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## INTRODUCTION

This yearbook's title bears, unusually, two dates: 2014-2015. Originally, starting in 1981, the 'Jaarboek' appeared in the year indicated in the title. The *Jaarboek 1985*, however, did not appear until in 1986. Since then, the 'Jaarboek' appeared in the next year. It gave the yearbook the character of an annual publication which presented work undertaken in the year before, the year reviewed. It also gave some at least the unfortunate impression that the 'Jaarboek' was always one year behind. In the course of years, next to this, the editorial committee did not hesitate to publish work which was accomplished after the year under review. This yearbook is a case in point, since it publishes two lectures that were held not in 2014 but in 2015. For these reasons we decided to give this year's title two dates, in order to be able to continue next year with the *Jaarboek 2016*.

This yearbook appears in between two international conferences that the Thomas Instituut organized on Aquinas and virtue, and its content is marked by that. The first contribution is written by Tomáš Machula, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Theology of the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, Czech Republic. Machula considers the cardinal virtues as a way to the theological virtues and vice versa. We planned to publish this paper, originally presented at our conference on Thomas Aquinas and the theological virtues, in December 2013, in the conference volume (which appeared this year at Peeters Publishers, Louvain, Belgium). Unfortunately something came in between. But we are glad to publish this paper now in our yearbook.

Our next conference, in December 2015, will address Aquinas on the moral virtues, acquired and infused. The topic of 'pagan virtues' is directly related to this, and the subject of the second contribution to this yearbook, written by professor Anthony WANG Tao, professor of Holy Spirit Seminary College of

Theology and Philosophy in Hongkong, China. Prof. Wang intended to participate in our 2015 conference, but will only be able to be 'present' in the form of this written contribution. What does it mean that the pagan can possess true but imperfect virtues?

A third contribution by Pim Valkenberg, member of our Institute and professor of Religion and Culture at the Catholic University of America, discusses three recent bookpublications on Aquinas in the USA, that concern Aquinas's ethics directly or indirectly; books written by Frederick Bauerschmidt, David Decosimo, and Matthew Tapie, participants and lecturers at our conferences of 2013 and 2015. The title of Valkenberg's contribution, "More than Hillbilly Thomists: Three attentive readers of Aquinas", is telling and inviting; it is explained in the paper itself.

The fourth and last contribution to this section of our yearbook dealing with Aquinas's ethics, is written by His Eminence Willem Jacobus Cardinal Eijk, archbishop of Utrecht. Cardinal Eijk delivered a lecture on ethics and technology in February (Tilburg) and in June (Utrecht) at the Tilburg School of Catholic Theology, being the Annual Lecture Christianity and Society. We invited him to publish his lecture in our yearbook, since he fundamentally refers to Aristotelean and Thomistic ethical accounts. We kindly thank Cardinal Eijk - who is also Grand-Chancellor of the Faculty of Catholic Theology of Tilburg University, the Faculty the Thomas Instituut belongs to - for his willingness to agree with publication in our yearbook.

Two more studies, concerning other topics than Aquinas's ethics, complete this yearbook. First, the undersigned was invited to give in April 2015 a lecture at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun, Poland. I addressed the issue of Aquinas interpreting Scripture on the Resurrection of Christ. It was my contribution to a stimulating and fascinating conference on the scriptural commentaries of Thomas Aquinas, organised by the professors Piotr Roszak and Jörgen Vijgen.

Second and last, Alexis Szejnoga, deacon in the parish of St. John XXIII (diocese 's-Hertogenbosch), publishes part of his research on

the ways in which Aquinas receives Avicennian thought in his *De Ente et Essentia*. The research undertaken issued forth in a thesis prepared at the researchmaster of the Tilburg Schools of Humanities and Catholic Theology in 2014.

On May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Syds Wiersma successfully defended his thesis on the *Pugio Fidei* of Raymond Martin. Wiersma previously published on this research in our Yearbook, especially in the *Jaarboek 2005*. The impressive result of his studies, directed by the professors Herwi Rikhof, Judith Frishman and the undersigned, can be read in the manuscript entitled: *Pearls in a dunghill: The anti-Jewish writings of Raymond Martin O.P. (ca. 1220 - ca. 1285)*, to be accessed at [https://pure.uvt.nl/portal/en/publications/pearls-in-a-dunghill\(4052e4d9-c2f2-4ff2-b754-5d410e634846\).html](https://pure.uvt.nl/portal/en/publications/pearls-in-a-dunghill(4052e4d9-c2f2-4ff2-b754-5d410e634846).html). Our website [www.thomasinstituut.org](http://www.thomasinstituut.org) provides a link as well.

Let me finally express my deep gratitude to all those who, in one way or another, contributed to the publication of yet another volume of our yearbook, its 34<sup>th</sup> issue. Special thanks go to Pascal Aerssens, who provided us with his editorial assistance.

This volume appears in the year in which we celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Thomas Instituut te Utrecht (Tilburg University)* and is yet another sign and fruit of the Institute's continuing efforts.

September 2, 2015

Henk J.M. Schoot,  
Editor-in-Chief.



## THE CARDINAL VIRTUES AS A WAY TO THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES AND VICE VERSA

*Tomáš Machula*

### **Status quaestionis**

The philosophy of Thomas Aquinas is based especially on Aristotelian concepts, where the priority of sensual knowledge over intellectual knowledge importantly takes place. This is not only a question of epistemology, but also of metaphysics, natural theology and, of course, ethics. The classical principle, that *grace does not destroy nature*, but presupposes and perfects it,<sup>1</sup> is a very good example of it. Consequently, a human being seems to be naturally disposed for the reception of supernatural divine influence or gift. This presupposition seems to be in accord with the Sermon on the Mount, where people pure in heart are blessed, because they shall see God. Whereas the vision of God is definitely a supernatural divine gift, the purity of heart seems to be rather a matter of the natural disposition of the human being, as well as the poverty in spirit or gentleness that are blessed by other blessings.

In the following text we will pay attention especially to Aquinas' writings where the question of acquired virtues as a disposition for infused theological virtues is explicitly solved. They are *Summa Theologiae* and the *Commentary on the Sentences*. In both writings he asks the same question but the answers remarkably differ. Comparing these positions and considering both argumentations we will reach the proposal of an acceptable solution that is able to harmonise both arguments.

In this context we will investigate some more arguments from the *Summa*, *Commentary on the Sentences* and *Disputed Questions on Virtue*,<sup>2</sup> where there are some inspiring thoughts that

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *STh* I, q. 1 a. 8 ad 2.

<sup>2</sup> I have used following English translations of Aquinas' works: St. Thomas Aquinas, *On Love and Charity. Readings from the Commentary on the*

offer a deeper insight into the above mentioned topic. Finally, we will pay attention to the inverse relationship between acquired and infused virtues, specifically the importance of infused virtues for acquiring and deepening the acquired virtues.

**Natural dispositions: *Summa Theologiae* versus *Commentary on the Sentences***

As I have said above, it is possible to presuppose the importance of natural training for receiving infused virtues. The whole question, however, is not clear enough. In his *Summa Theologiae*,<sup>3</sup> Aquinas explicitly deals with the question of whether charity is infused according to the natural capacities (*secundum quantitatem naturalium*) of human beings and he answers in the negative. In the “response” of the article the quantity or capacity of natural abilities is not important at all for the infusion of this theological virtue because the theological virtue of charity only depends on the grace of the Holy Spirit and not on natural disposition. As Aquinas points out: “the Spirit breathes where he will” (Jn 3: 8). Thus, the infusion of theological virtues is a matter of God’s free decision and not the logical consequence of some natural human effort. Aquinas says that the theological virtue of charity exceeds the capacity of human nature and that’s why its infusion does not depend on our natural powers, but only on the grace of the Holy Spirit who infuses it. The measure that was given to us is not the measure of our virtue, but the measure of the giving of Christ (see Eph 4, 7).<sup>4</sup>

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*Sentences of Peter Lombard*, transl. by P. A. Kwasniewski, T. Bolin and J. Bolin, Washington D. C.: CUA Press 2008; Sancti Thomae Aquinatis *Summa Theologiae*, literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Second and Revised Edition, 1920; Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on Virtue*, transl. by J. Hause and C. Eisen Murphy, Indianapolis: Hackett 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *STh* II-II, q. 24 a. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *STh* II-II, q. 24 a. 3 resp.: “Caritas autem, cum superexcedat proportionem naturae humanae, ut dictum est, non dependet ex aliqua naturali virtute, sed ex sola gratia spiritus sancti eam infundentis. Et ideo quantitas caritatis non dependet ex conditione naturae vel ex capacitate naturalis virtutis, sed

“Now, since charity surpasses the proportion of human nature, as stated above it depends, not on any natural virtue, but on the sole grace of the Holy Ghost who infuses charity. Wherefore the quantity of charity depends neither on the condition of nature nor on the capacity of natural virtue, but only on the will of the Holy Ghost who divides His gifts according as He will. Hence the Apostle says (Eph 4, 7): *To every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the giving of Christ.*”

In the *Commentary on the Sentences*,<sup>5</sup> however, there is a more detailed argumentation. It is based on the presupposition that God measures out equally to all human beings. If it is true, then the variety of God’s gifts must depend on the variety on the part of human beings. And this variety is determined by the measure of their preparedness to accept these gifts.<sup>6</sup> Aquinas compares it to the similar condition of natural forms, where matter is more or less prepared to accept another form by its accidental dispositions. Similarly, the soul, as a form of living being, is more or less prepared for the acceptance of some perfection by its activities. He distinguishes between naturally acquired and infused perfections. The acquired perfections belong to the natural capacity of the soul (as *actus secundi*). In the case of moral virtues, the right order of reason is a potentiality of the soul or something like a “seed”,<sup>7</sup> which the actual virtue can grow from. The soul’s actions that lead to the acquiring of virtues are both the dispositions for the acquiring of virtues and the active principles that lead the soul to virtuous

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solum ex voluntate spiritus sancti distribuentis sua dona prout vult. Unde et apostolus dicit, ad Ephes. IV, *unicuique nostrum data est gratia secundum mensuram donationis Christi.*”

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *In I Sent* d. 17 q. 1 a. 3 resp.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*: “Diversitas donorum receptorum ab ipso, attendatur secundum diversitatem recipientium. Diversitas autem recipientium attenditur, secundum quod aliquid est magis aptum et paratum ad recipiendum.”

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*: “Virtutes morales sunt in ipsa rectitudine rationis et ordine, sicut in quodam principio seminali.”

perfection.<sup>8</sup> In the case of infused theological virtues, the soul's actions are only dispositions, but they are not in the place of an active principle.

“Infused perfections, on the other hand, are in the nature of the soul itself as in a potency that is material only and in no way active, since they elevate the soul above all of its natural action. Hence the soul's operations stand to infused perfections as dispositions only.”<sup>9</sup>

	in natural capacities of soul	disposition	actualization
acquired perfections	yes	human action (capability of it)	human action (repeated)
infused perfections	no	human action	God's action

Consequently, the principal difference between acquired and infused virtues is on the side of the active agent and not on the side of the passive receiver, according to Aquinas. Whereas in the acquired virtues it is the human being who is both the active and passive principle, in the infused virtues it is God who is active and the human being is only their receiver. At the very beginning of this question, Aquinas stressed that God measures out equally to all human beings so that the variety of God's gifts depends on their receiver.<sup>10</sup> If it is so, then it is clear that the crucial factor in the

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*: “Operationes animae se habent ad perfectiones acquisitas, non solum per modum dispositionis, sed sicut principia activa.”

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*: “Perfectiones autem infusae sunt in natura ipsius animae sicut in potentia materiali et nullo modo activa, cum elevent animam supra omnem suam actionem naturalem. Unde operationes animae se habent ad perfectiones infusas solum sicut dispositiones.”

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*: “cum Deus habeat se aequaliter ad omnia, oportet quod diversitas donorum receptorum ab ipso, attendatur secundum diversitatem recipientium.”

receiving of infused virtues is the preparedness of the human soul. Aquinas says this preparedness is given both naturally and morally (by the dispositions that are the effects of our actions).<sup>11</sup> A mutual proportion of these presuppositions influences the capacity to accept the infused virtue. He who has better natural endowments can have more than the one who has less natural endowments even though both of them do their best. And similarly, he who has less natural endowments, but who strives more, can obtain the greater perfection than the one who has better natural dispositions, but neglects their cultivation and development.

“And because a better nature is more disposed for one and the same effort than the inferior nature, it follows that the one who has better natural endowments, when there is an equal effort of works, will receive a greater share of infused perfections than the one who has inferior natural endowments, and the one who has inferior endowments, if there be a greater effort in the work, will sometimes receive more than the one who has better natural endowments.”<sup>12</sup>

The whole matter can be depicted by the following simple equation that shows the proportion of the infused virtues to the acquired ones.

Capacity					
for	=	natural	+	acquired	– (acquired)
infused		dispositions		virtues	vices <sup>13</sup>
virtues					

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*: “Dicendum est igitur, quod mensura secundum quam datur caritas, est capacitas ipsius animae, quae est ex natura simul, et dispositione quae est per conatum operum.”

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*: “Et quia secundum eundem conatum magis disponitur natura melior; ideo qui habet meliora naturalia, dummodo sit par conatus, magis recipiet de perfectionibus infusis; et qui pejora naturalia, quandoque magis recipiet, si adsit major conatus.”

<sup>13</sup> In the case of vices, of course, it is not possible to speak about infused vices.

We have here two different answers from Aquinas to the same question. The answer in the *Summa* is more recent, so it has priority from the historical point of view. On the other hand, if the principle idea is the pursuit of truth (and it corresponds with Aquinas style of thinking), the important issue is not chronology but the force of the argument. Moreover, it is highly probable that if Aquinas had completely changed his former position, he would have explained this about-turn at least implicitly in the context of the objections and answers in the above mentioned article of the *Summa*. However, there is no discussion of this kind.

Quite the opposite takes place: in the earlier text (*Commentary on the Sentences*), Aquinas uses a more sophisticated argumentation regarding the same question. In the first objection in the text of the *Summa*, he quoted the text of Mt 25: 15, where there is the following text in Latin: *Dedit unicuique secundum propriam virtutem*, which means: he gave each in proportion to his virtue. Before the infusion of God's gifts there are (or can be) only acquired virtues in the human soul; that's why God gives his gifts with respect to them. Aquinas answers that this infusion of divine virtues really depends on the preparedness (or virtue) of the receiver, but this preparedness or disposition itself depends on a movement by the Holy Spirit.<sup>14</sup> In the *Commentary on the Sentences*, Aquinas begins with the same quotation of Mt 25: 15, but he adds the words of the Jerome's gloss: "Not on account of liberality or frugality do different men receive more or less, but according to the power of the recipients." In the response to this objection, Aquinas points out that the power of the recipient depends not only on his nature alone, but also on the disposition of the effort added to nature.

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. *STh* II-II, q. 24 a. 3 ad 1: "Sed hanc etiam dispositionem vel conatum praevenit spiritus sanctus, movens mentem hominis vel plus vel minus secundum suam voluntatem."

“The recipient’s power is not to be considered according to nature alone, but also according to the disposition of the effort added to nature.”<sup>15</sup>

In the *Summa*, Aquinas distinguishes between natural dispositions (i.e. acquired virtues) and dispositions preparing the human soul for the gift of habitual grace, but in the *Commentary on the Sentences* he distinguishes between only natural disposition and the disposition acquired by human effort. Aquinas describes the relationship of nature and grace in the context of the answer to the third objection in the text from the *Commentary on the Sentences*. Glory presupposes grace and grace presupposes nature. Hence charity is infused in the manner of grace. Grace itself is the disposition of nature for glory. And the disposition of nature for grace (or charity) is human effort (*conatus medius*).<sup>16</sup>

In the fourth objection, Aquinas compares human beings and angels. The parallel argumentation can be found in the third objection of the above mentioned article of the *Summa*, but it is less developed and, besides, it seems to be in accord with the answer from the *Commentary on the Sentences*. The difference between human beings and angels lies especially in the fact that an angel does not have anything that fights against its intellectual nature. Humans, on the other hand, have the sensual powers that deviate human beings from their way by the pressure of sensual pleasures. Human intellect is not in full harmony with human sensuality. The variety of angels in perfection is only based on their nature. In human beings, however, human effort following various natural powers must be added. So that a man who has greater natural conditions can have a lesser disposition for the infusion of charity than a man with lesser natural conditions who is able, however, to

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<sup>15</sup> *In I Sent* d. 17 q. 1 a. 3 ad 1: “Virtus recipientis non est consideranda secundum naturam tantum; sed etiam secundum dispositionem conatus advenientem naturae.”

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *In I Sent* d. 17 q. 1 a. 3 ad 3: “Ipsa gratia est dispositio naturae ad gloriam. Unde non requiritur quod interveniat alia dispositio inter caritatem et gloriam: sed inter naturam et gratiam cadit conatus medius, quasi dispositio.”

use them better, just as Aquinas discusses in the response. The same thought is expressed in Aquinas' words: "Charity cannot essentially decrease, except perhaps by succession (namely, in such a way that the charity that was in someone is destroyed) through mortal sin, and afterwards a lesser charity is infused owing to a lesser preparation for receiving it."<sup>17</sup>

To sum up both of the discussed texts, we can conclude:

1. The primary presuppositions for divinely infused perfections are the powers of human nature as such.
2. Human nature, however, is composed of several powers that can fight amongst them. Therefore, the ability to harmonize these natural powers (in order to use the full capacity of the nature) depends on the effort of each particular man.
3. Long-term and sustainable cultivation of these powers is the acquiring of moral virtues.
4. The measure of the preparedness or the capacity to receive divinely infused perfections is the sum of natural human powers, the virtues acquired by human effort, and the vices that are the opposite of virtues, so they diminish the above mentioned capacity.
5. Under usual conditions, the theological virtues are infused in the human being according to the disposition of his nature and his moral disposition through acquired virtues.

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<sup>17</sup> *In I Sent* d. 17 q. 2 a. 5 resp.: "Caritas non potest diminui essentialiter, nisi forte per successionem, ita scilicet quod destruaturs caritas quae inest, per mortale peccatum, et postmodum minor infundatur per minorem praeparationem."

6. God can, however, give his gifts according to his free will, so that this dependence of divinely offered perfection on the natural condition and effort allows for exceptions.

Points 5 and 6 enable us to harmonise Aquinas' conclusions from the *Summa* and the *Commentary on the Sentences*.<sup>18</sup> If we exaggerated the ideas from the *Summa* and completely refused any connection between natural effort and infused perfections, we would fall into contradiction with many Scriptural texts as well as with traditional Christian morality. If we exaggerated the *Commentary on the Sentences*, however, we might fall into semi-pelagianism. The moral appeals to our effort would be meaningless. It is possible to look at the dependence of God's gifts on human effort in the same way as at the dependence of God's grace on the sacramental signs. Whenever we perform the sign of baptism with the proper intention, God gives the grace of new birth. So we have a certainty that God has fulfilled what he had promised, and that the neophyte has received the baptismal grace. In other words God is positively bound – whenever we perform the sign, God's grace is coming. But God is not bound by this sign negatively, as though our arbitrary refusal of baptism could prevent God from giving his grace in an extra-sacramental way. And, like in our question, we can presuppose that, in the usual conditions, God gives his gifts to everybody who is receptive and who opens his soul for them. It should be true at least about his gifts necessary for salvation and that is the case of theological virtues. This receptivity, of course, means the preparedness of the soul or a cultivation of natural power that is appropriate for receiving supernatural gifts. In this case we also have a certainty that is based on God's justice and his promises.

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<sup>18</sup> Henri Bouillard summarizes the history of the exegesis of this contradiction between the *Summa* and the *Commentary on the Sentences* in: H. Bouillard, *Conversion et grace chez S. Thomas d'Aquin. Étude historique* (Paris: Aubier, 1944), pp. 4-16. According to Bouillard's view this problem cannot be solved by harmonizing of these positions but it should be considered as a shift to more Augustinian understanding of the relationship between nature and grace. My paper is an attempt to find a way of harmonization despite Bouillard's view.

If it were not so, it would throw our desire for perfection into confusion. It is in accordance with Aquinas' argumentation in the *Commentary on the Sentences*. On the other hand, we cannot place obstacles to God's action. He can give these supernatural perfections in another way, according to his inscrutability. And that is the point Aquinas stresses in the *Summa*.

In comparing the moral virtues as a presupposition of the theological virtues to the ordinary or extraordinary reception of God's grace, we do not want to say that the infusion of theological virtues in a human being without acquired moral virtues is an absolute exception. We undoubtedly know many people who acquired Christian faith but their moral life was not really virtuous.<sup>19</sup> A radical conversion of our opinions is not automatically connected with the acquiring of any moral habit. A man believes, and he wants to act well, but he does not succeed in it because he is only at the beginning of his moral growth. The preparatory formation of the soul by the acquired habits of virtues makes receptivity for theological virtues easier, but it is not a condition "sine qua non". The above-mentioned cultivation of the soul's powers helps in the reception of theological virtues, thus it can have various degrees and the fully virtuous nature is its most high, but it is not the only grade.

For the sake of completeness we have to say that the text of the *Summa* offers an even more radical interpretation by which natural human effort is important but this effort itself is an effect of Holy Ghost. We can see here the Augustine-inspired germs of an idea of the relationship between nature and grace that will be later developed by Domingo Bañez,<sup>20</sup> and that will turn out to be one of two competing concepts in the *De auxiliis* controversy. Since Aquinas never explicitly rejected his concepts from the *Commentary on the Sentences*, this harmonising interpretation seems to be correct and not far from the truth.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. *STh* I-II q. 113 a. 10.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Domingo Bañez, *Scholastica Commentaria in primam partem Summae Theologicae Divi Thomae Aquinatis*, Lugdunum 1588.

### Free will and virtues

One of the arguments supporting this interpretation is based on the role of freedom in the process of the reception of infused virtues. The argument follows thus: if the infusion of theological virtues is not necessary or deterministic, it must be accepted by free human will. Otherwise man could not refuse faith, hope and charity, which contradicts both our experience and divine Revelation. However, if freedom is needed for the reception of theological virtues, then we must acknowledge that the cultivation of our freedom helps us with the reception of theological virtues. Freedom follows intellect,<sup>21</sup> so that qualities that enable the will to follow the intellect better result in human beings becoming freer. Consequently, they will be better prepared to open their souls for the offer of infused theological virtues.

If we refused the importance of the cultivation of our will for the reception of theological virtues, we would have to say that the infusion of theological virtues is a determination from God's side. Such an idea is, of course, unacceptable because man would be determined to salvation or reprobation. It is the infamous concept of *praedestinatio gemina*. That's why we consider the meaning of the free will for the reception of theological virtues to be convincingly proved.

Aquinas dealt with the free will, e.g. in the context of the question of whether theological virtues can grow or diminish.<sup>22</sup> According to him, charity cannot diminish. Acquired habits grow or diminish depending on actions pertaining to these habits. But as charity does not come from our actions, these actions do not influence it in the same way as they influence the acquired habits. The only thing that is within the power of man regarding this is the decision as to whether to accept the gift or not. It means that charity can be diminished only by God's intervention or by sin<sup>23</sup> or by

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. *STh* I, q. 83 a. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. also the text on the free will in the context of justification (*STh* I-II, q. 113, a. 3).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *STh* II-II, q. 24 a. 10: "Caritas non causatur ab humanis actibus, sed solum a Deo, ut supra dictum est. Unde relinquitur quod etiam cessante

succession of particular infusions.<sup>24</sup> However, God does not cause any evil in the human soul. He only takes his gifts away, when man renounces them. A man renounces charity by sin. Venial sin is not so strong as to damage charity. It must be mortal sin that completely destroys charity, because it is the very abandonment of God's love.<sup>25</sup> Aquinas thus concludes that charity can be diminished neither by God nor by venial sin, but it can be destroyed and removed by mortal sin.

On the other hand, venial sins restrict charity indirectly, because they are dispositions for mortal sin.

“The consequence is that charity can by no means be diminished, if we speak of direct causality, yet whatever disposes to its corruption may be said to conduce indirectly to its diminution, and such are venial sins, or even the cessation from the practice of works of charity.”<sup>26</sup>

Resistance to the formation of the disposition for mortal sin is the resistance to the diminishing of charity. But such an effort is a natural activity that disposes the human being to maintaining the

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actu, propter hoc nec diminuitur nec corrumpitur, si desit peccatum in ipsa cessatione.”

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *In I Sent* d. 17 q. 2 a. 5 resp.: “Caritas non potest diminui essentialiter, nisi forte per successionem, ita scilicet quod destruaturs caritas quae inest, per mortale peccatum, et postmodum minor infundatur per minorem praeparationem.”

<sup>25</sup> Aquinas develops the detailed argumentation for this idea in *v De Virt* q. 2 a. 6: “Ex hoc autem aliquis mortaliter peccat quod aliquid magis eligit quam vivere secundum Deum, et ei inhaerere. Unde manifestum est quod quicumque mortaliter peccat, ex hoc ipso magis amat aliud bonum quam Deum. Si enim amaret magis Deum, praeeligeret vivere secundum Deum quam quocumque temporali bono potiri. Hoc autem est de ratione caritatis quod Deus super omnia diligatur, ut ex superioribus patet; unde omne peccatum mortale caritati contrariatur.”

<sup>26</sup> *STh* II-II, q. 24 a. 10: “Potest tamen indirecte dici diminutio caritatis dispositio ad corruptionem ipsius, quae fit vel per peccata venialia; vel etiam per cessationem ab exercitio operum caritatis.”

theological virtues. The best means for sin prevention, however, are the acquired moral virtues that are the relatively permanent abilities to act in the right way, i.e. not to sin. Of course, it is an indirect impact, but definitely a real impact.

In the *Commentary on the Sentences*, Aquinas discusses it very thoroughly. Charity, according to Aquinas, can be limited or interrupted by inner disorder of the human soul, regarding either the goal itself or the means for reaching it. As the goal of charity is God, the disorder deviating the soul from its goal is mortal sin. It absolutely destroys charity. Disorder concerning the means is a more complicated issue. The goal is untouched, but the human powers that perform the orientation towards the goal are disrupted. This is venial sin, which does not hit charity itself, but disrupts the dispositions for charity.

”Still, it is true that just as things directed toward the end are dispositive to the end, so correspondingly, inordinateness in them is dispositive to inordinateness about the end itself, and for this reason we say that venial sin is dispositive to mortal sin. Hence, by venial sins of this kind, a man is disposed to the loss of charity.”<sup>27</sup>

In this context, Aquinas says that charity diminishes, not essentially, but with respect to its roots. The contrary disposition that arises in the soul is an obstacle for charity.<sup>28</sup> The will begins to put created things first, instead of God. It destroys the inclination to charity that a mankind has so far possessed.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *In I Sent* d. 17 q. 2 a. 5 resp.: “Sed verum est quod sicut ea quae sunt ad finem disponunt ad finem, ita inordinatio in eis est dispositio ad inordinationem quae est circa finem, secundum quod dicimus, quod veniale peccatum est dispositio ad mortale. Unde per hujusmodi venialia disponitur quis ad amissionem caritatis.”

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*: “Et inde est quod caritas dicitur diminui quantum ad radicationem et fervorem, et non quantum ad essentiam. Quantum ad radicationem quidem, secundum quod fit dispositio ad contrarium, unde minuitur firma inhaesio caritatis.”

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *In III Sent* d. 31 q. 1 a. 1 resp.: “Quando ad particulare descenditur, tentatio aliqua inclinationem praedictam caritatis absorbet.”

Aquinas comments on the role of freedom for the infusion of God's gift of charity in the following way:

The justification of the ungodly is brought about by God moving man to justice. For it is He "that justifies the ungodly" according to Rm 4: 5. Now God moves everything in its own manner, just as we see that in natural things, what is heavy and what is light are moved differently, on account of their diverse natures. Hence He moves man to justice according to the condition of his human nature. But it is man's proper nature to have free-will. Hence in him who has the use of reason, God's motion to justice does not take place without a movement of the free-will; but He so infuses the gift of justifying grace that at the same time He moves the free-will to accept the gift of grace, in such as are capable of being moved thus.<sup>30</sup>

In this text there are again some elements of the later controversy regarding the relationship between God's grace and human freedom. Nevertheless, the most important issue for our discussion is the fact that both freedom and God's moving are the crucial factors for the reception of God's gifts. In the response to the third objection, Aquinas stresses that free will ("a proper movement of the human soul") is needed here. He rejects the parallel between the reception and the preservation of God's gifts. While the infusion of

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<sup>30</sup> *STh* I-II, q. 113 a. 3 resp.: "Iustificatio impii fit Deo movente hominem ad iustitiam, ipse enim est qui iustificat impium, ut dicitur Rom. IV. Deus autem movet omnia secundum modum uniuscuiusque, sicut in naturalibus videmus quod aliter moventur ab ipso gravia et aliter levia, propter diversam naturam utriusque. Unde et homines ad iustitiam movet secundum conditionem naturae humanae. Homo autem secundum propriam naturam habet quod sit liberi arbitrii. Et ideo in eo qui habet usum liberi arbitrii, non fit motio a Deo ad iustitiam absque motu liberi arbitrii; sed ita infundit donum gratiae iustificantis, quod etiam simul cum hoc movet liberum arbitrium ad donum gratiae acceptandum, in his qui sunt huius motionis capaces."

grace is a transformation of the soul where human assent is needed, the preservation is not a transformation so that God's activity only continues. If it were not so, God's grace would not remain in sleeping people, which is obviously absurd, as Aquinas shows in the other text of the *Summa*.<sup>31</sup> The movement of the human will is also necessary for the loss of charity that is the effect of mortal sin, as it was said above. In the Disputed Questions, Aquinas says that "God infuses humans with charity. But that which divine infusion causes needs divine action not just at its origin, in order to begin existing, but for its whole duration, in order to be preserved in existence."<sup>32</sup>

To sum up the above mentioned argumentations, we can see that according to Aquinas the reception of theological virtues needs free human assent. The ability of free choice is, of course, cultivated by acquired virtues that can be a useful means for the soul's receptivity for theological virtues. Besides, acquired virtues are a prevent of mortal sin, which destroys at least charity in human soul, as well as venial sins, which do not destroy charity, but dispose the human soul for a fall into mortal sin and the consequent loss of charity.

