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CONTENTS

NATURAL THEOLOGY AND THEOLOGICAL ETHICS: APPLICATIONS IN MELANESIAN CONTEXTS

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Abstract

The reasoning approach typically seen in Catholic natural theology is a style of reasoning that proceeds by way of a proposition or propositions with consequential logical deductions. The paper briefly surveys the course of natural philosophy/theology and proceeds to argue a phenomenological manner of reasoning in identifying natural law bases for deriving theological ethics. This engages a phenomenological style of reasoning where, "phenomena" encompasses both the "physical" and the "spiritual"––leading to focus on the ways that we may discern theological ethics using inductive approaches that manifest congruency with scriptural principles. The Melanesian applications content of the paper briefly and in an exploratory way proposes examples for reconstructing theological understanding such as marriage in Melanesian contexts where marriage and family as witnessed by historical anthropology and in certain respects by current practices are refocused by a phenomenological approach to theological ethics.

Keywords

natural philosophy, natural theology, Melanesian anthropology, Melanesian religion, phenomenology, theological ethics, Papua New Guinea.

Consider often the connection of all things in the Cosmos and their relationship with each other. For in a way all things are mutually

intertwined, and thus according to this there is a natural inclination, or love, that links everything together. For things follow another by reason of their attunement, to common spirit that breathes through them, and the unity of all being.[1]

The commandments of the Decalogue, although accessible to reason alone, have been revealed. To attain a complete and certain understanding of the requirements of the natural law, sinful humanity needed this revelation ...[2]

INTRODUCTION

Natural theology is a difficult and abstract topic with a long and complex history that is briefly portrayed[3] as a prelude to attempting a brief exploratory contextualisation in Melanesian settings.

Brief Survey of Natural Philosophy/Natural Theology from its Beginnings through to the Scholastic/Medieval Period

The roots of natural theology are in pre-Socratic Greek philosophy that begins with observation of the harmony in nature, and then seeks to build cognitive understanding, *philosophy*.[4] From this there

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[1] Marcus Aurelius, *Med.* 6.38: Πολλάκις ἐνθυμοῦ τὴν ἐπισύνδεσιν πάντων τῶν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ καὶ σχέσιν πρὸς ἄλληλα. Πρόπον γάρ τινα πάντα ἀλλήλοις ἐπιπέπλεκται καὶ πάντα κατὰ τοῦτο φίλα ἀλλήλοις ἐστί· καὶ γὰρ ἄλλῳ ἑξῆς ἐστι τοῦτο διὰ τὴν τονικὴν κίνησιν καὶ σύμπνοιαν καὶ τὴν ἕνωσιν τῆς οὐσίας. Translation in J. Needleman and J. P. Piazza, *The Essential Marcus Aurelius* (London: Jeremy Tarcher/Penguin, 2008). Marcus Aurelius, emperor of Rome, 161–180, was a Stoic philosopher with no Christian adherence.

[2] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [= *CCC*], 2071: "Decalogi praecepta, quamvis soli rationi sint pervia, revelata sunt. Ad completam et certam cognitionem obtinendam exigentiarum legis naturalis, peccator genus humanum hac egebt revelatione …" English translation in *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Homebush, NSW: St Pauls, 1994).

[3] A useful compendium resource for the philosophers/philosophies discussed in the first-half of this paper is the on-line *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: <https://plato.stanford.edu/contents.html>

[4] The term "philosophy" combines one of the Greek words for "love" (φιλία – *philia*), and the word for "wisdom" (σοφία – *sophía*). In this context of the above sentence, it is worth noting that the term "physics" has displaced the earlier English nomenclature "natural philosophy". There is still an earlier physics building at University of Melbourne that has a stone banner "Natural Philosophy" over the main entry—and in that usage "natural" meant physical/phenomenal as distinct from metaphysical/noumenal.

arose a distinction between the physical and the metaphysical or alternatively between the phenomenal[5] and noumenal[6]—between that which may be "seen" and that which may "not be seen".[7] In human terms, this distinction may be between body/soul or body/spirit or body/mind/spirit/soul—with the body being regarded as "physical" or "phenomenal" and mind[8] or soul being regarded as "metaphysical" or "noumenal". This early philosophical inheritance came to be received as "metaphysical philosophy", since the ancients accepted a reality of a non-physical/non-phenomenal world and this perception undergirded later reception of their philosophy (philosophies).

With the fifth-century BC classical Greek philosopher Socrates, metaphysical philosophy became essentially metaphysical *moral* philosophy focusing on "the good". This focus on "the good" was on what are referred to as "forms" or "ideas" or "principles". We are dependent upon the younger fifth-century Plato as a student of Socrates for the written inheritance of the teaching of his master—thus the term, Platonic philosophy.[9] It is from the third-century AD classical Greek philosopher Plotinus that we have Neoplatonism, in which the Socratic idea of forms shifted from a mental (*nous*) or cognitive[10] form to a theocratic articulation and it is this shift that

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[5] The term comes into English through Latin but with its root being Greek, *phainein* ("to show", "to appear"); i.e., that which may be observed.

[6] The term comes into English from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and derives from Greek, ωοῖεν – *noien* ("apprehend" or "conceive"), which in Kantian usage refers to knowledge or understanding that is apprehended other than by empirical observation, such as perceiving a spiritual presence.

[7] The commonplace term "see" is placed in inverted commas because there are many things that are not visible to the naked eye (such as gaseous composition or cellular composition) that nevertheless are "phenomenal", i.e., they may be comprehended and observed using natural or technological instruments (the eye an example or the former, the microscope an example of the latter). I shall use the terms physical/metaphysical and phenomenal/noumenal without introducing subtle distinctions between this dichotomisation.

[8] This engages a distinction between "mind" and "brain".

[9] A searching yet succinct and contemporary exposition of "the good" is found in Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

[10] The term "cognitive" derives from Latin *cognoscere*, dealing with empirical or practical knowing/knowledge, but that now mainly takes in English a meaning of reasoned mental processes that are not necessarily linked with empiricism.

provided the foundation for a metaphysical moral *theology*[11] (rather than simply a metaphysical moral *philosophy*).

