

“Natural Law in the Moral Thought of Benedict Ashley, O.P.: A Comparison with the View of Germain Grisez, John Finnis, and Joseph Boyle,” an earlier and slightly different version of which appears in the *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Quarterly* 22 (Fall 1999): 2-5.

Introduction

When the history of Thomism in the second half of the 20th century is written, the convert and Dominican moral theologian Benedict Ashley (b.1915-) most surely should be included. Ashley is primarily known for his many masterful writings in moral theology, bioethics, and Christian spirituality. Moreover, in such books as the highly praised *Theologies of the Body: Humanist and Christian*,¹ he has done much to show how Christian theology and modern science can mutually interact for the benefit of each other. However, overlooked in my estimation, is his significant contribution to Thomistic natural law theory.² Indeed, Ashley has written often and credibly on the subject of the *lex naturalis*. Unfortunately, his work in this area has not been given the attention it deserves – much of it passed over by those who think Ashley’s moral theology is rooted only in the Bible and not in the natural law.³ Although his theory of natural law is not as systematically developed as that of the well known “basic human goods school” (also known as the “new natural law theory”) of Germain Grisez, John Finnis, and Joseph Boyle,⁴ it is, nevertheless, an intelligent and rigorous presentation of the doctrine.

My goal in this brief article is to set forth as clearly as possible the main features of Ashley’s natural law theory. I will do so by comparing and contrasting his thought with that of Grisez et al., since their theory is probably the most ambitious and important natural law ethic currently available.⁵ I will conclude my paper by briefly noting some of the strengths and weaknesses of Ashley’s theory of natural law. Ashley’s theory can be summarized in the following seven points.

Ashley’s Theory of Natural Law

Firstly, Ashley emphasizes, along with St. Thomas Aquinas, that natural law is most fully constituted as law when “our reason grasps God’s plan reflected in his creation and comes to cooperate with him in completing his plan, using and perfecting his creation according to God’s purposes, and our own insofar as they conform to God’s.”⁶ It follows, according to Ashley, that natural law is most accurately defined as “*our human participation by our reason in God’s wise care of the world.*”⁷ In another context, Ashley offers a similar, but more expansive definition. Natural law, Ashley (and his colleague O’Rourke) write, “is our human sharing in God’s own wisdom about what kind of living will best fulfill the nature which the Creator has given us by creating us as bodily beings who also in our spiritual intelligence and free will image God (Genesis 1:27).”⁸

Secondly, Ashley has much in common with St. Thomas and Grisez et al., in that he begins his formal presentation of the natural law by looking to what fulfills us as human persons. St. Thomas and Grisez et al., refer to these fundamental aspects of our fulfillment or flourishing as the “basic human goods.”⁹ Ashley, however, will usually

call them “basic human needs.”¹⁰ Although Ashley is normally content to repeat what he calls Aquinas’ list of four basic needs, which he renders as “life, reproduction, truth, and society,” in another context he will expand the Common Doctor’s list by dividing Thomas’ good of life into the need for “food” and “security,” and by adding the need for “creativity.” Thus, Ashley arrives at *six basic needs*: *food* (i.e., appropriate nourishment, water, and air), *security* (i.e., protection against injury by natural forces, animals, and other humans; it includes the need for physical freedom), *sex* (i.e., our need to reproduce and to bond with a member of the opposite sex in marriage), *information* (including sense and intellectual knowledge and our need to communicate it), *society* (i.e., the need for community to meet our needs and to share goods in friendship), and *creativity* (i.e., our need to be creative in the arts and sciences in order to advance culture; however, it goes beyond this and includes our need to seek the “Ultimate Totality,” the Transcendent).¹¹

