

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

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



David O. Brink

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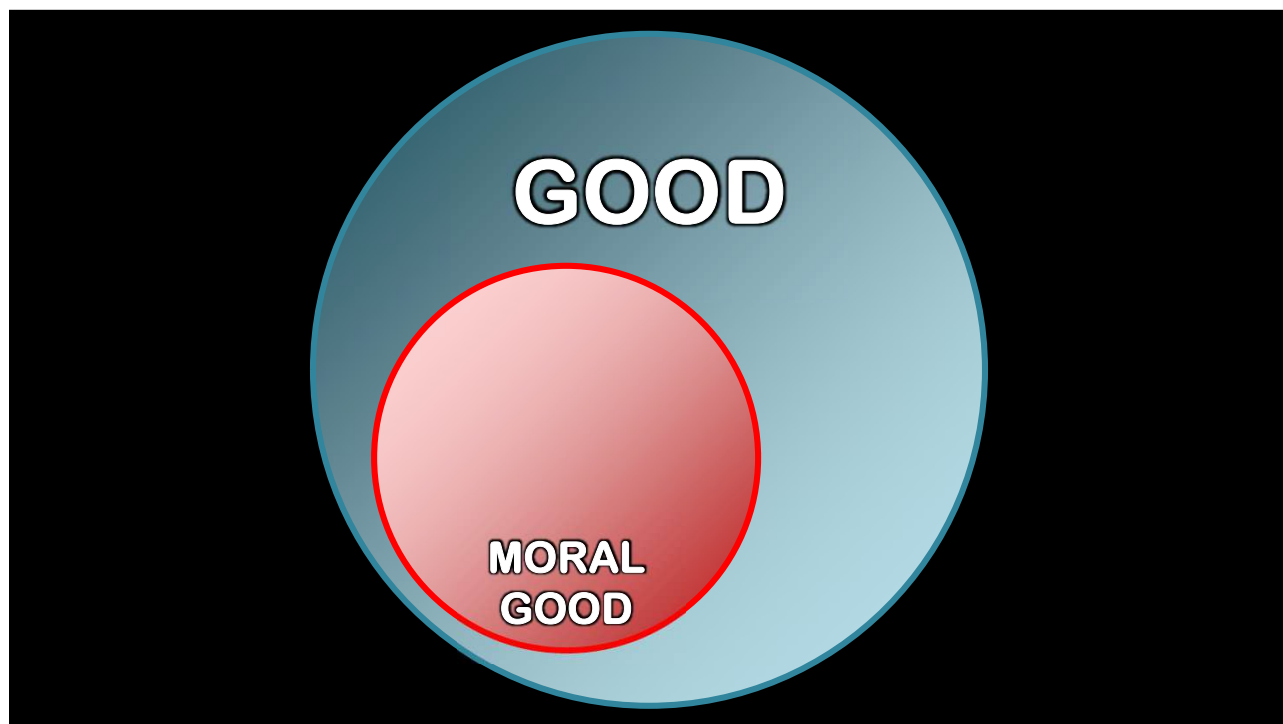
[Brink, "Autonomy," in *Cambridge Companion*, 152]

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

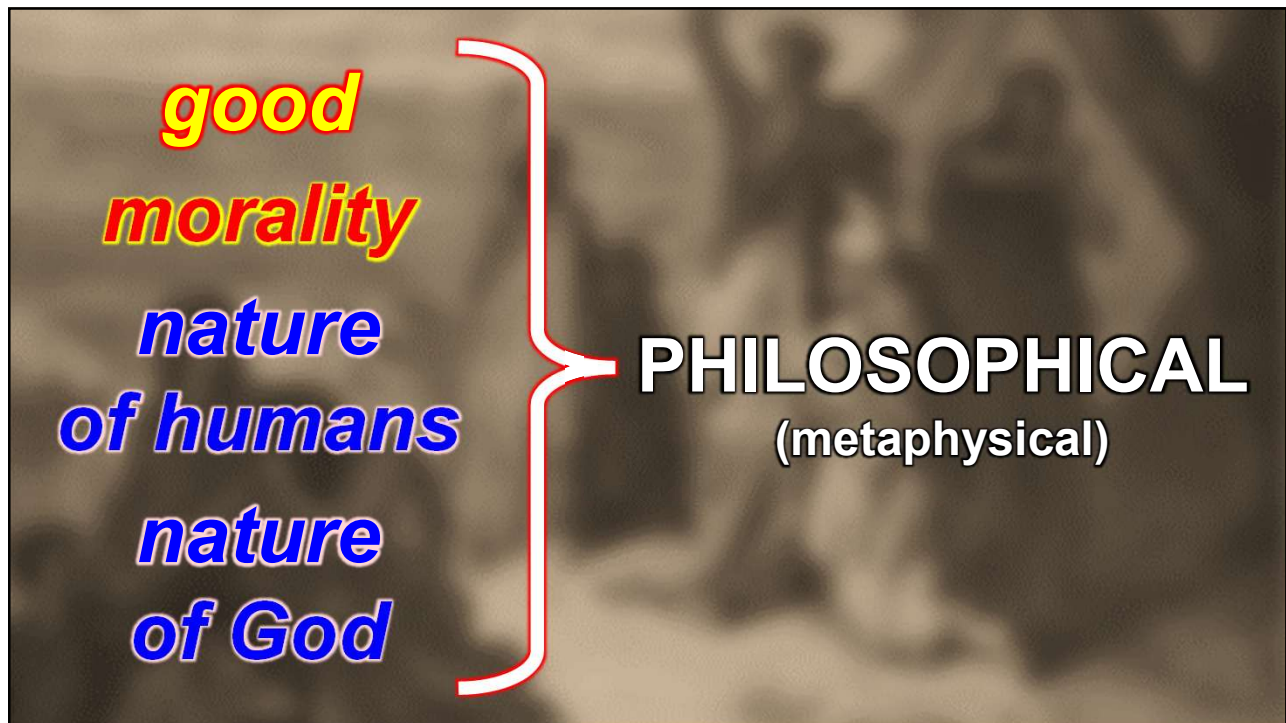
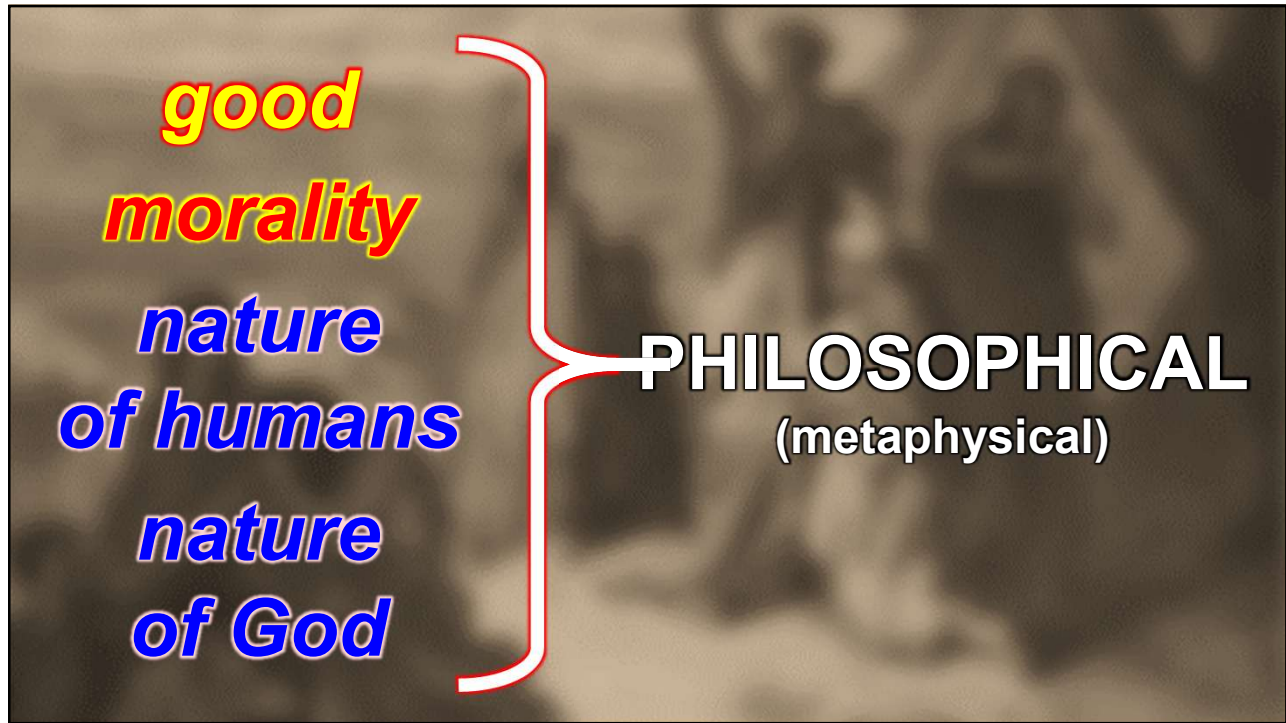
*It remains to be shown how this "translates" into human morality.*

*The theory of human morality finding its philosophical kernel in the virtue theory of Aristotle and its zenith in Thomas Aquinas is known as Natural Law Theory.*

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

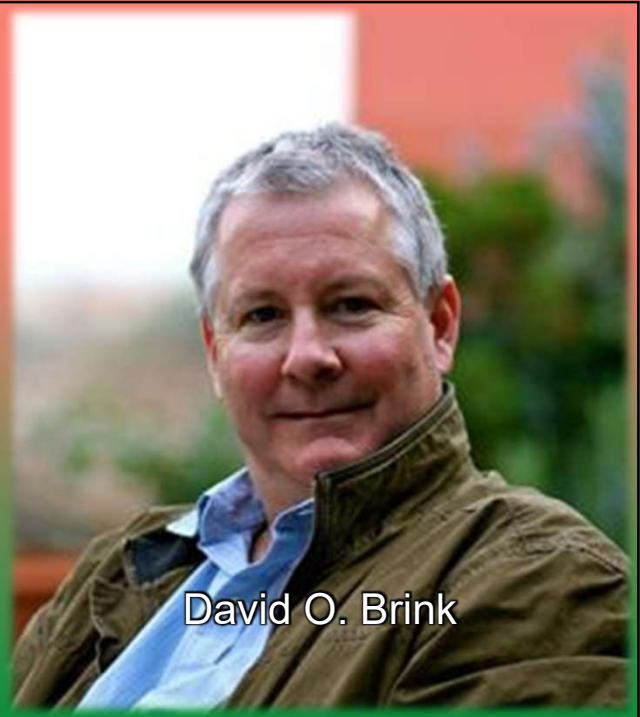


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*"Ethical naturalists, such as Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), claim that the moral properties of persons and situations depend on their **nature**. ... "*

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



David O. Brink

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

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



David O. Brink

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

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



David O. Brink

***But what is a nature if not metaphysical?***

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

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



David O. Brink

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

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

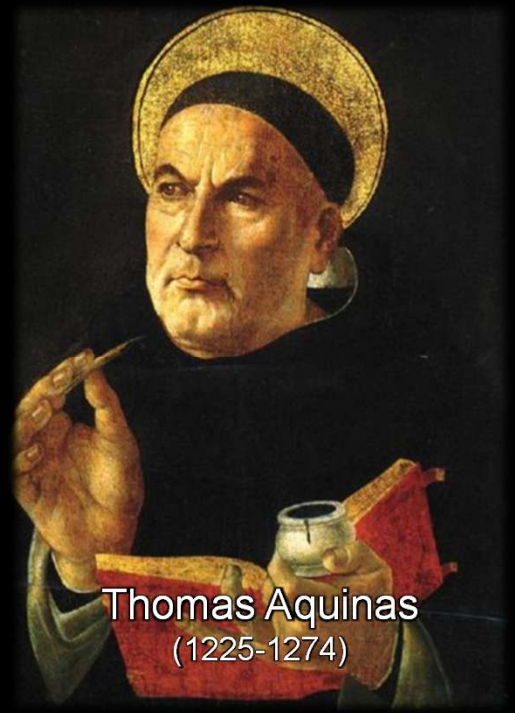


David O. Brink

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

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

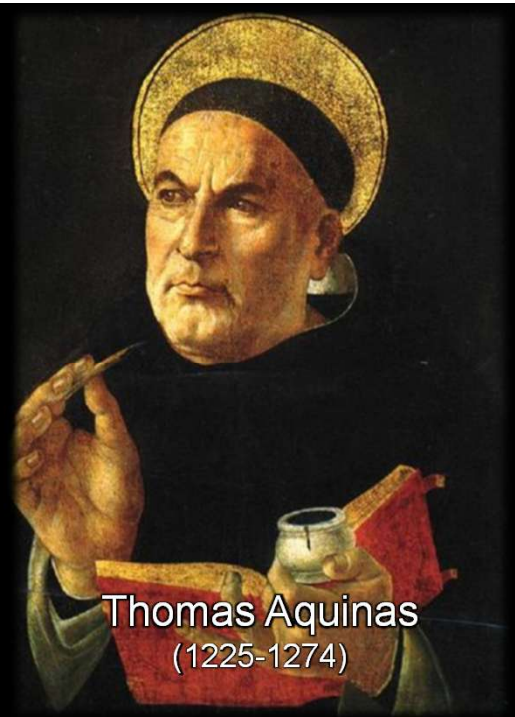
***"It was necessary for man's salvation that there should be a knowledge revealed by God, besides philosophical science built up by human reason ... because man is directed to God as to an end that surpasses the grasp of reason. ..."***



**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)

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

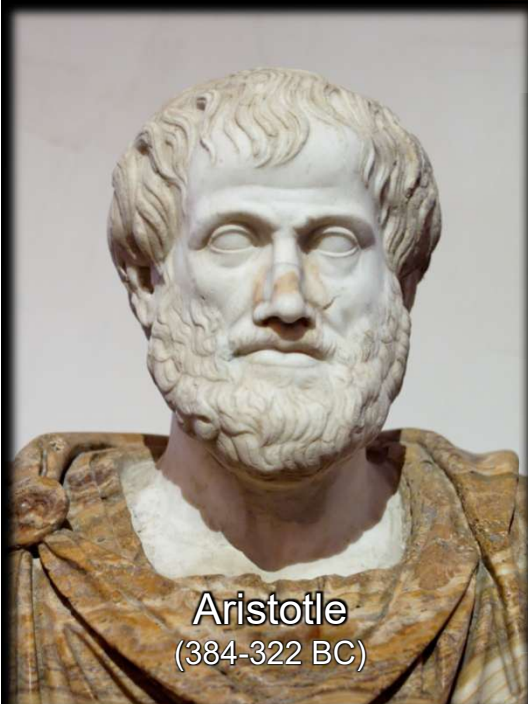
[Summa Theologiae I, 1]



**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)

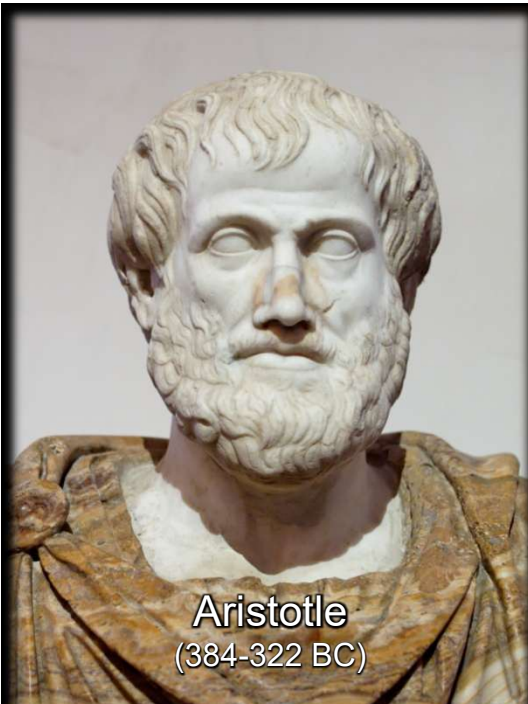
*While I agree with Aquinas's metaphysics regarding the philosophical aspects of human morality and goodness in achieving our **end** in this life, as a Protestant Evangelical, I do not agree with him regarding how we gain that ultimate **end** in the next life.*





Aristotle  
(384-322 BC)

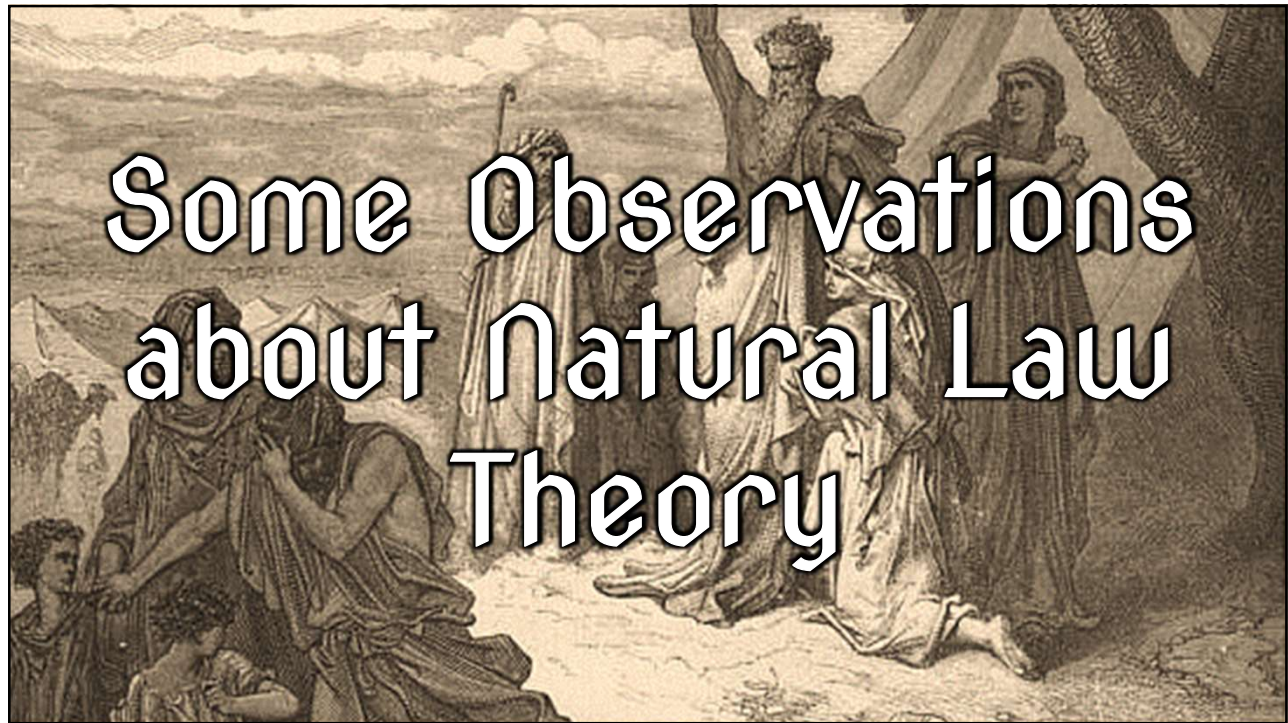
***"Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject-matter admits of, for precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions. ..."***



Aristotle  
(384-322 BC)

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

[Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 3, 1094<sup>a</sup>11, 25, trans. W. D. Ross in Richard McKeon, ed. *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941), 936]



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

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



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



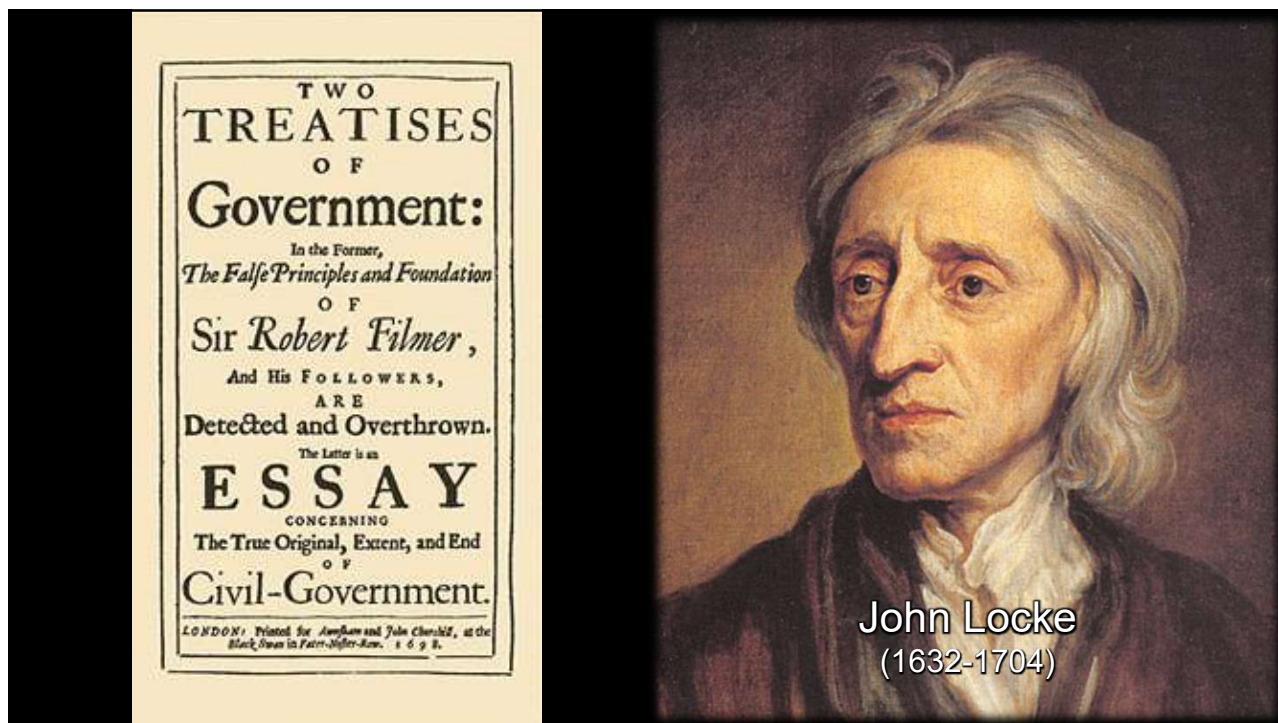
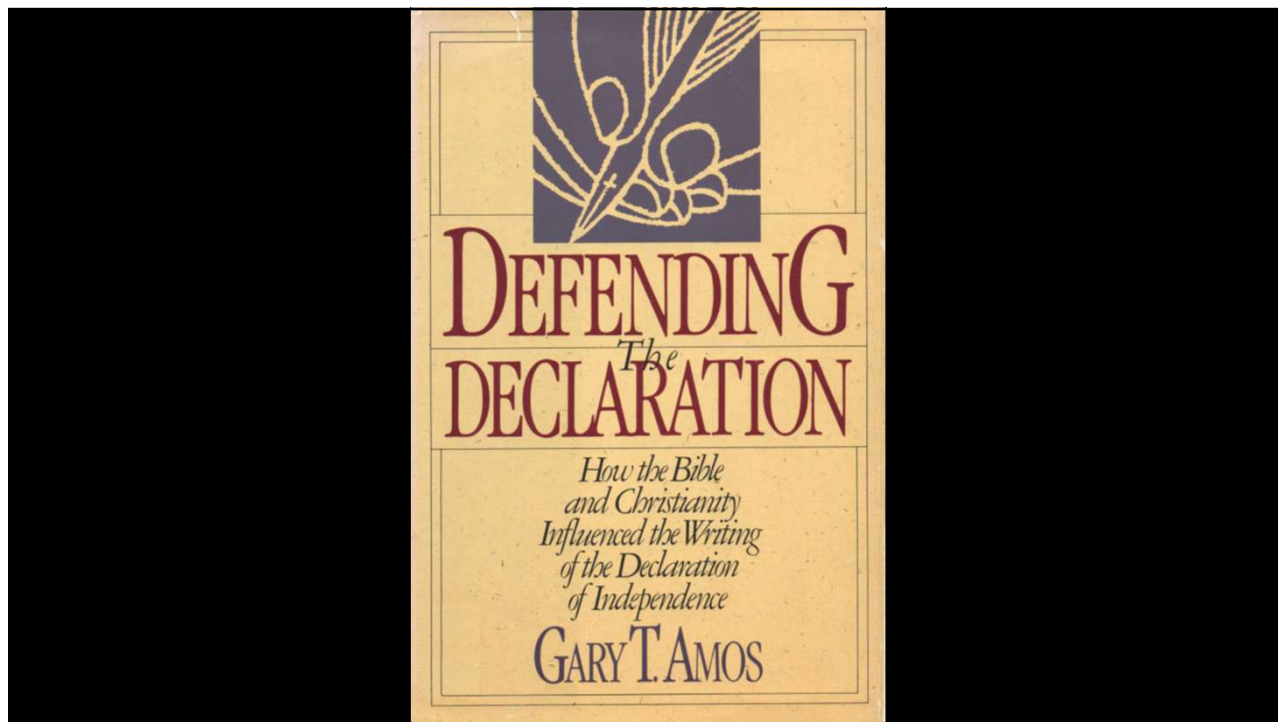
# Natural Law Theory is grounded in classical metaphysics.

