



## Natural Teleology and Human Dignity: Reading the Second Vatican Council in the Light of Aquinas

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The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Contemporary World (*Gaudium et Spes* [GS]) and the Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis humanae* [DH]) are two of the most important documents of the Second Vatican Council. Not only were both promulgated on 7 December 1965, but each one bases its moral teaching on the category of the dignity of the human person<sup>1</sup>. *Gaudium et Spes* takes the dignity of the human person as its starting point and explores its implications in the light of Revelation<sup>2</sup>. The title of *Dignitatis humanae* invokes this teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* and presents it as the foundation of the right to religious freedom.

The first of this paper's two aims is to show that each document grounds human dignity in natural teleology but does not offer a fully developed philosophical treatment of this position. By natural teleology I mean the view that the good of any thing, human beings included, corresponds to, and so can be discerned from, the ends to which it is directed by its nature, whether the ends in question are those proper to it in and of itself or those that it has as part of a wider order. In grounding human dignity in natural teleology Vatican II adopts a widely disputed set of underlying philosophical positions. Moreover, as authoritative

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<sup>1</sup> *Constitutio Pastoralis De Ecclesia in mundo huius temporis*, AAS 58 (1966) 1025-1115; *Declaratio De libertate religiosa*, AAS 58 (1966), 929-946.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Pars. I, cap. I, *De humanae personae dignitate*, GS 12-22.

Church teachings, the documents of Vatican II limit themselves to stating the doctrine of the Church without providing an articulated philosophical statement of its case.

The second aim of this paper is to indicate how Thomas Aquinas provides valuable resources for articulating Vatican II's thought on human dignity in more philosophical terms. It is worth turning to him since he is an eminent theologian who shares the same beliefs, concerns, and background, both Scriptural and Patristic, as Vatican II. Of particular relevance are his views on the relation between human dignity and natural teleology.

## 1. Human Dignity and Natural Teleology in Vatican II

Various studies on the genesis of *GS* indicate that the traditional doctrine of man as the image of God is at the root of the Council's teaching on human dignity. This, I shall argue, is why *GS* and *DH* ground human dignity in natural teleology.

In first place, an examination of the genesis of *GS* reveals how the Council's teaching on human dignity is based on the traditional doctrine of man as *imago Dei*. The theme of human dignity was already present in the *schema 'De ordine morali'*, drafted by the preparatory commission but rejected at the beginning of the Council. The last of its five chapters is entitled *De naturali et supernaturali dignitate personae humanae*. As *GS* will eventually do, this *schema* grounds human dignity in our condition as beings created in the image of God and called to divine filiation in Christ<sup>3</sup>.

Even though this *schema* was rejected, its central themes – natural law, moral conscience, the commandment of love, sin and redemption – were to be treated in the projected *schema* on the Church in the world. Moreover, its insistence that human dignity is grounded in man's condition as *imago Dei* was integrated into *GS*. The Sub-Commission that wrote the first draft of what would become *GS* was faced with the

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<sup>3</sup> «Humanae personae dignitas in eo sita est, quod homo ad imaginem et similitudinem Dei factus, et natura sua immediate ad Creatorem ordinatus, rationis lumen, liberae electionis potestatem, amoris flammam, rerumque corporalium dominium a Deo accepit. Immo consors divinae naturae (cf. 2 Petr. 1, 4) factus, vocatur ad eam participationem filiationis divinae Christi, qua et nos filii Dei nominamur et sumus (cf. 1 Io. 3, 1)» *Schema Constitutionis Dogmaticae De ordine morali christiano*, n. 24, Acta Synodalia, vol I, pars IV, 713.

challenge of finding a suitable perspective for treating such a varied and broad range of subjects. It met this challenge by making the Biblical concept of *imago Dei*, so dear to Patristic theology, the central concept of the first chapter of the *schema* (*De admirabili vocatione hominis*, May 1963). However, this carefully crafted section, set against the Church's dogma and Christian anthropology, was discarded in the alternative draft that a group of theologians drew up in Zurich in January of 1964. Most of it was recovered, however, in the Arricia draft (February 1965), which was the basis for the final text<sup>4</sup>. As Jean Mouroux argues in his penetrating commentary on the first chapter of *GS*, the concept of *imago Dei* is the key to its structure and internal logic<sup>5</sup>. In this way *GS* and *DH* develop a distinctively Christian anthropology<sup>6</sup>.

At the same time, these two documents do in fact ground human dignity in natural teleology. This is consistent with their Christian anthropology. True to the spirit of a distinctively Christian anthropology, *GS* avoids distinguishing between two orders, the natural and the supernatural, and speaks only of a single supernatural order – that of the Covenant – in which creation is but the first moment, but whose centre and end is Christ. This is probably attributable to the influence of Henri

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. P. DELHAYE, «La dignità della persona umana», in G. BARAÚNA (ed.), *La Chiesa nel mondo di oggi: studi e commenti intorno alla Costituzione pastorale Gaudium et spes*, Vallecchi, Florence 1966, 264-286, 264-267.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. MOUROUX, «Sur la dignité de la personne humaine», in M. PEUCHMAURD – Y.-M.J. CONGAR (eds.), *L'Eglise dans le monde de ce temps: constitution pastorale Gaudium et spes*, Cerf, Paris 1967, 229-253, 231.

Historically speaking, it is Christianity with its biblical concept of man as *imago Dei* which is responsible for the conviction that all humans possess the same indelible fundamental dignity. In a book-length study John Rist presents an impressive array of evidence to show that no comparable conception of human dignity existed in Classical antiquity. Contemporary rights-talk is a secularized version of the Christian conception of human dignity. Cf. J.M. RIST, *Human Value: A Study in Ancient Philosophical Ethics*, W.J. VERDENIUS – J.C.M. VAN WINDEN (eds.), *Philosophia Antiqua*, E.J. Brill, Leiden 1982.

<sup>6</sup> Several eminent commentators point out that *GS* develops a distinctively Christian anthropology. On the presence, motives and characteristics of this Christian anthropology, cf. H. DE LUBAC, *La Rivelazione Divina e il Senso dell'uomo: Commento alle Costituzioni conciliari «Dei Verbum» et «Gaudium et Spes»*, E. GUERRIERO (ed.), *Opera omnia*, 14, Jaca Book, Milan 1985, 254-266; J. MOUROUX, «Sur la dignité de la personne humaine», 229-233; J. RATZINGER, «Kommentar zum I. Kapitel (Pastorale Konstitution über die Kirche in der Welt von heute [Constitutio pastoralis de Ecclesia in mundo huius temporis „Gaudium et spes“])», in H.S. BRECHTER – B. HÄRING – J. HÖFER – ALII (eds.), *Zweite, völlig neu bearbeitete Auflage, Teil III: Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil. Konstitutionen, Dekrete und Erläuterungen, Lateinisch und Deutsch, Kommentare*, Herder, Freiburg - Basel - Wien 1968, 313-354, 316-318.

de Lubac's *Surnaturel* (1946). On the other hand, within this single supernatural order the structures of creation retain their own consistency and are discernible by reason alone<sup>7</sup>. Natural teleology and human dignity are eminent examples of such structures.

