

God, the Good, and Human Flourishing

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∞ THESIS ∞

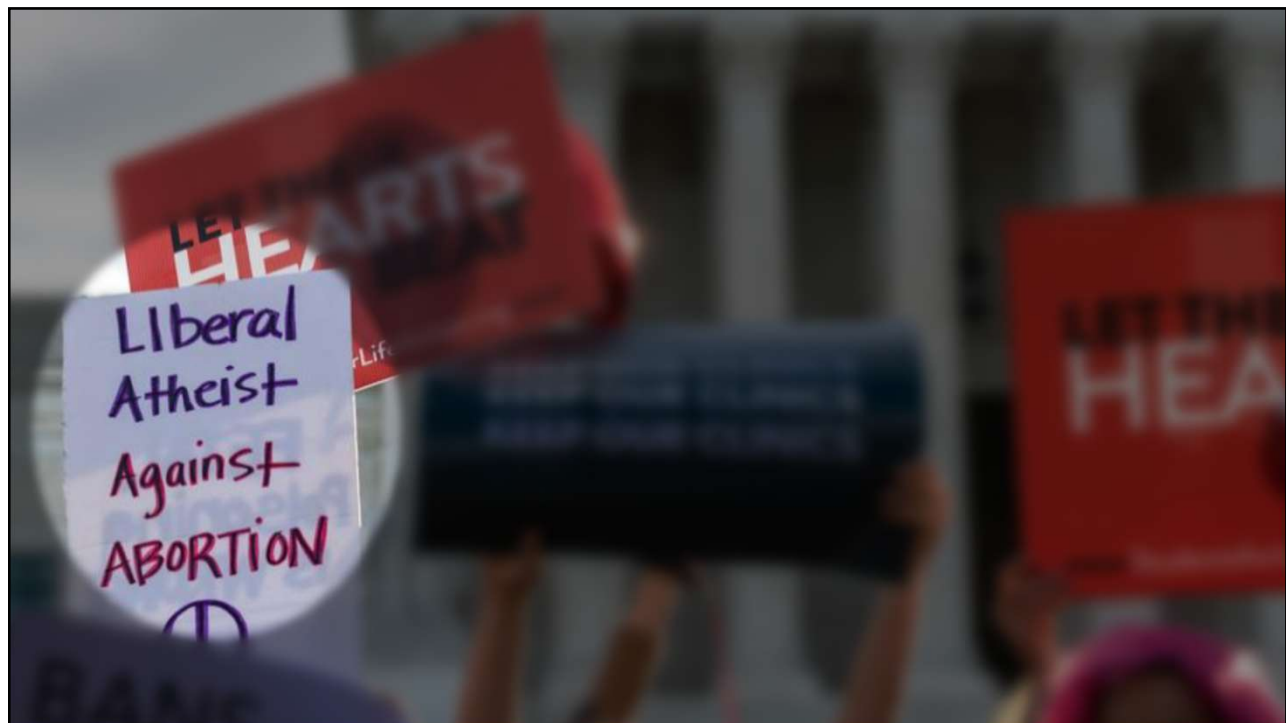
There are moral truths that are knowable by human beings by reason without reference to any revealed truth from the Bible.

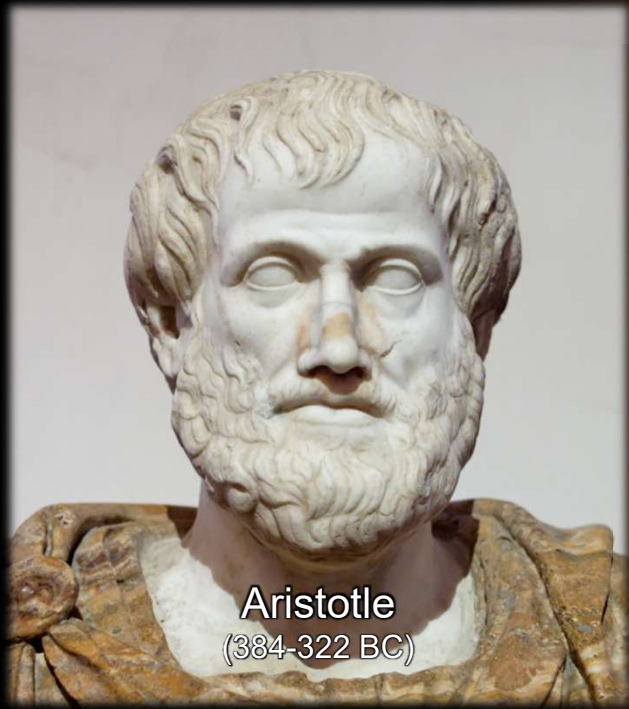
∞ OBSERVATIONS ∞

- ❖ I am not saying that these moral truths can ultimately be accounted for apart from the God of the Bible.
- ❖ Rather, just as a non-Christian can know certain scientific truths, that same non-Christian can know certain moral truths.

∞ OBSERVATIONS ∞

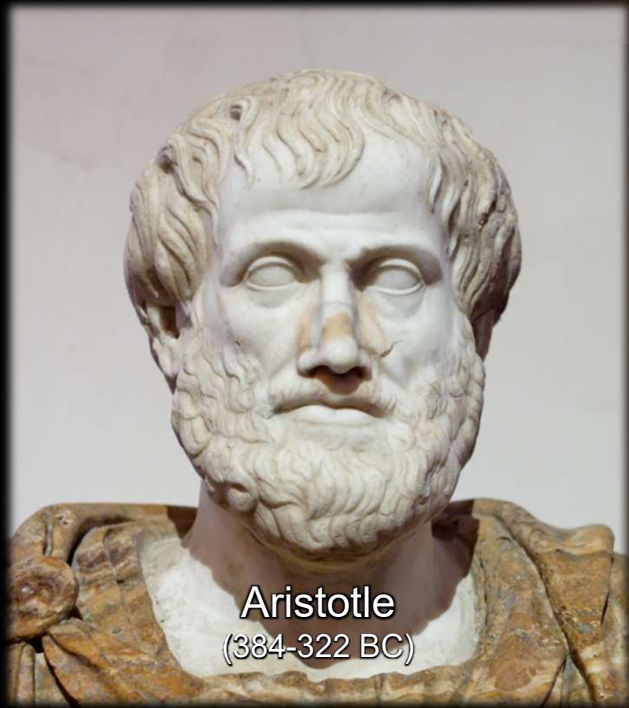
- ❖ This model of human morality is referred to as "Natural Law Theory."
- ❖ It aims primarily at moral issues that address societal concerns and not necessarily issues confined to personal piety.
- ❖ In the American experience, the application of these moral truths invariably involve public policy issues such as murder, theft, rape, slavery, abortion, homosexuality, same-sex marriage, and more.





Aristotle
(384-322 BC)

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



Aristotle
(384-322 BC)

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

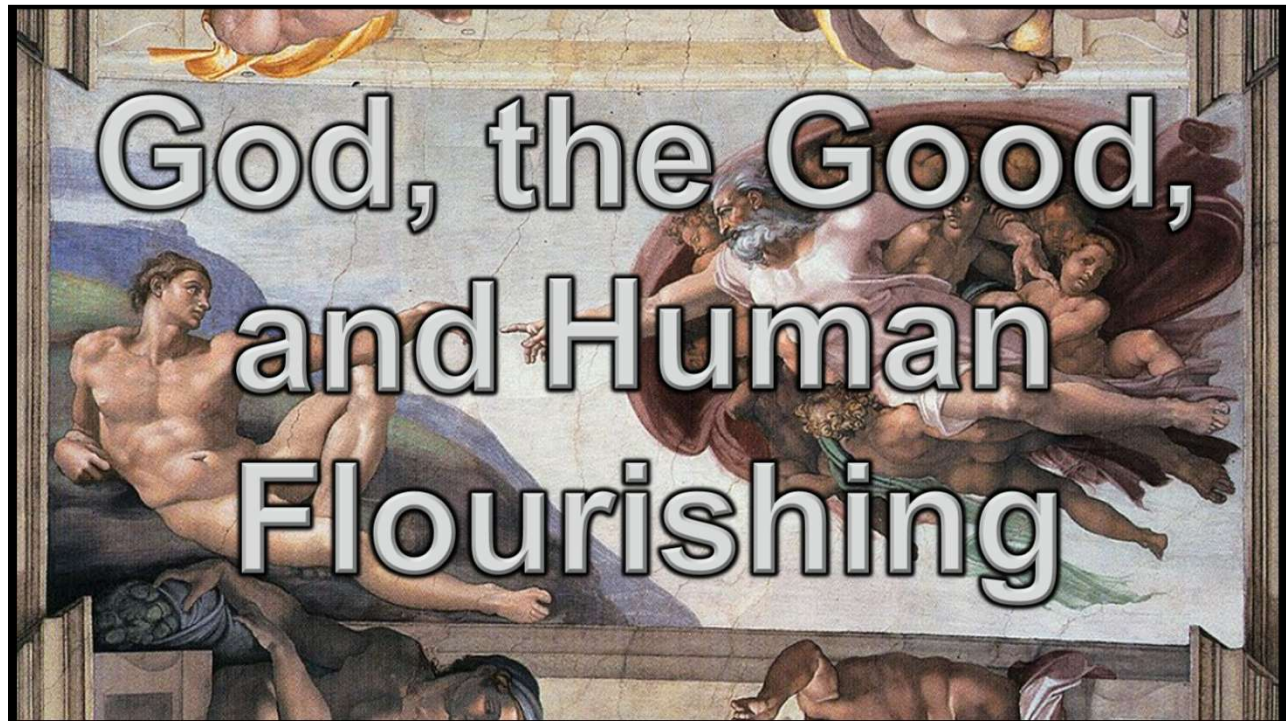
[Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 3, 1094^a11, 25, trans. W. D. Ross in Richard McKeon, ed. *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941), 936]

❧ OBSERVATIONS ❧

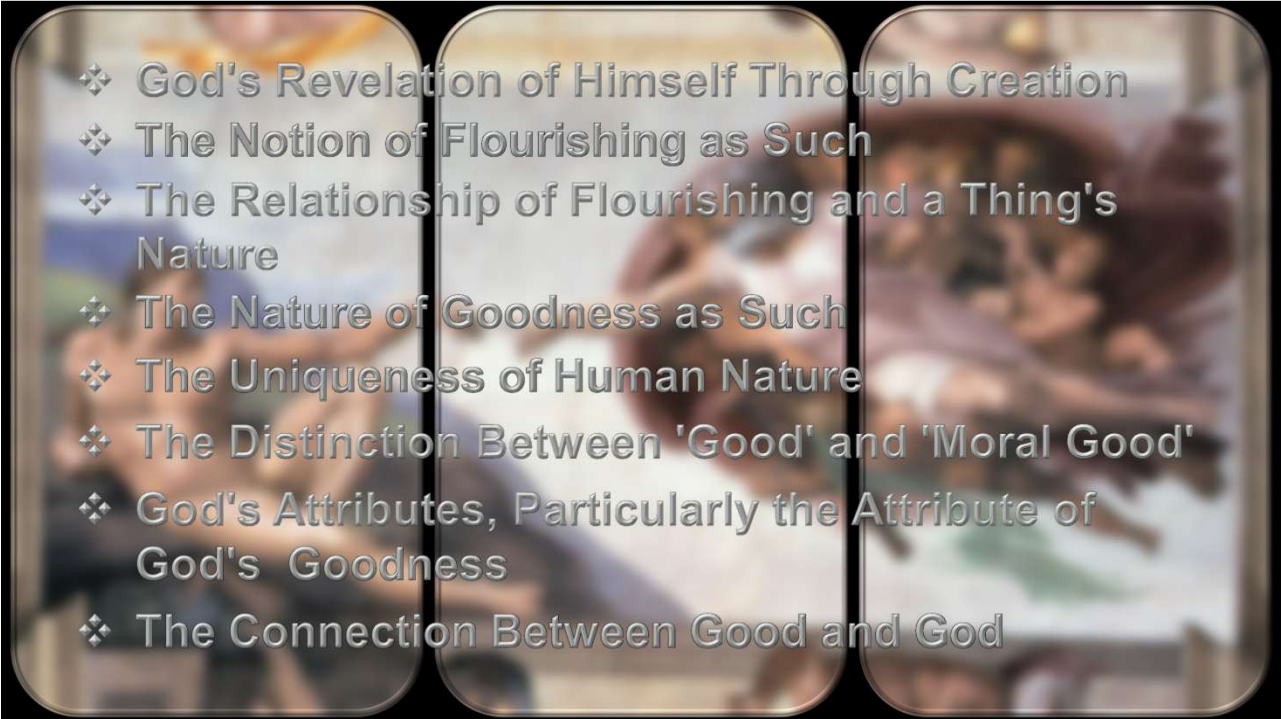
- ❖ For reasons we cannot get into here due to time, let it suffice to say that even though today one will find Natural Law Theory primarily among Catholics, it has nothing to do with the Protestant / Catholic divide.
- ❖ Understandably, Christians often frame moral debates along the contours of the Bible.
- ❖ I think it is important, however, for us to be careful to distinguish, on the one hand, moral obligations that arise out of the fact that we are all human beings from, on the other hand, moral obligations that arise out of the fact that we are Christians.

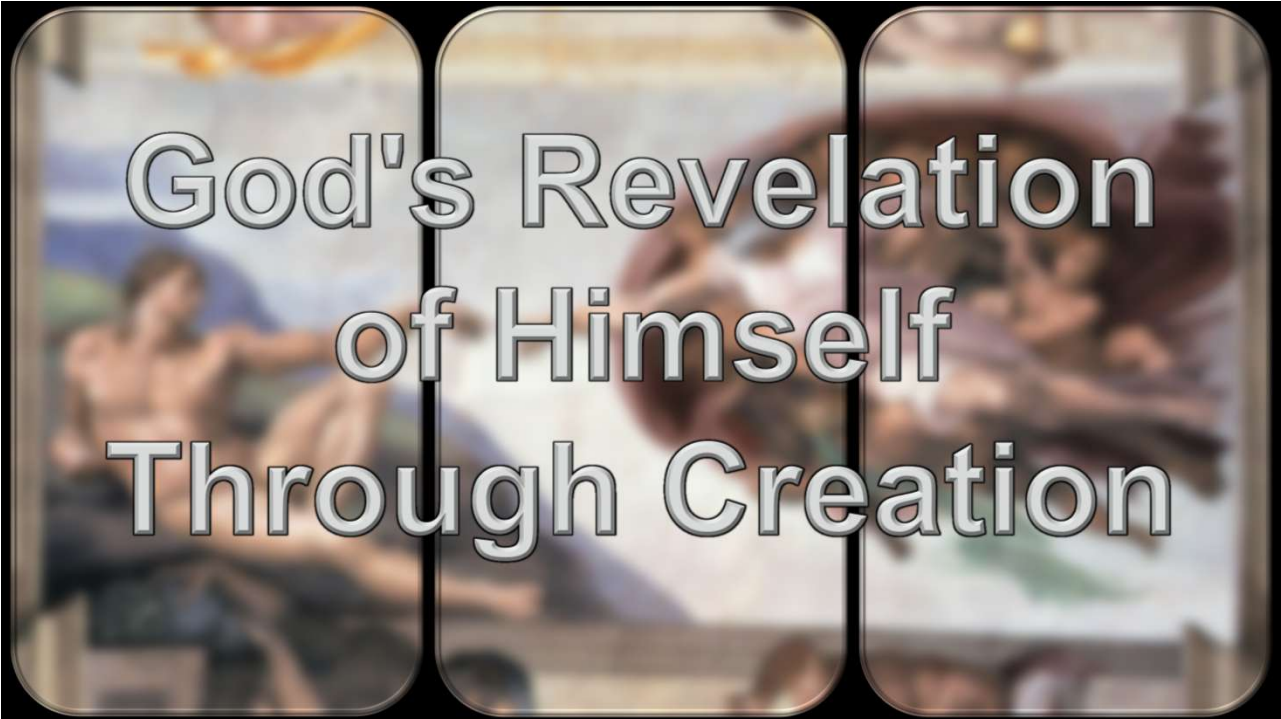
Biblical Morality or Morality?





