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**On 'Synderesis' and Moral Imagination: An Inquiry into the Beneficence of 'Imaginative Prudence' in Moral Development Via the First Principles of Natural Law of Saint Thomas Aquinas and the Imagination Ethic Theory of Darcia Narvaez**

Pierangelo dela Cruz Repuyan  
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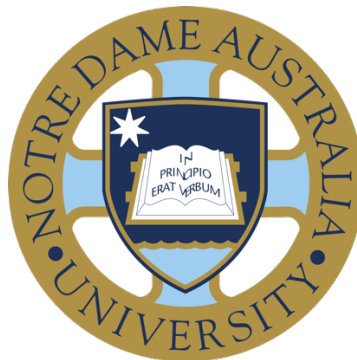
**ON 'SYNDERESIS' AND MORAL IMAGINATION:**

An Inquiry into the Beneficence of 'Imaginative Prudence' in Moral Development  
Via the First Principles of Natural Law of Saint Thomas Aquinas  
and the Imagination Ethic Theory of Darcia Narvaez

**Pierangelo dela Cruz Repuyan**

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**



School of Philosophy and Theology

Fremantle Campus

March 2021

## **Declaration of Authorship**

To the best of the candidate's knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published by another person, except where due acknowledgement has been made.

This thesis is the candidate's own work and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any institution.

Signature:

Print Name: Pierangelo dela Cruz Repuyan

Date: 24 March 2021

## Abstract

The Thomistic habit of *synderesis* innately inclines moral agents to the first principles of natural law which state that *good is to be done and pursued and evil to be avoided*. Serving as an ethical foundation in moral development, these primary moral principles direct practical reason to those acts that actualise the essence of human nature. Since the *act of synderesis* involves pre-cognitive (intuitive) and cognitive (apprehensive) processes, moral formation is necessary for the formal knowledge of the primary moral principles to inchoately foment through virtue habituation. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, virtues are habitual acts that form moral agents to become virtuous people and inform them, too, of which acts are morally apt for human flourishing. In this human process where ignorance, passion, weak will, vices, sin and concupiscence may vitiate the intended moral outcome, *synderesis* and moral virtues correlatively work together to set the ends to moral virtues and to determine which acts to do, pursue and avoid respectively. Specifically, the acquired moral virtue of prudence, which Aquinas considers as right reason applied to action, enables the proper discernment of the primary moral principles that temporally address the contingencies and particularity of everyday human historicity. A human faculty that assists in facilitating this discernment process is the interior sense called *moral imagination (vis imaginativa)*. While Aquinas has considered imagination as one of the sources of human knowledge, his treatment of prudential moral inquiry, however, appears to be underdeveloped without the consideration of imagination as one of the *quasi-integral parts of prudence*. In view of developing the seed of insight which Aquinas has sowed into the reality of imagination, the beneficence of *imaginative prudence* will be argued on account of its capacity to dispose practical reason to synthetically evaluate (*productive imagination*) and to ingeniously explore (*creative imagination*) various facets of given moral situations while integrating the primary moral principles in prudential moral inquiries. Apart from considering arguments from the theological and philosophical perspectives, the Imagination Ethic Theory of Darcia Narvaez will be explored to demonstrate how modern scientific research in psychology affirms the integrity and indispensability of *moral imagination* in realising natural law's ends via prudential moral inquiry.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis is a personal *exitus et reditus* journey. As I recall the moment my academic journey began when I left my parish ministry and reflect now on my impending return, the culmination of this journey could not have been possible without any help. To those who have been part of this journey, I sincerely acknowledge with deep gratitude *our* shared journey:

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I extend my gratitude to the administration, staff, and students at the University of Notre Dame Australia – Fremantle, past and present, most particularly to the School of Philosophy and Theology, for their guidance and encouragement. Through the university, I wish to acknowledge with gratitude the immense financial support that I have received from the Australian government funding under the Research Training Scheme and the Slavin Postgraduate Award.

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*“May you lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him,  
as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.”*

Colossians 1:10

**The Works of St. Thomas Aquinas Consulted in this Thesis**

***Sententia in libri De anima***

(Commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*)

***Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum***

(Commentary on Aristotle's Physics)

***Commentarii in libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Stagiritae***

(Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle)

***Sententia libri Ethicorum***

(Commentary on the Nichomachean Ethics)

***Expositio libri Posteriorum Analyticorum***

(Commentary on the Posterior Analytics of Aristotle)

***Sententia libri De memoria et reminiscencia***

(On Memory and Recollection)

***Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis***

(Disputed question on Created Spirits)

***Quaestiones disputatae de anima***

(Disputed questions on the Soul)

***Quaestiones disputatae de malo***

(Disputed questions on Evil)

***Quaestiones disputatae de veritate***

(Disputed questions on the Truth)

***Quaestiones disputatae de virtutibus in communi***

(Disputed questions on the Virtues in general)

***Summa contra Gentiles***

a.k.a. *Liber de veritate Catholicae fidei contra errores infidelium*

(Book on the truth of the Catholic faith against the errors of the unbelievers)

***Summa theologiae***

(Summary of Theology)

***Super I Epistolam B. Pauli ad Corinthios lectura***

(Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians)

NOTE: Latin texts of the *Summa theologiae* are taken from the Blackfriars translation.

### **Author's Note on the Use of Gender-Inclusive Language**

Every possible opportunity was undertaken in order to use gender-inclusive language in the presentation of this thesis. A number of quotations, however, have their original forms retained so as to preserve their intended meanings. No offense is intended should this cause any distress to readers. The author of this thesis upholds the dignity of all human persons since everyone, *without exception*, is created in the image and likeness of God.



**“Synderesis” is said to be the law of our mind,  
because it is a habit containing  
the precepts of the natural law,  
which are the first principles of human actions.**

Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a.1, ad. 2

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

“That world which is the theatre of man’s history”<sup>1</sup> serves as the moral agent’s “moral universe”<sup>2</sup> where the perennially recurring seduction of human reason by the “tree of knowledge of good and evil”<sup>3</sup> confronts the limits of human volition and affectivity. This same theatre has already witnessed the fall of the primordial moral agents which tragically resulted in the fracture of the created order brought about by that original human decision to go against the interior disposition to do and pursue the good and to shun evil.<sup>4</sup> The post-lapsarian state of moral agents has since then been marred by inner discords which reflect the secularised society’s penchant for dissonance. Human reason has been corrupted, the will has been weakened, and passions have been disordered. Nonetheless, though fallen and consumed, moral agents still inherit something from the original self: the innate disposition called *synderesis*<sup>5</sup> which “is said to incite to good and murmur at evil.”<sup>6</sup> *Synderesis*, originally called *synteresis*,<sup>7</sup> acts as the vestigial link between the fallen state of moral agents and the enduring

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<sup>1</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et spes* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 7 December 1965), § 2, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

<sup>2</sup> Darcia Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality: Evolution, Culture, and Wisdom* (NY: W. W. Norton and Company, 2014), 6.

<sup>3</sup> Gn 2:9 (NRSV).

<sup>4</sup> See Gn 3:23-24.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*. trans. Robert William Mulligan, SJ, James V. McGlynn, SJ, and Robert W Schmidt, SJ, *The Collected Works of St. Thomas Aquinas*. 3 vols. (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery Co., 1952-1954), IntelLex Past Masters, q. 16, a. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*. trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, *The Collected Works of St. Thomas Aquinas* (NY: Benzinger, 1947; repr. 1993), IntelLex Past Masters, I, q. 79, a. 12.

<sup>7</sup> St. Jerome introduced the term, *synderesis*, from the Stoic Greek term, *synteresis*, which means “preservation,” “safekeeping,” “keeping something in mind,” and “warning.” See Katarzyna Stępień, “Synderesis and the Natural Law,” *Studia Gilsoniana* 3, no. 3 (2014): 377.

divine presence in humanity.<sup>8</sup> Ontologically, owing to divine grace which is unmerited, moral agents are wonderfully left with that “spark of conscience”<sup>9</sup> whose continued existence is a reminder that human goodness has not been forfeited or lost despite the fall from grace. St. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274),<sup>10</sup> the Angelic Doctor (*Doctor Angelicus*), believes that the natural “inclination to good cannot be taken away even from the damned.”<sup>11</sup>

The innate nature of *synderesis* is described by Aquinas as “a kind of seed plot containing in germ all the knowledge which follows [and which] will be ready for use when needed.”<sup>12</sup> However, it pertains only to its habitual nature that what *synderesis* innately contains, which are “the precepts of the natural law, which are the first principles of human actions,”<sup>13</sup> is “naturally present [and] always present”<sup>14</sup> in moral agents. In this respect, Aquinas asserts that an “act of knowing is not prerequisite for the power or habit of *synderesis*, but only for its act.”<sup>15</sup> This implies that while the innate disposition to the first principles of natural law is naturally given, its epistemology rather requires time and experience. In this regard, this thesis acknowledges two processes involved in the *act of synderesis*, viz., pre-cognitive and cognitive processes, which undergird the inchoative knowledge of the first principles of natural law. It asserts that moral agency necessarily requires the dynamic elements of time and experience in grasping developmentally knowledge of the self-evident truths of the primary moral principles. Aquinas provides the methodology in dealing with these processes:

And since natural reason rises to the knowledge of God through creatures, while on the other hand the knowledge of God by faith comes down to us by divine revelation, and since the way of ascent is the same as that of descent, we must needs proceed by the same way in those things above reason which are an object of faith, as that which we

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<sup>8</sup> Robert A. Greene, “Synderesis, the Spark of Conscience, in the English Renaissance,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52, no. 2 (1991): 196.

<sup>9</sup> Bonaventure, *Sentences* II, d. 39, a. 2, a. 1 in Douglas Langston, “The Spark of Conscience: Bonaventure’s View of Conscience and Synderesis,” *Franciscan Studies* 53, no.1 (1993): 85

<sup>10</sup> Ralph McInerny and John O’Callaghan, “Saint Thomas Aquinas,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Summer 2018 Edition).  
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/Aquinas/>.

<sup>11</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 16, a. 3. (St. Thomas Aquinas will be referred hereafter as ‘Aquinas.’)

<sup>12</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 16, a. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 1. (In this thesis, the term, *first principles* or *precepts of natural law*, is used interchangeably with similar terms such as *first principles* or *precepts of moral action*, *first principles* or *precepts of practical reason*, *universal* or *primary* or *first moral principles*.)

<sup>14</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 16, a. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 16, a. 1.



followed hitherto in those matters concerning God which we investigated by reason.<sup>16</sup>

As moral agents navigate through life in pursuit of the practical moral truth, this thesis explores this moral passage where, owing to its nature as “a prelude to the act virtue,”<sup>17</sup> *synderesis* sets the ends to moral virtues, particularly the acquired virtue of prudence, in achieving human flourishing.

In the moral universe, moral agents exist as historical beings who are naturally capable of self-governance and self-transcendence. This statement finds foundation in Aquinas’s anthropology which states that human operations are founded and are meant to manifest the very nature of the human essence. This means that “since the rational soul is the proper form of man, there is in every man a natural inclination to act according to reason: and this is to act according to virtue.”<sup>18</sup> The acquisition of virtue is indispensably the key factor in moral development, particularly the moral virtue of prudence which, by being moved by *synderesis*, regulates the means when it “applies universal principles to the particular conclusions of practical matters.”<sup>19</sup> This statement underlines one of the propositions being argued in this thesis that when the first principles of natural law are considered, it need not be exclusively stated as an absolute metaphysical reality whose practical signification will always be presumed as being universally valid regardless of the consideration of the contingent historicity of moral agents. The acquired virtue of prudence mitigates the consideration of the search for the moral truth by assimilating the primary moral principles and the *infinity of singulars* in the determination of the morality of human acts. It relegates divine illumination and physicalism as epistemological extremes which do not represent Thomistic epistemology.

In considering the *act of prudence*, this thesis further proposes the consideration of moral imagination in prudential moral inquiries. Aquinas’s appreciation of what moral imagination can offer to prudential deliberations is regrettably not directly evident. Though his views were evidently conditioned by medieval philosophy and psychology prevalent during his time, there is still definitely much to be admired in Aquinas’s understanding of the moral person. This

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*. trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, The Collected Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1934), IntelLex Past Masters, lib. 4, cap. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 16, a. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 6.

understanding is renewed most particularly when his doctrine on the natural law is studied via the moral psychology of Darcia Narvaez in her *Triune Ethics Theory*. Her scientific research will demonstrate just how vital moral imagination is in moral development. Specifically considering her Ethic of Imagination will provide scientific grounding to what this thesis refers to as *imaginative prudence*. The habituation of this virtue provides moral agents the benefit of moral imagination which conjointly facilitates the understanding of the universal moral principles and of the contingencies of human historicity in the moral consideration of human acts. *Imaginative prudence* informs moral agents of those acts which are virtuous.

By and large, with moral agency<sup>20</sup> as the overarching focus, the main objectives of this thesis centre on the following: (i) to explore the ontology and epistemology of Aquinas's innate habitual disposition called *synderesis*, (ii) to investigate the moral development of the first principles of natural law via the correlation between *synderesis* and acquired moral virtues, (iii) to propose the necessity of imagination in prudence's role in moral development via moral inquiry, and (iv) to interrelate the Thomistic doctrine of the natural law (*legis naturalis*) and its correlative reality of natural inclination (*inclinatio naturalis*) with the scientific (psychological) research of Darcia Narvaez on the Ethic of Imagination in moral formation and development. Two literatures hold primary place in pursuit of the above objectives: St. Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* and Darcia Narvaez's *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality: Evolution, Culture, and Wisdom*.<sup>21</sup> Library research and analysis and synthesis of research materials are facilitated to achieve the originality of the thesis project.

Accruing from these objectives, moral agency as used in this thesis is understood from the perspective of human agents who may or may not have yet discovered the "truth about God."<sup>22</sup> This research assumes that since it deals with natural law as the basis of moral principles, the premise of its universality is inherent. It also takes cognisance of the revealed truth that just like the universal nature of *synderesis*, "God, who knows the human heart...has made no

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<sup>20</sup> This Christian anthropological categorisation of moral agency is owed particularly to Karl Rahner, SJ who conceives of the essence of the 'historical being' as the object of divine revelation and salvation which are both encountered within the moral agent's historicity. Rahner's transcendental theology generally accounts for this conceptualisation whereby moral agents exercise their freedom in responding to God's self-communication that brings about self-realisation and self-fulfilment. Note that in this thesis the term *moral agency* (or *moral agent*) is used interchangeably with the term *human agency* (or *human agent*) unless stipulated otherwise. See Karl Rahner, SJ, "The Theological Dimension of the Question About Man," in *Theological Investigations: Jesus, Man and the Church* (NY: Crossroad, 1981) 53-70; Karl Rahner, SJ, "Man (Anthropology)" in *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner, SJ (London: Burns and Oates, 1975), 887-893.

<sup>21</sup> See footnotes 2 and 6 above for Darcia Narvaez and St. Thomas Aquinas's literatures respectively.

<sup>22</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

distinction between them and us.”<sup>23</sup> The language of ‘natural ends’ proceeds from this assumption where the reality of the supernatural ends (*beatific vision*) is further envisaged for those whose lives commit to the truths about God. This thesis maintains the knowledge of God is the ultimate goal of every human cognition and operation: “Man naturally desires, as his last end, to know the first cause. But God is the first cause of all. Therefore man’s last end is to know God.”<sup>24</sup>

Outside the parameters of the objectives of this research, the moral agents’ realisation of their human ends, both natural and supernatural, is not just an essential task based on human self-promotion; more importantly, it is the moral agents’ moral responsibility based on their human essence as *imago Dei*. The potential significance of this research points not just to its contribution to the world of the academe, i.e., to advance and promote the interdisciplinary study between Thomistic theology and the science of psychology, but also, to proffer practical imaginative moral pathways that engender human flourishing on both personal and communal levels via virtue habituation. The ensuing discussion, therefore, echoing the Thomistic good construed as an ‘end,’ points to the irrevocable truth that: “*Deus est ultimus finis hominis.*”<sup>25</sup>

In view of the above, alongside this current Chapter 1 which gives a general overview of moral agency, Chapter 2 briefly surveys the history behind the conception of the term, *synderesis*. Its history will allude to the alleged transliteration error which, through the passage of time and community reflection, had given birth to *synderesis* that is held to dispose moral agents to the first principles of natural law. Since the subject of *synderesis* is the intelligent human person, Chapter 3 focusses on Aquinas’s anthropology whose understanding of the human person as a hylomorphic being is morally grounded on *synderesis*. The act of *synderesis* opens the mind of moral agents to the reality of the practical moral good and challenges them to persevere in actuating its practical meaning by acquiring moral virtues. This good is viewed as ‘practical’ since human intellect is ordered by practical reason to perform human acts that are perfective and complete of the human essence. On the other hand, it is ‘moral’ since it points to the ethical responsibility of all human persons to fulfil their end (*telos*) in accordance with natural

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<sup>23</sup> Acts 15:8-9.

<sup>24</sup> Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. 3, cap. 25.

<sup>25</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 8. “God is the ultimate end of man.”

law. Aquinas asserts the moral imperative of fulfilling the contents of the natural law “since to sin is nothing else than to stray from what is according to our nature.”<sup>26</sup>

Chapter 4 discusses the ontology and epistemology of *synderesis*. It highlights the intelligibility of moral goods (ends) due to the actuation of *synderesis*. This research will stress that *synderesis* does not only innately dispose moral agents to the primary principles (intuitive/precognitive/non-cognitive process), but it also assists in the development and maturation of the epistemic contents of the natural law (apprehensive/cognitive process). This understanding extends the traditional understanding of *synderesis* as a *disposition* to include its *habitual* propensity to sustain moral agency within the moral sphere. This ontological procession will see the correlation between *synderesis* and virtue. Underpinning the discussion in this chapter is the introduction of the notion of natural law which will gain further clarity as the thesis proceeds in its elaboration.

Chapter 5 studies the fundamental ‘material’ elements constitutive of Aquinas’s epistemology. Although *synderesis* is innate, the intuition (pre-cognitive; non-cognitive) and apprehension (cognitive) of the first principles of natural law will still require sensitive knowledge from the social environment (moral sphere). Aquinas believes that the sources of human knowledge, apart from the extramental world, also include *imagination*. As one of the internal senses (interior sensoria), imagination’s role in epistemology is especially pertinent to moral development. It is during the *turn to phantasm* when the process of abstraction unfolds that the *intellectus agens* (active or agent intellect) encounters the moral agent’s historicity (materiality). Moral imagination and *synderesis* conjointly open human consciousness to the primary moral principles and their practical consideration of contingent matters.

Chapter 6 elaborates the correlation between *synderesis* and acquired moral virtues, particularly the virtue of prudence. Acquiring moral virtues is indispensable for moral development. Although Aquinas relegates the acquired moral virtues as *imperfect* in view of the perfective nature of infused virtues, they have *practical* significance for moral development and moral inquiry. Acquired moral virtues *form* moral agents to be virtuous people while, at the same time, they *inform* their behaviour as to whether their actions correspond to their human nature and those which will yield accordingly the proper human ends. Acquired moral virtues have, therefore, an essential role in the *formation* and *information* of moral agents in

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<sup>26</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 109, a. 8.

leading them to discover the first principles of natural law and its derivatives, and through it, realise their natural inclinations via virtue habituation. In addition, virtue habituation is essential for *moral exemplars* or *virtue-enablers*, such as parents and grandparents, who have the specific important role of forming the future generation, most particularly children in their early sensitive years.

Chapter 7 takes an in-depth look at the beneficence of moral imagination and how it assists and facilitates the apprehension of the first principles of natural law. This section continues to argue for the necessity of moral imagination in prudential moral inquiry, an essential intellectual and appetitive process which Aquinas appears to have not fully advanced. The beneficence of *imaginative prudence* is proposed as an indispensable reality in fomenting the earlier apprehended first principles of natural law which innately serves as an ethical foundation in moral development.

Chapter 8 compares and contrasts Aquinas's doctrine on *synderesis* with Darcia Narvaez's *Triune Ethics Theory*. This chapter analytically demonstrates the parallelism between Aquinas's teachings on the acquired moral virtues as an essential element in the ongoing apprehension of the practical good and Narvaez's scientific observations on moral development based on the evolutionary and anthropological roots of the three global ethical mindsets relating to the *Triune Ethics Theory*. This investigation will show not just how intimate both studies are in relation to human flourishing, but also, it will provide scientific and anthropological foundations to the importance of moral imagination in moral development. Furthermore, it will necessarily take the discussion beyond ecclesial statements allowing for a broader treatment of the subject matter. Narvaez claims that the Ethic of Imagination, being the most developed and most complex of the three global ethical mindsets, is the key behavioural disposition that motivates moral agents to fulfil their human essence.

Chapter 9 analytically compares Aquinas's doctrine on natural inclinations with Narvaez's *Triune Ethics Theory*. This chapter investigates the traditional debate between the *order of reason* and the *order of nature* in the discovery, understanding and application of the natural law. The awareness of the natural law is held to be instantaneous although its cognitive formulation and maturation is inchoative spanning a lifespan. The comparative study will show that although Aquinas's moral psychology is obviously medieval, hence lacking the research methodology that modern science employs, it still proffers qualitative and legitimate assertions

that hold validity in modern psychology particularly in the scientific research of Narvaez. This evinces that there is verity in the moral psychology of Aquinas that still holds relevance in contemporary practical sciences.

Chapter 10 concludingly explores and demonstrates the viability of imagining the natural law via scientific and anthropological appropriations in moral inquiries. Using Narvaez's global ethical mindsets and her studies on *primal wisdom*, the natural law that is promoted by the universal primary principles via natural inclination is explicated. Formally involving the element of *imaginative prudence*, the significance of these appropriations is extended to moral agents' engagement in discernment exercises which serve as conducive platforms for imaginative contemplation and imaginative mindfulness. These exercises aim to form moral agents in realising their role in the community as *moral exemplars* or as *virtue-enablers*. This is in keeping with the fundamental reality that moral development, apart from self-authorship and self-fulfilment, also requires the community in the virtue-formation of future generations. Towards the ends, for the first principles of natural law to effectively serve as a moral foundation, there needs to be the commitment towards the habituation of *imaginative prudence* which facilitates the sound assessments of the moral sphere in view of achieving natural and supernatural ends. *Synderesis* initiates this intuitive process and sustains even more the subsequent apprehensive process in order to cause moral agents to remain in the moral sphere where pathways to moral ascendancy take shape and are realised.

## Chapter 2

### *Synderesis* and Moral Agency

#### Introduction

*Synderesis*, the *habitus* that disposes moral agents to the first principles of natural law, is a theological concept that flourished and permeated the foray of medieval literature and discussion between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> Historically, had it not been for Peter Lombard's *Sentences* wherein he made a slight reference to *St. Jerome's Commentary on Ezekiel*,<sup>2</sup> the term *synderesis* would have remained in the abyss of forgotten terminologies. Written during the mid-twelfth century, Lombard's citation does not reveal much but the interest it gathered rippled through subsequent centuries:

And so it is rightly said that man naturally wills the good, because he was established in a good and righteous will; for the higher spark of reason, which, as Jerome says, even in Cain could not be extinguished, always wills the good and hates evil. And they say that there is a second movement of the mind by which the mind, after relinquishing the law of higher things, subjects itself to sins and takes pleasures in them.<sup>3</sup>

Though Lombard's reference was merely concerned with the operation of the will rather than with the much broader and, at that time, in-vogue topic of moral agency via conscience, his

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Green explains that: "[The] treatment of *synderesis* over three centuries established its general definition, posed a set of attendant logical and psychological problems, invented a supplementary terminology, and expanded its rhetorical meaning through biblical exegesis." See Greene, "Synderesis, the Spark of Conscience, in the English Renaissance," 195.

<sup>2</sup> The actual publication of *St. Jerome's Commentary on Ezekiel* (c. 415) appeared in the *Glossa Ordinaria* which was considered as an authoritative compendium of biblical commentaries in the twelfth century compiled by several authors under the leadership of Anselm of Laon. See Stuart P. Chalmers, *Conscience in Context: Historical and Existential Perspectives* (Bern, Switzerland: International Academic Publishers, 2014), 73.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Lombard, *The Sentences*, ed. Joseph Goering and Giulio Silano., trans. Giulio Silano, Bk. 2: On Creation, (Toronto, Ontario: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2010), d. 39, c. 3, a. 251: 197-98.

*Sentences* attracted plenty of commentaries. Apart from the rise and expansion of universities and “the prominence that theology gained within these establishments”<sup>4</sup> that provided enthusiasm amongst medieval authors to deal with the concept of conscience, it was also due to St. Jerome’s transcription of the Greek word, *syneidesis*, to *synteresis* (which later was transliterated as *synderesis* or *synteresis* in Latin and English)<sup>5</sup> that contributed to the flux of commentaries. Timothy Potts provides the English translation of the *Commentary on Ezekiel*, 1.7:

Most people interpret the man, the lion and the ox as the rational, emotional and appetitive parts of the soul, following Plato’s division, who calls them the *logikon* and *thymikom* and *epithymetikon*, locating reason in the brain, emotion in the gall-bladder and appetite in the liver. And they posit a fourth part which is above and beyond these three, and which the Greeks call ***synteresin*: that spark of conscience which was not even extinguished in the breast of Cain after he was turned out of Paradise**, and by which we discern that we sin, when we are overcome by pleasures or frenzy and meanwhile are misled by an imitation of reason. They reckon that this is, strictly speaking, the eagle, which it not mixed up with the other three, but corrects them when they go wrong, and of which we read in Scripture as the spirit ‘which intercedes for us with ineffable groaning’ (Romans 8:26). ‘For no one knows what a man is really like, except the spirit which is in him (I Corinthians 2:11). And, writing to the Thessalonians, Paul also entreats for it to be kept sound together with soul and body (I Thessalonians 5:23). However, we also see that this conscience is cast down in some people, who have neither shame nor insight regarding their offences, and loses its place, as is written in the book of Proverbs: ‘When the wicked man reaches the depths of sin, he doesn’t care a damn.’ (Proverbs 18:3) So they deserve to be told: ‘You have acquired the face of a prostitute, you refuse to blush’ (Jeremiah 3:3).<sup>6</sup>

Many authors although they regarded St. Jerome’s transcription as a scribal error saw positive elements in it. Robert A. Greene acknowledges for example that: “Whatever the origin of the word...the concept expressed by it appears to have filled a logical need, which probably accounts for its thorough development and elaboration during the Middle Ages.”<sup>7</sup> Douglas Langston likewise echoes a similar thought: “It is unclear that Jerome meant to distinguish the

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<sup>4</sup> Linda Hogan, *Confronting the Truth: Conscience in the Catholic Tradition* (NY: Paulist Press, 2000), 64.

<sup>5</sup> See footnote no. 7.

<sup>6</sup> St. Jerome, *Commentary on Ezekiel*, 1.7 in Timothy C. Potts, *Conscience in Medieval Philosophy* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 79-80. (Emphasis mine)

<sup>7</sup> Greene, “Synderesis, the Spark of Conscience, in the English Renaissance,” 195.



two, but the distinction plays a major role in late medieval discussion on conscience.”<sup>8</sup> Tobias Hoffman is more methodical in his approval:

The text is important for two reasons. First, there Jerome introduces the term *synderesis* (presumably a corruption of the Greek word for conscience, *syneidésis*) to medieval theologians. Second, the scholastics treated some of the observations in the text regarding *synderesis* and conscience as having axiomatic value, on account of Jerome’s authority.<sup>9</sup>

Departing from the above perspective is John Mahoney who, considering St. Paul who used the popular Greek word, *syneidesis*, to refer to conscience, accepts that “Jerome used another and much more rare [*sic*] Greek term, *synteresis*, to refer to the *scintilla*, or spark, of conscience, a power still flickering in man even after sin.”<sup>10</sup> The troublesome text, however, remains unresolved and Linda Hogan summarises this general state of affairs: “Whether this corruption was introduced by Jerome or by later scribes is still the subject of debate, however. Indeed, there is a growing school of thought that disputes the fact that Jerome used the term *synteresis* at all.”<sup>11</sup>

While few authors still mention in their writings the unresolved rationale underlying the seeming error in the transcription of *syneidesis* to *synderesis*, *synderesis* now enjoys its official inclusion in Catholic moral theology.<sup>12</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* makes mention of *synderesis* in section number 1780: “The dignity of the human person implies and requires

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<sup>8</sup> Douglas C. Langston, *Conscience and Other Virtues: From Bonaventure to MacIntyre* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2000), 9.

<sup>9</sup> Tobias Hoffmann, “Conscience and Synderesis” in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 255.

<sup>10</sup> John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 187.

<sup>11</sup> Linda Hogan, “*Synderesis*, *Syneidesis* and the Construction of a Theological Tradition,” *Hermathena*, no. 181 (2006): 131.

<sup>12</sup> Since modern authors have generally moved on from the ambiguities surrounding the philological beginnings of *synderesis*, their intent to contribute to its scholarship could somehow be assumed. The following authors represent the above: David E. DeCosse and Kristin E. Heyer, eds., *Conscience and Catholicism: Rights, Responsibilities, and Institutional Responses* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015); Norman Ford, SDB, *Christian Conscience* (Deakin, ACT: Catholic Health Australia, 2009); James F. Keenan, SJ, *A History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century: From Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010); Klaus Demmer, MSC, *Shaping the Moral Life: An Approach to Moral Theology*, trans. Roberto Dell’Oro, ed. Keenan, SJ, James F. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2000).

*uprightness of moral conscience*. Conscience includes the perception of the principles of morality (*synderesis*).”<sup>13</sup>

The path that *synderesis* undertook to reach its current doctrinal level should not be viewed merely as a necessary logical attribution accepted in time without any serious thought or reflection. There is also the human side to this process. Hogan reflects on the state of mind of medieval authors regarding their theological pre-occupation with *synderesis*:

Indeed it was the reluctance, particularly among medievalists, to contemplate the possibility of error, that resulted in the creation of categories of the habitual conscience (*synderesis*) and the actual conscience (*conscientia*), which in turn formed the basis of theology that could affirm both that ‘conscience in man’s most secret core, and his sanctuary...[where] he is alone with God whose voice echoes in the depths’ and also that ‘it often happens that conscience goes astray through ignorance which it is unable to avoid.’<sup>14</sup>

Consequently, the inclusion of *synderesis* in the official Catholic Church teaching, albeit parenthetically cited, reveals primarily the action of the Church to acknowledge the true reality of this habit of the practical intellect notwithstanding its indeterminate etymological origin. Secondly, the inclusion recognises the *consensus fidelium*<sup>15</sup> that had shaped and had underpinned the theological evolution of *synderesis* towards being firmly established in the moral tradition of the Catholic Church.<sup>16</sup> The above revelations underscore the creative efforts

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<sup>13</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Homebush, NSW: St. Pauls Publication, 1994), no. 1780.

<sup>14</sup> Hogan, “*Synderesis, Suneidesis* and the Construction of a Theological Tradition,” 128. See also Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, § 16.

<sup>15</sup> *Consensus fidelium* is the common expression of the faith by the ecclesial community based on Sacred Scriptures, tradition and theology, which have been transmitted from generation to generation. The Church, though possessing the apostolic commission as the interpreter of the Christian faith, does not establish the faith that emanates from the *consensus fidelium* but rather preserves and communicates it as handed down by the community itself. See Wolfgang Beinert and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, eds., *Handbook of Catholic Theology* (NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1995), 655-657.

<sup>16</sup> Robert J. Smith, in a commentary footnote on the likelihood of a copyist’s error responsible for the term *synderesis*, states that: “Once the terms *synderesis* and conscience (*syneidesis*) were firmly entrenched in the tradition, Aquinas and others had no choice but to employ and make some sense of them and their relationship to each other.” Pragmatic as Smith may appear to be, the present author believes that the ecclesial discernment that the community of faith undertook for centuries to gradually embrace the theological reality of *synderesis* deserves a far better recognition in theological discussions and publications. What now supersedes the attribution of ‘error’ is the work of the faith community in putting theology at work to better understand the logic of the Christian faith. See Robert J. Smith, *Conscience and Catholicism: The Nature and Function of Conscience in Contemporary Roman Catholic Moral Theology* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998), 18-19, footnote 4.

of the People of God who obviously co-operated with the Spirit of Truth in discovering and accepting in faith what appears to have been present since the beginning of human creation.

True to her evangelical mission, the Catholic Church played its part by preserving and communicating the faith and understanding of the People of God regarding *synderesis* that had been handed down from one generation to the next. Without doubt, the authority of Aquinas played a major role in it and the likes of St. Augustine and St. Albert the Great would also have had a pivotally instrumental role in the magisterial consideration of *synderesis*. The reasons cited above persuasively point to the conclusion that conscience always had, as part of its operation, the perception of the internal principles of the moral order even at that time when it was not yet named the habit of *synderesis*. The neologism was perhaps a *felix culpa*.

The medieval treatment of conscience included the consideration of *synderesis* due largely to the more-than-likely scribal error which would have intrigued and challenged medieval authors to address this new theological concept. Eric D’Arcy explains that before a systematic study of *synderesis* was ever undertaken, there was a time of “muddled, uncritical exegesis of the passage”<sup>17</sup> in *St. Jerome’s Commentary on Ezekiel* that resulted in a lot of confusion about what *synderesis* is all about. Nonetheless, medieval authors engaged with the subject matter which then provided thematic platforms for ensuing generations. Hogan points out that arising from the introduction of *synderesis* into the narrative world of moral theology, medieval authors dealt with four issues: “(a) whether *synderesis* is a faculty, (b) whether it belongs to the intellect or to the will, (c) whether it is something that can be lost and (d) what is the relationship between *synderesis* and *conscientia*.”<sup>18</sup> The answers to each of these points are pertinently crucial in gaining an understanding of *synderesis*. The next chapter will shed light on some of these aspects of *synderesis*.

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<sup>17</sup> Eric D’Arcy, *Conscience and Its Right to Freedom* (NY: Sheed and Ward, 1961), 20.

<sup>18</sup> Hogan, *Confronting the Truth: Conscience in the Catholic Tradition*, 66.

