

## **GRISEZ ON ARISTOTLE AND HUMAN GOODS**

### **Response to “Natural Law, God, Religion, and Human Fulfilment”**

In his essay ‘Natural Law, God, Religion, and Human Fulfillment’ Professor Grisez has given us, in his usual stimulating and provocative way, a good many ideas to chew on and react to. Reading him is always a challenge. In this particular piece he has covered a lot of ground in moral philosophy, theology, and the history of thought. Happily it is not my task to comment on everything. My focus is to be Grisez’s discussion and criticism of Aristotle. However, this focus, while narrow enough for the purposes of this paper, will also give me the opportunity to discuss some of the other things he says.

As regards Aristotle, Grisez finds in the Stagirite certain ideas that, as he says, are “disastrous for religion and moral life” (p.13). Well, perhaps they are, but I think we ought to register a certain initial surprise that they could be. After all Aristotle’s philosophy has had such an effect on the theological and moral thinking of the past two millennia, whether Christian or not, that if we are to judge his philosophy disastrous we will probably find ourselves having to judge the thinking it affected disastrous too. Grisez does seem to think that, at least if his remarks on St. Thomas Aquinas later in his paper are anything to go by. But that would suggest that Grisez’s “renewal of Christian ethics” (p. 27) is less like a renewal and more like a revolution. Still it might be a needed revolution. I will return to this point at the end.

Grisez gives the following catalog or syllabus of Aristotelian errors.

- 1) God is only one, albeit the supreme one, of many self-subsistent substances.
- 2) God is self-thinking thought, fully actual and changeless, that cannot and need not do or make anything.
- 3) Some other substances, especially men, can relate themselves to this god by trying to be like it.
- 4) These substances become like the god through an ordered set of functions that culminate in the exercise of speculative reason.
- 5) None of the human substances is individually self-existent.
- 6) There is no place for a creator-creature relationship or for co-operation between man and Aristotle's highest god; there is no place for living in harmony with this god or for following its guidance.
- 7) Human goods are commensurable and ordered hierarchically.
- 8) Man's priorities are determined by nature, nurture, or fortune, not by one's free commitments—there is no freedom of choice and no possibility of making an overarching religious commitment.
- 9) Other goods, besides the goods at the top of the hierarchy, do not have intrinsic but only instrumental goodness.
- 10) There are no genuine moral virtues, or aspects of a person whose various parts are integrated with a set of freely chosen and faithfully fulfilled upright commitments organizing one's life.
- 11) Not every person possesses dignity—only the fortunate can realize human potential fully; many people are pretty poor specimens and some are natural slaves. (pp.13-14)

This is an impressive catalog and a heavy indictment. But it also represents, interestingly enough, a very common view. In fact it reflects in large part the prevailing scholarly consensus about Aristotle. To be sure few scholars would find the catalog as objectionable as Grisez does. They either have no special view on the matter or they even look upon it, or parts of it, with a certain satisfaction. It accords rather nicely with a sort of contemporary non-Christian secularism. However, one ought to add straightaway that, contemporary though it be, there is nothing especially new about it. The basic view about God and man that it attributes to Aristotle, and satisfaction with this view, go back to the Middle Ages and beyond (as Grisez in part notes, p.13 n.29). One of the chief representatives at any rate was the great Muslim thinker, Averroes.<sup>1</sup> In fact one might not unfairly describe the contemporary scholarly consensus and state of mind as a sort of revival of Averroism. The revival is not, I should add, a conscious one, since the scholars are generally not aware of, or at least not much interested in, the Averroist character of their views.

St. Thomas Aquinas, we know, labored long and manfully against Averroism, especially as it presented itself in the Latin Averroism of his day. Moreover he labored to show not only that Averroism was wrong as a philosophical doctrine but also that it was wrong as an interpretation of Aristotle.<sup>2</sup> In both respects he achieved considerable success. Averroism pretty much perished after his time both as a believable philosophy and as a believable interpretation of Aristotle. The revival of the Averroist interpretation

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief overview of the matter see Frederick Copleston's, *A History of Philosophy* (Doubleday, 1948), vol. 2, ch. 42. For Averroes himself a basic text is *The Decisive Treatise*, in *Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, ed. Hyman and Walsh (Hackett, 1973), pp. 293-316.