God	Good	Flourishing
❖ God's Existence ❖ God's Revelation of Himself Through Creation ❖ God's Attributes, Particularly the Attribute of God's Goodness	❖ The Nature of Goodness as Such ❖ The Distinction Between 'Good' and 'Moral Good' ❖ The Connection Between Good and God	❖ The Notion of Flourishing as Such ❖ The Relationship of Flourishing and a Thing's Nature ❖ The Uniqueness of Human Nature

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- ❖ God's Revelation of Himself Through Creation
 - ❖ The Notion of Flourishing as Such
 - ❖ The Relationship of Flourishing and a Thing's Nature
 - ❖ The Nature of Goodness as Such
 - ❖ The Uniqueness of Human Nature
 - ❖ The Distinction Between 'Good' and 'Moral Good'
 - ❖ God's Attributes, Particularly the Attribute of God's Goodness
 - ❖ The Connection Between Good and God



God's Revelation of Himself Through Creation

✧ **Romans 1:20** ✧

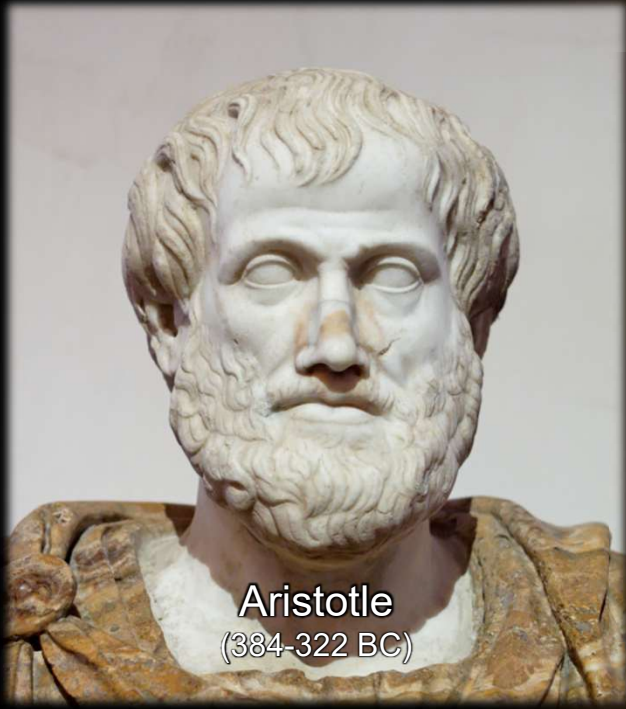
For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead ...

Included among those invisible attributes (lit. "invisibles") of God that are understood by "the things that are made," i.e., creation, is His goodness.

What interests us here regarding Natural Law Theory is the connection between God's goodness and His nature together with the good as manifested within the human community.

✧ *Romans 2:14-15* ✧

*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 ...*



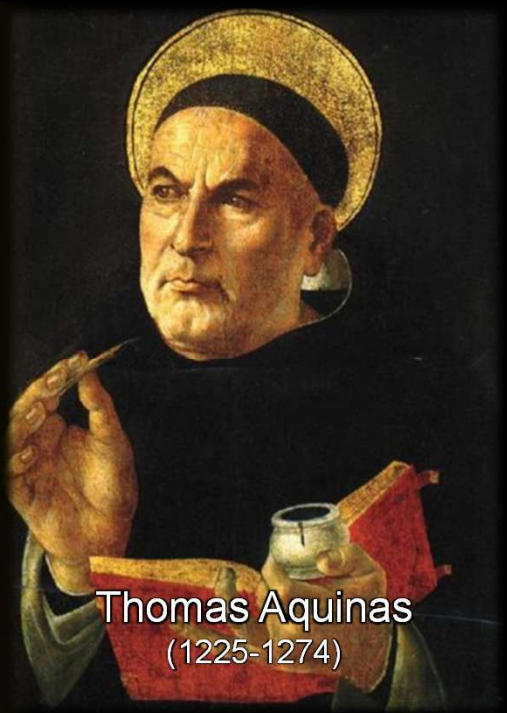
Aristotle
(384-322 BC)

"It is evident that the state is a creation of nature and that man is by nature a political animal. ... A social instinct is implanted in all men by nature."

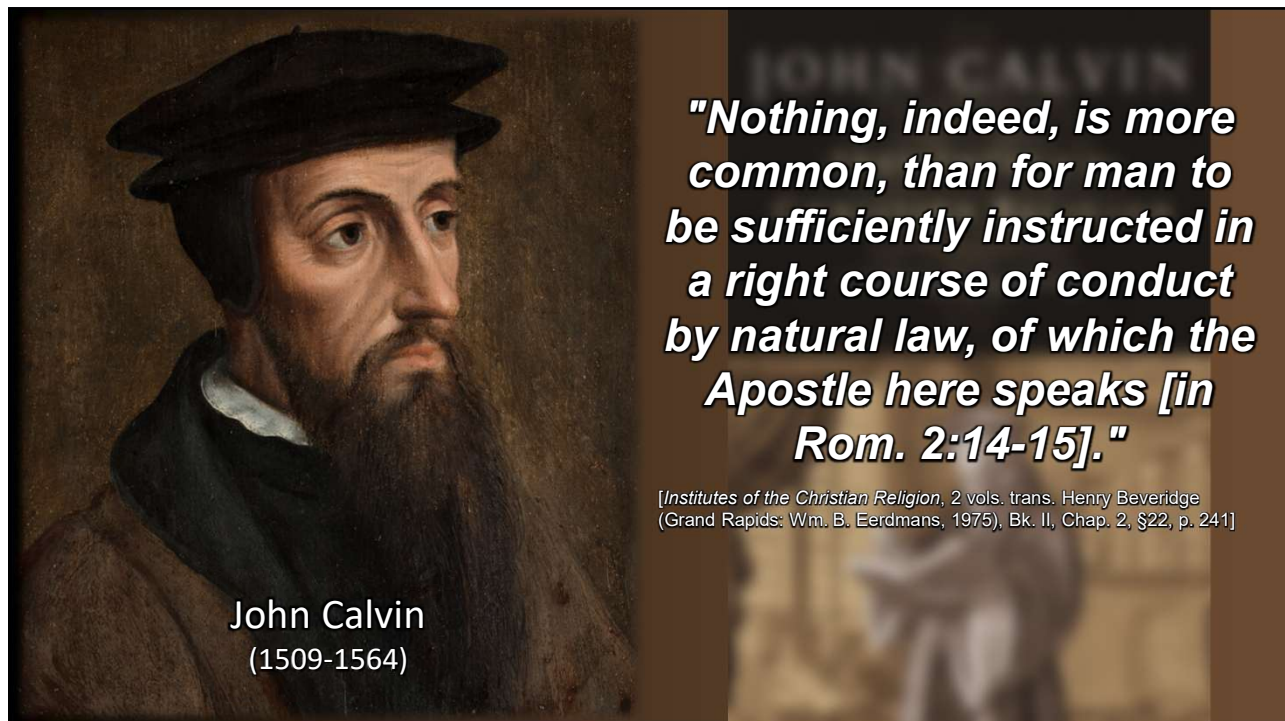
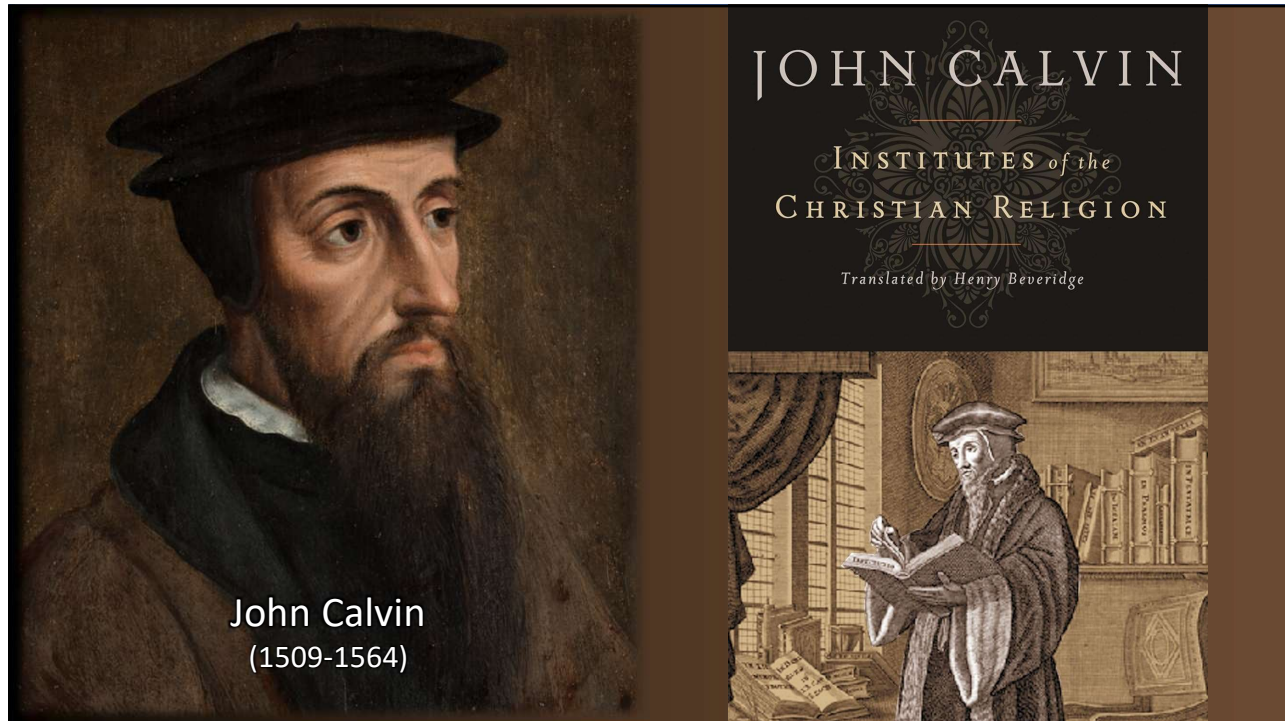
[Aristotle, *Politics*, Bk. I, ch. 2, 1253^a1, 38, trans. Benjamin Jowett, in Richard McKeon, ed. *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941), 1129, 1130]

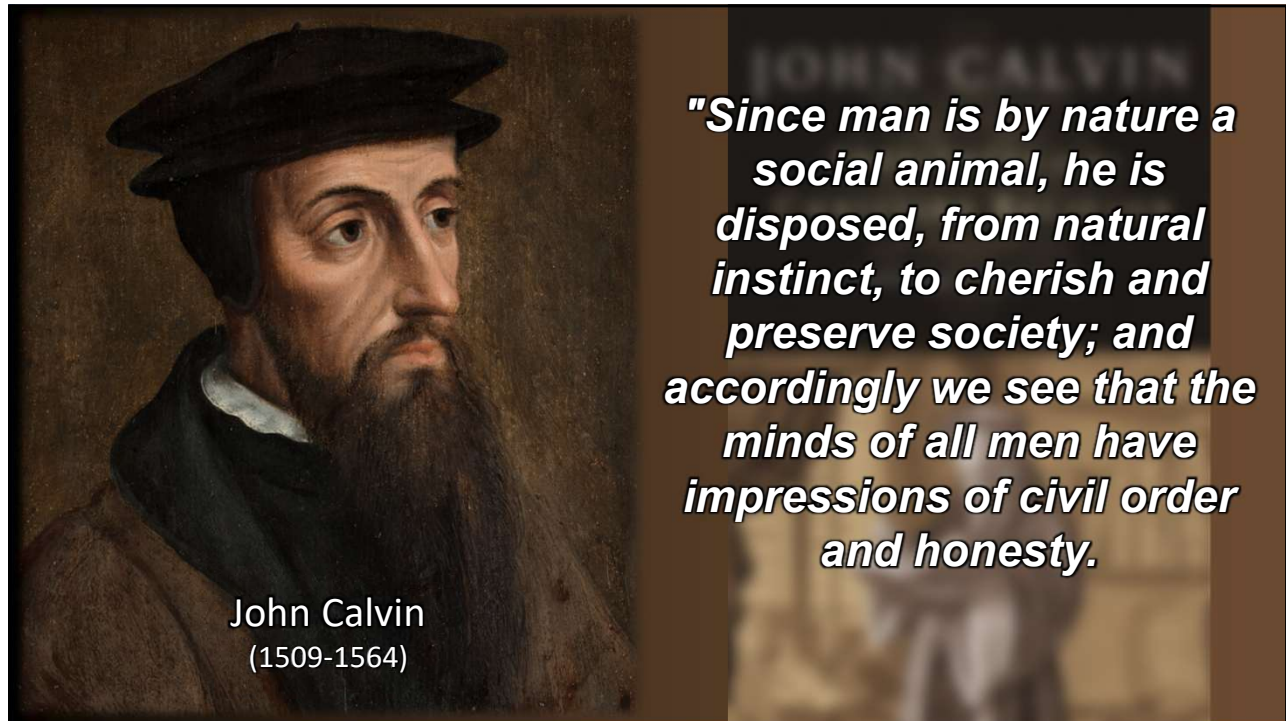
"Since man is a social animal, one man naturally owes another whatever is necessary for the preservation of society."

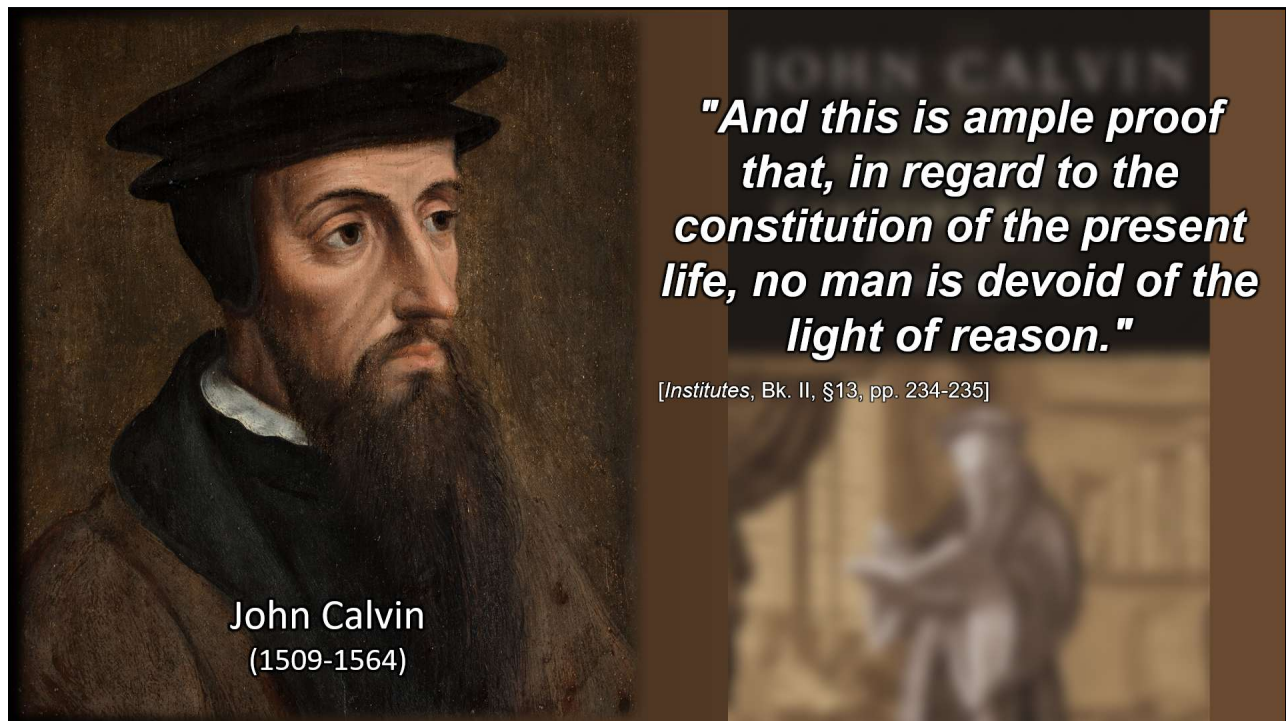
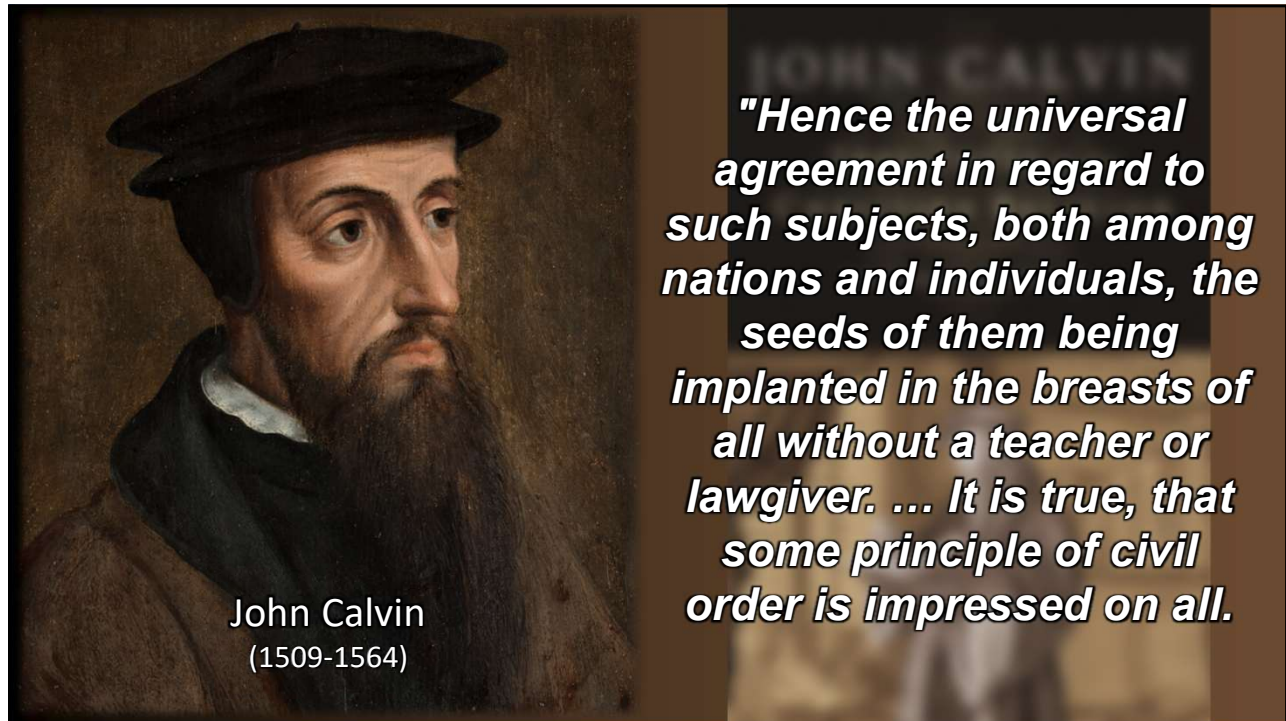
[Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 109, art. 3, ad. 1, trans. Father of the English Dominican Province (Westminster: Christian Classics, vol. 3, p.1656)]