## Medieval Thematic Treatment of *Synderesis*

Dalia Marija Stanciene, reflecting on the propensity of medieval authors towards a legalistic interpretation of conscience, points out the place of *synderesis* in the prevailing scholarship at that time:

During the second part of the twelfth century the interest of scholars was focused on the properties of *synderesis*.... Does *synderesis* necessarily lead man to good or can it bring him to perdition? Can *synderesis* be extinguished and condemned in evil doers who see and desire nothing except evil? Should *synderesis* be regarded as natural law?<sup>19</sup>

The legalistic treatment of conscience was a stark contrast to its historical roots where the discursive narrative then was focused on the nature and function of conscience. Retrospectively, during the medieval period when the academia of learning was flourishing from the thoughts of St. Augustine, Peter Lombard, Philip the Chancellor, St. Bonaventure and many others, Aquinas joined the theological debate and subsequently rose to unparalleled prominence with his insights on many theological issues particularly on *synderesis*. His contribution in this respect was no doubt cutting-edge and would be decisive in the history of Catholic moral theology on conscience. Hogan agrees: “The moral theology of Aquinas represents a high point in the Middle Ages.”<sup>20</sup>

It is a given historical fact that when Aquinas entered the debate on *synderesis*, there were already two prevailing schools of thought. These two conflicting philosophical paradigms were thought to be brought about by the confusion regarding the relationship between *syneidesis*<sup>21</sup> and the new concept of *synderesis*. One school, the voluntarists, viewed *synderesis* as a habit that disposes the will towards the good. This school followed the thoughts of the early thirteenth century author, Philip the Chancellor, who wrote the first medieval treatise explicitly on conscience.<sup>22</sup> St. Bonaventure became its most popular adherent. He specifically placed

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<sup>19</sup> Dalia Marija Stanciene, “Synderesis in Moral Actions” (paper presented at the Proceedings of the International Congress on Christian Humanism in the Third Millennium: The Perspective of Thomas Aquinas, Roma, Italia, 21-25 September 2003), 857.

<sup>20</sup> Hogan, “*Synderesis, Syneidesis* and the Construction of a Theological Tradition,” 65.

<sup>21</sup> *Syneidesis* refers to the knowledge of the universal moral principles applied to individual cases. St. Thomas Aquinas uses the Latin equivalent, *conscientia*, in referring to this application perhaps to avoid the confusion with the new term, *synderesis*, which is a corruption of *syneidesis*. See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 79, a. 13.

<sup>22</sup> Hogan, *Confronting the Truth: Conscience in the Catholic Tradition*, 67.

*synderesis* in the affect since he understood it as a passion (desire) for the practical good. He based his assertion on the fact that when moral agents fail to follow their conscience, the resulting experience is guilt or regret which emanates from the affect.<sup>23</sup> The other school, the intellectualists, viewed *synderesis* as a habit of the intellect and specifically as a habit of the practical reason. The Dominicans, including St. Albert the Great and Aquinas, generally represented this school of thought. The history of Catholic moral theology should note that Aquinas's teaching on *synderesis* as a habit, and not a faculty, only came about when he wrote the *Summa theologiae*. In scholastic theology, an (innate) 'habit' denotes that "with which one is born or supposedly is born"<sup>24</sup> while 'faculty' refers to "a power, ability, or active potency to do or to make."<sup>25</sup> Amid their differing theological views, both schools of thought considered *synderesis* as infallible and indestructible or inextinguishable.<sup>26</sup>

The work which Aquinas did on the theological notion of *synderesis* is described by Potts as a "tidying-up operation."<sup>27</sup> Indeed, though there were confusions and exaggerations during a century of debate and reflection, Aquinas's efforts contributed largely to the development of the theology of the relationship between *synderesis* and *syneidesis* which became the foundation for later reflections particularly on the Catholic understanding of the nature of conscience.

### **Textual Loci of *Synderesis* in the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas**

St. Thomas Aquinas's doctrine on *synderesis* is extensively treated in both his *Summa theologiae* and *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*. He wrote his *Summa theologiae* for "ad

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<sup>23</sup> Langston, "The Spark of Conscience: Bonaventure's View of Conscience and Synderesis," 80.

<sup>24</sup> Bernard Wuellner, SJ, *Dictionary of Scholastic Philosophy* (Milwaukee, WI: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1956), s.v. "innate habit."

<sup>25</sup> Wuellner SJ, *Dictionary of Scholastic Philosophy*, s.v. "faculty."

<sup>26</sup> Reflecting on whether *synderesis* can be extinguished or not, Douglas C. Langston reports that St Bonaventure believes that *synderesis* is extinguished among those who are hardened in their sins because the desire for good is extinguished in them. He quotes St. Bonaventure: "This *synderesis* [in the case of the damned] is perpetually hampered from goading to good and, consequently, can be said to be extinguished in respect of its exercise, but not extinguished without qualification, because it has another use, namely, to murmur in reply [to evil]. In this use, in which the function of *synderesis* is to sting and murmur in reply to evil is a punishment, not in the sense in which it is a matter of justice, because this murmuring in reply will be a commendation of divine justice but will not have the purpose of bringing forth fruitful repentance. Hence, in the damned, *synderesis* murmurs in reply to their guilt, yet in relation to punishment." See Langston, *Conscience and Other Virtues: From Bonaventure to MacIntyre*, 33-34.

<sup>27</sup> Potts, *Conscience in Medieval Philosophy*, 50.

*eruditionem incipientium*” (the instruction of beginners)<sup>28</sup> in the Christian religion. He bore in mind the difficulty of newcomers in understanding the Christian faith due in part to the lack of an effective methodology during his time. Aquinas spent eight years in writing the *Summa theologiae*. *Prima pars* (First Part) and *Prima secundae partis* (First of the Second Part) were first written between 1265 and 1269 in Rome. The *Prima pars* deals with the themes on *Sacred Doctrine, The Blessed Trinity, Creation, The Angels, The Six Days, Man, and The Government of Creatures* while the *Prima secundae partis* discusses the themes on *Man’s Last End, Human Acts, Passions, Habits, Vice and Sin, Law, and Grace*. Aquinas began writing the *Secunda secundae partis* (Second of the First Part) in Rome and completed it in Paris in the year 1271. He wrote on the following subjects: *Faith, Hope, Charity, Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance, and Acts Which Pertain to Certain Men*. *Tertia pars* (Third Part) was written when Aquinas was in Naples in 1272 where he worked on the following treatises: *The Incarnation, The Life of Christ, Sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation, The Holy Eucharist, Penance*. Aquinas did not finish writing the *Tertia pars*. The remaining treatises on the sacraments, i.e., the continuation of *Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, Matrimony*, including a treatise on *The Resurrection*, were posthumously added comprising what is now called as the *Supplementum tertiae partis* (Supplementary to the Third Part).

*Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, on the other hand, was written when Aquinas began his career as a master in theology at the University of Paris from 1256-59. As university masters, they were expected to conduct disputations (public debates) several times in each university year in order to academically train their students. It was considered then as an effective way of pedagogy. Masters presented topics for public debates where positive and negative affirmations were recorded and subsequently resolved by the masters by way of their disputations. At the end of each public debate (*disputatio*), masters write their disputations. During his tenure, Aquinas wrote several of them including *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* where twenty-nine disputed questions were expounded. To name a few, question 1 deals with *Truth*, question 2 on *God’s Knowledge*, question 3 on *Ideas*, question 4 on *The Divine Word*, question 10 on *The Mind*, question 11 on *The Teacher*, question 12 on *Prophecy*, question 13 on *Rapture*, question

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<sup>28</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 1, pr. (Blackfriars)

14 on *Faith*, question 21 on *Good*, question 23 on *God's Will*, question 27 on *Grace*, question 28 on *The Justification of Sinners*, and question 29 on *The Grace of Christ*.<sup>29</sup>

Specifically in *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, Aquinas allocates question 16 to *synderesis* and follows this up by his treatment on conscience in question 17. *Synderesis*, on the other hand, considered under the broader topic of *The Intellectual Powers*, is featured in the *Prima pars* of the *Summa theologiae* question 79, under the sub-heading, *Treatise on Man*, where article 12 expounds on the question, *Whether 'synderesis' is a special power of the soul distinct from others?* and where article 13 deals with the question, *Whether conscience is a power*.<sup>30</sup>

Regarding *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate's* question 16, *On Synderesis*, which was written ten years prior to the *Summa theologiae*,<sup>31</sup> Aquinas deals with three sub-questions: (i) "*Is synderesis a power or a habit?*", (ii) "*Can synderesis err?*", and (iii) "*Are there some in whom synderesis is extinguished?*" In this respect, he explains that *synderesis* is a "natural habit [which acts] to warn against evil and to incline to good."<sup>32</sup> Further, being a "natural habit," Aquinas asserts that *synderesis* is immutable and immovable. As a "natural habit," *synderesis* is considered as an agent whose actuation is only realised by an efficient cause.<sup>33</sup> When it comes to the question of error, Aquinas contends that *synderesis* does not err but only in its application of general principles to particular cases.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, he believes that ignorance, passion, weak will, evil habits, vices, sin and concupiscence may impede the cognition and appetite of the universal principles.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See the following commentaries on the works of St. Thomas Aquinas: Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 12-14; Aidan Nichols, OP, *Discovering Aquinas: An Introduction to his Life, Work and Influence* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 2002), 3-18; Thomas Franklin O'Meara, OP, *Thomas Aquinas Theologian* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 41-86; Josef Pieper, *Guide to Thomas Aquinas: A General Introduction to the Life and Work of the Angelic Doctor*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (USA: Pantheon Books, 1961), 75-88; and Torrell, OP, Jean-Pierre, *Saint Thomas Aquinas Volume 1: The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1996), 54-74, 142-159.

<sup>30</sup> Clarity is enhanced if the *Summa theologiae* is read in parallel with its Latin translation since it would precisely indicate the variance between *synderesis* from *conscientia* instead of just 'conscience' in the English translation. However, adding to the potential textual confusion is Aquinas's deliberate nuancing of *conscientia* as also referring to *synderesis* being a *habitus*: "*hic habitus interdum conscientia nominator*." See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 79, a. 13.

<sup>31</sup> Smith, *Conscience and Catholicism: The Nature and Function of Conscience in Contemporary Roman Catholic Moral Theology*, 6.

<sup>32</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 17, a. 1.

<sup>33</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 17, a. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 17, a. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 4.

Aquinas elaborates the ontology between *synderesis* and *syneidesis* in articles 12 and 13 under question 79 in the *Summa theologiae*'s *Prima pars* where he expresses the necessity of utilising the primary moral principles grasped by *synderesis* for consideration of particular situations: "For conscience, according to the very nature of the word, implies the relation of knowledge to something; for conscience may be resolved into *cum alio scientia*, i.e., knowledge applied to an individual case. But the application of knowledge to something is done by the same act."<sup>36</sup> In article nineteen of the *Summa theologiae*'s *Prima secundae*, Aquinas sheds further light on the contrast between *synderesis* and *syneidesis* by expounding on the question: *Whether the will is evil when it is at variance with erring reason?* Answering the question of whether an erroneous conscience is binding, Aquinas replies by stating that: "[A]bsolutely speaking, every will at variance with reason, whether right or erring, is always evil."<sup>37</sup> His reply, which is fundamentally expressive of the nature and function of *synderesis*, is underlined by his own assertion that "the object of the will is that which is proposed by the reason."<sup>38</sup> Since reason possesses the habit of the practical intellect, the habit called *synderesis*, it is practical reason that guides the will towards the specific performance of an action. In other words, it is practical reason which guides *syneidesis* to perform an action that is in consonance with the universal truths of doing good and avoiding evil.

The notion of the ultimate end in the context of moral agency must be considered principally in relation to, among other things, the treatment of human virtues. Since virtues perfect the rational power,<sup>39</sup> it is through the habituation of virtues that human volition will cause moral agents to move towards their ultimate end. Answering the query on the justification of humans via virtues, Aquinas explains that: "As to those things which are done by us, God causes them in us, yet not without action on our part, for He works in every will and in every nature."<sup>40</sup> Aquinas's *exitus et reditus* principle connotes what Rahner regards as the "historically becoming...and is essential unfinished" free response of the moral agent to God's self-communication.<sup>41</sup> In this respect, moral agents confront and ask themselves not simply the question, "Who am I?", but rather, "How do I become what I ought to be?" In this process of becoming, moral agents would need to draw from various moral sources that would equip them

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<sup>36</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 79, a. 13.

<sup>37</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 19, a. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 19, a. 5.

<sup>39</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 55, a. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 55, a. 4.

<sup>41</sup> Rahner, SJ, "The Dignity and Freedom of Man," 237.



with the necessary ethical dispositions in view of properly engaging in moral deliberations prior to making moral judgments.

Fundamentally, the nature of moral agents as historical intelligent beings who are naturally capable of self-governance and self-transcendence would need to be further grounded by their knowledge of universal moral principles, specifically of the most basic of these which are the first principles of natural law. As they face the contingent realities of this world, including their own moral fragility, they stand not just as existential intelligent beings, but more profoundly, as ontological beings who are naturally disposed to discover and to know what is good. This ontological disposition, however, cannot be presumed to be capable of being demonstrated by moral agents at all times, most especially when the concrete conditions for human virtues to foment are impoverished or absent. Moral development is crucial. Imaginative prudence is vitally and crucially beneficial. Divine grace is perpetual.

After situating moral agents in the midst of their social environment which presents the challenges for discovering their moral identity and moral agency, the following chapter discusses the anthropology of moral agency according to Aquinas. Since Aquinas locates *synderesis* in the rational part of the human soul, it is imperative that this assertion is grounded broadly in his understanding of the human person.

## **The Challenges of Moral Agency Today**

Confronted by the challenges posed by this current millennium, moral agents find themselves being confronted by the unabated rapid movements of human events, either possibly resigning to complacency due to human limitations and attitudinal dispositions, or perhaps committedly securing fulfilment of their human ends. Among these challenges, John Paul II identifies a “crisis of truth”<sup>42</sup> where a “radically subjectivistic conception of moral judgment”<sup>43</sup> has become commonplace in modern society. Objective moral standards are being ignored in moral deliberations. On the other hand, Benedict XVI sees the moral danger when industrialised nations impose their secularised ideologies on developing countries in the guise of offering

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<sup>42</sup> John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 6 August 1993), § 32, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_06081993\\_veritatis-splendor.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html).

<sup>43</sup> John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, § 32.

economic help. He asserts that the practical atheism that richer countries export to developing countries consequently causes the “moral underdevelopment”<sup>44</sup> of these people since they are being driven away by such ideologues from fully integrating their human development that is meant to recognise the work of God in their lives. When human life is driven by economic factors alone, the sanctity of human life is abandoned. Pope Francis himself recognises this threat of secularisation and observes that the modern age of knowledge and information has given rise to a “rejection of ethics and a rejection of God.”<sup>45</sup> He also raises the concern of the phenomenon of “rapidification”<sup>46</sup> which sees the unbridled and unabated succession of events that tends to harm society and the quality of human life by leading human attention away from God. Yet in the midst of all these challenges, he reminds everyone that: “What we have been promised is greater than we can imagine. May we never lose heart because of our limitations, nor ever stop seeking that fullness of love and communion which God holds out before us.”<sup>47</sup> The horizon of human concerns and the many other influences situate the moral agents in their social environment with its “joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties...of this age.”<sup>48</sup>

The proceeding introductory discussion presents four perspectives in coming to an understanding of the nature and function of *synderesis* in moral agency: *personal*, *doctrinal*, *communal*, and *teleological*. These perspectives reveal the multi-faceted nature of *synderesis* which supersedes any notion that it is merely a passive inclination awaiting actuation. Its thematic division is not meant to compartmentalise the reality of *synderesis*, but rather, it aims to show the richness of this innate reality in bringing about fulfillment and perfection in the life of moral agents. The consideration of the scientific research of Darcia Narvaez in this thesis

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<sup>44</sup> Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter to the Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Men and Women Religious, the Lay Faithful and All People of Good Will: On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth, Caritas in veritate* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 29 June 2009), § 29, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20090629\\_caritas-in-veritate.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html).

<sup>45</sup> Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful: On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, Evangelii gaudium* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 24 November 2013), § 57, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium\\_en.pdf](https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter on the Care for Our Common Home, Laudato si'* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), § 18, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html).

<sup>47</sup> Pope Francis, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family, Amoris laetitia* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, March 19, 2016), § 325, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20160319\\_amoris-laetitia.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia.html).

<sup>48</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, § 1.

will demonstrate these riches as exemplified by the phenomena of neuroplasticity, epigenesis and environmental effectuations.

### Personal: *Synderesis* as ‘Spark of Divine Love’

In the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et spes*, the Second Vatican Council Fathers explored the universally acknowledged anthropological quandary: “But what is man?”<sup>49</sup> Karl Rahner, SJ concurs: “Man has always been a source of inquiry to himself.”<sup>50</sup> Influenced by a ressourcement theology that sought to recoup neglected and forgotten themes from traditional resources such as the Holy Scriptures, the Council Fathers turned to the *Book of Genesis* to draw up a theological foundation suitable for exploring the basic question about the essence of humanity.<sup>51</sup> The Old Testament concept of *imago Dei*<sup>52</sup> was presented as a starting point in unravelling the meaning of moral agency in the face of current challenges. It spoke of the *imago Dei* as an existential condition whereby women and men are called from the outset “to communion [and]...to converse with God.”<sup>53</sup> It understood this ‘call’ as ‘personal’ since God created women and men in His *own* image and likeness. Likewise, it is ‘personal’ because the ‘call’ requires women and men’s free response to enter into a relationship with the Trinitarian God. The Council Fathers further affirmed that because of the personal nature of this call, “[t]his likeness reveals that man...is the only creature on earth God wills for itself.”<sup>54</sup>

Through divine providence, moral agents have the fundamental capacity for God (*capax Dei*) because they have been created in the image of God (*imago Dei*). This capacity enables moral agents to confidently journey towards the realm of eschatology. This confidence stems from the moral agents’ ontological condition that in spite of their ignorance, inordinate passion, weak will, vices, sin or concupiscence that may possibly steer them away from acquiring human

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<sup>49</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, § 12.

<sup>50</sup> Karl Rahner, SJ, “Man,” in *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner, SJ (London: Burns and Oates, 1975), 880.

<sup>51</sup> See Gerald O’Collins, SJ, *The Second Vatican Council: Message and Meaning* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 1.

<sup>52</sup> Gn 1:27a.

<sup>53</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, § 19.

<sup>54</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, § 24.

ends, the innate existence of *synderesis*, that “spark of divine love,”<sup>55</sup> beckons moral agents to discover fully this divinely effusing love that perdures in their heart. Such a love-revealing innate spark invites moral agents to a “primal remembrance of the good and true [that] is bestowed”<sup>56</sup> on every moral agent. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, who later became Pope Benedict XVI, made use of the Hebrew term, *anamnesis*, in lieu of *synderesis*, to describe its role in fostering the active remembrance of the unconditional love of God despite human transgression. Notwithstanding, Aquinas still asserts that *synderesis* is not tainted by sin’s corruption of human nature. He maintains that *synderesis* admits no error in the face of the good and the truth: “error can happen...due to a false deduction, or because of a false assumption.”<sup>57</sup> However, error will come not from *synderesis* but “from [the] wrong use of principles.”<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, Aquinas acknowledges that *synderesis* may be impeded from expressing the first principles of natural law during instances when the moral agent’s faculty of reason is “engrossed by some passion, or oppressed by some habit.”<sup>59</sup> This elucidation unveils that though cognition may already have been undertaken, volition may not necessarily be forthcoming unless moral virtues, such as prudence, are personally habituated by moral agents so that the “good is done and pursued, and evil is avoided” (*bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum*).<sup>60</sup>

#### Doctrinal: *Synderesis* as the ‘Imperatives of the Divine Law’

The Second Vatican Council produced an important theological statement on conscience that puts emphasis on moral agents rather than their obedience to laws:

In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. **For man has in his heart a law written by God**; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core

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<sup>55</sup> St. Basil, *Regulae fusius tractatae*, Resp. 2:1 in Benedict XVI, *Values in a Time of Upheaval*, trans. Brian McNeil (NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2006), 91. (Italics mine)

<sup>56</sup> Benedict XVI, *Values in a Time of Upheaval*, 92.

<sup>57</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 17, a. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 17, a. 2.

<sup>59</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 17, a. 2.

<sup>60</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths.<sup>61</sup>

By putting moral agency in the spotlight of its discourse, *Gaudium et spes* images the existential reality of moral agents who possess interiorly that comforting voice which serves as a sanctuary where moral agents can be alone with God. Implicit in this important statement is the silent acknowledgment of *synderesis* expressed in the traditional term of the law written by God in the hearts of women and men summoning them to love good and to avoid evil. The document recognises that moral agents may still err despite of the law written by God in their hearts. *Synderesis* enables moral agents to detect this law which guides human capacity towards moral consciousness. In addition, the Second Vatican Council's document, *Dignitatis humanae*, recognising the voice which guides human agents to discover the law in their hearts, declares that: "man perceives and acknowledges the imperatives of the divine law through the mediation of conscience."<sup>62</sup> The perception of the imperatives of the divine law refers to none other than the intuitive apprehension of *synderesis*.

Reflecting on the imperative nature of the divine law, Aquinas points out that: "Synderesis is said to be the law of our mind, because it is a habit containing the precepts of the natural law, which are the first principles of human actions."<sup>63</sup> This statement gives some idea on the moral weight of primary moral principles: natural law expresses the divine law in human terms. The intrinsic relationship between *synderesis* and natural law serves as an existential principle of unity that orients moral agents towards the full discovery of themselves as "intelligent being[s]" in an intelligible universe."<sup>64</sup> The contents of the first principles of natural law are held to be derived from the operation of the *intellectus agens*<sup>65</sup> and the intellective faculty of the human mind whose contact with the social environment is essential in human intellection. In and through this contact, moral agents become aware of their natural inclination as expressed by the natural law. It is also in and through this contact that they, partly like the angels, seize

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<sup>61</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, § 16. (Emphasis mine)

<sup>62</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Declaration on Religious Freedom on the Right of the Person and of Communities to Social and Civil Freedom in Matters of Religion, Dignitatis humanae* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 7 December 1965), § 3, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651207\\_dignitatis-humanae\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html). (Emphasis mine)

<sup>63</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 1.

<sup>64</sup> Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Thomism*, (NY: P. J. Kenedy and Sons, 1964), 33.

<sup>65</sup> In Thomistic epistemology, *intellectus agens* (active or agent intellect) is responsible for abstracting from the material and singular (phantasm) the essence of sensed material objects. The process of abstraction leads to the *intellectus possibilis* (possible intellect) which is responsible for formulating the concept or idea of that which is sensed. Wuellner, SJ, *Dictionary of Scholastic Philosophy*, s.v. "intellect."

divine wisdom through the *intellectus agens*. Stanciene renders this horizon as akin to *synderesis* as “the space where human nature meets angelic nature.”<sup>66</sup>

### Communal: *Synderesis* as ‘Spark of Conscience’

The ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council presupposes the human agents’ inner dialectic between the freedom to be involved and the freedom to be formed. The former, which posits the capacity to consent, initiates human agents to the reality of the community to which they naturally and socially belong. The latter, on the other hand, underscores the reality of the role of the community and the Church in providing wholistic and integral human formation.

In the Catholic Church tradition, the moral agent’s freedom to be formed is circumscribed specifically by the ecclesial mission “to preserve God’s people from deviations and defections and to guarantee them the objective possibility of professing the true faith without error.”<sup>67</sup> This predisposition acknowledges the historicity of moral agents “who are subjected to negative influences and tempted by sin to prefer their own judgment and to reject authoritative teachings.”<sup>68</sup> It is on this account that moral development via virtue formation is paramount in realising the moral agents’ freedom to become true expressions of their human essence.

History will confirm the subjugation of human agents to various philosophical extremes such as relativism and absolutism.<sup>69</sup> These extreme tendencies, which are equally operative in secularised societies and religious communities such as the Catholic Church, pose detrimental threats to human flourishing. Benedict XVI offers his comment on these polarities that define the religious experience of today:

Two antithetical conceptions of Catholicism are proposed. On the one hand, we find a renewed understanding of the essence of Catholicism that understands Christian faith on the basis of freedom and see this faith as a principle that sets people free. On the other hand, we find a superseded “preconciliar” model that subjects Christian experience to an authority that issues norms to regulate people’s lives even in the most intimate spheres and attempts in this way to maintain its power

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<sup>66</sup> Stanciene, “Synderesis in Moral Actions,” 861.

<sup>67</sup> CCC, no. 890.

<sup>68</sup> CCC, no. 1783.

<sup>69</sup> Conceptually, *relativism* is the extreme dependence on individual circumstances and perceptions in determining the morality of human acts. On the other hand, *absolutism* generally refers to the consideration of the universal appeal of moral principles without exception.

over them. It seems therefore that we have a conflict between two antithetical models, *morality of conscience* and *morality of authority*.<sup>70</sup>

St. Jerome's description of *synderesis* mentioned earlier as that spark of conscience which was not even extinguished in the breast of Cain after he was turned out of Paradise reveals a theology that is not just speculative but communally congruent with universal human nature. This spark profoundly arouses the human heart of the community to seek the moral good. Such a spark leads moral agents towards an intuitive awareness of the first principles of moral action. It is an awareness that is founded on the ontological nature and function of *synderesis*.

Jan Krokos suggests that "the basic question about *synderesis* is concerned with its mode of being or its place within the structure of man, or more precisely – the soul."<sup>71</sup> Aquinas locates *synderesis* in the rational part of the soul<sup>72</sup> and qualifiedly affirms that it is a habit although "some held that it is a power higher than reason."<sup>73</sup> By contrast, St. Bonaventure places *synderesis* in the affective part of the soul since the disposition is understood as a "desire for the good."<sup>74</sup> The Thomistic notion of habit (*habitus*) refers "to the determination of a potency, which so shapes the latter that it perfectly and permanently corresponds to its own nature."<sup>75</sup> Hence, *synderesis*, as *habitus*, disposes moral agent towards "the understanding of principles"<sup>76</sup> which, in the mind of Aquinas, particularly refers to the apprehension of the first principles of natural law. Through these principles, *synderesis* contributes to moral agency by its ontological intuition to seek and pursue the good and to avoid evil. *Synderesis* directs human reason to the goodness of human acts (*humanorum actuum*) and likewise reveals the contrary evil of the acts of men and women<sup>77</sup> since "*synderesis* does not regard opposites."<sup>78</sup> Since *synderesis* naturally orients the moral agent only to a singular object, that is towards the first principles of natural law, *synderesis* is considered as a "power of reason"<sup>79</sup> only insofar as it possesses the capacity to discover and know the practical good. *Synderesis*, being a disposition, actively seeks the

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<sup>70</sup> Benedict XVI, *Values in a Time of Upheaval*, 75.

<sup>71</sup> Jan Krokos, *Conscience as Cognition: Phenomenological Complementing of Aquinas's Theory of Conscience*, ed. Bartosz Adamczewski, vol. 7, European Studies in Theology, Philosophy and History of Religions, (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Peter Lang Edition, 2013), 73.

<sup>72</sup> Langston, *Conscience and Other Virtues: From Bonaventure to MacIntyre*, 39.

<sup>73</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 79, a. 12.

<sup>74</sup> Langston, *Conscience and Other Virtues: From Bonaventure to MacIntyre*, 30-31.

<sup>75</sup> Karl Rahner, SJ and Herbert Vorgrimler, trans. Richard Strachan, 2nd ed., *Dictionary of Theology*, (NY: Crossroad Publishers, 1981), s.v. "habit."

<sup>76</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 79, a. 12.

<sup>77</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 1, ad. 3. "Such like actions are not properly human actions; since they do not proceed from the deliberation of reason, which is the proper principle of human actions."

<sup>78</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 79, a. 12.

<sup>79</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 16, a. 1.

practical good which aids in the epistemic growth of the moral agents' knowledge of the universal moral principles. Aquinas claims that the first principles of natural law are "naturally known without any investigation on the part of reason."<sup>80</sup> On this basis, he establishes the infallibility of *synderesis*: "This is the knowledge of the first general principles, in reference to which everything else which is known is examined and by reason of which every truth is approved and every falsehood rejected."<sup>81</sup>

#### Teleological: *Synderesis* as '*Habitus naturalis*'

In pursuit of that path that will lead to self-authorship and self-fulfilment, moral agents discover the harsh truth about themselves. Moral agents discover and realise that they "[have] inclinations toward evil...and [are] engulfed by manifold ills which cannot come from [their] good Creator."<sup>82</sup> Consequently, moral agents discover themselves in the throes of the dramatic struggles between good and evil. Reminiscent of humanity's fall from grace, they bite into their new discovery and commit to it thereby impeding their own path to self-authorship and self-fulfilment. But prior to such deleterious discovery, moral agents would have more than likely discovered an affective propensity towards the good. Such propensity is at first similar to an undefined thrust from within (pre-cognitive) moving moral agents to act on those of which will be true to their human nature (cognitive). This thrust is the natural habit (*habitus naturalis*)<sup>83</sup> of *synderesis* through which moral agents possess a fundamental awareness of the first principles of natural law which they are able to use promptly when needed.<sup>84</sup>

Rahner, SJ identifies how moral agents are threatened from without and from within. He explains that moral agents find themselves in various situations where outside influences, such as materials and persons, will always be present. Although the extent of the influence rests ultimately on the decision of moral agents, the possibility is never absent since there is 'no

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<sup>80</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 79, a. 12.

<sup>81</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 16, a. 2. (St. Thomas Aquinas offers his explanation regarding the ontological manner of intuitively grasping the habit of *synderesis* by alluding to the hierarchy of being in which the lower beings overlap with the higher beings and are thus able to grasp intuitively, although incompletely, the nature of the higher beings. This relates to the human capacity to perceive the knowledge of the angels intuitively and immediately. See Smith, *Conscience and Catholicism: The Nature and Function of Conscience in Contemporary Roman Catholic Moral Theology*, 8; also footnote 41.)

<sup>82</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, § 13

<sup>83</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 79, a. 12.

<sup>84</sup> Hoffmann, "Conscience and Synderesis," 256.



zone' within the spatio-temporal dimensions of the moral agent that is inaccessible to the influence from without.<sup>85</sup> On the other hand, moral agents either find themselves degrading their dignity by going against themselves and the end to which they are called. Or, they eventually find themselves upholding their dignity through the aid of divine grace and thus progressively enhancing the maturation of their moral life.<sup>86</sup> Rahner speaks of executing a definitive free act of deciding in favour or against an ethical persuasion since "there cannot be any existential neutrality in the face of the historical being of man."<sup>87</sup> Thus, moral agents would have to respond one way or the other. Holy Scriptures provide practical direction in wrestling with those life-defining moments: "No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other."<sup>88</sup>

Moral agency emboldens human agents to confidently traverse the journey from freedom to self-fulfilment. The instrumentality of human freedom allows human agents to seek realities that will cause human flourishing or otherwise. Whichever course of action may have been chosen, freedom ushers in the existential possibility for moral agents to seek fruition of their human essence. They either stand on holy ground before the infinite God or take the path to moral decadence. Catholic teaching upholds that through divine grace, that grace which emanates from the absolute unconditional generosity of God and which completely is unmerited on the part of created beings,<sup>89</sup> freedom is both realised creatively in moral agents by it and through the exercise of moral agents' freedom to choose.<sup>90</sup> It is only through openness to divine grace that moral agents, finite though they are, will be brought by grace itself before the presence of the Infinite Being.<sup>91</sup> Considering its contrariety, freedom, however, can not only betray the fundamental orientation of moral agency, but more catastrophically, can gradually see the radical disavowing of the personal and free intent towards self-authorship and self-fulfilment.

The earlier-considered question, "But what is man?", draws out the following query: "What is the ultimate end of both woman and man?" Aquinas thematically dedicates questions 1 to 5 in the *Prima secundae* of his *Summa theologiae* to shed light on this anthropological question.

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<sup>85</sup> Karl Rahner, SJ, "The Dignity and Freedom of Man," in *Theological Investigations: Man in the Church* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd., 1963), 242.

<sup>86</sup> Rahner, SJ, "The Dignity and Freedom of Man," 242.

<sup>87</sup> Rahner, SJ, "The Dignity and Freedom of Man," 243.

<sup>88</sup> Lk 16:13.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 112, a. 2.

<sup>90</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 9, a. 6.

<sup>91</sup> See Rahner, SJ, "The Dignity and Freedom of Man," 246-255.

Aquinas believes that the answer to this question is: happiness (*beatitudo* or *felicitas*).<sup>92</sup> He specifies that since moral agents necessarily act for an end<sup>93</sup> and are acted upon voluntarily,<sup>94</sup> this end is therefore a universal good that brings about human self-fulfilment.<sup>95</sup> The perfection and fulfilment of the human person is achieved by knowing and loving God.<sup>96</sup> Aquinas believes that this end is ultimately “happiness in God.”<sup>97</sup>

## Summary

Aquinas’s principle of *exitus et reditus*, which alludes to the return of moral agents back to God (*reditus*) after a period of self-isolation or separation (*exitus*), fundamentally asserts the locus where moral agents become aware of their synderetic disposition and the challenges it brings to the ends of moral development. In effect, it ultimately points to the acquisition of the ultimate *telos* (end). This end (the goal of *reditus*) to which the moral agent has a natural inclination, is “naturally apprehended by reason as being good.”<sup>98</sup> Natural inclination disposes moral agents to pursue the practical good and to avoid evil. As the moral agents’ natural inclinations are connatural<sup>99</sup> with *synderesis*, both metaphysical entities dispose the moral agent towards the natural law which fundamentally governs human nature.

Far from being merely construed as a passive disposition awaiting actuation, the reality of *synderesis* in moral agents inherently possesses various attributes that define its natural inclination to do good and avoid evil. The moral agent experiences an interior attraction to the moral good (*personal*) which dictates fundamental norms of human conduct (*doctrinal*) that

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<sup>92</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 8.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 2.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 1.

<sup>95</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 2.

<sup>96</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 8.

<sup>97</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 8.

<sup>98</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

<sup>99</sup> The concept of connaturality as used in thesis is based on the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas who states that: “each single thing has a connaturalness with that which is naturally suitable to it” (Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 26, a. 1, ad. 3). Referring to the above text, natural inclination is connatural with *synderesis* since it is intrinsically fitting to or in accord with its own human nature to have the knowledge of the first principles of natural law. Inversely, *synderesis* is connatural with natural inclination since it is also fitting to and in accord to its nature that whatever it disposes is also disposed to by natural inclination. See Ralph McInerney, “Apropos of Art and Connaturality,” *The Modern Schoolman* 35, no. 3 (March 1958): 173-189; Thomas Ryan, “Revisiting Affective Knowledge and Connaturality in Aquinas,” *Theological Studies* 66, no. 1 (2005): 49-68; Taki Suto, “Virtue and Knowledge: Connatural Knowledge According to Thomas Aquinas,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 58, no. 1 (September 2004): 61-79; Andrew Tallon, “Connaturality in Aquinas and Rahner: A Contribution to the Heart Tradition,” *Philosophy Today* 28, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 138-147.

find contextualisation in the human society (*communal*) and which directs all moral agents to their ultimate end (*teleological*) which is happiness in God. These attributions operate synchronically to guide moral persons achieve self-fulfilment and self-perfection

## Chapter 3

### The Concept of the Human Person in Thomistic Anthropology

#### Introduction

Notwithstanding the human state after Adam and Eve's fall mentioned in the *Book of Genesis*,<sup>1</sup> Holy Scriptures reveal that "God's seed remains in them."<sup>2</sup> The initial verses of the third chapter of the first *Letter of Saint John* present the reality of lawlessness and sin in the context of humanity's relationship with God. The reference to the *seed* reveals a profoundly sublime meaning when its Latin etymology is considered. The Latin translation of the word, *seed*, which could mean "offspring" or "descendant,"<sup>3</sup> expresses the ideas of potentiality and engendering. Two theological assertions can be drawn from this statement. Firstly, considering the metaphor of the seed which possesses the capacity for growth, created beings have potentials invested in them by God. When the seed grows, it unleashes these potentials which reveal something about the essence of God who created them and the universe *ex nihilo*.<sup>4</sup> And secondly, as seeds would have come into being by a prior action (*ex nihilo*), there is an implicit Creator-creature relationship that stems from the very action of God as the "universal cause of being."<sup>5</sup> In this respect, created beings are metaphorically considered as 'God's offspring' or 'God's descendants' since every human life originates from God. This underlines the truth behind the biblical assertion that men and women are created in the "image of God."<sup>6</sup> It is due to this reason that created beings are able to rationally relate to God: "It is clear, therefore, that

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<sup>1</sup> Gn 3:1-24.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Jn 3:9.