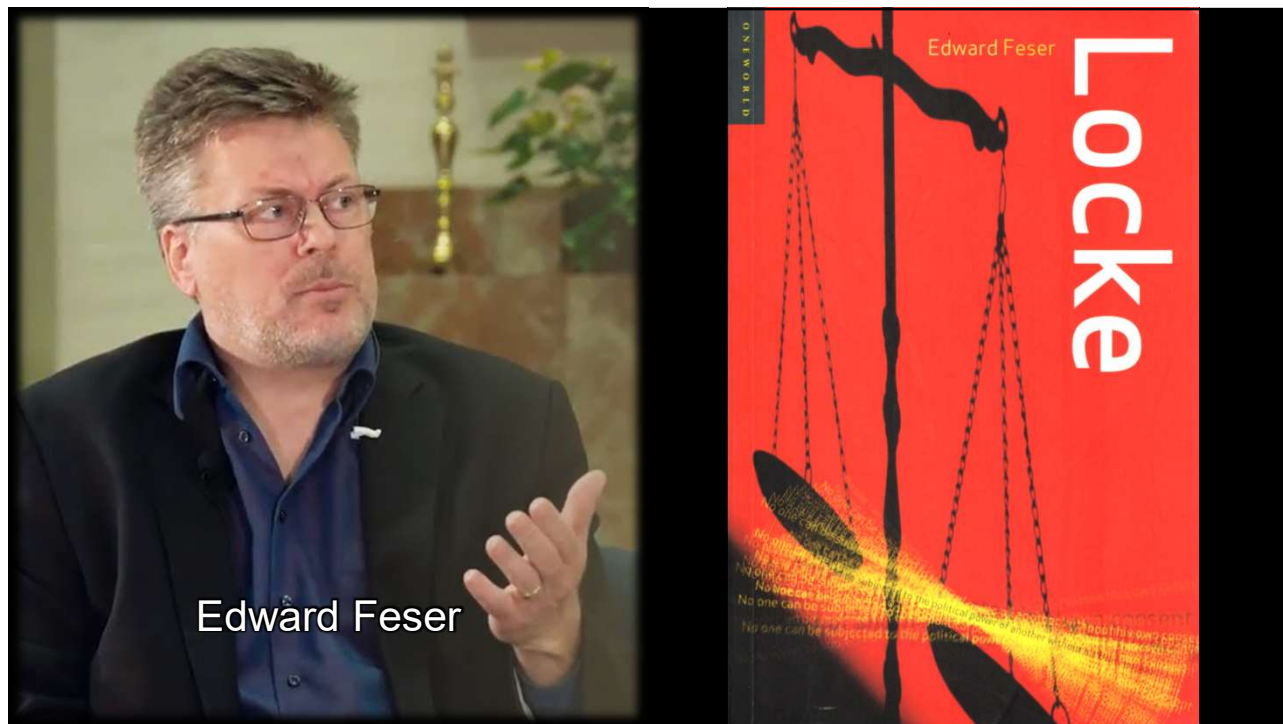
*As a model of morality that follows the contours and categories of Ancient Greek and Medieval Philosophy, Natural Law Theory traffics in certain fundamental concepts, most of which themselves need to be unpacked, including:*

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

Natural Law Theory  
 is closer to home  
 than many Americans  
 may realize.







Edward Feser

Locke

Edward Feser

OXFORD

No one can be subjected to the political power of another without his consent.



Hon. Clarence Thomas

Laurence H. Tribe

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**The New York Times**  
Monday, December 15, 2008

**Opinion**

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
## Clarence Thomas and 'Natural Law'


By LAURENCE H. TRIBE;  
Published: July 15, 1991


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


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

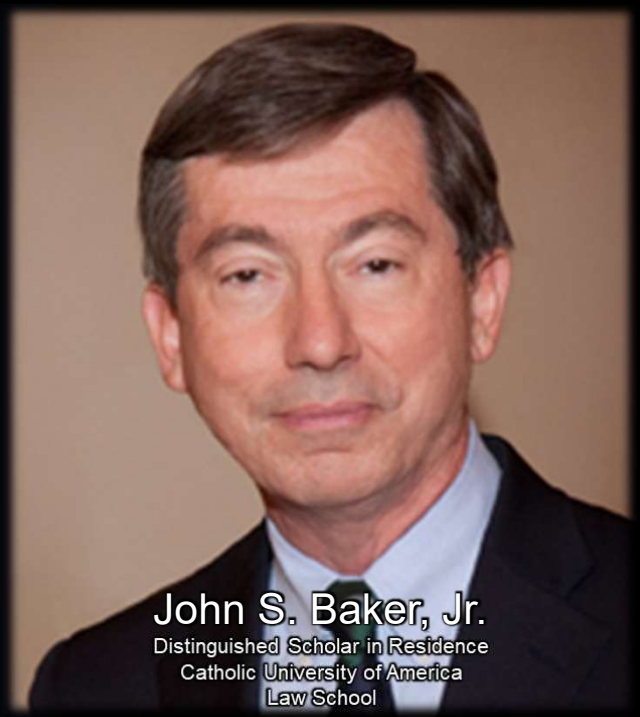
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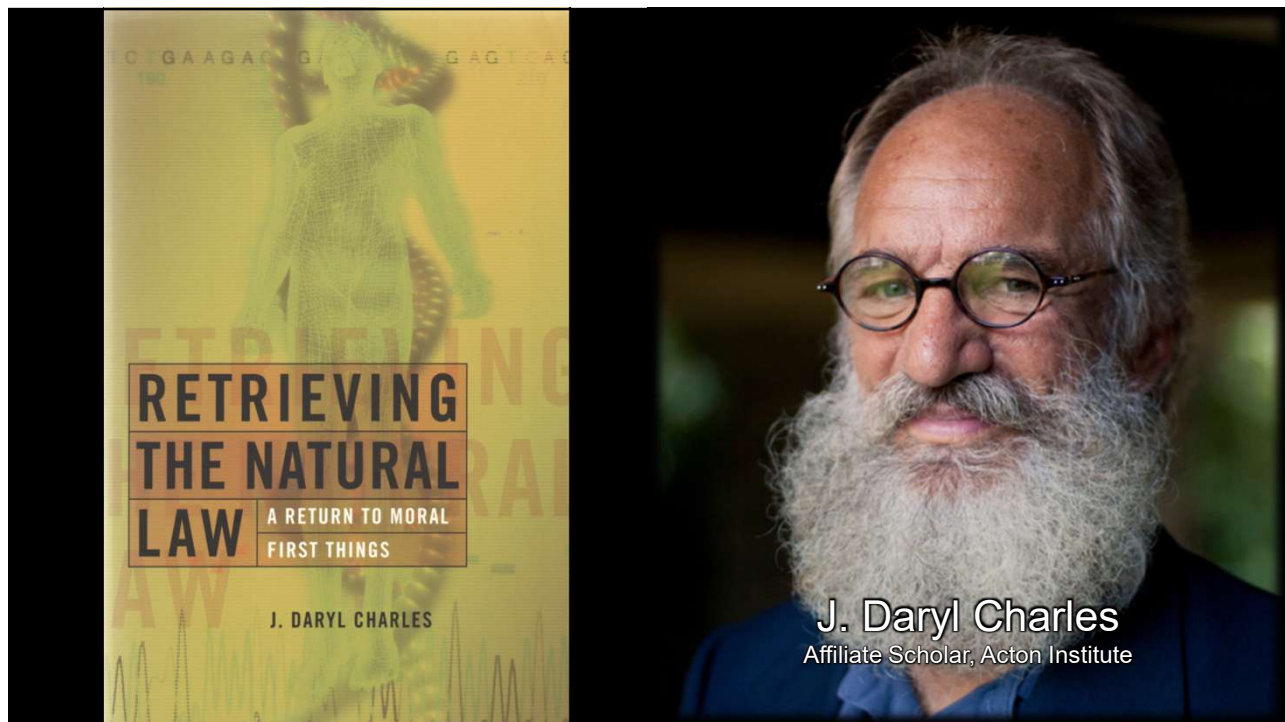
***"The anxious questions asked by the Senators about natural law and the nominee's disavowal that natural law would have any role in his decision of actual cases evidence a pervasive lack of understanding or acceptance of natural law."***

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



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

**Isn't Natural Law  
Theory Catholic?**

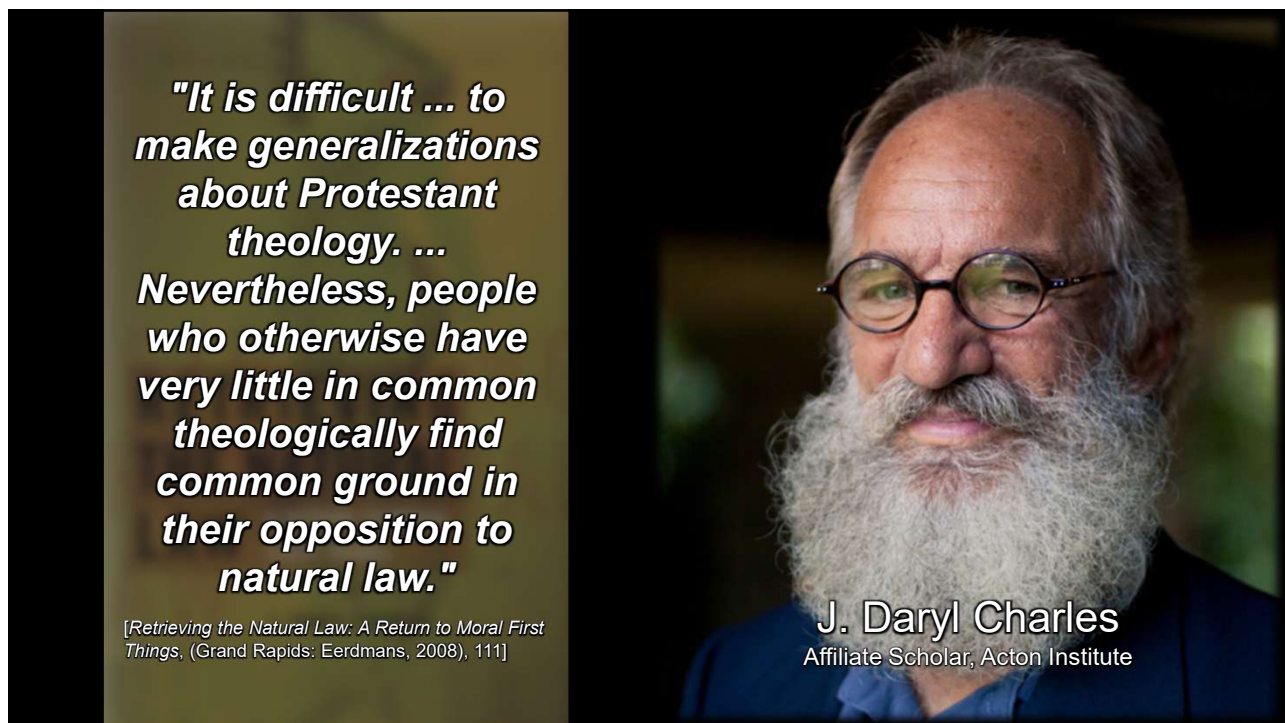


**RETRIEVING  
THE NATURAL  
LAW**

A RETURN TO MORAL  
FIRST THINGS

J. DARYL CHARLES

**J. Daryl Charles**  
Affiliate Scholar, Acton Institute



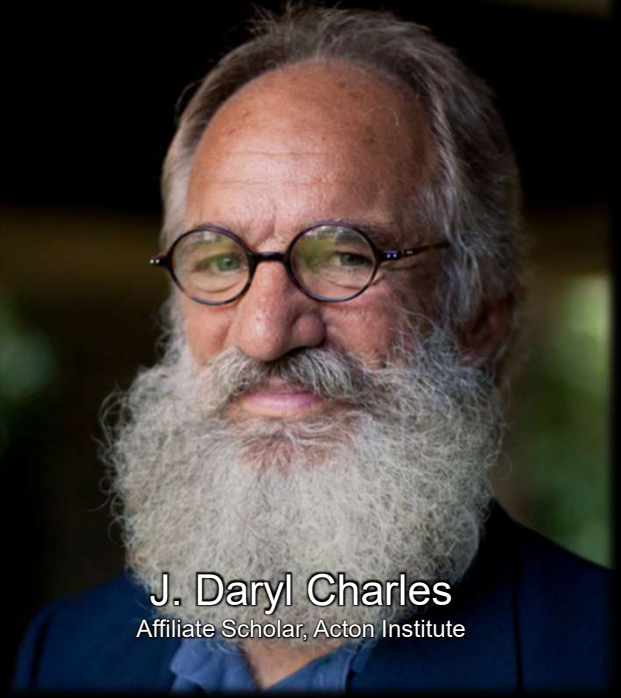
*"It is difficult ... to  
make generalizations  
about Protestant  
theology. ...  
Nevertheless, people  
who otherwise have  
very little in common  
theologically find  
common ground in  
their opposition to  
natural law."*

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

**J. Daryl Charles**  
Affiliate Scholar, Acton Institute

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

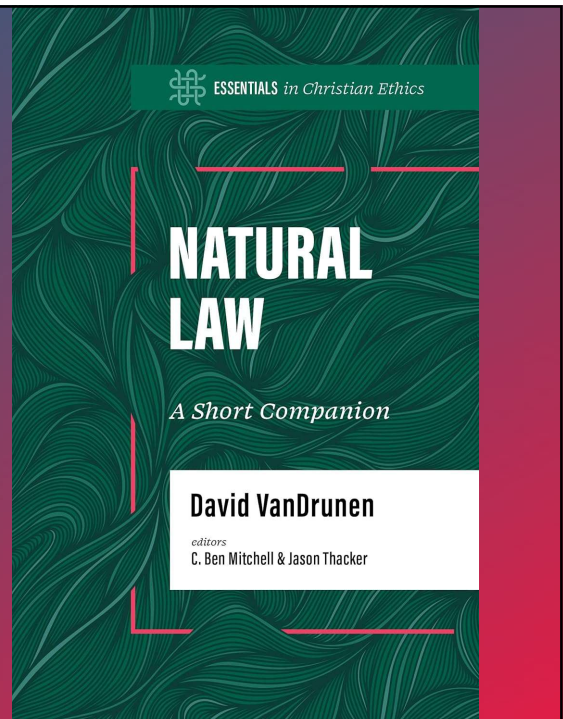
[Retrieving, 112]




**J. Daryl Charles**  
Affiliate Scholar, Acton Institute



**David VanDrunen**






**David VanDrunen**

***"Protestants should not affirm natural law despite being Protestant. They should affirm natural because they are Protestant. ... Protestants believe that Scripture is the highest authority for Christian faith and life, and since Scripture clearly teaches the reality and importance of natural law, Protestants must affirm natural law if they wish to be true to their own convictions."***

[David VanDrunen, *Natural Law: A Short Companion* (Brentwood: B&H Academic, 2023), 11, emphasis in original]

**REDISCOVERING THE  
NATURAL LAW IN REFORMED  
THEOLOGICAL ETHICS**



**Stephen J. Grabill**



**Stephen J. Grabill**  
Acton Institute and  
Grand Rapids Theological Seminary

***"While evangelicals today (both inside and outside of confessional traditions) may be surprised—even dismayed—by [Peter Martyr Vermigli's] strong affirmation of divine witness through the natural order,***



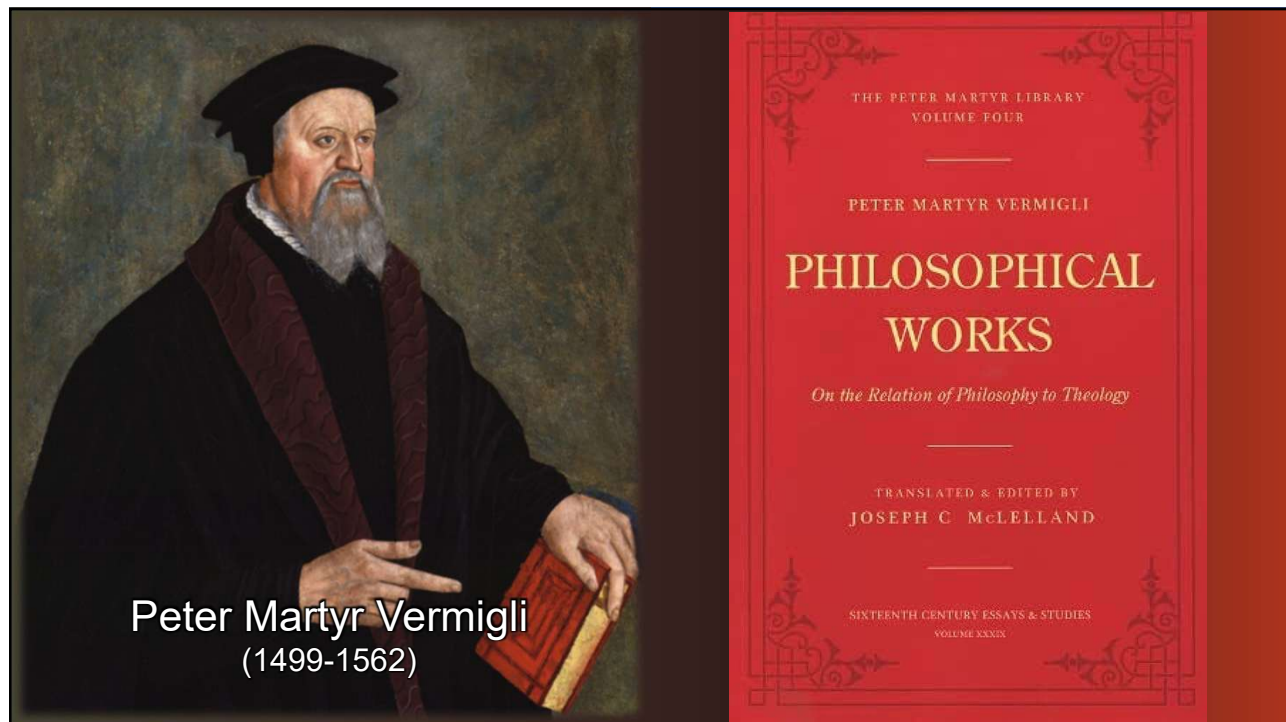
**Stephen J. Grabill**  
Acton Institute and  
Grand Rapids Theological Seminary

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

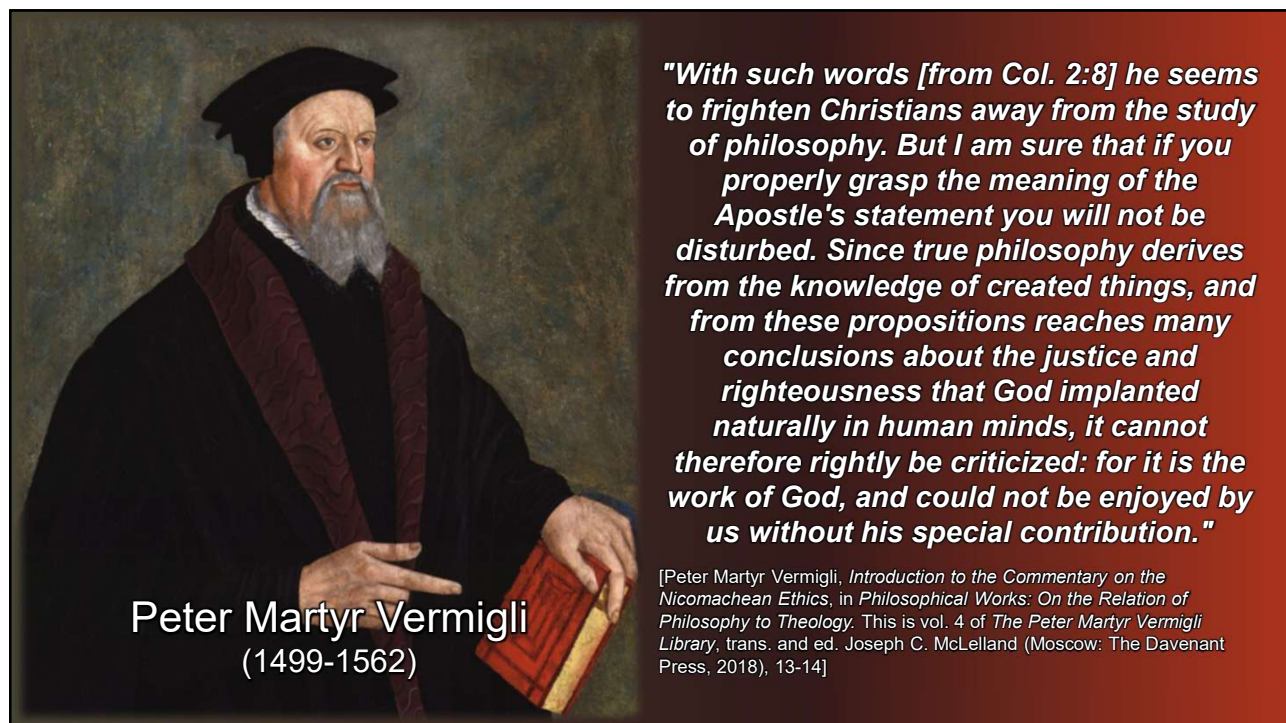
[Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 1]



**Stephen J. Grabill**  
Acton Institute and  
Grand Rapids Theological Seminary



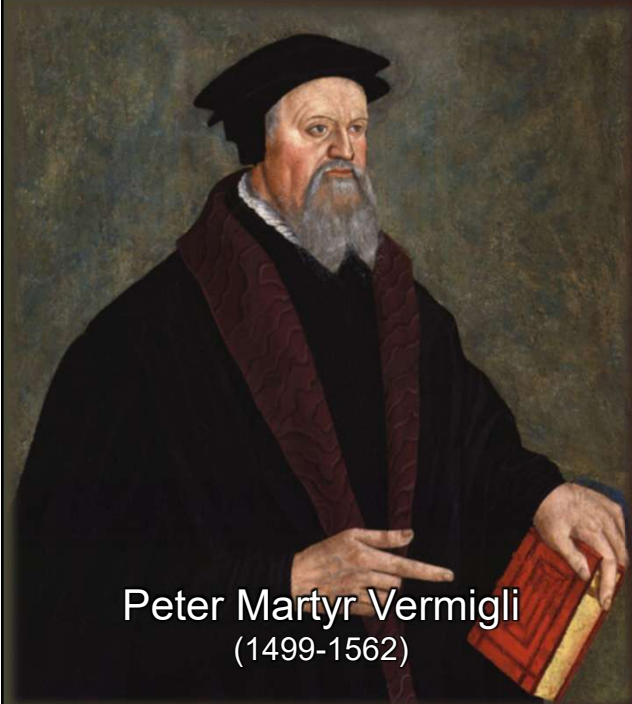
Peter Martyr Vermigli  
(1499-1562)



