment” (167-168). As such, in Finnis’ view, insofar as one understands by faith that integral human flourishing is realizable by divine grace and is good (as participation in the life God, who is good *per se*), it seems there is a sense in which infused practical understanding by cognitive conformity to this end can be said to grasp (by faith) that *this* existing human being is good as a reality to be acknowledged (i.e., there is conformity of infused practical and infused theoretical understanding by faith). In this case, one’s understanding of the human good is not by practical insight but by faith. As such, this point does not solve the explanatory gap in the above account of practical truth. This point also raises further questions, which cannot be addressed here, about Finnis’ understanding of the irreducible complexity of integral human fulfillment as final end (171-172).

³²⁹ Presumably, as I understand Finnis, the mutual reinforcement works something like the following: amidst continuing to act (according to practical understanding), to observe, and to reflect, one’s understanding of possibilities continues to deepen by repeated theoretical insight. Finnis writes, “By reflection, the theoretical can appropriate what was known practically” (Finnis, *Aquinas*, 94).

epistemological fruits of practical-cum-theoretical awareness already mentioned above, one might suggest that these fruits provide, in a certain sense, evidence (circumstantial) for or tentative confirmation of some kind of epistemological correlation or even *conformity* between theoretical and practical insight—between theoretical and practical truth. Such a correlation might suggest that our practical understanding (or practical-cum-theoretical awareness or “responsive awareness”³³⁰ or supervening “enhanced practical understanding”³³¹) of the worth of the person is not only anticipatory (as grounded precisely in practical insight) but is also *likely* (by correlation) to have some basis in existing reality (i.e., as a reality to be acknowledged). How does this realization bear upon our question: is enhanced practical understanding of the worth of the person sufficient to bridge the explanatory gap in the above account of practical truth, thus eliminating any epistemological gap?

What is notable here is that any judgment to affirm the worth of the person as a reality to be acknowledged is based precisely on *inference* rather than on understanding by insight. Is this inference *alone* sufficient to ground one’s awareness of human value—such that one is able “to make sense of the normative force, the directiveness of the principles of practical reason,” as Finnis suggests?

I think it is helpful to ask this question in the context of discussions about applied, ethically normative ideas such as human dignity, human rights, friendship, and love between persons. Consider Finnis claim about human rights: “there are rights which every member of our species is entitled to: human rights. But it would be equivocal and misleading to say, without clarification, that we have these rights because we are human. Rather, we each have them because every individual member of the species has the dignity of being a person.”³³² Can we

³³⁰ *CEJF* I.1, 36. I think Finnis uses the term “responsive awareness” to convey that one’s awareness of human value in this context arises amidst mutual reinforcement of theoretical and practical insights, in part, by *acting* according to one’s practical understanding. Acting, in a certain sense, propels practical-cum-theoretical awareness forward.

³³¹ *CEJF* I.1, 39.

³³² Finnis, *Aquinas*, 176.

speaking about normative rights claims in terms of a concept of human dignity that is grounded ultimately upon inference?

I do not think so, nor do I think Finnis ultimately relies upon practical understanding or inference to ground one's understanding of human dignity. In the next section, I make a case for this point, and then in the following section, I return to concluding analysis regarding Finnis' account of practical truth and the relationship between practical and theoretical truth.

UNDERSTANDING THE INTRINSIC GOOD OF THE PERSON

In discussing the dignity of being a person in his book *Aquinas*, Finnis says, following Aquinas, that dignity "connotes both superiority (e.g., in power, excellence, status) and intrinsic, non-dependent worth."³³³ To explain "intrinsic, non-dependent worth" Finnis cites Aquinas in a footnote: "'Dignity' signifies something's goodness for its own sake {*propter seipsum*}."³³⁴ Then, Finnis offers a brief discussion of the links between the terms "dignity," "good," and "person."³³⁵ What is important to see here, I think, is that, for Finnis, to grasp something about the "dignity of being a person" is to grasp something about the intrinsic good of the person. Regarding the dignity of being a person, Finnis writes the following:

"[W]e each have [rights] because every individual member of the species has the dignity of being a person. And this is not a 'status' to be conferred or withdrawn, but a reality to be acknowledged. It is a truth already grasped in one's understanding of basic reasons for actions: goods good for me and anyone like me—anyone who shares my nature, any human being."³³⁶

There are several points to highlight in this passage. First, notice Finnis' use of the phrase "reality to be acknowledged." Although I have used the phrase repeatedly in my analysis above, this is the first time I cite Finnis' own use of the phrase. If we return to Finnis' discussion of theoretical

³³³ Finnis, *Aquinas*, 179.

³³⁴ Aquinas, *Sent.* III, d. 35, q. 1, a. 4, sol. 1 as cited in Finnis, *Aquinas*, 179 n. 219.

³³⁵ Finnis writes, "The word and concept *persona* entails *dignitas*, and so is applicable to every individual of a rational nature" (Finnis, *Aquinas*, 176 n. 206). He points to *ST I*, q. 29, a. 3, ad 2.

³³⁶ Finnis, *Aquinas*, 176.

and practical truth, it seems clear to me that to grasp the good of a person precisely as a “reality to be acknowledged” is not (only or in the first instance) merely to grasp the practical truth of the good of the person. Rather, it is primarily to grasp something about the present, already given *is-reality* of the person’s good. It is to grasp the theoretical truth of the good of the person. To understand the good of *this* person is to be conformed cognitively to the reality of *this* person’s intrinsic good (at least implicitly).³³⁷ Recall, for Finnis, it is always *theoretical insight* that grasps the “conformity of knowledge to subject-matter”—whether what is understood is the “double reality” of *this* object of possibility and *this* subject, or, I suggest, whether it is the reality of the intrinsic good of *this* person (or the reality of the good of *this* virtue, action, or passion inhering in *this* person). Although I am not aware of Finnis stating this claim explicitly, I suggest that one’s understanding of human dignity in his view is conceptually grounded in theoretical insight (at least implicitly).

Second, notice Finnis says that the intrinsic good of the person is “already grasped”—albeit, vaguely and confusedly at first—in one’s understanding of basic goods by practical insight. This claim has an important implication, I think. If the dignity of being a person is both “already grasped” *and* grasped by theoretical insight as a reality to be acknowledged, then it must be grasped initially by theoretical insight (a second, *further* theoretical insight, I suggest)³³⁸ prior (at least analytically prior) to the practical insight. Therefore, it seems to me that in Finnis’ view intrinsic human dignity can be “already grasped in one’s understanding of basic reasons for actions,” but only in the sense that it is already grasped and understood analytically *prior* to the practical insight—and 1) not in the sense that it is grasped precisely by practical insight, for

³³⁷ Finnis mentions that love of a person’s given reality is “not practical but contentment or joy” in Grisez, Boyle, and Finnis, “Practical Principles,” 115. He distinguishes this love from the practical love for “whatever still may be hoped for as that person’s fulfillment” (115).

³³⁸ As I discuss in chapter 5, I suggest that any theoretical understanding of human dignity (intrinsic human good) must be grasped by *further* theoretical insight, that is, by a second theoretical insight after the initial theoretical insight by which the child originally grasps human possibility (in this case, the possibility of knowledge specifically) and the double reality of objects and subjects of possibility. This is for the simple reason that one must understand *that* a person exists prior (at least analytically prior) to grasping the intrinsic good of *this* existing person.

practical understanding is of practical truth, and 2) not in any sense that suggests the practical insight depends epistemologically on the theoretical understanding of human dignity. What is important to recognize here is that practical truth in Finnis' account cannot depend epistemologically on any already grasped theoretical understanding of human dignity (or intrinsic human good). Otherwise, in Finnis' view there would be a sense in which theoretical understanding of intrinsic human good is epistemologically *more basic* than practical understanding of the basic goods, and there would be a sense in which practical truth is true epistemologically by conformity to the existing person under the aspect of her intrinsic good as understood by theoretical insight³³⁹—both of which, I think, Finnis denies. Rather, as I understand Finnis, practical understanding can only allow for (but not require, epistemologically) a parallel, conceptually independent³⁴⁰ theoretical understanding of human dignity.

WHETHER CORRELATION BETWEEN PRACTICAL AND THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING SUFFICIENTLY RESOLVES THE EXPLANATORY GAP

Analysis

Given the above, if we return to the correlation argument between practical and theoretical understanding as discussed above—and here I speculate—perhaps in Finnis' account there is a sense in which enhanced practical understanding of human worth can point to (and call our attention to) the already implicit understanding of human dignity grasped by theoretical insight, should it be epistemologically present.³⁴¹ Perhaps Finnis thinks one's awareness of this correlation (by practical-cum-theoretical awareness) is sufficient to resolve the explanatory gap he identifies above.

³³⁹ As I argue in chapter 5, contrary to Finnis, I think these are valid claims.

³⁴⁰ That is, independent epistemologically with respect to natural human understanding.

³⁴¹ At this point, prior to significant reflection, perhaps one is not yet explicitly aware of having a theoretical concept of human dignity.

However, in Finnis' account, while there may be a limited sense in which theoretical understanding of human dignity can be "already grasped in one's understanding of basic reasons for actions" as just suggested, significantly, this theoretical understanding of human dignity *cannot* be the very concept by which the "for me and anyone like me" intrinsic to the initial understanding of first practical principles is made intelligible. This is because first practical principles are understood as *practically true* in Finnis' view. Therefore, the subject term of a practical proposition (i.e., one of the basic goods) and the proposition itself are understood *not* by conformity but by anticipation. The practical insight, by definition, cannot understand truth by grasping an indicative proposition's conformity to the reality of the thing signified by its subject (i.e., the real "conformity of intellect and thing"³⁴²). And, neither can it grasp a supposed logical conformity of theoretical truth to practical truth within the proposition itself and thus claim to link practical understanding of the proposition's subject to theoretical understanding of its predicate (e.g., the practical insight cannot link practical understanding of the term "knowledge" to theoretical understanding of the phrase "for me and anyone like me," such that the phrase is made intelligible according to a theoretical concept of human dignity).³⁴³ The practical insight, in Finnis' view, simply does not grasp truth by conformity (whether that conformity is to an existing thing or to an idea in the mind).

Brief summary on the relationship between practical and theoretical truth in Finnis' view

To summarize, practical truth in Finnis' view indeed depends on theoretical truth. Practical truth clearly depends epistemologically (in part) upon the theoretical understanding of possibilities (including theoretical understanding of the double reality of objects and subjects of possibility).

³⁴² ST I, q. 16, a. 2. C.f. DV 1.

³⁴³ For example, it is not possible to say the following: "Knowledge is to be pursued [practically understood] for me and anyone like me [theoretically understood according to a concept of human dignity]." The practical insight, by definition, does not grasp an intelligible relation (of logical conformity) between the theoretical understanding of "good" and the practical understanding of "good."

And, as I have emphasized already, what is understood practically is not reducible to theoretical understanding but is grasped by *further* practical insight. Furthermore, as we have just observed, though Finnis mentions this only briefly and indirectly, practical truth seems to allow for a parallel, independent, already grasped theoretical understanding of human dignity, should it be already understood. However, as I mentioned above, practical truth cannot depend epistemologically upon any already grasped theoretical understanding of intrinsic human dignity (good), per Finnis' definition of practical truth; otherwise, the basic goods would cease to be the basic epistemological concepts of human good that Finnis claims them to be.³⁴⁴

Therefore, it seems that the phrase "for me and anyone like me" included in the initial grasp of first practical principles in Finnis' view can be understood both in light of 1) the existing reality of personal subjects in the world as grasped by theoretical insight, and 2) the practical good of these subjects as grasped by practical insight (according to an anticipatory understanding of human fulfillment), but *not* in light of 3) the *already grasped* reality of their intrinsic good as real existing human persons. The theoretical, "already grasped" understanding of human dignity to which Finnis refers above, if it should be present epistemologically, can only be understood separately alongside that which is understood by practical insight.

Related conclusions

Considering the above discussion, there are two related conclusions concerning Finnis' account. First, given Finnis' understanding of practical truth, the basic goods and first practical principles are not grasped in light of any theoretical understanding of the human good. The practical insight indeed depends on the theoretical understanding of human possibilities, but it does not depend upon (nor can it consider) the good to be acknowledged of things in reality. For, again, according

³⁴⁴ As I discuss in chapter 5, I think we can speak about basic goods of practical reason *by extension* rather than merely *by anticipation*. This difference suggests an alternate understanding of practical truth and its relation to theoretical truth.

to the definition of practical truth, practical understanding of the good is true *not* by conformity to real, existing things, including their reality as good, but by anticipation.

Second, the phrase “for me and anyone like me” does not signify a unified conception of the human person’s good according to Finnis’ account of practical truth. Regardless of whether the meaning of the phrase in everyday language includes an already grasped, theoretical understanding of human dignity, in addition to the phrase’s practical understanding, as Finnis seems to suggest, this combination of concepts cannot be understood epistemologically according to some intelligible whole. Rather, given Finnis’ understanding of practical truth, such a conceptual unity can only be posited by inference, correlation, assumption, or assertion—and not according to understanding by insight. In other words, given Finnis’ view of practical truth, practical understanding of human good is epistemologically and conceptually separate from any theoretical understanding of human good. And, again, any supposed connection between the two understandings is possible epistemologically only by inference, correlation, assumption, assertion, etc. Recall what was said above about Finnis’ view of the relationship between theoretical and practical truth: the two types of truth specify opposite relationships between the human mind and its objects, but they are not equivocal terms. Rather, according to Finnis, they are analogically related, for ultimately, there is “conformity of the human mind, and its objects, with the mind of God.”³⁴⁵ My point here is that notwithstanding Finnis’ claim of ultimate conformity, from an epistemological perspective, there seems to be no intelligible relation between the two understandings of truth. How does this constraint in Finnis’ epistemology impact some of the applied scenarios he discusses?

³⁴⁵ See Finnis, *Aquinas*, 100, n. t. Grisez, Boyle, and Finnis, “Practical Principles,” 117. On understanding something about the conformity of practical truth and theoretical truth by faith, see *CEJF* I.10, 167-168.

Two applied examples

Here, I briefly examine two such examples: first, one of Finnis' statements on friendship, and second, his discussion of reason and love in a short commentary on Shakespeare's poem known as "Phoenix and Turtle." To begin, consider this statement of Finnis on friendship, to which I have added several labels in brackets to aid my subsequent analysis:

"For there can be no friendship or real harmony [A-theoretical truth] between persons where one fails to recognize or take as a reason for action, the good of the other person(s) [B-practical truth] as worth pursuing and respecting as an end in itself [C-theoretical truth], for the sake of the other(s) rather than merely for one's own sake."³⁴⁶

At each of the labels in brackets, I propose a conceptual clarification of the terms involved based on the above discussion. At point A, I suggest Finnis is referring to theoretical understanding of a hypothetical instance of friendship—understood theoretically not as a good but as an instance of the possibility of friendship between two existing persons. At point B, I suggest Finnis is referring to practical understanding of the good of the other person, that is, understanding of the person's good by anticipating his or her flourishing in view of the ideal of integral human fulfillment. Here, as I mentioned earlier, insofar as the person's good is understood by anticipation of an ideal (which itself cannot be realized by practical activity)³⁴⁷, then I think we understand the individual's good to be that of an existing subject-instance of anticipatory, practical understanding—not that of a person in the full sense of the term. Accordingly, practical understanding of the other person's good may be useful when thinking and acting practically, but it is incomplete. At point C, I suggest Finnis is referring to theoretical understanding of the good of the person, as informed by a theoretical concept of human dignity. Given integral human fulfillment is an ideal end and not a goal to be attained in Finnis' view³⁴⁸, as already mentioned, it

³⁴⁶ Finnis, *Aquinas*, 112.

³⁴⁷ Finnis, *Aquinas*, 105. C.f., Finnis, *Natural Law*, 419.

³⁴⁸ Finnis, *Natural Law*, 419, 451.

seems to me that practical understanding alone cannot make sense of the good of the other person precisely as an end *in himself/herself* (here and now).

In the sentence cited above, I suggest it is not possible as interpreted to say (i.e., it is not possible to make a theoretical judgment in truth) that friendship or any other practical good (B) can be pursued for the sake of the other person precisely as an end in himself/herself (C). This is because there is no epistemological connection between practical and theoretical truth in Finnis' view. Rather, the above proposition can only be inferred, assumed, or asserted to be true. Furthermore, I suggest that the passage's ending phrase, namely, "for the sake of the other(s) rather than merely for one's own sake," can only be understood, like the phrase "for me and anyone like me," as follows: 1) theoretically according to the existence of the subject, and 2) practically according to the practical good of the subject-instance, but *not* 3) theoretically according to the dignity of being a person. The third meaning is ruled out (except by inference, correlation, assertion, etc.) because the subject of the proposition (i.e., friendship or some other basic good) is understood practically. And, as already argued, epistemologically in Finnis' view, we do not understand by insight the relationship between theoretical and practical truth.

Now, I move to the second example mentioned above. Consider Finnis' discussion of reason and love in his commentary on Shakespeare's poem "Phoenix and Turtle" as follows:

"So I take the poem to be saying—not that Love supplies motives unknown to reason, motives which then operate in place of Reason, in Reason's place—but rather (i) that the Love exemplified in the literally exemplary couple *has* the true reasons (fully acknowledgeable by Reason) that are given by the worth of the persons involved, their true loveableness; but (ii) that to live up to this takes more than the intelligibility of the loveable goods instantiated in these loveable persons; it takes the wholehearted response of those persons; and (iii) that to observe by example the possibility of such devoted, constant, 'true' responsiveness enables one to deepen and reinforce one's understanding of the goods of knowledge, friendship, and practical reasonableness and thus also one's understanding of the good/value of the persons whose whole lives instantiate and exemplify those goods so awesomely. Love *does have* reasons, but these would remain 'no reason' if they remained merely intelligibilities affirmable by reason, and were not taken up, out of the fungibility of goods that can be and are instantiable in countless people, and embodied in *commitment to this particular person*."³⁴⁹

³⁴⁹ CEJF I.1, 40.

Although much could be said about Finnis' interpretation, I offer several brief points that highlight a few of the issues I have mentioned above. First, notice in (i) Finnis claims that the reasons for acting (as practically understood) are "given by the worth of the persons involved, their true loveableness." Here, in speaking about the worth of the persons, their true loveableness, Finnis is clearly speaking about their human dignity as understood theoretically—their intrinsic good and true loveableness is understood as given, as a reality to be acknowledged. But, a question immediately arises: how does Finnis know (epistemologically speaking) that basic goods as practically understood are *given* by the worth of the person as theoretically understood? Epistemologically in Finnis' view, as already discussed, we do not understand the relationship between practical truth and theoretical truth by insight. Rather, according to Finnis' epistemology as I understand it, we can only infer, assert, or posit a relation between these kinds of truth.

In points (ii) and (iii), again, an intelligible relation is inferred between practical and theoretical truth. And, this inference culminates in the following line: "Love *does have* reasons...." My concern about this point is as follows: how can acting practically for human goods be an authentic act of love for *this* person, again, if we do not genuinely understand the relationship between practical and theoretical truth? Or, stated differently, how can I interpret another person's practical action for me (e.g., gift giving) as an authentic act of love? Must I rely on inference or perhaps hope³⁵⁰? Is it not possible (at least in principle) for me to *understand* (by insight) that it is really an act of love? It seems to me that human acts need to be intelligible as authentic acts of human love, at least *in principle* (even if such loving acts are not *actually* possible without grace because of sin). Otherwise, humanly speaking, from the beginning, why would it be intelligible and choiceworthy (again, at least in principle) to affirm the intrinsic good of *this* person (theoretically) and then risk making a life-long commitment (practically) to act for

³⁵⁰ Finnis says, "In acting *for the basic goods*, one's hope simply is to foster them *in and for persons*" (Grisez, Boyle, and Finnis, "Practical Principles," 115).

this person's good (except of course by faith)—unless, perhaps, as Finnis suggests, one observes the possibility of friendship or love realized in others (e.g., in the exemplary couple) and then decides to affirm one's inference (namely, that acting practically can be an authentic act of love) based on this evidence? However, then, does not the same epistemological question simply shift to the exemplary couple: why should the couple risk this practical commitment in the first place? It seems to me that such reasoning cannot proceed endlessly. I do not doubt that there is ultimate conformity between theoretical and practical truth. I simply point out that, according to Finnis' epistemology, we can only infer this conformity.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, I confirm that practical understanding is certainly legitimate and necessary for both thinking about and performing good human actions, and for pursuing the active life of virtue and practical reasonableness. My question is about how practical understanding is true. In this study, I have attempted to clarify Finnis' answer to this question by examining, in particular, the epistemological significance of the phrase "for me and anyone like me," the meaning of which, Finnis says, is intrinsic to the initial grasp of first practical principles. Finnis provides a deeply insightful theory of how *understanding by insight* (what Aquinas calls *intellectus*) grounds our understanding of both theoretical and practical truth. One of Finnis' key insights, I think, concerns the epistemological contribution of practical-cum-theoretical awareness. As I understand Finnis, this awareness reveals a correlation between acting practically (based on practical understanding) and the deepening of one's theoretical understanding of human possibilities.

However, examining Finnis' view, I think, reveals at least two concerns. First, Finnis' discussion of human goods, as I understand it, does not seem to provide sufficient conceptual content for speaking about the present good of real things in the world, including both 1) the

already-given good of existing human subjects and objects of opportunity and 2) the good of real virtues, actions, and passions (and other secondary perfections) involved in our ongoing relations with persons, including especially our friendships. Everyday language use clearly demands, I think, the need to speak about the present good of things in the world and especially the intrinsic good of *this* person, who is good not only as a subject-instance of practical understanding but also *as a reality to be acknowledged*. I think this first concern can be resolved by emphasizing the need for theoretical understanding of human good, in addition to practical understanding, in our ethical discussions.

Second, insofar as I understand Finnis' view, I think there seems to be an epistemological gap in his discussion of the grounds for practical truth. This gap is not entirely resolved, I think, by Finnis' claim that awareness of human value helps to make sense of the integral directiveness of the first principles of practical reason. While Finnis' attempt to give awareness of human worth an explanatory role in making sense of practical truth is indeed valuable, ultimately, I think an epistemological gap remains. There is a persisting epistemological gap in Finnis' view, I think, because, according to his definition of practical truth, it is not possible epistemologically to establish any sense of conformity between one's theoretical understanding of intrinsic human dignity and one's practical understanding of human goods, except by inference or correlation.³⁵¹ This epistemological dependence upon inference 1) restricts the meaning and applicability of the phrase "for me and anyone like me," and 2) partially constrains Finnis' discussion of applied ethical topics such as friendship and human love between persons. I think the above epistemological gap suggests that a partial redefinition of practical truth is needed.

³⁵¹ Note that having subsequently communicated with Finnis after writing this chapter, my revised understanding of his view is that he thinks correlation or coherence (not conformity) between theoretical and practical truth is simply the best we can achieve in this life. Furthermore, regarding *Aquinas*, 176, my understanding is that Finnis does not intend to suggest that the practical insight depends on a theoretical understanding of human dignity. Finnis is satisfied with the limitations of practical judgments of the good of persons as subject-instances, it seems, because he regards practical truth to be so fundamental. According to Finnis, practical truth is not somehow inferior to theoretical truth; rather, it is simply a different kind of truth.

I do think there is an epistemological case to be made for practical truth, but I propose a somewhat different understanding of practical truth and its relation to theoretical truth, as I put forward in chapter 5. There, building upon the work of Aquinas and several of his interpreters (including Finnis), I examine how we might understand Aquinas' view that theoretical truth becomes practical "by extension."³⁵² I suggest that practical truth *must* depend epistemologically upon theoretical understanding of intrinsic human good³⁵³ (understood at least implicitly) to avoid the aforementioned epistemological gap. I also suggest that while ethics (a third-order science) is prior to metaphysics (a first-order science) in the order of learning,³⁵⁴ ethics is not epistemologically prior to one's initial pre-scientific, implicit, theoretical grasp of the intrinsic good³⁵⁵ of *this* human person in act.

³⁵² See ST I, q. 79, a. 11 and Aquinas' reference to Aristotle's *De Anima* III.10.

³⁵³ See ST I, q. 6, a. 3 ad 3.

³⁵⁴ Finnis discusses this in Finnis, *Aquinas*, 92, 102 n. z. C.f., *Ethic* VI.7 (1211).

³⁵⁵ Dewan makes a similar point in Dewan, "Natural Lights," 205-206, 211-212.

Part II

Chapter Three: A Turn to Simple Judgment and Simple Truth

Having raised concerns in Part I about what I think are two poles of contemporary Thomistic discourse on natural understanding of the human good and practical truth—namely, the theories of John Bowlin and John Finnis—I attempt in Part II, first, to consider practical thinking’s relation to simple thinking, and then, to articulate the beginnings of a third theory of practical truth situated somewhat moderately between the other two. I hope this third theory might answer some of the objections I raise in previous chapters. Recall in the Introduction I propose a set of motivating questions to guide this study: how does natural understanding of the human good and practical truth arise, and what theoretical groundwork is needed to give a practically relevant, consistent account of this? This second motivating question focuses my approach for much of Part II.

My objectives in the present chapter are as follows. I seek, first, to motivate my turn from the topic of the human good and practical truth in Part I to the topic of simple (speculative) judgment at the start of Part II; second, to locate this turn in a contemporary Thomistic discourse on practical thinking in the context of concrete human agency; third, to establish why I cannot simply presume an existing Thomistic account of speculative truth and then attend only to how speculative thinking becomes practical; and fourth, to explain my reasons for considering Robert Sokolowski’s non-Thomistic, descriptive account of human judgment in chapter 4. I write the present chapter especially for a Thomist audience, as I do not attempt to defend all the Thomistic claims I presume in the text below.

MOTIVATIONS TO TURN TO THE TOPIC OF SIMPLE JUDGMENT AND SIMPLE TRUTH

I begin by examining human judgment and what Aquinas calls speculative truth, which I also call simple truth. While my eventual goal is to consider how natural understanding of the human good and practical truth arises according to a Thomistic point of view, I initially turn to a discussion of human judgment and simple truth guided by Aquinas' claim that practical thinking depends on speculative thinking.³⁵⁶ I claim that articulating a defensible account of practical thinking depends on articulating a defensible account of simple thinking. As I mention in Part I, Bowlin and Finnis also acknowledge this general dependency.³⁵⁷ But, I suggest these authors do not adequately consider the nature of this dependency, especially in the context of actual thinking and human agency.

In support of my turn to examine how simple judgment arises actually and in particular, consider the following three claims.

First claim

My first claim is that a practically relevant, consistent account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth must allow practical thinking by virtue of this understanding to proceed in the context of actual human agency.³⁵⁸ In other words, the claim is that such an account must allow both 1) practical understanding of the human good and practical truth to proceed in act, and 2) practical thinking that participates in this understanding to proceed additionally in act as ordered to the end of concrete, voluntary human action.

Thus, our account cannot examine the topic somehow entirely in abstract or as divided from actual human agency. This requirement seems to follow from Aquinas' view that human

³⁵⁶ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 11. *DV* 14.4.

³⁵⁷ Bowlin, 97 n. 21. *CEJF* I.1, 32-33.

³⁵⁸ See Daniel Westberg, *Right Practical Reason: Aristotle, Action, and Prudence in Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 39.

understanding becomes practical by “extension” to operation, which is the “application of form to matter.”³⁵⁹ For, if practical thinking is ordered to the end of voluntary, concrete operation—and if practical thinking involves understanding the human good as an end of concrete operation³⁶⁰—then, assuming a human being performs a particular human act, the implication is that she understands something about the human good and practical truth actually and in particular, by virtue of particular acts of understanding in the intellect.

Daniel Westberg argues that practical thinking for Aquinas is situated in an account of concrete human agency. Below, to offer context for my approach in Part II, I briefly attempt to situate the present study in dialogue with Westberg’s book.

Second claim

Recall Aquinas’ claim that practical thinking depends on simple thinking. My second claim is that insofar as practical thinking proceeds in the intellect in act, the simple thinking upon which this practical thinking depends likewise proceeds in act. This claim is in keeping with the claim I mention in the Introduction regarding the metaphysical and psychological unity of the human act: that a theory of natural human understanding *quoad nos* must preserve the unity (by participation) of simple and practical thinking in human understanding and the unity of understanding and willing in human action.³⁶¹ I suggest this claim is consistent with Aquinas’ view that the speculative and practical intellects differ accidentally and that they are not separate powers. Aquinas writes, “Now, to a thing apprehended by the intellect, it is accidental whether it be directed to operation or not, and according to this the speculative and practical intellects differ.”³⁶² An implication of Aquinas’ view seems to be the following. If we assume that a particular operation of practical thinking proceeds in the context of actual human agency—and, if

³⁵⁹ DV 14.4. ST I, q. 14, a. 16.

³⁶⁰ ST I, q. 79, a. 11; I-II, q. 64, a. 3. DV 14.4.

³⁶¹ See ST I-II, q. 17, a. 4.

³⁶² ST I, q. 79, a. 11, esp. ad 2. C.f. I-II, q. 64, a. 3. Brock, *Philosophy*, 88-89.

we assume that practical thinking differs accidentally from speculative thinking—then a particular operation of speculative thinking must likewise proceed in act, which is the proximate subject of that practical thinking.³⁶³

In sum given Aquinas' claim that practical thinking depends on simple thinking, my second claim is that a defensible account of practical thinking in the context of actual human agency—and, indeed, of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth—depends on having a defensible account of how simple thinking proceeds in act. That is, a practically relevant, consistent account of the former demands a defensible account of the latter. The goal is to examine how a particular act of simple thinking extends to operation, such that natural understanding of the human good and practical truth arises, and such that additional practical thinking ordered to the end of concrete operation can proceed. In what follows, I do not consider practical thinking *in isolation from* simple thinking, nor do I consider practical thinking's dependence upon simple thinking *merely in general or in abstract*.

Michael Sherwin discusses practical thinking's dependence on acts of speculative apprehension of the good and simple volition in his interpretation of Aquinas' view. In the following section, I briefly attempt to locate my project in dialogue with both Westberg and Sherwin.

Third claim

My third claim is that a defensible account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth depends specifically on an account of *simple judgment* in act—that is, it depends on an account of how simple judgment arises actually and in particular in the human intellect. I suggest this third claim is implied in Aquinas' view that truth is in the intellect, properly speaking, by judgment,³⁶⁴ and in his claims that the intellect apprehends the good after apprehending the

³⁶³ The primary, substantial subject is the individual human being who thinks and acts.

³⁶⁴ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2.

true³⁶⁵ and that the true is a particular good.³⁶⁶ Indeed, as I discuss below, there is something telling about Aquinas' claim that the human intellect's operation of judgment is *proper to itself*.³⁶⁷

This third claim is not mentioned in the works of Westberg and Sherwin that I discuss below. After briefly locating the first two claims above in a dialogue with these authors, I attempt to show what remains unclear and why I think we need an account of simple human judgment in act.

A THOMISTIC DIALOGUE ON PRACTICAL THINKING IN THE CONTEXT OF ACTUAL HUMAN AGENCY

To locate the present study—including the above claims—in the context of a preceding Thomistic discussion of practical human thinking, I turn first to Daniel Westberg's *Right Practical Reason: Aristotle, Action, and Prudence in Aquinas* (1994), and then to Michael Sherwin's *By Knowledge and By Love* (2005). Both authors identify a psychology of voluntary, concrete human action in the works of Aquinas, and both try to clarify and to develop Thomistic thinking on the matter.³⁶⁸ In what follows, I do not attempt to engage these authors in depth. After briefly considering this dialogue, I raise several questions that guide my approach in the following chapters.

Westberg's *Right Practical Reason: Aristotle, Action, and Prudence in Aquinas*

In his book Westberg argues that Aquinas' discussion of practical thinking in the *Prima Secundae* of the *Summa Theologiae* qq. 12-17 is a metaphysical and psychological account of *actual* human agency—of how the acting human person arrives at *particular* action—and *not* a theory of the human being's *general* orientation to practical reasoning and the moral life, as he thinks some

³⁶⁵ ST I, q. 16, a. 4 ad 2.

³⁶⁶ ST I, q. 16, a. 4 ad 1; II-II, q. 109, a. 2 ad 1. C.f. ST I, q. 79, a. 11 ad 2.

³⁶⁷ DV 1.3.

³⁶⁸ Westberg quotes Elizabeth Anscombe, who writes about moral philosophy's need for an "adequate philosophy of psychology" (G.E.M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy*, 33 (1958), 1 as cited in Westberg, 39).

other Thomists suggest (Westberg points to Cajetan, for example).³⁶⁹ Westberg attempts to simplify prior Thomistic thinking on practical reason by articulating Aquinas' account in terms of a four-stage scheme involving intention, deliberation (an optional step), decision, and execution.³⁷⁰ He emphasizes the complementary "unity of thought and will" in practical reasoning.³⁷¹ In addition, he calls attention to the last and principal stage of practical reason (and of the virtue of prudence) in Aquinas' view, namely, execution (and, specifically, the cognitive operation 'to command'), which consists in carrying out a particular practical action.³⁷²

Westberg's claim is significant because it argues that practical reasoning is not a general mental process for Aquinas. Rather, practical reasoning involves complementary operations of intellect and will and is principally ordered to completion of a concrete human act. As I mention above, Aquinas says that practical operation is the "application of form to matter,"³⁷³ and this statement seems to support Westberg's interpretation at least narrowly on this point. In what follows, I adopt the Thomistic view that human understanding becomes practical by extension to *concrete* human operation.³⁷⁴

Westberg makes a separate claim about questions 8-11 in the *Prima Secundae*, which precede Aquinas' analysis of intention in q. 12. He claims that Aquinas' discussion in these questions is *not* about actual human agency. Instead, Westberg says this prior discussion is part of Aquinas' *general* account of the relation between human desire and action: it is about the *general* involvement of reason and will.³⁷⁵ "It is only with q. 12 that Thomas begins his special discussion of the actual process of human action," Westberg writes.³⁷⁶

³⁶⁹ I do not examine Westberg's critique of Cajetan. See Westberg 89, 124-125, 133, 229, 234.

³⁷⁰ Westberg, 131.

³⁷¹ Westberg, 50.

³⁷² Westberg, 5, 13-14, 59, 119-135, 234-235. See *ST* II-II, q. 47, a. 8.

³⁷³ *ST* I, q. 14, a. 16.

³⁷⁴ *DV* 14.4.

³⁷⁵ Westberg, 133.

³⁷⁶ Westberg, 133.

Questions

I do not intend to examine Westberg's second claim or his interpretation of Aquinas here (however, below, I point to Sherwin's difference with Westberg on this point). Rather, I simply suggest that if we assume as Westberg does that 1) actual practical thinking begins with the stage called intention (which includes both the practical intellect's apprehension of a good³⁷⁷ and the will's intention to that end), and that 2) practical thinking is ordered to concrete operation, then we encounter a question. Namely, how does this first stage of practical thinking arise in particular? Westberg says, "Intentions...need only to come under the judgment 'this is good' to be objects for choice and action."³⁷⁸ But, in the stage Westberg calls intention, how does the practical intellect first apprehend a particular good to intend in act?

Now insofar as our question takes us to the boundary of speculative and practical understanding, admittedly, it points beyond the scope of Westberg's study, which is practical reason. Nevertheless, it seems to me that to offer a complete metaphysical and psychological account of actual human agency, we need to take the discussion further. We need to discuss how practical thinking—specifically, practical apprehension of an end—arises in particular *quoad nos*. Aquinas says that practical thinking depends on speculative thinking, and Westberg acknowledges this general dependency.³⁷⁹ Westberg also acknowledges several other relevant dependencies *in general*, for example, Aquinas' view that love is first in the order of execution of human action.³⁸⁰ But, Westberg does not address questions such as the following: 1) how does the human intellect become practical and operative in act, 2) how does an operation of practical apprehension arise in particular, and 3) how does an operation of practical thinking participate in actual speculative understanding? These questions are simply out of scope in Westberg's discussion of human agency.

³⁷⁷ See Westberg 59-60.

³⁷⁸ Westberg, 235.

³⁷⁹ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 11. Westberg, 61, 195.

³⁸⁰ Westberg, 59-60, 245-249.

Thus, while claiming that practical thinking involves particular intellectual acts,³⁸¹ Westberg does not show how practical thinking is (or becomes) actualized initially. He does not address how an operation of practical apprehension arises. Neither does Westberg address how practical thinking participates in God's understanding and love, as I mention in the Introduction (at least minimally, insofar as it proceeds in act³⁸²).

Because Westberg does not go beyond the practical intellect in his discussion, I suggest that his study of Aquinas' metaphysical and psychological account of human agency is left somewhat incomplete—or at least that it remains unclear. Westberg does not address the first motivating question of the present study, which is about how our natural understanding of the human good arises. While Westberg emphasizes the unity of thinking and willing in human agency, he does not address the unity of understanding and willing that gives rise to the stage he calls intention—and, especially, to intention's initial cognitive operation, i.e., practical apprehension. Furthermore, Westberg does not discuss the unity of simple and practical thinking in human agency.

Therefore, I turn to the work of Michael Sherwin, who attempts to develop Westberg's account.

Sherwin's *By Knowledge & By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*

Michael Sherwin develops Westberg's account of the stages of human action by adding an initial stage he says Westberg neglects, namely, what he calls affirmation. Sherwin also modifies the cognitive component of Westberg's stage of intention: he changes it from *apprehensio* to *ordinatio*, citing *ST* I-II, q. 12.³⁸³ Sherwin suggests that this preliminary stage of affirmation includes both the intellect's apprehension of a good and the will's simple willing of that good. On

³⁸¹ Westberg, 59, 89.

³⁸² See *ST* I-II, q. 18, a. 1, 4.

³⁸³ Sherwin, 84-85, esp. n. 91. Sherwin refers to the analysis of Servais Pinckaers.

this point, he references the *Prima Secundae* qq. 8-11.³⁸⁴ This reference implies that, contrary to Westberg, Sherwin thinks there is a concrete stage of human action to be gleaned from Aquinas' discussion in these questions. Sherwin admits as much when he speaks about human love's place in the stages of human action. While Westberg only hints at love's role as a "natural psychological force" in ordering practical thinking to an end,³⁸⁵ Sherwin emphasizes this point and argues that love is "the primary appetitive principle of action" in Aquinas' account of human agency.³⁸⁶ Sherwin acknowledges that Aquinas is "not as clear as we would like" on this point, but he claims that Aquinas "does intend to integrate his theory of love into these stages."³⁸⁷

To make his point, Sherwin refers to Aquinas' attempt to integrate Augustine's theory of love—both love of enjoyment (*frui*) and love of use (*uti*)—into his discussion of the stages of human action in q. 16.³⁸⁸ And, pointing to Aquinas' corresponding distinction between love of friendship and love of concupiscence, Sherwin claims that love of a person always underlies the end of human action for Aquinas.³⁸⁹ More specifically, Sherwin says that in the stage of action he calls affirmation, the will's operation of simple willing is a voluntary love of affirmation of a person (an act of loving contemplation), which is a free, affective response to apprehending (or beholding) the good of an existing person.³⁹⁰ And, this is prior to the stage of human action called intention, in which, according to Sherwin, we apprehend the good of a person (additionally³⁹¹) as an end attainable by us (an *ordinatio*), and then intend that end through some means.³⁹²

³⁸⁴ Sherwin, 84.

³⁸⁵ Westberg, 89, 119, 245-249.

³⁸⁶ Sherwin, 90-91. See *ST* I-II, q. 25, a. 2; q. 26, a. 4; I, q. 20, a. 1.

³⁸⁷ Sherwin, 86.

³⁸⁸ Sherwin, 86-91. Sherwin references *ST* I-II, q. 16, a. 3-4 and Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* and *De trinitate*.

³⁸⁹ Sherwin, 92-93. See *ST* I-II, q. 26, a. 4.

³⁹⁰ Sherwin, 92-96, esp. n. 116. See *ST* I-II, q. 26, a. 4; q. 27, a. 1; II-II, q. 25, a. 7; I, q. 20, a. 2. On the voluntariness of simple willing, see Sherwin, 97, 99. C.f. *ST* I, q. 60; I-II, q. 26, a. 3.

³⁹¹ I use "additionally" here to clarify Sherwin's view that practically apprehending the good of a person as an end attainable by us (an *ordinatio*) is in addition to first apprehending the good of a person simply as a reality to be affirmed (in the stage called affirmation).

³⁹² Sherwin, 84-85, 93-94.

The implication of Sherwin's interpretation is that the stage he calls affirmation is speculative, and not yet practical. Indeed, Sherwin writes that affirmation only becomes a principle of action in the stage called intention, when by a cognitive act called an *ordinatio* we "recognize our beloved as an end toward which we can order our actions."³⁹³ He also suggests that the boundary between the stages of affirmation and intention—between simple willing in the will and *ordinatio* in the intellect—points to the "threshold between theoretical [speculative] and practical reason, between contemplation and action."³⁹⁴

Questions

I do not intend to examine Sherwin's argument or interpretation of Aquinas in the present study. I think Sherwin's approach is compelling in many respects, and I reference his work in chapter 5, where I attempt to articulate a somewhat nuanced position on natural apprehension of the good of a person. Here, I point to what I think remains to be considered in the present dialogue to offer a more complete metaphysical and psychological account of actual human agency, and I locate my project in view of this need.

The initial stage Sherwin calls affirmation is a welcome addition to the discussion, but its inclusion in the process of human action raises several questions. For example, in the stage Sherwin calls affirmation, how does the human intellect initially apprehend the good of an individual person, whom the will can then affirm by simple willing? Is it possible for the human intellect to apprehend the good of a person only theoretically at first, as Sherwin suggests, prior to apprehending the good also practically?³⁹⁵ Furthermore, assuming the good of a person can be

³⁹³ Sherwin, 85, 93; 95-96.

³⁹⁴ Sherwin, 95.

³⁹⁵ On this point, I share Stephen Brock's view that for Aquinas our original apprehension of the good is both speculative and practical. See Stephen L. Brock, "Natural Law, the Understanding of Principles, and Universal Good," *Nova et Vetera* 9, no. 3 (2011): 701. To clarify, I suggest that this is our original, *explicit* apprehension of the good, properly speaking. In chapter 5, I argue that prior to apprehending the good explicitly, the intellect apprehends the simple good *implicitly*. I also suggest that the cognitive act that Sherwin calls "*ordinatio*" in the intention stage may as well be called explicit apprehension of the good,

simply apprehended (at least implicitly) and loved by simple willing, as Sherwin argues, how is it further apprehended practically (and somewhat explicitly)—by a cognitive operation Sherwin calls *ordinatio*—as an end attainable through concrete practical activity? I explain my use of the terms “implicitly” and “explicitly” in chapter 5.

NEED FOR AN ACCOUNT OF SIMPLE HUMAN JUDGMENT TO GROUND AN ACCOUNT OF PRACTICAL THINKING

Bearing in mind the questions raised, I think we need to consider how simple judgment arises in act to ground an account of practical thinking. This is to recall my third claim above. Consider how this third claim follows from my first two claims, in view of the discussion with Westberg and Sherwin.

Recall, first, in dialogue with Westberg, we discover that insofar as practical thinking is situated in an account of actual human agency for Aquinas, a Thomistic account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth must allow practical thinking to proceed in act by virtue of that understanding, as ordered to the end of concrete operation. Second, in dialogue with Sherwin—and assuming Aquinas’ claim that practical thinking depends on speculative thinking—we discover that an account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth depends on an account of simple apprehension of the good of a person (at least implicitly).

My third claim is that an account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth depends on an account of how simple human judgment arises in act. In view of the first and second claims, I suggest this third claim is implied in Aquinas’ view that, properly

properly speaking (in the intention stage, Westberg likewise calls the first cognitive act of practical thinking “apprehension”). These points raise questions about the relations and distinctions between apprehension, simple willing, simple judgment, and *ordinatio*. I attempt to clarify some of these points in chapter 5.

speaking, truth is in the intellect by judgment,³⁹⁶ and in his claims that the intellect apprehends the good after apprehending the true,³⁹⁷ and that the true is a particular good.³⁹⁸

In other words, my third claim is that we need an account of how simple human judgment arises to situate natural understanding of the human good and practical truth—and additional practical thinking by virtue of that understanding—in the context of actual human agency. For, if practical thinking is ordered to the end of a concrete human operation, and if practical thinking is related accidentally by addition to simple thinking, and if apprehending the particular good depends on apprehending the true, which Aquinas says is first cognized when the intellect judges—that is to say, if we are talking about the possibility of a unified, voluntary human act of *this* person that extends to concrete operation—then we need to be able to discuss how simple judgment arises in act.