### **Infused virtues as a support of acquired virtues**

We have dealt with the connection between the virtues in the direction from acquired virtues to theological virtues. Now, we will attend to the direction from theological virtues to acquired virtues.<sup>33</sup> According to Aquinas, it is possible to be virtuous on a natural level

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. *STh* II-II, q. 24 a. 10 ad 3.

<sup>32</sup> *De virt* q. 2 a. 6: "Caritas enim hominibus a Deo infunditur. Quae autem ex infusione divina causantur, non solum indigent actione divina in sui principio, ut esse incipiant, sed in tota sui duratione, ut conserventur in esse."

<sup>33</sup> For order of acquiring of virtues cf. R.K. DeYoung, C. McCluskey, C. Van Dyke, *Aquinas's Ethics. Metaphysical Foundations, Moral Theory, and Theological Context* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), pp. 149-151.

even without infused supernatural virtues, but such virtuosity is not perfect.

It is charity that elevates the naturally acquired virtues to the level of perfection. This elevation is described in the concept of charity as the form of other virtues. Aquinas speaks about charity not only as a form, but also as a mover and a root of virtues,<sup>34</sup> or even as a mother of virtues.<sup>35</sup> The acts of all moral virtues are directed to the good. It is possible to describe various kinds of good in the following scheme:

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|------|--|--|
| Good | a) ultimate (universal) – communion with God |  |
|      | b) near (particular)                         | i) real – it can be directed to the ultimate good                      |
|      |  | ii) imaginary – it takes human being away from real good <sup>36</sup> |

On the natural level of acquired virtues there are created goods, i.e. real but particular goods that tend to the universal goal, which is the highest good. And this highest or ultimate good is the goal of charity.<sup>37</sup> Thus, charity seems to be the form of other virtues. In the moral sphere, a form is determined by its goal because the principle of morality is the will and the will is directed to the goal. That which determines the goal gives also the form of corresponding activity or its habit. Virtue becomes real and perfect through its direction to

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<sup>34</sup> *De virt* q. 2 a. 3: “Caritas est forma virtutum, motor et radix.”

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *In III Sent* d. 27 q. 2 a. 4 qa. 3: “Et ideo dicitur caritas mater aliarum virtutum, inquantum earum actus producit ex conceptione finis, inquantum ipse finis habet se per modum seminis, cum sit principium in operabilibus, ut dicit philosophus.”

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *STh* II-II, q. 23 a. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *Ibid*: “Manifestum est autem quod actus omnium aliarum virtutum ordinatur ad finem proprium caritatis, quod est eius obiectum, scilicet summum bonum. Et de virtutibus quidem moralibus manifestum est: nam huiusmodi virtutes sunt circa quaedam bona creata quae ordinantur ad bonum increatum sicut ad ultimum finem.”

the highest good. And this direction is the goal of charity, so that we can speak about charity as a form of other virtues.<sup>38</sup>

If we have charity, all our good works are directed to the highest goal, i.e. to God. Our virtues are real and perfect. They are perfected by charity. If we do not have charity, and our activities are directed to real but created goods only, then we have real but only imperfect virtue. On the other hand, mankind who is directed to imaginary good has only false virtue. A good example can perhaps be the “prudent” miser.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, every moral virtue receives its perfection by participation in charity as the highest perfection. It is the participation of the lesser in the higher that is the same as formation by the higher. Similarly, charity is a participation in grace.<sup>40</sup> That is why Aquinas considers acquired virtues perfected by charity as meritorious.<sup>41</sup> In this sense it is obvious that merit from good works is possible only if it is formed by higher perfection, that is not purely human merit, but God’s gift.

That is how infused theological virtues help acquired virtues. If all the virtues become perfect only when they are formed by charity, it is obvious that no matter how good acquired virtues are, they need some elevation by theological virtues to be perfect.

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. *STh* II-II, q. 23 a. 8 resp.: “in moralibus forma actus attenditur principaliter ex parte finis, cuius ratio est quia principium moralium actuum est voluntas, cuius obiectum et quasi forma est finis. Semper autem forma actus consequitur formam agentis. Unde oportet quod in moralibus id quod dat actui ordinem ad finem, det ei et formam. Manifestum est autem secundum praedicta quod per caritatem ordinantur actus omnium aliarum virtutum ad ultimum finem. Et secundum hoc ipsa dat formam actibus omnium aliarum virtutum. Et pro tanto dicitur esse forma virtutum, nam et ipsae virtutes dicuntur in ordine ad actus formatos.”

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *STh* II-II, q. 23 a. 7.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *In III Sent* d. 27 q. 2 a. 4 qa. 3 ad 2: “Et ideo gratia, quae est perfectio essentiae animae, constituens ipsam in esse spirituali, est forma et caritatis et prudentiae et temperantiae; nec caritas esset virtus si esset sine gratia, sicut nec prudentia si esset sine caritate.”

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *In III Sent* d. 30 a. 5 ad 3: “Actus aliarum virtutum non sunt meritorii nisi in quantum sunt informati caritate.”

Hence the virtuous pagan really is admirable, but he is not yet perfect.

### **Conclusion**

This is how the interconnection between acquired and theological virtues can be recognised. For the sake of receiving infused theological virtues, the formation of the human soul by acquired moral virtues (together with innate natural conditions) is very useful and usually required. These are both acquired natural dispositions of the human being, enabling the reception of infused virtues, and are an effective defence against the danger of mortal sin, which is the fatal obstacle for charity, deflecting away from the direction towards the ultimate goal. If a naturally moral man obtains the infused virtue of charity, his moral virtues become perfect because their direction to good is “stretched” beyond the horizon of the temporal and particular as far as to the highest and transcendental goal. Human good works become meritorious because they are oriented directly to God.<sup>42</sup>

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**ST. THOMAS AQUINAS'S THEORY OF PAGAN VIRTUES:  
A PILGRIMAGE TOWARDS THE INFUSED CARDINAL  
VIRTUES<sup>1</sup>**

*Anthony Wang Tao*

Virtue is the pivotal concept in both Aristotle's and St. Thomas Aquinas's ethical systems. St. Thomas's conception of virtue more or less presents complexity in substantial difference to Aristotle's through the intervention of the Christian message, particularly his virtue theory related to the divinely infused virtues.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, when St. Thomas elaborates his own theory of virtue, the Aristotelian four cardinal virtues (*prudentia, fortitudo, temperantia, justitia*) along with the three Christian theological virtues (*fides, spes, caritas*) altogether forge the backbone by which the true perfection and ultimate end of human life are sought. Furthermore, the complementarity and integration of theological virtues to the cardinal virtues that heals the imperfection and ambiguity of the human natural virtues by Christian grace are usually considered as one of the major innovative Theophilosophical contributions of St. Thomas. On the other hand, however, the distinction between "the intellectual and moral virtues" which can be subsumed under the category of cardinal virtues, and the theological virtues is remarkable in St. Thomas's theory. The former set of virtues are called pagan virtues (*virtutes*

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<sup>1</sup> This contribution is the excerpt of the thesis (Ph.L.), Pontifical Gregorian University, 2013 entitled "Reflection on Pagan Virtues: A Philosophical Study on St. Thomas Aquinas's Virtue Theory". For the Chinese version, see: 王濤, 〈反思異教德性：聖多瑪斯·阿奎那德性理論研究〉, 《漢語基督教學術論評》 (*Sino-Christian Studies: An International Journal of Bible, Theology & Philosophy*, Vol. 19 (2015), pp. 105-140. Here I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Henk J.M. Schoot and Fr. David P. Doran for their efforts of proofreading.

<sup>2</sup> J. Hause, "Aquinas on the Function of Moral Virtue", in *American Catholic Quarterly*, Vol. 81, No. 1 (2007), p. 1.

*gentilibus*) proportionate to human nature apart from divine assistance or specifically without the infusion of Christian sanctifying grace. Here the famous claim goes that “all the virtues of pagan Rome were merely splendid vices”. As we know, from the Augustinian tradition, a concept such as “virtuous pagan” is self-contradictory. No charity, no moral virtues! All excellence or perfection qualified to be virtues should be informed by charity and point to the ultimate happiness in afterlife rather than this earthly life and its ostensible happiness. Based on this radical understanding, the distinction negates the human natural capacity to perform virtuous acts and the agent himself being virtuous, and completely separates natural eudemonia and supernatural beatitude.

In recent years, the overlapping part of Aristotle’s and St. Thomas’s articulation of moral virtues, that is, pagan virtues or more courteously put, non-Christian virtues is under ardent debate within English-speaking academic circles.<sup>3</sup> The controversial issue in particular on which the scholars attempt to take sides is “whether Aquinas believed that the pagan could acquire genuine virtues”,<sup>4</sup> in other words, whether and to what extent a pagan can act genuinely virtuously according to St. Thomas’s virtue theory. St. Thomas’s proposition “the pagan can possess true but imperfect virtues (*vera virtus, sed imperfecta*)” and the correlative issues have been engaged by great amount of the academic discourses.

In this contribution, we intend to investigate the way St. Thomas articulates the theory of pagan virtues in the philosophical perspective by some scholarly discussions. Firstly, pagan virtues as a set of virtues in question will be lucidly located in St. Thomas’s

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<sup>3</sup> Knobel underscores that two terms “pagan virtue” and “Christian virtue” should be well-clarified in the first instance. She suggests the common usages of both, that is, “pagan virtue refers to the kind of virtue that can be possessed apart from habitual grace, while Christian virtue refers to the kind of virtue that cannot be possessed apart from habitual grace”. See: A. Knobel, “Aquinas and the Pagan Virtues”, *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (2011/Sep.), p. 339, footnote 1.

<sup>4</sup> A. Knobel, “Aquinas and the Pagan Virtues”, p. 339.

categorization of varieties of virtues and be justified as true virtue. Secondly, we will explain in what sense “pagan virtues are true but imperfect” according to St. Thomas with the help of recent scholarship. Lastly, the interaction between pagan acquired virtues and infused virtues will be subject to further scrutiny in order to discover the inner orientation of the pagan virtues towards divinity, namely their being good preparation for the transformation and unification by infused virtues.

### **Pagan Virtues apart from the Infusion of Grace**

Mattison III sums up three categorizations of virtues in St. Thomas's whole system of virtues, each of them are dualities: cardinal virtues/theological virtues categorized based on the object of the virtues; natural virtues or political virtues/supernatural virtues categorized based on the ultimate end of the virtues; and acquired virtues/infused virtues categorized based on the cause of the virtues.<sup>5</sup>

We can easily observe the dualistic tension between the cardinal virtues and the theological virtues at first glance in St. Thomas's magnum opus *Summa Theologiae*. The four cardinal virtues prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice are taken to be those on which the moral life hinges or depends “because we enter through the door of human life”. They are the principle of this life.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the four cardinal virtues embrace all the sub-virtues and even quasi-virtues as the root of them. The cardinal virtues cover the full range of human capacity of rationality, which are sometimes called “the intellectual and moral virtues” in general. In contrast to Aristotle, St. Thomas “has already moved rather far from

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<sup>5</sup> See: W.C. Mattison III, “Thomas's Categorizations of Virtue: Historical Background and Contemporary Significance,” in *The Thomist*, Vol. 74, No. 2 (2010), pp.189-235; W.C. Mattison III, “Can Christians Possess the Acquired Cardinal Virtues?” *Theological Studies*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (2011), pp. 558-585.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *De virtutibus cardinalibus*, a. 1, in *Quaestiones disputatae de virtutibus*.

Aristotle who does not treat these four virtues as a group elevated above the other virtues he discusses” in the sense that St. Thomas considers the cardinal virtues as the perfect state of virtues that subsumes a wide scope of “secondary virtues”.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, his cardinal virtues continue the understanding of the Church tradition that, the cardinal virtues are the virtues, according to St. Jerome, -- “by which one lives well in this mortal state and afterwards is led to eternal life”.<sup>8</sup> The cardinal virtues not only concern the earthly life within human natural capacity, they also have an orientation toward the more supreme and transcendent domain, namely the afterlife.

The remarkable contribution of St. Thomas’s virtue theory to that of Aristotle is the introduction of the theological virtues. “The theological virtues are above man... Hence they should properly be called not human, but ‘super-human’ or godlike virtues.”<sup>9</sup> They are the supernatural virtues of man as sharing in the grace of God.<sup>10</sup> The object of the theological virtues is God the last end of all who surpasses the knowledge of human reason, however, the cardinal virtues, however, composed of intellectual and moral virtues are comprehensible to human reason.<sup>11</sup> St. Thomas illustrates these double sets of virtues by the twofold happiness that man possibly enjoys. For him, the eudemonia proportionate to human nature can be obtained by human natural principles, accessible by unaided human effort; while beatitude, surpassing man’s natural capacity can be possessed through the assistance of God’s grace alone, i.e. by the participation of the Godhead. The latter happiness is the highest and ultimate end and thus out of the reach of human natural principles so that some additional principles are required to direct man to this kind of supernatural happiness. These principles are called “the theological virtues”. Their object or end is God Himself;

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<sup>7</sup> B. Kent, “Disposition and Moral Fallibility: The Unaristotelian Aquinas”, *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (2012), p. 154.

<sup>8</sup> Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 14. 9. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 61, a. 1, ad. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 58, a. 3, ad. 3.

<sup>11</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 62, a. 2.

they are infused into us without us by God, which are not known by human reason but by divine revelation.<sup>12</sup>

Returning to Mattison III's another two kinds of categorization of virtues: natural virtues/supernatural virtues, and acquired virtues/infused virtues. The former distinction is very explicit as the names imply; while in the latter acquired virtues and infused virtues are both scholastic terms. Generally, they are respectively considered as equivalent to "natural virtues" that are acquired naturally and "supernatural virtues" that are infused by God's grace into the nature of the human agent. Apparently, both of them are present within human nature, but the nature by acquiring is generally disposed to every human being as his essence, while the nature by being infused is informed by God's supernatural gift through the explicit religious conviction of the agent. St. Thomas indicates that acquired virtues are obtained by habituation, namely by the repetitive acts, and they direct man to good by the rule of reason. Infused virtues are by no means caused by human acts, but instead, lead man to the good by another rule, i.e. rule by Divine Law in favor with God's grace.<sup>13</sup>

The distinctions of natural virtues/supernatural virtues and acquired virtues/infused virtues can be conflated, while cardinal virtues and theological virtues may not be grafted neatly onto the duality in St. Thomas's virtue theory because the cardinal virtues can be both acquired and infused. St. Thomas indicates: "The theological virtues direct us sufficiently to our supernatural end, inchoatively: i.e. to God Himself immediately. But the soul needs further to be perfected by infused virtues in regard to other things, yet in relation to God."<sup>14</sup> The infused cardinal virtues exist and serve for the sake of one's supernatural end as well.<sup>15</sup> In St. Thomas's own words,

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<sup>12</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 62, a. 1.

<sup>13</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 63, a. 2.

<sup>14</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 63, a. 3, ad. 2.

<sup>15</sup> W.C. Mattison III, "Thomas's Categorizations of Virtue", p. 224ff. The famous example by St. Thomas of the difference between the acquired cardinal virtues and the infused cardinal virtues lies in *STh*, I-II, q. 63, a. 4

“those infused moral virtues, whereby men behave well in respect of there being ‘fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God’, differ from the acquired virtues, whereby man behaves well in respect of human affairs.”<sup>16</sup> After the above conflation, Mattison III concludes that St. Thomas presents a tripartite distinction of varieties of virtues by a synthesis of the scholarship of his predecessors: acquired (natural) cardinal virtues, infused (supernatural) theological virtues and infused (supernatural) cardinal virtues.<sup>17</sup> Other opinions also support this categorization. It holds that the infused virtues are not only theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, “but also the divinely infused intellectual virtue of prudence, and the divinely infused moral virtues: temperance, courage, and justice”.<sup>18</sup>

If pagan virtues were justified they can be located in the first set of acquired (natural) cardinal virtues proper to human nature without the infused assistance of grace from without whilst being oriented to the third kind, namely the infused (supernatural) cardinal virtues becoming the preparation for the higher virtues and happiness proportionate to those virtues.

Therefore are there pagan virtues or is the pagan virtuous? If pagan virtues are justified, we can proclaim that man can possess virtues and act virtuously on his own, or in other words, without any assistance or intervention from outside of our nature. The answer may be found in the way St. Thomas defines virtue.

In Aristotle’s ethics, virtue is both *aretē* “goodness” or “excellence” of human qualities that can be achieved by *meson* in moral conducts, and *hexis* that signifies habit. *Hexis* is usually translated

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when he exemplifies the different styles of temperate eating of the person under the acquired habituation and of the person in abstinence under the religious divine law and concludes that infused and acquired cardinal virtues differ in species.

<sup>16</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 63, a. 4.

<sup>17</sup> W.C. Mattison III, “Thomas's Categorizations of Virtue”, p. 228.

<sup>18</sup> J. Hause, “Aquinas on the Function of Moral Virtue”, p. 2.

as “habits of mind” or “character”. In the context of Aristotle, *hexis* has three basic meanings: first, a particular kind of state or disposition; second, a metaphysical middle ground between potency and actualization or activity; third, having something. In regard to the first meaning, it is better translated into “state of mind”, while the third one can best be translated as “habit”. Both translations fall short of the complete signification of the original word. “State” is much too general, whereas “habit” is too specific; and “disposition” also has drawbacks. Kent reminds us that the second meaning in which *hexis* in its more metaphysical signification refers to active causal power rather than passive natural capacity should be paid more attention to.<sup>19</sup> She says, “A *hexis* or *habitus*, in contrast, is a durable characteristic of the agent inclining to certain kinds of actions and emotional reactions, not the actions and reactions themselves.”<sup>20</sup>

In this sense, St. Thomas properly calls habit “the second human nature”. If things are repeatedly inclined or disposed towards one determinate direction, their inclination or disposition in that direction becomes determinate and reinforced. “In this way, they acquire a tendency towards it, like a sort of form, similar to a natural one, which tends in a single direction. Because of this, we speak of habit as ‘second nature’.”<sup>21</sup> Habit is a power that acts and is acted upon: “These capacities are fulfilled for activity through the help of something extra; that, however, is in them in the manner not of passive experience, but of a *form* that rests and remains in its possessor.”<sup>22</sup> St. Thomas indicates that once the habit of virtue has been formed, the actions conforming to the habit are performed with inherent pleasure because “a habit exists as a sort of nature, and that is pleasurable which agrees with a thing according to

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<sup>19</sup> B. Kent, “Disposition and Moral Fallibility”, pp. 144-145.

<sup>20</sup> B. Kent, “Habits and Virtues (Ia IIae, qq. 49-70)”, in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. by S. Pope (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), p. 116.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *De virtutibus in communi*, a. 9, in *Quaestiones disputatae de virtutibus*.

<sup>22</sup> *De virtutibus in communi*, a. 1.

nature.”<sup>23</sup> Habit becomes nature, so to speak. Good habits inform the virtues; while bad ones shape the vices.

Aristotle himself believes that virtue as habit arises in us neither by human nature nor by something contrary to human nature; “Rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit.”<sup>24</sup> St. Thomas agrees with Aristotle in that point, he thinks that moral virtues are in us by reason:

We do have a natural aptitude to acquire them (moral virtues) inasmuch as the appetitive potency is naturally adapted to obey reason. But we are perfected in these virtues by use, for when we act repeatedly according to reason, a modification is impressed in the appetite by the power of reason. This impression is nothing else but moral virtue.<sup>25</sup>

Virtues are not prior to action unlike the things nature endows us with, i.e. potency previous to operation. We don’t have virtues unless we actively act according to them. The habit of acting informs the virtue. We acquire moral virtues through intentional habituation or repetitive action that conforms to nature and leads to perfection or excellence.

The fact that we don’t have virtues in nature is well shown in St. Thomas’s explanation of the Latin word “*habitus*”. *Habitus* as derivation from *habere* (to have or possess) or *se habet* (way or relation that is disposed in between the thing itself and something else), is substantially different from our daily usage of the English word “habit”. If *habitus* means to have or possess, then virtue is a quality or capacity of human nature. St. Thomas suggests that he speaks of habit in the latter sense, namely virtue as habit is a disposition by which something is disposed well in regard to itself

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, 265.

<sup>24</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II-1, 1103a23-25.

<sup>25</sup> *Commentary on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, 249.

or another.<sup>26</sup> Virtue is the disposition to perfection in accordance with its very nature to the best.<sup>27</sup> Hence virtue is the perfection of a power and the habit orderly determined to act.<sup>28</sup> St. Thomas then borrows Aristotle's definition of virtue to define human moral virtue generally: A human virtue is that "which renders a human act and man himself good."<sup>29</sup> In this sense, moral virtue contains both qualities of the so-called second human nature, namely the permanent good habit and the virtuous act performed according to that habit.

Habit exists potentially as the essential nature of a human being. It appears as an inclination or receptivity to the virtues predisposed in both the nature of the species and of the individual.<sup>30</sup> Virtues are acquired by habituation proportionate to human nature as the second nature and are manifested in human acts making them completely virtuous under the guidance of human reason. They remain active within the domain of human natural life although they are not acquired by human nature *per se*. Human nature alone, however, has the suitability and inclination to possess virtues and has the natural drive to cultivate them. Ontologically, the pagan who has other supernatural spiritual orientations apart from Christian faith, or even the infidel who has no religious faith at all has the potential to obtain virtues accordingly.

Nevertheless, the ontology Christianity furnishes makes the question complicated. Although human nature is created good, mortal sin destroys its original goodness so that virtues are corrupted into vices. The devastating force caused by original sin has left pagan virtues in doubt. St. Thomas recognizes the good of nature by which good acts can be made by a pagan in mortal sin,

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<sup>26</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 49, a. 1.

<sup>27</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 49, a. 2.

<sup>28</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 55, a. 1.

<sup>29</sup> *STh*, II-II, q. 58, a. 3. In Aristotle's own words, "the virtue of man also will be the state of character which makes a man good and which makes him do his own word well." *NE*, II-6, 1106a21-23.

<sup>30</sup> *De virtutibus in communi*, a. 8.

Mortal sin takes away sanctifying grace, but does not wholly corrupt the good of nature. Since therefore, unbelief is a mortal sin, unbelievers are without grace indeed, yet some good of nature remains in them. Consequently it is evident that unbelievers cannot do those good works which proceed from grace, viz. meritorious works; yet they can, to a certain extent, do those good works for which the good of nature suffices. Hence it does not follow that they sin in everything they do; but whenever they do anything out of their unbelief, then they sin. For even as one who has the faith, can commit an actual sin, venial or even mortal, which he does not refer to the end of faith, so too, an unbeliever can do a good deed in a matter which he does not refer to the end of his unbelief.<sup>31</sup>

A pagan who has no assistance of sanctifying grace can perform virtuous acts because he also has his human nature to be perfected and to be able to dispose all the human capacities towards the perfection of both the agent and his acts. In this sense, these virtuous acts can be called self-fulfillment because they fulfill the nature of the agent. St. Thomas divides the good of human nature in a threefold manner. The first aspect is the constitutive principles and the properties of human nature, e.g. the powers of the soul. This good of nature as the basis of God's creating good is neither destroyed nor diminished by sin. The second aspect is man's natural suitability and inclination to virtue. St. Thomas suggests that it is simply diminished by original sin. What is entirely destroyed by our ancestral sin is the third aspect of the good of human nature, namely the gift of original justice that is "conferred on the whole of human nature in the person of the first man". St. Thomas continues,

Because human acts produce an inclination to like acts...  
Now from the very fact that a thing becomes inclined to

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<sup>31</sup> *STh*, II-II, q. 10, a. 4

one of two contraries, its inclination to the other contrary must needs be diminished. Wherefore as sin is opposed to virtue, from the very fact that a man sins, there results a diminution of that good of nature, which is the inclination to virtue.<sup>32</sup>

It is St. Thomas's unambiguous position that actual mortal sin may not impede a pagan's way to acquire his virtues, and original sin which ontologically pre-determines human's connatural deficiencies diminishes in a limited sense, rather than totally destroys, the human inclination to virtue. The principle left intact after the devastation of original sin is the aforementioned first aspect of the good of human nature, namely the constitutive principle called the first principle of thought and action to the natural good, i.e. *synderesis*.

The English word "conscience" finds its counterparts in Greek *synderesis* and in Latin *conscientia* which have inherent differences in meaning. In some European languages such as Italian, the word that signifies "conscience" usually has a double signification. The Italian word *coscienza* also signifies "consciousness" besides "conscience". *Synderesis* can signify moral judgment or non-moral awareness. Therefore, the double implication both in the moral and the intellectual realm are contained in *synderesis*. St. Jerome in his Commentary on Ezekiel defines *synderesis* as the leading power of the soul over the other three (reason, irascible appetite and concupiscent appetite) by his own anthropological articulation of the human soul. It is "the spark of conscience which was not quenched even in the heart of Cain, when he was driven of paradise... it is distinct from the other three elements and corrects them when they err".<sup>33</sup> *Synderesis* is the general principle of moral judgment of good and evil by right reason.

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<sup>32</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 85, a.1.

<sup>33</sup> Jerome, *Commentarium in Ezechielem*, I-1, quoted from Eric D'Arcy, *Conscience and Its Right to Freedom* (London/New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), pp. 16-17.

St. Thomas underlines that *synderesis* is not a power but a habit always inclining to good only.<sup>34</sup> It's "the habit of first principle"<sup>35</sup> and "the universal principles of the natural law",<sup>36</sup> which "pertains to the eternal norms of conduct",<sup>37</sup> being "a kind of prelude to the act of virtue".<sup>38</sup>

Therefore we must have, bestowed on us by nature, not only speculative principles, but also practical principles. Now the first speculative principles bestowed on us by nature do not belong to a special power, but to a special habit, which is called "the understanding of principles"... Wherefore the first practical principles, bestowed on us by nature, do not belong to a special power, but to a special natural habit, which we call "*synderesis*." Whence "*synderesis*" is said to incite to good, and to murmur at evil, inasmuch as through first principles we proceed to discover, and judge of what we have discovered. It is therefore clear that "*synderesis*" is not a power, but a natural habit.<sup>39</sup>

As the first practical principle bestowed on us by nature, *synderesis* disposes human acts towards good and conserves<sup>40</sup> the good of human nature. Therefore it must be permanent and immutable so as to be the very foundation of all the virtues disposed to goodness and perfection by its constant moral criterion of good and evil. It guarantees pagan virtues ontologically.

In all its activities nature intends what is good and the conservation of the things which are produced through the

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<sup>34</sup> *STh*, I, q. 79, a. 12.

<sup>35</sup> *STh*, I, q. 79, a. 13, ad. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Questiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 16, a. 1.

<sup>37</sup> *Questiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 16, a. 1, ad. 9.

<sup>38</sup> *Questiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 16, a. 2, ad. 5.

<sup>39</sup> *STh*, I, q. 79, a. 12.

<sup>40</sup> *Synderesis* in Greek literally means "conservation". See: J. De Finance S.J., *An Ethical Inquiry* (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2011), p. 436.

activity of nature. Therefore, in all the works of nature, the principles are always permanent and unchangeable and preservative of right order...As a result, for probity to be possible in human actions, there must be some permanent principle which has unwavering integrity, in reference to which all human works are examined, so that that permanent principle will resist all evil and assent to all good. This is *synderesis*, whose task it is to warn against evil and incline to good. Therefore, we agree that there can be no error in it.<sup>41</sup>

Thus a pagan, without the infusion or intervention of external assistance of a superior power, can perform virtuous acts because he possesses *synderesis* the first principle to dispose him to virtue on the one hand, on the other hand, however, “the pagan will not be able to act in conformity with right reason all of the time, and those failures will prevent him from ever achieving the fullness of acquired virtue.”<sup>42</sup> The imperfection of the virtues simply by human inborn power is discovered accordingly.

### **Pagan Virtues versus Infused Virtues: *vera virtus, sed imperfecta***

St. Thomas argues that pagan virtues are “true but imperfect” referring to the final perfect good which goes beyond the natural good of human being.<sup>43</sup> This argument becomes the key proposition of St. Thomas’s central position on pagan virtues from which most of the scholars develop their own theories.

As Knobel indicates, although most of the scholars involved in the debate agree that St. Thomas’s pagan can possess “true but imperfect” virtues, “how such virtues should be further

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<sup>41</sup> *Questiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 16, a. 2.

<sup>42</sup> A. Knobel, “Aquinas and the Pagan Virtues”, p. 343.