The eminent fourth-century BC Greek philosopher Aristotle saw the soul as the principle of the life of the body and in that perspective developed a moral philosophy that focused on a virtue ethics (a sense of inherent moral lawfulness as distinct from prescriptive "deontic ethics").[12] However, it was not until much later that Aristotelian method found development in the moral theology by St Thomas Aquinas (thirteenth century). The formative and magisterial influence on the emergence of medieval Latin scholastic metaphysical theology and metaphysical moral theology principally drew upon St Augustine of Hippo (fourth century). It was within this inheritance that St Anselm of Canterbury (eleventh century) introduced Platonic cosmology to first articulate the ontological proof of the necessary existence of God as a sophisticated noumenal/cognitive/metaphysical theology.[13] St Thomas Aquinas, later revered as the greatest medieval theologian, applied a method of demonstrating an analogous relationship between creation (as effect) and God (as cause). His moral applications involved inductive *a posteriori*[14] and causal reasoning that was less-engaged in "philosophical proofs" and more engaged in Aristotelian method now ascribed as "virtue ethics".[15]

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[11] The term "theology" combines the Greek words for God (θεός – *theos*), and a complex term that may be read as "rational ideation" (λόγος – logos). (Evidently, the latter term is not here used in the way that it is used in John 1:14.)

[12] Amplified in n. 47 below.

[13] The terms "ontology"/"ontological" refer to the nature of being or "*is*-ness" and combine two Greek words, ὄντος – *ontos* ("that which is"), and λογία, here used in the sense of "logical discourse". The method of Anselm was one of a reasoning from premise or *a priori* reasoning.

[14] *A posteriori* reasoning is distinguished from *a priori* reasoning in that the latter refers to deductive reasoning involving necessary conclusions from first premises, while the former involves inductive conclusions that follow from observations.

[15] For a standard reference see J. A. K. Thomson (trans.), rev. Hugh Tredennick, with introduction by Jonathan Barnes, *Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics*, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 2004). For a contemporary interpretation see Nancy E. Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

Beginning Contextualisation of Natural Philosophy/Natural Theology in Melanesian Settings

Natural theology as a topic has particular difficulty in Melanesian contexts. Across a long history of Greek philosophy from pre-Socratic times to natural theology in Latin Christendom there emerges a dichotomous worldview[16] between "material" and "spiritual"/or "physical" and "metaphysical"/or "phenomenal" and noumenal". As already noted, this may be simply stated as between what may be "seen" and what may "not be seen". The program for the 2019 MATS conference, for which this paper was prepared, proposed an understanding of natural theology in terms of "observation of nature and the use of human reason". Across the history of natural theology, the focus has often been on the "not seen"—on the *metaphysical*. The "observation of nature" is more typical of later manifestations of natural philosophy/natural theology since the Renaissance/Reformation periods, where the focus becomes more on the "seen"—on the *physical*.

A non-dichotomous or holistic perspective that suffuses the "material" and the "spiritual" is more characteristic of indigenous Melanesian cultures.[17] Further, the "human reason" of philosophy or theology proceeding in a singularly metaphysical manner has typically been of an abstract intellectualist kind. This is clearly seen in the eleventh-century articulation of the ontological proof proposed by Anselm of Canterbury.[18] His method renders a

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[16] References to "world" and to "worldview" in this paper refer not to our planet, earth, but to the mental/cultural environment in which we live, and "worldview" conveys these often implicit understandings of "worlds" and "worldviews".

[17] See P. A. McGavin, "Epistemology and Pastoral Practice: Applications in Melanesian Contexts," *MJT* 34 (2016): 58–60. This is expressed by Simeon B. Namunu, "Melanesian Religion, Ecology, and Modernization in Papua New Guinea," in *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology: The Interbeing of Cosmology and Community* (John S. Grim, ed.; Religions of the World and Ecology; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 149–280, at 251, as "… The ecosystem is not merely a system of natural phenomena within the environment, but includes spiritual phenomena."

[18] His thesis may be found in *Monologion* 3, and in *Proslogion* 2, respectively written about 1075 and 1077 (Brian Davies and G. R. Evans [eds], *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* [Oxford World's Classics; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998], 5–81 and 82–104). The ontological proof is typically exposited with reference to his second version. For convenient web-based

cognitive articulation and integration that has typically been represented as drawing upon the text of Romans 1:20[19] to build an intricate premise/logical reasoning[20] to "prove" the *necessity* of God. It is this manner of reasoning that is captured in the first sentence of the promotional poster for the 2019 MATS conference: "Natural theology is generally described as the endeavour to attain understanding of God and His relationship with the universe by way of human reason." This manner of naming of human reason implies a different paradigm than the overarching paradigm of both the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT), paradigms that are predicated upon the revelatory action of God and upon witness to the revelatory action of God (in the OT such as with Abraham and with the exodus, and in the NT with the conception, life, death, resurrection, and ascension/glorification of Jesus the Christ).

The achievements of medieval scholasticism as represented by Anselm may be termed "speculative" philosophy or philosophical theology, and this again presents a manner of human reasoning that is strange to indigenous Melanesian mentalities. During the medieval era and also the early Enlightenment era, the "speculative" manner of reasoning involved an abstract premise or premises and consequent logical deductions, reasoning that I term "propositional reasoning" or "syllogistic reasoning". Such a one-sided manner of thinking is also difficult for indigenous Melanesian mentalities (and also does not fit well with my manner of thinking!).

Natural Philosophy/Natural Theology from Enlightenment to Modern Periods and Melanesian Contexts

Moving from the medieval period and its antecedents, and into the era termed the Enlightenment, represents another methodological

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expositions see <https://www.iep.utm.edu/ont-arg/#H3> and <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40230655?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents>

[19] "Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. Therefore [unbelievers of God] are without excuse." I say "typically been represented", because Rom 1:20 itself is more in an *a postiriori* mode.

