



## Aquinas and Anscombe on Connaturality and Moral Knowledge<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The idea of ‘connatural knowledge’ is attributed to Aquinas on the basis of passages in which he distinguishes between *scientific* and *affective experiential* knowledge of religious and moral truths. In a series of encyclicals beginning with Leo XIII’s *Aeterni Patris*, popes have celebrated and commended Aquinas as the supreme guide in philosophy and theology and in some of these cited his discovery of connatural knowledge. The course and context of his ‘elevation’ are explored before proceeding to a discussion of moral knowledge in which different forms of non-theoretical cognition are identified. This leads to an examination of work by Elizabeth Anscombe on the factuality of ethical judgement and connaturality. Aquinas and Anscombe offer important insights but more work remains to be done. Moral knowledge is a many-faceted thing. More accurately, it is not one thing but many things analogously related both by their modes and by their objects.

### Keywords

Connaturality, dispositional knowledge, phenomenological recognition, rational apprehension, virtuous knowledge

### I.

My theme is moral epistemology, and my topics are the kind of knowledge that the virtuous agent has of good and bad, and of right and wrong as relating to courses of action, both in general and in particular situations, and the nature and interest of what Aquinas has to offer in characterising and explaining this kind of knowledge. St Thomas

<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to participants in seminars at the Center for Thomistic Studies, University of St Thomas, Houston, and in the Dianoia Institute, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne for helpful discussions.

sometimes describes it as involving ‘connaturality’ on the part of the agent, and some writers such as Jacques Maritain and more recently Elizabeth Anscombe have celebrated this as an important philosophical contribution: the former effusively and expansively, the latter more briefly and without textual reference but with narrower and sharper focus. ‘Connaturality’ (*connaturalitas*), however, remains an unfamiliar term even among people acquainted with central elements of Aquinas’s thought; and in the company of those who have some sense of it there is scholarly debate about how to understand Thomas’s use of the notion.<sup>2</sup> Exegesis apart, there are significant philosophical and theological questions surrounding it.

My route into these topics will be purposefully indirect since I wish to locate the issue of Aquinas on connatural knowledge within a broader context relevant to the reception of his work more generally, and to relate it to ongoing enquiries. The canonisation of St Thomas in 1323 took place half a century after his death. It did not occur earlier in part because of the novelty of his ideas and the opposition to them mainly from Franciscans and others adhering to Augustinianism who, apart from that allegiance, were deeply suspicious of the incorporation of aspects of Aristotelianism into philosophy and theology. In his Bull of Canonisation *Redemptionem misit*, Pope John XXII praises Thomas’s spiritual and intellectual virtues, but his steady elevation to

<sup>2</sup> Discussion originates among early Thomistic exegetes with Thomas Cajetan OP in his *Commentary on the Summa Theologiae* Ia IIae, qq. 55-59 (c. 1510), and most influentially with John of St Thomas OP in his *Cursus Theologicus* IV, disp. 17 (c. 1640). Twentieth century interest in the subject begins among French writers, again Dominicans, and is in the first instance concerned with the theological issue of knowledge of God. In these contexts cognition ‘*per connaturalitatem*’ is interpreted in line with John of St Thomas’s account as involving the affective recognition of the presence of the divine, or of its effects (serving as signs of the Persons of the Trinity) in the soul. Early contributions are those of the Ambroise Gardeil, OP, in *La Structure de l’âme et l’expérience mystique* (Paris: Gabalda, 1927), and Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, OP, in ‘L’Habitation de la sainte Trinité et l’expérience mystique’, *Revue Thomiste*, 33 (1928), pp. 449-474. It was later taken up by the French laymen philosophers Jacques Maritain (also influenced by John of St Thomas) and Yves Simon in turn influenced by Maritain. They each apply it more extensively but especially in relation to aesthetic and moral knowledge: see Jacques Maritain, ‘On Knowledge through Connaturality’ *Review of Metaphysics* 4 (1951), pp. 473-481, and Yves R. Simon, ‘Introduction to the Study of Practical Wisdom’, *The New Scholasticism* 35 (1961) pp. 1-40. The connection with aesthetic cognition is pursued by Ralph McInerny in ‘A Propos of Art and Connaturality’ *Modern Schoolman* 35 (1958), pp. 173-189. For discussion of Gardiel, Garrigou-Lagrange and other theologians of the period whom the author takes to misrepresent Aquinas’s own position by failing to situate Thomas’s writings in their historical context see John Dedek, ‘*Quasi Experimentalis Cognitio*: A Historical Approach to the Meaning of St Thomas’, *Theological Studies* 22 (1961) pp. 357-390. An excellent recent treatment is that of Taki Suto ‘Virtue and Knowledge: Connatural Knowledge according to Thomas Aquinas’ *Review of Metaphysics* 58 (204) pp. 61-79.

the status of ‘supreme guide’<sup>3</sup> only began with (the Dominican) Pius V’s proclamation in 1567 of Aquinas as (the first post-patristic) Doctor of the Church. One consequence of his elevation, particularly since the 19<sup>th</sup> century Aquinian revival, has been a tendency in neo-Thomistic presentations first, to propose the relevance to contemporary interests and approaches of what Aquinas has to say on some issue; and second, to claim that whatever authentic insights may have been achieved by the former they are already present explicitly or implicitly within the Aquinian literary corpus, and moreover that they are better understood by reference to it than by whatever *nouveaux philosophes* have to offer.

This is not the sort of thing said by admirers of Plato, Aristotle, or Kant, figures of comparable range, depth, and genius, and it calls for some explanation. In what follows, therefore, I first explore the roots of this tendency, indicating that it originated in more than a high estimation of Aquinas, and showing its expression in commendations of his idea of connaturality. Subsequent to that, I consider the issue of moral epistemology in general. Thereafter, I examine aspects of the ethics of virtue and moral knowledge as these were touched upon by Anscombe in ‘Modern Moral Philosophy’ and engaged more directly by her in a lecture ‘Knowledge and Reverence for Human Life’ in which she introduces the idea of connatural knowledge attributing it to Aquinas.