Here are five indications that these two documents do in fact ground human dignity in natural teleology.

First, in typically Thomist fashion, the Council stresses the teleological order that characterises the two specific attributes of man as *imago Dei*: intellect and will. Our intellect is directed towards truth; our will towards true good. It is due to this natural teleology that we are morally obliged to seek the truth, to adhere to it and order our entire life according to the demands of the truth that we know (*DH* 2-3).

Second, this directedness of our intellect and will presupposes that there is a teleological order in nature. We are not fulfilled by adhering to arbitrarily preferred goods, but only to true goods. If so, there must be an order of goods and things that exists independently of our thought and preferences, and which provides us with the standard for our judgments. Otherwise there is no standard by which we can distinguish the proper use of freedom from abuses of it.

Third, there is a ranking and even a teleological order among the various orders of truths. The Council insists that it is wisdom rather than progress in science, technology and other cultural achievements that brings the intellectual nature of a human person to its complete fulfilment. The achievements of culture, science and technology are certainly enriching and ennobling. However, wisdom, insofar as it consists fundamentally in seeking a deeper truth beyond the phenomena and events of the world, transcends them. This is because we can find that there actually is a deeper truth, a deeper structure or order in reality, and that there are invisible realities beyond the visible world (*GS* 15 §§ 1-2).

In this way the Council is asserting not only the possibility of discovering the truth about God through some sort of metaphysical reflection, but also that we are meant to engage in such reflection. For this reason, the Council denounces atheism as a deviation from truth and

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<sup>7</sup> «Etsi enim idem Deus sit Salvator qui et Creator, idem quoque Dominus et historiae humanae et historiae salutis, tamen in hoc ipso ordine divino, iusta creaturae autonomia et praesertim hominis nedum auferatur, potius in suam dignitatem restituitur atque in ipsa firmatur». *GS* 41.

proposes religion as a matter of truth. Man does not fully live according to truth unless he acknowledge and entrust himself to his Creator (*GS* 18 § 1).

Fourth, institutions are directed towards the good of man. Human persons are not only the subject and principle but also the end of all social institutions (*GS* 25 § 1). Indeed society is meant to be geared towards the perfection and fulfilment of human persons, as can be adduced from the Council's definition of the common good: "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily" (*GS* 26 § 1).

This definition of the common good obviously raises the question as to what constitutes human fulfilment. Once again natural teleology provides the key. Hence, in fifth place, natural teleology allows us to determine what perfects man in particular areas. The Council does not explore this theme either systematically or exhaustively. However, it does ground some moral requirements in this way. As we have already seen, religion and the respect for religious freedom are presented as demands of the teleology inherent in the intellect, which is ordered towards the discovery of truth and, ultimately, to union with God. Marriage is another moral issue that the Council addresses at length and grounds in the teleology of human nature. Human sexuality is, to use a term denoting teleology, 'ordered' to spousal love and communion and to the procreation and upbringing of children (*GS* 48 § 1; 50 §§ 1 et 3). Natural teleology is also invoked when it is declared that man is social by nature and that some societies, namely the family and political society, correspond immediately to our innermost nature (*GS* 25 §§ 1-2). Given our social nature, we have a responsibility to promote the common good (*GS* 30 § 1) and to respect others, seeing in each person another self and being concerned about helping each one have all that is necessary to lead a dignified life (*GS* 27 § 1). Solidarity then is another demand of natural teleology.

Besides upholding natural teleology and some of its moral implications, *GS* and *DH* take it as the foundation of human dignity. They take human beings to be superior both ontologically and axiologically to the rest of nature. This endows human beings with a special dignity. Of all things in the world, we human beings possess the highest dignity.

This is because we humans are persons: individuals endowed with reason, free-choice and, therefore, personal responsibility for our actions (*DH* 2 § 2). Our ontological superiority manifests itself in two expressions of our rationality: interiority and intellectual activity (*GS* 14 § 2).

On the one hand, we human beings rightly recognise that we are not mere things, such as a mere particle of nature or an anonymous element of a human society. We are superior to physical beings on account of our interiority: *interioritate enim sua universitatem rerum excedit* (*GS* 14 § 2)<sup>8</sup>.

On the other hand, we surpass the rest of nature by virtue of our intellect<sup>9</sup>. Thanks to our intelligence we have made scientific, technological and cultural progress. If these superior ways of living are the result of intelligence, then the Council is right to assert that we surpass the rest of nature in virtue of our intellect.

However, the Council also maintains that this ontological superiority confers upon human beings an axiological superiority to the rest of nature. This axiological superiority makes us the immanent end of the universe (*GS* 12§3)<sup>10</sup>. In virtue of our rational nature the rest of nature is ordered towards our good<sup>11</sup>. God has set man over nature, and through work man is meant to exert this dominion over nature so as to meet his own needs, as well as those of his family, and to the good of society (*GS* 34 § 1-2). Social and political institutions are also ordered to the good of human persons (*GS* 25-26). This does not explain from a philosophical standpoint, however, why man's ontological superiority necessarily entails axiological superiority.

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<sup>8</sup> Ratzinger provides an insightful explanation the constitution's reference to interiority in the light of Augustine (*intimior intimo meo*) and Pascal: «Tous les corps, le firmament, les étoiles, la terre et ses royaumes, ne valent pas le moindre des esprits; car il connaît tout cela, et soi, et les corps, rien». PASCAL, *Pensées*, Chevalier 829. Cf. J. RATZINGER, «Kommentar zum I. Kapitel», 323-324.

<sup>9</sup> «Recte iudicat homo...se intellectu suo universitatem rerum superare». *GS* 15 § 1.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Gen* 1:26; *Wis* 2:23; *Ps* 8:5-7; J. MOURoux, *Sur la dignité de la personne humaine*, 233.

<sup>11</sup> The chapter of *Gaudium et spes* on human dignity opens with an assertion of a teleological order in nature. Everything in the world is ordered toward man as its centre and summit. «Secundum credentium et non credentium fere concordem sententiam, omnia quae in terra sunt ad hominem, tamquam ad centrum suum et culmen, ordinanda sunt». *GS* 12 § 1.

Aware that the primacy of the human being is contested, the Council wisely specifies that most (*fere*) not all, believe this too. Cf. J. MOURoux, «Sur la dignité de la personne humaine», 233.