Peter Martyr Vermigli  
(1499-1562)

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

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



**Peter Martyr Vermigli**  
(1499-1562)

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

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



**David VanDrunen**



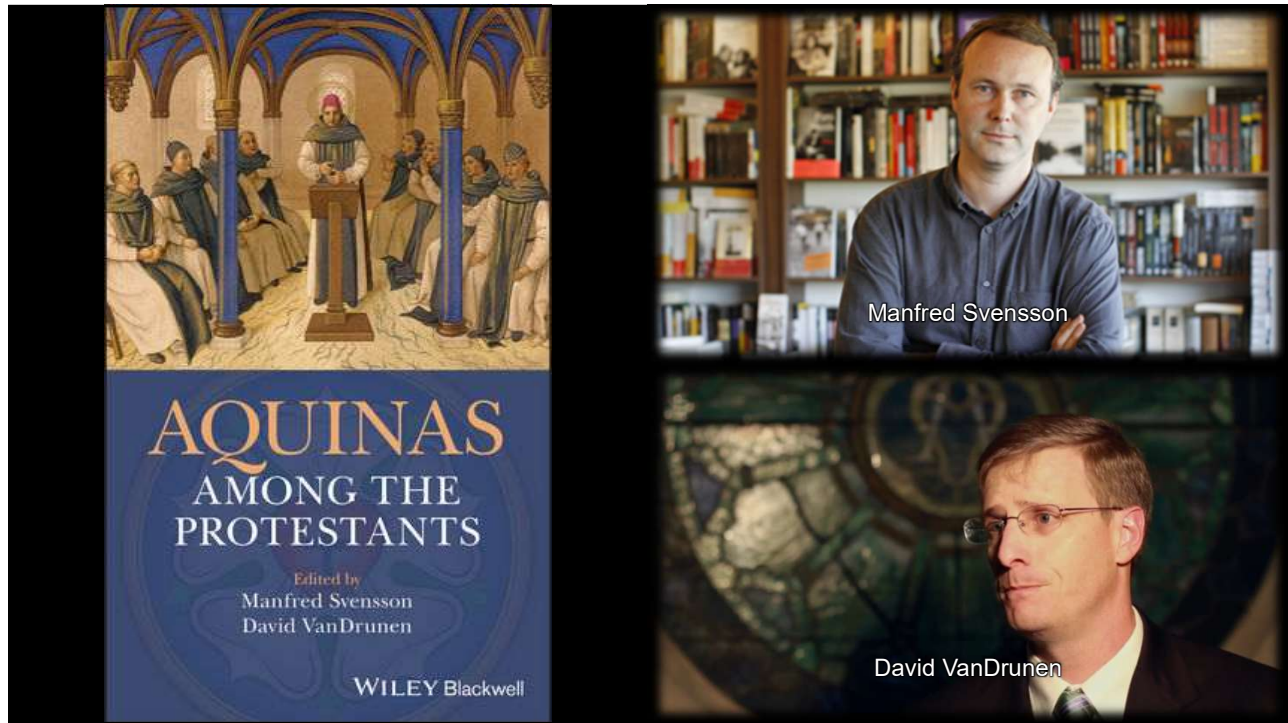
ESSENTIALS *in Christian Ethics*

**NATURAL LAW**

*A Short Companion*

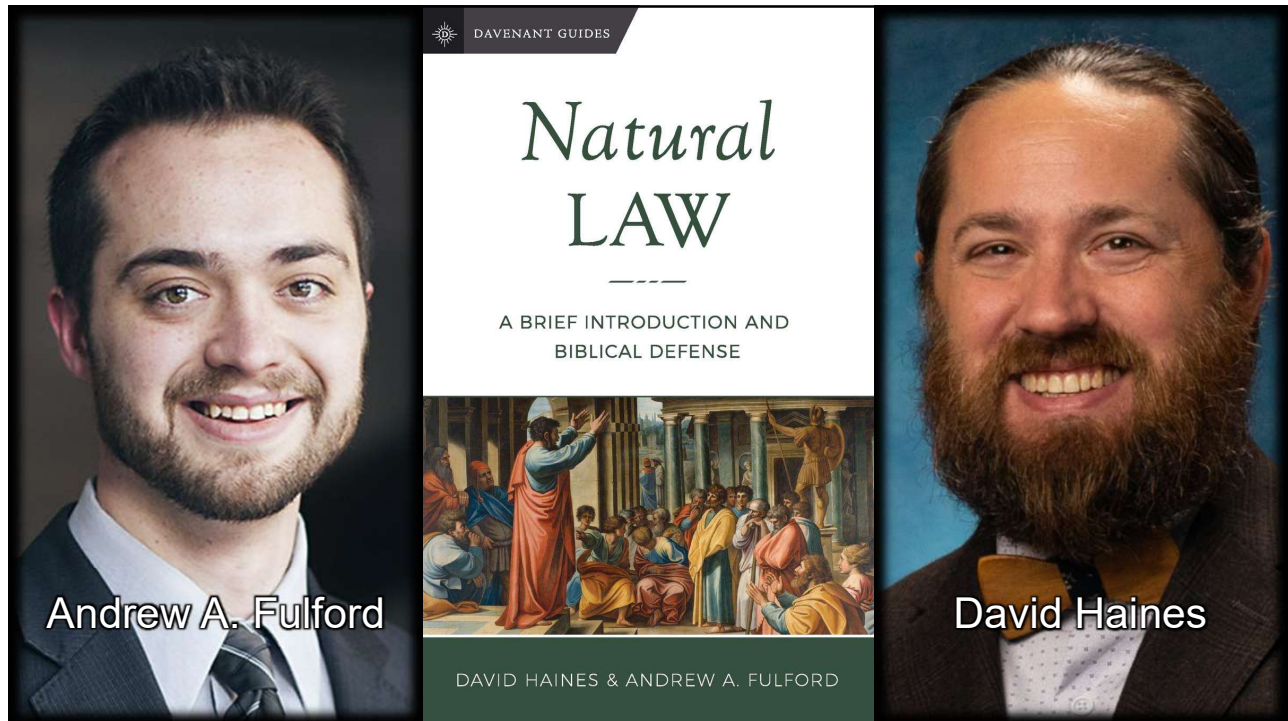
**David VanDrunen**

editors  
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Manfred Svensson

David VanDrunen



Andrew A. Fulford

David Haines

NATURAL LAW  
AND  
EVANGELICAL  
POLITICAL  
THOUGHT

*Edited by*  
JESSE COVINGTON, BRYAN MCGRAW,  
AND MICAH WATSON

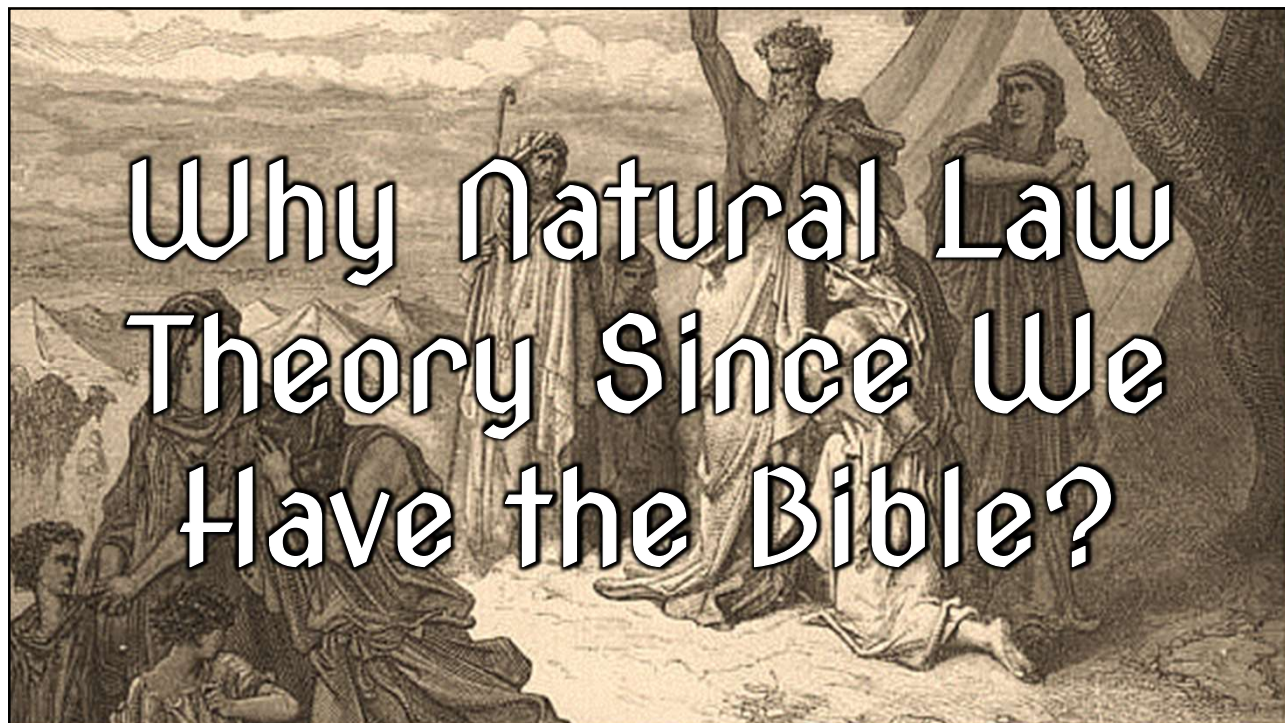
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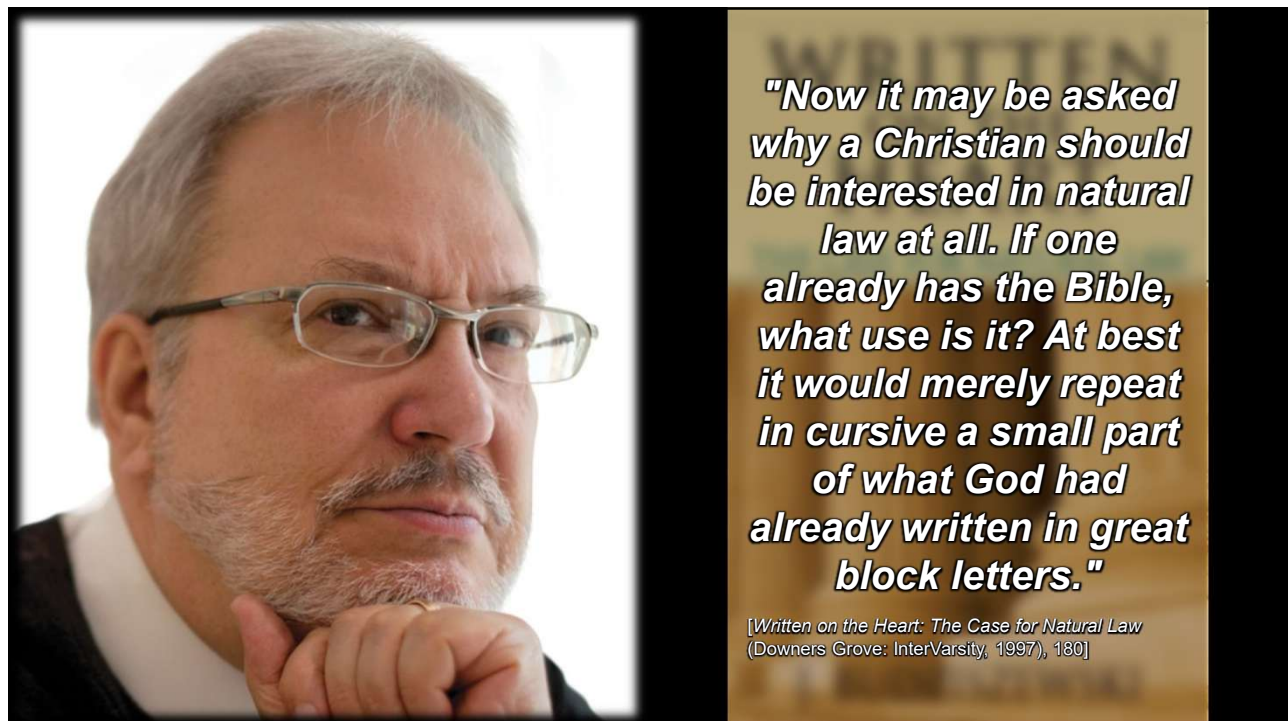
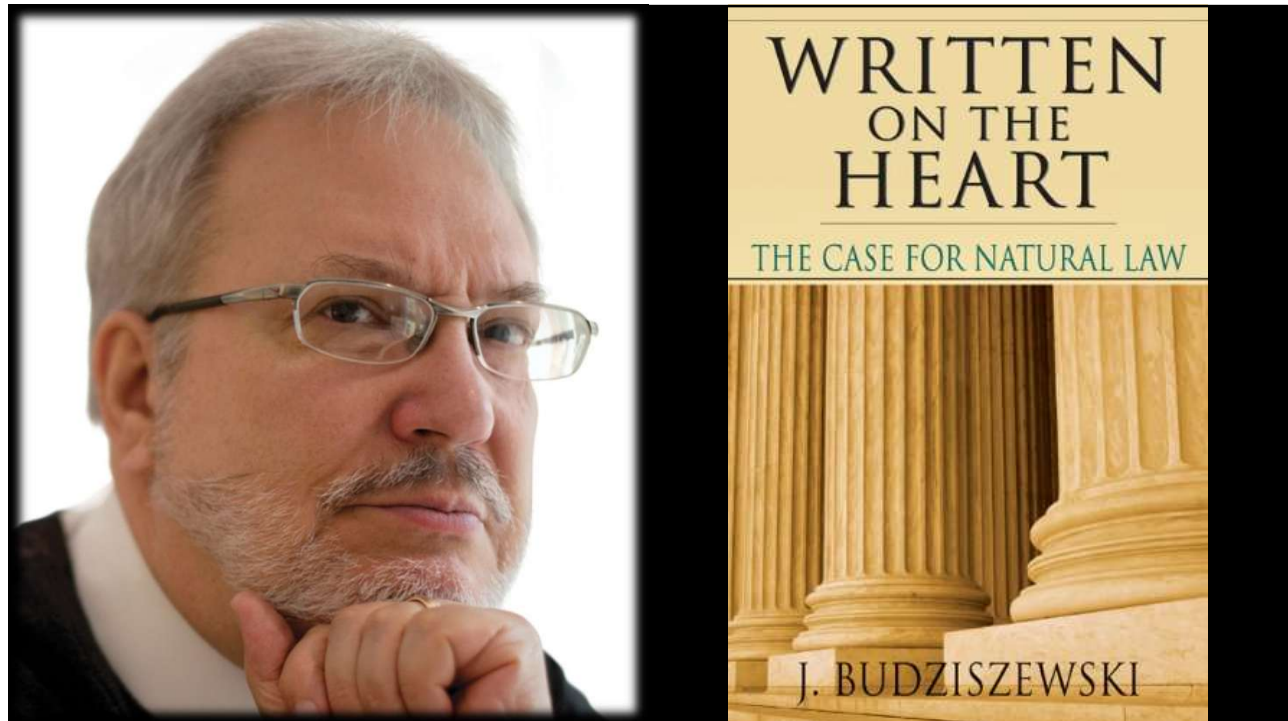
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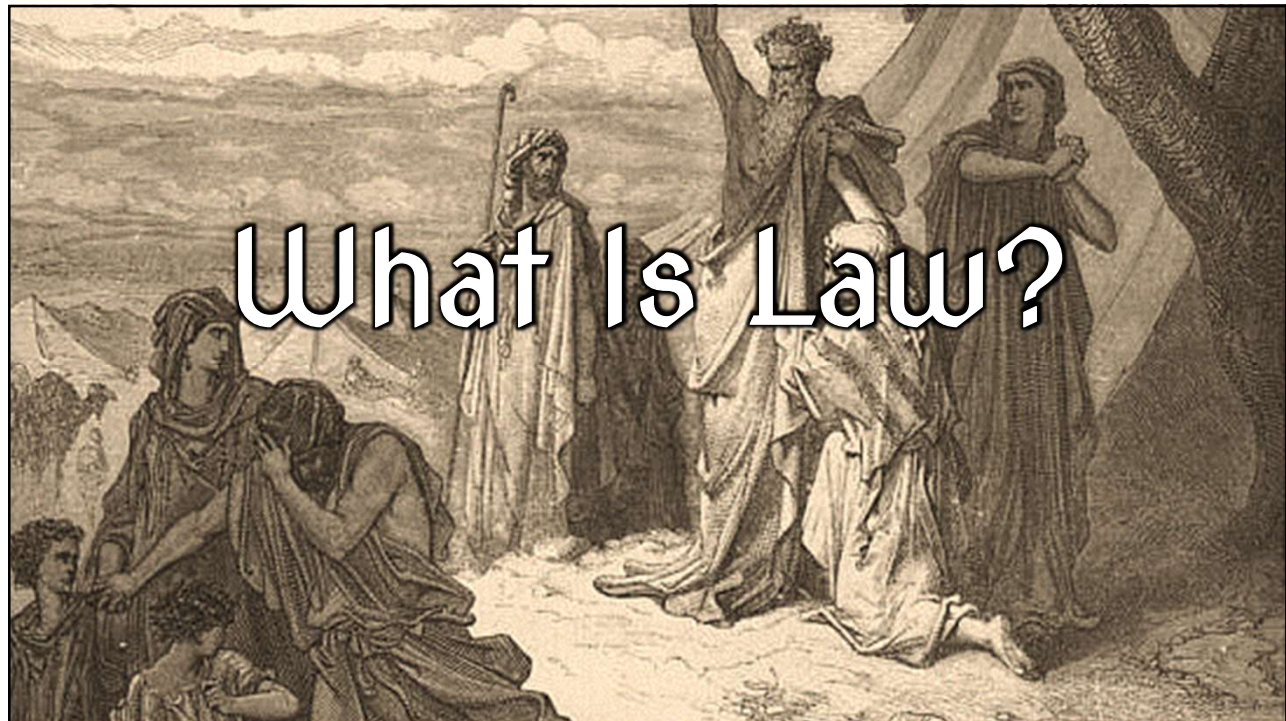




# Biblical Morality or Morality?

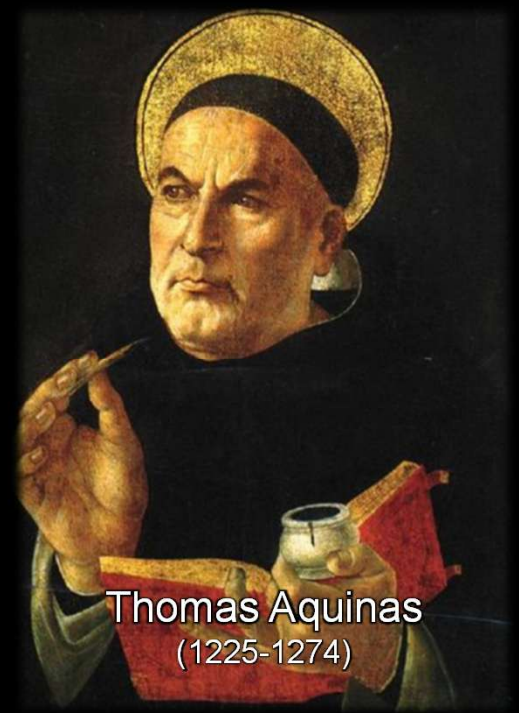


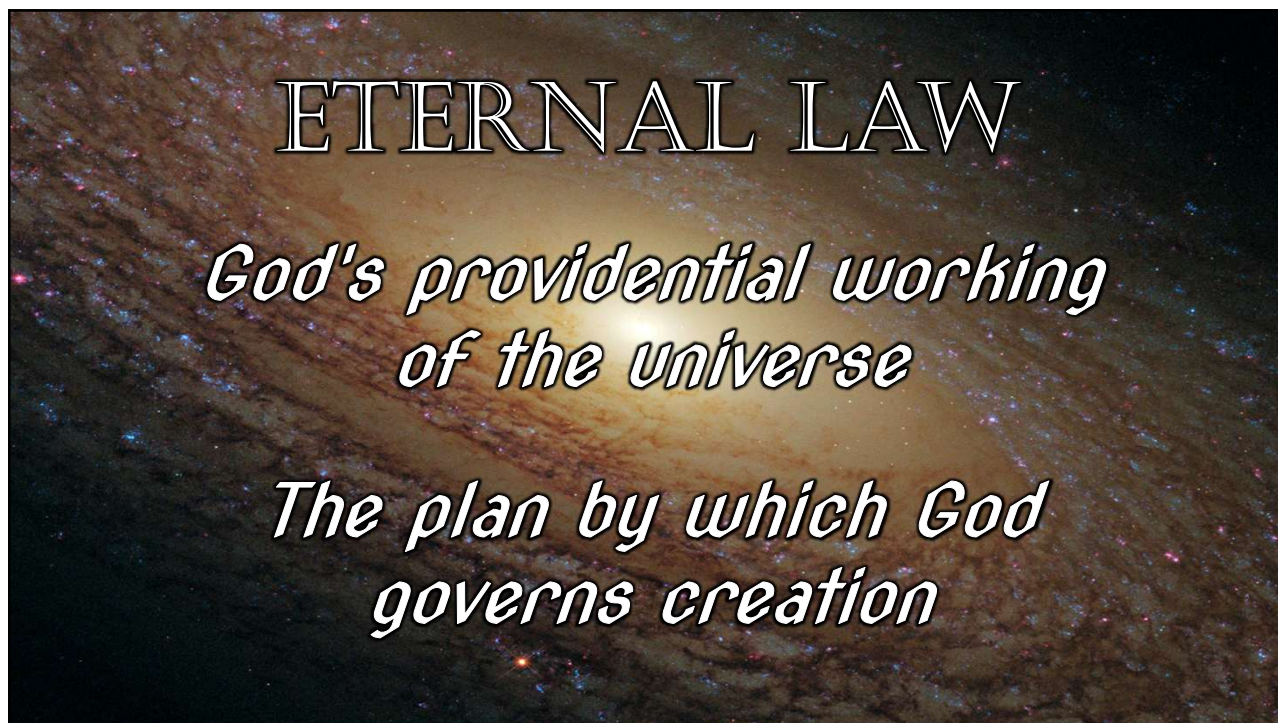
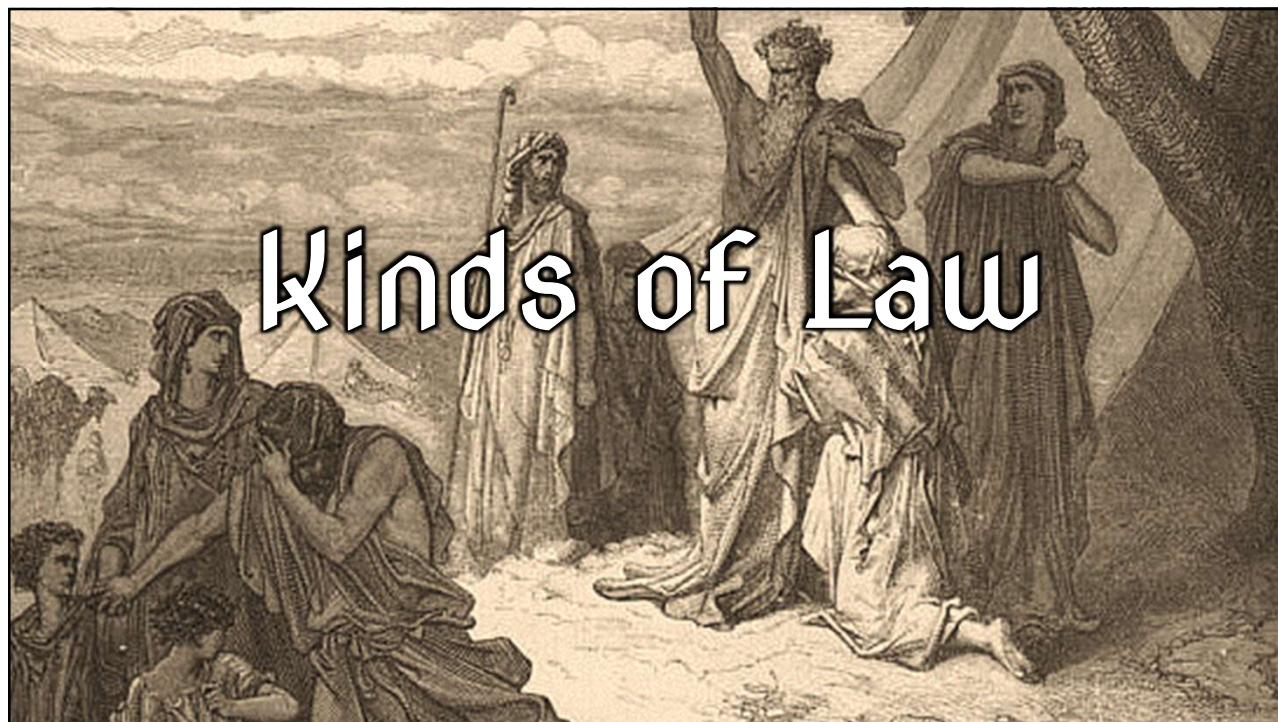
	<p><i>a righteous individual as part of a heavenly community</i></p> <p>☞ <b>Romans 4:4-5</b> ☞</p> <p><i>Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. {5} But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.</i>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