<sup>43</sup> *STh*, II-II, q. 23, a. 7.

characterized is a matter of dispute”.<sup>44</sup> In the Christian viewpoint, for a virtue to be perfectly true means that it should be ordered to the supernatural beatitude. Pagan virtues are thus true (in essence) but imperfect (in degree) inasmuch as they are simply ordered to the natural happiness (eudemonia) rather than supernatural blessedness (beatitude).

Shanley unpacks the theoretical adjustment of St. Thomas from Ia-IIae to IIa-IIae of the *Summa Theologiae* from the dichotomy as *virtus simpliciter/virtus secundum quid* to the trichotomy as *virtus vera simpliciter/vera virtus sed imperfecta/falsa similitudo virtutis*. This shift of distinction of virtues seemingly highlights St. Thomas’s intentional justification of pagan virtue as *vera virtus sed imperfecta*, apart from *falsa similitudo virtutis*, which is not virtue at all. In this sense, Shanley believes that it is how St. Thomas differs from St. Augustine, “Where Augustine could only see the dichotomy of perfect virtue and sham virtue, Aquinas recognizes a third of virtue—true but imperfect.”<sup>45</sup>

St. Thomas lists three levels of virtues. The first level is a set of virtues which are wholly imperfect (*omnino imperfectae*) that exist without practical wisdom. This set of virtues is called inclination rather than virtue, for it can be misused even in a harmful way without discernment of prudence. “Such inclinations, when they lack practical wisdom, do not possess the character of a virtue in a perfect way”.<sup>46</sup> This set of virtues is also called sham or false virtues (*falsa similitudo virtutis*), which are directed toward false goods that are incompatible with the ultimate end of life.<sup>47</sup>

St. Thomas continues to define the second level of virtue as “qualifiedly perfect virtues” (*aliquaqualiter perfectae*), which “consist

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<sup>44</sup> A. Knobel, “Aquinas and the Pagan Virtues”, p. 340.

<sup>45</sup> B.J. Shanley O.P., “Aquinas on Pagan Virtue”, in *The Thomist*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (1999), p. 563.

<sup>46</sup> *De virtutibus cardinalibus*, a. 2.

<sup>47</sup> *STh*, II-II, q. 23, a. 7.

in virtues that achieve right reason, but do not reach God himself through charity". This level of virtues is our subject matter in this article, this is pagan virtues are justified. He argues these virtues "are perfect in one way, in relation to human good, but not unqualifiedly perfect, because they do not attain the first standard, which is our ultimate end", and they "fall short of the true character of a virtue, just as moral inclinations without practical wisdom fall short of the true character of a virtue."<sup>48</sup> "The good which it takes for an end, is not the common end of all human life, but of some particular affair", which is what we call proximate good or particular good, such as to be a prudent student (not a prudent MAN!). St. Thomas suggests that even though the moral virtues by their nature like science and art simply do not relate to the ultimate good but to the particular good of human life, they can still make man good or as we say, virtuous.<sup>49</sup> Attention should be paid in his expression "fall short of the true character of a virtue"; here "true" must refer to *vera simpliciter*, true in absolute or unqualified sense. These virtues likewise are named as *virtus secundum quid* which order man to the last end in some genus.<sup>50</sup> Here the Latin word "*simpliciter*" (simply) means "absolutely, unqualifiedly or strictly", while "*secundum quid*" has nearly the opposite signification to *simpliciter*: "as such, relative, restricted, qualified". This second level of virtues is well known as "true but imperfect virtues" (*vera virtus sed imperfecta*) which can direct the act toward a particular true good without the helping hand of charity.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, this set of virtues is perfectible "because it retains an openness to being ordered by charity".<sup>52</sup>

The last level is composed of those that are unqualifiedly perfect (*simpliciter perfectae*) combined with charity that "make a human action unqualifiedly good, in that it is something that attains our

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<sup>48</sup> *De virtutibus cardinalibus*, a. 2.

<sup>49</sup> See: *STh*, II-II, q. 23, a. 7, ad. 3.

<sup>50</sup> *STh*, I-II q. 65, a. 2.

<sup>51</sup> *STh*, II-II, q. 23, a. 7.

<sup>52</sup> B.J. Shanley O.P., "Aquinas on Pagan Virtue", p. 563.

ultimate end (the end *simpliciter*)”.<sup>53</sup> These virtues are what we have categorized as the infused supernatural (cardinal) virtues. This level is given the title of “unqualified true virtues” (*virtus vera simpliciter*) in St. Thomas’s *Summa*.<sup>54</sup>

Therefore, pagan virtues are the true virtues *per se* despite the fact that they are not true *simpliciter* without the infusion of charity. St. Thomas also defines these two levels of human good based on their relation to human nature: “what corresponds with our own nature; what exceeds the abilities of our own nature”.<sup>55</sup> For the first level, pagan virtues suffice for the human natural end very well. St. Thomas concedes, “Acquired virtues do not constitute the greatest good in an absolute sense, but the greatest in the class of human goods. Infused virtues constitute the greatest good in an absolute sense, in that they order us towards the supreme good, which is God.”<sup>56</sup> The Christian message stretches the earthly temporality to the eternity in afterlife by bestowing the new life principle, and uplifts the end of human natural life to the supernatural height, and promises the highest beatific vision overriding the eudemonia of human natural life. It is natural prudence directed by human reason that leads to the happiness of present life and the perfection commensurate with human nature; while supernatural prudence guided by God’s supernatural charity leads to the blessedness of otherworldly happiness that is the highest. The two orders work respectively on their own right and the inferior is not necessarily denied or replaced by the superior. Kent indicates that in disagreeing with Augustinianism, St. Thomas concedes the pagan virtues in the sense that he does not think all moral virtues must be related to an ultimate supernatural end; and he holds the double ends which are natural and supernatural, corresponding to the double kinds of happiness and double related virtues.<sup>57</sup> Through

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<sup>53</sup> *De virtutibus cardinalibus*, a. 2.

<sup>54</sup> *STh*, II-II, q. 23, a. 7.

<sup>55</sup> *De virtutibus in communi*, a. 10.

<sup>56</sup> *De virtutibus in communi*, a. 9, ad. 7.

<sup>57</sup> B. Kent, “Moral Provincialism”, in *Religious Studies*, Vol. 30 (1994), p. 281.

lack of charity, a pagan as a sinful unbeliever can commit evil acts following the false prudence as we mentioned above. Meanwhile, he can also act virtuously and be orderable to the good commensurate with his own nature. Pagan virtues are generically true virtues but not true virtues *simpliciter*.<sup>58</sup>

Pagan virtues can be true virtues in the sense that they are the perfection of human nature by its own unaided effort of reason, namely proportionate to its natural resources. Nevertheless, in contrast with the perfect virtues that their infused counterparts are, pagan virtues are imperfect in degree. Then we need to turn to another important issue: to what extent are pagan virtues imperfect? Knobel summarizes two understandings of pagan virtues as true but imperfect. On the one hand, the invariable sinful actions leave the agent failing to act in conformity with his natural virtues so that “he will never fully possess even the virtues that are ordered to his natural good”; on the other hand, virtues lacking supernatural orientation “will be more like dispositions than virtues” or they will not be connected with each other as an integrity.<sup>59</sup> For the former, we have discussed above that human sin will hamper the exertion of acquired prudence in the application of *synderesis* to the concrete circumstances so that the virtue will present its imperfection as a result.

Knobel points out that some neo-Thomists like Jacques Maritain and Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange hold that those virtues claimed to be the true virtues that pagans can acquire are “unstable and closer to dispositions than to virtues” and those virtues will not be well-connected with each other in the sense that some may be lacking while others are present due to the absence of prudence.<sup>60</sup> Thus the pagan virtues are just unstable dispositions rather than a well-interconnected solidarity of virtues characterized by *habitus*.

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<sup>58</sup> *STh*, II-II, q. 23, a. 7, ad.1.

<sup>59</sup> A. Knobel, “Aquinas and the Pagan Virtues”, p. 340.

<sup>60</sup> A. Knobel, “Aquinas and the Pagan Virtues”, pp. 344-5.

Firstly, we have to focus on the difference between habit and disposition by which virtue is defined. In his early works, St. Thomas himself minimizes the difference between those two concepts; and he even asserts that they are not specifically diverse.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, in the more mature *Summa Theologiae*, he does make a sharp division between habit and disposition. In one instance, disposition can be taken as the genus of habit which is included in the definition of habit. He points out that disposition is a general term which “implies an order of that which has parts...either as to place, or as to power, or as to species”; it contains “all those dispositions which are in course of formation and not yet arrived at perfect usefulness” and “perfect dispositions, which are called habits”.<sup>62</sup> As the general name, disposition can be used to signify all kinds of habits. In this sense, habit is disposition.

In another instance, disposition can be a particular term along with habit, both acting as diverse species of the one subaltern genus. St. Thomas emphasizes the instances in which disposition can be divided against habit. Disposition is how our natural capacity in potentiality is disposed to its possible actuality; while habit is the disposition at the command of reason.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, “disposition” as a particular term is used to signify the imperfect that can easily lose its character as virtue. When St. Thomas talks about the first level of virtues that is wholly imperfect, he explicitly distinguishes virtue from disposition or inclination in the sense that virtue is disposed in a good way towards perfection or goodness, while inclination could be misused in a harmful way when devoid of prudence.

The inclinations that some people have even from when they are born to act in a way characteristic of a certain virtue... Inclinations of this sort are not found all together in everyone; rather some people have an inclination of one

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<sup>61</sup> A. Knobel, “Aquinas and the Pagan Virtues”, p. 346, footnote 27.

<sup>62</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 49, a.1, ad. 3.

<sup>63</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 50, a. 3.

sort, others of another. These inclinations do not possess the character of a virtue, because no one can misuse a virtue... Someone can, though, misuse this sort of inclination even in a harmful way, if one uses it without discernment... That is why such inclinations, when they lack practical wisdom, do not possess the character of a virtue in a perfect way.<sup>64</sup>

Within the same subaltern genus as diverse species against disposition, habit signifies the perfect one that is not easily lost. In this sense, habit is the mature and perfect disposition. St. Thomas believes that Aristotle's idiomatic Greek usage of "habit" regards habit as the outcome in which an easily changeable quality becomes hardly changeable by accident. Certainly, disposition is the opposite.<sup>65</sup> Etymologically, habit (*habitus*) is having or possessing; disposition (*dispositio*) means something disposed. Disposing is not as steady and fixed as having is. St. Thomas believes that *magis consonum intentioni Aristotelis*, two concepts are two different species of one type of quality, which are distinct from each other based on their causes. Habit derives from *causae immobiles*, that is, the sciences and the virtues; while disposition arises from *causae transmutabiles*, that is, the bodily constitution of human being. Habit is difficult to change and therefore implies a certain longevity, while disposition is not so by reason of its nature. "From this it is clear that the word 'habit' implies a certain lastingness: while the word 'disposition' does not."<sup>66</sup> Habit can be considered as the concrete (*difficile mobilis*) and therefore the perfect version of disposition *facile mobilis*. In this sense, disposition does not become habit.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *De virtutibus cardinalibus*, a. 2.

<sup>65</sup> Aristotle uses *hexis* to signify a virtue or skill, while uses *diathesis* for a state or condition like being hot or ill. These two Greek words respectively correspond to Latin terms *habitus* and *dipositio*. See: V. Boland O.P., "Aquinas and Simplicius on Dispositions—A Question in Fundamental Moral Theory", in *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 82, Issue 968 (2001), p. 468.

<sup>66</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 49, a. 2, ad. 3.

<sup>67</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 49, a. 2, ad. 3.

Human acquired prudence, as we have discussed, is somewhat weakened by original sin so as to imperfectly dispose the agent and his acts to their perfection. It may lead to evil by using the disposition in a harmful way and have nothing to do with virtue. That's false or sham prudence as we call it. As far as the true but imperfect prudence is concerned, virtues that dispose the moral agent towards the proximate or particular good instead of final good of life undoubtedly can be called virtues, nonetheless, this virtue should not be a steady one because they have to be vacillated according to the shift of various particular goods. For the second source of its imperfection, even the constant final end of life is well oriented; the imperfect prudence always fails to effectively command the agent towards that end. The virtues disposed well to it must be pendulous and mutable now and then. We have no reason to call these virtues "dispositions" in St. Thomas's negative sense of the word. Nevertheless, they are the virtues in an imperfect sense because of the deficiency of both immutable unambiguous final cause and efficient cause that charity can endow to human life from without. In the tradition of Thomist commentaries, pagan habit as an imperfect one is usually described as "in a state of disposition" (*in statu dispositionis*). Even though those commentators acknowledge St. Thomas's claim that the pagan has true but imperfect virtues, they don't actually believe that the pagan can have genuine good habits. The pagan can have virtues that are "like dispositions" or "like habit" at best.<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, pagan virtues are imperfect in the sense that all the virtues, intellectual and moral, are not well-interconnected to each other by acquired prudence so that they sometimes function separately and fail to form a powerful solidarity of virtues directed to the final end.<sup>69</sup> Firstly, prudence as the intellectual virtue should

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<sup>68</sup> A. Knobel, "Aquinas and the Pagan Virtues", p. 348.

<sup>69</sup> Knobel has a different opinion on this issue. She insists that once one performs an act of prudence for the specific end, he will necessarily perform acts of moral virtues that are ordered to that same end, whether

be connected with the rest of the cardinal virtues that subsume all the rest of sub-virtues. If not so, as we know, without the operation of practical wisdom in human acts, nothing can be appropriately called virtue that disposes things to their goodness and perfection. With regards the interconnection among the moral virtues to their imperfection St. Thomas argues,

...The perfect virtues are interconnected, but the imperfect virtues are not necessarily interconnected. To show this we need to know that since virtue is something that makes a person and what he does good, perfect virtue is something that makes a person and what he does perfectly good. Imperfect virtue, though, makes a person and what he does good not unqualifiedly, but in some respect. Good is found unqualifiedly in human activities when they match up to one of the standards that govern human activities: one of those corresponds strictly to human nature, and this is right reason; the other, though, is the first measure, which transcends us, so to speak, and this is God. It is through practical wisdom that we attain right reason, because it is, precisely, right reason in doing things... It is through charity, though, that we attain God...<sup>70</sup>

St. Thomas believes that an imperfect virtue is merely “an inclination in us to do some kind of good deed, whether such inclination be in us by nature or by habituation” in the sense that they are not connected. St. Thomas illustrates the first instance by

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the virtues are genuine or false. Therefore, “‘Connection’ is not some mysterious property possessed only by those virtues ordered to supernatural beatitude but a feature of human action itself.”<sup>69</sup> See: A. Knobel, “Aquinas and the Pagan Virtues”, p. 354. Knobel demystifies the supernatural grace as an external power that heals the ambiguity in human moral performance that mere human nature induces by connecting the “separate virtues” as solid virtue *simpliciter*. For her, virtues are necessarily well-connected with each other for consistency in human action. We will not endorse this opinion based on our daily experience.

<sup>70</sup> *De virtutibus cardinalibus*, a. 2.

the deed of liberality that is not necessarily at the same time the deed of chastity. He continues, however, “The perfect moral virtue is a habit that inclines us to do a good deed well” to the extent it should be connected with other virtues.<sup>71</sup> Here we find again the wording of “inclination” and “habit”. “A virtue cannot be perfect as a virtue if isolated from the others”.

Responding to the objection that “it is possible to have one moral virtue without another because man can exercise himself in the acts of single virtue without at the same time exercising himself in another”, St. Thomas mentions that some moral virtues perfect man regarding his general state, namely “those things which have to be done in every kind of human life”. He suggests that if man wants to exercise himself by virtuous acts in all such matters, he acquire all the habits of all the moral virtues at the same time.<sup>72</sup> Here “moral virtues perfecting man regarding his general state” signify what we have mentioned as “perfect ideas of human virtues” which “cover the full range of human capacity” and concern the human life as a whole, even potentially oriented towards the more supreme and transcendent life-span as the very foundation of all the other virtues. They are cardinal virtues, intellectual and moral: prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice. As St. Thomas indicates in *De virtutibus cardinalibus*, “if we take the four cardinal virtues as implying certain general criteria for virtues, they are interconnected in that one of these criteria alone is not enough for any virtuous action: all need to be present.”<sup>73</sup>

Disconnection of virtues as the manifestation of the imperfect pagan virtues could be considered as the further representation of disposition or habit *in statu dispositionis* that pagan virtues characterize. The good interconnection of virtues presents the well-balanced, rightly-ordered and all-round human natural qualities under the direction of perfect prudence towards the genuine final

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<sup>71</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 65, a. 1.

<sup>72</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 65, a. 1, ad. 1.

<sup>73</sup> *De virtutibus cardinalibus*, a. 2.

end in a perfectly resolute manner. That state of mind is simply what the perfect virtues *simpliciter* can achieve. The imperfect virtue makes an agent and his acts good not unqualifiedly but in some respect, namely good "*secundum quid*". Two powers, however, can lead all the human virtues towards unqualified good, one is right reason attained through prudence corresponding strictly to human nature, the other is the first measure that transcends us, i.e. God.<sup>74</sup> While the former is imperfect as we discussed previously. St. Thomas suggests that the latter whose charity is infused into us can guide us to unqualified good, "If, then, we take the virtues as unqualifiedly perfect, they are connected because of charity, because no virtue can be of this sort without charity, and once you possess charity you possess all the virtues."<sup>75</sup> Anyone who possesses charity ought also to possess all the other virtues because the infused charity can command all the virtues interconnected altogether towards the ultimate end by forging a solid integrity of virtues that are the infused cardinal virtues, as we will discuss later.

Keenan criticizes St. Thomas in his way of articulating the inter-connection of the cardinal virtues under the rule of reason. For St. Thomas and other virtue ethics philosophers, the rightly-ordered or well-integrated state of mind (usually ultimately guaranteed by the supernatural power) is always the criterion of the morally good and the function of moral virtues. It seems that St. Thomas does not work out a distinction between goodness and rightness.<sup>76</sup> Right (connection with charity or with prudence and inter-connection among all the virtues) is the good all the time. The intrinsic moral goodness cannot earn merit on its own right, such as benevolence. "Benevolence could provide a non-theological description of moral goodness. He states that benevolence differs from charity solely by the fact that the latter enjoys union with God. But he does not

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<sup>74</sup> *De virtutibus cardinalibus*, a. 2.

<sup>75</sup> *De virtutibus cardinalibus*, a. 2.

<sup>76</sup> J.F. Keenan S.J., "Distinguishing Charity as Goodness and Prudence as Rightness: A Key to Thomas's *Secunda Pars*", *The Thomist*, Vol. 56 (1992), pp. 423-424.

develop his thoughts on benevolence as he does with charity.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, the meritorious moral goodness of pagan virtues may remind us that benevolence, self-givingness or self-sacrifice as its radical modality, should be reconsidered as a possibility commensurate with human natural capacity in morality apart from the assistance of supernatural grace from without.

### **Pagan Virtues towards the Infused Virtues: A Pilgrimage**

What is the supreme form of pagan virtues by which the autonomous achievement of human morality can be realized? The answer may lie in the joint or the boundary between the virtues proportionate to human nature and a higher form of virtue that is superadded on human life from without, namely the infused virtues.

Undoubtedly, the ultimate end or *telos* of human life determines the achievement or the apex of the moral virtues. For St. Thomas, “neither the life of civic virtues lived out in the *polis* nor the contemplation of what is eternal which *theoria* affords is other than imperfect happiness<sup>78</sup> It is the beatific vision that offers the ultimate *telos*, namely, the highest happiness to man.

Final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence...Consequently, for perfect happiness the intellect needs to reach the very Essence of the First Cause. And thus it will have its perfection through union with God as with that object, in which alone man's happiness consists.<sup>79</sup>

St. Thomas differentiates four kinds of virtue following Plotinus: social or political virtues (*virtutes politicae*), perfecting virtues or

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<sup>77</sup> J.F. Keenan S.J., “Distinguishing Charity as Goodness and Prudence as Rightness”, p. 424.

<sup>78</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988, pp. 192-193.

<sup>79</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 3, a. 8.

purgative virtues (*virtutes purgatoriae*) which literally mean “cleansing virtues”, perfect virtues or virtues of the cleansed soul (*virtutes purgati animi*) and exemplar virtues (*virtutes exemplares*). Exemplar virtues are the virtues existing originating in God as the exemplar of human virtues. Social or political virtues are in man “according to the condition of his nature” as a social-political animal. “Man behaves himself well in the conduct of human affairs” according to these virtues. St. Thomas particularly points out that the political virtues “behoove(s) a man to do his utmost to strive onward even to divine things”. Accordingly, he proposes a group of virtues called “perfecting virtues or purgative virtues” to stand between the political virtues and divine exemplar virtues “so that some are virtues of men who are on their way and tending towards the Divine similitude”. The remaining set of virtues named “perfect virtues” or “virtues of the cleansed soul” refers to those that have already attained to that similitude.<sup>80</sup> We could easily discover that a number of groups of virtues are directed towards the Blessed and His exemplar virtues. This quartet of virtues could be deemed the pilgrimage of human virtues towards the Divine. The social or political virtues that belong are purely proportionate to human nature and lie in the lowest position of the ascending ladder, although they also are orientated towards the Godhead.

Shanley upholds the pagan virtues apart from supernatural grace or without divine assistance. He believes that *bonum civis* is precisely the ultimate end of pagan virtues proportionate to human nature in the virtue ethics of St. Thomas. “The *bonum civis* is a due end (*debitum finem*) of man, truly perfective of his nature and commensurate with his natural inclination... as the optimal good achievable by human beings apart from grace”<sup>81</sup> In his *Summa Theologiae*, St. Thomas, instead, uses “human virtues” or “natural virtues” to indicate virtues accessible to the unaided human capacities for the natural end of human life such as “political

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<sup>80</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 61, a. 5.

<sup>81</sup> B.J. Shanley O.P., “Aquinas on Pagan Virtue”, p. 574, 555.

virtues”; he implies that they pertain to the earthly happiness of humanity proportionate to human nature.<sup>82</sup>

When St. Thomas discusses that human will needs a virtuous disposition to aim at a good which surpasses the level of its own capacity, he mentions two ways in which a good can exceed the level of the will. The one situation happens “when the will is raised to aim at a good that exceeds the boundaries of human good”. Here St. Thomas means by “human” that which human nature can achieve by its own powers. The higher good is obviously divine good that can be led to by charity. The other happens “when someone seeks a good that belongs to someone else without the will’s being drawn beyond the boundaries of human good”, namely for the good of others, in this case “justice is needed to complete the will, along with all the virtues that are directed at other people”.<sup>83</sup> St. Thomas insists that the natural good God bestows on us in His creating grace becomes the foundation of natural love that “loves God above all things and more than himself”. Ontologically, “each part naturally loves the common good of the whole more than its own particular good”. The human individual inclines to the good of the human community. Accordingly, St. Thomas then justifies the civil good, “It may also be seen in civic virtues whereby sometimes the citizens suffer damage even to their own property and persons for the sake of the common good”.<sup>84</sup>

The achievement in the life of pagan political virtues, in the pursuit of the *bonum commune*, as Shanley says, “should not be understood as a moral order independent of the economy of grace, but rather as the preparation for grace that is itself already under the influence of grace”.<sup>85</sup> To propose the pagan virtues apart from supernatural

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<sup>82</sup> W.C. Mattison III, “Thomas's Categorizations of Virtue”, p. 221. For St. Thomas, civil good is the synonym of natural good. See: W.C. Mattison III, “Can Christians Possess the Acquired Cardinal Virtues?” p. 563, footnote 17.

<sup>83</sup> *De virtutibus in communi*, a. 5.

<sup>84</sup> *STh*, II-II, q. 26, a. 3.

<sup>85</sup> B.J. Shanley O.P., “Aquinas on Pagan Virtue”, p. 555.

grace and providence, for Shanley, is by no means to confirm the autonomy of the pagan virtues dictated by human “right” reason, but to uncover the theological significance of them “as a preparation for or openness to grace”. Although a kind of this-worldly pagan morality involves genuine or true virtues, the social or political life which “lies within the range of human achievement” as a second best kind of life apart from the perfect sanctifying life, should aim at “something beyond the city”<sup>86</sup> Shanley continues,

It (*bonum civis*) involves a subordination of self to the good of the community. The other-regarding (*ad alterum*) that is constitutive of justice opens the agent to appreciate a good transcending himself that imposes order on his pursuit of all other goods. The achievement of political virtue is an ordering to a self-transcending *debitum finem* that is in principle available to every moral agent as a fundamental option because it is a good in accord with human nature and inclination.<sup>87</sup>

Once we locate St. Thomas’s pagan virtue in human life as political life, it’s not difficult to figure out its supreme form. When we discuss political or social welfare, we have to refer to the common good which goes beyond one’s own natural conservation and perfection in the basic sense, in other words, to seek the good outside oneself. The supreme form of virtues in the pursuit of the common good is nothing but altruism according to which a man’s own natural fulfillment or perfection can be sacrificed for the sake of the welfare of other members in the community. Altruism can even reach its radical form: self-givingness or self-sacrifice. In the act of self-givingness, man can give up his own natural conservation for seeking for a more supreme perfection. Nevertheless, this moral elevation or achievement needs to be oriented and justified by supernatural resources. In this sense, political virtues can reach this elevation at their best without the helping hand from without or the immediate infusion of grace. They

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<sup>86</sup> B.J. Shanley O.P., “Aquinas on Pagan Virtue”, p. 567.

<sup>87</sup> B.J. Shanley O.P., “Aquinas on Pagan Virtue”, p. 574.

are the virtues proportionate to human nature and unaided human efforts. Once a man performs the political virtues for the common good over his own natural good, he can be regarded as a man in his pilgrimage to the Divinity. Therefore, pagan virtues have in themselves the orientation to the Divine, particularly as the phenomenon of the purgative virtues or perfecting virtues impressively presents. To show the state of perfecting inclination to the higher perfection, purgative virtues can be described as *in via* towards the Divine similitude but still in perfecting of their imperfection when one decides to seek more supreme perfection by striving for other's good at the price of his natural one. Thus there should be some continuity between acquired virtues commensurate with nature and the virtues infused by God's grace, especially within the life of a Christian.

For St. Thomas, the acquired virtues and the infused virtues should not be separate things for the perfect moral life because the infused virtues are necessarily required when he declares that charity is the form of all the moral virtues. He rightly says, "Charity is the mother and the root of all the virtues, inasmuch as it is the form of them all," it "directs the acts of all other virtues to the last end", and "gives the form to all other acts of virtue",<sup>88</sup> it becomes the efficient cause of all the virtues.<sup>89</sup> Thus the acquired virtues and the infused virtues are not parallel routes to the same end. The former should be transformed and elevated to the higher level by the latter to enter the supernatural order of life. The acquired virtues at their best can be the transitive phase towards a further direction, the spiritually higher state, namely *virtutes perfectae simpliciter* in God's grace, which can only be the infused virtues. Accordingly, the infused virtues are the perfect form of the imperfect acquired virtues that the pagan has. The acquired moral virtues as human efforts can only be the preparation towards being strengthened and transformed by the infused virtues of God's sanctifying grace.

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<sup>88</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 62, a. 4; II-II, q. 23, a. 8.

<sup>89</sup> *STh*, II-II, q. 23, a. 8, ad. 1.

A *habitus*, as Mirkes who holds to the above position writes, not only determines or perfects “a power of soul to perform a certain operation with ease, promptness, steadfastness and enjoyment”, but also shows itself “a passive power or agent, that is, capable of receiving further perfection from a superior habit”.<sup>90</sup> The acquired moral virtues unfold themselves as disposed towards more superior infused counterparts. Then Mirkes develops a hierarchical understanding of virtues by the Aristotelian matter-form relationship in which the natural disposition, the acquired virtues and the infused virtues inform a hierarchical series so that the “imperfect” acquired moral virtues serving as the material preparation of the perfect infused virtues are justified.

Just as the natural dispositions or “seed of virtue” are the perfecting principles of the inferior power of their respective faculties, so is it reasonable to argue that acquired moral virtue is the perfecting principle of the natural dispositions which are subordinate to it. Just as natural dispositions are the perfectible or material principles of the more perfect principles of the acquired intellectual and moral virtues, so is it reasonable to argue that acquired moral virtue is the perfectible or material principle of infused virtue which is superior to it.<sup>91</sup>

For Mirkes, the acquired moral virtues are the perfectible or material principle of the infused virtues that are superior and perfect. The moral virtue of a Christian or as we call Christian moral virtue as a whole is an indivisible composite virtue, a single entity that is absolutely perfect moral virtue (*virtus simpliciter*); it is formally an infused virtue and materially an acquired virtue. Mirkes

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<sup>90</sup> R. Mirkes, “Aquinas on the Unity of Perfect Moral Virtue”, in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 71, No. 4 (1997), p. 594.

<sup>91</sup> R. Mirkes, “Aquinas on the Unity of Perfect Moral Virtue”, p. 596.

believes that this interpretation is true to St. Thomas's view when he says that charity is the form of the virtues.<sup>92</sup>

In the Christian who also possesses the acquired virtues, moral virtue is a composite, ordered reality. It consists of an acquired virtue or material component and an infused virtue or formal component that together enable the justified to perform moral acts that are directed to one material object under two different but ordered formalities.<sup>93</sup>

We could say, therefore, that the infused virtues are built upon the acquired virtues in the sense that they are the preparation and thus receptive of the latter. This is not to say that the acquired virtues are proportionate to God's supernatural beatitude. On the contrary, the acquired virtues being perfect are the outcome of the perfect encounter of the habituated moral cultivation or purification with God's gratuitous healing charity and the realization of union with it through transformation.