It is understandable that the Council does not provide any such explanation. Theological reflection moves in a different direction from philosophical reasoning. Whereas philosophy must begin by making sense of the world around us, theology considers things from God and Revelation down. Natural teleology features in the Council as an upshot of the biblical doctrine of man as *imago Dei*, which presupposes in turn the doctrine of creation. Revelation teaches that God has created all things but called man to share in his life by making man in his own image. The uniquely human capacity to enter into a personal relation with the creator and end of all things attests to this. Man is ordered towards God, his ultimate end (Cf. *GS* 13 § 1; 17). This in turn means that we enjoy primacy over the rest of creation. In other words, our capacity for communion with God indicates that God has ordered the rest of nature to the good of human beings.

Hence, in *GS* and *DH* the Council, drawing out the implications of the biblical doctrines of creation and *imago Dei*, grounds human dignity and its moral entailments in a certain conception of natural teleology. The God-directedness of human nature is the basis for asserting the existence of a teleological order in nature. On the one hand, nature as a whole is teleologically ordered: all things are ordered to God, with man, the image of God, being ordered to know and love God as such. This godliness of man entails in turn that nature is ordered to the good of man. On the other hand, we can discover the truth about God and ourselves from the teleological order in nature, whereas we discover how we should act from the teleology of our own nature.

In the current philosophical scene there is valuable philosophical work that proposes this same conception of personhood and its ethical implications<sup>12</sup>. That notwithstanding, the Christian anthropology of Vatican II, with its confident assertions of human dignity, has hardly

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<sup>12</sup> One eminent example Robert Spaemann, whose ethical thought is centred on human dignity and natural teleology. Cf. R. SPAEMANN, «Naturteleologie und Handlung. Hermann Krings zum 65. Geburtstag mit Dank», *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 32 (1978), 481-493; R. SPAEMANN, «Über den Begriff der Menschenwürde», in E.-W. BÖCKENFÖRDE – R. SPAEMANN (eds.), *Menschenrechte und Menschenwürde. Historische Voraussetzungen - säkularer Gestalt - christliches Verständnis*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 1987; R. SPAEMANN, *Glück und Wohlwollen : Versuch über Ethik*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 1989; R. SPAEMANN, *Personen : Versuche über den Unterschied zwischen ‚etwas‘ und ‚jemand‘*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 1996; R. SPAEMANN – R. LÖW, *Natürliche Ziele : Geschichte und Wiederentdeckung teleologischer Denkens*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 2005.

set the tone for discussions of personhood in mainstream contemporary philosophy.

Much if not most work in analytic philosophy presupposes some degree of naturalism: the view that the natural sciences provided the main standard for any objective knowledge of the world. That is a far cry from the creationist worldview of Vatican II. Indeed, it is generally believed that such a worldview is incompatible with naturalism.

Second, the consideration of environmental issues from a naturalist perspective has raised questions about the status of human beings. Consequently, during the last four decades the idea that humans possess a greater dignity than animals has been challenged<sup>13</sup>.

Furthermore, some major philosophers, such as Foucault and Deleuze, have taken up Nietzsche's contestation of the consistency of the subject and articulated influential anti-humanist theories.

These trends indicate that for much, if not the greater part, of contemporary philosophy, Vatican II's teaching on the nature and the ethical implications of human personhood is highly questionable. The Council was well aware of this (*GS* 19 § 2) and of the need to corroborate its account of human dignity from a philosophical standpoint. It proposes its conception of man on the understanding that there are rival conceptions of human nature and dignity (*GS* 12 § 2). **Therefore, for the Council engagement with rival conceptions is mandatory and not to be bypassed.**

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. P. SINGER, *Animal Liberation :A New Ethics for our Treatment of Animals*, New York Review - Random House, New York 1975. M. MIDGLEY, *Animals and Why They Matter*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England 1983. T. REGAN, *The Case for Animal Rights*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1983. Of course, the mere assertion of animal rights does not entail a denial of human dignity and rights. However, it does entail a shift in the grounds for attributing rights and moral status to human beings. Those grounds can no longer be some supposed dignity that is unique to human beings in virtue of their rationality, but must be the common status of humans and animals as sentient beings.

Some defenders of animal rights are motivated by broader concerns about the environment. Indeed, some question the Christian conviction that humans *vis à vis* the rest of the world, have an overriding moral status. To claim that humans possess such an overriding moral status means that the non-human parts of the world are ordered to the good of human beings and so can be used as resources to meet genuine human needs. This does not entitle an indiscriminate or unbridled exploitation of natural resources. Christianity also sees man as a steward who must care for the environment. Ultimately, claims about the overriding moral status of human beings presuppose that humans, while part of the environment from a biological and physical standpoint, transcend the material domain in virtue of their rationality. Some strands of environmentalism, see humans exclusively as part of the environment. This means that promoting the good of the environment may sometimes override promoting the good of humans.



## 2. Proximate Natural Teleology: Aquinas on the Grounding of Natural Teleology

There are relatively few references to Thomas Aquinas in *GS* and *DH*, even though it would not be difficult to show how his thought inspires much of the teaching of both documents<sup>14</sup>. The two documents probably make scant mention of him in order to stress that their teaching is grounded in Revelation rather than a particular theological tradition. Still, to do the work that *GS* and *DH* leave undone – to provide a fuller and more systematic account of their teaching – one must turn to a particular theological tradition. In this regard, the thought of Aquinas is particularly promising. Of all major Catholic theologians, he is arguably the one whose work exhibits the highest degree of philosophical sophistication, penetration and cohesion. On the other hand, he is particularly suited to the task of providing a philosophical account of the Council's teaching on human dignity since he not only grounds human dignity in natural teleology but also analyses final causality in detail.

Completing the work that *GS* and *DH* left undone calls for two kinds of argument, each of which addresses one of two lines of objections to natural teleology. Natural teleology was initially defined as the view which identifies the good of any particular thing with both: (i) its particular ends and (ii) those ends that it may assume as part of a wider whole. According to this description, there are two levels of natural teleology: on a micro-level there is the natural teleology of a thing considered in and of itself and its particular, proximate ends; on a macro-level there are the ends that the thing is directed towards as part of a wider whole. To provide adequate theoretical resources on this issue, Aquinas needs to offer a compelling defence and explanation of natural teleology on each of these two levels. He also needs to show how an account of natural teleology on these two levels is connected with the issue of human dignity. In the remainder of this paper, I shall attempt to show that he delivers on these two scores since he claims that

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<sup>14</sup> In *GS* there are only explicit references to Aquinas's writings in the sections regarding the social nature of man (25, n. 45), the ends of marriage (48, n. 106), the universal destination of goods and property (69, nn. 147 et 149). Hence there are no explicit references to his writings in the section on human dignity. In *DH* (n. 3) there are only three explicit references to his works. They are all references to the *Summa theologiae*'s treatise on law and mainly regard eternal law.

we recognise human dignity against the backdrop of natural teleology on a global level and, in particular, by seeing how the other parts of the universe are ordered to its principle part: human beings. He presents an account of natural teleology on a global level and links it to the manifestation of human dignity. Furthermore, this account of natural teleology on a global level presupposes one of final causality on a micro-level. In order to see a directedness of the various parts of the universe to human beings, we must first see these different parts as parts. However, to see a part as a part we must first see it as a thing in its own right that, by achieving its own particular end, makes a particular contribution to the good of the system. This means that we need to recognise the existence of natural teleology on both an immediate and a global level. Aquinas provides an interesting account of each.

