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THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF THE NATURAL INCLINATIONS PROPER TO MAN IN *SUMMA THEOLOGIAE* 1-2.94.2

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Why these examples?

In this paper I wish to raise and address a question that bears directly on the passage from the *Summa theologiae* that sets the theme for this gathering of the Academy.¹ The article to which the passage belongs is *Prima secundae*, q. 94, a. 2. For my purposes, it will be useful to have in mind the passage's immediate context within the article. Let me start with that.

Having laid down the general thesis that a certain order is found among the things that fall into the apprehension of everyone, Thomas sets out an order among the precepts of natural law. On his view, these precepts fall into the apprehension of everyone, and evidently what he means to present is the order in which they do so. Earlier in the *Summa* he had laid down quite generally that in the human intellect's knowledge, the more universal is naturally prior to the less universal.² This is exactly the sort of order that he lays down in 94.2.

First comes the most universal precept of all, "the good is to be done and sought, and the bad, avoided".³ Then come more particular precepts, all of them concerned with goods to which man is naturally inclined. Their order is said to be the same as that of the natural inclinations to which they correspond. Thomas groups these inclinations into three levels or "modes", each of which is in function of some dimension of human nature. The order among these modes goes, again, from the more universal or general to the more particular or special.

Thomas does not try to give a complete list of the goods pertaining to each mode. He does, however, cite some examples. In relation to my question,

¹ Pontificia Academia Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, XI Plenary Session, *The Truth about God, and its Relevance for a Good Life in Society*, 17-19 June 2011, Rome. I am grateful to Steven Jensen and Luca Tuninetti for very helpful comments on drafts of this essay.

² See *Summa theologiae* (hereafter *STh*), I, q. 85, a. 3. For example, "animal" is understood prior to "man".

³ Translations throughout this paper are mine.

all of the examples will be of interest. In the first mode is inclination toward that which is good according to the nature that man shares with all substances, “inasmuch as any substance whatsoever desires the conservation of its being according to its nature”. Then comes inclination to more special things, according to the nature that man shares with the other animals. Here Thomas cites the “union of male and female” and the “rearing of offspring”. Finally comes our passage: “In a third mode, there is in man inclination toward what is good according to the nature of reason, which is proper to him; thus man has natural inclination to know the truth about God, and to live in society”.

My question is about these goods, knowing the truth about God and living in society. Is there some reason why Thomas cites, together, precisely these two? In other words, does he see in them a distinctive unity, some common feature that sets them apart from other objects of natural human inclination? Personally I think it unlikely that he selected them at random.

Now of course the passage itself presents a feature that distinguishes these goods from the ones previously cited in 94.2. These are “good according to the nature of reason, which is proper to man”. This, however, does not fully answer the question, since for Thomas these are not the only objects of natural inclination that fit this description. For instance, in the very next article he posits a natural inclination to act “virtuously,” which is to say, “according to reason” (94.3).⁴ So this feature, “good according to the nature of reason, which is proper to man,” is not especially distinctive of knowing the truth about God and living in society.

Nevertheless I do think that these goods have something rather special about them, as compared with other goods proper to reason such as virtue. It is not so special as to be entirely exclusive to them; on the contrary, in a way it does also belong to virtue. But as I shall explain further on, in the case of virtue it is somewhat “under the surface,” less explicit or immediate than in the cases of knowing the truth about God and living in society. I think it also offers a plausible explanation for Thomas’s citing these in 94.2.

Before presenting this feature, however, I would like to dwell a little on this notion of things that are good “according to the nature of reason” or according to the nature “proper” to man. It seems to me that in a sense, or even in two senses, *all* of the goods that Thomas cites in 94.2, as objects of natural human inclination and as pertaining to natural law, could be said to fit this description. Determining the sense in which the description does

⁴ Another one would be the inclination toward knowing truth, not specifically about God, but in general. I discuss this in section V below.

define the third mode of inclination and sets it off from the other two will help in bringing out what is even more special, within this mode, about knowing the truth about God and living in society.

The meaning of “good according to the nature of reason” in 94.2

Elsewhere I have argued at some length that all of the natural human inclinations cited in 94.2 are inclinations of the will.⁵ That is, they are inclinations of the rational appetite, the appetite whose objects are always things apprehended and presented to it by reason. I shall not repeat my arguments for this here.⁶ But however it stands with 94.2, Thomas certainly does not limit the natural inclinations of the will to objects that are strictly proper to man or in no way common to man and other things. For instance, the will naturally has the inclination found in every substance, toward the conservation of its being according to its nature. In fact the human will is naturally inclined, in a global way, toward everything that suits man according to his nature.⁷ This includes both those goods that are proper to him and those that he shares with others.

So this is one way in which even the first two modes of inclination in 94.2 could be viewed as pertaining specifically to reason. To the extent that they belong to the will or the rational appetite, they are inclinations toward goods that are naturally apprehended by reason, and they arise from that apprehension. In this sense, they are proper to man. It belongs to reason to direct man toward all of his true goods.

Another way in which the first two modes of natural human inclination could be seen as proper to man is with respect to their very objects. For example, in man’s case the natural inclination toward conservation in being must regard the being that is according to *man’s* nature, specifically *human* being. Every substance is said to be inclined toward the conservation of “its” being, according to “its” nature, not being in general.⁸ Likewise, the

⁵ Stephen L. Brock, “Natural Inclination and the Intelligibility of the Good in Thomistic Natural Law”, *Vera Lex* 6.1–2 (Winter 2005): 57–78.

