Theology is a science. In *Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace*, the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas in *Summa theologiae prima pars*, q. 1—that sacred doctrine constitutes a body of knowledge established by principles revealed by God—receives a full-throated defense by Steven Long. The author, a professor of theology at Ave Maria University in Naples, Florida, and a corresponding academician of the Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome, contends that there is a real distinction between a natural, proportionate end for human beings and the final, supernatural end, the beatific vision. This necessary distinction is collapsed, the author asserts, when certain theologians, most notably Henri de Lubac, begin a well-intentioned search for genuine theological ends by responding to the currents of historical contingency rather than beginning with immutable principles.

The author’s defense of the crucial distinction between a proportionate, natural end and a supernatural end takes shape in two parts. The first two chapters of *Natura Pura* uncover Aquinas’s teaching on the twofold end of human beings. The author performs this task not as a historian of Aquinas but as a theologian whose discovery of Aquinas’s thought on the issue leads to true knowledge of God. The following two chapters and conclusion form the second part of the book. Here the author expounds how the doctrine of *natura pura* is affected by contemporary trends in philosophy and theology in the West, especially in North America.

Chapter 1, “On the Loss, and the Recovery, of Nature as a Theonomic Principle: Reflections on the Nature/Grace Controversy,” is foundational. Originally published as part of a symposium on Lawrence Feingold’s *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters*, it is the best chapter in the book. The author mentions frequently the magisterial nature of Dr. Feingold’s work and encourages his own readers to study Feingold’s text. While Feingold articulates the distinction between a natural, proportionate end and a supernatural end in the teaching of Aquinas, Long’s first chapter takes the further step of addressing Henri de Lubac’s interpretation of Aquinas’s teaching.

In the first part of the tripartite chapter, the author sketches the general framework of the disputes concerning Aquinas’s teaching on nature and grace. Long shows that Aquinas’s teaching on nature and grace comprises two sets of texts. The first set shows that God is the end of all human beings, that human beings have a natural desire to see God, and that nature’s desires cannot exist in vain. The second set shows that human beings have a final, supernatural end in eternal beatitude. What is more, these texts state that this supernatural end is not proper to human beings by nature but exists solely out of God’s generosity toward His creatures. Long shows that, according to Aquinas, the lack of such a supernatural end would not constitute a punishment for human beings, because their natural end remains intact. It is only through a consideration of both sets of texts and their relationship to one another that an accurate picture of Aquinas’s doctrine can be gained and theological errors avoided: “A wrong emphasis on this question will generally lead to the symbiotic evils on the one hand of fideism and, on the other, of rationalism: twin aberrations” (13). Yet, the author argues, de Lubac’s appropriation of Aquinas’s text is exclusionary; he emphasizes the first set of texts to the abandonment of the second. The well-intentioned attempt of the historian to accentuate one set of texts in order to correct rationalistic excess while neglecting
an attempt at theological synthesis between texts that are prima facie problematic leads to error. It is in the second part of the first chapter that the author delineates the nature of the error in question.

The author maintains that de Lubac’s misreading of Aquinas leads to a flawed conception of obediential potency. Broadly speaking, obediential potency refers to a human’s receptivity to a divine motion that elevates him to the supernatural order. A reading of Aquinas that recognizes a clear distinction between the natural and supernatural end of human beings results in a robust notion of obediential potency. The human creature receives from the divine motion an actuation that elevates him to an end disproportionate to his nature. On de Lubac’s reading, in which the distinction is not stated so clearly, obediential potency becomes merely a susceptibility to miracle. In this interpretation, the real distinction between nature and grace itself is blurred. Nature is changeable by divine agency, but since the emphasis is placed on the mutability of nature, any sense that the divine motion borne from the perfect liberal of God’s goodness raises the human creature to an end completely exceeding his nature is lost. In trying to combat an overly rationalistic conception of nature that omits a theonomic principle, de Lubac unwittingly underemphasizes the radical quality of man’s supernatural call to beatitude.