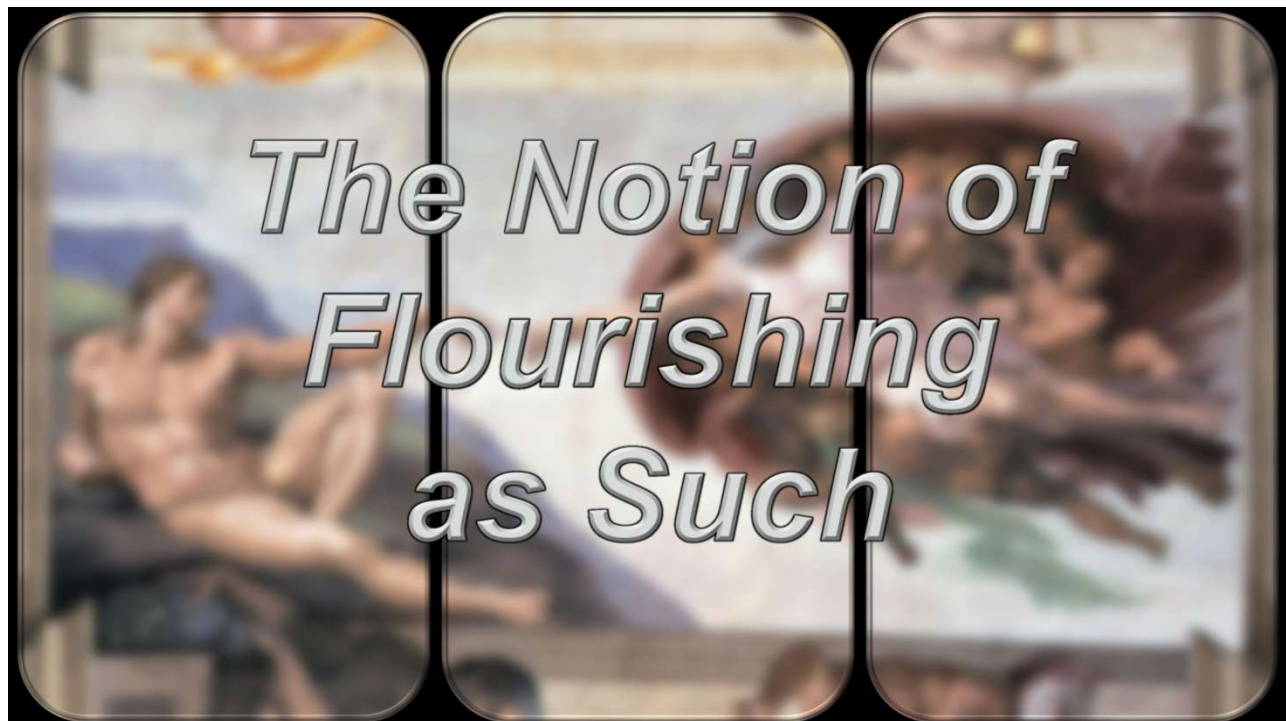


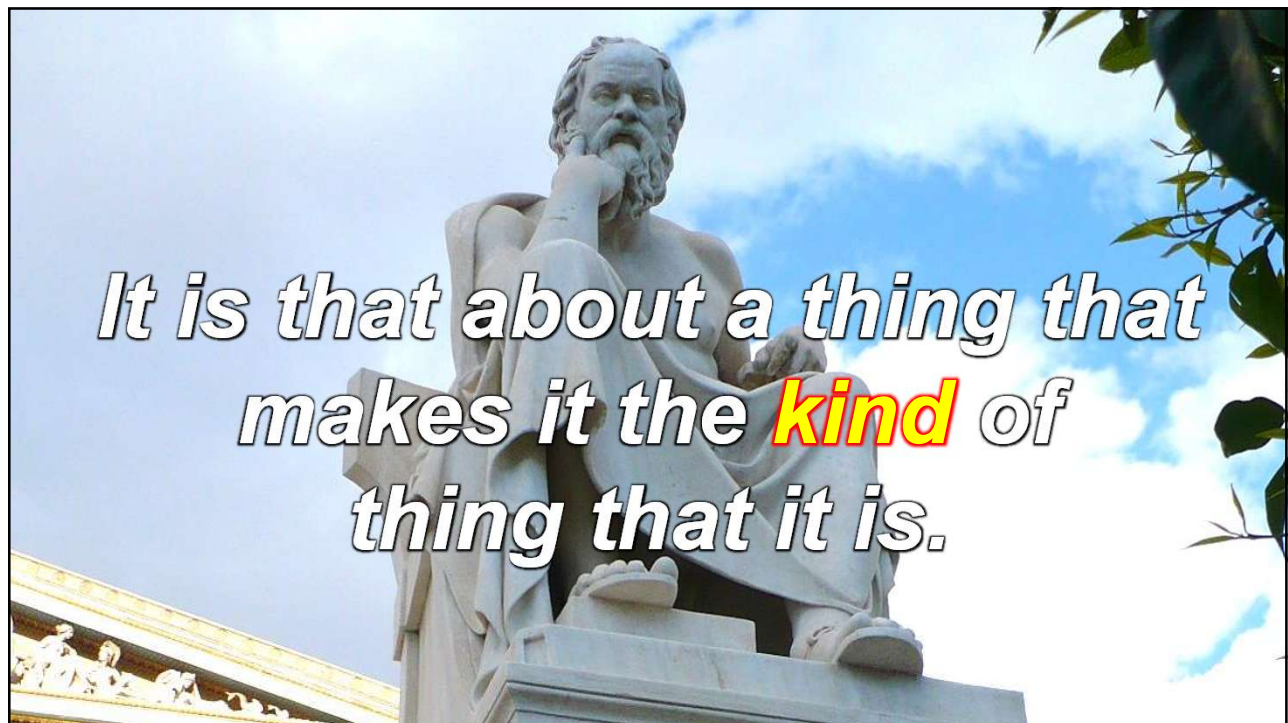
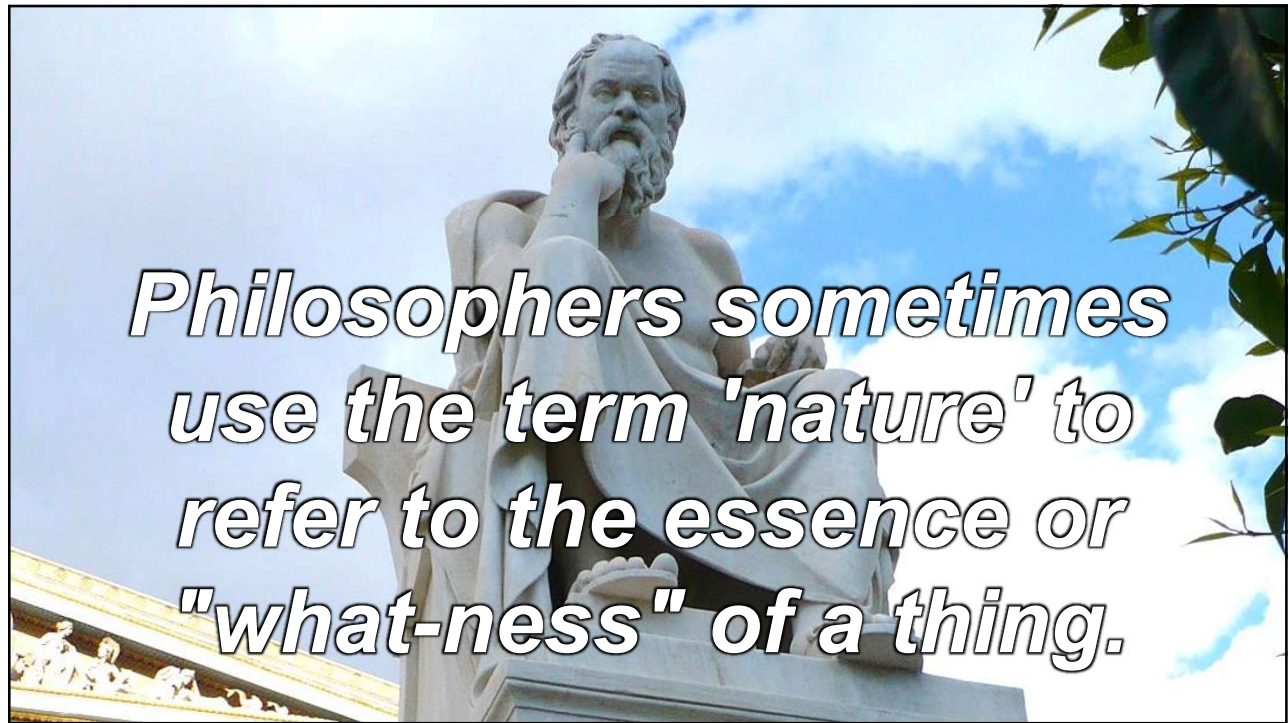
Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)









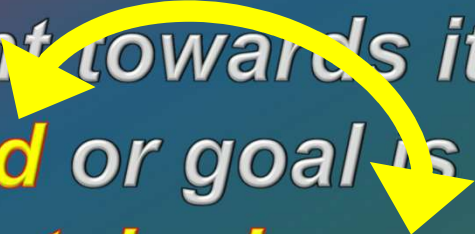


Flourishing has to do with the degree to which a thing develops into a mature version of its nature.

The state of maturity of a thing is regarded as its proper end or goal.

*The process of
development towards its
proper end or goal is
known as teleology.*

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proper **end** or goal is
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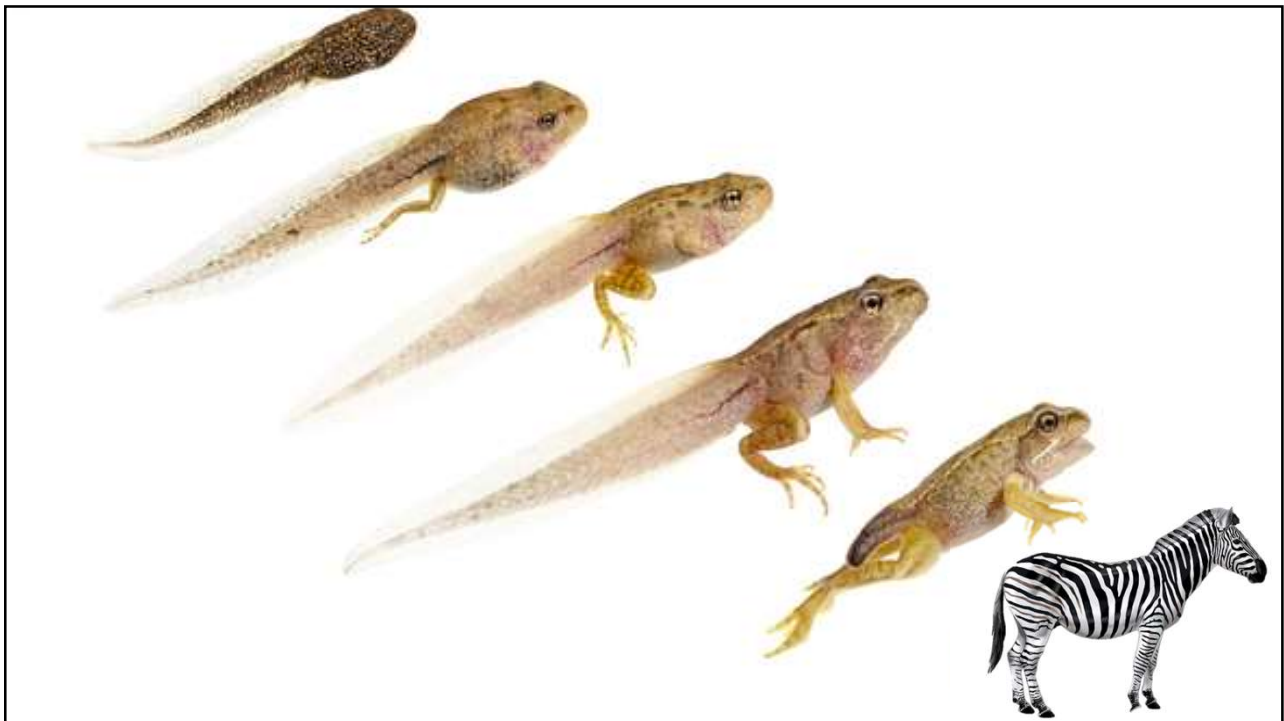
*The process of development towards its **proper end** or goal is known as teleology.*



The Relationship
of Flourishing and
a Thing's Nature

*The teleology of a thing
has everything to do with
the kind of thing that it is.*

*The thing's nature is what
gives it the potentials to
achieve its proper end.*



*The nature of a thing sets
it on its teleological
trajectory towards the
realization of its
proper end.*



natural kind

the nature (which is intrinsic to the
natural kind)

directs
the
natural
kind

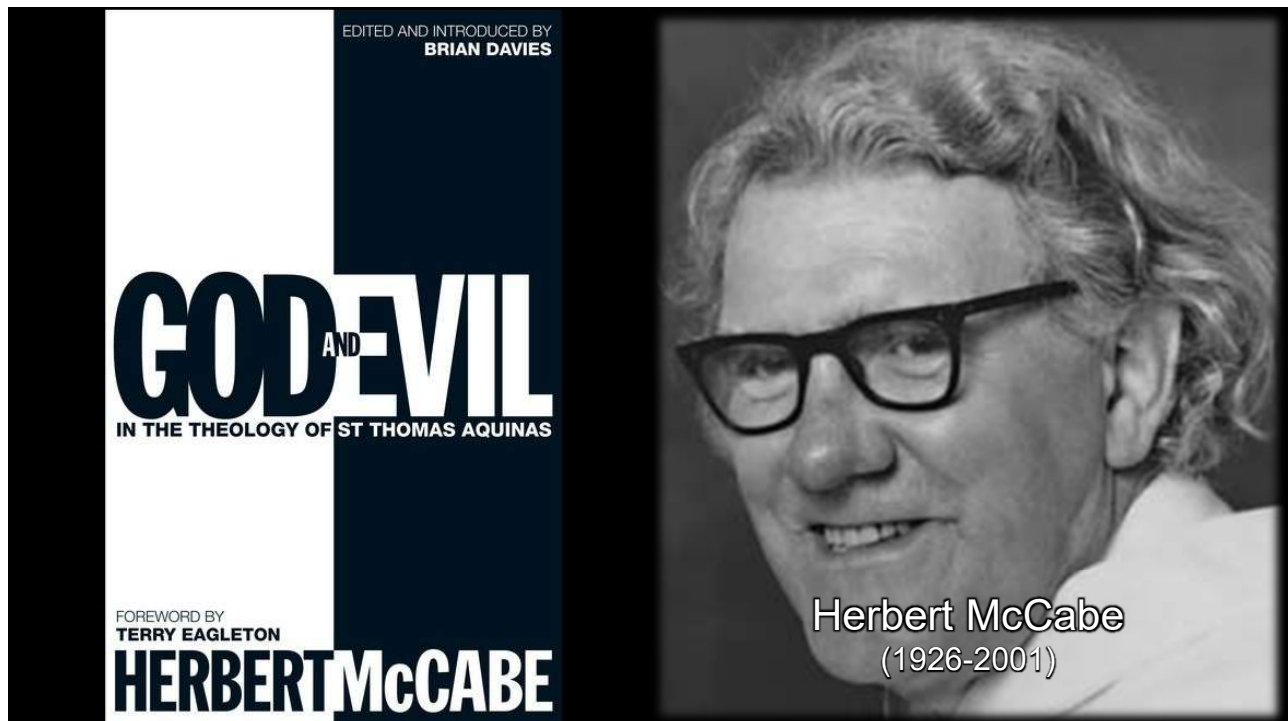
to its proper end or telos

*Being the proper end of
the thing, this realization
is the good of the thing.*



*The Nature of
Goodness
as Such*



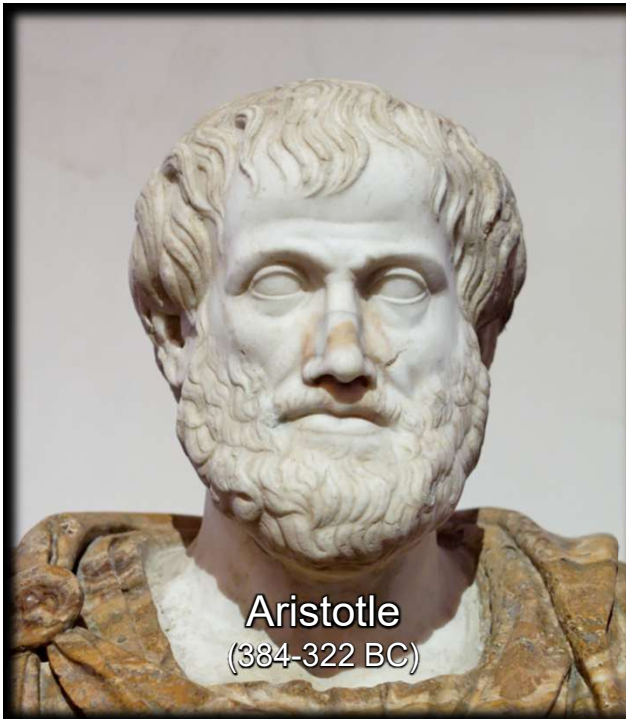


***"A perfect X is
an X that has
all its
properties; an
imperfect X
lacks one of
more of its
properties."***

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



Herbert McCabe
(1926-2001)