<sup>3</sup> Leo F. Stelten, *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Latin: With an appendix of Latin expressions defined and clarified*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1995), s.v. "semen."

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 45, a. 1, ad. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 45, a. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Gn 1:27.

intellectual creatures alone, properly speaking, are made to God's image."<sup>7</sup> The discovery of the practical good that *synderesis* grasps points human agents to their origin. The Thomistic doctrine of emanation, i.e., all creatures originate from an uncaused principal cause,<sup>8</sup> explains why it is inherent for women and men to discover their attraction to God. This implicitly signifies that something of the principal cause is present in the creature since "a thing has being by participation."<sup>9</sup> The seed of *synderesis* continues to exist in every rational being because the primordial good (being as good) which God created since the beginning of time, remains: "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good."<sup>10</sup>

Christian anthropology rests on the divine revelation which posits that in created beings, God's seeds remain. This seed is understood in this research as the seed of *synderesis* which God implants in every human being and remains in them even when human agents succumb to certain forms of lawlessness and sin. In the following discussion, Aquinas's teaching on anthropology will be first analysed. It will focus on the hylomorphic body-soul unicity of created beings as determinants of human operations particularly ethical actions and moral development. The ensuing discussion will consider the rational operations which Aquinas gives priority over other faculties that determine human acts, including the will and passions. Human acts, though under rational control, are affected, directly or indirectly, by factors that impede human agents from performing moral acts. In relation to *synderesis* and its intuitive grasp of the first principles of natural law, ignorance, weak will, inordinate passions, evil habits, concupiscence and sin affect the moral growth and development of the knowledge of the moral good. The difference between the Thomistic characterisation of an incontinent and intemperate person will be evaluated subsequently in view of presenting possible moral contexts in which the universal moral principles can either be ignored habitually or momentarily. The study of Aquinas's anthropology will serve as a theological foundation for the later reflection on virtues whose ends *synderesis* appoints.

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<sup>7</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 93, a. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 44, a. 1 and a. 2, ad. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 44, a. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Gn 1:31.

## Thomistic Anthropology

Aquinas dealt with the fundamental theological question of ‘*What is man?*’ by exploring humanity’s salvific imperative via the perspective of his Christian philosophy. Writing in his *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas advances the theology that human beings possess the indelible ‘imprint’ of the divine Being in their existence: “In the very fact of any creature possessing being, it represents the Divine being and its goodness. And, therefore, that God created all things, that they might have being, does not exclude that He created them for His own goodness.”<sup>11</sup> He also recognises the rational nature of every human being as the defining human characteristic which sets them apart from the rest of the creation. He sought the validity of Boethius’s anthropological definition by positing the intellectual capacity of every man and every woman: “a person is an individual substance of a rational nature” (*persona est rationalis naturae individua substantia*).<sup>12</sup> On account of this assertion, two important theological presuppositions relative to this research can be extrapolated: (i) the **hylomorphic theory**, and (ii) the **ontology of the intellect**.

The **hylomorphic theory** is Aquinas’s foundational principle in defining the body-soul unicity. In his *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, he poetically articulates, “My soul is not I” (“*Anima mea non est ego*”).<sup>13</sup> His statement implies his clear rejection of the various understanding of the body and soul relationship such as dualism and physicalism.<sup>14</sup> Aquinas believes that regarding this soul, “We must assert that the intellect which is the principle of intellectual operation is the form of the human body...this principle by which we primarily understand, whether it be called the intellect or the intellectual soul, is the form of the body.”<sup>15</sup> In a nutshell, Aquinas believes that: “the soul is not a body.”<sup>16</sup>

Aquinas maintains the matter-form complex in defining the composition of existing beings, i.e., matter = body, form = soul.<sup>17</sup> In *De spiritualibus creaturis*, he elucidates this union citing

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<sup>11</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 65, a. 2, ad. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 29, a. 1, arg. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Super I Epistolam B. Pauli Corinthios lectura*, cap. 15, lect. 2, sec. 924, <https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/SS1Cor.htm#152>.

<sup>14</sup> Generally speaking, *dualism* holds that the body is an unnecessary receptacle for the soul’s existence while *physicalism* negates the existence of the human soul.

<sup>15</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 76, a. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 75, a. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *De anima*, trans. J. A. Smith, The Complete Works of Aristotle, Bollingen Series - LXXI. Revised Oxford Translation. 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) Intellex Past Masters, 2.1.413a4-413a9.

in clearest terms the identification of the substantial form as the rational soul: “Thus, therefore, we say that in ‘this man’ there is no other substantial form than the rational soul, and that by it man is not only man, but animal, and living being, and body, and substance, and being.”<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, he delineates the meaning of substantial form in relation to its accidents: “the substantial form makes a thing to exist absolutely, and its subject is something purely potential. But the accidental form does not make a thing to exist absolutely but to be such, or so great, or in some particular condition; for its subject is an actual being.”<sup>19</sup> From this union between form and matter, Aquinas attributes the origin of the organic operation of a substance: “So the subject, forasmuch as it is in potentiality, is receptive of the accidental form: but forasmuch as it is in act, it produces it.”<sup>20</sup> Corollary to the above, Aquinas extends his consideration of the body-soul unicity to posit the reality of immaterial substances such as the angels.

On the other hand, the **ontology of the intellect** expresses the closeness of humanity’s existential being to God. The possession of intellective powers is the rationale by which Aquinas upholds that human agents reflect the image of God. Quoting Damascene in his *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas states that: “man is said to be made to the image of God insofar as by image is meant intellectual, free in judgment and capable of autonomous action.”<sup>21</sup> Through their intellective powers, human agents are rendered capable of cognising the truth (*veritas*) and the good (*bonum*) which are perfective of human nature. Just what is the full nature of this *truth* can only be attributed to God, says Aquinas:

(T)ruth is found in the intellect according as it apprehends a thing as it is; and in things according as they have being conformable to an intellect. This is to the greatest degree found in God. For His being is not only conformed to His intellect, but it is the very act of His intellect; and His act of understanding is the measure and cause of every other being and of every other intellect, and He Himself is His own existence and act of understanding. Whence it follows not only that truth is in Him, but that He is truth itself, and the sovereign and first truth.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *De spiritualibus creaturis*. trans. Mary C. Fitzpatrick and John J. Wellmuth SJ, The Collected Works of St. Thomas Aquinas. Electronic Edition. (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corp., 1993), InteLex Past Masters, a. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 76, a.1.

<sup>20</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 76, a.1.

<sup>21</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, pr.

<sup>22</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 15, a. 5.

Truth, in the Thomistic sense, is the realisation of one of the human natural inclinations, i.e., “to know the truth about God.”<sup>23</sup> (Natural law’s natural inclination will be fully discussed in chapters 7 and 8.) As a natural inclination, there is an internal ordering in every human agent that orients them to God. It has an especially intimate relationship with *synderesis* since both guide human agency in discovering the perfective good. With respect to the notion of good, Aquinas qualifies the order of human cognition by stipulating the hierarchy of intellection based on the nature of human beings:

[T]he intellect apprehends primarily being itself; secondly, it apprehends that it understands being; and thirdly, it apprehends that it desires being. Hence the idea of being is first, that of truth second, and the idea of good third, though good is in things.<sup>24</sup>

All these ‘primal goods’ (*bona*) point to the ultimate end which is perfective of the moral agent.

Correlative to the consideration of the notions of the truth and good, Aquinas distinguishes two types of knowledge belonging to the same intellectual power though differing in their ultimate objectives. The first type of power is called the speculative knowledge or intellect which apprehends the truth in itself while the second type is referred to as the practical knowledge or intellect which apprehends the same truth with the further view for operation. Both constitute a unified organic power of the intellect and each has a specific goal distinct from each other. Aquinas differentiates them accordingly: “For it is the speculative intellect which directs what it apprehends, not to operation, but to the consideration of truth; while the practical intellect is that which directs what it apprehends to operation.”<sup>25</sup>

The immanent capacity towards certain perfective ends is considered as a potency until the intellect and will conjointly cause the corporeal body to actively engage in the actuation of any given human potential. Aquinas raises an important point regarding the dynamism of this movement from potency to act: “every movement of the will must be preceded by apprehension, whereas every apprehension is not preceded by an act of the will.”<sup>26</sup> Aquinas’s

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<sup>23</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 16, a. 4, ad. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 79, a. 11.

<sup>26</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 82, a. 4, ad. 3. (The Thomistic doctrine of *potency and act* generally refers to the necessity for an external cause or agent to move or actuate created beings or objects towards becoming or changing according to the capacity of its own essence. This doctrine is clearly evident in acquiring knowledge: “Because our intellect shared in a defective intellectual light, it is not actuated with regard to all the intelligibles



doctrine on potency and act serves to underline the moral development of human agents which can be concretely observed in the process of virtue habituation.

### **The Intellective and Appetitive Powers of the Soul**

Aquinas locates the human intellect in the human soul: “the intellect is a power of the soul.”<sup>27</sup> He also maintains that “the intellect which is the principle of intellectual operation is the form of the human body.”<sup>28</sup> The intellective, however, is not the sole power of the soul. He also attributes an appetitive power to it which operates correlatively with the intellective and sensitive powers.<sup>29</sup> Possessing different powers, the soul’s powers find their “natural perfection only as united to the body.”<sup>30</sup> The unity of the soul with the body is a fundamental doctrine in Thomism. This unity is specified by the soul’s subsistent nature. Aquinas points out that:

Although the act of existing of a soul belongs in some way to the body, still the body does not succeed in participating in the existence of the soul according to the soul’s full excellence and power; and consequently there is an operation of soul in which the body does not share.<sup>31</sup>

It was necessary for Aquinas to affirm a subsistent soul in order to posit its immateriality and immortality. If the soul’s self-subsistence is not affirmed, it would lead to a physicalist understanding of the human person whereby intellection is had through the instrumentality of the body. Aquinas categorially opposes a physicalist approach to the body-soul reality: “a soul is an entity and subsists *per se* since it operates *per se*; for the action of understanding does not take place through a bodily organ.”<sup>32</sup> If, on the other hand, the absolute independence of the soul from the body is stressed, Aquinas could then be accused of espousing a dualist understanding of the human person. He preserves therefore the unity of the body and soul by

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which it can know naturally. It remains perfectible, nor could it reduce itself from potency to act had not its knowledge with respect to some things been actuated by nature.” Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 56, a. 1.)

<sup>27</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 79, a. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 76, a. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 79, a. 1, ad. 2.

<sup>30</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 90, a. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de anima*. trans. K. Foster and S. Humphries, The Complete Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), InteLex Past Masters, q. 1, ad. 18.

<sup>32</sup> Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de anima*, q. 1, s.c.

specifying the inter-related natures of both body and soul as constitutive of the human person operating as one and existing as an organic rational being. In his *Summa contra Gentiles*, Aquinas explains this organic operation:

That which has its being in common with a body, must have its operation in common with a body, because a thing acts inasmuch as it is a being: nor can the active power of a thing surpass its essence, since power results from the essential principles. But if an intellectual substance be the form of a body, its being must be common to it and the body: because from form and matter there results one thing simply, that exists by one being. Consequently an intellectual substance will have its operation in common with the body, and its power will be a power in a body: which has been proved to be impossible.<sup>33</sup>

The doctrine of hylomorphism is a Thomistic foundational teaching that underlines many of Aquinas's teachings particularly his doctrine on the virtues. It also serves as a theological anchor in correlating Thomism with the science of psychology. This will be undertaken towards the end of this thesis.

Aquinas's hylomorphism is underscored by his doctrine of the hierarchy of beings. Unlike angels which intellectually operate without the medium of a physical body,<sup>34</sup> human beings operate rationally through their given body-soul unicity.<sup>35</sup> Human cognition is initiated via sensitive experience, including imagination.<sup>36</sup> Without wanting to pre-empt the discussion on imagination later in this research, imagination partly undertakes a type of 'angelic intellection' that is accomplished by the *intellectus agens*. The human person is capable of imaginatively opening up to that primordial wisdom emanating from God via the *intellectus agens* which angels undertake without the necessity of a corporeal body. This is the epistemic moment when *synderesis* partly reaches out to the realm of the divine to grasp the innate first principles of natural law. The body-soul unicity is the underlying rationale as to why human agents as knowing subjects are intellectually actuated and realised due principally to their natural mode of being as embodied creatures:

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. 2, cap. 56.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 84, a. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Etienne Gilson offers his insight to this Thomistic assertion: "The angels are called spiritual substances because, being bodiless, they are pure spirits; they do not *have* an intellect, they *are* one. Men are made of souls and bodies, so one cannot say them that they *are* intellects, but, rather, they *have* one. For that reason, they are called intellectual substances rather than intellects, or spirits." Cf. Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Thomism*, 34.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 84, a. 6, ad. 3.

[T]o make it possible for human souls to possess perfect and proper knowledge, they were so made that their nature required them to be joined to bodies, and thus to receive the proper and adequate knowledge of sensible things from the sensible things themselves; thus we see in the case of uneducated men that they have to be taught by sensible examples.<sup>37</sup>

Rightfully, Aquinas asserts human knowledge is limited by human potentials: “For knowledge is regulated according as the thing known is in the knower. But the thing known is in the knower according to the mode of the knower.”<sup>38</sup>

Further to the understanding of the origin and nature of created beings in the hierarchy of beings, the end (*telos*) of created beings is a necessary Thomistic assumption. Aquinas points to a purpose and goal that naturally drive created beings to develop and achieve their potentials. This human development alludes to those human acts that are self-fulfilling and beatific. Virtues, which will be fully elaborated in the succeeding chapters, practically express these human acts which, through habituation, may lead human agents either to their human and beatific ends. Within this operation lies the governance by both the intellective and appetitive powers of the soul to operate in unison in delivering human agents to their ultimate *telos*. Noteworthy, passion (affect) has the potential to either lead or dissuade moral agents in the exercise of their human acts producing either virtues (good habits) or vice (bad habits).

The doctrine on the hierarchy of beings allows Aquinas to propound that:

[M]an can acquire universal and perfect goodness, because he can acquire beatitude. Yet he is in the last degree, according to his nature, of those to whom beatitude is possible; therefore the human soul requires many and various operations and powers.<sup>39</sup>

This quote specifically reveals the requirement of many and various operations and powers in the soul in order for it to guide moral agents to their ends. Human beings, according to Aquinas, are considered least among the rational creatures who would require more operations and power in climbing, as it were, the hierarchy of beings. Aquinas confirms this: “The intellectual

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<sup>37</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 89, a. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 12, a. 4.

<sup>39</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 77, a. 2. (A detailed examination of these powers and operations of the soul is outside the scope of this research. Suffice it to say, however, that Aquinas claims humans generally possess the powers of reasoning (intellective), willing (appetitive) and feeling (sensitive) and the so-called vegetative and locomotive powers. See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 78, a. 1.)

soul approaches to the Divine likeness, more than inferior creatures, in being able to acquire perfect goodness; although by many and various means; and in this it falls short of more perfect creatures.”<sup>40</sup>

Between natural dispositions and virtues are potential human acts which are determinants of telic ends.<sup>41</sup> Human acts are themselves dispositions “whereby that which is disposed is disposed well or ill.”<sup>42</sup> These dispositions, apart from being mitigated by the given constitution of the human agent as body and soul, are also dependent on the ruling of rational freedom in either wilfully consenting to the execution of human acts or the contrary. Reason as its basis, human agents act according to their specific natural capacity and innate disposition. Reason participates in this exercise by determining which actions promote the habitual good or not, whether human efforts are self-perfective or not. The desire for perfection is premised on the human intellect’s proclivity to turn towards the truth and the good, the fullness of both fosters human flourishing.

The grasp of the truth and the good is an apprehensive exercise that is potentially perfective of the knower, the moral agent. ‘Knowing’ in the mind of Aquinas is perfective spiritually though not materially. If the speculative (theoretical) intellect potentially perfects human knowledge, practical intellect also perfects human willing and acting. The apprehension of the innate first principle of practical reason, i.e., *bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum*, initiates the desiring and knowing of the perfective practical good. Yet a mere formal principle that necessarily requires time and experience for human agents to inchoately understand its content and meaning as universal moral principles, the apprehension of these principles as *primal goods* is naturally recognised being “the first thing that falls under the apprehension of the practical reason.”<sup>43</sup>

In the mind of Aquinas, the roles and objectives of the primary moral principles are to direct and guide the human intellect and will in making judgments that are ultimately perfective of human nature.<sup>44</sup> These principles and their derivative moral norms, i.e., secondary principles,

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<sup>40</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 77, a. 2, ad. 1.

<sup>41</sup> The term, *telic ends*, as used in this thesis, refers to the Thomistic teleological concept of the formal objects or goals of human acts which, apart from natural ends, is ultimately the supernatural end or the beatific vision.

<sup>42</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 49, a. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 49, a. 2.

<sup>44</sup> It should be clarified that not all acts of the intellect have an inclination towards the good. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 82, a. 2.

also provide moral guidance for moral development. As distinct powers of the soul, the intellect and will have embedded evaluative capacity which caters to the mind's analytical and evaluative processes. In reason's judicial processes, the prior reality of apprehension should be stressed before the will can take full flight.<sup>45</sup>

Probing the relationship between the intellect and the will, Aquinas explains that a thing or a moral agent could be moved in two ways: first *as an end* and second *as an agent*. Regarding the former, he contends that as an end, construed as a good ('end-as-good'), the end moves the intellect via the will. The will, in return, apprehends the good in the perceived end. The intellect appreciates the object of the will since the will is naturally inclined to seek that which is good.<sup>46</sup> The intellect, in this respect, is construed as a final cause since whatever is apprehended and perceived by the intellect as end-as-good moves towards it as an end.<sup>47</sup>

On the other hand, the notion of *as an agent* points to the will as inherently possessing the potential to move the intellect as an efficient cause. This causality, however, has a specific delineation according to Aquinas: "wherever we have order among a number of active powers, that power which regards the universal end moves the powers which regard particular ends."<sup>48</sup> In this text, he alludes to the capacity of the will to move the intellect to realise rational powers that are responsible for the realisation of particular ends.

By and large, two matters need to be spelt out firmly on the basis of the above. First, the will does not incline itself to just any good since what it is inclined to is congruent to the perfection to which human nature has a natural inclination. Since the intellect is inclined to seek and discover the good which proceeds from the apprehension of the first moral principles, the will understands this good as its own formal object. In effect, the intellect moves the will to the same good as an end. Aquinas asserts the following: "The will does not desire of necessity whatsoever it desires. In order to make this evident we must observe that as the intellect naturally and of necessity adheres to the first principles, so the will adheres to the last end."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 82, a. 4, ad. 3. "For every movement of the will must be preceded by apprehension, whereas every apprehension is not preceded by an act of the will."

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2. "[S]o good is the first thing that falls under the apprehension of the practical reason, which is directed to action: since every agent acts for an end under the aspect of good." In Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 19, a. 1, ad. 1, he qualifies this further by stating that: "The will is not always directed to what is truly good, but sometimes to the apparent good, which has indeed some measure of good, but not of a good simply suitable to be desired."

<sup>47</sup> See J. A. West, "Aquinas on Intellect, Will, and Faith," *Aporia* 13, no. 1 (2003): 2.

<sup>48</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 82, a. 4.

<sup>49</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 82, a. 2.

And secondly, dealing with the question of which is prior, the intellect or the will, this mental exercise will end in a vicious circle if left without any deciding determination.<sup>50</sup> Aquinas was fully aware of this possibility which he dutifully addressed by stating: “There is no need to go on indefinitely, but we must stop at the intellect preceding all the rest.”<sup>51</sup>

The discussion above establishes the correlation between the intellect and the will which, for all intents and purposes, are both powers operating within the one and the same rational faculty. Aquinas declares the final word in this respect:

[T]hese powers include one another in their acts, because the intellect understands that the will wills, and the will wills the intellect to understand. In the same way good is contained in truth, inasmuch as it is an understood truth, and truth in good, inasmuch as it is a desired good.<sup>52</sup>

### ***Passiones animae in the Summa theologiae***

Having considered above the operational relationship between the intellect and will, Aquinas acknowledges another reality that motivates both the intellect and will in proffering rational judgment, i.e., passions of the soul (*passiones animae*).<sup>53</sup> Habits and virtues, which will be considered in the next chapter, likewise influence the moral appraisal of human actions. Since rational judgments, taken in their broadest definition, are crucial in determining the morality of human actions, Aquinas engages to unravel the nature and function of *passiones animae* in his *Summa theologiae*'s *Pars secunda*. Framed within the soteriological theme of humanity's ongoing journey to God, Aquinas wrote the initial five questions exploring the ultimate goal of life while the next remaining two-hundred eighty questions outlined its relationship with human acts. In particular, questions 22 to 48 thematically proceed from the treatment of the

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 19, a. 3, ad. 1. “The good considered as such, i.e. as appetible, pertains to the will before pertaining to reason. But considered as true it pertains to the reason, before, under the aspect of goodness, pertaining to the will: because the will cannot desire a good that is not previously apprehended by reason.”

<sup>51</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 82, a. 4, ad. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 82, a. 4, ad. 1.

<sup>53</sup> This research employs the term, ‘passions,’ being the English translation of St. Thomas Aquinas’s *passiones*. Hence, *passiones animae* is rendered as ‘passions of the soul.’ The common translation of the Latin word, *passions*, to ‘emotions’ is apparently misleading and may not necessarily at all times allude to the Thomistic nuancing of *passiones*. See Robert Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions: A Study of Summa Theologiae Ia2ae 22–48*, 60 vols., vol. 19 (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 4.

location of emotions in the soul developing towards their classification, the consideration of their mutual relationship with the intellect and their resulting moral implications arising from this relationship. Overall, the structure is masterfully composed suggesting a logical development of theological themes in support of the *exitus-reditus* principle.

Construing *passiones animae*<sup>54</sup> as a reaction to external stimuli, Aquinas conceptualises the notion of passions as a case of a “patient [being] drawn to that which belongs to the agent.”<sup>55</sup> He claims that passions require something exterior to a subject rather than an interior principle to effect a modal change.<sup>56</sup> Aquinas attributes this ordination to the appetitive power rather than the apprehensive power<sup>57</sup> since the human mind is drawn appetitively to the good and evil outside the soul while apprehension is not.<sup>58</sup> Thomas Ryan is of the opinion, however, that “emotions are not merely reactions to stimuli. An emotion is both passive (“I am affected”) and active (“I move towards or away from something...agreeable/disagreeable, a value or disvalue, good or evil.”<sup>59</sup> Robert Miner also suggests that Aquinas does not reduce the reality of passions into “instinctive reactions that are impermeable to rational apprehension.”<sup>60</sup> Aquinas should have no concern in affirming the above interpretations as the apprehensive power is still involved in the process in a way unlike the appetitive power. For Aquinas, the apprehensive power does not tend towards the external stimuli “but knows it by reason of an ‘intention’ of the thing, which ‘intention’ it has in itself, or receives in its own way.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Aquinas offers his own etymological consideration of the word, passion, i.e., *passio* is formed from the verb *pati* which means *to suffer* or *undergo* or *be acted upon*. Its etymological meaning is descriptive of the reality of *passion* that is expounded in question twenty-two in the *Pars secundae* of the *Summa theologiae*. Other translations such as affection, emotions or even the literal modern translation of passion would appear deficient in resonating the wealth of meaning that St. Thomas Aquinas ascribes to *passiones animae*. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, ed. Eric D’Arcy, trans. Eric D’Arcy, 61 vols., vol. 19, The Emotions (1a2ae 22-23), (London: Blackfriars in conjunction with Eyre and Spottiswoode and McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), xxi-xxxii.

<sup>55</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 22, a. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Active potencies enable their possessors to ‘do’ something whereas passive potencies enable their possessors to ‘suffer’ or ‘undergo’ something. This intuitive sense is captured in the idea that the reduction of a potency to act requires a cause or explanation: those potencies whose actualization is due to an internal principle are active potencies; those potencies whose actualization is due to an external principle are passive potencies. See Peter King, “Aquinas on the Passions,” in *Aquinas’s moral theory: essays in honor of Norman Kretzmann*, ed. Norman Kretzmann, Scott Charles MacDonald, and Eleonore Stump (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 102.

<sup>57</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 22, a. 2, s.c.

<sup>58</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 22, a. 2.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Ryan, “Aquinas’ Integrated View of Emotions, Morality and the Person,” *Pacifica: Australasian Theological Studies*, 14, no.1 (February 2001): 56. In this article, Thomas Ryan seems to use the terms ‘passions’ and ‘emotions’ interchangeably.

<sup>60</sup> Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions: A Study of Summa Theologiae Ia2ae 22–48*, 19, 38.

<sup>61</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 82, a. 2.

In view of his teaching on the hierarchy of beings, Aquinas suggests that passions are not exclusively the property of human beings but rather are shared with non-rational animals.<sup>62</sup> This duality ascribes the element of instinct in passions that is almost exclusively alluded to animals. The corporeal nature of human persons which occasions somatic movement and alterations account for this reality. Hence, passions have both rational and non-rational elements.

Further on the nature of passions, Diana Fritz Cates provides an apt description of how Aquinas understands the passions:

Aquinas holds that emotions are modes of tending in relation to objects of perception or imagination that we assess to be significant for our own or another's well-being. Emotions are interior motions that are aroused by and oriented with respect to certain objects of 'cognition.'<sup>63</sup>

Cognition, as construed in the above, includes imagination as a source of stimuli for passions. The dynamism of emotions or feelings are best recalled via imagination than memory. When a man falls in love with a woman, he is drawn towards the woman because he feels love towards her. Similarly, someone could feel so passionate about the innocent children locked up indefinitely in detention centres and the anger that one feels stimulates a personal reaction against the unjust and inhumane treatment of these children. In these examples, the sensory appetitive power of the soul is understood to have made the move towards the source of the external stimulus. On this matter, Aquinas specifies the location of the *passiones animae* in the soul where the desiring emanates: "the passions (affections) are in the appetitive rather than in the apprehensive part."<sup>64</sup> Further, passions involve bodily resonance which reveals the attending presence of certain passions in the human person.<sup>65</sup> Neurobiological studies can confirm the presence of brain activity stimulated by sensible objects impinging on the sensitive

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 22, a. 1; I-II, q. 40, a. 3.

<sup>63</sup> Diana Fritz Cates, *Aquinas on the Emotions: A Religious-Ethical Inquiry* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 9.

<sup>64</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 22, a. 2, s.c. (Insert mine)

<sup>65</sup> Aquinas particularly identifies certain physiological modification or alteration on the part of the human soul as passions reign in. He states: "This corporeal transmutation is found in the act of the sensitive appetite, and is not only spiritual, as in the sensitive apprehension, but also natural." Apart from physiological changes, passions also involve intentional changes. Aquinas employs the example of colour being perceived by the eyes intentionally but not altering physically the colour of the eyes. See *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 22, a. 3; I-II, q. 22, a. 2, ad. 3.



organs. This relationship between Thomism and neuroscience will be further explored in a later chapter.

As alluded to above, *passiones animae* have the potential to influence the moral determination of human acts. Hence, some passions are considered well-ordered passions while some are regarded as disordered passions. The teleological determination of passions may be viewed in reference to whether the passions (or emotions) “foster or impede growth in love for God and others, facilitate or prohibit happiness and personal integration, cultivate or undermine inner and outer harmony in the person and in relationships with God and others.”<sup>66</sup> Thus, “[e]motions are “good” (“right”) or “bad” (“wrong”) due to their being ‘fitting’ or not in the judgement of practical reason. The benchmark is whether or not they protect and promote the values that facilitate or impede happiness.”<sup>67</sup> The teleological determination simply denotes whether human ends are being met or not.

In addition, Aquinas understands passions as a “kind of movement.”<sup>68</sup> This understanding is based on the object of the two types of the faculty of the sensitive appetite, namely, the concupiscible power and the irascible power. Movement basically refers to human reactions to external stimuli. Aquinas conceives of this as “[t]he sensual movement...following sensitive apprehension.”<sup>69</sup> Aquinas claims that the movement which effectuates the point of contact between an external stimulus and the human agent’s exterior senses is non-rational in nature and, therefore, not ruled by reason.<sup>70</sup> It is only when external stimuli are internalised that the purview of morality begins to take hold. Aquinas explains the reason behind this assertion: “Moral good and evil can belong to the species of a passion, in so far as the object to which a passion tends, is, of itself, in harmony or in discord with reason.”<sup>71</sup>

In question 81 of the *Prima pars* in the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas differentiates the sentient powers into the concupiscible and the irascible powers. He explains:

[A]s natural appetite is an inclination following the natural form, there must needs be in the sensitive part two appetitive powers—one through which the soul is simply inclined to seek what is suitable, according to the senses, and to fly from what is hurtful, and this is called the

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<sup>66</sup> Ryan, “Aquinas’ Integrated View of Emotions, Morality and the Person,” 58.

<sup>67</sup> Ryan, “Aquinas’ Integrated View of Emotions, Morality and the Person,” 61.

<sup>68</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 23, a. 2.

<sup>69</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 81, a. 1.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 81, a. 3.

<sup>71</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 24, a. 4.

concupiscible: and another, whereby an animal resists these attacks that hinder what is suitable, and inflict harm, and this is called the irascible.<sup>72</sup>

In differentiating the two, Aquinas argues that the concupiscible and irascible powers are subjects to both the intellect and the will. He claims that the cogitative power, an internal sense (interior sensorium) that is responsible for relating and the grouping of particular experiences or ‘intentions,’ is guided by universal moral principles or reason in controlling both the concupiscible and irascible powers. The cogitative power is the human counterpart of the estimative power in animals.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, “[t]o the will also is the sensitive appetite [passions] subject in execution, which is accomplished by the motive power [the will]”<sup>74</sup> before being moved by the concupiscible and irascible powers. External stimuli may, therefore, incite a positive or a negative reaction in the human person which, upon internalisation and consideration by the intellect and will, a good or evil act may consequently proceed. Aquinas adds: “The passions of the soul, in so far as they are contrary to the order of reason, incline us to sin: but in so far as they are controlled by reason, they pertain to virtue.”<sup>75</sup> It can be inferred from the foregoing that the Angelic Doctor stresses the moral imperative of following reason in pursuing actions that are moral: “For since man’s good is founded on reason as its root, that good will be all the more perfect, according as it extends to more things pertaining to man.”<sup>76</sup> Aptly facilitating the utility of reason, Aquinas upholds the value of passions in the attainment of the good: “But in so far as the sensitive appetite obeys reason, good and evil of reason are no longer accidentally in the passions of the appetite, but essentially.”<sup>77</sup> It is apparent that Aquinas sees the contribution of the passions to human flourishing in this regard. He determines that practical reason dictates what is good for human flourishing. Passions, in this process, are involved somehow indirectly by moving the will to inform reason what is particularly good, *hic et nunc*. The movement of the human soul towards the good is therefore not merely cognitive and volitive, but affective as well.

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<sup>72</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 81, a. 2.

<sup>73</sup> Aquinas recognises that passions are common to both humans and animals. However, the command of reason differentiates their propriety which in this case reason is to man/woman. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 24, a. 1.

<sup>74</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 81, a. 3. (Insert mine)

<sup>75</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 24, a. 2.

<sup>76</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 24, a. 3.

<sup>77</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 24, a. 4, ad. 1.

In view of the passions as having such an influence on the moral appraisal of human activities, Aquinas conjures the notions of the continent and the incontinent person. In the *Secunda secundae* of the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas differentiates these two types of persons: the “continent man, though subject to vehement desires, chooses not to follow them, because of his reason; whereas the incontinent man chooses to follow them, although his reason forbids.”<sup>78</sup> Following this definition, one may infer from Aquinas’s thoughts that reason holds the key to understanding their differences:

[W]hatever pertains to perversion of reason is not according to reason. Hence he alone is truly said to be continent who stands to that which is in accord with right reason, and not to that which is in accord with perverse reason. Now evil desires are opposed to right reason, even as good desires are opposed to perverse reason.<sup>79</sup>

Situating passions in the context of rational considerations of either the continent or incontinent person, Aquinas is of the belief that “passions, however vehement they be, are not the sufficient cause of incontinence, but are merely the occasion thereof, since, so long as the use of reason remains, man is always able to resist his passions.”<sup>80</sup> On this account, Aquinas clearly holds the primacy of reason in considering the morality of passions relative to the continent and incontinent persons. Following on the discussion above, acts bear a neutral or indifferent position until reason proceeds with their moral determination. Moreover, passionate acts could either be antecedent, i.e., “when the soul yields to the passions before the reason has given its counsel (impetuosity),”<sup>81</sup> or, consequent, i.e., “when a man does not stand to what has been counselled, through holding weakly to reason’s judgment (“weakness”).”<sup>82</sup>

Focussing on the different ways in which passions influence the act of the will as stipulated above, Aquinas’s treatise on sin in the *Summa theologiae* provides an insight into how the will can contravene the dictates of reason:

Sometimes man fails to consider actually what he knows habitually, on account of some hindrance supervening.... [I]n this way, a man who is in a state of passion, fails to consider in particular what he knows in general, in so far as the passions hinder him from considering it. Now it hinders him in three ways. First, by way of distraction. Secondly, by

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<sup>78</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 155, a. 3.

<sup>79</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 155, a. 1, ad. 2.

<sup>80</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 156, a. 1.

<sup>81</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 156, a. 1.