Thirdly, a central aspect of Ashley’s natural law theory is his understanding of how we come to knowledge of these basic human needs. This brings us to Ashley’s thought on the relationship between *ethics and anthropology*. According to Ashley, the following three conclusions of natural philosophy or natural science are necessary for ethical theory: “(1) Humans are animals, living, sentient, having biological drives to eat, rest, defend themselves, mate and reproduce; (2) Species-specific humans are intelligent, free, and social in a way that requires language and the invention of culture and technology; [and] (3) Human intelligence is dependent on the body to supply the instruments by which it is able to learn about the environment and the human person itself, but it is not identical with the activity of the body or of any bodily organ, not even the brain, nor is it subject to the mortality of the body.”¹² Hence, Ashley adds, “Aquinas lists *health, reproduction, society, and truth* as the basic goods of human nature.”¹³ For Ashley, then, the findings of modern science can and need to inform our philosophical anthropology since ethics rests on some idea of what it means to be human.¹⁴ This thesis, however, puts Ashley at odds with Grisez et al., who argue that the first principles of natural law (including the basic human goods) are underived, that is, they are self-evident (*per se nota*). Thus, according to Grisez et al., they do not rest on the conclusions of anthropology or metaphysics.¹⁵

Fourthly, Ashley has consistently maintained that these needs or inclinations, which correspond (as Ashley has recently admitted) to *basic human goods*, are arranged in a *hierarchy* and unified by one ultimate good, the latter sometimes designated as “contemplation.”¹⁶ Our author has expressed this traditional Thomistic position by arguing that the “primary principles” or “precepts” (as Ashley calls them) of the natural law, such as “Do good and avoid evil” (or what Ashley renders in a Christian context as “Seek the true goal of life in all your actions,” i.e., the love of God and neighbor) are hierarchically ordered.¹⁷ This is evident in his insistence that the first precept can be expressed more concretely by saying that the basic principles of the natural law direct us to: “Seek bodily health, the preservation of the human species, the common good of society, and truth as the highest element of the common good, *in ascending order of importance*, and avoid whatever is contrary to these goods.”¹⁸ Thus, unlike Grisez et al., Ashley understands the goods of human nature to be in some sense *commensurable*.¹⁹ Nevertheless, despite this “commensurability,” Ashley, like Grisez et al., is a firm

supporter of the Church's received moral teaching – reaffirmed in chapter 2 of Pope John Paul II's *Veritatis Splendor* – that there exist intrinsically evil acts and corresponding moral absolutes.²⁰ Hence, he rejects proportionalism as a basic method of moral decision-making.²¹

Fifthly, Ashley (and O'Rourke) call their natural law theory “prudential personalism,”²² or what I have elsewhere called a “*teleological ethic of ordered needs*.”²³ Ashley's moral methodology is *teleological* because it understands the rightness or wrongness of a free act as rooted not in “the will of any authority, but [in] some *intelligence* ... that is able to see the alternative means to the end and select the most effective.”²⁴ However, as I have already indicated, prudential personalism's teleology will avoid consequentialism and proportionalism by accepting moral absolutes, while at the same time, arguing that objective moral criteria must include the consequences of actions, yet not be reduced to them. As Ashley has noted, in a teleological way of judging, “the consequences of an act (insofar as they can be prudently determined) are important, but good consequences which are circumstantial (that is, which do not necessarily follow from the nature of the act) cannot make an intrinsically evil act good.”²⁵

Sixthly, Ashley argues that the virtue of *prudence* enables the acting person to move from the most general or primary principles of the natural law to apply specific moral norms such as “Do not commit adultery,” that is, to make good moral decisions in concrete situations.²⁶ This moral and intellectual virtue is defined as “facility in taking into consideration all the factors that enter into any particular moral decision, making as objective a judgment of conscience as one can, and then courageously and consistently acting according to that judgment.”²⁷ Indeed, Ashley (and O'Rourke) call their teleological natural law methodology of moral decision making “‘prudential’ to indicate its practical, goal-seeking, situational, contextual character.”²⁸ Here again, we find a great contrast with the theory of Grisez et al. For these authors, while prudence is absolutely necessary in the moral life, it does not enable us to derive *specific moral norms* from the primary principles of the natural law.²⁹ In their theory, what they call the *modes of responsibility* or intermediate moral principles,³⁰ enable us to show how these norms follow as *conclusions* from the first principle of morality.

