TELEOLOGY AND CHRISTIANITY

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The term teleology has been used by philosophers and ethicists for generations. It is a term that brings much insight into a plethora of theories. Yet, it is also a term that has been misconstrued by countless scholars. Unfortunately, this has resulted in its adoption by systems of belief and practice which oppose one another at their very core. However, a recovery of this term is important for understanding ethical theory and should be pursued earnestly. Those within virtue ethics, particularly those with a Christian belief system, should be particularly interested in this endeavor as teleology is often associated with this ethical theory. The purpose of this text is to show that Christian doctrine is congruent with a teleological system understood rightly.¹

In order to show the correspondence between the Christian faith and teleological principles, much effort must be made in establishing the foundations of these systems. It will be shown through this pursuit that any Christian theory must be based on a metaphysical realist ontology. From this background, it will be revealed that Aristotle’s understanding of teleology is the only true candidate for compatibility with Christianity. Having established this groundwork, a comparison will be made between some of the tenets of Christian doctrine, particularly the view of Christ’s resurrection and its implications for eschatology, and the components of Aristotle’s teleology. From this

¹Christian doctrine throughout this paper should be understood as referring to the basic tenets of the faith espoused by early creeds of the Church, i.e. Nicene Creed, Apolstes Creed, and Chalcedonian Creed).
discussion, it will be shown that not only is Aristotelian teleology compatible with Christianity, it is also beneficial for an understanding of ethical behavior.

**Ontology**

Before a discussion of teleology proper can begin, it is necessary to understand the ontology of Christianity. The reason for this resides in the numerous teleological positions that have been espoused by scholars over the generations. In order to ascertain which of these positions might be compatible with the Christian faith, it is important to understand the metaphysical presuppositions of this religion. Much could be said about this subject (and has been by many others), but for the purposes of this paper, only a brief presentation will be appropriate.

It is generally held that there are two broad categories in which ethical theories are based: realism and nominalism. According to Craig Mitchell, “Realism suggests that there are universals and particulars. Realism also suggests that things exist independent of the observer.”² He goes on to say that “nominalism suggests that only particulars exist. Thus nominalism denies that there are such things as real essences.”³ This disparity concerning universals is at the heart of the numerous ethical theories which arise from these ontologies.

For many, a discussion concerning ontology is a tiresome and endless endeavor. The debate hinges on opinions and presuppositions of parties involved. Yet, for those in agreement with orthodox Christian teachings, this problem should be settled

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³Ibid.
based upon scriptural teachings. It is through a proper understanding of the text that a
Christian ethicist is able to conclude that the Bible demands a metaphysical realist
position. William Murphy says,

    The nominalist and modern rejection of ontological change undermines what
we might call the theological foundations of Christian ethics. The NT emphasizes
theological foundations for moral action through reference to realities such as the
fulfillment of the Law and prophets in the person of Christ (Mt 5:17-20),
christological transformation of human persons through the “renewal of the mind”
as the foundation for Christian moral action (Rom 12:102), and the perfection of
human freedom (Gal 5:16-25; Rom 8:1-17) in the truth (Jn 8:32), through the Holy
Spirit.4

This realist position is also espoused by O’Donovan in his book Resurrection and Moral
Order. He bases much of his assertions on the belief in a created order. Accordingly, he
says,

    The order of things that God has made is there. It is objective and mankind has
a place within it. Christian ethics, therefore, has an objective reference because it is
concerned with man’s life in accordance with this order. . . Thus Christian moral
judgments in principle address every man.5

This leads him to conclude that “Since creation, and human nature with it, are reaffirmed
in the resurrection, we must firmly reject the idea that Christian ethics is esoteric, opted
into by those who so choose, irrelevant for those who do not choose.”6 From these
statements, it can be concluded that only a teleological understanding built upon
metaphysical realism can be considered for compatibility with Christianity.