[20] By "premise/logical" reasoning, I mean a reasoning that begins with a premise (or proposition) from which there proceeds a series of logical steps (logical deductions) to give a conclusion, such as, "Therefore, O man, thou art without excuse!" Elsewhere, I name this as *syllogistic* reasoning or *propositional* reasoning.

and perspectual shift that focuses on "human reason". The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century philosopher René Descartes is generally considered as the vanguard of the Enlightenment with his often-quoted dictum, *cognito ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am").[21] Although Descartes reckoned himself as a Christian, theologically he is better described as a Deist.[22] His is a speculative theology of a metaphysical philosophical kind involving cognitive processes that I have described as "syllogistic". Later writers of the Enlightenment developed further formulations and contra-formulations of cosmological/theological understandings—the most notable being the eighteenth-century philosopher Immanuel Kant. He proposed categorical imperatives as a basis of moral theology—a *moral imperative* or lawfulness as the basis of reason and reality.[23]

In part, Kant was contesting the ideas of the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher David Hume, who laid the foundations for empiricism, which grapples with observed behaviours[24] rather than inherent normative standards such as proposed in the categorical imperative reasoned system of Kant. The empiricism of Hume provided a foundation for later Utilitarians, led by the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British philosopher Jeremy Bentham[25] and in the nineteenth century by John Steward Mill.[26] Bentham expounded the maximisation/optimisation of human satisfaction or "utility" as the basis for evaluation of human actions. Mill articulated a positivist empiricist method[27] that influenced the development of inductive empirical reasoning as a scientific method.

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[21] From his 1637 *Discourse on Method* and his 1644 *Principles of Philosophy*.

[22] Deism treats God as a "first cause" of the universe (not in itself wrong) but does not attribute an ongoing interaction with the universe—and thus lacks a sufficient sense of ongoing divine providence and of divine action and continuing action in salvation.

[23] *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781.

[24] *Treatise of Human Nature*, 1738.

[25] *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, published in 1789.

[26] *A System of Logic*, published in 1843.

[27] Positivist method purportedly is based on observable natural phenomena, with information derived from sensory experience and interpreted through reason and logic, and rejects introspective and intuitive knowledge because metaphysical and theological claims cannot by verified by sense experience.

This positivist method provided foundations for the modern development of the social sciences that are premised upon relative valuation—rather than Kantian notions of categorical imperative or upon notions of "the good" deriving from classical metaphysical speculative moral philosophy/moral theology. It is the inheritances of utilitarian worldviews that have generally prevailed into the recent modern period, as manifested in the dominant relativism of contemporary international society (societies), where absolute norms are receding and where valuation is dominantly situationist and relativist.[28]

To the extent that these intellectual shifts across the Enlightenment and early Modern period or periods sustained propositional reasoning, they are probably better named as "natural *philosophy*" rather than "natural *theology*"—since the emerging "observational" or "empirical" approach generally focuses on the "material"/"physical", with little attention to or with even disregard of the "spiritual". These more recent versions of one-sidedness present further difficulties for Melanesian mentalities (and another difficulty for the author's mentality!) that is further explored in the next section.

DIVERTING ONE-SIDED AND DICHOTOMOUS SCHEMAS

There is a strong trait across Christian history that makes difficult the recognition of the insidiousness of dichotomous and/or one-sided reasonings, namely, the undercurrent in Christian history of a dichotomy/duality between "body" (σῶμα – *soma*), and "spirit" (πνεῦμα – *pneuma*) or "body" (*soma*) and "soul" (ψυκή – *psuke*). This dichotomy/duality and/or a one-sidedness is manifest where the "body" is located as the root of *sin*, whereas a proper understanding of the human person as body/soul/spirit encompasses a *holistic recognition* of "sin", rather than a compartmentalised or reductive attribution of "sin". This one-sided perspective may be instanced in

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[28] For a virtue ethics critique of situationist arguments, see P. A. McGavin and T. A. Hunter, "The *We Believe* of Philosophers: Implicit Epistemologies and Unexamined Psychologies," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 54 (2014): 279–96.
http://www.pdcnet.org/pdc/bvdb.nsf/purchase?openform&fp=ipq&id=ipq_2014_0054_0003_0279_0296

the way that the Genesis episode has often been represented, where the "apple" ("the fruit of the tree") presents a materiality that appeals to the body/flesh ("is good to eat"), while the crux of the sin is in the realm of will/spirit, "to be like God" (Gen 3:1–6). In brief, sin correctly should be located holistically, in the whole of human nature, in the whole person, or the whole society. A corollary of failure to grasp this theological and historical fact is a weakening of the historical and theological fact of the holistic human nature that is assumed by the eternal Word as Jesus of Nazareth. We cannot speak of Jesus with accuracy without an anthropology of body/spirit or body/soul,[29] and without an anthropology/theology of body/soul/divinity. Applied to "natural theology", this entails our engaging "human reasoning" across "physical" *and* "metaphysical" realms.

Such a fundamental recognition diverts us from a natural theology of a one-sided metaphysical philosophy kind, with its roots in the way that early Greek philosophy was received in the development of the natural theology of the Middle Ages and the early Enlightenment era as a kind of "speculative theology". Holistic approaches also divert us away from the natural philosophy of the later Enlightenment as developed by the Utilitarians as a manner of reasoning that locates human welfare in the optimisation of human satisfaction or "utility" that is generally understood "materialistically". We need a natural philosophy and a natural theology that addresses the welfare of the human person and human society—of the *whole* human person (body and spirit or body and soul) and a *holistic* understanding of human society. The line of argument in this paper proposes a holistic anthropology and holistic worldviews and leads toward versions of phenomenological

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[29] More fully stated, body/mind/soul/spirit. Mind (νοῦς – *nous*) in contemporary science is typically equated or conflated with brain, while soul (*psuke*) is often ignored. In strict terms when speaking about the humanity of Jesus we should refer to his *human nature*, while the term *anthropology* should be used only of human persons (the person of Jesus being at once human *and* divine).

philosophy/theology congruent[30] with non-dualistic mentalities.[31] Especially in relation to Melanesian cultural contexts, there remains another critical defect in received natural philosophy/natural theology that is clarified across the following two sections.