Seventhly, Ashley (and O'Rourke), in company with St. Thomas, Vatican II, and Grisez et al., formulate a “first principle of morality” in their natural law ethic which they express as follows: “*Do those acts, and only those acts, which are appropriate means to the supreme good of true knowledge and love of God, oneself, and the human community in time and eternity.*”³¹ On the basis of this most basic moral principle – which is much less specific than Grisez et al.'s – the authors conclude that *prudential personalism* is “‘personal’ because it grounds norms in the dignity and basic goods of the human person ... and it is ‘prudential’ because as far as practicable it takes into account the circumstances of an action and the proportionality of its consequences.”³² In doing so, the authors claim, their theory incorporates the strengths and avoids the weaknesses of moral theories such as proportionalism, consequentialism, etc.³³

Concluding Assessment

There are many worthy features of Ashley's natural law theory. I would list among them much as we have already seen: (1) his realist and objective method of ethics; (2) his effort to show how ethics is grounded in philosophical anthropology, that is, in (a universal and non-dualistic) human nature; (3) his sensitivity to the particularity of moral judgment; (4) his emphasis on the teleological character of morality, or its means-ends structure; (5) his incorporation of the virtues into natural law theory; (6) his defense of moral absolutes; and (7) his effort to root natural law in a Christologically informed theological anthropology.³⁴

My criticisms of Ashley's theory include: (1) his questionable affirmation of a hierarchy of goods which can often lead to proportionalism in the hands of someone not faithful to the Church's received moral teaching;³⁵ (2) his weak first principle of morality which, I would argue, needs to include reference (as it does in Grisez et al.'s theory) "to the many basic human goods which generate the need for *choice* and *moral guidance*";³⁶ and (3) the inadequacy of prudence (however necessary for choosing well) as a premise for moving from the general first principles of the natural law down to specific moral norms. With respect to this last criticism, I should note, however, that the real concern of "prudential personalism" is not, after all, with the necessary *process of deriving (specific) moral norms* (as it is for Grisez et al.), but rather, with guiding moral decision-making in concrete circumstances – hence, the importance of prudence.³⁷

I hope that this brief overview of Benedict Ashley's understanding of natural law, as it has been understood in comparison with that of Grisez et al., will stimulate further study of Ashley's moral thought in general, and his natural law theory in particular. In a time when it seems that the "culture of death" has eroded our respect for the inherent dignity, indeed, sanctity of human life, Ashley's natural law thinking can be a source of wisdom and light as we respond to this culture by showing how the Church's moral teachings are rooted in the nature of the human person – a nature both created and redeemed by God in Jesus Christ.

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¹ (Braintree, MA: Pope John Center, 1985, 1995, second ed.). See also Benedict Ashley, "The River Forest School and the Philosophy of Nature Today," in R. James Long (ed.), *Philosophy and the God of Abraham: Essays in Memory of James A. Weisheipl, O.P.* Papers in Medieval Studies 12 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1991), pp. 1-16.

² The following works contain Ashley's most explicit and extensive discussions of the natural law: *Theologies of the Body*, pp. 360-372; 386-482; *Living the Truth in Love: A Biblical Introduction to Moral Theology* (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1996), especially Part 1; *Health Care Ethics: A Theological Analysis*, 4th ed., co-authored with

Kevin O'Rourke, O.P. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1997), chapters 1 and 7; *Justice in the Church: Gender and Participation* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), pp. 7-9; 35-43; "What is the Natural Law?" in *Ethics and Medics* 12 (June 1987): 1-2; "Scriptural Grounds for Concrete Moral Norms," in *The Thomist* 52 (1988): 1-22 (esp. pp. 13-22); "Dominion or Stewardship?: Theological Reflections" in Kevin Wm. Wildes, S.J., et al. (eds.), *Birth, Suffering, and Death: Catholic Perspectives at the Edges of Life* (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Pub., 1992), pp. 85-106 (esp. pp. 90-92); and "What is the End of the Human Person?: The Vision of God and Integral Human Fulfillment," in Luke Gormally (ed.), *Moral Truth and Moral Tradition: Essays in Honor of Peter Geach and Elizabeth Anscombe* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1994), pp. 68-96 (This last article is Ashley's most sustained and penetrating critique of Grisez et al.'s moral theory. I believe, however, because Ashley misinterprets several aspects of their theory, his analysis, although insightful in many respects, ultimately fails to seriously damage the natural law theory of Grisez et al.).

³ The title of Ashley's recent moral *summa*, *Living the Truth in Love*, can lead to this impression; note that it is subtitled *A Biblical Introduction to Moral Theology*. However, Ashley's stated goal (and great contribution) is to root moral theology primarily in the Word of God, as Vatican II's *Optatam Totius* called for, while also drawing on the best of recent scripture scholarship, philosophy, and other sources of truth.