5Oliver O’Donovan, Resurrection and Moral Order (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans,
1986), 17.
6Ibid.
Teleological Views

Simply answering the question of whether Christianity is teleological is no simple task. There are numerous facets of teleology that must be analyzed in order to ascertain its role in the Christian faith system. Among these, a primary matter of concern is the exact nature and definition of teleology. Any cursory glance at this subject reveals that there is a plethora of opinions as to how teleology should be understood. Without preliminary agreement as to the meaning of this term, there is no hope in attempting a task as weighty as determining the teleological nature of Christianity.

Establishing complete agreement among scholars concerning the proper understanding of teleology is quite possibly an impossible task. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, it will be understood that Aristotle’s view of teleology is the most appropriate. Other views, such as those put forth by consequentialist are inadequate and misrepresent of this position. Not only is it the most accurate understanding of the term, but Aristotle’s teleology is also based on realist presuppositions, and is therefore, the best candidate for evaluation with Christianity. It is for this reason that his teleology with be analyzed and compared with Christian doctrine.

Teleological Components

Now that it has been established that Aristotle’s teleology is the best option for consideration in relation to Christianity, it is necessary to analyze the primary components of his teleology. While there are aspects of Aristotle’s ethical beliefs that are
contrary to the Christian faith, his system of teleology will be shown to be compatible.\textsuperscript{7} In Aristotle’s \textit{Physics}, he presents four causes as his understanding of action or being.\textsuperscript{8} Each of these causes, in what is commonly called his entelechy, play an important role in Aristotle’s causal explanation.\textsuperscript{9} The first cause is labeled the formal cause. This cause is related to “what it is to be something.”\textsuperscript{10} Understanding this cause is essential for understanding Aristotle’s teleology. As such, much detail will be presented and analyzed in the following paragraphs. The second cause is the material cause. By this, Aristotle is referring to the components which comprise a subject. In explaining this, Aristotle says,

\begin{quote}
For letters are the causes of syllables, and the material is the cause of manufactured articles, and fire and the like are the causes of the whole, and the premises are causes of the conclusion, in the sense of that out of which these respectively are made.”\textsuperscript{11}
\end{quote}

The label commonly associated with the third cause is efficient cause. Aristotle says this cause is “Then again (3), there must be something to initiate the process of the change or its cessation when the process is completed, such as the act of a voluntary agent (of the smith, for instance), or the father who begets a child.”\textsuperscript{12} The last cause, often called the

\textsuperscript{7}John E. Hare, \textit{God and Morality: A Philosophical History} (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 19.

\textsuperscript{8}Aristotle, \textit{The Physics}, trans. Philip H. Wicksteed and Francis M. Cornford (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 133; It is understood that “action” or “being” may not be sufficient to explain what exactly Aristotle believes the causes refer to. For the purposes of this paper, these terms will be employed with the understanding that others might also be used. Monte Ransome Johnson, \textit{Aristotle on Teleology} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 40-41 provides an adequate discussion of the term “cause” and what it relates to.

\textsuperscript{9}Mitchell, \textit{Charts of Christian Ethics}, chart 5; Johnson, \textit{Aristotle on Teleology}, 41.

\textsuperscript{10}Johnson, \textit{Aristotle on Teleology}, 46.

\textsuperscript{11}Aristotle, \textit{Physics}, 133.

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., 129.
final cause, is typically what is referred to when considering the subject of teleology. Frequently, this cause is translated as the cause “for the sake of which.”¹³ This understanding provides an apt description for this cause at this point. Further discussion will be presented on this subject following the material related to the formal cause.

One of the aspects which is essential to comprehending Aristotle’s entelechy is to understand that Aristotle views each of these causes as holding an important and explanatory role. Johnson describes this by saying,

Demonstrative knowledge requires syllogism of which the cause or explanation is the middle term. In *Posterior Analytics* ii 11, Aristotle names the four kinds of cause, and proceeds to discuss how it is that each can play the explanatory role of middle term in a scientific demonstration.¹⁴

Yet, when considering the idea of teleology, the material and efficient causes do not play as integral a role as the formal and final cause. Aristotle says, “As we know, there are four basic Causes: (1) “that for the sake of which” the thing exists, considered as its “End”; (2) the *logos* of the thing’s essence (really these first two should be taken as being almost on and the same).”¹⁵ As such, discussion will be limited to the latter with an understanding of the role of the former.