## II.

The revival of interest in the thought of St Thomas that began in Italy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and led to the promulgation in 1879 of Leo XIII’s encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, was partly a response to modern philosophies, and to Catholic reactions to them. The philosophies in question originated in Cartesian and other forms of continental rationalism and in British empiricism. Though these traditions are familiarly and intelligibly contrasted, aspects of them were sometimes held in common, as for example in the notion that the immediate objects of experience are only ever internal subjective states, and relatedly that the only under-derived certainty we can have about contingent matters is that provided by introspective awareness of such states.<sup>4</sup> Within academic and scholarly circles modern rationalism and empiricism displaced, and were widely held to have refuted, the philosophies and theologies of the medieval and late-scholastic schools. In their metaphysics, ethics and social theories, the latter derived from versions of

<sup>3</sup> The expression is used by Pius X in his *Motu Proprio* Apostolic letter *Doctoris Angelici* of 1914.

<sup>4</sup> Both assumptions were acutely identified and effectively undermined by Thomas Reid invoking notions that recall scholastic analyses of earlier versions of similar views. For exploration of these themes see John Haldane, ‘Thomas Reid and the History of Ideas’ *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 74 (2000), pp. 447-469.

Christian neo-Platonism associated with Augustine and from Christian neo-Aristotelianism articulated most famously by Aquinas and developed by his Dominican confreres.

In broader educated circles the modern way of thought took the form of what was seen as enlightened progressivism, combining scientific enquiry with egalitarian politics. This tended either to marginalise religion, or to attack it for its supposed irrationality and for its pernicious effect upon human autonomy and welfare. Roman Catholicism was seen as a particular offender, in part for its long historical influence, and in part because of the scale and reach of its claims. Within Catholicism itself, beginning in the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and encouraged by the explosive manifestation of the new philosophies in the French revolution, there began to develop two broad responses to Enlightenment rationalism. The first rejected the terms of its critique of religion by repudiating the claims of rational enquiry to be the route to the true and the good. The second partly challenged the enlightenment conception of rationality while also claiming to show that, in its proper form, reason could establish the existence of God and the reality of value, and from these derive further comprehensive truths of religion, ethics and politics of just the sort and substance that had long been taught by the Church or were derivable from those teachings.

The former position, advanced by figures such as Joseph de Maistre and the sometime priest Félicité de La Mennais, came to be known as 'Traditionalism' and was in effect a form of fideism. It held that the compelling grounds for belief are not 'empirical' or 'rational' in the philosopher's senses of those terms, but are instead the testimony of the common experience of humankind and the commands and teachings of long-established authorities, most relevantly Popes and Councils. The second response acquired the title 'Ontologism'. It derived from the Cartesian Oratorian Nicholas Malebranche but was developed in the period in question by the priest-theologians Antonio Rosmini, founder of the Institute of Charity, and Vincenzo Gioberti. Though the latter switched from being an advocate to an opponent of Rosmini's thought, the shared originating outlook was a form of rational intuitionism within which knowledge of God is immediate and non-inferential.

Arguments between and within Traditionalism and Ontologism proved unsettling to the Church, and these reactions to enlightenment humanism came to be seen as representing unacceptable extremes: the one deprecating human reason and thereby undermining the *imago dei* doctrine, the other threatening to render revelation gratuitous and to devolve into a form of rationalistic panentheism. Viewed from the point of Rome, these 'solutions' to the challenge posed by modern philosophy were beginning to look as bad if not worse than the original problem. Ontologism and traditionalism were subject, therefore, to a series of Roman condemnations including from the Holy Office in 1861 and 1866, respectively. But anathematisation of error is not by itself

establishment of truth. What was called for was a proper measure of the relation between faith and reason, and a synthesis between them of a sort that had prevailed in the best of the scholastic traditions. And the best of the best was deemed to be that achieved by Aquinas. Hence the call of 1879 by Leo XIII:

[The] Church herself not only urges, but even commands, Christian teachers to seek help from philosophy. ... Among the Scholastic Doctors, the chief and master of all towers [was] Thomas Aquinas. ... While, therefore, we hold that every word of wisdom, every useful thing by whomsoever discovered or planned, ought to be received with a willing and grateful mind, We exhort you, in all earnestness to restore the golden wisdom of St Thomas, and to spread it far and wide for the defence and beauty of the Catholic faith, for the good of society, and for the advantage of all the sciences.<sup>5</sup>

Four decades later, in anticipation of the approaching 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Aquinas's canonisation, Pius XI issued *Studiorum Ducem* in which he celebrated the virtues of St Thomas as an individual, as a philosopher, and as a theologian, referring for the first time in any Papal encyclical to Aquinas's use of the term 'connaturality' by quoting from the *Summa Theologiae* where he writes 'wisdom denotes a certain rectitude of judgment according to the Eternal Law. Now rectitude of judgment is twofold: first, on account of perfect use of reason, secondly, on account of a certain connaturality [*connaturalitatem*] with the matter about which one has to judge'.<sup>6</sup> Thomas's notion of 'Connaturality' would later be cited by Paul VI in *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964), and by John Paul II in *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) and in *Fides et Ratio* (1998), but the most relevant reference is that by Pius XII in *Humani Generis* (1950). The encyclical returned to Leo XIII's concerns about modern development, this time and significantly in the present context, specifying ethics as well as general metaphysical and theological topics and mentioning connatural knowledge.

[Critics] reproach this [Thomistic] philosophy taught in our schools for regarding only the intellect in the process of cognition, while neglecting the function of the will and the emotions. This is simply not true. Never has Christian philosophy denied the usefulness and efficacy of good dispositions of soul for perceiving and embracing moral and religious truths. ... Indeed St. Thomas holds that the intellect can in some way perceive higher goods of the moral order, whether natural or supernatural, inasmuch as it experiences a certain 'connaturality' with these goods, whether this 'connaturality' be purely natural, or the result of grace ...<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana) paras. 7 & 17.