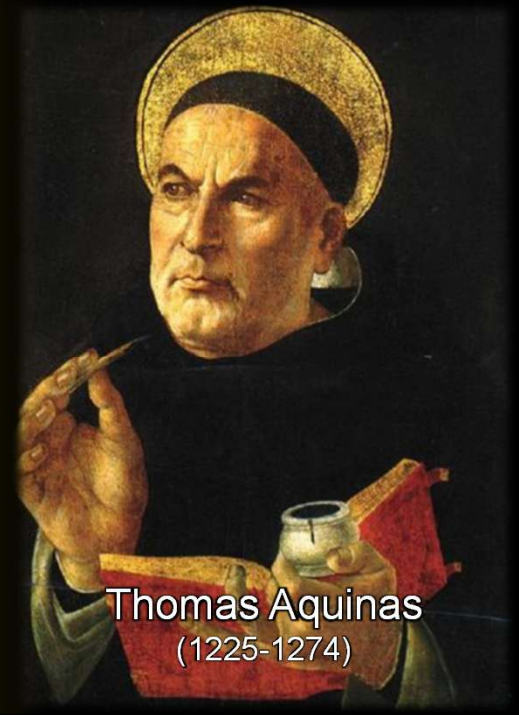
Aristotle
(384-322 BC)

***"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."

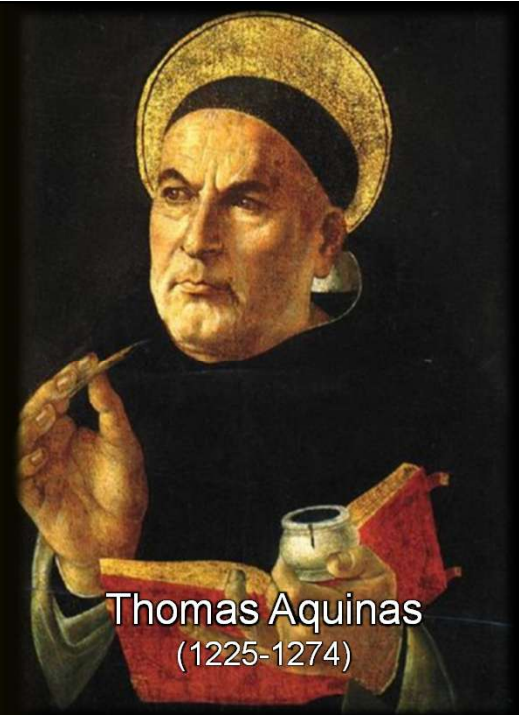
[Summa Theologiae I, Q5, art. 1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province in St. Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologica: Complete English Edition in Five Volumes (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981), 23]



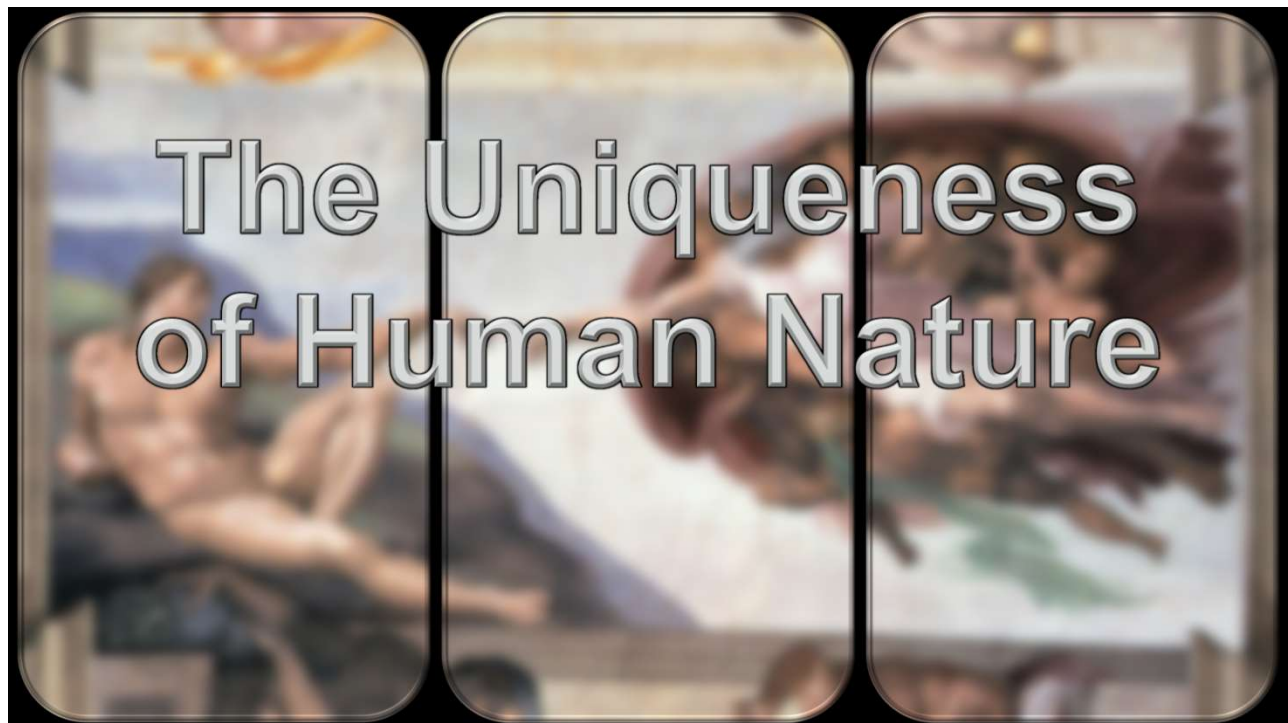
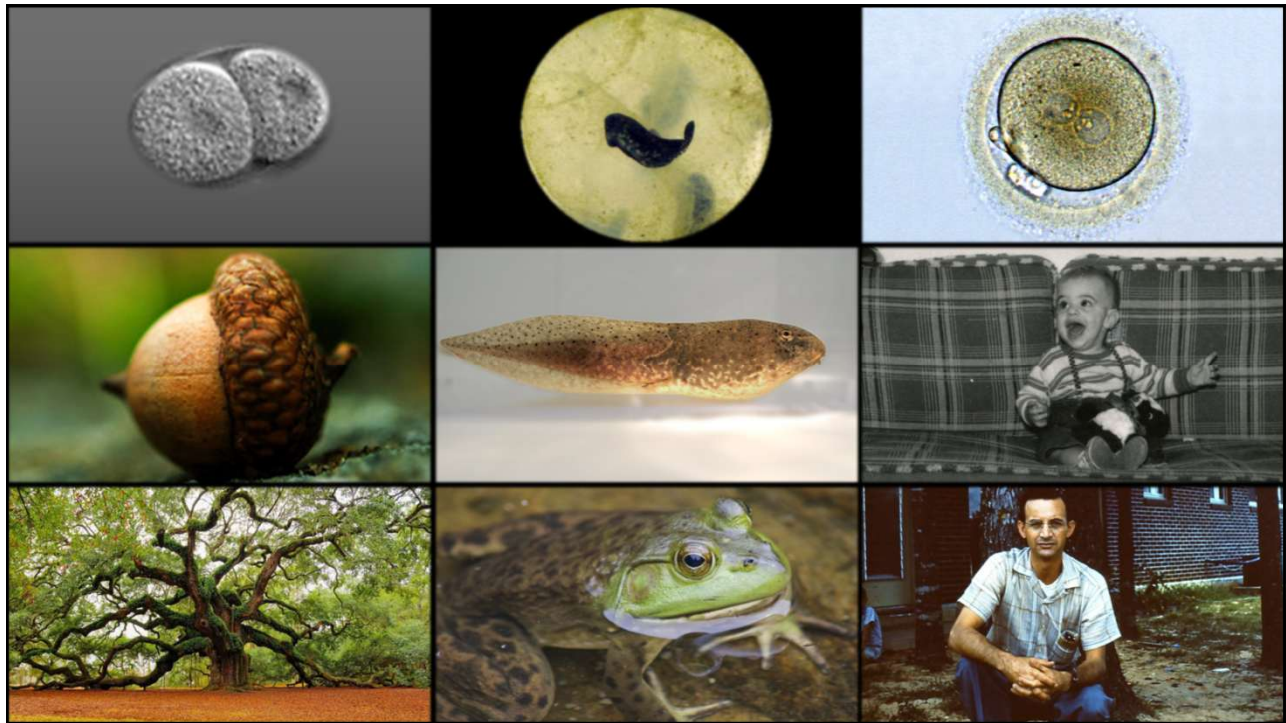
Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"Goodness signifies perfection which is desirable."

[ST I, Q5, art. 1]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)



It is, perhaps, easy to see the proper end, i.e., the good, of natural, living things in terms of their physical bodies.

With respect to human beings, however, two factors must be emphasized.

*Unique among animals,
humans have both
rationality and free will.*

*Rationality enables us to
deliberate among goods.
Free will enables us to
choose among competing
goods.*

*The good of the acorn is to
become a fully mature oak tree.*

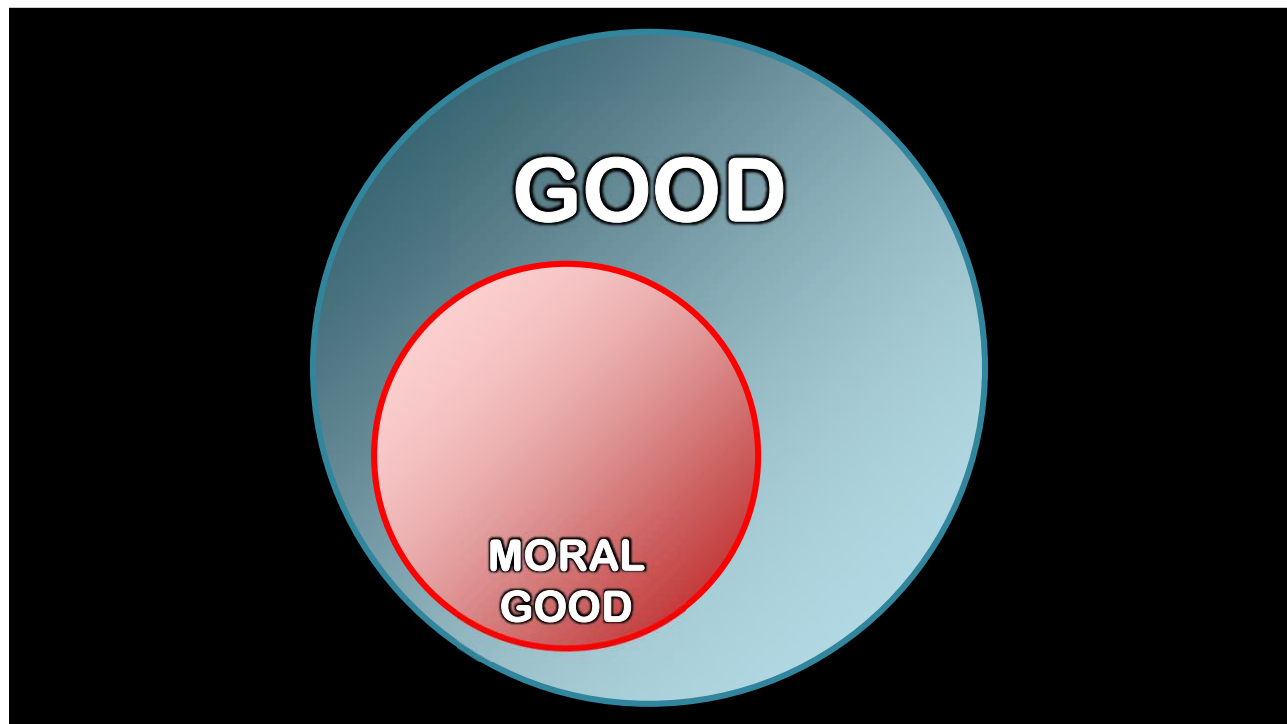
*The good of tadpole is
to become a fully mature frog.
They can "choose" nothing else.*

*The good of each of them is
manifested in their
material aspect.*

Regarding the good of a human, however, there is more than becoming a fully mature adult in body. There is also the good of the soul.



The Distinction
Between 'Good'
and 'Moral Good'



Unlike other animals, the rationality and free will of humans allow us to choose either in accordance with or in opposition to our proper end.

Regarding the good of a human, however, there is more than becoming a fully mature adult in body. There is also the good of the soul.

The soul of the human has a teleology that has come to be known in the classical tradition as virtue.

But, unlike the body, virtue only arises out of careful choices that sculpt the character.

Those choices are a function of the human's rationality and free will.

The tadpole cannot "choose" against its nature.

But a human can choose not only to the detriment of its body, but also to the detriment of the soul.

This is essence of morality.



The Connection Between Good and God

One more important characteristic of 'good' that will set us up for the last point.

The essential characteristic of any property that constitutes the teleological development of a creature is that the new property come into existence. It takes on being.

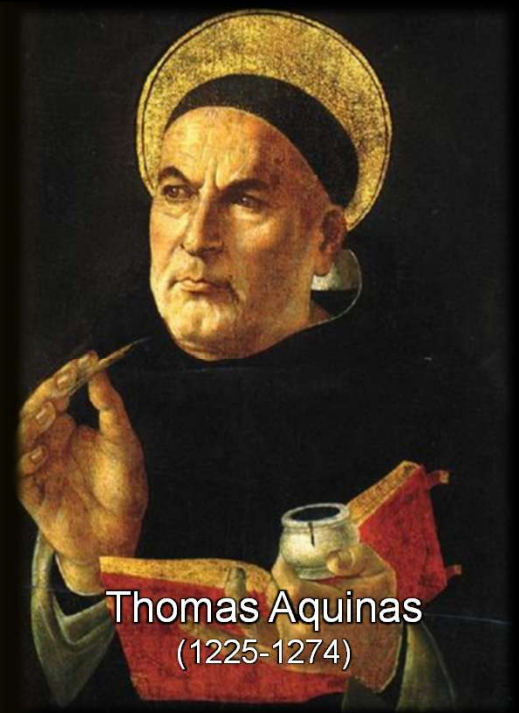
Being is that by which anything is made real.

This means that as a thing moves along the trajectory of its teleology, it acquires being.

In other words, the potentials that a thing has by virtue of its nature are actualized in as much as they take on being.

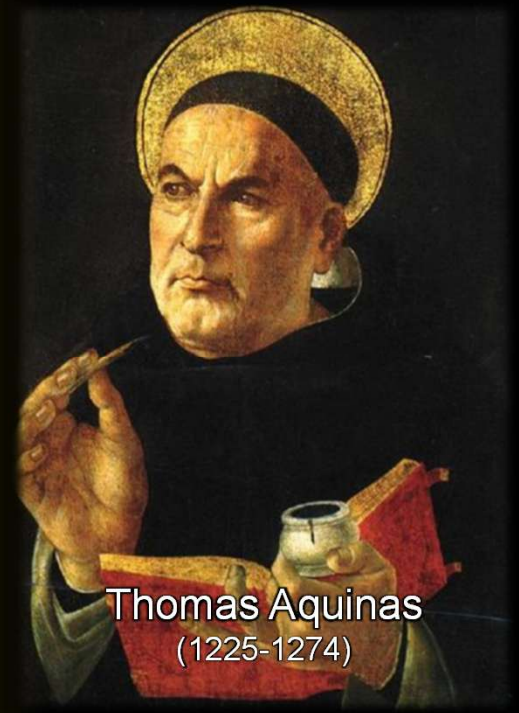
All this, then, points to one profound truth: the terms 'being' and 'good' are convertible.

"Goodness and being are really the same, and differ only in idea; which is clear from the following argument. The essence of goodness consists in this, that it is in some way desirable. Hence the Philosopher says: 'Goodness is what all desire.'



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"Now is it clear that a thing is desirable only in so far as it is perfect; for all desire their own perfection. But everything is perfect so far as it is actual."

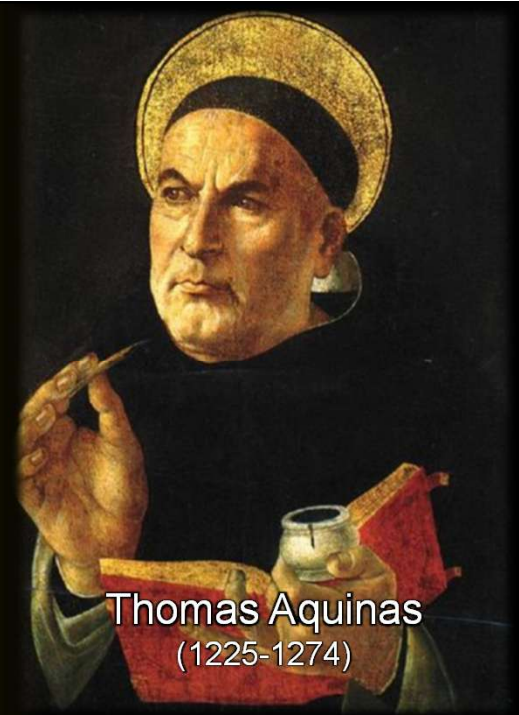


Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"Therefore, it is clear that a thing is perfect so far as it exists; for it is existence that makes all things actual, as is clear from the foregoing."