<sup>2</sup> See in particular his *De Unitate Intellectus contra Averroistas*.

among contemporary scholars is thus a distinctively modern phenomenon, which, as I have already remarked, owes little to its Averroist pre-history. One might well be inclined to conclude, therefore, that such Averroism, if it was dominant once and has, quite independently, returned to dominance again, is well founded in the Aristotelian texts and naturally imposes itself on the reader's mind. To this conclusion one cannot, I think, entirely object. But one should not allow it altogether. Not only was it possible for Aquinas to argue many centuries ago that Averroism was false to Aristotle's texts, it is possible to argue the same now, as in fact some contemporary scholars have been doing.<sup>3</sup> In other words, there is a certain split in the world of scholarship about what Aristotelianism is, and if one side of this split dominates now, the other dominated earlier and may well come to dominate again.

Let us say, then, that Grisez's criticism of Aristotle is a criticism of one of the possible Aristotles that scholars find in the texts. To that extent, therefore, I can agree with him and can even endorse his indictment. "Yes," I am inclined to say, "if that is what Aristotle said, then he was wrong and needs to be corrected." But maybe that is not what Aristotle said. In which case the indictment does not stand and we should forbear to condemn, or at least to condemn on these grounds. I do not intend here to engage this scholarly debate (that would take me too far from the burden of Grisez's paper). But I do wish to put on the table a third approach—an approach that can perhaps mediate the controversy and help, in some degree, to explain it.

My own sense about Aristotle and his philosophy is something like the following. His texts are indeed ambiguous and unclear, and they are ambiguous in precisely the

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Gianluca di Muzio, 'Aristotle on Improving one's Character,' *Phronesis* 45 (2000): 203-219.

ways that have been noticed by the scholars, whether medieval or modern, and that have split them into rival camps. But the reason for this is not that Aristotle really went one or the other way chosen by the scholars and just failed to make that sufficiently clear to the non-scholars. On the contrary, Aristotle left things unclear because he really thought they were unclear. So, unlike the scholars, he quite deliberately refrained from deciding which way to go. He exercised over himself, in other words, a certain degree of ascetical restraint. He was ready to decide questions where he thought he had evidence to go on—determinative if he thought the evidence determinative, probable if he thought it probable. Where he thought he had no evidence, or where no solution rationally presented itself, he held back and kept a judicious silence. Perhaps he would have preferred to go one way rather than the other. But if so we cannot tell that from the texts he left us.

One immediate illustration of this relates to numbers 1), 2), 3), 6), and possibly 8) and 10) in Grisez's syllabus above, namely the apparent lack of a providential and personal god in Aristotle. One should say straight off that there was no lack of a providential and personal god or gods in the Greek thought of Aristotle's day, as the evidence of the great tragedians and the mystery religions makes very clear. So why does this not get reflected in Aristotle? An answer is already present in Xenophanes. The personal gods of pagan Greek religion are too irrational and too immoral to be worthy of belief or worship. If the philosopher is going to believe in a god, therefore, this god must be one that he can give some philosophical and not mythical ground for. Now the world itself provides such philosophical ground for the existence of such a god. For the world is not sufficient to explain itself; something else beyond it must be posited to explain it.

This fact is the basis of the several cosmological arguments for the existence of a god (Grisez states one of them in his paper, p.7). But do these arguments establish indisputably that this god is a personal god, or that, if he is, he is also a providential god? I think not. But conversely neither do these arguments establish that this god is *not* personal and providential (unless one takes some modern or Averroist interpretation of them). They leave the question open. The wise philosopher then will refrain from saying or concluding anything that closes the question. He will say what he can and then shut up.

Another and more complex illustration relates to the problem of life after bodily death—which may or may not be part of what is being referred to in number 5) of Grisez’s syllabus above. This is a problem, in fact, for any philosopher, and those who have tried to answer it on purely philosophical grounds have all, I think, fallen into error. The problem is as follows. There is clearly in man a certain power or powers whose relation to the body is puzzling. I refer to reason and will or choice. If man is a physical being then these powers too, it would seem, should be physical and ultimately explicable in physical terms. This thought is, one might say, what drives contemporary discussions in the philosophy of mind, where just about everyone is a physicalist. Or perhaps one should say that just about everyone *wants* to be a physicalist. For, if the truth be told, physicalism is more a hope than an achieved reality. No one has yet come up with a fully satisfying physicalist theory. I do not say this because philosophers cast doubt on each other’s theories. I say it because they each cast doubt on their own theory. Some, to be sure, do think that they have got closer to a solution than others, but none thinks he has really cracked it. Indeed, in view of this phenomenon, at least one prominent philosopher of mind has declared that we are constitutionally incapable of coming up with any such