<sup>6</sup> Pius XI, *Studiorum Ducem* (Rome: Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1923) para 7, quoting *ST IIa IIae*, q. 45, a. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Pius XII, *Humani Generis* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1950) para. 33.

The context of this response brings me closer to the contribution of this idea to modern debates about moral epistemology. Earlier in his letter Pius XII refers to ‘the new erroneous philosophy which, rivalling idealism, immanentism and pragmatism, has assumed the name of existentialism, since it concerns itself only with the existence of individual things and neglects all consideration of their immutable essences’.<sup>8</sup> Here existentialism is viewed as challenging the metaphysics of natures, but in the period in question its other marked feature was something it shared with phenomenology and with certain strands of anglophone philosophy, namely an emphasis on experience, self-consciousness, emotion, and will in explaining ethics.

The immediate source of phenomenological ethics was Husserl’s method of the analysis of mental acts, but just behind that and more substantially relevant was Franz Brentano’s reintroduction of the scholastic notion of intentionality, and with it his account of moral cognition as affective. A sometime Dominican novice, Catholic priest, opponent of the doctrine of papal infallibility, and life-long admirer of Aquinas, in 1889 Brentano gave a lecture entitled ‘The Origin of our Knowledge of Right and Wrong’ in which he argued that love and hate are modes of cognition of particular instances of good and bad acts or features.<sup>9</sup> Max Scheler (who twice converted to and twice abandoned Catholicism) developed this idea in relation to the nature of specific values and of the hierarchy among them. Scheler’s value theory involved an attack on rationalist ethics (specifically the formalism of the Kantian categorical imperative) and the counter-proposal that ethics is rooted in feelings of sympathy and again of love and hate.<sup>10</sup> It was out of this background that Sartre’s work emerged, including at the outset of the war *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* (1939) and at its close *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946). The new pattern of ethics rejected impersonal moral theorising in favour of first-person consciousness of alienation and meaning, and of freedom and responsibility. Due to his literary work these ideas spread beyond academic philosophy into educated culture and contributed to a general hostility towards ‘scientific ethics’ such as were associated not only with Kant’s ethics of rational duty but also with natural law systems of principles, precepts, and casuistical reasoning of the sort associated with Catholic moral philosophy and theology.

Besides its influence in the secular world, phenomenological-existentialism was winning converts within Catholic colleges and

<sup>8</sup> *Humani Generis* 6.

<sup>9</sup> F. Brentano, *The Origin of our Knowledge of Right and Wrong* trans. R. M. Chisholm & E. H. Schneewind (London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Value: A New Attempt at the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism* trans. M. Frings & R. Funk (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

seminaries; hence Pius XII's rejoinder to the contemporary critics of Thomism, and his claim that Aquinas long-ago appreciated the role of experience and emotion. In the previous decade, however, an Oxford Dominican, Victor White OP, had written a three-part article in *Blackfriars* on 'Thomism and "Affective Knowledge"' which, though programmatic, is more insightful, clearly-expressed and effective in drawing on the range of Aquinas's thought than much of what was written in the wake of Pius' rallying call.<sup>11</sup> Surprisingly, it is little known, but happily and aptly is referred to by Fergus Kerr in a recent review of a volume of essays on Elizabeth Anscombe's work.<sup>12</sup> Aptly because, as Kerr observes, at her request Victor White tutored Anscombe on Aquinas for two terms during 1939, and it is likely that this included some study of Thomas's approach to ethics.<sup>13</sup> White's diagnosis is of continuing relevance. He writes

It is probable that the most serious obstacle in the way of a rapprochement between Thomism and much 'modern thought' is the widespread misgiving that Thomism ignores or rejects 'value-perception' or 'value-experience'. This misgiving is impressive both to the layman and to the professional philosopher ... That 'experience', 'value-perception', 'intuition', 'instinct', 'real' or affective' knowledge – call them what you will – have in great measure come to claim the place which of old was ascribed to logical reasoning is a commonplace which calls for no proof. ... A philosophy which is to claim the permanent allegiance of the human mind, and of the modern mind in particular, must take account of the phenomenon of value experience. ... Is Thomism able to undertake this task? Has St Thomas himself made any attempt to do so? ... It is hoped to be able to show that good reason to believe that Thomism not only can fully account for much that has been a chief preoccupation of recent contributions to the subject, but is in a position to supply their acknowledged deficiencies.<sup>14</sup>

### III.

Whether one conceives of the normative structure of morality or ethics,<sup>15</sup> in terms of virtues and vices, of values and disvalues, of

<sup>11</sup> Victor White OP, 'Thomism and "Affective Knowledge"', Three-part article, *Blackfriars* 24 (January 1943): pp. 8–16; 24 (April 1943): pp.126–131; and 25 (September 1944): pp. 321–328.

<sup>12</sup> F. Kerr, OP, 'Review', *The Oxford Handbook of Elizabeth Anscombe* edited by Roger Teichmann (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2022) *New Blackfriars*, 104 (2023), pp. 373–376.

<sup>13</sup> See John Berkman 'The Influence of Victor White and the Blackfriars Dominicans on a young Elizabeth Anscombe' *New Blackfriars* 102 (2021), pp. 706–727.

<sup>14</sup> White, 'Thomism and "Affective Knowledge"' (Part One), op. cit., pp. 8–10.

<sup>15</sup> I write of 'morality or ethics' to accommodate but not endorse any of a variety of views ranging from ones that equate the corresponding concepts, to ones that regard them as

positive and negative principles, or some other features such as ideals or duties, or combinations of the foregoing, there is a question of the character of moral or ethical knowledge, and relatedly of how it is acquired and developed. There is a tendency to treat the ontology and epistemology of moral or ethical theory as distinct on the assumption that what, if anything, is there to be known in a given domain is distinct from how, if at all, it is to be cognised. That assumption underlies scepticism, but it is challenged by views which hold that in some cases the objects of knowledge are to some degree constituted out of the forms of human sensibility or modes of thought. Thus, the idea that something *is red* if and only if it would *look red* to a normal human observer under normal conditions closes the gap between colour fact and colour perception. Again, the notion that something is true if and only if it is derivable by some human proof-procedure dissolves any absolute distinction between thought and reality. Less radically, however, one might hold that the nature of what is held to be known in a given domain restricts the possible modes of knowledge of it, or again that reflection on the ways in which we believe we have knowledge restricts the possible interpretations of the domain itself.