Hence it is clear that goodness and being are the same reality."

[ST1, Q5, art. 1]

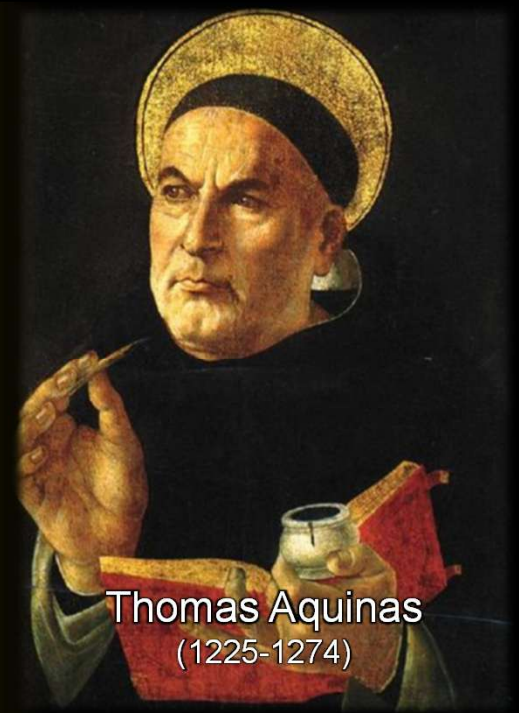


Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

1. 'Good' is first identified with 'desirable' (appetible).
2. 'Desirable' is identified with 'perfect'.

***"Now it is clear
that a thing is
desirable only in
so far as it is
perfect; for all
desire their own
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(ST I, Q5, art. 1)

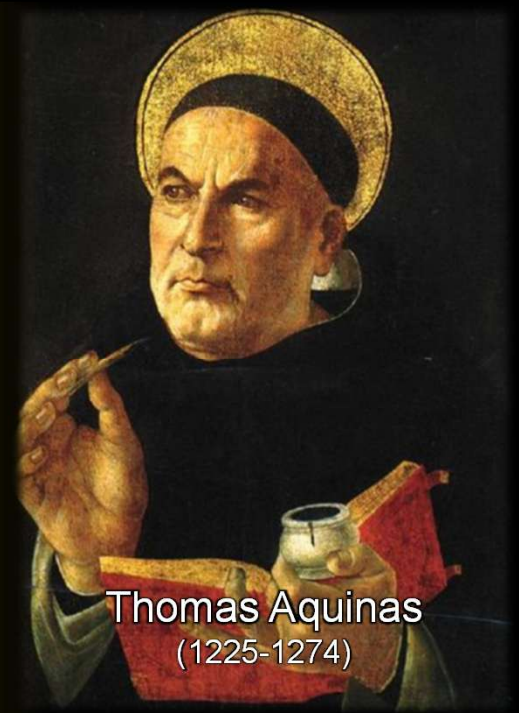


Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

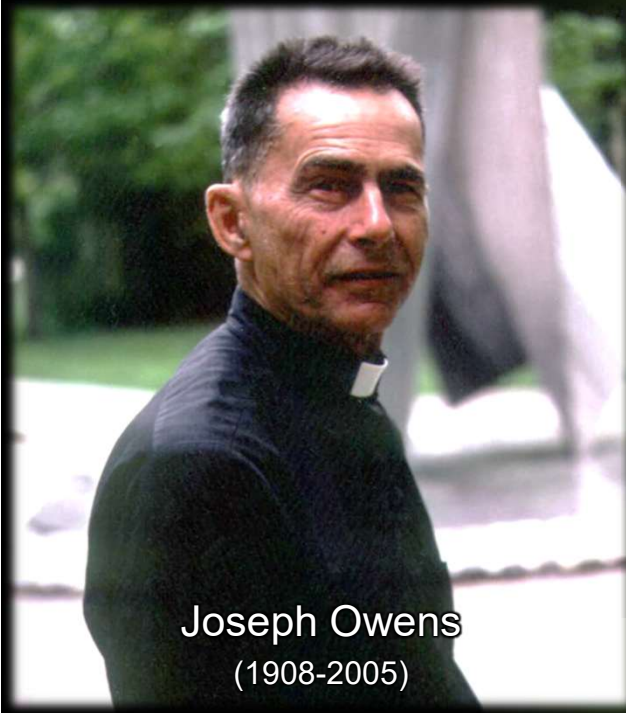
1. 'Good' is first identified with 'desirable' (appetible).
2. 'Desirable' is identified with 'perfect'.
3. 'Perfect' is identified with 'act' or 'actuality'.

***"Everything
is perfect so
far as it is
actual."***

(ST1, Q5, art. 1)

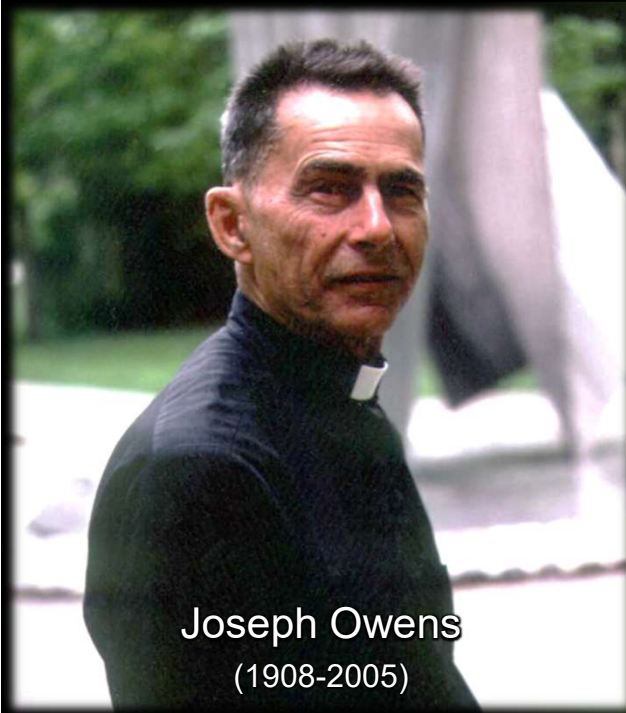


Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

A portrait of Joseph Owens, a man with short dark hair, wearing a black clerical shirt with a white collar. He is looking slightly to the right. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with greenery and a white structure.

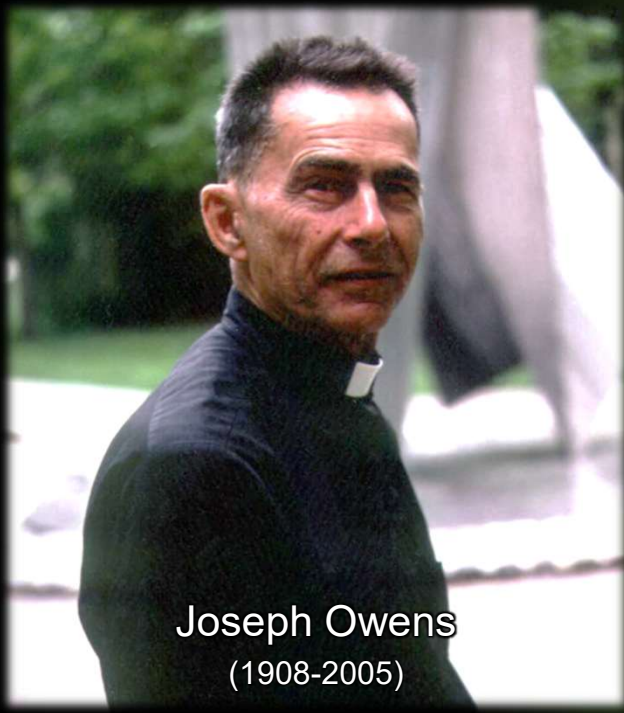
"An alternate word for actuality in this respect is "perfection" (entelecheia). It was used by Aristotle along with actuality to designate the formal elements in the things.

Joseph Owens
(1908-2005)

A portrait of Joseph Owens, a man with short dark hair, wearing a black clerical shirt with a white collar. He is looking slightly to the right. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with greenery and a white structure.

"These perfected the material element in the sense of filling its potentiality and completing the thing.

Joseph Owens
(1908-2005)



Joseph Owens
(1908-2005)

"Since existence is required to complete the thing and all the formal elements and activities, it may be aptly called the perfection of all perfections."

[An Interpretation of Existence (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1968), 52-53]

perfection
(entelecheia, ἐντελέχεια)

en, ἐν = in

+

telos, τέλος = end, goal

+

echein, ἔχειν = to have

perfection

(entelecheia, ἐντελέχεια)

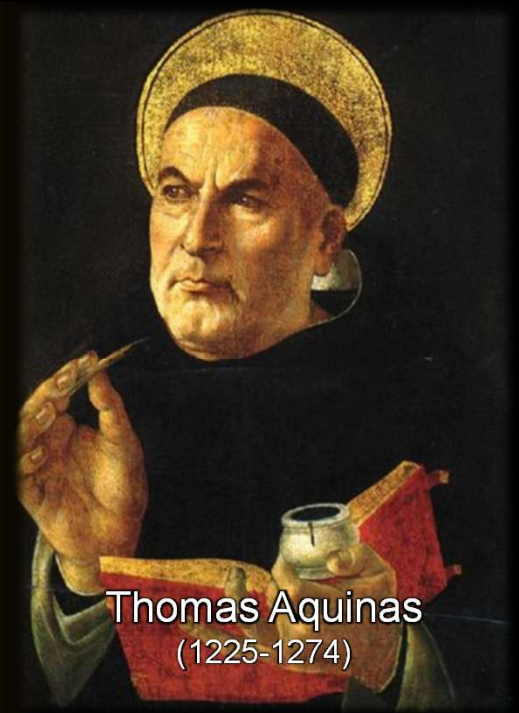
to have the end or goal in

***A being whose essence is its
existence will have, indeed, will
BE, all the perfections of
existence without limit.***

1. 'Good' is first identified with 'desirable' (appetible).
2. 'Desirable' is identified with 'perfect'.
3. 'Perfect' is identified with 'act' or 'actuality'.
4. 'Actuality' is identified with 'being'.
5. God is goodness itself in as much as God is being itself.

***"To God alone does
it belong to be His
own subsistent
being."***

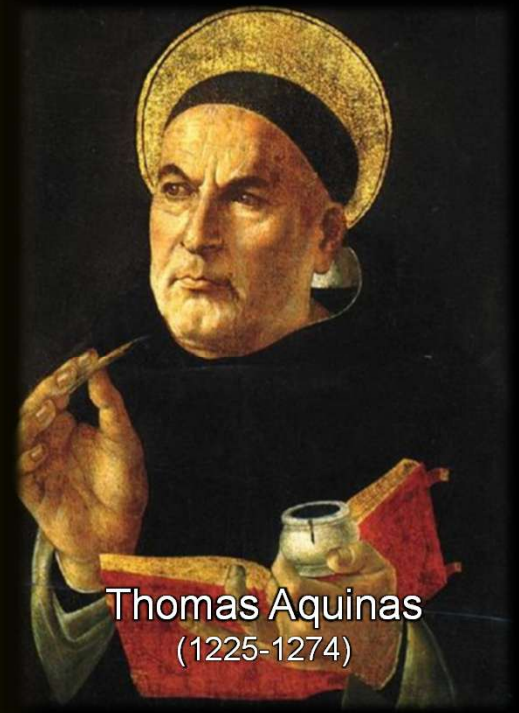
[ST 1, Q 12, art. IV]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"God is absolute form, or rather absolute being"

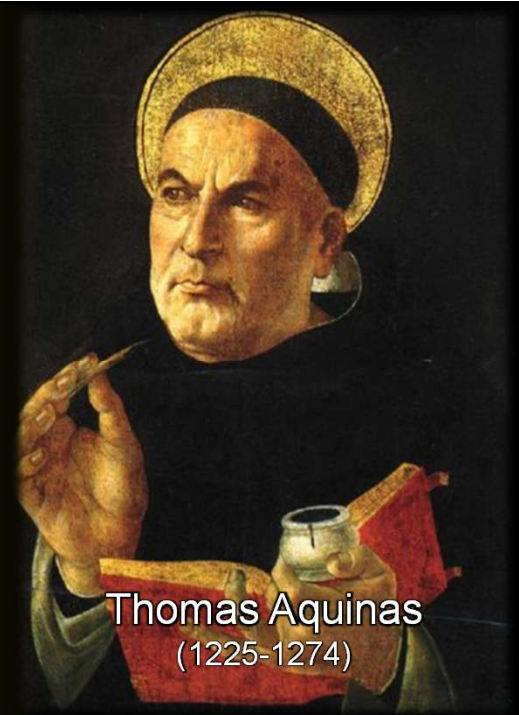
[ST, I, Q3, art. 7.]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"God is supremely being ... He is being itself, subsistent, absolutely undetermined."

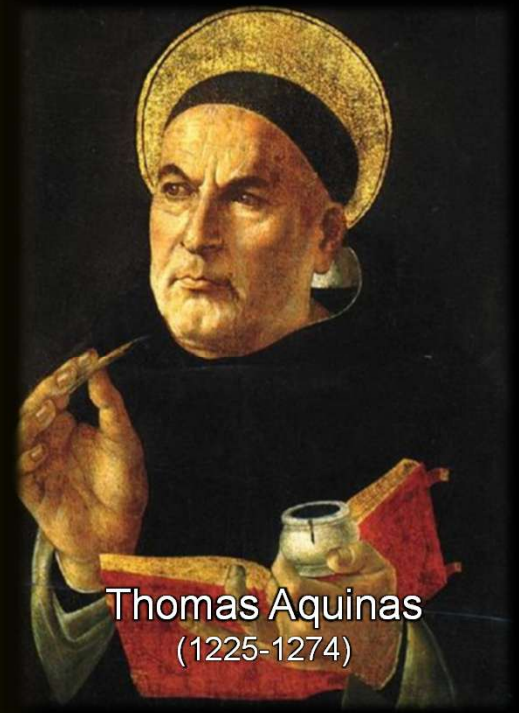
[ST I, Q 11, art. iv.]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

***"Good belongs
pre-eminently
to God."***

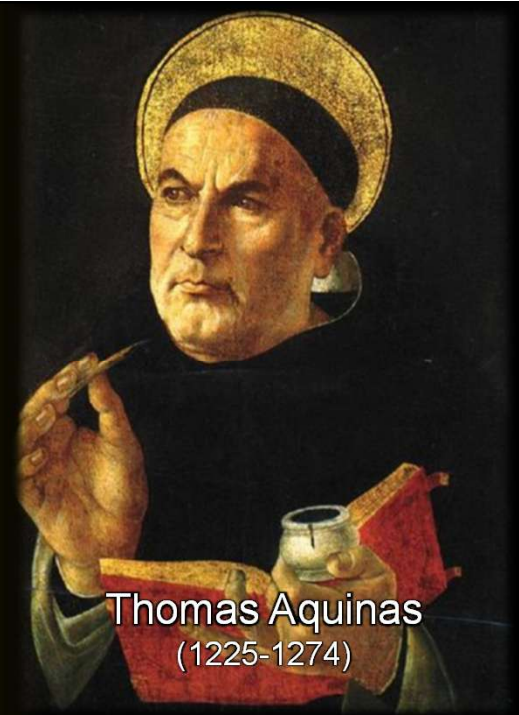
(ST I, Q5, art. 1)



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

***"... the perfections
following from God to
creatures ... pre-exist in
God unitedly and simply,
whereas in creatures
they are received,
divided and multiplied."***

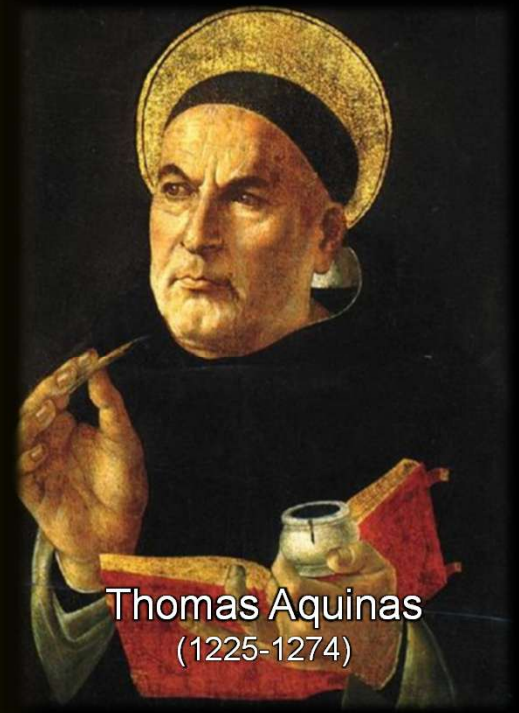
[Summa Theologiae, I, 13, 4]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