A justification and clarification of the particular, proximate natural teleology of things is also necessary in order to interpret the implications of human dignity correctly. If there is proximate natural teleology, we need to determine what constitutes human good by analysing the teleology intrinsic to human beings as a whole and in their various constitutive dimensions.

The limits of this paper only allow for a summary of the main stages of Aquinas' analysis of proximate natural teleology. In my view, there are three such stages, each of which has to do with intentionality or end-directedness.

1. Efficient causality is end-directed.
2. The end-directedness of efficient causality explains how ends can exert a real causal influence even in a state of virtual existence.
3. End-directedness is the result of thought and so its presence in non-rational beings must be the work of some mind.

We can find a way into Aquinas's analyses of these three points in the first draft of the fifth way, *QD De veritate*, q. 5 a. 2, which touches upon each of them.

First, agent or efficient causality is intentional, namely, end-directed. This is Aquinas' main reason for upholding final causality. To qualify as an efficient cause, the thing in question must exert a determined effect. Hence, the thing in question only functions as an efficient cause insofar as its action is directed towards that particular effect. Sin-

ce the effect in question is not just any result but a determined one, end-directedness holds of ends to which the agent is directed *per se* rather than *per accidens*. As Thomas often argues, end-directedness is a condition of efficient causality<sup>15</sup>. This way of grounding final causality deprives objections to natural teleology of much of their force since the efficient cause is the form of causality that virtually all acknowledge. If final causality is a condition of efficient causality, objecting to the former risks making it impossible to uphold the latter.

Rejecting final causality reduces instances of efficient causality to chance events in which the connection between a cause and its effects would be casual rather than determinate. This is hardly a convincing view. It deprives us of any grounds for distinguishing between things going right and going wrong. This is why Aquinas objects to some anti-teleological models from ancient philosophy.

From his reading of the *Metaphysics* Aquinas believes that some ancient philosophers only acknowledged material causality (*Metaph.* I [A], 3, 984a1) whereas others only add efficient causality to the picture (*Metaph.* I [A], 3, 984b-984a16). Both views are unsatisfactory because they cannot explain what teleological explanations do: how things perfect themselves by attaining their proper good.

On the one hand, appeals to efficient causality cannot substitute teleological explanations. To suppose they could would mean that any case of efficient causality would result in the good of the thing that it works upon. Take the act of heating something. At times this does result in good. As an Irishman I believe that the heating powers of boiling water are good whenever I need to make some tea. At other times those same heating powers are not good but bad for a thing. The heating powers of boiling water were not good for me when, as an infant, I stuck my left hand into a fresh cup of tea. Many good things are destroyed if they are submitted to excessive heat. Another kind of cause is responsible for making efficient causality good or bad.

Thomas believes that this same point also proves the inadequacy of explanations based on material causality alone. Although it is not entirely clear what he means, if we construe him in the following way we can see why explanations based on material causality alone would fail to substitute teleological explanations. Materialist reductionism concei-

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. *De principiis naturae* 3 (Ed. Leon., t. 42, 16-19).

ves events as processes in which one body (*a*) acts upon another (*b*) and changes it. However, with form left out of the picture there is no way of knowing whether the change in question is beneficial or not to *b*, and so there is no room for a teleological explanation either. We can only determine whether a change is beneficial by taking intentionality – end-directedness – into account, and the ends to which a thing is directed depend upon its form. Mechanistic models of causality are inadequate because, in reducing the world to matter, they not only leave forms out but also the intentionality of those forms. As a result, a mechanistic model of causality is incapable of accounting for the difference between things going well or badly in nature. Moreover, to distinguish between things going well or badly, we need to distinguish between ends to which a thing is directed in and of itself from those to which it ends up at. Only the former counts as end-directedness.

Nevertheless, even if we admit that efficient causality is necessarily end-directed, we still have to explain how the end in question qualifies as a cause. Often ends are states of affairs that are only brought into being through their correlative efficient cause and only really exist once the efficient cause has carried out its work well. Prior to that, they only exist virtually. Aquinas is well aware of this: ends come first in terms of the directedness of the action but are the last thing to be brought about (*finis est prius in intentione, ultimus in executione*)<sup>16</sup>. A cause, however, must exert a real rather than a virtual influence on that which it brings into being. The virtual existence of most ends prior to the completion of their correlative efficient cause would seem to preclude that they exert any real causality.

However, the intentionality of efficient causes indicates that the influence exerted by a virtually existent end is nonetheless real. Whenever there is an efficient cause there is a virtually existent final cause. Indeed, something becomes an efficient cause once it is activated by the correlative final cause<sup>17</sup>. Hence, it is not always necessary that a cause

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Scriptum* IV, d. 14 q. 1 sol. 2B ad 3; ST I-II, q.1 a.1 ad 1; I-II, q. 18 a. 7 ad 2; I-II, q. 20 a. 1 ad 2; I-II, q. 25 a1 c; *QD De malo*, q. 2 a. 3c.; *Contra doctrinam retrahentium*, c. 7.

<sup>17</sup> There is a difference between being an end (*finis*) and being a final cause. An end only becomes a final cause while it triggers off an instance of efficient causality. Cf. *QD De potentia*, q. 5 a. 1c.

exist prior to its effect in terms of time<sup>18</sup>. A virtually existent end can still qualify as a cause as long as it exerts a real causal influence. This is the second key stage to Aquinas's justification of final causality: the intentional character of final causality explains how it can exert a real causal influence while still in a state of virtual existence.

Summing up, efficient causality is intentional – that is, end-directed – and through its intentional character the end, which may only exist virtually in the intentionality of the efficient cause, exerts a real causal influence and so qualifies as a cause in its own right, one which on the level of intentionality is prior to the efficient cause itself.

Of course, at present we tend to speak of intentionality in a narrower sense than Aquinas does. Whereas 'intentionality' currently denotes the object-directedness of any state of consciousness and so is only attributable to sentient beings, for Thomas it denotes any kind of end-directedness and so is a feature of any action and being whatsoever<sup>19</sup>. In his view, however, intentionality is only attributable to non-sentient and non-rational beings in a limited sense<sup>20</sup>. Ultimately, the limited intentionality of non-rational beings is always the work of some rational agent. In other words, the teleology found in nature is the result of a superior, non-human intellect. Naturalism is incompatible with teleology. Comparing the end-directedness of natural forms to that of rational action allows us to see why Aquinas believes that the existence of teleology provides a basis for disproving naturalism<sup>21</sup>.

In rational action, the agent understands, and so can give an account of the end pursued, the motive for pursuing it and what makes

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<sup>18</sup> As Thomas puts it, a cause is not always prior in nature to effect. Cf. ST I-II, q.1 a. 1 et ad 1. It must be prior in some respect, however. As already noted, they are prior in terms of intentionality, namely, in the end-directedness of an efficient cause.