To descend from abstraction to examples, it is plausible to maintain that the nature of arithmetic or geometry is such that our knowledge of them could not be perceptual and that talk of 'seeing' that  $2+3 = 5$  or that every triangle is a trilateral is metaphorical. Approached from the perspective of the knowing subject the phenomena of ethical or moral delight and disgust suggest that the proper objects of these may include perceptibles and perceptual imaginables, and further perhaps that someone incapable of perception might be unable to comprehend the specific goodness or badness of some action or situation. These connections serve to make the case for not treating the ontology and the epistemology of the ethical or moral separately. They also suggest a test on the adequacy of any theory of the nature of moral or ethical reality, which is to ask how someone could acquire knowledge of it; and relatedly a test of the corresponding account of moral or ethical knowledge, namely, how one could teach a child the correct use of the relevant language. They may also serve to explain how the capacity to recognise good and bad might be impaired and even lost.

It is not implied by anything suggested thus far that there could not be quite different ways of coming to know the 'moral facts'.<sup>16</sup> There has been needless conflict among would-be followers of Aquinas as

properly applicable but distinct, and to others that avow the authenticity of one but deny that of the other.

<sup>16</sup> In line with my earlier policy of using moral and ethical largely interchangeably again for convenience I use 'moral fact' imprecisely for whatever might be deemed the proper object of moral or ethical cognition.



a result of failing to appreciate this point.<sup>17</sup> In saying that, however, I need to note two distinctions one of which is that drawn by Aquinas himself, but not always using the term ‘connaturality’. This is between what at this stage might simply be termed ‘theoretical’ and ‘non-theoretical’ knowledge of moral facts. Earlier I cited Pius XI quoting from *Secunda Secundae* (q. 45, a.2) where Thomas distinguishes two kinds of judgement of the eternal law, but the distinction is first drawn at the outset of the *Summa* in order to provide an analogy for a difference between kinds of religious knowledge.

Since judgment appertains to wisdom, the twofold manner of judging produces a twofold wisdom. A man may judge in one way by inclination [*per modum inclinationis*], as whoever has the habit of a virtue judges rightly of what concerns that virtue by his very inclination towards it. Hence it is the virtuous man, as we read [in Aristotle *Ethics* X] who is the measure and rule of human acts. In another way, by knowledge, [*per modum cognitionis*] just as a man learned in moral science [*scientia morali*] might be able to judge rightly about virtuous acts, though he had not the virtue. The first manner of judging divine things belongs to that wisdom which is set down among the gifts of the Holy Ghost: ‘The spiritual man judgeth all things’ (I *Cor.* 2: 15). And Dionysius says (*Div. Nom.* ii): ‘Hierotheus is taught not by mere learning, but by experience of divine things’. The second manner of judging belongs to this doctrine which is acquired by study, though its principles are obtained by revelation.<sup>18</sup>

The issue of how to understand Thomas’s differentiation of ‘a twofold manner of judging’ in the domains of the moral and the religious, and the relation between these and other more recent distinctions between theoretical and non-theoretical knowledge is complicated by Aquinas’s conception of science, and its difference from modern understandings of theory, and by the brevity of his treatment of knowledge by inclination. For Thomas *scientia* involves a system of beliefs and related practices of enquiry. Drawing upon Aristotle’s account in the *Posterior Analytics*, he thinks of a science proper as an organised body of knowledge involving a set of self-evident principles serving as axioms from which conclusions are derived deductively. In the case of

<sup>17</sup> A recent example is the dispute between advocates of ‘old’ and ‘new’ natural law theories, on which see J. Haldane ‘Thomistic Ethics in America’ *Logos* 3 (2000) pp. 150–168. A good sense of the terms of the mutual critiques is provided by Mark Murphy, ‘Self-evidence, Human Nature, and Natural Law’ *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 69 (1995), and Patrick Lee, ‘Is Thomas’s Natural Law Theory Naturalist?’, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 71 (1997). See also J. Haldane ‘Reasoning about the Human Good’ and John Finnis’s response in R. George & J. Keown eds *Reason, Morality and Law: The Philosophy of John Finnis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) pp. 37–55, & pp. 468–472.

<sup>18</sup> *ST.* Ia, q. 1, a.6, ad 3. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Aquinas are from, *Summa Theologica* trans., Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1920).

speculative science (natural philosophy, metaphysics and natural theology) the first principles are known by reason either directly or by abstraction. Since, in his understanding, the subject matter of these sciences concern necessities, and the derivations are secured demonstratively, the conclusions are also certain. In the case of sacred theology the first principles are received from revelation and though not self-evident, given their Divine source, they are epistemically certain.

Turning to 'moral science', however, whose object is the Natural Law, it seems as if a distinction needs to be drawn between *scientia moralis* in a restricted sense, and the common work of practical reason. The former would again proceed by setting out first principles, and then together with information about the nature of the subjects in question (here human beings) derive from these a series of primary and secondary precepts proceeding deductively from the more to the less general. The common work of practical reason, however, has to reach judgements about particularities, i.e., what to do or refrain from doing in this particular circumstance. As Aquinas observes, in contrast to the domains of speculative enquiry this involves the contingent, and so exceptionless certainty may not *always* be available. Additional to this point about the degrees of knowledge, there is also his claim that an agent can exercise practical reason in a way other than by an explicit and articulated grasp of principles and inference from these to evaluative and practical conclusions. This is his judgement by natural inclination.