Mirkes says, "Besides acts of faith, hope and charity, Christians can posit supernatural acts of fortitude, temperance, justice, and prudence and their allied virtues, acts that are the means to attaining their supernatural end or happiness."<sup>94</sup> This viewpoint implies the blessed acquired virtues that exist within the Christian are the transformed and thus perfecting ones. The transformed acquired virtues by infused virtues can be accurately called "infused cardinal virtues", as we have mentioned in the first chapter, one of the three sets of virtues according to the categorization of St. Thomas's virtue theory.

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<sup>92</sup> R. Mirkes, "Aquinas's Doctrine of Moral Virtue and Its Significance for Theories of Facility", *The Thomist*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (1997), p. 196, esp. footnote 20.

<sup>93</sup> R. Mirkes, "Aquinas's Doctrine of Moral Virtue and Its Significance for Theories of Facility", p. 212.

<sup>94</sup> R. Mirkes, "Aquinas on the Unity of Perfect Moral Virtue", p. 598.

Is there any contradiction between the different ends respectively that the acquired cardinal virtues and the infused cardinal virtues dispose to? St. Thomas exemplifies this by looking at diverse forms of temperance on food: diet (for natural health) and abstinence (for the subjection to God).

Now it is evident that the mean that is appointed in such like concupiscences according to the rule of human reason, is seen under a different aspect from the mean which is fixed according to Divine rule. For instance, in the consumption of food, the mean fixed by human reason, is that food should not harm the health of the body, nor hinder the use of reason: whereas, according to the Divine rule, it behooves man to “chastise his body, and bring it into subjection”, by abstinence in food, drink and the like.<sup>95</sup>

Although St. Thomas successively indicates that the infused virtues and their acquired counterparts differ in species, he shows that the motive and end of the acquired moral virtues are included within those of the infused moral virtues so that both the proximate and final end, or natural and supernatural end are achieved simultaneously without contradiction, as Mirkes underscores.<sup>96</sup> As St. Thomas says, “acts produced by an infused habit, do not cause a habit, but strengthen the already existing habit; just as the remedies of medicine given to a man who is naturally healthy, do not cause a kind of health, but give new strength to the health he had before.”<sup>97</sup>

Apparently, acquired abstinence serves the civil good; while infused abstinence serves the final good. Yet the latter can and often should complete the former. “Abstaining from food in order to keep one’s head clear out of love for God should also serve bodily health. The higher end directs the work of the acquired virtue and

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<sup>95</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 63, a. 4.

<sup>96</sup> R. Mirkes, “Aquinas on the Unity of Perfect Moral Virtue”, pp. 599-600.

<sup>97</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 51, a. 4, ad. 3.

transforms its final cause.”<sup>98</sup> Notwithstanding that the ends of the infused and acquired moral virtues are diverse, the ultimate good perfectly subsumes or satisfies the proximate good. Being the final good, it should never deviate from the proximate good that nourishes the nature but exalts it to a higher plane in which the instability and ambiguity of the proximate good will be overcome. The imperfection of pagan acquired virtues will be healed towards the perfection and trueness *simpliciter* accordingly. In this way, we say “grace brings nature to fulfillment”.

The aforesaid theory underlines the trans-formative power of supernatural grace in moral acts on the one hand, and also pinpoints the vital human and active moral efforts prepared for the infusion of grace into nature. As Mirkes concludes,

The sublimation of human virtue into divine is a direct testimony to the dispositive character of human nature and the divine potential of human moral effort. For Aquinas, then, nature is dynamic in character and includes an inner drive toward its existential fulfillment. Grace builds not on the ruins of nature but on its foundation.<sup>99</sup>

Thus the good cultivation of pagan acquired (cardinal) virtues can be the good preparation of the reception of being infused by God’s grace. Ontologically speaking, the human person as an *imago Dei* is open to and fit for grace so that “formation by grace implies the perfection of what is human”.<sup>100</sup> We need to pay attention here, however, since the preparation by no means the cooperation of human natural facility with divine grace. Humanity is impotent to acquire grace, and for this reason the infused virtues will never be ascribed to the acquired ones. The acquired moral virtues as human

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<sup>98</sup> J. Inglis, “Aquinas’s Replication of the Acquired Moral Virtues: Rethinking the Standard Philosophical Interpretation of Moral Virtue in Aquinas”, in *Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (1999), p. 21.

<sup>99</sup> R. Mirkes, “Aquinas on the Unity of Perfect Moral Virtue”, p. 604.

<sup>100</sup> R. Mirkes, “Aquinas on the Unity of Perfect Moral Virtue”, pp. 604-605.

efforts can only be the preparation of the latter through being strengthened and transformed by them.

Christians should not praise the acquired virtues only for their own sake, but chiefly in order to prepare themselves and others for the reception and retention of a panoply of infused moral virtues. While Aquinas held that human beings can cooperate in the acquisition of the acquired virtues...he regarded true virtue as a gift for which one can prepare but in which one cannot cooperate.<sup>101</sup>

The preparation can be understood as the material preparation for a newborn solidarity of virtues of the Christian, the solidarity composed of the acquired cardinal virtues as its material and the infused virtues as its form according to Mirkes's unification theory.

As far as the interaction between acquired virtues and infused virtues within a Christian is concerned, the unification theory that Mirkes suggests holds that the acquired virtues and the infused virtues must complement each other because neither sides can be the cause of the other. The imperfect acquired virtues need to be perfected by the infused virtues through being disposed toward the ultimate good; while the infused virtues, however, require the material component to help the individual to make decisions not only regarding supernatural life, but also concerning the human affairs in present life.<sup>102</sup>

The acquired virtue and its facility constitute the material component of Christian moral virtue; this comprises the visible or observable facility. This facility allows for the easy performance of virtuous acts due to the moderation of passions and the destruction of contrary vices that can only come as a result of the repetition of acts of virtue over time in varying circumstances. The infused moral

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<sup>101</sup> J. Inglis, "Aquinas's Replication of the Acquired Moral Virtues", p. 22.

<sup>102</sup> R. Mirkes, "Aquinas's Doctrine of Moral Virtue and Its Significance for Theories of Facility", pp. 204-205.

virtue and its facility comprise the formal component of Christian moral virtue since the infused moral virtue enables the faculty and its natural virtue to adhere firmly to the good of virtue and, through charity, to be ordered to the supernatural end. The incomplete nature of each type of facility implies their complementarity.<sup>103</sup>

St. Thomas also asks the question whether charity can be without moral virtue. In response to the point that those who have charity find it difficult to do works of virtue, he admits that it is not the truth for those who possess acquired moral virtues because the repeated habituated acts remove the contrary dispositions and facilitate the life of infused virtue.<sup>104</sup> Even a Christian who already possesses God's sanctifying grace can merely act virtuously at times due to the lack of facility to tackle the presence of contrary dispositions. Consequently, he may fail to act virtuously in certain areas of his life that are not directly concerning salvation.<sup>105</sup> The correlative facility needs to be substantiated and nourished by the acquired habituation. For example, a Christian who was used to eating temperately before converting to Christian faith can easily observe abstinence because the contrary dispositions of him such as gluttony have already been overcome orderly.

On the other hand, the theological virtues such as charity are not observable since we cannot discern the elicited or specific acts of charity due to their hidden motivation. Nevertheless, the cardinal virtues are the observable complement for the moral judgments.<sup>106</sup> DeYoung also endorses this point of view. She argues that the cardinal virtues will never be replaced by theological virtues but be

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<sup>103</sup> R. Mirkes, "Aquinas's Doctrine of Moral Virtue and Its Significance for Theories of Facility", p. 218.

<sup>104</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 65, a. 3, ad. 2.

<sup>105</sup> W.C. Mattison III, "Can Christians Possess the Acquired Cardinal Virtues?" p. 585.

<sup>106</sup> J.F. Keenan S.J., "Distinguishing Charity as Goodness and Prudence as Rightness: A Key to Thomas's *Secunda Pars*", in *The Thomist*, Vol. 56 (1992), p. 425.

offered “a new range of operation”, they are “instruments and implementers of the theological virtues in the matter of concrete acts, but these acts are now done with the ultimate end in view.”<sup>107</sup> Human moral effort becomes a constitutive element after being transformed by the supernatural power and “forms an operational unity with grace and the infused virtues”.<sup>108</sup>

As a result, the acquired moral virtues become the proper preparation for the infused virtues. Mirkes concludes the vision of perfect unification of the acquired moral virtue and its infused counterparts within a Christian,

Acquired and infused moral virtue together form a unity, a single, indivisible virtue that is supernatural in character. The moral virtue infused by charity rewards the human act with a perfection that far exceeds its finite scope... The Christian person existentially has a single nature consisting of human and divine causes, and this nature is a divinized one. God, who is perfect unity and perfect activity, not only shows human persons who they are, but also unifies and activates them in ways they are not able to be or do on their own.<sup>109</sup>

In this new solid integrity of virtues we categorize as that of the infused cardinal virtues, being perfect *simpliciter*, has the acquired cardinal virtues that a pagan exclusively possesses as its material cause, and the infused virtues as its formal cause, efficient cause and final cause as well.

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<sup>107</sup> R. Konyndyk DeYoung, Colleen McCluskey, and Christina Van Dyke, *Aquinas's Ethics: Metaphysical Foundations, Moral Theory, and Theological Context* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), p. 142.

<sup>108</sup> R. Mirkes, “Aquinas’s Doctrine of Moral Virtue and Its Significance for Theories of Facility”, p. 218.

<sup>109</sup> R. Mirkes, “Aquinas on the Unity of Perfect Moral Virtue”, p. 605.

### Conclusion

St. Thomas's virtue theory, especially his theory of pagan virtues not only discovers the feasible and necessary infusion of supernatural beatitude for man's ultimate good and perfection, but also unfolds the potential capacity, or more accurately put, suitability and inclination to other sublime forms of perfection. The openness of pagan virtues ensure the human autonomous natural facility to perform both the acquired cardinal virtues proportionate to his inborn nature, and oriented to the infused supernatural cardinal virtues that God bestows on us by His gratuitous sanctifying grace.

A pagan can be genuinely virtuous so that "all the virtues of pagan Rome were virtues on their own right". Kent suggests that the idea that "only those with the 'correct' theological commitments can have true moral virtues while others cannot" commits moral provincialism. In opposition to moral provincialism, "moral cosmopolitanism" embraces the common capacity for virtue of human being in general.<sup>110</sup> She believes that St. Thomas is also strongly influenced by a moral cosmopolitanism tradition.<sup>111</sup> St. Thomas justifies the pagan virtues and points out their limitation, he says,

It is possible by means of human works to acquire moral virtues, in so far as they produce good works that are directed to an end not surpassing the natural power of man: and when they are acquired thus, they can be without charity, even as they were in many of the Gentiles. But in so far as they produce good works in proportion to a supernatural last end, thus they have the character of

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<sup>110</sup> B. Kent, "Moral Provincialism", pp. 269-285. Another possibility is that a kind of Christian inclusivism can claim itself moral cosmopolitanism by its latent exclusivist agenda called "everybody being an anonymous Christian".

<sup>111</sup> B. Kent, "Moral Provincialism", p. 276.

virtue, truly and perfectly; and cannot be acquired by human acts, but are infused by God. Such like moral virtues cannot be without charity.<sup>112</sup>

St. Thomas's claim that "pagan virtues are true, but imperfect" posits the limitation or possibility for a pagan to be perfected *simpliciter* beyond his own efforts, namely under another formal cause (efficient cause, final cause) that is initiated by God and His saving grace.

Pagan virtues obtain their supreme form in social or political virtues when concerning the common good. They can be purgative virtues in a perfecting dynamic towards the godhead. Nevertheless, due to the imperfection of pagan virtues manifested in both unsteady habit *in statu dispositionis* and disconnection of each virtues, intellectual and moral, the pilgrimage to where the true perfection *simpliciter* lies has to be carried out by the supernatural assistance from outside of the human natural facilities. Through the transformation of pagan acquired cardinal virtues by the infused virtues, in the perfect unification of both parties, the infused cardinal virtues come into being as a solid integrity of virtues which has the pagan virtues as its observable concrete matter and the infused virtues as its form. In this sense, pagan virtues act as a proper and good preparation and complement of the perfect virtues *simpliciter* within the Christian. The ultimate union of human *eros* for self-fulfillment and God's gratuitous self-giving *agape* shapes the perfect form of human virtue, i.e. Charity.

For St. Thomas, pagan virtues should not be considered merely as being purely instrumental to the salvation for the afterlife. Human good itself is also a true good proportionate to human nature towards which an earthly life is led. In this approach, the justification of pagan virtues can't be charged with Pelagianism theologically. Virtues in the natural level have nothing to do with salvation. They are just the proper preparation for the next stage of perfection beyond human natural good. We are by no means to

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<sup>112</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 65, a. 2.

suggest that pagan virtues could be the criterion of being worth to receive saving grace. Thus the proclamation that the pagan has virtues apart from the assistance of supernatural grace cannot be charged of Pelagianism which alleges that pagans possess the unaided ability to lead themselves to the path of salvation.

On the question of pagan virtues from the philosophical perspective, a strong theological understanding like O'Meara's should be evaded, which suggests that all that can be called "virtues" are grace-infused, "Not only faith, hope, and charity are infused along with grace but also those habits called 'cardinal virtues' and their sub-virtues."<sup>113</sup> To give a credible account of a philosophical investigation of St. Thomas's virtue theory it is necessary not to over-generalize through theology which can lead us away from the complexity of the interrelationship between the natural and theological virtues. In a similar way, the theological proposition like "all pagans are potentially Christian or anonymous Christian", along with the latent evangelical agenda behind it, is not our original intention to justify pagan virtues. On the contrary, we articulate this subject matter for further academic perusal: the investigation of pagan virtues in the other modalities of human ethics, especially Oriental religiosity such as Chinese Confucianism and Buddhism, which emphasizes that the perfection of human being is not from divine alterity through blessedness but by awakening of the potential supernatural power inside human nature, or rather by liberating from the natural imperfection through the mysterious moral-spiritual practices, seemingly a kind of active cultivation of the acquired virtues.

For this purpose, we would rather prefer the ontological presupposition of *homo religiosus* to justify pagan virtues. Osborne locates religious obligations in the moral instead of theological virtues because he indicates that religious virtues such as benevolence (sacrifices as the extreme form) and devotions are

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<sup>113</sup> T.F. O'Meara, "Virtues in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas", in *Theological Studies*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (1997), p. 265.

merely the means to God as the ultimate end as the moral virtues are. Religious obligation “is based not on a special divine command, but rather on the natural inclination of all humans...like Augustine, Thomas thinks that the virtue of religion is a necessary condition for a good life.”<sup>114</sup> Herein human as *homo religiosus* becomes Osborne’s basic ontological foundation. Religiosity (rather than specific religious faith!) is not infused grace but the connatural nature in human ontological structure. As St. Thomas says, “man, by his natural powers alone, can love God more than himself and above all things.”<sup>115</sup>

Based on this ontology, virtue ethics can be transcended and steps taken towards duty ethics, namely leaps from “to be good by being right (order or disposition)” to “to be good by being good *per se* (through fulfilling duty as imperative)”. *Homo religiosus* will justify and facilitate duty ethics by providing an ontological foundation on which deontology is established. Once this step has been established, good as the moral imperative will be awarded its intrinsic good. In this sense, therefore, to say a pagan is virtuous and meritorious if his dispositional acts are virtuous, even without being justified before God, is not problematic.

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<sup>114</sup> T.M. Osborne Jr., “The Augustinianism of Thomas Aquinas’s Moral Theory”, in *The Thomist*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (2003), p. 288.

<sup>115</sup> *STh*, I-II, q. 109, a. 3.



**MORE THAN HILLBILLY THOMISTS  
THREE ATTENTIVE READERS OF AQUINAS**

*Pim Valkenberg*

In the past two years I have been reading three books about Thomas Aquinas written by former colleagues of mine. Ever since I offered to write a review essay about these three books, I have often wondered whether they have anything specific in common, but even though it was relatively easy to find characteristics common of two out of the three books, it took me a long time before I finally realized why I kept reading these books even though teaching or researching Aquinas is not an official part of my present duties in the area of religion and culture. The common characteristic of the three books and the reason why I kept reading them was that they were written by attentive readers of Aquinas.

Well of course that should not be exceptional at all. Every good book about Aquinas should be the result of attentive reading. So why did I end up seeing this as a specific characteristic? The answer is probably that each of the three authors has discovered Thomas Aquinas more or less on his own, not mediated by a school-tradition in which Aquinas was the default choice. Even though each of the three scholars spent some time at a Catholic institution, they did not come to the study of theology from a Catholic background. The reason why I call them attentive readers of Aquinas is that they were drawn to their reading of Aquinas on the basis of a personal match between their theological insights and what they discovered in Aquinas, without the traditional approach to Aquinas as the main theological authority that is still maintained – positively and sometimes negatively – in many Catholic theological institutions.

The best way to explain what I mean here is to compare their more or less individual paths toward Aquinas with a way of reading Thomas Aquinas that seeks to build on a strong continuity between him and the later tradition bearing his name, the tradition

of (neo-) Thomism. This is a way of reading that is fairly successful nowadays at the Thomistic Institute situated within the Pontifical Faculty of the Immaculate Conception housed at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington D.C. The mission statement of the Thomistic Institute says that it “promotes research into the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas and the subsequent Thomistic tradition. The research of the institute is both historic and systematic, deeply rooted in the classical Catholic tradition while engaging contemporary discourse and thought. It recognizes also the importance of the philosophical heritage of the Common Doctor of the Church as a well-spring that can enrich the study of theology.”<sup>1</sup> Since the Pontifical Faculty at the Dominican House of Studies is a partner in the Washington Theological Consortium, together with the university where I work, I have had the occasion to attend quite a few of their conferences and lectures. The choice of the themes of these conferences and lectures is determined by two of the characteristics mentioned above: a study of Aquinas in continuity with the Thomistic tradition, and with special attention to its philosophical dimensions as foundation for the theological training of future Dominicans.<sup>2</sup> I do not want to suggest that one approach to Thomas Aquinas is better than the other – even though I certainly have a preference, based on my own theological training – but I want to draw attention to the fact that the three books that I want to review are in a certain sense a-typical in their approach to Aquinas. Some German scholars of Thomas Aquinas have coined the term *thomanisch* as different from *thomistisch* to express such an a-typical approach that concentrates more on Aquinas’s own theological approach than on the broad Thomistic tradition that sets forth his name.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Found on the website of the Thomistic Institute, accessed on July 8, 2015. See <http://www.thomisticinstitute.org/about-ti/>

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.thomisticinstitute.org/past-conferences/> for a list of past events.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Richard Schenk – a member of the Board of Advisors of the Thomistic Institute – in his *Die Gnade vollendeter Endlichkeit: zur transzendentaltheologischen Auslegung der thomanischen Anthropologie* (Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 1989), p. 76.

Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt – whose newest book on Aquinas I will discuss below has characterized his own approach to Thomas Aquinas as “being a hillbilly Thomist”.<sup>4</sup> For those who are not familiar with the term “hillbilly”: it refers to someone from the Southeast in the United States who is considered to be an outsider to the civilized manners of the urban Northern elite. While the term clearly has a pejorative connotation, Bauerschmidt defends himself quite well in a biting footnote: “My own experience is that one only writes of Thomas with fear and trembling, because there is always some Thomist lurking around the corner, ready to leap out and demonstrate that you have focused too much on the *Summa Theologiae* and ignored the Aristotelian commentaries or, even worse, your Latin is so poor that you have failed to appreciate Thomas’ use of the ablative absolute in a particular passage. Of course, one might respond that Thomas himself dared to interpret Aristotle without knowing Greek, making him perhaps a ‘hillbilly Aristotelian’.”<sup>5</sup>

So what is the added value of “hillbilly Thomism” or perhaps “outback Thomism” or even “*heikneuter* Thomism”?<sup>6</sup> I would say that the virtue of being aware of one’s not knowing the fine details of traditional readings of Aquinas makes one more attentive to what Thomas actually has to say and therefore such a reading might actually become more compelling than the default reading. The disadvantage of unfamiliarity is compensated by greater attentiveness.

After some extended study of Thomas Aquinas, though, one can no longer hide one’s growing familiarity with the object of

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Also, O.H. Pesch, *Thomas von Aquin: Grenze und Größe mittelalterlicher Theologie* (Mainz: Grünewald, 1988), p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> F.C. Bauerschmidt, ‘Shouting in the Land of the Hard of Hearing: on being a hillbilly Thomist’, in *Aquinas in Dialogue: Thomas for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. by J. Fodor, F. C. Bauerschmidt, *Modern Theology* 20/1 (2004), 163-83.

<sup>5</sup> F.C. Bauerschmidt, ‘Shouting in the Land of the Hard of Hearing’, p. 179 nt. 17.

<sup>6</sup> My Van Dale dictionary for “hillbilly” says: “boer, heikneuter, pummel. Oorspronkelijk iemand uit het zuidoosten van de USA”.

one's study and this is certainly what Fritz Bauerschmidt showed in his *Holy Teaching*, an introductory set of translations of the *Summa Theologiae* with copious footnotes published in 2005.<sup>7</sup> There were two main reasons why I liked to use the book in my teaching: the attention to theological and Christological themes, and maybe most importantly the vivid examples about children and dogs that often succeed in bringing Aquinas's sometimes dry analyses much closer to the experiences of our students. And yes: the new book contains more vivid examples about the same children and the same dogs.

The title of the new book is *Thomas Aquinas: Faith, Reason, and Following Christ*, and in the midst of many other introductory volumes to Aquinas, it is without a doubt the element of "following Christ" that stands out.<sup>8</sup> While most scholars have approached Aquinas mainly as a theologian in the context of the university school, particularly in Paris where he spent two important periods of his life, Bauerschmidt wants to approach Aquinas predominantly as a Dominican friar who goes wherever his Dominican superiors want him to go. Certainly, he is a *magister in sacra Pagina* but his academic career is definitely subordinate to or, rather, is a consequence of his ecclesial vocation.<sup>9</sup>

While the book can certainly serve as a general introduction to the life and thought of Thomas Aquinas, its real objective is to show how Aquinas tried to "relate faith and reason for the sake of following Christ" (x). Consequently, after an introductory chapter that situates Aquinas in the context of his time,

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<sup>7</sup> F.C. Bauerschmidt, *Holy Teaching: Introducing the Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Grand Rapids MI: Brazos Press, 2005). Note the dedication to Stanley Hauerwas, "fellow hillbilly Thomist" in front of the book.

<sup>8</sup> F.C. Bauerschmidt, *Thomas Aquinas: Faith, Reason, and Following Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> It is no coincidence that Bauerschmidt introduces himself not only as a professor of theology at Loyola University Maryland, but also as a Deacon of the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Nor is it a coincidence that the same combination (professor of theology and permanent deacon) characterizes several members of the 'Thomas Instituut te Utrecht'.

two series of three chapters shed light on the two main themes of the book: Faith and Reason (chapters 2-4) and Following Christ (chapters 5-6). It is interesting how this division in two parts almost reminds one of the classical two-layered approach to the study of Thomas Aquinas: first his philosophy, next his theology. This is not at all what Bauerschmidt intends to do, and yet his interest in what he calls the “intellectual project” of Thomas Aquinas – later corrected into “intellectual ministry” (81) – almost suggests such an order – as does the order of the *quaestiones* in the *Summa Theologiae* itself. Again, it would be a misunderstanding to think that Bauerschmidt simply offers a cross-section of that famous compendium since he furnishes much more, but maybe it is the geniality of his approach that it can be read in such a simple way.

In the first half of the book (chapters 2-4) Bauerschmidt discusses a number of classical topics, sometimes tending toward a close reading of Aquinas’s texts, sometimes toward engaging in debates between different traditions of reading him. He does not hesitate to side with Étienne Gilson in characterizing Aquinas as a preeminent practitioner of “Christian philosophy” (43) and with Josef Pieper in characterizing his philosophy as primarily a “way of life” (77). Again, it is the choice to live as a Dominican friar that determines Thomas’s choices in his intellectual ministry. Chapters three and four, about *praeambula fidei* and *fides quaerens intellectum* contain some of the vintage discussions that one would find in any classical compendium to Aquinas, and Bauerschmidt shows that he – even though still identifying as a “Hillbilly Thomist” (xi) – knows his Thomism thoroughly, with the French Thomists and the Anglo-Saxon analytic philosophers on top of it. But at the end of these sometimes long-winded discussions he returns to his main thesis toward the middle of the book: even though Aquinas was very much interested in Aristotle, he always used this knowledge for an ulterior perspective. In the felicitous phrase by Vivian Boland (quoted 175): “His option for Aristotle is to be understood within his option for the Dominicans.” It is a bit easier to recognize this ulterior perspective in the two chapters devoted to soteriology: “the way of God Incarnate” and “the way of God’s people”. The basic metaphor of the way is of course derived from Aquinas’s insistence that the final part of Holy

Teaching discusses our way back to God and how Christ has shown us the way in himself. In this part, Bauerschmidt often refers to Aquinas's sermons, an often neglected part of his tasks as a Master of the Sacred Page but of course foremost as a Dominican friar. He shows very well how the "architectonic role of creation in Thomas's thought" (197) plays an important part in his discussion of the incarnation, since what is true in general, viz. that God and creation can never be rivals in a zero-sum game, is true in a special way in Christ. This gives a decidedly theological reason for the renewed emphasis on the humanity of Christ that Aquinas displays in his soteriology. The specific stress on religious life as one of the characteristics of Bauerschmidt's approach shows again in his discussion of Christ as teacher and exemplar (222), but also in the specific attention to the priestly identity of Christ, following the lead of the letter to the Hebrews (207). Bauerschmidt has a nice way of integrating themes from the second part of the *Summa* into his main attention to themes from the first and the third parts. His insistence that Aquinas discusses the work of the Holy Spirit as gracefully stimulating human action oriented to the beatific vision (229) is a case in point. Consequently, chapter six about "the way of God's people" discusses principles of human action, the life of grace and formation in virtue before it arrives at the sacramental life. A sustained reflection about the Eucharistic poem *Adoro te devote* forms the apogee of this chapter.

As if to show that this hillbilly Thomist knows his classics, Bauerschmidt ends his book with a final chapter on Thomas in history. His goal is to show "how a figure like Thomas Aquinas must be constantly thought and rethought anew within shifting historical contexts" (291). Just before his final insightful pages about the way in which historical theology is able and not able to retrieve Thomas Aquinas, I was struck by Bauerschmidt's observation that "the career of the Dominican theologian Edward Schillebeeckx (1914-2009) is instructive and, in some ways, typical of post-Conciliar theologians" (307) in that his earlier work is a very fine example of historically-formed Thomist engagement with modern culture, while Thomas does not seem to play any major role in his later work any longer. At the same time, one still has the

impression that the basic idea of “openness to secular learning and new intellectual developments” is still very much Thomistically – or maybe *thomasisch* – informed. The bibliography contains a list of Latin editions with English translations and it shows the meticulousness and at the same time willingness to serve a more general public that characterizes this very rich book.