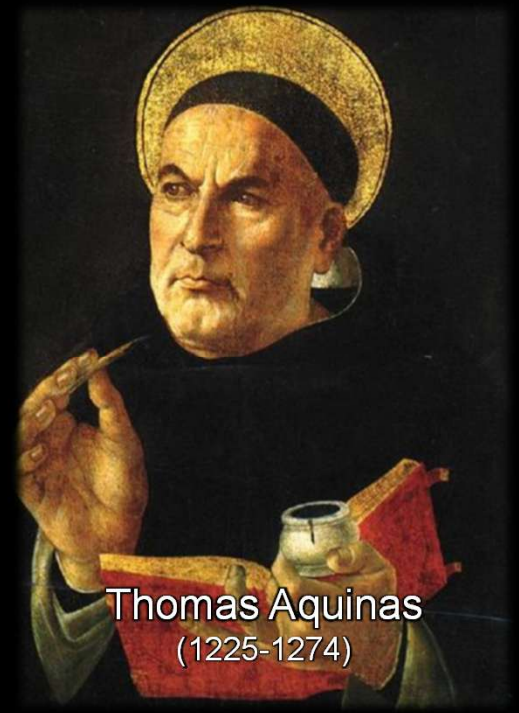
***"Thus from the four preceding articles, the definition of law may be gathered; and it is nothing else than **an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by him who has care of the community, and promulgated.**"***

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



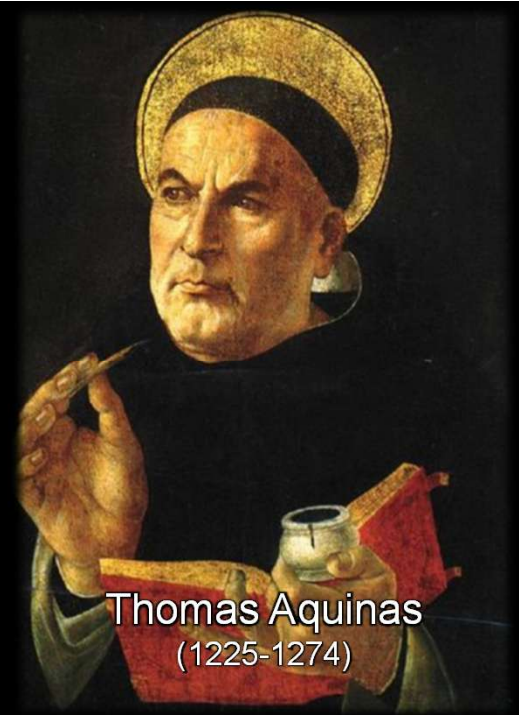


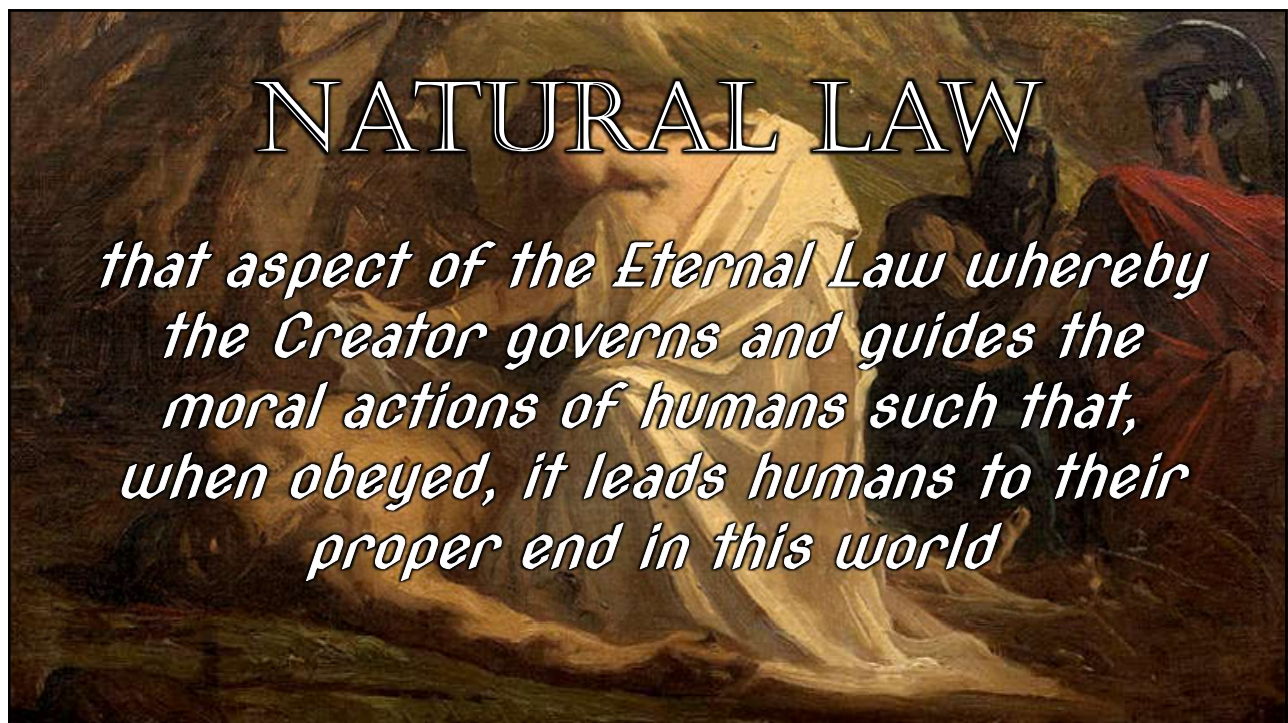
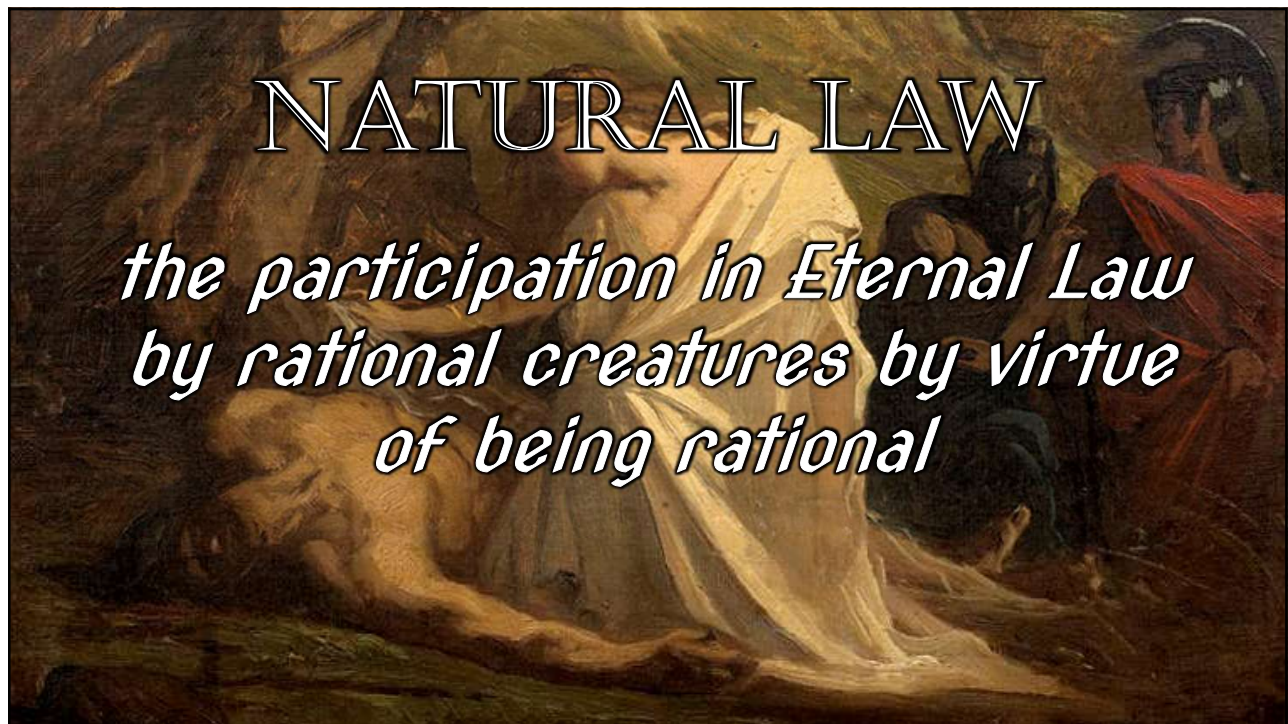
***"It is evident, granted that the world is ruled by Divine Providence ... that the whole community of the universe is governed by Divine Reason. Wherefore the very Idea of the government of things in God the Ruler of the universe, has the nature of a law."***

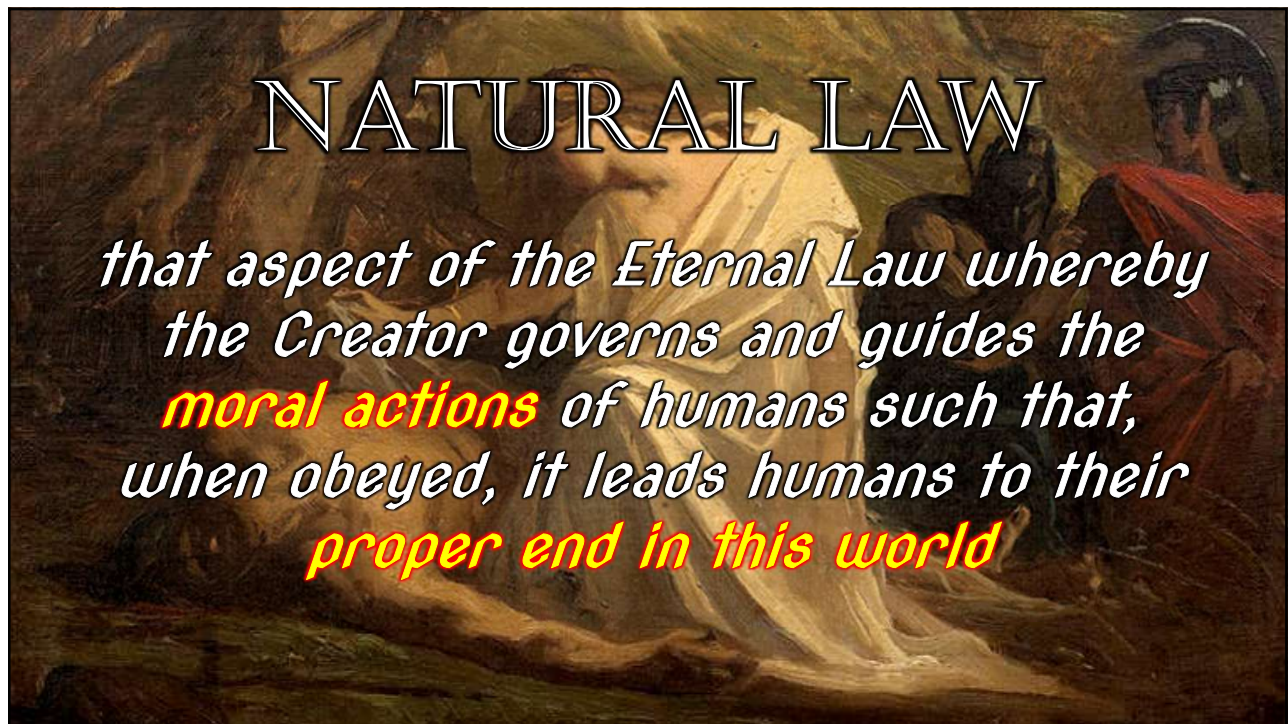


***"And since the Divine Reason's conception of things is not subject to time but is eternal, according to Prov. viii, 23, therefore it is that this kind of law must be called eternal."***

[S7-II Q91, Art. 1]







# NATURAL LAW

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

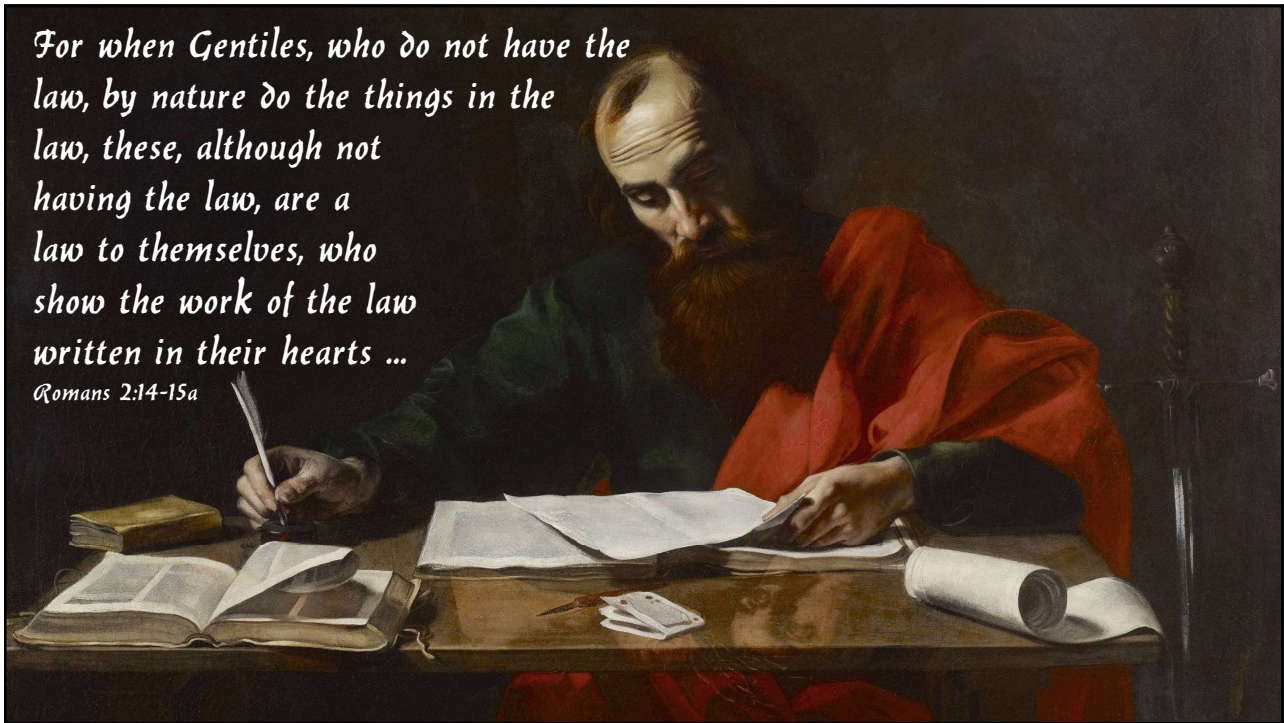


# NATURAL LAW

***discoverable by reason***

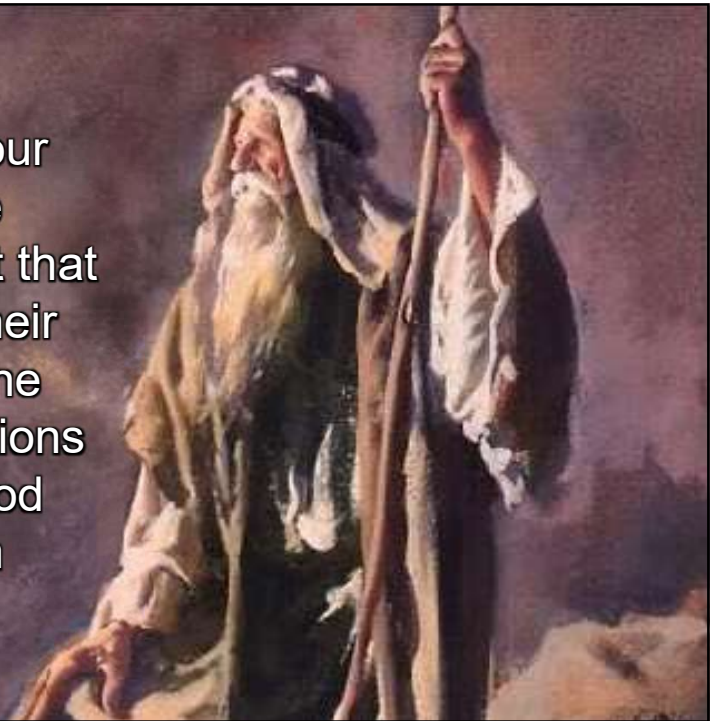
*For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts ...*

*Romans 2:14-15a*

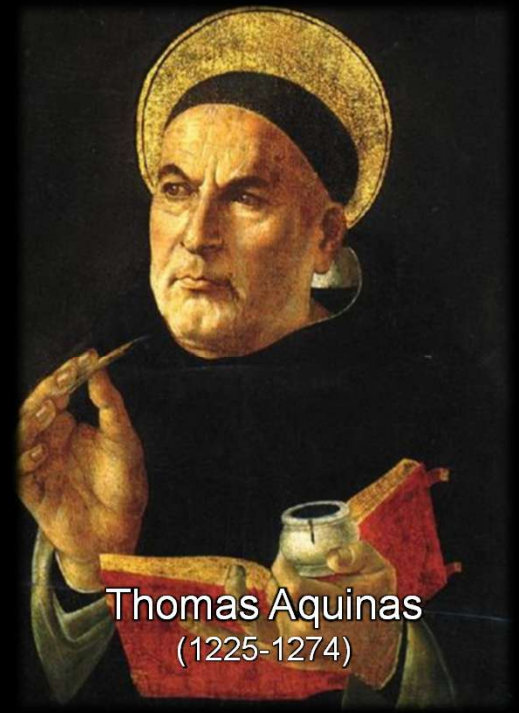


☞ Deut. 9:5 ☞

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

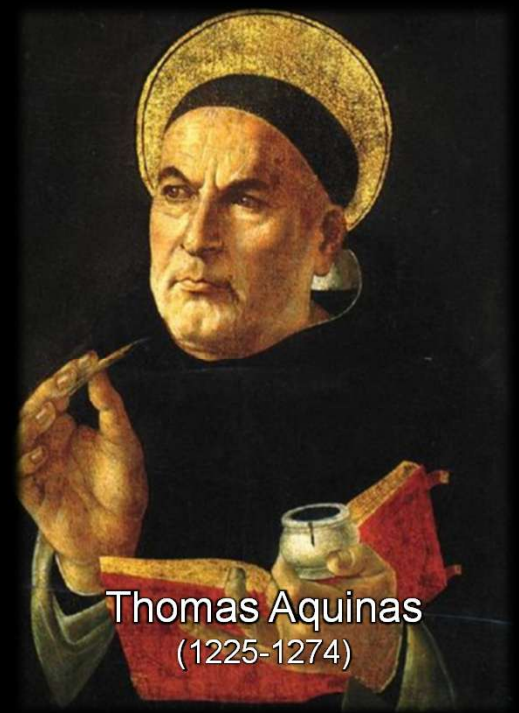


***"It is evident that all things partake somewhat of the eternal law, in so far as, namely, from its being imprinted on them, they derive their respective inclinations to their proper acts and ends.***



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

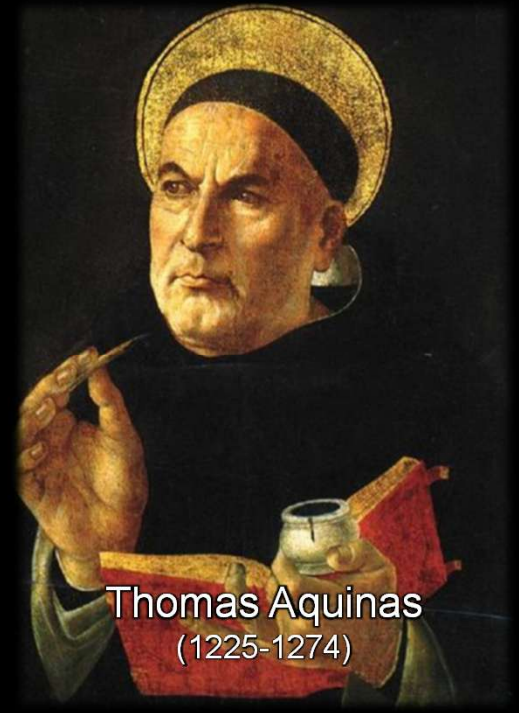
***"Now among all others, the rational creature is subject to Divine providence in the most excellent way, in so far as it partakes of a share of providence, by being provident both for itself and for others.***



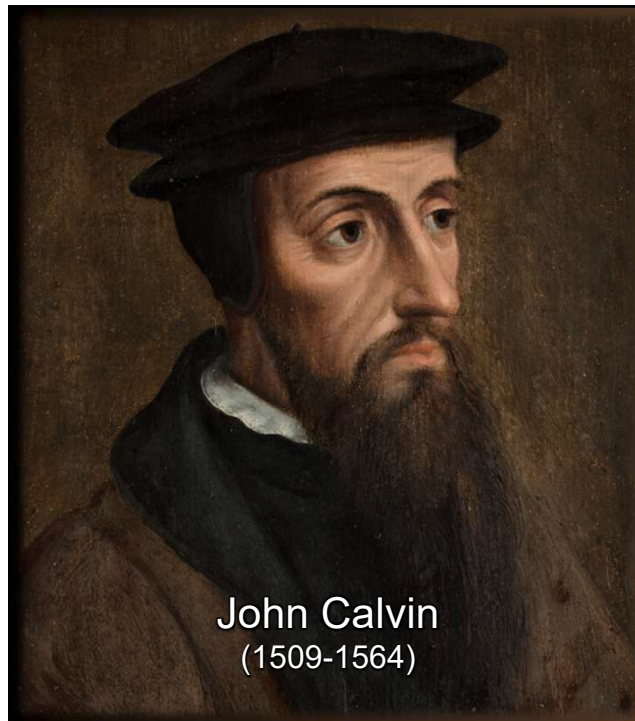
Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