theory (though that has not stopped him siding with physicalism in principle).<sup>4</sup> My own conviction is that the failure here is not due to some constitutional incapacity. It is due to the fact that physicalism is just an impossible doctrine. No matter how cleverly stated it may be, it is never going to make sense of the facts. The powers of reason and choice are intrinsically immaterial and have features (notably universality and freedom) that nothing material could have or explain.

So if man is not just a physical being, what else is he and what happens to this something else at death? One could take a dualist line here, like Platonists and Cartesians, and posit a soul as a second and independent substance alongside the body. When the body dies the soul and its powers survive and exist as such without need of or dependence on a body. But then, if we go this way, we make the connection between body and soul before death (when they are united) utterly mysterious. How are these two substances, body and soul, supposed to interact and how can they form the unity that we see man manifestly to be? There are no satisfactory answers to these questions. Dualism is as unbelievable a doctrine as physicalism.

The problem forces us to look for a notion of soul which 1) gives the soul a degree of being that transcends the physical and that grounds the non-physical powers, and yet 2) naturally ties the soul to the body so that the two form a single unity. Aristotle's doctrine of the soul as form of the body is the only doctrine that provides any satisfactory answer here. For as form of the body, and so as actuality to potential, the soul and the body form an intrinsic unity as do the shape and the clay of a statue. But as principle of life and activity (for the body as such is not active but only when animated), the soul can have powers that it activates in bodily organs, as sight and hearing, and

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<sup>4</sup> Colin McGinn, *The Problem of Consciousness* (Blackwell, 1991).

others that it does not activate in bodily organs, as reason and free choice. Nevertheless this doctrine has certain particular consequences that Aristotle himself notes. First, the origin of the soul cannot be attributed to the normal and material processes of conception and gestation, for these could not explain its immaterial powers. The soul, or at least the mind, must come from “outside” (*De Generatione Animalium* 2.3.736a21-29)—an enigmatic remark that Aristotle makes and leaves without further explanation (much to the perplexity of the scholars). Second, and for the same reason, the soul cannot at death be bound up, or at least not necessarily, with the death of the body. So what happens to it? Does it live on? But how? Since it is by nature fitted for a body and naturally belongs with the body, it ought to have a body and cannot intelligibly be thought of as going on disembodied for ever. Reincarnation is, of course, one possible answer, but one for which there is no convincing evidence and which, indeed, is in tension with the form/matter doctrine (for this doctrine requires that particular souls have their own particular bodies and cannot just pick up and put down any body whatever). Aristotle therefore seems to have rejected it (*De Anima*, 407b13-26, 414a19-27). So if physicalism won’t work, nor dualism, nor reincarnation, what does Aristotle say instead? Well, to be frank and *pace* the commentators, he says nothing. All he does is state and cling to the two points just noted, that: 1) the soul has powers that give it a degree of being independent of the body, and 2) the soul naturally belongs with the body. The commentators have scrambled to reconcile these statements with each other and with the fact of death. Generally speaking they have managed to do so only by denying or downplaying point 1). That is what modern physicalists do. It is also what the Averroists more or less did in their own peculiar way. They attributed the powers in question not to the human soul but to some

other soul or intellect not connected with the human body. Hence the human soul is not immortal and there is no personal survival of individual men after death. But this Averroist answer, to say nothing of the physicalist one, does not solve the Aristotelian problem. Because it effectively denies point 1) it just ignores the problem by changing the question.

To speak the truth here, there is only one fully satisfactory solution to the Aristotelian problem, and that is the Christian doctrine of the creation of the human soul in the womb immediately by God and of the resurrection of the body. But these doctrines could never be discovered by reason, even if they are what reason, unknowingly, is really looking for. They are a gift of revelation. What then should a philosopher do? He can try, on the one hand, to solve the problem without revelation, but if he does so he will just end up falling into one or another error—as the modern physicalists do, as Aristotle's commentators did, and as Cartesians and Platonists have done. Or he can, on the other hand, simply acknowledge his ignorance and shut up. That, I contend, is what Aristotle did. Having said as much as reason permitted him to say, and sufficient to lay out the parameters of the problem, he fell into a discrete silence. Were it not for the grace of revelation we should all be doing the same.