<sup>19</sup> A similar view is proposed in contemporary analytic metaphysics by dispositional essentialists. Cf. G. MOLNAR, *Powers: A Study in Metaphysics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2003, 60-81.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. ST I-II, q. 12, a. 5.

<sup>21</sup> In and of itself Aquinas's case against certain non-teleological models of causality does not disprove naturalism: cf. *QD De veritate*, q. 5 a. 2. Rather it shows that the interplay of all four kinds of cause – matter, form, agent and end – is necessary to explain natural phenomena. It is possible then to be committed to natural teleology from a naturalist standpoint. If so, one grounds natural teleology in natural kinds or what Aquinas calls natural forms (i.e. the forms of non-rational individuals). The question though is whether such a view stands up. Thomas believes that it does not because ultimately end-directedness is always the result of thought.

the chosen means suited for attaining that end. Of course, the action of animals also involves consciousness. However, it does not involve rationality. The behaviour of other animals is determined and instinctive. Through language we humans, on the other hand, not only manifest our rationality but also our capacity to set our ends. By talking about the reasons for our action we manifest a rational understanding of what we choose and why we choose it. This capacity to choose one end over another for a reason amounts to the capacity to set one's ends<sup>22</sup>. Other beings, however, lack this capacity due to their lack of rationality. As a result, their behaviour is structured around ends that are fixed but which they have not set. Thomas, however, claims that any fixed end has to be set. In this case, some rational agent has to be responsible for setting the ends to which non-rational beings, which lack the capacity to set their ends, direct themselves. By this Aquinas does not mean that some mind takes already existent things and directs them towards certain ends, but rather that some rational agent capable of creating non-rational beings makes them for certain ends and so gives them a nature that is directed towards such ends.

This third stage of Aquinas's analysis of natural teleology indicates that, in his view, a properly conducted inquiry into teleology should lead to a recognition of theism. Indeed, he believes that proximate natural teleology and its divine origin are so manifest that anyone with use of reason cannot but recognise these facts<sup>23</sup>. While the form of a thing is the intrinsic principle from which end-directed operations issue, it is not the cause of that end-directedness in non-rational beings. Seeing that we humans have not programmed nature, there must be some mind over and above nature that is responsible for establishing the end-directedness of natural forms and which has the necessary capacity to do so. This is the core of the fifth way: it is impossible to fully account for the irrefutable fact of proximate natural teleology unless nature has been ordered by the divine mind<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *QD De potentia*, q.1 a. 5.

<sup>23</sup> As Thomas sees it this is how all people recognise God's existence. Cf. CG, III c. 38; *Postilla super Psalmos*, Ps. 8, n. 1-3; ST, II-II q. 85 a. 1; *Collationes in Symbolum Apostolorum*, 2 [Ed. N. Ayo]. For a discussion of his views on this matter, cf. D. FARRELL, *The Ends of the Moral Virtues and the First Principles of Practical Reason in Thomas Aquinas*, Analecta Gregoriana, 318, Gregorian & Biblical Press, Roma 2012, 227-245.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *QD De veritate* q. 5 a. 2; ST, I q. 2 a. 3; *Lectura super Ioannem*, prologus [Marietti, n. 3].

This last stage of Aquinas's account of proximate natural teleology, which is more controversial and problematic than the first two, is not essential to the issue at hand. The first two stages of Aquinas's analysis of natural teleology are not affected if the central premise of the fifth way, the need for natural ends to be set by a rational agent, turns out to be unsound. These first two stages rely instead upon compelling claims about end-directedness as a condition of efficient causality.

### 3. Natural Teleology on a Global Level and Human Dignity

Although individuals of a particular kind have their particular ends (natural teleology on an immediate level) they always belong to a series of wider wholes which eventually ends with the universe and creation in its entirety. This raises the question as to whether they have further ends in virtue of their condition as parts of wider wholes (natural teleology on a global level). Aquinas believes that they do. Indeed, he believes that we perceive human dignity against the backdrop of this broader natural teleology. In his view, we recognise ourselves as the most perfect part of the universe, the part to which the others are ordered.

He provides a particularly clear explanation of how teleology occurs and works on a global level in ST, I q. 65 a. 2<sup>25</sup>. In any whole or complex system we can distinguish four levels of natural teleology.

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For a fuller discussion of the fifth way, cf. D. FARRELL, *The Ends of the Moral Virtues and the First Principles of Practical Reason in Thomas Aquinas*, 211-227.

<sup>25</sup> In this article Aquinas provides arguably the clearest and most closely argued statements of his analysis of natural teleology on a macro-level. He is discussing whether the physical realm was made for the sake of God's goodness. After criticising the Origenist view that the physical realm was created on account of sin, Thomas turns to the *pars construens* of his discussion. The problem can only be clarified if we adopt a holistic perspective: if we consider things against the backdrop of the universe. To do so allows us to consider the relation that exists between particular sectors of reality and the whole – the universe – to which they belong as parts.

For fuller studies of Aquinas's thought on the order of the universe, cf. J. LEGRAND, *L'univers et l'homme dans la philosophie de saint Thomas*, L'Édition Universelle - Desclée de Brouwer, Bruxelles - Paris 1946. J.H. WRIGHT, *The Order of the Universe in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, *Analecta Gregoriana*, 89, Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome 1957. F. MARTY, *La perfection de l'homme selon saint Thomas d'Aquin : ses fondements ontologiques et leur vérification dans l'ordre actuel*, *Analecta Gregoriana*, 123, Presses de l'Université Grégorienne, Rome 1962. O. BLANCHETTE, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas: A Teleological Study*, Pennsylvania State University Press, College Park 1992. M.I. GEORGE, «Aquinas on the Goodness of Creatures and Man's Place in the Universe: A Basis for the General Precepts of Environmental Ethics», *The Thomist* 76 (2012), 73-124.

This is most apparent in those kinds of whole that we know best. A human being is one such whole. Hence, Aquinas analyses the different levels of natural teleology at play in a human being<sup>26</sup>. This allows him to clarify how natural teleology occurs and works on the largest scale possible: that of the universe itself.

There are four levels of natural teleology at work in human beings. First, human beings are a particular kind of organism and so comprise numerous parts (e.g. eyes), each of which has its particular end: its act and its particular perfection (e.g. seeing). Hence, any part of a whole or system has a particular end and perfection (L1). This proximate natural teleology is the kind of teleology that we have been considering so far.

There are three further levels: the directedness of: (L2) the less perfect parts of a whole or system to the more perfect parts; (L3) the parts to the whole; (L4) individuals to the whole universe and the ultimate end.