A GENERAL CONCERN REGARDING THOMISTIC ACCOUNTS OF SIMPLE HUMAN JUDGMENT

Having identified need for an account of simple judgment to articulate an account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth, now I point to a need for clarity in Thomistic discourse on the difference between the intellectual operations of apprehension and judgment. Following Aristotle's *De anima*, Aquinas calls the intellect's first operation apprehension and its second operation judgment.³⁹⁹ Clarity on this difference is needed, I suggest, if we are to consider how the latter arises distinctly (by addition) from the former, as Aquinas indicates.⁴⁰⁰

To motivate the following discussion, I begin with a general observation about Thomistic accounts of simple judgment, and then I raise a concern. I do not examine the arguments of

³⁹⁶ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2.

³⁹⁷ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 4 ad 2.

³⁹⁸ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 4 ad 1; II-II, q. 109, a. 2 ad 1. C.f. *ST I*, q. 79, a. 11 ad 2; I-II, q. 9, a. 1; q. 10, a. 1.

³⁹⁹ *Peryerm*, Introduction.

⁴⁰⁰ *ST I*, q. 85, a. 5.

individual Thomists initially, though I do mention a few examples below. My approach is rather to mention the general observation and concern, to offer a brief summary of Aquinas' view on intellectual judgment, and then to discuss possible interpretations and a need for clarity.

My general observation is that Thomistic accounts tend to distinguish simple judgment from simple apprehension in two ways. First, judgment is distinguished from apprehension in terms of its logical form, that is, its propositional form. Judgment is said to form a proposition (or enunciation), which is a logical composite of predicate and subject parts already simply apprehended.⁴⁰¹ Second, judgment is distinguished from apprehension in terms of its general object or end, which Aquinas says is the true (given the nature of the intellect).⁴⁰² I discuss these points and a few examples below, after briefly considering what I understand to be Aquinas' view on the topic.

My concern with this general approach is that it tends to underspecify—or to leave somewhat underdetermined—the natural species of simple judgment *as an interior, proper operation of the human intellect* distinct from simple apprehension. And, my further concern is that if we cannot fully and determinately specify how simple judgment is distinct from apprehension, then we cannot offer an account of how simple judgment arises *from* simple apprehension, which our account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth requires.

Looking ahead, I suggest there is a distinction between specifying the object of an act of simple judgment 1) insofar as it is the proximate object of a logical operation, and 2) insofar as it is the *end* of a natural, proper operation of the intellect having an *interior* principle of movement (albeit, not subject to our practical command).⁴⁰³ Similarly, there is a distinction between specifying the object of an act of simple judgment 1) insofar as it is a logical instance of judgment's general object, namely, truth, and 2) insofar as it is the *end* of a particular operation

⁴⁰¹ *ST I*, q. 85, a. 5 ad 3.

⁴⁰² *ST I-II*, q. 3, a. 7; *I*, q. 16, a. 1-2.

⁴⁰³ See *ST I-II*, q. 1, a. 2; q. 6, a. 1-2; q. 17, a. 6. By analogy, see *ST I-II*, q. 1, a. 3 ad 3; q. 18, a. 7.

of simple judgment, which is cognized as true and as a particular good, and which is the principle of a real relation of truth (of conformity of this individual intellect to this particular thing).

What the above amounts to, I think, is a certain tendency to conflate the logical and natural (or metaphysical) species of simple judgment in the intellect. This concern motivates the approach I begin to develop in later chapters to examine human judgment in terms of its natural causal principles.

In sum if we cannot specify the object of an operation of simple judgment *as an end*,⁴⁰⁴ *according to the nature of an end*⁴⁰⁵ and as good⁴⁰⁶—and further, if we cannot identify a principle of exercise inclining particularly to that end—my concern is that we cannot say how any such operation of judgment distinctly arises from simple apprehension in the intellect at all.⁴⁰⁷ But, as I suggest above, we need a Thomistic account of how simple judgment arises to articulate a defensible account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth.

A NEED FOR CLARITY IN AQUINAS' ACCOUNT OF SIMPLE JUDGMENT

Having raised a general concern about a tendency in Thomistic accounts, which I hope begins to motivate the following discussion (admittedly, without yet giving examples), I now move to consider Aquinas' own view on human judgment and truth. Initially, I discuss what seems clear in Aquinas' account. Then, I ask a question about the meaning of Aquinas' claim that truth is in the intellect, properly speaking, by judgment.⁴⁰⁸ Namely, my question is as follows: *what* does the intellect have by judgment, properly speaking, that first enables it to cognize truth?

Below, I do not attempt a textual or historical study of Aquinas' works on the matter, nor do I attempt to speak about Aquinas' view in depth. Rather, I simply raise the question, consider

⁴⁰⁴ ST I-II, q. 6, a. 1-2.

⁴⁰⁵ ST I-II, q. 1, a. 2.

⁴⁰⁶ ST I-II, q. 1, a. 4.

⁴⁰⁷ See ST I-II, q. 1, a. 2.

⁴⁰⁸ ST I, q. 16, a. 2.

a contemporary Thomistic interpretation on the topic (giving an example of the tendency just mentioned), and identify a need for clarity in Aquinas' account of how simple judgment arises, so that truth can first be cognized. The need for clarity I observe motivates the approach I take in later chapters.

I hope the following discussion speaks to why I do not simply 1) presume an existing Thomistic account of simple judgment, and then 2) attend only to how simple understanding becomes practical in the present study. For, my claim is that clarity is needed in Aquinas' account of simple judgment—and in related Thomistic accounts—to explain how the operation arises naturally in act in the human intellect. Given practical thinking's dependence on simple thinking, we must attempt to articulate a clearer account of how simple judgment naturally arises to offer an account of how natural understanding of the human good and practical truth likewise arises.

What is clear in Aquinas' account of simple judgment and truth in the human intellect

The first point to mention is Aquinas' claim regarding the distinctiveness of the human intellect as a natural power or capacity of the soul—and, indeed, of the human being. I think that an implication regarding the distinctiveness of the intellect's operations follows from this claim. As I discuss further in chapter 5, Aquinas says that the human intellect (specifically, the possible intellect) is a natural passive power and potentiality (I also call this a general inclination) to universal *ens* (a being).⁴⁰⁹ Regarding the distinctiveness of the human intellect, Aquinas writes the following:

“...the powers of the soul are distinguished by the different formal aspects of their objects: since each power is defined in reference to that thing to which it is directed and which is its object.... if any power by its nature be directed to an object according to the common ratio of the object, that power will not be differentiated according to the individual differences of that object.... Now, the intellect regards its object under the common ratio of being [*entis*]: since the [possible] intellect is that ‘in which all are in potentiality.’ Wherefore the [possible] intellect is not differentiated by any difference of being.”⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁹ *ST I* q. 78, a. 1; q. 79, a. 1-2.

⁴¹⁰ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 7. C.f. q. 59, a. 4.

Now Aquinas is clear that the rational operations of apprehension and judgment are those of a single natural power, i.e., the human intellect.⁴¹¹ Given this claim, what is implied regarding the distinctiveness of the intellect's operations in the above statement is as follows. For Aquinas, the operations of apprehension and judgment are not differentiated according to the formal or common *ratio* (intelligibility) of the intellect's natural object, which is *ens* (a being). Rather, to use Aquinas' words, the operations are "differentiated according to the *individual* differences [my emphasis]" of their respective objects.

And what are the *individual* differences of the objects of apprehension and judgment that serve to distinguish the two operations? Thomistic accounts often distinguish an operation of apprehension in terms of the intellect's initial cognition of a particular activating principle or cause (i.e., its starting point), while they distinguish an operation of judgment in terms of its particular term or end (i.e., its end point) in relation to that principle. Indeed, Aquinas says that the first proper—albeit, incomplete—object of the human intellect is the "quiddity of a material thing," which is understood by the intellect's first operation, namely, apprehension.⁴¹² Notably, for Aquinas, the human intellect does not acquire perfect cognition by this first operation of apprehension.⁴¹³ Aquinas says that the second proper object and end (or term) of the human intellect is the true, which is understood by the intellect's second operation, namely, judgment (i.e., composition and division, or affirmative and negative judgment).⁴¹⁴ Aquinas also calls this operation assent,⁴¹⁵ as I discuss further below.

⁴¹¹ *Peryerm*, Introduction. *PA*, Forward. *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2; q. 85, a. 5.

⁴¹² *ST I*, q. 85, a. 5 and ad 3; a. 3; a. 6.

⁴¹³ *ST I*, q. 85, a. 5.

⁴¹⁴ *ST I-II*, q. 3, a. 7; *I*, q. 16, a. 1-2. *Peryerm* 1.7, paragraph 4. C.f. *ST I*, q. 86, a. 1; *I-II*, q. 3. C.f. Brock, *Philosophy*, 85. Schmidt, 221.

⁴¹⁵ *ST I-II*, q. 17, a. 6; *II-II*, q. 2, a. 1.

Distinction in terms of an individual activating principle or cause of apprehension

Consider the individual object of apprehension further. Aquinas says that individual material things are the initial cause and measure of human intellectual cognition and knowledge.⁴¹⁶ Indeed, according to Aquinas, it is an individual material thing that initially activates sense and intellectual cognition and that—concurrently, along with the intellect’s own active principle of abstraction, the agent intellect (or active intellect)⁴¹⁷ (I discuss this in chapter 5)—moves the intellect to apprehend something about what the thing is (i.e., its quiddity or nature).⁴¹⁸

The first point to emphasize here is that the intellect’s apprehension is a *particular operation*, whose initial, partial activating (efficient) cause—i.e., its principle of exercise—is the individual thing itself (again, the thing’s efficient causality is *partial* because the intellect’s operation is also caused by its own active principle of abstraction, the agent intellect). The second point to emphasize is that, in Aquinas’ view, what the human intellect apprehends by abstraction is the nature (or quiddity) of the material thing *as a universal*, apart from the thing’s individual qualities.⁴¹⁹ Because of the remoteness and feebleness of its natural participation in the Divine intellect,⁴²⁰ the human intellect, Aquinas says, understands what it apprehends incompletely—and only indistinctly and confusedly—especially at first.⁴²¹ Indeed, for Aquinas, the interior likeness by which the intellect apprehends is a common or general concept.⁴²²

Therefore, although that which the human intellect primarily understands is the individual thing that activates it,⁴²³ the human intellect does not understand the thing *as an individual* by apprehension—because it does not apprehend the thing by abstraction as *formally* distinct from other things (for, again, the agent intellect abstracts the universal from individual

⁴¹⁶ SCG I.61. ST I, q. 16, a. 5, esp. ad 2. C.f. Brock, *Philosophy*, 88.

⁴¹⁷ ST I, q. 85, a. 1; q. 79, a. 3.

⁴¹⁸ ST I, q. 85, a. 5, 3. *Peryerm*, Introduction. *PA*, Forward.

⁴¹⁹ ST I, q. 86, a. 1; q. 85, a. 1, esp. ad 1.

⁴²⁰ ST I, q. 79, a. 2; q. 58, a. 3.

⁴²¹ ST I, q. 85, a. 3; a. 5.

⁴²² DT 5.4 as cited in Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 134. C.f. DV 1.1. C.f. Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 81.

⁴²³ ST I, q. 85, a. 2; q. 77, a. 3.

matter).⁴²⁴ Furthermore, by apprehension alone, the human intellect does not understand *that* it cognizes the individual thing. Aquinas writes, “it is proper to [the human intellect] to [cognize] a form existing individually in corporeal matter, but not as existing in this individual matter.”⁴²⁵

Distinction in terms of an individual object or end (or term) of judgment

Now while Aquinas is clear that the initial cause or principle—the starting point—of the human intellect’s natural cognition is the individual material thing, he is also clear that the proper object and end (or term) and perfection—the end point—of the human intellect is truth as understood (or cognized), which he says is a particular good.⁴²⁶ Aquinas defines truth as the conformity or adequation (*adequatio*) of thing and intellect.⁴²⁷ Furthermore, he says truth is found primarily in the intellect (and secondarily in things), and that when the intellect understands the truth of a natural thing, it is *measured by* that thing (and not by itself).⁴²⁸ So, we might say that in truth the intellect conforms *to* the thing apprehended. Or, we might adopt John O’Callaghan’s helpful explanation as follows: “‘*Adaequatio*’ is derived from the Latin preposition ‘*ad*’ meaning *to* in the sense of *directed at* prefixed to the Latin ‘*aequus*’ meaning *equal*. To say that the operation of intellect is *adequatio rei* is to say that it is *directed* or *ordered* to equality with the thing.”⁴²⁹

Before I move to discuss the significance of truth for Aquinas in the next section, it is worth noting the following: to say that truth is the proper object and end of judgment in the intellect (*quoad se*) is not necessarily to understand truth *as an end* (*quoad nos*).

⁴²⁴ ST I, q. 86, a. 1.

⁴²⁵ ST I, q. 85, a. 1.

⁴²⁶ ST I, q. 16, a. 2; a. 4; I-II, q. 9, a. 1; q. 10, a. 1.

⁴²⁷ ST I, q. 16, a. 2. DV 1.1.

⁴²⁸ DV 1.2. ST I-II, q. 64, a. 3.

⁴²⁹ John O’Callaghan, “The Identity of Knower and Known: Sellars’s and McDowell’s Thomisms,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 87 (2014): 19.

Two significant points about Aquinas' account of truth

A first point of significance

Before I raise a question in the next section, I mention two significant points regarding Aquinas' account of truth. The first point is that Aquinas seems to use the term "true" in at least two senses when speaking about the intellect's operations. The first sense seems to apply broadly to operations of both simple apprehension and judgment. The second sense applies only to human judgment and seems to refer more narrowly to a completion or perfection of the first sense: it involves what Aquinas says is implied by the term "truth" *properly speaking* and in view of the perfection of the intellect.⁴³⁰

Consider the following. Aquinas says, "the true is in the intellect in so far as it is conformed to the object [*rei*] understood."⁴³¹ Broadly speaking, I suggest this statement can apply to the first sense of the term "true" above. For, Aquinas says that the human intellect (or any apprehensive power, including the human senses) is true when it cognizes "what a thing is"—that is, when it apprehends "what a thing is" and thus has in it the likeness of a thing "existing outside the soul."⁴³² In other words, the human intellect or any cognitive power is true—in the first sense—when it conforms formally in some sense (albeit, in a *qualified, non-universal* sense in the case of any non-rational apprehensive power⁴³³) to the thing cognized by apprehension. Indeed, he writes, "the sense is true of any thing, as is also the intellect, when it [cognizes] 'what a thing is'.... Truth therefore may be in the senses, or in the intellect [cognizing] 'what a thing is,' as in anything that is true."⁴³⁴

Notice that in this first sense of truth, the intellect is true and has truth whenever it cognizes "what a thing is," but it does not cognize or apprehend *that* it is true or *that* it has truth.

⁴³⁰ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2. *DV* 21.1.

⁴³¹ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 1.

⁴³² *DV* 1.3. *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2; q. 85, a. 6; q. 85, a. 1 ad 1; q. 78, a. 4; q. 58, a. 5; q. 57, a. 1 ad 2.

⁴³³ *ST I*, q. 14, a. 1. C.f. Brock, *Philosophy*, 72.

⁴³⁴ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2.

And, as I mention above, Aquinas is clear that this first sense of the true, which the intellect has by an operation of apprehension, is incomplete and imperfect.⁴³⁵

Aquinas distinguishes the second sense from the first when he speaks about what is implied by the term “truth” properly speaking and according to the perfection of the intellect. He says that the perfection (or completion) of the intellect is truth *as cognized* (“*verum ut cognitum*”).⁴³⁶ Sometimes Aquinas includes the term “affirmed,” “said,” or “expressed” (*dixit*) together with the term “cognized,” and so we might say that the perfection of the intellect is truth *as cognized and affirmed*.⁴³⁷

In other words, for Aquinas, truth arises in the intellect, properly speaking, not merely when it is true or has truth (in the first sense) but when it additionally cognizes (and affirms) *that* it is true or has truth. That is, the human intellect first *cognizes* truth when it not only conforms to the thing cognized but additionally when it cognizes its own conformity to that intelligible thing. Aquinas writes, “truth is defined by the conformity of intellect and thing; and hence to [cognize] this conformity is to [cognize] truth.... the intellect can [cognize] its own conformity with the intelligible thing.”⁴³⁸

In sum we might say that for Aquinas, truth, properly speaking—as ordered to complete or perfect equality with the thing—involves two layers of conformity and cognition. First, the intellect conforms to the thing cognized—and this is truth in the first sense, when the intellect cognizes *what* the thing is by apprehension. Aquinas says that the human intellect does not acquire perfect cognition of a thing by the first act of apprehension.⁴³⁹ Second, the intellect additionally conforms itself (by judgment or assent⁴⁴⁰) to the thing cognized. And, to cognize the

⁴³⁵ ST I, q. 85, a. 5 and ad 3; a. 3; a. 6.

⁴³⁶ ST I, q. 16, a. 2.

⁴³⁷ ST I, q. 16, a. 2. C.f. Brock, *Philosophy*, 85.

⁴³⁸ ST I, q. 16, a. 2.

⁴³⁹ ST I, q. 85, a. 5.

⁴⁴⁰ ST I-II, q. 17, a. 6; II-II, q. 2, a. 1.

intellect's *own* conforming to the thing is to cognize truth, properly speaking—in the second sense.

A second point of significance

The second significant point to mention is the moment at which (i.e., when) cognition of truth first arises in the intellect, properly speaking, according to Aquinas. Pointing to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* vi, Aquinas says that the intellect first cognizes truth *when* it judges that a thing is as "the form which it apprehends about that thing."⁴⁴¹ This kind of judgment is what Aquinas calls *judgment of affirmation or assent*.⁴⁴² Here, Aquinas seems to be saying that the intellect first cognizes truth when—by an operation of judgment of affirmation—it judges *that* what it first apprehends of a thing conforms to the thing itself.⁴⁴³

Given Aquinas refers specifically to *judgment of affirmation* (or *assent*) when discussing the intellect's first cognition of truth, it is worth mentioning here the form of signification of this kind of judgment as a logical operation in his view. Indeed, following Aristotle, Aquinas distinguishes different modes of judgment and different modes of expressing or signifying judgment.⁴⁴⁴ Aquinas says the human intellect judges by what he calls "composing [or joining] and dividing [or separating]."⁴⁴⁵ More specifically, Aquinas says the intellect judges by affirmation—or, secondarily, by denial—when it composes or divides concepts to form a proposition that says something is (or is not).⁴⁴⁶ Following Aristotle, Aquinas says that a proposition is signified by speech that is either true or false, is spoken of in the indicative, and is usually signified by a declarative sentence having subject-predicate form.⁴⁴⁷ Aquinas writes, "for

⁴⁴¹ *ST* I, q. 16, a. 2.

⁴⁴² *Peryerm* 1.8. *ST* I-II, q. 17, a. 6; II-II, q. 2, a. 1.

⁴⁴³ *DV* 1.3.

⁴⁴⁴ See *Peryerm* 1.7-8. C.f. Brock, *Philosophy*, 84.

⁴⁴⁵ *ST* I, q. 16, a. 2. *DV* 1.3.

⁴⁴⁶ *DV* 1.3. *DT* 5.3. *ST* I, 14, 6 ad 1. Schmidt, 214 n. 48, 241.

⁴⁴⁷ *Peryerm* 1.7. Brock, *Philosophy*, 84.

in every proposition [the intellect] either applies to, or removes from the thing signified by the subject, some form signified by the predicate.”⁴⁴⁸

I discuss Aquinas’ use of a logical perspective when speaking about judgment further below. Looking ahead, I emphasize the distinction between speaking about judgment of affirmation as a logical operation and speaking about it as a natural, proper (or simple) operation of the human intellect.

A need for clarity

Given the above discussion of truth, Aquinas’ claim is clear: to cognize truth, properly speaking, the intellect needs not only to apprehend (by abstraction) what a thing is, which is to have a certain incomplete truth, but also to conform to a thing by judgment, such that it can cognize its *own* conformity to the thing, properly speaking.⁴⁴⁹ The implication of this claim seems to be that the intellect first cognizes truth, *properly speaking*, when it judges because it is only by judgment—and not by apprehension alone—that the intellect first conforms to a thing, *properly speaking*. I think this is also to say the following, according to Aquinas: it is only by judgment that the intellect conforms *properly* to a thing, and it is primarily by judgment that the intellect has a *real* relation of truth (a real relation of conformity to a thing), properly speaking.⁴⁵⁰

However, what seems less clear, at least at first, is Aquinas’ answer to the following question: what does the intellect do—or what does it have—by judgment that conforms it *properly* to a thing? In other words, *why* is truth in the intellect, properly speaking, only by judgment? Or, *how* does the intellect conform to a thing, properly speaking, only by judgment? Again, in other words, the question is as follows: what makes conformity *proper*—or, what makes a relation of truth *real*, properly speaking—in the human intellect?

⁴⁴⁸ ST I, q. 16, a. 2.

⁴⁴⁹ ST I, q. 16, a. 2.

⁴⁵⁰ DV 1.3. Aquinas says, “the relation of knowledge to a thing known is something real [*in rerum natura*]” (DV 1.5 ad 15). C.f. O’Callaghan, “Knower and Known,” 19.

Aquinas' response

Aquinas suggests the beginnings of a response to this question in his discussion of the proper meaning of truth in *DV* 1.3, which motivates my approach in the following chapters:

“For the nature of the true consists in a conformity of thing and intellect. Nothing becomes conformed [*adaequatur*] with itself [i.e., in reality,⁴⁵¹ properly speaking], but conformity requires distinct terms [equality is of diverse things]. Consequently, the nature of truth is first found in the intellect when the intellect begins to possess something proper to itself, not possessed by the thing outside the soul, yet corresponding to it, so that between the two—intellect and thing—a conformity may be found. In forming the quiddities of things, the intellect merely has a likeness of a thing existing outside the soul, as a sense has a likeness when it receives the species of a sensible thing. But when the intellect begins to judge about the thing it has apprehended, then its judgment is something proper to itself—not something found outside in the thing.”⁴⁵²

There are two claims to highlight in Aquinas' statement. The first is that truth is a conformity (or adequation) of distinct things in reality—and, specifically, of an individual intellect *to* an individual thing. The general claim is that for one thing to conform to (or to be “directed or ordered to equality with”⁴⁵³) another, it must be distinguished from the latter. Otherwise, any relation of conformity is not sufficiently distinguished from a mere logical relation of identity.⁴⁵⁴ In other words, the claim is that for a relation of truth to be *real (in rerum natura)*⁴⁵⁵ by an operation of *proper* conformity (which is the principle of the relation⁴⁵⁶), the intellect (and its operation of judgment) must be sufficiently distinguished, in particular, from the individual thing to which it conforms. The second point to highlight is Aquinas' claim that the intellect begins to have something distinct and proper to itself interiorly (which is not in the exterior thing) precisely by judgment—and, indeed, that the intellect begins to conform to the exterior thing by this judgment, properly speaking.

⁴⁵¹ I have added the comment “in reality” (*in rerum natura*) to clarify that Aquinas seems to be speaking here about adequation between natural things. Aquinas also speaks of merely conceptual relations, i.e., only in reason (*rationis tantum*), such as a relation of identity (*DV* 1.5 ad 15).

⁴⁵² *DV* 1.3.

⁴⁵³ O'Callaghan, “Knower and Known,” 19.

⁴⁵⁴ *DV* 1.3. See O'Callaghan, “Knower and Known,” 19. C.f. *ST I*, q. 2, a. 3. *DV* 1.5 ad 15.

⁴⁵⁵ *DV* 1.5 ad 15.

⁴⁵⁶ *De Ente* 5.

This second point helps to focus the above question as follows: *what is it*, in particular, that the intellect has by judgment that is distinctly and properly its own (and which is not found outside it)?

An interpretation: what makes judgment distinct and proper to the intellect?

Interpreting Aquinas on this point, John O'Callaghan suggests that what the intellect has by judgment, its second operation, that is proper to itself is a *formal* (or, perhaps we might say logical) difference, namely, "the propositional structure of subject and predicate in a judgment."⁴⁵⁷ O'Callaghan writes,

"The term of the first operation of intellect [i.e., apprehension] has no formal difference that is proper to itself. In a way, the term of the first operation of intellect is *too* formally identical with the thing it apprehends to be true of it.... it is only when the operation of the intellect takes on the character of a judgment, a subject-predicate structure, that it can be said to have something proper to itself."⁴⁵⁸

Other Thomists point similarly to the formal or logical distinctiveness of judgment. Westberg refers to the "two logical elements in the proposition: a subject and predicate."⁴⁵⁹ Brock says that the concept apprehended is "typically signified by a single word," and that the proposition expressed by judgment is "typically signified by a declarative sentence, in which a predicate is either applied to a subject or withheld from it."⁴⁶⁰

Is this Aquinas' view on what the intellect has by judgment that is proper to itself?

My question is whether O'Callaghan's interpretation is Aquinas' view. That is, is subject-predicate structure what the intellect has by judgment that is proper to itself, according to Aquinas? In

⁴⁵⁷ O'Callaghan, "Knower and Known," 19.

⁴⁵⁸ O'Callaghan, "Knower and Known," 20.

⁴⁵⁹ Westberg, 65.

⁴⁶⁰ Brock, *Philosophy*, 84.

other words, is a formal difference, namely, propositional structure, what distinguishes judgment from apprehension in the intellect?

As I mention above, Aquinas does speak of the composition of subject and predicate by judgment, in which the predicate is either affirmed or denied of the subject.⁴⁶¹ Even more, Aquinas says that if we consider an operation of simple judgment of affirmation (or negation) according to what is in the intellect (and not as it refers to reality), then there is *always composition*: for judgment always involves comparing one simple concept with another.⁴⁶² These statements of Aquinas certainly seem to affirm O'Callaghan's view that what distinguishes apprehension and judgment is a formal difference, i.e., propositional structure.

What must be emphasized, however, is that Aquinas is speaking in these statements according to a logical point of view. Aquinas discusses human judgment from a logical point of view especially in his commentaries on Aristotle's *On Interpretation* and *Posterior Analytics* and in parts of q. 16, a. 4 of the *Prima Pars*. Following Aristotle, Aquinas tells us that logic is the science of reason: it is about the acts of reason.⁴⁶³ Logically speaking, Aquinas says that the intellect's first operation, apprehension, is the understanding of simples or indivisibles. This is the operation "by which the intellect apprehends just the essence [or quiddity] of a thing alone";⁴⁶⁴ that is, the intellect apprehends simply "*what* a thing is."⁴⁶⁵ And, the intellect's second operation, judgment, is the act of "composing [or combining] and dividing."⁴⁶⁶ In this operation, the intellect combines or divides simple concepts (or likenesses) apprehended by its first operation to form an affirmative or negative proposition (or enunciation) about the thing apprehended.⁴⁶⁷ Logically

⁴⁶¹ *Peryerm* 1.3.

⁴⁶² *Peryerm* 1.3 n. 4. C.f. Schmidt, 210.

⁴⁶³ *PA*, Forward.

⁴⁶⁴ *Peryerm*, Introduction.

⁴⁶⁵ *PA*, Forward.

⁴⁶⁶ *Peryerm*, Introduction. *PA*, Forward.

⁴⁶⁷ *Peryerm* 1.3. *DV* 1.3.

speaking, Aquinas is clear that in every proposition, the intellect “either applies to, or removes from the thing signified by the subject [term], some form signified by the predicate [term].”⁴⁶⁸

Aquinas tells us that when we speak about judgment narrowly in the logical domain, i.e., according to the science of reason, we are not immediately concerned with the existence of the thing signified by the subject or with the intellect’s conformity to that thing. Indeed, Aquinas says that “the logician considers the mode of predication and not the existence of the thing.”⁴⁶⁹ He says that logic “studies things according to their formal principles” as apprehended,⁴⁷⁰ and he says that “the true and the false belong specifically to the study of logic.”⁴⁷¹

Considering the above, we might be inclined to say, yes, logically speaking, what the intellect has by judgment that is properly its own is a formal, propositional structure. For, to speak about propositional structure is to speak about the formal difference between judgment and apprehension in the logical domain. But, is this Aquinas’ complete or primary answer? I suggest the answer is no.

Aquinas also speaks about judgment according to nature (and metaphysics)

As I discuss above, and as O’Callaghan himself emphasizes,⁴⁷² Aquinas does not speak about judgment only according to a logical perspective. Aquinas also writes, “the intellect judges about the thing it has apprehended at the moment when it says that something is or is not.”⁴⁷³ How can Aquinas speak logically about propositions and modes of predication, while also saying that the intellect can “judge about the thing it has apprehended” and that its judgment is said to be true when it conforms to the exterior thing?⁴⁷⁴ The answer seems to be that in these latter claims

⁴⁶⁸ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2.

⁴⁶⁹ *Metaph* VII.17 n. 1658 as translated in Schmidt, 236.

⁴⁷⁰ *Quaestiones disputatae De potentia*, 6.1 ad 11 as translated in Schmidt, 236.

⁴⁷¹ *Metaph* IV.17. C.f. Brock, *Philosophy*, 86.

⁴⁷² O’Callaghan, “Knower and Known,” 19.

⁴⁷³ *DV* 1.3.

⁴⁷⁴ *DV* 1.3.

Aquinas is speaking not merely logically but also naturally (and metaphysically), according to the nature of the intellect.

Reasons why the above is not Aquinas' complete or primary view

In view of Aquinas' claims about judgment according to the nature of the intellect, I suggest there are at least three reasons why O'Callaghan's interpretation above—i.e., what the intellect has that is proper to itself by judgment is a *formal* difference, namely, propositional structure—is not Aquinas' complete or primary view.

First, Aquinas is clear that the proposition is a *sign* of human judgment—and not somehow its essence as a natural operation. Indeed, the proposition is said to be true insofar as it is a sign of the intellect's truth.⁴⁷⁵ Aquinas says that the proposition *signifies* the intellect's composition and division.⁴⁷⁶ The proposition is the intelligible unity made when the intellect joins two intelligible concepts, allowing the intellect to consider many intelligibles as one.⁴⁷⁷

The implication of these statements of Aquinas seems to be that the truth of a proposition in the logical domain depends upon—and is a sign of—the truth of the intellect in the domain of natural things. Indeed, for Aquinas, the human being can judge by affirmation and can cognize truth *because* she has an intellect, naturally speaking. Therefore, arguably, while Aquinas *might* be willing to admit that propositional structure formally distinguishes judgment from apprehension *in the logical domain*, I do not think he suggests that propositional structure formally and *properly* distinguishes judgment from apprehension as an operation of the human intellect in the domain of natural things. And, thus, what the thinking human being has that is properly her own is not primarily the propositional structure of her judgments (she has this, in a sense, secondarily, as a sign of her judgments). Rather, as I discuss in chapter 5, what she has

⁴⁷⁵ See Robert Schmidt's discussion of Aquinas' *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* I, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1 in Schmidt, 237.

⁴⁷⁶ *ST* I, q. 85, a. 2 ad 3. C.f. Schmidt, 222-223, 234, 237.

⁴⁷⁷ *DV* 8.14.

properly on her own is *primarily* something else: namely, *simple* judgment of affirmation or *natural* assent (not subject to her command), according to an *interior* principle of movement.

The second reason is that if we speak about propositional structure alone, I suggest we cannot formally differentiate between two species of judgment of affirmation (or assent) that Aquinas himself distinguishes in *ST* I-II, q. 17, a. 6. Here, Aquinas speaks about the act “whereby [the intellect] assents to what it apprehends,”⁴⁷⁸ which is judgment of affirmation. He distinguishes two species of this operation of judgment as follows: one is a *natural* assent (I also use the term *simple* judgment of affirmation), which is not subject to our command; the other is an assent (or dissent) that is in our power and is subject to our command.⁴⁷⁹ I speak about these distinct species of assent at length in later chapters. My point here is simply that both species of assent (or judgment of affirmation) have subject-predicate, propositional structure. Indeed, the formal specification (or logical form) of each is (or at least can be) *identical* according to a logical perspective. Therefore, I do not think Aquinas intends to say that propositional structure alone is what formally and properly distinguishes the operation of either species in the domain of natural things.

The third reason is that to speak of a proposition and its logical structure alone is not to speak *distinctly* of the particular intellectual operation of judgment that is its principle. In the above quote from *DV* 1.3, Aquinas says that equality is of *diverse* things. He also says that “the relation of knowledge to a thing known is something real (*in rerum natura*)”⁴⁸⁰ (that is, the relation is something distinct in the domain of natural things). I think the implication of these points is as follows: if we are speaking about a real relation of truth and not merely a logical relation of identity, then the proximate principle of this real relation, which is the operation of judgment by which the intellect conforms to (or is directed to equality with) a thing, must be real and distinct in the same context as that in which the thing itself is real and distinct. And, the

⁴⁷⁸ *ST* I-II, q. 17, a. 6.

⁴⁷⁹ *ST* I-II, q. 17, a. 6; a. 5 ad 3.

⁴⁸⁰ *DV* 1.5 ad 15.

context we are speaking of is that of reality, namely, the domain of natural existing things.

Notably, although he does not speak to my claim, O'Callaghan himself says something similar: "So to have a real relation of equality, we need to have some sort of real distinction between the things judged to be equal."⁴⁸¹

So, again, my claim is that if truth is a real relation, then the proximate principle of this relation, which is the operation of judgment by which the intellect conforms to a thing, must be distinct *in the domain of natural things*. Thus, contrary to O'Callaghan's view, I think the distinction that the intellect has by judgment is not merely a formal difference of propositional structure—because this is not a real distinction (at least on its own). Rather, I suggest that what distinguishes an operation of judgment from the thing to which it conforms (and also distinguishes it from simple apprehension) must be a secondary distinction in being—by addition and perfection (and not merely a logical distinction). Indeed, Aquinas says that truth is a perfection of the intellect⁴⁸² and a particular good,⁴⁸³ which implies it is a secondary addition of being in the intellect. I suggest this secondary perfection of being must proceed by natural principles, according to the nature of the intellect.

This is to return to a discussion of how an individual operation of simple judgment of affirmation arises distinctly in act from simple apprehension, such that it proceeds distinctly as a secondary addition of being in the intellect. We seek to identify the natural principles of distinction that make this simple judgment properly the intellect's own.

What is Aquinas' view on how simple judgment arises in the intellect?

I suggest above that O'Callaghan's interpretation cannot be Aquinas' complete or primary view on how simple judgment is distinct and proper to the intellect. While *what* formally or logically

⁴⁸¹ O'Callaghan, "Knower and Known," 19.

⁴⁸² *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2.

⁴⁸³ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 4 ad 1; II-II, q. 109, a. 2 ad 1. C.f. *ST I*, q. 79, a. 11 ad 2.

distinguishes judgment from simple apprehension may be its propositional structure as O’Callaghan suggests, *that* a judgment has propositional structure—and, *that* it proceeds actually and in particular in the intellect at all—are separate considerations. Recall Aquinas says the proposition is a *sign* of judgment, but *that* judgment proceeds—of which the proposition is a sign—is something else.

Now, I turn to consider Aquinas’ view directly. What is Aquinas’ view on how simple judgment arises distinctly and properly in the intellect—such that we can follow Aquinas in saying that the truth arising in judgment is a particular good? My initial claim is that Aquinas is not as clear as we might like on his view (however, as I discuss in chapter 5, I think he offers hints as to what a Thomistic view on the matter might be).

Again, as I mention above, Aquinas is clear that the initial activating cause of an operation of simple apprehension in the intellect is the material thing itself, and he is also clear that things are the measure of human cognition and knowledge. But, Aquinas seems less clear on the additional, secondary causes of judgment in particular—that is, on how or why it proceeds secondarily from apprehension. In his discussion of truth in the intellect in article 2 of question 16 of the *Prima Pars*, Aquinas simply uses the term “when” to speak of the arrival of judgment and truth in the intellect. He writes, “*When*, however, [the intellect] judges that a thing corresponds to the form which it apprehends about that thing, then first it [cognizes] and expresses truth [my emphasis].”⁴⁸⁴ Likewise, in *DV* 1.3, as I quote above, he writes, “the nature of truth is first found in the intellect *when* the intellect begins to possess something proper to itself.... *when* the intellect begins to judge about the thing it has apprehended, then its judgment is something proper to itself.... the intellect judges about the thing it has apprehended at the moment *when* it says that something is or is not [my emphasis].”⁴⁸⁵ In these examples, Aquinas does not say how or why intellectual judgment proceeds; rather, he simply suggests *that* it

⁴⁸⁴ *ST* I, q. 16, a. 2.

⁴⁸⁵ *DV* 1.3.

proceeds or that it *may* proceed. Somewhat similarly, in book I, chapter 61 of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas seems careful not to speak of how knowledge or judgment arises in the intellect. He writes, “The human intellect’s knowledge is *somehow* [or “in a manner” (*quodammodo*)] caused by things; *whence* [or “when” or “hence”] it is that knowable things are a measure of human knowledge. For what is judged by the intellect is true by the fact that the thing is so, and not vice-versa [my emphasis].”⁴⁸⁶

Now, as I mention above, Aquinas distinguishes apprehension and judgment in terms of perfection of the intellect. He says that what the intellect has secondarily by simple judgment, namely truth, is a perfection of what it has by its first operation of apprehension.⁴⁸⁷ But, notice in the above statements that Aquinas does not specify the secondary principles or causes by which the intellect is additionally perfected. Aquinas only mentions the intellect’s initial activating principle, the thing itself, which originally moves the intellect to its first operation of apprehension (he also speaks of the concurrent causality of the active intellect, as I mention above). Now, in Aquinas’ view, it seems that the exterior thing itself is *both* a primary principle of apprehension *and* a primary—albeit incomplete and partial—principle of judgment in the intellect. For, recall that, according to Aquinas, what the intellect *primarily* understands by judgment is the thing itself.⁴⁸⁸ Nonetheless, the exterior thing that initially activates the intellect seems insufficient to explain the intellect’s secondary movement from apprehension to its own proper distinction and perfection by judgment. Can we explain this additional movement to judgment in the intellect?

⁴⁸⁶ SCG I.61. Here, I primarily use Brock’s translation in Brock, *Philosophy*, 87-88. Secondarily, I use Pegis’ translation.

⁴⁸⁷ ST I, q. 85, a. 5.

⁴⁸⁸ ST I, q. 85, a. 2.

Brief interpretations on natural causality in the human intellect and a response

Interpreting Aquinas, Westberg attempts to explain the movement from apprehension to judgment in terms of the *natural* causality of the intellect: “This move from apprehension to judgment is natural for the mind to make because it wants to know.”⁴⁸⁹ On this point, Westberg again references Aquinas, who writes, “The natural desire of the rational creature is to know everything that belongs to the perfection of the intellect, namely, the species and the genera of things and their types.”⁴⁹⁰

Interpreting Aquinas somewhat similarly, Sherwin says that theoretical truth “necessarily moves the intellect to assent [i.e., judgment].”⁴⁹¹ And, commenting on Aquinas’ statement that “the intellect understands some things naturally,”⁴⁹² Sherwin writes, “natural here signifies what is proper to each thing’s substance.... Something that is natural is not a matter of choice. Instead, it is a necessary feature of the very substance of a given creature.”⁴⁹³

Now, as I mention above, Aquinas does speak of a judgment or assent in the human intellect that is *natural*: specifically, he speaks of our *natural assent* to first principles. He writes, “If, therefore, that which the reason apprehends is such that it naturally assents thereto, e.g. the first principles, it is not in our power to assent or dissent to the like: assent follows naturally, and consequently, properly speaking, is not subject to our command.”⁴⁹⁴ Aquinas also uses the term “necessity” when speaking about the human intellect. He says that the human intellect “naturally and of necessity adheres to the first principles.”⁴⁹⁵ And, regarding conclusions deduced from first principles, he writes, “there are some propositions which have a necessary connection with the first principles.... And to these the intellect *assents of necessity*, when once it is aware of the

⁴⁸⁹ Westberg, 65.

⁴⁹⁰ *ST I*, q. 12, a. 8.

⁴⁹¹ Sherwin, 138-9. C.f. *DV* 14.1.

⁴⁹² *ST I-II*, q. 10, a. 1 sc.

⁴⁹³ Sherwin, 54, commenting on *ST I-II*, q. 10, a. 1. C.f. *I-II*, q. 51, a. 1; q. 91, a. 2 ad 2.

⁴⁹⁴ *ST I-II*, q. 17, a. 6. C.f. *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 1; a. 3 ad 2.

⁴⁹⁵ *ST I*, q. 82, a. 2. C.f. a. 1.

necessary connection of these conclusions with the principles [my emphasis].”⁴⁹⁶ Aquinas also says, “The human intellect must of necessity understand by composition and division [i.e., judgment].”⁴⁹⁷

However, what must be emphasized, I think, is that when Aquinas uses the terms “natural” and “necessity”—or, also “natural necessity”⁴⁹⁸—in cases like the above to speak about intellectual judgment, he is speaking about the human intellect generally⁴⁹⁹ and formally,⁵⁰⁰ *as to its object*. Indeed, Aquinas says that the act of reason can be considered in two ways: first, as to the exercise of the act, and second, as to the object of the act.⁵⁰¹ And, in q. 17, a. 6 of the *Prima Secundae* as cited above, Aquinas clearly indicates he is speaking about natural assent (or simple judgment of affirmation) according to the latter way of consideration—that is, as to its object. It is also clear that when Aquinas speaks of a proposition’s necessary connection to first principles, he is speaking about a formal (or logical) necessity by deduction.⁵⁰²

According to Aquinas, to consider an act with respect to its object is to consider the specification or formal determination of the act. It is to consider *what* act occurs or the *whatness* of an act. By contrast, to consider an act as to its exercise is to consider the act on the part of its subject. This is to consider whether or not a subject acts and thus whether or not a particular act proceeds. It is to consider *that* a particular act occurs or the *thatness* of an act.⁵⁰³

All of this is to say that when Aquinas speaks about natural assent or the necessity of assent in the above, I do not think he is speaking about necessity with respect to exercise. There is natural necessity as to its object, if or when a particular operation of judgment proceeds in the intellect. But, whether—or *that*—judgment proceeds actually and in particular is a separate

⁴⁹⁶ *ST I*, q. 82, a. 2.

⁴⁹⁷ *ST I*, q. 85, a. 5. C.f. *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2.

⁴⁹⁸ *ST I*, q. 82, a. 1.

⁴⁹⁹ *ST I-II*, q. 10, a. 1-2.

⁵⁰⁰ *ST I*, q. 82, a. 1.

⁵⁰¹ *ST I-II*, q. 17, a. 6.

⁵⁰² *ST I*, q. 82, a. 1-2.

⁵⁰³ *ST I-II*, q. 9, a. 1; q. 10, a. 2; I, q. 82, a. 4. *DM 6*.

question of exercise. Indeed, while Aquinas says that the “human intellect must of necessity understand by composition and division,”⁵⁰⁴ he does not say *that* any particular operation of simple judgment must proceed. Therefore, we might say that *when* the intellect judges or assents, it “must of necessity understand by composition and division,” but here we use the term “when” like Aquinas,⁵⁰⁵ without saying *that* judgment occurs (in particular), or at least without explaining how or why it occurs.

TWO REASONS TO SUGGEST THERE IS NO IMMEDIATELY APPARENT WAY TO EXPLAIN PARTICULAR JUDGMENT IN THE INTELLECT, GIVEN THE ABOVE

Now I do think there is a Thomistic case to be made for natural assent or simple judgment of affirmation in the intellect, and this is what I argue in chapter 5. But, given what we have discussed so far, I suggest we have no immediately apparent way to explain how particular judgment can proceed in the intellect at all. Two reasons for my claim are as follows.

A first reason

First, as I mention above, Aquinas says that the human being’s possible intellect is a natural passive power and potentiality (I also call this a general inclination) to universal *ens* (a being).⁵⁰⁶ Secondly, by implication and according to perfection, the intellect is also a natural potentiality to truth.⁵⁰⁷ Now, as I discuss above, given this starting premise, we can explain satisfactorily a particular operation of apprehension in the possible intellect (and its initial turning to the phantasms⁵⁰⁸) in view of the following: 1) that an exterior material thing initially activates (and

⁵⁰⁴ *ST I*, q. 85, a. 5.

⁵⁰⁵ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2. *DV* 1.3.

⁵⁰⁶ *ST I* q. 78, a. 1; q. 79, a. 1-2.

⁵⁰⁷ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2; q. 85, a. 5; I-II, q. 3, a. 7. I suggest the intellect’s inclination to truth is implied secondarily in its primary inclination to universal *ens*.