I have digressed rather from the topic of Grisez's essay, but not I think without purpose. For I wish to draw from my digression a general moral for Aristotelian scholarship and therefore also for discussion and criticism of Aristotle. Let us by all means criticize what Aristotle says; let us by all means criticize what the scholars say he says; but let us also, where the ambiguity of the texts and the shifting back and forth of

the scholarly disputes alert us, refrain from criticizing when Aristotle simply and rightly stops. Let us give him the benefit of his silence.

To a large extent, therefore, I do not object to what Grisez complains of in his discussion of Aristotle. I would only add that he is speaking less about Aristotle and more about a certain scholarly interpretation of Aristotle. At least I will say this of some of what Grisez says, namely what he says on the points I have expressly mentioned: 1), 2), 3), 5), 6), 8), 10). But on the remaining points I must demur. Here is where I shall pass to some more properly philosophical as opposed to scholarly or historical remarks. For I think there are problems with some of Grisez's own ethical views. I have given expression to some of my criticisms of Grisez in this regard elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> There is no need for me to repeat those criticisms here. I wish instead to raise some additional ones. They concern Grisez's claims about the incommensurability of human goods and therewith his criticism of the hierarchical theory of human goods adopted by Aristotle (and also by St. Thomas Aquinas after him).

Grisez holds the view, or seems to hold the view, that if two goods are incommensurable then they are also incomparable. He seems to think, in other words, that if X and Y are really incommensurable then they cannot be compared at all and one of them cannot be said to be better or worse than another. For, as his argument seems to go, if X and Y were really comparable as better or worse then there would have to be some common measure according to which the comparison was being made. At any rate

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<sup>5</sup> My criticisms have actually been directed at Finnis as much as at Grisez since their views in these respects are very close. See my: 'St. Thomas and the Naturalistic Fallacy,' *The Thomist* 51 (1987): 51-69 'On the Alleged Incoherence of Consequentialism,' co-authored with Robert McKim, *New Scholasticism* 62 (1988): 349-352; 'Practical Thinking: Some Comments on Finnis and Aquinas,' *Modern Schoolman* 62 (1990): 111-122; 'Consequentialism, Incoherence and Choice: a Rejoinder to a Rejoinder,' co-authored with Robert McKim, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 66 (1992): 69-74. The first and third of these articles also appear in a revised form in my *Vices, Virtues, and Consequences. Essays in Moral and Political Philosophy* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001).

Grisez writes: “[the basic goods] are incommensurable: neither equally good nor more or less good than one another” (p. 10). He also says that for Aristotle human goods “are intelligibly commensurable and ordered hierarchically” (p. 13, and see also p. 2 n5), the implication being, I think, that to order goods hierarchically, or to say that some are better than others, is necessarily to commensurate them.

Now this implication seems to me false (it does not even hold in mathematics where incommensurability is most at home, for the diagonal of the square, which is incommensurable in length with the side, can nevertheless be compared in length with the side, for it is longer than the side). I do, to be sure, agree with Grisez and his collaborators that goods are not comparable in the way utilitarians, consequentialists, or proportionalists say they are. For these theorists want to compare goods by using a common measure for all goods—pleasure, say, or the satisfaction of interests. At least in the more thoroughgoing kinds of such theory all goods can be weighed on a common scale according to how much of the relevant feature they have. In this sense all goods are commensurable because any good can be made better than or equal to another simply by increasing the quantity of the first or decreasing the quantity of the second. Pushpin, as Bentham famously said, is as good as poetry because, or insofar as, the pleasure provided to one person by a certain quantity of pushpin is equal to the pleasure provided to the same or another person by another quantity of poetry. Now Mill, as we know, rejected this view of Bentham’s. Or rather he supplemented it by saying that some pleasures, the intellectual ones, are superior to others, the physical ones, regardless of the quantities involved. Hence on his view no quantity, say, of the pleasures of eating could measure up to the pleasures of philosophy. Mill evidently thought, then, unlike Grisez, that pleasures

could be both incommensurable and yet comparable. For the intellectual pleasures are superior to the physical pleasures though they cannot be measured on the same scale.