TRANSITION TO MORAL PHILOSOPHY/MORAL THEOLOGY

By the Socratic era, the development of natural philosophy progressed toward a single goal, the form specified as "the good", a goal that with Plotinus shifted from a cognitive or mental (*nous*) form to a theocratic articulation that provided the foundation for a metaphysical moral *theology* (rather than a metaphysical moral *philosophy*). Whether in philosophy as the form of "the good" or in theology as "God" (*theos*), we are dealing with metaphysical reasoning that engages either a single *cause* or a single end (*telos*), namely, a *divine cause* and a *divine end*. This manner of engaging a reasonable cause and a reasonable end is critical to the attribution of *lawfulness*, and thus to "natural philosophy"/"natural theology" that is a metaphysical *moral philosophy* or a metaphysical *moral theology*. I here name "moral" in the sense of "lawful". As I shall later amplify, this engages metaphysical reckoning that is not arbitrary, but is *lawful*, *and* engages physical reckoning is not arbitrary, but is *lawful*. Thus—as shall be amplified—we deal with

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[30] The wording "congruent" is crucial and is different from the "proof" language of syllogistic philosophical theology of the "ontological proof" or "categorical imperative" kinds. These proceed by way of the logic of premise and deductive argumentation, while phenomenology proceeds inductively by way of consistency of evidence. This latter method increasingly characterises a contemporary Catholic approach—such as most recently seen in the espousal of a framework of "listen", "reason", "propose" as a "methodology" for presenting a holistic appreciation of natural moral law as inscribed in human nature. See Congregation for Catholic Education, *"Male and Female He Created Them": Toward a Path of Dialogue on the Questions of Gender Theory and Education* (Vatican City, 10 June 2019), nos 4 and 30–32.

[31] Development of natural law understandings in Catholicism along these lines is represented by the International Theological Commission, *In Search of a Universal Ethic: A New Look at Natural Law* (Vatican City, 2009):
<http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20090520_legge-naturale_en.html>

metaphysical theology that entails *moral* lawfulness; and we deal with physical philosophy/theology that entails *moral* lawfulness.[32]

TRANSITIONS TO CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL SCIENCES UNDERSTANDINGS OF LAWFULNESS

As outlined above, the early Enlightenment inheritors of medieval natural theology influenced a transition in moral philosophy/moral theology toward what they reckoned as "inductive" (although in certain respects it remained "syllogistic") and that also was "lawful". During the later Enlightenment era we encounter philosophers who professed Christianity—yet of a deistic kind—and who promoted perspectives where human values were understood in terms described as "Utilitarian".[33] This perspective in turn gave rise during the early Modern period to the development of "social sciences" continuing into the contemporary era, where there is a "lawfulness", even if it only one of "utility".

I need now to state the sharp-end of this compressed survey of natural philosophy/natural theology argumentation, namely, the predicate of a single rational cause and a coherent rational end (or set of ends). Simply stated, this is a predicate of <u>one</u> *creator* God

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[32] Second Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et spes*) (1965), no. 36: "For by the very circumstance of their having been created [by God], all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws and order. Man must respect these as he isolates them by the appropriate methods of the individual sciences or arts. Therefore if methodical investigation within every branch of learning is carried out in a genuinely scientific manner and in accord with moral norms, it never truly conflicts with faith, for earthly matters and the concerns of faith derive from the same God. Indeed, whoever labours to penetrate the secrets of reality with a humble and steady mind, even though he is unaware of the fact, is nevertheless being led by the hand of God, who holds all things in existence, and gives them their identity" (*The documents of Vatican II with Notes and Index: Vatican Translation* [Vaticn City: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2009). An alternative and succinct catechetical statement is from *CCC*, 2500: "… God reveals himself to him [man] through the universal language of creation … the order and harmony of the cosmos …"

[33] Discourse from this later-Enlightenment/early modern period often used the term "good" (or, in more contemporary discourse, "goods and services"). Such usage does not relate to or does not directly relate to a *moral* sense of "good" nor to a Platonic sense of "the good", and "utility" may simply convey a "descriptive" status and not convey a "normative" status.

with <u>one</u> *end* or a <u>unified</u> *set of ends*. Without this predicate and without engagement of a logical reasoning process, one *does not have* "natural philosophy" or "natural theology" in the intellectual traditions that I have portrayed.[34]

LACK OF CORRESPONDENCE IN THE BACKDROP OF NATURAL PHILOSOPHY/NATURAL THEOLOGY WITH THE BACKDROP OF TRADITIONAL MELANESIAN WORLDVIEWS

It follows from my argumentation as brought to a sharp point in the last paragraph of the preceding section that "natural philosophy"/"natural theology" entails rational reasoning that proceeds from a predicate of a lawfulness in creation that follows from a prior predicate of a single and beneficent creator, namely, *one God*. The fact, however, is that the world of classical Greece did not share those predicates, it was a world of polytheism and of contesting gods.[35] A further fact is that the world of Augustine of Hippo who engaged neo-Platonic inheritances in constructing what became a Latin theological inheritance also lived in the chaotic world of a failing Roman empire with a divine emperor and also with polytheism and contesting gods.

In contrast with the worldviews as I have portrayed in the development of received natural theology, indigenous Melanesian cultural inheritances had/have multiple gods/spirits in relations that may be beneficent or malevolent.[36] That is, customary Melanesian

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[34] This recognition is neatly captured in a different perspective by Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Penguin, 1993), 392: "Anselm's formulation [of the ontological proof] emerges from a context of deep [Catholic Christian] belief and disciplined [monastic] spirituality, and may be seen as a clarified or academic summary of what is already known, rather than as an argument to be put to an outsider". This is especially true of an outsider in customary Melanesian culture.

[35] I here speak in terms of the general reception of classical Greek thinking, whereas on more sophisticated readings, polytheistic gods could be read as "secondary causes" while acknowledging a single unifying "first cause".

[36] The Melanesian anthropological record clearly attests to the absence of "uniform patterns of belief systems about deities/spirits in relation to Melanesian cosmologies and mythologies". See G. W. Trompf, *Melanesian Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 12–19; Namunu, "Melanesian Religion," 260; and E. L. Kwa, "The Role of Traditional Knowledge in Achieving Sustainable Economic Development,"

cultures prior to experiences of Christianisation never embraced a single beneficent creator.[37] These observations serve to reinforce the revelatory origins for monotheism and for divine beneficence, and, thus, to a *revelatory foundation* of the received natural philosophy/natural theology inheritance.