<sup>82</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 156, a. 1.

way of opposition, because a passion often inclines to something contrary to what man knows in general. Thirdly, by way of bodily transmutation, the result of which is that the reason is somehow fettered so as not to exercise its acts freely; even as sleep or drunkenness, on account of some change wrought on the body, fetters the use of reason. That this takes place in the passion is evident from the fact that sometimes, when the passions are very intense, man loses the use of reason altogether: for many have gone out of their minds through excess of love or anger. It is in this way that passion draws the reason to judge in particular, against the knowledge which it has in general.<sup>83</sup>

Elaborating on the abovementioned three ways in which passions may influence reason and will, the third rationale refers to physiological causes that affect the proper functioning of reason, e.g., types of dementia such as Alzheimer's disease. Apart from physiology, it may also occur that an impediment may temporarily restrict the use of reason due to an experience of intense and extreme emotional love or anger, e.g., an over-protective man locks up his lover at home to prevent her from meeting up with any man, including her own family. Aquinas reminds his readers that passions, too, have the capacity to deceive reason by causing bodily organs to transmit misinformation as to what is actually sensibly perceived. He believes that the powers of imagination and cogitation can be influenced by bodily modifications or movements caused by the nagging of human emotions.<sup>84</sup> These eventualities vitiate ultimately the proper ordering of reason albeit only indirectly influenced by passions or emotions. It will be unravelled in the chapters ahead why Aquinas has regrettably shown distrust towards imagination's capacity to assist the moral mind discover the moral good.

The second way, i.e., passion influences the judgement of reason and the will, can be better explained by referring this matter to Aquinas's elaboration in the *Secunda secundae*, question seventy-seven, article one in the *Summa theologiae*:

[W]e observe that those who are in some kind of passion, do not easily turn their imagination away from the object of their emotion, the result being that the judgment of the reason often follows the passion of the sensitive appetite, and consequently the will's movement follows it also, since it has a natural inclination always to follow the judgment of reason.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 77, a. 2.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 77, a. 1; I, q. 78, a. 4.

<sup>85</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 77, a. 1.

The second way basically implies that passions have the capacity to sway not reason but the will to go against what the universal moral principles prescribe. The universal moral principles are classified as normative in Thomistic theology and would be therefore the only moral principles upon which the morality of human acts derives its moral determination. Aquinas upholds that particular knowledge plays an indispensable role in practical judgment since its locus is the “realm of the concrete.”<sup>86</sup> The import of particular knowledge in moral deliberations will be fully discussed later in this thesis.

Lastly, regarding the first way in Aquinas’s consideration of how passions influence the judgment of reason and act of the will, he underlines what he calls the “dispersion of energy” in the operation of the soul.<sup>87</sup> He maintains that if various passions are altering or modifying human dispositions, the power of the soul suffers division and it is consequently pulled towards dealing with the mitigating effects of human passions. Such suffering causes reason to be ignored; passions potentially could result into the disordering of the will. In his own words, Aquinas spells out the effect of a surplus of emotions being experienced by human agents: “By this law of distribution, when the sense appetite is fired by emotion the will, which is the rational appetite, has little or no force for its own activity.”<sup>88</sup>

On the basis of the three ways mentioned above, it is obvious that *passiones animae* can influence the judgment of reason and the will albeit indirectly. The negative import of *passiones animae* means that the universal moral principles are not observed and, henceforth, an act is consequently pursued that is foreign to the primary moral principles. From the perspective of the universal moral principles, this research raises then the question regarding how *passiones animae* may actually, albeit indirectly, assist in contributing to the effective application of the first moral principles in concrete particular situations in the life of a human person? The question presupposes the primary principles as given realities in human agents and at the same time envisages the essential practical value of virtues in moral development that fosters human flourishing.

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<sup>86</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, trans. John Fearon, OP, 61 vols., vol. 25, ed. John Fearon, OP, Sin (1a2ae 71-80), (London: Blackfriars in conjunction with Eyre and Spottiswoode and McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1969), I-II, q. 77, a. 2.

<sup>87</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 77, a. 2. (Blackfriars)

<sup>88</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 77, a. 1. (Blackfriars)

## The Incontinent and the Intemperate Person

In question one-hundred and fifty-six, article three of the *Secunda secundae* in Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas introduces the intemperate person. By comparison and contrast, the incontinent person is qualifiedly described as being *more moral* than the intemperate person: "the intemperate man sins more gravely than the incontinent."<sup>89</sup> Robert Pasnau echoes this in these direct terms: "From a moral perspective, the intemperate person is much worse."<sup>90</sup> Similarly, Aristotle regards the continent person and the intemperate person as "a good state and...a bad one,"<sup>91</sup> respectively.

How is an incontinent person different from an intemperate person? Intimating from its location in the *Summa theologiae* where both are discussed following the specific sub-title headings of *Continnence* and *Incontinnence* and under the general theme of the *Cardinal Virtues*, Aquinas distinguishes them both:

(I)n the intemperate man, the will is inclined to sin in virtue of its own choice, which proceeds from a habit acquired through custom: whereas in the incontinent man, the will is inclined to sin through a passion. And since passion soon passes, whereas a habit is "a disposition difficult to remove," the result is that the incontinent man repents at once, as soon as the passion has passed; but not so the intemperate man; in fact he rejoices in having sinned, because the sinful act has become connatural to him by reason of his habit.<sup>92</sup>

The realities of both the judgment of reason and the act of will distinguish an incontinent person from an intemperate person based on the text above. Firstly, in view of the act of the will, Aquinas considers the will's inclination in the intemperate man as premised on habit or vice while in the incontinent man, the will is indirectly influenced by passions. This distinction undergirds the fundamental difference external influences have on the act of the will. Since in the intemperate person the influence on the act of the will is caused by habits or vices, the outcome is shaped by habitual dispositions that are motivated by a disregard for rational thinking. In addition, passions' influence on the incontinent person is said to be fleeting as

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<sup>89</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 156, a. 3, s.c.

<sup>90</sup> Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature: A Philosophical Study of Summa theologiae Ia 75-89* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 244.

<sup>91</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W. D. Ross, rev. by J. O. Urmson. The Complete Works of Aristotle - Bollingen Series LXXI (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corp., 1992), InteLex Past Masters, 7.8.1151a1120-1151a1128.

<sup>92</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 156, a. 3.

compared to the intemperate person's appetitive disposition to act against the will which is ingrained.

Secondly, the intemperate person is aware of the judicial ruling of reason but chooses instead to do the opposite. The intemperate person "has an entrenched disposition to choose things that satisfy his sensual desires, and so he simply lives his profligate life, unapologetic," says Pasnau.<sup>93</sup> The incontinent person, on the other hand, due to the influence of passions, is left to act on them despite an unwillingness to do it. The incontinent person is influenced only at a specific moment since passions dissipate rather quickly. Aquinas believes that incontinent persons would have and may have already made a moral resolution about a particular action but due to concupiscence which weakens the will, they succumb to the temptations of the passions.<sup>94</sup>

Alongside this aspect of the judgment of reason, there is also a teleological question pertaining to what is ignored by the intemperate person and the incontinent person. As disposition is habitual, the intemperate person ignores ultimately the end or the good. Intemperate persons are aware of the moral good and choose rather to do exactly what they want. Due to the imposition of the habit or vice, reason is weakened, but not obliterated, and its operation is muted. Aquinas conveys this observation in *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*:

One who has the habit of some vice does indeed lose the principles of activity, not as universal principles, but in their application to some particular case, in so far as through some vicious habit his reason is stifled in order to keep it from applying the universal judgment to its particular activity when making its choice. In this way, also, the wicked man who falls into the depths of sin is said to have contempt.<sup>95</sup>

On the basis of the above discussion, concerns regarding fostering the primary principles among intemperate persons are existentially real. Aquinas specifically raises this concern regarding their moral state: "Now it is more difficult to bring back to the truth once who errs as to the principle; and it is the same in practical matters with one who errs in regard to the end."<sup>96</sup> This concern is crucial since the absence of any internal moral compass adversely

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<sup>93</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 244.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 6, a. 7. "For the man who yields to concupiscence acts counter to that which he purposed at first, but not counter to that which he desires now; whereas the timid man acts counter to that which in itself he desires now."

<sup>95</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 16, a. 3, ad. 3.

<sup>96</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 156, a. 3, ad. 2.

affects moral development. Recognising, however, that it is difficult to remove such error in reason as it could be habitual, Aquinas is of the belief that finding a ‘cure’ to intemperance and incontinence is not impossible.<sup>97</sup> The nature of this ‘cure’ is a matter for later discussion. Suffice to state at this stage that, with the possibility for the rehabilitation of the senses, incontinent persons’ ignorance is and can be dealt with since their judgement of reason proceeds only from a momentary passion or emotion and at the back of this, they actually know what is good but simply ignore it.

The characterisation of the intemperate person reveals a human person who is aware of the moral good but appears to possess a weak will. Something more pleasurable and sensual alternative would have been more likely the culprit behind the demise of rational thinking. The degree of pre-occupation with habits or vices is considered of such intensity that the universal principles expressed by reason are muted by the intemperate person. Given that the disposition accorded by *synderesis* is never extinguished, it would appear that no matter how many times it would be reiterated that all human beings, including of course the intemperate person, have the primary moral principles in them, it would amount to nothing if the human disposition is habitually swayed to ignore it.

The incontinent person, on the other hand, is clearly affected volitionally, albeit indirectly by passions, and can recover quite easily from the tempting grasp of the passions. The incontinent person would be prone to consider which is most pleasurable at a particular moment without critically thinking about the consequences of such proclivity. That said, since the recourse to passion could only be episodic, its cessation is conceivable. Moreover, since passions only indirectly influence the will, it does not vitiate the knowledge of the primary principles and should therefore be available for consideration by the incontinent person. As Aquinas rightfully affirms: “[S]o long as the use of reason remains, man is always able to resist his passions.”<sup>98</sup>

The nature of the passions reveals the seeming superior importance of being guided by reason in performing moral acts. Aquinas could only confirm this observation: “[E]very movement of the will must be preceded by apprehension.”<sup>99</sup> There is a real threat that passions or emotions may adversely affect the moral ordering of human agents. Due to this threat, the acquisition of moral virtues is essential. But there is also the positive import of having human passions or

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<sup>97</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 156, a. 2.

<sup>98</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 156, a. 1.

<sup>99</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 82, a. 4, ad. 3.



emotions come to the aid of reason in firmly grasping the practical good. To this, Pasnau offers this salient advice: “What a virtuous person needs...is not a strong will, but the intellectual capacity to see the passions for what they are, and to resist them calmly and rationally.”<sup>100</sup>

## Summary

The human person is a hylomorphic unity. Human operations including moral development are subject to this natural state. As a body-soul unity, human agents interact with the social environment in actuating interior dynamisms such as the apprehension of the first principles of natural law by *synderesis*. In this specific apprehensive operation where the first principles of natural law are intuited, Aquinas assigns a primary role to practical reason in view of guiding human agents seek and fulfil their proper human ends. Practical reason affords human agents the disposition to act morally on concrete matters. Passions, however, may affect this disposition so much so that it can indirectly influence practical reason via the will to either perform good acts or to do otherwise. The influence of passions on human acts stresses the importance of an operative and fomenting knowledge of the first principles of natural law which *synderesis* intuitively apprehends. Requiring time and experience for its moral growth, this practical knowledge complements virtue habituation which also needs the same degree of human commitment and care for moral virtues to develop from mere habits. The examples of the lives of incontinent and intemperate persons shed light on the possible outcomes when passions influence reason and will. It could either result into the possession of an entrenched disposition where the first principles of natural law are ignored or the possession of a momentary disposition where the disavowal of the universal moral principles is short-lived and moral awareness is regained thereafter. In human moral development, it is essential that the knowledge of the first principles of natural law is afforded time and experience to grow. The lack of commitment and care to nourish one’s knowledge of the first principles of natural law would more than likely translate into a disordered moral life and consequently, at a broader scale, a fragmented community that is bereft of moral understanding and will.

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<sup>100</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 249.

## Chapter 4

### *Synderesis* and the Intelligibility of Moral Goods

#### **Introduction**

Fully cognisant of the complex moral persuasions of good and evil in human affairs, Kohelet, the central figure in the wisdom book of *Ecclesiastes*, offers the following counsel to human agents: “In the morning sow your seed, and at evening do not let your hands be idle, for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.”<sup>1</sup> Consistent with the previous chapters’ metaphorical allusion to the reality of *synderesis*, the seed represents the potential reality of the moral good in human agents. The following discussion will initially focus on this natural human desire to acquire the complete and perfective good which *synderesis* brings intuitively and apprehensively to human awareness. This theme of moral desire will flow into the consideration of the natural inclination (*inclinatio naturalis*) and its co-extensive correlative, the natural law (*lex naturalis*). In discussing these moral realities, their telic ends, i.e., natural and supernatural ends, will be analysed as a good to be pursued. Finally, *synderesis*, since it draws the human agent to the knowledge of the first principles of natural law, will be explored in view of its correlativity with natural inclination. A theological investigation of their natures should reveal their necessity in moral development. True, one does not know which one will prosper – good or evil, but when human agents beginning at a young age are given appropriate moral care and are introduced to the life of virtues, one can share with Kohelet’s expectation that in the morning, all will be good.

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<sup>1</sup> Eccl 11:6.

## ***Inclinatio naturalis: Desiring the Perfective Good***

Aquinas formulates the desire of every human person to achieve the *good* that is perfective of human nature: “all desire the fulfilment of their perfection, and it is precisely this fulfilment in which the last end consists.”<sup>2</sup> This desire to be and to become, since “every agent, of necessity, acts for an end,”<sup>3</sup> is the existential moral path of the human person where the opportunity to enter into a “friendship with God” unfolds.<sup>4</sup> Aquinas believes that every human person has such a capacity via natural knowledge:

The existence of God and other like truths about God, which can be known by natural reason, are not articles of faith, but are preambles to the articles; for faith presupposes natural knowledge, even as grace presupposes nature, and perfection supposes something that can be perfected.<sup>5</sup>

Alongside this capacity for natural knowledge, the *telos* of individual moral pathways is coupled by a *desire* towards human flourishing. Eleonore Stump realises this in her reading of Thomism: “In the will...what is implanted in the rational faculty is not a habit of knowledge but rather an innate inclination to act.”<sup>6</sup> The fact that the pursuit of human goods is not just an intellectual but also an appetitive exercise should not come as surprise if common human behaviour is considered. Some people are drawn to the memory of their deceased loved ones upon hearing their favourite songs. Moved not just by the recollection of the past spent with their loved ones when they were still alive, imagination also allows past emotions (passions) to emerge while listening to those songs. These emotions play as vehicles of the meaning one has inscribed in past sense experiences. Germain Grisez confirms this human engagement towards those goods by indicating that as corporeal beings, we are ‘sensitised’ in some form prior to intellection:

These inclinations are part of ourselves, and so their objects are human goods. Before intelligence enters, man acts by sense spontaneity and learns by sense experience. Thus in experience we have a basis upon

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<sup>2</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Paul J. Waddell, *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 123.

<sup>5</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 2, a. 2, ad. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003), 89.

which reason can form patterns of action that will further or frustrate the inclinations we feel.<sup>7</sup>

The medieval concept of *inclinatio naturalis* spells out Aquinas's anthropological basis of the notion of the good, a concept which is correlative to the notion of end (*telos*).<sup>8</sup> Drawn from Aristotle, Aquinas echoes his idea of what the good is: "good...is that which all things desire" (*bonum est quod omnia appetunt*).<sup>9</sup> There is a compelling invitation to pause and reflect on this text, yet it will become apparent, quite immediately, that this good is not really fully appropriated. Douglas Flippen acknowledges that this definition is problematic since what people desire is multiplied and manifold.<sup>10</sup> He is effectively saying that there is a plethora of human ends as much as there are many human inclinations. Under this same observation would Aquinas have probably resorted to propose the Aristotelian notion of the "happiness" (*beatitudo*), the ultimate and final good or end for all human person,<sup>11</sup> as the good's necessary co-existential correlative. Without such a recourse, the Aristotelian notion of "happiness" would have likely remained marooned in secularity. When the discussion turns to the acquired moral virtues, the concept of good will acquire further attributions in the light of human agents' reasoned will to define themselves by acquiring natural and supernatural ends.

The notions of good and end intrinsically bear a reciprocal relationship where "everything in seeking its end seeks the good and everything, in so far as it attains its end, is itself good."<sup>12</sup> In addition, both notions are understood to be correlative to the concept of *inclinatio naturalis*. Aquinas throws light on the teleology of this correlation: "Everything naturally tends to the end for which it exists. But all things are ordained to God as their end.... All things, therefore, naturally tend to God."<sup>13</sup> This statement unambiguously specifies the ultimate end accorded to each human person by divine will: "If, therefore, we speak of man's last end as of the thing which is the end, thus all other things concur in man's last end, since God is the last end of man and of all other things."<sup>14</sup> Henceforth, the good or the end that which human agents seek is proximately and ultimately God, who is the efficient cause and the final cause of everything:

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<sup>7</sup> Germain Grisez, "The First Principle of Practical Reason: A Commentary on the *Summa theologiae*, 1-2, Question 94, Article 2," *The American Journal of Jurisprudence* 10, no. 1 (1965): 180.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2. "[G]ood has the nature of an end."

<sup>9</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 21, a. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Douglas Flippen, "Natural Law and Natural Inclinations," *The New Scholasticism* 60, no. 3 (1986): 288

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 8. "Man's last end is happiness."

<sup>12</sup> Ross A. Armstrong, *Primary and Secondary Precepts in Thomistic Natural Law Teaching* (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), 46. Cf. Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 21, a. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 2, s.c.

<sup>14</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 8.

“Accordingly, because God is the last end, He is sought in every end, just as, because He is the first efficient cause, He acts in every agent. But this is what tending to God implicitly means.”<sup>15</sup>

The Thomistic notion of *inclinationis naturalis* demands further exploration. The realities of both *inclinationis naturalis* and *legis naturalis* will be the initial foci of the discussion in the immediate section below. This will be followed by a determination of the role of reason, specifically practical reason, and its relation to the will, both intellectually and appetitively, in seeking moral goods that are complete and perfective of human nature. And lastly, the discussion will turn to the consideration of the self-evident nature of the first precepts of natural law which *synderesis* apprehends intuitively and immediately.

### ***Inclinatio naturalis vis-à-vis Lex naturalis***

The concept of *inclinationis naturalis* “looms large in any Thomistic account of the natural law.”<sup>16</sup> Though natural law is conceptually much broader, exploring the nature of *inclinationis naturalis* via the anthropological perspective will necessarily reveal its connaturality with *lege naturalis*.

*Inclinatio naturalis* refers to those inherent dispositions directing the human agent towards acquiring proximate and ultimate goods (i.e., natural and supernatural ends respectively). In discussing the nature of the human will in question eight, article one of the *Prima secundae* of the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas provides an insight into the essence of *inclinationis naturalis*: “the appetite is nothing else than an inclination of a person desirous of a thing towards that thing.”<sup>17</sup> The idea of moving from point a to point b in view of securing the good is suggestive of the dynamic motion towards perfecting and completing the human self. The intelligibility of the good is participative in this motion where reason, being a good itself, seeks out the good and the telic end of its natural inclination.

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<sup>15</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew Levering, “Natural Law and Natural Inclinations: Rhonheimer, Pinckaers, McAleer,” *The Thomist: A Speculatively Quarterly Review* 70, no. 2 (2006): 155.

<sup>17</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 8, a. 1.

On the other hand, *lex naturalis*, understood as the “participation of the eternal law in the rational creature,”<sup>18</sup> constitutes the ordering of reason in human nature that is expressive of the eternal law. Being a reality “instilled...into a person’s mind as a matter of natural knowledge,”<sup>19</sup> Frederick Copleston declares that “[e]very man possesses...the light of reason whereby he can reflect on these fundamental inclinations of his nature and promulgate to himself the natural moral law.”<sup>20</sup> He appears to suggest that by engaging human reasoning, the human agent is able to acquire an understanding of the natural law. Natural law is known in this regard by reflecting on those human acts to which the human person has natural inclinations and that which reason recognises as morally good at the same time. Copleston’s understanding of the natural law points to the correlativity between natural law and natural inclination. Natural law is therefore “natural in the sense that they are not humanly enacted but are objective principles which originate in human nature.”<sup>21</sup> “[I]n some way written in his very substance, so that he has only to observe himself attentively in order to discover it there,” says Etienne Gilson.<sup>22</sup> When it comes to its discovery interiorly within the human person, Martin Rhonheimer offers his evaluation:

The discovery of this natural law in man – its cognitive objectification, one might say – occurs only on the level of reflection, where the order of precepts of the natural law is recognised as an order of right actions established by the practical reason.<sup>23</sup>

The declaration by the *International Theological Commission* gives further reflection on this theological matter:

Every human being who attains self-awareness and responsibility experiences an interior call to do good. He discovers that he is fundamentally a moral being, capable of perceiving and of expressing

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<sup>18</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 91, a. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Stump, *Aquinas*, 88.

<sup>20</sup> Frederick C. Copleston, *Aquinas: An introduction to the ideas of the medieval thinker whose influence is greater to-day than it was during the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1955), 213.

<sup>21</sup> Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, vol. 1 (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1997), 173.

<sup>22</sup> Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. L. K. Shook CSB (NY: Random House, 1956), 265.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason: A Thomist View of Moral Autonomy*, trans. Gerald Malsbary (NY: Fordham University Press, 2000), 58.

the call that, as we have seen, is found within all cultures: ‘One must do good and avoid evil’.<sup>24</sup>

Aquinas upholds that the ordering of reason is something that is active and dynamic and not merely a passive manner of receiving moral principles effortlessly. Natural law underscores the ordering of reason in order to give rise to the proper reflection and knowledge of the corresponding moral good that can be derived from human experiences. Practical reason accomplishes this by reaching out to the promptings of natural law from within the self since the human person is constitutive of the natural law. This reaching out engenders awareness to will the facilitation of the necessary steps that will foster genuine human and moral development. Reason orders human thinking, feeling and acting in such a way that all these facets of the human self contribute towards the completion and perfection of the human person.

Aquinas’s main text dedicated to natural law is found in *Prima secundae*, question 94, article 2. Discussed under the heading of *Natural Law*, it is preceded by the discussion on *Eternal Law* and followed by *Human Law*.<sup>25</sup> Turning to this main text, Aquinas defines here the natural law as “the participation of the eternal law in the rational creature.”<sup>26</sup> This definition lays down the fundamental Thomistic pre-disposition regarding the presence of divine reason in the human person: “[I]t is evident that all things partake somewhat of the eternal law, insofar as, namely, from its being imprinted on them, they derive their respective inclinations to their proper acts and ends.”<sup>27</sup> The fundamental nature of the divine presence in humanity takes its root in Holy Scriptures: “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> International Theological Commission, *In Search of a Universal Ethic: A New Look at the Natural Law* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009), § 39, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20090520\\_legge-naturale\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20090520_legge-naturale_en.html).

<sup>25</sup> In the *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 91, a.1, Aquinas defines ‘law’ in the general sense as the “dictate of practical reason emanating from the ruler who governs a perfect community.” He divides the ‘law in general’ into four specific categories based on a descending hierarchical order of origin and importance: (i) eternal law, (ii) divine law, (iii) natural law, and (iv) human law. Aquinas views eternal laws as the laws “ordained by God to the governance of things foreknown by Him.” It is eternal since these laws have always been in existence within divine reason. (Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 91, a. 1.). Divine laws, on the other hand, are that laws by which “man is directed how to perform his proper acts in view of his last end.” The Decalogue falls under these types of laws. (Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 91, a. 4.). Since natural law is “the participation of the eternal law in the rational creature,” human laws are “particular determinations, devised by human reason” of the natural law. (Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 91, a. 2.). The specification of natural laws into practical norms as dictated by practical reason falls within the scope of human laws.

<sup>26</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 91, a. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 91, a. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Gn 1:27.

Humanity's fundamental divine orientation parallels the presence of the habit of *synderesis*. According to Aquinas, "*Synderesis* is...the law of our mind, because it is a habit containing the precepts of natural law, which are the first principles of human actions."<sup>29</sup> The first principles apprehended through *synderesis* express the divine act of sharing heavenly wisdom by which human agents are able to discern what is good and what is evil:

[T]his is the first precept of law, that '**good is to be done and pursued, and evil is avoided.**' All other precepts of the natural law are based upon this: so that whatever the practical reason naturally apprehends as man's good (or evil) belongs to the precepts of the natural law as something to be done or avoided.<sup>30</sup>

Further to the insights tendered above on the correlativity between natural inclination and natural law, Jacques Maritain opines that: "When he (St. Thomas Aquinas) says that human reason discovers the regulations of natural law through the guidance of the *inclinations* of human nature, he means that the very mode or manner of which human reason knows natural law is not rational knowledge, but knowledge *through inclination*."<sup>31</sup> In other words, "the natural law is precisely the ends to which man is naturally inclined insofar as these ends are present in reason as principles for the rational direction of action," says Grisez.<sup>32</sup>

In what arguably is considered a hallmark in Thomistic natural theology, Aquinas presents in question ninety-four, article two of the *Prima secundae* in the *Summa theologiae*, his precise doctrine on the natural law:

Wherefore according to the order of natural inclinations, is the order of the precepts of the natural law. Because in man there is first of all an inclination to good in accordance with the nature which he has in common with all substances: inasmuch as every substance seeks the preservation of its own being, according to its nature: and by reason of this inclination, whatever is a means of preserving human life, and of warding off its obstacles, belongs to the natural law. Secondly, there is in man an inclination to things that pertain to him more specially, according to that nature which he has in common with other animals: and in virtue of this inclination, those things are said to belong to the natural law, "which nature has taught to all animals", such as sexual intercourse, education of offspring and so forth. Thirdly, there is in man an inclination to good, according to the nature of his reason, which

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<sup>29</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 1, ad. 2.

<sup>30</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2. (Emphasis mine)

<sup>31</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Man & the State* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1954), 82. (Insert mine)

<sup>32</sup> Grisez, "The First Principle of Practical Reason," 182.



nature is proper to him: thus man has a natural inclination to know the truth about God, and to live in society: and in this respect, whatever pertains to this inclination belongs to the natural law; for instance, to shun ignorance, to avoid offending those among whom one has to live, and other such things regarding the above inclination.<sup>33</sup>

Aquinas presents in the above text his practical understanding of *inclinationis naturalis* by delineating what constitutes the natural law in real terms, i.e., beyond its formal nature as conceptual precepts. He does this by stipulating those principles whose contents are derived only from the primary moral principles. This is premised on the practical assertion that natural law directs human inclinations to those of which are fundamentally perfective of the human nature and which are actually in existence in matter and form. Arranged in hierarchical order, he determines the three orders of natural law as cognised and realised in human affairs.<sup>34</sup> These further specifications “represent [the] proper ordering of human goods of human life” according to human nature.<sup>35</sup> The hierarchical organisation demonstrates the ordering of created species capable of relating to the divine Creator by means of intentional rationality. From the human person’s perspective, these natural inclinations “are goods that man shares with all creatures, other goods that he shares with only some other creatures, and some that are peculiar to himself.”<sup>36</sup> These goods are noticeably universal in form which allows for further specification. From these natural inclinations arise subsequent precepts relative to each individual specification. Copleston summarises the first order as the “precept that life is to be preserved”<sup>37</sup>; the second order being the “precept that species is to be propagated and educated”<sup>38</sup>; and finally the third order being the “precept that he should seek truth and avoid ignorance, especially about those things knowledge of which is necessary for the right ordering of his life, and that he should live in society with other men.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

<sup>34</sup> See discussion of the hierarchical ordering of natural inclinations in the following literature: Peter Seipel, “Aquinas and the Natural Law: A Derivationist Reading of ST I-II, Q. 94, A. 2,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 43, no. 1 (2015): 31; Anthony Lisska, *Aquinas’s Theory of Natural Law: An Analytic Reconstruction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 103; International Theological Commission, *In Search of a Universal Ethic*, §§ 48-50; Copleston, *Aquinas*, 215; Armstrong, *Primary and Secondary Precepts in Thomistic Natural Law Teaching*, 46-51.

<sup>35</sup> Seipel, “Aquinas and the Natural Law,” 31.

<sup>36</sup> Ralph M. McNerny, *Ethica Thomistica: The Moral Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 45.

<sup>37</sup> Copleston, *Aquinas*, 215.

<sup>38</sup> Copleston, *Aquinas*, 215.

<sup>39</sup> Copleston, *Aquinas*, 215.

Aquinas ascribes to practical reason – reason which is ordered towards action or activity – the apprehension of the good since it is good that is the first thing that falls under its apprehension. (The closeness of this assertion to *synderesis* is evident and will be further explored in the proceeding chapters particularly on the virtues.) In this light, Grisez undergirds the functional reality of natural reason as responsible for the universal desire to acquire the good as end in humans: “ends to which man is naturally inclined insofar as these ends are present in reason as principles for rational direction of action.”<sup>40</sup> This explanation underpins Aquinas’s moral regard for virtue habituation since natural law itself prescribes virtues as rational directions for actions which teleologically accords human agents with not just human ends, but beatific (supernatural) ends more essentially. Aquinas states in this respect that: “all acts of virtues are prescribed by natural law: since each one’s reason naturally dictates to him to act virtuously.”<sup>41</sup> He immediately qualifies his statement by setting the parameter against an exceptionless universal understanding of human inclinations to the good: “many things are done virtuously, to which nature does not inclined at first; but which, through the inquiry of reason, have been found by men to be conducive to well-living.”<sup>42</sup>

Based on the preceding discussion, it is apparent that the hierarchical ordering of natural law highlights Aquinas’s attempt to formulate the first precepts of natural law based on human nature’s *inclinatio naturalis*. According to the *International Theological Commission*, these inclinations “are very general, but they form the first substratum that is at the foundation of all further reflections on the good to be practised and on the evil to be avoided.”<sup>43</sup> This commentary reflects the widely accepted view of *inclinatio naturalis* as “a set *basic* practical principles...a set of *basic* methodological requirements of practical reasonableness...and a set of *general* moral standards.”<sup>44</sup> Grisez and Seipel both hold the same view explicating that “this principle is *basic* in that it is given to us by our most primitive understanding”<sup>45</sup> and “the first principle of practical reason is *extremely general*”<sup>46</sup> respectively. If the *International Theological Commission* construes natural law as the first substratum, Maritain views them as the “preamble and not the law itself.”<sup>47</sup> Armstrong, on the other hand, believes that Aquinas

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<sup>40</sup> Grisez, “The First Principle of Practical Reason,” 182.

<sup>41</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 3.

<sup>42</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 3.

<sup>43</sup> International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic,” § 46.

<sup>44</sup> John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, 2nd ed. (NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 23. (Italics mine)

<sup>45</sup> Grisez, “The First Principle of Practical Reason,” 175. (Italics mine)

<sup>46</sup> Seipel, “Aquinas and the Natural Law,” 31.

<sup>47</sup> Maritain, *Man & the State*, 81.

did not confine natural law “to these *general*, self-evident principles, which he often referred to as the primary precepts.”<sup>48</sup> All these considerations allude to the basicity of *legis naturalis* which finds evidence in the thoughts of Aquinas: “As to those general principles, the natural law, in the *abstract* (universal), can nowise be blotted out from men's hearts.”<sup>49</sup> Having stated therefore that the natural law is general and universal in nature, the functions of which would need to be further explored.

Going by the *International Theological Commission*'s conviction that “[i]t is impossible to remain at the level of generality, which is that of the first principles of natural law” [and that] “moral reflection must descend into the concreteness of action to throw its light on in it,”<sup>50</sup> it is expedient henceforth (a) that a brief determination be elucidated if there is only a solitary principle or several precepts of the natural law, and, (b) that a terse exploration of the possibility of any moral attribution to the first principles of moral action be undertaken. To remain at the *level of generality* is undoubtedly pointless from the perspective of moral virtues, let alone in the realm of Christian discipleship. Moreover, “[p]ractical principles – or the *lex naturalis* – are discovered in particulars through experience. This is necessarily the case because in the human world there simply do not exist any universal persons, relationships, things or actions.”<sup>51</sup> Copleston comments that “the precepts that good should be done and evil avoided, the truth of which is said by Aquinas to be known intuitively, obviously tells us very little about human conduct: we want to know what ‘good’ and ‘evil’ mean in the concrete.”<sup>52</sup> The universal moral precept, *bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum* therefore necessitates further concretisation since as being meant to be a practical principle, it must be able to concretely direct and guide human actions in human life. Thus, according to Aquinas's elaboration:

Some things are therefore derived from the general principles of the natural law, by way of conclusions; e.g. that "one must not kill" may be derived as a conclusion from the principle that "one should do harm to no man": while some are derived therefrom by way of determination; e.g. the law of nature has it that the evil-doer should be punished; but

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<sup>48</sup> Armstrong, *Primary and Secondary Precepts in Thomistic Natural Law Teaching*, 182. (Italics mine)

<sup>49</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 6. (Italics and insert mine)

<sup>50</sup> International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic,” § 53.

<sup>51</sup> Martin Rhonheimer, *The Perspective of Morality: Philosophical Foundations of Thomistic Virtue Ethics*, trans. Gerald Malsbary (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 292.

<sup>52</sup> Copleston, *Aquinas*, 214-215.

that he be punished in this or that way, is a determination of the law of nature.<sup>53</sup>

## Primary and Derived Moral Principles

Aquinas considers the question, “Whether the natural law contains several precepts, or only one?”, in question 94, article 2 of the *Prima secundae* in the *Summa theologiae*. After having stated that the first principles of natural law are founded on the “good...which all things seek,”<sup>54</sup> he concluded by stating the primary moral principle: “good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided.”<sup>55</sup> It should be apparent upon an initial reading of Aquinas’s text that he maintains only one foundational principle from which all other precepts are derived: “all other precepts of the natural law are based upon this.”<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, in his reply to the first objection in the question under current consideration, Aquinas reiterates his paradigmatic stance on the unicity of all precepts under one natural law: “All these precepts of the law of nature have the character of one natural law, inasmuch as they flow from one first precept.”<sup>57</sup>

Article 6 of question 94 provides the specification regarding the calculus of the precepts of the natural law. In answering the question, “Whether the law of nature can be abolished from the heart of man?,” Aquinas explains that:

[T]here belong to the natural law, first, certain most general precepts, that are known to all; and secondly, certain secondary and more detailed precepts, which are, as it were, conclusions following closely from first principles. As to those general principles, the natural law, in the abstract, can nowise be blotted out from men's hearts.<sup>58</sup>

In the mind of Aquinas, *bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum* is the foundational principle upon which other general precepts and secondary and more detailed precepts are derived. However, the specifications as to what these general precepts and secondary precepts are fail to be adequately defined by Aquinas. Scholars are generally not in

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<sup>53</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 95, a. 2.

<sup>54</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

<sup>55</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

<sup>57</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2, ad. 1.