Another reason why Ashley's thought on natural law has been overlooked is that in many of his writings he often does not explicitly refer to his ethical theory as a "natural law" theory. For example, he will, as in chapter 10 of *Theologies of the Body*, refer to his ethical theory as an ethic of "co-creative stewardship." But it is most evident, in my view, that what Ashley is doing in this chapter is articulating a theory of natural law.

⁴ See especially the following important works of these authors on natural law: Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, Vol. 1: *Christian Moral Principles* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), esp. chapter 7; and two works jointly authored by Grisez, Finnis, and Boyle: *Nuclear Deterrence, Morality and Realism* (Oxford and N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1987), chapter 10 and "Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends," in *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 32 (1987): 99-151. See also Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) and *Aquinas: Moral, Political, and Legal Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), chapters 3-5; Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, Vol. 2: *Living a Christian Life* (Chicago: Franciscan Press, 1993). Much of these authors' thinking on natural law has been ably summarized and evaluated by William E. May, *An Introduction to Moral Theology* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1994, revised ed.), chapter 2 (esp. pp. 68-90); and Aurelio Ansaldo, *El Primer Principio del Obrar Moral y Las Normas Morales Especificas en el Pensamiento de G. Grisez y J. Finnis* (Rome: Pontificia Universita Lateranense, 1990).

⁵ Ashley himself has said this; see his "Christian Moral Principles: A Review Discussion," *The Thomist* 48 (1984): 450-460.

⁶ Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love*, p. 28.

⁷ Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love*, p. 28. Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1-2, Q. 91, a. 2: "This participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called natural law."

⁸ Ashley and O'Rourke, *Health Care Ethics*, pp. 156-157.

⁹ Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1-2, Q. 94, a. 2; Grisez, Boyle, and Finnis identify seven such basic human goods in “Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends,” pp. 106-108. Grisez has added an eighth basic human good, “marriage,” in *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, Vol. 2, chapter 9.

¹⁰ William E. May has criticized this substitution of the term “need” for “good” as a departure from St. Thomas’ usage. May notes that St. Thomas would have called these needs “natural inclinations.” For St. Thomas, these needs or inclinations orient us to the basic human goods (See *Summa Theologiae*, 1-2, Q. 94, a. 2). The latter, “when intelligently understood,” May comments, “serve as the starting points or indemonstrable first principles of practical thinking.” May, Book Review of *Theologies of the Body*, in *The Thomist* 54 (1990): 168-172, at p. 172. I respond to Professor’s May’s concern (in his otherwise very favorable review) in my doctoral dissertation which was done under his direction at the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family, *The Fundamental Moral Theology of Benedict Ashley, O.P.: A Critical Study. Toward a Response to the Second Vatican Council’s Call for Renewal in Moral Theology* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1998), pp. 266-271. Here I argue that Ashley is largely influenced by his former teachers Mortimer Adler and Yves Simon on this matter.

¹¹ Ashley, *Theologies of the Body*, p. 396. These needs correspond to the four dimensions of the human person: the biological, psychological, social, and spiritual or creative (Ashley and O’Rourke, *Health Care Ethics*, p. 18). I treat all of these needs in more detail in *The Fundamental Moral Theology of Benedict Ashley*, pp. 262-288.

¹² Ashley, “What is the End of the Human Person?” p. 73.

¹³ Ashley, “What is the End of the Human Person?” p. 73.

¹⁴ Ashley’s position is that while ethics cannot be *formally* reduced to metaphysical biology, it *materially* presupposes certain conclusions (or material conditions) of a philosophical anthropology that is part of natural philosophy. He comments: Ethics presupposes natural philosophy which, “beginning with the generic study of human beings as natural objects, and then as animals, proceeds to show that animals of this sort are intelligent, free persons who understand their own activities both theoretically and practically. The human nature (natural moral law) to which we must conform to be morally good human persons is a nature that requires us to make decisions about the unconditionally is-to-be [i.e., the purpose (end) of a human act]” Ashley, “What is the End of the Human Person?” p. 76.