I subscribe to natural philosophy/natural theology, but in a manner that nests that philosophy/theology in a revelatory context or revelatory contexts—namely the revelatory contexts that the church names as the Old Dispensation (Covenant) and the New Dispensation (Covenant) in naming God as Father—and linked with the revelatory consummation in the life, death, resurrection, and glorification of the Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acknowledging this revelatory backdrop clarifies appropriate approaches for contemporary natural theology research and practice, and provides a foundation for proceeding to a Christian natural philosophy/natural theology that may be proclaimed in Melanesian contexts and lived in Melanesian cultural congruity.

<https://www.academia.edu/15192648/_The_Role_of_Traditional_Knowledge_in_Achieving_Sustainable_Economic_Development_>, 14, who writes: "The common thread that runs across this body of [Melanesian anthropological literature] is the call to revisit the diverse and unique traditional cultures of PNG …", while Namunu, *Melanesian Religions*, 252, more portrays the beneficence of Melanesian cosmic relationality; and G. W. Trompf, *Payback: The Logic of Retribution in Melanesian Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), portrays a harsher perspective on the construction of balance/relationality in Melanesian cultures.

[37] The scriptural inheritance is complex, and contains misconstructions of the God-of-kinship that is grounded in the confession of "…the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and Jacob" and successive covenantal relations, but constructions/misconstructions that are given universal repositioning in later OT prophetic texts such as Isa 66:19–20; Zech 8:23; and Tob 13:11. There nevertheless is a stark contrast with Melanesian conceptions of origin that are rooted in local past human lineages, rather than from outside-lineage in an eternal creator; and, in further contrast, where scriptural lineage origins are set in a wider "known world" that stretches beyond specific locality across a geographic sweep that may now be described as the Near East. An interesting exposition of Israelite transition from tribal to universal perspectives in religion is found in R. Firestone, "A Jewish Response to Christian Theology of Religions," in *Twenty-First Century Theologies of Religions: Retrospection and Future Prospects*, ed. Elizabeth Harris, aul Hedges, and Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi (Current of Encounter 54; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 309–27, at 311–25.

A HOLISTIC AND IMMANENTIST NATURAL THEOLOGY

The premise for natural theology in the era of Christendom—and as already noticed in the reasoning premise for Anselm—was that God's "eternal power and deity has been clearly perceived … [and thus those who do not believe in God] are *without excuse*" (Rom 1:20, emphasis added).[38] This is not a reasonable premise in traditional Melanesian cultural contexts. Although not a complete paradigm, the Areopagus address of St Paul is more suited as a basis for proclamation and reasoning in Melanesian contexts:

> Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, "To an unknown god". What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you (Acts 17:22–23).

Some amplification is needed for Melanesian contexts that may or may not have devotional shrines in the manner of the Athenians, although Melanesians may be observed to engage in respectful and reciprocal deferences to spirits/ancestors,[39] and they will not have an altar inscribed "to an unknown god". The point of this Areopagus address is an appeal engaging an "unknown" in Melanesian cultures: "The God who made the world and everything in it … is not far from each of us …" (Acts 17:24 and 27–28). Such a manner of appeal is distinct in that the proclamation is of a creation—a primal creation that precedes cognizance of ancestral inheritances and/or presences—and claims a *single origin* for the cosmological and ecological order in which human societies are situated. What has

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[38] A perspective that is implicit across the entire OT, for example: "the whole earth is full of God's glory" (Isa 6:3b).

[39] On the pervasive reciprocal transactions between spirit/ancestors and living kin, see A. L. Crawford, *AIDA: Life and Ceremony of the Gogadala* (Port Moresby: National Cultural Council of Papua New Guinea, 1981), 187–88; Namunu, "Melanesian Religions," 251–52. R. R. Wilk, *Economics and Cultures: Foundations of Economic Anthropology* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 7–8, in giving an introduction and overview of "economic anthropology", succinctly makes an observation that is generally recognised in Melanesian anthropology, that the generally "reciprocal" nature of Melanesian sociality is reflected in Melanesian religions/spiritualities. See L. Tom, "Dedication to Idolatrous Worship in Acts 17:22–23 and Implications for Dialogue between the Gospel and Melanesian Religions," *MJT* 35 (2019): 81–104.

congruence with Melanesian spiritual/cultural sensibilities is that such a manner of appeal at once conveys an *immanence* of God, who while yet remaining "above" the created order that is God's handiwork, nevertheless is *present within* an ordered worldview, within a created order.

The significance in Melanesian contexts is that in respect of human persons and human societies, such a created order is *both* "physical" *and* "metaphysical".[40] That is, human persons and human society/societies and human environments are structured both "physically" *and* "metaphysically".[41] That is, persons are integrally both body and soul (or body and spirit); and societies likewise have both organisational and relational forms that may be observed in the usual sensory manners *and also* structural forms where observation is engaged differently from the usual sensory manners—that is, persons and societies have both "physical" or "phenomenal" aspects *and* "metaphysical" or "noumenal" aspects. And—crucially in Melanesian cultural contexts—this recognition is *holistic*, rather

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[40] There is a difficulty in the above sentence insofar as Melanesian identity is not so focused on individuals ("persons", nor on "humankind") as on kinship/community—as somewhat captured by the *Tok Pisin* (Pidgin English) term *wontok* ("one talk"; that is, persons of the same language/kinship language group). In brief, identity is intensely relational and relationality less takes a nuclear family focus (see Namunu, "Indigenous Religion," 279, n. 42 for a typical amplification). Further, this identity relationality extends ecologically (for example, Namunu, "Indigenous Religion," 258, 261, and 263). Yet further, this "social ecology" is manifested in characteristic clan identification of environmental property rights: see Namunu, "Indigenous Religion," 252, 258, and 263; L. T. Jones and P. A. McGavin, *Land Mobilisation in Papua New Guinea* (Canberra: Asia Pacific Press, 2001); and C. Filer and M. Macintyre, "Grass Roots and Deep Holes: Community Responses to Mining in Melanesia," *The Contemporary Pacific* 18 (2006):215–31. This is relationality reflected in the sentence "human persons and *human societies*" in the text above.