⁶ For the gist of one of the arguments, see below, n. 39.

⁷ See *STh* I-II, q. 10, a. 1.

⁸ At least, Thomas is not speaking of any such general object of inclination in 94.2. Elsewhere he does indicate that the nature of being, *ens inquantum ens*, is universally “agreeable”: *STh* I-II, q. 29, a. 1, ad 1. He also seems to hold that charity involves an inclination toward the conservation in being of all specific natures – see *STh* II-II, q. 25, a. 3 – and I think that this could very well have a natural analogue. But it would be proper to man in the way that the inclinations in the third mode are. Only reason can relate to the specific being and good of every nature.

union of male and female toward which man is naturally inclined would be that of human male and female, and the rearing of offspring, that of human offspring. In other words, if the goods pertaining to the first two modes of inclination in 94.2 are in function of natures that man has in common with other things, this is only in the sense that man's species has certain genera in common with other species, and that some of the goods pertaining to his species have genera in common with those pertaining to other species. What each species is inclined toward is its own specific form of the genus of the good in question, not the whole genus.⁹

This enables us to say more precisely in what sense the goods in the "third mode" are proper to the nature of reason. They are goods that do not have any genus in common with those of other natures. They have no sub-rational counterpart. There is such a thing as the conservation of the walrus's being according to its nature, but there is no such thing as the walrus's approach to the knowledge of God. This sort of good exists only in a rational form.

The same holds, I take it, for living in society. By "*societas*", Thomas does not seem to mean just any group or community whose members somehow cooperate with each other. In order to relate as *socii*, the members must have some grasp of the relationship itself, and they must be living in it by choice. That is, a *societas* is a friendship of one sort or another.¹⁰ Only rational substances are capable of friendship, in the proper sense.¹¹ This is not to say that *societas* is confined to civil society. For instance, there is also domestic society.¹² But this too is something proper to humans, more than mere union of male and female. Thus Thomas asserts that between man and woman, the union "ought" to be social.¹³ It might not be.

⁹ That the inclination of each substance toward its proper being can be considered in a general way does however mean that we can see all substances as falling under a single general order, and so under a single (divine) precept. The same holds for inclination in the second mode, that which is common to all animals. The point also applies at the level of the very first precept of natural law. This precept corresponds to the absolutely universal inclination, common to all beings, toward the good. The goods of different beings differ (see *STh* I, q. 6, a. 2, ad 2), but insofar as they all fall under the common *ratio* of the good, we can consider a single general precept dictating that each being seek its good.

¹⁰ "*Eos enim qui conueniunt uel per nature originem uel per morum similitudinem uel per cuiuscumque societatis communionem, uidemus amicitia coniungi*": Thomas Aquinas, *De regno ad regem Cypri*, Lib. I, cap. x, ll. 47-50 (Leonine).

¹¹ See *STh* II-II, q. 25, a. 3.

¹² See Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, Lib. VIII, lect. 12, §1720 (Marietti).

¹³ *STh* I, q. 92, a. 3.

It is in this sense, then, that knowing the truth about God and living in society are good according to man's proper nature. They do not exist in any form apart from the operation of reason itself. But while this distinguishes them from the other examples cited in 94.2, it does not distinguish them from other goods of reason such as virtue. Does anything?

Essentially common goods

One conjecture that occurred to me, to explain Thomas's choice of the two examples, is that he was seeing them in relation to the broad division of the properly human pursuits – the pursuits that pertain to the life of the intellect – into the contemplative and the active.¹⁴ The truth about God would be the chief focus of the contemplative life, and society would provide the main field for the active life. However, I do not think that this quite fits with the overall concern of 94.2. Thomas is presenting a very global vision of practical reason and of the ends that naturally govern its work. They are things that everyone needs and naturally understands that he needs. The need to know the truth about God is not confined to those who pursue the contemplative life, nor is the need to live in society limited to those who follow the active life.

To this one might respond that even if we are not thinking of the pursuits to which people chiefly dedicate themselves, we can still distinguish between speculative and practical ends. So perhaps what Thomas has in mind with his choice of examples is simply the broad division of reason's operations into those that are speculative and those that are practical. This is more plausible, but I still do not find it convincing, for two reasons.

One reason is that for Thomas, even though "truth about God" is chiefly speculative truth, it is not exclusively so. Considered simply in Himself, God is a purely speculative theme, because He in no way depends on our action. But we may also consider Him in relation to us, and even in a practical relation. We may look to Him for practical direction or guidance. Thus Thomas judges that while *sacra doctrina*, the science of theology, is primarily speculative, secondarily it is also practical.¹⁵ Now, he does seem to hold that the "natural" or philosophical science that treats of God, namely metaphysics, is purely speculative.¹⁶ We do not obtain divine guidance by doing

¹⁴ See *STh* II-II, q. 179, aa. 1 & 2. Thomas relates this division to the two kinds of happiness posited in *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7-8, 1177a12-1179a2; see *STh* II-II, q. 180, aa. 2 & 4; q. 181, a. 1; q. 182, a. 1.

¹⁵ See *STh* I, q. 1, a. 4.