Grisez might respond here that Mill was just deluded and that, for a utilitarian, the notion of different kinds or qualities of pleasure is incoherent. Some contemporary utilitarians might, in fact, agree with him on this point.<sup>6</sup> But let that be, since I have no interest in defending Mill. Let me say rather that Aristotle also distinguishes commensurability and comparability. At least he does so in a passage from the *Politics* which, if my interpretation of it is right, presents a perfectly clear and plausible account of that distinction.

In the passage in question (*Politics* 3.12: 1283a4-9) Aristotle is comparing different claims to rule. He raises the possibility that inequality in any good whatever (including color and size) could count as a superior claim to rule (so that, for instance, the fairer or taller should rule over the darker and shorter). He dismisses this view for several reasons, one of which is that it would make all goods commensurable (*sumbleta*). He illustrates his point using a dispute from pipe playing about who should be given the better pipes. He writes:

Suppose a certain size counted as more [than virtue or skill in pipe playing] then size generally would come into competition with both wealth and freedom [in its claims to being given the better pipes]. So if this person excels in size more than that person excels in virtue (or skill), and if superiority in size generally is of more weight than superiority in virtue (skill), then all goods would be commensurable.

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<sup>6</sup> Richard M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 121.

For if this much size is better than this much virtue (or skill), then clearly that much is equal to it.<sup>7</sup>

The argument here is elliptical, but it can be expanded as follows. If a certain amount of size counts as more of a claim to pipes than a certain amount of skill or virtue in pipe playing, then by reducing the amount of the size one should eventually get to an amount that equals, in its claim to pipes, the original amount of skill. Hence, size and skill will be commensurable. Further, supposing also that a certain amount of wealth or freedom counts as more of a claim to pipes than that same amount of skill, then some lesser amount of both will, in claims to pipes, equal it. Hence they too will be commensurable with skill. But things equal to a third thing are equal to each other, hence the amount of wealth and freedom equal to the amount of skill will also equal the amount of size that was equal to it. Consequently all these goods will be commensurable with each other and with every other good that one allows to make claims to the pipes.

Aristotle regards it as obvious that all goods are not commensurable, yet he clearly also regards it as legitimate to say that some goods are better than others. At any rate he is prepared to say, for instance, that the goods of the soul are superior to those of the body, and that the virtues of the part of the soul that has reason are better than the virtues of the part of the soul that listens to reason (*Politics* 4(7). 1, 14: 1333a16-36).

What he means by this can, I think, be best explained as follows.

Goods are not commensurable because different goods are good with respect to different jobs or functions. The good of pipe playing is good with respect to the job of

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<sup>7</sup> The translation is taken from my *The Politics of Aristotle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 100.

playing the pipes; the good of speed is good with respect to running and winning races; the good of political virtue is good with respect to ruling. These goods are clearly incommensurable in the sense that no amount of speed or political virtue is going to make up for a deficiency in musical skill when it comes to playing the pipes. Only skill in pipe playing is relevant here and only people competing on the basis of such skill can sensibly be measured against each other as regards better or worse. The other goods are simply irrelevant. Different goods, therefore, are incommensurable in that they are relevant for different jobs, and a good that counts for doing one job does not thereby count for doing some other and completely different job. But this does not mean that one cannot say, for instance, that one of these incommensurable goods is better than another. For one can indeed do this by comparing, not how a good relevant for one job is better or worse with respect to that job than a good relevant for a different job, but how the different jobs compare to each other. Bridle making, for instance, is a lesser good than horse riding, not because someone skilled in horse riding will make a better bridle than someone skilled in bridle making, but because bridle making is for the sake of horse riding and not vice versa (*Ethics* 1.1). Likewise we can say that the body is for the sake of the soul and the parts of the body for the sake of the whole body.