***"Wherefore it is clear
that being as we
understand it here is the
actuality of all acts, and
therefore the perfection
of all perfections."***

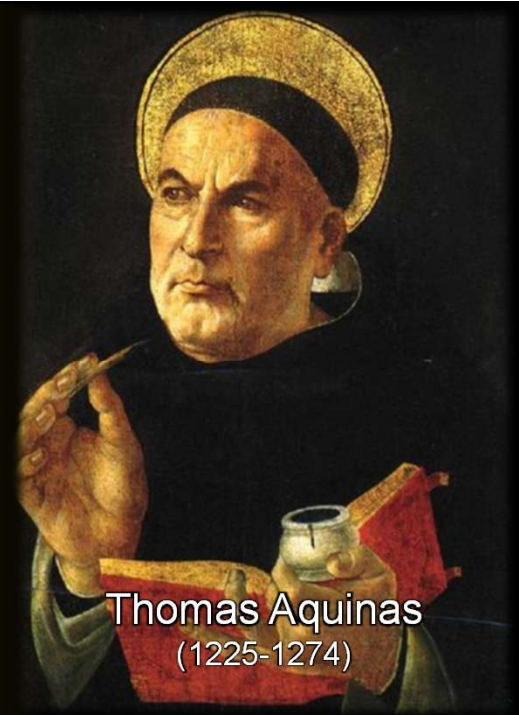
[On the Power of God, VII, 2, ad. 9, trans. English Dominican Fathers (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2004), v. III, p. 12]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

***"All perfections existing
in creatures divided and
multiplied, pre-exist in
God unitedly."***

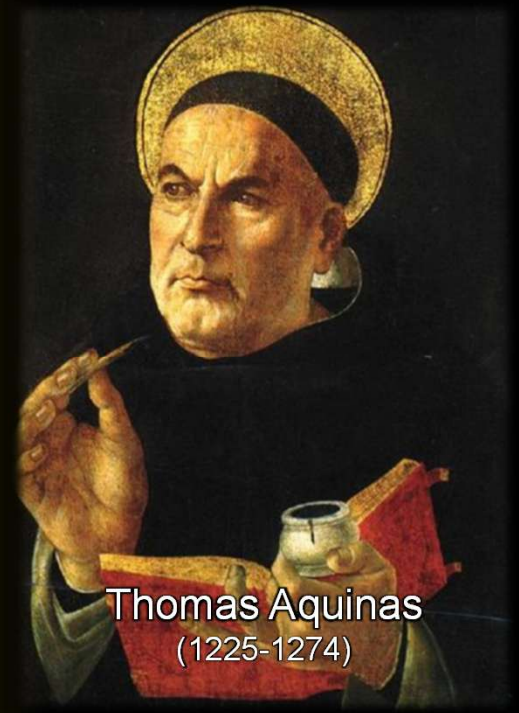
[Summa Theologiae, I, 13, 5]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

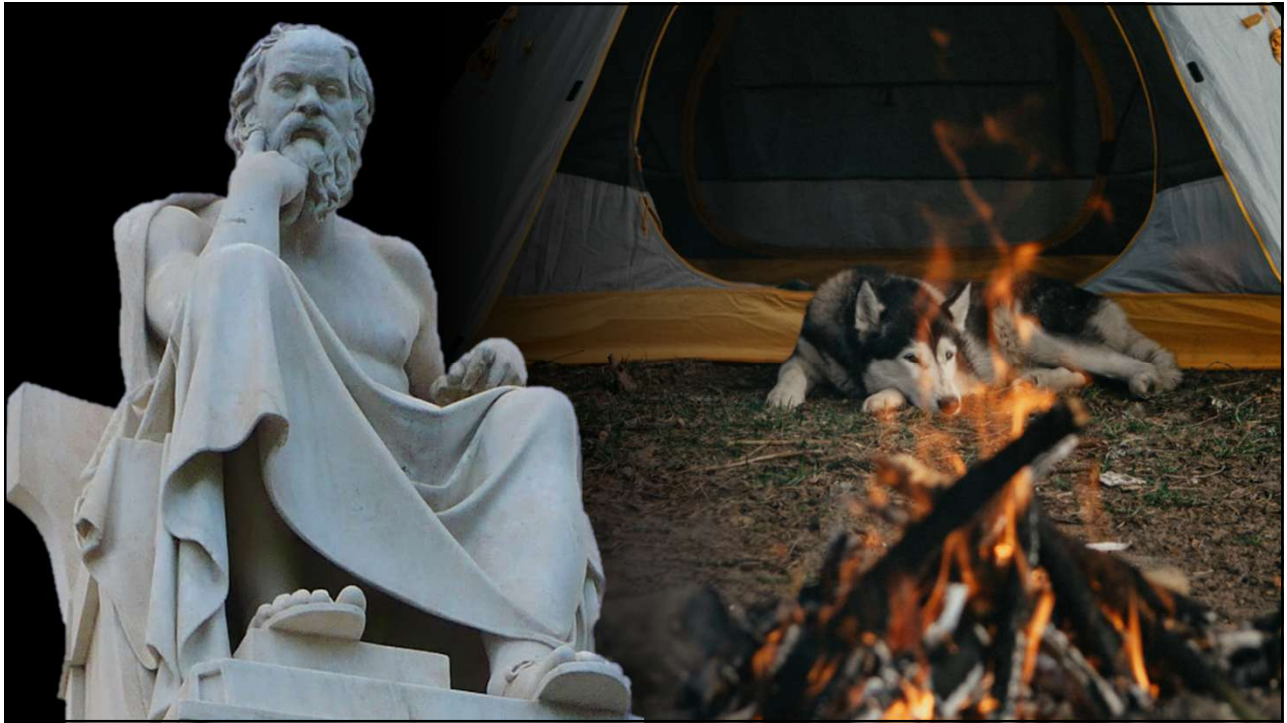
***"Nothing of the
perfection of being can
be wanting to Him who is
subsisting being itself."***

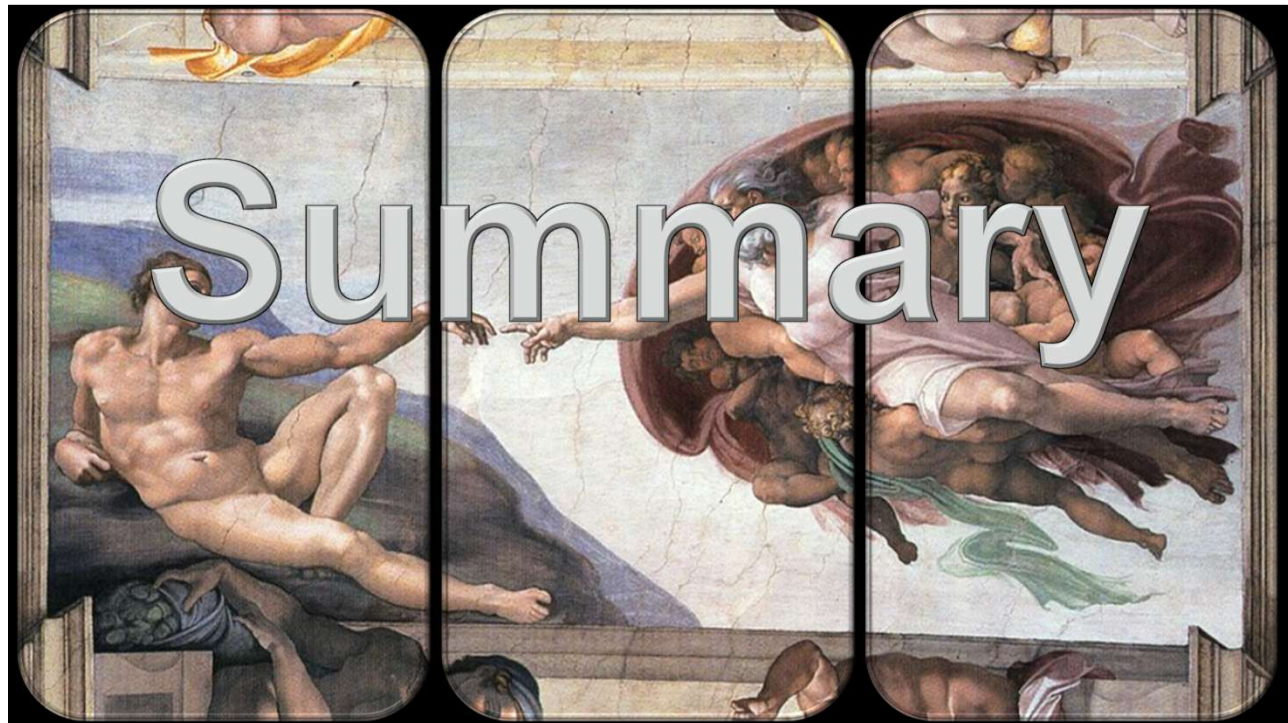
[*Summa Theologiae*, I, 4, 2, ad. 3]



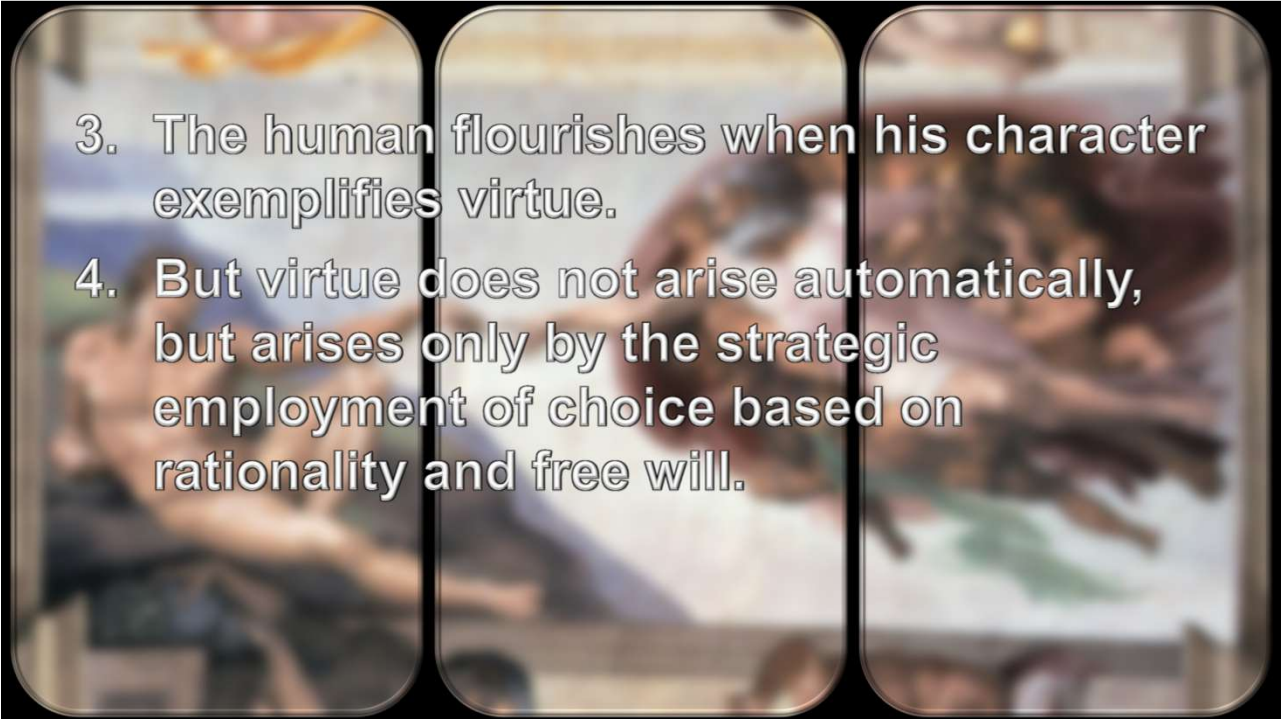
Thomas Aquinas
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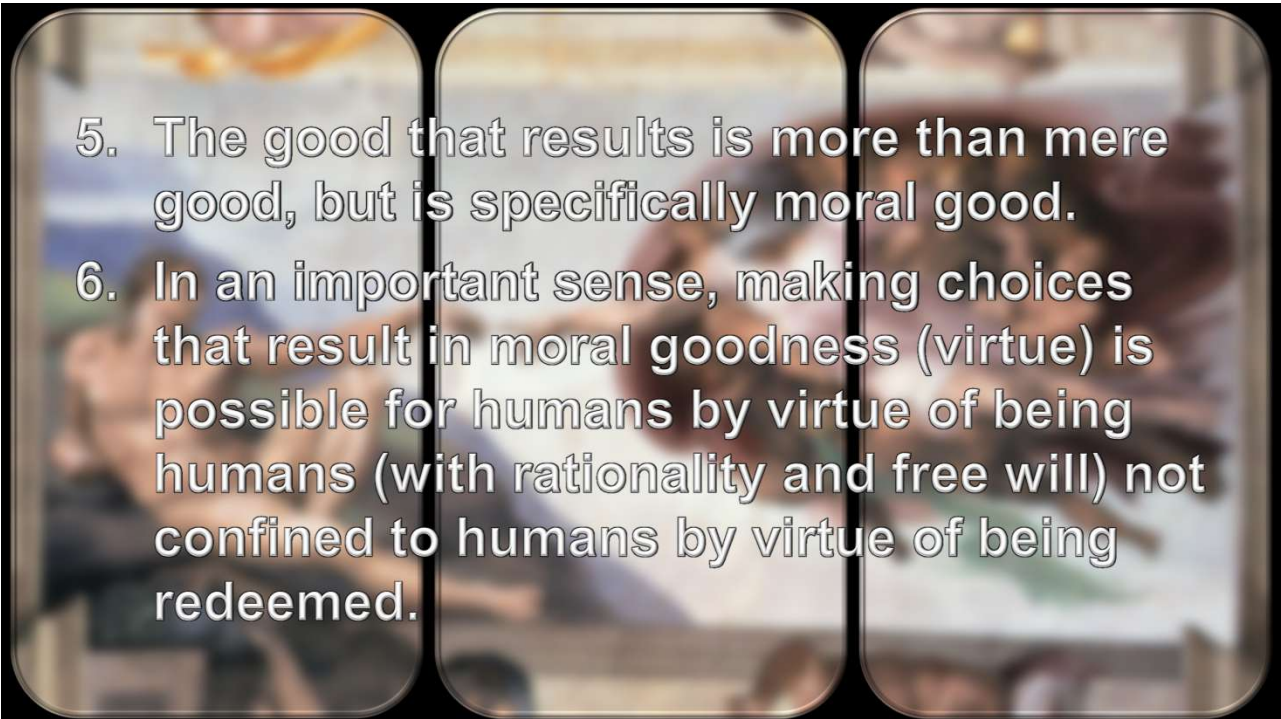
**From this point regarding God
as subsisting being itself, one is
in a position not only to
demonstrate the existence of
God, but also to demonstrate the
superlative attributes of God.**