⁵⁰⁸ *ST I*, q. 84, a. 7. See chapter 5.

moves to exercise) the senses and, by virtue of the senses, the possible intellect, and 2) that the active intellect concurrently moves the intellect to abstract the quiddity of the thing. But, I suggest we cannot (yet) explain the intellect's additional, secondary (and more perfect) movement to particular judgment of or proper conformity to the thing. Logically speaking, we can explain what a judgment is: it is a logical combination or division of what the intellect apprehends; it is the forming of a proposition. And, formally speaking, as to its object (i.e., truth), we can explain judgment as a conformity or adequation of the intellect to a thing. But, we cannot (yet) explain why or *that* the intellect judges (or assents) actually and in particular at all. That is, we cannot explain particular judgment according to a principle of exercise—i.e., according to a principle of acting or being moved for an end.⁵⁰⁹ We also cannot yet speak of understanding the object of a particular operation of judgment (i.e., this particular truth) *as an end*.⁵¹⁰

Why does the possible intellect make a particular judgment at all, given that the intellect is by nature a potentiality and passive power (a general inclination)?⁵¹¹ We cannot claim that the human intellect is necessarily, particularly, and singularly inclined to judge an individual exterior thing by nature—which is to say that the human intellect is determined to judge by natural instinct⁵¹²—because this implies that the human intellect's particular operation of judgment is specified by an end that it does not cognize and, indeed, that the operation is determined and moved exteriorly by another. For, as Aquinas says, an act is specified by an end,⁵¹³ and if a thing has no cognition of the end of its action—in this case, the end or reason for its particular operation of judgment—then “the principle of acting or being moved for an end is not in that thing, but in something else, by which the principle of its action towards an end is imprinted on it. Wherefore such like things are not said to move themselves, but to be moved by others.”⁵¹⁴ But,

⁵⁰⁹ *ST I-II*, q. 6, a. 1.

⁵¹⁰ *ST I-II*, q. 6, a. 1-2.

⁵¹¹ Recall *ST I-II*, q. 1, a. 2.

⁵¹² See *ST I*, q. 83, a. 1. *DV* 24.2.

⁵¹³ *ST I-II*, q. 6, a. 1; q. 1, a. 3.

⁵¹⁴ *ST I-II*, q. 6, a. 1.

this implication is contrary to Aquinas' claim that what the intellect has by judgment is properly its *own*,⁵¹⁵ and it is contrary to Aquinas' claim that human judgment is distinct from non-rational judgment because it proceeds according to a fully interior principle movement, as I mention in the Introduction.⁵¹⁶

Furthermore, the above implication is contrary not only to Aquinas' claim that what the intellect has by judgment is properly its own,⁵¹⁷ but also to his premise regarding the definition of the human intellect. As I just mentioned, Aquinas claims that the human intellect is a natural potentiality to universal *ens*.⁵¹⁸ If the intellect were inclined by nature (i.e., by natural instinct) to *particular* judgment about a thing—or, to *particular* judgment about some general category of things—then it could not at the same time be in potentiality to (i.e., be generally inclined to) other particular judgments about those things. And, thus, it would not be generally inclined to universal *ens*, which is contrary to the starting premise. Indeed, the human intellect's natural potentiality to universal *ens*—and not to some less common object—is what distinguishes it from any other non-intellectual apprehensive or sensitive power.⁵¹⁹ In addition, the human intellect's potentiality or general inclination to judgment, I suggest, is what distinguishes it as a passive apprehensive power from any natural active power, which instead is entirely determined and moved to particular action by natural appetite.⁵²⁰ I discuss these points further in chapter 5.

A second reason

There is a second reason to suggest that we have no immediately apparent way to explain how particular judgment can proceed in the intellect at all. The reason arises from the following.

⁵¹⁵ DV 1.3.

⁵¹⁶ ST I-II, q. 6, a. 1. DM 6. DV 24.2. ST I, q. 83, a. 1.

⁵¹⁷ DV 1.3.

⁵¹⁸ ST I q. 78, a. 1; q. 79, a. 1-2.

⁵¹⁹ ST I, q. 78, a. 1.

⁵²⁰ See ST I-II, q. 17, a. 2 ad 3; a. 9: the sense powers are subject to the command of reason but not the natural (active) powers. ST I-II, q. 6, a. 4; I, q. 80.

As I mention above, Aquinas says that what the human intellect apprehends by abstraction is the nature (or quiddity) of a material thing *as a universal*, apart from the thing's "individual qualities represented by the phantasms."⁵²¹ Therefore, although that which the human intellect *primarily* understands by apprehension is the individual thing that activates it (*quoad se*),⁵²² that which the human intellect *directly* cognizes (*quoad nos*) is the universal (by virtue of an intelligible species). Indeed, the human intellect does not cognize a thing *as an individual* by its first act of apprehension (*quoad nos*), nor does it cognize by initial apprehension *that* it understands the individual thing (*quoad nos*).⁵²³

However, while Aquinas says that the human intellect cannot cognize "the singular in material things directly and primarily," significantly, he says that it can cognize the individual thing *indirectly*—and that it does this by an operation of judgment, by which it forms a proposition.⁵²⁴ Aquinas writes as follows:

"But indirectly, and as it were by a kind of reflection, [the intellect] can know the singular, because, as we have said above (q. 84, a. 7), even after abstracting the intelligible species, the intellect, in order to understand, needs to turn to the phantasms in which it understands the species, as is said *De Anima* iii, 7. Therefore it understands the universal directly through the intelligible species, and indirectly the singular represented by the phantasm. And thus it forms the proposition 'Socrates is a man.'"⁵²⁵

There are several related questions that arise regarding Aquinas' claim that the human intellect can cognize the individual thing *indirectly* by judgment. They are as follows: if we assume the intellect by initial apprehension cognizes a material thing *as a universal* and *not* as an individual—and if it also does not cognize *that* it understands an individual—how can the intellect (re-)turn itself both to the phantasms and indirectly to the singular thing itself represented by the phantasms so as to judge that the individual thing is or (is not)?⁵²⁶ Indeed, Aquinas says that "to

⁵²¹ *ST I*, q. 85, a. 1 ad 1; q. 86, a. 1.

⁵²² *ST I*, q. 85, a. 2; q. 77, a. 3.

⁵²³ *ST I*, q. 86, a. 1; q. 85, a. 1; a. 5.

⁵²⁴ *ST I*, q. 86, a. 1.

⁵²⁵ *ST I*, q. 86, a. 1.

⁵²⁶ See *DV* 1.3

understand actually its proper object, [the intellect] *must of necessity* turn to the phantasms in order to perceive the universal nature existing in the individual [my emphasis].”⁵²⁷ I use the term “re-turn” here to highlight a distinction. Namely, there is a distinction between 1) the intellect’s initial turning to the phantasms to abstract the universal from the particular by the agency of the active intellect (concurrently, upon the intellect’s initial activation by an exterior thing, by virtue of the senses), and 2) the intellect’s additional, secondary *re-turning* to the phantasms and indirectly to the singular thing itself to judge of—and to conform itself to—that particular thing. While we can explain the intellect’s initial operation of apprehension in terms of its causal principles—that is, according to the causality (efficient) of the exterior thing that activates it and the interior concurrent causality of the agent intellect—we cannot (yet) explain the intellect’s additional, secondary, more perfect movement to its own operation of judgment. For, recall that Aquinas says the intellect (i.e., the possible intellect) is a passive power.⁵²⁸ Assuming Aquinas’ claim that “nothing reduces itself from potentiality to act,” and if we are to argue that an operation of judgment proceeds distinctly in addition to the intellect’s initial operation of apprehension, then we need to be able to explain that secondary operation in terms of its causal principles.⁵²⁹ That is, we need to explain how the intellect is presented with the particular object and end of its operation of judgment (the *what* of the operation) by a principle of specification, and how the intellect is determinately moved to that end (*that* the operation is done) by a principle of exercise. For, as I mention in the Introduction, Aquinas says, “Every agent, of necessity, acts for an end.... For if the agent were not determinate to some particular effect, it would not do one thing rather than another: consequently in order that it produce a determinate effect, it must, of necessity, be determined to some certain one, which has the nature of an end.”⁵³⁰

⁵²⁷ ST I, q. 84, a. 7.

⁵²⁸ ST I, q. 79, a. 2 ad 2.

⁵²⁹ ST I-II, q. 1, a. 2.

⁵³⁰ ST I-II, q. 1, a. 2.

Given the above discussion, and assuming the intellect initially cognizes an exterior material thing *as a universal* and *not* as an individual—and that the intellect does not cognize *that* it understands an individual—I re-articulate my above questions more precisely as follows. First, what principle or cause *specifies* the particular object of the intellect’s particular operation of judgment *as an end*, so that it can re-turn to the phantasms of the sense powers and conform itself (in particular, albeit indirectly) to the individual exterior thing itself? And, how can this particular end be specified (at all) if the intellect initially apprehends only the universal quiddity of a thing, apart from its individual qualities? In other words, how can the intellect reach the individual thing itself by judgment given it apprehends only a universal?

Second, to emphasize what I say earlier, what principle or cause *moves* the intellect additionally—actually and in particular—to this particular end? That is, what principle or cause moves the intellect to exercise a secondary operation of judgment, in addition to its initial operation of apprehension, such that it can cognize truth, properly speaking? Or, in other words, given Aquinas’ premise that the intellect is a potentiality and general inclination to universal *ens* by nature,⁵³¹ and given Aquinas’ claim that the intellect, insofar as it cognizes a thing by simple apprehension, must be true regarding what a thing is⁵³²—the implication being that the intellect conforms to the thing implicitly, but not properly, by simple apprehension—the question is as follows: what moves the intellect secondarily and additionally to incline or to conform *itself* (to assent) to that individual thing by judgment, such that it can cognize truth properly speaking, which is to cognize its *own* proper conformity to the thing. I suggest that in the above we have not (yet) answered these questions.

Again, for the intellect’s judgment to be *its own* (and not merely that of another)—and, for the intellect to cognize “its *own* conformity [my emphasis]” to the intelligible thing, which is to cognize truth, properly speaking, according to Aquinas⁵³³—I suggest that the judgment’s principle

⁵³¹ ST I q. 78, a. 1; q. 79, a. 1-2.

⁵³² ST I q. 16, a. 2; q. 85, a. 6; q. 58, a. 5.

⁵³³ ST I, q. 16, a. 2.

of movement must likewise be the intellect's *own*. That is, the judgment must proceed according to an intrinsic principle of movement for an end. For, Aquinas says, "Now in order for a thing to be done for an end, some [cognition] of the end is necessary. Therefore, whatever so acts or is moved by an intrinsic principle, that it has some knowledge of the end, *has within itself the principle of its act* [my emphasis]." ⁵³⁴

In sum, given the above account, we cannot immediately explain how the particular object of an operation of judgment is *specified* and cognized *as an end*, nor can we immediately explain the principle of *exercise* by which the intellect is inclined to that particular end. Note that we cannot yet consider the human will as a principle of exercise of the intellect because, for Aquinas, "every movement of the will must be preceded by apprehension" ⁵³⁵ of "the appetible good." ⁵³⁶ The intellect apprehends the good after the true, ⁵³⁷ and it first cognizes truth, properly speaking, when it judges, ⁵³⁸ which is what we seek to explain.

A TURN TO A DESCRIPTIVE ACCOUNT OF HOW HUMAN JUDGMENT ARISES IN PARTICULAR

Without a clear sense of how simple judgment arises in act in the human intellect according to a Thomistic point of view, I turn in chapter 4 to consider Robert Sokolowski's *descriptive* account of human engagement in truth in *Phenomenology of the Human Person*. I dialogue with Sokolowski because he describes how human engagement in truth *arises* by judgment, which is what I seek to understand—and because his description is practically relevant to our common experience of naming and predicating together with others. While Sokolowski does not claim to be a Thomist, he holds several premises that broadly align with a Thomistic ontology of the human person. Indeed, Sokolowski begins his descriptive account with the following premise: "the human person

⁵³⁴ ST I-II, q. 6, a. 1.

⁵³⁵ ST I, q. 82, a. 4 ad 3.

⁵³⁶ ST I, q. 82, a. 3. Recall I argue in chapter 1 that the human will *cannot* be the *first* mover of the intellect's apprehension of the good.

⁵³⁷ ST I, q. 16, a. 4 ad 2.

⁵³⁸ ST I, q. 16, a. 2.

is defined by being engaged in truth, and human action is based on truth.”⁵³⁹ He also says that human beings have a fundamental desire for truth (veracity).⁵⁴⁰ Like a Thomist, Sokolowski affirms human acts of intellectual understanding and willing;⁵⁴¹ he emphasizes the distinctive propositional (predicational) form of declarative speech and acts of predication (i.e., judgments);⁵⁴² and he argues that the thing itself (in reality) is what we primarily know (that is, he holds an identity theory of knowledge).⁵⁴³

Looking ahead, I eventually conclude that Sokolowski’s descriptive account does not offer the clarity I am seeking, at least narrowly on its own (I do not examine his overall phenomenological approach). However, dialogue with Sokolowski helps to clarify my question and to focus my attention on the relevant subject matter. Indeed, I recognize more clearly that—despite both having a common propositional form—I seek to *distinguish* judgment of affirmation by simple understanding (i.e., by natural assent) from judgment of affirmation by inductive inference (e.g., by assent subject to our choice and command⁵⁴⁴), which is already a practical activity.

Dialogue with Sokolowski also helps to specify my approach. To disambiguate the above modes of judgment, I realize in the next chapter that I must ground a Thomistic account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth in a theoretical account of simple judgment of affirmation (i.e., natural assent) *in which I specify the operation according to its natural causal principles*.

⁵³⁹ Sokolowski, 1.

⁵⁴⁰ Sokolowski, 20-21.

⁵⁴¹ See, for example, Sokolowski 26-27.

⁵⁴² Sokolowski, 3, 48, 61.

⁵⁴³ Sokolowski, 176, 296-298.

⁵⁴⁴ See ST I-II, q. 17, a. 6.

Chapter Four: Robert Sokolowski and the Agent of Truth

A motivating concern

In his book *Phenomenology of the Human Person*, Robert Sokolowski claims that using language and grammar in speech—or, similarly, we might say, expressing a proposition or having a propositional attitude—signals that the speaker is a rational, intellectual, thinking agent.

Sokolowski writes, “The best access we have to intelligence in action is the syntax of language....

Mind is made present in the syntax of speech.”⁵⁴⁵ He also writes, “It is specifically the grammar of our speech that signals the intellectual activity behind our words.... If an animal were to use grammar in its sounds or gestures to indicate syntactic, categorial actions, we would have to say that it was thinking.”⁵⁴⁶ Finally, he writes, “...declaratives could not be attributed to or used by the computer; it could never declare on its own....”⁵⁴⁷

My initial concern with Sokolowski’s claim arises, in part, for a *practical* reason: because the speech of today’s so-called digital assistants and large language models directly seems to challenge Sokolowski’s claim. When I use my voice to ask the Google Assistant, “How are you doing today?” it replies, “I’m doing great. Thanks for asking. What can I help you with?” And, when I prompt the Generative Pre-trained Transformer 3 (GPT-3) large language model by asking, “How do we know what is good?” it replies, “I think we know what is good by using our conscience.”⁵⁴⁸ Indeed, the models in these cases *appear* to use language and express sentences.

Below, I summarize several of Sokolowski’s reasons for his claim and then attempt to engage them at greater length. Further examination of this claim and related points reveals a

⁵⁴⁵ Sokolowski, *Phenomenology of the Human Person*, 86. See especially Sokolowski, 80-87; c.f. 10, 39, 70.

⁵⁴⁶ Sokolowski, 84.

⁵⁴⁷ Sokolowski, 43.

⁵⁴⁸ For this prompt I used a temperature setting of 0.7. Note the GPT-3 model appears to generate summaries of articles, outlines of essays, translations, and analogies. It also appears to answer questions, respond to open ended conversation, etc. See <https://beta.openai.com/examples>.

nuanced position, I think, regarding the distinction between artificial “intelligence” and human intelligence and on the relation between human judgment and practice.

An approach

Recall in chapter 3 I explain why I turn to consider simple truth and Sokolowski’s *descriptive* account of human judgment in the present chapter. Aquinas claims that our understanding of the good depends on our understanding of true,⁵⁴⁹ which he says we first cognize when we judge, properly speaking.⁵⁵⁰ I dialogue with Sokolowski because he examines how human engagement in truth *arises* by judgment, which is what I seek to understand—and because his description is practically relevant to our everyday experience of learning to name and predicate in conversation with others. Although Sokolowski does not claim to be a Thomist, his starting premises are broadly consistent with a Thomistic ontology of the human person.⁵⁵¹

Sokolowski attempts to clarify what it means to be involved with truth by offering a phenomenological description of our human experience of judgment as first-person conscious agents.⁵⁵² I engage Sokolowski’s book narrowly on his *descriptive* account of human judgment, and then I raise several related questions in view of my thesis. I do not examine Sokolowski’s overall phenomenological approach.⁵⁵³ My primary question is whether Sokolowski’s *descriptive* account helps to clarify *how simple human judgment arises distinctly in act*. Note that in the following I do *not* attempt to compare artificial and human (practical) judgment somehow

⁵⁴⁹ ST I, q. 16, a. 4 ad 2.

⁵⁵⁰ ST I, q. 16, a. 2.

⁵⁵¹ Sokolowski, 1, 26-27, 176.

⁵⁵² Sokolowski, 4.

⁵⁵³ Note I do *not* suggest that Sokolowski offers merely an isolated, descriptive account of human judgment in *Phenomenology of the Human Person*. Rather, my understanding is that Sokolowski articulates his descriptive account of human judgment *phenomenologically*, that is, as one who articulates his experience of judgment as a first-person conscious agent.

speculatively; rather, I compare them only *practically* in terms of their common logical and material effects (e.g., language use and sentence expression) and practical causes.⁵⁵⁴

A reason for Sokolowski's claim: use of language requires an act and agent of predication

One reason Sokolowski thinks use of language and grammar reveals both an act of thinking and a thinking agent is because grammatical sentences must be constructed according to syntax or grammatical form. Even the most basic sentences combine subject and predicate (noun and verb) according to the predicative form S is p : the "never-absent form of predication, in which something is said of something else," he writes, pointing to Aristotle.⁵⁵⁵ Referencing the linguist Derek Bickerton, Sokolowski emphasizes that what is particularly special about grammar is not its linear concatenation but its hierarchic, embedding, nesting structure.⁵⁵⁶ Indeed, Sokolowski claims that the basic structure of predication itself involves this embedding or stacking structure. Specifically, even for predication involving simply a noun and a verb, he writes, we "still have an embedding and the sharp part-and-whole structure that constitutes syntax."⁵⁵⁷ He gives an example of standard predication: "...because we would have the subject (the ball) now being taken as the discrete whole within which the predicate (being green) is being stacked."⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁴ Indeed, the Turing test depends on the possibility of such a practical (not speculative) comparison. In making a *practical comparison*, what I am comparing *theoretically* is, in fact, two theories of human activity: 1) a *partial* theory of instrumental human practice (using ML as an instrument or tool), and 2) a more comprehensive theory of human judgment and activity. Consider the following simplified example of the Turing test. Suppose there is a human user who types chat messages into a chat session visible on a computer screen. This is the human judge. Additionally, suppose there are two other chat "agents" participating remotely in the chat session: one is another human being who types responses to the judge's messages in the same chat session, and the other is a chat bot (a ML model) that also sends responses to the judge's messages in the same chat session. After writing a message to the other "agents" in the chat session and receiving replies, it is the judge's responsibility to decide which response is that of a human being and which is that of a ML chat bot. Note that the human judge can compare the responses of the human being and the chat bot because they share a *common material effect*: visually expressed sentences on a computer screen.

⁵⁵⁵ Sokolowski, 48, 61-62.

⁵⁵⁶ Sokolowski, 35-37.

⁵⁵⁷ Sokolowski, 58. C.f., Brock, *Philosophy*, 86-87.

⁵⁵⁸ Sokolowski, 58, 119.

We might take Sokolowski's example further to show that even a simple subject-verb sentence like "She runs" involves predicative hierarchy. For, following Aristotle and Aquinas, if we transform the verb "runs" into the verb "is" plus a participle, we have the equivalent sentence "She is running" in standard predicative form, where a predicate is referred to a subject and is in some way *in* the subject (i.e., the act of running can be considered *in* the subject, at least in a certain sense).⁵⁵⁹ In other words, the subject "she" is the whole who has or performs the act of running (according to Aristotle and Aquinas, the action "running" is an accident of the subject "she"). Although there are different modes of predicating, in every case, distinct subject and predicate terms are combined to form a proposition expressed as a sentence.⁵⁶⁰

The basic reasoning of Sokolowski's argument seems to go as follows: if use of language involves combining parts of a sentence (e.g., words and phrases) according to grammatical form, then there must be an act of combining—an act of predication or judgment—by which these parts are combined into the whole sentence.⁵⁶¹ And, if there is an act of combining, then there must be an agent that performs the act: an agent of predication. Sokolowski points to Edmund Husserl, who he says identifies two performative functions of grammatical speech: it not only *expresses* a state of affairs but also *signals* or *indicates* "a cognitive action on the part of the speaker."⁵⁶²

Two further questions

This claim raises two key questions: what makes an action cognitive or predicative, and what makes something an agent or speaker of predication or judgment? Practically speaking, it seems that both human beings and large language models can express sentences having grammatical

⁵⁵⁹ See *Metaph* V.9.

⁵⁶⁰ Sokolowski, 48, 61, 72, 117. C.f. *Metaph* V.9.

⁵⁶¹ Sokolowski, 48, 61.

⁵⁶² Sokolowski, 83. See Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, ed. Dermot Moran, trans. J.N. Findlay (New York: Routledge, 2001), vol. 1, investigation I.

syntax. And, given that sentences express propositions according to predicative form, the implication seems to be that both human beings and large language models perform some kind of predicative or judicative action (judgment) to construct the sentences they express. And, thus, both seem, practically speaking, at least in some sense, to be agents of predication or judgment according to Sokolowski's view.

Indeed, figuring out how to implement deep layering and hierarchical structure in artificial neural networks (and how to train these layers efficiently) was a crucial technical breakthrough in the mid-2000s that helped engineers build the so-called “deep” machine learning (ML) models that drive today's digital assistants and large language models—and their apparent use of language and speech.⁵⁶³

It is significant to point out that today's deep learning models do not simply output pre-programmed responses based on a series of rules, nor do they rely on mere brute-force processing—although some of both do occur. Rather, deep learning models work by identifying patterns in data. As Lee explains, “Unlike the rule-based approach, builders of neural networks generally do not give the networks rules to follow in making decisions. They simply feed lots and lots of examples of a given phenomenon—pictures, chess games, sounds—into the neural networks and let the networks themselves identify patterns within the data.”⁵⁶⁴ And, by training machine learning models to identify deep patterns and correlations in data, it becomes possible, for example, for a model to input a sentence it may not have “seen” or “heard” before, and then to perform an optimization task (e.g., to speak a “relevant” output sentence, to translate a sentence into another language, etc.).⁵⁶⁵ Arguably, deep learning models can make “better” judgments than human beings in certain narrow domains of optimization, for example, when

⁵⁶³ Kai-Fu Lee, *AI Superpowers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2018), 9. Michael Wooldridge, *A Brief History of Artificial Intelligence* (New York: Flatiron Books, 2021), 119-20.

⁵⁶⁴ Lee, 8.

⁵⁶⁵ See Lee, 10.

playing a board game of chess or Go,⁵⁶⁶ or perhaps when minimizing default rates on loan applications.⁵⁶⁷

A concern

All of this is to say that I think Sokolowski's claim raises a concern. Namely, unless we make some distinctions regarding kinds or degrees of predicative or judicative action (and related distinctions regarding kinds or degrees of agency or subjectivity) and thus clarify what we mean by terms like "categoriality," "form," "concept," and "proposition," Sokolowski's approach may seem to conflate artificial and human judgment (and, somewhat similarly, to conflate percepts and concepts, syntax and categoriality,⁵⁶⁸ logic and metaphysics, etc.). Indeed, Sokolowski's claim that "Mind is made present in the syntax of speech"⁵⁶⁹ might suggest—contrary to his intention—that digital assistants and large language models are "intelligent" agents. But, while artificial "smart" skills such as speech and language translation are technically impressive, at least at present, these capacities are clearly limited in any general human context—beyond narrowly specified domains of data and optimization.

A possible reply

Now, in defense of his view, it is significant to note that Sokolowski claims the grammar of speech signals rational activity "only if our speech is thoughtful."⁵⁷⁰ Sokolowski gives examples of when our thinking may not be fully engaged when we speak, for example, when we simply repeat phrases or clichés⁵⁷¹—or, to add my own example—when we make a pre-rehearsed so-called

⁵⁶⁶ A deep learning model called AlphaGo won a game of Go against the human champion, Ke Jie, in 2017 (Lee, 1-2).

⁵⁶⁷ Lee, 10.

⁵⁶⁸ Sokolowski says, "Categoriality is another name for syntax," (Sokolowski, 45).

⁵⁶⁹ Sokolowski, 86.

⁵⁷⁰ Sokolowski, 84.

⁵⁷¹ Sokolowski, 84.

“elevator pitch” to someone. In these cases, Sokolowski suggests we “let the associative pull of words lead us on to other words.”⁵⁷² Nonetheless, Sokolowski goes on to claim that “the grammar of our discourse does in principle indicate or signal that we are thinking as we speak.”⁵⁷³

In reply to my concern, perhaps Sokolowski might decouple his claim that categoriality is simply another name for syntax⁵⁷⁴ and instead suggest that use of patterns in machine learning—under the *appearance* of language use and sentence expression—is deeply associative and not categorial. I think this response is on the right track, but of course, we need to clarify what we mean by terms like “categorial” or “formal.”

Still, I think there is something significant about Sokolowski’s claim. As I argue further below, I claim that use of syntax (and logic more generally) signals rational activity *in principle*, but not necessarily practically so (or “palpably” as Sokolowski suggests⁵⁷⁵) in the proximate act of speaking or in the proximate practical “agent” of speech. Rather, I claim below that use of syntax or logic signals rational activity in principle only by *resolution* (*reductio* or *resolutio*) to the primary natural substantial principle or cause of that use, to adopt Aquinas’ term.⁵⁷⁶ Indeed, there is something telling about any particular *exercise* of predication, as Sokolowski indicates in the following claim: “The *ability* to carry out syntactic articulation, in speech, concepts, and things, may require certain neural structures as its preconditions, but its actual *exercise* is the work of the human being.”⁵⁷⁷ I think this position needs to be clarified and nuanced.

Below, I attempt to make some of the distinctions mentioned. However, my concerns with Sokolowski’s approach extend beyond matters of emphasis and clarification—and beyond

⁵⁷² Sokolowski, 85.

⁵⁷³ Sokolowski, 85.

⁵⁷⁴ Sokolowski, 45.

⁵⁷⁵ Sokolowski, 39.

⁵⁷⁶ See DV 1.1. C.f. Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 74. C.f. Jan A. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought: From Philip the Chancellor (ca. 1225) to Francisco Suarez* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2012), 88.

⁵⁷⁷ Sokolowski, 42.

my concern about conflating syntax and categoriality. I also have substantive concerns with several of Sokolowski's philosophical claims, which I attempt to discuss below.

To engage his view in greater depth, I begin by attempting to summarize Sokolowski's descriptive account of categoriality—or, to use Husserl's phrase, his description of the "genealogy of logic" or predication.⁵⁷⁸

Sokolowski's approach

Drawing on the work of phenomenologist Edmund Husserl and linguist Derek Bickerton, Sokolowski emphasizes the distinction between what he calls protolanguage and language. Protolanguage, Sokolowski says, is an intermediate communicative stage between animal sounds and language.⁵⁷⁹ Protolanguage is associative and episodic, adheres to immediate context, and involves linear sequencing of words (without explicit grammar).⁵⁸⁰ Significantly, for Sokolowski, protolanguage lacks *syntax*. He writes:

"Protolanguage is speech deprived of syntax, or speech that has not attained syntax. It is what we call baby talk. In it the speaker indicates things, but only episodically. It consists of one, two, or several 'names' strung together to show something, but it does not have any explicit grammar. It has something like semantics but no syntax. This kind of speech is spoken by children under about two years of age, and it is also found in adults who were deprived of language instruction when they were young."⁵⁸¹

Citing Bickerton, Sokolowski says that something analogous to protolanguage is what can be "learned by apes who are trained in human language"; these higher animals, however, cannot make use of language because they cannot master syntax.⁵⁸²

According to Sokolowski, language, by contrast, is structured by grammatical syntax and expresses formal, logical meaning, or what Husserl calls *categoriality*.⁵⁸³ What is distinctive about

⁵⁷⁸ Sokolowski, 53, 57.

⁵⁷⁹ Sokolowski, 35.

⁵⁸⁰ Sokolowski, 31, 35, 37-38.

⁵⁸¹ Sokolowski, 35.

⁵⁸² Sokolowski, 35. See Bickerton, *Language and Species*, 108 as cited in Sokolowski, 41.

⁵⁸³ Sokolowski, 36, 39, 41, 45.

language is its hierarchic, part-and-whole grammatical structure (its syntax) and its ability “to range over” the present and the absent (to refer to things both present and entirely absent, separate from the immediate setting).⁵⁸⁴ While protolanguage expresses a “sequence of ideas,” language expresses thoughts embedded in larger thoughts.⁵⁸⁵ Indeed, the syntax of language is for Sokolowski “the expression of intelligence in speech.”⁵⁸⁶

Thus, according to Sokolowski, if human reason and indeed the human person is paradigmatically expressed in human speech (according to the syntactic structure of language), “then syntax is the most tangible presence of reason and the most palpable presence of the human person.”⁵⁸⁷ Human speech through language is the “primary expression of human reason.”⁵⁸⁸

Husserl’s genealogy of logic and categoriality (a genealogy of predication), according to Sokolowski

Here I briefly summarize Sokolowski’s description of how formal, logical thinking arises from perception for human beings. Sokolowski interprets Husserl’s theory and then adds what he says is an important modification. I limit my critical engagement below to discussing Sokolowski’s interpretation and modification of Husserl rather than discussing Husserl’s texts directly. The theory begins with the premise that there is no initial, innate knowledge of logical form or syntactic structure in human beings: neither from biology nor from *a priori* structures of the mind.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁴ Sokolowski, 38-39.

⁵⁸⁵ Sokolowski, 37.

⁵⁸⁶ Sokolowski, 41.

⁵⁸⁷ Sokolowski, 39.

⁵⁸⁸ Sokolowski, 39.

⁵⁸⁹ Sokolowski, 57.

As explained by Sokolowski, Husserl's basic theory is as follows.⁵⁹⁰ He begins with the phenomenon of perception. Perception involves experiencing a perceived thing through a manifold of appearances. The perceptive experience is continuous rather than discrete. While the subject perceives the thing according to a variety of aspects, profiles, and perspectives, the claim is that all these views are continuously experienced "as being 'of' one and the same object."⁵⁹¹ Sokolowski quotes Husserl as follows: "Each single percept in this series is already a percept of the thing. Whether I look at this book from above or below, from inside or outside, I always see *this book*. It is always one and the same thing."⁵⁹² The claim is that the identity of the thing is "implicitly presented in and through the manifold," even though the perceiving subject does not focus on this identity.⁵⁹³ Furthermore, the claim is that this stage of continuous perception is prelogical, pre-predicative, and pre-categorial and fit to be expressed in protolanguage.⁵⁹⁴

For Sokolowski, following Husserl, the significant movement from continuous perception to formal thinking can proceed when "one particular feature of the thing attracts our attention and holds it."⁵⁹⁵ Sokolowski explains this movement as follows:

"We make the move into categoriality and syntax when we do the following: we go back to the identity of the thing; we now focus on the identity and on the thing as a whole (we establish a subject, *S*, 'the ball'), and we focus again on the feature in question—say, the color—but we now take it explicitly as a part of the whole (we establish a predicate, *p*, 'is green').... We have reached something that can be formalized as *S is p*.... We explicitly embed the feature in the thing, the predicate in the subject, and we now enter the game of logical inclusion and exclusion, with all its refinements and syntactic complexities."⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹⁰ Sokolowski points to Husserl's explanations as presented most fully in *Experience and Judgment* and also in his earliest work, *Logical Investigations*.

⁵⁹¹ Sokolowski, 53.

⁵⁹² Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, volume 2, Investigation VI, p. 284, as cited in Sokolowski, 53.

⁵⁹³ Sokolowski, 53-54.

⁵⁹⁴ Sokolowski, 54.

⁵⁹⁵ Sokolowski, 55.

⁵⁹⁶ Sokolowski, 55-56.

Sokolowski describes this movement as achieving a proposition or a meaning that can be communicated and shared: a “lifting of perception into thought.”⁵⁹⁷ He emphasizes, “the proposition, or the state of affairs, as a categorial object, does not come about when we impose an a priori form on experience.”⁵⁹⁸ Rather, it arises in the way things are presented to us: “they can become articulated, their wholes and parts shaken out and their formal structure made explicit. If things did not present parts and wholes to us, predication and syntactic articulation could not occur; predication takes place between us and things, not within our own consciousness....”⁵⁹⁹

Sokolowski’s modification of Husserl’s account

Sokolowski’s key modification of the above account is to describe the movement from perception to categorial thinking intersubjectively: “as something a speaker does for a listener”—and not as something that occurs only between the mind and a thing.⁶⁰⁰ He writes,

“Logical form arises not only between the mind and the object, but also between two (or more) people who articulate the object in common.... My claim is that there can be subjects and predicates, there can be predication, ‘the very core of universal syntax,’ because, through the use of words, an object can be brought before a speaker and a listener as an object of reference [by naming the object], and an aspect of that object can be differentiated and registered in it.”⁶⁰¹

By using a name, Sokolowski explains, the speaker establishes an object as the subject (as a whole subject) to be articulated. Then, the speaker uses a predicate to focus the listener’s attention on a part or feature of that object.⁶⁰²

Sokolowski’s claim is that predicational form comes *originally* from public activity: from the interaction between speaker and listener. Solitary or private thinking is “the derivation from

⁵⁹⁷ Sokolowski, 57.

⁵⁹⁸ Sokolowski, 56.

⁵⁹⁹ Sokolowski, 56.

⁶⁰⁰ Sokolowski, 58.

⁶⁰¹ Sokolowski, 59-60.

⁶⁰² Sokolowski, 59-61

or the rehearsal for” public speech; it is “internalized conversation.”⁶⁰³ Sokolowski argues that if movement from perception to thought occurred privately then communication (in common) would be impossible.

Referencing psychologist Paul Bloom’s research on how children learn, Sokolowski notes that children do not learn names simply by association through repetition: “the child does not just experience the word and the thing”; rather, the child “experiences another person using the word to signify the thing.”⁶⁰⁴ For the child to take sounds as words, there needs to be an act of naming by another person that establishes referential intent.⁶⁰⁵ Sokolowski describes the child’s movement into predication and thinking as follows: “What the child enters into when he begins to point and then to symbolize is the activity of establishing a reference and then embedding a predicate within the referent; he enters into categorial predication, the use of syntax in speech, in reciprocity with other speakers.”⁶⁰⁶

Indeed, Sokolowski concludes that “originally and essentially predication occurs between persons, not in a solitary mind that imposes logic on experience.”⁶⁰⁷ And, specifically, it seems that both intersubjective exchange and language are essential for the transition from perceiving to thinking categorially for Sokolowski. He writes, “I would claim, however, that categorial forms and syntactically shaped experience could not be thought to occur in the sphere of ownness, because such syntax is the deposit of conversational action, and such activities could not occur without the presence, in principle, of other speakers.”⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰³ Sokolowski, 62.

⁶⁰⁴ Sokolowski, 63.

⁶⁰⁵ Sokolowski, 63.

⁶⁰⁶ Sokolowski, 64.

⁶⁰⁷ Sokolowski, 67.

⁶⁰⁸ Sokolowski, 126.

ANALYSIS

There are several points to note in Sokolowski's account of the genealogy of logic and categoriality.

The first point to highlight is that Sokolowski's approach begins with continuous sense perception, in which the identities of objects of perception are implicitly presented through a manifold of aspects and profiles. Husserl calls these various aspects "percepts" insofar as the subject perceives them as such. The premises here seem to be at least the following: 1) things exist; 2) these things have properties and accidents; and 3) they reveal and present themselves as such—as substances having accidents—to the perceiving subject, even though the subject does not yet explicitly understand them as such (i.e., as subjects of predication and thus as substances).⁶⁰⁹ The primary point is that in Sokolowski's view there is, by extension, a certain implicit order to continuous perceptive experience across space and time (e.g., there are correlations across perspectives, from one continuous sense perception to another), such that things themselves (as objects of perception) are implicitly perceived, though not as formally structured.⁶¹⁰ Sokolowski's claim seems to be that, in presenting themselves, existing things cause this perceptive experience.

The second point to highlight is that, in Sokolowski's view, a speaker leads a listener (a cognitive subject) into thinking about things. The speaker does this through use of language and predication, specifically by naming a thing and bringing it into focus as a subject of predication—thereby establishing referential intent—and then by expressing a predicate to attend to some feature of the subject as part of the whole.⁶¹¹ Here Sokolowski does not simply augment Husserl's account to recognize the influence of human conversation. Rather, contrary to Husserl,

⁶⁰⁹ Sokolowski, 55.

⁶¹⁰ Sokolowski, 54.

⁶¹¹ Sokolowski 55, 59, 65.

Sokolowski claims that “the categorial level belongs first and foremost to the intersubjective exchange, not to the single mind.”⁶¹²

A further implication is that even though Sokolowski locates categoriality in an intersubjective context, such that persons predicate for one another,⁶¹³ there is nonetheless a certain epistemic priority involved. Namely, at least in the case in which children (as listeners) first learn to name, the speaker in Sokolowski’s account must already use language and think rationally (to some extent) prior to the listener.⁶¹⁴ It is in this sense that the speaker “lead[s] the listener into thinking,” in Sokolowski’s words.⁶¹⁵

The third point to highlight is that, although the speaker leads the listener into thinking, “the listener has to have a certain elementary trust in the speaker in order to awaken into rationality, to grasp what is being referred to and what is being said about it.”⁶¹⁶ Sokolowski emphasizes that confidence in another is especially important in childhood, “when attachment to the expressed mind of another shapes the powers of our own mind.”⁶¹⁷ Although Sokolowski does not address the distinction here, one wonders about the seemingly relevant formal distinction between emotional attachment and elementary trust in this context.

A question of structuralism

Given Sokolowski’s modification of Husserl’s account, we may begin to share S.J. McGrath’s question as to whether Sokolowski’s view issues into structuralism. That is, to adopt McGrath’s concise summary of the structuralist position, we may ask whether Sokolowski’s position implies that meaning (or similarly combination, judgement, or predication) is ultimately a function of the external, socially-constructed relation of linguistic terms or “signifiers to one another in a system

⁶¹² Sokolowski, 126.

⁶¹³ Sokolowski, 60-61.

⁶¹⁴ Sokolowski, 63-64.

⁶¹⁵ Sokolowski, 65.

⁶¹⁶ Sokolowski, 65-66.

⁶¹⁷ Sokolowski, 66.

of symbols constituted and regulated by public use.”⁶¹⁸ And, if Sokolowski’s view does issue into structuralism, we may ask, further, how such a system could get started: is a literary-hermeneutical theory needed to consider a history of discourse?⁶¹⁹ I return to the question of how use of language and logical syntax gets started further below.

Sokolowski’s reply

To refute any structuralist interpretations, Sokolowski clarifies that the human conversation within which all intelligibilities are “actualized and located” is “not a formal, structuralist system”; rather, “it subsists only in the people who carry it along and who are actual or potential conversants in it.”⁶²⁰ Sokolowski’s reply to those “who have located human thinking in the structuralism of language or in intertextuality” is as follows:

“The response that I would offer to this proposal is that thinking does not occur in structures or texts but in their use, and in order for the use to occur there must be a user of language or a dative of manifestation, an agent of truth.”⁶²¹

A point of clarification

A point of clarification here is that Sokolowski does *not* want to claim that human beings intelligibly grasp indivisibles or universal ideas precisely *from* or *in* syntax. He writes, “the syntax in question is not used, first and foremost, to articulate ideas in our minds.”⁶²² Indeed, Sokolowski distances himself both from contemporary structuralist theories of knowledge and from certain medieval theories of knowledge, such as Avicenna’s view, that posit a separate active intellect for all human beings. For Sokolowski such theories risk implying that thinking is

⁶¹⁸ S. J. McGrath, “Phenomenology of the Human Person by Robert Sokolowski,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 75, no. 1 (2011): 151.

⁶¹⁹ McGrath, 147-151.

⁶²⁰ Sokolowski, 169, 171.

⁶²¹ Sokolowski, 171.

⁶²² Sokolowski, 156.

not a real action of human beings themselves.⁶²³ Rather, human thinking occurs *through use of*—and not *from* or *in*—syntax.⁶²⁴ Sokolowski goes so far as to say that “*only* within the context set by syntax do we let the intelligibilities of things become manifest to us [my emphasis].”⁶²⁵

Given the above, Sokolowski seems to suggest that syntax is a necessary condition or context for human understanding but not a sufficient one. Indeed, Sokolowski says he seeks to identify the *conditions* for human understanding: “to bring out the subjective conditions that allow the objective distinctions to be disclosed.”⁶²⁶

These distinctions need more precise clarification. For now, to adopt Aquinas’ terminology, what we can say is that syntax is not the primary *formal* cause of human understanding in Sokolowski’s view. While syntax has formal structure according to his theory, this formal structure arises through *use* by human beings who articulate an object in common⁶²⁷: it is “a residue of public conversation.”⁶²⁸ In Sokolowski’s view, syntactic form is the necessary “context” and “frame” for human understanding. “Syntax is precisely the frame in which intelligible content is disclosed,” he writes.⁶²⁹ He clarifies this point further as follows: “The essentials of things are not expressed *in* the syntax of speech, but the manifestation of essentials can happen *only* when syntax comes into play [my emphasis].”⁶³⁰

And why is syntax necessary as such, according to Sokolowski? The answer seems to be that syntax provides the necessary formal scaffolding—the context—through which human beings can, through use of syntax, “make explicit distinctions between and within the kinds of things.”⁶³¹ That is, through use of syntax (and not just the syntax of a single judgment but that of

⁶²³ Sokolowski, 170-171. In *DV* 11.1, Aquinas critiques Avicenna’s view for its extrinsicism: it “excludes proximate causes, attributing solely to first causes all effects which happen in lower natures.” See Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 80-84, 170-173. C.f. *ST I*, q. 79, a. 5.

⁶²⁴ Sokolowski, 299.

⁶²⁵ Sokolowski, 156, 105.

⁶²⁶ Sokolowski, 124.

⁶²⁷ Sokolowski, 59.

⁶²⁸ Sokolowski, 124.

⁶²⁹ Sokolowski, 166, 124, 156.

⁶³⁰ Sokolowski, 105.

⁶³¹ Sokolowski, 99.

a series of judgments, a whole conversation⁶³²), human beings can begin “to distinguish essential from coincidentals” and “to distinguish between properties and accidentals” and “to identify a ‘one’ or an ‘entity’ [the substance] behind the properties as that from which they flow.”⁶³³

In sum, while a structural idealist might go so far as to argue that universal logical structure *underlies the essences* of being and thinking,⁶³⁴ Sokolowski’s claim, as already cited, is clearly that “thinking does not occur in structures or texts but in their use.” The implication is that the *use* of syntax is more fundamental than the structure of syntax. The further implication is that the *user* of syntax, whom Sokolowski calls an “agent of truth,” is more fundamental than its use.

Below, I examine whether turning, first, to the *use* of language and, second, to the *user* of language helps to secure Sokolowski’s theory from issuing into structuralism.

ANALYSIS: USE

To consider whether turning to the *use* of language clarifies Sokolowski’s view, I think it is helpful by comparison to look briefly at the work of Jeffrey Stout. Stout’s epistemological theory is pragmatic, inferentialist,⁶³⁵ and contextualist,⁶³⁶ and given McGrath’s definition above, we might say it is practically structuralist—but not idealistically so.⁶³⁷ Stout’s theory is admittedly very

⁶³² Sokolowski, 118.