¹⁶ See *STh* II-II, q. 45, a. 3.

metaphysics. It should be noticed, however, that in 94.2, Thomas does not speak precisely of scientific knowledge (*scientia* or *scire*) about God. He speaks generically of “cognizing” the truth about God, “*cognoscere veritatem de Deo*”. Not all cognition of truth is scientific. For example, the wisdom that is a gift of the Holy Spirit is not scientific, and yet it is certainly true.¹⁷ And it has a practical dimension.¹⁸ Of course the gift of wisdom, like theology, depends on supernatural influence. But Thomas also seems to posit a desire for divine guidance at the natural level. This comes out rather clearly in another passage of the *Summa* concerning a dictate of natural law that regards God. In the discussion of the virtue of religion, at the beginning of the question on sacrifice, he says that “natural reason dictates to man that he be subject to some superior, on account of the defects that he perceives in himself, in which he needs to be helped *and guided* by some superior. And whatever this [superior] be, this is what is called a God by all”.¹⁹ So the natural inclination toward knowing the truth about God may well be, at least secondarily, inclination toward a practical sort of knowledge. It would not pertain exclusively to the speculative domain.

As for my other reason for doubting whether Thomas’s examples in 94.2 are meant to reflect the speculative-practical distinction, I shall be in a better position to explain it further on, in the last section of the paper, after I have presented the substance of my own proposal.

Now, consider again the examples in the second mode. Here too Thomas could have cited other things, other objects of natural “animal” inclination that have no sub-animal counterparts. Perhaps the most obvious one would be pleasure. Between pleasure and the objects that he does cite, however, there is this difference: pleasure can be a purely individual or private goal. It can be so not only in itself, but also in its object, the pleasant thing that gives rise to it. An eater’s pleasure is in something that he has made exclusively his own, by ingesting it. It has become his private good. It cannot be shared. By contrast, each of the two examples cited is an essentially common good. It is “common”, not in the mere sense that it can be taken universally, as capable of many instances, but in the sense that a single instance of it is intrinsically a good shared by more than one individual. The union of male and female is the good of both. That is of its very nature. The male’s pleasure in it differs from the female’s, but it is the same union. The rearing of offspring is similar.

¹⁷ See *STh* II-II, q. 45, a. 2.

¹⁸ See *STh* II-II, q. 45, a. 3.

¹⁹ *STh* II-II, q. 85, a. 1.

What about the example of the first mode of inclination, the conservation of a substance's being according to its nature? Fr. Dewan has long been insisting that this does not refer only to the substance's individual being, but also, and even primarily, to the being of its kind, the *whole* being that is "according to its nature".²⁰ This must be right. Thomas knows very well that reproduction is not confined to animals. Plants are doing it all the time. Aristotle calls it the *most natural* work of living things, the end of all that they do by nature. By it they "share in the immortal and the divine" as far as they can.²¹ Nor is Thomas even confining this inclination to living things. He speaks of all substances.²² For him, every natural thing tends to effect its like and to promote the being of its kind, as far as it can.²³ An especially clear example, to which he often refers, is that of fire.²⁴ My point is that the being of the kind is a common good.

As for the examples in the third mode, that society is a common good needs no argument. It is probably what the phrase "common good" first brings to mind. I shall look at the other example in a moment. But recall the possible example that is not cited here, virtue. This does not refer quite so immediately or so explicitly to common good. Granted, it is a delicate point. Probably almost everyone understands that a human individual is not going to advance very far in virtue, if he or she associates with no one else in pursuing it. Even more importantly, the virtues intrinsically bear on things other than themselves. They have objects. And the primary objects of virtue are indeed common goods, not anyone's private possession. Nevertheless, the sheer notion of virtue does not refer to common good in such an explicit way as does the notion of life in society. Thus, in 94.3, Thomas sees the need to defend the idea that virtue is ordered to common good.

²⁰ For example, in Lawrence Dewan, O.P., "St. Thomas, John Finnis, and the Political Good", *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 337-74, at 366-67.

²¹ Aristotle, *De anima*, II.4, 415a27-b1.

²² The passage from Cicero's *De officiis* that I have put in the *Appendix* is sometimes cited as background for the discussion of natural inclinations in 94.2. See Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Sr. Mary Thomas Noble, O.P., Washington: The Catholic University of America Press 1995, pp. 405-408. There are indeed notable parallels. But while Cicero does treat self-preservation and reproduction together, he attributes them only to *animantes* (par. 11). By this he seems to mean, not animated things generally, but solely animals. If Thomas did have this passage in mind, then his speaking of "all substances" was quite deliberate and is all the more significant.

²³ See *STh* I, q. 19, a. 2. The point is fundamental for the very doctrine of the good; see *STh* I, q. 5, a. 4.

²⁴ Again, see *STh* I, q. 5, a. 4; cf. *STh* I, q. 60, a. 4; *STh* I, q. 80, a. 1.

At first glance, some virtues, such as temperance, seem to be ordered only toward private goods.²⁵ Although in truth even temperance is ordered to common good, the point is not simply obvious, something immediately understood by all.²⁶

This is what I propose as the distinctive feature serving as criterion for Thomas's choice of examples: that their very notions refer quite explicitly and immediately to common goods.