¹³Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology*, 64.

¹⁴Ibid., 49.

Formal Cause

The formal cause, as used by Aristotle, might better be understood as “what it is to be something.” Unfortunately, the exact meaning of this phrase is difficult to comprehend. Aristotle describes it by saying,

Then, naturally, (2) the thing in question cannot be there unless the material has actually received the form or characteristics of the type, conformity to which brings it within the definition of the thing we say it is, whether specifically or generically. Thus the interval between two notes is not an octave unless the notes are in the ration or 2 to 1; nor do they stand at a musical interval at all unless they conform to one or other of the recognized ratios.17

In his effort to explain this difficult Greek phrase, Johnson says,

And tò tiv ὧν εἰ'ναι is in several places connected by Aristotle with the definition of a thing. To be more specific, it indicates the object of a definition – what is being defined: ‘what it is for something to be’, whose formula is definition, is also called the substance of each thing.18

He goes on to say,

Consider as a translation for tò tiv ὧν εἰ'ναι ‘that which something [always or all along] was to be’. This could apply to Aristotle’s account of generation, which holds that the form pre-exists before an embodied thing comes to be in matter. This is especially important in cases of biological generation and development. For in such cases, not every phase of development is the basis for its explanation, but only the animal ‘in the state of completion’ (ejntelevceia), i.e. a fully mature adult, which corresponds to its form.19

16Johnson, Aristotle on Teleology, 46.
17Aristotle, Physics, 129.
18Johnson, Aristotle on Teleology, 48.
19Ibid.
Understanding what is meant by Aristotle when referencing this form is pertinent to comprehending his teleology. The formal cause is one of the driving factors in his position. The form is what an entity was created to become.

A belief in the creative work of God is foundational to a Christian understanding of the formal cause. According to Hawkins, the form of a tiger should be understood as the fully mature tiger with all of the potentialities realized.\(^{20}\) In the same way, the form of man is a perfected being. A Christian view of the creation of mankind gives exactly this potential. The basis for this is the necessity of order, which results from a belief in a creator. O’Donovan says,

> It is true, of course, that to speak of this world as ‘created’ is already to speak of an order. In the first words of the creed, before we have tried to sketch an outline of created order with the phrase ‘heaven and earth’, simply as we say ‘I believe in God the Creator’, we are stating that the world is an ordered totality. By virtue of the fact that there is a Creator, there is also a creation that is ordered to its Creator, a world which exists as his creation and in no other way, so that by its very existence it points to God.\(^{21}\)

The belief in a creator and therefore, in his creation, necessitates a belief in order. To have a creation with no order is illogical and contrary to God’s nature.

The fact that Christianity holds to a created order is foundational to a teleological understanding. When order is implemented, it is done so with a purpose toward an end. Relating to the form of humanity, this end is a human with realized potentialities. Johnson describes the order of mankind by saying, “Something persists through embryonic, infant, pubescent, adult, and geriatric stages. The definition and


substance (form) of biological entities refers to a fixed point in a continuous development." Thus, the form of man is that fixed point whereby potentialities are achieved and form is reached.

The obvious question which results from this analysis is "at what stage is a complete human form reached?" Some follow an avenue of pursuit whereby they believe that certain criteria may be discerned and established to define the merits of a "complete" human. Yet, this results in great difficulty, as defining this "completion" is open to opinion and individual whims. However, the Christian does not have such difficulty. A belief in scriptural teaching gives the follower of Christ the ability to discern what the form of man is that God intends. The book of Genesis teaches that man was created in the image of God. The exact nature of what this image entails is difficult to discern. However, if the image of God is to reflect the nature of the Divine, then the possibilities for a "complete" man seem to entail such facets as perfect morality, virtuous character, and freedom of will. It could be endlessly argued that other elements are implied (and they may be), but an exact understanding of this term is not necessary at this point.