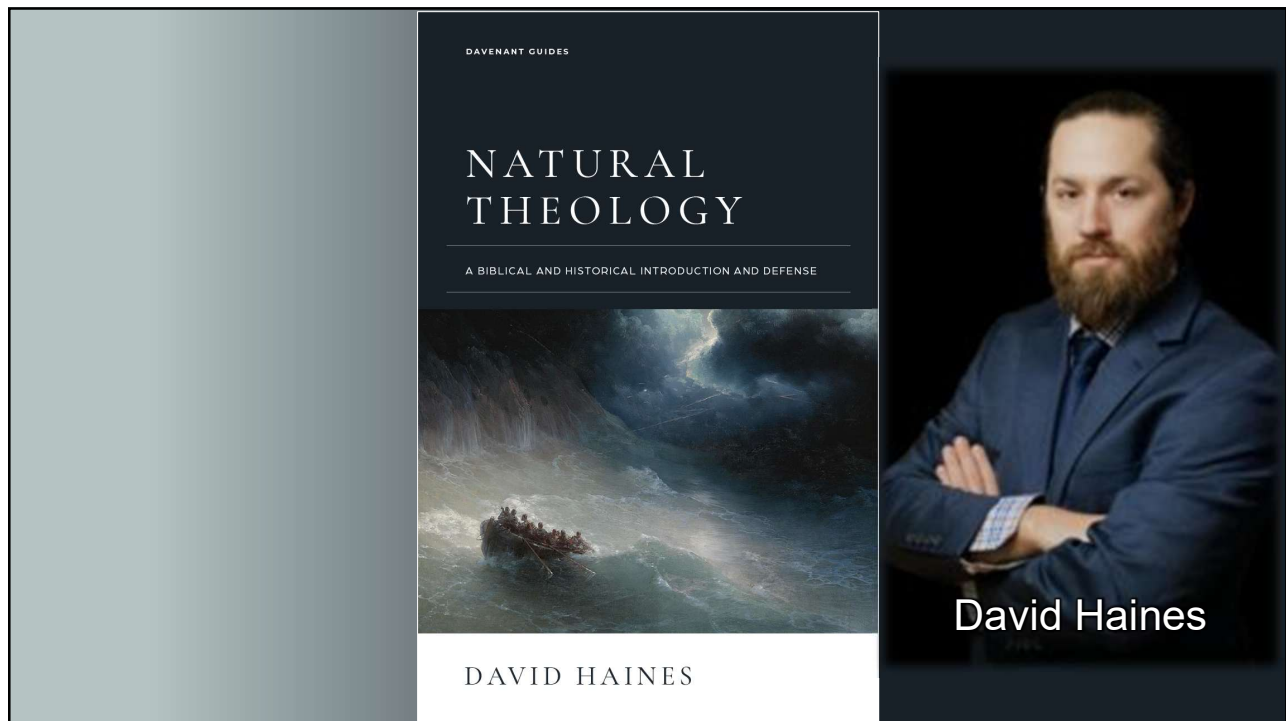
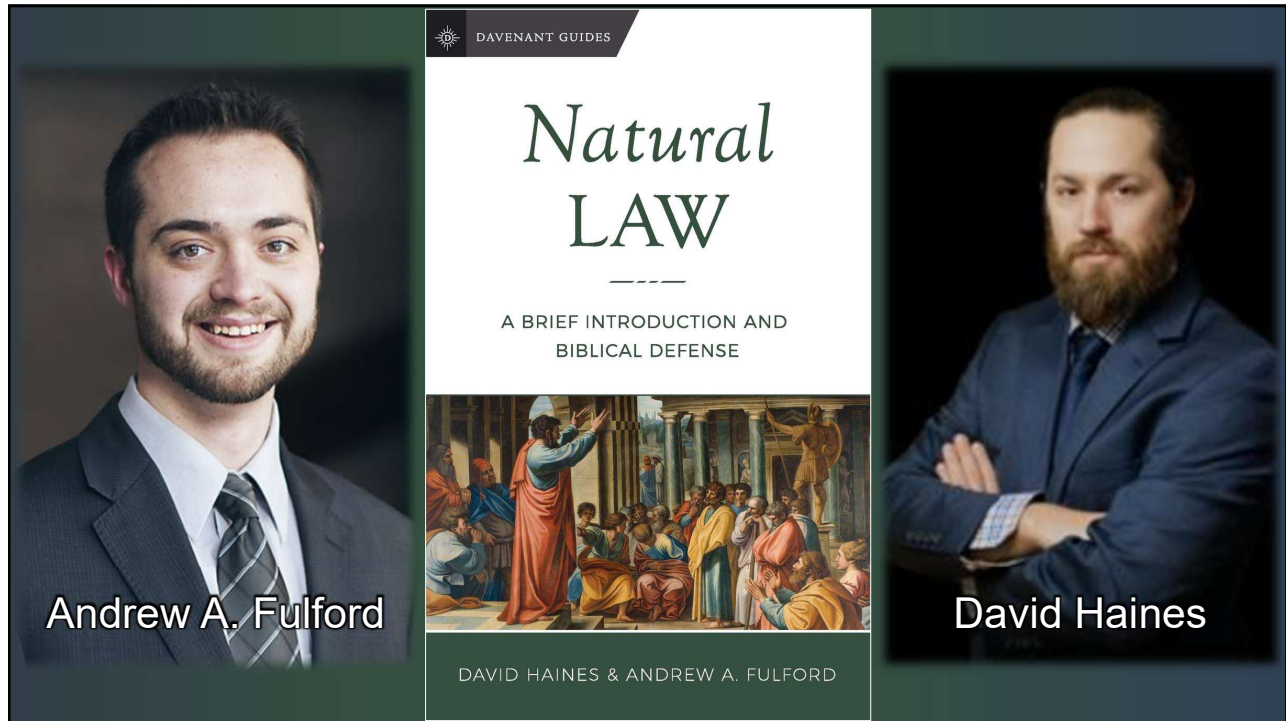
1. A thing's good, i.e., its flourishing arises out of that thing reaching its proper end; e.g., the flourishing of a tadpole is when it becomes a full-grown frog.
2. The flourishing of a human, however, has more to do with the soul than with the body.

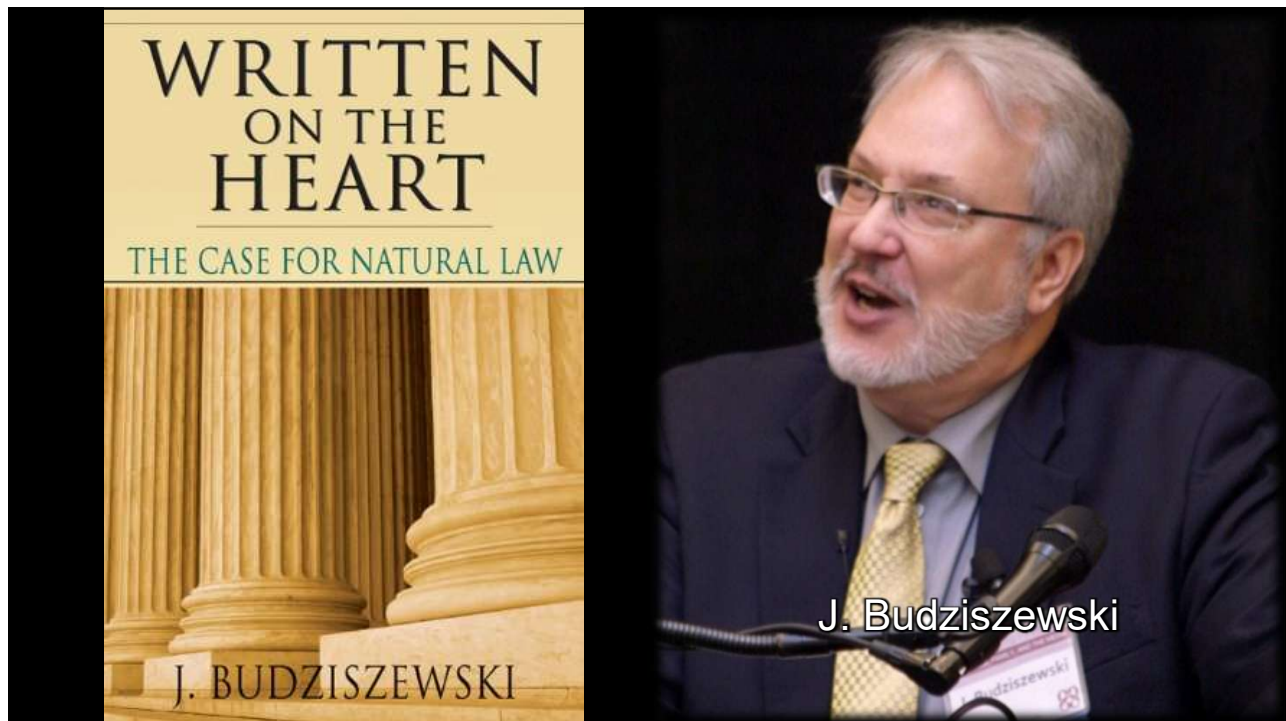
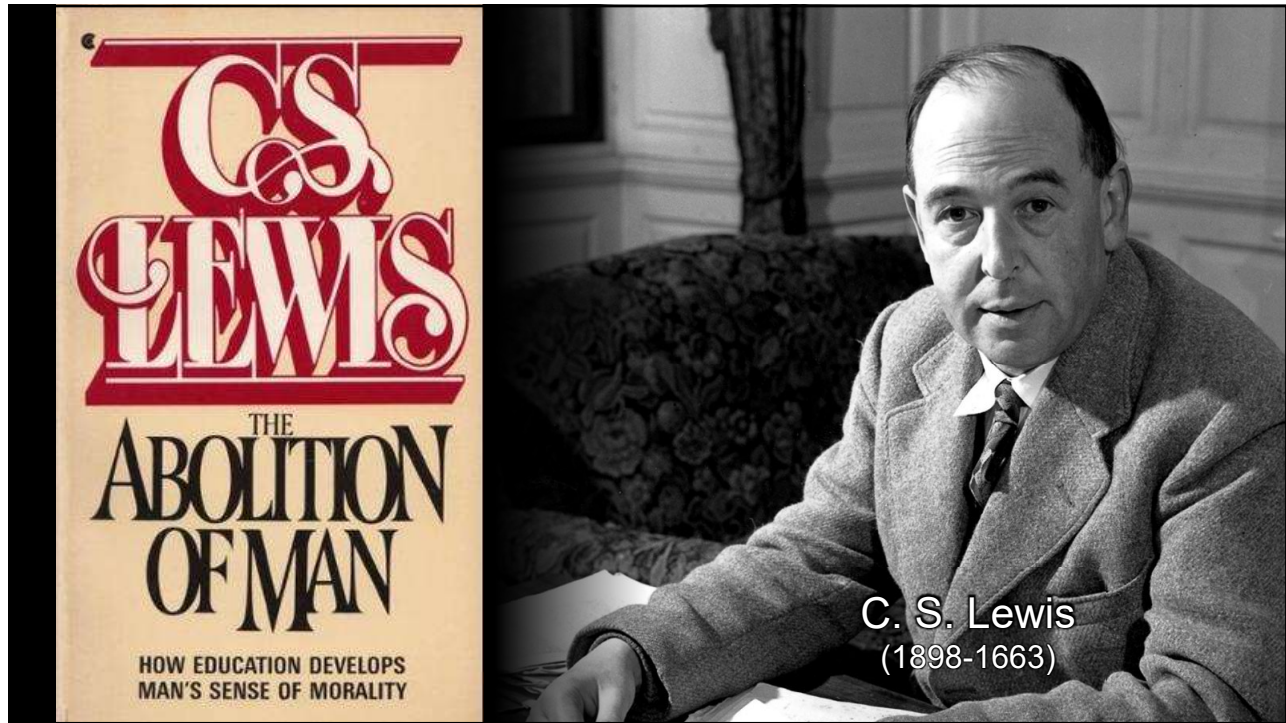
- 
3. The human flourishes when his character exemplifies virtue.
 4. But virtue does not arise automatically, but arises only by the strategic employment of choice based on rationality and free will.

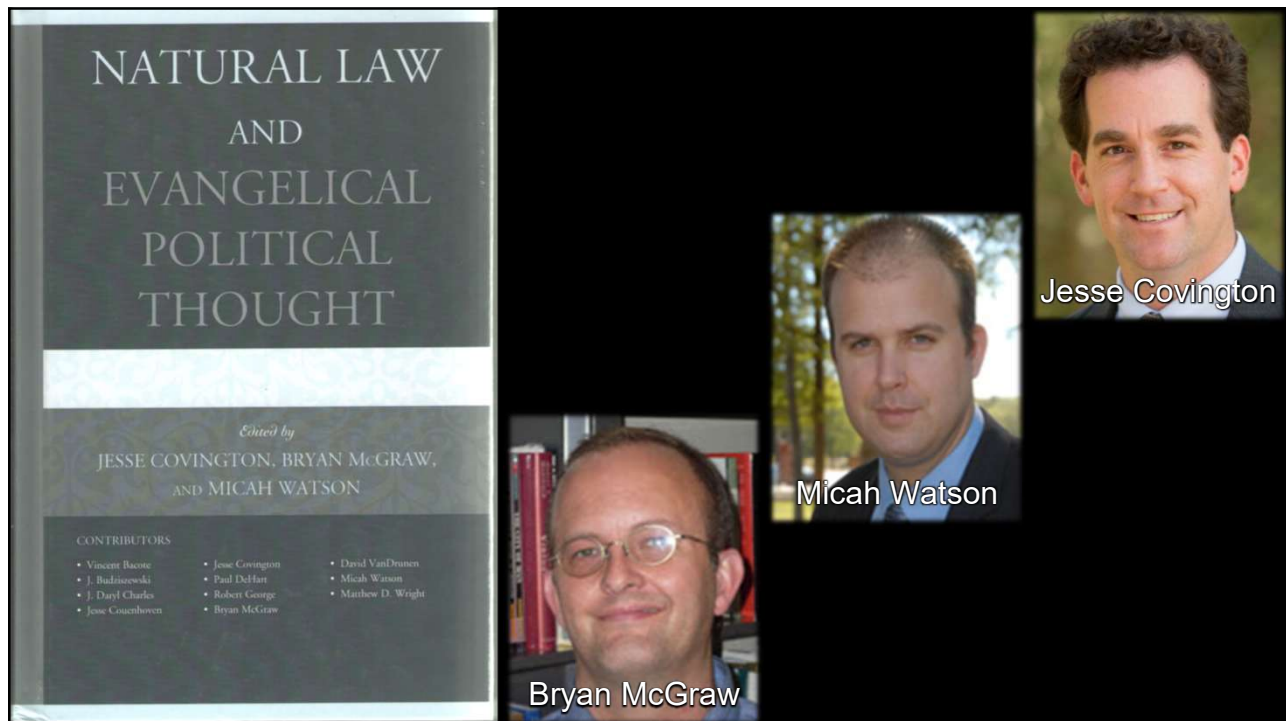
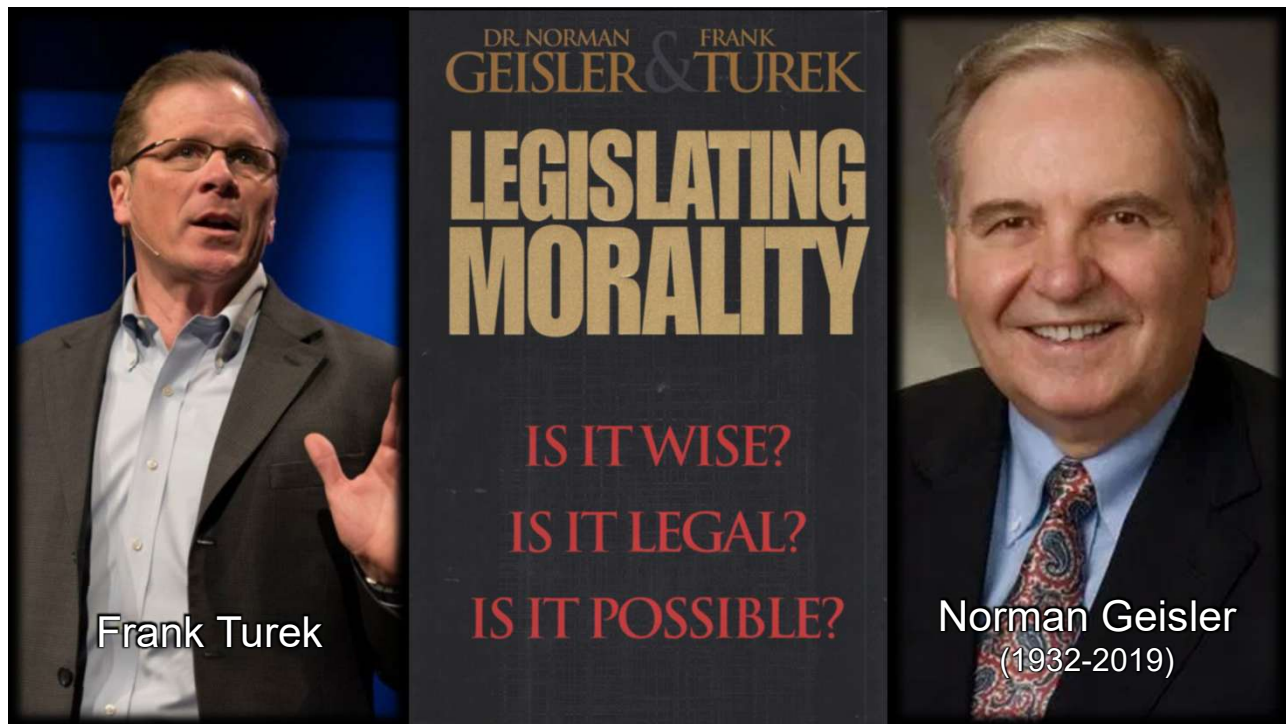
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5. The good that results is more than mere good, but is specifically moral good.
 6. In an important sense, making choices that result in moral goodness (virtue) is possible for humans by virtue of being humans (with rationality and free will) not confined to humans by virtue of being redeemed.

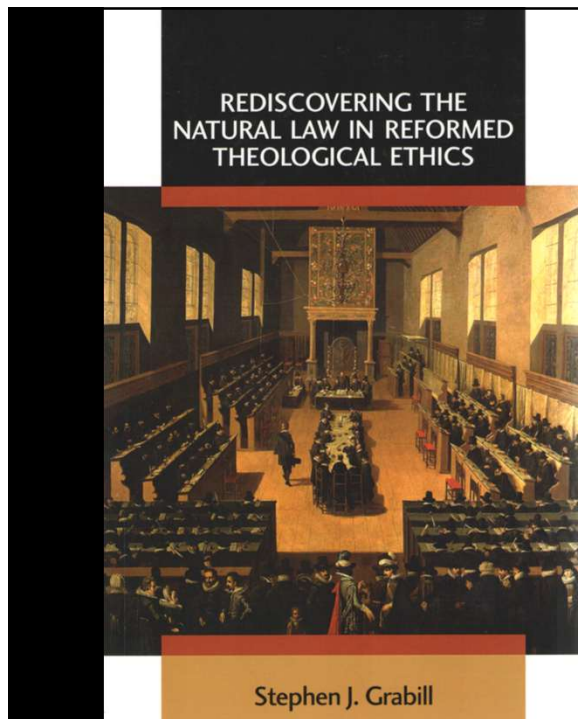
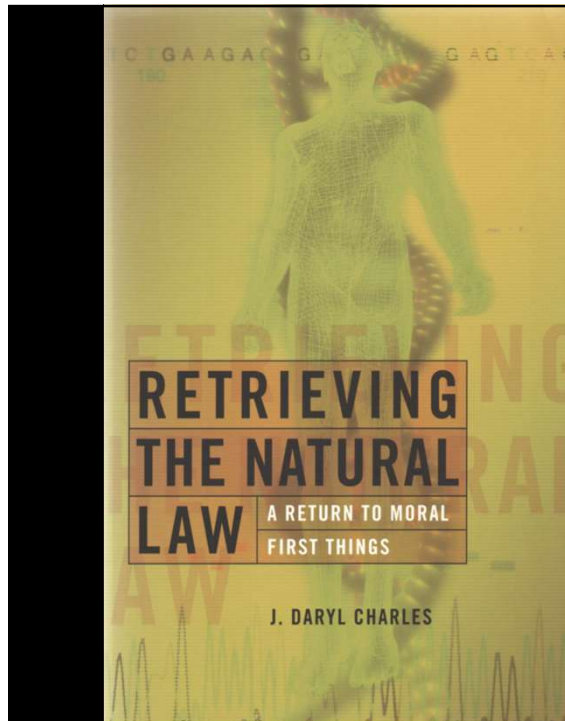
7. The possession of rationality and free will held commonly by all humans makes the discussion of objective moral truths possible.
8. The possibility of this discussion enables Christians to make arguments for public policy that exemplify moral virtue.