God and common good in natural law

But should we see "knowing the truth about God" as meant to refer to a common good? If we took it on the side of the activity, we might doubt it. Each instance of such knowing is the good of a single individual. However, the same could be said of "living in society"; everyone has his or her own social life. We should look on the side of the object, the side of what the knowing is about. With respect to this, there is nothing that is more truly a common good.

Perhaps we are not very accustomed to speaking of God as a "common good". Usually we apply the expression to things like peace or justice, things that inhere in a community as attributes. But a "common" good is not always an attribute of a community. It is an end to which a community is ordered. It may be extrinsic to the community. Every community is ordered toward the good primarily intended by its commander or governor, and sometimes both the governor and his good are extrinsic to it. For instance, the President of the United States is the commander in chief of the armed forces, which are a sort of community, but he is a civilian. And the good that he primarily intends, the nation's welfare, is also in large part extrinsic to the armed forces. Nonetheless their operations are ordered to it.

It is in this way that God's good, which is God Himself, is the universal end of all things.²⁷ Thomas does not hesitate to call God the common good of the universe.²⁸ God's good is the supreme end. All other ends are subordinate to it, because in comparison with it they are all merely particular. "Thus in order that someone will a particular good with an upright will,

²⁵ *STh* I-II, q. 94, a. 3, obj. 1 & ad 1.

²⁶ According to Thomas, the Epicureans sought virtue as ordered only to the pursuit of maximum pleasure; that is, sense-pleasure, a private good. See *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, lib. I, lect. 5, §57 (Marietti).

²⁷ See *STh* I, q. 103, a. 2.

²⁸ For example, *Quodlibet* I, q. 4, a. 3; *STh* I, q. 60, a. 5, ad 3 & ad 5; *STh* I-II, q. 109, a. 3.

that particular good must be willed materially” – willed as “for an end” – “and the divine common good must be willed formally”, as the end.²⁹

What I am suggesting is that this is also how Thomas wants us to be chiefly thinking of God as we read 94.2. We should not be thinking of Him only as the principle and end of “religion”, meaning by this a special field of activity that is itself defined by reference to Him. We should mainly be thinking of God *as God*, principle and end of the *world*, its universal overseer and highest good. This is the conception that Thomas takes to be what is commonly understood by this so familiar name, “God”.³⁰ And so understood, that all naturally see the need to know the truth about God seems hard to quarrel with. Atheists can see it too.³¹

This view is favored, I think, by the approach to the precepts of natural law used in 94.2, the absolutely universal outlook adopted. The precepts are seen in the setting of an order running through all things, the order to the good. Even before the phrase “natural inclination” appears, the first precept is said to be founded on the “*ratio* of the good”, this being “what all desire”; that is, what *all beings* desire. And the discussion in 94.2 is surely meant to recall *Prima secundae*, q. 91, a. 2, on the existence of a natural law. There the presence of natural inclinations in all creatures is very prominent. These are seen as effects of God’s providence, and even as “participations” in His eternal law. It is in 91.2 that Thomas famously defines natural law as the participation in the eternal law proper to the rational creature. Just prior to this he had said that the end of God’s government, the common good to which the eternal law primarily orders things, is God Himself.³² I think we can very well take “natural inclination to know the truth about God” as signaling the way of being ordered to this end that is proper to the nature of the rational creature. It is the *beginning* of this way.

Someone might object that if God is supposed to enter into 94.2 predominantly under the aspect of the supreme *good*, then what ought to be cited is not knowing the truth about Him, but rather loving Him. Thomas of course does take the love of God to be a matter of natural law.³³ But we

²⁹ *STh* I-II, q. 19, a. 10.

³⁰ See *STh* I, q. 13, a. 8.

³¹ This is not to say that they actually pursue the question with the full seriousness that it calls for. Thomas judges that disbelief in God usually involves some culpability. I discuss this in Stephen L. Brock, “Can Atheism be Rational? A Reading of Thomas Aquinas”, *Acta Philosophica* 11.2 (2002): 215–238.

³² *STh* I-II, q. 91, a. 1, ad 3.

³³ See *STh* I-II, q. 100, a. 3, ad 1.

should not forget that here he is talking about those inclinations that are quite strictly proper to rational nature, with no sub-rational counterpart. The love of God is not actually of this sort, any more than inclinations toward lower common goods are. “Each and every nature is inclined toward conserving not only its individual reality, but also its species. And in a much stronger way, each and every one has a natural inclination toward that which is the unqualifiedly universal good”.³⁴ The walrus has no way of knowing the truth about God, but it does have its way of loving Him. Indeed, in any inclination toward a good, God is being loved somehow.³⁵ We could go so far as to say that in a confused, but still real way, even the first precept of natural law, the one based on “the good”, is directing toward God.

This is the case even though not every inclination toward a good has God as its *object*, its proper formal principle. An inclination is a sort of movement, toward the reality of its object, and insofar as its object is a good, it is somehow ordered toward the reality of God as well. It is going “in His direction”. Every desire of a good is ultimately “for” God, even if only in an instrumental way, through being under His control.³⁶ In fact sub-rational desire cannot be for any common good except in an instrumental way. Even if the reality that is its object is, in itself, a common good, the *ratio* according to which that reality moves sub-rational desire is some particular or private goodness in it, such as its gratifying the senses. Bearing directly on something common, *as* common, requires reason.³⁷ The union of male and female walrus is the good of both, but this is not *their* motive for seeking it. It could only be “nature’s” motive for “teaching” them to seek it, the purpose for which sense-pleasure is naturally joined to it.³⁸ Nevertheless, in non-rational animals, the inclination toward pleasure is naturally regulated in such a way as to be generally in accordance with the order toward their common good and, ultimately, with the eternal law.³⁹ In this sense, it is an inclination toward God.

