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DESIRE, EMOTION, AND BOREDOM: USING MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY TO MAKE SENSE OF A MODERN PH ENOMENON

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Has the world become more boring? Many today would say that it has. This paper will discuss the nature of boredom, its connection to globalization, and then suggest some solutions. It will conclude that the world has not become more boring, but perhaps we ourselves have become more boring.

I. A BOOK ABOUT NOTHING

When J.-K. Huysmans published *Against the Grain* in 1884, he thought that he had been writing for maybe ten people, that he had been "crafting a hermetic book, locked to idiots."[1] Instead, as he would declare twenty years later, "*Against the Grain* fell like a meteorite into the literary fairgrounds, and there was astonishment and fury."[2] To the envy of novelists everywhere, he was not exaggerating.

Huysmans had not expected many readers for very good reason: *Against the Grain* is a book about nothing, a nineteenth-century precursor to *Seinfeld*. Its only character is a jaded, misanthropic aristocrat who flees the world for a suburban hermitage. The novel simply catalogs his eccentric attempts to escape the boredom of modern life, one after the other, in excruciating detail. He decorates his rooms with color schemes that work only at night, under artificial light; he buys a tortoise and encrusts its shell with gold and jewels; he collects odd and exotic flowers; he experiments with perfumes and fragrances; he mentally inventories his vast library; he spends an evening luxuriating in sexual memories, and then reads an early Christian poem in praise of consecrated chastity. But nothing works for long, and after destroying his health, he must move back to Paris.

Despite the absence of a plot, *Against the Grain* was a sensation throughout France and the rest of Europe. Many condemned it, others praised it, but it had struck a chord. The book became the bible of the Decadent movement, and it inspired Oscar Wilde to write *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Evidently Huysmans

was not alone in finding modern life boring, and his contemporaries found it refreshing, and even comforting, to read about someone confronting the problem head-on.

II. NAMING THE PROBLEM

Whatever the prevalence of boredom in the nineteenth century, it can only have increased. Boredom is now so widespread that we can no longer remember what it was like when artists and writers were not preoccupied with themes of restlessness, dissatisfaction, and weariness. We are not surprised when someone quits a pleasant, well-paying job and moves to the country to work as a guide in national park, or when married couples divorce because they have become bored with each other. Earlier generations would have found their motivations incomprehensible.

Our familiarity with boredom should give us pause. We are constantly talking about boredom, but we do not wonder about boredom. And yet, there is a lot to wonder about. "Why is it that no other species but man gets bored?" Walker Percy asks. "Under the circumstances in which a man gets bored, a dog goes to sleep."[3]

Boredom is a subtle emotion, a state of mind that eludes easy classification. Being bored is unpleasant, but not exactly painful, either. Sometimes we do not even realize we are bored. Then, with sudden self-consciousness, we realize that we are feeling restless or weary, and that we would rather be doing something else. When we are bored, it is not that we feel any positive emotional distress; rather, nothing engages us about what we are doing. Our desires have nothing to latch on to, and we find ourselves itching for something, anything, that might grab our interest. Leo Tolstoy calls boredom "the desire for desires."[4] Elizabeth Goodstein calls it "experience without qualities."[5]

Boredom can be mild, as when we become bored of playing cards or listening to a lecture, or when we turn off a movie because it has become boring. It can also be excruciating. Prisons typically reserve solitary confinement for the worst offenses precisely because it is so boring. But whether the boredom is mild or severe, if at all possible, we immediately seek escape by doing something else. In both Western and Eastern cultures, gambling is a favorite solution. The anxiety

and anticipation chases out the boredom, and the temporary reprieve is often valued more highly than any possible winnings. Other solutions are not so benign. In its reporting, the news media often links boredom to addiction, violence, and self-destructive sexual behavior. Those who are extremely bored sometimes find even pain a welcome relief.

So what is boredom, and why do we go to such lengths to avoid it? We can get some answers come from an unlikely source: medieval theories of emotion, currently undergoing a great revival of interest. Precisely because they are medieval and premodern, they offer refreshing perspectives on emotion—and thus boredom.

III. THOMAS AQUINAS ON DESIRE AND EMOTION

Among medieval theorists of emotion, St. Thomas Aquinas stands out, indisputably, as the greatest. His *Treatise on the Passions* was once the longest treatment of emotion ever written, and it remained so long after its completion in 1271, casting a long shadow over all later medieval writers and every early modern philosopher. Today, his theory of the emotions still ranks as one of the most compelling and wide-ranging of any culture or historical period, and it has been attracting increasing attention from contemporary philosophers of emotion.