<sup>58</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 6.

agreement on what constitutes the natural law. Daniel Mark Nelson offers his commentary: “Thomas nowhere provides a complete or detailed enumeration of what one might suppose are the actual precepts of the natural law.”<sup>59</sup> Armstrong, on the other hand, goes further than Nelson by specifying those which are considered as derivatives of the primary principle of the natural law. He

decided that besides the principle of “good ought to be done and evil ought to be avoided” (which may also be formulated, “one ought always act in accordance with reason”), the following also comprised the principles of natural law: “one ought to respect and preserve not only human life, but where possible, all life (we here express the principle in its shortened form), “sexual intercourse ought to be subject to some restrictions,” “the family group ought to comply with some fixed patterns,” and “we ought to live together in society in obedience to certain rules.”<sup>60</sup>

He concludes that “not even the precepts of the Decalogue were regarded as being primary precepts of natural law”<sup>61</sup> by Aquinas because “he was particularly anxious to limit the class of primary principles to include only the most general.”<sup>62</sup> Armstrong contends likewise that the precepts of ‘do good and avoid evil’ and ‘ought always to act according to reason’ belong to the class of self-evident principles and were used by St. Thomas Aquinas “to serve as examples.”<sup>63</sup> There is apparently not a wide observable academic concurrence with Armstrong’s list of primary precepts of natural law. The general propensity is directed towards the reading of several *general* precepts of natural law as being derived from the one principle of *bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum*. In view of this, McInerny’s question is worth considering: “Is one precept sufficient to express how we should achieve our appropriate end?”<sup>64</sup> Or, perhaps, the human mind can be assured that the first principles of natural law have “the status of being enshrined in all other natural law principles, whether they are the immediate conclusions from the self-evident principles (as for instance, the precepts of the Decalogue) or conclusions of more remote nature.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Daniel Mark Nelson, *The Priority of Prudence: Virtue and Natural Law in Thomas Aquinas and the Implications for Modern Ethics* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 15-16.

<sup>60</sup> Armstrong, *Primary and Secondary Precepts in Thomistic Natural Law Teaching*, 126.

<sup>61</sup> Armstrong, *Primary and Secondary Precepts in Thomistic Natural Law Teaching*, 126-127.

<sup>62</sup> Armstrong, *Primary and Secondary Precepts in Thomistic Natural Law Teaching*, 126.

<sup>63</sup> Armstrong, *Primary and Secondary Precepts in Thomistic Natural Law Teaching*, 25.

<sup>64</sup> McInerny, *Ethica Thomistica: The Moral Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, 41.

<sup>65</sup> Armstrong, *Primary and Secondary Precepts in Thomistic Natural Law Teaching*, 181.

Aquinas's teaching might be viewed as confusing owing to its seeming lack of information regarding matters relating to *synderesis*. Since Aquinas teaches that *synderesis* is the "habit containing the precepts of the natural law,"<sup>66</sup> the inevitable question ensuing from this is crucially pertinent: if *synderesis* contains the first principles of natural law, then what exactly are those principles and how do they end up in the habit of *synderesis* as self-evident principles?<sup>67</sup> D'Arcy has summed up the frustration of academics in having to deal with scant information to work on regarding the primary moral principles:

Unless Aquinas tells us, his account of *synderesis* is incomplete, and so also, consequently, is his account of conscience. We cannot yet be quite sure which are the principles all men share, and so we cannot be quite sure what are the limits to which judgments of conscience may extend in all good faith.<sup>68</sup>

### The Moral Intent of the Primary Principles

Under consideration in this section is the fundamental question of whether the precept, *bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum*, is merely a statement of fact or a moral directive. This investigation has affinity with the *is-ought* debate, i.e., if a moral imperative could be inferred from a descriptive statement.<sup>69</sup> If the principles are considered as *is*-statements, then the precepts convey *directives* as to 'how to be good' and 'how to avoid evil.' Considered *as directives*, its apparent objective then is to serve as pre-determined guides for the actualisation of human conduct befitting of the human person as a rational being. Directives do not necessarily convey the notion of a commandment that is demanded of a human person. The *Corporal Works of Mercy* could be used as examples of moral directives under this

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<sup>66</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 1, ad. 2.

<sup>67</sup> It is interesting to note that Germain Grisez states that the 'first principles of practical reason' and 'the first precept of the law' are synonymous although "the former connotes derived practical knowledge while the latter connotes rationally guided action." The differentiation is helpful in elaborating on the different natural and functional aspects of the one and the same reality of the first principles of the natural law. See Grisez, "The First Principle of Practical Reason," 178.

<sup>68</sup> D'Arcy, *Conscience and Its Right to Freedom*, 71.

<sup>69</sup> The consideration of the movement from *is*-statements to *ought*-statements is regarded to have been initiated by David Hume in his classical work, "Treatise of Human Nature". Hume advances the philosophical understanding that a 'value statement' (*ought*-statements) could not be drawn from a 'statement of fact' (*is*-statements). If an *ought*-statement is not included in the syllogistic premises, then it is illegitimate to conclude an *ought*-statement from it. (Owing to the fact that this debate has already been attributed in a host of literature, and, due to limitation of space, this present research will not cover the contents of the debate.) See David Hume, "A Treatise of Human Nature," *British Philosophy: 1600-1900* (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corp), bk. 3, pt. 1, sec. 1.

specification. ‘To feed the hungry’ or ‘to provide shelter to the homeless’ are moral directives which promote the values of sacrifice and charity towards others but it is not offered as a command. On the other hand, if the principles are to be viewed as *ought*-statements, then there is the moral imperative ‘to do good’ and ‘to avoid evil.’ The *Decalogue* falls under this classification. ‘To worship only one God’ and ‘to observe the Lord’s Day’ are considered therefore as moral imperatives. Contrary to a directive, moral imperatives do have the notion of a command or order that this or that action needs to be followed.

Grisez advocates along the same line as above stipulating that the first principles of practical reason are “really prescriptive...[and] does not have primarily [an] imperative force.”<sup>70</sup> He maintains that as self-evident principles, “reason prescribes the first condition of its own practical office.”<sup>71</sup> Practical intellect therefore cognises what is good for the human person and directs human action to its realisation. This understanding underscores the natural-ness of the law of nature which only states what is essential for the perfection of human nature. Furthermore, Rhonheimer declares that “the natural law is not primarily and per se a collection of normative statements that the practical reason simply finds ‘already there’ to ‘follow’: instead, it is the first, immediate, *result* of the preceptive acts.”<sup>72</sup> At the back of this, he claims that:

Even the fact that we know we are ‘rational mammals’ only comes from experience that we have of our own rationality. And that we are mammals who are always seeking what we understand as good on the basis of reason. Again, we only know because we have our own experience of our acts of practical reasoning. And we know these acts because we know their content (their object). And this object is, in general the good.<sup>73</sup>

Slightly echoing Grisez’s commentary, Rhonheimer stresses that the “natural law...could be called the ‘perceptive subject matter’ of the human reason [since it becomes a] ‘descriptive subject matter’ to the extent that the reason reflects upon its own acts.”<sup>74</sup> What both Grisez and Rhonheimer are saying is that the practical intellect only seeks what is practically good for practical reason to apprehend as necessarily complete and perfective of the human person.

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<sup>70</sup> Grisez, “The First Principle of Practical Reason,” 190.

<sup>71</sup> Grisez, “The First Principle of Practical Reason,” 192.

<sup>72</sup> Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, 61.

<sup>73</sup> Rhonheimer, *The Perspective of Morality*, 266.

<sup>74</sup> Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, 61.

Since the apprehension of the practical good is performed by the practical intellect, it does present what it apprehends as constitutive of human nature, hence, of the law of nature. This thought has found its way in the mind of the *International Theological Commission*:

The moral obligation that the subject recognizes does not come, therefore, from a law that would be exterior to him (pure heteronomy), but arises from within the subject himself. In fact, as indicated by the maxim... – “One must do good and avoid evil” – the moral good that reason determines “imposes itself” on the subject. It “ought” to be accomplished.<sup>75</sup>

The *International Theological Commission*’s statement appears to stress reason as a *force of nature* that directs human persons to their *end*. Grisez spells out this force of nature by implying that: “If natural law imposes obligations that good acts are to be done, it is only because it primarily imposes with rational necessity that an end must be pursued.”<sup>76</sup> The possibility for any human persons to be pulled away from what their natural inclination dictates can only be construed as a deviation from the natural ordering of things. Human limitations do vitiate the human desire towards flourishing as Nelson suggests:

But because humans were created for supernatural end, the achievement of which exceeds the abilities of human nature unaided by grace, and because human reason itself is deficient in many ways as a result of sin, even perfect knowledge of the natural is insufficient.<sup>77</sup>

In summary, D’Arcy’s query attempts to probe further into the nature of the first principles: “What, then is its role? It seems to be a purely formal principle, providing the rule that governs all our moral reasoning, rather than its universal premis[e].”<sup>78</sup> Rhonheimer reminds everyone that any reflection on the primary principles must bear in mind that it “already presupposes the experience of this principle as being *practical* [and that it] has its origin as a principle of action already in the practical reason, in the reason embedded in striving.”<sup>79</sup> Gilson appears to agree: “To say that we must do good and avoid evil is not arbitrarily to decree a moral law; it is merely to read a natural law which is written in the very substance of beings and to bring to light the hidden spring of all their operations. We have to do it, because it is our nature to do it.”<sup>80</sup> *Lex*

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<sup>75</sup> International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic,” § 61.

<sup>76</sup> Grisez, “The First Principle of Practical Reason,” 182.

<sup>77</sup> Nelson, *The Priority of Prudence*, 13.

<sup>78</sup> D’Arcy, *Conscience and Its Right to Freedom*, 52.

<sup>79</sup> Rhonheimer, *The Perspective of Morality*, 269-270.

<sup>80</sup> Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 265.



*naturalis* therefore being constitutive of the human person, contemplates on the moral development of the human person by providing moral guidance to human agents who are already naturally inclined to the moral good.

Exactly what it means for the first principles of natural law to be natural or self-evident is the task of the following section.

### ***Inclinatio naturalis vis-à-vis the Ratio of Human Goods***

Aquinas ascertains that “all those things to which man has a natural inclination, are naturally apprehended by reason as being good.”<sup>81</sup> Two elements in this statement require a brief explanation: (1) the dynamism of the appetitive movement which causally effects the apprehension of the good, and (2) the role of reason (*ratio*) in instigating the appetitive movement. These two elements will be elaborated in the ensuing sub-sections.

#### The Dynamism of the Appetitive Movement

In the mind of the Angelic Doctor, the abovementioned quote presupposes that human agents are ontologically imperfect. Consequently, humanity’s metaphysical state necessitates appetitively moving from the state of moral imperfection to the state of moral perfection under the driving force of human desires (passions). In this respect, Aquinas declares that: “(E)very appetite exists because of a need, for an appetite is a desire for what is not possessed.”<sup>82</sup> The appetitive movement is therefore understood as necessary since the human person’s fundamental ordination is towards achieving perfection which is expressive of the telic end. Owing to the faculty of reason which naturally inclines human agents to the moral good, Aquinas universally claims that perfection is desired by every rational being. In other words, if reason is allowed to guide human willing, there is no reason whatsoever why it would not

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<sup>81</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

<sup>82</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum*, ed. W. Stark. trans. Richard J. Blackwell, Richard J. Spath, and Edmund W. Thirlkel (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corp., 1963), InteLex Past Masters, lib. 1, lect. 15, sec. 136.

direct human agents to their perfection. Since to be morally good perfects every human agent, why then would the human will and passion not subscribe to the dictate of reason?

Since in ideal situations when the appetitive movement promotes the acquisition of the universal good, reason specifies those particular realities which are determinants of human perfection. In his own words, Aquinas explains the role of reason in the movement towards perfection and its relation to the apprehension of the first moral principles:

[M]an arrives at the knowledge of intelligible truth by advancing from one thing to another; and therefore he is called rational.... And since movement always proceeds from something immovable, and ends in something at rest; hence it is that human reasoning, by way of **inquiry and discovery**, advances from certain things simply understood - namely, the first principles; and, again, by way of judgment returns by analysis to first principles, in the light of which it examines what it has found.<sup>83</sup>

In light of the above, the movement from *unknowing* to *knowing* something takes on a similar dynamism that gradually achieves cognition. A person needs time and experience to learn how to swim initially perhaps by simply learning how to stay afloat in the water and then moving to learning the different swimming strokes. In considering this processional movement, Aquinas realises, too, the mutual interdependence of the intellect and will in the procurement of the telic end. He states:

Every act of reason and will in us is based on that which is according to nature: for every act of reasoning is based on principles that are known naturally, and every act of appetite in respect of the means is derived from the natural appetite in respect of the last end. Accordingly, the first direction of our acts to their end must needs be in virtue of the natural law.<sup>84</sup>

It is clear from the foregoing therefore that for Aquinas, “natural inclinations provide the foundation and the direction for our knowledge of self-evident principles of natural law.”<sup>85</sup> (Aquinas’s understanding of the primary moral principles as self-evident truths is discussed below.) There is certainly a dynamic operation that takes place between these givens in co-

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<sup>83</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 79, a. 8. (Emphasis mine)

<sup>84</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 91, a. 2, ad. 2.

<sup>85</sup> Armstrong, *Primary and Secondary Precepts in Thomistic Natural Law Teaching*, 47.

operatively delivering to human agents what they necessarily require to advance from their present state towards moral perfection.

Having initiated the discussion above regarding the complementarity between reason and will, the relational functionary elements of intellection and appetite in respect to natural law will now be further explored below.

### ‘Reason’ Behind Human Appetition

Aquinas theorises that *inclinacionem naturalem* is the apprehensive movement which tends reason towards the (moral) good. Since reason apprehends the moral good as end, it does so only on the basis that it brings about the desired perfection in human persons. Reason is naturally disposed to the good not because the good is good *per se*, but because reason apprehends the perceived good as good for sake of the end of the human agent. Reason, however, does not completely work in isolation since in tending towards the good, the appetitive faculty contributes indirectly to the appraisal of the good that is being apprehended. The good which is desired by the appetitive power reaches reason and consequently is informed of the nature of such good as sensed. The appetitive power tends towards the desired object only after reason has evaluated the good as good for the human person. Aquinas’s teaching that “for every movement of the will must be preceded by apprehension, whereas every apprehension is not preceded by an act of the will”<sup>86</sup> adequately explains the mutual relationship between reason and will. Specifying that the outcome of this relationship is something practical, Grisez opines that the will’s function is bound by the dictates of reason since it is only in relation to volition that knowledge is construed as practical. He intimates that:

[T]he first acts of practical knowing are prior to the first acts of the will. These acts of knowing are practical only by reference to the will, whose acts they specify, but not through the subordination to the will characteristic of those acts of practical reason which pre-suppose a prior act of the will.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 82, a. 4, ad. 3.

<sup>87</sup> Germain Grisez, “Natural Law and Natural Inclinations: Some Comments and Clarifications,” *The New Scholasticism* 61, no. 3 (1987): 312.

Hence, *inclinatio naturalis* serves “as mute pointer in the right direction and reason is the sight which apprehends such a pointer knows why the direction is the right one, and directs the person with sight to the way to go.”<sup>88</sup>

A necessary cognate of the relationship between the intellect and the will in relation to *legi naturali* and *inclinatio naturali* is the determination of the moral good. To elaborate on this consideration, the discussion regarding the following subject matters provides clarifications: (i) human inclination may or may not necessarily involve the moral consideration of things, and (ii) moral good necessarily involves the teleological considerations of human acts. Regarding (i), it should be acknowledged that not all human inclinations flow from the intellect-will relationship. Some human activities involve certain natural inclinations which are non-rational. Physiological functions such as the pumping out of blood from the left atrium to the left ventricle through the aorta to the different organs and tissues of the body carrying oxygen and nutrients is achieved ‘naturally’ or involuntary since the heart muscles are naturally inclined to operate in such a physiological manner. This example obviously does not attract any moral evaluation since the consideration of natural inclination in this regard does not involve the operations of the intellect and the will.

Regarding (ii), natural inclinations may invite moral evaluations in view of whether the good that is being acted upon by the will corresponds to what the reason dictates as perfective of human nature and whether it adheres to natural law. Flippen states that the “order which reason, by considering, puts into operations of the will is the business of morality.”<sup>89</sup> Since a law is defined as the “ordinance of reason for the common good”<sup>90</sup> by Aquinas himself, it logically follows that a law is meant to provide specific ethical standards and guidance in society. Natural inclination itself may be viewed as a moral ordering directing the human agents to their human (natural) and beatific (supernatural) ends. This moral ordering is on account of the service of both the intellect and will and the delimitation imposed by human passions. In reference to the latter factors, Aquinas insists that though these powers may affect the apprehension of the good, they are subordinated to reason. He says then:

All the inclinations of any parts whatsoever of human nature, e.g., of the concupiscible and irascible parts, in so far as they are ruled by reason, belong to the natural law, and are reduced to one first precept,

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<sup>88</sup> Flippen, “Natural Law and Natural Inclinations,” 312.

<sup>89</sup> Flippen, “Natural Law and Natural Inclinations,” 301.

<sup>90</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 90, a. 4.

as stated above: so that the precepts of the natural law are many in themselves, but are based on one common foundation.<sup>91</sup>

Fundamentally, concupiscible and irascible passions are indeterminate realities when it comes to moral considerations: they are neither good nor evil and indirectly affect the will and not reason. Aquinas does not disregard the reality of the passions albeit they only indirectly affect reason. The occasion that passions present to human reason is potent enough to blur the difference between what is rational and not rational.

### ***Inclinatio naturalis vis-à-vis Synderesis***

*Inclinatio naturalis* directly points human agents to the first principles of natural law since disposing them towards the moral good is its essence. Natural inclinations though are not the natural law but are natural dispositions that draw every human person to where they should be directed to in order to actuate the potentialities of their human nature. Grisez provides an explanation to this assertion:

Nature is not natural law; nature is the given from which man develops and from which arise tendencies of ranks corresponding to its distinct strata. These tendencies are not natural law; the tendencies indicate possible actions, and hence they provide reason with the point of departure it requires in order to propose ends.<sup>92</sup>

Natural inclinations are therefore dispositions which are operative in all human agents who are considered hylomorphic beings. This dynamism accounts for the organic movement of the human agent within the *exitus-reditus* paradigm by Aquinas. It views the sojourn of the human person as a movement towards full human and moral development whereby every step forward is a step closer to the ultimate *telos*. The path of moral development is serviced by reason which directs the will to the end under the influence of natural inclination. Aquinas holds this same position as Seipel who offers this remark: “[W]e can come to know the proper ends of human life by carefully determining the inclinations we truly possess by way of our God-given human

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<sup>91</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2, ad. 2.

<sup>92</sup> Grisez, “The First Principle of Practical Reason,” 181.

nature.”<sup>93</sup> Rightfully establishing the normative place of natural inclination in the scheme of human intellection, apprehension thus precedes every other volition as mentioned above.<sup>94</sup>

With natural inclination’s correlativity with reason already well-established in the preceding discussion, the investigation of its relationship with *synderesis* is now proffered. If the will’s natural inclinations - this will being a rational appetite<sup>95</sup> - direct the practical intellect to the first principles of natural law, *synderesis* is the habit of certainty that disposes every person to apprehend the moral good. Aquinas regards *synderesis* in this fashion based on two accounts: first, because it is permanently placed in the human soul and cannot be extinguished; and second, because it only conveys the truth of the first principles of natural law. Aquinas elucidates that “‘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.”<sup>96</sup> Considered as defined, it is one thing to posit that the practical intellect arrives at the knowledge of the first principles of natural law via *synderesis* and it would be another thing to demonstrate how *synderesis* actually realises its own apprehensive act, i.e., to “judge of those things which have been discovered by reasoning.”<sup>97</sup>

A salient feature of Aquinas’s conceptualisation of *synderesis* is the apprehension of what are believed to be *self-evident* truths (*per se nota*). In Thomistic linguistics concerning the primary principles, *self-evident* is defined as the immediate and non-discursive grasp of the first principles of natural law. Aquinas utilises a self-evident theory in his analysis of whether knowledge is innate or acquired. Via self-evident theory, Aquinas maintains that the knowledge of the primary principles is not innate in the sense that knowledge is brought about by some form of divine illumination. Apparently, the primary moral principles are essentially underived truths that are yet to be actuated via synderetic action. John Finnis offers his explanation of this phenomenon:

The first principles of practical reason are ‘indemonstrable’ and ‘self-evident’.... Aquinas firmly holds that they are understood by what he calls ‘induction’ of principles, by which he means insight into data of experience (data preserved, after the direct experience, in the memory).

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<sup>93</sup> Seipel, “Aquinas and the Natural Law,” 47.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 82, a. 4, ad. 3.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 8, a. 1.

<sup>96</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 79, a. 12.

<sup>97</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 79, a. 12.

‘To reach a knowledge of them [first principles, whether speculative or of practical reason] we need sensory experience and memory.’<sup>98</sup>

One crucial element pertinent to this research is the determination on how the truths of the first principles of natural law are considered self-evident. The Thomistic use of the term self-evident is not in consonance with the contemporary usage of the word itself. Self-evident is commonly understood as something that is known without the need for proofs to ascertain its authenticity or veracity. It is important to note that for Aquinas, self-evident truths are reached, as Finnis mentions above, via sensory experience and memory. These two intellectual operations are both mutually exclusive and dependent of each other in facilitating human intellection. Regarding the *sensory* experience, Grisez, concurring with Finnis, explains that: “Using the primary principle, reason reflects on experience in which the natural inclinations are found pointing to good appropriate to themselves.”<sup>99</sup> Nelson accurately identifies the corporeal state and the human condition as the necessary givens in human intellection: “Because of the way in which we are created, it is natural for us to use our powers in characteristic ways to come to know things, which is not to say we are born with that knowledge.”<sup>100</sup> Further, he states that human limitations contribute towards how knowledge is acquired by the human intellect:

One cannot reason to conclusions in the speculative or practical sciences without supplying experientially known information that is not found in naturally known general first principles, which themselves have an experiential component. Moreover, given the limitations of human reason, there is a great potential for error in reaching conclusions. The mode of our participation in God’s reason is not full, Thomas says, but imperfect.<sup>101</sup>

Rhonheimer adds depth to the discussion by highlighting that the intellect is not a mere passive receiver of sensitive information in formulating the primary moral principles. He stresses, indicating unity with Aquinas, the con-joint act of the intellect to draw data from the extramental world and the action of the intellect itself to tap into the *intellectus agens* in discovering the light of *synderesis*.

Even though Thomas holds firmly to the position that all knowledge arises through senses – that, indeed, nothing at all could be known without its first having been made present to the intellect by way of the

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<sup>98</sup> John Finnis, *Aquinas: Moral, Political, and Legal Theory* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>99</sup> Grisez, “The First Principle of Practical Reason,” 180.

<sup>100</sup> Nelson, *The Priority of Prudence*, 110.

<sup>101</sup> Nelson, *The Priority of Prudence*, 110.

senses, and that in every act of knowing there occurs a “turning toward phantasms” (*conversio as phantasmata*) – nevertheless, he never in any way reduces the action of the intellect to a mere rational “reworking” of sense data in the manner of an empiricist or sensualist.... From the formal point of view, the cause is the intellect itself, and that means that its relation to sense experience is not merely that of a “receiver,” nor does it “contribute something” and certainly not in a “creative manner”; it is rather, as a “light” that “makes visible” what is *already there* but “hidden” because not yet presented to sense perception.<sup>102</sup>

Rhonheimer’s explanation above substantially sums up what *self-evident* refers to concerning the knowledge of the primary moral principles. Grisez follows this thought through with parallel semantic articulation: “Our minds use the data of experience as a bridge to cross into reality in order to grasp the more-than-given truth of things.”<sup>103</sup>

The initial sensory experience earlier alluded to by both Rhonheimer and Grisez may not, however, be enough to form a firm and definitive knowledge. From the perspective of sensitive cognition, previous knowledge from memory may necessarily be required. Finnis, asserting the process called ‘induction of principles’ whereby primary moral principles are produced, he maintains that induction, as opposed to syllogism, paves the way for the first principles of natural law to be immediately intellected in the human mind as self-evident truth. He believes that memory serves as a pool of knowledge or a storage of information whereby previous knowledge are integrated, composed, or combined to arrive as a newly inducted knowledge. Foreshadowing a later discussion point, imagination’s instrumentality in cognition is posited by this research as having an epistemic value not only in the initial apprehension of the primary principles but also with the expansion of knowledge via amalgamation of previously cognised truths.

The above discussion presented the Thomistic understanding that sensory experience and memory maintain crucial contributory roles in the formation of the first principles of natural law. They provide, as it were, epistemic raw materials and the cognitive mechanism which allow for sensible data to be processed and conceptualised respectively as self-evident. By their very nature, they are not exclusively and essentially responsible for the consideration of

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<sup>102</sup> Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, 264.

<sup>103</sup> Grisez, “The First Principle of Practical Reason,” 176.



acquired sensible data as self-evident. They provide the same contributory role even to non-self-evident truths.

While the question on *how* first principles of natural law are apprehended will be considered in the next chapter, it needs to be pointed out that beyond the natural apprehension of the intelligible goods, “a discursive, inventive process of the natural reason [takes place whereby] what is potentially contained in these principles is cognitively unfolded and made explicit.”<sup>104</sup> Explaining this quote, Rhonheimer maintains that through the discursive and inventive process, the human agent embarks on the path of experience where personal discoveries through one’s initiative or by receipt of instruction or revelation are achieved.

It is overwhelmingly clear at this point that sensory experience is vital in the discernment of the first principles of natural law. Aquinas further construes a more expansive manner of intellection beyond sensitive intellection. He believes that “[s]ensitive knowledge is not the entire cause of intellectual knowledge. And therefore it is not strange that intellectual knowledge should extend further than sensitive knowledge.”<sup>105</sup> Following Aristotle, the Angelic Doctor acknowledges the hylomorphic condition of the human person which allows for sensitive knowledge and for the intuitive intellectual knowledge to take place.<sup>106</sup> In this respect, Aquinas acknowledges two operations in the sensitive part of the soul: “One, in regard of impression only, and this operation of the senses takes place by the senses being impressed by the sensible. The other is formation, inasmuch as the imagination forms for itself an image of an absent thing, or even of something never seen.”<sup>107</sup> The intuitive intellectual knowledge relative to the self-evident truths contained in the first principles of natural law is accorded to the *intellectus agens* which is directly responsible for causing “the phantasms received from the senses to be actually intelligible, by a process of abstraction.”<sup>108</sup> Aquinas claims that the *intellectus agens* is the “means of which we can know the truth of changing things in an unchanging way.”<sup>109</sup> It is through the *intellectus agens* that the sensible good, which is naturally sought by the practical intellect, becomes impressed on the soul as the practical good that guides human agents to fulfill the precept, *bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum*. Lest human reason is “perverted by passion, or evil habit, or an evil disposition of

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<sup>104</sup> Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, 285.

<sup>105</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 84, a. 6, ad. 3.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 84, a. 6.

<sup>107</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 85, a. 2, ad. 3.

<sup>108</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 84, a. 6; I, q. 79, a. 3, ad. 3.

<sup>109</sup> Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, 264.

nature,”<sup>110</sup> there is a real expectation that human agents would flourish under the moral foundation and ethical guidance of the first principles of natural law. Being contingent human agents, there will always be the likelihood that though the first principles of natural law are intuitively apprehended by *synderesis*, it may fail to serve any practical purpose when moral reasoning is perverted by passions and inordinate vices.

Aquinas intelligently asserts that “there is in every man a natural inclination to act according to reason: and this is to act according to virtue.”<sup>111</sup> The study of virtues in the following chapters provides the pertinent forum for reflecting on how human agents may gain practical guidelines in view of the growth of the knowledge of the primary moral precepts. It is presupposed in this research that the knowledge of the first principles of natural law is an ongoing *inquiry* and *discovery* simultaneously taking place within the gambit of human moral development since (i) the moral precepts contained in the first principles of natural law are extensively generic in nature, and (ii) the contingent nature of the human person being a body-soul unicity is characterised by both dispositional (interiorly) and situational (exteriorly) fluctuating influences. Since through the first moral principles human agents proceed to discover and judge what have been intuitively discovered via *synderesis*,<sup>112</sup> the path towards a virtuous life and experience should enable the moral precept, *bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum*, come to its full realisation and perfection in the human person.

## Summary

*Synderesis* is the innate disposition (*habitus*) that intuitively grasps the universal principles of natural law. As a habit understood in the Thomistic sense, it contains the precepts of the first principles of moral action. Through it, the human mind is illumined by the knowledge of the primary moral principles which state that *good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided*. The disposition, however, is only actualised when the human mind engages with the physical world from where the material content of morality is sourced. This epistemological contact is necessary and pivotal in guaranteeing that the moral good that *synderesis* apprehends is inchoatively actualised. Moreover, *synderesis* does not only point to moral good but also

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<sup>110</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 4.

<sup>111</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 3.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 79, a. 12.

desires that this moral good grows to its full potential. It is through the habituation of moral virtues that the moral good transforms human agents into moral agents who are naturally capable of acquiring not just the natural ends but the supernatural ends as well.

This rationale behind the pursuit of the moral good's specificity is consistent with Thomistic anthropology which conceptually views the human person as a composite of body and soul. In this view, the hylomorphic unicity of the human person is determinant of the process of cognising sensible materials. As Aquinas himself asserts, everything resided first in the extramental world before eventually making its way in the human mind to end up as an idea or a concept. Aquinas believes that human cognition is brought about by mainly two processes: sensitive cognition and imagination, both of which can operate mutually or separately in knowing the truth. However, without human agents personally immersing and engaging in an intelligible and moral universe, the first principles of natural law will never have any intelligibility.

Aquinas conceives of the apprehension of the first principles of natural law as an appetitive movement that is premised on the human agents' natural disposition to seek the universal moral good. Reason is naturally disposed to the moral good since, as a good itself, it recognises and responds to the good present in other realities that are inherently good. In this dynamism of apprehension, Aquinas presents the notion of natural inclination and the concept of the *ratio* of the perceived moral good. He contemplates the ontological dynamism between reason and will in moral development as the process that gives rise for human agents to actively seek and pursue the moral good and avoid evil.

Aquinas contends that the *intellectus agens* is responsible for illuminating the human mind of the divinely presaged and sensitively cognised *a priori* universal moral good. It is through both of these factors that the first principles of natural law attain their intelligibility and enforceability which is expressed via its principal derivatives (e.g., secondary principles), viz., the *inclinatio naturalis* to preserve life, the *inclinatio naturalis* to reproduce and to educate offspring, and the *inclinatio naturalis* to know the truth about God. These three represent the immediately derived primary moral principles expressed in a hierarchical order where the natural inclination to know the truth about God signifies the disposition that is closest to that which engenders the acquisition of the supernatural ends. In this mutual regard, the ordering of the natural law discloses the ordering of human natural inclinations.

In the overall scheme of things, *synderesis* appoints the moral ends which have been appropriately considered by practical reason as morally good in themselves to be either acquired as natural or supernatural end. As human nature inclines human agents to these moral ends, it is *synderesis* which paves the way for these moral ends to be intuitively and apprehensively known. This primordial knowledge is critical for moral development. Without the necessary accordance of moral nourishment, the first principles of natural law remain inoperative and ineffective in directing human agents to their telic ends.

## Chapter 5

### The *Materia causae* in the Cognition of the Practical Good

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter dealt with fundamental truths about the nature of *synderesis* as an innate habit which enables the human person to intuitively apprehend the first principles of natural law. The theological inquiry on *synderesis* in this chapter presupposes a few matters. Firstly, *synderesis*, according to Catholic theology, is implanted by God in every human person and is uniformly given to all. Secondly, since its formal object is the first principles of the natural law whose roles are to serve as moral foundation and to provide moral guidance to human agents, *synderesis* will still require the necessary stimuli from the social environment for its epistemic growth and maturation. And thirdly, every human agent possesses the capacity for moral growth and this is realised by way of virtue habituation. The first presupposition has already been dealt with in the previous chapters. The third presupposition will be covered in later chapters. The task of this present chapter relates to the second presupposition which focusses on investigating the various material causes (*materia causae*) which influence the actuation and the apprehension of the first principles of natural law. These epistemic materials influence, directly or indirectly, pre-cognitively and cognitively, the *act of synderesis* in human agents.

## The Notion of Apprehending the Practical Good

The disciple in the *Gospel of Matthew* 19:16 raises a valid question pertinent to this present study: “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?”<sup>1</sup> Catholic eschatology teaches that the good (supernatural end) is synonymous to eternal life even if it is upheld that: “No one is good but God alone.”<sup>2</sup> But God’s goodness overflows out to his creation for no reason but for the sake of good alone. The gift of *synderesis* manifests God’s overflowing goodness. Within the human self, there is an inner sanctum where this good is known and experienced. The Second Vatican Council Fathers identify this inner sanctum in the following terms: “In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law...summoning him to love good and avoid evil.”<sup>3</sup>

In the spiritual interiority of human agents, the discovery of the primary moral principles takes place in the human soul. Aquinas’s foray into the field of ontological realism or metaphysical realism<sup>4</sup> decidedly led him to the soul’s inner sanctum and away from the polar spectrums of physicalism and illuminism.<sup>5</sup> These polar spectrums have been theorised to be causes of moral knowledge in the human person. Proposing the middle ground (*via media*) as the locus where divine wisdom and human wisdom meet, Aquinas adopted Aristotle’s *intellectus agens* and determined it as the principle which illumines the soul in knowing the first principles of natural law. He explains: “We must therefore assign on the part of the intellect some power to make things actually intelligible, by abstraction of the species from material conditions. And such is the necessity for an active intellect (*intellectus agens*).”<sup>6</sup> The other component of the middle ground is sensitive experience which Aquinas delegates as responsible for actuating the innate habit of *synderesis*. It also provides the necessarily epistemic materials serving as precursors to human intellection. Anthony Lisska refers to these as “the epistemological materials propaedeutic to concept formation.”<sup>7</sup> The ontology of the agent (active) intellect underlines the apprehension of the practical good that inheres in the first principles of natural law.

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<sup>1</sup> Mt 19:16.

<sup>2</sup> Mk 10:18.

<sup>3</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, § 16.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony J. Lisska, “A Look at Inner Sense in Aquinas: A Long-Neglected Faculty Psychology” (paper presented at the Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, 2006), 4, 9-10.

<sup>5</sup> In epistemology, *physicalism* generally posits that knowledge is obtainable only through the instrumentality of the physical body while *illuminism* asserts that knowledge is brought to human agents through some form of divine infusion.

<sup>6</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 79, a. 3. (Insert mine)

<sup>7</sup> Anthony J. Lisska, *Aquinas's Theory of Perception: An Analytic Reconstruction*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1.