¹⁵ See Grisez and Finnis, “The Basic Principles of the Natural Law: Reply to Ralph McInerny,” *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 26 (1981): 21-31. See also Robert P. George, “Natural Law and Human Nature,” in George (ed.), *Natural Law Theory: Contemporary Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 31-41. This article is reprinted in George, *In Defense of Natural Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), pp. 83-91. As George makes clear, these authors, while maintaining that ethics is not *epistemologically* dependent on human nature, nonetheless, affirm that it is *ontologically* grounded in human nature.

¹⁶ Our supreme (and supernatural) good or end is the “beatific vision.” In this life, however, we also have a natural (ultimate) end that is “contemplation” or the “contemplation of truth” (Ashley, “What is the End of the Human Person?” pp. 86-88). This key tenet of Ashley’s thought is also explored in *Living the Truth in Love*, pp. 92-95; 99-103, where Ashley summarizes his view in response to Grisez’s rejection of

contemplation as the natural end of man: “[I]n achieving our supernatural goal we also attain our natural goal of integral human fulfillment [Grisez et al.’s concept of the realization of all the human goods in the whole human community], and transcend it by becoming adopted children of God, participants in divine life. This supernatural goal is not only inclusive of all natural goals, but *unifies* them completely, since in possessing God alone, we possess all that God has created” (p. 108).

¹⁷ Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love*, p. 108.

¹⁸ Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love*, p. 108, emphasis added.

¹⁹ See Grisez, Boyle, and Finnis, “Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends,” p. 110 for their understanding of the twofold incommensurability of the basic human goods. For a convincing defense of Grisez et al.’s incommensurability thesis against the claim that there is an objective ranking of the basic goods, see George, “Recent Criticism of Natural Law Theory,” in George, *In Defense of Natural Law*, pp. 31-82, at pp. 69-75. This article originally appeared in the *University of Chicago Law Review* 55 (Fall 1988): 1371-1429.

²⁰ See Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love*, pp. 129-133.

²¹ See Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love*, pp. 134-138; Ashley and O’Rourke, *Health Care Ethics*, pp. 159-166. See also Ashley’s pre-*Veritatis Splendor* treatment of absolute moral norms, “Ethical Decisions: Why ‘Exceptionless Norms’?” *Hospital Progress* 62 (April 1985): 50-53; 66.

Grisez has probably been the foremost critic of proportionalism; e.g., see Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, Vol. 1, chapter 6.

²² Points six and seven in the text will explain how “prudential personalism” is both “prudential” and “personal.”

²³ Latkovic, *The Fundamental Moral Theology of Benedict Ashley*, chapter 4.

²⁴ Ashley and O’Rourke, *Health Care Ethics*, p. 145. In contrast, Grisez et al., describe their moral theory as one which is “beyond ‘teleology’ and ‘deontology.’” Their theory seeks to “combine the strengths and avoid the weaknesses” of these two ethical systems as they have been commonly understood. Thus, these authors want to ground morality in human goods, but also protect human dignity by upholding moral absolutes (Finnis, Boyle, and Grisez, *Nuclear Deterrence, Morality and Realism*, pp. 275-277).

²⁵ Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love*, p. 133; see also Ashley and O’Rourke, *Health Care Ethics*, pp. 146-148.

²⁶ It is the task of prudence, or, as Ashley likes to call it by its biblical designation, *practical wisdom* to apply the first principles of the natural law “to particular problems of life which constitute the *means*” to our goal (in this life) of integral human fulfillment (Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love*, p. 93).

In chapter 10 of *Theologies of the Body*, Ashley will coordinate his six basic needs with the cardinal virtues and with various moral norms for their proper use. Thus, Ashley quite skillfully, in my judgment, weaves the virtues into his account of the natural law.

²⁷ Ashley and O’Rourke, *Health Care Ethics*, p. 58. One judges the morality of a human act by first asking some *general* questions: (a) How does this action in its context contribute to the growth of persons in community? (b) Will this act make me more truly human as Jesus was, or less so? and (c) Is one clear about the ultimate goal of human life? (Ibid., pp. 170-171). *Specific* questions then follow. In making an actual moral decision, three things must be determined: First, “Is my end the right end?” Second, “Is

my proposed act an ‘effective means’ in attaining my end? Or, is the act an intrinsic evil, i.e., contradictory to a basic goal?” Third, “In the circumstances, is my act an appropriate means, here and now, or is its ‘normal effectiveness’ destroyed?” (See *ibid.*, p. 171).