For Aquinas, when it comes to desire, the key metaphysical concept is appetite, or *appetitus* in Latin.[6] In its most generic sense, appetite is the principle in being that aims toward what is perfective or completing. "Appetite," Aquinas writes, "is nothing other than an inclination toward something, something that is both similar and suited to that which desires it."[7] It directs being toward its *telos*,[8] that is, its perfection and completion. As such, appetite is an essential constituent of anything that exists. Consequently, for Aquinas, all being is ecstatic.[9]

In the *Summa*, appetite first emerges in his discussion of being and goodness. Aquinas maintains that everything is good insofar as it exists, and vice versa.[10] "Being" and "goodness" are convertible terms that denote the same reality, although the words signify different concepts and different aspects of that reality.[11] To distinguish between them, he introduces the concept of appetite. He describes goodness as that which evokes appetite: to be good is to be appetible, that is, desirable.[12] The implications of this definition are startling. Appetite is inextricably

linked to being and goodness.[13] Also, appetite is not just good in itself; appetibility, that is, desirability, is the defining characteristic of goodness.[14] The goodness of appetite is bound up with the goodness of being. This positive evaluation of appetite permeates his appraisal of human appetite.

The convertibility of "being" and "goodness" means that everything that exists is good—because being, any kind of being, is necessarily good. The perfection of anything is also good, he continues, and (we can infer) so too must be the appetite that inclines it toward that perfection.[15] Without appetite, there would not be this dynamic movement, and the world would not move toward its perfection. Instead, the world would stagnate. Appetite is not just intrinsically good; it is integral to creation's inherent dynamism.

Aquinas's account of evil also illuminates his view of appetite. Following Augustine, Aquinas defines evil as a privation of goodness.[16] He distinguishes between two different kinds of evil (*malum*): physical evil and moral evil. Physical evil is nonmoral and refers to material loss or corruption, as when something material passes from existence. Moral evil is found only in rational creatures and consists in the voluntary choice of something disordered and contrary to one's *telos.*[17] Both physical and moral evil are defined vis-à-vis appetite. Aquinas maintains that evil is the effect of something good being impeded from the completion of "its natural and due disposition"—a claim that implicitly defines evil in terms of appetite, insofar as a thing's disposition manifests its appetite.[18] Hence evil can be defined not just as a privation of goodness, but also as a frustration of appetite and the consequent disintegration of being, insofar as evil blocks appetite from attaining its natural *telos.* This metaphysical opposition between appetite and evil has implications for the moral reliability of appetite in human action. Since appetite points the way to human nature's completion, it also points the way to moral goodness.

Appetite does not generate movement by itself. It is a "passive power."[19] As such, it requires an external trigger before generating movement. It is an inclination and a power to act when certain objects come into view. Aquinas identifies three kinds of appetites in the world: natural appetite, sense appetite, and the will (also called the intellectual or rational appetite).[20] Each responds to a different kind of desirable object. Once activated, each appetite moves toward perfection in its own way. Aquinas describes these three appetites as follows:

> Some things are inclined toward a good only by natural disposition, without cognition, such as plants and inanimate objects. And this sort of inclination toward a good is called natural appetite. Other things are inclined toward a good with some amount of cognition; not that they apprehend the good as good, they apprehend only some particular good, just as the senses apprehend sweet and white and the like. The inclination that follows this sort of cognition is called the sense appetite. Still other things are inclined to a good with the cognition proper to the intellect, and these things know the good as good. These things are most perfectly inclined toward the good. . . . And this inclination is called the will.[21]

In this passage, the three appetites are defined according to their objects. Appetite necessarily inclines toward its object, and therefore species of appetite can be distinguished by the kind of object desired, that is, by its*telos.*[22]

Aquinas is most interested in the appetites that require some kind of cognition. Sometimes he even defines appetite with reference to cognition, even though natural appetite would seem to be excluded by such a definition.[23] He writes, "Appetitive power is a passive powerwhich is naturally moved by what is apprehended."[24] Appetite is passive insofar as it is "acted upon" by objects via apprehension; it is a power insofar as appetite acts in response to the apprehended objects. Without apprehension, appetite remains dormant. Once the object toward which an appetite inclines is apprehended, the appetite responds and moves toward it. There are two kinds of cognition, sense cognition and intellectual cognition, and accordingly there are two kinds of cognition-dependent appetites. Sense appetite operates in response to sense cognition, and intellectual appetite operates in response to intellectual cognition.