On L2 there is an end-directedness of the less perfect parts of some whole or system to the more perfect parts. Like any organism, a human being comprises different organs and forms of cognition, some of which are not only less perfect than others but actually support the more perfect ones, thereby manifesting ways in which they are directed towards the more perfect ones. Sensory and intellectual knowledge are both forms of human cognition. Human thought, however, depends on sensory knowledge, such as sight, even though it is superior to sensory knowledge. Its superiority means that human beings are perfected in the exercise of thought, rather than in that of purely sensory knowledge, as is appropriate for other animals. Therefore, in human beings sensory knowledge is directed towards thought<sup>27</sup>. Aquinas sees a metaphysical law at work here. In a whole or a system the less perfect parts exist for the sake of the more perfect ones.

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<sup>26</sup> He does not specify his motives, but they are probably the following. First, due to our embodiment our understanding of reality must always part from and ground itself in our understanding of material realities. Second, it is easy to detect the first levels of natural teleology in life-forms. Third, it is easier to detect the last level of natural teleology in rational beings whose rationality only finds its ultimate fulfilment in knowing God. Humans satisfy all three requirements.

<sup>27</sup> The other example is of a less perfect organ being ordered towards a more perfect one. Aquinas proposes the example of lungs and heart. In his view, the lungs are ordered towards the functioning of the heart. Although the example may not be entirely convincing we can certainly find other examples of a less important body part existing as support for more important ones.



Furthermore, the parts are ordered to the good of the whole, just as the various parts of a human being are ordered towards the human form, namely towards leading a human life.

When it comes to individuals and in particular to organisms, it is hard to raise serious objections to this principle. However, applying this principle to realities such as nature, which are wholes or systems in a loose sense, becomes problematic<sup>28</sup>. Nature as a whole does not depend on, and so is not significantly affected by, the activity of most of its parts. The extinction of many species of life or of many heavenly bodies does not affect the consistency of nature as a whole. If so, the claim that the activities of parts are always ordered towards the whole is exaggerated unless it can be shown somehow that this claim also applies to systems that consist of separately subsistent parts. Claims about the end-directedness of less perfect parts to the good of more perfect ones, and of parts to the good of the whole, make sense, however, if we conceive the role of the subordinate parts in broader sense: in terms of perfection. The subordinate parts are ordered to the more perfect ones or of the whole insofar as they can contribute in some way or another to the perfection of the latter. This in fact is how Thomas explains the matter: each species is directed to the good of the universe insofar as its own perfection enriches that of the universe<sup>29</sup>.

Continuing the examination of the natural teleology present in human beings, L4 emerges: the ordination to God the ultimate end. Human beings in fact have an extrinsic ultimate end: the fruition of God. In like manner, the universe and all its parts are directed towards the glory

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<sup>28</sup> Aquinas distinguishes between what is a whole or system that are one in and of itself (*per se*) and that which is such in virtue of some order or arrangement among its parts. A whole is one in and of itself when the parts belong to the same substance or piece of matter. However, when the whole comprises parts that to some extent exist and act outside it, and, therefore, do not belong entirely to it but only in some respect, then such a whole is one in terms of order or arrangement. Cf. *Sententia libri Ethicorum* I, lc. 1 1.78-95.

We can see the difference between the two by comparing a whole which is one in and of itself, such as a human being, with one that it is one in terms of order, such as an orchestra. A human has many body parts. Each of these has its own peculiar function. However, none of them exists apart from the body nor performs an autonomous function. An orchestra, on the other hand, does not absorb its members entirely. They lead lives outside the orchestra and can go on living even if they leave it. However, there are acts that they can perform only insofar as they belong to the whole and act for its sake: performing a symphony. Nature is a whole in this latter sense.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Scriptum* II, d. 3 q. 1 a. 4.ad 3; d. 17 q. 2 a. 2 ad 6; CG II, c. 45 [Marietti, n. 2111].

of God. They glorify him by attaining their perfection, which constitutes a certain likeness of divine being and perfection.

These are the four levels of natural teleology present in systems, the universe included. According to Aquinas, human dignity emerges against the background of L2.

Human beings constitute the most perfect part of the universe on account of their rationality. This is why we call humans persons. The term 'person' denotes dignity. Hence, it has been adopted to refer to the most perfect thing in the whole world: individuals of a rational nature<sup>30</sup>. Still, further argumentation is required to show that we humans really stand as ends with regard to the rest of nature.

In my view, Aquinas provides his best treatment of this issue in *Summa contra gentiles* (III, c. 112). There he proposes seven interesting arguments on how infra-rational beings are ordered by divine providence to the good of human beings<sup>31</sup>. Some of these seven arguments simply offer another take on the preceding one. For this reason, they can be reduced to four sets of argument, depending on which grounds are adduced to show humans are the principle parts of the universe: (i) their capacity for free-choice (1-2); (ii) their rationality (3-5); (iii) their capacity to direct the rest of nature to their own good (6); (iv) the immortality of the human soul (7).

Even though Thomas is doing theology, these analyses work on a philosophical level. He thereby provides an interesting philosophical account of a famous statement from Vatican II: man is the only creature on earth that God has wanted for its own sake (*GS* 24 § 3).

To appreciate the philosophical value of Aquinas's arguments it is necessary to bear in mind the overall argument of the *Liber de veritate fidei catholicae contra errores infidelium* (CG). The third book of this work discusses God as the end and ruler of all things. After analysing how God is end and then the ruler of all things, it passes to his rule over intellectual creatures, which, in virtue of their rationality and free action, fall under divine governance in an utterly distinct manner (CG III, c.1; c. 111). Of course, one might object that a philosophically compel-

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Scriptum* I, d. 23 q. un. a.1c.; I, d. 26 q. 1 a. 1c.; ST I, q. 29 a. 1 c.; a. 3c. For more on the connection between dignity and personhood, see L. DEWAN, «Some Notes on St. Thomas's Use of 'dignitas'», *Nova et Vetera* [English Edition] 11 (2013), 663-672.

<sup>31</sup> For the arguments, cf. CG III, c. 112 [Marietti, n. 2856-2862]. For the clarifications, cf. CG III, c.112 [Marietti, n. 2863-2868].

ling account of man's place in the universe cannot rely on claims about divine providence but should be available independently of a theistic metaphysics. Within the context of CG this objection is not warranted. In discussing providence, Aquinas presupposes the existence of the God of Christianity insofar as he can be known by natural reason (CG I, c. 13). Moreover, as we shall see, some of his arguments on human dignity do not rely on theistic premises.

The first two arguments focus on how free choice sets human beings apart from the rest of the world. Through free choice humans are the only being in the world that possess self-mastery over their action. Rather than act, other beings react, as if they operated under the direction of another<sup>32</sup>. This renders the relation between humans and the rest of the world analogous to that between a principle agent and an instrument. An instrument does not act by itself but can only perform its proper act if deployed by a duly skilled person, who is the principle agent of the action performed through the instrument. Whereas the instrument only acts under the direction of the principle agent and for the ends of the principle agent, the principle agent can set and act for his own ends. Since humans have free choice and the rest of the world does not the relation between humans and the rest of the world is analogous to that between principle agents and instruments: humans have the character of principle agents; the rest of nature has the character of instruments at the service of humans (CG III, c. 112 [Marietti, n.2856]).