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

[S7 HI Q91, Art. 2]



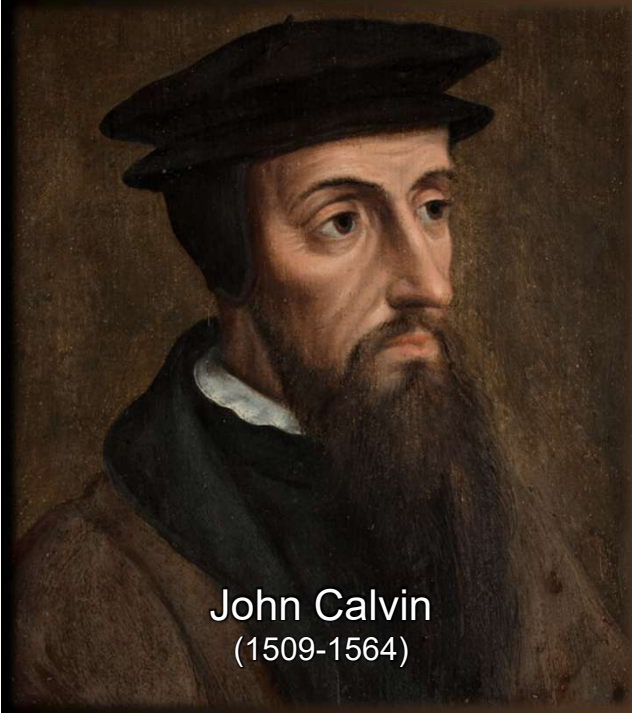
**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)



**John Calvin**  
(1509-1564)

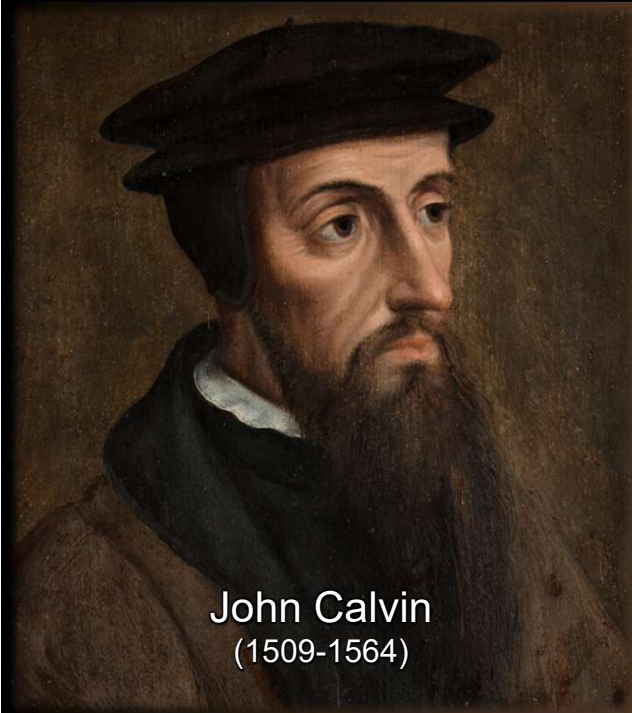
***"Nothing, indeed, is more common, than for man to be sufficiently instructed in a right course of conduct by natural law, of which the Apostle here speaks [in Rom. 2:14-15]."***

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

A portrait of John Calvin, a French theologian, philosopher, and reformer. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a dark cap and a dark robe with a white collar. He has a long, dark beard and is looking slightly to the right.

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

John Calvin  
(1509-1564)

A portrait of John Calvin, a French theologian, philosopher, and reformer. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a dark cap and a dark robe with a white collar. He has a long, dark beard and is looking slightly to the right.

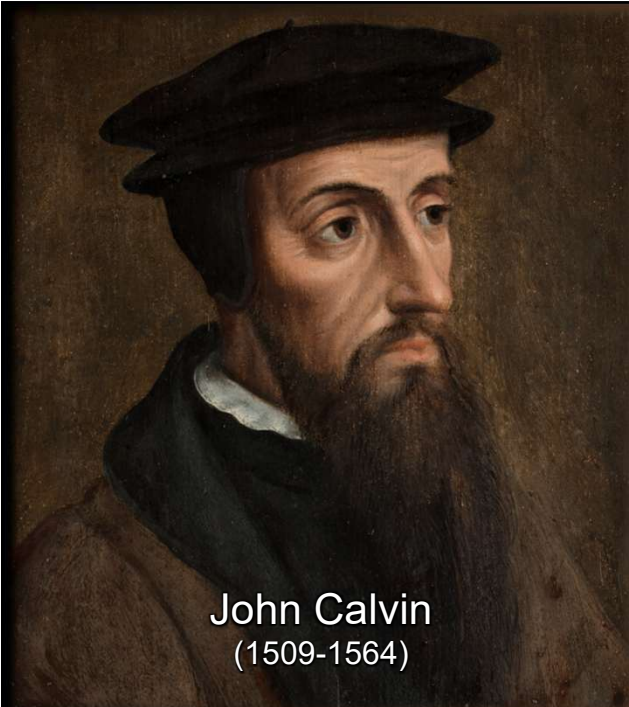
***"Hence it is that every individual understands how human societies must be regulated by laws, and also is able to comprehend the principles of those laws."***

John Calvin  
(1509-1564)



John Calvin  
(1509-1564)

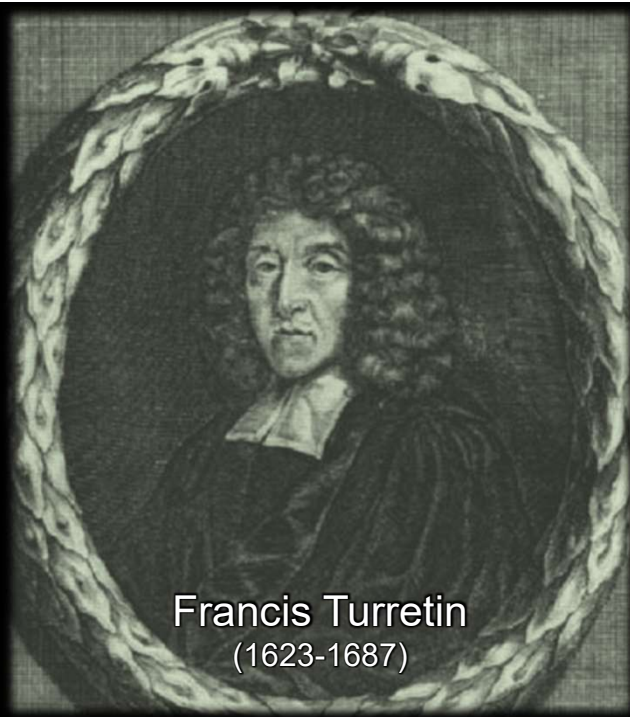
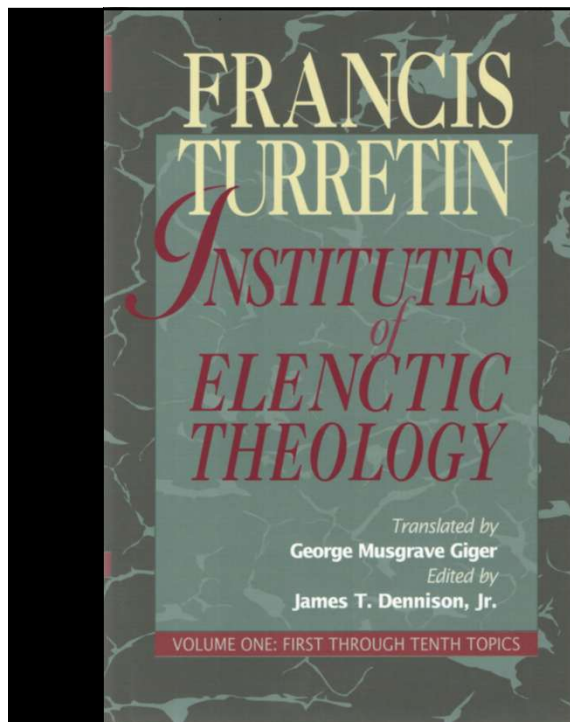
***"Hence the universal agreement in regard to such subjects, both among nations and individuals, the seeds of them being implanted in the breasts of all without a teacher or lawgiver. ... It is true, that some principle of civil order is impressed on all."***



John Calvin  
(1509-1564)

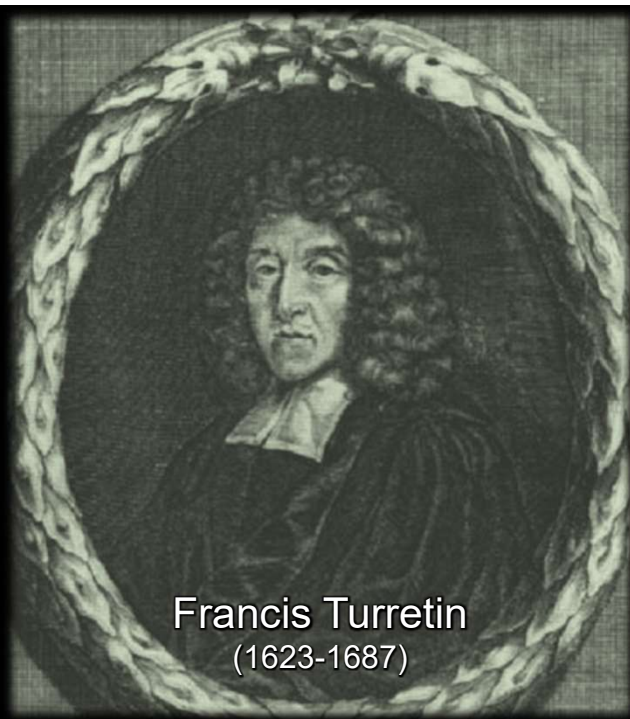
***"And this is ample proof that, in regard to the constitution of the present life, no man is devoid of the light of reason."***

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



Francis Turretin  
(1623-1687)

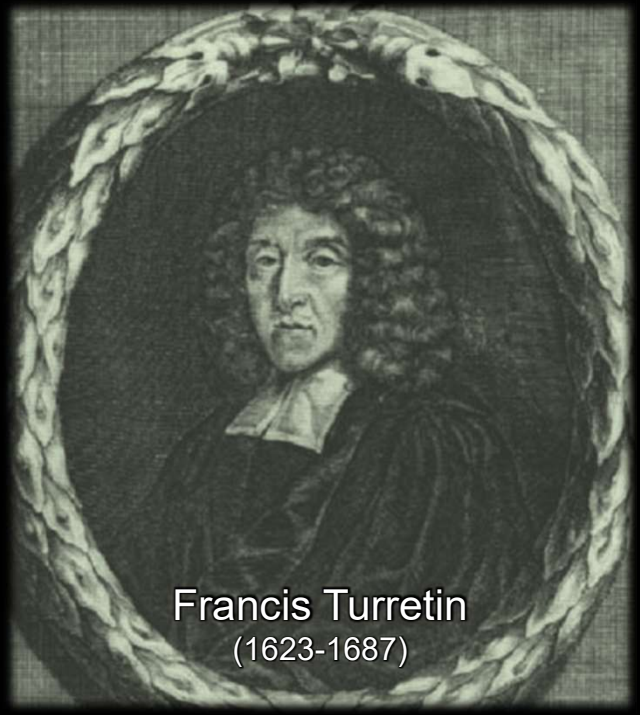
*"Natural law is taken strictly and properly for the practical rule of moral duties to which men are bound by nature. ... The orthodox ... affirm that there is a natural law ... arising ... from a divine obligation being impressed by God upon the conscience of man in his very creation ... drawn from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



Francis Turretin  
(1623-1687)

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

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



**Francis Turretin**  
(1623-1687)

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

**Martin Luther King, Jr.**  
(1929-1968)

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

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

Martin Luther King, Jr.  
(1929-1968)

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

David VanDrunen

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

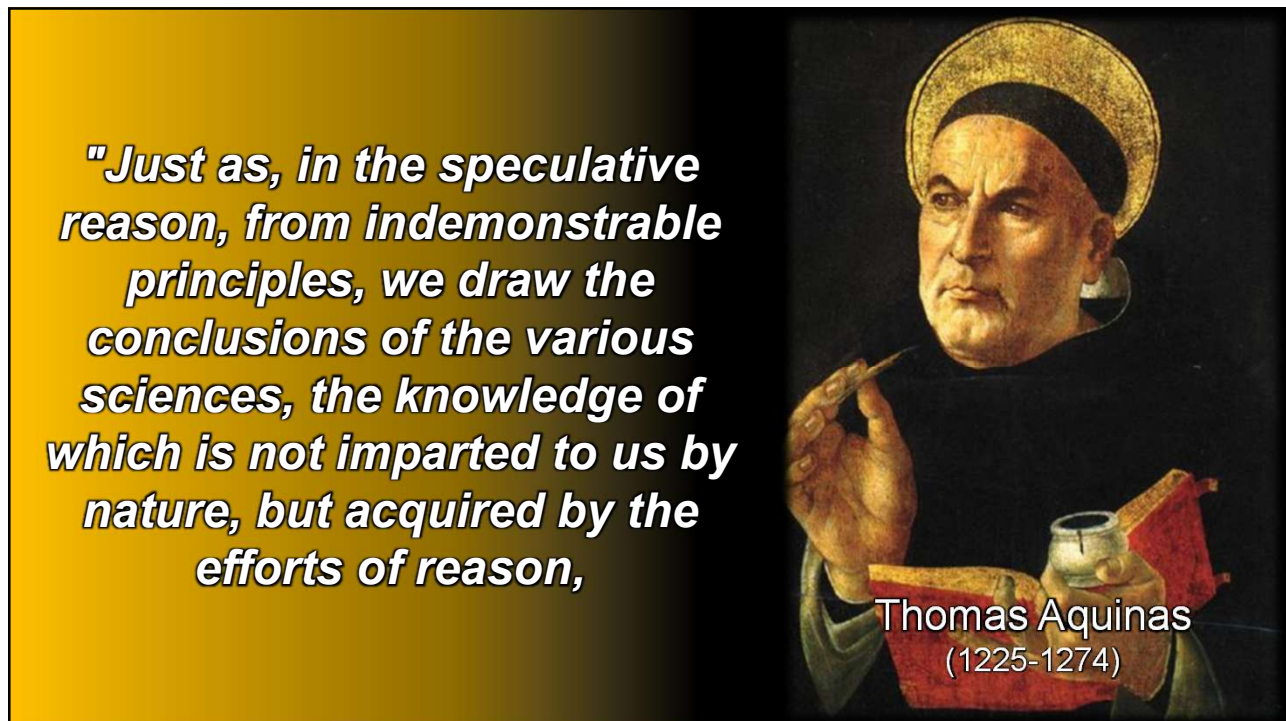
[David VanDrunen, "Medieval Natural Law and the Reformation: A Comparison of Aquinas and Calvin," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 80 (2006): 77-98]



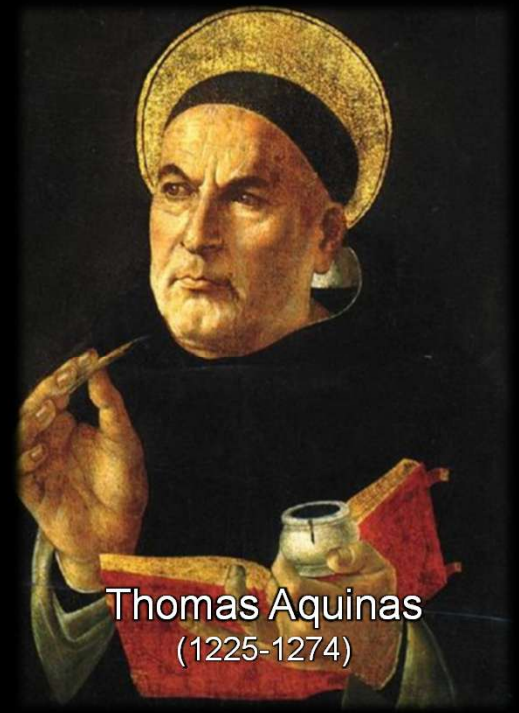
☞ John T. McNeill (1885-1975) ☞

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

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

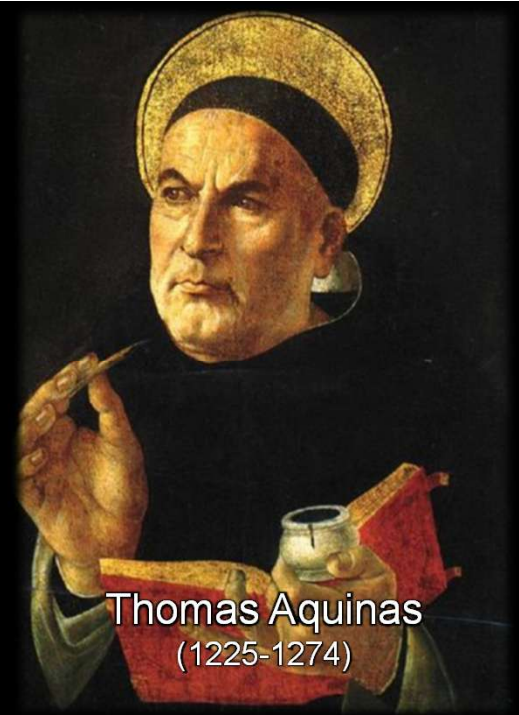


***"so too it is from the precepts of the natural law, as from general and indemonstrable principles, that the human reason needs to proceed to the more particular determinations of certain matters.***



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

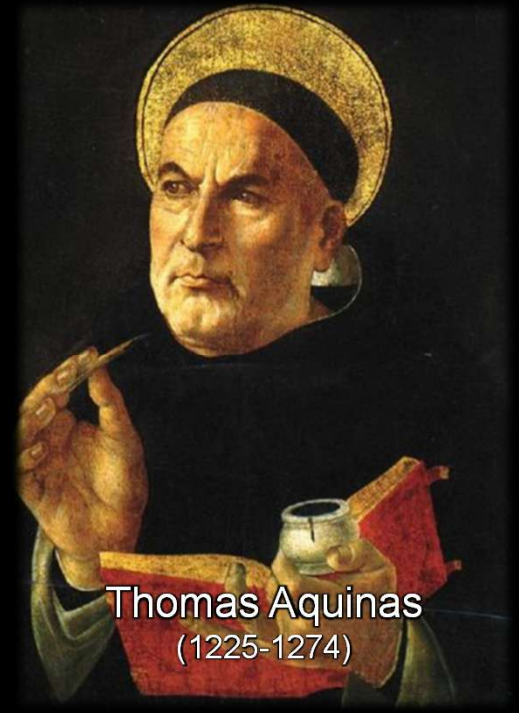
***"The practical reason is concerned with practical matters, which are singular and contingent: but not with necessary things, with which the speculative reason is concerned.***



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

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

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

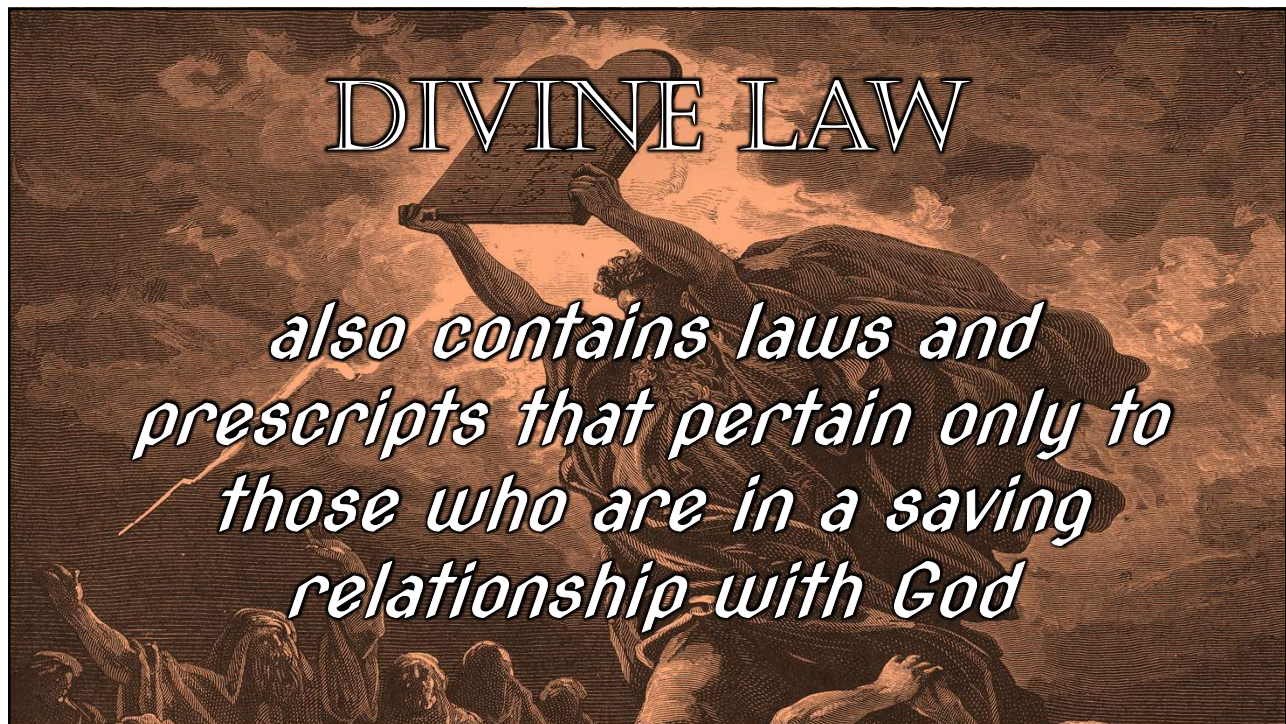


Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

## DIVINE LAW

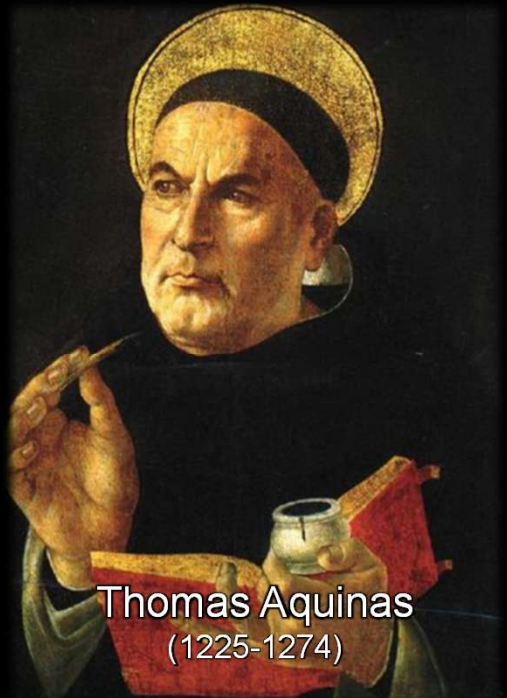
*the revelation of God's law through Scripture to believers overlaps with the Natural Law*