The two other books are rewritten versions of PhD theses about a specific aspect of Aquinas’s ethics. The book by David Decosimo started under the direction of Jeffrey Stout as a PhD thesis at the Department of Religion of Princeton University, and it ripened in the “scholastic disputations” at the lunch table of Loyola University Maryland that Fritz Bauerschmidt mentions in his preface as well.<sup>10</sup> Starting this fall, David Decosimo will join the school of theology and the graduate division of religious studies at Boston University. In this book, he discusses Aquinas’s view on the possibility of “pagan virtues”. The fascination for this theme is related to the fact that Aquinas’s two major *auctoritates* – apart from Scripture – viz. Aristotle and Augustine embraced such widely divergent positions on this point. A pagan himself, Aristotle’s virtue ethics was of course about “pagan virtues” yet Augustine thought that pagans lacked grace and charity and could not, therefore, display any real virtue. Decosimo insists that Aquinas needs both Aristotle and Augustine to find a proper answer to this question, but how does he do that? In the introduction Decosimo makes clear that the field of research has been dominated by what he calls “hyper-Augustinians” such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Stanley Hauerwas and John Milbank who interpret Aquinas through an Augustinian lens and thus conclude that pagans are incapable of real virtue.<sup>11</sup> A rival

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<sup>10</sup> D. Decosimo, *Ethics as a Work of Charity: Thomas Aquinas and Pagan Virtue* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> In his article “St. Thomas Aquinas’s Theory of Pagan Virtues: A Pilgrimage Towards the Infused Cardinal Virtues” in this *Jaarboek*, Wang Tao discusses the same debate with Augustinian interpretations of Aquinas, but he reacts to the supernaturalist tendency of the secondary literature that he discusses by making a rather forced opposition between philosophical and “strong theological” understandings of Aquinas.

interpretation, labeled “public reason Thomism” by Decosimo, appeals to the tradition of natural law but discusses virtue ethics only tangentially. Decosimo refuses to choose between Aristotle and Augustine with a motivation that sounds much like Bauerschmidt’s approach just discussed: “Impelled by commitment to Christ, Thomas strives to be Aristotelian by being Augustinian and vice versa” (9). The argument that he develops says that Aquinas “welcomes pagan virtue *for charity’s sake*, not against but because of his Christian convictions” so that the commitment to charity shapes not only his moral theology but his very life as a Christian moral theologian. Decosimo calls his own approach a specimen of “prophetic Thomism” that seeks to unite and transform tradition and liberation. He is aware of the two different ways in which he uses the concept of charity in this book as he appeals to Thomas as a virtue ethicist who generously and charitably makes space for the possibility of pagan virtues while defining pagan virtue as a charitable way of life not informed by charity itself since it lacks the infused theological virtues. It is quite clear that Thomas thought it very well possible for ancient pagans to live a life of virtue, but how is this virtuous life related to the Christian life of virtue? Decosimo starts tackling this questions by paying attention to Thomas and his approach to the outsiders of his time, Jews and Muslims. After that, he discusses the basic notions of his moral theology: God, the good, and the desire of all things. In this manner, he seeks to elucidate how his ethical vision is part of *sacra doctrina* that discusses God and everything else in its relation with God. After this opening that shows the theological context of Aquinas’s discussions on ethics, Decosimo zooms in on the concept of virtue in chapter three. Again, he highlights the theological character of virtue ethics in Aquinas: a virtue is a kind of habit that is ordered toward seeking the Triune God. But how does he conceptualize pagan virtues? They can be called human virtues because they are attainable by non-Christians based on human nature, but they lack the possibility for infused virtues that are dependent on God’s

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Decosimo has a better take on how the two need to go together in Aquinas, I think.

grace. Chapter four focuses more precisely on the analysis of these virtues. In this chapter, Decosimo shows why he is opposed to a narrow reading of Aquinas – Thomas Osborne is a name often mentioned in this context – that characterizes such human virtues as unstable, unconnected and imperfect. In contrast, Decosimo reads Aquinas in such a way that he affirms such human moral virtues as true and connected, even though they are of course imperfect because they lack the connection with beatitude as their ultimate aim. Chapters four to eight contain a sustained close reading of crucial passages from Thomas’s works, mainly from the *prima secundae* of course, but also from the *quaestiones disputatae* and the commentaries on Scripture. Time and again Decosimo repeats his main thesis: “not against but because of Thomas’s Augustinian commitments, the outsider is welcomed as capable of a virtue fully worth the name” (139). I like the way in which Decosimo meticulously explains his reading of texts that are often quoted by those arguing that Aquinas does not allow for pagans to have genuine virtues. This is the case with *STh* I-II.65.2 (on the possibility of virtues without charity) in chapter five and with *QD Virt.* 5.2 (on the unity of the virtues) in chapter six. For me, working in the context of the Catholic dialogue with other religions, chapter eight (pages 198-235) about *infidelitas* and the role of conceptions of final ends was the most exciting chapter.<sup>12</sup> The point of departure here is Aquinas’s statement that someone without faith lacks charity and therefore every single act of such a person is sin insofar as that person acts as unbeliever (*STh* II-II.23.7). Decosimo explains that Aquinas means that the act of an unbeliever is sinful if it is done with a view on a final end that is characterized by unbelief. The point is here that even acts that seem to be good, like giving alms, are necessarily sinful if done for purposes of a religion that is, from Aquinas’ point of view, unbelief. So doing good becomes sinful when it is motivated by the Buddhist ideal of *karuna* (compassion). Decosimo discusses two main texts: *STh* II-II.10.4 and the commentary to Romans 14:23 (“whatever does not proceed

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<sup>12</sup> For my approach, see “How Others Bear Witness to Our Faith: Aquinas and *Lumen Gentium*”, in Henk J.M. Schoot (ed.), *Jaarboek 2013 Thomas Instituut te Utrecht*, pp. 55-75.

from faith, is sin”). He discusses two opinions that are in his eyes insufficient. The first opinion (“Accidental virtue”) says that unbelievers can perform good acts, but these are always accidental to an otherwise sure path to a bad end, yet Decosimo quite convincingly argues that such a viewpoint sees good and evil as equal possibilities for human being, and that is contrary to Aquinas’ anthropology in which humans always choose - along with possible bad choices – some good according to their nature. The second opinion (“*sola religio*”) argues that only specifically religious and charitable acts are sinful since they are done with unbelief as end. Again, Decosimo argues, this is too simple, since there is not a one on one relation between religious acts and religious ends; often, people have several motives for their acts, and an end can be a mixture of false and good elements. So he proposes a more nuanced conception of final ends that allows for such multiplicity, while still defending Aquinas’s position on the importance of people’s religious convictions for their final end. Part of this solution is the distinction between strong and weak unbelief: strong unbelief is an active opposition to Christianity, while weak unbelief is adhering to religious beliefs that might be incompatible with or contrary to Christianity.<sup>13</sup> Now Decosimo proposes that only strong unbelief leads to sinful acts, while weak unbelief can be seen as a mixture of good ends with the end of unbelief that makes the acts of unbelievers good as long as an opposition to the Christian faith has not been established. For instance, believing that God is one is not an act of unbelief, but believing that God is not Triune.<sup>14</sup> In proposing this interpretation, Decosimo is aware that he advances a “maximally charitable view that can still claim to keep faith with Thomas.” (218-19). Even though I share the charitable view, I am

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<sup>13</sup> A third form that Decosimo discusses later, is simply unfamiliarity with Christianity (225). In this case, I would translate *infidelitas* as non-belief instead of unbelief. Aquinas makes the distinction between *negatio pura* (non-belief) and *contrarietas* (unbelief). See *Jaarboek 2013*, p. 67.

<sup>14</sup> D. Decosimo, 217. I would rather say – as Decosimo does elsewhere – that denying the Trinity would constitute an act of unbelief, but believing that God is not Triune would not necessarily do so, since one can do so while misunderstanding the proper meaning of Trinitarian discourse.

not sure whether I agree with the “keeping faith with Thomas” aspect of Decosimo’s interpretation here. I would rather say that this is a reading that is motivated by our present-day sensibilities but at the same time forces Aquinas into a way of thinking that is alien to his own sensibilities in his own time. For instance, when Decosimo talks about the possibility for a Muslim to pray to honor God and Muhammad – a juxtaposition that most Muslims would find strange – he thinks that praying for Muhammad’s sake is not in itself an attack on Christianity (217). Yet if one reads what Aquinas has to say about Muhammad, one cannot but conclude that for him honoring Muhammad equals dishonoring God and is therefore always an act of unbelief. As I have explained elsewhere, this is a refusal to take Islam seriously as a theological challenge for Christians, a lack of engagement that simply cannot be saved by an act of charity as Decosimo tries to do. This also explains why Aquinas was able to take Islam seriously at the philosophical level, but not at the theological level.<sup>15</sup> In that sense, I’m afraid that I come close to the *sola religio* opinion that Decosimo finds unsatisfactory. When Decosimo pleads in favor of a principle of interpretive charity (223) he uses a hermeneutical principle that Aquinas uses in his interpretation of the Fathers of the Greek Church: their sayings need to be interpreted with reverence (see the prologue to his *Contra errores Graecorum*). In ecumenical matters, and maybe sometimes in relation with Jews (see below) Aquinas was able to offer the interpretive charity that Decosimo proposes, but in relations with Muslims he was not.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> P. Valkenberg, ‘Can We Talk Theologically? Thomas Aquinas and Nicholas of Cusa on the Possibility of a Theological Understanding of Islam’, in *Rethinking the Medieval Legacy for Contemporary Theology*, ed. by A. Min (Notre Dame IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 131-66.

<sup>16</sup> In the article just mentioned, I argue that this principle of *pia interpretatio* was exactly what makes the difference between Thomas Aquinas and Nicholas of Cusa in their interpretation of the Qur’an (and, to a lesser extent, the person of Muhammad). One can of course argue that Nicholas had access to sources that Aquinas had not in his possession, but then again it might be true that Aquinas was just not interested in knowing more about Islam as a religion.

Before I come to Decosimo's final conclusions, I need to address a stumbling block in my reading of his excellent book and that is the way in which he refers to Aquinas's Latin texts. First of all, I need to say that it is admirable for an American scholar to follow the Latin original texts instead of being satisfied with English translations. In this respect, Bauerschmidt, Decosimo and Tapie are all impeccable scholars. Yet, the way in which Decosimo refers to Latin, using single words or parts of phrases in his English sentences instead of quoting the Latin in the footnotes, sometimes makes no sense.<sup>17</sup> Instead of quoting the Latin texts, Decosimo uses the footnotes very often to give some further explanation or deliberation, but in such cases one would want the footnote to be actually on the bottom of the page since no reader will leaf to the extensive notes section on pages 273-327 every time he or she encounters a footnote sign.

In the two final chapters, Decosimo comes back to his conviction that his charitable interpretation of Aquinas nevertheless does justice to the Augustinian strand in Aquinas's theological discourse. For that reason, he discusses the role of sin and grace in limiting the extent of pagan virtues (*STh* I-II.109.3) while at the same time upholding it in its imperfect integrity. In the final chapter, Decosimo explains the title of his book: *Ethics as a Work of Charity*. Driven by Augustinian charity, Aquinas welcomes the pagan outsider – Aristotle is of course the key model here – not only in his reflections on their virtues but also in the process of writing his ethics. “Precisely his commitment to charity leads him not only to welcome pagan virtue, but, more than that, to construct a way of doing so that, in its very form, itself *performs* that welcome” (256). In his insistence on this act of interpretive charity, Decosimo indeed steers a middle course between “hyper-Augustinian” and

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<sup>17</sup> One example only: on page 160 Decosimo quotes *STh* I-II.65.1 as follows: “Right choice (*rectam electionem*) requires not only...” In the English sentence, “right choice” is the subject of the sentence, but the Latin says *ad rectam autem electionem non solum sufficit...* so Decosimo gives an accusative case ending for the subject of the English sentence which is awkward.

“Aristotelian” interpretations of Aquinas, and at the same time he shows us how Aquinas can be a support for a Christian theology and ethics that is able to welcome the stranger without neglecting its own grace-based existence. Yet, still, I think that we need to make another act of interpretive charity, recognizing that Aquinas was able to welcome a non-believing outsider such as Aristotle who had never heard the Gospel, but had more trouble welcoming monotheist Aristotelians (Jews, Muslims) whom he would respect as philosophers but would still classify as unbelievers who refused to open themselves for the Gospel.

The third and final book originated as a PhD in the field of moral theology as well. Matthew Tapie defended his PhD on Thomas Aquinas and his view on the observation of the Jewish law in 2012.<sup>18</sup> After a short period as visiting assistant professor of theology at the Catholic University of America, and shorter periods at Georgetown University and Loyola University in Maryland, he has recently started his new job as assistant professor of theology and director of the Center for Catholic-Jewish studies at Saint Leo University in Florida. Since Tapie has discussed his views in the previous *Jaarboek*, I can suffice with a somewhat shorter description.<sup>19</sup> Tapie’s book starts with an introductory chapter on the history of supersessionism as an almost perennial attitude of the Church towards Judaism. Tapie uses the work of Jules Isaac and of R. Kendall Soulen to make a distinction between economic supersessionism (God has replaced Israel with the Church because Christ has fulfilled the ceremonial Jewish law) and punitive supersessionism (God has replaced Israel with the Church because of the sins of the Jews). In the second chapter, he focuses on the discussion about Aquinas and supersessionism: was Aquinas a representative of a specific form of supersessionism or not? On the

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<sup>18</sup> M.A. Tapie, *Aquinas on Israel and the Church: the Question of Supersessionism in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Eugene OR: Pickwick, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> See M.A. Tapie, ‘Out of Zion the Deliverer Shall Come: St. Thomas Aquinas on Jewish Worship as *Figura praesentis spiritualis beneficii*’, in H.J.M. Schoot (ed.), *Jaarboek 2013 Thomas Instituut Utrecht*, pp. 77-109.

one hand, the Jewish scholar Michael Wyschogrod argues that Aquinas teaches that Jewish observance of the Law after Christ is obsolete and sinful. On the other hand, Matthew Levering argues that Aquinas does not hold a form of punitive supersessionism, but he does not adequately distinguish this from economic supersessionism. In the final part of this chapter, Tapie discusses the more specific interpretations of supersessionism in Aquinas by two well-known scholars of Aquinas: Bruce Marshall and Steven Boguslawski. One of the problems in the entire discussion about Aquinas and supersessionism is, according to Tapie, that it concentrates entirely on texts about the ceremonial laws from the *Summa theologiae* and neglects Aquinas's much richer expositions in his commentary on the letters ascribed to Saint Paul. Therefore, the heart of Tapie's book consists of four chapters that introduce Aquinas' commentaries on the letters to the Hebrews, Romans, Galatians and Ephesians. His survey ends in the conclusion that we have three "Rival Versions of Christ's Fulfillment of the Law" as the title of chapter eight reads. One version, derived from the commentaries on Hebrews and Galatians, says that Jewish fulfillment of the law after Christ is fulfilled, destroyed and deadly (= economic supersessionism). The second version, derived from the commentary on Ephesians, says that it is fulfilled and destroyed (= economic supersessionism mixed with post-supersessionist resources), while the third version, derived from the commentary on Romans, says that it is fulfilled and upheld (= post-supersessionist resources). So Aquinas is much more positive on the present Jewish fulfillment of the Law in the commentary on Romans than in his other commentaries, or in his *Summa theologiae*. At this point I have a question on method: Tapie's presentation is very careful and balanced, and yet I do not exactly understand what type of argument he wants to make about the "rival versions".<sup>20</sup> He does not seem to work with a chronological

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<sup>20</sup> The language evokes of course the famous book by A. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Notre Dame IN, 1990) quoted on page 185 but not in the bibliography. The same book is discussed by Decosimo because of its alleged Augustinian interpretation of Aquinas.

hypothesis as a way to explain the differences, nor does he discuss stylistic differences between Aquinas's commentaries on the Pauline letters.<sup>21</sup> The only reason that he gives for the somewhat singular order of his presentation of Aquinas's commentaries in chapters 4-7 (Hebrews, Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians) is the different ways of relating the grace of Christ to the people of Israel according to Aquinas' prologue to the Pauline commentaries (page 57-59). Yet, the consequence of such an approach should be that Tapie analyzes the different relations between the Jewish observance of the Law and the grace of Christ as three different facets of a nuanced discourse rather than as three rival versions. Moreover, Aquinas tries to do justice to the nuances in Paul's discourse and therefore in his commentary he tries to be faithful to the specific accent that Paul emphasizes in his rhetoric. This is how I understand Tapie's argument that "Aquinas provides a model of reading of Scripture that is open to the possibility of locating and repairing inconsistencies" (185). Yet he seems to force his interpretation of Aquinas a bit in saying that "In the same way that Aquinas invoked 'Aristotle against Aristotle,' Aquinas seems to invoke a positive Pauline statement on the value of circumcision to overturn the negative Pauline statement that Jewish Law has no value after Christ" (185). At the end of his book, Tapie comes back to the conversation with Michael Wyschogrod that encapsulates his motivation to write this book: in his commentary on Romans 11, Aquinas states that it would be unfitting (*inconueniens*) if the prerogatives of the Jewish people were to be abrogated on account of the Jewish unbelief in Christ, as this would call into question the faithfulness of God. When Tapie explained this to Wyschogrod, he answered, "it would not simply be 'unfitting.' It would be unacceptable." (188). So I think that it would be incorrect to say that the positive statement about Jewish observations after Christ in the commentary to Romans outweighs the negative statements in his commentary on the other letters and in the *Summa theologiae*. It is correct, however, to say that Aquinas shows openness for multiple possible readings, as he often does in his commentaries on

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<sup>21</sup> Tapie adds a footnote on the problem of working with a chronological hypothesis regarding Aquinas's Scriptural commentaries on page 179.

Scripture. And I also think that we can – and must – read Aquinas nowadays in a way that maximizes openness to others rather than narrowness, even if Aquinas expressed himself in his own historical context in a way that seemed to favor narrowness. We must do so because of the historical realities in which we live. After the Holocaust or the *Shoah*, *inconveniens* indeed can no longer simply mean unfitting, but it means unacceptable. Not because a Jewish scholar says so, but because he has made us sensitive to realities that we have overlooked. In this case, Tapie of course can agree with Wyschogrod because of the important role of the letter to the Romans in the history of the origins of *Nostra Aetate*, fifty years ago.<sup>22</sup> We should be aware though, that such a benevolent interpretation, as advocated by Decosimo as well, is our decision, albeit facilitated by theological possibilities that Aquinas provides us with.

Finally, it is the combination of such attentive readings and of the willingness to ponder these benevolent interpretations that makes Bauerschmidt, Decosimo and Tapie more than hillbilly Thomists. Even though they have no obvious connection to the Thomas Instituut of Utrecht, it is indeed fitting – *conveniens* – that their work is discussed in the *Jaarboek*. After all, they have been guests or will be guests at the conferences of the Thomas Instituut as well.

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<sup>22</sup> M.A. Tapie points to this in the *Introduction* to his book (p. 1-6) as I do in my *Preface* to the same book (p. ix-xii).

## **ETHICS AND TECHNOLOGY: INTIMATE STRANGERS**

*Willem Jacobus Card. Eijk*

Without any doubt, science and technology changed our world, our way of thinking and feeling, in short our culture most radically in the last two centuries. Industrialization from the end of the eighteenth-century implied the decline of a culture and a socioeconomic life that had existed and most gradually developed from the Middle Ages. Due to the invention and introduction of the steam machine the old guilds came to an end. These associations of craftsmen with their strong mutual ties, intensely meaningful for every day's life of whole families, their pride of their craftsmanship and their mutual care for another were substituted by the industrial proletariat with its lack of cohesion and its social misery in the nineteenth-century.

Subsequently, the industrial era had to yield its place to that of the information society due to the development of new technical means of communication, particularly television in the fifties and sixties of the last century. The information society, making sources of information which were accessible only to the elite, available for the masses and the rapid rise of prosperity partly due to new technologies from the early sixties enabled the individual to live and organize his life independently from fellow human beings to a large extent. This marked the start of the culture of expressive individualism and authenticity, which implies that the individual human being does not only have the right, but also the obligation to distinguish himself from others by his looks, his religion, his philosophy of life, his set of moral values. Again new technological developments led to a profound change of human culture.

### **Actual technological progress**

And technical developments have not come at a standstill yet, but are going on and even at an ever higher speed in many diverse fields.

One of these developments concerns the digitalization of the world. Internet and the social media make a huge mass of information available on a small tablet and even a mobile phone, which required whole libraries in the not so far past. This only strengthened and deepened the culture of expressive individualism and authenticity. The digitalization of the world is an unstoppable and inconceivably rapid process with an unpredictable impact on our culture. Without any doubt, this process will bring us many advantages, though it is at the moment very uncertain which will be its possible collateral effects and risks. René Munnik, reflecting on the digitalization of the world, wonders what it will mean for our life and culture and also for Christian faith. We are passing at high speed from a lettered culture, in which information is communicated by the alphabet, having its expression in words, to a digitalized culture, in which information is communicated by algorithms, mathematic signs and functions. What will this imply for the communication of the Christian faith, which is mediated by the Word in the Holy Scripture and ultimately by the incarnated Word, Jesus Christ? Is it therefore not a necessity to develop a theology and anthropology of communication?<sup>1</sup>

Much is also speculated about the introduction of what is loosely termed 'robots'. These are already active in industries and financial administration, which does raise fear that they, by being cheaper, will oust employees and thus cause massive unemployment.<sup>2</sup> It is expected that in the not so far future we will drive in self-driving

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<sup>1</sup> R. Munnik, 'De digitalisering van de wereld', *Collationes* 44 (2014), Nr. 1 (pp. 5-21).

<sup>2</sup> E. Bijlo. 'Robots ook in 2015 eng', in *Trouw*, 3 January 2015, Verdieping, pp. 2-3.

cars, be surrounded everywhere, at home and outside, by robots for housekeeping and other activities, intelligent furniture, clothes, vehicles, roads and materials with a high capacity to communicate with one another and with us. In this way, we will be able to manage a big number of devices at home and elsewhere. This is called ambient intelligence.

These devices will soon have their place in health care and probably home care, too. Due to the strong increase of the ageing population there are more elderly people in need of care and few younger people available for giving care. Moreover, due to a lack of financial means, society cannot afford to employ enough personnel. The solution for this problem could be robotisation of health and home care. A number of care activities could be performed by machines, led by advanced software. However, this technology, though most certainly solving a whole range of practical problems, does also raise doubts: would that not dehumanize health and home care? One could imagine an old lady receiving home care from robots, who rarely meets a living human person. In order to find an answer to this problem robotics, the science which deals with the theoretical and practical implications of robots, examines the possibilities to produce humanoids, robots resembling human persons.<sup>3</sup>

Even more intriguing are the tantalizing technologies which are already applied or will be so in the future in the human being himself. It is possible to connect devices by means of electrodes, placed in neural tissue, with neurons or neuronal networks. Many people suffering from deafness are able to hear again by way of a cochlear implant, which transmits sound waves to the auditory nerve. Research is done to connect a camera with the optic nerve by way of a neuro-implant in order to make blind people see something. Neuro-implants or neuro-prosthesis, placed deep in de brain, can transmit electric impulses targeted to special neuronal networks. This is called Deep Brain Stimulation. By this one

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<sup>3</sup> D. Russo, 'Domotics and robotics', in *Dolentium Hominum* 29 (2014), nr. 1 (pp. 137-144).

succeeds in controlling the tremor of Parkinson's disease and suppressing obsessive compulsive actions. One explores whether this is also effective in epilepsy, depression, anorexia and addiction.

However, these neuro-implants may also change personality. This was observed, for instance, in a 62 years old man in whose brain a neuro-prosthesis was implanted because of Parkinson's disease. The therapy led to an improvement of his condition and locomotion and a diminishment of his tremor, but at the same time also to changes of his state of mind, euphoria and uncontrolled behavior. He, himself divorced, began a sexual relationship with a married woman and tried to sexually abuse nurses. He bought houses and cars he could not afford and suffered from megalomania without understanding his condition. By diminishing the tuning of the Deep Brain Stimulation the mania disappeared, but the Parkinson returned, which did not respond to other kinds of treatment. This situation presented to the physicians attending him a difficult choice. They could either offer him an adequate treatment of his Parkinson's disease, by which he could function physically well, but had to put up with a grave mania. Or they could forego the therapy with Deep Brain Stimulation, by which he would be psychically healthy but bedridden due to Parkinson.<sup>4</sup>

It is also possible to connect a computer to neuronal networks by a brain implant, called a Brain Computer Interface (BCI, here termed neuromotor prosthesis). In 2001 Matthew Nagle, 25 years old, got due to an attack with a knife a spinal cord lesion at the cervical level, which caused a quadriplegia, i.e. paralyzes of both arms and both legs. A neuromotor prosthesis, consisting of 96 very fine electrodes, implanted in the motor part of the brain cortex in 2004, was able to 'read' his thoughts and to translate them into a signal

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<sup>4</sup> A.F.G. Leentjens, V. Visser-van de Walle, Y. Temel, F.R.J. Verhey, 'Manipuleerbare wilsbekwaamheid: een ethisch probleem bij elektrostimulatie van de nucleus subthalamicus voor een ernstige ziekte van Parkinson', in *Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Geneeskunde* 148 (2004), nr. 28 (pp. 1394-1398).

transmitted to a computer. By thinking, Matthew was able to move a cursor on the screen to certain icons and click on them. In this way he could switch on the television, choose channels, check his e-mail and manage other devices in his house.<sup>5</sup>

The connection of the brains of human beings with a computer nourishes the discussion on cyborgs. With this one means people who have developed an intimate and sometimes even necessary relation with a machine or even a physical fusion of a human being and a machine.<sup>6</sup> Apart from the spectacular therapeutic successes, Brain Computer Interfaces could also be used for other ends. Could one use Brain Computer Interfaces to imitate or enforce, for instance, the function of the hippocampus, a structure at the inferior part of the brain, responsible for memory? Would it not be possible to transmit information directly to this part of the brain of people whose professional activities or even whose lives depend on the quick exchange of information, like stock traders and military personnel? These techniques would perhaps make it possible to connect the brains of soldiers with a communication center and with one another as to exchange information directly to their brains such that they could be mobilized in short a time. A report of the Developments, Concepts and Doctrine Centre of the British Defense Ministry, published in 2007, which presents a Global Strategic Trends Program from 2007 till 2036, foresees the “development of artificial sensors capable of interfacing with the human mind.”<sup>7</sup> These applications go beyond therapy and aim at

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<sup>5</sup> L.R. Hochberg, M.D. Serruya, et al., ‘Neuronal ensemble control of prosthetic devices by a human with tetraplegia’, in *Nature* (2006), pp. 164-171.

<sup>6</sup> *The Oxford English dictionary*, red. by J.A. Simpson, E.S.C. Weiner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., IV, p. 188; the term was introduced by Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline in 1960, see: Manfred E. Clynes and N.S. Kline, ‘Cyborgs and space’, *Astronautics* (1960), pp. 26-27 and 74-75; reprinted in: *The Cyborg Handbook*, red. by Gray, Mentor, Figueroa-Sarriera (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 29-34.

<sup>7</sup> Developments, Concepts and Doctrine Centre of the British Defense Ministry, *The DCDC Global Strategic Trends Programme 2007-2036*, 2007 (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), pp. 58 (see:

the improvement of the capacities of healthy beings. This is called enhancement.<sup>8</sup>

Another field in which new technologies may change the world and perhaps the human being as such, too, is that of molecular biology and synthetic biology. It concerns techniques for modifying DNA. This may be used in order to treat genetic diseases, but also for enhancement. Gene doping is an example of this: genes containing the code for the desired drugs can be transferred to the nuclei of cells of certain tissues of athletes. In this way the drugs to improve their achievements are produced inside their bodies. Once the modification of DNA especially in the germline will be possible, could researchers then construct new forms of life or even design human persons according to preference? Would that not lead to a modification of human nature as such or the creation of a new being with human biology as point of departure?

And what to think of artificial reproduction, which expanded the whole concept of parenthood far beyond the 'classical' one, we knew until a few decades ago? The newest development in reproduction concerns the cultivation of germ and egg cells from skin cells in mice. This implies the production of induced pluripotent stem cells from skin cells by transferring to their nuclei four genes in order to reprogram them. These stem cells can be triggered to become precursor cells of sperm and egg cells. In mice by applying in vitro fertilization it is possible to bring about live births with the thus produced sperm and egg cells. By injecting precursor cells of sperm cells from the own skin cells in the testis of a male who lost his sperm producing tissue by radiation therapy,

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[http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20121026065214/http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/5CB29DC4-9B4A-4DFD-B363-3282BE255CE7/0/strat\\_trends\\_23jan07.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20121026065214/http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/5CB29DC4-9B4A-4DFD-B363-3282BE255CE7/0/strat_trends_23jan07.pdf)).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. "M. Schermer, 'De geest en de Machine: Over de conceptuele en morele implicaties van brein-machine-interacties', in *Leven als Bouwpakket: Ethica verkennen van een nieuwe technologische golf*, red. by Tsj. Swierstra, M. Boenink, B. Walhout, R. van Est (Kampen: Klement, 2009).

one may perhaps enable him to beget children by normal sexual intercourse. However, it seems also possible, for instance, to produce by this method even egg cells from skin cells of a male. This would imply that a homosexual couple could have children of their own, at the moment only in theory though, because in practice there are still enormous hurdles to be taken, if one would like to realize that.<sup>9</sup>

### **Can ethics mean something for technology?**

After this brief overview of actual and future new technologies it goes - I think- without saying that it is necessary to define our position towards applying them in practice, because they will shape our lives, society and culture with far-reaching consequences. We cannot stop them from being developed and applied, but by reflecting on them now, we might be able to steer their development and application in a positive way. For reasons, I will further explain hereafter, it is in the first place necessary that technicians themselves and subsequently policy makers and politicians define their stance. Can ethics in the meaning of a science of moral theory help them in reflecting on this issue? I hope to show that the answer is affirmative. However, the relationship between ethics and technology, described in the title of his conference as one between “intimate strangers,” is not easy in every respect.

When I worked in one of the two hospitals of the University of Amsterdam by the end of the seventies, at a certain moment various questions rose concerning the application of life prolonging treatment: which were the criteria for discerning whether advanced life prolonging techniques should be applied or not in concrete cases? Some collaborators proposed to institute an ethical commission. This proposal was immediately shot to pieces

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. the on-line article of the periodical *Nature* on this topic, D. Cyranoski, ‘Rudimentary egg and sperm cells made from stem cells’, 24 December 2014, see: <http://www.nature.com/news/rudimentary-egg-and-sperm-cells-made-from-stem-cells-1.16636>. In 2015 researchers succeeded in creating human sperm and egg cells in dish, starting from human skin cells

by the chef de clinique: “For Heaven’s sake, no, because we will then get a moral theologian about the house.” Apparently, ethicists and moral theologians are not extremely popular among people active in the field of technology. For this at least three reasons exist.

1. In the first place, ethics and moral theology as scholarly disciplines use other methods of reasoning than those used in technology, which is an applied positive science. Many currents in moral philosophy, especially in Christian ethics, and certainly moral theology take as point of departure knowledge that goes beyond the strictly empiric knowledge which is the starting point for positive sciences and technology. Therefore, technologists do not always easily understand the arguments of ethicists and moral theologians.
2. Secondly, technologists not rarely view ethicists and moral theologians as ‘peepers’, people looking over their shoulders, trying to put on the brakes by their objections against the application of new technologies. This often happens with regard to new biomedical technologies: robotisation in health care, neuro-implantations, artificial reproduction techniques for instance cloning by way of nuclear transplantation or DNA modification. In 1997 members of the International Academy of Humanism, declared themselves openly in favour of cloning of human beings in a statement. In this they warned of theological scruples:

“The potential benefits of cloning may be so immense that it would be a tragedy if ancient theological scruples should lead to a Luddite rejection of cloning.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “Declaration in defence of cloning and the integrity of scientific research,” *Free Inquiry* (1997), summer, pp. 11-12, quotation on p. 12. It concerns among others Francis Crick, one of the discoverers of the double helix structure of DNA in 1953, Simone Veil, former president of the European Parliament, and the Dutch anaesthesiologist Pieter Admiraal, an international advocate of euthanasia during the eighties.