For the same reason the relation between humans and the rest of the world is analogous to that between free citizens and slaves in some political societies of antiquity. In those societies, free citizens were the only people that the government cared about for their own sake, whereas slaves were subordinated to the interests of the free. Due to our free choice, we humans have the character of freemen whereas the rest of the world, whose behaviour is determined, has the character of a slave<sup>33</sup>. In this sense the rest of the world is related to humans as a slave is to free citizens (CG III, c. 112 [Marietti, n. 2857]).

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Scriptum* III, d. 23 q. 1 a. 4 sol. b.; *QD De veritate* q. 22 a. 4c.; CG IV, c. 55 [Marietti, n. 3942]; ST I, q. 60 a. 1 arg. 1.

<sup>33</sup> Aquinas makes the same point elsewhere. «(A)nimalia bruta et plantae non habent vitam rationalem, per quam a seipsis agantur, sed semper aguntur quasi ab alio, naturali quodam impulsu. Et hoc est signum quod sunt naturaliter serva, et aliorum usibus accommodata». ST II-II, q. 64 a.1 ad 2.

This is not the place to look at Aquinas' views on slavery. However, his use of this analogy does not amount to an approval of slavery. In fact, if we ask ourselves about the legitimacy of slavery, the analogy breaks down. Aquinas' point is that the rest of the world lacks the dignity proper to human beings. That is not the case with slaves, who are human beings. Nor does this analogy warrant an indiscriminate exploitation of nature, as studies on Aquinas's environmental ethics have shown<sup>34</sup>.

The upshot of these two arguments is that human beings cannot be treated as mere instruments but must be treated as ends in themselves. Kant insists upon this vigorously. Unlike Kant, however, Thomas grounds this in a realist framework.

The next three arguments analyse the way in which human beings, in virtue of their intellect, constitute the principle part of the universe and so the part to which the others are ordered. Thanks to our intellect, we humans stand apart from other parts of the universe in relation to God and the universe as a whole. First, we are the only beings capable of union with God. As a result we are, in second place, that part of the universe that most resembles God. Third, we are that part which most resembles the universe as a whole, to which all parts of the universe are ordered, because both the universe and the intellect take in all reality, albeit in different ways. These arguments follow a different strategy from the preceding ones. They are arguments *a fortiori*. Let us suppose that it is not so apparent that human beings are the principle part of the universe but that it is more apparent that the parts of the universe are ordered towards God (the fourth level of natural teleology) or the universe as a whole (the third level of natural teleology). If human beings are the part of the universe that most resembles both God and the universe as a whole, humans must be the principle part of the universe, and so the one to which the other parts are ordered (CG II, c.112 [Marietti, n.2858-2860]).

The sixth argument parts from the following tenet: a thing is treated by other parts of the world in ways suited to its own nature. This tenet is absurd, however, if it means, to give just one example, that sheep have evolved to their current state in order to provide nourishment for

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<sup>34</sup> For a detailed discussion of the consistency of Aquinas's environmental ethics and for a survey of literature on the issue, cf. M.I. GEORGE, «Aquinas on the Goodness of Creatures».

wolves. It makes sense, however, if we construe it differently. A thing possesses certain natural qualities that make it a suitable resource *de facto* for the activities of other parts of nature. Each part of the world supports others. We humans also need other parts of nature to support ourselves. What sets us apart from the rest of nature, however, is that we are the only beings that can turn each and every part of nature, and not just a limited range of parts, to our advantage. Through thought and technical activity we make use of the rest of nature for our own good, not only for our material but also for our spiritual good. In pointing to the spiritual good, Aquinas is referring to nature's condition as the medium through which we come to know God. Any other part of nature, even though it has its own end, can, by its very nature, serve the good of humans in one way or another. If so, every other part of the universe is ordered toward humans. Each human then constitutes a principle part of the universe. It is appropriate to make use of it responsibly for the legitimate good of human beings (CG III, c.112 [Marietti, n. 2861]). This also implies, although Thomas does not mention it here, that human beings should never be instrumentalised. In other words, whereas it is appropriate for us to use infra-rational beings for our needs, it is always inappropriate to treat a fellow human in such a way.

The seventh argument is more complicated. It relies on a series of controversial metaphysical positions: the immortality of the human soul and the existence of divine providence. It considers what value the human soul must have for God on account of its immortality. We want things either as ends in themselves or merely as means for further ends. The things that we want as ends in themselves are those that we always want. The things that we want as mere means are those that we want sometimes but not always. The human soul is the only incorruptible thing in the world. This makes it the only thing in nature that God, who has made it so, wants for its own sake. Consequently, God wants human beings for their own sake and orders the rest of nature to the good of human beings (CG III, c.112 [Marietti, n.2862]).

In this chapter of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, Thomas argues convincingly that the ontological superiority of human beings entails that the rest of the world is subordinated to human beings and, therefore, that human beings enjoy axiological superiority over the rest of the world. Thomas thereby justifies rigorously the central tenet of persona-

lism: human beings, in virtue of their peculiar dignity, should not be instrumentalised nor treated as mere things but treated with respect. Two merits of Thomas's approach stand out. First, with his careful analysis of natural teleology and of man's place within the order of the universe, Thomas grounds human dignity in a compelling way. Second, some of his arguments (1, 2, 5, 6) do not invoke God and so can be integrated within a non-theistic perspective. While naturalism as such is never an acceptable position for Thomas, these arguments indicate at least that the recognition of human dignity is not dependent on the recognition of God.

Human dignity, however, is something that we expect everyone to recognise. If so, it must be so apparent that anyone should recognise it. The arguments that Thomas proposes, however, do not seem to fit that bill: they are quite sophisticated and presuppose several strong metaphysical commitments. Notwithstanding, Thomas believes not only that they are within the grasp of the average person but also that many of our most commonplace thoughts take place against the backdrop of a consideration of the natural teleology of the universe.

According to Aquinas, all language users, and not just the theoretically sophisticated, consider the world from a holistic perspective, seeing and setting things within a wider whole. We situate ourselves in this holistic perspective by recognising and applying one of the first principles: 'Every whole is greater than each of its parts'. Along with the principle of non-contradiction, this is one of the first principles: one of those features of the world that is so foundational that it also constitutes the foundation of our thought<sup>35</sup>. Precisely because this is a fundamental though analogical feature of reality, it comes into play in all types of reflection and discipline, and so is not the object of such disciplines<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. *Sententia super Metaphysicam* II, lc. 1 [Marietti, n.277]; IV, lc. 5 [Marietti, n. 595]; IV, lc. 6 [Marietti, n. 605]; XI, lc. 1 [Marietti, n. 2150]. It is a proposition that is known non-inferentially but in virtue of itself (*per se notum*): we do not need a middle term to see how the predicate holds of the subject. Once we understand what a whole is and what a part is, we cannot but understand that a whole is greater than each of its parts, even though we might apply this principle mistakenly in some cases.