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

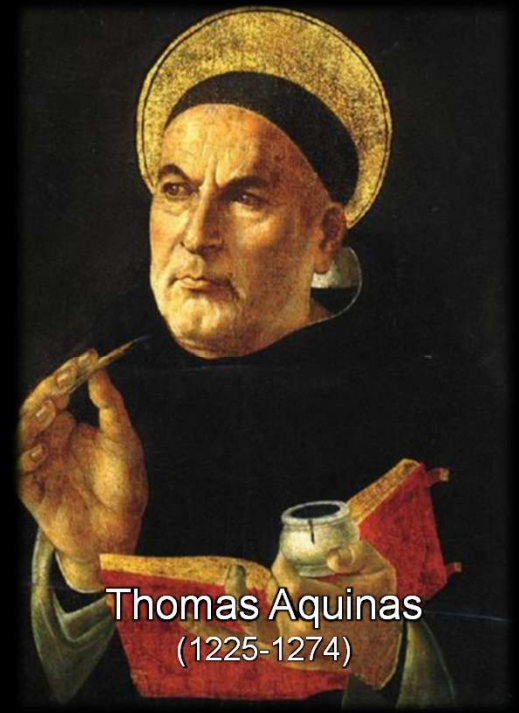
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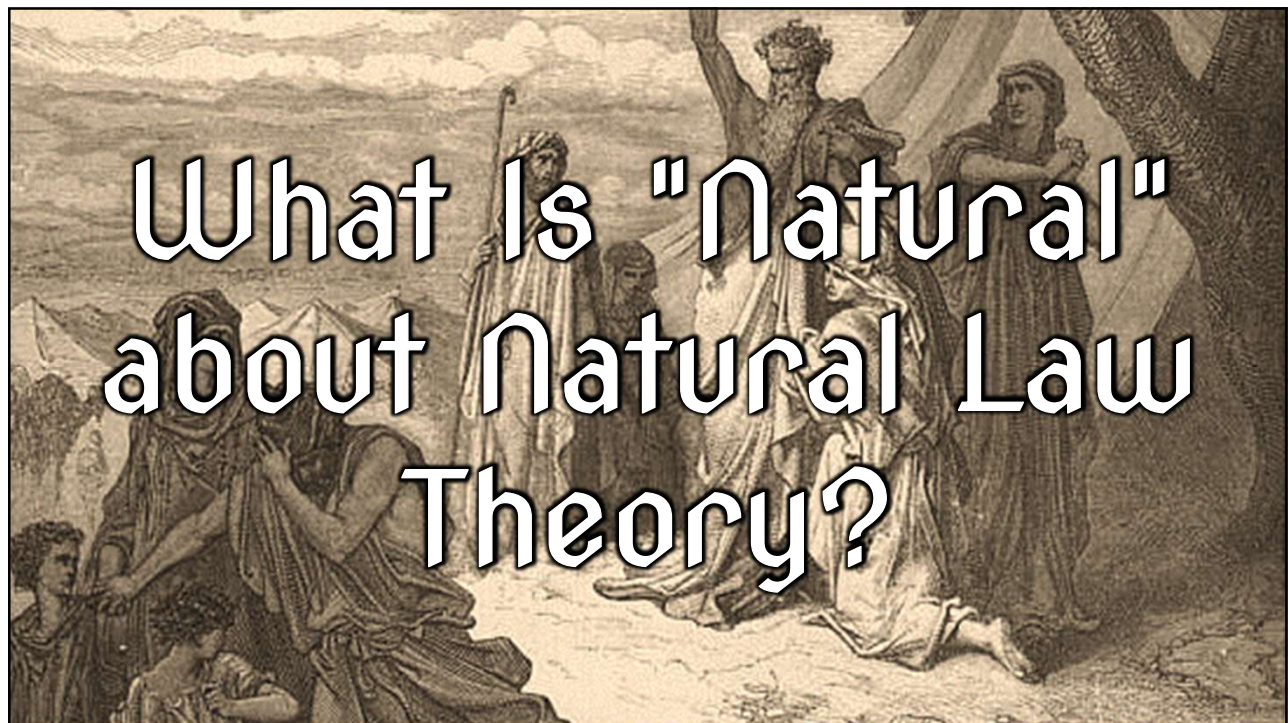
Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

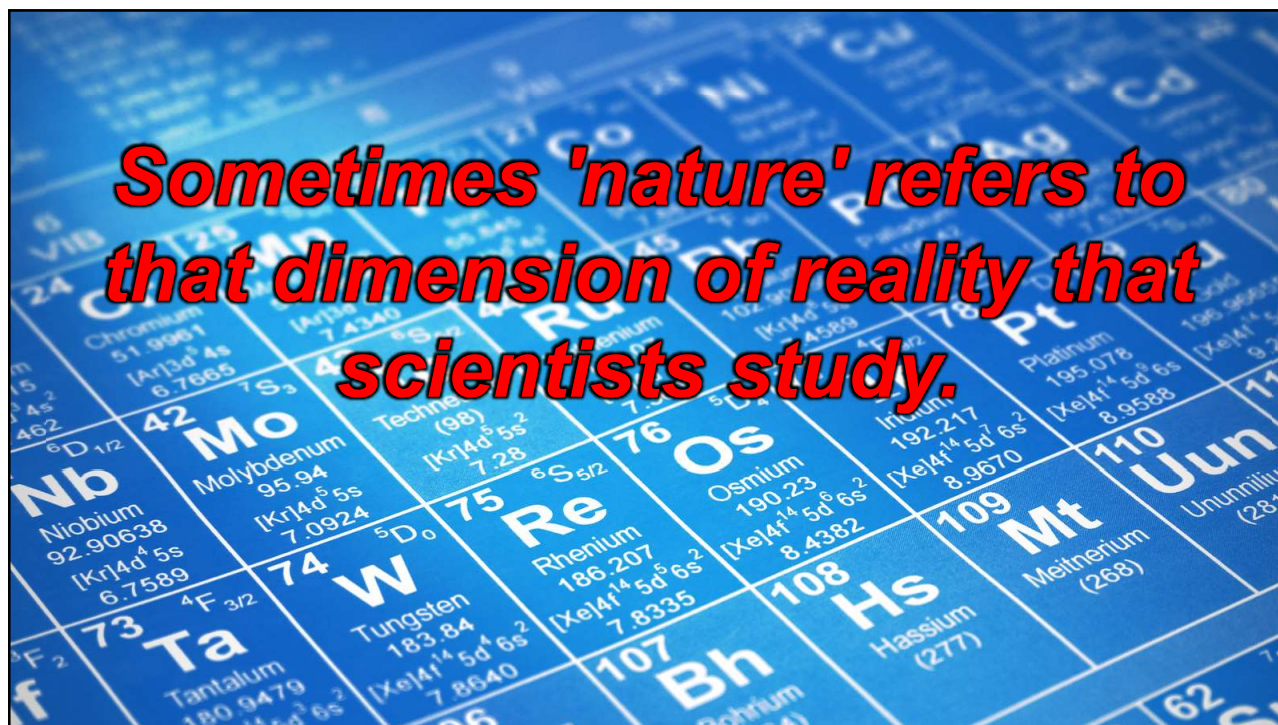
***"But since man is ordained to an end of eternal happiness which is inproportionate to man's natural faculty ... it was necessary that, besides the natural and the human law, man should be directed to his end by a law given by God."***

*(ST I-II Q91, Art. 4)*

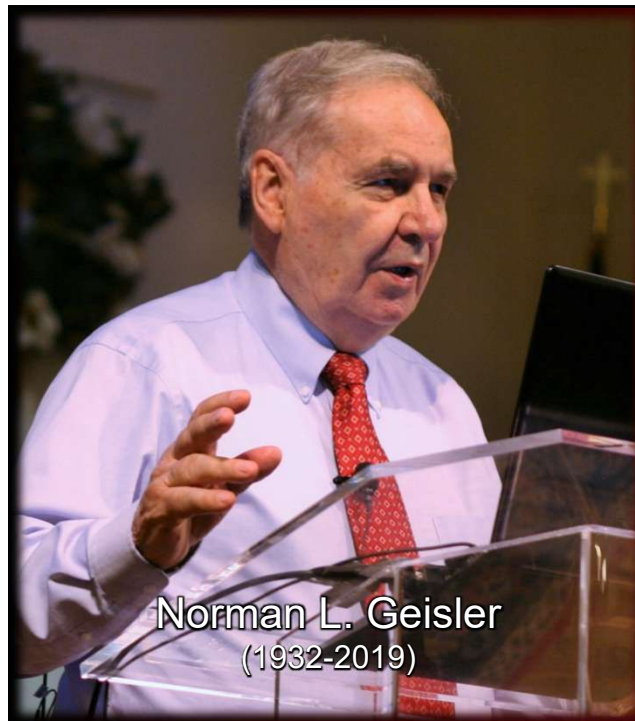
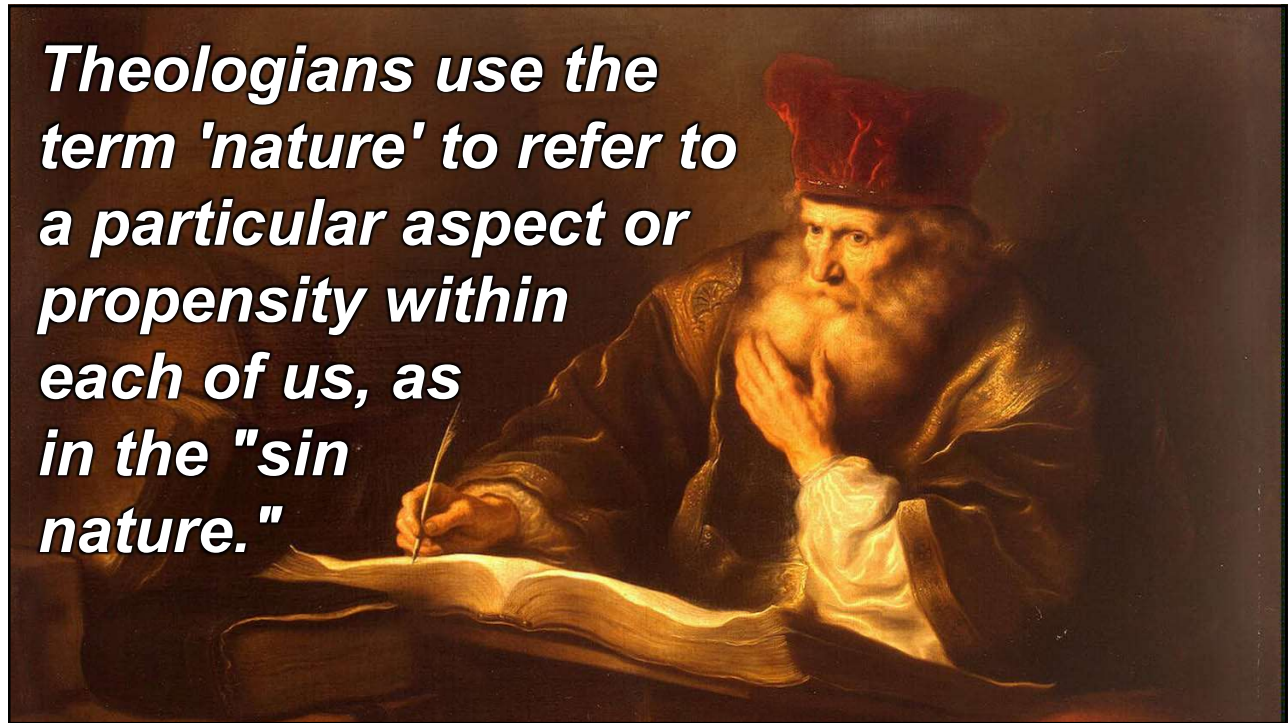


Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)





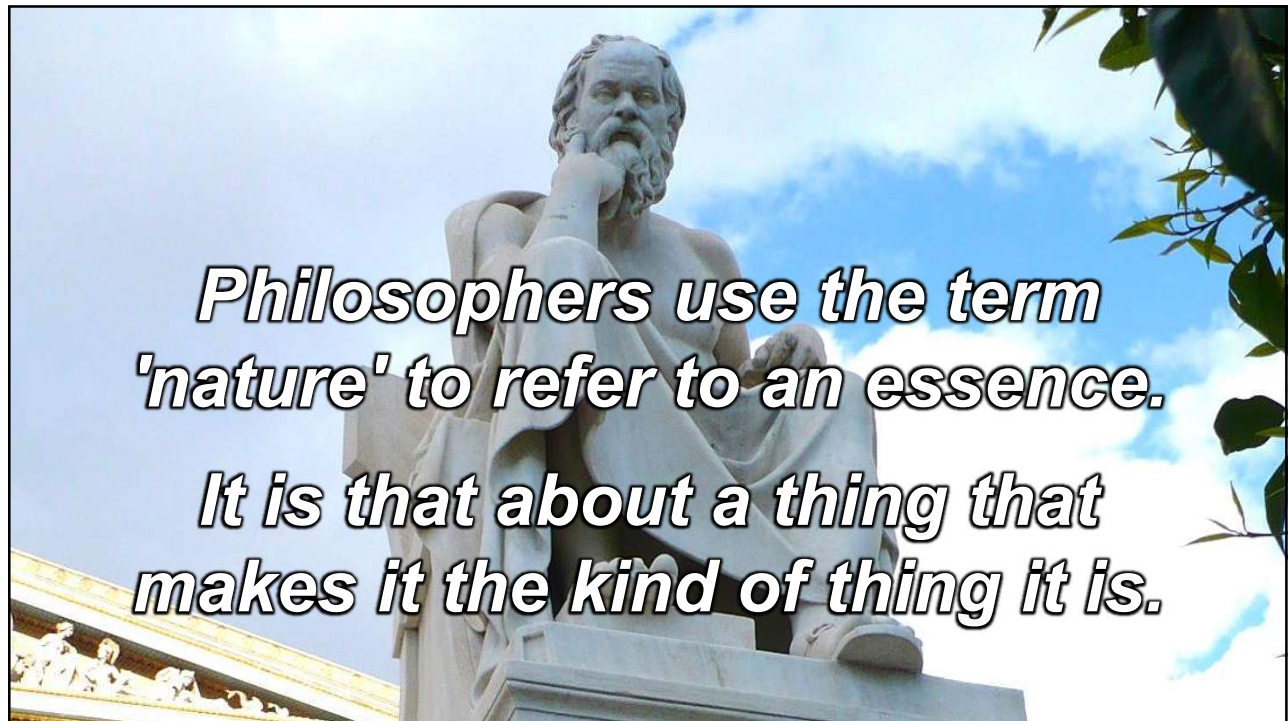
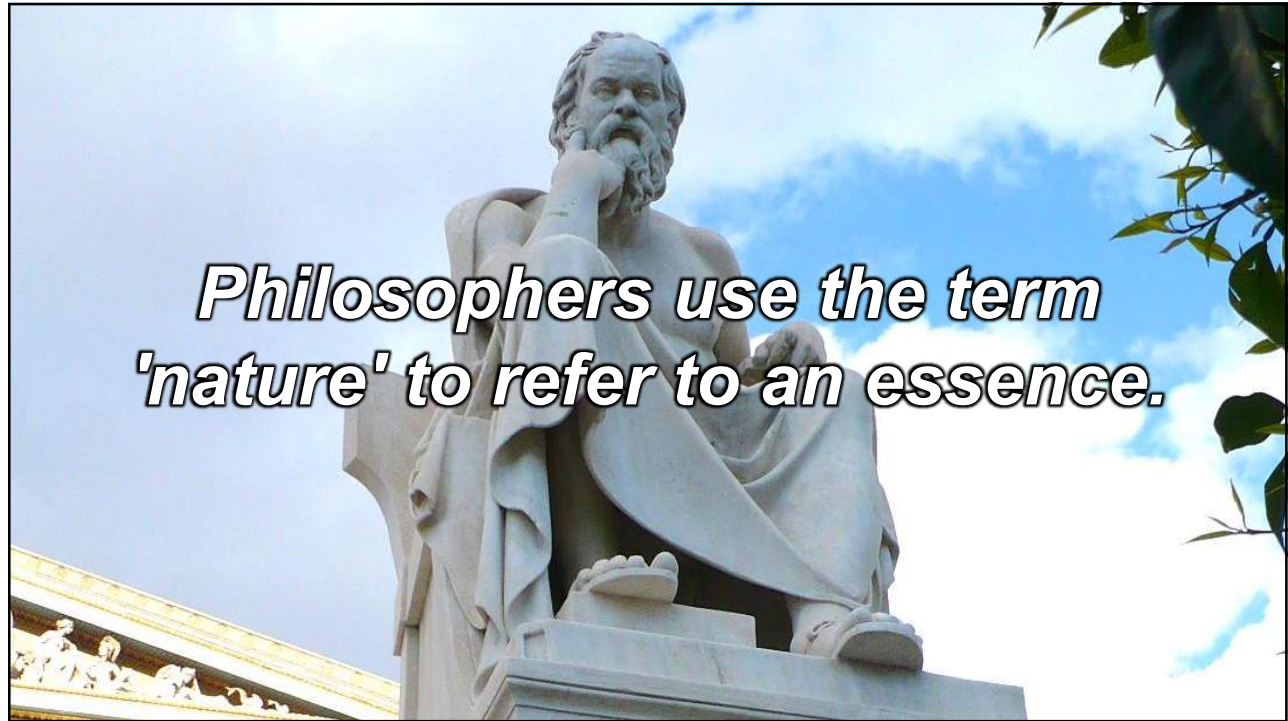
***Theologians use the term 'nature' to refer to a particular aspect or propensity within each of us, as in the "sin nature."***



**Norman L. Geisler**  
(1932-2019)

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

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



# "What-ness"

*with respect to a thing's operations:*

*Nature*

*with respect to a thing's matter:*

*Form*

*with respect to a thing's accidents:*

*Substance*

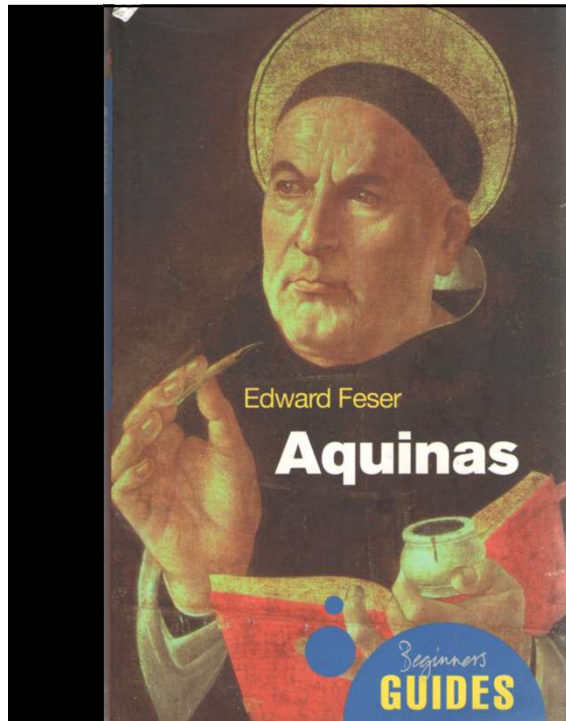
*with respect to a thing's intellect:*

*Quiddity*

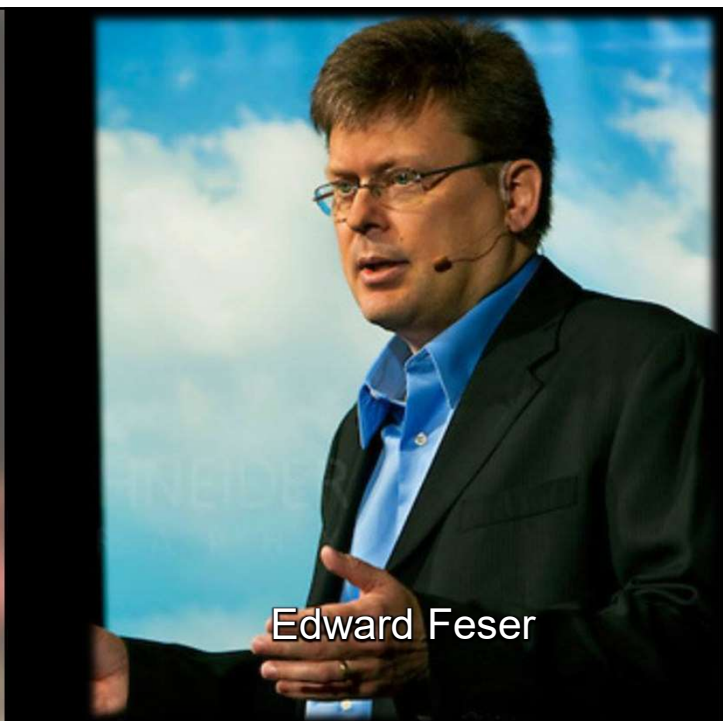
*with respect to a thing's existence:*

*Essence*

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



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

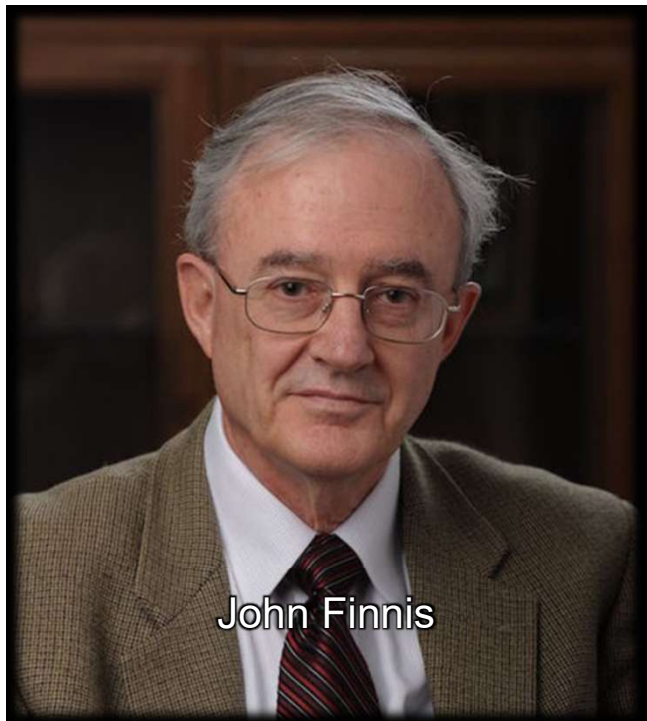


***"Nothing could be further from the spirit of Thomas, for whom natural law ... is 'natural' precisely because it derives from human nature, conceived of in Aristotelian essentialist terms."***