³⁴ *STh* I, q. 60, a. 5, ad 3.

³⁵ See *STh* I, q. 6, a. 1, ad 2; *STh* I, 44, a. 4, ad 3.

³⁶ See *STh* I-II, q. 1, a. 2, corp. & ad 3.

³⁷ And evidently in man’s case, sub-rational inclinations are firmly ordered toward common good only to the extent that they are controlled by reason; see below, n. 39.

³⁸ I am alluding to the phrase from Ulpian that Thomas cites in 94.2 – “*quae natura omnia animalia docuit*”. Very pertinent to this is *STh* I-II, q. 4, a. 2, obj. 2 & ad 2.

³⁹ In this respect the human sense-appetite differs from that of the other animals. It is ordered toward the common good and directly in accordance with the eternal law, not spontaneously, but only insofar as it is regulated by man’s own reason. See *STh* I, q. 91, a. 6, esp. obj. 3 & ad 3. See also *STh* I-II, q. 56 a. 4 ad 2; I-II, q. 62, a. 3; I-II, q. 63, a. 1; and especially 94.2, ad 2, which says that the inclinations of the lower parts of man’s nature

What is proper to rational nature, then, is an inclination that has God as its very object.⁴⁰ Only the will's desire can bear directly on the universal, divine good. But this is because only intellect can assimilate the *ratio* of the desirable, "the good", in an absolute mode, universally. That gives it a certain proportion to God, understood as the "first principle of all goodness".⁴¹ It provides a means of relating to the divine good in a proper, not merely instrumental way.⁴² The good pertains to intellect, as "a true", before it pertains to will as "desirable".⁴³ The will's natural love of God presupposes a natural inclination to know the truth about His goodness.⁴⁴ And this inclination is altogether proper to the rational creature.⁴⁵

But my main point is that Thomas's examples in 94.2 all refer to common goods. Is this not entirely fitting? We are in a treatise on law. It is of the very essence of any law to order to a common good.⁴⁶ In fact this is of the essence of any true principle of practical reason. "Just as nothing stands firmly in speculative reason except by resolution to first, indemonstrable principles, so nothing stands firmly in practical reason except by ordination to the last end, which is a common good".⁴⁷ This is because "every part is ordered to

pertain to natural law only insofar as they are ruled by reason. This serves, I think, to confirm the thesis that the natural human inclinations cited in the corpus of 94.2 as directly corresponding to precepts of natural law are all inclinations of the rational appetite.

⁴⁰ See *STh* I-II, q. 1, a. 8; cf. *STh* I, q. 65, a. 2, in *fine corp.*

⁴¹ *STh* I, q. 6, a. 4.

⁴² Pertinent here is *STh* II-II, q. 2, a. 3. Insofar as rational nature "knows the universal *ratio* of being and good, it has an immediate order to the universal principle of being". Thomas is here explaining that this natural order toward God as the universal principle of being is what *makes possible* the supernatural order, the movement toward God as He is in Himself. The beginning of *that* movement is believing God's Word, clinging to "truth about God" as spoken *by* God Himself. The inclination cited in 94.2, toward simply knowing truth about God, is not the inclination of supernatural faith itself; we should not there be thinking of God precisely as the object of faith. Rather, faith presupposes and perfects this natural inclination.

⁴³ *STh* I-II, q. 19, a. 3, ad 2. See *STh* I, q. 82, a. 3; I-II, q. 9, a. 1.

⁴⁴ "*Quia dilectio Dei est maius aliquid quam eius cognitio, maxime secundum statum viae, ideo praesupponit ipsam. Et quia cognitio non quiescit in rebus creatis, sed per eas in aliud tendit, in illo dilectio incipit, et per hoc ad alia derivatur, per modum cuiusdam circulationis, dum cognitio, a creaturis incipiens, tendit in Deum; et dilectio, a Deo incipiens sicut ab ultimo fine, ad creaturas derivatur*": *STh* II-II, q. 27, a. 4, ad 2 (emphasis of course mine). Here the topic is charity, but I think this discussion must apply to the natural order as well; see *STh* I, q. 60, a. 1, *Sed contra*, and a. 5, *Sed contra*.

⁴⁵ See *STh* I, q. 6, a. 1, ad 2.

⁴⁶ *STh* I-II, q. 90, a. 2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, ad 3. One might ask why, if nothing stands firmly in practical reason except by ordination to common good, the very first precept of natural law only speaks of

the whole as the imperfect to the perfect; but one man is part of a perfect community”.⁴⁸ Some precepts of law may directly regard goods that in themselves are private. But they always do so with a view to the common good that the law as a whole regards.⁴⁹ The more directly a precept regards the common good, the more perfectly it shares in the nature of law.⁵⁰ All of Thomas’s examples in 94.2 serve to highlight the fact that the precepts of natural law are truly laws, firm principles of practical reason, and hence also sound moral rules, rules for the will. “The will of a man who wills some particular good is not right unless he refers it to the common good as its end”.⁵¹ Even if the “primacy of common good” is not cited explicitly in 94.2, it is very much on the scene. Given the exceptional importance of 94.2 within Thomas’s teaching on natural law, this surely deserves stressing.