Relating the epistemological notion of apprehension to *synderesis* is basically drawn from Aquinas's own theological reflection on natural law in his *Summa theologiae*: "good is the first thing that falls under the apprehension of the practical reason."<sup>8</sup> To apprehend seems to connote a power which *synderesis* does not actually possess. *Synderesis*, however, is a habitual disposition which moves moral agents to the knowledge of the practical good. Aquinas explains this fully in this text:

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>9</sup>

Implied in the above text is the process of discovery and judgment of things discovered through the first principles. Rhonheimer offers his understanding behind this implication:

Nothing can be "deduced" from the first principle. Instead, it "shows itself" in the various specific principles and develops in them its foundational-practical effectiveness, not only as a principle of thinking, but as a *principle of movement*.<sup>10</sup>

Since the primary moral principles require specific epistemological movements, this assumes the process which Aquinas envisages: it begins with the *simple apprehension* of the essences or quiddities of sensed objects and develops into the more complex cognition involving the process of *composition* and *division*.<sup>11</sup> *Synderesis* operates in the simple apprehension of quiddities upon being actuated via sensitive experience. As mentioned previously, *synderesis* is certainly not passive but an active and dynamic participant in the epistemic growth of the primary moral principles. There is meaning in why Aquinas equivocates *synderesis* to reason in the following text: "Natural reason known by the name of synderesis appoints the end to moral virtues."<sup>12</sup> This implies effectively then that when *synderesis* moves human agents, it follows this movement.

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<sup>8</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 79, a. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Rhonheimer, *The Perspective of Morality*, 274.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 85, aa. 5 and 8; also, I, q. 16, a. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 6.

The understanding of the notion of apprehension in Aquinas's epistemology is crucial in fully grasping the different metaphysical moments that occur during this process. These moments will be fully articulated later in this thesis. That said, the intuitive process of apprehension points beyond mere cognition of the perfective good. Human agents are not 'all brain'; they also possess a will and emotions. Both faculties of volition and appetite are involved, too, in bringing about the apprehension of moral knowledge. Furthermore, Stump suggests that the term 'apprehension' in Aquinas's writings may either refer to "cognitive and non-cognitive acts of grasping."<sup>13</sup> She believes that non-cognitive reception (intuition, pre-cognition) occurs when the intellect receives epistemic materials without apprehending it. On the other hand, the cognitive act refers to the growth of the knowledge of the universal principles through sensitive experience (apprehension).

The following section will now shed light on Aquinas's epistemology which should provide the necessary fundamental insights into his doctrine on *synderesis*.

### **The Thomistic Theory of Cognition: An Overview**

Aquinas's hylomorphic theory underscores his epistemology. It fundamentally presents the human person as constitutive of a body and soul. His hylomorphism-grounded epistemology is the key to his insights in the disciplines of psychology and metaphysics. As will be demonstrated below, his understanding of the specific phases in the intellectual cognition such as the *act of the corporeal organ* and *turn to phantasm* is undergirded by the body-soul composite. His celebrated statement in *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* sums up Aquinas's cognitive theory: "Nothing is in the intellect that was not previously in sense" ("*Nihil est in intellectu quod non sit prius in sensu*")."<sup>14</sup>

The discussion in the previous chapter lucidly posited that the Thomistic intellectual process necessarily starts via sensory experience. As these extramental elements make contact with the human person, specifically through the human sensory organs, it leaves an impression that images the actual existing object outside the human mind. These sensory images are raw images of material objects in the extramental world that would have to be internally processed

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<sup>13</sup> Stump, *Aquinas*, 250.

<sup>14</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 3, arg. 19.



before the human mind can fully grasp what it is. Since extramental objects are material in nature, there is obviously no way that what is perceived externally would be present internally in the mind exactly as how it exists as perceived. Aquinas refers to the impressions made by these extramental elements on the mind as likeness of what is perceived. This “empirical constraint,”<sup>15</sup> as Pasnau puts it, points necessarily to how Aquinas qualifies the limits of the knower to know: “whatever is received into something is received according to the condition of the recipient.”<sup>16</sup> Since the human person as the potential knower “can have knowledge of all corporeal things”<sup>17</sup> due to the intellect, Aquinas asserts that the intellective process is initially a process of abstracting the universal from sensible images that have been perceived and have been impressed on the rational soul. This is premised on the Thomistic assertion that the rational soul is immaterial and therefore can only cognise spiritual images, i.e., the universal quality of a material object, or philosophically, the essence of an existential substance. The *intellectus agens* (active or agent intellect) is responsible for the operation of abstraction after which it passes the intelligible species on to the *intellectus possibilis* (possible intellect) to turn it into a formal concept or word.

Regarding the phenomenon of perceiving, i.e., perception as involving and including other human senses such as feeling, tasting, smelling, hearing, the human person does not only sense the distinctive and manifold accidental attributes of existing objects in reality, such as the red colour of an apple, but rather, it grasps ultimately its perceived essential specification or universal quality.

There appears to be an inseparable intellective process which involves the cognition of the external world achieved by the external senses and processed by the internal senses which produce the cognition of perceived realities. This inseparable metaphysical process involves the simultaneous apprehension of the universal and particular elements of the perceptible world. This metaphysical sequence or order of the procession may be likened to the proverbial dilemma: *which comes first, the chicken or the egg*. Aquinas would argue that the universal is what is cognised prior to the particular since the “intellect has the universal for its object.”<sup>18</sup> Since anything physical (particular) is incapable of penetrating the human mind, the universal is what is abstracted out of perceived objects. This is the question that has preoccupied

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<sup>15</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 113.

<sup>16</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 75, a. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 75, a. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 85, a. 3.

medieval thinkers, including obviously Aquinas: how does a physical object leave a non-physical (immaterial, spiritual) impression of itself on the mind?<sup>19</sup> Aquinas attributes to the *intellectus agens* the metaphysical task of stripping off perceived sensed objects of all their accidental attributes to effectively grasp its essence or its universal quality. What is abstracted out of a perceived red apple is the apple-ness that defines all existing red apples. The cognitive process does not conclude with the mere grasp of the *quiddity*. Aquinas affirms that ensuing from the abstraction of the essence or the universal quality of sensible objects, the human mind *turns to the phantasm (conversio ad phantasmata)* to confirm and affirm that what is perceived is really and actually ‘this red apple’ and not any other red apple or other apples for that matter. This determination underlines the real experience that a human person actually perceives as a hylomorphic being. The understanding of the specificity of the cognitive process is an important element in Thomism. Empiricism is indispensable in the study of *synderesis* and its process of sustaining the practical knowledge of doing and pursuing the good.

### **Sensitive Knowledge and Experience of the Material World**

As earlier elucidated, human agents cognise the world around them once extramental elements leave their impressions on the external senses. The quality of the impression is dependent upon the cognitive boundaries of human agents since “the thing known is in the knower according to the mode of the knower.”<sup>20</sup> This qualification provides the metaphysical foundation for whatever human agents seek to apprehend, including the appropriation of the practical good that results from its cognition. As the universal capacity of every contingent rational being to seek the synderetic good is affirmed, the circumstantial aspect of its moral development depends on the individuality and experience of moral agents.

Though evidence favours the rational stress in Thomistic literature, there is an underlying content within it that upholds the value of human experience. Knowing is an experience of and by the whole person. More than a rational intellection, sensitive cognition is also a learning experience. The intuitive apprehension of the first principles of natural law confirms not just a

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 84, aa. 1-8.

<sup>20</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 12, a. 4.

disposition but an ensuing experience that contributes towards the fuller understanding of those innate moral precepts.

Possessing a given nature which is a body-soul composite, human agents interact with the outside world through the intermediary of their physical bodies whose external senses serve as immediate points of contact for sensory interactions. Material stimuli are recognised as immediately acting upon the sensory organs in order to catalyse the production of sensitive knowledge. The causal relationship between potency and act undergirds this intellectual process. It also highlights the intrinsic relationship between sense organ and sense faculty. In this process, Aquinas affirms the existence of the five interior senses that receive these extramental stimuli.<sup>21</sup> Short of explicating any underlying rationale for the attribution of five human senses, Aquinas simply ascribes their distinction and number to nature: “nature provided various mediums for the various senses, according to the convenience of the acts of the powers.”<sup>22</sup>

Aquinas confirms that nature is responsible for equipping human agents with the necessary faculties and spiritual powers to be able to realise their own perfection. Since the sensitive faculties operate under the intellectual faculties, sensory human experiences are harnessed by the intellect in order that human potentialities are actualised by virtue of their natural ordination. The actualisation of human potentials practically begins by the initiatory intellectual process of sense perception<sup>23</sup> whereby the reception of sensible species by the sensory organs is instantiated. Aquinas asserts the existence of various internal organs which serve as receptors of sensory inputs or stimuli which bring about various physiological responses on the different sense organs such as the experiences of smell, touch, feel, taste and vision. All of these are classically referred to as the ‘objects of sense perception.’ Though merely initiatory, these physiological experiences are crucial in the cognitive process since they provide the foundational raw materials for the eventual apprehension of knowledge and subsequent synthesis of such.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 78, a. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 78, a. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Sense perception encompasses reception of external stimuli beyond the more general idea of tactile reception which involves the various types of dermal and epidermal receptors spread out and located all over the human body. In this thesis, ‘perception’ is understood as the internal processing of the sensory data received by the sensitive organs. The process whereby external stimuli are received by the external organs is referred to as ‘sensation’ (tactile sensation). Taken together both sensation and perception point to the process of sensory or sensitive cognition.

The human body serves as the conduit, as it were, between the exterior environment and the interior environment, between the exterior senses and the interior senses, in internalising the epistemic process of cognition. During the initial phase of contact, the external senses relate to the internal senses by reducing the sensed extramental objects into sensible species. The immaterial sensible species, according to Stump, are “received by the senses although not cognised by them.”<sup>24</sup> The process of reduction that is initially involved in this cognitive process is pre-analytical, i.e., this phase is prior to any actual cognition that is yet to take place. Cognition realises when a sensible species is eventually produced in the form of a concept or a word. Analytically, the reception of the sensible species by the internal senses does not involve any cognitive act although it may appear so after carefully studying the specific natures of the internal senses, specifically the *vis cogitativa* which will be demonstrated below.

Further to the above-mentioned reductive process whereby extramental objects are received as sensible species by the internal senses, sensitive cognition requires certain stimulus or input without which the required sensory act on sense organs cannot take place. The inherent nature of the sense organs makes it possible for it to be necessarily acted upon by extramental materials. Aquinas underscores the passive nature of the sense organs: “the passivity of sensation was an instance of like being acted upon by like.”<sup>25</sup> It is simply not the essential property of the sense organs to come out and engage with the social environment on their own accord. In affirming the sense organs’ passivity, Aquinas also affirms the co-natural instantaneous effect of such relative to the in-coming stimuli: “sense is a passive power, and is naturally immuted by the exterior sensible.”<sup>26</sup> As bearing a passive configuration, sense organs are necessarily disposed to be immuted in deference to its specific role in the process of intellection. H. D. Gardeil sums up the cognitive process in this manner:

We have but to remember that in the process of sensation there are two phases: the passive phase, in which the sense is informed and determined by the external object; and the active phase, which properly constitutes the act of knowledge, and in which the informed faculty determines itself.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Stump, *Aquinas*, 250.

<sup>25</sup> Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de anima*, lib. 2, lect. 10, sec. 350.

<sup>26</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 78, a. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Henri Dominique Gardeil, *Introduction to the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. John A. Otto, vol. 3: Psychology (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1956), 53.

The instantaneity that the process of stimulated interaction by extramental objects on the sense organs involves the sub-powers of the cognitive (apprehensive) and the appetitive (sensitive) faculties located in the soul's intellective or apprehending power. Aquinas claims that the cognitive and appetitive powers (both extensions of the intellective power) are responsible for the appropriate reaction to extramental stimuli.<sup>28</sup> In effect, both of these powers are responsible for directly dealing with the internal senses in processing impressed extramental data. Aquinas differentiates the role of reason in this respect which excludes the external senses that rely upon the stimulation by extramental objects for its operation. Aquinas explains this differentiation:

The exterior senses require for action exterior sensible things, whereby they are affected, and the presence of which is not ruled by reason. But the interior powers, both appetitive and apprehensive, do not require exterior things. Therefore they are subject to the command of reason, which can not only incite or modify the affections of the appetitive power, but can also form the phantasms of the imagination.<sup>29</sup>

The movement of sensitive power, in particular, is enabled by the natural disposition towards the fundamental ordering of the good and the avoidance of evil. Aquinas characterises this sensual movement as “an appetite following sensitive apprehension.”<sup>30</sup> By this he meant that the causal movement of the appetitive faculty is ordered by reason.

### **The Thomistic Intellective Operations**

In the *Prologue* of his *Commentary on Aristotle's Posterior Analytics*, Aquinas succinctly describes his teaching on the intellective operations:

Now there are three acts of the reason, the first two of which belong to reason regarded as an intellect. One action of the intellect is the understanding of indivisible or uncomplex things, and according to this action it conceives *what* a thing is. And this operation is called by some the informing of the intellect, or representing by means of the intellect.... The second operation of the intellect is its act of combining or dividing, in which the true or the false are for the first time present.... But the third act of the reason is concerned with that which is peculiar to reason, namely, to advance from one thing to another in such a way

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<sup>28</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 78, a. 1, ad. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 81, a. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 81, a. 1.

that through that which is known a man comes to a knowledge of the unknown.<sup>31</sup>

It should be clear by now that the Thomistic intellectual operations are generally premised on sensitive cognition. Most knowledge begins from sensory experience while some are cognitive products of this initial interaction with the extramental world, i.e., knowledge formulated via imagination. With regard to the intellectual operation of *composition* and *division*, Aquinas claims that when previously sensed intelligibles are synthesised new concepts or ideas are formed. Experience reveals that human knowledge inchoately develops when recently-formed concepts or ideas are combined, in its entirety or elements of it, with other recently-formed concepts or ideas or with previously-sensed concepts or ideas. The human agent may initially understand via audition the sound of a piano (or any other musical instrument) and this understanding of sounds may develop and grow upon hearing other types of sound such as musical instruments played in a musical duet, quartet, quintet or the full-scale orchestra. New ideas or concepts may be products of the progression of understanding of earlier grasped sensible knowledge. Considering the principle of non-contradiction as an example: a child who has learnt that her parents cannot be with her at school discovers consequently that her parents cannot be with her and be at home at the same time. By and large, Aquinas believes that the intellect has the innate capacity to form new concepts by joining or synthesising previously cognised intelligible species, including sensible species for that matter:

The human intellect must of necessity understand by composition and division. For since the intellect passes from potentiality to act, it has a likeness to things which are generated, which do not attain to perfection all at once but acquire it by degrees: so likewise the human intellect does not acquire perfect knowledge by the first act of apprehension; but it first apprehends something about its object, such as its quiddity, and this is its first and proper object; and then it understands the properties, accidents, and the various relations of the essence. Thus it necessarily compares one thing with another by composition or division; and from one composition and division it proceeds to another, which is the process of reasoning.<sup>32</sup>

Further, Aquinas explains that what is involved in the intellectual process of composition and division is *differentiating* and *comparing*: “Composition and division of the intellect are made

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio libri Posteriorum Analyticorum*, trans. F. R. Larcher, OP, The Collected Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1970), InteLex Past Masters, pr.

<sup>32</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 85, a. 5.

by differentiating and comparing. Hence the intellect knows many things by composition and division, as by knowing the difference and comparison of things.”<sup>33</sup> During this process when the human intellect compares and differentiates one thing from another by composition and division, Aquinas also points to the process of reasoning that is set in motion. These constitute the second and third operations of the intellect according to the mind of Aquinas respectively. The first act of the intellect is *simple apprehension* which entails the intellectual apprehension of the *quiddity* of a sensed material object. Through abstraction, *quiddity* is extracted from sensible species which is understood to have earlier left an impression on the sensory organs. The process of abstraction will be dealt with in length below.

Specifically pertinent to this current study, the intuitive apprehension by *synderesis* of the first principles of natural law is considered as occurring within the purview of the first action of the human intellect. The notion of good is considered at the pre-reasoning level (pre-cognition) and as such necessitates the second and third process of intellection for such good to be truly intelligible and therefore formed and conceptualised. It should be clearly pointed out, however, that: “In the acquisition of knowledge, principles and elements are not always (known) first: for sometimes from sensible effects we arrive at the knowledge of principles and intelligible causes.”<sup>34</sup> This statement both points to the acquisition of derived knowledge from previously cognised knowledge and the knowledge which emanates from the intuition and apprehension of the first principles of natural law by *synderesis*.

Aquinas’s proposition above extends the consideration of *synderesis* when it comes to the consideration of its ontological nature. While *synderesis* is an innate disposition towards the good, this good necessarily requires fomenting by way of time and experience. Analogically, this good is potentially a primary knowledge in the human intellect and necessarily requires inchoative stimulation for its germ of truth, as it were, to come out from its shell. This is a logical consequence of that fact that as contingent and corporeal beings, knowledge is mediated by the physical body and its senses. This is the logical proof as to why *synderesis*, or human intellection for that matter, achieves its formal object *via media*, i.e., it is halfway between divine illumination and physical or sensory intellection. Owing to this, *synderesis* draws its epistemic materials from the social environment and nowhere else. If knowledge is divinely infused into the soul, this would defy the role of the human body in its natural constitution as

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<sup>33</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 85, a. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 85, a. 8.

a body-soul composite. Inversely, to give preponderance on knowledge being acquired solely by sensory cognition and thereby disregarding the inherent disposition of the human person towards the synderetic good is effectively negating the hylomorphic unicity of created beings.

The discussion so far has proposed that the dynamism of intellection is a process in a continuum passing from potentiality to actuality. Intellectual knowledge is always a potentiality anticipating actualisation by sensory stimuli. Being in a passive state, epistemic stimulation is necessary in order to facilitate human intellection, which for intent and purposes, may require series of repeated experiences for such intellection to be fully realised. Human intellection does not reach its perfection in an instant and may necessarily acquire it by degrees.

Interiorly governing the transition from potentiality to actuality is the necessity of time in the apprehension and formation of human knowledge. Aquinas firmly states that “composition and division of the intellect involve time.”<sup>35</sup> In this light, it is apt herein to raise an important query: *Does the human intellect instantly grasp the essence of a material object at the first instance of sensitive contact?* It would be difficult to understand that the human intellect would have such an innate capacity to grasp the *quiddity* of material object without considering factors such as time and experience. A child would not be able to immediately comprehend that the first person he or she sees at birth is a human being, let alone his or her biological father or mother. A child’s understanding of the human beings around him or her would require a growing experience that is punctuated by time and repeated experiences. Similarly, any human person would require time and experience in getting to know the person he or she wishes to marry.

### **The External and Internal Sensoria: *Materia causae***

#### The Sensory Intellective Process: General Overview

Aquinas, following the philosophy of the fourth century Stagirite, believes that nature itself has accorded every human person the necessary powers to cognise extramentally. This is, according to Thomism, a defining attribution which differentiates human agents from higher beings such as angels and lower beings such as non-rational animals. This cognitive power,

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<sup>35</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 85, a. 5.



apart from other inherent human powers considered within the order of created beings, holds a supreme value in the free and passionate pursuit of human fulfilment and perfection. Aquinas asserts the primacy of intellection which appears to govern the hierarchical ordering of created beings in their appetitive inclinations. His assertion of this primacy of being is well-established and widely known. He expresses this in terms of the moral agent's natural desire for knowledge: "[T]he proper operation of man as man is to understand.... Hence the desire of man is naturally inclined to understand."<sup>36</sup> Aquinas maintains that this natural desire for knowledge ultimately leads towards a desire for God which is expressive of the natural desire to understand the causes of things: "Man has a natural desire to know the causes of whatever he sees.... [M]an naturally desires, as his last end, to know the first cause. But God is the first cause of all. Therefore man's last end is to know God."<sup>37</sup>

In the Thomistic hierarchy of being, the human person is a body-soul unity who demonstrates a specific degree of intellection attributable to lower forms of spiritual beings and higher form of animals. Such noble placement in the *cognitive zeitgeist*<sup>38</sup> admits inherent limitations while simultaneously proffering the moral agent's potential viability for growth and development be it intellectually, volitionally or affectively. Nature's endowment assures the existence of the necessary resources which are meant to set the moral agent on the moral path towards human fulfilment and perfection. This path is complex and fluid, but the moral agent is pre-conditioned, as it were, to face the realities ahead. One of his spiritual endowments is the habit of *synderesis*. This is a most fundamental endowment since it is innate and immediately accessed, not to mention that it is available *in perpetuum*. But the grasp of the first principles is not like waking up in the morning knowing the Catholic Doctrine of Transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the real Body and Blood of Christ without prior recourse to some form of study or research. Gilson concisely describes this metaphysical process using the analogy of the light that is the *intellectus agens*:

The human intellect possesses therefore a light just sufficient in order to acquire the knowledge of intelligible to which it can raise itself by means of sensible things. In a certain sense, indeed, we possess in us the germ of all knowledge: *praexistunt in nobis quaedam scientiarum*

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Stagiritae*. trans. John P. Rowan, The Collected Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery Company, 1961), IntelLex Past Masters, lib. 1, lect. 1, sec. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. 3, cap. 25.

<sup>38</sup> Simon Kemp and J. O. Fletcher Garth, "The Medieval Theory of the Inner Senses," *The American Journal of Psychology* 106, no. 4 (1993): 572.

*semina*. These pre-formed seeds, of which we have natural knowledge, are first principles: *prima intelligibilia principia*. What characterises these principles is that they are the first conceptions which our intellect forms when we enter into contact with the sensible. To say that they pre-exist in the intellect is not to say that the intellect possesses them actually in itself, independently of the action which bodies exercise on our soul. It is simply to say that they are the first intelligibles which our intellect conceives starting immediately from sensible experience.<sup>39</sup>

Gilson's observation is consistent with the assumption of this thesis that the synderetic good is a formal principle that does not have material content until the human mind comes into contact with the extramental environment. His attribution to this as *first intelligibles* signifies the necessity of an external catalyst to bring about cognition. In this cognitive process that is defined by the body-soul unicity, the order involved in the apprehension of the first moral principles is mediated and initially processed by the external and internal sensoria. Though both of these sensoria are involved in the over-all cognitive process, perception, i.e., the processing of the acquired sense data, is the domain of the internal sensoria (internal senses).

The reality of phantasm, which contains the sensible species arising from the 'epistemic contact'<sup>40</sup> between the extramental object and the external-internal sensoria, denotes the intelligible species subsequently resulting after abstraction. As previously articulated, it is through the agency of the *intellectus agens* that the abstraction of the sensible species takes place by stripping off the accidental attributes attached to it in order to extract the universal factor, or *quiddity*, contained in the perceived extramental object. The resulting intelligible species is stored in the *intellectus possibilis* where it remains for further intellectual processing. At this stage, what is abstracted is the universal essence or quiddity of the extramental object. Since human knowing is specific or particular, Aquinas theorises what he calls *conversio ad phantasmata* (*turn to phantasm*) where the intellectual process 'returns' to the sensible materials earlier received by the external senses for the purpose of intelligibly identifying particularly and singularly that which was cognised earlier. The *turn to phantasm* fulfills the specification of the object perceived which the possible agent is unable to do so since it can only directly grasp the universal. Aquinas reminds us of this:

Our intellect cannot know the singular in material things directly and primarily. The reason of this is that the principle of singularity in

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<sup>39</sup> Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 215.

<sup>40</sup> Stump, *Aquinas*, 182-187.

material things is individual matter, whereas our intellect...understands by abstracting the intelligible species from such matter.<sup>41</sup>

In effect, if what is perceived initially is an orange fruit, ‘this orange fruit’ and not any other orange fruit is apprehended via *conversio ad phastasmata*. Underlying this example is the psychological fact that only the accidentals (material attributes such as colour, size, shape, etc.), and not the *quiddities* of material objects, are perceived and cognised. The apprehension of the universal is a metaphysical reality beyond perceptual knowing. This is evinced by Aquinas in the following teaching:

Whereas the proper object of the human intellect, which is united to a body, is a quiddity or nature existing in corporeal matter.... Now it belongs to such a nature to exist in an individual, and this cannot be apart from corporeal matter: for instance, it belongs to the nature of a stone to be in an individual stone, and to the nature of a horse to be in an individual horse, and so forth. Wherefore the nature of a stone or any material thing cannot be known completely and truly, except in as much as it is known as existing in the individual. Now we apprehend the individual through the senses and the imagination.<sup>42</sup>

The above discussion suffices for the delineation of what is called sensory cognition or sensitive intellection. What is crucially pertinent now is the study of the four internal sensoria: *sensus communis*, *vis cogitativa*, *vis memorativa*, and *vis imaginativa*. Among the four sensoria, the discussion below will specifically explore the faculties of memory and imagination in view of their role in the possible stimulation and ensuing formation of the practical good. The outcome of this exploration will serve as a foundation to the discussion on the beneficence of moral imagination in moral development.

#### The Four Internal Sensoria

Textual considerations regarding the external and internal sensoria are sourced from the *Prima pars* of the *Summa theologiae* and the *Commentary on Aristotle’s On the Soul (Quaestiones disputatae de anima)*. Although Aquinas deals with the internal sensoria in various places in

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<sup>41</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 86, a. 1.

<sup>42</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 84, a. 7.

many of his *obra maestra*, these two treatises provide more substantial and targeted discussions compared to the rest. It should be added that Aquinas appears not be heavily interested in treating this matter at length. The status of the internal sensoria as being only a pre-analytical phase in the intellectual process, hence pre-cognitive, may have been the underlying rationale why it did not receive any emphasis. The discussion below, however, will shed light on the importance of its role not only in cognition but in the broader spectrum of moral development.

Aquinas regards the four internal sensoria as organic senses. As organic senses, the brain is identified as the source of every sensorium's operations. Aquinas claims that their individual operations are performed as an organic whole geared towards producing consequently a phantasm (*phantasmata*) out of the extramental objects initially sensed by the external sensoria. Their operations are meant to serve the ultimate purpose of the human agent's desire for self-fulfilment and self-realisation. Gilson points out how nature itself supplies human life with the necessary structures to achieve these ends: "Nature neither makes beings in vain nor multiplies them needlessly. Yet she never refuses them anything they need. Therefore the sensitive soul must exercise as many operations as are required for the life of a perfect animal."<sup>43</sup> Thus, nature's generosity provides the basic ingredients for human agents to seek their perfection and fulfilment in life.

An important attribute of phantasms that is pertinent to and relative to the intellectual process is its potential nature. Since it bears the sensible species, phantasm is considered as potentially intelligible. This attribution underscores its essential status in the cognitive process whereby phantasms "are in potency with respect to the intelligible or intentional mode of existence which the essence must assume to be actually known by the intellect."<sup>44</sup> This statement effectively relativises phantasm as an intermediary between sensitive cognition and intellectual condition. Through the action of the *intellectus agens*, the sensible species is passed on to the *intellectus possibilis* after extracting the universal out of the sensible species. The intelligible species, which bears now the universal quality of the extramental object sensed earlier, possesses the intellected intention or the conceptualised image of the sensed object. The epistemic role of the *intellectus possibilis* appears over now since the sensible species has reached the terminus of the cognitive process. However, what remains to be determined is how does the intellect know the specificity of the cognised extramental object? In other words, how

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<sup>43</sup> Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 204.

<sup>44</sup> Gardeil, *Introduction to the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 130.

does the moral agent know particularly that ‘this orange’ is the actual orange that was perceived and not some other orange. The discussion below will explain the significance of the four internal sensoria in relation to the phenomenon of the *turn to phantasm* which accounts for the knowledge of particulars.

### *Common Sense (Sensus communis)*

Among the four internal sensoria, it is the role of common or proper sense (*sensus communis*) to bring together and coordinate all the external stimuli that have left their impressions on the external sensoria. It is on this basis that Aquinas aptly describes common sense as the “common root and principle of the exterior senses.”<sup>45</sup> Tasked to undertake the over-all coordination of the four internal sensoria, common sense exercises discernment and judgment. It discerns, for example, whether the object being perceived is red or blue in colour. Likewise, it judges, for example, whether what is being tasted is sweet or salty. Due to these functions, Aquinas confirms that “all apprehensions of the senses must be referred”<sup>46</sup> to the common sense. Moreover, common sense coordinates all external stimuli by serving as a ‘hub’ to all traffic within the internal sensoria processes. For example, it coordinates with *vis cogitativa* in determining whether what is being perceived is beneficial or harmful to the human agent. It would also relate with *vis memorativa* and *vis imaginativa* in drawing from their stored wealth of knowledge in identifying objects being sensed. On account of the above, Robert Edward Brennan, OP describes common sense as “the foundation and meeting ground of all the external senses.”<sup>47</sup>

Contrary to the popular understanding of common sense as something like a knack for seeing things as they are, and, doing things as they ought to be done, common sense in Thomism represents some type of a ‘central processing unit’ where the apprehension of impressions acquired by the different senses are synthesized and discriminated. An interesting function of the common sense is its ability to sense that it is sensing. This reflexive ability enables common sense to be dynamically aware of its processes in relation to the social environment. In this respect, Brennan pinpoints that “in the very act of perceiving an objective world, we also

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<sup>45</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 78, a. 4, ad. 1.

<sup>46</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 78, a. 4, ad. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Edward Brennan, OP, *Thomistic Psychology: A Philosophic Analysis of the Nature of Man* (NY: The Macmillan Company, 1941), 14.

perceive a subjective world.”<sup>48</sup> This statement discloses the nature of common sense as being dynamic and active, not passive, since it incites an internal movement determining a reactive response to perceived external stimuli. The dynamics of the impact of external stimuli upon internal receptors will be elaborated from the perspective of psychology in the ensuing chapters.

### *Memory (Vis memorativa)*

When primary school-aged children return home, they will probably tell their parents their experiences at school. They will use their memory (*vis memorativa*) to remember and reminisce about what they had *seen* and had done at school. Aquinas ascribes to human memory the capacity to “apprehend a thing not only at the actual time of sensation, but also when it is absent.”<sup>49</sup> The inner sense of memory is an image-forming power that enables human agents to remember (*reproductive*) or to reminisce a past event in a rather syllogistic manner (*recollective*). Since it requires walking down the memory lane, memory requires the aid of the intellect but only incidentally since it is largely the activity of the re-presentative sense to produce memory of past events.<sup>50</sup> In contrast to memory, which is a recalling of a past event, to reminisce, according to Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, is “not remembering a fact that has been learned, but rather like reliving in memory a past experience.”<sup>51</sup>

A note needs to be stated regarding the difference between sensitive memory and intellectual memory. Sensitive memory is peculiar to the internal sensoria while the intellectual memory pertains to the realm of the *intellectus possibilis*. Stump makes the commentary that intellectual memory is similar to sensitive memory although without the imagery. The presence of imagery is not accorded to the *intellectus possibilis* since it maintains only *universals* or *quiddities*. Imagery is relative to phantasms which are mental representations of sensed extramental objects. On the nature of the sensitive memory, she makes the further remark that “memory at this level would consist of something like replaying the internal movie of previous sensory experience, though with some phenomenological indication that the sensory experience being

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<sup>48</sup> Brennan, OP, *A Philosophic Analysis of the Nature of Man*, 15.

<sup>49</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 78, a. 4.

<sup>50</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 79, a. 7; also, I, q. 78, a. 4.

<sup>51</sup> Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, “Imagination and Theology in Thomas Aquinas,” *Louvain Studies* 34 (2009): 172

reviewed is a past experience.”<sup>52</sup> As will be referred to below, cogitative sense is co-extensive with memory in the sense that its evaluation of perceived sensibles is recalled or reminisced by memory.

### *Imagination (Vis imaginativa)*

The discussion on *vis memorativa* introduces the topic on imagination (*vis imaginativa*) since both are co-extensive. Such would be helpful since Aquinas’s “account of the imagination is somewhat frustrating in its austerity. If one combs through his works looking for the term *imagination* or its synonym *phantasia*, one finds little or no reference to [it].”<sup>53</sup> Be that as it may, Aquinas makes the determination to consider imagination as one of the interior senses:

As to the memorative power, man has not only memory, as other animals have in the sudden recollection of the past; but also "reminiscence" by syllogistically, as it were, seeking for a recollection of the past by the application of individual intentions. Avicenna, however, assigns between the estimative and the imaginative, a fifth power, which combines and divides imaginary forms: as when from the imaginary form of gold, and imaginary form of a mountain, we compose the one form of a golden mountain, which we have never seen. But this operation is not to be found in animals other than man, in whom the imaginative power suffices thereto.<sup>54</sup>

Insinuating a later discussion, this thesis characterises Aquinas’s treatment of imagination as seminal in respect to his specific teaching on prudence. The arguments supporting this position will be articulated in the proceeding chapters. Moreover, scientific research in psychology will prove to be pivotal in re-shaping the human understanding of the beneficence of moral imagination in the ethical assessments of human conditions and situations.

There is certainly potential in Aquinas’s teaching on imagination most specifically when considered as a necessary faculty in prudential moral inquiry. There is no shortage of commentators who have highlighted, directly or indirectly, this potential. On account of his reflection on the work of Aquinas, Brennan identifies two imaginal operations:

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<sup>52</sup> Stump, *Aquinas*, 260.

<sup>53</sup> Bauerschmidt, “Imagination and Theology in Thomas Aquinas,” 169.

<sup>54</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 78, a. 4.

the first a function of purely sensitive imagination, where original experiences are reproduced just as they occurred; the second a function of logistic or dianoetic imagination, sometimes referred to as deliberative imagination, wherein insight and control are exercised to produce images of things that never really occurred, or never happened in the manner that they are picture.<sup>55</sup>

In view of the above text, Pasnau explicates that *vis imaginativa* is one imaginal power where the mind exercises control over the sensory appetites principally owing to its freedom to produce what it intends to imagine. Although the epistemic materials are obtained extramentally, “the mind controls this avenue of stimulation.”<sup>56</sup> Later in this thesis, it will be demonstrated how the mind can be adversely influenced by passions in producing irrational thoughts.

Imagination’s operation of receiving and conserving sense impressions transmitted by common sense broadly manifests its relation to memory. Reproductive imagination appears static just like memory where its phantasms are like ‘stored items’ available to be drawn from its storehouses when required. Creative imagination, on the other hand, presents a more dynamic operation of creating a mental image in the absence of sensed extramental objects. Two things need to be pointed out on account of the latter: firstly, because it is impossible to imagine things that have not been imagined before, imagination presupposes an “[accumulation] of certain original impressions from the exercise of our external senses.”<sup>57</sup> Imagination in this respect employs the second operation of the intellect called *compositio et divisio* in forming phantasms by combining different elements of previous impressions never before executed to produce a new imagined image or phantasm. Fiction stories and sci-fi alien creatures would be good examples of putting together realistic elements from various sensory-base experiences to produce images that are actually non-existent. One might expect that the image of God of an avid Bible-reader would be different from someone who has hardly read the Holy Scriptures. Secondly, since what was put before a human agent’s consciousness is no longer present to the exterior senses, the phantasm is less distinct than the previously sensed original matter. Thus, “imagination suffers from certain inexactitudes and failures of details”<sup>58</sup> as compared to the original sensed matter. Both forms of imagination endure this limitation since phantasms are

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<sup>55</sup> Brennan, OP, *A Philosophic Analysis of the Nature of Man*, 18.