The Luddites were English textile artisans who protested against the introduction of machines in textile industry from 1811 to 1817, because these took over their labor and made them unemployed. Ethicists and moral theologians are perceived as old-fashioned, easily scared people, blocking the development and application of new techniques, which would be in fact nothing else than a blessing for humanity in the eyes of technologists themselves.

3. The third problem technologists often have with ethicists and moral theologians, is that these would 'always' be too late. Nowadays, new techniques, after having been discovered, are mostly soon adopted in practice. Scarcely was the first baby, conceived by in vitro fertilization, born in 1978, when this artificial reproduction technique was widely applied over the whole world, whereas ethicists and moral theologians were still struggling to figure out its various ethical aspects. The Congregation for the doctrine of the faith published its instruction on artificial reproduction techniques, *Donum vitae*, not until 1987.<sup>11</sup> The complaint against ethicists and moral theologians is that they arrive at conclusions on new technological developments only when these are already used for years. This would make their judgments and opinions worthless.

These objections or complaints against ethicists and moral theologians explain something of the title of this conference "Ethics and technology: intimate strangers." Both are strangers for one another. But neither are they 'aliens' for one another, which the Tilburg School of Catholic Theology hastens to say by adding to the title that they - though strangers - are 'intimate'. Why? In order to save something of the relevance of a faculty of catholic theology for modern society? Maybe this was a hidden motive, but I would like to emphasize something more fundamental. Technology is

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<sup>11</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, '*Instructio de observantia erga vitam humanam nascentem deque procreationis dignitate tuenda Donum vitae*', AAS 80 (1988), pp. 70-102.

applied by human beings. Therefore, applying technology is a free act. And a free act implies moral responsibility and thus has everything to do with ethics. Though a certain aversion to ethics may be observed among a number of technologists, developing and applying technology as a kind of free human action has the full interest of ethics, and rightly so. However, do technologists have the same interest from their part in ethics? In as far as they are strangers for one another, it is the primary duty of the ethicist or moral theologian as an expert in analyzing free action to render his discipline more accessible and comprehensible to the technologist. The ethicist who is most able to 'odd this little job' is the one who presented the first all-embracing ethical theory in history, i.e. Aristotle (384-322 BC).

#### **'Making' versus 'doing'**

In order to explain this let us return for the sake of argument to the old lady, who needs home care, which can however only be offered for economic reasons by completely robotizing her house, such that she is only taken care of by robots and no human persons need to be employed any more.

When are we allowed to qualify the robotisation of the old lady's house as a morally good act? Of course, some difficulties will occur in the beginning, especially with the software, the most essential and delicate aspect of modern technology, like we all experience now and then. In the beginning the lady will be taken out of bed at three o'clock in the night, instead of the so carefully programmed seven o'clock in the morning and put in a cold instead of a warm shower. Now, she should not complain too much because this concerns most software in the initial stage. But, let us say that after half a year till one year the software is correctly set and the robots perform their work flawlessly. Is she now finally satisfied? It goes without saying that the old lady will be glad to be taken out of bed at a humane time and to have warm showers.

However, does this mean that everything is now okay? In a certain sense yes and in a certain way no. It is the brilliant insight of Aristotle that in all human acts, so also in that concerning the application of technology, two levels must be distinguished from one another: ‘making’ and ‘doing’, in Greek terms ‘poesis’ (ποίησις) and ‘praxis’ (πραξις).<sup>12</sup> So far we only analyzed the robotisation from the point of view of ‘making’ or ‘producing’. The evaluation whether making something is good, depends on the quality of the thing that was made, the product. At the moment that the software is functioning fine and the old lady is taken out of bed at reasonable times and undergoes showers of a bearable temperature, the product is good and therefore the act of developing and applying technology as such is good.

There is a strong tendency in our present society, impressed by what technology achieves, to stick only to this level of making. Doing so, we will confine ourselves to live as efficiently as possible. This also implies to do everything in the shortest time and in the cheapest way possible. Therefore, economics has a very strong and practically inescapable impact on the decisions of politicians and policy makers. By this we run the risk that our whole life will become for us “a means to live it out efficiently.” Balaban, referring to the euthanasia discussion, wonders whether that would not also imply the goal “to die with the least effort and the shortest possible time.”<sup>13</sup>

Can we conclude that the act of robotisation, because the ‘product’ is good, is to be qualified as a morally good act and praise the technician who realized this, and the politicians and policy makers who ordered it, as persons acting in a morally good way? I can imagine that after some time the old lady, surrounded by her robots,

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<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. by H. Rackham (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press/William Heinemann, 1982), Loeb Classical Library nr. 73, VI,III,IV-V, 1140 a-b; O. Balaban, ‘Praxis and Poesis in Aristotle’s practical philosophy’, in *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 24 (1990), pp. 185-198.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

but meeting no living human being any more, will nonetheless, start to complain again, but not anymore about the technique, because the product has become irreprehensible. Though the product was good, one might at least hesitate to qualify the act of robotisation as totally good. For this act has still another level, which we overlooked in analyzing it only from the point of view of making. The old lady's well-being or happiness is at stake at a deeper level than when she was only lifted out of bed at an inconvenient time or being put under the cold shower. Humans are social beings and cannot do without contacts with fellow human beings and their love. And this problem cannot be solved by adjusting and improving her robots any further. Here we come upon a human aspect for which ambient technology and robotisation do not appear to be a solution. Even the best humanoid, however resembling a human person, will not be able to replace a living human being. The fact remains that human beings have a social nature and cannot do without human relationships. The absence of other human beings cannot be abridged by machines. By totally depriving the old lady of human contacts, one of her basic rights is violated. The act of producing, however perfect in itself from the perspective of making, failed in another way, namely by not being just. And the technician, however skillful he may be, cannot be qualified as a just person.

Here, we discover in this free act of developing and applying technology another level, namely that of 'doing' (praxein). Doing is here used in the sense of an intransitive verb and does not have a product outside the act itself, on the qualification of which depends the qualification of the act. In as far as fundamental rights are respected or realized by the act, one can speak of 'doing justly'. If they are violated, one should speak of 'acting unjustly'. This act, if morally right, actuates or perfects the acting person. It makes him a just man. It is not the product, the end of making, which is outside the acting person, but it is doing which has its end in itself: the just

act is performed because of itself, according to Aristotle: “Doing well is in itself the end.”<sup>14</sup>

The robotisation of the old lady’s house, though perfect from the perspective of making, implies violating her basic right to human relationships. It can therefore not be qualified as ‘doing justly’. And doing justly by respecting and realizing basic human values is an end in itself, exactly because these values are ends in themselves. The criterion for evaluating the act from the perspective of making does not necessarily coincide with that of doing. Of course, this does not exclude that robotisation as such could be very welcome, but then at the condition that it is not employed to deprive people who need care, totally from human contacts.

The example per excellence to explain the difference of an analysis of the act from the perspective of doing and that of making is the perfect crime: well prepared and executed, it is perfect from the perspective of the result and thus from that of making, but remains ethically objectionable from the perspective of doing: however perfect the result, it remains ‘doing unjustly’.

#### **‘Techne’ versus ‘practical wisdom’ (prudence)**

What has been said so far, concerns human action in general. Intriguing however for the relationship between technology and ethics is that Aristotle adds to the distinction between making and doing another parallel distinction, i.e. that between ‘techne’ (τέχνη) and ‘practical wisdom’ (phronesis/φρόνησις).<sup>15</sup> The term ‘techne’, from which our word ‘technique’ is derived, means craftsmanship. In Latin it is translated as ‘ars’, but it does here not only imply art in the contemporary meaning of the word. Techne is a kind of virtue which enables man to make something well, i.e. it has pretty much the same meaning as our word technique in the sense of an acquired skill to perform a certain activity in a structured way. The aim of techne or technique in this sense is the perfection of the product of

<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, op. cit., VI, IV,V,1140b 5.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 1140a-b.

the act and thus of ‘making’. *Techne* does however not concern a moral evaluation. Whether robotisation helps to realize human values or violates them is indifferent for *techne*.

On the contrary, practical wisdom concerns the moral evaluation of the act. Practical wisdom is the virtue which enables the human being to realize himself as such, i.e. as a really humanly acting person, which is the same as a morally good acting person, by his free action under concrete circumstances. Practical wisdom aims at the perfection of human action from the perspective of doing, not from that of making.<sup>16</sup> It does therefore not concern the product of the human act. Practical wisdom is the virtue which enables practical reason, i.e. reason concerned with human acting under concrete circumstances, to recognize and apply the means proportionate to the end one intends to realize, also termed the golden mean, taking into account fundamental human values.<sup>17</sup> Returning to the old lady whose house is robotized: practical wisdom helps to see the right means between under-robotisation, by which she would not receive enough taken care, on the one hand and over-robotisation and dehumanisation of her conditions on the other. Both under-robotisation and over-robotisation would have harmed her rights and thus been unjust acts. Practical wisdom

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 57, 5 ad 1: art concerns the *recta ratio factibilium*, whereas practical wisdom (*prudentia*) concerns the *recta ratio agibilium*.

<sup>17</sup> Cr. Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, op. cit., II,VI, 1106b36-1107a2: “Virtue then is a settled disposition of the mind determining the choice of actions and emotions, consisting essentially in the observance of the mean, relative to us, this being determined by principle, that is, as the prudent (practically wise, WE) man would determine it.” Aristotle here gives a summary of his concept of the mean in relation to virtue, as it would be seen not in the first place from the perspective of practical wisdom, but from that of the person who is practically wise. The famous example that Aristotle gives in order to explain the mean in relation to virtue is that of courage as a means between cowardice or lack of confidence and insensitive recklessness of overconfidence: *ibid.* III,VI-IX,1115a5-1117b22.

incorporates techne: robots have to function well and effectively, but practical wisdom goes further and considers basic human values as well. Therefore, practical wisdom is the way by which contemporary society can escape from the one-sided straitjacket of economic values which is caught for the last decades.

An obvious question is of course: which are the fundamental human values we should respect and realize? Does the new technological era not call for a renewed anthropology and new values and norms, with a view to its great impact on culture? For heaven's sake: no. In our being as it is created by God, the moral natural law is deeply rooted. The norms showing us the way to respect, protect or realize these values have already been formulated. The first universal fundamental principles of moral natural law cannot be proved but are - as Thomas Aquinas says - 'per se nota,'<sup>18</sup> or 'objectively evident'. The first type that belongs to this is that the good should be done and the evil should be avoided.<sup>19</sup> This looks like stating the obvious, but that is not so. The 'good' is no empty concept, because man can recognize by nature certain things as good in themselves, when his reason has matured and he has a certain experience. To these fundamental values belong, according to the analysis of the works of Thomas Aquinas by Finnis: life (procreation included), knowledge, play, esthetic experiences, sociability (friendship), practical reasonableness and religion. One may recognize other human values, but they can be reduced to the seven mentioned here.<sup>20</sup> These seven values are all equally fundamental: there is no hierarchy between them and the one cannot be sacrificed for the other. Anthropological research also under non-Western people showed that one may find these values notwithstanding all other differences in diverse cultures. Man knows these fundamental values by a spontaneous inclination to realize them. Difficulties to accept this explanation may rise when one forgets that it does not concern blind instincts as in the case of animals, but a conscious

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ibid., I-II, 94,1c ; 100,3c.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., I-II, 94,1c.

<sup>20</sup> J. Finnis, *Natural law and natural rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), Clarendon Law Series, Chapter IV.

inclination toward which the human being can and must make a choice. The Ten Commandments (which belong to moral natural law except the third one concerning the sabbatical peace) are norms which prohibit the violation of basic human values.

Experts may observe that I avoid translating the Greek *phronesis* into 'prudence', as is more common. The reason is that prudence is often not understood in the way which Aristotle and the Christian Tradition until Thomas Aquinas used it, but as a kind of caution, a hesitation of fear to act or to intervene, or also the calculation of a tactician and self-interest. This is however not the case. Practical wisdom or prudence in the classical sense of the word may also imply a very rapid and decisive action or intervention. An orthopedic surgeon may act very prudently by not operating and applying conservative treatment in certain types of bone fractures, whereas acting equally in prudent way by operating immediately in an emergency case like that of a rupture of a brain artery. And practical wisdom is by no means directed at self-interest, but on respecting and realizing what is good in itself.<sup>21</sup> The translation of *phronesis* by practical wisdom may prevent a series of wrong interpretations.

The confusion that prudence is a quality of the tactician eager to slyly safeguard his own interest finds its source in the temptation we all know, to see as good what we want to be good. The point is that practical wisdom is at the borderline between ratio and will. It indicates something as a good which is in fact the object of the will. It here concerns however the good recognized as such by reason through prudence and then proposed to the will. This presupposes the sincere will to accept what is objectively good and not what is desired as good, but is not good in reality.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. J. Pieper, *Über die Tugenden. Klugheit, Gerechtigkeit, Tapferkeit, Mass* (München: Kösel, 2008), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., p. 18.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II,56, 3; J. Pieper, *Über die Tugenden*, op. cit., pp. 52-54.

## Epilogue

For a final conclusion let us return to the provocative title of this lecture: ethics and technology, what are they: intimate strangers? The answer depends on what you mean by ethics.

In the first place, let me try to find an answer to this question, taking ethics in the sense of ethical science, represented by the ethicist and moral theologian. Are the technicians and the policy makers and the politicians, who draw the framework for applying technology, on the one hand and the ethicist and moral theologian on the other intimate strangers for one another? They do not need to be intimate with one another at all costs and whether they know each other very well, is not so important. The ethicist and moral theologian can explain the theory of ethics and analyze practical wisdom from the theoretical point of view. They may assist in analyzing difficult cases by indicating the basic human values and norms involved. Sometimes, this may be very easy. That the old lady should not be deprived from human relationships by robotizing her house is not so difficult to understand. A more complicated question, in which the advice of ethicists and moral theologians may be useful, is that of whether the urologist may restore fertility in a patient whose sperm producing tissue has been lost due to radiotherapy, by transplanting sperm stem cells derived from the patient's own skin, such that he may beget a child by sexual intercourse? Apart from the risks of this technology, one may question how it is to be evaluated from the point of view of the Church's doctrine on marriage and sexuality. Thus, I do most certainly not say that ethicists and moral theologians are completely useless. As a matter of fact, I am one of them. The emeritus professor of history and television phenomenon Maarten van Rossem said in an interview, asked after his vanity as scholar in history: "You have to be convinced that it makes some sense that you exist."<sup>23</sup> The expertise of ethicists and moral theologians in the field of ethical theory does however not imply that they have the virtue of practical wisdom

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<sup>23</sup> L. Reijmer, "In een vorig leven Amerikadeskundige", in *Volkskrant* (2015), 4 februari, V 2-3.

themselves. Despite their theoretical knowledge of moral theology, they are not necessarily the best confessors, able to advise their confessants in concrete questions. After all, the chef de clinique, quoted above, though not having perhaps entirely positive motives, was not completely wrong by keeping away the moral theologian from his ward. Determining what proportionate treatment is in the circumstances of a concrete patient, is not to be done by the moral theologian with his theoretical knowledge, but by the medical doctor himself with his personal practical wisdom.

This brings me to ethics in its other sense, namely that of morals or the whole of ethical principles. Are ethics in this sense on the one hand and technology and especially its representatives, technicians, policy makers and politicians, on the other intimate strangers for one another? The answer is: they should be intimate and no strangers to one another. It is they who have to decide to develop or apply technology under the concrete circumstances and they should do that in a morally responsible way. These decisions cannot be made by the ethicist or moral theologians. The technicians, policy makers and politicians have to do that themselves on the basis of their practical wisdom, which incorporates their 'techne', their skillfulness, but goes beyond that, analyzing the application of technology also from the aspect of doing: i.e. wondering whether it is an act proportionate to respecting, protecting or realizing fundamental human values. Ethics should be no intimate stranger, but a most intimate and loved 'friend', so to say. The means for making ethics an intimate and loved friend is the virtue of practical wisdom. Ethics is then an inner moral characteristic of reason and will, leading technological developments and applications. By practical wisdom completed by the other virtues, the acting person is enabled to evaluate his decisions in complicated situations in the light of fundamental human values and norms "prompte, faciliter et delectabiliter,"<sup>24</sup> i.e. spontaneously, easy and with pleasure.

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<sup>24</sup> This classical triad is derived from various texts of Thomas Aquinas: *Quaestiones de quolibet* IV, 10, 1c; *De Virtutibus in Communi* q. un, q. 1;

We saw in the introduction to this conference that man is becoming increasingly potent. By his scientific technology he may destroy the earth and abolish himself, as Lewis said.<sup>25</sup> But by applying the same technology he is equally able to improve the conditions of life and develop effective medical treatments for diseases, thus far deemed incurable. The dividing line between both is marked by practical wisdom.

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*De Caritate* 2c; *Summa Theologiae*, I-II,107,4c; *Summa contra Gentiles* III,128.150.

<sup>25</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The abolition of man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943), Ch. 3 “The abolition of man”.







## AQUINAS, SCRIPTURE AND THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

*Henk J.M. Schoot*

### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

The Gospel of Matthew records an earthquake twice; one when Jesus dies on the cross (27,51) and one when an angel of the Lord descends from heaven and rolls away the stone of Jesus' grave (28,2). A double earthquake. Thomas Aquinas records in his *Catena Aurea* the traditional saying by Bede, that a healthy fear should precede both the faith in the passion and the faith in the resurrection of Christ. The worldly hearts must be moved to penitence. In his commentary on Matthew, the *reportatio* of it, Aquinas, however, slightly adjusts Bede's gloss, and gives us an alternative spiritual reading of the double earthquake. The first indicates the movement of the hearts, for through death man is liberated from sin. The second indicates the translation into glory. And then Aquinas quotes Ro 4,25: "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." Christ's death is associated with the forgiveness of sins, and his resurrection with the new life of justification.<sup>2</sup>

This mystical, spiritual reading of the earthquakes in Matthew, is in fact a profound theological reading of death and resurrection of Christ, and gives a double portrait of the salvation brought about by Christ. Paul's letter to the Romans helps Thomas to interpret the Gospel of Matthew. It forms a fine example for what I would consider to be the lasting relevance of the way in which

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<sup>1</sup> A former version of this contribution was delivered as an invited lecture at the international conference *The Biblical Commentaries of Thomas Aquinas and its Contemporary Relevance*, at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun, Poland, on April 21-23, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> *Catena Aurea In Mattheum* 724; *In Mattheum* 28, 459.

Thomas Aquinas reads the Bible, and applies that in his theology. And I will explain that shortly.

The first what came to my mind, when I was asked to contribute to the study of the contemporary relevance of Aquinas's exegesis, was Aquinas' treatment of the resurrection. At the Utrecht institute of Aquinas research, we spent, at the end of the last century, much effort on place and function of Scripture in Aquinas's theology. Especially our colleague Pim Valkenberg published widely on this subject, lastly in 2000 in his book "Words of the Living God. Place and Function of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas." In this book, Valkenberg designs a 'heuristic framework' to investigate Aquinas's theology, focusing on his theology of the resurrection of Christ. Valkenberg proves convincingly that to treat Scripture in a superficial way, as proof of dogmatic statements, may be the case in neo-scholasticism, but not in Aquinas' theology itself. And so I decided that the subject of my contribution should be the resurrection of Christ in Aquinas, one of the most biblical parts of Aquinas's theology.

There are in fact two more reasons for this choice. Firstly, the history of the theology of the resurrection of Christ is extremely interesting. As I hope to be able to show you, the vast differences between the ways in which the resurrection is approached is very instructive for different ways of conceiving the role of Scripture in theology, and even for different ways of conceiving the task of theology as such. And secondly, from a historical and a theological perspective, it is quite interesting to see that Aquinas renews theology in renewing the theology of the resurrection. He does new things with the resurrection, that are indicative of - next to a more scriptural approach - a more soteriological way of doing theology.

In my contribution I will take two steps. The first step will be to take a look at Aquinas's commentary on the sentences, the *Scriptum*, and place it in the history of the theology of Christ. The next step will be to examine the *Summa Theologiae*, and traces the changes that the theology of the resurrection shows. In studying these changes, we will be able to conclude that there is one major reason for these changes, and that is the intense work of biblical

exegesis that Aquinas undertook between writing his *Scriptum* and his *Summa Theologiae*. Exegesis is responsible for a new course in dealing with the resurrection of Christ.

### 1. Aquinas on the resurrection of Christ in his *Scriptum*

Even after the massive work undertaken by Thomas Marschler, it still stands that Thomas Aquinas was the first ever to introduce a question concerning the resurrection of Christ in his commentary on the sentences of Peter Lombard. It raises many questions. Why is it that Peter Lombard hardly gives any attention to the resurrection of Christ? And why does Thomas consider it necessary? Which questions does he actually treat?

Let me first draw your attention to a very fundamental theological move that was performed by Aquinas. Peter Lombard does pay attention to the resurrection of Christ, but only in the context of the general resurrection of the dead, at the end of time. For him the resurrection of Christ is first and foremost an eschatological subject, understood in the sense of a future subject. When Aquinas decides to design a question on the resurrection in the context of the theology of Christ, what we nowadays call Christology, he does something very significant. From eschatology to Christology, or better even: from eschatology to soteriology. In his view, it is not enough to end the treatment of Christ with the theology of his death.

Aquinas faces a tradition of theology of Christ, in which most of the attention is spent on two subjects only: incarnation and satisfaction. The theology of the hypostatic union and its consequences is in fact the discussion ground for all questions concerning the person, the identity of Christ. And satisfaction pretty much sums up, especially since Anselm, all theology of the work of Christ. In a seminal article in *Theological Studies*, as far back as in 1970, Gerald O'Collins, who devoted most of his academic life to studying the resurrection of Christ, complains about this state of affairs. What is at stake? He mentions a Manichean uneasiness with the body, and a Pelagian preference for human action above the unique divine action in the resurrection. Marschler speaks about Monophysite tendencies; due to these tendencies, that tend to approach the soul and the body of Christ as glorified, there was in

fact no need to discuss or highlight the resurrection. Resurrection was in fact something that already was contained in the incarnation, in as much as the human nature that the Word assumed was in fact glorified, or just temporarily passible. From this point of view, the death of Christ was not very 'dead', so to say, and that minimizes the importance of the resurrection.

So when Aquinas adds a *quaestio* devoted to the resurrection of Christ, this may be seen as programmatic. However much he collects and reorganizes questions that were formulated during the first half of the thirteenth century, the step as such is quite meaningful. As we shall see, it forms Aquinas's first step in the direction of a theology of Christ which is more biblical in character. Which are the issues that he addresses? They are four. They concern the reasons for the resurrection in the first place. Whenever Aquinas addresses such a question, he is not after an absolute necessity, but instead tries to understand why happened what happened in the life of Christ. It is a form of '*fides quaerens intellectum historicum*' (Schillebeeckx); how does the resurrection fit in in Gods salvation history? What is its fittingness? We cannot discuss Aquinas's answer in detail, but it is very clear that the thrust of the discussion is still very much 'incarnational' so to speak; Aquinas is concerned that body and soul apart are only imperfect; a body needs a soul, but a soul needs a body as well, and this is confirmed by the resurrection of Christ.

There is, by the way, a vast hermeneutical difference between modern approaches to the resurrection and medieval ones. In many respects. But let me emphasize here that medieval theologians commonly and without exception accept that the human soul of Christ is both eternal and glorious. Eternal, just like any human soul, and glorious, since Christ enjoys from his conception onwards the beatified vision, following the principle of perfection according to which the Son of God should possess a perfect human nature.<sup>3</sup> This means that medieval theologians do not look at the resurrection in order to restore the human soul to life,

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<sup>3</sup> See my *Christ the 'Name' of God. Thomas Aquinas on naming Christ*, Publications of the Thomas Instituut te Utrecht vol. I, Louvain: Peeters, 1993, p. 179ff.

that is, not in the sense in which they do so concerning the human body. There is, however, the concept of the resurrection of souls, but this does not regard souls coming to life after death, but souls coming to life after sin. Aquinas and others speak about spiritual resurrection. This is the type of resurrection not so much associated with the end of times, but with baptism. When Aquinas moves the resurrection of Christ from eschatology to Christology, this is an important motif for that move. One can discern it in two answers given to objections in the first article in the *Scriptum*: the resurrection concerns the beginning of a new life, and the perfection of human nature to the good.<sup>4</sup>

The other questions Aquinas addresses in his commentary on the Sentences concern the three days after which Christ resurrected, and the signs of the resurrection that the risen Christ offered, both in general as well as specifically.

Valkenberg, having tested this text with his heuristic device, draws the conclusion that Scripture here forms source and framework of Aquinas's approach. Nevertheless, this is even much more the case with Aquinas's treatment of the resurrection in the *Compendium Theologiae* and the *Summa Theologiae*. We will focus now on the latter, in our second step.

### **Intermezzo: the *Summa contra Gentiles***

Let me just, by way of short intermezzo, ask one question concerning the *Summa contra Gentiles*, which will add to the profile of the *Summa Theologiae*. Looking at the *Summa Gentiles* from a modern apologetic perspective, one would have expected Aquinas to give a large treatment of the resurrection of Christ there. It is well-known that in the traditional apologetic theology that was born in reaction to the enlightenment, the resurrection of Christ was given a privileged place. In fact, as Francis Fiorenza has shown, the resurrection of Christ, considered as the largest miracle of all, historically proven by the empty tomb, was the main extrinsic proof

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<sup>4</sup> *Scriptum* III 21.2.1 ad 3 and ad 4.

for the veracity of the Christian belief.<sup>5</sup> The fact of the resurrection proved both the possibility and the factuality of divine revelation and intervention, and the contents of the Christian belief. At least, thus was the way in which traditional fundamental theology was set up. It was assumed that Aquinas was one of the godfathers, if not the only one, of this approach. But where does Aquinas treat the resurrection of Christ in the *Summa contra Gentiles*? Indeed, he nowhere does. The resurrection is only approached in the part on eschatology, but nowhere else, and thus only from the perspective of the general resurrection.

## 2. Aquinas on the resurrection of Christ in his *Summa theologiae*

Against this background, it is even more remarkable what Aquinas does in the *Summa Theologiae*. Now he is the first, and the only theologian of the Middle Ages, who designs a theology of Christ in two parts, the first part of which is devoted to the incarnation (qq. 1-26: *de ipso incarnationis mysterio*) and the second part of which is devoted to the mysteries of the life of Christ (qq. 27-59: *de his quae per ipsum Salvatorem nostrum, idest Deum incarnatum, sunt acta et passa*).<sup>6</sup> The first part concerns the conditions of possibility for what is studied in the second part, and thus bears a certain metaphysical and linguistic character. The second part concerns salvation history itself. The treatment of these mysteries follow the order of the creed, and end with six questions concerning the exaltation of Christ: resurrection, ascension, the sitting at the right hand of the Father and judgment. Aquinas does not place the resurrection outside of the theology of Christ, as a neutral point of reference and proof, but inside the treatment of salvation history, as one of the main mysteries, one of the main subjects of faith. Not philosophy, or history for that matter, but theology determines the approach to the resurrection.

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<sup>5</sup> *Foundational Theology*, pp. 6 and 7.

<sup>6</sup> Quotations from the prologue to the *Tertia Pars*. See also the introduction to q. 27.

Marie-Dominique Chenu has considered this treatise as a piece of Biblical theology, and so it is. Valkenberg's analysis confirms that these texts are developed extremely close to the biblical foundations of it. And even more so, the *Summa Theologiae* is much more biblical than the *Scriptum* already was.

I will draw attention to four elements, in order to corroborate this thesis of a remarkable biblical character of Aquinas's treatment of the resurrection of Christ: the arguments *sed contra*, Aquinas recognizing that the resurrection of Christ is first believed on hearsay evidence, his soteriological approach, and the way in which he handles Romans 4,25.

### 2.1 *The sed contra-arguments*

It is well-known that *sed contra*-arguments often contain authorities. Authorities either from Scripture, or from Fathers, or otherwise. At first sight, the use of these authorities may be interpreted as proof by authority. In the case of Scripture, it would indicate an extrinsic handling and bespeak a penchant for rationalism.

On the contrary in this case, I would argue. On the contrary, since if one examines the authorities adduced in *Quaestio* 53, one can easily establish that these quotations are in fact the origin of the very question itself. The question whether it was necessary for Christ to rise again, arises from a consideration of the meaning of Jesus himself saying to the disciples in Emmaus "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead" (Lk 24, 46). It is in fact an exegetical question that is raised: why does Christ say that it was written and necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead? The same goes for the question whether it was fitting that Christ rise on the third day, which arises having read what Jesus foretold in Matthew: "and on the third day he will rise again" (Mt 20,19). The following question concerns the issue whether Christ was the first to have risen. In the argument *sed contra* both the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians and a gloss are quoted: "Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of all who have fallen asleep", and the gloss says: "the first in time and dignity". In fact, a number of exegetical issues are

dealt with in this question. The way in which Christ's resurrection differs from those who were brought back to life by Elia, Elisha and Christ himself. And also the question how we have to interpret the tombs opening up, at the time of the crucifixion, even before the resurrection of Christ. This, for instance, is a question we see dealt with in Aquinas' commentary on Matthew as well.