The natural priority of the good of truth over that of society

There is one other point about Thomas’s examples of inclinations proper to reason that I think the criterion of the common good serves to explain. This is the order in which he presents them. I would suggest that even in this small detail, he is attending to the type of order that he has in mind throughout 94.2 – the order in which things fall into the apprehension of human reason, and which goes from the more general to the more particular.

If we look one last time at the examples in the second mode, we see that the one cited first is indeed both more general and prior in apprehen-

“good” and not of “common good”. I have already suggested that in a sense, by ordering toward the good, this precept is in fact ordering toward God, and hence toward common good. Moreover, natural law’s legislator is God, and what comes first in His practical reason is not goodness in general; it is His own goodness, which is the end of all goodness. But the precept based on goodness in general is the first in our apprehension, because it is the most general. “Good” is more general than “common good”. However, clearly the division of the good into common good and private good is not *ex aequo*, like that of a genus into species. It is analogical, *per prius et posterius*. And even if the principle of the priority of common good is not our very first practical principle, nonetheless it surely pertains to the same level as the first principle; that is, it stands above the precepts corresponding to the more particular (generic or specific) natures of things. I discuss this in Stephen L. Brock, “The Primacy of the Common Good and the Foundations of Natural Law in St. Thomas”, in *Ressourcement Thomism*, ed. Reinhard Hüutter and Matthew Levering, Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press 2010, pp. 234-255, especially 250-255.

⁴⁸ *STh* I-II, q. 90, a. 2, corp.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, ad 1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, corp.

⁵¹ *STh* I-II, q. 19, a. 10.

sion. It is more general, because (as far as Thomas knew) among all animals there is union of male and female, but not all rear the offspring; and among those that do, the union of male and female is still more common, since any rearing of offspring presupposes the offspring's existence. For the same reason, the goodness of the union of male and female is prior in practical reason's apprehension. If one saw no good in the children's existence, he would hardly see any good in their education.⁵²

Assuming that Thomas does have the aforesaid order in mind, it seems to me that even if we take the knowledge of God to be purely speculative, his examples of inclinations proper to reason cannot be meant to reflect the mere generic distinction between speculative and practical ends.⁵³ If they were, surely he would have put first the inclination toward living in society. For on the whole, practical ends are more common in human life. Thomas says that "the active life precedes the contemplative, as that which is *common to all* precedes, in the order of generation, that which is proper to those who are perfect".⁵⁴ After all, the objects of the first two modes of inclination are practical ends as well. Sheer survival is a practical end. Political society itself first "comes into being for the sake of life".⁵⁵ On the whole, practical ends are more urgent. Purely speculative ends are the privilege of the leisured.⁵⁶ As the saying has it, *primum vivere, deinde philosophari*. And practical reason naturally understands this.

One thing, however, is the set of speculative ends taken as a whole, and another is that particular end which is the knowledge of the truth about God. Even if this is just one among many branches of speculative knowledge, only it is *wisdom*. This is because, in the proper and unqualified sense

⁵² The passage from Cicero's *De officiis* also cites the inclination toward sexual union first (see *Appendix*, par. 11). In his formulation, its being for the sake of procreation is quite explicit. This makes its conceptual priority vis-à-vis the care of the offspring even more evident than it is in 94.2.

⁵³ See above, section III.

⁵⁴ *STh* II-II, q. 182, a. 4, ad 1.

⁵⁵ Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 1252b29-30.

⁵⁶ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I.1, 981b21-25; I.2, 982b23. (Notice too that according to Aristotle, in the purely speculative order, the investigation of lower or smaller questions precedes inquiry into the higher or more universal causes: *Metaphysics* I.1, 982b14-17). The passage from Cicero's *De officiis* posits an inclination proper to man toward knowing truth, not specifically about God, but quite generally (*Appendix*, par. 13), and prior to this it posits an inclination proper to reason toward social life (par. 12). Regarding the inclination toward truth, he says that we engage in this when we are free from necessary occupations and cares (par. 13).

of the term, “wisdom” means knowledge of the absolutely highest, most universal cause.⁵⁷ And in a way this knowledge is in a class by itself, because one of its functions is to rule over all the other human disciplines, by judging and ordering them.⁵⁸ As Thomas says at the beginning of the *proemium* to his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, all of the sciences and arts are ordered to a single end, namely, the perfection of man, which is beatitude; and for this reason, one of them must rule over all the others. This one is wisdom.

The ruling function of wisdom – even philosophical wisdom, metaphysics, which in itself is purely speculative – is not limited to the speculative domain. As is obvious, the practical sphere too is ordered to man’s beatitude. That the knowledge of the highest cause is fit to rule even over the practical sphere makes sense, if we consider that the highest *kind* of cause is the final cause, and that therefore the highest and most universal cause is in fact the most universal end. Being concerned with this end pertains to the very notion of wisdom. “With respect to the things that are truly good, there is some highest cause that is the supreme good, which is the last end, through knowledge of which a man is said to be truly wise”.⁵⁹ Understood as wisdom, the knowledge of the truth about God is nothing other than the knowledge of the truth about the supreme common good. Even if in itself this knowledge is speculative, its object is not just the end of those things are matters for speculation, such as natural things. It is also the ultimate end of the things that depend on man’s own deliberate action, practical things. The entire practical order is subordinate to it. All practical ends are apt to be judged in light of the knowledge of it.