While these goods are better or worse according to their place in the hierarchy, none of them is commensurable with any other in the sense that a greater amount of a lower good will make up for a deficiency in a higher good, or even that a lesser amount of a higher good will make up for a deficiency in a lower good. For instance, if one has a deficiency in horse riders one is not going to make up for it by recruiting twice as many bridle makers; nor is one going to make up for a deficiency in bridle makers by recruiting

half as many horse riders—no matter how skilled the bridle makers or horse riders are. Likewise the heart is better than the big toe because it is central to the functioning of the whole body while the big toe is peripheral. For a body can survive without a big toe but not without a heart. Yet a body cannot be perfect without a big toe. If the heart is made stronger, for instance, this does not make up for the loss of a big toe.

This fact is rather significant. It means that in a hierarchy of goods, while some are higher or better than others, none is more basic. On the contrary, all are equally basic, since, *ex hypothesi*, all are equally needed for the completion of the whole. Or at least this will be true of goods that are, as I shall say, organic to a given hierarchy as opposed to those that are merely instrumental. Take the body, for instance. The body is an organic hierarchy while bridle making and horse riding form an instrumental hierarchy. In an organic hierarchy all the parts are equally necessary for the integrity of the whole but not all the parts are equally important (as with the big toe and the heart). All the parts are also for their own sake as well as for the sake of the whole. Since the big toe is an integral part of the perfect body it belongs to the body in its own right and as such. It belongs, in other words, immediately to the idea of the body's perfection and of its complete functioning and not mediately or because of something else. The fact that it is less at the center of the body's perfection and functioning than the heart does not alter its independent place in that perfection and functioning.

The matter is a little different with goods that are instrumental to a given hierarchy, as opposed to those that are organic. Bridle making, for instance, is instrumental with respect to horse riding and medicine is such with respect to the body. The exercise of medical skill that the body needs in order to be restored to health will no

longer be needed once the body has been restored. The administering of curative measures stops at that point since the body can now function from within its own resources. Food and drink are also instrumental goods but ones that, unlike medical skill, are always needed. The reason in their case is that they become, after digestion, parts of the body and so pass over into the class of organic goods and do not remain simply instrumental. Or, to follow Aristotle, we might say that medicine is a tool for health but food is materials for health (*Politics* 1.3: 1256a5-10). Likewise with bridle making and horse riding. Bridles may be organic to horse riding (a horse cannot be ridden well without them), but bridle making is instrumental. If bridles never wore out or broke, then once enough of them had been made there would be no further need of bridle making. Bridle making, we shall say, is like medicine, and bridles like food. Both bridles and bridle making are for the sake of horse riding, just like food and medicine are for the sake of health. But the “for the sake of relation” is different in each case. One, as I say, is organic and the other instrumental. For this reason, if for no other, we must say that Grisez’s charge 9) is false as applied to organic hierarchies in Aristotle.

At all events, such an organic hierarchy is an instance of parts whose goodness is comparable but not commensurable. It is an instance of something that I think Grisez is committed to denying. For he wants to say about the human goods that they are all equally basic in a way that one cannot also say that one of them is better than another. Or at least one cannot say this prior to some choice one makes of which good to make more central to one’s own life or which good to make the principle of any hierarchical ordering among goods. In other words, there is no *natural* hierarchy to the human goods, or a hierarchy that precedes choice, though there may be a personally created hierarchy that

follows choice. The belief that there is such a natural hierarchy, which he rightly attributes to both Aristotle and Aquinas, he regards as a defect in their systems.

There seem to be a number of reasons for his holding that this is a defect. The primary or fundamental one is that the basic goods are, as he says, all equally ultimate as reasons for acting. Each is good in and of itself and not because of, or derivatively from, some other good (p. 10). But I think this reason is not decisive, for the hierarchical conception of goods that one finds in Aristotle and Aquinas is well able to accommodate it. For in this conception the several goods can still be considered ultimate as reasons for action. Life or survival, for instance, is a good to be pursued just as such even if it is also a good to be pursued for the sake of other and higher goods, namely the goods of the soul. And this remains true whether we are comparing these goods with each other or are comparing the prospective advantages of various instances of the same good in particular contexts (p.2 n.5, p.10 n.25). Instances of human goods, even though hierarchically subordinate to instances of goods higher up the scale, do not lose their own power of direct appeal to choice.