<sup>56</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 258.

<sup>57</sup> Brennan, OP, *A Philosophic Analysis of the Nature of Man*, 126.

<sup>58</sup> Brennan, OP, *A Philosophic Analysis of the Nature of Man*, 128.



“more or less exact copies of original experience.”<sup>59</sup> The recourse to the original experience is undertaken to verify its details accurately. The uncertainty that is experienced due to imagination’s inexactitudes is complemented by data drawn from memory.

Alongside its task of forming perceptual images of previously sensed impressions, imagination also acts as a storehouse of images accrued from perceptual experiences:

Thus, therefore, for the reception of sensible forms, the ‘proper sense’ and the ‘common sense’ are appointed.... But for the retention and preservation of these forms, the ‘phantasy’ or ‘imagination’ is appointed; which are the same, for phantasy or imagination is as it were a storehouse of forms received through the senses.<sup>60</sup>

The conservation function of imagination is apparently for future use.<sup>61</sup> The notion of imagination is intimately linked to virtue in the sense that human agents can imagine themselves doing virtuous acts done by other people. Although this link was intimated by Aquinas, it will, however, be demonstrated in the ensuing chapters that moral imagination has a particularly significant function in the moral assessment undertaken by the virtue of prudence. This is one consideration that has escaped the consideration of Aquinas in his teaching on the various properties of prudence. The moral formation of the younger generation will benefit from imaginatively reflecting on the role-modelling by adult members of the community. The Epistle to the Hebrews attests to this significance: “Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.”<sup>62</sup>

### *Cogitative Sense (Vis cogitativa)*

Aquinas drew up his concept of *vis cogitativa* by understanding rational and instinctual recognition of harm or danger, pleasure or displeasure between humans and animals. He observes that animals operate instinctively in determining the presence of danger and pleasant stimuli. He cites the example of a sheep who *sees* danger upon the sight of a wolf and the bird who gathers straw to make a nest. This instinctive capacity in animals is governed by the

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<sup>59</sup> Brennan, OP, *A Philosophic Analysis of the Nature of Man*, 127.

<sup>60</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 78, a. 4.

<sup>61</sup> See Robert Edward Brennan, OP, “The Thomistic Concept of Imagination,” *The New Scholasticism* 15, no. 2 (1941): 152-153.

<sup>62</sup> Heb 13:7.

estimative power. Being instinctual in nature, the sheep, for example, does not have the capacity to rationalise or think about what danger or pleasurable is present at hand. Birds, on the other hand, when gathering straws for making a nest, perceive the usefulness of straws since it protects their brood from prey. Animals react to random situations via the determination of incidental sensibles which are not sensed *per se* (or cognised) but rather derived from other perceived qualities of sensed objects. A sheep perceives a wolf as wolf and not a wolf that poses a danger to its life. Birds would not have a clue how straws exactly protect its brood. By virtue of their gathered instinctual experiences which Aquinas refers to as ‘collation of ideas,’ animals are able to put together bits of experiential data to determine their reaction. Animals therefore compose and divide elements of past experiences to generate an instinctive non-evaluative understanding of a situation.

In humans, the estimative sense is the cogitative sense (*vis cogitativa*). The examples cited above descriptively apply to human experiences particularly in conjunction with memory. Gerrity Benignus confirms this co-relationship:

[T]he cogitative power and memory connect our repeated experiences together, and so give rise to ‘experience’ in the broader meaning of the term, namely, the knowledge or skill which arises from repeated contacts with a certain kind of object – as when we speak of an ‘experienced man.’<sup>63</sup>

The main difference between the cogitative and estimative senses is the evident fact that rational creatures are able to rationally analyse sensory inputs and not depend solely on instinct. The cogitative sense creates phantasms of what danger or pleasure look like. At the back of all these is the reality of *experience* impinging on the human senses informing it of certain sensory knowledge available extramentally for immediate use or for proper storehousing.

Studying the cogitative sense from the perspective of the passions, Pasnau elucidates the power of this sense to enable human agents to perceive individual objects.<sup>64</sup> He cites the example of the fear of spiders. Passions incite fear when one sees a spider crawling on the wall which cogitative sense recognises as a particular experience. However, the (universal) mind directs the cogitative sense by making it realise that the perceived spider is merely one among many

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<sup>63</sup> Benignus Brother Gerrity, *Nature, Knowledge, and God: An Introduction to Thomistic Philosophy* (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing Company, 1947), 214.

<sup>64</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 257-258.

spiders, in fact, one among larger and more venomous ones. This explanation echoes Lisska's delineation of the functions of the cogitative sense: "to be aware of an individual as an individual; to recognise an individual as a member of a kind."<sup>65</sup>

*Vis cogitativa* is also credited for preparing the phantasm for the act of abstraction owing to its relationship with the intellect.<sup>66</sup> The content of this process is beyond the limits of this thesis but it is important to remember that the cogitative sense "performs these functions...under the direction of the intellect."<sup>67</sup> Important maybe the operational role of *vis cogitativa* in sensitive cognition and in the transition from it towards intellective cognition, Flaherty is correct in asserting that "St. Thomas has insisted with us on the necessity of the *vis cogitativa* to prepare a suitable phantasm [but] he has not said *how* this preparation is accomplished."<sup>68</sup> That said, the relevance and the necessity of *vis cogitativa* is unequivocally confirmed by Aquinas. It is clearly evident that the cogitative sense poses as an important internal sense when it comes to the determination of the specificity and particularity of the cognised matters due fundamentally to its capacity for *compositio et divisio*. There is no real epistemology without actually arriving at the specific cognition of singular matters. The *knowledge of singular* is the practical expression of hylomorphism of which rational beings have the innate capacity to acquire.

#### Phantasm as *Materia causae*

This sub-section succinctly explores the nature of phantasms (sensible knowledge) as the material cause (*materia causae*) of intellectual knowledge. As asserted earlier, the knowledge of the first principles of natural law is partly dependent on the material world for its content. Through epistemic contact with the extramental world, data are introduced to the human intellect for intellective processing. While Aquinas asserts that "to be cognizant of the natures of sensible qualities does not pertain to the senses, but to the intellect,"<sup>69</sup> he likewise concurs that:

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<sup>65</sup> Lisska, *Aquinas's Theory of Perception: An Analytic Reconstruction*, 249.

<sup>66</sup> Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. 2, cap. 73.

<sup>67</sup> Daniel Leo Flaherty, "The Function of the *Vis Cogitativa* in Preparing the Phantasm for the Act of Abstraction According to St. Thomas Aquinas" (Master of Arts, Loyola University Chicago, 1956), 19, [https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_theses/1387](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/1387) (1387).

<sup>68</sup> Flaherty, "*Vis Cogitativa* in Preparing the Phantasm for the Act of Abstraction," 33.

<sup>69</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 78, a. 3.

[I]ntellectual knowledge is caused by the senses. But since the phantasms cannot of themselves affect the passive intellect, and require to be made actually intelligible by the active intellect, it cannot be said that sensible knowledge is the total and perfect cause of intellectual knowledge, but rather that it is in a way the **material cause** (*materia causae*).<sup>70</sup>

What Aquinas is saying is that sensible knowledge is untenable without the service of material causes by which phantasms largely depend for their contents. Aquinas metaphorically alludes to the external organs as being “awakened by them (sensible objects) to the consideration of things”<sup>71</sup> to commence the process of intellection. Since knowledge mainly originates from the sensitive world<sup>72</sup> (with imagination accounting for the other source),<sup>73</sup> phantasms are non-existent if the extramental world is devoid of any materiality. Aquinas makes this important philosophical determination: “[W]e actually feel or know a thing...because our intellect or sense is actually informed by the sensible or intelligible species.”<sup>74</sup>

Cognitively, sensitive knowledge is a precursor to intellective knowledge since “sensitive knowledge is necessary to the soul.”<sup>75</sup> Conceptualisation, which is the point when the intellective process apprehends extramental objects, will fail to occur without the initial sense-perception whereby the sensible species emanating from the epistemic contact between the internal senses and the impinging effect of an extramental objects on the sensory organs is consummated. Aquinas summarises this process in these words: “For one cognitive power, namely, the sense, is the act of a corporeal organ.”<sup>76</sup>

Phantasms can be described as epistemic instruments in the intellective process. As likeness (*similitudo*)<sup>77</sup> of perceived sensible objects, phantasms bear the accidental qualities of sensed objects, albeit undefined and yet-to-be-cognised. Aquinas explains that “[t]he thing understood

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<sup>70</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 84, a. 6. “*Secundum hoc ergo, ex parte phantasmatum intellectualis operatio a sensu causatur. Sed quia phantasmata non sufficiunt immutare intellectum possibilem, sed oportet quod fiant intelligibilia actu per intellectum agentem; non potest dici quod sensibilis cognitio sit totalis et perfecta causa intellectualis cognitionis, sed magis quodammodo est materia causae.*” (Emphasis mine)

<sup>71</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 84, a. 4. (Insert mine)

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 84, a. 6, ad. 3. “Sensitive knowledge is not the entire cause of intellectual knowledge.”

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 84, a. 6, ad. 2.

<sup>74</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 14, a. 2.

<sup>75</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 84, a. 4.

<sup>76</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 8, a. 1.

<sup>77</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 85, a. 2, ad. 1. “*Dicendum quod intellectum est in intelligente per suam similitudinem. Et per hunc modum dicitur quod intellectum in actu est intellectus in actu, in quantum similitudo rei intellectae est forma intellectus; sicut similitudo rei sensibilis est forma sensus in actu. Unde non sequitur quod species intelligibilis abstracta sit id quod actu intelligitur, sed quod sit similitudo eius.*” (Emphasis mine)

is in the intellect by its own likeness.”<sup>78</sup> Evidently, sensed objects could only be present in the intellect as a *likeness* and not as the actual object that is sensed. Gilson provides his commentary on the Thomistic assertion that the role of phantasms is merely instrumental in the cognitive process: “It is important to emphasize that a sensible *species* is not itself what is sensed. Instead **it is the means by which** the senses sense extramental things.”<sup>79</sup>

The instrumentality of phantasms in the intellectual cognition is specifically important because it carries the material specifications of sensed objects. In Scholastic theology, these are considered as the accidentals of material substances. In the intellectual procession where the *turn to phantasms* is metaphysically undertaken, phantasms provide the material determination to the universal quiddities abstracted from the intelligible species. The *turn to phantasms* is Aquinas’s solution to the question on the particularity of sensed objects considering that the “intellect has the universal for its object.”<sup>80</sup> The phantasms produced by memory, imagination and cogitative sense all contribute to the intellectual process of concretely defining a specific concept or idea.<sup>81</sup>

### ***Conversio ad phantasmata* (Turn to Phantasm)**

From sensing an extramental object impressing on the external senses to the resulting production of sensible species, to its ensuing abstraction by the *intellectus agens*, and reaching towards its passage towards the *intellectus possibilis*, Aquinas presents the goal and purpose of human intellection: the understanding of sensible objects by way of producing their corresponding concepts or ideas in the human mind. But what really brings about the cognition of such material objects as they exist and not merely in their universal *quiddity*? What makes a human person cognise *this* mango, and not that mango? Aquinas answers these quandaries by propounding the principle of *conversio ad phantasmata* (*turn to phantasm*).

Aquinas is unambiguous in stating that owing to the doctrine of hylomorphism, the *turn to phantasm* is an essential process in intellectual cognition. He clearly states: “In the present state

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<sup>78</sup> Brennan, OP, *A Philosophic Analysis of the Nature of Man*, 231.

<sup>79</sup> Stump, *Aquinas*, 249. (Emphasis mine)

<sup>80</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 85, a. 3.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 85, a. 7; Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 18, a. 8, ad. 5. See also James B. South, “Intellectual Knowledge of Material Particulars in Thomas Aquinas: An Introduction,” in *Aquinas on Mind and Intellect: New Essays*, ed. Jeremiah Hackett (Oakdale, NY: Dowling College Press, 1996), footnote 8.

of life in which the soul is united to a passible body, **it is impossible for our intellect to understand anything actually, except by turning to the phantasms.**<sup>82</sup> If what is in the intellect is universal quiddities, the *turn to phantasms* realises the full process of cognition where the identification of the actual sensed object is specified, not in its universal state, but rather, in its particularity.

Aquinas recognises the *epistemic limit* that is expressed by his anthropology (hylomorphism), notably on the impossibility of the intellect to directly cognise particulars:

Our intellect cannot know the singular in material things directly and primarily. The reason of this is that the principle of singularity in material things is individual matter, whereas our intellect...understands by abstracting the intelligible species from such matter. Now what is abstracted from individual matter is the universal. Hence our intellect knows directly the universal only.<sup>83</sup>

The empirical constraints mentioned above shed light on the importance of the intellect to *turn to phantasm*. Unlike angels who are spiritual in nature,<sup>84</sup> human creatures as corporeal beings necessarily have to avail of phantasms in order to cognise perceived objects. The *turn to phantasm* is considered an essential step in the cognitive act for without it, the human agent will never really know anything. Knowledge is gained though not just by the intellect alone but by the whole rational person. Body and soul work as a tandem in constituting an understanding of human agency and the social environment. Stump aptly describes this cooperative act: “An intellect is not identical with a human person, and the knower is the human person, not the intellect alone.”<sup>85</sup>

In concert with the Angelic Doctor, this thesis has been underlining the importance of Aquinas’s doctrine of hylomorphism as the underlying principle in his epistemology. It is really on this basis that human intellection is not possible outside the body-soul concept. Aquinas aptly describes this human limitation in intellectual cognition in the following words: “[T]he object of knowledge is proportionate to the power of knowledge.”<sup>86</sup> The principle of individuality further defines this limit.<sup>87</sup> This principle apparently expresses the parameters of

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<sup>82</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 84, a. 7. (Emphasis mine)

<sup>83</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 86, a. 1.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 57, aa. 1-2.

<sup>85</sup> Stump, *Aquinas*, 273.

<sup>86</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 85, a. 1.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 85, a. 1.

human cognition as being governed by the spiritual nature of the rational soul and the corporeality of the human body.

In his study of Thomistic epistemology, James South elucidates the given human condition that necessitates the cognition of particulars beyond the universals. Firstly, he affirms the empirical propensity of Thomistic theology: “The mediating role of sensation is central to Thomas’s account of cognition.”<sup>88</sup> Secondly, reflecting on the relationship between the intellect and sensible powers, Aquinas introduces the concept of ‘participation’ in explaining the necessity of the metaphysical phenomenon of *turn to phantasm*. Citing the Aquinian text in *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, South presents his argument which he labels as “the rule of Dionysius” or the “axiom of continuity”:

The cogitative power is that which is highest in the sensitive part of man, and, thus, sense in some way comes in contact with the intellectual part so that it participates in something of that which is lowest in the intellectual part, namely, discursive reason. This is in accord with the rule of Dionysius...that contact is established where the lower begins and the higher leaves off.<sup>89</sup>

The *rule of Dionysius* or the *axiom of continuity* is grounded on the Thomistic hierarchy of beings. In each of the different levels of being, its top end touches the lower end of a higher entity while its lower end touches the top end of a lower entity. South makes his case using this order of continuity to explain the relationship and association between the immaterial intellect and sensory organs:

The immaterial intellect is continuous with the sensitive soul which in turn is continuous with the external physical world. It is this continuity that can account both for the general relationship between sense and intellect as well as the more specific issue of the intellectual knowledge of the material singular.<sup>90</sup>

The general relationship between sense power and intellectual power is best exemplified by the joint causality exercised by the agent intellect and phantasm in the production of the

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<sup>88</sup> South, “Intellectual Knowledge of Material Particulars in Thomas Aquinas,” 86.

<sup>89</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 1.

<sup>90</sup> South, “Intellectual Knowledge of Material Particulars in Thomas Aquinas,” 100-101.

intelligible species. It is the hierarchy of powers in which the lower power is in continuity with the higher power through participation that accounts for this relationship.

In addition, he concludes with the following insight:

The continuity between phantasms and the intelligible species produced by the agent intellect allows the potential intellect to “reflect” back on the phantasm. This reflection provides us with our knowledge of the singular. It is the phantasm, the product of internal sensory processes, that provides the likeness of the material object. This phantasm, in turn, provides the causal connection between the material object and the intellect. This connection allows the intellect to make judgments about and have knowledge of material singulars.<sup>91</sup>

Evident from the discussion above is the fact that knowledge that is obtained by human agents is knowledge secured not by reason alone. Human knowledge is mediated since the human person is body and soul and the unicity with which the human person operates is dictated and guided by it. Understanding of this sort is necessarily underlined by the principle of individuation. The human person, as a rational being, responds personally and more than just intellectually to various stimuli present in the environment. The capacity of human agents to respond to stimuli, both internally (neurobiologically) and externally (socially), will be discussed in the ensuing chapters. Human responses indicate human potentials since potency and act are correlative terms in Thomistic moral philosophy.

## Summary

According to Thomistic epistemology, the apprehension of the practical good by *synderesis* is inchoately undertaken through an intellective process involving the cognitive and appetitive faculties. Underscored by the body-soul reality (hylomorphic), this process is both intuitive and apprehensive in nature. The intuitive process is governed by the *intellectus agens* which is responsible for awakening the natural disposition towards discovering the good that is morally complete and perfective of human agents. The apprehensive process, on the other hand, involves sensory experience which instantaneously activates the innate moral disposition that

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<sup>91</sup> South, “Intellectual Knowledge of Material Particulars in Thomas Aquinas,” 101-102. See also George Peter Klubertanz, SJ, *The Discursive Power: Sources and Doctrine of the Vis Cogitativa According to St. Thomas Aquinas* (St. Louis, MI: The Modern Schoolman, 1952), 290-295.



is *synderesis*. The intuitive apprehension of the first principles of natural law by *synderesis*, however, requires time and experience for these principles to be made fully intelligible by the human mind and imagination. The time and experience involved in this intellectual process are responsible for the material contents of phantasms which Aquinas construes as the likeness of sensed objects. If phantasms are rich in moral contents, there is greater likelihood for the moral good to develop and to guide moral conduct.

Moral content that is invested with time and experience contributes to the ongoing formation of the human understanding of the perfective good and the inchoative development of the same moral good that is potentially transformative of the human moral condition. In the intellectual process, these material contents are received, processed and stored by the interior senses - notably by memory, imagination and cogitative sense - as phantasms. Imagination's phantasms particularly allow for moral growth to mature through composition and division of priorly sensed concepts or ideas. Cognition is mediated by the internal senses which participate in various critical ways, most especially the acquisition of material causes for intellectual knowledge to materialise. Further, the metaphysical phenomenon of the *conversio ad phantasmata* specifies the importance of enriching the contents of phantasms since when the intellect *turns to phantasms*, the contents are present to be singularly identified as determinants to human flourishing. In this respect, phantasms serve as *materia causae* for the intellection of the practical good. When this occurs, it guarantees that, at least intellectually, the human agent is exposed to the basic rational experience of the moral good. Beyond this fundamental exposure, the human agent must acquire moral virtues to actually engage in moral flourishing.

## Chapter 6

### *Synderesis* and the ‘Perfecting’ Virtue of Prudence

#### **Introduction**

Moral agents, having lost their full integrity due to original sin, experience the pervasive interior assault on a now weakened will (*akrasia*).<sup>1</sup> What saves moral agents from further moral harm, at least in principle, is the given reality of *synderesis* which guarantees the persisting spiritual link between God and them. *Synderesis* guarantees a moral foundation upon which moral agency can evolve from merely performing acts of men and women to virtuously demonstrating human acts befitting of an *imago Dei*. When human agents are allowed to grow in an optimal virtuous environment, such condition facilitates *synderesis* to fulfill its task of naturally seeking the perfective good. Aquinas points out the *telos* of human acts: “Happiness is man’s true good” (“*Beatitudo est verum hominis bonum*”).<sup>2</sup>

As a moral foundation, *synderesis* must be practically and materially assisted for it to mature and to reach its potential. It must be provided with all the necessary avenues within the grasp of the human power in order for the good which it intuitively apprehends undergoes the process of continual actualisation and maturation. It is materially incoherent to assert that the human person is in possession of *synderesis* when the moral good that it inclines to could not be sustained by a realistic prospect of inchoation. Human perfection is in a causal motion when a

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<sup>1</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas asserts that due to sin, humanity’s first parents have lost a firm grasp of their free-will thereby rendering their actions capable of opposing what reasons dictate. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 83, a. 2. “Man is said to have lost free-will by falling into sin, not as to natural liberty, which is freedom from coercion, but as regards freedom from fault and unhappiness.”

<sup>2</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 2, a. 3.

personal commitment to perfection is undertaken: “one is said to be in the state of perfection, not through having the act of perfect love, but through binding himself in perpetuity and with a certain solemnity to those things that pertain to perfection.”<sup>3</sup> Alongside, the human project must necessarily flee from a mere abstractive and presumptive conception of the good and commit rather towards an adherence to a moral lifestyle befitting genuine human nature.

This chapter specifically discusses the nature and significance of acquired moral virtues in moral development. It presupposes that authentic human acts engender the actualisation of human potentials in acquiring the perfective telic ends. Aquinas’s conceptualisation of virtue as “a power of the soul...which implies perfection of power”<sup>4</sup> explicitly implies the human capacity for moral development (self-movement). Virtue habituation expresses the human commitment to act out human potentials to bring about the desired natural and supernatural ends. Both of these ends are understood as modes of perfection in varying degrees and are construed as a participation in the life of God. Supernatural ends though require the benefit of infused grace while natural ends may be realised even without a personal articulated faith in God. As previously stressed, the latter perspective is thematically accommodated in this thesis in order to broadly highlight the potentials of every and any human agent to achieve their natural perfection.

Human nature possesses certain limits which impact on the human propensities to acquire the moral virtues. External factors may adversely affect the human intent to seek self-fulfilment and self-perfection, hence, the need to cultivate human virtues. The acquisition of moral virtues assists human agents in their formation and in their information about the moral path that will truly lead them to their perfection and fulfilment. Prudence is the virtue that integrally assists human agents in making moral inquiries on the basis of their knowledge of the first principles of natural law. It will be argued that Aquinas’s teaching on prudential counsel or inquiry could be further developed by including imagination as one of its quasi-integral parts. When human agents employ their imagination, moral judgments are given more latitude in securing the moral truth since due consideration of both universal moral principles and the contingent human conditions are undertaken prior to moral judgment.

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<sup>3</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 184, a. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 56, a. 1.

## Moral Development as ‘Self-Movement’

The late French philosopher Étienne Henri Gilson contends that: “Man is placed on a frontier where the world of spirits and the world of bodies meet. The powers of both must necessarily belong to him.”<sup>5</sup> The inherent juxtaposition of these human powers accords all human agents the potency to act as moral agents who are capable of operating within human limited powers to achieve self-transcendence. What is profoundly propitious in the hylomorphic unicity of the body and soul is the natural capacity of the soul to act as the principle of operation that enables human transformation. Gilson points this out by reflecting on Aquinas’s anthropology: “The notion of the soul is much wider than that of the human soul. In its wide sense soul is defined as the first act of an organised body capable of performing functions of life.”<sup>6</sup> For human agents to achieve both natural (proximate) and supernatural (remote) ends as fruits of their natural ordination, they must necessarily embody the moral virtues.

The Thomistic human person, in view of the connaturality and co-operation of both *inclinatio naturalis* and *synderesis*, is capable of potentially developing and maturing into an agent of morality. Moral agency pertains to the dynamic human capacity to engage and be transformed by human efforts under the grace of God. These human activities define moral agents as people who are reasonable, willful and passionate about acting in view of perfecting that which they are potentially capable. Aquinas, quoting Damascene in the *Prologue* of his *Treatise on the Last End*, promotes the inherent qualities of the moral agent as an intelligent rational being “endowed with free-will and self-movement.”<sup>7</sup> This Damascenian definition of the human person duly notes the specific connaturality between reason and will in promoting authentic self-movement. As previously noted of Aquinas’s theological persuasion, it is primarily upon the influence of reason that human efforts are transposed to something more than just being an *act of man* to becoming a *human act*.<sup>8</sup>

The abovementioned *inclinatio naturalis* of the human person particularly bespeaks of the pre-determination of human initiatives whereby its formal object points to the *beatific vision* as its

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<sup>5</sup> Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 200.

<sup>6</sup> Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 187.

<sup>7</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, pr.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 1.

ultimate goal. *Synderesis* grounds the procession from acts of men and women to human acts by supplying the primordial habitual disposition that infallibly gravitates the human person towards the first principles of natural law. While the human person's *telos* is pre-determined, the progression towards its realisation, however, is not. The habituation of moral virtues as indicative of self-movement presents itself as a necessary stage in moral development. Virtues are considered as *conditio sine qua non* in the human passage towards perfecting basic human nature. While self-movement is categorically an inherent quality that defines the moral agent, it is more so a crucially promising phenomenon, i.e., it is *the* potentially perfective human project that foreshadows-only the attainment of the yet-to-be-realised-happiness (*beatific vision*). The post-lapsarian human limitation did not stop Aquinas from persistently affirming the pertinence of *synderesis* despite of the original sin's mystifying transmission of its effects from generation to generation: "Sin blots out the law of nature...in particular cases, not universally, except perchance in regard to the secondary precepts of the natural law."<sup>9</sup> The self-movement relating to the application of the synderetic first principles to particular situations remains in effect, however, it does preclude this persistence when it comes to the application of secondary principles, i.e., principles derived from the first principles.<sup>10</sup> On the basis of the development of human morality as self-movement where an impediment concurrently exists and whereby this privation is understood as such rather an inherent human quality, the natural disposition towards the perfective good subsists:

As to those general principles, the natural law, in the abstract, can nowise be blotted out from men's hearts. But it is blotted out in the case of a particular action, in so far as reason is hindered from applying the general principle to a particular point of practice, on account of concupiscence or some other passion.<sup>11</sup>

Aquinas further qualifies this privation that impedes the secondary principles from realising perfective human acts: "[when it comes to] the secondary precepts, the natural law can be blotted out from the human heart, either by evil persuasions...or by vicious customs and corrupt habits...and even unnatural vices."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 6.

<sup>10</sup> The exclusion of the secondary moral principles, those principles derived from first moral principles, is premised on the Thomistic claim that the first moral principles are infallible while secondary moral principles are not. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 6.

In possession of the natural capacity for self-movement, the human agent's commitment towards moral self-development is vitally guided by certain "principles of action"<sup>13</sup> called virtues that potentially catalyse and help actuate the full maturation and development of moral potentials. As *inclinatio naturalis* orders the human agents' moral development according to their nature,<sup>14</sup> *synderesis*, on the other hand, provides cognitive apprehension of these first principles of natural law through which it apprehends the good via its nature as a "habit that contains the precepts of the natural law."<sup>15</sup> While in principle the human pursuit of the good end and the end's good is well-stated by Aquinas, it should be clear by now that in all of these articulations, self-movement must specifically be understood as a potential rather than a determinate reality. If evil persuasions, vicious customs, corrupt habits and unnatural vices vitiate the moral self-movement of human agents, it would be perfective embodiment of virtues itself that would stymie the corrupting influence of vices that impede moral growth. Properly speaking then, in view of its correlation with natural inclination and *synderesis*, acts of virtues, which determine and express the active meaning of self-movement, adhere to natural law in ordering human activities towards the perfective good. Henceforth, since "natural law belongs everything to which a man is inclined according to his nature,"<sup>16</sup> Aquinas unequivocally professes that:

there is in every man a natural inclination to act according to reason: and this is to act according to virtue. Consequently, considered thus, all acts of virtue are prescribed by the natural law: since each one's reason naturally dictates to him to act virtuously.<sup>17</sup>

Since natural law prescribes acts of virtue in self-movements that are perfective of the nature of the human agent, virtues then are considered essential pathways through which moral self-movement is advanced. In order for human nature to be perfected, virtues must be regarded as indispensable dispositions in seeking the good end and the end's good. Thereto, if human agents desire to be happy and to be in eternal union with God, they need to live a virtuous life.

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<sup>13</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 3.

As Holy Scriptures attest in proclaiming the Beatitudes: “Happy are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Constitutive Elements of the Thomistic Moral Development**

Virtues are providential and necessary since they orient humanity’s “feigned ignorance and hardness of heart”<sup>19</sup> towards authentic moral development. When the formation of human morality is accorded with diligence and perseverance, such feigned ignorance will be enlightened by the infallibility of the *synderesis*. Eventually, the hardness of heart is supplanted by habitual virtues that consequently conform human dispositions to the existential order with which nature and reason call forth. When human agents invest in moral development, “nature provides things not merely with the *end* that they are ordered to, but with the very principles that allow them to arrive at those *ends*.”<sup>20</sup> Notwithstanding, *synderesis*, limited by its own nature as a universal principle, needs the facility of rational inquiry for its principles to be applied in concrete situations: “For we arrive by the inquiry of reason from universal principles to particular applications.”<sup>21</sup>

Throughout a moral agent’s moral development, the human self undergoes a lifespan of dispositional transformations that anticipates the formation of an aptitude for moral understanding and moral reasoning. Considering the Thomistic pre-eminence of rational operation in the human pursuit for self-transcendence, the ensuing discussion on moral development theorises upon the various realities which influence the cognition of the practical good, viz., the generation of habits and virtues, the ethical formation effected by moral stakeholders, and the central synthetic function of prudence. To premise the discussion below, it would be beneficial to cite the following quote explicating how Aquinas understands the relationship between reason and will in the determination of human acts:

Of actions done by man those alone are properly called “human,” which are proper to man as man. Now man differs from irrational animals in this, that he is master of his actions. Wherefore those actions

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<sup>18</sup> Mt 5:8.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. CCC, no. 1859.

<sup>20</sup> Angela McKay, “Synderesis, Law, and Virtue,” in *The Normativity of the Natural* (Springer, 2009), 33.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de virtutibus in communi*. trans. John Patrick Reid OP, The Collected Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (Providence, RI: The Providence College Press, 1951), IntelLex Past Masters, a. 8. See also McKay, “Synderesis, Law, and Virtue,” 40.

alone are properly called human, of which man is master. Now man is master of his actions through his reason and will; whence, too, the free-will is defined as “the faculty and will of reason.” Therefore those actions are properly called human which proceed from a deliberate will. And if any other actions are found in man, they can be called “of a man,” but not properly “human” actions, since they are not proper to man as man.<sup>22</sup>

### The Generation of Habits and Virtues<sup>23</sup>

It is evidently clear that Aquinas gave much thought to the rightful placement of virtues (*virtus*) within the corpus of his *Summa theologiae*. Alongside his much-treated exposition in the *Summa theologiae*, his doctrine on morality appears nearly identical with another publication of his called *Quaestiones disputatae virtutibus a communi*. It may be recalled that the basic structure of the *Summa theologiae* presents the sojourn of human agents who, conscious of their origin from God (*Prima pars*) and who through the guidance of the laws (*Prima secundae*) and the embodiment of these laws via good habits or virtues (*Secunda secundae*), discover the gratuitous reality of these laws and virtues in Jesus Christ who is the only way to God (*Tertia pars*). The unfolding of truths confronting the human person inclines towards not a circular movement starting from God and ending back to God but rather a spiral upward movement demonstrating an intensification of one’s knowledge and personal relationship with God which incipiently began via divine invitation. God being the beginning and the same God being the end represents the Alpha and Omega of the divine presence in human salvific history.<sup>24</sup>

As evidenced by the placement of the treatise on morality in between God and Jesus Christ, this reveals not just the probable Thomistic conception of the role of Spirit in human discipleship, but more importantly, it projects the rightful appropriation of the cognition of

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<sup>22</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, qq. 55-70. Aquinas distinguishes the different types of virtues according (i) to their cause, (ii) to their last end, and (iii) to their formal object. As to their cause, virtues could either be distinguished as *naturally acquired* or *divinely infused*. As to their last end, virtues could either be directed towards their natural or supernatural end. This ‘end’ is correlative to ‘happiness.’ The *theological* and *infused moral virtues* fall under *divinely infused* whereas the *acquired moral virtues* are considered *naturally acquired*. As to their formal object, the formal object of theological virtues is God; while *truth* and *good* are the formal objects of intellectual and moral virtues respectively. Intellectual virtues are “virtues...for the consideration of the truth” (Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 57, a. 2.). Traditionally, prudence, wisdom, science and understanding are considered intellectual virtues.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Rev 22:13.



revealed truths embodied in laws which guide the formation of human acts towards becoming acts of virtues. Through this synoptical delineation of the textual plan of the *Summa theologiae*, it is already apparent that the cognitive, volitive and appetitive faculties have important and specific roles in bringing about the realisation of telic ends.

On account of the above, the following question arises relevant to the present study: *How do moral virtues assist in the development of moral imagination which forms part of moral understanding and moral reasoning that are principally instantiated by the habit of synderesis?* The role of prudence is pivotal in the scholarly discovery of how the interior sense of imagination (together with memory as a material foundation) can foster a ‘habit of imagination’ that assists in virtue embodiment (moral development). Defined by Aquinas as “right reason applied to action,”<sup>25</sup> prudence’s intrinsic relationship with the internal senses of *vis memorativa* and *vis imaginativa* will be the major focus of the discussion below.

### *The Emergence of Habitus*

Aquinas’s treatise on habits covers questions 49 to 89 of the *Prima secundae* in the *Summa theologiae*. Questions 49 to 54 deal with the general aspects of habits while questions 55 to 89 deal with specific habits which include virtues, vices and sins.

The specific consideration of habits as one of the intrinsic principles of human acts is basically founded on the Thomistic principle that “happiness is to be gained by means of certain acts...[and] in order to know by what acts we may obtain happiness, and by what acts we are prevented from obtaining it.”<sup>26</sup> In his treatment of the virtues, Aquinas elucidates the distinction between virtues’ natural and supernatural ends: the teleological realities which result axiomatically from the authentic ordering of human acts according to the dictates of nature and the infusion of divine grace. From the perspective of Catholic doctrine, the notion of *synderesis* appears to be inconceivable without the full consideration of the supernatural ends. However, the apprehension of the synderetic good does not automatically transpose human acts into meritorious acts deserving of supernatural ends. Within the limits of human nature, natural ends (or goods) may be the ‘next best thing’ for some others who may have yet to profess faith

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<sup>25</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 2, s.c.