Earlier I mentioned the need to introduce a second distinction. This concerns non-theoretical moral, or more broadly value knowledge, now to be considered independently of Thomas's scheme. For modern writers the category of 'theory' is a broad one. One instance is that of an axiomatized body of beliefs, but this need not assume knowledge let alone certainty at the level of principles. The general premises may be hypotheses conjectured for the sake of explaining phenomena. Supposed or asserted unconditionally they may also concern what are deemed to be intrinsically only probabilistic matters. Again, a theory may be conceived in terms of sets of prototypes by reference to which particulars are classified. Even less formally, a theory might extend to set of explicit articulated beliefs and conjectures relevant to some domain. Given this diversity there is no single counterpart notion of non-theoretical cognition. Some would deny that there is any such thing, insisting that all thought and observation are 'theory-laden' or more limitedly theory-dependent. Even if that were so, however, there would still be a difference of degree of theory-involvement. More importantly, it does not follow from a cognition being conceptually-structured that it is thereby theory-laden in any substantial sense. If all thought and perception are conceptually-informed (all thinking is aspectual and all perceiving is in some way or another perceiving-as) there remain available several possibilities for non-theoretical cognition. One such is that of

a cognitive act or state (experience, perception or belief) that is direct, non-inferential and need not be articulated, or further articulable by its subject.

Abstracting from the question of whether this is to be identified with ‘knowledge by inclination’ or whether the latter may be only one species of the non-theoretical, there are three candidate forms of value cognition that might be deemed such: 1) *rational apprehension*, 2) *phenomenological recognition*, and 3) *dispositional orientation*.

By *rational apprehension* I mean a form of understanding involving grasp of the relevant concepts and of the intrinsically intelligible connections between them. In terms of familiar epistemological classifications this would be a form of synthetic a priori knowledge, not a matter of logical or verbal definition but also not requiring empirical verification. An obvious candidate would be the claim that intentionally killing an innocent human being is always wrong; another that enslaving a stranger for one’s benefit is unjust. Denying these involves no logical or definitional contradiction, but asserting their negations may express no seriously comprehensible ethical thoughts. Doing so could at most be a failure or a refusal to think ethically, a refusal no more reasonable than a refusal to think geometrically when considering shapes and angles.

By *phenomenological identification* I mean experiencing something as good or bad, typically (and perhaps essentially) mediated by some affective response to it or to the contemplation of it. Here the sight or memory or vivid imagining of the deliberate killing of an innocent would typically evoke disgust or horror, and that response would not be consequent upon the moral judgement but the non-intellectual form of it. A further related example would be that of experiencing another human being or an animal as a locus of life and subjecthood, thereby to be acknowledged and respected.

By *dispositional orientation* I have in mind a spectrum of possibilities including a baby’s seeking the mother’s breast, a child seeking companionship, helping someone who has fallen, closing the eyes of one who has died, seeking meaning and understanding.

This list may not be exhaustive and its members need not be exclusive: they are mutually compatible and the second and third may overlap. What is common between them is that they are to be distinguished from the kind of knowledge of the moral advanced by an ethical theory in the sense of a classification of moral concepts, of the relations between them, and of the derivability from rules and principles of particular judgements of value and requirement. In this regard utilitarianism, Kantianism, and contractualism are all ethical theories, as is Thomistic natural law in its ‘moral-scientific’ formulations including that set out by Aquinas in the ‘Treatise on Law’, *Prima Secundae*

especially qq. 90–94, and yet more extensively and elaborately in neo-Thomistic manuals.<sup>19</sup>

#### IV.

The posthumous publication of four volumes of writings by Elizabeth Anscombe has contributed generally to the growth of interest in, study of, and engagement with her ideas and arguments. It has made easily available previously published but rather inaccessible texts that relate closely to ones already well-known and much discussed, such as ‘Modern Moral Philosophy’ and *Intention*. Additionally, however, it has brought into print a large number of pieces not previously published some of which advance, while others supplement ideas presented in previously known writings. Among these now available texts are ones in which she is more explicit than in what was published in her lifetime about her interest in and indebtedness to Aquinas’s thought on issues that concerned her.<sup>20</sup> One such is ‘Knowledge and Reverence for Human Life’ but I begin with an idea introduced in ‘Modern Moral Philosophy’. That essay is most famous for its three theses: that moral philosophy ‘should be laid aside until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology’, that the concepts of *moral* obligation, *moral* duty, *moral* right and wrong etc. are derived from a divine law conception of ethics that has receded; and that English moral philosophy from Henry Sidgwick in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the date of her essay (1958) is all essentially consequentialist. In writing of ‘philosophy of psychology’ Anscombe meant the psychology of character, motive, intention and the like, not the psychology of cognition, and the entire essay seems devoid of any interest in moral epistemology. Yet, unidentified as such and perhaps even unknowingly, part of her discussion can be recast in the form of an account of non-theoretical moral cognition.

Granting to Hume the discovery that ‘*moral* oughts’ (in the divine law derived sense) cannot be derived from statements of fact, she argues that it does not follow that there cannot be a valid transition from the non-normative to the ethical: from ‘is’ to ‘owes’ and from ‘owes’ to statements about the virtues and vices of honesty and dishonesty, justice and injustice. The transition is explained in terms of levels of description. Echoing the form of Hume’s account of why ‘Moral Distinctions aren’t derived from reason’<sup>21</sup> she writes:

<sup>19</sup> Such as M. Cronin *The Science of Ethics Vol. 1 General Ethics, Vol. 2 Special Ethics* (Dublin: Gill & Son, 1920–1922).

<sup>20</sup> I explore the origins and course of her engagement with Aquinas’s work and document its influence across the range of her writings in ‘Anscombe and Aquinas’ in R. Teichmann ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Elizabeth Anscombe*, op. cit., pp. pp. 442–468.

<sup>21</sup> D. Hume *Treatise of Human Nature* Book III, Part iii, section 2.