A thorough pursuit of the precise meaning of "image of God" is not needed for the Christian believer because of the understanding that this "image" was marred after the fall. Genesis 3 teaches that when Adam and Eve chose to disobey the command of the Lord, consequences resulted. The physical cost of the fall is apparent from the penalty prescribed by God, but it appears that this was only representative of the total cost of this

22Johnson, Aristotle on Teleology, 48-49.
23Genesis 1:26-27.
act. Christian history teaches that the greater cost of the fall was the marring of the “image of God.”25 Exactly what this entails is not fully understood and, for present purposes, does not need to be. The important aspect of this doctrine is the belief that man is no longer able to live in the full form intended by the Lord. The sin that man entered into has resulted in a lack of personal ability to achieve the status of “complete” man.

It is at this point that the teleology of Christianity really begins to reveal its nature and differentiate itself from other belief systems. The reason for this resides in the belief that it is only through the resurrection of Christ that the form of man can be achieved. Christian doctrine teaches that man is able to be restored to the place God originally intended for mankind because of Christ’s resurrection from the dead. It is through a belief in this occurrence that one can hope for his own restoration. This work of Jesus provides a dramatic reversal of the work of Adam. O’Donovan says,

The meaning of the resurrection, as Saint Paul presents it, is that it is God’s final and decisive word on the life of his creature, Adam. It is, in the first place, God’s reversal of Adam’s choice of sin and death: ‘As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive’ (1 Cor. 15:22). In the second place, and precisely because it is a reversal of Adam’s decision to die, the resurrection of Christ is a new affirmation of God’s first decision that Adam should live, an affirmation that goes beyond and transforms the initial gift of life: ‘The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit’ (15:45). The work of the Creator who made Adam, who brought into being an order of things in which humanity has a place, is affirmed once and for all by this conclusion.26

The resurrection of Christ was absolutely essential to the restoration of man to his “complete” form. O’Donovan says,

It might have been possible, we could say, before Christ rose from the dead, for someone to wonder whether creation was a lost cause. If the creature consistently


acted to uncreate itself, and with itself to uncreate the rest of creation, did this not mean that God’s handiwork was flawed beyond hope of repair? It might have been possible before Christ rose from the dead to answer in good faith, Yes. Before God raised Jesus from the dead, the hope that we call ‘gnostic’, the hope of redemption from creation rather than for the redemption of creation, might have appeared to be the only possible hope. ‘But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead . . .’ (15:20). That fact rules out those other possibilities, for in the second Adam the first is rescued. The deviance of his will, its fateful leaning towards death, has not been allowed to uncreate what God created.27

Without a belief in the resurrection of Jesus, Scripture dictates a hopeless striving of man. The form of man has no hope of realization without this single event in history.

O’Donovan again explains,

Man’s life on earth is important to God; he has given it its order; it matters that it should conform to the order he has given it. Once we have grasped that, we can understand how this order requires of us both a denial of all that threatens to become disordered and a progress towards a life which goes beyond this order without negating it. But when the gospel is preached without the resurrection (as it was preached by the romantic idealists more or less throughout the nineteenth century), then, of course, the cross and the ascension, collapsed together without their centre, become symbols for a Gnostic other-worldliness.28

The resurrection of Christ allows for the resurrection of man and a restoration of the form of man. Of course, this form is not fully realized here on earth. It is rooted in the eschatological hope of the faith. Yet, even though the form is a future reality, it influences the daily living of individuals. Christians adopt the teaching that Christ is the picture of the ultimate form of man. Therefore, they strive to live in the way of the “complete” man to the extent that they are able while on earth. Accordingly, Kent explains Augustine’s view of the role of Christ by saying, “You ought to value most highly your patience, kindness, willingness to forgive, the courage to do the right thing

27Ibid., 14.

despite the worldly costs, and other virtues exemplified by Christ. For this reason, Augustine declares Christ’s entire life on earth a splendid education in morals.”29 Christ is the model of the virtuous man and therefore should be followed in pursuit of the form of man originally intended by God.