There is a hierarchy among the appetites based on the degree of cognition on which they depend. The rational and sense appetites surpass natural appetite because they imply cognition and voluntary engagement. Although it can also seek sense goods, the rational appetite surpasses the sense appetite because it inclines toward unqualified and unlimited goodness, and not just sense goods.[25]For Aquinas, furthermore,the rational appetite shares an essential similarity with God's appetite,[26] and, with its orientation toward infinite good, it has the capacity to love and enjoy God. This ranking is not based on distrust or disdain for the material, but on the metaphysical principle that superior knowledge correlates with a superior

capacity for engagement with being. Those appetites that incline toward greater goods or a more profound appreciation of being are superior to others. For instance, the casual cigar smoker might enjoy a superb Cuban cigar, but the cigar connoisseur appreciates it more because of his greater knowledge. Similarly, animals cannot enjoy good food as much as we can: they can appreciate food only on a sensible level, but we can appreciate food—and the social contexts in which it is consumed—on many levels.

As human beings, we are more complicated than any other kind of being because we have all three kinds of appetites. When they are operative, they influence and sometimes compete with each other, as when they incline us toward mutually incompatible goods. It is this conflux of different appetites that makes us complicated. Nonetheless, despite the difficulties that sometimes arise from their interactions, each moves us toward our perfection; each is necessary for human flourishing; each is an inner compass oriented toward happiness; none can be ignored without cost.

We should note that Aquinas's account of desire has profound implications for ethics. It implies that morally good human behavior is nothing other than bringing our appetites—the inner structure of our desires—to their fulfillment. When we act in ways that advance our natural inclinations, our actions are morally good. When we frustrate our natural inclinations, our actions are morally defective.

The importance of our natural inclinations for moral value raises an important epistemological question: how do we know what they are? Here we can learn something from Aquinas. His method of identifying our natural inclinations is to analyze the constitutive elements of a given nature, and then see what brings it to fulfillment. Aquinas does not begin with abstract speculation. He begins with a close examination of what actually exists, in its essential ontological structure. He looks at the structural elements of human physiology--for example, our orientations toward food and drink--and concludes that since these material features are intrinsic to human nature, they must be good. He also looks at the human intellect, with its structural orientation toward making sense of the world, and concludes that there is a natural inclination toward knowing the truth.[27]

Although Aquinas does not engage skeptical concerns about the possibility of knowing our natural inclinations, his pre-Cartesian confidence is not easily

dismissed. He does not ask much from the skeptic. He maintains that our natural inclinations can be divided into a handful of inclinations, such as the inclinations toward food, reproduction, knowledge of truth, and human society, all of which are difficult to deny as integral characteristics of human nature.[28]

Aquinas does not engage many of the subjective implications of his account, but we can draw some interesting conclusions. First, because our inclinations are oriented toward the perfection of the human person, they are fundamentally trustworthy. We can discover something about human flourishing by reflecting on our subjective experience of desire. Our experience of desire cannot be taken entirely at face value, due to the possibility of disordered desire and self-deception, but it does provide a legitimate, if incomplete, basis for determining how we should live.

Many systems of morality present a vision of what the virtuous person looks like, and it is left to the individual to figure out how to get there. For example, a certain vision of patience might be presented, with close attention to its various characteristics and requirements. Meanwhile, the practical question of how to become patient is seen as an entirely different question, perhaps belonging to the field of psychology or spirituality. In Aquinas's system, it is not absolutely necessary to know what the finished product looks like in order to behave ethically. Our natural inclinations provide sufficient guidance of themselves.

IV. UNDERSTANDING BOREDOM WITH AQUINAS

With all this in mind, we are now ready to turn to Aquinas's account of the emotions and how it can help us to understand boredom.

Aquinas divides our emotions into two categories: passions and intellectual affections.[29] Passions such as anger and fear ultimately flow from our physical desires and always involve our bodies, and we share them in common with the animals. Intellectual affections, however, can spill over into the body, but they do not directly involve it; they are purely mental emotions.[30] They include our deepest desires, our deepest joys, but also our deepest sorrows and our deepest despair. (Contemporary philosophers such as Martha Nussbaum also argue for a category of emotions that do not directly involve the body.)[31]

Aquinas defines intellectual affections, these purely mental emotions, as movements of the will. Today we think of the will as merely the power to make choices, the ability to vote yes or no. For Aquinas, however, the will does not simply choose between polar opposites, as though its orientation were completely impartial. Rather, it is inherently directed toward what is good. In fact, for Aquinas, the will is nothing other than an infinite desire for what is good.[32] When we make choices, we are simply directing this inexhaustible desire toward particular goods. When the will strives toward a particular good without actually possessing it, Aquinas calls it desire; when the will rests in some particular good after obtaining it, Aquinas calls it joy.