So even setting aside the point mentioned earlier about seeking divine guidance, in a sense the knowledge of God stands above the distinction between the speculative and the practical. As wisdom, it rules over both of them. And in this sense, it is a very general, comprehensive good, even more so than is living in society. This fits with Thomas’s citing it first in 94.2.

But does the desirability of this knowledge fall into the apprehension of practical reason prior to that of living in society? That is, does grasping the need to live in society somehow presuppose grasping the need for this knowledge, as grasping the need to rear the offspring presupposes that of

⁵⁷ See *STh* I, q. 1, a. 6; I-II, q. 57, a. 2; I-II, q. 66, a. 5; II-II, q. 45, a. 1.

⁵⁸ “*Sapientia habet iudicium de omnibus aliis virtutibus intellectualibus, et eius est ordinare omnes, et ipsa est quasi architectonica respectu omnium*”: *STh* I-II, q. 66, a. 5.

⁵⁹ *STh* II-II, q. 45, a. 1, ad 1. This article is about the infused gift of wisdom, but the wisdom that is an intellectual virtue also bears on the last end or beatitude. See *STh* I-II, q. 66, a. 5, ad 2.

doing what is required to bring the offspring into being? Thomas clearly regards wisdom as a fundamental human need.⁶⁰ Knowledge of the truth about God is far and away more urgent than other speculative knowledge.⁶¹ Even if we could expect no practical help or guidance from Him in remedy of our defects, God would still be our ultimate end, and our end is the most urgent thing for us to know.⁶² And I think we can indeed see a way in which it does fall into reason's apprehension prior to the good of living in society, if we reflect on a phrase in the last sentence of the corpus of 94.2.

The sentence is a concluding observation about the inclination toward the good that is in accordance with the nature of reason. "And according to this, those things that regard this inclination pertain to natural law, for instance *that man avoid ignorance*, that he not offend those with whom he needs to associate, and so forth". Clearly Thomas is associating the dictate to avoid ignorance with the inclination to know the truth about God. Yet he does not say "ignorance about God". He simply says "ignorance". This suggests two things.

First, it suggests that man has not only an inclination toward knowing the truth about God, but also an inclination toward knowing truth as such, truth taken absolutely or in general. Thomas posits such an inclination explicitly, in the article on the natural inclinations of the will.⁶³ Truth is the mind's connatural and proper good. Everyone understands that on the whole, knowing truth is better than being in ignorance. We might say that they understand that having a mind is better – intrinsically better, just in itself – than not having one.

Of course the inclination toward truth in general would also be proper to reason. However, truth taken generally does not refer so directly or explicitly to common good as does truth about God. Some truths are only of interest to this or that individual; for instance, the truth regarding the circumstances of an action that one is deliberating about performing. So the

⁶⁰ Notice how he takes this need for granted. "*Adeptis autem singulis praemissorum [bonorum exteriorum], possunt adhuc multa bona homini necessaria deesse, puta sapientia, sanitas corporis, et huiusmodi*": *STh* I-II, q. 2, a. 4.

⁶¹ On Thomas's view, this urgency accounts for the fact that God himself has revealed the truth about Him that reason can arrive at. The leisure and the other conditions that the investigation requires are too scarce. See *STh* I, q. 1, a. 1. At the same time, precisely because of the urgency of knowing about God, leisure itself is something urgent, not just for a few but for everyone; on this see the discussions of the third precept of the Decalogue in *STh* I-II, q. 100, a. 3, ad 2, and I-II, q. 100, a. 5.

⁶² On this see *STh* I-II, q. 89, a. 6.

⁶³ *STh* I-II, q. 10, a. 1.

fact that in 94.2, Thomas speaks of truth about God, not truth simply, further supports the idea that his examples are chosen for their reference to common good.

The second suggestion is that in a way, the inclination toward knowing the truth about God and the inclination toward knowing truth generally are one and the same. We can make sense of this, I think, if we keep in mind that knowing the truth about God is the same as possessing wisdom. For wisdom is also called the “science of truth”.⁶⁴ To be sure, all human disciplines are concerned with truth. Truth is an end in every intellectual operation, whether speculative or practical.⁶⁵ But if wisdom stands over the rest, this is because it bears on truth to the highest degree.⁶⁶ This in turn is because it regards the highest cause.⁶⁷ We grasp the truth about something more perfectly, with greater certitude, the more perfectly we know its cause or its explanation.⁶⁸ In this sense, the inclination toward knowing truth generally, and the inclination toward knowing the truth about God, are virtually the same thing. If by “God” is meant the highest cause – the most universal good, the ultimate end of reality – then indifference toward the truth about God would be nothing short of indifference toward the very meaning of existence. To be sure, some may not put much effort into seeking it. They may be distracted by other occupations, or discouraged by its difficulty. But this does not mean that they are judging the knowledge of it to be no better than ignorance about it. If they were, *could* they be judging that in general knowledge is better than ignorance? In the end, would they not be judging that having a mind is really no better, in itself, than not having one?