There are two additional reasons that seem also to be playing a role in Grisez's thinking here. The first of these concerns what is needed to reject proportionalism or consequentialism. The second concerns the question of human dignity. As regards the first, he holds that the right way to reject these moral theories is through the claims: a) that all the goods are incommensurable so that it is impossible to sum them into one calculation and compare the resulting states of affairs of different actions as better or worse; and b) that since all the goods are equally basic in the sense that none is, by nature

at any rate, subordinate to or for the sake of another, it is always wrong to attack one for the sake of protecting another (as consequentialists sometimes say one should do).

But again I think the hierarchical conception of goods in Aristotle and Aquinas can accommodate these claims. It accommodates claim a) through its differentiating between incommensurability and incomparability. The human goods are incommensurable and so cannot be summed (in the way that consequentialists want); but they are nevertheless comparable and so can be said to be better or worse, higher or lower. It also accommodates claim b), or at least the conclusion of claim b), even though it does say that some goods are for the sake of others. The answer is basically this. The goods of the body, for instance, such as health and strength, are for the sake of the goods of the soul, so that one should prefer the latter to the former and be ready, in certain cases, to forego the former for the sake of the latter (as in fasting, celibacy, martyrdom, and so on). But, despite this natural subordination of the goods of the body to those of the soul, one may not directly destroy the goods of the body (say in suicide or euthanasia). The reason is not that, through some inconsistency of thinking, the goods of the body are now being said not to be for the sake of soul so that one may not, after all, subordinate the former to the latter. Rather it is because here one's choice focuses on an evil and not on a good. To choose to suffer death from another rather than, say, deny the faith is not to choose the evil of death. It is to choose the good of faith. Death comes from the other's choice, not from one's own. Indeed, death comes despite one's choice, for one would prefer to live if possible. Conversely, in the case of deliberately committing suicide, whether one does it to avoid suffering physical evil like bodily pain (as in physician assisted suicide) or to avoid spiritual evil (as when a captured soldier commits suicide to

avoid betraying his friends or country under torture), one is oneself choosing the evil of death. But it is irrational to choose evil, even in order to attain some good (as the avoidance of pain or treachery). For it is an elementary principle of reason to choose good and never to choose evil. Reason, of course, is the principle of virtuous behavior so that to choose against reason, as one does when one chooses an evil, is to choose vice over virtue. Hence to choose suicide to avoid treachery is not, as it may seem, a case of subordinating a lesser good (bodily life) to a higher (loyalty to friends and country), but of subordinating a higher good (virtue) to a lesser (avoidance of the physical pain of torture).<sup>8</sup>

One should not be disturbed here by the fact that sometimes we do think it right deliberately to sacrifice, and not just to suffer the loss of, a lesser good for the sake of a greater good, as when we cut off a diseased big toe or even a leg to save the whole body. For here it is crucial that the limb cut off is diseased or damaged in some way so that it is ceasing to function as a part of the body and is becoming a danger to the body. To remove a healthy part of the body which is posing no threat to the body is very different from removing a diseased part that is posing a threat. That is why, for instance, it is rational to remove a diseased or damaged womb to save the whole body but not rational to be sterilized so as to continue sex without having more children. For the very fact that one would have children otherwise proves that the generative organs are healthy and in no need of being removed or rendered inoperative for bodily safety. What is needed in such a case is not surgery but virtue, the virtue of abstinence.

This is the way, at any rate, that I think the tradition of moral thinking indebted to Aristotle and Aquinas would avoid the perils of consequentialism. That this tradition can

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<sup>8</sup> For more extended discussion of this point see essay 4 in my *Vices, Virtues, and Consequence*, pp. 74-89.

do so without giving up the idea of a natural hierarchy of human goods shows that that idea, contrary to Grisez's thinking, need not lay one open to those perils.

This brings us to the second of the additional reasons that Grisez seems to have for regarding a natural hierarchy as a defect in the Aristotelian (and Thomistic) systems. It concerns his charge 11) against Aristotle. This is the charge that, on Aristotle's view, not every person possesses dignity but that many are poor specimens of humanity and that some indeed are natural slaves. Well, certainly, a conviction that not all are equal is a feature of the Aristotelian position and, I should say, of any hierarchical account of the human goods. For as some people are more and others less capable of the higher goods so are they themselves lower or higher on the scale of human perfection. But what does this mean? Surely no one even today would deny that different people should be treated differently. Some people we send to jail, others we put in mental institutions, others we set to forced labor, others we keep under parental guidance, others we give full freedom to, others again we put in high office. And is this not a case of treating some people as higher and others as lower on the scale of human perfection? Doubtless mistakes can be and are made in all these cases and some people are put where they do not deserve to be. But no one would deny the principle of treating people according to their needs and deserts, nor that jail, forced labor, parental guidance, and so on are among the things that some people need and deserve. Yet, though we do this, we still maintain, and rightly maintain, that all men have equal dignity as men. Indeed to punish wrongdoers with prison and to reward well doers with freedom is precisely the way we treat them as of equal dignity. Not to hold deliberate wrongdoers responsible for their wrongs and well doers responsible for their well doing would be to deny to both their dignity as free