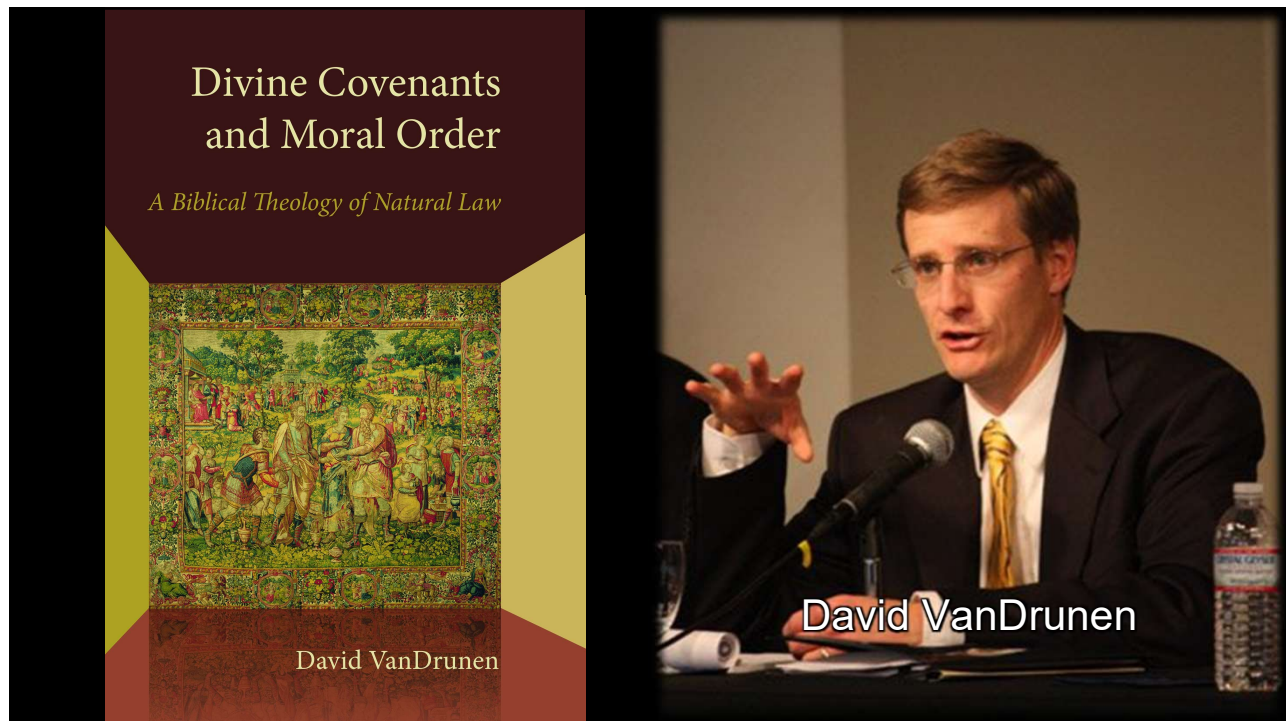
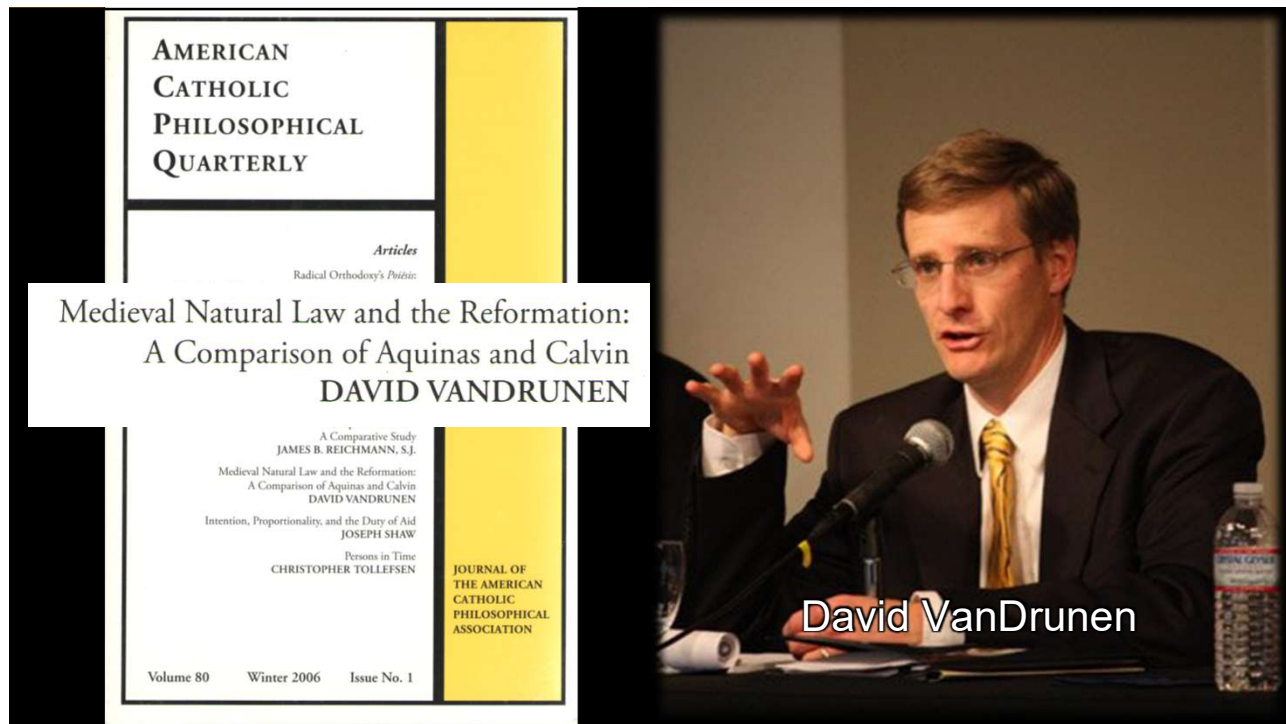


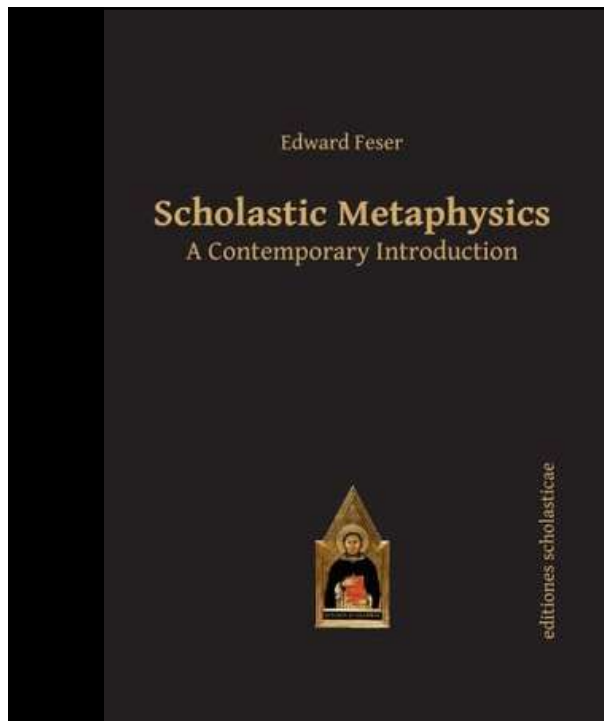
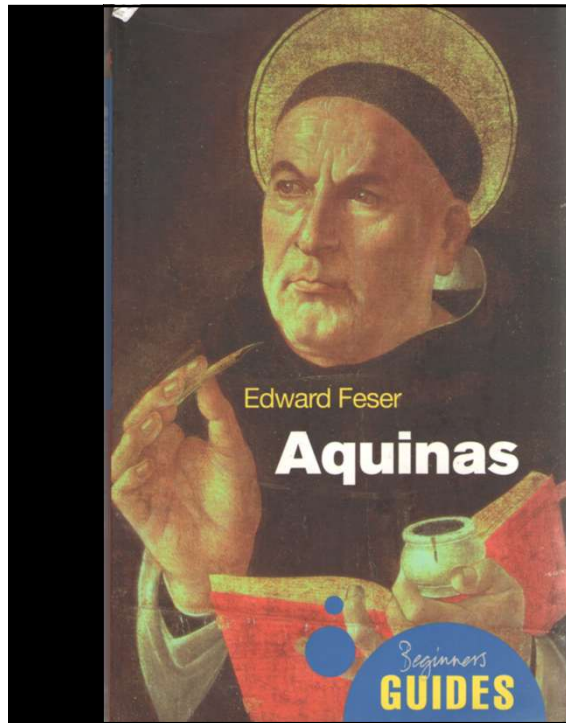


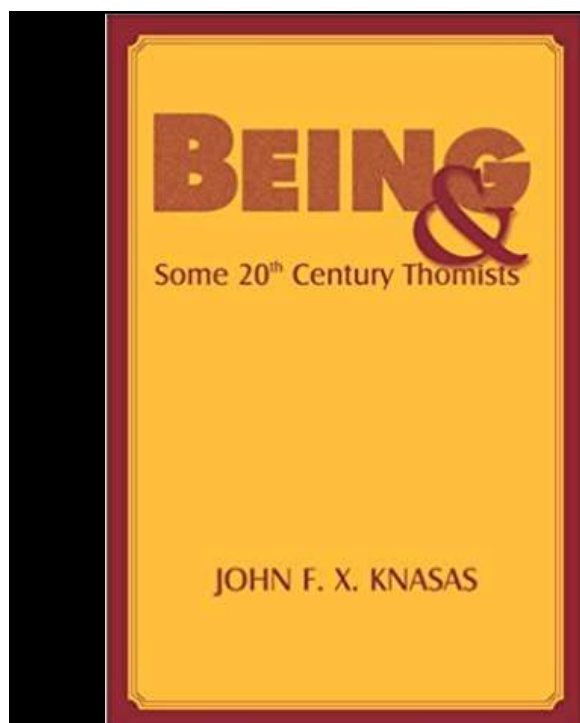
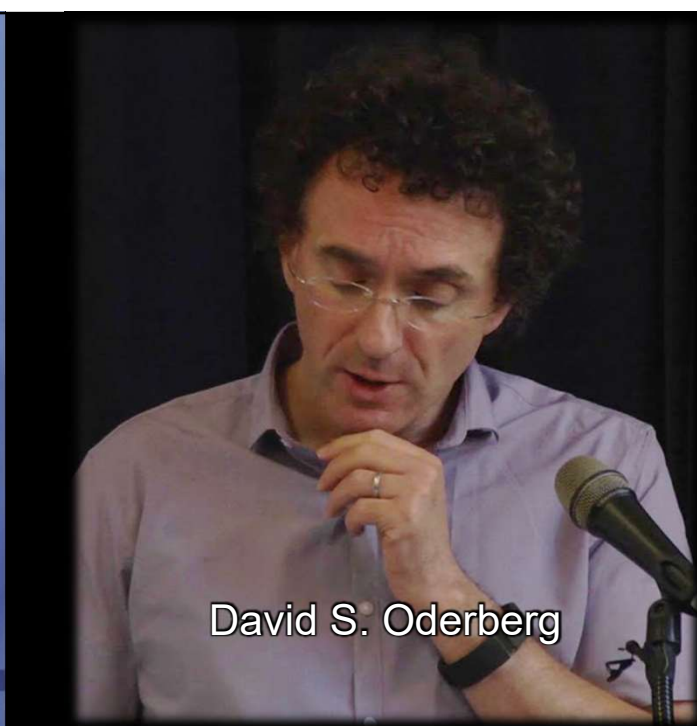
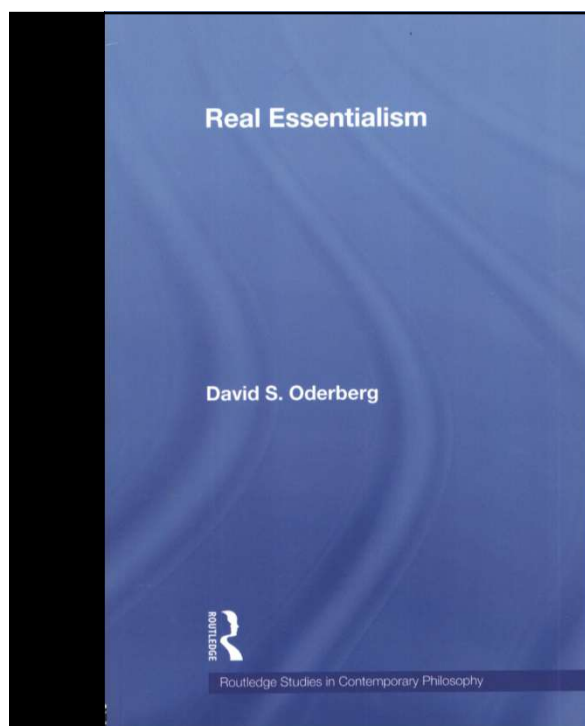












New Scholasticism 59 (1985): 449-470

The Convertibility of Being and Good in St. Thomas Aquinas

by Jan A. Aertsen

IN MANY medieval thinkers, e.g. Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, the statement can be found: "being and good are convertible" (*ens et bonum convertuntur*).¹ That is to say, "being" and "good" are interchangeable terms in predication (*converti enim est convertim praedicari*).² Wherever "being" is predicated of something, the predicate "good" is involved as well.

That must imply that "good" is here not a concept that adds a real content or a new quality to "being", as a result of which "being" is restricted. For in that case there would be no question of convertibility.³ "Good" is an attribute which pertains to every being, it is a property of being as such, a "mode that is common, and consequent upon every being."⁴ In other words, "good" is coextensive with "being", it is one of the so-called *transcendentia*⁵ which, since Suarez, are usually referred to as "transcendentals".

¹ Alexander of Hales, *Summa I*, Inq. 1, Tract. 2, q. 3, membrum 1, c. 1, a. 1, "An idem sit bonum et ens"; Bonaventure, *In II Sent.*, d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, fundam. 5, "Res et bonum convertuntur, sicut vult Dionysius", d. 24, a. 2, q. 3, fundam. 4; Albert the Great, *De Uno* q. 1, a. 4; *Summa Theol.*, tract. 5, q. 28; Thomas Aquinas, *In I Sent.* 8, 1, 3; *De Ver.* XXI, 2; *In De Hebdomadis*, lect. 9; *Summa Theol.* 1, 16, 2.

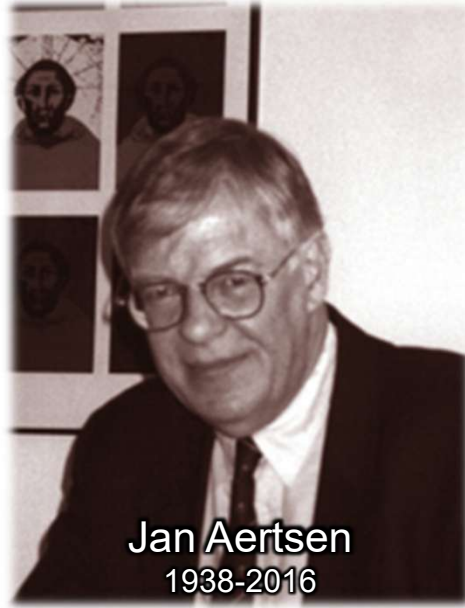
² Thomas Aquinas, *De Ver.* 1, 2 ch. 2.

³ *De Pot.* IX, 7 ad 5: Bonum quod est in genere qualitatis, non est bonum quod convertitur cum ente, quod nullum rem supra ens addit.

⁴ *De Ver.* 1, 1: modus generaliter consequens omne ens.

⁵ Comp. Albert the Great, *Summa Theologiae* tract. 6, q. 27, c. 2: Bonum dicitur intentionem communem et est de transcendentibus omne genus sicut et ens.

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Jan Aertsen
1938-2016

Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought

FROM PHILIP THE CHANCELLOR (CA. 1225)
TO FRANCISCO SUÁREZ



BY
JAN A. AERTSEN

BRILL

Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals

The Case of Thomas Aquinas

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Jan A. Aertsen

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