This will suffice for now. In fact, I think that most of the sixteen questions that are raised, are raised on the basis of reflection on Scripture, mentioned in the *sed contra*-argument. On the *sed contra*-argument of the last question raised, we will return shortly.

### 2.2 *Resurrection is first believed on hearsay evidence*

The second element I want to bring to the fore, is Aquinas's attentiveness to something that lacks in Scripture. In q. 55.2 he treats the question whether it was fitting that the disciples saw Christ's resurrection. The *sed contra*-argument concludes tellingly that no one saw Christ rise from the dead, and the question is to the meaning of this important feature of the resurrection stories. In his book *Eternal life?* Hans Küng once argued that one of the important differences between the canonical and the non-canonical gospels indeed is that some of the latter contain stories about what actually happened on the moment that Christ rose from the grave.<sup>7</sup> The so-called gospel of Peter for instance, contains a rather bizarre description of the event. Their lack of description of the event of the resurrection is what makes the canonical scriptures even more trustworthy. But before Hans Küng, Thomas Aquinas already underlined the importance of this lack of description in the canonical Gospels. It gives him the opportunity to emphasize the unique character of the resurrection; Christ did not return to a manner of life which was open to the common knowledge of mankind, Aquinas says. He rose to a life which was immortal and conformed to God. Therefore Christ's resurrection should not have been seen immediately by men, but it was fitting that it was made known to them through the ministry of angels. Whatever else will be said about the ways in which Christ risen makes himself known,

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<sup>7</sup> H. Küng, *Ewiges Leben?* (München: Piper, 1982), Chapter V: Schwierigkeiten mit der Auferweckung Jesu, pp. 127-154.

first and foremost it is through hearing that the apostles believe in Christ's resurrection.<sup>8</sup> They saw Christ with their own eyes, but they were the eyes of faith.

### 2.3 *A soteriological approach of the resurrection*

For the third element let us return to the first question formulated by Aquinas, concerning the necessity of his resurrection. We already mentioned that this question is an interpretation of what Jesus risen said to the disciples upon returning from Emmaus. Compared to his treatment of the same question in the *Scriptum*, Aquinas' discussion here is more biblical, more theological and more mature. In the solution he offers five reasons why the resurrection is necessary or fitting. The first concerns the merit of Christ. Divine justice needs to reward Christ, who humiliated himself out of charity and obedience. Exaltation is his reward, the first stage of which is the resurrection. The second and third reason have to do with faith and hope. Here we have the Pauline understanding of the resurrection as confirming the divinity of Christ, which in modern times became so important. It was already for Aquinas, since the resurrection confirms that Christ was crucified through weakness, but now lives through the power of God. Had he not been raised, our believing would be useless. Hope is at stake here, since Christ's resurrection is the promise of the general resurrection. I know that my redeemer lives, Christ risen from the dead. Faith and hope are both firmly rooted in chapter 15 of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Just as the second and the third reason for the necessity of Christ's resurrection originate in the same Pauline thought, the fourth and fifth do as well. The fourth and fifth contain two quotations from Paul's letter to the Romans, that are of paramount importance to Aquinas's theology of the resurrection. In Romans 6,4 Paul says: "So that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too might live a new life." We could call this a moral motif for the resurrection of Christ, since it instructs the faithful how to live their lives, that is by dying for sin but being alive for God in Christ Jesus (Ro 9.11). This is the spiritual resurrection we earlier spoke of. This resurrection is not

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<sup>8</sup> *STh* III, 55.2 ad 1.

reserved for the future, but starts here and now in the life of anyone baptized. Aquinas considers Romans 6.4 as in fact an explanation of an earlier saying of Paul, the one I quoted at the outset of my contribution: “He was put to death for our sins and raised to life to justify us” (Ro 4,25). Here Aquinas gives us the fifth and last reason for the resurrection, and I think it is the most important one. The resurrection is a complement to our salvation. Death and resurrection are two sides of the same coin. By death Jesus endured evil in order to free us from it. By his resurrection he was glorified that he might move us towards what is good. Death is negative, the forgiveness of sins and the doing away with evil. Resurrection is positive, moves towards what is good, towards the justification. Justification is the word here with which Aquinas sums up the fundamental positive contribution of the resurrection to our salvation.

It is quite telling that four out of these five reasons for the fittingness of the resurrection concern us, those who believe in Christ. The resurrection is for Christ, but most of all for us. The soteriological nature of the resurrection is underscored in a way Aquinas did not before. The three motifs he mentioned in his commentary on Peter Lombard were antropological, concerning human nature, christological, concerning merit, and only third and last soteriological. In his mature exposition Aquinas underscores the salvific meaning of the resurrection, and it is Paul who puts him on this track.

#### 2.4 *Quoting Romans 4,25*

We can easily see that we are dealing here with a development in Aquinas’s theology of the resurrection, simply by looking up all the places where Aquinas quotes Romans 4,25. Aquinas does so thirteen times, most of them in the context of the resurrection. The first, chronologically speaking, is his commentary on Matthew 28, with which I began my lecture. The double earthquake associated with death and resurrection, and with sin and justification. Then we encounter Aquinas quoting this verse in his commentary on John, where he speaks about the corporeal and the spiritual resurrection,

and in his commentary on Romans, where he does the same.<sup>9</sup> Then in the text we just spoke about, STh III 53.1 c. But Aquinas quotes this verse not only in the very first question on the resurrection, but also in the very last that he treats, in q. 56.2, and he does so twice, both in the *sed contra*-argument as well as in the last answer. He says that this verse can mean nothing else except the resurrection of the soul. He also quotes a gloss on a Psalm, saying “Christ’s resurrection is the cause of the resurrection of souls at the present time and of the resurrection of bodies in the future.”

In the last answer, Aquinas attempts to distinguish between the salvific value of the passion and the resurrection. He says that the justification of the soul means the remission of sins and the newness of a life of grace. Both are brought about by the power of God, both by Christ’s death and his resurrection. So much for the effective causality. But in terms of exemplar causality “passion and death of Christ are properly the causes of the remission of our faults, for we die to sin. The resurrection, on the other hand, more properly causes the newness of life through grace or justice.” Or, as Aquinas says in his *Compendium Theologiae*: “As Christ destroyed our death by His death, so He restored our life by His resurrection.”<sup>10</sup> All of these quotations belong to the last eight years or so – depending on the uncertain dating of his exegetical works – of Aquinas’s writing career; he never did in all the years before. Jean-Pierre Torrell suggests that it may have been the case that Aquinas lectured on Romans when he was in Rome, between 1265 and 1268.<sup>11</sup> Judging from the subject we are now discussing, that would be plausible indeed, since Aquinas’s commentary on Ro 4,25 contains all the elements that we recognized in the other texts where he quotes this verse. It must have been his lectures on Romans which got Aquinas on this track. Aquinas emphasizes that Christ’s resurrection is effectively salvific for us, his human nature being an instrument of his divinity, a thought he borrows from John of Damascus. The effect is similar to its cause, for the death of our sins

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<sup>9</sup> *In Joannem* 5, lectio 5; *Ad Romanos* 4, lectio 3; 8, lectio 7; cf. *Ad Col* 3, lectio 1; and *I Ad Thess* 5, lectio 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Compendium Theologiae* I, 239.

<sup>11</sup> *Initiation*, p. 367.

is caused by Christ's death, and the resurrection to new justice is caused by Christ's resurrection to the new life of glory.

This wraps up the four elements that I wanted to adduce, in order to corroborate my thesis that Aquinas's treatment of the resurrection of Christ in the *Summa Theologiae*, is in fact a very biblical treatment of the topic. The *sed contra*-arguments show how all questions are indeed Biblical in origin. Resurrection is first believed on hearsay evidence, as Aquinas recognizes from Scripture's silence about the resurrection itself. Salvation history is present much more in his treatment of the fittingness of the resurrection. And Romans 4,25 marks the difference between the early and the later interpretation of the resurrection. Aquinas, much more than in his commentary on Peter Lombard, is guided by Scripture, most notably by the writings of Paul.

### **Conclusion**

Francis Fiorenza states that the modern apologetical approach to the resurrection of Jesus was in fact overhauled by the progression of biblical exegesis, in the course of the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> A better understanding of prophecy and miracles in Scripture made this view of the resurrection obsolete. Aquinas would never have felt the need for approaching the resurrection in an apologetical way, if this is not totally anachronistic to say, since he works from the assumption of the *unio hypostatica*. His is an approach both from 'above' and from 'below', not only from below. But, and this is the point I want to stress, the Biblical character of his interpretation would have prevented him from doing so. The material I have presented leads convincingly to the conclusion that Aquinas considers the resurrection of Christ more and more from a faith perspective, and from the perspective of salvation history.

Does that mean that we have to read the Bible in the way Aquinas did? Now here is a question that cannot be answered in a facile way. Much of what Aquinas has written which belongs to what we nowadays call exegesis is outdated, for lack of proper

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<sup>12</sup> *Foundational Theology*, pp. 9 and 10.

resources and of disciplines, such as history and language. But I would strongly recommend Aquinas's exegesis in three respects. Aquinas's approach operates with the unity of Scripture, and merits the name of 'canonical exegesis'; we have seen a small but important example of it, seeing how Romans helped to explain Matthew. Aquinas's approach is spiritual; we have seen an important example of it as well, since the spiritual meaning of the resurrection of Christ is of paramount importance to Aquinas's reading of Scripture. And third and last Aquinas's approach to Scripture is theological; that is to say, Aquinas is despite all the details that rightfully belong to a meticulous reading, always intent on answering the question what Scripture is saying, ultimately, about the mysteries of faith. And when theologizing about these mysteries of faith, this theological reading of Scripture is never far away, on the contrary, always near at hand. This makes his reading of the Bible theological, and his theology Biblical.

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**PERSIAN PERSPECTIVES ON PRIMA PHILOSOPHIA:  
THE RECEPTION OF AVICENNIAN THOUGHT IN  
THE *DE ENTE ET ESSENTIA***

*Alexis Szejnoga*

**1. Introduction**

This article is an adaptation of my master thesis in which I examined the historical-philosophical context of the tractate *De ente et essentia*, a succinct treatment of Aristotelian ontology, written by Thomas Aquinas *infra magisterium*. The very first research question that I posed was: what was the wider historical-philosophical background against which Thomas Aquinas wrote the *De ente et essentia*? However, it did not take long before it became clear that one specific element of that historical-philosophical background was probably more influential on the metaphysical thought of Thomas than any other.

In the early thirteenth century, the philosophical landscape was primarily dominated by the interaction between Christian and Arabic culture. The mingling of cultures on the Iberian Peninsula generated an exchange on philosophical, theological, and literary levels. Among the most discussed works were commentaries on the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle by Ibn Sīnā, who would become known in the West by his Latinized name, Avicenna. Upon a first reading of the *De ente et essentia*, it immediately becomes apparent that Thomas refers to Avicenna quite a lot. It would seem that Avicenna's interpretation of Aristotelian metaphysics posed a major influence upon Thomas. Well-known scholars on the metaphysical thought of Saint Thomas have come to a similar conclusion regarding the *De ente et essentia*, although their reasoning is not always explicitly stated. James Weisheipl, a Dominican scholar who authored an extensive biography of Thomas Aquinas, says of the *De ente et essentia*: "This work is highly original, even though it is heavily indebted to Avicenna's

Metaphysics”.<sup>1</sup> Armand Maurer comments in the introduction to his English translation of the *De ente et essentia* that it has an affinity with Thomas’s commentary on the *Four Books of Sentences* by Peter Lombard, “both in their metaphysical notions and their dependence on Avicenna”.<sup>2</sup> Anthony Kenny states of the *De ente et essentia*: “The treatise is heavily influenced by the eleventh-century Arabic philosopher Ibn Sina or Avicenna, whose *Metaphysics* is referred to in the very first lines of Aquinas’ prologue”.<sup>3</sup> All three authors cited above not only mention Avicenna as an influence on the metaphysical thought of Thomas, but they also do so in an exclusive manner (besides Avicenna no other influence is mentioned) and in terms which denote more than a casual or minor influence (“heavily indebted”, “dependent” and “heavily influenced”). This leads to a second specific question to engage the text with: how exactly does the influence of Avicennian thought upon Thomas become apparent within *De ente et essentia*?

Thus, my examination of the text of the *De ente et essentia* will be guided by questions regarding the historical-philosophical context of the tractate, and concerning visible signs of Avicennian influence within the text. This will be done in two consecutive steps. The first part will present the historical and philosophical context of the *De ente et essentia*. The second part will focus specifically on the influence of Avicenna, and his interpretation of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. This influence will be examined by looking at explicit and implicit references to Avicennian thought made by Thomas in the text of the *opusculum*, and by briefly reviewing a comparative study of the ontologies of Thomas and Avicenna prepared by De Raeymaeker.

A final opening remark concerns matters of methodology. All citations of the Latin text of the *De ente et essentia* are taken from the *Editio Leonina*.<sup>4</sup> Citations from the English text are taken from Bobik’s *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A Translation and*

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<sup>1</sup> J. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d’ Aquino: His Life, Thought and Works* (Garden City: 1974), p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Aquinas, A. Maurer, *On Being and Essence* (Toronto 1968), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> A. Kenny, *Aquinas on Being* (New York: 2002), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia, Tomus XLIII, Roma 1976.

*Interpretation*.<sup>5</sup> Reference to the titles of philosophical works is in the original language, with a translation in English within parentheses upon its first occurrence in the text. Whenever an original text was not written in Latin, the Latin title is used whenever Thomas refers to a Latin translation. Thus Avicenna's *Ilāhiyyāt* (*Metaphysics*) refers to the Arabic original, while Avicenna's *Metaphysica* (*Metaphysics*) refers to the Latin translation of the text. In those cases where Latin titles might be referring to different texts (for example, the *Sufficiencia* or the *Metaphysica*), the context should clarify which version is meant.

## 2. Historical-philosophical context

In order to shed light on the historical-philosophical context of the *De ente et essentia*, it is first necessary to determine precisely when this *opusculum* was written. Bartholomew of Lucca (c. 1236 - c. 1327), disciple and confessor to Thomas Aquinas, mentioned the manuscript in his list of works by his fellow Dominican as *Tractatus de ente et essentia quem scripsit ad fratres et socios nondum existens magister* (*Treatise on Being and Essence, which he wrote for his Brothers and Colleagues, while not yet a Master*). Thomas's graduation at the theological faculty of the University of Paris has been reliably determined to have taken place in March 1256, and the *De ente et essentia* can therefore safely be assumed to have been written before then. It is generally agreed upon that he wrote the treatise while lecturing on the *Libri quattuor sententiarum* (*Four Books of Sentences*) of Peter Lombard (c. 1096 – 1164) at the University of Paris. This means that the *De ente et essentia* was probably written after his departure from Cologne, where he had been studying under Albert the Great (1193/1206 - 1280), in 1252. This limits the possible composition of the treatise within a four-year window (1252-1256). This means that for the construction of a summary of possible influences on Thomas's metaphysical thought, no events postdating 1252 will be considered.

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<sup>5</sup> J. Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A Translation and Interpretation* (Notre Dame: 1965).

*Aristotelianism*

In the broadest sense, Aristotelianism denotes the entire field of philosophy that is primarily inspired by the thought of the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BCE). In a way, he himself can be thought of as the founder of the tradition that bears his name, seeing as how he started the Lyceum in Athens, a school that educated students in his peripatetic tradition. Later philosophical movements became interested in his thought, causing renewed interest in his teachings. The first resurgence of Aristotelian philosophy in the Common Era happened with the advent of Neo-Platonism in the third century, starting with the philosophy of Plotinus (204-270). Having become interested in the works of Plato (428-348 BCE), this school of thought extended its view to include the writings of his student Aristotle, commenting and expanding on them.

Starting in the ninth century, Islamic philosophers and theologians began translating and commenting upon Aristotle's work. Al-Kindī (801-873, also known by his Latin moniker Alkindus), al-Fārābī (872-950, known in the West as Alfarabi), al-Ghazālī (1058-1111, also called Algazel in Latin) and Ibn Rushd (1126-1198, known as Averroës) all wrote treatments of different parts of the Aristotelian corpus. The interest in the works of Aristotle in the Islamic world provided an impulse to Aristotelian research in the Latin West.

*Liber de causis and Fons vitae*

A specific work of philosophy that deserves mention here is the *Liber de causis* (*Book of Causes*), which in 1252 was still attributed to Aristotle. It treats the problematic relationship between the One and the Many, or how multiplicity can originate from unity. To bridge the apparent chasm between simplicity and diversity, the author posits the Spirit, which is both singular and a principle of diversity, and which includes in itself the multiplicity of Forms. Through the mediation of the Spirit, the One brings about the existence of the Soul, which in the Neo-Platonic tradition must be understood as the Soul of the World. It should be clear that this

mediated creation of the Soul posed a problem for Islamic and Christian philosophers, as it touched upon certain tenets of Gnostic heresies.

Although unknown to Thomas Aquinas when he wrote the *De ente et essentia*, he later discovered that the *Liber de causis* had in fact not been written by Aristotle, as its contents were largely drawn from the *Stoicheiosis theologikè* (*Elements of Theology*, better known by its Latin title *Elementatio theologica*) by Proclus (412-485). Thomas made this discovery after having received a translation of this work of Proclus from his friend and fellow Dominican William of Moerbeke (1215-1286), and reported on his findings in the *prooemium* of his *Super librum de causis expositio* (*Commentary on the Book of Causes*).<sup>6</sup> Although the author of the *Liber de causis* has still not been identified with certainty, it is believed that he was a Muslim philosopher or theologian, who set forth to synthesize the Neo-Platonic doctrine of emanation with the Islamic theology of creation. As such, the work is a combination of thoughts from both Proclus and Plotinus (204-270).

Another proponent of Neo-Platonism that has exerted a major influence on the *De ente et essentia*, was the Hebrew philosopher Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1021-1058) from al-'Andalus, who became known in the Latin West as Avicbron. Although an accomplished poet, he will primarily be remembered as one of the first philosophers to introduce Neo-Platonism to Western Europe. A collection of five tractates on matter and form, known by its Latin title as *De materia et forma*, or alternatively as *Fons vitae* (this is the name that Thomas refers to), was translated from Arabic into Latin in 1150. It should be noted that Thomas Aquinas, and his scholastic intellectual heirs, were of the opinion that the author of the *Fons vitae* was a Christian philosopher. It was only in 1846, when Solomon Munk discovered a Hebrew translation of the

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, transl. by V. Guagliardo O.P., C. Hess O.P., R. Taylor (Washington D.C.: 1996), p. 4. For the Latin text: Thomas Aquinas, *Super librum De Causis expositio*, ed. by H.D. Saffrey O.P. (Freiburg/Leuven: 1954), or *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia*, Tomus XLIX, Roma (in preparation).

Arabic original of the *Fons vitae*, that it was concluded that Avicbron was in fact none other than Solomon Ibn Gabirol.

The five tractates of the *Fons vitae* presented several aspects of the doctrine of matter and form. Among these were the relationship between matter and form in physical substances, the existence of *substantiae simplices* which form an intermediary level between the *prima essentia* (God) and physical creation, and the thought that all created substances are composed of matter and form, even spiritual substances (a point of contention with Thomas, which was taken up by the Franciscan school of thought, for example in the works of Bonaventura). Moreover, Avicbron posits that all matter is one, although it becomes less spiritual as it is farther removed from the *prima essentia*. As Avicbron tried to strictly separate his philosophical thoughts from his religious beliefs, it can be contested whether the *Fons vitae* presents an attempt to reconcile Neo-Platonic philosophy with Jewish theology.

#### *Avicenna*

The final influence on Thomas Aquinas to be individually treated here, and the one of which the influence will be traced throughout the *De ente et essentia*, is that of Avicenna. This Persian polymath, who had the reputation of being somewhat of a genius (he claimed to have known the Qur'ān by heart at age seven), wrote extensively on such diverse subjects as medicine, geology, metaphysics and psychology. In addition to this, Avicenna also wrote multiple volumes of poetry, as well as composing parts of his scientific works in verse. He was also a devout Muslim, and part of his intellectual calling was to synthesize *kalām*, or Islamic theology, with the philosophical schools of Plato and Aristotle.

Avicenna was in fact so successful in reconciling Islamic theology with Greek philosophical thought, that he became the main proponent of Islamic philosophy in the twelfth century. However, in Europe his teachings would not be accepted as easily. His writings were met with heated discussions, about the real distinction between being and essence for example, which led to a proscription of his work in the city of Paris in 1210 (sharing the fate of Aristotle's intellectual heritage). By the time that Thomas

Aquinas arrived in Paris in 1252, this prohibition must have been lifted or otherwise weakened, as Maurer notes that Avicenna was “in vogue” while Thomas taught in Paris.<sup>7</sup>

The thought of the real distinction between existence and essence, or between *esse* and *essentia* to use Latin nomenclature, was arguably first formulated by Avicenna. It means that on an ontological level, there is a difference between what an object is (its *essentia* or essence), and that an object is (its *esse* or existence). Admittedly, the distinction itself was already formulated by Aristotle in his *Analytica posteriora* and his *Metaphysics*. However, it is argued that Avicenna is the first to uphold the distinction on a metaphysical level, whereas Aristotle limited it to an analytical level. The real distinction between being and essence will be one of the specific points that will be traced in the *De esse et essentia*. Its formulation by Avicenna and the context in which it arose will be treated in the second part of this article.

The literary output of Avicenna was enormous. Most famous among his many works is the *Kitāb ash-Shifā'* (*Book of Healing*), an encyclopedia of philosophical thought. It was entitled “*Book of Healing*” because through the wisdom that it held, it “healed” the reader of his ignorance, which according to Avicenna should be regarded as a sickness of the mind. Parts of this encyclopedia would be translated into Latin, and as such they were known to Thomas. That part of the *Kitāb ash-Shifā'* which had theological and metaphysical subjects as its topics (*Ilāhiyyāt*), was translated into Latin as the *Metaphysica*. This was a new treatise on the subject, not a commentary on the work of the same name by Aristotle. Likewise, the part which treated on physics was translated into Latin and was known by the name of *Sufficientia*, which is also the Latin title for the entire *Kitāb ash-Shifā'*. That part of the encyclopedia dedicated to psychology (*al-Nafs*) was translated as *De anima*. Finally, *al-Mantiq*, the part that expounded Avicenna's thought on logic, was known in Latin as the *Logica*. Although only the *Metaphysica* and the *De anima* are explicitly referred to by Thomas, we can trace the influence from all these four parts of the *Kitāb ash-Shifā'* in the *De ente et essentia*.

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Aquinas, A. Maurer, *On Being and Essence*, Toronto 1968, 8-9.

### 3. Avicennian influence on the *De ente et essentia*

#### *Explicit references to Avicenna and his works*

We will start by examining those instances in which Thomas thought it prudent to explicitly refer to Avicenna and his works to construct or strengthen his argument. In total, there are thirteen of these explicit references to be found in the *De ente et essentia*. In fact, Avicenna is the most referenced author in the *opusculum*, with the exception of Aristotle.

If we look at the explicit citations of Avicenna, we note that Thomas mentions the name of the literary work to which he is referring in only six out of thirteen cases. In total, Avicenna's *Metaphysics* is referred to four times, while his *On the soul* is mentioned only two times, with both references being made to the beginning of the book (i.e. first book, chapter one). If we take all explicit references to Avicenna into account, we note the same skewed ratio: in ten out of thirteen explicit references, Avicenna's *Metaphysics* is used as a source, while reference is made to his *On the soul* on only three occasions. Furthermore, all references to *On the soul* are made within the confines of the fifth chapter of the *De ente et essentia*, in which Thomas discusses the composition of the intelligences. Of the ten times that Thomas refers to Avicenna's *Metaphysics*, eight times reference is made to the fifth book of that literary work, the only two exceptions being the first two references. This is quite understandable, as they occur not in the main narrative of the *De ente et essentia*, but in the introduction in which the importance of the work is explained, and in the first chapter in which the different terms used to refer to *essentia* are listed. Considering the above, it would not seem to be an exaggeration to label the fifth book of the *Metaphysics* as the main Avicennian influence on the *De ente et essentia*, with the first book of his *On the soul* as a remote and far less important second.

The first explicit reference is worth commenting upon because it cites a general principle, formulated by Avicenna, which is then combined by Thomas with a citation of Aristotle, in order to accentuate the importance of the *De ente et essentia*. Considering

that ‘being’ and ‘essence’ (*ens et essentia*) are the first notions conceived by the intellect, as Avicenna posits, it is very important to understand these two concepts, as they constitute the fundament on which all other knowledge rests. The science of being-qua-being, i.e. metaphysics, thus starts with the exploration of the notions of ‘being’ en ‘essence’; ontology constitutes the *prima philosophia*. The explicit mentioning of Avicenna in this first sentence of the *De ente et essentia*, in combination with a referral to Aristotle, could be considered a clear indicator that the works and thought of Avicenna are going to represent a major influence on the *opusculum*.

However, it seems that Thomas severely misquotes Avicenna, as the Latin translation of his *Metaphysics* reads ‘being and thing and necessity’ as the first notions (*ens et res et necesse*).<sup>8</sup> Wisnovsky puts forward the thesis that Avicenna introduced the Arabic word for essence (*māhiyya*), as a substitute for the Arabic word for thing (*shay*). This substitution occurred over time, while considering the theological discussion on the distinction between things and existents, and had the abstract noun thingness (*shay’iyya*) as an intermediary.<sup>9</sup> It is therefore possible that Thomas either possessed a manuscript of the Latin translation of the *Metaphysics* of Avicenna in which the translator used *essentia* instead of *res*, or Thomas might have substituted *essentia* for *res* himself, having knowledge of Avicenna’s later work. Interestingly, the omission of *necesse* implies a purely philosophical interest in Thomas, as necessity in the teachings of Avicenna refers to necessary being, which is limited to the being of God, in contrast with his creation, which exemplifies contingent being.

Moreover, as Delfgaauw notes, being appears to be more intuitive as a first impression upon the intellect than essence.<sup>10</sup> But this is instantly explained by Delfgaauw: we should not interpret

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<sup>8</sup> M.-D. Roland-Gosselin O.P., *Le De Ente et Essentia de S. Thomas D’Aquin* (Kain : 1926), p. 1 note 2.

<sup>9</sup> R. Wisnovsky, *Avicenna’s Metaphysics in Context* (London: 2003), pp. 145-180.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Aquinas, B. Delfgaauw, *Over het zijn en het wezen*, (Kampen: 1986), pp. 71-72 noot 4.

Thomas here as positing that the understanding of an essence is a first impression upon the intellect, but simply that ‘being’ is instantly perceived as being in this or that manner. A third complication regarding this explicit reference to Avicenna may occur in translating the Latin word ‘*ens*’. Considering the lack of indefinite articles in Latin, this word may be alternatively translated as ‘being’ or as ‘a being’. The first possibility poses a problem as it may be read as either an abstract noun or a gerund, and is therefore ambiguous. The alternative seems to be synonymous to ‘thing’ and should therefore be rejected; a thing clearly refers to the composite of existence and essence, and should therefore not be used for one of its principles.

The second explicit reference merits extra attention, not because of its content, but because of the apparent uncertainty of its origin. Thomas refers to Avicenna to include the word ‘*forma*’ as another name for *essentia* in his list of synonyms in the first chapter of the *De ente et essentia*. This is the only occasion in which Roland-Gosselin and the editors of the Leonina edition disagree on the place in the *Metaphysics* that is referred to. The Leonina gives two options: the sixth chapter of the first book or the second chapter of the second book.<sup>11</sup> Since Thomas himself refers to the second book (‘*ut dicit Auicenna in II Metaphysice sue*’), the first option seems a bit puzzling, even more so because the word ‘*forma*’ is not encountered in the line cited from book 1, chapter 6 (‘*unaqueque res habet certitudinem propriam que est eius quidditas*’). To add to this enigma, Roland-Gosselin’s text, which is based on eight Parisian manuscripts, reads ‘*ut dicit Auicenna in tercio Methaphysice sue*’. As a possible source of this reference Roland-Gosselin proposes the fifth chapter of the third book, but with caution.<sup>12</sup> Roland-Gosselin’s critical apparatus notes no variations within the eight Parisian manuscripts. However, the Leonina edition notes five variations among its sources, consisting of inversion of ‘*Metaphysice*’ and ‘*sue*’, and different ways in which

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<sup>11</sup> *Metaph.* 1/6:72v a or *Metaph.* 2/2:76r a. See Leonina edition, book 43, page 369, note 36.

<sup>12</sup> *Metaph.* 3/5:80 b. See M.-D. Roland-Gosselin o.p., *idem*, 4:2-3 and note 1.