Suppose that I say to my grocer ‘Truth consists in *either relation of ideas*, as that 20s [100p] = £1, *or matters of fact*, as that I ordered potatoes, you supplied them, and you sent me a bill. So it doesn’t apply to such a proposition as that I owe you such-and-such a sum’. Now if one makes this comparison, it comes to light that the relation of the facts mentioned to the description ‘X owes Y so much money’ is an interesting one, which I will call that of being brute relative to that description. Further, the brute facts mentioned here themselves have descriptions relatively to which *other* facts are ‘brute’ - as, e.g., *he had potatoes carted to my house* and *they were left there* are brute facts relative to ‘he supplied me with potatoes’.<sup>22</sup>

In brief, Anscombe’s argument is that one description of a set of facts grounds another description and that this, perhaps together with a social context, grounds another thereby implying statements about what is due and what justice requires in that respect. Her discovery of brute relativity and its implications for ethics may be represented as a matter of non-deductive logic or metaphysics but it may also be cast as the discovery of a form of rational apprehension whose medium is language. Someone introduced through learning English to the relevant concepts and the forms of their embedding in descriptive structures is able to discern the intelligible connections between them and thereby recognise that ordering goods and not paying for them is (*ceteris paribus*) unjust: true *ex vi terminorum* but not as a matter of mere verbal definition. This is knowledge but it is not theoretical for they need know nothing about theories of concepts and of inference, or theories of ethics or natural law, but nor is it knowledge by inclination.

Similar transpositions into the key of ‘the epistemology of “non-theoretical” moral cognition’ can, I suggest, be effected in respect of other essays such as ‘On Promising and its Justice’ (1969), ‘Rules, Rights and Promises’ (1978),<sup>23</sup> but it is only as her concern with particular moral questions deepened that she began to consider directly the issue of the kind of knowledge involved in recognising human values, and at the core of those the fundamental value or ‘dignity’ of human beings. This is addressed most extensively in ‘Knowledge and Reverence for Life’ from which I quote at some length inserting markers (A, B, C, etc.) for the purpose of interpretation.

[Distinguish] two different types of knowledge. The one, [A] knowledge of the dignity of human nature, not knowledge of indifferent truth, and most likely an example of knowledge by connaturality. [B] The other, all that is more often called knowledge: mathematics and the natural sciences, logic and psychology, history and the things that have happened

<sup>22</sup> Anscombe ‘Modern Moral Philosophy’ in Mary Geach & Luke Gormally eds., *Human Life, Action and Ethics* (Exeter: ImprintAcademic, 2005), pp. 169-194, at p. 173.

<sup>23</sup> Both collected in G.E.M. Anscombe *Ethics, Religion and Politics: Collected Philosophical Papers Vol. III* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981).

within people's personal memories, and so on. ... The idea that reason cannot give you ends or judge for or against ends has proved so influential that the notion of non-indifferent truth seems obscure. So also may the idea of connaturality as I have introduced it.

... [C] Connatural knowledge is the sort of knowledge someone has who has a certain virtue: it is a capacity to recognize what action will accord with and what ones will be contrary to the virtue. [D] The person who has no meanness in him, but rather generosity, is liable to avoid or reject some course of action, without difficulty perceiving it to be ungenerous. Or it simply won't occur to him as a possibility. ... [E] The one with connatural knowledge is inclined against the action and [F] that inclination itself is a sort of perception of the meanness of action even without the judgements being formulated. ... [G] If the judgement does get formulated, the formulation is an expression of what was already expressed in the rejection.<sup>24</sup>

Anscombe immediately goes on to speculate about the nature of connaturality *per se*:

[H] The word 'connatural' of course has to do with 'nature'. So far as I have been able to notice in St Thomas, digging around with a lexicon, [I] its principal use in him is to talk of what is readily known by beings of a certain nature. [J] Material substances are connatural objects of knowledge to us, for example. I take it that this is because we are ourselves material beings, embodied intelligences. [K] When Plato says that the soul is 'akin to the forms' he is giving expression to the same idea. [L] I haven't been able to find St Thomas giving the term the application I have been describing. Indeed, I don't know the source of that application. But it is not difficult to justify; for [M] the virtue of the virtuous person is like a second nature.

First, regarding the distinction drawn in A and B between indifferent and non-indifferent truth and knowledge, Anscombe's account is unsatisfactory. In a 'Comment' on her essay Peter Geach takes exception writing that 'human goods *include* knowledge of the sort Anscombe oddly calls indifferent'.<sup>25</sup> Later in her discussion she had allowed that 'indifferent' knowledge will not be so when having some of it is necessary for acting prudently in respect of exercising justice. This might suggest that whereas knowledge of the inalienable dignity of the person is something significant *per se*, knowledge of mathematics, logic, history, etc, is only so *per accidens* in the context in which respecting human dignity is at issue. For Aquinas, however, knowledge is among the goods proper to human nature and the pursuit and attainment of it has intrinsic value. Someone might respond invoking the distinction

<sup>24</sup> Anscombe 'Knowledge and Reverence for Human Life' pp. 59-60.

<sup>25</sup> P. Geach, 'Comment on Elizabeth Anscombe's Paper', in Russell Hittinger ed., *Linking the Human Life Issues* (Chicago: Regnery, 1986), pp. 179-184 at 183.

between moral and intellectual values and virtues and say that knowledge of human dignity belongs to the former, and other knowledge to the latter. But this is not to the point, since part of what constitutes human dignity is humanity's reason and capacity for discovering truth including in the range of Anscombe's list. The fact that the decimal expansion of  $\pi$  is infinite may be outwith normal human concerns, but the proof of it by Johann Lambert was a powerful exercise of reason and as such bears on the issue of the kind of value that belongs to human persons.

What she states in C to G and in M correspond closely to things said by Aquinas, or are implications or expansions of such things. H ('connatural' has to do with 'nature') is seemingly truistic though it may be taken to support different ideas. In his 'Comment' Geach writes 'I fear I see [in her account of connaturality] some hangover of the ancient idea that like is known by like; some remnants of this are also, to my mind, present in the thought of Aquinas'.<sup>26</sup> 'Connatural' is a potentially confusing term. 'Co', 'com', and 'con' (not in its negative sense) are variant forms of the same prefix diverging according to the form of the stem to which they are attached. The root meaning is 'together with' and sometimes one or other may be used to form words with the same English meaning as in 'cospecific' and 'conspecific'. 'Together with in nature', however, is ambiguous. In one sense it means that something belongs to the nature of a subject, as it belongs to the nature of humans to have hearts, or to speak (the first being congenital, the second acquired). In another sense it means two or more things 'having or being of the same nature' as in the co/conspecific example.