While the author takes great pains to show the missteps in de Lubac’s reading of Aquinas, he never imputes bad motives, nor does he fail to appreciate the subtlety of de Lubac’s intellect. In the third part of the chapter, the author considers the motivations for de Lubac’s analysis. The author traces the source of de Lubac’s concerns to the sixteenth-century theologian Luis de Molina and his doctrine of grace. Anxious to affirm and protect freedom of will, Molina has recourse to the idea of God’s scientia media—God’s knowledge of what each creature would do in all possible circumstances. This approach lets Molina preserve the doctrines of God’s perfect foreknowledge and God’s complete success in saving all the elect, without invoking any sort of grace that infallibly moves the human will. This doctrine is based on a conception of freedom of indifference that originated with the Franciscan theologian William of Ockham. Ockham’s freedom consists of a choice between contraries and is independent from any external influences. But the assertion that freedom exists independent of divine agency plays directly into the hands of those who would completely remove God from any consideration of nature. This backdrop may create the impression that professing a clear distinction between nature and grace is simply another instance of trying to claim that the natural world is autonomous, independent from the agency of divine providence. This leads the author to conclude that while “de Lubac was correct in seeking the answer in teleology, and correct again in seeking an answer that would once more establish the theonomic character of natural order,” he was incorrect “in supposing that natural teleology in itself could be shoehorned into or equated with a supernatural trajectory” (43). The argument of the first chapter lays the artifice for all the arguments to come.

In the second chapter, “A Criticism of Nature as Vacuole for Grace,” the author analyzes what he sees as a natural outgrowth of de Lubac’s thought in Hans Urs von Balthasar’s The Theology of Karl Barth (1951). Through an analysis of von Balthasar’s text, the author shows that von Balthasar holds a limit concept of nature: nature is intelligible only insofar as it is able to act as a receptacle for grace. Although von Balthasar is correct in pointing out that all of the created order is affected by grace, it does not follow that it is impossible to abstract a concept of pure nature. The author then points out the difficulties von Balthasar’s doctrine has for his own theology. More importantly, the author draws attention to the necessity of an intrinsically intelligible concept of nature for the evangelical mission of the Church. Moral teachings that govern relations between human beings and the human good suppose a natural frame of reference for their intelligibility. The absence of a proportionate nature for human beings then destroys the intelligibility of Church teaching in matters of faith and morals.
In the second part of the book, the author shifts his attention to contemporary trends in philosophy and theology. The third chapter, “On the Impropriety of Treating Theology’s Handmaiden like an Analytic,” the author examines the preponderance of analytic philosophy in Anglo-American faculties. If nature only receives ontological intelligibility with grace, then it belongs to theology alone to provide a real understanding of nature. Philosophy, then, is not only degraded from her traditional status as theology’s handmaiden, but is also deprived of her sapiential nature, reducing her to an instrument of logic susceptible to as many uses as there are philosophers. The fourth chapter, “Why Natura Pura Is Not the Theological Stalking Horse for Secularist Minimalism or Pelagianism,” sees the author responding to a criticism of the doctrine of natura pura, namely, if created nature were intelligible in itself without reference to grace, then the necessity of grace is undermined. Engaging the thought of Jacques Maritain, Jean Porter, and David Schindler, the author demonstrates both that a doctrine of natura pura does not undercut the necessity of grace and that a healthy public culture relies on an approbation of the praeambula fidei and the truths of natural law, two doctrines that rely on the intelligibility of nature per se.

The present volume marks a real contribution to Thomistic studies and philosophical theology. Long’s intelligence, close treatment of Aquinas’s texts, and illustrative examples make this a useful text for all those interested in moral theology, grace, and Thomism. This handsome volume, put together as part of Fordham University Press’s Moral Philosophy and Moral Theology series, constitutes a necessary tool for understanding the mind of Aquinas on the doctrine of grace in relation to more modern theologians. Long’s text takes on difficult topics, but it will prove useful for both advanced undergraduates and graduate students. University libraries with a philosophy or theology section require this book.

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The Cancer Experience:
The Doctor, the Patient, the Journey
by Roy B. Sessions


Roy B. Sessions, MD, a distinguished retired otolaryngologist and current professor of otolaryngology at the Medical University of South Carolina, has written a book whose title suggests a focused analysis of the disease of cancer and the challenges faced by patients and physicians contending with its often harsh existential reality. As such, it may recall other books offering insights into the medical profession and physician culture, such as How Doctors Think, by Jerome Groopman, MD (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007), which is directly intended to assist patients who are negotiating their treatments and hope to improve both their experience and outcome.

A cancer patient might be surprised to discover here a work that is far less specific to this end, one that instead surveys an extremely broad array of important social, cultural, and bioethical topics. The author’s