**Final Cause**

With an understanding of Aristotle’s formal cause, it is now appropriate to pursue a view of his final cause. It is this cause which is most frequently associated with teleology and, rightly so, for it is in the final cause that the purpose of action is realized. Johnson describes this cause by saying,

> The words ‘purpose’ and ‘aim’ are commonly used as more elegant renderings of tov ou' eÊJneka. But as with tò tiv ὧν εἶναι, it is more accurate here again to use an awkward English phrase like ‘that for the sake of which’ or, more technically, ‘the [cause] for the sake of which’ to translate the awkward Greek phrase. . . Essentially, the phrase tov ou' eÊJneka signifies a causal reification of this ‘for the sake of’ or ‘in order to’.30

This final cause addresses the “why?” of an action. It is in this aspect that the goal is revealed.

At first there might be some confusion as to the difference between this final cause and the previously mentioned formal cause. In fact, these causes are very similar and are related to one another in an integral way. However, there is a distinct difference between the two. Whereas the form of man relates to the completed man, this does not mean that the completed man is the aim whereby man is focusing his life. The form of

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30Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology*, 64.
man is essential for the aim to be fulfilled, but it, in itself, is not the aim. Rather, Aristotle proposes the ultimate end of man as *eudaimonia*, or happiness.\(^{31}\) In order for this happiness to be achieved in man, the form of man must be complete. Therefore, the formal cause could be understood as the avenue whereby the final cause is pursued.

According to Aristotle, this final cause has two ways in which it is to be understood in animate things.\(^{32}\) He says, “For ‘that for the sake of which’ is twofold: that of which [i.e. the aim] and that for which [i.e. the beneficiary].”\(^{33}\) Johnson explicates this by saying, “Happiness and health correspond to that for the sake of which of which (dittón); the individual and the patient to that for the sake of which for which (ouJ eJÈneka-wJ’).”\(^{34}\) According to this understanding, the ultimate goal being pursued by individuals is happiness, but as with any pursuit, there are beneficiaries.

A brief discussion of each of these two aspects of understanding the final cause is necessary before a dialogue as to their relation to Christianity can begin. First, it has already been stated that the aim of humanity is happiness, or *eudaimonia*. This is by no means an uncontroversial claim. For Aristotle, happiness is the final goal. Yet, some might hold to other ends of humanity. It is clear from any cursory glance at an individual’s life that happiness is not the only goal pursued by man. In the above example, shelter was pursued. Any man might pursue any numbers of such ends. Often, 

\(^{31}\)There is much debate as to the proper way to understand *eudaimonia*. While this is an important matter, space does not permit a thorough analysis. See Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology*, 221.


\(^{34}\)Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology*, 65.
these ends might provide no initial form of happiness at all. However, Aristotle acknowledges this fact, but is not deterred. Rather, it is his belief that while multiple ends are pursued by individuals, if the reason for these pursuits is investigated, it will eventually lead to the aim of happiness. Aristotle says,

Well, happiness more than anything else is thought to be just such an end, because we always choose it for itself, and never for any other reason. It is different with honour, pleasure, intelligence and good qualities generally. We do choose them partly for themselves (because we should choose each one of them irrespectively of any consequences); but we choose them also for the sake of our happiness, in the belief that they will be instrumental in promoting it. On the other hand nobody chooses happiness for their sake, or in general for any other reason.

Thus, Aristotle puts forth the view that particular ends may be numerous and vary greatly, but what is called the ultimate end of humanity is happiness. Similarly, Aquinas also held that all action is pursuant of one ultimate end. McInerny describes his view by saying,

Aristotle did not want to settle for the claim that all actions aim at some end or other: he holds that there is some end or good for the sake of which all actions are performed. That it, there is an overarching, comprehensive, ultimate end of all that human beings do. Aquinas moves toward the same position by a series of steps.