In Aquinas the issue of natures and subjects recurs but in at least three importantly different ways. The first, is where he argues that natures are singular in things but universal in the mind, i.e., the nature of cat *a*, and of cat *b* are numerically distinct entities but in the mind a universal nature *Catness* is formed. The second, is in his theory of cognition in which *x*'s knowledge of *y* is explained in terms of *x* receiving the form of *y*: either under material conditions but not with the matter of *y* (as in sense experience) or immaterially (as in intellectual cognition). In this case the cognitive subject takes on some aspect of the nature of another thing but predicatively not substantially. *X*'s specific nature is neither lost nor changed. The third way relates to a feature inhering in a subject as part of *its* nature, either innately, congenitally, by infusion, or by acquisition.

Connaturality as Aquinas is concerned with it belongs to this third mode. What Anscombe says in C-E and I and M corresponds to this, but J and K imply the like-is-known-by-like principle. Perhaps this was suggested to her by reading his theory of the intentional reception of

<sup>26</sup> Op. cit., pp. 179-180.

sensible and intelligible forms. But first, that is a different matter, and Thomas does not invoke this theory in the description of something belonging to the innate or acquired nature of a subject. Second, while Geach's 'fear of a hangover of the ancient idea' may be warranted as a characterisation of Anscombe's interpretation, it would be a misreading by either of them to attribute this to Aquinas himself. His idea is not that the knower and the known share natures but that some feature *f* of the known, existing naturally in it, is received into the cognitive power of the knower intentionally, and for that to be possible the power has not to be naturally *f*. This indeed is the basis of Thomas's arguments for the immateriality of the intellect: since it can receive the form of any nature it cannot have any nature.

The meaning of Anscombe's remark L: 'I haven't been able to find St Thomas giving the term [connaturality] the application I have been describing' is uncertain since it is unclear what 'the application' refers to. Its place in the text might suggest the likeness of knower and known, but given that she seemed to be aligning Aquinas with some version of that idea, it makes better sense if L refers back to her claim that knowledge of the dignity of human nature, as well as being non-indifferent, is a case of connatural knowledge in the sense of recognition by virtuous inclination. This interpretation is encouraged by the course of the ensuing discussion in which she focuses on the idea of the recognition of the intrinsic worth of a human being and adds that 'the connatural knowledge of the dignity of human nature is the most important sort of knowledge of it'. Aquinas does not give the dignity of the human as an object of connatural cognition, and Anscombe's way of formulating the idea of human value has a modern ring to it, indeed it carries an echo of Kant.

Readers of Anscombe are likely to find this suggestion incongruous but there is further reason to consider it. In writing that connatural cognition is the most important kind of knowledge of human value she implies that there is at least one other way of knowing of it which I take to be via analysis and argument. Elsewhere, she writes that 'The prohibition on murder is so basic that it is difficult to answer the question why murder is intrinsically wrongful. Some think they can get an answer out of more general principles'.<sup>27</sup> She proposes a different source by way of a quasi-transcendental deduction. Rational arguments can be given to show that adultery, theft, despoilment of natural resources, and so on are wrong. The general form of these is that observance of corresponding proscriptions is required for the human good. She continues 'The unit whose good the argument seeks is the human individual, considered generally. To kill him then, is to destroy that being which is the

<sup>27</sup> 'Murder and the Morality of Euthanasia' in *Human Life, Action and Ethics* pp. 261-277 at p. 266.



point of those considerations'.<sup>28</sup> This suggests an analogous derivation of the dignity of the human person. Certain kinds of action are to be chosen or avoided because of their relation to the human good. The locus of the human good is the human person. To violate the person is to act against their intrinsic and inalienable value the protection of which was the purpose of choosing or avoiding certain kinds of actions. It hardly needs observing that this conclusion lies in the same territory as Kant's second 'Humanity' formulation of the categorical imperative: 'never act in such a way as to treat humanity, whether in ourselves or in others, as a means only but always as an end in itself'.

As regards the connatural cognition of human value, I presume she regards this as the most important form of knowledge of it because it occurs prior to and independently of 'theoretical' argumentation, conjoining cognition and affectivity. She does not say, however, what are characteristic expressions of it, only that someone who has it 'must act somehow, and abstain from actions too'.<sup>29</sup> Obviously they will be acts expressing virtue, justice principally and pre-eminently but, as she acknowledges, it requires prudence to choose what to do in particular cases. There would seem, however, to be quite basic forms of expression of the natural knowledge of human dignity that are best characterised as affective responses. These lie centrally in the fields of what I earlier termed phenomenological identification and dispositional orientation. Examples would include revulsion at the sight of captives paraded naked, anger at hearing a vulnerable person being abused, and covering a corpse. In her 1939 essay of the *Iliad*, Simone Weil writes that 'Anybody who is in our vicinity exercises a certain power over us by his very presence, and a power not exercised by him alone, ... But this indefinable influence that the presence of another human being has on us is not exercised by men (in war)'.<sup>30</sup> This is doubly interesting. First, it suggests another aspect of connatural inclination, perhaps presupposed to the examples just given, a response to the human body as manifesting a kind of life to be respected, but second, the possibility of that response being diminished or suppressed by other emotions and dispositions. Here again the connection between affect, cognition and virtue (and vice) is apparent.

## V.

I have suggested that Anscombe's writings contain ideas relevant to the three forms of non-theoretical value cognition I identified earlier:

<sup>28</sup> Op. cit, p. 267.

<sup>29</sup> 'Knowledge and Reverence for Human life' p. 65.

<sup>30</sup> S. Weil, *The Iliad, or the poem of Force* trans. M. McCarthy (Wallngford, PA: Pendle Hill Press, 1956) p. 7.