²⁸ Ashley and O’Rourke, *Health Care Ethics*, p. 169.

²⁹ Grisez and Boyle state: “Like Ashley, we hold that the moral virtues are essential for a morally good *life*. . . . But unlike Ashley, we do not think detailed *analysis* of the moral virtues, in general and/or in particular, deserve an important place in moral theology” (Grisez and Boyle, “Response to Our Critics and Our Collaborators,” in Robert P. George (ed.), *Natural Law and Moral Inquiry: Ethics, Metaphysics, and Politics in the Work of Germain Grisez*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1998, p. 235). One of the three reasons they give for saying this is that the moral virtues, “not being propositional [like the modes], cannot be premises for normative judgments” (*Ibid.*, p. 236). For an interesting discussion of the relationship between the virtue of prudence and specific moral norms in the thought of Aquinas, see Finnis, *Aquinas*, pp. 163-170.

³⁰ These modes, such as the Golden Rule, are “more specific than the first principle of morality [= “*In voluntarily acting for human goods and avoiding what is opposed to them, one ought to choose and otherwise will those and only those possibilities whose willing is compatible with integral human fulfillment*”], but they are more general than specific moral norms identifying kinds of human choices as morally good or morally evil” (May, *An Introduction to Moral Theology*, p. 79). See also George, “Recent Criticism of Natural Law Theory,” p. 52; and Ansaldo, *El Primer Principio del Obrar Moral y Las Normas Morales Especificas en el Pensamiento de G. Grisez y J. Finnis*, pp. 67-87 for explanation of the modes and how they “specify” the first principle of morality.

³¹ Ashley and O’Rourke, *Health Care Ethics*, p. 171. I have compared their articulation of the first moral principle with the one offered by Grisez et al. (see endnote 30 above), in *The Fundamental Moral Theology of Benedict Ashley*, pp. 319-320; 330-332. There I argue that Ashley’s first principle is too general to be of any real value in helping one to distinguish morally good from morally evil choices.

For a good treatment of how St. Thomas, the Council Fathers of Vatican II, and Grisez et al. formulate the primary moral principle, see May, *An Introduction to Moral Theology*, pp. 72-76.

³² Ashley and O’Rourke, *Health Care Ethics*, p. 171.

³³ Ashley and O’Rourke, *Health Care Ethics*, p. 171. Compare this with Grisez et al.’s comments about teleological and deontological ethics in endnote 24 above.

³⁴ Much as Pope John Paul II has done in chapter 1 of *Veritatis Splendor*, Ashley argues that the ethics of Jesus “and his historical exemplification of ethics *cannot be separated from the natural law*, but instead becomes for the Christian *a way to recover the natural law in its authentic sense*” (Ashley, *Theologies of the Body*, p. 386, emphasis added. For the full discussion see pp. 386-397.). Had we more space, this topic would definitely merit a more detailed discussion.

³⁵ May has argued that St. Thomas does not, in fact, arrange the basic goods into a hierarchy, and that this interpretation of Thomas “is an imposition, and a dangerous one, on the text of St. Thomas [note omitted]. It is dangerous because it lends support to those who claim that, once a person is no longer able to know the truth (e.g., one in a so-called persistent vegetative state), his bodily life is no longer of value to him because of his inability to participate in the ‘higher’ good of truth.” While May notes that Ashley

rejects this “quality of life” view, he thinks that Ashley’s hierarchical ordering of the goods unfortunately encourages this way of thinking (See May, “Recent Moral Theology: Servais Pinckaers and Benedict Ashley,” *The Thomist* 62 [January 1998]: 117-131, at p. 130).

³⁶ See Grisez, *Christian Moral Principles*, p. 184, emphasis added.

³⁷ It also explains why Ashley does not show the *process of moral reasoning* from the first principle of morality to specific moral norms by anything closely resembling the “modes of responsibility.” For a fuller treatment of this criticism as well as the others mentioned, see *The Fundamental Moral Theology of Benedict Ashley*, pp. 314-321; and pp. 330-332 where I compare the strengths and weaknesses of Ashley’s moral theory with Grisez et al.’s moral theory.