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



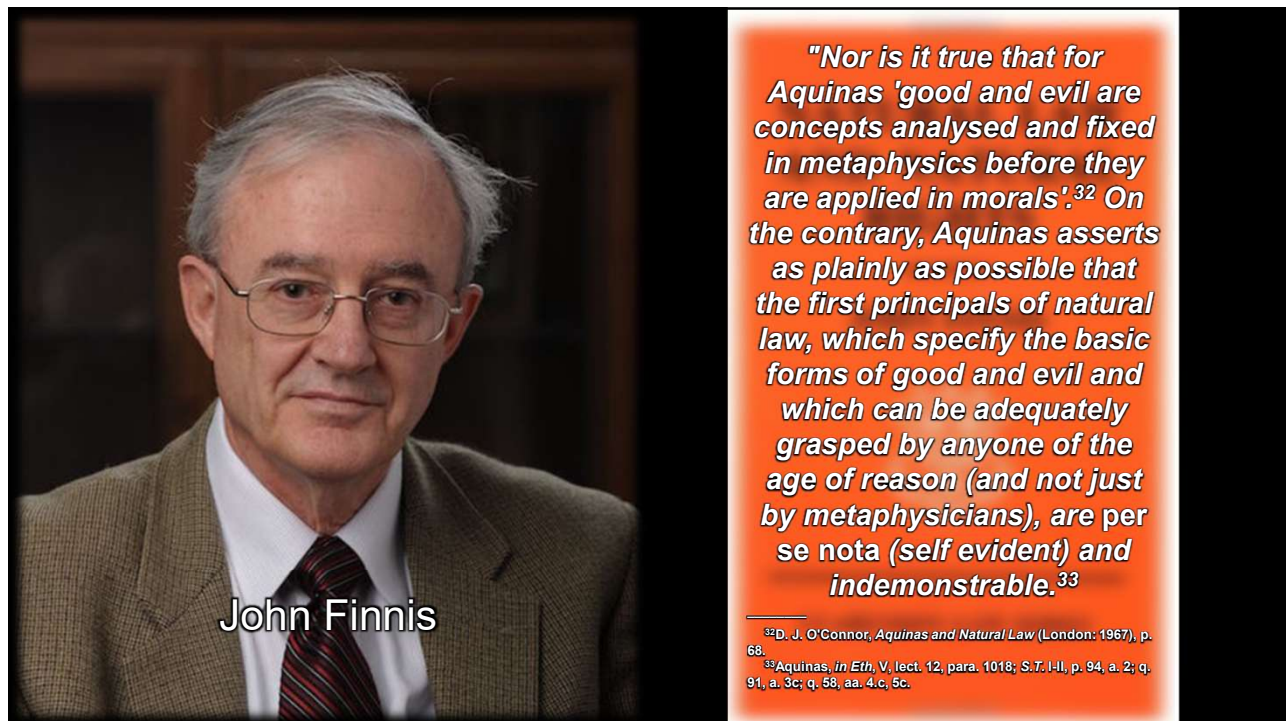
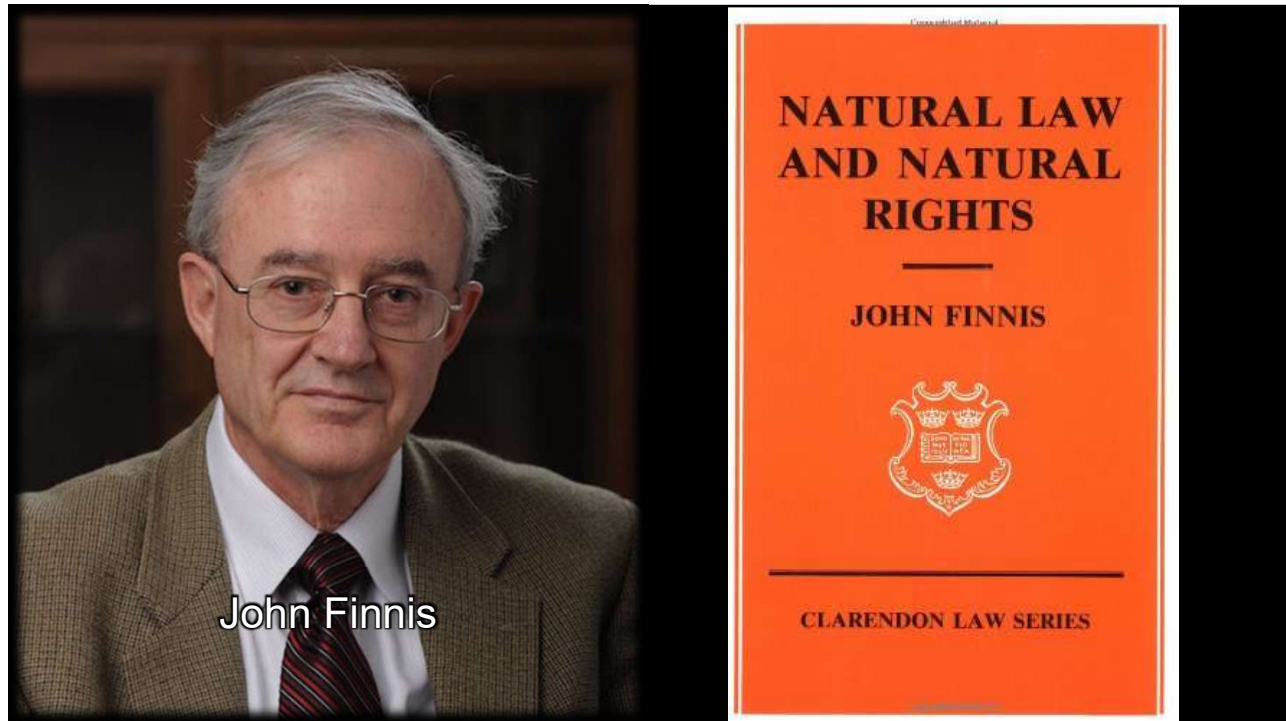
Edward Feser




John Finnis



Germain Grisez  
(1929-2018)



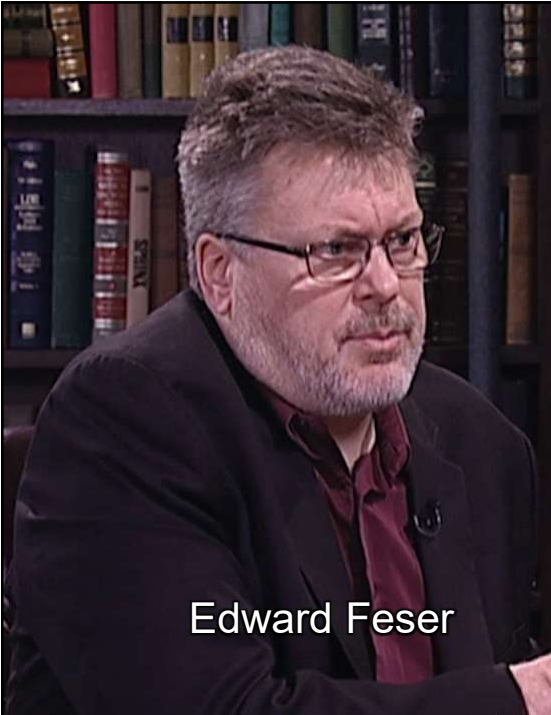


John Finnis

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

<sup>34</sup>Cf. the objections of Margaret MacDonald, 'Natural Rights' in P. Laslett (ed.), *Philosophy, Politics and Society* (Oxford: 1956), 35 at p. 44.  
<sup>35</sup>Pace Strauss, *Natural Right and history*, pp. 7-8.

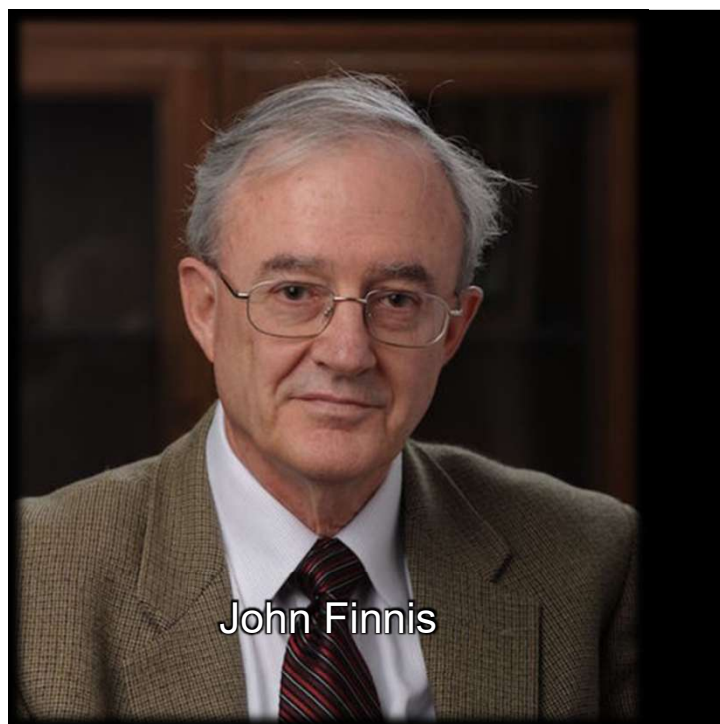
[John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, 33-34)]



Edward Feser

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

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



John Finnis

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>33</sup>Aquinas, *in Eth.*, V, lect. 12, para. 1018; S.T. I-II, p. 94, a. 2; q. 91, a. 3c; q. 98, aa. 4.c, 5c.

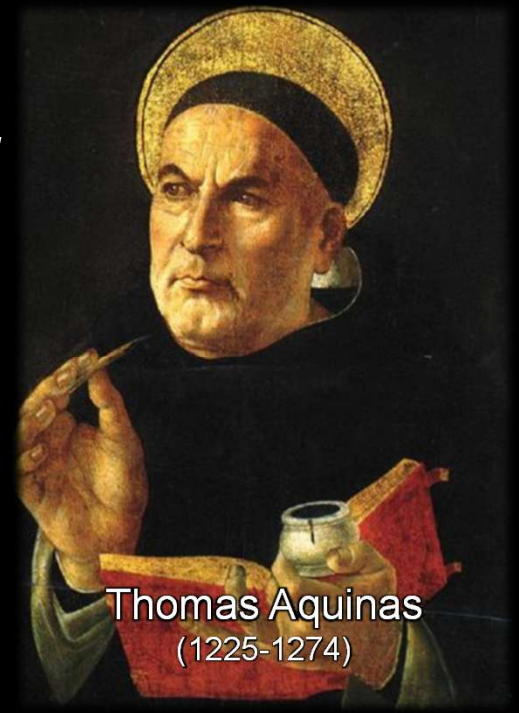
*"Good is the first thing that falls under the apprehension of the **practical reason**, which is directed at action."*

[ST I-II, Q94, art. 2]



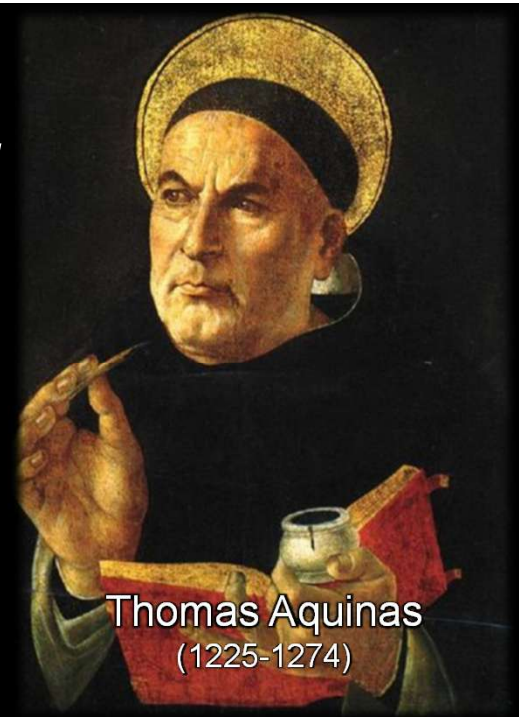
Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

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



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

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



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

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

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

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

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

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

[ST, I, 2, 1]



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>35</sup>Pace Strauss, *Natural Right and history*, pp. 7-8.

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

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

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

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<sup>35</sup>Pace Strauss, *Natural Right and history*, pp. 7-8.

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

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

[ST, I, 2, 1]



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

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

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

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

<sup>35</sup>Pace Strauss, *Natural Right and history*, pp. 7-8.

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>35</sup>Pace Strauss, *Natural Right and history*, pp. 7-8.

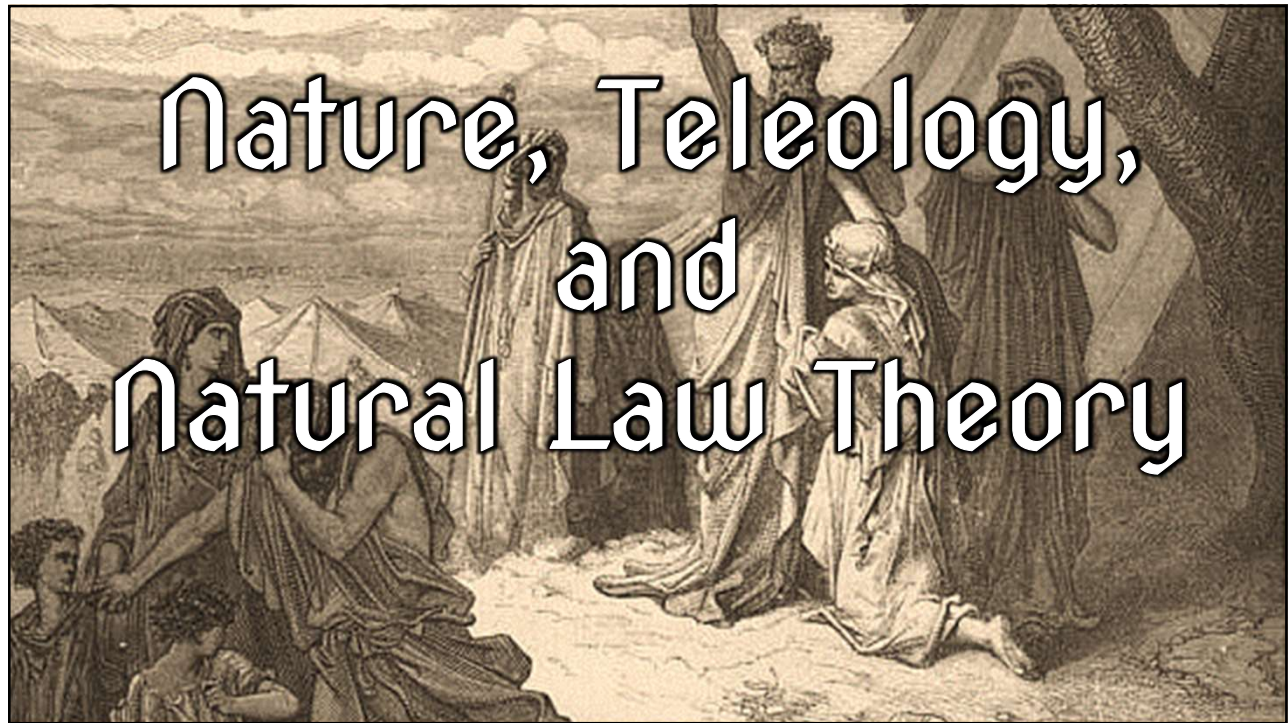
[John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, 33-34)]

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

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

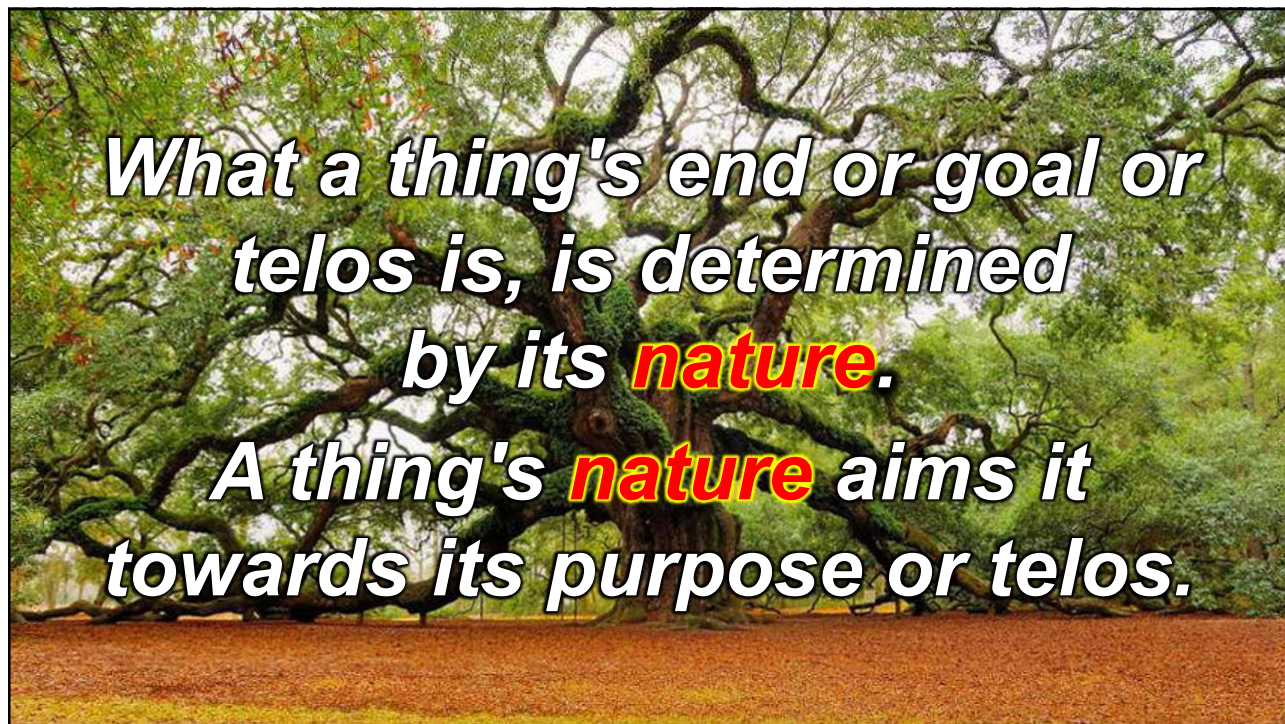


**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)



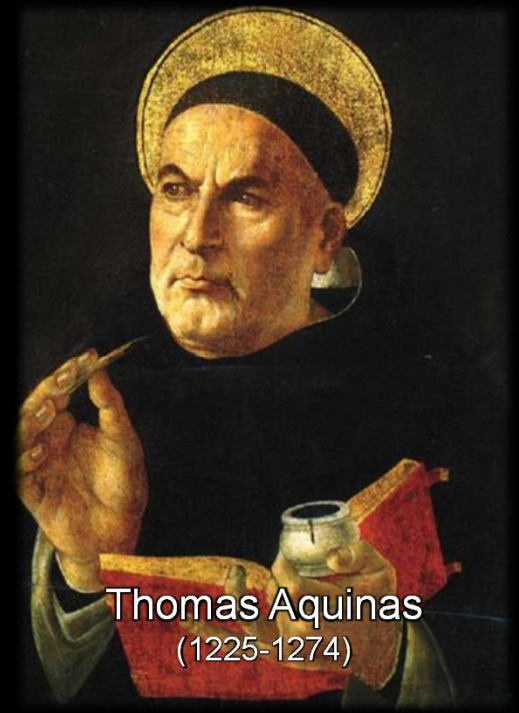
*As a living thing grows and matures, it does so, if unimpeded, towards its proper end or goal or telos.*





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

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Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

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

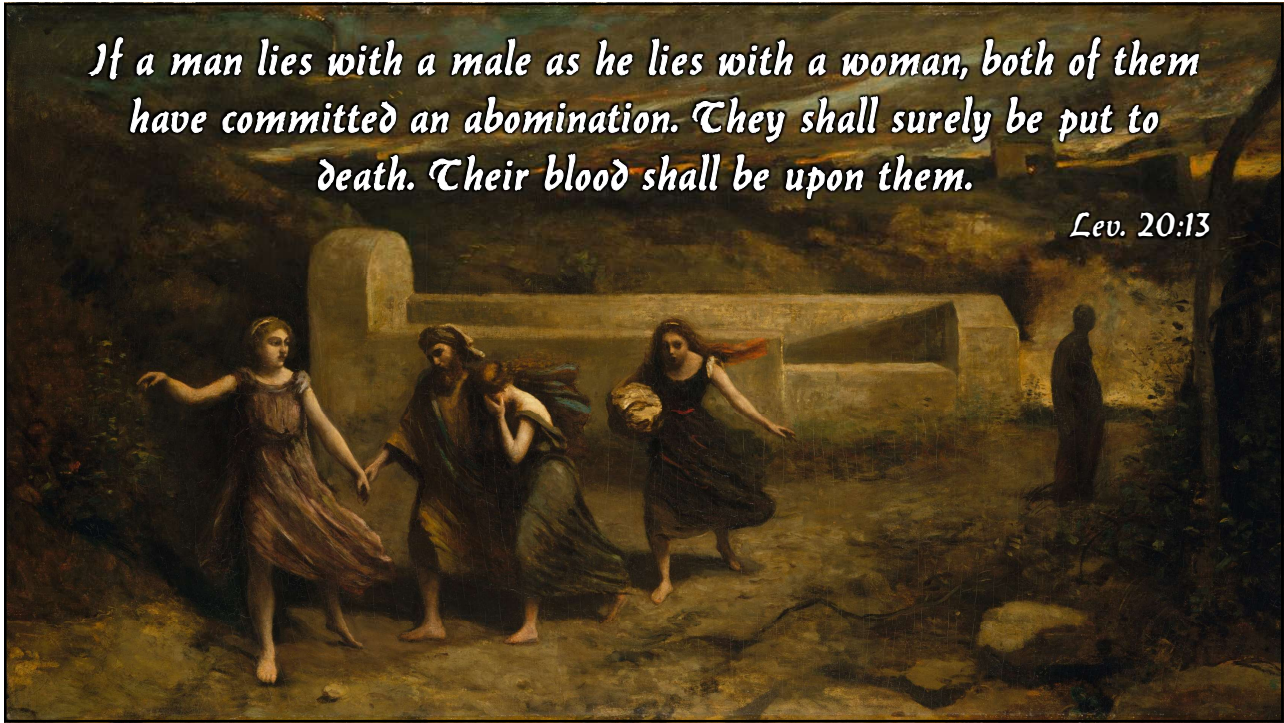
[SCG III, 129, §4, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (University of Notre Dame Press Edition) vol. 3:II, p. 163. Reprint of *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith* (Garden City, NY: Hanover House, 1956)]

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

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

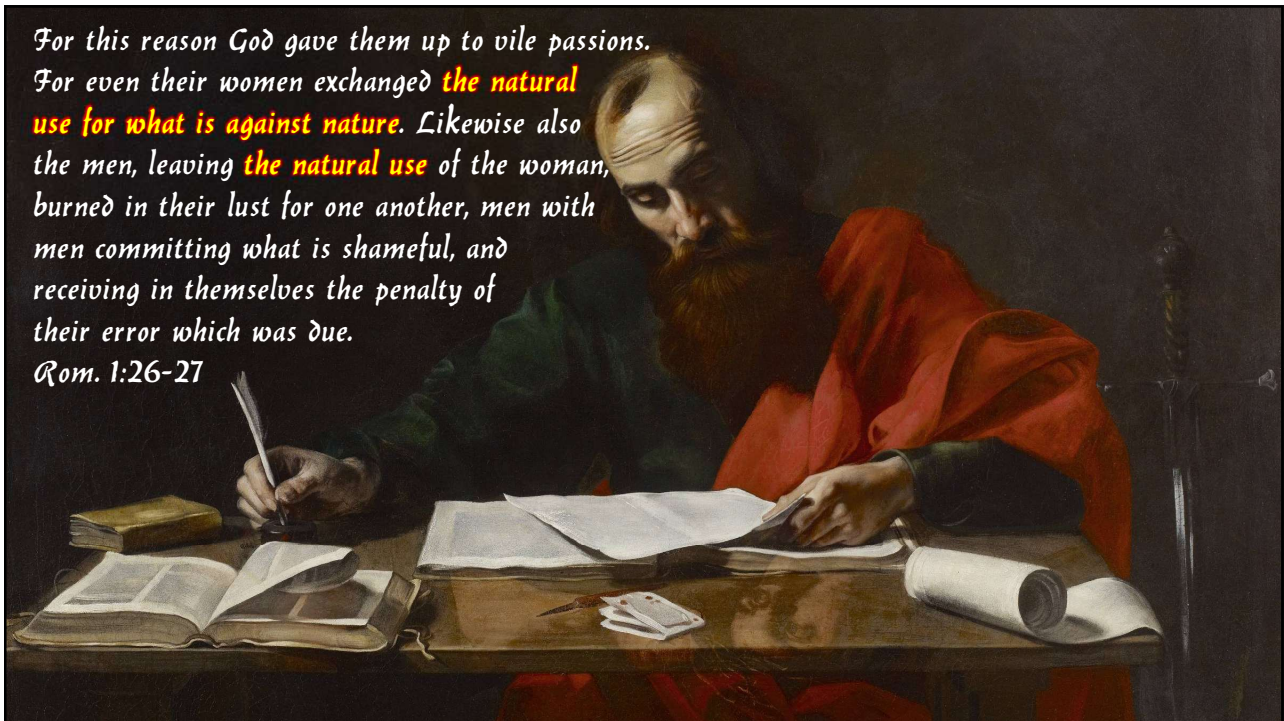
*If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them.*