⁶³³ Sokolowski, 108. Note this discussion points to the structure of logic in reasoning without suggesting how logic is related to being or metaphysics. Note Sokolowski also says that our abstracting the intelligibilities of things “cannot be *activated* except through compositional patterns [my emphasis],” and, elsewhere, that “the power to abstract needs the concurrence of syntactic structures” (Sokolowski, 299, 146, 99). These comments seem to suggest that, for Sokolowski, syntax has not only formal structure but also an *active* causal role (perhaps as a partial, instrumental efficient or material cause?) in moving us to understand the intelligibility of a thing. All of this needs more clarification with respect to causality.

⁶³⁴ McGrath, 151.

⁶³⁵ Jeffrey Stout, “Radical Interpretation and Pragmatism: Davidson, Rorty, and Brandom on Truth,” in *Radical Interpretation in Religion*, ed. Nancy K. Frankenberry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 34–35. C.f. Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 93.

⁶³⁶ Jeffrey Stout, “On Having a Morality in Common,” in *Prospects for a Common Morality*, ed. Gene Outka and John P. Reeder (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 229–30. Stout, *Democracy*, 249.

⁶³⁷ Stout, “Radical,” 36; “Morality,” 230–231.

different from Sokolowski's, and the meanings each thinker attributes to terms like "truth" and "desire" are likewise different. However, to make a point, I begin by highlighting a few similarities between the theories.

First, Stout, like Sokolowski, says it is necessary to consider *use*—and not merely structure—when examining thinking and meaning.⁶³⁸ Indeed, Stout distances himself from structural idealism.⁶³⁹ In addition, Stout defends the meaningful distinction between the terms "justification" and "truth" in everyday language use, and like Sokolowski, he points to the significance of desiring or striving for truth⁶⁴⁰ (Sokolowski uses the term "veracity"⁶⁴¹) and for accuracy.⁶⁴² Stout and Sokolowski both emphasize the decisively social, conversational, public character of human thinking.⁶⁴³ And, both highlight the epistemological significance of reasoning.⁶⁴⁴

These similarities notwithstanding, however, Stout argues—contrary to Sokolowski⁶⁴⁵—that reasoning (and judging, predicating, etc.) is a social practice that *essentially involves inference*.⁶⁴⁶ Drawing on the work of Sellars, Davidson, and especially Brandom, among others, Stout argues for a pragmatic, inferentialist semantic theory of "meaning *as use* [my emphasis]."⁶⁴⁷ That is, Stout accounts for the "conceptual content of linguistic items" inferentially (but not merely inferentially⁶⁴⁸) in terms of how these linguistic items are employed by language users in

⁶³⁸ Stout has a semantic theory of "meaning as use" (see Stout, "Radical," 37), which is significantly different from Sokolowski's theory of thinking "in use" of structure. C.f. Stout, *Democracy*, 248, 253.

⁶³⁹ See Stout, "Morality," 230-231.

⁶⁴⁰ Stout, "Morality," 230.

⁶⁴¹ Sokolowski says that veracity is the "impulse toward truth" (Sokolowski, 20). Sokolowski 21, 94.

⁶⁴² Stout thinks truth is synonymous to the term "accuracy": "accuracy with respect to the subject matter" (Stout, *Democracy*, 254-255). Following Bernard Williams, Sokolowski discusses accuracy as a virtue of truthfulness (Sokolowski, 91-92). But, he emphasizes that truthfulness and veracity are more fundamental than accuracy (93).

⁶⁴³ Sokolowski, 58-63, 126, 131. Stout, "Radical," 35.

⁶⁴⁴ Sokolowski, 131. See Stout, "Radical," 34-35.

⁶⁴⁵ Sokolowski says, "It would be wrong to say, however, that we *first* collect a lot of properties and only *subsequently* infer that they flow from an essence. Properties and essence come together" (Sokolowski, 107).

⁶⁴⁶ Stout, "Radical," 34-35. C.f. Brandom, 93.

⁶⁴⁷ Stout, "Radical," 37.

⁶⁴⁸ See Stout, "Radical," 36.

the social exchange of reasons.⁶⁴⁹ Thus, Stout's theory of meaning *as use* of language is notably distinct from Sokolowski's theory of meaningful thinking *in the context of use*. Whereas, for Stout, meaning is *inferred* from language use in social practices, for Sokolowski, meaningful thinking arises *in the context of* language use and human conversation.

I do not attempt to examine the details of Stout's theory here. What I think we can gather from this brief comparison is simply that considering *use* of language in isolation does not tell us how *meaningful* use of language arises. If meaning is *inferred* from language use, as Stout argues, then we need to consider how inference arises. Or, if meaningful thinking arises *in the context* of language use, as Sokolowski argues, then we need to consider how meaningful thinking arises in this context. Thus, I turn to consider, more fundamentally, the language *user*, who is the agent or subject of language use in both theories.

ANALYSIS: A USER OF LANGUAGE AND AN AGENT OF TRUTH

Recall, in his response to the structuralist position, Sokolowski claims not only that thinking occurs in the *use* of structures or texts but also that "in order for the use to occur there must be a user of language or a dative of manifestation, an agent of truth."⁶⁵⁰

Now, Stout also refers to language users. For Stout, "meaning as use" arises in the context of reasoning as a social practice. He accounts for "meaning as use" in terms of how linguistic items are used by language users in the social exchange of reasons.⁶⁵¹ Indeed, referencing Brandom, Stout writes, "Brandom's approach is pragmatic in the sense that he takes

⁶⁴⁹ Stout, "Radical," 37-38.

⁶⁵⁰ Sokolowski, 171.

⁶⁵¹ Stout, "Radical," 37-38. Stout says Brandom's theory is a theoretical alternative to representationalism and takes its point of departure from Sellars, who writes, "What was needed was a functional theory of concepts which would make their role in reasoning, rather than [their] supposed origin in experience, their primary feature" (Stout, "Radical," 34, who cites Brandom quoting Sellars in Brandom, 93).

the normative know-how of unreflective language-users to be more basic than the reflective expression of norms in rules.”⁶⁵²

Given both Sokolowski and Stout refer to “language users,” we immediately see that, if we are to distinguish one view from another, we cannot consider simply the term “language user” itself. In addition, we need to consider each theory’s specification of the term. To distinguish one theory from another, we need to consider each theory’s specification of the mode of acting or operating as a “language user.” And, this mode of using or acting, in order to function as a point of explanation in each thinker’s respective theory, must be specified according to some distinctive, determinate, and stable aspect, at least within the local context of each theory. Indeed, it is this determinate or stable aspect that defines what it means to be a subject of activity or language use according to each theory.⁶⁵³

Sokolowski specifies a “language user’s” mode of acting as follows: the “user of language” is “a dative of manifestation” and “an agent of truth.” Of course, to understand what this means we need to consider Sokolowski’s use of the terms “manifestation” and “truth,” the latter of which he explains in terms of a theory of correspondence⁶⁵⁴ and an identity theory of knowledge. Following Aristotle and Aquinas, Sokolowski affirms that the thing itself is what we directly and primarily know,⁶⁵⁵ and that the knower becomes identified with or “adequated” to the thing known.⁶⁵⁶ Sokolowski points to the indispensable role of the word or name, which presents a thing in its intelligibility: “the intelligibility of the thing becomes present when the name is found.”⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵² Stout, “Radical,” 37.

⁶⁵³ As I discuss below, understanding *ens* by conceptual addition as *res* involves understanding it (at least vaguely) according to a stable, determinate mode of being or nature (See Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 193, 223).

⁶⁵⁴ Sokolowski, 181.

⁶⁵⁵ Sokolowski, 176, 296-298.

⁶⁵⁶ Sokolowski, 102 n. 4, 155.

⁶⁵⁷ Sokolowski, 156. Sokolowski, 177. And, for Sokolowski, since “use of any name engages universality” and either designates (explicitly) or connotes (implicitly) an essence (135), naming in some sense involves presentation of the essence and the making of distinctions (131).

By contrast, Stout says that a “user of language” is a participant in social practices and a “player” of “language games,” which involve self-committing activities such as exchanging reasons with one another.⁶⁵⁸ He says that “being justified in believing something is a relation among a person, a proposition, and an epistemic context.”⁶⁵⁹ Stout writes, “testing or justifying beliefs always involves appeal to further beliefs and not appeal to things as they are in themselves, independent of all human description.... at any given time there is no justificatory appeal beyond the world-as-we-are-currently-describing-it.”⁶⁶⁰ According to Stout’s semantic theory “of meaning as use,” *pragmatics* is prior to semantics and logic. Indeed, semantics “calls upon inferential practices to explain conceptual content.”⁶⁶¹ Given this, we might call Stout’s “language user” an “agent of inference.”

Whether it follows that the “language user” is an “agent of truth” or an “agent of inference,” it seems, depends, in part, upon the *theoretical* premises of each thinker’s theory (and more broadly, of course, upon whether the resulting claim follows from these premises, upon whether the premises and the resulting claim are consistent with theories in other domains, upon whether the claim is relevant to our experience of knowledge and practice *quoad nos*, etc.). Perhaps similar concerns factor into Sokolowski’s statement regarding the possibility of speaking philosophically about human thinking:

“If we wish to clarify, philosophically, what thinking is, all we can do is to speak about the kind of identity that is presented to us in knowledge and distinguish it from the kinds of identities that occur in pictures, mental images, and the direct perception of things.”⁶⁶²

⁶⁵⁸ Stout, “Radical,” 35-37, 42. Stout also suggests that language users who participate in the social practice of reasoning “hope,” “care,” and “strive” (practically) for better reasons and indeed for moral truth (as distinct from justification), even though they cannot know whether they have that truth (Stout, “Morality,” 230).

⁶⁵⁹ Stout, “Morality,” 220.

⁶⁶⁰ Stout, *Babel*, 33. Note that Aquinas offers a somewhat similar epistemological critique of sight—the implication being, I think, that the critique likewise applies to other non-rational apprehensive powers. He writes, “For although sight [or any other non-rational apprehensive power] has the likeness of a visible thing [a visible likeness/apprehension], yet it does not know the comparison which exists between the thing seen and that which itself apprehends concerning it” (*ST I*, q. 16, a. 2). However, as I discuss in chapter 5, Aquinas does not apply this critique to the human intellect.

⁶⁶¹ Stout, “Radical,” 37, 42, 45.

⁶⁶² Sokolowski, 176.

Regarding the distinction between a thing itself and our knowledge of a thing, Sokolowski, surprisingly, goes so far as to say, “it would be better if we did not focus simply on the simple, elementary parts of the problem.”⁶⁶³

GENERAL ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE

Now perhaps Sokolowski aims to be consistent when he admits the limitations of philosophical thinking, given his descriptive approach. Indeed, in the introduction to his book, Sokolowski writes,

“...the human person is defined by being engaged in truth, and human action is based on truth. I do not intend to prove that human beings are specified in this way (what sort of premises could I use?), but rather to describe, analytically, what our engagement in truth means. I hope to show, not to demonstrate, what we are as human persons.”⁶⁶⁴

An advantage of Sokolowski’s response here is that it acknowledges the bounds of a descriptive—and also, I suggest, an epistemological—approach to knowledge. Indeed, one of the arguments I hope to defend in this study is that epistemological claims—i.e., claims about knowledge—depend on premises regarding the nature of the being that knows (or has knowledge). That is, I think the definition of the term “knowledge” depends, at least in part, on the nature of the being that knows. I discuss this topic further below.

While Sokolowski’s *description* of what human engagement in truth means is enlightening, the point I would like to emphasize is that Sokolowski begins with a theoretical premise: the human person is an agent of truth.⁶⁶⁵ Indeed, this is a theoretical premise about human nature. I think this starting premise and any related premises need to be explicitly stated as such.

⁶⁶³ Sokolowski, 155.

⁶⁶⁴ Sokolowski, 1.

⁶⁶⁵ On the first page of his book’s introduction, Sokolowski clarifies that the term “the agent of truth” is a synonym for “the human person” (and a paraphrase of the term “rational animal”) (Sokolowski, 1).

Then, Sokolowski attempts to offer a description of human judgment that aligns with this starting premise. Notably, what Sokolowski does not attempt to do is to develop a parallel theory of the human person as an agent of truth to complement his description. However, I think there is much theoretical work involved, for example, in moving from the claim that the human being can understand truth to the claim that the human being can act knowingly and freely as an agent truth.

A first critique

My first critique of Sokolowski's account is that while he says he aims to *describe* what it means to be engaged in truth as a human person *quoad nos*⁶⁶⁶—and to discuss the emergence of language and the formal structures of human thinking *quoad nos*,⁶⁶⁷ he nonetheless makes several secondary theoretical claims in the domains of philosophy of mind, philosophical anthropology, and metaphysics, without, I think, sufficiently explaining these moves philosophically and without specifying the premises upon which these theoretical claims depend.

I think that several of Sokolowski's secondary theoretical claims *do not follow from* his descriptive account. Example claims include the following: first, that Aquinas' discussion of the agent intellect is a "just-so" story⁶⁶⁸ and that it offers no explanation of human thinking and knowing;⁶⁶⁹ second, that "we should begin our analysis with the phenomenon of syntactic articulation and not with the simple extraction of an intelligibility...the power to weave comes

⁶⁶⁶ Sokolowski, 1, 7.

⁶⁶⁷ Sokolowski, 1, 53-67.

⁶⁶⁸ Sokolowski, 298-299.

⁶⁶⁹ Sokolowski, 102-103, including n. 4. Sokolowski also distances himself from Aquinas' use of terms such as "likeness" and "similitude" (*similitudo* in Latin), which, while speaking *primarily* of an exterior thing we understand (a *quod*), Aquinas uses to speak *secondarily* of the interior concept and the intelligible species in the intellect *by which* we understand (a *quo*). Sokolowski, 294-298. See *ST I*, q. 85, a. 2. In Sokolowski, 295, he points to *SCG I*.53, 3. He also cites, Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 17, a. 3. Sokolowski writes, "It is acceptable to say that we assimilate the intelligibility, but not that we acquire a similitude of it" (176). He also says that "the constant use of the term *similitudes* for intelligible species, concepts, judgments, and even arguments does seem to 'substantialize' them to an uncomfortable degree" (298).

first,⁶⁷⁰ and, third, that human understanding (specifically, apprehension by simple abstraction of the intelligibilities of things) proceeds “*only* within the context set by syntax [my emphasis].”⁶⁷¹

Note that these claims seems to depend on an assumed premise, which I do not think Sokolowski attempts to explain, that when a speaker leads a listener (e.g., a child) into thinking, “the listener has to have a certain elementary trust in the speaker in order to awaken into rationality.”⁶⁷²

Although I cannot do so here, I think we need to assess such claims theoretically (for example, I think theory shows, contrary to Sokolowski’s claim, that rationality awakens elementary trust in a speaker, and not the reverse).

A second critique

My second critique of Sokolowski’s descriptive account is that it is ambiguous and underdetermined, and that without clarification it does not respond adequately to structuralist concerns. Neither do I think it adequately distinguishes human and artificial judgment, as I attempt to show in the next section. Recall when pressed by structuralists to show that his description is not of what I call an “agent of inference,” Sokolowski simply reasserts his starting premise that the human being is an agent of truth.⁶⁷³ While I seek to defend Sokolowski’s claim that the human being is *primarily* an agent of truth, I also argue that the human being is *secondarily* an agent of inference. My critique of Sokolowski’s descriptive account is that it does not distinguish between the two species of human judgment of affirmation identified in the last chapter, namely judgment of affirmation by simple understanding (i.e., by natural assent) and judgment of affirmation by inductive inference (e.g., by assent subject to our choice and

⁶⁷⁰ Sokolowski, 299. Similarly, Sokolowski writes, “In our philosophical analysis we do not begin with the ‘first act’ of the intellect; we begin by considering the third act, reasoning, or, as we have formulated it, the reciprocal reasoning that is conversation” (Sokolowski, 131).

⁶⁷¹ Sokolowski, 156. C.f. Sokolowski, 105, 131, 189.

⁶⁷² Sokolowski, 65-66.

⁶⁷³ Sokolowski, 171. McGrath, 151.

command⁶⁷⁴), which is already a practical activity.⁶⁷⁵ I suggest that both species of human judgment 1) rely on human engagement in truth, 2) can have *identical* propositional form, and 3) *can fit Sokolowski's description of how judgment arises*.

Recall in chapter 3 I raise a similar concern about Thomistic accounts of human judgment. I observe that Thomistic accounts tend to distinguish the intellectual operation of judgment, first, in terms of its logical or propositional form, and second, in terms of its general object or end, which is truth. My concern there is that the approach tends to underspecify—or to leave somewhat underdetermined—the natural species of simple judgment *as an interior, proper operation of the human intellect* and, thus, that it does not offer an account of how simple judgment arises distinctly in act (which our account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth requires).

My concern about Sokolowski's descriptive account is similar. Even though Sokolowski *describes* how human judgment *arises in particular*, i.e., in a context involving “two (or more) people who articulate [an] object in common,”⁶⁷⁶ because he speaks about judgment only in terms of its logical and material effects (e.g., language use and sentence expression) and in terms of its object as a logical *instance* of truth, generally speaking (and not as a *particular* good and *end* of an intellectual operation having interior principles of specification and exercise), the result is to conflate the natural and logical (and practical) species of human judgment of affirmation. Indeed, assuming Sokolowski's premise that the human person is an agent of truth, his description alone is underdetermined and could apply either to simple human judgment or to judgment by inductive inference. Thus, for example, when a child articulates an object in common together with a speaker, we can identify at least two possible explanations of the judgment: the child could

⁶⁷⁴ See ST I-II, q. 17, a. 6.

⁶⁷⁵ Sokolowski briefly refers to human beings as “practical agents” and mentions a speaker declaring herself as a practical agent when she is involved in practical activity (Sokolowski, 257, 259). He also speaks of making inductions and drawing inferences (10). But, I do not think Sokolowski speaks of making judgments of affirmation *by inductive inference* or *by practice*. Neither does he speak about *practical* agents of inductive inference and language use, as I discuss below.

⁶⁷⁶ Sokolowski, 59-60.

be predicating 1) because she understands the simple intelligibility of the thing itself (this is a simple judgment), or 2) because she *chooses* to accept the speaker's naming of the object (for a practical reason, e.g., attachment, trust, evidence, advice, explanation, etc.) and thus to make the judgment herself practically (this is a judgment by inductive inference).⁶⁷⁷ In the latter case, the judgment by inductive inference is an effect of the child's practical thinking.⁶⁷⁸

CONCLUSIONS

Given the above critiques, my conclusion is that because it cannot distinguish a particular operation of judgment by inductive inference, whose immediate cause is practical activity, from a particular operation of simple judgment by natural assent,⁶⁷⁹ Sokolowski's description of human judgment—at least narrowly on its own—does not provide the clear account of simple human judgment and simple truth that we need for a Thomistic account of practical truth. Recall I do not examine Sokolowski's overall phenomenological approach.

The ambiguity in Sokolowski's description of human judgment suggests that focusing on how language use arises does not go back far enough. What I think needs to be explained in Sokolowski's view, as I mention above, is the human listener's *particular* "elementary trust" in

⁶⁷⁷ Note that the latter case is a secondary practical operation that depends on a prior simple judgment of affirmation about the speaker. This practical judgment by inference may move the child to return to contemplate *ens*, which she then may come to understand by simple judgment. Also, note that according to Thomistic thinking, if a judgment we initially think is true is later understood to be false, then assuming no other changes, we know that the original judgment was a judgment by inference and not a judgment by simple understanding—because judgments of affirmation by simple understanding are always simply true (and never false) (ST I, q. 85, a. 6). Finally, note that judgments about artificial things or artifacts (e.g., a car or perhaps a ball, to use Sokolowski's earlier example) are a special case: a judgment about an artifact is made either 1) simply by virtue of apprehending the nature of the human being who is the creator or user of the artifact (the person's operations and the artifact are thus understood secondarily by virtue of a single intelligible species), or 2) practically by inductive inference (see chapter 5 and ST I, q. 85, a. 4; q. 58, a. 2). The human intellect does not apprehend the intelligibility of (or conform to) an individual artifact simply and directly—because the artifact is not a natural thing with a nature.

⁶⁷⁸ Presumably, judgment by inductive inference is also possible in the human cogitative power by virtue of only a vague intellectual understanding and love of a person, plus the additional causal influence of other sensitive powers (both apprehensive and appetitive). Thus, each judgment by inductive inference may not involve a particular practical voluntary choice or decision.

⁶⁷⁹ ST I-II, q. 17, a. 6.

this individual speaker, which he says is required for the listener to “awaken into rationality.”⁶⁸⁰

Sokolowski speaks of “veracity”—a deep freedom and a “love of the truth”—which is more fundamental than our “penchant for moral truth” or the verification of a proposition, but I have not seen Sokolowski speak specifically about how a *general* desire or “love of the truth” becomes a principle of *particular* human judgment in act.⁶⁸¹ Does the advent of “elementary trust” require the context of syntax in Sokolowski’s view, and how does it arise?

In view of this conclusion, my working thesis is that to articulate an account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth, we need a *theoretical* explanation of human judgment *in terms of its causal principles*—such that we can disambiguate the above species and begin to clarify how the operation arises distinctly in act. This thesis motivates my approach in the next chapter. There, I consider a Thomistic, *speculative* account of simple human judgment and then of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth. This is also to consider how simple human judgment is distinguished from practical judgment by inductive inference as its cause.

Final thoughts on a dialogue with practical structuralists and my initial motivating concern

Despite the critiques above, I think the practical relevance of Sokolowski’s description of human judgment presents an opportunity to dialogue further with practical structuralists like Stout and to respond to the motivating concern I raise at the beginning of the chapter. Assuming we make judgments both by simple understanding and by inductive inference, I think it is reasonable to call the human being both (primarily) an agent of truth and (secondarily) an agent of inference. The challenge for the practical structuralist is to explain how the human agent is determined to some *particular* judgment by inductive inference in the first place (this is to explain both *what* is done and *that* it is done in terms of the operation’s practical principles of specification and exercise).

⁶⁸⁰ Sokolowski, 65.

⁶⁸¹ Sokolowski, 20-21, 26-27, 94.

Recall Aquinas says, “if the agent were not determinate to some *particular* effect, it would not do one thing rather than another [my emphasis].”⁶⁸² And the further challenge is to explain how the human agent’s experience of voluntary, self-determined judgment arises. The challenge for the realist (and the Thomist) who describes the human person as an agent of truth is to articulate the distinction between judgment by inductive inference and judgment by simple understanding in terms of the former’s dependence on the latter (and since judgment by inductive inference is a practical operation, this involves showing how the human intellect becomes practical, which is the topic of the present study).

Finally, thinking about judgment by inductive inference in terms of its practical principles provides an opportunity to address the motivating concern I raise at the beginning of the chapter. Recall I question Sokolowski’s claim that using language in speech signals the rationality of the speaker. My concern arises for a practical reason: because today’s digital assistants and large language models *appear* to use language and to express sentences. I think the possibility of *practical* language use (that is, by means of judgment by inductive inference) suggests that it can be *practically relevant* to speak about proximate *practical* agents or subjects of inference and language use *in a practical context of use*. While language use may signal a rational person primarily and in principle (i.e., by resolution to the natural rational substantial cause of use⁶⁸³)—and while the human person may be the *primary natural principle of exercise* of that language use⁶⁸⁴—I think there is a valid, *practically relevant* case to be made for secondary, *practical* language users and agents of syntax. I support Sokolowski’s claim that “behind the use of syntax there is not an [inference] engine but a responsible agent.”⁶⁸⁵ However, I also claim that *in between* the *practical* effects of language use (e.g., sentence expression) and the primary responsible agent there can be *practically relevant*, proximate agents (or subjects) of syntax and

⁶⁸² ST I-II, q. 1, a. 2.

⁶⁸³ See DV 1.1.

⁶⁸⁴ Sokolowski makes a similar claim in Sokolowski, 42.

⁶⁸⁵ Sokolowski, 42.

language use, whose use is relevant in a logical context of practice.⁶⁸⁶ I suggest that digital assistants and machine learning models (e.g., large language models) can be examples of such *practical* agents of use.⁶⁸⁷ Indeed, machine learning theory and practice confirm that the judgments of a ML model are clearly made by inductive inference⁶⁸⁸ (e.g., by discretely classifying a probability value based on a classification threshold or cutoff value⁶⁸⁹) and that they are the remote logical and material effects of particular commands specified and executed by practical human operation, in at least the first instance (I say “particular commands” because a fully specified or determinate rule becomes a particular command when it is executed).⁶⁹⁰

I do not claim that these practical agents are *real* subjects, substances, or individuals in the domain of natural things; rather, they (and their remote operations of use) are artifacts and

⁶⁸⁶ Note that we can specify a human being’s own judgment by inductive inference as seated in the cogitative power (the interior subject of the judgment) and moved by the practical intellect and the will.

⁶⁸⁷ I think there is a *practical* case to be made for referring to a machine or model as an artificial or practical “agent” or “subject of activity.” Indeed, ML models may be considered *practical* “agents” (in a context) whose *practical* operations cause material effects that have *practical* implications for human beings (because human beings are material beings). For example, it is *practically* relevant to me that a digital assistant (a practical “agent”) is “listening” to conversations in my home (there are privacy implications involved). Similarly, it is *practically* relevant to me that a ML model (a practical “agent”) is driving a car on the road near my home (there are practical safety risks involved).

⁶⁸⁸ Since human beings are the creators, implementors, and users of a ML model, we are uniquely positioned to offer a fully specified (and presumably indisputable) practical theory of its causes, operations, and material effects. Indeed, a practical theory of causality can help to disambiguate (or to specify the practical species of) a description of the material effects of human practice. On machine judgment by inductive inference, see Goodfellow *et al.*, 4, 51. Theoretically, we know that computers are simply state machines with memory. See Michael Rescorla, “The Computational Theory of Mind,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2020), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/computational-mind>.

⁶⁸⁹ See Michael A. Nielsen, *Neural Networks and Deep Learning* (Determination Press, 2015), <http://neuralnetworksanddeeplearning.com/>, chap. 1.

⁶⁹⁰ I suggest that using a practical theory of ML to explain a model’s judgment is essentially to specify the operation in terms of its causal principles. Although probability and statistical estimation intervene, ML models are fully determinate given their dependence on probabilistic rules and command (albeit the determinacy is complex). See Goodfellow *et al.*, 114. By analogy, see Aquinas’ discussion of a thing moved determinately by another in *ST* I-II, q. 1, a. 2. C.f. *ST* I-II, q. 6, a. 1; q. 17, a. 3 ad 1; a. 9. More broadly, we might say that any logical movement from physical hardware to a discrete binary or logical domain (e.g., a computer’s digital sampling of an analog signal) involves practical judgment or combination, which requires exterior principles of particular command and exercise, in at least the first instance. Indeed, command is exteriorly specified and executed not only in software but also in the design and use of hardware transistors and logic gates, which harness the natural properties of semiconductors to perform binary operations and are used to build computers. For example, the on-off judgment of a transistor is exteriorly “commanded” by specification of a particular transistor design (e.g., which thereby specifies its threshold voltage) and by exercise of a particular electric current. On how transistors work, see Chris Woodford, “Transistors,” Explain That Stuff, 2019, <https://www.explainthatstuff.com/howtransistorswork.html>.

effects of human practice. I suggest that to speak *practically* about an agent of inference or language use is to speak about it in terms of its logical and material effects and practical principles, which is to speak *indeterminately* about its species from a speculative point of view. To redeploy (somewhat analogously) Stephen Brock’s discussion of motion in Aquinas’ natural philosophy in a narrow *logical and practical* context, we might say that logical “subjects,” “operations,” and “capacities” emerge from logically “conjoined” principles of activity.⁶⁹¹ These logically “conjoined” principles of activity distinguish a particular logical context: in this case, the logical context of a computer process and model operating as a practical “subject of activity.”

In sum the above claim is that both human and artificial judgments by inductive inference—i.e., the judgments by inference of both humans and (proximately) of artificial agents—depend on human practice (admittedly, the latter is a case of protracted extension to remote operation involving many determinate transformations).⁶⁹² The further claim is that, broadly and practically speaking, Sokolowski’s descriptive account of judgment and learning to predicate could include both cases.⁶⁹³

The above argument suggests a *practical* reason to decouple Sokolowski’s use of the terms “agent of truth” and “agent of syntax” (Sokolowski uses these terms and the term “agent of logic and verification” synonymously to speak about the human person).⁶⁹⁴ I do not think these terms are synonymous because, *practically speaking*, both human beings and machines can be

⁶⁹¹ Brock, *Philosophy*, 31.

⁶⁹² The former case, i.e., human judgment by inference, is one in which a human person’s practical thinking causes a particular operation of judgment by inference in the cogitative power. While practical theory alone can specify a description of artificial judgment, which is always practical and always by inference, it cannot fully specify a description of human judgment—because human judgment of affirmation has at least two species, only one of which is practical.

⁶⁹³ Note there are certain similarities between a description of *supervised* training of a machine learning model—involving operations of forward and backward propagation through a set of labeled training data (see David E. Rumelhart, Geoffrey E. Hinton, and Ronald J. Williams, “Learning Representations by Back-Propagating Errors,” *Nature* 323, no. 6088 (1986): 533–36)—and Sokolowski’s description of a child learning to predicate, who, as guided by a speaker, goes back and forth “between focusing on the judgment and focusing things, and through this movement [sees] whether the judgment and the state of affairs can be blended with one another” (Sokolowski, 64, 181). Also, there are certain similarities between a description of *unsupervised* training of a machine learning model (in which patterns in data are “shaken out”) and Sokolowski’s description of Husserl’s genealogy of logic above.

⁶⁹⁴ Sokolowski, 3, 14, 48–49.

agents of syntax and logic. But only the human being is an agent of truth, properly speaking.⁶⁹⁵ In the next chapter I offer a *speculative* reason to decouple these terms. There I make a Thomistic case that simple judgment (i.e., understanding of simple truth) naturally arises in the human intellect by implicit apprehension and voluntary simple willing: the beginnings of which, contrary to Sokolowski's view, do not require the "context set by syntax."⁶⁹⁶ The implication is that syntax is *not* the first or most "palpable" presence of the human person as Sokolowski claims.⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹⁵ Note that judgments by inductive inference can be "true," qualifiedly and accidentally speaking. See *ST* I, q. 75, a. 5; I-II, q. 6, a. 1-2; q. 18, a. 10 ad 2. C.f. Brock, *Philosophy*, 75.

⁶⁹⁶ Sokolowski, 156, 105. Furthermore, contrary to Sokolowski's critique, I think we need Aquinas' account of the agent intellect to make this case.

⁶⁹⁷ Sokolowski, 39. Recall *ST* I, q. 85, a. 2 ad 3.

Chapter Five: Simple Judgment and Understanding the Human Good and Practical Truth

Introduction

I begin this chapter with two main objectives. The first is to articulate a Thomistic account of how simple judgment of affirmation (i.e., natural assent) arises in the human intellect by natural participation. The second is to suggest the beginnings of an account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth in terms of the first. This latter objective is the primary goal of the present study.

Recall in chapter 3 I discuss my reasons for the first objective. There I explain why I turn to examine simple truth in a study of practical truth. In view of Aquinas' claim that practical thinking depends on speculative thinking⁶⁹⁸—and in a Thomistic dialogue on practical thinking in the context of concrete human agency—I suggest that to articulate an account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth, we need to consider how simple judgment of affirmation arises distinctly *in act*—and not merely in general. I suggest this need is implied in Aquinas' view that the intellect first cognizes truth, properly speaking, when it judges,⁶⁹⁹ and in his claims that the intellect apprehends the good after apprehending the true⁷⁰⁰ and that the true is a particular good.⁷⁰¹ I examine these points further in the present chapter.

At the end of chapter 3, I suggest there is need for clarity in Aquinas' account of how simple judgment of affirmation arises in the human intellect in act. I point to what I think is a general tendency in Thomistic discourse to conflate the logical and natural species of the operation, and I identify at least two explanatory gaps that must be accounted for to explain how it proceeds naturally at all. Namely, we must account for the principle of understanding that

⁶⁹⁸ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 11. *DV* 14.4.

⁶⁹⁹ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2.

⁷⁰⁰ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 4 ad 2.

⁷⁰¹ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 4 ad 1; II-II, q. 109, a. 2 ad 1. C.f. *ST I*, q. 79, a. 11 ad 2.

specifies the object of the operation *as an end*, and we must account for the interior principle of exercise that inclines the intellect to that particular end.

In chapter 4 I observe that Sokolowski's descriptive account of human judgment does not give us the clarity we need—at least narrowly on its own—because it cannot differentiate between two species of judgment of affirmation (or assent) that Aquinas distinguishes,⁷⁰² namely, what I call simple judgment and judgment by inductive inference. Indeed, both operations can have identical logical and material effects (e.g., language use and sentence expression). I arrive at the following thesis: if we are to distinguish judgment by inference as an effect of human practice from human judgment by simple understanding as a (partial) cause thereof, then we must attempt to articulate a speculative account of simple human judgment in terms of its natural causal principles, and then to articulate an account of the intellectual principles of human practice in terms of this.

I divide the present chapter into three sections. In section 1 I examine a Thomistic account of the nature of the human intellect in view of a starting premise, its implications, and several related claims. This speculative analysis grounds my discussion in section 3 of the logical ordering of the intellect's immanent apprehensions of *ens*, truth, and good.⁷⁰³ In section 2 I consider the possibility of truth in the intellect. Here I recall from chapter 3 my discussion of Aquinas' two senses of truth and the need for clarity in a Thomistic account of simple judgment. In section 3 I draw on the speculative analysis of section one and attempt, first, to articulate a Thomistic account of how simple judgment of affirmation and simple truth arise, properly speaking, in terms of their natural causal principles (i.e., their principles of specification and exercise) and, second, to articulate an account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth in terms of the first. My starting premise in the first section below is a claim from Aquinas about the nature of the human intellect.

⁷⁰² *ST* I-II, q. 17, a. 6.

⁷⁰³ See *ST* I, q. 16, a. 4 ad 2.

SECTION 1: A THOMISTIC ACCOUNT OF THE NATURE OF THE HUMAN INTELLECT

A starting premise

Suppose we begin with Aquinas' term "*ens*," which we can translate as "a being."⁷⁰⁴ I attempt to offer a definition of the term "*ens*" further below. To start, the reader may simply choose to regard the term as a placeholder in the following premise. Following Aquinas, the starting premise I propose (*quoad se*), which I attempt to clarify below, is as follows: the human being has a natural potentiality to universal *ens* (*ens universale*).⁷⁰⁵ Further below, I also attempt to define the terms "universal" or "universal context." Aquinas calls this natural potentiality (or capacity or power) of the human being the human intellectual aptitude or intellect.⁷⁰⁶

Now I could proceed by attempting to identify the premises upon which this starting premise logically depends and, further, by attempting to define various terms such as "natural," "potentiality," and "universal." But, to discuss all of these points *quoad se* involves a certain reflexivity or circularity of explanation until we identify the natural grounds for knowledge (and for logic, freedom, etc.) *quoad nos*.⁷⁰⁷ Thus, my proposal, rather, is simply 1) to begin with the premise (assuming any premises or definitions necessary to start with this premise), 2) to attempt to explain *quoad se* how knowledge can arise *quoad nos* in view of this premise, and then 3) to indicate how we might approach an explanation of the starting premise *quoad se* in view of *quoad nos* knowledge (i.e., by reflecting on our act of understanding *quoad nos* and beginning to posit more explicitly a definition of the human intellect).

⁷⁰⁴ Following Lawrence Dewan, I think it is helpful to translate *ens* as "a being" to emphasize that for Aquinas the term refers to this particular, concrete *ens*. See Dewan, "Natural Lights." Aertsen cites Aquinas' *Commentary on Boethius's De hebdomadibus*, lecture 2, where Aquinas emphasizes that *esse* signifies *in abstracto*, while *ens* signifies *in concreto* (Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 187).

⁷⁰⁵ *ST I* q. 78, a. 1; q. 79, a. 2. C.f. *SCG II*.83 (esp. paragraph 31). C.f. *DV* 10.11 ad 10. C.f. Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 135, 162, 181.

⁷⁰⁶ *ST I*. q. 78, a. 1; q. 79, a. 1.

⁷⁰⁷ See Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 136.

Regarding the above terms, what I will say for now is that I begin by using them *logically*. Although I eventually claim that these terms have relevance according to a universal context for human beings, I do not begin by assuming this claim. Later, I attempt to make a case for their universal significance. Thus, regarding the term “natural,” for example, I begin by using the term tentatively to refer to any quality or capacity for operation that flows or proceeds, at least logically, by a certain ordinary or “natural” (or logical) resultance in a subject of activity whose “first act” (or existence) with a nature is taken as given or *per se* according to a context. Given the starting premise above, I claim that the human intellect is a natural capacity that flows, at least logically, by a certain ordinary or natural resultance insofar as a human being exists with a human nature. Later, with respect to a universal context, I claim that the individual human being is a natural primary substance whose natural intellectual power *actually* flows by natural resultance in the human subject existing with a human nature.⁷⁰⁸

Now, I discuss several implications of the starting premise as stated. In other words, if there is a human intellect as claimed, and if the human intellect is activated at all (i.e., if it is moved or actualized from potentiality to act at all), then several implications follow.

A natural potentiality is a passive capacity or power, which insofar as it persists as a subject of potentiality (at least logically speaking), is specified according to a natural inclination or appetite

First, by definition, insofar as the intellect is a potentiality and is at first “like a clean tablet on which nothing is written,” as Aquinas and Aristotle claim—and is thus a passive⁷⁰⁹ power—its individuality and subjectivity precisely as *this* subject of potentiality needs to be logically distinguished, as specified by a general ordering to or readiness for activation by an active principle or cause. We can call this general directedness a natural inclination to or natural

⁷⁰⁸ ST I, q. 77, a. 6 ad 3; a. 7 ad 1.

⁷⁰⁹ ST I, q. 79, a. 2; q. 77, a. 3.

appetite for some active principle.⁷¹⁰ Without such a specification, the subject of potentiality cannot be logically distinguished as a relevant (or persistent) passive subject to be actualized. More generally, for any capacity to exist or persist as a subject of activity, some kind of logical principle of interiority or subjectivity (e.g., a general inclination or particular act) needs to specify it. And, for a potentiality or passive capacity specifically, its subjectivity needs to be specified as *generally* ordered to some principle. Without some logical ordering or inclination, the passive capacity cannot be logically distinguished as a capacity or subject of activity at all.⁷¹¹

Therefore, to summarize, the first implication of our starting premise is that the intellect, insofar as it is a natural potentiality and passive power, has a general natural inclination to its principle or moving cause, which is *ens*. That is, the intellect has a natural inclination to or appetite for *ens*.

Insofar as it is a potentiality, if it is to be activated, the intellect must be activated by a principle or moving cause that is exterior to it, at least in the first instance

Second, insofar as the intellect is a potentiality and passive power, it also follows that, if the intellect is to be actualized at all, something *extrinsic* must activate it as a principle or moving cause of its act, at least in the first instance of its actualization.⁷¹² We can call this principle or moving cause the intellect's natural object,⁷¹³ which, given the premise above, is *ens*. According to our premise, then, if *ens* activates it, the intellect is actualized and moved in some manner from potentiality to act. And, if no *ens* activates it, the intellect simply remains in potentiality.

⁷¹⁰ See Lawrence Dewan, "The Real Distinction Between Intellect and Will," in *Wisdom, Law, and Virtue* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 137–38.

⁷¹¹ Thus, having a natural potentiality implies having a natural inclination to be actualized by some principle or moving cause. Indeed, a passive power is logically distinguished from any other entity, and from its principle or moving cause specifically, insofar as it is a general potentiality and natural inclination to a principle or moving cause. Without this specifying condition, there is simply no distinct potentiality or passive power to speak of in a given logical context.

⁷¹² See *ST I*, q. 77, a. 3; q. 78, a. 3. C.f. *DV* 22.12 ad 2; *ST I*, q. 82, a. 4 ad 3. C.f. Sherwin, 57.

⁷¹³ See *ST I*, q. 77, a. 3.

Insofar as it is activated and persists as a subject of activity upon activation, the intellect must be changed. But, the change (movement from potentiality to actuality) that proceeds must be interior and immanent to the intellect and not merely the result of transitive action or motion (or passion) caused by exterior ens

Third, insofar as it is activated by exterior *ens* (and moved from potentiality to actuality), if the intellect is to persist in its subjectivity upon activation without being diminished (and without losing anything it has)—i.e., if the intellect’s identity and distinctiveness as a passive subject of activity is to proceed through change⁷¹⁴—then the intellect must be activated in such a way that the proceeding change is due *not* merely to the transitive action of exterior *ens*⁷¹⁵ but also (upon activation) is due to the intellect’s own immanent (interior) activity of conforming to *ens*.⁷¹⁶

To clarify this point, it is helpful, I think, to distinguish a passive capacity (or power) of operation—and, specifically, a cognitive or apprehensive power, as I discuss further below—from what we might call a passive instrument. I discuss this distinction by considering several common examples of receiving form without matter. I begin by discussing a passive instrument, which receives form without matter entirely passively. Then, I discuss a passive capacity or power, which, having a certain immanent activity (at least logically speaking), receives form without matter as a subject of activity.

A passive instrument, which receives form without matter passively, is *not* a subject of activity

A passive instrument, upon activation (by use), conforms⁷¹⁷ to its principle or moving cause merely according to the transitive operation of its principle—and, specifically, in such a way that while gaining something upon activation, it also loses something it had before the change.

⁷¹⁴ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 2.

⁷¹⁵ That is, the transitive action cannot merely terminate in the intellect as a passion. See *Metaph V.9*.

⁷¹⁶ Since the intellect is immaterial, this change must be an immediate change and not a motion (see Brock, *Philosophy*, 36-37; 70).

⁷¹⁷ The passive instrument conforms by passion, which terminates in the subject acted upon (*Metaph V.9*).

Because the passive instrument receives form without matter passively, we generally do *not* attribute subjectivity to it.

For example, as Brock helpfully highlights in his book, Aristotle illustrates the idea of receiving form without matter by discussing use of common wax (e.g., bees wax).⁷¹⁸ When wax is impressed by a signet ring, Aristotle explains, it receives the imprint of the ring without its iron or gold. Indeed, because of what it is and the natural properties it has, wax can receive the form of a signet ring without its matter. Brock emphasizes that such reception of form is an entirely commonplace activity.

Because wax is a passive instrument in this example, its receiving the form of the ring (i.e., its conforming to the ring) is caused simply by the transitive action of the ring (and, less proximately, by the user of the ring; like the wax, the ring is an instrument of the user). And, through the change, the wax loses something it had before. Namely, for example, the wax's potentiality to receive the form of other rings or objects is clearly lessened after it is impressed (i.e., it is difficult to impress a second form of a ring on top of the first), unless the wax is further acted upon, say, by heating or remolding, to smooth its surface (so that it again can be impressed).

A somewhat similar example, perhaps, is a violin, which produces music (sound with form) when its strings are vibrated by a bow in accord with the form of a violinist's movements. In this case, the violin is likewise a passive instrument, and our common language use seems to support this claim. For, when we speak of violin music, we do not say the violin itself is playing music (as a subject of activity); rather, we usually say the violinist is playing music. Indeed, the violin is the violinist's passive *instrument*. Like the wax, upon activation, the violin loses something it had before: its potentiality to be played by other musicians is significantly lessened (or perhaps entirely absent) while it is being played.

⁷¹⁸ Aristotle compares the human senses to wax. See Brock, *Philosophy*, 72-73. Here, Brock cites, Aristotle, *De anima* II.12. On "natural immutation" of form (as distinct from "spiritual immutation" of form in the senses), see *ST I*, q. 78, a. 3.

In a qualified sense and to varying degrees (depending on their natures), we might say that most (if not all) stable material things can be exteriorly impressed with form and thereby be used as passive instruments, at least in principle, insofar as their accidental features can be actualized and ordered in various ways. In this way, such instruments can be signs of the exterior principle or moving cause of their impressed form. Paintings, traffic signs, carvings, music, etc. are all impressed with form.

A passive capacity or power, which receives form without matter, is a (passive) subject of activity

Unlike a passive instrument, a potentiality that is a passive capacity and subject of activity has a general inclination to its natural object. Upon activation, it conforms to its principle of activation not merely passively but also actively by its own immanent operation (at least according to a certain logically relevant context). Furthermore, a passive capacity of activity is distinct from a passive instrument insofar as, upon activation by its principle and moving cause, its identity and distinctiveness as a subject in relation to its principle persists in act (and is not diminished, at least logically and in principle, if not actually).⁷¹⁹ Upon activation by its principle, a passive capacity becomes particularly actualized interiorly (and relatively more perfectly) by virtue of its own proper, immanent activity (“secondary operation”).⁷²⁰ Below, I briefly attempt to explain how a passive capacity that is generally inclined to its principle becomes particularly related (and conformed) to its particular principle upon activation.