With this above understanding of the ultimate end, the question of who is the beneficiary of such an end of mankind now arises. Some might hold that God is the beneficiary, for otherwise the pursuits of man would be vain pursuits. Yet, Johnson goes

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35 Leo J. Edlers, *The Ethics of St. Thomas Aquinas: Happiness, Natural Law and The Virtues* (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Peter Lang, 2005), 36.


to great lengths to show that God cannot be a beneficiary of mankind.  According to Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, the primary cause of creation is an unmoved mover. This being (or beings) is perfect in all regards. As such, it cannot be changed. Any change would mean a prior state was imperfect. Clearly, to be the beneficiary of an action would be to be changed in some way. As such, the unmoved mover cannot be the beneficiary in the final cause. While this conclusion is not agreed upon by all, it will be assumed for the purposes of this paper. Therefore, according to this view, the beneficiary of the complete form of man would necessarily be that individual.

Having established the foundations for an Aristotelian view of the final cause, Christianity can now be compared to this understanding. The foundation of Aristotle’s teleology, as previously discussed, is the idea of eudaimonia, or happiness. Many Christian scholars have voiced strong agreement with Aristotle’s assertion. Elders says, “St. Augustin[e] shares this view and observes that all want to be happy. Later medieval theologians also considered the search for happiness an essential element of the Christian view of man.” He goes on to list such notable Christians as St. Anselm, William of Auverge, and St. Thomas Aquinas as expressing agreement with Aristotle’s view of


42Space does not permit further investigation into this matter. Either position could be said to be compatible with Christianity. Therefore, the conclusion presenting the most difficulty will be utilized here.

43Elders, *Ethics of Aquinas*, 35
happiness. Yet, these opinions are not satisfactory for putting forth such a claim as Christianity being a teleological faith. Rather, the specific teaching of the religion must be investigated in order to make such a statement.

The scriptural teachings concerning the fall and its consequences (as previously discussed) necessitate an eschatological understanding of this final cause. If it is impossible for man to achieve the fullness of the image of God in this life, then it would be absurd to understand human happiness as being achievable in the present world. Elders, in describing the teachings of Aquinas, says,

Finally, the perfect virtues required for happiness can only be reached with difficulty and after a long period of practice. St. Thomas can only conclude that perfect happiness is not found in this present life, but in after-life during which our immaterial soul continues to exist.”

He gives further reasoning for this by stating, “he [Aquinas] corrects Aristotle in his description of happiness. Aristotle was thinking of the imperfect happiness people can attain in this life, but this cannot be the ultimate end, since ultimate happiness must entirely satiate us.” Thus, the happiness taught by Aristotle, if understood in a Christian sense, is tied to eschatology and therefore, to the resurrection of Christ.

If happiness is understood as otherworldly, what is meant by this? Elders summary of Aquinas is again beneficial in this regard. He says,

In his *Summa contra gentiles* Aquinas discusses several theories about what brings happiness and concludes that supreme human happiness must consist in that activity which is proper to man only, sc. In the contemplation of truth by which he

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44Ibid., 35.

45Ibid., 41.

46Ibid., 38
enters into contact with what is above him and is least dependent on external things. The object of this contemplation is not the material world, but the highest reality, God.\textsuperscript{47}

Kent, in speaking about Augustine, says,

Notice that Augustine shares the Stoics’ conviction that we can be made happy only by that through which we are made good, but disagrees, vehemently, about what this is. In Stoic ethics, that which makes us good and happy is our own character, whereas in Augustine’s ethics, it is God: a divine being, not a human state of mind. Augustine himself sees no serious conflict between declaring happiness our supreme good and declaring God our supreme good, for love itself works to overcome the distinction.\textsuperscript{48}

For Aquinas and Augustine, some sort of love for God and/or contemplation of Him forms the ultimate end: happiness.\textsuperscript{49} This is in absolute agreement with the teachings of Scripture, particularly of Christ himself. It is Christ who instructs His followers in that the greatest commandment is to “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matt 22:37, NASB).