[41] As Namunu, "Melanesian Religion", 249, contends, "… Spirits and ecology are part of a single, complex Melanesian vision of life". Trompf, *Payback*, 105, speaks of "… the seamless fabric of traditional society". See also Bernard M. Narokobi, "What is Religious Experience for a Melanesian?" in *Christ in Melanesia: Exploring Theological Issues*, Point Series (ed. James Knight; Goroka, PNG: Melanesian Istitute for Pastoral and Economic Services, 1977), 8–9: "… 'Life' is not limited by material things nor by earthly existence, but is preeminently pneumatic and numinous … [and] intrinsic to this view is the belief in personal spirits."

than dichotomous. That is, in Melanesian mentalities there is not a cleft between the "physical" human person and the "metaphysical" human person; between present human persons and their ancestral spirits; and likewise not a cleft between the "physical" human society and the "metaphysical" human society, between "physical" worlds and "metaphysical" worlds.[42]

A further nuance in using this Acts text as a reference point is recognition that the Athenian gods were not necessarily universal, and often were specific to that particular culture. Likewise, and with added emphasis, the spiritual pantheon of Melanesians is *not universal*—it is specific to ancestral narratives of particular kinship groups and their geographic boundaries. The plethora of languages that is characteristic of Melanesia, and as so exemplified in Papua New Guinea, witnesses that there is not commonality in the naming of kinship spiritual pantheons[43]—they are largely particular to each kinship/language group and acknowledged in particular reciprocal and ecological relations between kinship domains, kinship ancestors, and present kin.[44] An ecological/spiritual/theological perspective informed by the Acts text places the local Melanesian spiritual/physical worldviews/inheritances in larger perspectives— that locate local physical/spiritual worldviews in a universal context, and a context that has a universal provenance and governance that

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[42] This is contrary to a Kantian [and contemporary "positivist"] view where "… cognitional activity is restricted to a world of possible experience and that [is] a world not of metaphysical realities but of sensible phenomena," as expressed by J. A. Allen, "Bernard Lonergan's View of Natural Knowledge of God,", *HJ* 59 (2018): 484–96, at 487, and quoting, B. Lonergan, "Natural Knowledge of God," in W. F. J. Ryan and B. J. Tyrrell (eds), *A Second Collection: Papers* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 117–33, at 122.

[43] The local nature of the spiritual world is reflected in the range of vernacular terms used to describe practices of sorcery and witchcraft that relate to such beliefs: *puri puri*, *mura mura*, *dikana*, *vada*, and *mea mea* that is now commonly expressed in *Tok Pisin* and in English as *sanguma*. See Miranda Forsyth and Richard Eves (eds), *Talking it Through: Responses to Sorcery and Witchcraft Beliefs and Practices in Melanesia* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2015), 4.

[44] In most Western usages, "ecology" tends to refer to physical environments, while in Melanesian usages "ecology" is better understood holistically as embracing physical and social and noumenal environments—for example, see Namunu, "Melanesian Religion," 252, 259, and 261; and Tompf, *Payback*, 138, who speaks of "the 'ecology of religion' as a whole".

was "*un*known to them [to you]" (Acts 17:23). This is distinct from the worldview of Natural Theology proceeding from the typical reading of the Romans text—and invites a proclamation and recognition of an "unknown", "… in whom we live and move and have our being…" (Acts 17:28). Such a proclamation of an "unknown" portrays divinity as a giver, "not in need of anything" (Acts 17:25), yet nevertheless with a nearness that is congruent with Melanesian holistic and immanentist worldviews.

HOLISTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD OF NATURAL PHILOSOPHY/NATURAL THEOLOGY

As with persons, human societies are both "material" and "spiritual", and like persons the "material" and the "spiritual" are viewed or should be viewed *holistically*. I have spoken of "viewing" or of "observing"—and this is of "phenomena" that is *both* "material" *and* "spiritual". Where such observing is systemic— rather than impressions or episodic—the process may be named "phenomenological". That is, the argument is toward a "natural theology" method introduced in the abstract of this paper as "phenomenological method"—where "phenomena" are viewed holistically, embracing and integrating the observances of material and spiritual phenomena and discerning an ordering, a connaturality, an intelligibility, or a *lawfulness* across and between these domains.[45]

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[45] The term "connaturality" is drawn from a 1992 paper by Joseph Ratzinger, "If You Want Peace: Conscience and Truth", *Values in a Time of Upheaval* (trans. Brian McNeil; Eng. edn; New York: Crossroads, 2006), 75–100, at 92–93. The term "intelligibility" was suggested by Emeritus Professor John Kleinig in email communication (1 August 2019). A very apposite point is made by Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 202 and 265, where she speaks of "different procedures and methods of verification" across different disciplines (such as philosophy and anthropology). As a cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural scholar, I concur with her observation on 203 in respect of different manners of argumentation and modes of reflection "… [as these] belong to different disciplines and universes of discourse are not easily related to one another". A sense of multi-perspectual discourse/discernment is expounded in, P. A. McGavin, "Metaphors and 'Doing Theology'," *ACR* 96 (2019): 66–82. For particular applications to Melanesian contexts and in epistemological terms, see McGavin, "Epistemology and Pastoral Practice," 1–11.

Such a holistic perspective is also a more correct reading of scriptural anthropology (something I argue elsewhere, but cannot amplify here)—as well as being a perspective more congruent with Melanesian mentalities. Further, where a holistic phenomenological approach is set in a context of "The God who made the world and everything in it … and is not far from each one of us …" (Act 17:24 and 27), there follows an appreciation that the created order—both "physical" and "metaphysical"—is intelligible as being *lawful*. That is, the lawfulness of the created order is not only true of "physical"/"material" realms, but also is true of "metaphysical"/"spiritual" realms. It also follows that in adopting such holistic phenomenological perspectives we may observe inductively an ordering or lawfulness of human persons and of human societies.[46] It is in this holistic phenomenological sense of "natural philosophy"/"natural theology" that we can by inductive means engage processes by which we discern "lawfulness" in respect of human persons and human societies—that is, discern *theological ethics*.