Recall that for there to be a logically relevant, distinct passive subject of activity in a given context—that is, in order for there to be (at least) a logical distinction between “interior” and

⁷¹⁹ See *ST I*, q. 79, a. 2. According to Aquinas, because it is an immaterial power (and not conditioned by matter), the human intellect is not deprived of anything upon activation (*ST I*, q. 14, a. 1). However, the human senses, because they are conditioned by matter and have only qualified modes of immateriality, can be weakened in their capacity to operate as subjects of activity (in varying degrees), say, for example, if acted upon by a “strong” principle (e.g., very loud noise can harm the ear’s operation) (*ST I*, q. 75, a. 3, ad 2; Brock, *Philosophy*, 72-75; Brock cites Aristotle’s *De anima*).

⁷²⁰ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 2.

“exterior” in a given context, the passive subject’s “first act” (its primary principle of distinction and relation) must be generally specified and exercised in that context. For the intellect, this individuating principle, prior to the intellect’s particular activation and secondary operation, is its general act and inclination to *ens* (its “first act”).

Upon activation by a particular exterior *ens*, the intellect would lose its logical distinctiveness as a subject of activity with respect to that *ens* (according to its general inclination), if there were no particular operation to specify its particular relation in “second act” to that principle upon activation. This is because, having been activated by *ens*, the intellect is no longer in potential relation to that *ens* by virtue of a general inclination. Thus, for the intellect to be distinctly a subject of activity with respect to a particular *ens* upon activation by that *ens*, the intellect must have a corresponding interior act that particularly actualizes its general inclination to that *ens*.

In other words, given that any *ens* (i.e., any particular *ens*) may activate the intellect, the intellect as a potentiality and passive power is logically distinguished from such an *ens* insofar as it has a general inclination to it and is thus potentially in relation to any such *ens*. Upon activation by a particular *ens*, when the intellect is thus logically no longer in potentiality to being activated by that *ens*, then, if the intellect is not to be logically diminished in its distinctiveness as a subject with respect to that *ens* (by losing its potential for relation to that *ens*)⁷²¹—for, recall, the intellect as a subject is logically specified precisely in terms of potentiality—then, given the intellect cannot remain unchanged if it is to be activated, the change caused by *ens* must move the intellect to actualize its own interior, particular inclination and relation to *ens* by particular immanent, immediate operation (which, perfecting the intellect, makes it more—and not less—distinctive as a subject of activity than it was before the change, i.e., such that its relation to *ens* is not only potential and general but active, particular, and proper).

⁷²¹ Again, see *ST I*, q. 79, a. 2.

The human sense of hearing

Consider another example of a passive capacity and subject of activity, namely, the human sense of hearing. Unlike the intellect, this sense's capacity to receive form without matter is qualified because it is a material subject. Suppose we claim that the human being has a natural potentiality or capacity for hearing sound,⁷²² which is located bodily in the ear. Given this premise, we can call the capacity for hearing a passive power because it is initially activated by something exterior to it, namely, particular sound. Furthermore, we can call it a passive power to the degree that sound activates it not to change it into something else or merely to cause the physical ear (e.g., the ear drum) to move, but to move the capacity to its proper immanent operation of hearing in the human being.⁷²³ I discuss the human senses further below.

Two additional points

Having made the beginnings of a case for passive capacities and subjects of activity, at least logically speaking, I briefly note two additional points regarding these passive capacities before returning to a discussion of the intellect and its natural object, specifically.

Distinguishing a cognitive or apprehensive power as a kind of passive capacity

First, it is worth clarifying that we can distinguish a general passive capacity (which is activated by an exterior principle) from what we might call a cognitive or apprehensive passive capacity (or power) more specifically, according to following specific difference. Namely, if the natural object and immanent operation of a passive power correspond "formally" to the power's exterior activating principle (at least vaguely and in principle), then, we can call the passive power, more specifically, a cognitive or apprehensive passive power. Whereas, if the natural object and

⁷²² *ST I*, q. 78, a. 3.

⁷²³ On the senses as cognitive, see *ST I*, q. 14, a. 1. C.f., Brock, *Philosophy*, 64-74.

immanent operation of a passive power do not correspond “formally” to the power’s exterior activating principle, then the passive power is not a cognitive or apprehensive passive power.

Aquinas says that both the human intellect and the human senses are cognitive (or apprehensive) passive powers.⁷²⁴ Generally speaking, Aquinas distinguishes a cognitive (or apprehensive) subject of activity from a non-cognitive subject of activity as follows:

“Cognizers differ from non-cognizers in this, that the latter have none but their own form, whereas a cognizer is apt to have the form of some other thing as well; for the cognitive likeness of the thing cognized is in the cognizer. Hence, it is clear that the nature of a non-cognizer is more contracted and limited, while the nature of cognizers has a greater amplitude and extension.”⁷²⁵

“Formally” specifying the natural object and immanent act of a passive power

My second point is as follows. In the above examples—and, indeed, for any passive subject of activity—in addition to identifying the activating principle or moving (efficient) cause of a passive capacity, it is also relevant to consider the “formal” cause of a passive capacity’s interior object and immanent operation. Recall that any operation, including an immanent operation, is specified in terms of its natural object or end. Furthermore, recall that the immanent operation of a cognitive (or apprehensive) power is specified in terms of an interior object that corresponds “formally” (at least vaguely and in principle) to its active principle. We can call the interior object of a cognitive power a cognitive likeness.⁷²⁶

What is the “formal” cause of cognitive likeness in a passive cognitive power? There seem to be at least three possibilities. The first possibility is that the activating principle of the cognitive power is not only the moving (efficient) cause but also the “formal” cause of cognitive likeness and cognitive operation in the cognitive power. This possibility seems to apply to material cognitive powers such as the natural human (exterior) senses. In such cases, using

⁷²⁴ See *ST I*, q. 80, a. 1; q. 78, a. 1, 3-4.

⁷²⁵ *ST I*, q. 14, a. 1. Here, I adopt Brock’s translation of *cognoscens* in Brock, *Philosophy*, 64. C.f. *ST I*, q. 80, a. 1; q. 84, a. 2. C.f. Brock, *Philosophy*, 69-72.

⁷²⁶ Again, see *ST I*, q. 14, a. 1.

Aquinas' terminology, we might say that the exterior principle "impresses" or "immutes" its "form" in some qualified sense upon the passive cognitive power, efficiently and "formally" causing the corresponding interior cognitive likeness (or interior object) to "fall" in the passive cognitive power by immanent operation.⁷²⁷

The second possibility is that the formal cause of cognitive likeness and cognitive operation is the cognitive power itself, by some interior active principle. According to Aquinas, this possibility is applicable to the human intellect (by the active agent intellect), which I discuss further below, but it does not apply to the human sensitive powers. Aquinas says that the sensitive powers are entirely passive, whereas in the human intellect, "there is something active and something passive."⁷²⁸

The third possibility is that the formal cause of cognitive likeness and cognitive operation is not exterior *ens* but another exterior active formal principle. For example, Aquinas says, "The species whereby the angels understand are not drawn from things, but are connatural to them."⁷²⁹ According to Aquinas, these intelligible species proceed in the angelic mind as impressed by God.⁷³⁰

Having discussed possibilities for "formal" causality of cognitive likeness in a cognitive power, I now move to discuss the meaning of the term "*ens*." I return to a discussion of formal causality of cognitive likeness in the human intellect below.

⁷²⁷ Aquinas says that "sense is a passive power, and is naturally immuted by the exterior sensible" (*ST I*, q. 78, a. 3). C.f. *ST I*, q. 85, a. 1 ad 3. On Aquinas' use of "falls" (*cadit*), see *ST I-II*, q. 55, a. 4 ad 1; q. 94, a. 2; *DV* 21.1; 21.4 ad 4. C.f. Wippel, 41.

⁷²⁸ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 3 ad 1. Tentatively, perhaps Aquinas' point here implies that the human intellect, unlike the human senses, has a *properly* immanent act (i.e., entirely proper to itself).

⁷²⁹ *ST I*, q. 55, a. 2. C.f. *ST I*, q. 57, a. 1, ad 3.

⁷³⁰ *ST I*, q. 56, a. 2.

What is ens ("a being")?

An approach

Recall that, logically speaking, insofar as passive powers are specified according to their exterior principle and moving cause, which is their natural object, they are likewise distinguished from each other according to that principle.⁷³¹ Thus, the sense of hearing is distinguished from the sense of sight, logically speaking, insofar as the sense of hearing is activated by a principle of one logical category, namely, sound, while the sense of sight is activated by a principle of a different logical category, namely, light (or "illuminated color"⁷³²).

Now, according to our starting premise above, the intellect is a passive cognitive (or apprehensive) power whose principle and moving cause (and natural object) is universal *ens*. There is something unique about this principle, which leads to a number of key implications, some of which I attempt to consider below.

Whereas, logically speaking, we distinguish the human sense powers according to their natural objects and claim that each corresponds to a distinct logical category, the claim I seek to defend below is that we cannot speak of the human intellect's natural object, *ens*, as a logical category. Rather, following Aquinas, I claim that exterior *ens* is the principle of our first, simplest interior common concept (common *ens*), and that we specify and distinguish any other interior logical concept in terms of this first concept.⁷³³ Indeed, one of the implications of this claim is that our knowledge of logic and logical categories depends upon and flows from our understanding of *ens*.

Recall our starting premise: the intellect is a natural potentiality to universal *ens*. As I argued above, insofar as it is a passive power and potentiality, if it is to be activated, the intellect must be activated by something extrinsic to it, at least in the first instance of its activation and

⁷³¹ *ST I*, q. 78, a. 3.

⁷³² *ST I*, q. 78, a. 3. C.f. Brock, *Philosophy*, 60.

⁷³³ *DV 1.1*. C.f. Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 81.

immanent operation. The claim is that, in at least the first instance of the intellect's activation, extrinsic *ens* moves the intellect to its immanent operation of understanding, whose object is expressed according to a corresponding interior concept of *ens*, which falls in the intellect upon the intellect's activation by extrinsic *ens*.⁷³⁴ Thus, extrinsic *ens* both activates the intellect's immanent operation of understanding and is a moving cause of the interior concept of *ens* falling in the intellect.

Now, admittedly, the only way we can specify explicitly and theoretically what a phrase such as "exterior *ens*" refers to is according to some interior concept or combination of concepts (e.g., to form a definition of the term). But, according to our starting premise, prior to the first act of understanding, the intellect begins as a blank slate and has no concepts. Therefore, I proceed simply by proposing a definition of the term exterior *ens* (relying on our implicit, *quoad nos* understanding), and then later, I attempt to explain it. There may seem to be an apparent circularity of explanation until we establish the grounds of *quoad nos* understanding (but there is no actual circularity, I claim).

The meaning of "*ens*"

The meaning (*ratio*)⁷³⁵ I propose to introduce, following Aquinas, is as follows. Namely, the term "*ens*" (or "a being") signifies *quod est*, which we can translate as "what is" or "that which is."⁷³⁶ Aquinas emphasizes that "*ens*" signifies a concrete "what is" or "that which is" as considered under the aspect of its actuality (*esse*) or act of being.⁷³⁷ Significantly, he also says the term "*ens*" does not primarily signify the combination of "what" and "is"; rather, it consignifies this

⁷³⁴ See DV 10.11; *Metaph* I.2. C.f. Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 161-162. Again, on Aquinas' use of "falls" (*cadit*), see ST I-II, q. 55, a. 4 ad 1; q. 94, a. 2; DV 21.1; 21.4 ad 4. For references to Aquinas on the concept, see Simon, 130 n. 50.

⁷³⁵ ST I, q. 13, a. 4. See Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 94-95, 81 on the term "*ratio*."

⁷³⁶ *Peryerm* I.5 (20) as cited in Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 175. C.f. Aertsen, 84, 180.

⁷³⁷ *Metaph* IV.2 (553) as cited in Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 193. C.f., Aertsen, 223; *In De hebdomadibus*, lecture 2 as cited in Aertsen, 187.

combination secondarily, “insofar as it signifies a thing having being (*rem habentem esse*).⁷³⁸ The primary signification of the term “*ens*” is a concrete being (or “what is” or “that which is”) under the aspect of its particular actuality (*esse*).

Given this definition, the *quoad se* starting premise is, thus, that the intellect is a natural potentiality to universal *ens*, which is to say that the intellect is naturally inclined, in principle, to be activated by any and every concrete (or particular) “that which is.” Furthermore, in at least the first instance of its actualization, any *ens* that activates the intellect must be exterior to it (exterior to the intellectual subject). The implication is that it is in terms of a corresponding interior concept of common *ens*, which falls in the intellect upon its activation by exterior *ens*, as the interior object of the intellect’s immanent operation of understanding, that any other concept or proposition in the intellect is understood. In other words, *ens* activates the intellect’s immanent operation of understanding, and exterior *ens*, in particular, activates the intellect in at least the first instance of its immanent operation of understanding.

Indeed, according to our premise, (interior) common *ens* is the first and simplest and most common internal apprehension or concept that falls in the human intellect upon its activation. And, the further implication is that whatever we understand additionally by our intellects, we understand in terms of a concept of common *ens*. Aquinas writes, “That which the intellect first conceives, as best known, and into which it resolves all its conceptions, is being (*ens*).”⁷³⁹

While I shall offer several ways of explaining or describing this starting premise and its implications below, it is important to recognize that, according to this premise, the meaning of the terms I use in these explanations *follow* understanding of common *ens* in the order of knowing and understanding (i.e., epistemically). That is, the terms and phrases employed in the

⁷³⁸ *Peryerm* I.5 (20) as cited in Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 180.

⁷³⁹ *DV* 1.1; Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 80.

descriptive explanations below involve complex concepts defined conceptually in terms of a prior, more fundamental concept of common *ens*.

A descriptive explanation of the starting premise (which implicitly relies on *quoad nos* understanding of *ens*)

In other words, assuming there is something (some “that which is”) rather than nothing (no “that which is”) in reality, which is to assume a distinction between is and is not and, further, a universal context of existing “thats” or things (*res*), the claim is that the human intellect has a natural inclination to be activated by any such individual existing thing (“that which is”) in the universal context according to that thing’s most fundamental principle of actuality (and, as I discuss further below, also according to its most fundamental principle of individual unity and distinction as a thing (*res*)).

Again, the claim is that the logical distinction between is and is not, or the meanings of terms such as “thing,” “reality,” “universal,” etc. are understood in terms of the primary, most common concept of *ens*—and secondarily, in terms of its negation. Thus, insofar as we understand *ens*, we also can understand *quoad nos* (and thus do not merely assume) various logical distinctions, such as that between something and nothing.

By analogy

In a certain sense, by analogy and extension, we can think of the intellect as an unqualified apprehensive power. Whereas the senses are qualified apprehensive powers—that is, they are passive powers in potentiality to be activated by a certain category of natural object—, the intellect is, at least in principle, an unqualified apprehensive power, which is not restricted to logical category. The intellect is a passive power in potentiality to be activated by universal *ens*—by anything that is.

The universal context, conceptual addition, the transcendentals, and methods of reasoning and resolution

At this point, one question that may arise is what we mean by the term “universal” when referring to universal *ens* in the starting premise. If the term “universal” is understood by conceptual addition in terms of the interior concept *ens*, then how does the term “universal” add anything to the term *ens* in the starting premise, in which it refers to *ens* as exterior principle of the intellect’s actualization?

Although I cannot address Aquinas’ account of the genesis of primary concepts at length here,⁷⁴⁰ I suggest that the term “universal” may be understood in terms of a concept of multitude. Aquinas offers a conceptual account of the transcendental concept of multitude (*multitudo*)⁷⁴¹ in five steps in *De potentia*, as Aertsen discusses. The five steps are as follows. First, *ens* falls in the intellect. Second, *non ens* is apprehended from the negation of *ens*. Third, the concept of formal division (*divisio*) follows from these two—and also from understanding that this *ens* is not that *ens*, which, as I shall discuss below, requires a way of apprehending a formal distinction between the two *ens*.⁷⁴² As Aertsen explains, “From the fact that this being is not that being, we apprehend that it is divided from the other (*divisum ab alio*).”⁷⁴³ Fourth, the concept of one (*unum*) arises insofar as we understand that this *ens* is undivided in itself. Fifth, we apprehend the concept of multitude (*multitudo*), insofar as we understand that this *ens* is divided from that *ens*, and each is one in itself.⁷⁴⁴

⁷⁴⁰ For Aquinas’ general account of the transcendentals, see *DV* 1.1, 21.1 and *Sentences I*, 8.1.3, as referenced by Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 72.

⁷⁴¹ Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 223–226, 228. Aquinas says that multitude belongs to the transcendentals (see *ST I*, q. 30, a. 3 ad 2).

⁷⁴² Aertsen emphasizes that the transcendentals *res* and *aliquid* must be considered in the transition from the negation of *ens* to the notion of division. The positive quiddity of *ens* is expressed by the transcendental concept *res* (Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 223).

⁷⁴³ Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 221.

⁷⁴⁴ Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 221. Here, Aertsen offers an analysis of *Quaestiones disputatae De potentia* 9.7 ad 15.

Now, according to Aquinas, an addition to the concept *ens* by way of conceptual (or logical) addition⁷⁴⁵ can be called a transcendental⁷⁴⁶ concept, which is coextensive with the concept of *ens*.⁷⁴⁷ Thus, if we assume the meaning of the term “universal” is informed in some way by the meaning of the term “multitude,” then, although when we use the term “universal” we mean something conceptually in addition to the concept of *ens* (i.e., we refer explicitly to every *ens*), we can say that this notion is originally contained implicitly and indistinctly in the concept of *ens*⁷⁴⁸—again, insofar as we reason by conceptual addition from common *ens* as the first concept to the relatively more explicit meaning of the term “multitude.” Thus, using the term “universal” to modify the term “*ens*” in the starting premise is not necessary in the starting premise: using simply “*ens*” is sufficient. However, use of the term makes explicit (by inner explication⁷⁴⁹) that the intellect is in potentiality to every *ens* in the context of universal *ens*.

Briefly, a further point is that Aquinas distinguishes two ways of reasoning, namely, by composition (or synthesis or discovery) and by resolution,⁷⁵⁰ and he distinguishes two modes for each way of reasoning, namely, *secundum rem* (according to thing) and *secundum rationem* (according to *ratio* or meaning).⁷⁵¹ Here, I briefly discuss the two modes of resolution: first, *secundum rationem*, and second, *secundum rem*.⁷⁵²

Because everything we conceive of interiorly resolves (*secundum rationem*) to understanding of *ens* according to our starting premise, and because the interior concept of *ens*

⁷⁴⁵ Aquinas discusses the three ways of addition in *DV* 21.1. See Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 86.

⁷⁴⁶ For Aquinas, the transcendentals are general modes of being. What is transcended are the special modes of being, that is, the categories (Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 92; see *DV* 1.1). The transcendental modes of being are specified according to the third mode of addition, which is addition in reason: by conceptual addition. See *DV* 21.1. See Aertsen, 86, 91-94.

⁷⁴⁷ Aquinas emphasizes that transcendental concepts have the same extension as the concept of *ens*. See *In De hebdomadibus*, lecture 2 as cited in Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 91 n. 51. C.f. Aertsen, 93. Although they have different meanings conceptually, they are identical in the subject or supposit of a proposition (*Metaph* IV.2 (548) as cited in Aertsen, 96 n. 70).

⁷⁴⁸ See *DV* 1.1 and Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 87.

⁷⁴⁹ Again, see *DV* 1.1 and Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 87.

⁷⁵⁰ See *DT* 6.1 as cited in Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 132-133. C.f. *ST* I, q. 79, a. 9.

⁷⁵¹ Again, see *DT* 6.1 as cited in Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 132-133.

⁷⁵² The distinction between the two modes of resolution distinguishes the subject of metaphysics and its cause (Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 135; see *DV* 1.1).

corresponds to the principle of the intellect's immanent operation of understanding, which is exterior *ens* (in at least the first instance of understanding; here the transcendental term *res* (or *rem*) is convertible with *ens*), then whenever we understand, we understand, primarily, the (exterior) *ens*, which is that actualizing principle.⁷⁵³ Indeed, according to Aquinas (I mention this in previous chapters), we primarily understand the principle and natural object of the intellect, that is, (exterior) *ens* (a being, a what, a *quod*). Only secondarily, by reflection, do we understand *that* we understand (exterior) *ens* by virtue of⁷⁵⁴ an interior concept of *ens* (a by virtue of, a *quo*).⁷⁵⁵

Now, insofar as we understand primarily exterior *ens* as principle and can formally distinguish one *ens* from another (using some of the secondary transcendental concepts mentioned above, which I discuss further below), we can, thus, reason not only *secundum rationem* but also by resolution from an exterior effect to an exterior cause—that is, from the proximate exterior *ens*, which immediately activates the intellect to the cause of this exterior *ens*. And, this second mode of reasoning by resolution from external effect to external cause is reasoning *secundum rem*. Because, by our intellect we understand exterior *ens* as principle—indeed, we primarily understand exterior *ens* (and *res*) as principle—we can reason by resolution *secundum rem* to the principle or cause of the exterior *ens* (*res*) that is the proximate principle and moving cause of the intellect's activation (and operation of understanding).

In summary, interiorly, *secundum rationem*, we can reason by resolution from any conceptual likeness (or proposition) to what is interiorly most common, namely, common *ens*

⁷⁵³ See Aertsens, *Transcendentals*, 94 and the discussion of Aristotle's triad: *nomen-ratio-res* (in *Peryerm*). C.f. John P. O'Callaghan, *Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), chap. 1.

⁷⁵⁴ Regarding the intelligible species, which is the formal species of the interior concept, Dewan suggests using the phrase "by virtue of" rather than "by means of" to avoid the tendency to interpret "knowing through" a likeness as a kind of mirror-situation in which the likeness is viewed as the terminus or goal of the act of understanding (Lawrence Dewan, "St. Thomas, Ideas, and Immediate Knowledge," *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review/Revue Canadienne de Philosophie* 18, no. 3 (September 1, 1979): 400).

⁷⁵⁵ ST I, q. 85, a. 2. O'Callaghan, *Linguistic Turn*, 31. C.f. Brock, *Philosophy*, 66.

(i.e., what Aquinas calls “commonness by predication”⁷⁵⁶). And, exteriorly, *secundum rem*, we can reason by resolution from the proximate principle of the intellect’s activation (i.e., extrinsic *ens*) to the extrinsic causes of that *ens*. And, because such resolution to causes cannot proceed to infinity (given our starting premise, there is, indeed, a proximate principle or cause and order among causes⁷⁵⁷), resolution points ultimately to the most common principle or cause of causes, i.e., to the first principle or cause of *ens* (or *res*).⁷⁵⁸ Aquinas calls this extrinsic form of commonness “commonness by causality.”⁷⁵⁹

On the need for resolution, both with respect to *ens* as an interior concept and *ens* as an (exterior) principle (*res*), Aquinas writes:

“Just as in demonstrable matters a reduction must be made to principles known to the intellect *per se*, so likewise in investigating what something is (*quid est*). Else one will fall into an infinite regress in both cases, with the result that science and knowledge of things will perish entirely.”⁷⁶⁰

The above discussion helps to clarify what we mean by universal *ens* and a universal context of *ens*, according to our starting premise. How do we know what the universal context is (is there a set larger than the universal context; can there be multiple universes, etc.)? Given our starting premise and the discussion above, the context of universal *ens* refers to what has *commonness by causality*. The universal context includes every *ens* (the multitude of *ens*) that *secundum rem* resolves to the first cause. Commonness by causality is not commonness according to a single logical category or genus but is commonness precisely according to causality, which resolves to the first principle or cause of that which can actualize the intellect, namely, *ens*.⁷⁶¹ Indeed, according to our premise, the intellect is in potentiality to be activated by whatever has commonness by causality—by whatever is in the universal context: the intellect has

⁷⁵⁶ DT 5.4 as cited in Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 134.

⁷⁵⁷ See ST I, q. 2, a. 3.

⁷⁵⁸ DV 22.12 ad 2; ST I, q. 82, a. 4 ad 3. See Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 133, 135.

⁷⁵⁹ DT 5.4 as cited in Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 134-135.

⁷⁶⁰ DV 1.1, as cited in Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 74.

⁷⁶¹ See Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 228.

a certain universal extension, a transcendental openness.⁷⁶² Indeed, (exterior) *ens* is a principle of the intellect's particular operation and a cause of interior commonness by predication. Thus, *ens* is a principle of operation and relation by correspondence (i.e., *ens* is a principle of truth) in the intellect.

Of course, the implication of all of this is that, according to our premise, the term “universal” is not defined by hypothesis or inference from the observable world. Rather, the term is defined logically (by conceptual addition) in terms of the most common concept to fall in the intellect, which is *ens*.

Analysis: Our starting premise given a definition of “ens”

Now, given our discussion of the intellect thus far according to our starting premise, it seems reasonable to suggest that upon activation by *ens* at least two interior concepts fall in the intellect: first, interior *ens* and, second (at least virtually or implicitly), its negation, non-*ens*.⁷⁶³

Above, I also mention that, beginning with an interior concept of *ens*, by conceptual addition, logically it is possible to arrive at certain additional transcendental concepts in terms of a primary concept of *ens* (these transcendental concepts are general modes of being that are coextensive with *ens* in the order of causality).

However, following Aertsen, I also indicated that we need an additional apprehension to proceed with reasoning by conceptual addition. More specifically, upon activation by *ens*, if the intellect is to apprehend that this *ens* currently activating the intellect is formally different from any other such *ens* (and, thus, if the intellect is to formally apprehend that there is more than one such *ens* that can activate it—and, indeed, that it is in potentiality to be actualized by more than one such *ens*), then, the intellect must be able to distinguish formally one *ens* from another, at

⁷⁶² See Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 105.

⁷⁶³ Tentatively, I suggest that to apprehend non-*ens* explicitly, an interior principle of exercise must first move the intellect to make a logical negation.

least vaguely and in principle. Above, I already indicated briefly that apprehending the transcendental concept of division seems to rely on apprehending this formal distinction: that this *ens* is not that *ens* and, thus, that one *ens* is formally divided from another (furthermore, other transcendental notions, such as one and multitude, depend on a concept of division).⁷⁶⁴ But, how can we apprehend the formal distinction between one *ens* and another?

Two requirements to distinguish formally one *ens* from another

Given our starting premise, at least two claims seem to be implied in order for this *ens* to be distinguished formally (at least partially) from that *ens*. First, in the universal context of *ens*, if at least two formally distinct exterior things exist that can activate the intellect, then these things must be formally distinguished from each other in some universally relevant sense—that is, according to some formal mode of distinction (i.e., the two formally distinct things must exist with distinct natures). Second, if the intellect is to distinguish formally this *ens* from that *ens* upon activation, it must have some active principle to provide at least minimal cognitive access to these universal forms (natures, essences, or species), at least vaguely. Going forward, I shall call logical distinctions that are relevant in the universal context *formal* distinctions.

Note that to distinguish formally one *ens* from another in the universal context, the modes of formal distinction apprehended by the intellect cannot simply specify, *secundum rationem*, general modes of being like the transcendentals, which are coextensive with *ens* exteriorly *secundum rem*. Neither can some extrinsic difference be added to *ens* to distinguish it essentially as *ens*, for recall the above claim that nothing is extrinsic to *ens* (and indeed, *ens* is not a genus).⁷⁶⁵ Rather, the natures that formally distinguish (at least partially) one *ens* from another in the universal context must specify, contract, or determine the what (*quod*) of *ens* (i.e.,

⁷⁶⁴ See Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 223.

⁷⁶⁵ Of course, accidental *ens* can be added to a substance (*ens per se*) (Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 86). On the three ways of addition, see DV 21.1.

determine the inner mode of *ens*⁷⁶⁶) in some way *secundum rem*. The simplest formal determinations or modes of *ens*, which contract *ens* to a nature or essence, are what Aristotle and Aquinas call the special modes or categories (or general genera) of *ens*.⁷⁶⁷

Additionally, *secundum rem*, if the formal mode of determination of *ens* is partially specified and partially in potentiality to being specified, which is the case for material *ens*, then, according to the nature of that material *ens*, there must be not only a formal principle of *ens* but also a principle (a subject or supposit) of potentiality of *ens* (i.e., *ens* must be a composite of form and potentiality). For natural material *ens*, this principle of potentiality is what we call matter (i.e., the material principle of *ens*). For living material *ens*, following Aquinas, we can call the formal principle of *ens* a soul, and we can call the material principle of *ens* a body.⁷⁶⁸

Finally, it is relevant to mention that insofar as the individuality of material *ens* (according to its nature) is partially in potentiality and not yet fully actualized and distinguished formally, we can say that individual matter is the principle of material *ens*' individuation.⁷⁶⁹ Nonetheless, because any existing *ens* is precisely a *particular ens* (with a primary act and nature), there is a transcendental understanding of individual *ens* that does not reduce to numerical distinction based on matter.⁷⁷⁰ The important point for our purposes is that although any exterior *ens* is an individual *quoad se*, we as human beings without perfect proper cognition cannot understand *ens* properly as an individual without relying on the senses (nor can our intellect be activated by individual material *ens* in the first place, except through the material causality of the senses).⁷⁷¹ I discuss these points further below.

⁷⁶⁶ See DV 1.1 and Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 87-88.

⁷⁶⁷ See DV 1.1 and *Metaph* V.9. C.f. Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 88-90.

⁷⁶⁸ See ST I-II, q. 51, a. 1.

⁷⁶⁹ See ST I, q. 14, a. 11.

⁷⁷⁰ Aquinas says, "everything possesses unity and individuality in the same respect as it possesses being" (*Ad verc.*, c. 108, as cited in Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 236 n. 100). See Aertsen, 236-237.

⁷⁷¹ ST I, q. 84, a. 7; q. 87, a. 3 ad 1; Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 184. See ST I, q. 84, a. 6.

In summary

Thus, again, to repeat, the two implied claims are that 1) exterior *ens* (or *res*) is formally distinguished in the universal context (at least partially) according to a certain formal mode of being (which we can call an essence or nature), and 2) if there is to be any formal understanding in the intellect beyond mere activation (i.e., such that proper cognition is possible, at least vaguely), the intellect must have some active principle that gives minimal cognitive access to such forms to begin to understand *ens* distinctly and properly as such (and to begin to distinguish formally this *ens* from that *ens*) upon activation.

A definition of proper cognition

With the above discussion in mind, I offer a tentative definition of the term “proper cognition” as I use it below. According to Aquinas, to have proper cognition is to understand things “not only in so far as being is common to them, but in so far as one is distinguished from the other.”⁷⁷² In other words, to understand *ens* properly is to understand it not only in general, by virtue of a common concept of *ens*, but also as individual and distinguished from other particular *ens* in the universal context according to its formal and material principles.⁷⁷³

The point I seek to defend below is that *proper* cognition of *individual* material *ens* is possible for human beings by nature, at least vaguely. However, because human beings cannot naturally apprehend every distinction (both formal and material) that individuates exterior material *ens*, any imperfect proper cognition that arises is possible only in union with the senses (indeed, sense cognition of an individual material thing is possible). Later, when I discuss simple judgment, I speak about the possibility of *indirect* proper *intellectual* cognition of material *ens* as an individual.⁷⁷⁴

⁷⁷² *ST I*, q. 14, a. 6.

⁷⁷³ *ST I*, q. 14, a. 6, 11.

⁷⁷⁴ See *ST I*, q. 86, a. 1.

Three claims about human understanding

Now I propose to state several claims about human understanding in particular, which are related to the general implications discussed above and are specifications of our starting premise. Then, I discuss several relevant reasons for these claims (however, I do not attempt here to fully defend them). Then, I discuss several implications of these claims.

I am working towards defending the claim that proper cognition is possible for human beings, at least vaguely. Eventually, I argue that because proper cognition is possible, knowledge of truth, human good, and practical truth is possible.

Claim 1: The human intellect begins like a clean tablet and does not have impressed formal, intelligible species innately or connaturally

As I have discussed in previous chapters, following Aquinas and Aristotle, the first claim is that the human intellect is “at first ‘like a clean tablet on which nothing is written,’ as the Philosopher says (*De Anima* III.4).”⁷⁷⁵ Thus, the human intellect does not begin with any initially impressed formal or intelligible species—whether innately or connaturally—by which the human being understands.⁷⁷⁶ This claim is implied in the starting premise above: as stated, the human intellect is in the beginning “only in potentiality to understand, and afterwards we are made to understand actually.”⁷⁷⁷

Aquinas also posits modes of cognition other than that of the human intellect. As already mentioned, he discusses the sensitive and estimative powers of non-rational animals. Additionally, Aquinas posits the mode of cognition of the angelic intellect, which he says, is closer in proximity to the first intellect than is the human intellect and, by reason of this, “is always in act as regards those things which it can understand”⁷⁷⁸ (i.e., the angelic intellect is naturally

⁷⁷⁵ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 2.

⁷⁷⁶ See *ST I*, q. 84, a. 3.

⁷⁷⁷ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 2.

⁷⁷⁸ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 2.

complete⁷⁷⁹). Aquinas says, “The species whereby the angels understand are not drawn from things, but are connatural to them.”⁷⁸⁰ More specifically, he says that God, the first cause and first intellect, impresses the forms (i.e., proper types) of all things, both spiritual and corporal, upon the angelic intellect through an intelligible outpouring from the beginning (i.e., when the angel is created with its intellectual nature).⁷⁸¹ On account of these connatural, impressed intelligible species in the angelic intellect, Aquinas says that the angel can understand many things with proper cognition.⁷⁸² Indeed, according to Aquinas, insofar as the angelic intellect is impressed with intelligible species of all things, which includes all that goes into specifying each thing’s principle (or principles) of individuation,⁷⁸³ angels can understand singular things properly (in their individual conditions)—in their distinction from each other—by virtue of universal forms.⁷⁸⁴

Claim 2: Human understanding of *ens* depends on the senses

Now I introduce two additional premises that further specify our starting premise. The first premise is that the human being is by nature bodily (i.e., material) and that the human being’s intellect (or intellectual principle or intellectual soul) is united to the human body as its form (i.e., as its formal principle).⁷⁸⁵ In other words, the human intellect (or intellectual soul) is the formal principle of the human body—and, indeed, of the whole human being. There is an additional related claim: the human being has sensitive powers or senses (among other natural powers), which inhere in organs of the body and whose acts are exercised by these bodily organs.⁷⁸⁶

⁷⁷⁹ *ST I*, q. 55, a. 2.

⁷⁸⁰ *ST I*, q. 55, a. 2. C.f. *ST I*, q. 58, a. 7.

⁷⁸¹ *ST I*, q. 55, a. 2; q. 56, a. 2.

⁷⁸² *ST I*, q. 55, a. 3 ad 3.

⁷⁸³ *ST I*, q. 57, a. 2.

⁷⁸⁴ *ST I*, q. 57, a. 2 ad 3.

⁷⁸⁵ *ST I*, q. 76, a. 1.

⁷⁸⁶ *ST I*, q. 78, a. 3-4. C.f. Brock, *Philosophy*, 72-74.

The second premise is as follows: human understanding of *ens* naturally *depends* (materially) on the senses.⁷⁸⁷ Aquinas writes, “in the present state of life whatever we understand, we know by comparison to natural sensible things.”⁷⁸⁸ In other words, as I discuss further below, the senses and sense cognition are, in a way, the *material cause* of intellectual cognition in the intellect.⁷⁸⁹ More specifically, the claim is that material *ens* activates the senses (moving them to immanent sensitive apprehension and cognition) and, further, that it impresses its likeness formally (albeit, in a qualified way) upon the senses (such that the impressed interior sensitive likeness, which is the interior object of a given sense power’s immanent operation, corresponds formally in some qualified way to the exterior material *ens* as principle).⁷⁹⁰ The additional claim is that, insofar as material *ens* activates the senses (and impresses its likeness upon the senses), sense cognition is in a way the material cause of intellectual cognition of *ens* in the intellect.⁷⁹¹ Note the implication seems to be that material *ens* activates (efficiently and materially) both sensitive cognition and, in a partial sense, intellectual cognition.⁷⁹²

It is worth mentioning that, for Aquinas, our perceiving of common sensibles and percepts or phantasms formed by the cogitative power often intervenes between our perceiving of proper sensibles (i.e., raw sense knowledge) and our intellective cognizing and abstracting of universal forms.⁷⁹³ However, it seems that incidental perceptions of the cogitative power depend at least vaguely on the intellect’s understanding of *ens* (with a nature)—and perhaps also on its understanding of other transcendental concepts—even from the beginning, according to Aquinas. For, the cogitative power judges and perceives “by means of coalition of ideas” as guided by the

⁷⁸⁷ ST I, q. 78, a. 4 ad 4. C.f. DT 1.3; Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 182.

⁷⁸⁸ ST I, q. 84, a. 8.

⁷⁸⁹ ST I, q. 84, a. 6.

⁷⁹⁰ See Brock, *Philosophy*, 73 and Aristotle, *De anima* II.12 as cited in Brock, n. 59.

⁷⁹¹ ST I, q. 84, a. 6.

⁷⁹² Indeed, if material *ens* activates a human being’s sense power, which is a part of the human body (and part of the human being), then it activates in some sense the whole human being, whose unifying formal principle is the intellectual soul. See ST I, q. 96, a. 1; q. 79, a. 1. C.f. Brock, *Philosophy*, 56-57.

⁷⁹³ See Daniel D. De Haan, “Perception and the *Vis Cogitativa*,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 88, no. 3 (2014): 436–37.

intellect, and not *merely* by instinct (i.e., by external particular command and exercise).⁷⁹⁴ We might say that the intellect is activated (albeit, vaguely) by *ens* at least as soon as the senses are activated by *ens*.

I cannot defend these claims sufficiently here. I introduce them to discuss below the implications of the human intellect's dependence on the senses in the present state of life. One reason to mention the second premise is that unity of cognition in the human subject seems to require the intellect's partial dependence on the senses. Indeed, if the human being were to have intellectual cognition apart from sense cognition, a question would arise concerning the unity of sensitive and intellectual cognition in the whole human subject. Namely, how would sensitive and intellectual apprehensions relate, and what would be the comparison between them?⁷⁹⁵ Because all intellectual cognition partially depends on the senses according to our claim, I suggest that unity of sensitive and intellectual cognition is possible (and, further, that proper cognition is possible) in human beings, at least vaguely (I argue this point further below).⁷⁹⁶

An implication

Regarding human intellectual cognition, there is a significant implication, given the human intellect's dependence on the senses (I hinted at this point briefly above). Namely, according to Aquinas, in the present state of life, in which everything we naturally understand we cognize "by comparison to natural sensible things,"⁷⁹⁷ what we understand first is *ens* "*as considered in material [or sensible⁷⁹⁸] things* [my emphasis]."⁷⁹⁹ In other words, the implication is that, although according to our starting premise the natural object of the human intellect is universal *ens*, in the present state of life, given we do not have *perfect* proper cognition but rather

⁷⁹⁴ *ST I*, q. 78, a. 4.

⁷⁹⁵ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2.

⁷⁹⁶ See *ST I*, q. 76, a. 1. C.f. *ST I*, q. 84, a. 4.

⁷⁹⁷ *ST I*, q. 84, a. 8. C.f. q. 84, a. 7.

⁷⁹⁸ *ST I*, q. 84, a. 8.

⁷⁹⁹ *ST I*, q. 87, a. 3 ad 1; q. 84, a. 7-8. C.f. Brock, *Philosophy*, 78-79; Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 184.

“apprehend the individual through the senses and the imagination,”⁸⁰⁰ it is individual *material ens* as perceived through the senses that first activates the human intellect, naturally and proximately. Aquinas writes,

“The object of the intellect is something universal, namely, ‘being’ and ‘the true,’ ... [but] the first object of our intellect, in this state of life, is not every being and everything true, but “being” and “true,” as considered in material things...from which it acquires knowledge of all other things.”⁸⁰¹

An important point here is that when material *ens* activates the intellect by virtue of the material causality of the senses, proper intellectual cognition of material *ens* is possible, at least vaguely. Indeed, proper cognition of material *ens* in the intellect proceeds in union with the senses. While the human intellect cannot understand material *ens* naturally by *perfect* proper cognition of a thing’s formal and material principles of individuation,⁸⁰² the human being can cognize material *ens* formally, individually, and properly (at least vaguely) in the very operation of intellectual cognition—because of the unity (by participation) of sensitive and intellectual cognitive operations in the individual human being, according to the present claims.

Claim 3: Human beings have an active (agent) intellect; Given Claims 1 and 2, apprehension by abstraction proceeds according to a specifically human mode

The third claim is that if the human intellect begins as a blank slate as stated above (the first claim), and if the intellect is to understand formally at all (i.e., by virtue of universal forms or intelligible species)—however vaguely—upon activation by *ens*, then it must have some active power by participation in a higher intellect,⁸⁰³ by which it can do two things.

First, recalling that intellectual understanding depends materially on the senses (claim two above), the human intellect by participation in a higher intellect must be able to enlighten

⁸⁰⁰ ST I, q. 84, a. 7; q. 85, a. 1.

⁸⁰¹ ST I, q. 87, a. 3 ad 1.

⁸⁰² See ST I, q. 14, a. 6; q. 57, a. 2.

⁸⁰³ ST I, q. 79, a. 4.

both the forms impressed (in a qualified sense) upon the senses by material *ens* and the phantasms (or percepts, sortals, etc.) additionally perceived in the cogitative power, such that by intellectual overflowing to the sense powers,⁸⁰⁴ “the phantasms are made more fit for the abstraction therefrom of intelligible intentions.”⁸⁰⁵ In other words, the intellect must be able to “throw light on”⁸⁰⁶ sensitive perception and the forming of phantasms, such that phantasms are made fit for abstraction—and, again, such that there is some degree of formal unity between sensitive (especially sensitive cognition of incidental sensibles and phantasms⁸⁰⁷) and intellectual cognition in the human subject.⁸⁰⁸

Second, the human intellect by participation in a higher intellect must be able to abstract the universal form or intelligible species from the phantasm (i.e., from that which is cognized by the sense powers).⁸⁰⁹ In other words, using Aquinas’ words, the human intellect by participation must be able to enlighten “things which are intelligible in potentiality, in so far as by abstraction it makes them to be actually intelligible.”⁸¹⁰ By the human intellect’s act of abstraction, Aquinas indicates, we abstract from the material conditions of a thing’s individuality and consider its universal form (or nature or quiddity).⁸¹¹

Following Aristotle, Aquinas calls this active power of the human intellect—both to enlighten and to abstract—the active (or agent) intellect. He distinguishes the active intellect from the possible intellect, which passively receives the intelligible species abstracted by it.⁸¹² It is the possible intellect that is moved both to receive intelligible species abstracted by the active intellect and to apprehend and to understand actually as activated by *ens*.⁸¹³ I cannot examine all

⁸⁰⁴ *ST I*, q. 78, a. 4 ad 5.

⁸⁰⁵ *ST I*, q. 85, a. 1 ad 4; q. 79, a. 4.

⁸⁰⁶ *ST I*, q. 85, a. 1 ad 4.

⁸⁰⁷ See De Haan, “Perception,” 401.

⁸⁰⁸ *ST I*, q. 78, a. 4.

⁸⁰⁹ *ST I*, q. 85, a. 1 ad 4.

⁸¹⁰ *ST I*, q. 54, a. 4 ad 2.

⁸¹¹ *ST I*, q. 85, a. 1 ad 4.

⁸¹² *ST I*, q. 79, a. 2, esp. ad 2.

⁸¹³ *ST I*, q. 54, a. 4 ad 2.

of the details of Aquinas' view here (nor can I defend them sufficiently here). To start, I refer the reader to *ST I*, q. 79, a. 3-4; *ST I*, 84, 6. The necessity of the active intellect arises for Aquinas, who follows Aristotle, because forms existing in matter (i.e., the forms of individual material *ens*) are only potentially intelligible. And, just as the senses are activated by what is actually sensible, so too must there be some active power of the human intellect to make things actually intelligible, "by abstraction of the species from material conditions."⁸¹⁴

Therefore, according to this view, as I already mentioned above, while material *ens* activates both the human sense powers and, by virtue of the senses, the human intellect (specifically, the possible intellect), and while sensitive cognition is the *material* principle (and material cause) of the intellect's operation of understanding, the active intellect (by participation in a higher intellect) is precisely the active *formal* principle (and formal cause) of the intellect's operation of understanding (again, by making sense cognition actually intelligible by abstraction). Indeed, material *ens* activates the possible intellect by virtue of the senses. However, this activation is partial and incomplete: an interior active principle (i.e., the active intellect) is also required to enlighten sense cognition and to make the nature of the form of *ens* actually intelligible by abstraction, such that the intellect is moved to its particular, corresponding immanent activity of understanding *ens* by virtue of a universal form (an intelligible species).