For Aquinas, then, we could say that boredom is what happens when the will cannot find anything worthy of its infinite desires.[33] The will has nothing to desire and nothing to rejoice in, and yet it cannot help desiring anyway. Boredom is the non-space between desire and joy: the will stuck in neutral, or spinning its wheels. Strikingly, the philosopher Schopenhauer argues for nearly the same understanding of boredom. The main difference is that, unlike Aquinas, Schopenhauer thinks that nothing is desirable enough to satisfy our will. Consequently, for Schopenhauer, we are doomed to oscillate between boredom and distraction, endlessly moving from restlessness to excitement and back again, never finding anything that truly satisfies us.[34]

Many have seen a connection between boredom and the experience of modernity that began with the Enlightenment. According to Lars Svendsen, a Scandinavian philosopher, "Boredom is the 'privilege' of modern man. While there are reasons for believing that joy and anger have remained fairly constant throughout history, the amount of boredom seems to have increased dramatically. The world has apparently become more boring."[35] Likewise, Elizabeth Goodstein writes that "boredom is an experience of modernity, of modern temporality" and "a form of subjective malaise proper to modernity."[36]

This understanding of the connection between boredom and modern culture finds support in the etymology of boredom. In English, the word "boredom" dates just to the mid-nineteenth century when it was coined by Charles Dickens in *Bleak House*, and the verb "to bore" appears only slightly earlier.[37] Both English words are related to the French word *ennui*, a word whose contemporary meaning seems to have emerged during the early modern period, and which in turn derives from

the old French word *ennuyer*, "to annoy," and then ultimately the Latin phrase *mihi in odio est*, "it is hateful to me." Since vocabulary inevitably reflects culture, the invention of boredom suggests that the experiences associated with it became more prevalent after the Enlightenment. People have undoubtedly been getting bored for millennia, but we only recently invented words to talk about it—in part, surely, because nothing relieves boredom like complaining to someone else about being bored—and that suggests boredom has been increasing.

According to the Thomistic and Schopenhauerian account of boredom, the link between boredom and modernity is easy to understand. Not that modernity necessarily leads to boredom: the Enlightenment inspired many forms of modernity, and many of them are genuine achievements in every sense of the word. Being open and open-ended, they create space for people of differing beliefs to live together in peace, and they make it possible for pluralistic societies to thrive. But other forms of modernity, which we might call closed or atomistic, disconnect the world from the infinite. They cripple our ability to conceive of the world as anything more than a collection of atoms and molecules. Since our infinite desires cannot be satisfied with the finite, sooner or later, when the world is disconnected from the infinite, the world becomes boring. And when the world becomes boring, we become jaded—that is, habitually disposed to expect disappointment. The limitations of a disenchanted world always eventually become evident, because our finite intellects always eventually catch up to our infinite desires. The young hedonist finds the pursuit of pleasure exhilarating and liberating; the jaded protagonist of Huysmans' *Against the Grain* knows better, because his illusions have dissipated in the cold light of experience.

By severing the world from the infinite, closed modernity cuts the ground from under its own feet. It takes the infinite and puts it out of our reach. Because we desire the infinite, it can only end in boredom. In his poem "To the Reader," Baudelaire describes boredom as a "delicate monster" who wants to swallow the world with its yawn.[38]

V. LOOKING FOR A SOLUTION

Although we think of boredom as a trivial annoyance, the evidence suggests otherwise. Lars Svendsen explains that his recent book on boredom was inspired

by "the boredom related death of a close friend" and the realization that boredom cannot be considered "an innocent pose or a minor affliction."[39] Boredom is more than an inconvenience. Boredom is life and death, or at least life and living death.

The sheer diagnosis of the problem provides an important measure of relief. The reception of *Against the Grain* indicates that many of its readers experienced great catharsis in seeing their boredom acknowledged and taken seriously. As Walker Percy writes, "There is a great deal of difference between an alienated commuter riding a train and this same commuter reading a book about an alienated commuter riding a train."[40] The bored commuter reading Huysmans' *Against the Grain*is in a much better state than the bored commuter who does not know that he is bored. He has the comfort of knowing that he is not alone, and he starts to have a glimmer of hope: "If there is a name for my problem, then there might also be a solution."