⁶⁴ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, II.1, 993b20.

⁶⁵ Thus prudence, which is an intellectual virtue and as such is ordered toward knowledge of the truth, pertains to the active life: *STh* II-II, q. 181, a. 2.

⁶⁶ This is one reason why wisdom must be a kind of speculative knowledge; practical intellect only regards truth up to a point, viz. insofar as it is applicable to action. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, II.1, 993b21–22. Aristotle does make the desire to avoid ignorance the proper motive of speculative inquiry: *Metaphysics* I.2, 982b20. But this hardly entails that the principle, “ignorance is to avoided”, only regards speculative knowledge. There is also bad and even culpable ignorance in the practical sphere; see *Nicomachean Ethics*, III.1, 1110b28–34; III.5, 1113b29–1114a3. Thomas posits a kind of sin called “negligence”, which is voluntary ignorance of what one ought to know, and which extends to both speculative and practical matters; see *STh* I-II, q. 76, a. 2. Also interesting is *STh* II-II, q. 166, a. 2, obj. 1 & ad 1, on Aristotle’s use of the term *studiosus* (σπουδαῖος) as a synonym for *virtuosus*.

⁶⁷ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, II.1, 993b23–30.

⁶⁸ See *STh* II-II, q. 9, a. 2.

If this is right, then there does seem to be a way in which understanding the desirability of living in society would presuppose understanding the desirability of knowing the truth about God. For again, by “society” is meant the sort of community that is properly rational. Living in society primarily means communing with other minds. It means reasoning together. Our natural need for society, and even society’s own nature, is very much in function of our natural need for truth. If we did not see truth as a goal, we would not – or rather, *could* not – engage in reasoning at all. Much less would we be inclined to engage in it together. The sheer idea of society, to say nothing of its intrinsic desirability, would be unintelligible to us.

And, I dare say, so would the very principle of the primacy of common good. As we saw, only intellect relates directly to common good. No common good holds sway except through some intellect. Seeing the primacy of common good seems to go hand in hand with seeing that intellect, and therefore truth, ought to rule.

Appendix

M. Tullius Cicero, *De Officiis*, I.iv.11-14

- [11] *IV. Principio generi animantium omni est a natura tributum, ut se, vitam corpusque tueatur, declinet ea, quae nocitura videantur, omniaque, quae sint ad vivendum necessaria, anquirat et paret, ut pastum, ut latibula, ut alia generis eiusdem. Commune item animantium omnium est coniunctionis adpetitus procreandi causa et cura quaedam eorum, quae procreata sint; sed inter hominem et beluam hoc maxime interest, quod haec tantum, quantum sensu movetur, ad id solum, quod adest quodque praesens est, se accommodat paulum admodum sentiens praeteritum aut futurum; homo autem, quod rationis est particeps, per quam consequentia cernit, causas rerum videt earumque praegressus et quasi antecessiones non ignorat, similitudines comparat rebusque praesentibus adiungit atque annectit futuras, facile totius vitae cursum videt ad eamque degendam praeparat res necessarias.*
- [12] *Eademque natura vi rationis hominem conciliat homini et ad orationis et ad vitae societatem ingeneratque in primis praecipuum quendam amorem in eos, qui procreati sunt, impellitque, ut hominum coetus et celebrationes et esse et a se obiri velit ob easque causas studeat parare ea, quae suppeditent ad cultum et ad victum, nec sibi soli, sed coniugi, liberis ceterisque, quos caros habeat tuerique debeat; quae cura exsuscitat etiam animos et maiores ad rem gerendam facit.*
- [13] *In primisque hominis est propria veri inquisitio atque investigatio. Itaque cum sumus necessariis negotiis curisque vacui, tum avemus aliquid videre, audire, addiscere cognitionemque rerum aut occultarum aut admirabilium ad beate vivendum necessariam ducimus. Ex quo intellegitur, quod verum, simplex sin-*

cerumque sit, id esse naturae hominis aptissimum. Huic veri videndi cupiditati adiuncta est appetitio quaedam principatus, ut nemini parere animus bene informatus a natura velit nisi praecipienti aut docenti aut utilitatis causa iuste et legitime imperanti; ex quo magnitudo animi exsistit humanarumque rerum contemptio.

- [14] *Nec vero illa parva vis naturae est rationisque, quod unum hoc animal sentit, quid sit ordo, quid sit, quod deceat, in factis dictisque qui modus. Itaque eorum ipsorum, quae aspectu sentiuntur, nullum aliud animal pulchritudinem, venustatem, convenientiam partium sentit; quam similitudinem natura ratioque ab oculis ad animum transferens multo etiam magis pulchritudinem, constantiam, ordinem in consiliis factisque conservandam putat cavetque, ne quid indecore effeminateve faciat, turn in omnibus et opinionibus et factis ne quid libidinose aut faciat aut cogitet.*

Quibus ex rebus conflatur et efficitur id, quod quaerimus, honestum, quod etiamsi nobilitatum non sit, tamen honestum sit, quodque vere dicimus, etiamsi a nullo laudetur, natura esse laudabile.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ M. Tullius Cicero, *De Officiis*, with an English translation by Walter Miller, Cambridge (Massachusetts): Harvard University Press 1975, pp. 12–16.