A few general implications and tentative conclusions

Given the above claims, there are a few general implications and conclusions to highlight before moving to the next major section on truth.

The first general implication is that, if the intellect is activated by material *ens* such that there is any implicit, partial understanding of *ens* as formally determinate and distinct—i.e., as existing with a determinate and stable mode of being (a nature)—then not only has a concept of

⁸¹⁴ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 3.

ens (“a being”) fallen in the intellect but also (by abstraction of an intelligible species and conceptual addition) a vague concept of *res* (“a thing”) has likewise arisen in the intellect secondarily.⁸¹⁵

For Aquinas, *ens* and *res* are transcendentals *secundum rationem* that refer to the same exterior particular *ens* (as principle of the intellect’s operation) in reality *secundum rem*. However, *res* is distinguished interiorly (by conceptual addition) from *ens* insofar as the former concept (*res*) signifies exterior *ens* as viewed from its essence (nature) or “reality” (apprehended by abstraction), while the latter concept (*ens*) signifies exterior *ens* as viewed from its *esse* (existence) or “actuality.”⁸¹⁶ Recall that the interior concept of *ens* signifies and corresponds to the concrete exterior *ens* as principle (*quod est*)—according to our starting premise—because it is the concrete *ens* as principle that activates the intellect and moves it to a particular operation of immanent understanding (by virtue of the senses), by which a concept of common *ens* falls in the intellect. In a given operation of understanding, the concept of *ens* can be said (*quoad se*) to include a nature implicitly (insofar as every concrete exterior *ens* that activates the intellect is formally stable, determinate, and distinct because it exists with a nature), even if we do not apprehend *quoad nos* what that nature is at first, prior to abstraction.⁸¹⁷ We begin to understand *ens* as somewhat *formally* determinate and distinct (albeit, partially and vaguely) once we apprehend (by abstraction of the intelligible species by the active intellect) the nature of *ens* and thus also (by conceptual addition) have a concept of *res*.⁸¹⁸

There are two important points to keep in mind here. First, as I discussed briefly above, in the act of understanding (as moved by concrete material *ens* as principle), what is primarily understood is, indeed, the *ens* or *res* as principle, that is, (exterior) *ens* (a being, a what, a *quod*)

⁸¹⁵ Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 197, 223.

⁸¹⁶ DV 1.1. *Metaph* IV.2 (553). Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 193-194.

⁸¹⁷ Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 180.

⁸¹⁸ ST I, q. 14, a. 6. See Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 197, 223.

or *res*. Only secondarily, by reflection, do we understand *that* we understand (exterior) *ens* or *res* by virtue of an interior concept of *ens* (a by virtue of, a *quo*) or *res*.⁸¹⁹

Second, in the act of understanding, while an interior concept of *ens* or *res* corresponds primarily to the concrete exterior *ens* or *res* as principle (which exists in reality with a nature), any interior concept of *ens* or *res* is apprehended *formally quoad nos* only generally (although an interior concept of *res* is relatively-speaking more formally determinate than a concept of *ens* alone).⁸²⁰ This is because, given our three claims above, we abstract intelligible species only partially and generally—and vaguely and confusedly, especially at first—and certainly *not* perfectly. And, therefore, without perfect understanding of universal natures and all that goes into specifying an individual material thing’s principles of individuation in the universal context (i.e., a material thing’s principles of form and potentiality or matter),⁸²¹ the interior likeness (i.e., the interior *ens* or *res*) by virtue of which we understand is not *formally* distinct (interiorly) from every other. However, again, because material *ens* is the principle of the intellect’s operation of understanding by virtue of the senses, we (as a whole human being) do properly understand individual exterior *ens* (or *res*) as a principle (at least vaguely) *in the very act of understanding*. Indeed, there is a correspondence of *this* particular operation of understanding in the intellect to *this* particular exterior *ens* as principle (with a nature).

With the above discussion in mind, it thus seems reasonable for Aquinas to say in *ST I*, q. 84, a. 7 that “in the present state of life...the proper object of the human intellect, which is united to a body, is a quiddity or nature existing in corporeal matter”—while also saying, as stated in our starting premise, that the human intellect is a natural potentiality to universal *ens* or “has an operation extending to” universal *ens*.⁸²²

⁸¹⁹ *ST I*, q. 85, a. 2. O’Callaghan, *Linguistic Turn*, 31. C.f. Brock, *Philosophy*, 66.

⁸²⁰ *ST I*, q. 85, a. 1.

⁸²¹ *ST I*, q. 57, a. 2.

⁸²² *ST I*, q. 87, a. 3 ad 1. C.f. *ST I* q. 79, a. 2. C.f. *ST I* q. 78, a. 1; Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 184.

To summarize, while individual exterior *ens* as principle activates the human intellect (by virtue of the senses), the natural object that falls in the intellect interiorly (the interior object of the immanent operation) is primarily common *ens* (implicitly with a general nature or form, which is not apprehended at first, prior to abstraction) and, secondarily, common *res* (apprehended somewhat more distinctly with a general nature or form, by virtue of an intelligible species abstracted by the active intellect). But, in the very operation of intellectual cognition (as actualized by exterior *ens*), when the intellect is actively understanding, the *individual* immanent operation of understanding (as specified by its interior object, the common cognitive likeness) indeed corresponds by formal identity (albeit vaguely) to the *individual exterior ens* as principle.

A summary regarding proper cognition and the intellect's dependence on the senses

Finally, before moving to the next major section on truth, it is worth restating the above claims specifically in terms of the possibility of proper cognition. Again, unless the claim is that the human intellect is impressed perfectly with the intelligible species of every universal nature, including the nature of every individuating principle of *ens* (which is Aquinas' claim regarding the angelic intellect and *not* regarding the human intellect), then we cannot understand individual *ens* formally and distinctly—that is, properly—apart from the senses.

However, proper cognition of individual *ens* is possible at least vaguely for human beings because of 1) the human intellect's natural dependence on the senses, by which it has sense cognition of the individual (in union with the intervening operation of the cogitative power, by which, together with the intellect and other interior sense powers, the human being is able to form individual phantasms and to make particular judgments of singulars),⁸²³ and because of 2) the active intellect and its capacity of abstraction of intelligible species by participation in a higher intellect. Because of the unity of sensitive and intellectual cognition in the human being, it is

⁸²³ ST I, q. 78, a. 4. C.f. De Haan, "Perception."

possible for individual material *ens* to impress its material likeness upon the senses and, by virtue of the senses, to (partially) activate the intellect and, together with the active, formal causality of the agent intellect, to move it to proper cognition.⁸²⁴

Furthermore, the implication is that the human intellect depends on the senses for any natural operation of understanding.⁸²⁵ For, given the intellect begins as a blank slate, and given the proper object of the intellect in the present state of life is the nature of a material thing, then, if the intellect is to understand at all, it must be initially activated by material *ens* by virtue of the senses⁸²⁶ (or secondarily, as moved by sense knowledge and phantasms recalled in the imaginative or memorative powers, which were originally formed insofar as material *ens* impressed its sensible likeness upon the senses and partially activated both the cogitative power and the intellect).⁸²⁷

SECTION 2: THE POSSIBILITY OF TRUTH IN THE HUMAN INTELLECT

Having examined a Thomistic account of the nature of the human intellect in view of our starting premise, I now consider the possibility of truth in the intellect, generally speaking. Recall in chapter 3 I mention Aquinas' claim that truth is a real relation of conformity of the human intellect to a thing (*res*).⁸²⁸ Given the above discussion, how can we speak about truth as a distinct, real relation in the context of universal *ens*—and not merely as a logical relation (e.g., a logical relation of conformity between a “truth-knower” and a “truth-maker” or between a proposition and a fact⁸²⁹)?

⁸²⁴ *ST I*, q. 89, a. 1.

⁸²⁵ *ST I*, q. 84, a. 7.

⁸²⁶ *ST I*, q. 89, a. 1.

⁸²⁷ *ST I*, q. 78, a. 4; q. 84, a. 7 ad 2; a. 8.

⁸²⁸ *DV* 1.1, 1.5 ad 15. C.f. *ST I*, q. 16, a. 1-2.

⁸²⁹ See Stout, “Radical,” 45-6; G.E. Moore (1910-11, chap. 15) and Bertrand Russell (1912, p. 129) as cited in Marian David, “The Correspondence Theory of Truth,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2016 Edition (Stanford: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2016), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/truth-correspondence/>.

Consider the following argument. First, suppose we say that in the context of universal *ens*, there is a universally relevant and thus *real* distinction between *this* existing human being with an intellect and *this* exterior *ens* (or *res*) (to be understood): for both exist individually and distinctly with a nature in the universal context of natural things. Thus, for the human intellect, which proceeds by natural resultance in a human being who exists with a human nature, there is a real distinction between interior and exterior. According to our starting premise, the human intellect is a natural potentiality to universal *ens*. Because the distinction between the intellect and a thing is real in the universal context, the intellect's operation of understanding, in principle, can achieve some amount of real formal conformity (or correspondence, identity, or equality) to the thing.⁸³⁰

Indeed, by the intellect's operation of understanding, although some amount of formal equality may be achieved, the real distinction between intellect and thing remains. More specifically, the individual thing (exterior *res*) continues to exist with a nature (the thing's natural form is its formal *principle of being*), while a distinct operation of understanding exists in the intellect (which also exists), whose interior object is a concept (interior *ens* or *res*) with the same form but in an intelligible mode (the concept's intelligible form is the intellect's formal *principle of understanding*).⁸³¹ Because the formal context of universal exterior *ens* is the same as the formal context of universal interior *ens*—i.e., the formal contexts of universal being and universal knowing are the same—then, when the intellect formally understands *ens* by immanent operation (whose interior object is common *ens*), it formally understands exterior *ens* itself.

In sum we can speak about truth as a real relation of conformity (or adequation) of the intellect to a thing (*res*)⁸³² insofar as the thing, the intellect, and the intellect's immanent operation of understanding are real and distinct in the context of universal *ens*. Indeed, we can say that the intellect's relation to a thing is real if the principle of the relation is real. In this case,

⁸³⁰ See O'Callaghan, "Knower and Known," 19.

⁸³¹ Aquinas, *De Ente* 2 (55-56). See O'Callaghan, *Linguistic Turn*, 26.

⁸³² DV 1.1, 5. C.f. Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 254; O'Callaghan, "Knower and Known," 19.

the proximate principle of the relation is the intellect's immanent operation of understanding, which is something real and distinct in the universal context. However, considered logically in the opposite direction, there is *no real relation*: the thing has no real relation *to* the intellect (for when the intellect understands immanently, no operation moves exterior *res* itself; indeed, exterior *res* is unaffected and does not depend on the intellect's understanding).⁸³³

Apprehension by simple abstraction in the human intellect is true (and ordered to truth, properly speaking) by nature

In view of the above argument on the possibility of truth, I suggest we can follow Aquinas in saying that the human intellect is true when it cognizes "what a thing is" by an operation of simple apprehension.⁸³⁴ Even more, we can say that if the intellect is activated at all by *ens* such that simple apprehension proceeds, then the intellect must be true (*necessarily*, by nature), at least vaguely and implicitly. This claim is implied in our starting premise, for the intellect's context for potential simple apprehension is proportionate to universal *ens*. Indeed, Aquinas writes, "the intellect, in so far as it [is cognizing], must be true, so far as it has the likeness of the thing known, this being its form, as [cognizing]."⁸³⁵ Likewise, he says, "Now the intellect is always true as regards what a thing is, just as the sense regarding its proper object."⁸³⁶

Although the human intellect's simple apprehensions must be true, they are nonetheless incomplete and indistinct, especially at first. Indeed, there are two relevant implications to mention given our previous discussion of the intellect's mode of cognition and dependence on the senses. The first implication is that the intellect's simple apprehensions may or may not conform initially to the substantial *ens* (or *res*) (i.e., the substance) that primarily activates the intellect,⁸³⁷ for the intellect sometimes apprehends the natures of secondary accidents or the

⁸³³ See *DV* 1.5 ad 15.

⁸³⁴ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2.

⁸³⁵ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2. C.f., *ST I*, q. 85, a. 6; q. 85, a. 1 ad 1; q. 78, a. 4.

⁸³⁶ *ST I*, q. 58, a. 5; q. 57, a. 1 ad 2.

⁸³⁷ *ST I*, q. 85, a. 3 ad 4.

effects of motions prior to apprehending the natures of substances (and causes and wholes).⁸³⁸

Aquinas writes,

“Now there are many kinds of things that are hidden within, to find which human knowledge has to penetrate within so to speak. Thus, under the accidents lies hidden the nature of the substantial reality, under words lies hidden their meaning; under likenesses and figures the truth they denote lies hidden (because the intelligible world is enclosed within as compared with the sensible world, which is perceived externally), and effects lie hidden in their causes, and vice versa. Hence we may speak of understanding with regard to all these things.”⁸³⁹

The second implication to mention is that when the intellect apprehends wholes (or substances), it apprehends them only generally and indistinctly at first,⁸⁴⁰ without properly apprehending their parts (and without properly apprehending *that* they are wholes).⁸⁴¹ In other words, upon activation—regardless of whether the intellect first apprehends the nature of a primary substance or the nature of a secondary substance (e.g., an accident or part)—because the intellect “does not at once grasp all that is virtually contained” in any first apprehension,⁸⁴² the intellect does not initially apprehend distinctly the unity of whole and part, or of substance and accident, etc.

The intellect first cognizes truth, properly speaking, when it judges

Now it is relevant to recall a distinction I introduce in chapter 3. There is a distinction between saying the human intellect is true whenever it apprehends “what a thing is” and saying the intellect apprehends *that* it is true (or saying it cognizes truth, *properly speaking*). Recall I suggest Aquinas uses the term “true” in at least two senses when speaking about the intellect’s operations. Truth in the first sense arises when the intellect conforms to a thing and cognizes

⁸³⁸ See, for example, *ST I*, q. 29, a. 1 ad 3; *ST II-II*, q. 8, a. 1. C.f. Dewan, *Form and Being*, 151; Brock, *Philosophy*, 37-38.

⁸³⁹ *ST II-II*, q. 8, a. 1. C.f. *ST I*, 29, 1 ad 3; Dewan, *Form and Being*, 151, 240-241.

⁸⁴⁰ See *ST I*, q. 14, a. 6. C.f. Brock, *Philosophy*, 79.

⁸⁴¹ See *ST I*, q. 85, a. 3.

⁸⁴² *ST I*, q. 58, a. 4.

what it is by simple apprehension.⁸⁴³ The intellect does not cognize *that* it is true at this stage. Aquinas says the human intellect does not acquire perfect cognition of a thing by the first act of apprehension.⁸⁴⁴ Truth in the second sense arises in the intellect when it additionally conforms *itself* to the thing apprehended by an operation of simple judgment (or natural assent⁸⁴⁵). When the intellect cognizes its *own* conformity to the intelligible thing by judgment then *first* it cognizes (or apprehends) truth, *properly speaking*.⁸⁴⁶ The second sense of truth is a completion or perfection of the first sense: it involves what Aquinas says is implied by the term “truth” *properly speaking* and in view of the perfection of the intellect.⁸⁴⁷

Even though the intellect’s apprehensions by simple abstraction are necessarily true, the claim is that the intellect first cognizes truth, *properly speaking*, when it judges because it is only by simple judgment—and not by apprehension alone—that the intellect additionally conforms itself to a thing, *properly speaking* (that is, by its own interior principle of movement). Indeed, because its apprehensions by simple abstraction are incomplete⁸⁴⁸ (and not perfect like those of the angelic intellect), the human intellect does not cognize *individual ens* properly and somewhat distinctly except insofar as it predicates its simple apprehensions of an *individual ens* or *res* as subject, which occurs in the operation of judgment.⁸⁴⁹ This is to say the following: it is only by judgment that the intellect conforms *properly* to a thing, and it is primarily by judgment that the intellect has a *real* relation of truth (a real relation of conformity to a thing), properly speaking.⁸⁵⁰

⁸⁴³ DV 1.3. ST I, q. 16, a. 2

⁸⁴⁴ ST I, q. 85, a. 5.

⁸⁴⁵ ST I-II, q. 17, a. 6; II-II, q. 2, a. 1.

⁸⁴⁶ ST I, q. 16, a. 2.

⁸⁴⁷ ST I, q. 16, a. 2. DV 21.1.

⁸⁴⁸ ST I, q. 85, a. 3.

⁸⁴⁹ ST I, q. 58, a. 4.

⁸⁵⁰ DV 1.3. Aquinas says, “the relation of knowledge to a thing known is something real [*in rerum natura*]” (DV 1.5 ad 15). C.f. O’Callaghan, “Knower and Known,” 19.

Simple judgment in the intellect is not initially possible

I seek to defend the claim that the human intellect first cognizes truth, properly speaking, when it judges. Indeed, given Aquinas' claim that the intellect apprehends the good after apprehending the true,⁸⁵¹ we need a way to speak about how a concept of truth arises in the intellect to speak about how natural understanding of the human good and practical truth arises. However, I suggest that simple judgment is not possible in the intellect at first. Given our starting claim that the intellect begins "like a clean tablet on which nothing is written,"⁸⁵² I suggest that in the beginning, even after simple apprehension of exterior *res*, there are no *interior* causal principles of *particular* intellectual self-movement in the human intellect to move it to a particular operation of simple judgment.⁸⁵³ Recall in chapter 3 I suggest that to explain how simple judgment arises we must account for the principle of understanding that specifies the object of the operation *as an end*, and we must account for the interior principle of exercise that inclines the intellect to that particular end. One reason there is no possibility of self-moved simple judgment at first is because there is no initial concept of the good in the intellect to specify the operation of the will, which is, according to Aquinas, the intellectual appetitive power that *interiorly* moves the intellect (and other powers of the human subject) to exercise their respective secondary operations.⁸⁵⁴

With no possibility of interior intellectual self-movement at first, it seems that if judgment by simple understanding and proper cognition is to arise in the intellect at all, *it must arise, in part, by virtue of simple apprehension, at least in due course*. Indeed, this is what I claim below.

Recall in chapter 3 I suggest that clarity is needed in a Thomistic account of how simple judgment arises distinctly in act in terms of its natural causal principles. In what follows I attempt

⁸⁵¹ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 4 ad 2.

⁸⁵² *ST I*, q. 79, a. 2.

⁸⁵³ Note there are *general* intellectual principles of self-movement in the human being. Namely, there are the human being's intellectual potentialities or passive powers, i.e., the intellect and (at least virtually) the will. But, these general principles are not yet *particularly* actualized at first.

⁸⁵⁴ *ST I*, q. 82, a. 4.

to clarify and to develop Aquinas' view on the subject in a manner consistent with his claims. I suggest below that the possibility of simple judgment by understanding and proper cognition arises, in part, because concepts of truth and good fall in the intellect *implicitly* by repeated (or, compounded) simple apprehension and conceptual addition, following the intellect's initial activation by exterior material *ens*. This falling of concepts in the intellect implicitly proceeds because the intellect is generally inclined to *universal ens*, and because of its active principle, the agent intellect. In due course, following a process of compounded, implicit simple apprehension and conceptual addition—and following the human will's voluntary participation by simple willing—I suggest that *explicit* simple judgment of affirmation by understanding and proper cognition of exterior *ens* arises. Indeed, I suggest we need to apprehend *ens* as true and good *implicitly* before we can first cognize (or apprehend) truth properly and somewhat *explicitly* when the intellect judges. Further below I speak to the intellect's *explicit* apprehension of the human good—and, indeed, the practical good.

To begin the next section, I propose *how* a process of compounded simple apprehension and conceptual addition implicitly gives rise, in part, to the natural causal principles of a particular operation of simple judgment, following the intellect's initial apprehension of exterior *ens*.

SECTION 3: A THOMISTIC ACCOUNT OF SIMPLE JUDGMENT, SIMPLE TRUTH, AND NATURAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE HUMAN GOOD AND PRACTICAL TRUTH

Implicitly apprehending the true and the good by immanent operation (simple apprehension) and conceptual addition

Apprehending *ens* and *res* by first immanent operation

Recall I have already discussed how the intellect apprehends by its first immanent operation. As mentioned previously, upon its activation by exterior *ens*, first, the intellect apprehends *ens* by virtue of an interior concept of common *ens*. Furthermore, by simple abstraction of an intelligible

species, the intellect apprehends *ens* by conceptual addition at least vaguely as *res*—as a thing, i.e., as *ens* contracted or determined with a nature.

Now, the intellect's first immanent operation by which it apprehends *res* is *itself* secondary, interior (or intentional) *ens*. Recall that the first immanent operation of the intellect is a principle of a real relation: it is a principle of the intellect's conforming to *res* (note that the operation is not a real relation, *properly speaking*, until it proceeds additionally by simple judgment according to an interior principle of movement). Significantly, given the intellect is a general inclination to *universal ens* according to our starting premise (indeed, both exterior *ens* and secondary interior *ens* are in the same context of universal *ens*), the intellect's first immanent operation can secondarily activate the intellect (i.e., itself).

Implicitly apprehending a concept of truth by second immanent operation

Upon secondary activation by its own first immanent operation of apprehending *ens* (and then apprehending *ens* as *res*), the intellect secondarily and implicitly apprehends by simple abstraction, further, the nature of its first immanent operation, which is to apprehend the nature of its particular conforming to *res* as principle.⁸⁵⁵ Attempting to follow Aquinas, I suggest that to apprehend *ens* (and then *ens* as *res*) secondarily by apprehending the nature of the intellect's immanent operation of conforming to *res* is to apprehend secondarily and implicitly a concept of true.⁸⁵⁶

To summarize, we can say that, insofar as the intellect secondarily apprehends by simple abstraction the nature of the first immanent operation of intellectual cognition by which it apprehends *ens* and the nature of *ens* (i.e., *ens* as *res*)—again, which is itself secondary (interior) *ens*, which can secondarily activate the intellect—the intellect can apprehend by simple

⁸⁵⁵ Indeed, first, exterior *ens* moves the intellect to understanding, and second, the intellect's immanent operation of apprehending *ens* moves itself to further understanding (i.e., to apprehend the nature of itself apprehending *ens*).

⁸⁵⁶ *ST I*, q. 87, a. 3, including ad 1-2.

abstraction secondarily and implicitly the nature of its conformity to *res* in act and, thus, apprehend implicitly a concept of truth. The concept of truth is secondarily and implicitly apprehended by a certain implicit conceptual addition and inner explication, and it falls in the intellect as such.⁸⁵⁷ That is, the intellect implicitly apprehends truth as a relational transcendental, whose proximate principle is the intellect's first immanent operation of cognition and whose primary⁸⁵⁸ natural principle is exterior *ens*. *Secundum rem*, interior *ens*, *res*, and true are coextensive with exterior *ens*.

It is worth mentioning that to apprehend a concept of true implicitly is not (yet) to understand truth explicitly and properly by judgment. Indeed, explicit interior judgment is not possible until interior particular self-movement is possible. However, as I explain further below, as soon as *res* is apprehended, implicitly there is already a self-evident proposition corresponding to the exterior subject of the apprehension that *could* be made. One might say that we understand this self-evident proposition implicitly by apprehension—but, we do not (yet) understand *that* we understand the proposition, nor do we make it somewhat explicitly by judgment.

Implicitly apprehending the nature of the intellect

To apprehend the nature of the intellect's individual conforming to *res* is to apprehend the nature of the intellect's first immanent operation (interior *ens*) of conforming to *res*, as activated by exterior *ens*. Notably, *quoad se*, it is also to apprehend implicitly the nature of the interior principle of this operation, which is to apprehend implicitly the nature of the intellect itself as a passive power (i.e., it is to apprehend implicitly the nature of the intellect's first act). For,

⁸⁵⁷ See *ST I*, q. 16, a. 4 ad 2.

⁸⁵⁸ Note the exterior *ens* that proximately activates the intellect *secundum rem* may not be the primary, natural, substantial exterior material *ens* that primarily activates the intellect *secundum rem* (because the exterior *ens* that proximately activates the intellect may be secondary exterior *ens*). Of course, primary, natural, substantial exterior material *ens* is the primary natural principle of secondary exterior *ens*. The first and primary principle of natural substantial material *ens* is the First Cause.

recalling our discussion above of a passive power, we can say that to apprehend the nature of a *particular* immanent operation of a passive power (as activated by a particular principle) is also to apprehend the nature of the *general* interior potentiality or inclination activated by that principle (which is the subject of that operation).⁸⁵⁹

However, there is a significant epistemological point to bear in mind. Namely, although the intellect may apprehend implicitly its own nature whenever it secondarily apprehends the nature of its immanent operation of conforming to *res* (upon activation by that *res* or *ens*), the intellect does not thereby apprehend itself *as the subject* of that understanding or conforming. In other words, the intellect does not apprehend *that* it is (itself) the individual operative subject of the immanent operation of conforming to *res* simply by apprehending the nature of that operation. More specifically, from one particular activation and apprehension of immanent operation to the next, the intellect does not apprehend itself as the singular intellectual subject of activation and cognitive activity simply by apprehending, first, the nature of each *ens*, and second, the nature of each corresponding immanent intellectual operation (although, it is possible that the intellect also apprehends separately, vaguely, and indistinctly the natures of the intellect and the human being who has an intellect, for both are *ens*).

What I am suggesting here is that while the natures of various *ens* (exterior or interior) may be apprehended separately and indistinctly by the intellect upon its activation, this is not to suggest that the intellect thereby apprehends more distinctly that one such *ens* (i.e., the intellect itself) is the singular subject of operation of the others.

The reason for this claim is that, given the above apprehensions alone, the intellect cannot immediately distinguish between at least two possibilities. The first possibility, which is the possibility I seek to defend and which is claimed in our starting premise, is that the intellect is, indeed, the singular intellectual subject of its own immanent operations. Indeed, given our

⁸⁵⁹ In this case, recalling our starting premise, the intellect is a natural potentiality or general inclination (or passive power) to be activated by *ens* (or *res*) so as to conform immanently thereto, while an individual immanent act of conforming to a particular *res* upon activation is a particular secondary operation thereof.

starting premise, we can say that when the intellect apprehends the nature of its immanent operations, it also apprehends implicitly its own nature as a subject of intellectual operation, even though it does not yet understand *that* it apprehends its own nature. The second possibility, however, which is contrary to our starting premise, is that each operation of intellectual apprehension is exteriorly and particularly commanded and executed in the universal context and is not a secondary operation that proceeds interiorly in a single intellectual subject. *Quoad nos*, how can the intellect apprehend itself as a singular subject of intellectual operation, as distinct from this second possibility? I address this question further below.

Implicitly apprehending the intellect's natural inclination to *ens* (and a concept of good) by third immanent operation

Given our starting premise, after the intellect implicitly apprehends *ens* as true, a further apprehension proceeds whereby the intellect apprehends itself implicitly as a principle and an end—and, indeed, as a subject—of intellectual operation. This is also to apprehend the intellect's own natural inclination to *ens*. I now attempt to explain this third apprehension briefly.

For reference, I begin, again, with another summary of the first two apprehensions. Upon activation by exterior *ens*, first, the intellect apprehends *ens*. Then, by simple abstraction of the nature of *ens*, the intellect apprehends *ens* as *res*. In the first immanent operation by which it apprehends *ens* as *res*, the intellect conforms to *res* but does not yet apprehend *that* it conforms to *res*. Upon secondary activation by its own immanent operation of apprehending *ens* as *res*, second, the intellect apprehends by simple abstraction, further, the nature of this first immanent operation, which is to apprehend the nature of its first operation of conforming to *res* as principle (as activated originally by exterior *ens* or *res*). At this point, by apprehending the nature of its own first immanent operation, the intellect apprehends *that* it conforms to *res*—and, because it apprehends the nature of its immanent operation, it also implicitly apprehends its own nature.

To apprehend the original exterior *ens* by virtue of this secondary apprehension is to apprehend it implicitly according to a concept of the true.

Notably, it is the intellect's own first immanent operation that is the further principle and moving cause of its secondary apprehension. In other words, the intellect moves itself to secondary immanent operation (although, the primary proximate principle of activation is still the initial exterior *ens*). By this secondary immanent operation, the intellect apprehends the nature of its own immanent operation (and implicitly the nature of itself). In this case, the intellect conforms to itself but does not yet apprehend *that* it conforms to itself (here, it does apprehend *that* it conforms to *res*). Similarly, the intellect does not yet apprehend *that* it is a subject of intellectual operation.

This further, secondary apprehending by immanent operation (and by simple abstraction) of the nature of the intellect's conforming to *res* and an implicit concept of the true (which is also interior *ens*) once again can activate the intellect a third time. Indeed, upon further activation by its own secondary immanent operation of apprehending the nature of its conforming to *res* (and an implicit concept of the true), the intellect apprehends by simple abstraction, third, the nature of the immanent operation by which it conforms (secondarily) to its own initial conforming to *res*. In other words, by this third immanent operation, the intellect apprehends *that* it conforms to itself (conforming to *ens*)—by apprehending the nature of the secondary immanent operation by which it conforms to itself (conforming to *ens*). In doing so, the intellect implicitly apprehends itself as a (passive) principle and a subject of intellectual operation (i.e., as a subject of conforming to *ens*). This is also to apprehend the nature of the immanent operation by which the intellect passively activates and moves itself to *ens* (i.e., the nature of the immanent operation of proximate intellectual self-activation and self-movement).

It is significant to examine what is happening in this third immanent operation of apprehension. The principle and moving cause of the third activation of the intellect is the intellect's own secondary apprehending of its conforming to *res* as true (and also implicitly its

apprehending of its own nature). The third immanent operation that proceeds because of this third activation is again an intellectual operation of apprehending (by simple abstraction) and conforming to *res* as true (but not simply so, as I argue). So, the intellect apprehends *ens* (or *res*) as true by simple abstraction in both the second and third immanent operations of the intellect. Likewise, an interior implicit concept of true falls in the intellect by virtue of both operations.

However, there is a significant distinction between these two apprehensions and between the two corresponding interior implicit concepts of true that fall in the intellect. The second immanent operation apprehends true simply by virtue of apprehending the nature of the intellect's initial immanent operation of conforming to *ens* as *res*—that is, by apprehending itself conforming to *ens* as *res*. Following Aquinas, we can call the implicit concept of true that falls in the intellect by this second apprehension truth *simply*.⁸⁶⁰

By contrast, the intellect's third immanent operation implicitly apprehends true not simply by virtue of secondarily apprehending the nature of its initial conforming to *ens* as *res* (which, again, is also to apprehend the nature of itself and to conform to itself implicitly) but also, additionally, by virtue of thirdly apprehending the nature of that secondary immanent operation (i.e., the secondary immanent operation in which the intellect activates and moves itself to apprehend its own nature and the true and to conform to itself conforming to *ens*). By its third immanent operation, the intellect implicitly apprehends true additionally by virtue of apprehending the nature of its secondary operation of moving and conforming to itself (conforming to *ens*). Whereas the intellect moves itself and conforms to itself by virtue of its second immanent operation, the intellect apprehends *that* it moves itself and conforms to itself by virtue of its third immanent operation.⁸⁶¹ By its third immanent operation, the intellect conforms to itself (in truth) not only (simply) as conforming to *ens* as *res* but also additionally (in

⁸⁶⁰ See *ST I*, q. 16, a. 4.

⁸⁶¹ By its third immanent operation, the intellect apprehends the *nature* of its second immanent operation of (passive) self-movement and self-conformity (and of implicit apprehension of the true). The intellect's second immanent operation is the principle and moving cause of this third immanent operation.

truth) as moving itself and conforming to itself conforming to *ens* (i.e., the intellect conforms to itself additionally in truth as the principle of its own secondary operation). Indeed, by its third immanent operation, the intellect apprehends by simple abstraction additionally both 1) the nature of the operation of intellectual self-moving and self-conforming to *ens*, and 2) implicitly the nature of itself as a (passive) principle of intellectual self-moving and self-conforming to *ens* (upon initial activation by exterior *ens*).

Now, as I have discussed before, to apprehend the nature of a particular immanent operation of a passive power (as activated by a particular principle) is also to apprehend the nature of that power's general inclination to its principle. Thus, we can say that by the third immanent operation, the intellect apprehends not only the nature of its particular operation of intellectual self-moving but also the nature of its general inclination to its principle, which is itself (conforming to *ens*) and, indeed, *ens*, for exterior *ens* is the initial principle that activates the intellect. Therefore, to summarize, we can say that by the third immanent operation, the intellect apprehends—at least vaguely and implicitly—the nature of its general inclination to *ens* or *that* it inclines to *ens*.

Several significant implications follow the intellect's third immanent operation

The intellect implicitly apprehends that it is a subject of intellectual operation (and a subject or principle of intellectual movement and self-movement) with a nature

There is a significant implication that follows when the intellect apprehends by virtue of its third immanent operation *that* it moves itself and conforms to itself. Namely, I suggest, the intellect implicitly apprehends itself as a singular (passive) principle and *subject* of intellectual operation (and self-movement). For, by apprehending itself (with a nature) and conforming to itself (conforming to *ens*), first, by virtue of the second immanent operation and then, again, by virtue of the third immanent operation, the intellect apprehends the truth that, before and after

(passive) self-movement, the nature of its immanent operation (and the nature of itself as a principle of that operation) is the same.⁸⁶² In other words, the intellect apprehends—at least vaguely and implicitly—*that* it is a singular subject and principle of intellectual operation (a principle of inclination to *ens*), which persists through change caused by secondary self-movement.⁸⁶³

The intellect implicitly apprehends the idea of perfection (or fullness, plenitude, completeness) of being (and the principle of distinction between potentiality and actuality and between primary and secondary *ens*)

A second implication of the intellect's third immanent operation is as follows. Recall that when exterior *ens* initially activates the intellect, it is a principle and moving cause of immanent operation in the intellect. This immanent operation (this movement to additional act) is a secondary kind of *ens*, which proceeds secondarily and is added to the intellect interiorly. It is this secondary interior *ens* that secondarily activates the intellect and moves it to a secondary immanent operation. By apprehending the nature of itself in both the second and third immanent operations—precisely such that apprehending its own nature in the second immanent operation (as interior *ens*) further activates itself yet a third time—the intellect apprehends implicitly the nature of the principle of distinction and relation (by operation) between primary and secondary *ens*. In other words, the intellect apprehends that, by its own second immanent operation, it adds *ens* secondarily to itself (whereby it is thirdly activated) in such a way that its primary nature (as a subject of intellectual operation) remains the same. The intellect's second immanent operation is truly *ens*; hence, the intellect is thirdly activated. Again, the point is that

⁸⁶² We might say that the intellect achieves a certain union with itself by virtue of its second immanent operation, and that it apprehends implicitly *that* it achieves this union by virtue of its third immanent operation. See *ST* I-II, q. 28, a. 1 ad 2.

⁸⁶³ Note, as I mention below, the intellect can later understand this truth more explicitly by love, by reasoning by resolution, and by simple judgment—when the will participates by love in the intellect's implicit apprehension of itself as a subject of intellectual operation by moving it somewhat explicitly to judgment.

by apprehending its own nature in the second immanent operation, first, simply, and then, again, by virtue of (passive) self-movement and additional immanent operation (i.e., by apprehending the nature of its second immanent operation by virtue of its third immanent operation), the intellect apprehends implicitly the nature of the principle of distinction and relation by operation between primary *ens* and secondary *ens* (or, according to Aquinas' terminology, between *ens simpliciter* and *ens secundum quid*⁸⁶⁴). For a passive power, this is also to apprehend the nature of the principle of distinction and relation by operation between potentiality (first act) and secondary actuality (second act).

Because the apprehended nature of the intellect is the same in both the second and third immanent operations, what the intellect apprehends implicitly from one apprehension to the next is the *secondary* distinction and relation by operation between itself primarily and itself secondarily, which is the distinction between itself simply (according to its primary act of being) and itself by addition (by secondary act)—i.e., by addition of secondary interior *ens*. In other words, we might say the distinction between the intellect simply (or, *ens* simply or primarily) and the intellect as having additional, secondary *ens*—which is the distinction between the intellect in potentiality and the intellect secondarily in act—is a distinction of relative fullness or perfection (or plenitude or completeness) of being by operation (i.e., its having additional, secondary *ens* by operation).⁸⁶⁵ According to Aquinas, a thing is perfect insofar as it is actual and complete.⁸⁶⁶ Aquinas writes, “for a thing is perfect in proportion to its state of actuality, because we call that perfect which lacks nothing of the mode of its perfection.”⁸⁶⁷ And, the mode of perfection of the intellect as a potentiality and passive power—as a subject of operation—is for it to be not only generally in act but also secondarily operating in particular. Indeed, we might say that the

⁸⁶⁴ *ST I*, q. 5, a. 1 ad 1.

⁸⁶⁵ *ST I*, q. 5, a. 1. C.f. *ST I-II*, q. 18, a. 1. C.f. Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 305, 310; Jan A. Aertsen, “Natural Law in the Light of the Doctrine of the Transcendentals,” in *Lex et Libertas: Freedom and Law According to St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. L. J. Elders and K. Hedwig (Vatican City: Libr. Ed. Vaticana, 1987), 102–3.

⁸⁶⁶ *ST I*, q. 5, a. 1. Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 305.

⁸⁶⁷ *ST I*, q. 4, a. 1. See Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 305.

intellect, as a subject of operation, is moved to a certain relative fullness or perfection (or completeness or plenitude) of being and actuality whenever it is secondarily activated and moved additionally to particular operation—both upon secondary self-actualization and upon primary actualization by exterior *ens*.⁸⁶⁸

The intellect implicitly apprehends the good: to apprehend the truth of inclination to *ens* is to apprehend the good simply and implicitly

A third implication of the intellect's third immanent operation is as follows. Attempting to follow Aquinas, we can say that to apprehend the original, exterior *ens* (as principle) implicitly by conceptual addition, first, by virtue of a concept of common *ens* (and then *res*), and second, by virtue of an implicit concept of true, and, third, by virtue of apprehending the nature of the intellect's inclination to *ens* (and to itself) is to apprehend exterior *ens* according to a simple, implicit concept of good. In other words, we can say that a concept of good falls in the intellect simply and implicitly by conceptual addition by virtue of, first, a concept of *ens*, second, an implicit concept of *true*, and third, by apprehending the intellect's inclination to universal *ens*.

Aquinas writes,

“A thing is prior logically in so far as it is prior to the intellect. Now the intellect apprehends primarily being itself; secondly, it apprehends that it understands being; and thirdly, it apprehends that it desires (*se appetere*) [inclines to; has an appetite for] being. Hence the idea of being is first, that of truth second, and the idea of good third, though good is in things.”⁸⁶⁹

Interiorly, *secundum rationem*, the common ideas of *ens*, true, and good are conceptually distinct as apprehended implicitly by immanent operation and conceptual addition. Indeed, Aquinas says that good (*bonum*) and *ens* differ *secundum rationem* (according to ratio or meaning) because good adds the aspect of desirableness or appetibility, which *ens* does not

⁸⁶⁸ Note the intellect does not yet understand *that* it is perfected by exterior *ens*.

⁸⁶⁹ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 4 ad 2.

present.⁸⁷⁰ However, exteriorly, *secundum rem* (according to thing), following Aquinas, we can say that the distinctly apprehended transcendental concepts of good, true, and *ens* are convertible and coextensive with the exterior individual *ens* that initially activates the intellect as its principle and moving cause.⁸⁷¹ Indeed, it is because these common concepts are the interior objects of immanent operations of the intellect that they, the immanent operations, and the intellect itself formally correspond (albeit, vaguely and implicitly) to the individual exterior *ens* as principle.

An additional point: A distinction between *ens* and good according to absolute predication

As I hinted at above, by its third immanent operation the intellect implicitly apprehends several ideas, including 1) the idea of itself as a primary subject of operation (primary *ens*), 2) the idea of perfection of itself (as primary *ens* and as a subject) through operation (secondary *ens*), and 3) an implicit concept of the good. It is worth noting that, although *ens* and good are convertible and coextensive *secundum rem*, because these concepts are distinct *secundum rationem*, Aquinas says that “they are not predicated of a thing absolutely in the same way.”⁸⁷² The concepts *ens* and *good* are convertible when a thing is considered according to its first act (i.e., according to its simple or primary *ens* and first goodness), for a thing can be apprehended as good merely insofar as it exists (as primary *ens* with a nature) and activates the intellect as such. However, the concepts *ens* and good are divided conceptually when a thing is apprehended as good according to not only its primary *ens* but also additionally its secondary *ens* by operation, by which the thing has a more absolute or simple (or complete) goodness by virtue of a certain fullness of being.⁸⁷³ For, according to Aquinas, perfection or fullness (or plenitude) of being—and not simply primary

⁸⁷⁰ ST I, q. 5, a. 1. Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 304-305. Note we might say that when the intellect apprehends the nature of its second immanent operation, it implicitly apprehends its (passive) perfection of itself as good and as an end.

⁸⁷¹ ST I, q. 5, a. 1. C.f. Aertsen, “Natural Law,” 103.

⁸⁷² ST I, q. 5, a. 1 ad 1.

⁸⁷³ DV 21.2 ad 6.

ens—is of the very essence of the good.⁸⁷⁴ Aquinas writes that “goodness signifies perfection which is desirable.”⁸⁷⁵ And, human beings have proper fullness of being (and, thus, more complete goodness) through a certain multiplicity of additional, secondary *ens* and operation.⁸⁷⁶ As Aertsen writes, “The completion of a thing concerns its faculties and powers; it consists in its activity. Operation is the act through which a being attains its complete goodness.”⁸⁷⁷

To apprehend the good implicitly is to apprehend the simple truth of the good implicitly

It is worth mentioning that to apprehend the good implicitly is to apprehend the simple *truth of the good* implicitly: it is to apprehend simply and implicitly the good as true (according to the aspect of the true). Recall that to apprehend truth implicitly is to apprehend implicitly the nature of the immanent operation by which the intellect conforms to its principle.⁸⁷⁸ By its second immanent operation, the intellect apprehends the nature of the operation by which it conforms to *ens* as *res*, which is to implicitly apprehend truth simply. And, by its third immanent operation, having already implicitly apprehended truth simply, the intellect implicitly apprehends truth additionally by apprehending the nature of the operation by which it conforms (secondarily) to its own conforming to *ens* as *res* (i.e., the nature of the operation by which the intellect inclines to *ens* and inclines or moves itself to *ens*). Thus, to apprehend the good simply and implicitly, which is to apprehend the truth of the good simply and implicitly, is to apprehend (implicitly) not only the truth of the intellect’s conforming to *res* but additionally the truth of the intellect’s inclining to *ens* as *res*. Indeed, recalling the convertibility of *ens*, true, and good,⁸⁷⁹ Aquinas writes, “good is contained in truth, inasmuch as it is an understood truth.”⁸⁸⁰

⁸⁷⁴ ST I-II, q. 18, a. 1. C.f. Aertsen, “Natural Law,” 103.

⁸⁷⁵ ST I, q. 5, a. 1 ad 1. C.f. ST I, q. 16, a. 4.

⁸⁷⁶ ST I-II, q. 18, a. 1.

⁸⁷⁷ Aertsen, “Natural Law,” 103. Aertsen references Aquinas, *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 11.

⁸⁷⁸ See ST I, q. 87, a. 3.

⁸⁷⁹ ST I, q. 16, a. 3.

⁸⁸⁰ ST I, q. 82, a. 4 ad 1. C.f. Jan A. Aertsen, “Beauty in the Middle Ages: A Forgotten Transcendental?,” *Medieval Philosophy & Theology* 1 (1991): 94.

Note this *implicit* apprehension of the simple truth of the good is *not practical* (that is, the good is *not* apprehended as an end of human operation).⁸⁸¹

To apprehend the nature of the intellect as inclining to ens (and as a subject of self-movement to ens) by the third immanent operation is also to apprehend the nature of the human will

I suggest that by apprehending the nature of itself inclining to *ens* (and inclining itself to *ens*) in the third immanent operation, the intellect not only implicitly apprehends additionally the truth of the good but also apprehends by simple abstraction the nature and truth of the general inclination and first act of the human will, whose natural object is the good in general (or universal good),⁸⁸² or the apprehended good,⁸⁸³ or “that which is apprehended as good and fitting.”⁸⁸⁴ Furthermore, to apprehend the nature of the will is to apprehend the nature of the intellect additionally and secondarily as having its own interior potentiality for self-moving and self-conforming to *ens*, that is, as having an additional, secondary potentiality and general inclination to incline itself to *ens* by secondary operation. In a certain sense, we might say that the intellect’s conforming to itself as inclining to *ens* in the third immanent operation is also the intellect’s conforming to itself as having a will, an intellectual appetite. In other words, insofar as we say that, by its third immanent operation, the intellect apprehends implicitly by simple abstraction that truth includes good (i.e., the truth of the good) and that conforming to itself conforming to *ens* includes conforming to itself inclining to *ens*, then we can say that by the same third immanent operation, the intellect also apprehends implicitly by simple abstraction the nature of itself as including or as (additionally) having a will.⁸⁸⁵ That is, by its third immanent operation the intellect apprehends implicitly by simple abstraction the nature of the will, which is

⁸⁸¹ ST I, q. 79, a. 11.