EXAMPLES FROM PHYSICAL AND METAPHYSICAL NATURAL ORDER

From the perspective of a physician or a public health professional, inductive observations allow discernment of the *laws for bodily health*—for example, moderate the consumption of saturated-fat foods to avoid vascular and cardiac disease; and *laws for societal health*—for example, draining still-water located near domestic areas to avoid the social incidences of malarial infection. Adopting such a holistic perspective toward persons and societies correspondingly enables inductive discernment of *laws for personal spiritual health* and *laws for societal spiritual health*[47]—for

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[46] This position was neatly expressed in a 1996 interview in German subsequently published in English by Joseph Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth: Christianity and the Catholic Church at the End of the Millennium, An Interview with Peter Seewald* (trans. Adrian Walker; San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007), 231: "Not only nature has its order, its form of life that we have to heed if we want to live by and in it, man too is essentially a creature and has a creaturely order."

[47] In a different manner of expression, allows inductive discernment of a *holistic* "*human ecology*".

example, sexual profligacy entails degeneration of the spiritual life of persons and societies, quite apart from the material personal and social impacts of sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

In brief, cognitive and practical appropriation of belief in one creator God by persons and societies entails holistic appreciation of lawfulness across both physical and metaphysical realms. In respect of the metaphysical realm, this may be stated in *moral* terms—that certain personal and social attitudes and behaviours are "good", while certain personal and social attitudes and behaviours are "bad". I prefer the nomenclature of *ethics* to the nomenclature of *morals*.[48] That is, there are personal and social attitudes and behaviours that are "ethical" and personal and social attitudes and behaviours that are "unethical". Where the perspective is "theological"—rather than simply "philosophical"—we may thus speak of "theological ethics", as in the title of this paper. And, further, we may speak of theological ethics where the manner of ethical discernment is holistic and *inductive*, rather than deductive and reductionist (as has been more characteristic of "moral theology").[49]

A non-inductive method is of the "*Thou shalt*"/"*Thou shalt not*" kind, and this is termed *deontic* morality[50]—and a "deontic"

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[48] The terms are similar, with morals deriving from Latin, *moralis*, and ethics deriving from Greek, ἔθική – *ethike*, but the connotations surrounding usage have differed over time. It is common nowadays for organisations to refer to "ethics" in the sense of "ethical practice", where "ethics" is used as a header for "codes of conduct". Such usages are often better named as "protocols"—as typically they specifying procedural courses of action and/or prescribed action pathways. Such rule-based and externally imposed written standards and guidelines involve weak recourse to virtue ethics and capture deontic moral perspectives (see next footnote). Typically, they are contemporary secular expressions of an earlier "manualist tradition" that prevailed in moral theology. Admittedly, the terms "moral theology" and "theological ethics" overlap and the distinctions drawn may have as much to do with tone, as with substance—yet the prescriptive tone of manualist approaches, both earlier and contemporary, is more akin to "morals" than to "ethics". The term "virtue" derives from the Latin *virtus* ("worth" or "merit" that inheres, rather than is prescribed) (thus, "virtue ethics").

[49] Joseph Ratzinger, "The Renewal of Moral Theology: Perspectives of Vatican II and *Veritatis Splendor*," *Communio* 32 (2005): 357–368, at 358, portrayed moral theology prior to the Second Vatican Council as "characterised by the rationalism of the manualist tradition".

[50] Derived from Greek for "duty" or "obligation", δέον –*deon*, whose root is "right", *dei* (not to be confused with Latin of the same lettering). The main focus of OT

approach is not in the realm of "natural theology" in the manner proposed in this paper.[51] Natural theology/natural philosophy that has a holistic perspective involves discernment in an "inductive" manner across phenomenal *and* noumenal worlds. That is, we learn a lawfulness by holistic *observation*. Further, this does not necessarily mean "individual or individualistic observation"—we carry social memories and traditions that upon careful examination and reasoning may be seen to be "wise", may be seen to act as transmitters of holistic lawfulness for persons and for societies.

DIFFICULTIES IN THEOLOGICAL ETHICS DISCERNMENTS

Sometimes theological ethics discernments may be difficult, may take time, and may involve the affirmation or the rejection of indigenous customs and/or rejection of imported customs.[52] In this respect, relations between men and women and understandings of marriage and family are pointed examples (that for reasons of space are here only outlined).[53] When Christian missionaries first came to

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ethics is of the "thou shalt"/"thou shalt not" kind—in contrast with NT ethics that are mainly *virtue* ethics (from Latin *virtutem*, moral strength or character). The Beatitudes (Matt 5:1–12; and Luke 6:2–26) are *descriptive* of virtue ethics *states* ("blessed are the poor in spirit") rather than of virtue ethics *behaviours*. The Pauline corpus is dominated by virtue ethics—such as "love, joy, peace …" (Gal 5:22). In a scriptural context it is worth noting Jesus' words, "I am the way [*hodós*]" that *hodós* derives from ὁδος – *hodos*, which also has the sense of "right": that is, Jesus presents himself not simply as "*a* way" but as "*the* [right] way". And, although the NT gives witness to Jesus' taking-up and fulfilling "the [Mosaic] law", it is virtue ethics that dominate the witness to Jesus' teaching.

[51] The confluence of natural and revelatory aspects is acknowledged in *CCC*, 2071, as cited at the head and at the end of this paper. Nevertheless, a complication has to be reckoned with in that received Catholic manners of reasoning that are claimed as "natural theology" typically have been exercises in propositional reasoning of a syllogistic kind, and *not* natural theology as argued in this paper.

[52] Namunu, "Melanesian Religion", 280, n. 57, makes a similar observation: "Where there are such things as noble traditions in Melanesia, then we have to look for them within the culture of the Melanesian people … [and this will involve being] able to distinguish between the noble and the ignoble aspects of their traditional customs [and to] discard the ignoble ones and hold onto the noble ones….". See also McGavin, "Epistemology and Pastoral Practice," 62–64.