But what would a solution look like? Aquinas's account of acedia, his closest approximation to an account of boredom, suggests some answers. The vice of acedia, usually translated as sloth,is typically seen as a kind of laziness. Aquinas, however, defines it as a kind of sadness. More specifically, it is sadness about spiritual ornon-material goods.[41] It leads to disgust for non-material goods, and especially the effort they require.[42] This sadness and disgust make us want to flee from anything related to active works of love—the very things that should inspire the deepest joy. Consequently, Aquinas classifies acedia as the vice opposed to joy, and specifically the joy that flows from charity, or love.[43]

From this diagnosis of acedia, Aquinas prescribes a counterintuitive cure: that those plagued by acedia spend more time thinking about non-material goods.[44]This might seem like torture. How could it cure our sadness to think more about what makes us sad? For Aquinas, when we consider non-material goods properly, we cannot help but find them attractive. Acedia is not simply an affective problem; it is also a cognitive problem. Consequently, addressing the cognitive problem makes it easier to handle the affective problem.

Now, acedia is not the same thing as boredom. Acedia is sadness about non-material goods, while boredom is a restless striving of the will. Likewise, acedia is a vice, but boredom is morally neutral. Yet they are closely related, because each involves a failure of desire: acedia fails to desire what is in fact desirable, and

boredom fails to desire anything at all. Moreover, acedia always leads to boredom. The sadness of acedia cuts us off from what is most worthy of desire. It leaves us in a room full of finite objects, and no matter how intriguing they are, sooner or later we will always end up bored. Many other things also lead to boredom, but none with such certainty.

Therefore, even though boredom is not acedia, Aquinas's cure for acedia can be applied to boredom. Just as with acedia, the first step to moving beyond boredom is a mental realignment, a radical reconsideration of the status quo. Any solution to boredom must first find a vantage point, a place to stand, where the world does not look boring. It means that we need to look at the world in such a way that appears as it truly is: infinitely good and infinitely meaningful.

Yet how do we find such a place to stand? Paradoxically, I would like to suggest, that mental realignment can only be accomplished by concrete acts of love: for others, for society, for whatever is good or true or beautiful. For example, we know that physical exercise is good for us and will improve our mental state. But until we start exercising, it seems like a burden. It is only after we start exercising that we feel its physical benefits. Likewise, the mental realignment that expels boredom comes not through an intellectual epiphany, but through activity. The Spanish poet and mystic John of the Cross wrote, "Where you do not find love, put love, and you will find love."[45] By responding to life as though it were in fact infinitely lovable, we come to perceive it as such with greater and greater clarity—and the more we escape boredom.

But all this can seem too theoretical and too romantic. In Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, when Yelena complains that she is "bored to death," her stepdaughter Sonya advises her to devote herself to the peasants on her estate. Yelena immediately dismisses the suggestion. "It's only in uplifting novels that people go out and teach and doctor the peasants," she says.[46]It is hard not to sympathize with Yelena: taking on more work hardly seems like a solution to boredom. And yet—she is missing something, that she is looking at things the wrong way.

Yelena is stuck thinking that the solution to boredom is distraction, and so she fails to see how tending to the peasants would help; how could hard work ever provide her with a pleasant distraction? But the solution to boredom is not distraction. Distraction, by definition, cannot satisfy; it can only distract us from

burdens and unfulfilled desires. Every time she looks to distraction as the remedy for her boredom, Yelena locks herself more deeply in a cycle of boredom and distraction, and always ends up more jaded and lethargic than she was before. Before she can emerge from her boredom, she needs to face the futility of distraction. Even more, she needs a place to stand where she can see the infinite breaking through the finite. Standing there, creative self-transcendence would no longer seem like work; it would start to seem like rest. Her infinite desires would finally be able to rest in something, and the resting of her desires would crowd out any space for boredom.

VI. CONCLUSION

Has the world become more boring? I would say not. However, we ourselves might have become more boring. Undoubtedly, globalization and technology have brought many fantastic developments—including, among other things, this conference. Yet all the distractions of the modern world have distracted us from many of the pure and simple joys of life, and thus led to an increased level of boredom. As we move forward in the process of globalization, both East and West would benefit greatly by focusing on the problem of boredom and looking for ways to avoid it.

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[1] Interview with A. Meunier, *Les Hommes d'aujourd'hui*, no. 263 (1885), reprinted in the 2003 Penguin edition of *Against the Grain*, trans. Patrick McGuinness, p. 219.

[2]Joris-Karl Huysmans, Preface to 1903 edition of *Against the Grain*, reprinted in the 2003 Penguin edition, trans. Patrick McGuinness, p. 217.