⁸⁸² ST I-II, q. 9, a. 1.

⁸⁸³ ST I-II, q. 8, a. 1.

⁸⁸⁴ ST I-II, q. 9, a. 2.

⁸⁸⁵ In ST I, q. 82, a. 4 ad 1, Aquinas writes, “under the notion of being and truth is contained both the will itself, and its act, and its object.”

in the intellect. Indeed, Aquinas says the will is in the intellect⁸⁸⁶ (but not as a part⁸⁸⁷).

Furthermore, he says that “he who grasps the good by his intellect is, as such, endowed with will,”⁸⁸⁸ and that “the diversity derived from the notion of good and true suffices for the difference of intellect from will.”⁸⁸⁹

We might say, at least tentatively, that the intellect’s third immanent operation is a proximate principle and moving cause of the first act and general inclination of the human will, which proceeds additionally in the intellect by natural resultance as a distinct passive power with a distinct natural object, according to the intellect’s general inclination to *ens*.⁸⁹⁰ In other words, we might say that upon apprehending (by simple abstraction) its own general inclination to *ens* by its third immanent operation, the intellect’s inclination to *ens* proceeds additionally (and secondarily) by natural resultance as a general inclining to its own inclining to *ens* (or a general inclining to its perfection or good, which is its conforming to *ens*), which is to incline to the good as apprehended, at least implicitly (i.e., to *ens* apprehended additionally as true and good). The intellect’s additional, secondary general inclining to its own inclining or conforming to *ens*—this further inclining to the good in general or to the good as apprehended (at least implicitly)—is the intellectual appetite or human will, which is in the intellect.⁸⁹¹

Given the intellect begins as a blank slate according to our starting claim above, we might say, again at least tentatively, that before the intellect apprehends by simple abstraction the nature (and general inclination) of the will (and the nature of itself inclining to *ens*) in its third immanent operation, the will is in the intellect perhaps indistinctly (or perhaps virtually or in potentiality). Somewhat similarly, we might say that the truth of the good is included indistinctly

⁸⁸⁶ *ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 2 ad 3. *ST* I, q. 77, a. 6-7; q. 82, a. 4 ad 1. C.f. *ST* I, q. 82, a. 3 ad 2; q. 16, a. 4 ad 1. C.f., Dewan, “Cooperation,” 213-214.

⁸⁸⁷ As the transcendental good is not part of the transcendental true (both are coextensive with *ens*), so the will is not part of the intellect. See *ST* I, q. 59, a. 2.

⁸⁸⁸ *SCG* I.72.

⁸⁸⁹ *ST* I, q. 59, a. 2 ad 2.

⁸⁹⁰ See *ST* I, q. 77, a. 6 ad 3; a. 7 ad 1.

⁸⁹¹ Aquinas says, “some inclination follows every form” (*ST* I, q. 80, a. 1), and “every inclination results from a form” (*ST* I-II, q. 8, a. 1). *ST* I, q. 82, a. 4 ad 1; I-II, q. 6, a. 4.

in the intellect's implicit apprehension of simple truth by virtue of its second immanent operation, even if this additional truth is not apprehended more distinctly until its third immanent operation.⁸⁹²

But, once the intellect apprehends at least vaguely the first act and general inclination of the will by simple abstraction in its third immanent operation, then we might say that the will proceeds in the intellect actually by natural resultance as a potentiality and passive appetitive power: as a first act and general inclination to that which is apprehended (at least implicitly) as good and fitting.⁸⁹³ Given that an act is specified by its end or object, we can say that the first act or general inclination of the will is specified according to a general concept of the good, i.e., the apprehended good in general, or the common or universal good. Following Aquinas we can say that the human will or intellectual appetite is a potentiality and passive appetitive power and general inclination to the good in general or to the good apprehended (at least implicitly) as fitting (i.e., *ens* apprehended as true and additionally as fitting and good, *conveniens et bonum*).⁸⁹⁴

The distinction between intellect and will

There is a key point to emphasize given the above discussion. The human will is not simply the human being's general inclination to universal *ens*, which is, instead, the definition of the intellect according to our starting premise. Rather, the human will is an additional, secondary general inclination that proceeds *interiorly* in the intellect, and, thus, it is an individual intellect's *interior* inclination to its own inclining and conforming to universal *ens*. It is an individual intellect's interior inclination (or intellectual appetite) to the good apprehended as fitting.

⁸⁹² *ST I*, q. 82, a. 4 ad 1.

⁸⁹³ *ST I-II*, q. 9, a. 2. See *ST I*, q. 77, a. 4, 6-7; q. 82, a. 4 ad 3. C.f. *DV* 22.12 ad 2; Sherwin, 57.

⁸⁹⁴ *ST I*, q. 80, a. 2; *I-II*, q. 8, a. 1. C.f. *DM* 6 ad 7; *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 2 ad 1; Aertsen, "Beauty," 94–97.

Furthermore, recall our starting claim above (claim two) that the human being is by nature bodily and that the human being's intellect (or intellectual principle or intellectual soul) is united to the human body as its formal principle,⁸⁹⁵ which is to say that the intellect is the formal principle of the whole human being. Given this claim, we can say that the human will is the interior intellectual appetite of the whole human being to the good apprehended as fitting.

Note, as I mentioned in chapter 1, the human will is not inclined simply to the good *per se* (of itself)—because inclining to the good as end requires a subject of inclination or desire. Rather, the will is inclined to the good apprehended as fitting by the intellect⁸⁹⁶—and, indeed, the will is in that intellect.⁸⁹⁷

Two claims regarding the human will

In the present study, I cannot examine in detail the nature of the human will as an intellectual appetite and power of self-movement. Rather, I simply state two of Aquinas' claims regarding the human will as I understand them, which are relevant for the following discussion.

The first claim is that the human will can move itself, the intellect, and the human being's other natural powers to exercise their respective operations.⁸⁹⁸ The second claim is that the human will is *not* determined, compelled, or moved necessarily to *exercise* its secondary operation.⁸⁹⁹ Indeed, the human will wills voluntarily.⁹⁰⁰

Accordingly, we can call the human will a primary *interior* principle of intellectual self-movement. The will, which is in the intellect, is an interior inclination to incline oneself—the

⁸⁹⁵ *ST* I, q. 76, a. 1.

⁸⁹⁶ *DM* 6. C.f. *ST* I-II, q. 10, a. 1; I-II, q. 8, a. 1.

⁸⁹⁷ *ST* I-II, q. 3, a. 4.

⁸⁹⁸ *ST* I, q. 82, a. 4; *DM* 6.

⁸⁹⁹ *ST* I, q. 82, a. 1; q. 83, a. 1. C.f. *ST* I-II, q. 6, a. 4; q. 10, a. 2, 4; *DM* 6. C.f. Lawrence Dewan, "St. Thomas and the Causes of Free Choice," in *Wisdom, Law, and Virtue* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 179–80.

⁹⁰⁰ *ST* I-II, q. 6, a. 1.

intellective subject—to universal *ens* apprehended as good and fitting.⁹⁰¹ Although we can say that the first act (or general inclination) of the human will proceeds in the intellect by natural resultance (at least somewhat distinctly) by virtue of the intellect’s third immanent operation (following the intellect’s initial, partial activation by exterior *ens*), the claim is that the will’s particular exercise by secondary operation is voluntary and indeterminate.

In a certain sense, the two above claims are related. For, given the human will is a distinct, primary *interior* principle of self-inclination and self-movement in the intellect, then, by this definition, which depends on the distinction between exterior and interior, the will is not determined as a subject of *interior* exercise to incline itself to any particular *ens* apprehended as good and fitting.⁹⁰² Indeed, while the intellect moves the will with respect to the specification of its act, no *ens* apprehended as good and fitting (no matter how perfect and full of being) in the context of universal *ens* can compel the will to exercise its secondary operation—because no *ens* (besides the will itself) can exercise the particular *interior* operation that is the will’s self-inclination to it (apprehended as good).⁹⁰³

Tentatively, we might say that the will’s power of exercise proceeds in the intellect by natural resultance by virtue of (and by participation in) the intellect’s first act and general inclination to *ens*. For, to be generally inclined to universal *ens* as *this* intellectual subject seems to include interiorly (at least indistinctly) a general inclination to incline oneself (as this subject of intellectual inclination) to universal *ens*. In sum, I suggest that insofar as the will’s general inclination to intellectual self-movement proceeds interiorly by participation in the intellect’s first

⁹⁰¹ *ST I*, q. 80, a. 1-2. C.f. *SCG I*.72.

⁹⁰² Aquinas says that necessity of coercion—when “someone is forced by some agent”—is altogether repugnant to the will (*ST I*, q. 82, a. 1). Aquinas distinguishes necessity of coercion from natural necessity and necessity of end: while saying that the human will is operatively indeterminate, we can also say that the human will desires happiness and the universal good (apprehended as fitting) by natural necessity. C.f. *DM* 6.

⁹⁰³ *ST I*, q. 82, a. 4; I-II, q. 10, a. 2; *DM* 6. C.f. Dewan, “Free Choice,” 180.

act (somewhat distinctly by virtue of its third immanent operation), the will is a primary *interior* principle and subject of intellectual self-movement.⁹⁰⁴

Particular activation of the will, as specified by the particular good implicitly apprehended

Having discussed how the human will (the first act of the will) proceeds distinctly in the intellect by natural resultance by virtue of the intellect's third immanent operation, I now move to discuss the possibility of secondary immanent operation in the will. Recall, again, that the intellect's second immanent operation is the interior activating principle and moving cause of its third immanent operation. Furthermore, recall that by its third immanent operation, not only does the intellect implicitly apprehend its own inclining to universal *ens* and the nature of the will, but also a general concept of the good falls in the intellect implicitly.

The key point to mention is that by its third immanent operation, the intellect implicitly apprehends its proximate principle and moving cause, which is its second immanent operation, as good—as a particular good. In other words, by its third immanent operation, the general concept of the good that the intellect implicitly apprehends is joined implicitly to the individual principle and moving cause of this operation, which is the intellect's second immanent operation. Indeed, by its third immanent operation, the intellect conforms to its second immanent operation (and implicitly it conforms to itself as the subject of this operation) not only as *ens* and true but additionally as good.⁹⁰⁵ And, this particular good implicitly apprehended as fitting and desirable

⁹⁰⁴ Tentatively, it seems the apprehended nature of the intellect's third immanent operation and the apprehended nature of the will's immanent operation are the same. The distinction between the two operations seems to be with respect to the *primary* principle and subject of the operation. The *primary* moving principle of the intellect's third immanent operation (at least partially) is exterior *ens*, in at least the first instance. The *primary* moving principle of the will's immanent operation is the will itself. In other words, the distinction is whether the primary motive principle of the intellect's activation and immanent operation is *exterior* (i.e., exterior *ens*) or *interior* (i.e., the will). Regarding intellectual operation simply (and the order of apprehension by simple abstraction), the operation of the intellect (as initially moved by exterior *ens*) is prior to operation of the will. See *ST I*, q. 82, a. 3; a. 4 ad 3.

⁹⁰⁵ By its third immanent operation, the intellect also implicitly apprehends its first immanent operation and, indeed, the initial exterior *ens* that activates it as good.

(i.e., the intellect's second immanent operation implicitly apprehended as good—and, implicitly, the intellect itself apprehended as good) can (partially) activate the will.⁹⁰⁶

However, this is *not* to say that upon (partial) activation by the intellect—i.e., upon the intellect presenting a particular good implicitly apprehended as fitting to the will—that the will is thereby moved to immanent operation. For, as I mentioned above regarding the will as an interior subject of operation, although the intellect can move the will with respect to specification of its object and secondary operation—that is, by presenting a particular good apprehended as fitting to the will—the intellect does not move the will with respect to the exercise or performance of its act. Indeed, according to Aquinas, the human will is not moved in a necessary way regarding the exercise of its operation.⁹⁰⁷ To exercise its secondary operation, the will moves itself.⁹⁰⁸

What this means is that, by its first act and general inclination to the universal good as apprehended, the will—as an interior intellectual appetite and subject of secondary operation and self-movement—upon having been (partially) activated by the intellect's third immanent operation (and initially by exterior *ens*), can simply and voluntarily will (by simple willing) to participate additionally in its first act by secondarily inclining itself to the particular good implicitly apprehended as fitting by the intellect.⁹⁰⁹

Now, although the will is free with respect to exercise, in the first instance of its (partial) activation by the particular good implicitly apprehended as fitting, since there is no other apprehended good for the will to will (i.e., at first, there is no particular reason for the will not to

⁹⁰⁶ By its second immanent operation, the intellect achieves a certain union with itself (as initially moved by exterior *ens*). Additional implicit apprehension of this union as good and fitting by the intellect's third immanent operation is a secondary, instrumental cause of movement in the will (i.e., of partial activation of the will and implicit presentation of its object) (*ST* I-II, q. 28, a. 1 ad 2). However, recall the intellect is a passive power (*ST* I, q. 79, a. 2). It does not become a *proper active* principle of specification of the will's object until it becomes practical (*ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 1 ad 2). Note the practical intellect commands by participation in the will's act (*ST* I-II, q. 17, a. 1; *DV* 14.4). C.f. *ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 1-2; q. 19, a. 3 ad 1.

⁹⁰⁷ *DM* 6.

⁹⁰⁸ *DM* 6. *ST* I-II, q. 10, a. 2.

⁹⁰⁹ Aquinas emphasizes that natural love is principle and cause of the love of choice in *ST* I, q. 60, a. 2. Michael Sherwin emphasizes that this primal act of simple willing (*simplex voluntas*) is a human act and as such is freely willed (Sherwin, 84-85, 93, 97-98).

exercise its secondary operation), presumably the will simply exercises its secondary operation as specified by the particular good by a certain simple willing. It is worth emphasizing, again, that this initial simple willing is not necessary (i.e., it is not exteriorly determined or coerced); rather, it is simply voluntary.⁹¹⁰

Love: simply and freely willing the good implicitly apprehended as fitting (by simple willing)

In this first instance of secondary operation, by simply and freely willing to incline itself as moved and specified by the implicitly apprehended good (i.e., the good of the intellect's second immanent operation as apprehended by its third immanent operation), the will freely wills to participate secondarily by immanent self-inclination in the movement of the intellect's original second immanent operation (i.e., the operation by which the intellect implicitly conforms to itself), which the intellect subsequently apprehended implicitly as good and fitting by its third immanent operation. In other words, while by its third immanent operation, the intellect implicitly apprehends its second immanent operation as good and fitting, by the will's immanent operation, the will secondarily participates voluntarily by self-inclination in that movement of the intellect's second immanent operation, by which the intellect conforms to itself conforming to *ens* (and by which the intellect thirdly activates and moves itself to its third immanent operation, such that good is implicitly apprehended and interior willing is possible).

By simply and freely inclining itself to participate secondarily and interiorly by immanent operation in the intellect's conforming to itself (and, indeed, in the intellect's moving and perfecting of itself, as moved and perfected initially by exterior *ens*), the will freely wills to affirm and to participate in the intellect's secondary immanent operation by a certain voluntary and

⁹¹⁰ ST I, q. 82, a. 1; I-II, q. 6, a. 4; I-II, q. 10, a. 2. C.f. Sherwin, 96-98.

affective participation and *complacency* in the truth of the good of the intellect in act (as moved by itself and initially by exterior *ens*).⁹¹¹

Aquinas calls this first immanent operation and interior change (again, exteriorly indeterminate and voluntary) in the human will “love” (*amor*).⁹¹² As I mentioned above, it is also sometimes called simple willing (*simplex voluntas* or *velle*).⁹¹³ Indeed, Aquinas says this first love in the will is “nothing else than complacency in that object”⁹¹⁴ (*complacentia boni*⁹¹⁵)—i.e., it is a certain interior complacency in (or adaptation to) that secondary operation of the intellect (and exterior *ens*, as its initial principle) implicitly apprehended as good and fitting.⁹¹⁶ The will freely and affectively participates in this secondary operation of the intellect. Aquinas also calls this love in the will an *affective* union (a union of affection or bond of affection), which is caused by the prior *intellectual* union that proceeds in the intellect by immanent operation (i.e., the intellect’s union with itself as a subject and its union by conformity and likeness to exterior *ens*).⁹¹⁷

To summarize, we can say that the proximate formal and efficient or motive cause (partial and indeterminate) of the will’s immanent operation of love is the intellect in act.⁹¹⁸ That is, the intellect in act—by union with itself by virtue of its second immanent operation (and by union with exterior *ens* by virtue of its first immanent operation) and by implicit apprehension of this union as good by virtue of its third immanent operation—moves the will by presenting its object to it.⁹¹⁹ In other words, we can say that the intellect, by understanding and contemplating *ens*, moves the will to love by specifying its object. That is, by contemplating *ens*, the (implicit)

⁹¹¹ ST I-II, q. 26, a. 2. Note since we are talking about voluntary, elective love in the will, we are talking about the love Aquinas calls “dilection” (q. 26, a. 3).

⁹¹² ST I-II, q. 25, a. 2; q. 26, a. 1-2.

⁹¹³ ST I-II, q. 8, a. 2. See ST I-II, q. 12, a. 1 ad 4. Sherwin, 85. C.f. David Gallagher, “The Will and Its Acts,” in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 81.

⁹¹⁴ ST I-II, q. 26, a. 2.

⁹¹⁵ ST I-II, q. 25, a. 2.

⁹¹⁶ ST I-II, q. 26, a. 2. C.f. q. 28, a. 2; Sherwin, 71, 78, 95.

⁹¹⁷ ST I-II, q. 28, a. 1 and ad 2.

⁹¹⁸ See ST I, q. 82, a. 3 ad 2.

⁹¹⁹ See ST I-II, q. 27, a. 1-3.

truth of *ens* (and itself), and the (implicit) truth of *ens* as good (or the truth of the good of *ens*)—which Aquinas suggests is also *ens* apprehended as beautiful—the intellect (and initially exterior *ens*) moves the will to respond freely by love.⁹²⁰ Indeed, Aquinas says, “the contemplation of spiritual beauty or goodness is the beginning of spiritual love.”⁹²¹

Note, when the will is activated, the intellect’s conforming to itself (and to *ens*) by immanent operation already proceeds in the intellect. Indeed, the intellect (and interior *ens*) is already cognitively present to itself, at least vaguely and implicitly, by immanent operation. The will’s secondary participation in this intellectual operation by self-inclining is thus of a different mode: it is a certain (limited, relative) interior affirming, enjoying (or delight or rejoicing in),⁹²² or affective participating therein.⁹²³

The possibility of implicit simple judgment: Simple willing moves the intellect to exercise its act additionally and voluntarily by implicit simple judgment

When the human will participates freely in the intellect’s second immanent operation by simple willing, the will moves the intellect to exercise its second immanent operation additionally and secondarily by interior self-inclination (the will is a *primary* interior principle of cognitive movement). Insofar as the intellect’s second immanent operation proceeds additionally and secondarily by the will’s participation, we can say that this intellectual operation proceeds somewhat voluntarily. And, thus, we can call the intellect’s second immanent operation not only one of simple apprehension but also, secondarily—by the will’s participation and movement—one of *implicit* simple judgment. What I am suggesting here is that, by the will’s participation, the

⁹²⁰ See *ST* I-II, q. 3, a. 5, esp. ad 2; II-II, q. 179-180. On Aquinas and the beautiful as the true apprehended as good, which pleases through its clarity and proportion, see Aertsen, “Beauty,” 94-95. C.f. Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 335.

⁹²¹ *ST* I-II, q. 27, a. 2.

⁹²² *ST* I-II, q. 26, a. 2.

⁹²³ See Sherwin, 77-78.

intellect begins to understand not only implicitly by simple apprehension but also voluntarily by implicit simple judgment.

That is, by voluntarily affirming and participating in the intellect's second immanent operation by simple willing, the human will interiorly (self-)inclines the intellect to make an implicit particular judgment (or combination or joining of formal predicate to subject) about what it already implicitly apprehends by its second immanent operation, which is itself conforming to *ens*. The implicit simple judgment is the intellect's voluntary conforming to itself conforming to *ens* (but not yet *conforming itself* to *ens* actively and properly). We might say that implicit simple judgment is a voluntary conforming of the cognitive subject to its principle.

Note that this *implicit* simple judgment is not yet *proper* and explicit—because the intellect does not yet conform voluntarily by judgment to the exterior thing that initially activates it. Indeed, the judgment is not yet, properly speaking, about exterior *ens* or about substantial *ens*.

The possibility of explicit simple judgment: Simple willing moves the intellect to explicit simple judgment about exterior ens

Inclination to *ens* as principle, implicitly apprehended as good

Next, without attempting to examine the following in detail (which could be attempted in a future study), I point to the possibility of making an *explicit* simple judgment about exterior *ens*, given our starting premise.

First, recall that the object of the immanent operation of a passive power is its principle and moving cause.⁹²⁴ In the present case, the object of the intellect's second immanent operation is its principle and moving cause, which is the intellect's first immanent operation. Now, assuming the natural, immediate principle of the intellect's particular activation (in this

⁹²⁴ ST I, q. 77, a. 3.

state in life) is neither perfect exterior *ens* nor the first principle of universal *ens*, then when the will participates in the movement of the intellect's second immanent operation by simple willing—such, that the intellect's second immanent operation proceeds additionally and voluntarily as an implicit simple judgment—this love or complacency in the will does not find complete enjoyment in its proximate object. Rather there is a certain limited or “incipient” enjoyment in the will in the presence of the good as implicitly apprehended,⁹²⁵ but because the will is inclined to the *universal* good, this complacency proceeds from a limited enjoyment of its object to further desire or inclination towards that same object as good (and, further, to the principle of that proximate object).⁹²⁶

In other words, while the intellect's second immanent operation conforms to its principle (which is the intellect in act by its first immanent operation), the will, by participating in this operation by simple willing, finds a certain complacency in this object as good. That is, the will finds a certain complacency in the intellect's operation of conforming to *ens*, implicitly apprehended as good. And, this complacency and incipient enjoyment proceeding in the presence of its object, having reached its object by participation, becomes inclination or desire for deeper union with its object—and further, with its principle. The will's complacency proceeds as an inclination to deeper union with the intellect in act, and further, to deeper union with and conformity to the initial exterior *ens*, which is the principle of the intellect's first immanent operation, implicitly apprehended as good. As Aquinas says, “the lover is not satisfied” with any external or “superficial apprehension” or union or enjoyment of the beloved, but seeks deeper union and “strives to gain an intimate knowledge of everything pertaining to the beloved.”⁹²⁷ And, thus, by love, the will's movement is circular (it is complacency proceeding as incipient

⁹²⁵ ST I-II, q. 11, a. 3. Michael Sherwin helpfully explains Aquinas' use of the term “complacency” (*complacentia*): “As a word that literally signifies ‘with pleasing assent’ (*cum + placentia*), it can convey incipient enjoyment, without excluding full enjoyment. In other words, it can signify love as the principle of both desire and enjoyment” (Sherwin, 78).

⁹²⁶ ST I-II, q. 26, a. 2.

⁹²⁷ ST I-II, q. 28, a. 1-2.

enjoyment and then desire): moving (by desire) towards the good object that first moves the will, which (proximately) is the intellect in act, and further to the good that primarily activates and moves the intellect as its principle and moving cause, namely, exterior *ens*.⁹²⁸

Love in the will (complacency proceeding as desire) can move the intellect to turn to its principle, to reason implicitly by resolution to its principle, and to make further judgment

By virtue of the human will's participation in the intellect's second immanent operation and its inclining (by complacency proceeding as desire) to the principle of this operation by love, interior movement in the intellect can proceed not only as implicit simple judgment but also as implicit reasoning by resolution from one judgment to another—i.e., from one implicit judgment to its principle, such that a further judgment about that principle can be made (by participating voluntarily in the intellect's prior apprehension of that principle). Recall our discussion above that reasoning by resolution (or discovery) proceeds from effect (e.g., from intellectual operation) to cause (e.g., to the principle or moving cause of that intellectual operation).⁹²⁹

One of the requirements for implicit reasoning by resolution to proceed, at least initially *secundum rationem*, it seems, is that the intellect must have already apprehended (at least implicitly) the principle of its initial implicit simple judgment. This is the case here regarding the intellect's second immanent operation. Indeed, by love of the good implicitly apprehended as fitting, the will can move the intellect, having made an initial implicit judgment regarding its second immanent operation, to reason implicitly by resolution to that judgment's principle, which is the intellect's first immanent operation, and then to make a further judgment regarding that principle. That is, the will, by voluntarily participating in the intellect's first immanent operation, can move the intellect to affirm by judgment what it previously apprehended by its first immanent operation.

⁹²⁸ ST I-II, q. 26, a. 2.

⁹²⁹ DT 6.1; DV 1.1. C.f. Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 132-135.

Significantly, the intellect's inclining to *ens* as principle (and subject) by judgment and by implicit reasoning by resolution, as moved by the will's love of the implicitly apprehended good, is a re-turning not only to the intellect's first immanent operation by resolution *secundum rationem*, but also, by resolution *secundum rem*, to the *individual* exterior material *ens* that initially activates the intellect as its principle.

An assessment: Explicit simple judgment and (indirect) proper intellectual cognition of exterior ens are possible

The key claim here is that when simple love in the will voluntarily moves (by complacency proceeding as desire) the intellect to incline (by implicit reasoning and resolution) to its initial exterior principle (under the aspect of the implicitly apprehended particular good), then *proper*, *explicit* simple judgment by understanding about individual exterior *ens* arises distinctly in act. In other words, by simple willing, the will, which is the intellect's *interior* principle of movement, moves the intellect to participate *additionally* and *properly* in its first immanent operation (i.e., the operation by which it apprehends an exterior thing and implicitly conforms to it) by explicit simple judgment. My claim is that this proper, *explicit* simple judgment by voluntary, natural assent is the intellectual operation to which Aquinas refers in question 16, article 2 of the *Prima Pars*.⁹³⁰

Significantly, it is thus "when the intellect begins to possess something proper to itself"⁹³¹: when by *simple* judgment of affirmation or *natural* assent the intellect *conforms itself* to (or affirms) the thing apprehended *as an individual* by virtue of simple love in the will, which is the intellect's *interior* principle of movement. Now, the intellect's conformity to an intelligible thing is properly *its own*. And, now, we can say that the intellect has a *real* relation of truth (a

⁹³⁰ C.f. *ST* I-II, q. 17, a. 6.

⁹³¹ *DV* 1.3.

real relation of conformity to a thing), *properly speaking*.⁹³² To understand an *individual* exterior *ens* by explicit simple judgment is to understand it somewhat distinctly by *proper cognition* (see the next section on how simple judgment involves an implicit returning to the phantasms).⁹³³ An important point here is that by explicit simple judgment (as moved by the will's simple love of the particular good), the human intellect *itself, indirectly* and by reflection (by returning to the phantasms), begins to understand exterior *ens* somewhat distinctly as an *individual* by what we might call its *own proper intellectual* cognition.⁹³⁴ Recall our discussion of *ST* I, q. 86, a. 1 in chapter 3.

As I discuss further below, the operation is a natural, secondary, voluntary response by participation to the good of an exterior thing—primarily, a person—who first loves us.⁹³⁵ The natural causal *principle of understanding* that specifies the object of the operation *as an end* is the intellect's *implicit* apprehension of the particular good (discussed above). The natural causal *principle of exercise* that inclines the intellect to that particular end is the will's voluntary operation of simple willing. The operation of explicit simple judgment is simply voluntary but not practical: it is not subject to our choice and command.

An implicit re-turning to phantasms, sense knowledge, and the material principles of exterior *ens* Additionally, given our earlier claims regarding the human sense powers (including the cogitative power) and their participation in intellectual cognition (i.e., exterior *ens* activates and moves the human intellect, in part, by virtue of the senses)—and, furthermore, given both that the proper

⁹³² *DV* 1.3. Aquinas says, “the relation of knowledge to a thing known is something real [*in rerum natura*]” (*DV* 1.5 ad 15). C.f. O’Callaghan, “Knower and Known,” 19.

⁹³³ *ST* I, q. 14, a. 6.

⁹³⁴ On the need for a Thomistic account of natural *intellectual* understanding of singular things to answer the critiques of Kant, Heidegger, Duns Scotus, and others, see White’s critical analysis of Étienne Gilson’s view and the primacy of judgment of existence in White, *Wisdom*, chapter 4.

⁹³⁵ *ST* I-II, q. 109, a. 6. We might say that the degree of explicitness of the intellect’s judgments is proportionate to the degree of voluntariness of the will’s acts (i.e., the more the intellect apprehends, and the more the will loves by virtue of this understanding—and, thus, moves the intellect—the more explicit are the intellect’s self-inclined judgments).

object of the intellect in this life is the nature of material *ens* and that whenever we understand in this life we must turn to the phantasms—the intellect’s inclining to *ens* as principle by resolution is also a re-turning (at least implicitly) to phantasms, to sense knowledge, and to the individual material principles of exterior *ens* that activate the senses.⁹³⁶

Insofar as voluntary participation in our re-turning to exterior *ens* (apprehended as a particular good thing) by virtue of simple judgment and reasoning by resolution in the intellect readies our intellect and our sense powers to be further activated and moved by exterior material *ens* and its principles, then, upon further activation by *ens*, it is possible for our intellects to apprehend and to contemplate *ens* ever more deeply. Likewise, it becomes possible for our wills to love *ens* apprehended as good and fitting more deeply and freely (by virtue of that deeper understanding), at least in principle.⁹³⁷

As I mention earlier, for young children this process of simply inclining to (and, eventually, practically re-turning to) *ens* is guided significantly by caregivers (i.e., by other persons)—such that upon activation by *ens*, we begin to understand and to contemplate *ens* by our intellect and to love the good by our will. Eventually, after repeated understanding and contemplation of *ens*—and, as we begin to apprehend practical truth and to act practically (as I discuss briefly below)—we can begin to move ourselves and others practically (explicitly and intentionally) by love to re-turn to *ens* (and to create secondary *ens* by operation), such that *ens* might activate our intellects and move us to ever deeper understanding and contemplation.⁹³⁸ Significantly, the

⁹³⁶ *ST* I, q. 84, a. 7; q. 78.

⁹³⁷ Aquinas teaches that because of sin, human beings fall short of what they could otherwise do by nature (in principle); indeed, grace is necessary (*ST* I-II, q. 109, a. 2).

⁹³⁸ Note that to re-turn ourselves *practically* by operation to exterior material *ens*, which I have not yet discussed, requires movement by the practical intellect in cooperation with the sense powers (especially the cogitative power) and other motive powers, etc. *ST* I, q. 79, a. 11 ad 1. C.f. De Haan, “Moral Perception,” esp. 297-298, 304-307.

possibility of immanent self-inclining practically by love depends on having been moved and loved initially by exterior *ens* (i.e., by another person).⁹³⁹

Explicitly apprehending truth, properly speaking

When explicit simple judgment about exterior *ens* arises, this voluntary participation in the intellect's first immanent operation again secondly activates the intellect. When the intellect apprehends the nature of this operation of simple judgment by virtue of its second immanent operation, the nature it apprehends is the same as before, namely, the nature of itself as conforming to an exterior thing. However, now the intellect's first immanent operation is subject to an accidental difference:⁹⁴⁰ the intellect's conforming to a thing is additionally and secondarily moved by active self-inclination. Attempting to clarify and to develop Aquinas' view, I claim that when by its second immanent operation the intellect cognizes its own active conforming of itself to an intelligible thing by explicit simple judgment (as secondarily moved by the will, which is the intellect's interior principle of movement), then first it *explicitly* apprehends truth, properly speaking.⁹⁴¹

Explicitly apprehending the human good—and, indeed, the practical good

Aquinas says the intellect apprehends the good third, after apprehending truth.⁹⁴² I suggest that once the intellect explicitly apprehends the truth of simple judgment, properly speaking, by its second immanent operation, this second immanent operation again thirdly activates the intellect. When the intellect apprehends the nature of this second immanent operation by virtue of its

⁹³⁹ Aquinas writes, "And since there cannot be an infinite regression, we need to hold that regarding the first movement of the will, something external, at whose instigation the will would begin to will, moves the will of anyone not always actually willing" (*DM* 6).

⁹⁴⁰ *ST* I, q. 79, a. 11.

⁹⁴¹ *ST* I, q. 16, a. 2.

⁹⁴² *ST* I, q. 16, a. 4 ad 2.

third immanent operation, the nature it apprehends is the same as before—that is, again, the intellect apprehends itself desiring and inclining to its conforming to *ens*. However, now the intellect’s second immanent operation is subject to an accidental difference:⁹⁴³ the intellect conforms to itself conforming to *ens* as additionally and secondarily self-moved by the will.⁹⁴⁴ My claim is that when by its third immanent operation the intellect cognizes its *own active self*-inclining to *ens* and to the truth of *ens* (and to the perfection of *ens* and itself) by its second immanent operation, then first it *explicitly* apprehends the good, properly speaking. In other words, the intellect originally apprehends the human good explicitly when it apprehends thirdly the nature of the intellect’s active, self-inclining understanding of truth by simple judgment.

The concept of good that falls in the intellect by its third immanent operation is apprehended not merely as true but additionally *as the object and end* of an active, self-inclined, *interior* operation of simple judgment (again, as self-moved by the will, which is the intellect’s intrinsic principle of movement). Aquinas says that to apprehend the good not only as true but also as an end of a motion or operation is to apprehend the good practically. The implication is that to apprehend the good of truth by simple judgment is also to apprehend the *practical good*.

Aquinas writes,

“The true and the good include each other, since the true is a good and every good is true. Therefore, the good can be considered speculatively when only its truth is considered. For example, we can define the good and show what its nature is. But the good can also be considered practically if it is considered as a good, that is, as an end of a motion or operation.”⁹⁴⁵

We might say that to apprehend the practical good initially is to apprehend the particular good of truth as an end of an *interior*, voluntary, self-inclined operation of natural assent—i.e., as an end that is *interiorly* good and *interiorly* loved.⁹⁴⁶

⁹⁴³ ST I, q. 79, a. 11.

⁹⁴⁴ Prior to the will’s participation, the intellect moves itself (from its first immanent operation to subsequent immanent operations) merely passively as a *secondary* (instrumental) interior principle of cognitive operation (the primary principle is exterior *ens*). The will secondarily moves the intellect to exercise as a *primary interior* principle of cognitive operation.

⁹⁴⁵ DV 3.3 ad 9; 14.4. ST I, q. 14, a. 16; q. 79, a. 11 ad 2. C.f. Aertsen, “Natural Law,” 104-105.

⁹⁴⁶ ST I-II, q. 6, a. 1. DM 6. DV 24.2.

To apprehend the practical good includes apprehending the good of truth *simply*,⁹⁴⁷ which we recall is to apprehend it as desirable, as a perfection of the intellect and the person, and, by resolution, *as an end* of the love and activity of exterior *ens* and its principles, especially other persons. Indeed, to apprehend the good simply is *primarily* to apprehend exterior substantial *ens* (a person) as good⁹⁴⁸ and as a cause of our understanding by love. Moreover, to apprehend the practical good includes apprehending the good of truth additionally and practically *as an end of my own voluntary self-movement and further practical operation (i.e., as an end simply loved by me that extends to operation)*.⁹⁴⁹ When the intellect apprehends the practical good it apprehends itself not only as inclining passively to *ens* (as simply moved by another), but also as extending actively to operation by self-movement.

Once the intellect apprehends the practical good it becomes practical: it begins to direct what it apprehends to self-moved operation.⁹⁵⁰ Aquinas says that a concept of the good, i.e., the practical good, “is the first thing that falls under the apprehension of the practical reason.”⁹⁵¹ To apprehend the practical good initially is also to understand *implicitly* the practical truth about human operation in terms of it, which Aquinas says is the first principle of practical reason.⁹⁵²

⁹⁴⁷ Note, as I mention in chapter 3, Stephen Brock also argues that for Aquinas our original apprehension of the good is both speculative and practical (Brock, “Natural Law,” 701). To clarify Brock’s interpretation, I suggest that this is our original *explicit* apprehension of the good. Recall above I say that the intellect apprehends the good of truth *simply* and *implicitly* by its third immanent operation prior to simple judgment—but not yet properly and explicitly.

⁹⁴⁸ Aquinas says the good is primarily in things (ST I, q. 16, a. 1; a. 4 ad 2). Note we might say, tentatively, that apprehending the good of truth *simply* implies, by resolution, understanding it as a *practical* end of the love and activity of the First Cause. Ultimately, by resolution, it implies the primary Goodness of the First Cause. See ST I-II, q. 18, a. 1; I, q. 5, a. 1, 4; q. 16, a. 1; a. 4 ad 2. Indeed, when we apprehend the human good *simply quoad nos*, what we understand by natural participation *quoad se* is the human being according to the aspect of God’s love of that individual person to Himself (i.e., we understand that God, by communicating his goodness, loves this person as an end of his *practical* operation in creation to participate fully in His love of Himself). See ST I, q. 14, a. 16; q. 29, a. 3 ad 2; q. 44, a. 4; II-II, q. 25, a. 7.

⁹⁴⁹ In other words, to apprehend the human good *practically* is to understand it additionally as an end of my love and practical operation—and this includes understanding myself as the individual human subject of that love. ST I, q. 79, a. 11; DV 14.4.

⁹⁵⁰ ST I-II, q. 94, a. 2; I, q. 79, a. 11.

⁹⁵¹ ST I-II, q. 94, a. 2. C.f. ST I, q. 5, a. 2, esp. ad 1.

⁹⁵² ST I-II, q. 94, a. 2; q. 64, a. 3. Note that *when* the intellect apprehends the practical good it becomes practical and begins to *direct* what it apprehends to operation. Thus, the intellect becomes an active, self-moving, practical principle of specification only secondarily—*when* it understands (by participation) the practical good and the first practical principle in terms of it. Prior to this, the possible intellect is merely

For, when the intellect apprehends the practical good by its third immanent operation, it is already implicitly (but not yet explicitly) joined to its principle and moving cause, which is itself by its second immanent operation cognizing truth and conforming to itself conforming to *ens* by simple judgment. Later, as I mention below, the intellect can begin to understand practical truth properly and more explicitly by practical judgment.

A few provisional claims to indicate the possibility of actual practical thinking and acting

Finally, by way of conclusion and without attempting to advance a systematic argument, I offer a few *provisional* claims that point to the possibility of *actual* practical thinking and acting. I suggest the following claims indicate how the present approach might overcome a certain caveat that emerges in view of the above discussion. Namely, I suggest that practical thinking and acting remain only abstract possibilities according to the above approach, unless we also speak to how our understand and love of human beings *as individual substantial wholes* arise by proper cognition, at least vaguely. Recall that in the present state of life, because we do not have perfect, exhaustive apprehension of natures by simple abstraction, we understand individual things actually through the senses and the imagination.⁹⁵³

Our question is as follows: how can the practical intellect be a motive power of the whole human person, as Aquinas suggests?⁹⁵⁴ I cannot examine this question sufficiently here. Below, I simply *point* to how our understand and love of human beings *as individual substantial wholes* might arise, such that actual practical thinking and acting for human goods can follow. I acknowledge that much additional work is needed on this topic and that the following claims may need modification or correction.

passive. I think this claim is consistent with Aquinas' view in *ST I*, q. 18, a. 3. Indeed, the intellect does *not* move itself to understand first principles.

⁹⁵³ *ST I*, q. 84, a. 7.

⁹⁵⁴ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 11 ad 1.

First claim

The first claim is that, by virtue of the senses, various exterior material *entia* (over time) can activate and move the human intellect (again, partially and incompletely) such that it comes to apprehend a variety of natures (by simple abstraction of intelligible species, which it habitually retains).⁹⁵⁵ Presumably, some of the natures the intellect apprehends are those of primary substantial *ens* (including the nature of the human being), and some are those of secondary *ens* (including the natures of general inclinations or powers of the human being).

However, because the human intellect apprehends natures implicitly and only indistinctly and confusedly at first,⁹⁵⁶ we do not understand at first *that* the natures we apprehend are those of parts or wholes, or *that* they are the natures of secondary or primary substantial *ens*. Aquinas writes, “in the first apprehension of anything newly apprehended [the human intellect] does not at once grasp all that is virtually contained in it.”⁹⁵⁷ Furthermore, given “motion is the route to knowledge of actuality” for us,⁹⁵⁸ we may apprehend the natures of secondary motions before we apprehend the natures of their substantial causes, which sometimes may be hidden from our understanding at first.⁹⁵⁹ Also, it is worth noting that, according to Aquinas, the intellect only cognizes (or apprehends) by virtue of one intelligible species at a time.⁹⁶⁰

Insofar as we implicitly apprehend *ens*, true, and good by immanent operations in the intellect (according to the process discussed above), we also come to understand—albeit, only *implicitly*—certain simple, self-evident propositions or combinations corresponding to these apprehensions. However, because we understand these self-evident propositions only implicitly

⁹⁵⁵ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 4 ad 4; a. 6.

⁹⁵⁶ *ST I*, q. 85, a. 3.

⁹⁵⁷ *ST I*, q. 58, a. 4.

⁹⁵⁸ Dewan, *Form and Being*, 151. See *Metaph* 9.3.

⁹⁵⁹ See *ST I*, q. 29, a. 1 ad 3; II-II, q. 8, a. 1.

⁹⁶⁰ *ST I*, q. 85, a. 4.

by apprehension, we do not initially understand *that* we understand them, nor do we initially make them explicitly by judgment.⁹⁶¹

Second claim

The second claim is that, insofar as we start to freely affirm what we simply apprehend by simple willing (according to the process discussed above), we can begin to understand and to participate in our implicit apprehensions more explicitly by judgment (i.e., by making self-evident combinations corresponding to our implicit apprehensions somewhat voluntarily). By judgment, our intellect conforms to exterior material *ens* not only implicitly (by apprehension) but also somewhat voluntarily and explicitly, such that understanding of truth, properly speaking—by proper cognition of exterior material *ens* (again, with the aid of the senses)—is possible, at least vaguely.⁹⁶²

However, as I mentioned above, because the human intellect apprehends the nature of exterior material *ens* indistinctly at first, it only makes simple judgments about exterior *ens* initially (e.g., this is a subject with a nature). The intellect cannot make judgments about part-to-whole distinctions (or secondary-to-primary, or accident-to-substance distinctions) in exterior *ens* initially.

Third claim

The third claim is that human love—interiorly in the will and in our other natural appetitive powers as guided by will, and as given and expressed by the practical actions, guidance, and judgments of other human persons—helps to direct the gaze and orient the consideration of our

⁹⁶¹ See *ST* I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

⁹⁶² *ST* I, q. 16, a. 2.

apprehensive powers (both the intellect and the sense powers),⁹⁶³ readying them to be activated by individual material *ens*, and especially by primary substantial material *ens* (as the principle of secondary *ens*).⁹⁶⁴ Indeed, human love helps to turn the human being's apprehensive powers to exterior material things, such that, upon activation and encounter, the intellect might come to apprehend by simple abstraction the natures of these things *more distinctly* as those of wholes and parts.

In other words, the claim is that by the will's participation in the intellect's operations by simple willing, such that the intellect begins to understand what it apprehends more explicitly by judgment—and, by the love, practical activity, and guidance (and judgments) of other persons—our apprehensive powers can be turned to the phantasms, to the material principles of *ens*, and indeed to exterior *individual* substantial *ens* itself in such a way that, upon (partial) activation, the following are possible, at least vaguely. First, it is possible that the intellect apprehends by simple abstraction the nature of secondary material *ens* more distinctly *as secondary* and *as part* (having already apprehended indistinctly the more common nature of which it is a part). Second, it is possible that the intellect apprehends by simple abstraction the nature of substantial material *ens* more distinctly *as a whole* and, indeed, *as a primary principle* of secondary *ens* (and, in the case of a human being, as a primary principle of secondary operation, especially operations of love).⁹⁶⁵

⁹⁶³ On the will moving the intellect to consideration, see *DM* 6. C.f. Sherwin, 46-49. The sensitive appetites also turn us to the phantasms, which by virtue of the material causality of the senses can orient the intellect to consider *ens*.