<sup>36</sup> Metaphysics is the discipline that deals with this sort of principle. It does so by clarifying the meaning of the concepts that underlie first principles (in this case the concepts 'whole' and 'part'). Cf. *Sententia super Metaphysicam* IV, lc.5 [Marietti, n. 595]; XI, lc 1 [Marietti, n.2150].

Several of the most commonplace practices provide a confirmation and an illustration of how we think from a holistic perspective. In practices such as farming, fishing, hunting, cooking and eating we take the life of animals or plants to satisfy our vital needs. If we believe that such practices are licit, this is because we consider nature as a whole in which we are the principle parts<sup>37</sup>. Such part-whole reasoning is unavoidable. Even someone who holds the contrary position and objects that it is wrong to kill animals to obtain food and clothing, is nonetheless envisaging nature as a whole in which humans and animals are parts. What such a person objects to is either the idea that the less perfect parts exist for the sake of the more perfect, or the idea that human beings are more perfect than animals. This train of reasoning nonetheless confirms that we inevitably think against the backdrop of the universe as a whole. It is quite reasonable then for Aquinas to claim that we all recognise human dignity against the backdrop of the second level of natural teleology.

#### 4. Concluding Observations

Vatican II grounds the central moral category of human dignity in natural teleology, but without providing a careful philosophical justification of natural teleology. Aquinas, however, provides remarkable resources for carrying out this task. On the one hand, he justifies final causality by considering the requirements of efficient causality. On the other hand, he develops a careful analysis of how teleology functions within complex systems, the universe included, and points to how language users cannot avoid considering teleology on the global level of the universe. It is against the backdrop of the teleology present in the universe that the dignity of human beings emerges. We recognise that human beings, in virtue of their rationality (intellect and free choice), are the principle parts of the universe, those parts towards which the other parts of the universe is ordered. Some of the arguments that Aquinas develops to show this have the advantage of not relying on theistic premises. He thereby describes ways in which it is possible to recogni-

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<sup>37</sup> In ST I-II, q. 64 a.1 Aquinas does not make any direct mention of the part-whole analogy. However, he does state that in the order of things the imperfect exists for the sake of the perfect. This amounts to an invocation of the part-whole analogy.

se human dignity independently of or prior to the recognition of God. Nevertheless, by setting all of his arguments within a rigorous and systematic justification of natural teleology, Aquinas provides much needed resources for articulating Vatican II's teaching on human dignity in engagement with contemporary philosophy<sup>38</sup>. A great deal of work is still required. This paper has merely outlined Aquinas's conception of natural teleology and its bearing on human dignity. Hopefully it has succeeded in showing that it is worth retrieving and developing this area of his thought.

**Sommario:** Nella Costituzione *Gaudium et Spes* e nella dichiarazione *Dignitatis Humanae*, il Concilio Vaticano II non solo presenta la dignità della persona umana come il punto di partenza del suo insegnamento morale, ma fonda addirittura la dignità umana nella teleologia naturale. Per teleologia naturale si intende la tesi, secondo la quale il bene di ogni cosa corrisponde ai fini a cui essa è indirizzata in virtù della sua natura, sia quelli particolari, sia quelli che le spettano in quanto parte di un ordine più ampio, in modo che il bene della cosa possa essere rilevato da questi fini. In quanto insegnamenti ufficiali della Chiesa, i menzionati documenti si astengono dal fornire una spiegazione filosofica della dignità umana. L'esistenza della teleologia naturale, d'altronde, viene generalmente contestata nella filosofia moderna. Per questo motivo, la fondazione della dignità umana nella teleologia naturale costituisce un approccio assai discutibile a tale argomento. Fra tutti i principali teologi cattolici, Tommaso d'Aquino è molto probabilmente quello che offre le risorse filosofiche più sviluppate per articolare una tale concezione della teleologia naturale e del suo rapporto con la dignità umana. Il presente studio esamina e valuta il modo in cui egli fonda la dignità umana sulla teleologia naturale. A suo avviso, constatiamo che l'uomo è la parte principale dell'universo e che le altre parti sono ordinate al suo bene. Dopo aver esaminato la sua giustificazione generale dell'esistenza di fini particolari a cui ogni cosa è ordinata in virtù della propria natura, l'articolo considera la sua spiegazione del modo in cui ogni parte dell'universo prosegue dei fini ulteriori all'interno dell'universo come totalità, nonché il suo principale gruppo di argomenti sul modo in cui percepiamo la dignità umana sullo sfondo della teleologia naturale dell'universo (CG III, c. 112).

**Parole chiave:** *Gaudium et Spes*, *Dignitatis Humanae*, dignità umana, teleologia naturale, causalità finale, S. Tommaso d'Aquino..

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<sup>38</sup> In this sense, the resources that Aquinas provides us with enable us to overcome the limits that Paul Ricoeur identified in some strands of personalism. Ricoeur hoped that the eclipse of the personalist movement associated with Mounier would open opportunities for a more fecund study of a category as important and fundamental as human personhood. For Ricoeur, the personalist movement associated with Mounier could not compete with existentialism and Marxism. The canonical texts and conceptual framework of the latter two movements were superior in theoretical sophistication to the work of Mounier. Cf. P. RICOEUR, «Meurt le personalisme, revient la personne», *Esprit* 50 (1983), 113-119.



**Abstract:** In *Gaudium et Spes* and *Dignitatis Humanae* the Second Vatican Council not only presents the dignity of the human person as the parting point for its moral teaching but also grounds human dignity in natural teleology. Natural teleology is the view that the good of any thing corresponds to, and so can be discerned from, the ends to which it is directed by its nature, both that end which is proper to it and those ends that it has as part of a wider order. As official Church teachings, these documents refrain from providing a philosophical justification of their account of human dignity. The existence of natural teleology, however, is generally contested in modern philosophy. For this reason, grounding human dignity in natural teleology constitutes a questionable approach to the issue. Of all major Catholic theologians, Thomas Aquinas is arguably the one who provides the most developed philosophical resources for articulating these views on natural teleology and its connection with human dignity. This paper examines and assesses the way in which he grounds human dignity in natural teleology. In his view, we see that human beings are the principle part of the universe and that the other parts of the universe are ordered towards the good of human beings. After surveying his general justification of how a thing is ordered to particular ends in virtue of its nature, the paper considers his explanation of how each part of the universe assumes further ends within the universe as a whole, and his main set of arguments on how we perceive human dignity against the backdrop of the natural teleology of the universe (CG III, c. 112).

**Key words:** *Gaudium et Spes*, *Dignitatis Humanae*, human dignity, natural teleology, final causality, St. Thomas Aquinas.