This understanding of happiness is clearly compatible with both Aristotle’s teleology and Christianity. Yet, the question of the beneficiary still arises. Scripture teaches that selfishness is a vice.\textsuperscript{50} Is not the pursuit of happiness the ultimate in selfishness? While it may appear this way at first, this is not a good understanding of what it is to be a beneficiary. Pursuing happiness is not pursuing selfish desires just as being the beneficiary of shelter from a building is not selfish. Rather, it is a fulfillment of the human form and the desire of the Creator. There are clear benefits for the individual,

\textsuperscript{47}\textit{Ibid.}, 40-41.

\textsuperscript{48}Kent, “Augustine’s Ethic,” 215-16.

\textsuperscript{49}Contemplation should be seen as an outworking of love for God.

\textsuperscript{50}James 3:16
but these should not be construed as vices in any way. O’Donovan’s understanding of the final cause is beneficial in this regard. He understands the end of man in terms of a transformation of the individual. A person is the beneficiary of this transformation, but it is ultimately done to meet the ordered plan of God. He says,

We must go beyond thinking of redemption as a mere restoration, the return of a status quo ante. The redemption of the world, and of mankind, does not serve only to put us back in the Garden of Eden where we began. It leads us on to further destiny to which, even in the Garden of Eden, we were already directed. For the creation was given to us with its own goal and purpose, so that the outcome of the world’s story cannot be a cyclical return to the beginnings, but must fulfilment that purpose in the freeing of creation from its ‘futility’ (Rom. 8:20). This fulfilment is what is implied when we speak of the ‘transformation’ of the created order.

The eschatological transformation of the world is neither the mere repetition of the created world nor its negation. It is its fulfilment, its telos or end.  

Likewise, Aquinas understands the effects on the individual as the perfecting of the person. McInerny summarizes his view by stating,

But it is not absurd to say, indeed it is inescapably true, that insofar as a human agent performs a human act, that action is undertaken on the implicit assumption that to act in that way is perfective of the agent. (Here “perfective” is tied to the act’s reaching its term, that is, being a perfected act. Holiness or extraordinary goodness is not meant.) That is Aquinas’s basis for saying that all human agents actually pursue the same ultimate end.

There appears from this nothing contrary to Christian doctrine. Rather, this teleological system provides a great system for understanding some of the essential elements of eschatology.

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\[\text{O’Donovan, Resurrection and Moral Order, 55.}\]

\[\text{McInerny, “Ethics,” 201.}\]
The result of this teleological facet of the Christian faith is that it gives great guidance for an ethical theory. In particular, virtue theories have been grounded on this system.\textsuperscript{53} In \textit{The Moral Quest}, Stanley Grenz says,

If this is who we are, the ethical imperative follows, an imperative which in reality is closely connected to an indicative: Be/become who you are! Live in the present in accordance with the perfect conformity to Christ which one day you will enjoy, because in fact you are the glorified saints who you will one day be.”\textsuperscript{54}

It is in this way that the virtuous agent is to live. Virtue is modeled in the life of Christ, and though the virtuous life cannot be achieved at present, it should be pursued in everyday living.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Teleology has played a significant role in religion, philosophy, and ethics since before Aristotle.\textsuperscript{55} Yet, it is a misunderstood notion, frequently appealed to with little regard to its true meaning. Stating that Christianity has a teleological component is a dangerous endeavor, as this term is so often misapplied. However, by pursuing a thorough understanding of this system from a metaphysical realist position, it becomes quite apparent that Christianity demands an Aristotelian teleological theory. Not only is Aristotle’s teleology founded upon the same metaphysical presuppositions, but the essential components to his teleology, the formal and final causes, correspond to Christian teachings. O’Donovan summarizes this poignantly by saying,


The resurrection of Christ, upon which Christian ethics is founded, vindicates the created order in this double sense: it redeems it and it transforms it. The important thing is not which of these two aspects of the resurrection we emphasize at any moment, but that it does properly have both aspects; origin and end are inseparably united in it. The humanity of Adam is carried forward to its ‘supernatural’ destiny precisely as it is rescued from its ‘sub-natural’ condition of enslavement to sin and death. The vindication of that humanity in Christ’s resurrection includes both its redemption and its transformation.\footnote{O’Donovan, \textit{Resurrection and Moral Order}, 56-7.}
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