[3] Walker Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), p. 71.

[4]*Anna Karenina*, V.8.

[5]Elizabeth S. Goodstein, *Experience without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2005).

[6]Lawrence Donohoo argues that the prominent status of appetite in the thought of Aquinas has received insufficient attention. See Lawrence J. Donohoo, "The Nature of Desire" (STL Thesis, Dominican House of Studies, Washington, D.C., 1989), 1-15. His thesis offers an overview of appetite in Aquinas, and I am indebted to it for calling my attention to the importance of this theme in Aquinas's writings.

[7]*ST* I-II 8.1.

[8] Aquinas uses the Latin word *finis,* not its Greek cognate *telos,* but for various reasons this study has opted to use primarily *telos* rather than *finis* or "end" (the English equivalent of finis).

In ancient Greek, telos has a simultaneous double meaning: it indicates both what a thing aims at and its completion and perfection. In other words, it has a sense not only of a terminal destination, but also of the perfective completion of a nature according to its own inner ontological trajectory. Hence it is particularly suited to express the metaphysical concept of that to which an appetite strives.

In Aquinas's writings, finis has multiple meanings. It can mean "end, limit, conclusion" with synonyms *extremitas, extremum, terminus, ultimatum*, or it can mean "aim, purpose" with synonyms *causa finalis, terminus*. Consequently, *finis* can refer to the end to which a nature tends by virtue of its ontological structure, that is, its *telos,* or it can refer to, say, an objective chosen by a rational creature that is not intrinsic to its natural inclinations and that may, in fact, be opposed to them (as in the case of sin). Its meaning must be determined from context, and it does not always serve as a synonym to *telos.* Furthermore, while Aquinas often employs *finis* in contexts that imply the same functional characteristics as *telos,* as much of his teleology is drawn directly from Aristotle, the word *finis* does not inherently imply the same sense of a nature's perfection.

Similarly, the English word "end" is unsatisfactory because it has many possible meanings and thus fails to emphasize the highly specific meaning that is implied in this context.

Lastly, analytic philosophers have lately become more interested in the concept of teleology, and so the use of the word *telos* in English-language philosophy is not uncommon and can be relied upon to summon the desired associations.

See Roy J. Deferrari, M. Inviolata Barry, and Ignatius McGuiness, *A Lexicon of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1948), 424-26.

[9]G. J. McAleer, *Ecstatic Morality and Sexual Politics: A Catholic and Antitotalitarian Theory of the Body* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 13-33.

[10]*ST* I 5.1. In this article, Aquinas quotes Augustine's pithy maxim from *De doctrina Christiana* 1.32: *"inquantum sumus boni sumus,"* or "inasmuch as we exist, we are good." For a collection of essays on the question of the relationship between being and good from an analytic perspective, with particular reference to Aquinas, see Scott MacDonald, ed., *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

[11]For an exposition of Aquinas on the convertibility of being and goodness, see Jan A. Aertsen, "The Convertibility of Being and Good in St. Thomas Aquinas,"*New Scholasticism* 59 (1985): 449-70. For a survey of contemporary and medieval objections to the idea that everything that exists is good, see Jan A. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1996), 290-91, 306-14.

[12]"The reason something is good is that it is desirable. . . . Goodness and being are the same in actuality, but goodness as such involves the idea of desirability while being as such does not" (*ST* I 5.1).

[13]It follows that any telos or end is good, and vice versa. If something is perfective and therefore desirable, it is good; if something is good, it must be an end insofar as it is desirable. Aertsen succinctly describes their relationship as follows: "'Good' is something desirable and thus it becomes the end of the appetite. 'Good' has the aspect of a final cause. Conversely, the end has, because it is desirable, the aspect of 'good.' Therefore, [writes Aquinas], '"Good" and "end" have the same nature, since the good is that which all desire'" (Aertsen, "Convertibility of Being," 466-67; *Sententia super Metaphysicam* 2.4).

[14]It is important to note that the good is good not simply because it is desired. Rather, the fact that something is desired is the principal clue that it is good. "The definition [of the good in terms of appetite]

does not mean to say that something is good because it is desired but rather the converse: something is desired because it is good. Through the effect, in this case the appetite, the cause is manifested, that is, the good. The nature of the good is such that it is appetible" (Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals,* 300).

[15]*ST* I 20.2.