agents. Similarly not to keep children under parental guidance and not to institutionalize the mentally ill would be to deny them their basic needs and so to treat them as of less dignity than others whose basic needs we do not deny.

In other words it is precisely the treating all men as of equal dignity that requires us to treat them differently according to their different deserts and needs. If Aristotle believed the same and held, for instance, that some should be given high office and others not, that some should be induced to do good by exhortation and others by coercion, that some should have freedom and others not, he is, as far as this goes, just doing what we also do. True, we might disagree with him over certain policies and classifications, but we certainly do not disagree with him over the principle. We cannot conclude, therefore, that just because he thought different sorts of people should be treated differently, or just because he thought there was a hierarchical division among men, he also thought that not all men were of equal dignity as men. Perhaps he also thought that, but I can see no evidence to suppose that he did. Indeed there is evidence to suppose that he thought the reverse. For he condemns cannibalism on the grounds that a man is not a fit object to be hunted and eaten (*Politics* 4(7). 3: 1324b39-41). Only wild beasts are fit for that. But if some men were so unequal as not to count as of equal dignity with other men then there could be no reason to condemn cannibalism like this. On the contrary one would be free to argue that some men might be treated like, or even worse than, animals. And that is indeed what some contemporary philosophers are arguing about the unborn and the very young, that these are so far from being human that we may legitimately use them like animals for purposes of experimentation (they have not yet said that we may legitimately eat them, though I am not sure why).

We can conclude then that none of Grisez's reasons against having a natural hierarchy of human goods in one's moral theory is sound. But what follows from this? Not very much in fact. It follows, to be sure, as I have argued, that Grisez's criticisms of Aristotle and Aquinas are, in respect of the ideas of hierarchy and incomparability, incorrect. But it does not follow that Grisez's own theory is wrong or defective in any further and decisive way. Indeed his theory might otherwise be perfectly acceptable as it stands. For while I think Grisez has not shown that a moral theory *must not* have a natural hierarchy of goods in order to work, I also think that no one else has shown that a moral theory *must* have a natural hierarchy of goods in order to work. I think, in fact, that Grisez has shown very well that one can dispense with a natural hierarchy and yet have everything that a moral theory, even a natural law moral theory, needs. He has managed to show, or I have no reason to think he has not managed to show, that a legitimate pluralism of moral theories is possible here. We can stay with the Aristotelian and Thomist tradition and have a natural hierarchy, or we can abandon that tradition and not have a natural hierarchy. Either way seems possible. Indeed, for all I am able to see at present, Grisez's theory might have advantages that the tradition lacks. But again, for all I can see, it may not and the reverse may be true.

If I might return, then, to my comments at the beginning of this paper about whether Grisez is renewing or revolutionizing Christian ethics, I should say that he is doing both and neither. He is doing both in the sense that he has introduced a revolutionary theory (a theory that revolutionizes the tradition in rejecting hierarchy and comparability), and thereby a theory that may well serve also to renew the tradition, if only by provoking a thoughtful reaction. He is doing neither because his theory is not one

that we are obliged to accept (he has failed to show that we *must* revolutionize the tradition) and so not one we are obliged to accommodate by way of renewing or altering the tradition. We can, if we wish, carry on regardless. On the other hand I don't think we can carry on as if there were no viable alternative to the tradition, for Grisez's position seems to be precisely such an alternative. We must adopt instead a tolerant pluralism. Grisez and his collaborators, on the hand, and Thomists and other followers of the tradition, on the other, must be allowed to hold on to their respective theories if they wish. But, conversely, neither of them must be allowed to accuse the other of maintaining something vitiated or disastrous. Or at least not yet anyway.

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