*Lev. 20:13*



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

*Rom. 1:26-27*



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

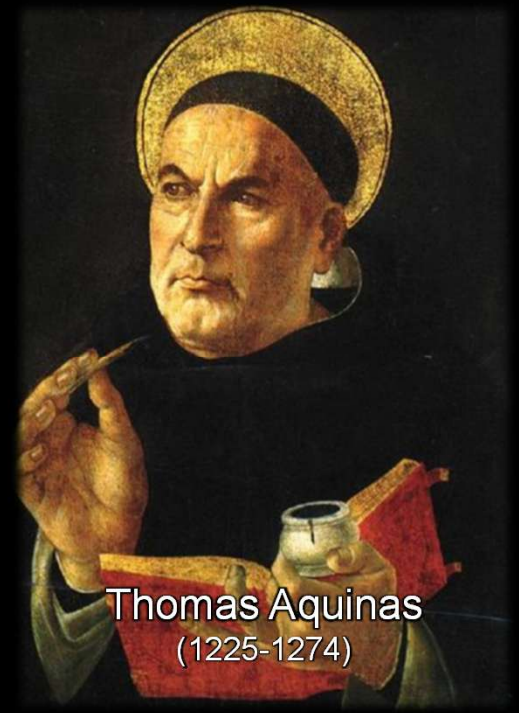
*These enable us to choose, not merely among particular goods, but to pursue the good as such.*

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

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

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

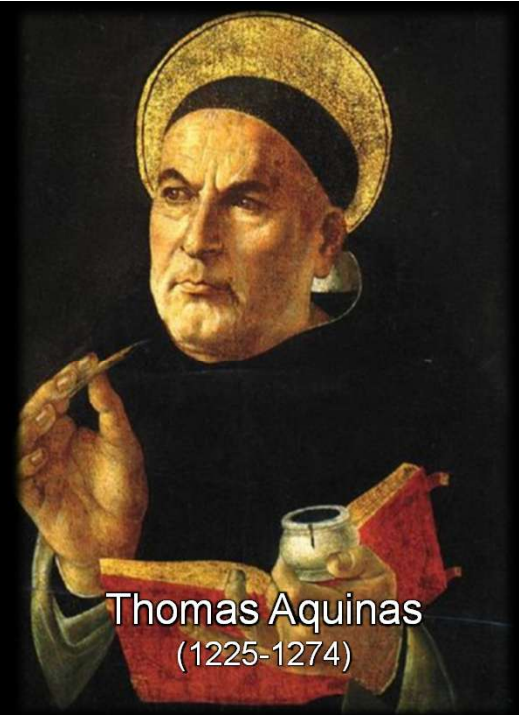
[ST I-I, Q6, introduction]



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

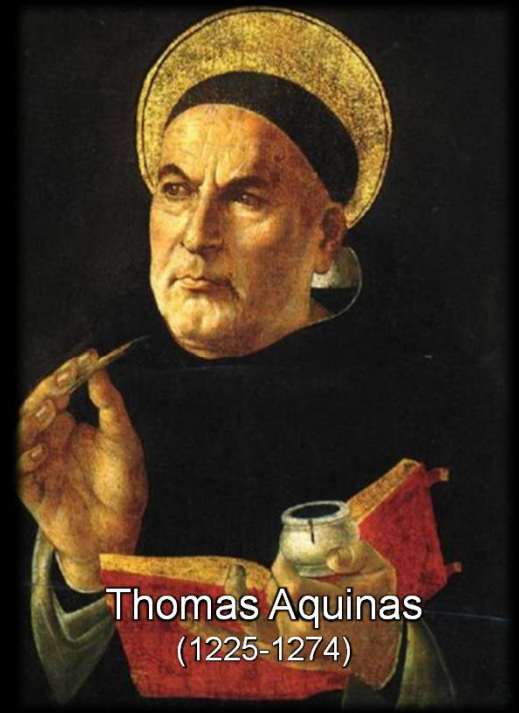
***"Man determines himself by his reason to will this or that, which is true [good] or apparent good."***

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



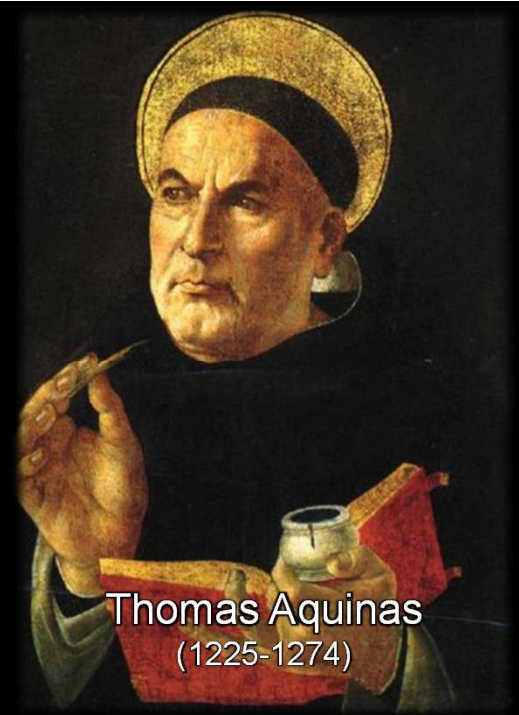
Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

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



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

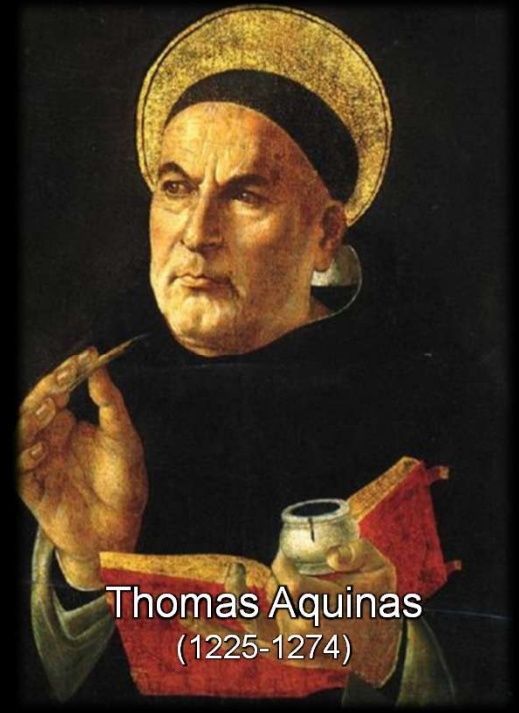
***"Moral fault is found  
primarily and principally  
in the act of the will  
only . . . so . . . an act is  
moral because it  
is voluntary. . . .***



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

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

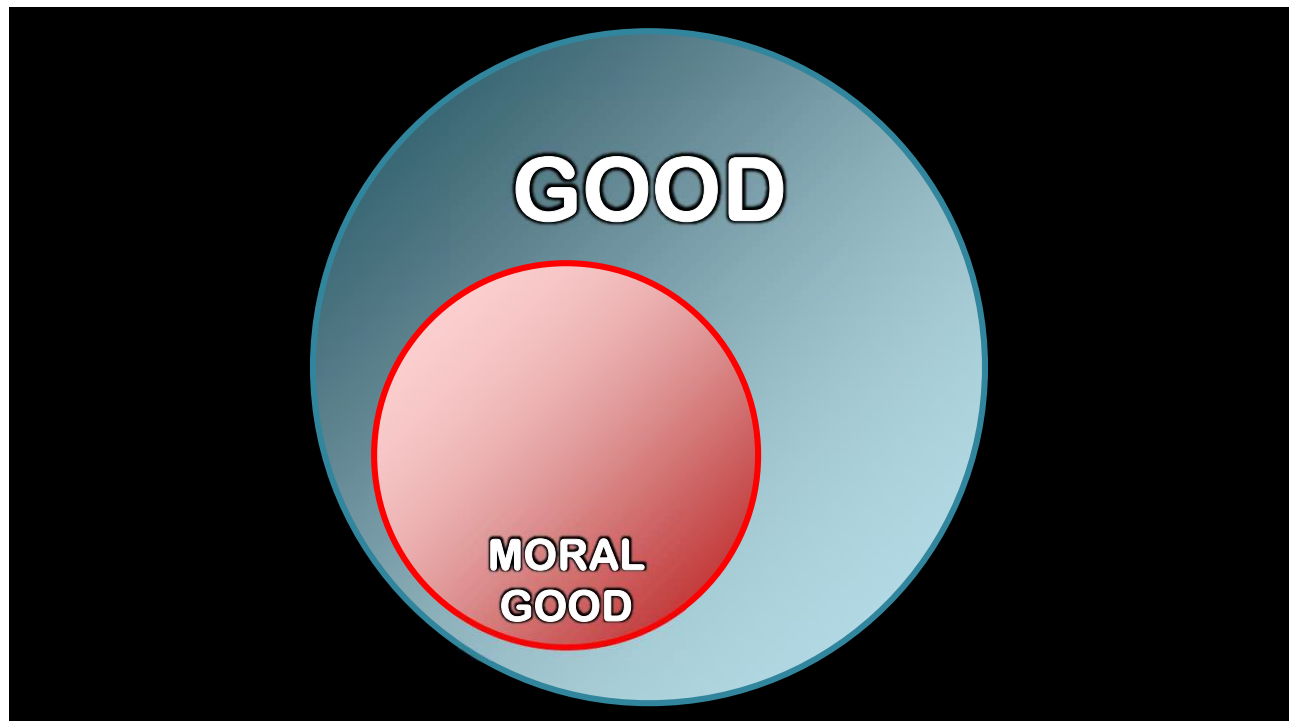
[*Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 10, §13]



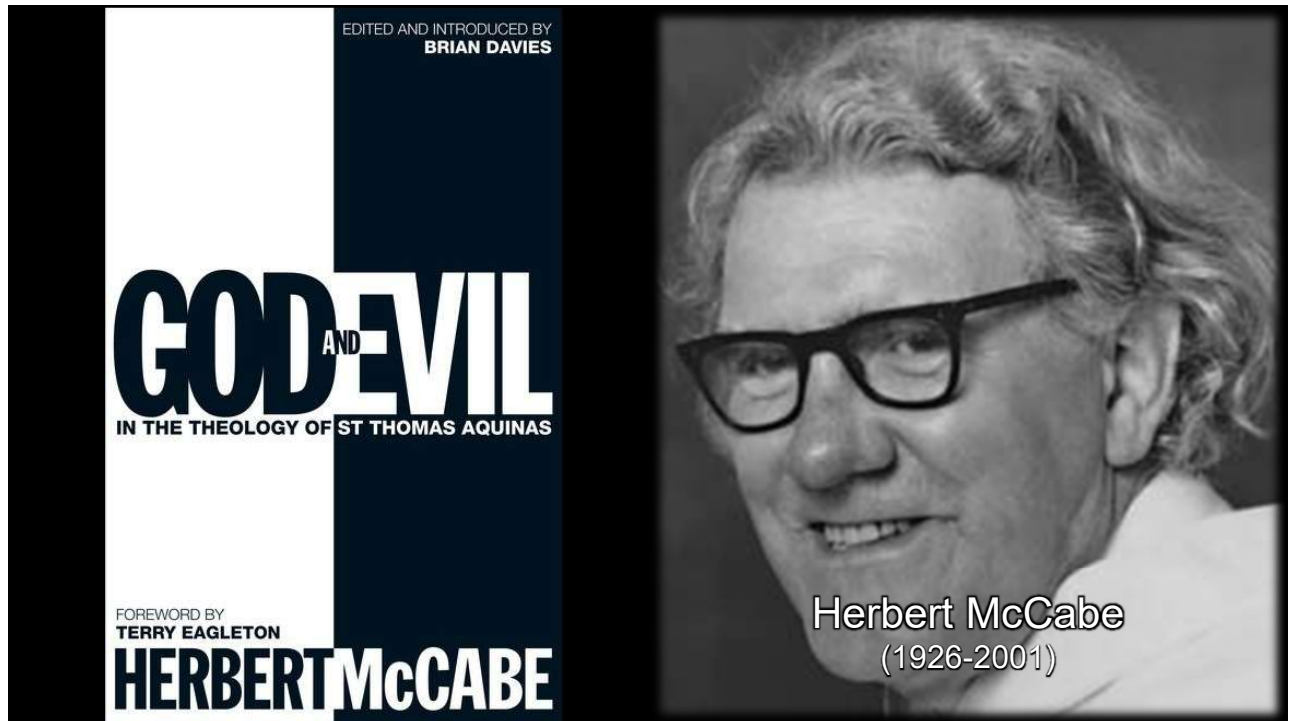
Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

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

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

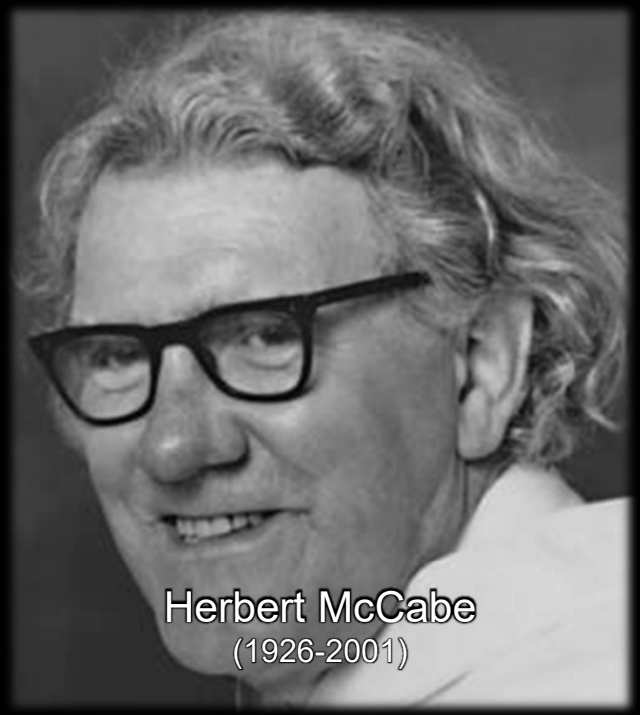




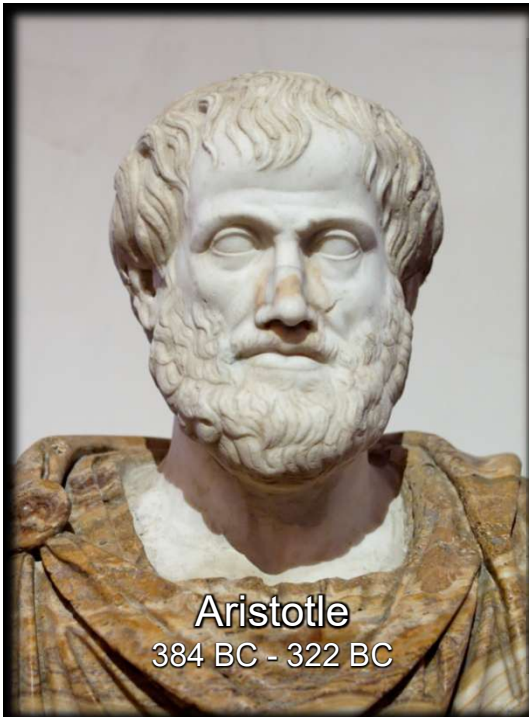


**"A perfect X is an X that has all its *properties*; an imperfect X lacks one of more of its *properties*."**

[*God and Evil in the Theology of St Thomas Aquinas* (London: Continuum, 2010), 40]



Herbert McCabe  
(1926-2001)



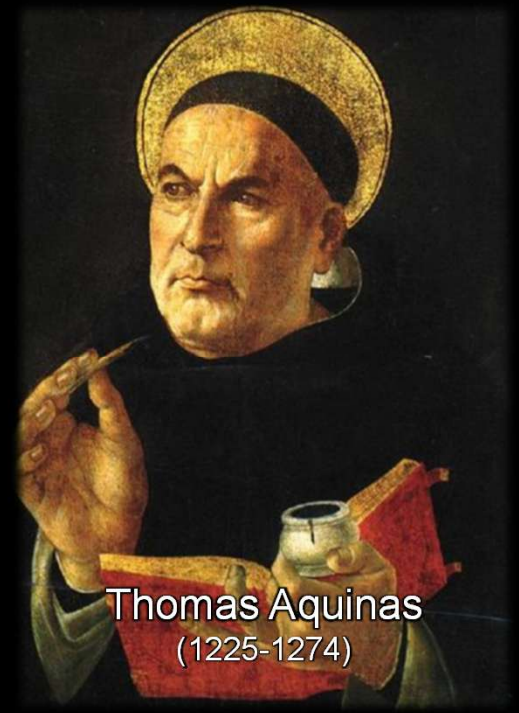
Aristotle  
384 BC - 322 BC

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

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

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

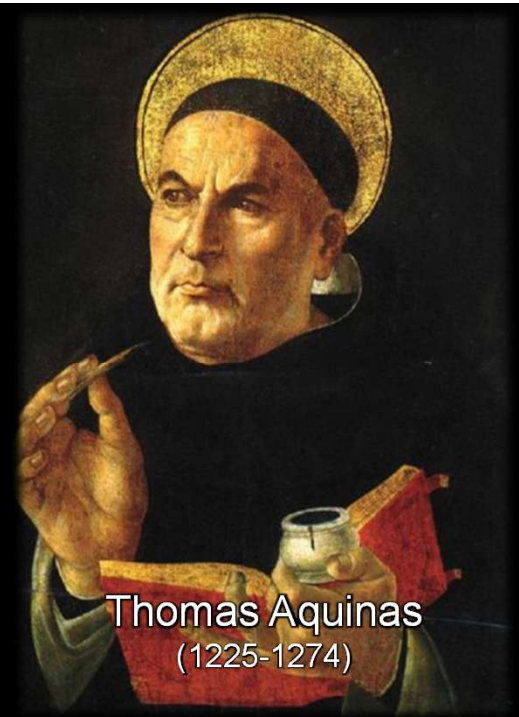
[Summa Theologiae I, Q5, art. 1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province in St. Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologica: Complete English Edition in Five Volumes (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981), 23]



**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)

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

[ST I, Q5, art. 1]



**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)

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

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

**True is that which corresponds  
to reality.**

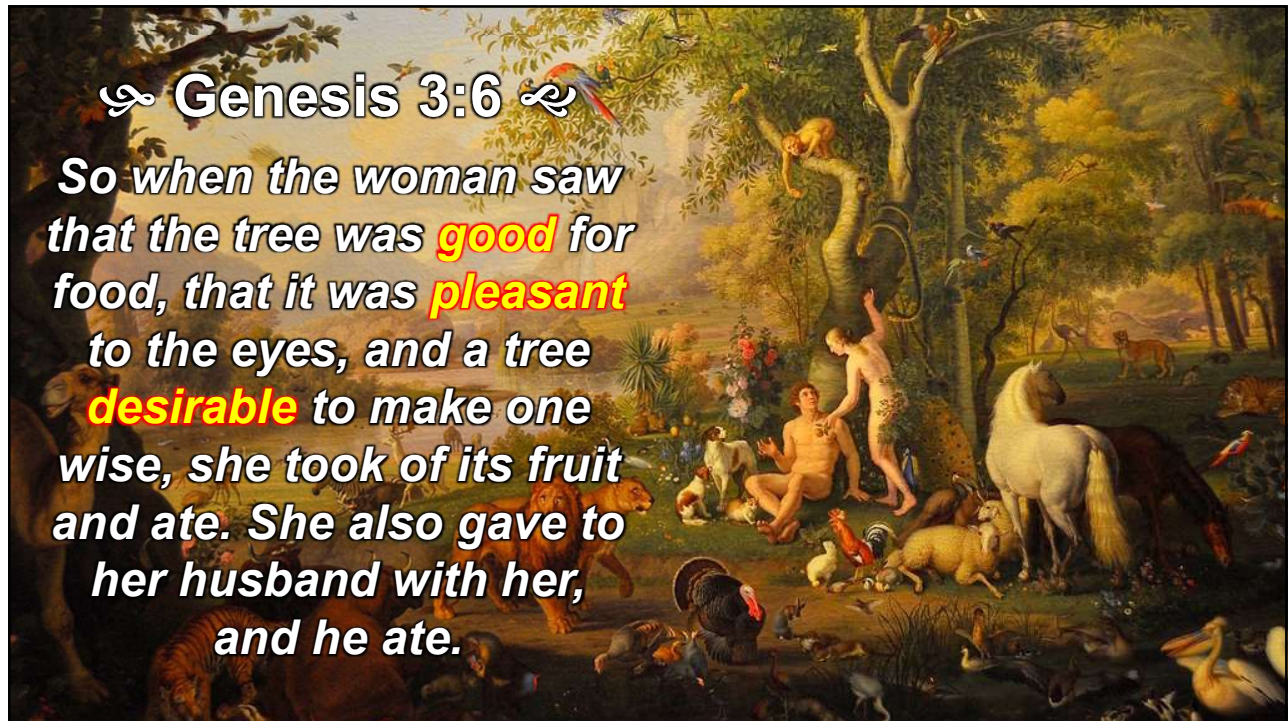
**Good is that which actualizes a  
thing's telos, which is to say  
good is that which perfects  
the thing.**

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

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

✧ Genesis 3:6 ✧

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





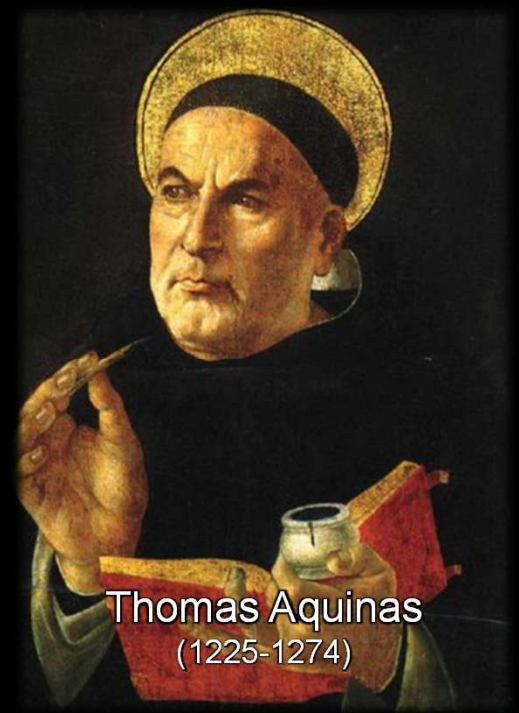


☞ 1 Kings 15:5 ☞

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

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

[ST I, 19, art 9]



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)