[16]*ST* I 48.1. For a discussion about the classical doctrine of evil as privation, see the recent exchange between Patrick Lee and John F. Crosby. Patrick Lee, "The Goodness of Creation, Evil, and Christian Teaching,"*Thomist* 64 (2000): 239-70; John F. Crosby, "Is All Evil Really Only Privation?"*Proceedings of the American CatholicPhilosophical Association* 75 (2001): 197-210; Patrick Lee, "Evil as Such Is a Privation: A Reply to John Crosby,"*American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 81 (2007): 469-88; and John F. Crosby, "Doubts about the Privation Theory That Will Not Go Away: Response to Patrick Lee,"*American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 81 (2007): 489-505.

[17]Aquinas discusses the metaphysics of evil in *ST* I 48-49. For his treatment of the metaphysics of moral evil, see especially *ST* I 48.5-6, 49.1 ad 3, 49.2. See also *ST* I-II 79.

[18]*ST* I 49.1. See also *De malo* 1.1-3, and especially *De malo* 1.1, where Aquinas discusses the relationship of evil to *appetitus*.

[19]*ST* I 80.2.

[20]For a discussion of created appetite in Aquinas, see William A. Wallace, "Appetition and Emotion," in *The Modeling of Nature: Philosophy of Science and Philosophy of Nature in Synthesis* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 174-180. For a discussion of the rational appetite, see David Gallagher, "Thomas Aquinas on the Will as Rational Appetite,"*Journal of the History of Philosophy* 29 (1991): 559-84.

[21]*ST* I 59.1. Aquinas further distinguishes natural appetite from sense appetite in *ST* I 80.1 and sense appetite from intellectual appetite in *ST* I 80.2.

[22]*ST* I 80.1 ad 3; *ST* I 80.2. The inclusion of natural appetite in the same category as sense appetite and intellectual appetite sits uneasily with contemporary science. Kenny, for instance, is critical of this teleological understanding of noncognitive agents (Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind,* 61). However, Aquinas's account of the universality of appetite constitutes a philosophical and theological position that contemporary physics does not engage or contradict. It is a philosophically interesting attempt to find metaphysical commonality in disparate aspects of reality that cannot be easily dismissed. But regardless of the merits of his position, Aquinas's classification of physical tendencies as a form of appetite draws attention to the central place of appetite in his metaphysics, as well as his conviction that every created thing is internally oriented by appetite toward its *telos.*

[23]See *ST* I 80.2. The natural appetite does not follow apprehension as do the sense appetite and the intellectual appetite (*ST* I 78.1 ad 3; see also *ST* I-II 8.1). Rather "natural appetite is an inclination following on physical form [*formam naturalem*]" (*ST* I 81.2). So it is not clear why Aquinas defines appetite in *ST* I 80.2 in a way that excludes natural appetite. When pressed, it seems that he would not want to retain apprehension as an absolutely necessary feature of appetite at the expense of excluding natural appetite. It is possible, though, that he might insist on it: elsewhere he argues that natural appetite is not without its cognitive dimension insofar as it inclines objects according to God's knowledge. He writes: "Natural objects desire that which is suited to their nature, not through their own knowledge, but through the knowledge of the Author of nature" (*ST* I-II 26.1). See also *ST* I 6.1 ad 2, 103.1 ad 1; *ST* I-II 27.2 ad 3.

[24]*ST* I 80.2. After 1270, Aquinas avoids referring to the will as a passive power, seemingly due to the condemnations of the bishop of Paris in 1270. These condemnations anathematize the description of

free choice (*liberum arbitrium*) as a passive power, and even though the condemnations do not touch on whether the will is a passive power, Aquinas seems to avoid applying such language to the will afterward. Nonetheless, Aquinas does not refrain from implicitly describing the will as a passive power. For example, see *ST* I-II 18.2 ad 3, which describes appetite as intrinsically passive, albeit in a qualified sense, in a way that clearly includes the will (Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love*, 96-97). On the essential continuity of Aquinas's position regarding the will's passivity, see also Daniel Westberg, "Did Aquinas Change His Mind about the Will?"*Thomist* 58 (1994): 41-60.

The text of the condemnations of 1270 can be found in Latin in H. Denifle and A. Chatelain, *Chartularium universitatis parisiensis* (Paris: Frairs Delalain, 1889), 1:486-87, and in English in James Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino,* 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1983), 273. For the historical context, see John F. Wippel, "The Condemnations of 1270 and 1277 at Paris,"*Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 7 (1977): 169-201, and Fran çois-Xavier Putallaz, *Insolente libert é: controversies et condamnations au XIIIe si ècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1995). See Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love*, 96n126.