*rational apprehension* in this case mediated through language, *phenomenological identification*, and *dispositional orientation*. As regards the second and third of these what Anscombe proposes, in her own terms, is that perception and inclination are interwoven as when she writes ‘The one with connatural knowledge is inclined against the action and that inclination is itself a sort of perception of the meanness of acting ... (One might compare this to the revulsion which is sometimes part of the perception of something as disgusting...)’. (p. 60). Given, however, that her concern is with knowledge of the dignity of the human person one might have expected mention of some more direct ‘encounter’ with that, such as is indicated by Simone Weil. Elsewhere, however, Anscombe writes of a phenomenon seemingly related to this, there calling the knowledge ‘mystical’. Given the breadth of the category I include this as a case of phenomenological identification.

Sexual acts are not sacred actions. But the perception of the dishonour done to the body in treating them as the casual satisfaction of desire is certainly a mystical perception. I don’t mean, in calling it a mystical perception, that it’s out of the ordinary. It’s as ordinary as the feeling for the respect due to a man’s dead body: the knowledge that a dead body isn’t something to be put out for the collectors of refuse to pick up. This, too, is mystical; though it’s as common as humanity.<sup>31</sup>

I also suggested that rational apprehension is a type of synthetic a priori knowledge. What of the status of phenomenological and dispositional cognition? One is a form of felt experience, the other of recognition by inclination. In each case the objects are things (in the broadest sense) not logical relations or other abstracta, but the relation to the things does not seem to be wholly empirical in the sense that the source of the knowledge is not observation and the ‘conceptions’ that inform these cognitions are not got from experience but are logically presupposed to it. The presentations of things that are expressed in actions and reactions towards them are in this respect a priori.

I return finally to Aquinas. First, to note that there is a question of how his ideas about connatural knowledge relate to the categories I have discussed. Part of the challenge in answering this is that, notwithstanding the commendations of his admirers, what he has to say is rather sketchy. He himself does not much use the term ‘connatural’ in relation to moral/value/virtue knowledge. He does, however, use other terms in related ways, if not synonymously, and what he says is more or less the same. There are six relevant notions which I list and illustrate:

<sup>31</sup> Anscombe ‘Contraception and Chastity’ in M. Geach & L. Gormally eds. *Faith in a Hard Ground: Essays on Religion, Philosophy and Ethics* by G.E.M. Anscombe (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2008).

*1. Knowledge by connaturality.*

‘Now rectitude of judgment is twofold: first, on account of perfect use of reason, secondly, on account of a certain connaturality with the matter about which one has to judge. Thus, about matters of chastity, a man after inquiring with his reason forms a right judgment, if he has learnt the science of morals, while he who has the habit of chastity judges of such matters by a kind of connaturality’ (*ST* IIa IIae, q. 45, a 2).

*2. Knowledge by affectivity.*

‘Knowledge of truth is twofold. One is purely speculative ... the other is affective’ (*ST* IIa, IIae, q.162, a.3, ad 1).

*3. Knowledge by appetite.*

‘The aptitude of the sensitive appetite or of the will to some good, ... is called “sensitive love”, or “intellectual” or “rational love”. So that sensitive love is in the sensitive appetite, just as intellectual love is in the intellectual appetite’ (*ST*. Ia, IIae, q.26, a.1).

*4. Knowledge by disposition.*

‘For as the taste judges of savours according to its disposition, even so does the human mind judge of things to be done, according to its habitual disposition’ (*ST*. IIa, IIae, q.24, a.11).

*5. Knowledge by experiential awareness.*

‘There is a twofold knowledge of God’s goodness or will. One is speculative ... The other knowledge ... is effective or experimental’ (*ST*. IIa, IIae, q. 97, a.2, ad 2).

*6. Knowledge by inclination.*

‘... the mind of man, by a sort of natural inclination tends toward the truth, though it does not perceive the reason for the truth’ (*In Libros Physicorum* I. lectio 10, 79).

The second point is more fundamental and concerns the issue of the relation of moral cognition to action. Among phenomenological

axiologists, existentialists, and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Oxbridge ethical intuitionists (such as Broad, Moore, Prichard, and Ross) there was a question about whether judgements of value could by themselves motivate action. To say that the subject matter of judgements is not indifferent would only relocate the issue, since the question would then be how does non-indifferent knowledge rationally motivate, or if it does is that not because it has had incorporated into it a subjective pro-attitude of desiring to do what one holds to be good? How stands Aquinian (or Anscombean) connaturalist cognitivism in relation to this challenge. So far as St Thomas is concerned the answer is that there is a motivating source but it is not a subjective pro-attitude; rather, it belongs to the logic of practical reasoning. To be oriented to the good is to be disposed to act towards it, and the reason for that is the first principle of practical reasoning, the *synderesis* rule: ‘good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided’.<sup>32</sup> This is neither a description of a psychological pro-attitude which as a matter of contingent fact is widely shared, nor is it a high-level moral judgement (even in the broadest sense of ‘moral’). It is rather the defining principle and general form of practical cognition and reasoning. How then is it known? Sometimes Thomists treat it as a piece of innate knowledge or something immediately given to intuition; but that is, I believe, to mischaracterise it. Certainly, it must be in place if practical cognition is to occur but the ‘must’ here is logical and its presence is not as a proposition, rather it as one might say, the ‘substantial form’ of the practical mode of thought. Or to recall again the shade of Kantianism it is a case of the constitutive a priori – another instance of which is that cited by Thomas a few lines earlier when he writes ‘the same thing cannot be affirmed and denied at the same time’.

Work remains to be done to clarify, integrate, and supplement the important contributions of those discussed here. Developing a deeper understanding of the complexities of the issues calls for resources not obviously present in St Thomas for all his genius. Meanwhile followers of Anscombe rightly admiring of her acuity and subtlety, also need to consider the limitations of her work on these same questions. Moral knowledge is a many-faceted thing. More accurately, it is not one thing but many things - analogously related, as Aquinas might observe, both by their modes and by their objects.

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<sup>32</sup> *ST* Ia, IIae, q. 94, a.2. I discuss these issues more extensively in ‘Is every action morally significant?’ *Philosophy* 86 (2011) pp. 375-404.

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