'*Metaphisice*' is altered, but not one manuscript seems to refer to the third book of the *Metaphysics*. Moreover, in their introduction, the editors of the Leonina edition signal that some of the earliest manuscripts gloss Avicenna's *Physics*, rather than his *Metaphysics*. They evaluate this odd variation as an early misreading which was corrected at a very early stage, because 'the *Sufficientia* does not refer to *forma* in this sense'.<sup>13</sup> In conclusion, it would appear that all manuscripts selected to be used by the editors of the Leonina edition refer to the second book of the *Metaphysics*, while all manuscripts which were used by Roland-Gosselin refer to the third book. In addition, the exact place that is referred to by Thomas is uncertain, both for Roland-Gosselin as for the editors of the Leonina. That this reference to Avicenna poses a problem also becomes evident from the commentary on the *De ente et essentia* by Thomas (cardinal) Cajetan. Although the 1907 Roman printing of the Latin text glosses '*sicut dicit Avicenna in II Metaphysicae suae*', Kendzierski and Wade seem fit to translate 'as Avicenna says in III Metaphysicae' while referring to the fifth chapter of the third book, their translation being based upon the 1934 printing by Marietti.<sup>14</sup>

At this point, it should be noted that Roland-Gosselin draws attention to the fact that the Latin translation of the *Metaphysics* often uses the word '*certitudo*' where the Arabic word for essence appears in the original text.<sup>15</sup> Taking into account all of the above, and the fact that Roland-Gosselin's text antedates the Leonina edition of the *De ente et essentia*, the following solution to the described enigma seems highly plausible: the text should read '*II Metaphisice*' and refers to *Metaph. 2/2:76r* a '*hec certitudo... est forma*', as suggested by the Leonina edition. The text variation of the Parisian manuscripts could be explained by a common original, whether included in those eight or lost, in which the text was altered by mistake (creating a corruption) or even on purpose by a scribe

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<sup>13</sup> 'la *Sufficientia* ne touche pas ce sens de *forma*'. Leon. 43.350 :c.5, p25.

<sup>14</sup> S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Opusculum De Ente et Essentia: Commentariis Caietani Illustratum*, Romae 1907, p. 30. Cajetan, L. Kendzierski, F. Wade, *Commentary on Being and Essence* (Milwaukee 1964), p. 72.

<sup>15</sup> Also in note 1, *ibidem*, 4.

who thought he was correcting an error made by a previous copier of the manuscript. The alternative source for the reference quoted by the Leonina edition (i.e. *Metaph.* 1/6:72v a) might be taken from Roland-Gosselin, who presents it as an example of the use of the word ‘*certitudo*’ by the translator of the Arabian original of the *Metaphysics*, rather than a possible source of the explicit reference made to Avicenna by Thomas. The seemingly incorrect translation of the work of Cajetan can also be explained by a contrast between Italian and Parisian versions: in a footnote on the very first page of their translation, Kendzierski and Wade remark that they have used two Latin texts. One prepared in Turin by Laurent and printed by Marietti in 1934, and one prepared in Paris in 1883.<sup>16</sup> This seems to corroborate the thesis that the Parisian versions refer to the third book, while Italian versions cite the second book.

On several occasions, the reference to Avicenna does not introduce a new element to Thomas’s argument; rather it strengthens a thought introduced by Thomas or others, and therefore constitutes an appeal to authority. In two cases, Avicenna is referred to as agreeing with other philosophers: once he is cited in agreement with Boethius and Averroës, and once in agreement solely with Averroës. In both these cases, the keyword used in the conjunctive clause is ‘*etiam*’. In other instances, Thomas uses a reference to Avicenna as the natural outcome of his own argument. These references are all introduced by the keywords ‘*unde*’, which is invariably translated by ‘whence’, and ‘*ideo*’, which is translated as ‘this is why’. The fourth and final keyword used by Thomas to introduce a citation of Avicenna is ‘*ut*’, translated by Bobik with ‘as’. When this keyword is used, a thought or principle of Avicenna is introduced which is new, or which is cited in contrast to the preceding argument.

#### *Implicit references to Avicennian thought*

In addition to the abovementioned cases in which Thomas himself felt it opportune to mention the author of the incorporated

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<sup>16</sup> Cajetan, L. Kendzierski, F. Wade, *Commentary on Being and Essence*, Milwaukee 1964, 39 note 1.

influences on his *opusculum*, there are quite a few instances in which commentators on the *De ente et essentia* have noticed a striking similarity with parts of Avicenna's work, where Thomas does not reference his sources.

Three implicit references are included in the Appendix without specifying an Avicennian work as a source. All three of these are taken from the notes of Roland-Gosselin. In no. 2 he notes that the opinion that he rallies against is that of Averroës, and that Thomas agrees with the alternative opinion, as he himself wrote in his commentary on the Aristotelian *Metaphysics*<sup>17</sup>. In no. 3, Roland-Gosselin notes that the technical term '*materia signata*' entered the scholastic vocabulary because the translator of Avicennian works used it. In contrast, the translator of the works of Averroës used the term '*materia demonstrata*' for the same gloss; no specific literary source is mentioned. In no. 7, Roland-Gosselin remarks upon Avicenna's multiple attacks on the Platonic notion of separate forms. In this instance, reference to Avicennian sources is given (*Metaph.* 5/1:87r b E, *Metaph.* 7/2:96r and *Metaph.* 7/3:96v) but these are not included in the table as their relevance to the citation from the *De ente et essentia* is not self-evident.

Three longer tracks of text which betray Avicennian influence deserve more attention. The editors of the Leonina note that lines 105-150 of chapter 2 are comparable to Thomas's commentary on the *Four Books of Sentences* of Peter Lombard, and that in that work reference is made to Avicenna (no. 5).<sup>18</sup> Also, a direct reference to Avicenna is incorporated in the critical apparatus.<sup>19</sup> Most interestingly, Roland-Gosselin has not noticed this Avicennian influence on Thomas. Another major passage of the *De ente et essentia* is thought to be of Avicennian origin by the editors of the Leonina: lines 195-222 of chapter 2.<sup>20</sup> A third large portion of the *opusculum* which might be of Avicennian origin is lines 26-155 of

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<sup>17</sup> *In Met.* L. VII, l. 9 (t. 25, p. 3 b).

<sup>18</sup> *Super Sent.* I d. 25 q. 1 a. 1 ad 2, referens Avicennam. Leon. 43.371: note on 105-150.

<sup>19</sup> *Metaph.* 5/3:88r a A.

<sup>20</sup> *Metaph.* 5/5:89v D-E.

chapter 3, making up most of that particular chapter.<sup>21</sup> This is a reference to Avicenna's threefold consideration of essences, as described in 2.4 below.

In conclusion, it can be said that the list of implicit references to Avicennian sources includes a wider variety of literary works than that of the explicit references. In addition to his *Metaphysics* and his *De Anima*, his implicit references also include his *Logica* and the *Sufficientia*. Two sources are notable for their frequency: the fifth book of the *Metaphysics* and the first book of the *Logica*, occurring three and four times respectively. If we look at the length of the passages which show Avicennian influence, we note that some are considerably larger than those that Thomas cites while mentioning Avicenna as their author. Therefore, it might be said that the unmarked influence of Avicenna on the text of the *De ente et essentia* is significantly larger than is betrayed by explicit citations.

*Avicennian influence on the De ente et essentia: De Raeymaeker*

A third mode of influence is neither marked by Thomas himself, nor by the compilers of (semi)critical editions of the text of the *De ente et essentia*. In contrast, it is remarked upon in handbooks and articles on Thomist metaphysics. To give a broad indication of the extent to which Avicennian thought is regarded as highly influential on the works of Thomas in general, and on his *De ente et essentia* in particular, I will briefly review a short treatise precisely on this topic written by the Flamish Thomist Louis De Raeymaeker (1895-1970), as it focuses most specifically at the topic at hand.<sup>22</sup> He starts by noting Avicenna's accent on the priority of three concepts: being, thing and necessity. These concepts are prior in that they constitute the first experience of the intellect and because one is not able to explain them in simpler or prior concepts. Existential knowledge is always a mixture of the experience of existence which

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<sup>21</sup> *Metaph.* 5/1-2:86v a-87v b.

<sup>22</sup> L. De Raeymaeker, *Vergelijkende studie over de betekenis van het "zijn" in de metafysiek van Avicenna en die van Thomas van Aquino* (Brussel: 1955).

is mediated or ‘troubled’ by quiddity: both sensory and mental experiences refer to being-in-this-or-that-manner. However, since Avicenna contents that existence is not included in any essence, they must in one way or the other, be separate. De Raeymaeker sets out to clarify their distinction within the Avicennian corpus. First, he summarizes Avicenna’s understanding of quiddity or essence. First of all, an essence can be considered in three ways: absolute (*in se*), extramental (*in re*) or mental (*in intellectu*). Regarding these last two, it is posited that individuality characterizes an essence *in re*, while universality characterizes an essence *in intellectu*. De Raeymaeker comments on the similarity to the *Elementatio theologica* of Proclus and the *Liber the causis*, attributed by the Arabian philosophers to Aristotle, in which a threefold causal hierarchy was described: (1) absolute perfection, (2) universal perfection and (3) individual things. That Avicenna was influenced by the Neo-Platonic tradition is almost a matter of certainty; Wisnovsky even refers to him as a ‘Neo-Platonizing’ Aristotelian. However, Avicenna does reject the Platonic notion of individual participation in an otherworldly idea; his teaching on essences is constructed in an Aristotelian fashion.

Most importantly, according to De Raeymaeker, Avicenna considers existence to be superadded to essences, labeling existence as mere accident. However, this does not denote one of the nine categories of accidents as described in Aristotle’s ten genera. Rather, Avicenna calls existence concomitant to essences (*concomitans*), denoting that it is a necessary property of the essence. These concomitant properties either belong to the essence on account of itself (De Raeymaeker poses the property of unevenness which belongs to the number three on account of its own essence), or on account of some extrinsic principle, as is the case with existence, since it is caused by an action of creation by God. The external causation of existence is necessitated by the fact that existence permeates the ten genera, since it is found in all its categories. Therefore, the cause of existence of all essences should be sought outside the categories. This also explains why we can understand the nature of a being (a *djinni* for example) without knowing if such a being actually exists in reality, since its existence is not included in its essence. But even though it comes from

without, existence still belongs to the essence as an attribute. Essences therefore seem prior in Avicenna's ontology. De Raeymaker succinctly summarizes Avicenna's stance by stating that in his ontology 'existence is a derivative of the totality of quidditative principles'.<sup>23</sup>

Avicenna also claims that an essence which has non-being as a concomitant attribute (i.e. something which does not exist in reality), still sustains itself in an absolute sense, on account of its inner quidditative structure, independent of any relationship to external reality, including existence. An essence considered absolutely (*in se*), possesses an 'inner firmness' (cf. *certitudo*) and presents itself as such to our intellect.<sup>24</sup> We may then conclude that for Avicenna both existence and non-being present itself as concomitant properties of essences; but while existence comes from without, having its cause in God who transcends the ten genera, it is supported by non-being, in which 'the inner firmness inherent to the essence absolutely considered is directly and necessarily expressed'.<sup>25</sup> Existence does not exhibit the independence of quiddities. On the contrary, existence is always related to an essence, and cannot be considered absolute. Existence therefore only has relative value, while essences have absolute value. From the above, De Raeymaker concludes that for Avicenna, ontological priority lies with quiddities or essences, which he states is understandable given the influence of Neo-Platonic sources on his philosophy. Given the emphasis on the absolute quality of essences and their inherent connection to necessary being, Avicenna's ontology may rightly be called 'essentialism'.

De Raeymaeker then comments on Thomas's reception of Avicennian thought. He notes that especially Thomas's earlier works (such as the *De ente et essentia*) show a profound influence

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<sup>23</sup> 'zo is het bestaan een derivaat van het geheel aan quidditatieve principes'. Ibidem, 11.

<sup>24</sup> 'de loutere quidditeit, d.i. de niet-zijnde quidditeit, de quidditeit waarvan het niet-zijn een eigenschap is, bezit een inwendige stevigheid en dringt zich als zodanig op aan ons verstand'. Ibidem, 11.

<sup>25</sup> 'waarin de *inwendige* stevigheid eigen aan de op zichzelf (*absolute*) beschouwde quidditeit rechtstreeks en noodzakelijk tot uitdrukking komt'. Ibidem, 11.

by Avicenna. Thomas too posits the priority of being in relation to the human intellect. It is precisely being which is first experienced by the human intellect, and which in fact constitutes its formal object. In addition, Thomas primarily connects the understanding of being with sensory experience of reality, or the world, following Aristotle. This goes against Platonic thought and several mental experiments proposed by Avicenna, in which the human mind experiences itself in an exploration of the inner world. However, for Thomas, the awareness of being is inherently linked to a fundamental openness of the human intellect to the world.

The threefold division of essences (*in re, in se, in intellectu*) can also be found in Thomas's works, for example in this excerpt from chapter 4 of the *De ente et essentia*:

Now, a nature or essence signified as a whole can be considered in two ways. In one way it can be considered according to its proper content, and this is an absolute consideration of it [...] In the other way, an essence is considered according to the existence it has in this or that [...] This nature has a twofold existence, one in singular things, the other in the soul.<sup>26</sup>

Taking into account that with 'soul' (Lat. 'anima') Thomas here refers to the human intellect, the Avicennian influence becomes evident. As noted above, this entire passage of the *De ente et essentia* has been linked by Roland-Gosselin to the first two chapters of the fifth book of Avicenna's *Metaphysics*.

Also with regard to the argument on the distinction between *esse* and *essentia*, the influence of Avicenna's thought is unmistakable to the point where De Raeymaeker claims that the evidence that Thomas gives for the distinction is actually identical to that given by Avicenna:

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<sup>26</sup> 'Natura autem vel essentia sic accepta potest dupliciter considerari : uno modo secundum rationem propriam et haec est absoluta consideratio ipsius [...] Alio modo consideratur secundum esse quod habet in hoc vel in illo [...] Haec autem natura duplex habet esse : unum in singularibus, aliud in anima'. Leon. 43.3:26-29, 45-47, 52-53.

Whatever is not of the understood content of an essence or quiddity is something that comes from without and makes a composition with the essence [...] it is clear, therefore, that existence is other than essence or quiddity.<sup>27</sup>

So, although Thomas acknowledges the distinction between existence and essence and the external causation of existence on account of its independence of the essence's content, he still posits a strong relationship between the two principles of being, as they form a composition with each other. In accord with Avicenna, he sees existence as a concomitant property of essences (although that terminology is not yet used in the *De ente et essentia*), which is added to it by an external cause, which he claims to be God.

At this point, I would like to briefly comment upon the real distinction between essence and existence as proposed by Avicenna. It did not develop within an intellectual vacuum. In fact, the discussions among the different factions of *mutakallimūn* (Islamic theologians) on the relationship between the concepts of "thing" (*shay'*) and "existent" (*mawjūd*), appear to have provided Avicenna with the necessary impetus to develop his thought. Moreover, the discussion on things and existents did not merely arise out of philosophical interest in ontology, but rather from a theological interest to revolve apparent paradoxes which presented itself in the interpretation of various verses of the Qur'ān. The *mutakallimūn* were faced by two distinct problems: one the one hand, they sought to resolve the question whether or not it could be said that God is a thing. On the other hand, they were trying to make sense of the Qur'ānic verses in which the creative power of God was exalted, for example sura 36:82: "Verily His command, when He intends a thing, is *only* that He says to it, 'Be!', and it is". What is this thing, the object of God's command to be, that is before it exists? How was this description of divine creative power to be reconciled with Neo-Platonized Aristotelian ontology, of which the Islamic dogmatists were the intellectual heirs? It was within the context of these theologically driven debates that the conceived

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<sup>27</sup> 'Quidquid enim non est de intellectu essentiae vel quidditatis, hoc est adveniēns extra et faciēns compositionem cum essentia [...] Ergo patet quod esse est aliud ab essentia vel quidditate'. Leon. 43.4:94-95, 102-103.

relationship between things and existents gave rise to the Avicennian distinction between essence and existence.

We find Avicenna's approach of the subject matter in his *Kitāb ash-Shifā'* (*Book of Healing*), and more specifically in chapter 5 of the first book of the *Ilāhiyyāt* (*Metaphysics*). Here, Avicenna makes three important points: first, that 'thing' and 'existent' signify primitive, basic, and immediately apprehensible concepts. As such, they cannot be put in a genus. Second, he emphasizes that there is a clear difference in meaning between *shay'* and *mawjūd*: *shay'* refers to an entity with regards to its essence, while *mawjūd* refers to an entity with regard to its existence. Third, he affirms that thing and existent are co-implicated (*mutalāzimāni*), and by inference, that neither term is logically prior to the other.

The development of the concept of *mawjūd* (existent) into *wujūd* (existence) seems obvious, but some explanation is required to follow the conceptual development of *māhiyya* (essence; lit. 'whatness') from the concept *shay'* (thing). A possible explanation is offered by a careful reconstruction of an argument in the *Ilāhiyyāt*, in which Avicenna shows in what sense thing and existent differ from each other. He does this by differentiating between specific existence (*al-wujūd al-khāṣṣ*) and affirmative existence (*al-wujūd al-ithbātī*). Predications of specific existence assert *what* something is, and is also called 'inner reality' (*haqīqa*, which would be translated into Latin as *certitudo*). It is called specific because it denotes existence in a class (species) of things. On the other hand, predications of affirmative existence assert *that* something is. Since inner reality and specific existence are identical, argues Wisnovsky, and inner reality is also identical to *māhiyya*, it follows that specific existence is identical to *māhiyya*. The three concepts of specific existence, inner reality and whatness/essence are therefore intensionally identical. And since affirmative existence is distinct from specific existence, it follows that existence is distinct from essence.

According to Wisnovsky, there exists the possibility that the development of *māhiyya* from *shay'* was facilitated by Avicenna's use of the word *shay'īyya* (thingness). In another passage from the *Ilāhiyyāt* (38:20-23), he fulminates against people who defend the viewpoint that among all that is predicated, there are non-existent

entities which have no thingness. He boldly advises these people to ‘go back to whatever dogmatic formulae they babbled out unintelligibly’. As an aside, the entities that are referred to here are impossible entities, the third category of the triad necessary-contingent-impossible existence. The hypothesis that *shay’iyya* served as a bridge between the concepts of *shay’* and *māhiyya* faces two challenges: first, we would suspect broad usage of the term in the ninth and tenth century debates between *mutakallimūn*; and this is simply not the case. Despite the fact that only a fraction of *kalām* texts from that time period is available to modern scholars, there seems to be no indication that the term was widely used. There exists the distinct possibility that al-Maturidi is the original inventor of the term *shay’iyya*. This claim is even more credible given the fact that Avicenna grew up in the area outside Bukhara, where the influence of the Samarqandi Hanafism of al-Maturidi (a school of Islamic jurisprudence) was strongly felt. It appears to be a likely scenario that Avicenna encountered the term *shay’iyya* sometime during his early education. Naturally, it is also quite possible that Avicenna himself came up with the word *shay’iyya*; it is a straightforward abstract noun, constructed through use of the suffix *-iyya*, similar to the English suffix *-ness*, which serves a similar purpose. In his works, Avicenna showed a predilection to invent and use new abstract nouns.

However, Thomas was not merely influenced by the intellectual heritage of Avicenna; he would also significantly add to it. After his treatment of the argument for the real distinction between *esse* and *essentia* in all substances but God, he continues:

It is necessary therefore that the quiddity itself or the form, which is the intelligence, be in potency with respect to the existence which it received from God; and this existence is received as an act. It is in this way that potency and act are found in the intelligences.<sup>28</sup>

Thomas here applies the Aristotelian notion of potency and act to the metaphysical relationship between existence and essence. This

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Ergo oportet quod ipsa quidditatis vel forma quia est intelligentia sit in potentia respectu esse quod a Deo recipit ; et illud esse receptum est per modum actus’. Leon. 43.4:149-152.

also implies a radical opposition to the idea that essences are somehow prior to existence, and in fact, to the notion of essentialism. For following Aristotle, Thomas cannot but grant priority to act, although this sentiment is not yet fully voiced within the *De ente et essentia*. Not only because Aristotelian philosophy declares that act holds priority over potency, but also because potency can only be thought of in relationship to a corresponding act. Thomas's ontology could therefore be considered existentialist, rather than essentialist like that of Avicenna, if we are prepared to look beyond the limits of this first *opusculum*. Existence is the absolute ground of metaphysics as essences point to existence as *modus essendi* to *actus essendi*. Existence is the 'act of acts' and the 'perfection of perfections' as Thomas would phrase it in his later works.

#### 4. Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction above, the aim of this article was to examine the historical-philosophical context in which Thomas wrote his treatment of Aristotelian ontology, and to look at the *opusculum* with special attention for the philosophical influence of the Persian polymath Avicenna.

The historical-philosophical context was discussed in the first part. We saw that the environment in which Thomas wrote the *De ente et essentia* was one of new developments. The intermingling of cultures on the Iberian Peninsula facilitated the exchange between the bearers of Jewish, Christian and Islamic cultures. Thomas lived in a timeframe in which the translations of these works were becoming widely available, and as a result, their contents were fiercely debated by Christian theologians.

The influence of these debates on the *De ente et essentia* becomes clear in various passages where Thomas objects against the views of proponents of several distinct philosophical topics (such as the Franciscans with regard to the subject of spiritual matter, and the "Platonists" with regard to the real existence of essences independent of concrete individuals).

The *De ente et essentia* thus constitutes a treatment of Aristotelian ontology which includes mention of ways in which it

was received by later philosophers and other commentators. The question arises whether within this discussion of Aristotelian ontology, Avicenna's voice could be considered as the one closest to that of Thomas. In other words: does Thomas value the Avicennian treatment on the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle above all other commentaries? I believe that, at least within the confines of the *De ente et essentia*, such a conclusion is warranted. Three points support my conclusion: first, the evaluation of explicit references made to other authors in the *De ente et essentia* shows that Avicenna is referred to more than any other author. Secondly, while the mere quantity of references in itself does not prove anything, we see in the *De ente et essentia* that Thomas only refers to Avicenna in agreement with his statements, while other authors are at times referenced to present an argument contrary to the interpretation of Aristotle presented by Thomas. Thirdly, in addition to the quantity and content of explicit references to the works of Avicenna, various passages of varying length exhibit a likeness to Avicenna's treatment of similar topics. Some discuss the same thought in different wording, while others are either paraphrases or verbatim citations of Avicennian texts.

Taken together, the three points mentioned above make the proposition, that the metaphysical thought of Avicenna constitutes the major influence on Thomas's interpretation of Aristotelian ontology, at least plausible (it should be noted at this point, that Thomas saw the same viewpoint strengthened by the *Liber the causis* and in the work of Boethius). In my opinion, this proposition is not only plausible but also true. If we limit our evaluation of the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas to the exposition of Aristotelian ontology which he presents in the *De ente et essentia*, then we must conclude that more than any treatment on the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle, the Latin translation of the *Ilāhiyyāt* determined the way in which Thomas interpreted Aristotelian ontology. Therefore, in the broadest sense we could say that Avicenna constitutes the most influential author with regard to Thomas's interpretation of Aristotelian ontology as presented in the *De ente et essentia*. The most specific identification of the major influence on the *De ente et essentia* would be the Latin translation of the *Metaphysics* of Avicenna.

In addition, the partial Avicennian origin of Thomas's interpretation of the real distinction between *esse* and *essentia* in composed substances is asserted by several authors. John Wippel comments in his handbook on Aquinas's metaphysics: "Avicenna has often been cited, both by thirteenth-century writers and by twentieth-century scholars, as an early defender of real distinction between essence and existence in such entities".<sup>29</sup> Wisnovsky examines the origin of the Avicennian interpretation of the real distinction between essence and existence in creatures in no less than three chapters of his *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context*.<sup>30</sup> Even though he does not specifically refer to Thomas as a philosophical heir to the Avicennian distinction, he does examine the roots of the Avicennian distinction in the so-called Ammonian synthesis, a Neo-Platonic reconciliation of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy, which Avicenna in turn tried to synthesize with theological claims made by Islamic dogmatic theologians. Parviz Morewedge connects the Avicennian formulation of the distinction to later Islamic and Scholastic philosophers:

However, Ibn Sina's distinction is important not only because it occupies such a significant place in his own philosophical system, but also because of the role it plays in the philosophical systems of later philosophers, such as Ibn Rushd, Aquinas, and Ockham, who took issue with what they believed to be his formulation of the distinction, and in so doing, centered some of their own significant doctrines around the alleged Ibn Sinian distinction.<sup>31</sup>

But maybe more important for a proper understanding of Thomas's early metaphysical thought is not the admission that it is influenced by, or indebted to, the thought of Avicenna, but the realization of the way in which Thomas went beyond Avicenna and developed his own philosophical notions to arrive at a new and innovative way

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<sup>29</sup> J. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: from Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington: 2000), p. 134.

<sup>30</sup> R. Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context* (London: 2003).

<sup>31</sup> P. Morewedge, "Philosophical Analysis and Ibn Sīnā's 'Essence-Existence' Distinction", in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 92, No. 3, pp. 425-435, p. 426.

to view the relationship between creation and its creator. More specifically, it is precisely in the addition of the notion of an admixture of potency and act in created beings, that the *De ente et essentia* does not constitute a mere summary of Aristotelian ontology as interpreted by Avicenna, but a philosophical work which in and of itself is “highly original”, to once again quote Weisheipl. As a result of the addition of this new way of viewing the fundamental difference between God and the created simple substances, Thomas also shifts the ontological priority to existence, whereas Avicenna proposed the priority of essences over existence.

Considered within these two contexts, the historical-philosophical situation in which Thomas wrote the *De ente et essentia* and the major influence exerted on him by the *Book of Healing of Avicenna*, the importance of this early work within the *corpus Thomisticum* becomes apparent: although it might have been intended as a treatment of Aristotelian ontology written on behalf of his fellow Dominicans at the Chapelle Saint-Jacques in Paris, it actually affords us a first, partial look at the philosophical groundwork on which Thomas’s theology is built. In addition to being a treatment of Aristotelian notions interpreted in such a way that they may become the backdrop to Christian theological doctrine, Thomas presents a new and innovative interpretation of the distinction between creation and its creator. His notion of an admixture of potency and actuality in simple created beings is elegant in its simplicity, making the conjecture of incorporeal matter, as proposed by philosophers of the Franciscan school, obviously unnecessary. Furthermore, there is a foreshadowing here of the inherent connection between God and creation through the participation in existence: every being comes to be by receiving existence from the First Cause who is also Pure Being. In my opinion, this makes Aquinas’s interpretation of the difference between God and other simple substances more conducive to theological and spiritual needs than the (unnecessarily complicating) notion of incorporeal matter. However, this does not mean a wholesale rejection of (Neo-)Platonic doctrine; the notion of emanation from, and return to God is reconcilable with his admixture of potency and actuality and is thus retained (although this schema of *exitus* and *reditus* is not part of the content of the *De*

*ente et essentia*). Therefore, the characterization of Thomas as an Aristotelian as denoting a negative disposition toward Neo-Platonic thought seems unwarranted.

**Appendix:****Implicit references to Avicenna in the *De ente et essentia*.**

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| 1. 1 :50-52  | But it is called essence from the fact that through it and in it a real being has existence.   | <i>Log. P/1:3v b</i><br><i>Metaph. 1/6:72v a C</i><br><i>Suffic. 1/6:17r b</i> |
| 2. 2:10-12   | Neither can the form alone of a composed substance be said to be its essence, although some try to assert this.  |  |
| 3. 2:73-75   | We should notice, therefore, that the principle of individuation is not matter taken in just any way whatsoever, but only designated matter.   |  |
| 4. 2:100-101 | [rather], whatever is in the species is also in the genus, but as undetermined.  | <i>Metaph. 5/3:88r a A</i>   |
| 5. 2:105-150 | We can see how this comes about if we examine how body taken as part of animal differs from body taken as genus; [...] And so the form of animal is implicitly contained in the form of body, when body is its genus.          | <i>Metaph. 5/3:88r a A</i>   |
| 6. 2:195-222 | From this it is clear why the genus, the difference, and the species are related proportionally to the matter, to the form, and to the composite in the real world, although they are not identical with them. [...] for we do | <i>Metaph. 5/5:89v D-E</i>   |

- not say that the definition is the genus or the difference.
7. 3:16 [...] as the Platonists held [...]
8. 3:26-155 Now, a nature or essence signified as a whole can be considered in two ways. [...] and it is in this way, too, that the notion of the genus and of the difference belong to it. *Metaph.* 5/1-2:86v a-87v b
9. 4:11-13 The strongest demonstration of this is from the power of understanding in them. *De an.* 5/2:22v b A  
*De an.* 5/2:23r b
10. 4:41 It is easy to see how this may be so.
11. 5:5-7 [and] this is why we find some philosophers who say that God does not have a quiddity or essence, because his essence is not other than his existence. *Metaph.* 7/4:99r b
12. 6:59-62 For, since the parts of substance are matter and form, certain accidents follow principally on form, certain others follow principally on matter. *Suffic.* 1/6:17r b  
*Log.* 1:4r a b
13. 6:85-86 [and] this is why it remains in him after death. *Suffic.* 1/6:17r b
14. 6.102-103 But sometimes they cause accidents which are only aptitudes, their completion being received from an exterior agent. *Suffic.* 1/6:17r b

Fragments cited from the *Editio Leonina* of the *De ente et essentia*, book 43 (pp369-381), as [chapter]:[line numbers]. “P” stands for *prologus* or *proöemium* (introduction). References to Avicennian sources: *Metaph(ysica)*, *De An(ima)*, *Suffic(ientia)* or *Log(ica)*, [book/treatise]/[chapter]:[folio number][v(erso)/r(ecto)] [a/b] [A-F].