[25]*ST* I 59.1. See also *ST* I 19.3, 82.1-3; *ST* I-II 2.7-8, 5.8.

[26]See *ST* I 93 (esp. 93.3, 93.6-7).

[27]Aquinas seems to attach particular significance to the animal dimension of the human person when determining what is "natural" to the human person, as when he distinguishes between natural and nonnatural desires (*ST* I-II 30.3). Elsewhere, however, he clarifies that this distinction corresponds to only one meaning of "natural," and that in another sense that which flows from rationality should also be considered natural to the human person (*ST* I-II 31.7; see also *ST* I-II 94.2).

[28]*ST* I-II 94.2. For a discussion of the various kinds of natural inclinations that Aquinas identifies and their relationship to his ethics, see Pinckaers, *Sources of Christian Ethics*, 408-56.

Skeptics might deny that there are any inclinations constitutive of human nature, or indeed that there is such a thing as human nature. There have been many philosophical movements in the twentieth century that deny the existence of any common human nature. However, their rhetoric often falls short of their actual claims. No one seriously denies that we need food or that we are bound to time and space. Very few would deny that we universally desire friendship and human affection, or that we share other such universal inclinations. They may want to claim that these inclinations can be shaped in different ways—and to an extent Aquinas would agree—or they may want to claim that we should live without reference to these basic inclinations, but that is different from denying the fact of their existence.

[29] Aquinas does not spell out his views on the relationship between categories of passion and affection in any single place; they must be reconstructed from scattered comments here and there. For a discussion of the categories of passion and affection in Aquinas, see Nicholas E. Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion* (Catholic University of America, 2011), pp. 15–18, 75–93.

[30] See *ST* I 82.5 ad 1;*ST* I-II 22.3 ad 3, 31.4 ad 2.

[31] See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003), pp. 59–60. See also Michael L. Stocker, "Some Considerations about Intellectual Desire and Emotions," in *Thinking about Feeling: Contemporary Philosophers on Emotion*, ed. Robert C. Solomon (New York: Oxford University, 2004), pp. 135–48.

[32] More precisely, in scholastic terminology, it is an inclination toward the universal good, a passive power ready to be activated by the cognition of good and desirable objects. See *ST* I 19.1, 59.1; *ST* I-II 2.7–8.

[33] See Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire*, pp. 259-271.

[34] According to Schopenhauer, "the nature of man consists in the fact that his will strives, is satisfied, strives anew, and so on and on; in fact his happiness and well-being consist only in the transition from desire to

satisfaction, and from this to a fresh desire, such transition going forward rapidly. For the non-appearance of satisfaction is suffering; the empty longing for a new desire is languor, boredom."This empty longing is painful: "[W]hen at last all wishes are exhausted, the pressure of will itself remains, even without any recognized motive, and makes itself known with terrible pain as a feeling of the most frightful desolation and emptiness."And since, according to Schopenhauer, no ultimate good exists, the infinite desires of our wills can never be fully satisfied, and boredom is inevitable. See Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), §52, 260; §65, 364; §58, 319–320; and Bernard Reginster, "Nietzche's 'New Happiness': Longing, Boredom, and the Elusiveness of Fulfillment,"*Philosophic Exchange: Annual Proceedings* 37 (2007), pp. 19–25.

[35]Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, trans. John Irons (Bath: Reaktion Books, 2005), p. 21.

[36] Goldstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, p. 6, p. 18.

[37]*The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989).

[38]"To the Reader" in *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

[39]Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*,p. 7.

[40] Walker Percy, "The Man on the Train," in *The Message in the Bottle* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1975), p. 83.

[41]*ST* II-II 35.1–2.

[42] See *ST* II-II 35.1; Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, "Resistance to the Demands of Love: Aquinas on the Vice of *Acedia*." *The Thomist* 68 (2004), pp. 173–204; and Jean-Charles Nault, *La saveur de Dieu: l'ac édie dans le dynamisme de l'agir* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2006), pp. 280–89.

[43] After his questions on the virtue of charity in the *Secunda secundae*, Aquinas turns to the vices opposed to charity. The first vice he considers is hatred, and the second is acedia.

[44]*ST* II-II 35.1 ad 4.

[45] This phrasing is a loose translation of John's words. A more literal translation would be: "Where there is no love, put love, and you will draw love." See Letter 26, to Madre María de la Encarnación, July 6, 1561, in John of the Cross, *The Collected Works of St John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1991), p. 760.

[46] Anton Chekov, *Uncle Vanya*, trans. Michael Frayn (London: Methuen Drama, 2005), Act III.