

Afterword

JOHN FINNIS

Response to Daniel D. De Haan

I welcome many aspects of Daniel De Haan's eirenic and philosophically oecumenical commentary. But I have some demurrers.

He asks (in his second paragraph) why I do not hold 'that *human normativity* can be first known in one way by commonsense or non-practical theoretical reason, and also first known in another way by practical reason', that is (going to his penultimate paragraph), by 'practical insight [that] discerns something more concerning *human normativity* which is not grasped by any theoretical insights ... [namely] basic goods of *human normativity* as being rationally desirable and rationally directive of human actions'. For 'it depends on which order of *human normativity* is in question. *Human normativity* is first known by a theoretical insight into *theoretical goods* of human beings from the 1st order of normativity. And *human normativity* is first known by a practical insight into practical goods within the 3rd order of normativity. This practical insight is informed by the first order of normativity's fields of possibility known by initial theoretical insights ...'

I have italicized the phrases that inhibit me from affirming this position or set of positions. The phrase 'human normativity' seems to me irremediably equivocal/ambiguous; it does not pick out anything that could be 'first known in one way' and also, itself, be 'first known in another way'. Rather, human beings think, and thus in a sense exist, in all four 'orders' (in the sense of 'order' deployed in my lecture and in Aquinas' prologue to his commentary on Aristotle's *Ethics*), and the kind of normativity that is one element of the first, 'theoretical' order (the order of realities that are what they are, independent of our consideration of them) is—even when it is predicated of human beings rather than stars or fish--radically different from the

kind of normativity that is fundamental to the third, ‘practical’ order of morally significant, non-technical deliberation and choice by human persons capable of that. (And are the second-order normativity of modal logic and the fourth-order normativity of chess or English grammar instances of ‘human normativity’?)

The first-order knowledge that is indispensable (necessary and at least minimally and initially sufficient) for practical insight into the first principles that pick out and direct us to pursue and do each of the basic human goods is much more a matter of natural sciences (including humdrum common-sense knowledge of causalities) than of metaphysics, properly speaking. Metaphysics, as Aristotle and Aquinas teach, is the last of the sciences in order of acquisition, but to know that knowledge is possible requires no more than awareness that questions can be successfully answered, that evidence is relevant to right answers, and so on, and without any articulated awareness that this is a matter of conforming the mind to reality can be quite sufficient for acquiring the third-order insight that knowledge is good for its own sake and ignorance a bad.

Such basic human goods, known first by practical (third-order) insight, have no systematic relationship to what De Haan calls ‘theoretical goods’ concerning human beings as known in first-order natural sciences. And on the other hand, the theoretical goods identified in an adequate first-order metaphysics would be accurately identified just insofar as that metaphysical account of human nature drew upon the logically and epistemologically prior, third-order, ethical/moral philosophical knowledge of truly human goods. The ‘common sense’ to which at points De Haan appeals is a medley of practical insights, more or less uncritically anticipated metaphysics of the kind just mentioned, and more or less loose and equivocally articulated would-be natural-scientific findings.

At times, De Haan suggests that I hold an exclusionary position about what kinds or degrees of first-order knowledge are available as the matrix (so to speak) for basic practical insights. But the suggestion is, it seems to me, without foundation. The illustrations I gave of initial practical insights were deliberately minimal—a search for the necessary and minimally sufficient. There are no upper bounds to what is relevant and appropriate for that matrix. But what is relevant and appropriate are the facts and causalities known to natural

sciences, knowledge that does without questionable categories such as ‘human normativity’ and ‘theoretical good’.

Response to Melissa Moschella

I am grateful to Melissa Moschella for pointing us not only to some further reflections of Alasdair MacIntyre, but also to places where Germain Grisez and Christopher Tollefsen have ventured further—as she herself now does—into the depths and subtleties of the human reality constituted by the fact that we find ourselves to be, as creatures who not only have potentialities that are simply and starkly *given* prior to our understanding, choosing and acting, but also have (within certain given or imposed constraints) a freedom that entails both a *sui generis* normativity (the moral ought) and a self-shaping that transcends the given.

I don’t think that anything I have said commits me to the position that ‘we should apply the epistemological principle—that natures are known by capacities, which are known by their acts, which are known by their objects—*within* each order.’ And I cannot see that we need to revise either the thesis ‘that first-order knowledge of what is possible is a prerequisite for third-order knowledge of what is good’, or the thesis ‘that what is good for us depends ontologically on first-order human nature.’ It may be that some of the issues that Moschella has articulated hereabouts are at least partly put to rest by the point I articulated earlier in this ‘Afterword’, about the distinction within first-order knowledge between knowledge (pre-scientific, or natural-scientific) of factual possibilities and causalities, and knowledge that I called adequately metaphysical and said is partly dependent upon (and, so far forth, ‘carries back’) a third-order understanding of human goods and virtues.