[53] An example of this moral discourse/discernment in respect of education is seen in P. A. McGavin, "Conversing on Ethics, Morality, and Education," *Journal of Moral Education* 42 (2013): 494–511.

what is now the Gulf Province of Papua New Guinea, there were "long houses" where men and pubescent boys gathered in socialities from which women and girls were excluded, and—although distinct ethnographically—analogous "long house" cultures also occurred in Sepik areas. Another example is from the area now named as Hela Province, where the hut of a man was separate from the hut of a woman, and where cohabitation focused on the generation of children, rather than mutuality in man/woman relations. In the past and into the present, we also widely observe in Melanesian cultures marked segmentations in the work lives of men and of women—even to the point, for example, where in some areas some crops may be "men's crops" and others only "women's crops". My readers/hearers could multiply examples—but it is evident that in traditional Melanesian cultures there was not a unified understanding of relationships between men and women, of the family, and of masculine and feminine roles and identities (nowadays often referred to as "genders").

A lack of unified understanding in these respects is also observed as we move to contemporary society—I have had research assistants from areas evangelised by the Catholic Church and who might be described as "cultural Catholics" whose manners of forming a family or of not forming a family more reflected what is now prevalent with the loss of Christian values in what is termed "western society".

Such evidence of apparent stability and viability in personal and social values across contemporary societies and across segmented customary societies indicate that—without acute discernments—phenomenological methods may not give more insights than those of cultural anthropologists and ethnographers, whose researches are partial and/or merely descriptive, rather than robustly holistic. Inducing an appreciation of genuine human ecologies recalls my earlier remarks that revelatory backdrops/premises are also evoked—for historical and contemporary anthropological records do not necessarily point to well-attuned induction of the philosophical/theological premises of the dignity of human persons, male and female, that undergird a sound phenomenological theological personal and social ethics.

In cultures such as my own in Australia (and across many decades I have noticed also in urban Papua New Guinea), there is a loss of understanding of lawful boundaries of sexual behaviours and of marriage and family; and in Melanesian societies there remain undercurrents of earlier understandings of person and society that appeared to have a validity and a stability in specific historical cultural settings but that nowadays are less-viewed as having validity or viability in changing Melanesian cultural settings. One approach is deontic: "*Do this!*"/"*Do not do that!*" This seems less persuasive in the face both of past inheritances and of prevalent contemporary social changes and influences. That is why—rather than a moral theology approach—I more espouse a *theological ethics approach*.

In respect of the instances of human relations between the sexes, in marriage, and in sexual identities and roles, I do not pretend that it is necessarily straightforward inductively to demonstrate an inherent lawfulness. While I cannot pretend to have as much depth-exposure to Melanesian cultures as to my own Australian culture, I nevertheless have an advantage from extensive travels over many decades that have provided substantial across-time and cross-cultural Melanesian observations as well as numerous international observations. Quite apart from what my Catholic religion teaches doctrinally, I have observed the dysfunctionality in families that lack stable bonds between husband and wife; I have observed how children who lack wholesome male and female parental/mentor models are disadvantaged in human maturation and fulfilment; I have observed how societies that do not have respectful understandings of masculine human dignity and respectful understandings of feminine human dignity thereby fail to uphold the dignity of human persons—and become chaotic and dysfunctional personally and socially.

SUMMING-UP THE THESIS AND METHOD OF THE PAPER

The outlines in this paper of the sweep of philosophical worldviews through to the contemporary international era bring us to situations where classical "natural law" foundations are hardly present in the dominant ideation both in international academia and in international society (societies). The qualifier "international" is

introduced in recognition that there are local societies that do not share prevalent international valuations. Historically, Melanesian societies were local societies that did not share in the historical worldviews/philosophies/theologies as here surveyed until the missionary and trade influences of the modern period.[54] In the contemporary era it is the overlay of distinctively Melanesian worldviews and international worldviews that is a particular challenge in bringing "natural law" perspectives to historical and contemporary Melanesian contexts—especially in an endeavour to adopt inductive methods and apologetics for "theological ethics". Such is the challenge of this paper—a challenge that necessarily is addressed in an exploratory way, rather than in a definitive manner.

From the viewpoint of "human understanding" as named in the promotional poster for the 2019 MATS conference that is the genesis of this paper, the thrust of my argument is that a natural theology approach leads to theological ethics that are of a *reasoned* kind—of a reasoned kind where holistic observation proposes that we assent to a coherence or lawfulness that is *inherent in nature*. Inherent in the nature of the "physical" order (what has often been termed "the laws of nature" understood materially) *and* inherent in the nature of the "metaphysical" order (what has often been referred to as "moral law"). The emphasis in this paper points to an apologetic for appealing to what in holistic observances may been seen as "reasonable", with a reasonableness that is *lawful* in a holistic perspective across the domains of "physical" and "metaphysical".

A theological ethics approach is consistent with such an appeal because the appeal is cognitively and practically attuned to social and cultural behaviours both for persons and for inheritances and for present social contexts of persons; and attuned in ways that cohere with our physical/metaphysical nature. (Although I recognise the complexities of "natures"—plural—I say "nature" to reinforce a "holistic" coherence.) Such ethical manners of living and behaviours are healthy; such behaviours and manners of living are fulfilling;

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[54] In any event, it is only with the recent modern period that one may speak of an "*international* worldview or worldviews". The point of emphasis or distinction with Melanesian societies is the degree of local specificity in worldview or worldviews, even while recognising certain pan-Melanesian characteristics of worldviews.

such behaviours and manners of living give glory to the one who gave us the gift of our nature (of our natures) and thus have the character of *worship*. This last word, "worship", takes us to the heart of our nature—our human nature (natures)—since we are made for the beauty of creature/creator relationship that properly should be named as *love* and *worship*. Repeating the second lead-quote of this paper:

> To attain a complete and certain understanding of the requirements of the natural law, sinful humanity needed [divine] revelation (*CCC*, 2071).[55]

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[55] For treatment of natural law in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, see nn. 2035–39.