⁹⁶⁴ As I mentioned above, the will's participation in the intellect's operations by simple willing orients and readies the intellect in several ways, for example, by moving it to consider and to understand *ens* more explicitly by combination or judgment, by moving it to reason interiorly by resolution, and by inclining it to the principles of its immanent operations. Also, the will's participation (by simple willing) in the intellect's operations can begin to orient and ready the sensitive appetites and apprehensive powers: by orienting the phantasms (in the cogitative power) to make them more fit for abstraction, and by inclining these powers to their material principles—and especially to the material principles of substantial *ens*.

⁹⁶⁵ See especially *ST* I, q. 85, a. 3; q. 76, a. 6 ad 1. Even though the intellect apprehends by simple abstraction indistinctly at first, the claim is that eventually, in a particular operation of intellectual cognition as activated by exterior material *ens*,—and, presumably upon repeated activation by exterior material *ens* and by multiple material *entia* (including, by substantial material *ens* and its various secondary accidents) and, in particular, as activated by the manifestly revelatory (and good and loving) operations (see *ST* I, q. 76, a. 1) of exterior substantial material *ens*, especially those of human persons who love and relate to her, and refer her to *ens* (through their actions, use of language, etc.)—the intellect apprehends by simple

Significantly, by apprehending the nature of a whole exterior substance more distinctly, the human intellect can begin to cognize multiple things (i.e., both a primary substance and its secondary parts and operations) at once by virtue of a single intelligible species.⁹⁶⁶

Fourth claim

The fourth claim is that there is something significant about apprehending the nature of another human being more distinctly as that of a substantial whole. Namely, it enables us to apprehend secondary operations as human operations and as parts of the individual, whole human being—and, thus, *as operations of human love*. I discuss this point briefly here without attempting to examine it suitably in the present study.

To begin, as I discussed in the previous claim, assume that, upon encountering an individual human being (person A), a human subject (person B) by her intellect (eventually) apprehends by abstraction the nature of that human being (person A), who moves her and who loves her, more distinctly as a whole, such that she apprehends the nature as that of a primary substance (a human being, person A), who is a primary principle and subject of secondary operation (secondary *ens*), including both secondary material operation and rational (freely willed) operation.

The claim is that by apprehending human nature more distinctly, the human subject (person B) apprehends implicitly (as guided and oriented by something like the process discussed above) that the other human being's (person A's) material operation participates in his rational operation, which is to apprehend implicitly in some sense that this human being's (person A's)

abstraction the nature of material *ens* somewhat more distinctly and determinately than at first (see *ST I*, q. 85, a. 1 ad 1). C.f. *DV* 1.1; Aertsen, *Transcendentals*, 87-90; Schmidt, 274-282.

⁹⁶⁶ See *ST I*, q. 85, a. 4; q. 58, a. 2. Furthermore, by love, the intellect also can be oriented to apprehend the natures of exterior material *entia* for the first time (which were perhaps hidden before). Additionally, by participating (by simple willing) in the intellect's apprehension of the nature of the whole, the will can move the intellect to begin to reason by resolution *secundum rem* and to make judgments more explicitly regarding the relation of secondary exterior *ens* to primary exterior *ens* (and to understand these judgments as self-evident and true).

rational operation gives form to his bodily operation (and more generally that his rational principle is the form of his human body).

With assumptions like those above, which admittedly need to be examined at much greater length, I suggest that something significant arises. Namely, having apprehended the nature of another human being more distinctly as that of a whole rational animal (whose rational soul is the form of his body and his bodily operations), it becomes possible to apprehend the human being's secondary practical (and bodily) operations *as secondary operations* (and *as parts*) of that individual, whole human being—and, indeed, as operations of freely willed human love. I discuss this last point further below.

Fifth claim

The fifth claim is that by virtue of another human being's love for us, and our apprehension thereof, we can come to apprehend *our own human nature* more distinctly as that of a primary, substantial human being *secundum rem*. In support of this claim, consider the following points.

Attempting to follow Aquinas, suppose we say that simple rational love⁹⁶⁷ is to will good to a person.⁹⁶⁸ There is a twofold tendency in this movement of love. Primarily, there is what he calls love simply, or love of friendship. He writes, a human being “has love of friendship towards him [the person] to whom he wishes good.”⁹⁶⁹ Secondly, there is love of concupiscence (or desire). As Aquinas writes, a human being “has love of concupiscence towards the good that he wishes to another [or ‘someone’],” that is, to himself or to another person.⁹⁷⁰ I cite Aquinas at length on these points and then comment on their relevance regarding the present claim:

“Now the members of this division are related as primary and secondary: since that which is loved with the love of friendship is loved simply and for itself; whereas that which is loved with the love of concupiscence, is loved, not simply and for itself, but for something else. For just as that which has existence, is a being simply, while that which exists in

⁹⁶⁷ Aquinas calls rational love in the will “dilection” (see *ST I-II*, q. 26, a. 3).

⁹⁶⁸ See *ST I-II*, q. 26, a. 4; q. 28, a. 1-3.

⁹⁶⁹ *ST I-II*, q. 26, a. 4.

⁹⁷⁰ *ST I-II*, q. 26, a. 4.

another is a relative being; so, because good is convertible with being, the good, which itself has goodness, is good simply; but that which is another's good, is a relative good. Consequently the love with which a thing is loved, that it may have some good, is love simply; while the love, with which a thing is loved, that it may be another's good, is relative love."⁹⁷¹

In view of the above points, what I suggest regarding the present claim is that when another person loves you or me—when another person knowingly and freely acts for our good—there is a twofold tendency in this movement of love. Primarily (and firstly), by love of friendship—having already apprehended our human nature somewhat distinctly and properly cognized us as a whole human being somewhat explicitly by judgment, and having further apprehended our substantial whole as good (according to the process discussed above)—the lover voluntarily intends to love us simply to the good (i.e., to participate somewhat distinctly and voluntarily, by understanding and by love, in our substantial first act⁹⁷²). Secondly, by love of concupiscence, the lover chooses to participate in loving us simply by loving us by additional practical operation.⁹⁷³ Notably, the lover must understand us somewhat distinctly as a whole human being (whose rational principle is the form of our material principle) and, further, as good (as the whole object of his love), in order for the lover to order his secondary practical operations (by love of concupiscence) to participate in his primary love for us by love of friendship.

Assuming the above account of rational love, my first point is that insofar as we apprehend another human being's secondary operations *as operations of human love* for us, as suggested in the previous claim, then we must implicitly apprehend, at least somewhat distinctly,

⁹⁷¹ ST I-II, q. 26, a. 4.

⁹⁷² *Quoad se*, this first act is God's understanding and love of the individual person to Himself (ST I, q. 20, a. 2; q. 44, a. 4 ad 3; q. 14, a. 16).

⁹⁷³ More specifically, our primary good (as the beloved) is the object of the lover's operation of love of friendship, which proceeds first as complacency and incipient enjoyment therein. And, secondarily, since neither we nor the lover are perfectly good, the lover's complacency in the will proceeds additionally as a further desire (by love of concupiscence) for deeper union with its principle (i.e., with us, the beloved) and for our good, which moves the lover's intellect both 1), by love of friendship, to contemplate our first act more deeply (to apprehend the nature of our substantial act more distinctly and additionally as good), and 2), by love of concupiscence, to consider (by practical thinking) whether to act practically for our good by secondary practical operation (that is, whether to participate additionally in loving and contemplating our first act more deeply by loving according to secondary operation, to cause secondary *ens* or good in us, the beloved). I cannot attempt to consider this process at length here.

the above unified, twofold tendency in this human love. That is, we must implicitly apprehend that while the proximate object of the lover's secondary operation of love for us (by love of concupiscence) may be a material good that is caused (or created) in us by practical operation (e.g., health, nutrition, reception of a gift, etc.), the primary object of the lover's love for us (by love of friendship) is our complete good as a whole human being.

My second point is that insofar as we apprehend implicitly, at least vaguely, *that* another human being's secondary practical operations of love (by love of concupiscence) are ordered according to a primary operation of love of friendship, and insofar as we apprehend implicitly the nature of the primary object of that love of friendship somewhat distinctly as a whole—and, insofar as we apprehend that this primary object of another's love is *our own simple good*—then we also implicitly apprehend our own nature somewhat distinctly as that of a whole, substantial human being *secundum rem*. Although the nature of our substantial reality may be somewhat hidden from us at first, we might say that another's love for us moves us to encounter our substantial *ens* as good (as the object of another's love) and as somewhat perfected by that love, and thus, it can move us to apprehend the human nature of our substantial *ens* somewhat more distinctly—as a human being who is loved and who is able to love *secundum rem*.

In sum, insofar as we understand our simple good to be the primary, whole object of another human being's love, we implicitly apprehend our own human nature somewhat *distinctly* as that of an individual, substantial soul-body composite *secundum rem*, whose intellectual principle is the form of our body. Significantly, in this case, we do *not* apprehend our human nature merely *indistinctly* as that of an *interior* intellectual principle *secundum rationem*, which is, rather, how I suggest we might implicitly apprehend our nature by abstraction at first, by virtue of the intellect's earlier second immanent operation (according to the interior process discussed at length above).

Sixth claim

The sixth claim is that insofar as we implicitly apprehend by abstraction our human nature somewhat distinctly as that of an individual, substantial soul-body composite *secundum rem*, whose intellectual principle is the form of our body, then the intelligible species by virtue of which this apprehension proceeds can inform the intellect's subsequent immanent operations (according to the process outlined above).⁹⁷⁴ That is, the immanent operations by which the intellect apprehends *ens* additionally as true and good can proceed by virtue of this more distinct intelligible species. I do not summarize this process again here.

My point is that by apprehending the nature of our intellect's immanent operations by virtue of this more distinct intelligible species, first, as conforming to *res* in the second immanent operation (apprehending a concept of truth) and, then, as inclining to *ens* in the third immanent operation (apprehending a concept of good), we can begin to love according to a concept of our whole, simple good (absolutely) by simple willing in the will.⁹⁷⁵

Without retracing the above steps, my claim is that insofar as this simple willing moves the intellect to make its first immanent operation more explicit by judgment (now, by virtue of a more distinct intelligible species), this immanent operation again can secondly and thirdly activate the intellect. And, by the intellect's third immanent operation, we can again apprehend the practical good.

Unlike in the initial case of practical apprehension discussed above, in this case, having apprehended our human nature more distinctly as that of a whole, substantial human being *secundum rem*, what we now apprehend by this third immanent operation is the practical good of our whole, substantial human person as a primary self-mover and *primary (substantial) principle*

⁹⁷⁴ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 4 ad 4; a. 6.

⁹⁷⁵ See *DV* 22.15.

and subject of human love and practical human operation (or as a primary human “agent of practical truth”). Indeed, this concept falls under the apprehension of the practical intellect.⁹⁷⁶

I tentatively suggest that to apprehend our primary practical good in this manner is to understand implicitly the primary (or first) principle of practical reason.⁹⁷⁷ Insofar as our will then intends to love our primary practical good (or, eventually, another human being’s primary practical good⁹⁷⁸) as an end of practical operation by love of friendship (i.e., to participate practically in apprehending and willing our primary act of being by intending our primary good as the end of practical operation),⁹⁷⁹ then, I suggest the will moves the intellect to understand its primary practical good—and, indeed, the first principle of practical reason—more explicitly by practical judgment.

Finally, I think (tentatively), we can say that the human intellect understands the practical truth of the self-evident first principle of practical reason somewhat explicitly by practical judgment—*according to proper practical cognition*. That is, insofar as our will voluntarily participates in the intellect’s understanding of our primary practical good by love of friendship (by intending our primary practical good as an end of practical operation), such that a more explicit practical judgment proceeds, we understand the first principle of practical reason somewhat explicitly by proper practical cognition.

Additional considerations

Although I cannot discuss understanding secondary practical principles in the present study, I think the above analysis provides some of the groundwork to begin to examine how we

⁹⁷⁶ ST I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

⁹⁷⁷ Aquinas writes, “...the first principle of practical reason is one founded on the notion of good, viz. that ‘good is that which all things seek after.’ Hence this is the first precept of law, that ‘good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided’” (ST I-II, q. 94, a. 2).

⁹⁷⁸ See ST I-II, q. 28, a. 1-2.

⁹⁷⁹ DV 22.15; ST I-II, q. 12, a. 2; q. 26, a. 4. C.f. Josef Pieper, *Living the Truth* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 147.

apprehend the natures of secondary natural inclinations and make corresponding judgments about secondary practical principles, according to the process outlined. I also think that the groundwork is partly in place to begin to examine the interior movement by which we reason and act practically—*primarily*, by love of friendship (of ourselves or of other human beings, who share our nature, as ends), and, *secondarily*, by love of concupiscence, in choosing means to an end.⁹⁸⁰

CONCLUSION

Having attempted to defend the possibility of proper cognition of practical truth by simple judgment—and recognizing that much more work needs to be done—I conclude by offering a few final thoughts on the relation between human understanding and love. The question I would like to consider briefly is as follows: how does human love help us to understand (and to contemplate) the truth and the good of *ens* more properly, distinctly, and deeply? This question is somewhat related to Finnis’ reflections on the epistemological contributions of practical-cum-theoretical awareness, as I discuss in chapter 2. It is very much related to Aquinas’ discussion of the distinction between speculative and affective cognition, the latter of which proceeds through love.⁹⁸¹ On this topic, I cite two texts of Aquinas and then offer a few brief comments:

“...good is the cause of love, as being its object. But good is not the object of the appetite, except as apprehended. And therefore love demands some apprehension of the good that is loved. For this reason the Philosopher (Ethic. ix, 5,12) says that bodily sight is the beginning of sensitive love: and in like manner the contemplation of spiritual beauty or goodness is the beginning of spiritual love. Accordingly knowledge is the cause of love for the same reason as good is, which can be loved only if known.”⁹⁸²

“Something is required for the perfection of knowledge, that is not requisite for the perfection of love. For knowledge belongs to the reason, whose function it is to distinguish things which in reality are united, and to unite together, after a fashion, things that are distinct, by comparing one with another. Consequently the perfection of knowledge requires that man should know distinctly all that is in a thing, such as its parts, powers, and properties. On the other hand, love is in the appetitive power, which regards

⁹⁸⁰ DV 22.15. C.f. ST I-II, q. 28, a. 1-2; Sherwin, 92-94.

⁹⁸¹ Aquinas, *Lectura super Johannem* (Commentary on the Gospel of John) 17:25. C.f. ST II-II, q. 180, a. 1; I-II, q. 28, a. 1-2.

⁹⁸² ST I-II, q. 27, a. 2.

a thing as it is in itself: wherefore it suffices, for the perfection of love, that a thing be loved according as it is known in itself. Hence it is, therefore, that a thing is loved more than it is known; since it can be loved perfectly, even without being perfectly known.”⁹⁸³

One of the significant points here, as I understand it, is that as soon as a thing is understood “as it is in itself,” then, it can be loved, even if it is not understood perfectly. I suggest that understanding “a thing as it is in itself” could be interpreted as understanding a thing at least vaguely by proper cognition—having apprehended its nature somewhat distinctly as that of a substantial, unified whole. In other words, the claim is that any understanding of a thing as a substantial whole by proper cognition—even if this understanding is vague and imperfect—suffices for it to be loved by the will. Significantly, what this means is that love of an individual human person is possible, even with imperfect knowledge. And, this love of a human person, “as she is in herself,” and as good, can turn us to contemplate her good more deeply and to act for her good practically by love of friendship.

Insofar as I understand Aquinas, the reason human love reaches to the thing in itself, even when it is understood only imperfectly, is because the order of human cognition and the order of human love are different, at least naturally in this life. Human cognition (which is generally inclined to universal *ens*) conforms to its principle properly *to the extent that it is understood*—not only in general but also as (somewhat) distinct from other things. By contrast, human love (which is generally inclined to universal good, apprehended as fitting), while starting from the intellect’s minimally proper but imperfect cognition of a substantial human being (apprehended as good), tends immediately and absolutely to that person’s simple, complete good. This is to tend immediately, by participation in that person’s first act through understanding and love, to her Final End, which is her complete good as she is in herself absolutely, as an end that participates in the Final End, as a human being perfected through secondary operations of love (notably, this is also the universal or common good of universal

⁹⁸³ ST I-II, q. 27, a. 2 ad 2.

ens). Indeed, Aquinas says that love, even in this state of life, “tends to God first [as Final End], and flows on from Him to other things.”⁹⁸⁴

Therefore, tentatively, we might say that to love *this* person as simply good (absolutely) now—by simple willing and further by genuine love of friendship—is to love this person “perfectly” by natural participation in God’s love of her, albeit vaguely (at least in principle).⁹⁸⁵ But, this is not to love her by perfect proper cognition and perfect contemplation of her simple good, and thus, we cannot love her perfectly by our secondary practical operations—simply by a vague love of friendship.⁹⁸⁶ Love of friendship and practical operations, however, can help move us to contemplate this person’s good more deeply.⁹⁸⁷ Finally, it is worth emphasizing that to love another person naturally by human love is not to love her perfectly by supernatural charity, which Aquinas says is only possible by grace.⁹⁸⁸

⁹⁸⁴ ST II-II, q. 27, a. 4 (including ad 1-2), and a. 3. C.f. ST I, q. 82, a. 3. Note there may be a way to use the term “anticipation,” which Finnis uses (although with a somewhat different meaning), to refer to practical thinking’s anticipation of the intellect’s more distinct and more perfect contemplation of universal *ens* by love.

⁹⁸⁵ See ST I-II, q. 27, a. 2, esp. ad 2. C.f. q. 6, a. 2.

⁹⁸⁶ See ST I-II, q. 18, a. 1. Even more, because of human sin and resulting ignorance, malice, weakness, disordered love of concupiscence, etc. (ST I-II, q. 85, a. 3), Aquinas says that fallen human beings fall short even of the good they could otherwise do by nature. Indeed, grace is necessary for both healing and sanctification (ST I-II, q. 109, a. 2).

⁹⁸⁷ And, since human love (*quoad se*) tends to God first as Final End, it can draw us (*quoad nos*) not only to contemplation of creatures but also by natural reason to a certain natural contemplation of God as Creator and First Cause through his created effects (ST II-II, q. 27, a. 4; I, q. 82, a. 3; I-II, q. 27, a. 2 ad 2; I, q. 12, a. 12).

⁹⁸⁸ See, ST II-II, q. 23, a. 1; I-II, q. 62, a. 2; q. 63, a. 4.

Conclusion

In this study I examine *how* the human being naturally comes to understand the human good and practical truth according to a Thomistic perspective. I consider how natural understanding of the human good arises both simply—when we implicitly understand the good of a human person as a reality to be affirmed⁹⁸⁹—and practically—when we understand the human good additionally as an end of human operation.⁹⁹⁰ I begin with a claim that Aquinas draws from the Christian tradition as my starting premise: that the human being is created by God with an intellectual nature and natural intellectual aptitude to participate in God’s understanding and loving.⁹⁹¹ This is also to say that the human being has an intellect (and a will). Then, I highlight an implication to guide my approach: that a consistent account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth cannot divide human thinking, willing, and acting from their grounding by natural participation in God’s understanding and love.

I suggest this topic is broadly relevant to Christian ethicists and moral theologians, at least given Aquinas’ presuppositions, because the very intelligibility of human freedom depends upon it.⁹⁹² Indeed, my claim in the Introduction is that natural understanding of the human good and practical truth must arise, at least vaguely and in general, so that voluntary human decision and activity, love of friendship, and acquired virtue can have natural, intrinsic character or intelligible structure, at least in principle (even if one claims that love of friendship and virtuous activity cannot be realized in fallen humanity without grace).⁹⁹³

My motivating questions in this study are as follows: how does natural understanding of the human good and practical truth arise, and what theoretical groundwork is needed to give a

⁹⁸⁹ *ST* I, q. 14, a. 16; q. 29, a. 3 ad 2; II-II, q. 25, a. 7. Finnis, *Aquinas*, 176.

⁹⁹⁰ *ST* I, q. 79, a. 11. *DV* 14.4.

⁹⁹¹ *ST* I, q. 93, a. 4; q. 14; q. 20.

⁹⁹² *DV* 24.2. *ST* I-II, q. 13, a. 6.

⁹⁹³ *ST* I-II, q. 109, a. 2. White, *Wisdom*, xxv.

practically relevant, consistent account of this? In view of these questions, I approach this study in two main parts and five chapters.

PART I: CHAPTERS 1 AND 2

In Part I, which includes chapters 1 and 2, I examine, broadly speaking, what are two poles of contemporary Thomistic discourse on natural understanding of the human good and practical truth: namely, the theories of John Bowlin and John Finnis. Bowlin proposes a relatively minimalist account of naturally knowable practical content, and Finnis offers a much more specified theory of knowable practical concepts and truths. While both Bowlin and Finnis adopt a broadly Thomistic account of human understanding and willing, I suggest that each grants an overly determinative role to one of these rational acts in his theory of practical truth, while diminishing the role of the other.

Chapter 1: John Bowlin and the Human Will

In chapter 1 I argue that Bowlin grants an overly determinative role to the human will in his theory of practical truth. Specifically, I critique Bowlin's claim that the human intellect apprehends the last end and its general parts as good *because* the human will is naturally disposed to them simply and absolutely.⁹⁹⁴ After examining possible interpretations of Bowlin's claim about the will's causality, I conclude that the human will can be neither the first efficient cause nor the formal cause of the intellect's apprehension of the human good according to a Thomistic perspective. Assuming Aquinas' claim that the human will is naturally determined to the good in general (apprehended as fitting), my response to Bowlin is that the will cannot move

⁹⁹⁴ Bowlin, 56.

the intellect until the intellect first apprehends a particular good (at least implicitly) and thus presents the will with its natural object.⁹⁹⁵

I do not imply that the human will has no causal influence over the intellect's apprehensions of the good. Rather, I simply affirm the Thomistic view that, while the will can move the intellect to exercise its act, the will cannot be the *first* mover of the intellect's apprehension of the good.⁹⁹⁶ Furthermore, though I suggest in chapter 5 that the will is a *secondary* mover of the intellect's apprehension of the *practical* good, I submit that the will cannot be the epistemic source or formal cause of the intellect's practical understanding. For, to attribute formal causality to the will is incompatible with Aquinas' claim regarding the nature of the intellect, namely, that it is a natural potentiality to universal *ens*.⁹⁹⁷

My conclusion is that Bowlin's theory cannot provide a consistent account of formal understanding of the human good, and thus, that it is unable to prevent the contingency of the human good from going "all the way down."⁹⁹⁸

Chapter 2: John Finnis and the Practical Insight

In chapter 2 I argue that Finnis attributes an overly determinative role to the practical intellect (and the practical insight) in his theory of practical truth. My critique is that Finnis' theory of cognitive movement from theoretical to practical truth introduces an assumption that compromises his argument's internal consistency. Finnis' view of practical truth (at least as I understand it) is that seemingly apart from any theoretical grasp of the already given and present good of things in reality—for, practical truth is true by anticipation and *not* by correspondence to reality—and thus proceeding it seems entirely internally to the mind, the knowing subject comes to understand practical truth by *further* practical insight.

⁹⁹⁵ ST I, q. 82, a. 3-4.

⁹⁹⁶ ST I, q. 82, a. 4 ad 3.

⁹⁹⁷ ST I, q. 78, a. 1.

⁹⁹⁸ Bowlin, 130.

I think this account of practical truth raises the following questions: first, where does the knowing subject (entirely internally within her intellect or mind) get the intelligibility of the practical good? And, second, how is practical truth normative for human action? There is an epistemological gap and internal inconsistency in Finnis' view, I think, because according to his definition of practical truth, it is not possible to establish any sense of conformity between one's theoretical and practical understanding of the good, except by inference or correlation. Recalling my starting premise above, this gap in conformity seems to divide practical human thinking, willing, and acting from their grounding by natural participation in God's understanding and love.

Conclusions for Part I

In sum I conclude in Part I that each author above introduces an epistemological gap in his overly determinative theory of practical truth that obstructs the causal unity (by participation) of simple and practical thinking in human understanding and the unity of understanding and willing in human action. Without a compelling Thomistic account of practical truth yet in hand, I move in Part II to consider its theoretical requirements and then to articulate a third theory, which I suggest begins to answer the objections raised in Part I.

PART II: CHAPTERS 3 TO 5

Chapter 3: A Turn to Simple Judgment and Simple Truth

My approach in Part II takes three turns. First, motivated by Aquinas' claim that practical thinking depends on simple thinking, I turn in chapter 3 to the topic of simple truth. Here, I recognize that a clear Thomistic account of practical truth relies on a clear account of simple truth—and, more specifically, on an account of *how* simple judgment of affirmation (i.e., natural assent) arises in the human intellect. After briefly examining Aquinas' discussion of the topic and a Thomistic

interpretation thereof, I observe both a need for clarity and a tendency in Thomistic thinking to conflate the operation's logical and natural species.

I identify at least two explanatory gaps that must be accounted for to explain how particular judgment can proceed naturally in the intellect according to a Thomistic point of view. Namely, we must account for the principle of understanding that specifies the object of an operation of simple judgment *as an end*, and we must account for the interior principle of exercise that inclines the intellect to that particular end. While there is a clear Thomistic case to be made, I suggest that more work is needed to explain how simple judgment of affirmation arises distinctly in act in the context of actual thinking and in view of concrete human agency.

Chapter 4: Robert Sokolowski and the Agent of Truth

Second, without a clear sense of how simple judgment arises in act according to a Thomistic point of view, I turn in chapter 4 to consider Robert Sokolowski's *descriptive* account of human engagement in truth in his book *Phenomenology of the Human Person*. I dialogue with Sokolowski because he describes how human engagement in truth *arises* by judgment, which is what I seek to understand—and because his description is practically relevant to our everyday experience of naming and predicating together with others. Sokolowski does not claim to be a Thomist, but his starting premises are broadly consistent with a Thomistic ontology of the human person.⁹⁹⁹

In my brief, narrow analysis of Sokolowski's descriptive account of human judgment, I make a *practical* claim. Sokolowski says human judgment arises in the context of human conversation—that is, in a context involving “two (or more) people who articulate [an] object in common.”¹⁰⁰⁰ My claim is that merely describing human judgment and its logical and material effects in a context leaves the natural species of the operation ambiguous and underdetermined.

⁹⁹⁹ Sokolowski, 1, 26-27, 176.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Sokolowski, 59-60.

Given a particular descriptive instance of human judgment in standard propositional form—and without a complementary theoretical analysis of its causal principles—I suggest we *cannot determine* the operation’s natural species.¹⁰⁰¹ For, there are at least two distinct possibilities: the human judgment could be either 1) a case of judgment of affirmation by simple understanding (i.e., by natural assent), or 2) a case of judgment of affirmation by inductive inference (e.g., by assent subject to our prior choice and command¹⁰⁰²), which is already a practical activity. Much less, according to a merely descriptive account, can we determine whether the judgment is aided by grace—and, thus, is a case of infused (i.e., supernatural) understanding of simple or practical truth.

At the end of chapter 4, I conclude that because it cannot distinguish a particular operation of judgment whose immediate cause is practical activity (I call this judgment of affirmation by inductive inference) from a particular operation of judgment by natural assent (I call this judgment of affirmation by simple understanding),¹⁰⁰³ Sokolowski’s descriptive account of human judgment—at least narrowly on its own—cannot provide the grounding we need in simple truth for an account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth. Again, this is a narrow *practical* observation: I do not examine Sokolowski’s overall phenomenological approach (nor, do I consider his work on moral psychology), and I do not address whether Sokolowski’s account can distinguish theoretically an agent of truth from an agent of inference.¹⁰⁰⁴

With this conclusion in mind, I specify my thesis as follows: to articulate a relevant, consistent account of practical truth, we need to build upon an account of simple judgment of affirmation (of simple truth) *that specifies the operation in terms of its natural causal principles—*

¹⁰⁰¹ See *ST I-II*, q. 1, a. 3 ad 3; q. 18, a. 7.

¹⁰⁰² See *ST I-II*, q. 17, a. 6.

¹⁰⁰³ See my discussion of *ST I-II*, q. 17, a. 6 in chapter 3.

¹⁰⁰⁴ My view in chapters 4 and 5 is that the human being is naturally both an agent of truth and, additionally and practically, an agent of inference.

such that we can clearly distinguish it from an operation of judgment by inductive inference, which is already a practical activity.

Chapter 5: Simple Judgment and Understanding the Human Good and Practical Truth

My third turn is to examine the intellectual principles of human practice according to a Thomistic point of view. This is to articulate a *speculative* theory of simple human judgment and then of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth, which is the primary topic of this study.¹⁰⁰⁵ As I mention in the Introduction to chapter 5, if we are to distinguish judgment by inference as an effect of human practice from human judgment by simple understanding as a partial, proximate cause thereof, then we must attempt to articulate a theoretical (speculative) account of simple human judgment in terms of its natural causal principles, and then to articulate an account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth in terms of this.

First task

My first task in chapter 5 is to articulate a Thomistic account of judgment of affirmation by simple understanding (i.e., by natural assent) in terms of its natural causal principles. This is also to articulate an account of simple truth. I suggest that judgment by simple understanding is distinct from judgment by inductive inference insofar as it arises naturally (and proximately) by implicit apprehension and voluntary simple willing and not by secondary practical operation (i.e., by choice, command, and exercise). I argue that simple judgment is neither moved determinately by instinct nor compelled exteriorly—indeed, no exterior principle (i.e., no exterior cause, agent, or subject of activity) determines the human being's individual performance of the act.

¹⁰⁰⁵ See *ST* I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

In sum, my account of judgment of affirmation by simple understanding is as follows. I begin with a starting premise: that the human being is created by God with an intellectual nature and natural intellectual aptitude to participate in God's understanding and loving. This is to claim that the human being by nature has an intellect, which is a natural potentiality to universal *ens*.¹⁰⁰⁶ Then, I suggest that as we are loved and moved to understanding by things and especially persons in reality, concepts of *ens*, truth, and good fall in our intellect *implicitly* by apprehension. I discuss the immanent operations involved in this process of implicit apprehension in the chapter. At this point, the intellect does not (and cannot) yet conform *itself* by judgment or assent to the things it cognizes (i.e., by its own interior principle of movement), and thus, the intellect does not yet cognize truth, properly speaking. Recall in chapter 3 I offer two reasons why we cannot yet explain how particular judgment arises in the intellect at all. Because the intellect cannot yet properly (and explicitly) apprehend the true, neither can it properly cognize the good, which Aquinas says it first cognizes after apprehending the true.¹⁰⁰⁷

Nonetheless, my claim in the chapter is that prior to judgment the intellect can still apprehend the true and the good *implicitly*—just not yet properly and explicitly. Here, in making a distinction between implicit and explicit apprehension, I attempt to clarify and to develop Aquinas' view in a manner consistent with his claims—while recognizing we need a way to explain how simple judgment arises in terms of its natural causal principles. I suggest these *implicit* apprehensions arise in the intellect when it secondly and thirdly apprehends the nature of itself by virtue of its second and third immanent operations, after firstly apprehending *ens* and the nature of the exterior material thing that activates it by virtue of its first immanent operation. By virtue of its second immanent operation, the intellect secondly conforms to itself and thus apprehends itself conforming to *ens* (but not yet *conforming itself* to *ens* actively), and this is to apprehend the true implicitly. By virtue of its third immanent operation, the intellect thirdly

¹⁰⁰⁶ *ST I* q. 78, a. 1; q. 79, a. 2.

¹⁰⁰⁷ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 4 ad 2.

apprehends itself inclining itself (passively) to its conforming to *ens*¹⁰⁰⁸ (but not yet *inclining itself* actively to its *own* conforming to *ens*), and this is to apprehend the good implicitly (but not yet practically).¹⁰⁰⁹ I submit this is also to apprehend the nature of the will implicitly. Once the intellect apprehends the nature of the will implicitly, I suggest the will is in the intellect somewhat distinctly (but not as a part¹⁰¹⁰) and that it can move itself voluntarily by simple willing to love the particular good apprehended implicitly, which the intellect presents to it as its object. This is to participate secondarily and voluntarily by immanent, active self-inclination in the movement of the intellect's original second and first immanent operations. To participate in the intellect's first immanent operation of conforming to *ens* additionally by simple willing is to move the intellect to exercise this operation additionally—and somewhat voluntarily and explicitly—by simple judgment.

Significantly, it is thus “when the intellect begins to possess something proper to itself”¹⁰¹¹: when by *simple* judgment of affirmation or *natural* assent the intellect *conforms itself* to (or affirms) the thing apprehended *as an individual* by virtue of simple love in the will. Indeed, my claim is that simple judgment of affirmation arises naturally and voluntarily in the intellect as simply moved by the will, which is the intellect's *interior* principle of (self-)movement. The will's operation of simple willing is a secondary, voluntary movement by participation in response to the good of an exterior thing—primarily, a person—who first loves us.¹⁰¹² The operation of simple judgment is simply voluntary but not practical: it is not subject to our choice and command. When by its second immanent operation the intellect cognizes its *own* proper

¹⁰⁰⁸ This is also to apprehend itself (the intellect) inclining itself (passively) to the perfection of itself and the perfection of *ens*, as moved by exterior *ens*. See *ST I-II*, q. 18, a. 1.

¹⁰⁰⁹ See *ST I*, q. 16, a. 4 ad 2. We might say that this is also to apprehend the intellect's passive perfection of itself implicitly as good and as an end.

¹⁰¹⁰ *ST I*, q. 59, a. 2.

¹⁰¹¹ *DV* 1.3.

¹⁰¹² Recalling our starting premise that that the human being is created by God with an intellectual nature, the claim is that God is the First Mover, simply, who both “moves the soul inwardly or inspires the good wish” of our simple willing and who moves the exterior subordinate movers (i.e., the persons) who first love us by natural human love. Aquinas says that the human being “must be directed to the last end by the motion of the first mover, and to the proximate end by the motion of any of the subordinate movers” (*ST I-II*, q. 109, a. 6).

conformity to an intelligible thing by simple judgment, then first it apprehends truth (somewhat explicitly), properly speaking.¹⁰¹³

I suggest that articulating a theory of voluntary judgment of affirmation by simple understanding *quoad nos* in terms of its natural causal principles helps us 1) distinguish simple judgment from apprehension in the human intellect (not only logically but also ontologically and causally), 2) distinguish simple judgment from secondary judgment by inductive inference, which is already practical, and 3) clarify a distinctly natural understanding of human judgment and simple truth (as distinct from understanding aided by grace).

Second task

My second task is to propose the beginnings of an account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth in terms of the above theory of human judgment of simple truth. Recall I say above that the intellect first apprehends truth, properly speaking, when it cognizes (by its second immanent operation) its own conforming to *ens* by simple judgment. And recall that simple judgment is the intellect's additional participation by self-movement in its first immanent operation (this self-movement is secondarily and interiorly exercised by voluntary simple willing in the will). My further claim is that we first understand the human good—and, indeed, the practical good and practical truth—properly speaking, when the intellect additionally apprehends (by its third immanent operation) the good of the truth of simple judgment.

Indeed, my thesis is that to apprehend the practical good is to apprehend thirdly the nature of the intellect's active, self-inclined understanding of truth by simple judgment (this is also to apprehend the good of our substantial human person as a subject and agent of truth and good by love).¹⁰¹⁴ Recall that the will is the intellectual appetite: it is an interior (secondary)

¹⁰¹³ See *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2.

¹⁰¹⁴ In other words, the intellect apprehends the practical good when it apprehends thirdly the nature of itself actively inclining itself to its *own* conforming to *ens*—and thus, actively inclining or directing to its own

intellectual principle of self-inclination or movement.¹⁰¹⁵ When the will moves the intellect to judge simply and then to cognize the true and the good, it moves the intellect to extend to secondary operation by self-inclination. Aquinas says that to consider the good practically is to consider it as an end of a motion or operation.¹⁰¹⁶ I suggest the intellect first apprehends the good practically when it apprehends the good of truth, properly speaking: that is, when it apprehends the *good of truth as an end of a voluntary, self-inclined operation of simple judgment*.

To apprehend the practical good includes apprehending the good of truth *simply*—i.e., as desirable, as a perfection of the intellect and the person, and, by resolution, *as an end* of the love and activity of exterior *ens* and its principles, especially other persons. Indeed, to apprehend the good simply is *primarily* to apprehend exterior substantial *ens* (a person) as good¹⁰¹⁷ and as a cause of our understanding by love. But, moreover, to apprehend the practical good includes apprehending the good of truth additionally and practically *as an end of my own voluntary self-movement and further practical operation (i.e., as an end simply loved by me that extends to operation)*.¹⁰¹⁸ Once the intellect apprehends the practical good it becomes practical: it begins to direct what it apprehends to self-moved operation¹⁰¹⁹ (psychologically, we begin to understand the practical good as an opportunity,¹⁰²⁰ or as an *ordinatio*,¹⁰²¹ or as an end whose fulfillment we can participate in by our own love and practical operation). Furthermore, to apprehend the practical good initially is also to understand implicitly the practical truth about human operation in terms of it, which Aquinas says is the first principle of practical reason.¹⁰²² We might say that when the human being apprehends the practical good, she begins to understand herself (at least

perfection by secondary operation (and the perfection of the whole human subject) and the perfection of *ens*. Again, see *ST* I-II, q. 18, a. 1.

¹⁰¹⁵ *ST* I, q. 80, a. 2; q. 82, a. 4 ad 3.

¹⁰¹⁶ *DV* 3.3 ad 9; 14. 4.

¹⁰¹⁷ *ST* I, q. 16, a. 1; a. 4 ad 2.

¹⁰¹⁸ *ST* I, q. 79, a. 11. *DV* 14.4.

¹⁰¹⁹ *ST* I-II, q. 94, a. 2; I, q. 79, a. 11.

¹⁰²⁰ *CEJF* I.1, 29 n. 21.

¹⁰²¹ *ST* I-II, q. 12. Sherwin, 85, 95.

¹⁰²² *ST* I-II, q. 94, a. 2; q. 64, a. 3.

vaguely) as a *primary subject* of human love and practical operation (or as a primary “agent of practical truth”)—having been first loved by another. She can begin to understand practical truth properly and more explicitly by practical judgment. Once she apprehends the practical good, her intention (love of friendship), practical reasoning, and acting can follow, but these are beyond the scope of the present study.

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

One way I think the above account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth is distinct from the theories of Bowlin and Finnis is that it affirms and builds upon Aquinas’ claim that *the practical intellect cognizes truth just as the speculative intellect*. The accidental difference between the two is that the practical intellect directs the cognized truth to operation.¹⁰²³ Indeed, I claim that natural understanding of practical truth is determined neither by the human will (as Bowlin claims) nor by the practical insight (as Finnis claims). Rather, the human person comes to understand truth *both simply and practically* by her intellectual and voluntary engagement with things in the world—and primarily with persons, who first love us. The accidental difference between simple and practical cognition arises *by addition* when the intellect apprehends the truth of simple judgment *as a particular good* (and as an end of self-movement extending to operation)—and, thus, apprehends the practical good (and, implicitly, practical truth).¹⁰²⁴

Thomist philosophers such as Stephen Brock and Lawrence Dewan already argue that our understanding of the good depends on our grasp of the good of a being (*ens*),¹⁰²⁵ including chiefly,

¹⁰²³ ST I, q. 79, a. 11.

¹⁰²⁴ As I discuss above, the will’s voluntary participation by simple willing in the intellect’s initial implicit apprehensions is a secondary efficient cause of both the intellect’s simple judgment and its additional apprehensions of the true and the good, properly speaking. But, the will does *not* thereby determine the intellect’s natural understanding of the human good and practical truth.

¹⁰²⁵ Dewan, “Natural Lights,” 205-206, 211-212. See ST I q. 16, a. 1; a. 4, ad 2.

the good of freely-acting human persons.¹⁰²⁶ But, as far as I know, they do not discuss in depth how this understanding of the human good naturally *arises*. I try to take the conversation further—thereby attempting to make an original contribution—by synthesizing and developing the work of several Thomists on related topics to propose the beginnings of an account of simple judgment and proper cognition of truth, human good, and practical truth (*quoad nos*).

I suggest that originality in the present Thomistic account may be found in the following: in its attempt to distinguish two species of human judgment of affirmation (i.e., simple judgment and judgment by inductive inference) in terms of their causal principles, in its attempt to explain how the human intellect initially apprehends the true and the good *implicitly* when it apprehends the nature of itself by immanent operation, in its attempt to explain how the human will arises distinctly in the intellect, in its attempt to explain how simple judgment (i.e., natural assent) and simple truth arise distinctly and voluntarily in terms of their natural causal principles, and in its attempt to explain how natural understanding of the human good and practical truth arises in terms of the prior account.

SIGNIFICANCE OF RESULTS

I submit that the present Thomistic account of natural understanding of the human good and practical truth preserves the unity (by participation) of simple and practical thinking in human understanding and the unity (by participation) of understanding and willing in human action,¹⁰²⁷ and thus that it begins to answer the objections raised above regarding the other theories. Additionally, I suggest it offers an approach to causal analysis that can help us 1) begin to disambiguate the judgments we hear and express in everyday experience, and 2) consider questions of transparency and accountability concerning these judgments. I also suggest it can

¹⁰²⁶ Stephen Brock, "Book Review: Knowing the Natural Law. By Steven J. Jensen," *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 81, no. 1 (2017): 133.

¹⁰²⁷ See *ST I-II*, q. 17, a. 4.

help us articulate distinctions between human and artificial “intelligence” and “agency,” which are topics of significant contemporary relevance.¹⁰²⁸

Finally, it is worth highlighting the above account’s dependence on a tradition of natural human love. Indeed, my claim is that we naturally come to understand the human good and practical truth by our intellectual and voluntary engagement with other human persons *who first love us* (e.g., parents or caregivers, especially at first, and other family members, teachers, mentors, friends, etc.). This implies that our *natural* understanding of the human good arises when others first love us into a tradition of human love (or, perhaps an order of love) and when we then participate additionally in this love by voluntary self-movement and practical operation. Is this view compatible with a Christian understanding of the diminished yet enduring goodness of human beings after the fall from grace? Recall our discussion of Aquinas’ view on the natural inclination to virtue in the Introduction. Aquinas says that while the natural inclination to virtue can be diminished indefinitely by obstacles that might impede it from attaining its term, it cannot be destroyed entirely because its root (i.e., the human being’s natural intellectual aptitude) remains by nature.¹⁰²⁹ Somewhat similarly, perhaps we might say that a tradition of natural human love and virtue is likewise diminished but not destroyed after the fall from grace. We might say that caregivers love children into this tradition, which abides at least inchoatively in their hearts and in the hearts of the persons who come before them, such that natural understanding of the human good and practical truth arises in the child by proper intellectual cognition at least vaguely and in general.¹⁰³⁰

¹⁰²⁸ See *ST I*, q. 16, a. 1.

¹⁰²⁹ *ST I-II*, q. 85, a. 2.

¹⁰³⁰ *ST I-II*, q. 63, a. 1; *I*, q. 93, a. 8 ad 3; q. 85, a. 3. The claim is that the tradition of human love begins at creation and is diminished but not destroyed after the fall from grace. God is the First Mover, simply. Grace is necessary both to heal and to sanctify human beings and the tradition of human love. Recall Aquinas’ claim that we need God’s help to move us both supernaturally by grace and naturally, to prepare us for the gift of grace, by directing us to the last end inwardly and by directing us to the proximate end by the motion of subordinate movers, especially human persons, who love us into the tradition of human love by participating in God’s understanding and love. See *ST I-II*, q. 109, a. 2, 6.

One way in which this account is relevant to everyday practical concerns is that it allows claims about human dignity and freedom to be intelligible and normative *in principle*—and it allows us to understand that this is so at least implicitly and vaguely—without relying on assumption or inductive inference in the first instance of understanding. It also preserves the intelligibility and normativity of the human love of friendship *in principle*, without rendering it unintelligible and foreign to our human nature (and to our practical activity) apart from grace.¹⁰³¹ If this argument is at least minimally successful, it suggests that we indeed *can* understand—naturally and prior to any philosophical reasoning—something universally true and normative about the human good and practical truth, at least vaguely, implicitly, and in general.¹⁰³²

¹⁰³¹ Again, this is not to claim that any actual turning to God can be awakened in fallen human nature without God's help (*ST* I-II, q. 109, a. 6).

¹⁰³² *ST* I-II, q. 94, a. 6.

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