<sup>26</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 6, pr.

in God or may have no opportunity at all to be made aware of anything transcendental. This perspective is employed in the discussion below allowing for a more general appropriation and affirmation of moral virtues.

The limits of human nature present the inescapable reality of confronting practical issues that relate to virtue embodiment. This fits perfectly well within the synderetic operation of apprehending the *practical good* that requires practical engagement with extramental realities necessary for the emergence of the possibility of sense knowing. In the midst of this engagement is the centrality of the human person, a hylomorphic unicity, who operates in the natural world while envisaging, consciously or unconsciously, the natural ends in the face of occurring existential hindrances.<sup>27</sup> The reality of these potential blockages raises the importance of the emergence and development of habits. This stance has always been promoted by scholastic theologians who “understood the important function that *habitus* has in shaping human conduct.”<sup>28</sup> Aquinas’s definition of habits strongly underlines this necessity: “Wherefore habit implies relation not only to the very nature of a thing, but also, consequently, to operation, inasmuch as this is the end of nature, or conducive to the end.”<sup>29</sup> This definition qualifies habits as implying “a certain determination according to a certain measure”<sup>30</sup> whereby the human agent’s nature and actions either demonstrate an ordering towards the good or evil. Habits, being one of the principles of human acts, are not pre-determined in this respect.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, in contrast to natural habits such as *synderesis* itself, habits can be lost if not practised or lived.<sup>32</sup>

The emergence of habits in the human agent is understood as the actuation of potential qualities brought about by extrinsic factors such as the obligation exacted by human laws and the infusion of divine grace. Aquinas explains this incipient process of habit formation: “Habit is caused by act, because a passive power is moved by an active principle. But in order that some quality be caused in that which is passive the active principle must entirely overcome the passive.”<sup>33</sup> These qualities, which are expressive of habit (*habitus*), refer “to a real modification

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<sup>27</sup> Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. 2, cap. 129. (Aquinas asserts that there are human acts that are proper to man as man and there are human acts that are naturally wrong or evil such as the submission to human passions that impedes the proper ordering of reason.)

<sup>28</sup> Romanus Cessario, OP, *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics*, Second ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2009), 34.

<sup>29</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 49, a. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 49, a. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 50, a. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 49, a. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 51, a. 3.

of a person's moral character. Vicious *habitus* produce a vicious individual; virtuous *habitus*, a virtuous person."<sup>34</sup> When human agents act on these extrinsic factors, there emerges the onset of what would be potential habits. Depending on the degree of commitment human agents allocate for their moral development, in due course of time, "[v]irtue makes a real saint, but vicious *habitus* leaves the person in a state of disordered potential."<sup>35</sup>

Being a movement from potency to act, the emergence of habits initially indicates an activity of human volition. However, the will is not entirely isolated from the influence of reason in its principled operations. Aquinas confirms this:

The will from the very nature of the power inclined to the good of the reason. But because this good is varied in many ways, the will needs to be inclined, by means of a habit, to some fixed good of the reason, in order that action may follow more promptly.<sup>36</sup>

On this basis, habits emerge when sensitive powers responsively act "at the command of reason"<sup>37</sup> and consequently, when potencies are moved to action, "it is clear that the active principle...is reason."<sup>38</sup>

Aquinas could not have been more emphatic in positing the role of reason and will in the development of moral reasoning. He certainly views this development as an ongoing commitment whereby "repeated acts cause a habit to grow"<sup>39</sup> and where "habit is engendered little by little."<sup>40</sup> Aquinas is aware as well that when "acquired over time, habits grow to be 'second nature.'"<sup>41</sup> That said, "[h]abits are not only qualities and accidents, but they are the qualities and accidents which lie closest to the nature of a thing, and which comes closest to entering into its essence and integrating themselves into its definition."<sup>42</sup> Since habits have effectively penetrated human nature so intimately but not essentially, "a habit is like a second nature, and yet it falls short of it. And so, it is that while the nature of a thing cannot in any

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<sup>34</sup> Cessario, OP, *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics*, 40.

<sup>35</sup> Cessario, OP, *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics*, 41.

<sup>36</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 50, a. 5, ad. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 50, a. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 51, a. 3.

<sup>39</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 52, a. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 54, a. 4.

<sup>41</sup> Bonnie Kent, "Habits and Virtues (Ia IIae, qq. 49-70)" in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 116.

<sup>42</sup> Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 256.

away be taken away from a thing, a habit is removed, though with difficulty.”<sup>43</sup> The depth with which habits (and vices) are ingrained expresses the hard work of moral agents: “Thus repetition of acts which pierces matter more and more completely with its form (or enters deeply into a power of the soul with some new disposition) progressively builds up a habit. So too, does cessation of these acts of the performing of contrary acts destroy and corrupt it,”<sup>44</sup> so adds Gilson who also believes that “a single act is enough to conquer the passivity of the power in which the habit develops.”<sup>45</sup> On this basis, it could potentially happen that an act (or an already existing habit) acts “not in proportion to the intensity of the habit”<sup>46</sup> resulting to a decrease of that habit. A decrease of a habit means “a habit either of virtue or of vice, may be corrupted by a judgment of reason, whenever its motion is contrary to such vice or virtue, whether through ignorance, passion or deliberate choice.”<sup>47</sup>

The reading of Aquinas’s treatise on the habits prompts a conscious paralleling of understanding between habits and virtues. Virtue (*Virtus*), being a species of *habitus*, encompasses everything about the nature of *habitus* and more. The full nature of virtues will be rendered more clearly when the ends of virtues, particularly the ends of moral virtues, are discussed. This is, in fact, where Thomism departs from Aristotelianism. The introduction of the infused virtues which promote the supernatural ends distances Aquinas from Aristotle on the doctrine on virtues.

### *Habitus in Virtus*

Servais Pinckaers’s published article titled, *Virtue Is Not A Habit*,<sup>48</sup> stimulates thinking on how the Scholastic understanding of *habitus* differs considerably with the common usage of the term, ‘habit.’ While one can understand the conflation of the two terminologies due to the usual assertion of a habit as being the repetition of human acts, Aquinas delineates a more deeply psychological and rational understanding of *habitus*. Aquinas conceives of *virtus* as *habitus* whereby the occurrence of repeated human behaviour is profoundly ordered by reason in

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<sup>43</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 53, a. 1.

<sup>44</sup> Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 258.

<sup>45</sup> Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 258.

<sup>46</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 52, a. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 53, a. 1.

<sup>48</sup> Servais Pinckaers, “Virtue Is Not A Habit,” *CrossCurrents* 12, no. 1 (1962): 65-81.

harmony with human nature. Hence, the reality of *habitus* is far more than the observable human activity which is exhibited repeatedly without any conscious deliberation and cognitive awareness.

Aquinas defines *virtus*<sup>49</sup> as “a good quality of the mind”<sup>50</sup> whose “end...since it is an operative habit, is operation”<sup>51</sup> “by which we live righteously [and] “which no one makes bad use.”<sup>52</sup> In the order of causation, the content of this definition is evidently reflexive of the nature of good *habitus* since *virtus* is simply good *habitus* repeatedly done: “Therefore a habit of virtue cannot be caused by one act, but only by many.”<sup>53</sup> Beautifully phrased by Aquinas is his Aristotelian quote expressive of the same: “As neither does one swallow nor one day make spring: so neither does one day not a short time make a man blessed and happy.”<sup>54</sup>

In two separate places in the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas affirms that “[v]irtue denotes a certain perfection of power”<sup>55</sup> and a “[h]abit is indeed a perfection.”<sup>56</sup> As evidenced by these two citations, both the formal objects of *habitus* and *virtus* point to the general notion of completion, fulfilment or perfection of human actions that are consistent with nature and reason. Both presume that if reason truly discerns the essence of human nature, actions emanating from it would be nothing short of that good that completes, fulfils and perfects the human person. Aquinas and Aristotle find unison in asserting the empirical nature of *habitus* and *virtus*. There is the *material dimension* that is purported when *habitus* and *virtus* are alluded to as actual and real behavioural modifications. Beyond this point, however, Aquinas takes a ‘solo flight’ by extending the nature of *virtus* to include his theological understanding of virtues expressive of the Catholic moral tradition. John Inglis explicitly acknowledges this Thomistic extended scholarship by stating that: “Aquinas’s conception of the highest good and its relation to the functional character of human activity led him to break with Aristotle by replicating each of the acquired moral virtues on an infused level.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 55, a. 1, ad. 1.

<sup>50</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 55, a. 4.

<sup>51</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 55, a. 4.

<sup>52</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 55, a. 4.

<sup>53</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 51, a. 3.

<sup>54</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 51, a. 3.

<sup>55</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 55, a. 1.

<sup>56</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 52, a. 1.

<sup>57</sup> John Inglis, “Aquinas’s Replication of the Acquired Moral Virtues: Rethinking the Standard Philosophical Interpretation of Moral Virtue in Aquinas,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 27, no. 1 (1994): 4

Aquinas's doctrine on the infused virtues accommodates original philosophical and theological bents which place his thoughts far beyond the realm of secular thinking. On this, Bonnie Kent is in agreement: "When Thomas proceeds to argue that certain habits are infused in us by God, it becomes all the more evident that ancient philosophy has been left behind."<sup>58</sup> Although the topic regarding the relationship between acquired and infused virtues is outside the scope of this research, it is important to point out that the consideration of the supernatural ends is a necessary part of any theological inquiry in Catholic morality. That said, it is also equally important to impress the rationale behind the infusion of virtues (or grace) in the life of the human person. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* spells out: "It is not easy for man, wounded by sin, to maintain moral balance. Christ's gift of salvation offers us the grace necessary to persevere in the pursuit of the virtues."<sup>59</sup>

The infusion of grace to aid human efforts habituate the virtues is premised by the Thomistic principle that: "grace does not destroy nature but perfects it" ("*gratia non tollat naturam, sed perficiat*").<sup>60</sup> This principle has officially been endorsed by Catholic Church teaching: "Human virtues acquired by education, by deliberate acts and by perseverance in repeated efforts are purified and elevated by divine grace."<sup>61</sup> Aquinas insists that the "[i]nfused virtue is caused in us by God without any action on our part, but not without our consent."<sup>62</sup> The infused grace is unmerited yet freely given out of pure generosity by God. It is understood to have a transformative effect on acquired natural ends in so far as rendering them meritorious for beatific ends. Aquinas is adamant in stating that: "We need a habit...that our natural powers may be elevated by an infused habit to what is above their nature."<sup>63</sup> In the end, seeking natural ends via the acquired moral virtues has a pressing significant value in moral development, and not just in faith development.

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<sup>58</sup> Kent, "Habits and Virtues (Ia IIae, qq. 49-70)," 117.

<sup>59</sup> CCC, no. 1811.

<sup>60</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 1, a. 8.

<sup>61</sup> CCC, no. 1810.

<sup>62</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 55, a. 4.

<sup>63</sup> Aquinas, *De virtutibus*, q. 1, a. 1, ad. 11.

## *Acquiring Moral Ends*

One important aspect of Thomistic theology is its teleology. Aquinas speaks of *telos* in relation to both (i) the metaphysical pre-determination and (ii) the existential contingency of the human person. The metaphysical pre-determination alludes to those intrinsic human operations that process all data received from the external environment. The ontological realities determinant of created beings such as *synderesis*, *inclinatio naturalis*, operations of the interior sensoria, cognition and intellection, all fall under this classification. On the other hand, the existential contingencies of the human agents relate to their human experiences which have been internally processed initially and which now have proceeded to be demonstrated externally through their *human acts*. Under this classification includes *habitus* and *virtus*. The former in the above largely rests on the intellective (cognitive) operation of the human soul while the latter rests on the appetitive (volitive) operation of the human soul. The sensitive or emotive operation (passion) affects both the cognitive and volitive operations.

Regarding (i), revealed by the metaphysical pre-determination is the ontology of being as created in the ‘image and likeness of God.’ Since this relates particularly to the ontology of being, the metaphysical fact is sustained regardless of any rational (or irrational) disapproval of the Christian faith.<sup>64</sup> In experiential terms, this may come to human awareness as an ethical proposition to commit to a lifestyle expressive of the commandments of God. It is an awareness that is founded on the natural ordering of reason whose operation provides the human person with the knowledge and the desire “for his ultimate end, that which he desires as his perfect and crowning good.”<sup>65</sup> Such *telos* is of a grand moral scale that “it is necessary for the last end...to fulfil man’s appetite, that nothing is left besides it for man to desire.”<sup>66</sup>

It is observable from the analysis above that the reality of “the end is the foundation and principle of the means to the end.”<sup>67</sup> Probing further, Aquinas maintains that “[t]he human intellect does not determine its ends, but is determined by them. It is not free to set whatever end it likes. Rather these are set before the human intellect by nature.”<sup>68</sup> As previously

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<sup>64</sup> The conscious recognition of God as the *telos* of all human activities cannot be automatically assumed since, according to Aquinas, not everyone is able to know that there is God. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 2, a. 1 ad. 1.

<sup>65</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 5.

<sup>66</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 5.

<sup>67</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 5.

<sup>68</sup> Dominic Farrell, *The Ends of the Moral Virtues and the First Principles of Practical Reason in Thomas Aquinas* (Rome, Italy: Gregorian and Biblical Press, 2012), 86.

mentioned, *inclinatio naturalis* conjointly operates with *lege naturalis* in determining the human *telos* that is in accord with the principles of practical reason. Since practical reason sets the rational parameters relating to human actions, it provides at least the formal knowledge of the practical good necessary for moral virtues to achieve their ends. Without the knowledge of the practical good and the innate guidance by *inclinatio naturalis*, it would be impossible for the will to acquire moral virtues, something that the will can achieve not out of necessity but by virtue of its innate determination.<sup>69</sup>

Naturally immersed in such a desire for the *telos* is natural reason which naturally fulfills the active role of being the principle of human acts.<sup>70</sup> Aquinas confirms that among created beings, this human act “can only be done by reason and intellect...whose province is to know the proportion between the end and the means to that end.”<sup>71</sup> This natural reason is referred to by Aquinas as *synderesis* which “appoints the end to moral virtues.”<sup>72</sup> In respect to moral development, the significance of this end is critically paramount since its determination is without any specificity not until the universality of practical reason is applied concretely by considering the context of human agents. From this context arises the means in and through which the human agent may act towards achieving the appropriate moral ends. Later in this discussion, this role of context-considering will be attributed to the virtue of prudence. On this basis, *synderesis* does not just appoint the *telos* of the moral virtues, but it also “provides the foundation out of which the virtues arise.”<sup>73</sup> After all, virtues are good habits qualitatively making moral agents good and their operations good.<sup>74</sup> The historicity of this operation is implied. In respect to the acquisition of moral ends which Aquinas speaks of as contingent upon the habituation of moral virtues, he maintains that nature is not responsible for the perfection of human acts but by “reason wherein the seeds of all virtue reside.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 5.

<sup>70</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 90, a. 2.

<sup>71</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 18, a. 3.

<sup>72</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 6.

<sup>73</sup> McKay, “Synderesis, Law, and Virtue,” 34.

<sup>74</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 56, a. 3. “And since virtue is that ‘which makes its possessor good, and his good work likewise,’ these latter habits are called virtuous simply: because they make the work to be actually good, and the subject good simply.”

<sup>75</sup> Aquinas, *De virtutibus*, a. 8, ad. 10.



The perfection of virtues being gradually developed runs parallel with the degrees of perfection that are achieved. The discussion now turns to those perfective human operations that are externally demonstrated by the will.

Apropos of (ii), *telos* can be rightfully understood in relation to the good as lived. It is important that virtues are spoken of in this manner since they are qualities and operations that are materially exemplifiable and perceptible. Moreover, the dynamism of moral development does not unfold in a vacuum, but rather, it unravels in human agents' consciousness and the consciousness of the community. Aquinas's discussion regarding the cause of virtue in "Whether virtue is in us by nature?" delineates specifically the essential placement of virtues in the life of a human agent:

[V]irtue is natural to man inchoatively. This is so in respect of the specific nature, in so far as in man's reason are to be found instilled by nature certain naturally known principles of both knowledge and action, which are the nurseries of intellection and moral virtues, and in so far as these is in the will a natural appetite for good in accordance with reason.<sup>76</sup>

The above quote speaks of the moral aptitude of all human agents that is naturally given. This points to the practical possibility for human moral development that engenders self-fulfilment and self-transcendence. Psychology would refer to these realities as self-authorship and self-governance in moral development. Aquinas recognises that human agency may be ill-disposed due to physiological or psychological reasons which effectively impede rational deliberations on moral issues. A person who suffers from schizophrenia with psychotic symptoms would be physiologically unable to cognitively process what is really good and what is really bad. In the face of moral conflicts though, the human agent stands not without the possibility of moral triumph. Since virtues develop inchoatively, the moral person can occasion human acts that rationally, wilfully and passionately generate natural good-ness that promotes moral well-being over a period of time. Morally upright persons are products of years of habituating in virtues who, as will be adequately pointed out later, hold a special and unique responsibility to be virtue-enablers to others.

This same thought above convinces Angela MacKay to assert that:

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<sup>76</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 63, a. 1.

Man is ordered towards virtue in so far as he possesses natural habitual knowledge of the first principles of thought and action and insofar as he naturally desires the good of reason, but he naturally desires the good reason because, thanks to his possession of these first principles, he has inchoate knowledge of that good.<sup>77</sup>

With virtues creating a virtuous person demonstrating virtuous acts, the moral agent must be seriously considering the proper ends of human acts since they, according to Aquinas, bring happiness to people. To consider the end is nothing more than grasping the truth about one's nature since "[e]very agent, of necessity, acts for an end."<sup>78</sup> According to Klaus Demmer, it is in the experience of virtue where the moral agent reaches the height of perfection: "In the virtues, moral commitment reaches its peak.... Virtues bring forth the best in a person, and to this end, all the moral strength available to her or him is required."<sup>79</sup> Perfection that awaits is something that Aquinas truly desires for every person due to the human capacity for moral virtue that "is actuated by acting in accord with the analogous naturally known principles of practical reason."<sup>80</sup>

### *Natural 'Perfection' via Habituation of Virtues*

In the *Prima secundae* of the *Summa theologiae*, question sixty-three, article two, Aquinas deals with the question, "Whether any virtue is caused in us by habituation." Having mentioned in the previous article that "virtue is natural to man inchoatively,"<sup>81</sup> Aquinas stresses this proposition further: "It is therefore evident that all virtues are in us by nature, according to aptitude and inchoation, but not according to perfection, except the theological virtues, which are entirely from without."<sup>82</sup> This Thomistic assertion that virtue is in every human person naturally yet aptitudinally and inchoatively is tantamount to saying that the human person is both capable of perfection and capable of being perfected. The latter points to the ends of moral virtues while the former relates to the ongoing habituation of virtues. The definition of virtue alluded to earlier, i.e., that virtue makes human agents good and their acts good, is equivalent to this statement. To speak of the human person as capable of perfection and capable of being

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<sup>77</sup> McKay, "Synderesis, Law, and Virtue," 39.

<sup>78</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, a. 1, a. 2.

<sup>79</sup> Demmer, MSC, *Shaping the Moral Life: An Approach to Moral Theology*, 53.

<sup>80</sup> Farrell, *The Ends of the Moral Virtues and the First Principles of Practical Reason*, 97.

<sup>81</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 63, a. 1.

<sup>82</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 63, a. 1.

perfected is theologically and pragmatically important in the analysis of virtue. Since it is maintained that there is the naturally apprehended good that is accessed by the first principles of practical reason from “man’s most secret core and his sanctuary,”<sup>83</sup> there proceeds from this affirmation the logical theological evidence of the primordial perfection that the human person possesses ontologically. There is no wonder then why Aquinas aptly refers to *synderesis* as the “nurseries of virtues.”<sup>84</sup> *Synderesis* certainly is indispensable if the human capacity to draw from within one’s moral reservoir the potency to be perfected according to the moral dictates of natural reason itself is maintained and asserted. But this requires further facilitation in view of setting the moral agents on their way to moral perfection. Since moral virtues possess the “perfections of appetency,”<sup>85</sup> its activation is exigent in order for it to inaugurate the inchoative moral development of moral agents. This role is given to reason as Aquinas states so: “[H]uman reason directed to the good is defined according to the rule of human reason can be caused by human acts: inasmuch as acts proceed from reason, by whose power and rule the aforesaid good is established.”<sup>86</sup> Farrell translates this in practical terms: “[T]he first thing that the pre-virtuous agent needs in order to form a virtue is some idea what is actually virtuous.”<sup>87</sup>

It could not be better stressed how Aquinas affirms that “certain seeds or principles of acquired virtue pre-exist in us by nature.”<sup>88</sup> This is another of his statements confirming the potency of moral agents towards attaining perfection. Since these certain seeds or principles are qualifiedly and inchoatively present in the human person, human acts proceeding from these can actually form acquired human virtues. Aquinas considers these principles as being “more excellent than the virtues acquired through them.”<sup>89</sup>

The analysis just rendered above is a key understanding in the later discussion regarding moral development that is initiated by *synderesis*. In this regard, moral virtues uniquely contribute and facilitate the moral formation of human agents. It materially supplies the habitual experience of the good through the lives of virtue-enablers in the community. Once virtues impinge upon the conscious awareness of human agents, most specially upon children during

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<sup>83</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, § 16.

<sup>84</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 63, a. 1. “[I]n so far as in man's reason are to be found instilled by nature certain naturally known principles of both knowledge and action, which are the nurseries of intellectual and moral virtues.”

<sup>85</sup> Farrell, *The Ends of the Moral Virtues and the First Principles of Practical Reason*, 97.

<sup>86</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 63, a. 2.

<sup>87</sup> Farrell, *The Ends of the Moral Virtues and the First Principles of Practical Reason*, 97.

<sup>88</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 63, a. 2.

<sup>89</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 63, a. 2.

their early sensitive years, they commence their life-long moral training and education. The intuitive formation of the moral sense takes shape during this process. In this process, the natural capacity for moral perfection begins to unfold gradually transforming human agents into moral agents by perfecting their human dispositions.

### *The Two 'Perfect' Ends*

Aquinas distinguishes acquired moral virtues from infused moral virtues by qualifying that “[i]nfused and acquired virtue differ not only in relation to the ultimate end, but also in relation to their proper objects.”<sup>90</sup> The matter relating to the relationship between moral virtues and the perfect ends is brought to light in view of the given teleological inclination with which Aquinas has particularly ordained his *Summa theologiae*. We can recall here the notion of the *exitus-reditus* principle which underlines his thematic approach. More than merely a preferred thematic orientation, Aquinas’s approach provides the doctrinal foundation to the Catholic Church’s view on the vocation of all people and the future of those who follow Christ:

The Church, to which we are all called in Christ Jesus, and in which we acquire sanctity through the grace of God, will attain its full protection only in the glory of heaven, when there will come the time of the restoration of things. At that time the human race as well as the entire world, which is intimately related to man and attains him, will be perfectly reestablished in Christ.<sup>91</sup>

Aquinas is aware that though the *image of God* is naturally found in men and women (hence, it is universal in nature), it is not found by everyone. The assumption of the divine presence in humanity is asserted without exception, however, its habitual manifestation and expression, let alone the epistemic persuasion of the intellect, is subject to human disposition. Aquinas qualifies this delineation:

Since man is said to be the image of God by reason of his intellectual nature, he is most perfectly like God according to that which he can best imitate God in his intellectual nature. Now the intellectual nature

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<sup>90</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 63, a. 4.

<sup>91</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen gentium* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 21 November 1964), § 48, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html).

imitates God chiefly in this, that God understand and loves Himself. Wherefore we see that the image of God is in man in three ways. First, inasmuch as man possesses a natural aptitude for understanding and loving God; and this aptitude consists in the very nature of the mind, which is common to all men. Secondly, inasmuch as man actually and habitually knows and loves God, though imperfectly; and this image consists in the conformity of grace. Thirdly, inasmuch as man knows and loves God perfectly; and this image consists in the likeness of glory.... The first is found in all men, second only in the just, and third only in the blessed.<sup>92</sup>

The above quote highlights the different states of *perfection* according to the mind of the Angelic Doctor. Reiterating it here, what is fundamentally evident is the fact that the human person is capable of perfection and is capable of being perfected via acquired (human acts) moral virtues and infused grace. Further, Aquinas has a realistic positive approach towards the capacity of all human persons to achieve perfection since he believes that all human agents desire to be fulfilled or be perfected despite of the fact that “all men are not agreed as to their last end: since some desire riches as their consummate good; some pleasure; others something else.”<sup>93</sup>

Aquinas speaks of the possibility of achieving perfection through the means of the infused and acquired virtues. It is premised on the two ways in which he sees its realistic possibility:

[T]he perfection of the Christian life consists simply in charity, but in the other virtues relatively. And since that which is simply, is paramount and greatest comparison with other things, it follows that the perfection of charity is paramount in relation to the perfection that regards the other virtues.”<sup>94</sup>

The just cited text points to an understanding of what perfection means relative to either the infused or acquired virtues. Thus, acquired moral virtues pertain to natural affairs while infused virtues relate to supernatural affairs.

The realisation of natural and supernatural ends is incumbent upon the capacity of moral agents to produce certain effects. Since acquired virtues are produced by human efforts, it can only be expected to produce effects that matter to the natural order. In contrast, infused virtues are

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<sup>92</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 93, a. 4.

<sup>93</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 7.

<sup>94</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 184, a. 1.

received from God since moral agents on their own are not capable of achieving supernatural ends. However, perfection is still attributable relative to each order of habitual operation and telic effect. In this regard, the Angelic Doctor distinguishes infused from acquired virtues:

It is therefore clear from what has been said that only the infused virtues are perfect, and deserve to be called virtues simply: since they direct man to the ultimate end. But the other virtues, those namely, that are acquired, are virtues in a restricted sense, but not simply: for they direct man well in respect of the last end in some particular genus of action, but not in respect of the last end simply.<sup>95</sup>

The above Thomistic text unambiguously declares that the supernatural ends are (and should be) the primary and ultimate objective of the human person since “man’s last end is happiness.”<sup>96</sup> This does not, however, (and should not) negate the significance of acquired moral virtues in moral development since they practically and ethically contribute to the moral well-being of human agents and societies globally. Renée Mirkes, OSF certainly agrees with the just-stated assertion: “Aquinas presents acquired moral virtue as disposed toward infused moral virtue.”<sup>97</sup>

It is apparent that the subject of virtues is the human person. As body and soul, the human person is a free and contingent being who is subject to change. Such is Mirke’s perspective who emphasises the human person as a historically conscious and materially perfectible being. She strongly argues that:

[G]race could never detract from nature. Rather witnessing to the dignity of the human person as an *imago Dei* who is open to and fit for grace, the supernatural life of God confers on human nature the very completion toward which it tends.<sup>98</sup>

The understanding of the nature of the human person necessitates the serious consideration that apart from human nature being hylomorphic, human nature is one indivisible existential reality which is and can be moved from potency to act by a necessary external agent.<sup>99</sup> The

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<sup>95</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 65, a. 2.

<sup>96</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 8.

<sup>97</sup> Renée Mirkes, OSF, “Aquinas on the Unity of Perfect Moral Virtue,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (1977): 596.

<sup>98</sup> Mirkes OSF, “Aquinas on the Unity of Perfect Moral Virtue,” 605.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. 2. cap. 3. “Whatever is moved is brought to the term of movement by the mover and agent. Therefore mover and moved tend to the same term. Now that which is moved, since it is in potentiality, tends to an act, and consequently to perfection and goodness: for by its movement it passes from potentiality to act. Therefore mover and agent by moving and acting always intend a good.”

hylomorphic unicity of human persons is the basis of the possibility of perfection which every human being is naturally oriented to by divine origin:

God, who is perfect unity and perfect activity, not only shows human persons who they are, but also unifies and activates them in ways that are not able to be or do on their own. The greater the unity and actuation in human nature itself, the more is it *capax Dei*, open to divinisation; the greater the divinisation, the surer the union between God and the Christian.<sup>100</sup>

Concludingly, the concept of the Thomistic hierarchy of being is useful in understanding the ordering of perfection of the created beings. The human person possesses both the potency for perfection and imperfection. In terms of virtue, it is evident that two parallel forms of virtue operate in human agents which are not opposed to each other. These virtues, both acquired and infused, complement each other simply because the human person is an existential being who is naturally one and indivisible. The habituation of virtues expresses the free will of human agents to neither replace the angels nor downgrade themselves to sentient created beings but to desire to be necessarily true and good in accordance with their nature. Aquinas's placement of human beings in the hierarchy of beings is underlined by their potentials to become better individuals expressive of the religious truth that: "God can make better the things He has made."<sup>101</sup> Indeed, by the infused virtues, "the mode of being of humans is increased by virtues, which give humans a greater potency to act, God can direct them to perform more perfect actions."<sup>102</sup> Though acquired and infused virtues have ultimate and proximate ends respectively, these do not mean that the infused virtues cancel out the acquired virtues on the basis of their superiority in the hierarchy of beings. The infused virtues are modes of divine grace infused in the soul of human persons in view of elevating or transforming human efforts into the supernatural order. This evidently takes place without destroying or supplanting whatever is already good and present in the human person.

Proceeding from the elaboration above, it must be unequivocally stated that: "Everything imperfect is a participation of what is perfect."<sup>103</sup> Aquinas, speaking about the perfection of God, declares that human imperfections possess certain degrees of the perfection from God

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<sup>100</sup> Mirkes, OSF, "Aquinas on the Unity of Perfect Moral Virtue," 605.

<sup>101</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 25, a. 6.

<sup>102</sup> John Rziha, *Perfecting Human Actions: St. Thomas Aquinas on Human Participation in Eternal Law* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 129.

<sup>103</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 93, a. 2.

who is essentially the Absolute Perfection. Human persons manifest their desire, albeit imperfectly and sometimes implicitly, to participate in the perfection of God through the habituation of virtues. And with an openness to a life of faith in God, the infusion of grace (e.g., infused virtues) is entreated whereby the human person commits freely to life's stewardship for the attainment of supernatural life. The acquired virtues are not futile human acts which bear no significance at all and not least to the moral development of the human person. Since virtues do not operate in a vacuum, the acquired virtues being ordered to the 'civil society' preponderate on the importance of the community in fomenting opportunities for people to be nursed in virtues. Perfect or imperfect, acquired or infused, the community benefits from the ordering of the will towards anything and everything that develops and promotes the cause of the *imago Dei*. Furthermore, the Christian family and faith-communities cannot ignore the essential importance of acquiring moral virtues since "the Christian moral life (is) the gradual perfection of the image of God in the human person."<sup>104</sup> On this matter of embodying gradual perfection, Aquinas unequivocally counsels everyone that:

[V]irtue is more lasting than learning, this must be understood in respect, not of the subject or cause, but of the act: because the use of virtue continues through the whole of life, whereas the use of learning does not.<sup>105</sup>

There are known external factors which may potentially foment or impede human moral development. This discussion will now turn to these factors for consideration, keeping in mind that the human person only has the natural aptitude towards *virtus* and effective catalysts need to be introduced to actuate those perfective human potencies.

#### External Factors Actuating Habit and Virtue Acquisition

After delving into Aquinas's assertions on the reality of intrinsic human operations, this research now thematically leads into a discursive discussion of those extrinsic elements which are responsible for the potential development of acquired moral virtues. The Thomistic claim that acquired virtues make human agents good persons and their actions good as well is the

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<sup>104</sup> Cessario, OP, *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics*, 45.

<sup>105</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 53, a. 1.



very practical thrust upon which the ensuing discussion is anchored. The practical good that is incipiently intuited and developed throughout a lifespan renders personal and integral value to the human person intending on becoming a moral person whose transformation can only be practically achieved via virtue habituation. It is upon this basis that this thesis contends that the inchoation of virtues personally assists in the moral agent's discernment of the meaning and content of the first principles of natural law.

### *The Necessity of Virtue Cultivation*

In question 63 of the *Prima secundae* of the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas focuses on "The Cause of Virtues." In article one, he lays down the foundation:

[V]irtue is natural to man inchoatively. This is so in respect of the specific nature, in so far as in man's reason are to be found instilled by nature certain naturally known principles of both knowledge and action, which are the nurseries of intellectual and moral virtues, and in so far as there is in the will a natural appetite for good in accordance with reason. Again, this is so in respect of the individual nature, in so far as by reason of a disposition in the body, some are disposed either well or ill to certain virtues: because, to wit, certain sensitive powers are acts of certain parts of the body, according to the disposition of which these powers are helped or hindered in the exercise of their acts, and, in consequence, the rational powers also, which the aforesaid sensitive powers assist.<sup>106</sup>

The above text is dense in formulation and meaning yet it fully appropriates that virtue is natural to the human person. It suggests that the reality of the inherent disposition or aptitude is potentially operative in the human person (hence, inchoatively). This is foreshadowed by an earlier Aquinian proposition which implies that virtues are potential operations requiring actuation.<sup>107</sup> Aquinas alludes to this by using the metaphor of the seed: "certain seeds or principles of acquired virtues pre-exist in us by nature."<sup>108</sup> This statement lucidly delineates that owing to that seed of the first moral principles, human agents are considered metaphorically as nurseries of virtues in view of their potential volition to habituate the virtues.

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<sup>106</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 63, a. 1.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 55, a. 2. "Since virtue is the principle of some kind of operation, there must needs pre-exist in the operator in respect of virtue some corresponding disposition. Now virtue causes an ordered operation."

<sup>108</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 61, a. 1.

The metaphor also intimates that being nurseries, it is necessarily inchoative, which means these virtues will require time to develop. Aquinas rightfully envisages the flourishing of these nurseries in the exercise of prudence specifically among those who are chronologically advanced: “Prudence is rather in the old, not only because their natural disposition calms the environment of the sensitive passion, but also because of their long experience.”<sup>109</sup> The notion of being ‘old’ seems for the Angelic Doctor an indication of “experience (which) is the result of many memories”<sup>110</sup> necessary to make prudential (virtuous) decisions. Asserting a claim appearing to be within the province of psychology or the philosophy of the mind, Aquinas pinpoints the interior sensoria as constituting the bodily organ, i.e., the brain, that is “perfected by memory and experience.”<sup>111</sup> This assertion pertinently imbues the consideration of the intimate relationship between the acquired virtues and the interior sensoria, a relationship which engenders the formation and information of the intuited good. Lest the human person be influenced by laziness and pride<sup>112</sup> and “corrupted by the passions,”<sup>113</sup> the human person should be able to commit towards being formed and being informed. This matter on the virtues’ role in the formation and information of the human person secures the thematic direction of the discussion in the succeeding section.

### *The Nurturers of the ‘Seed of Virtues’*

Similar to *synderesis* on the basis of their potential practical operation in the soul of the human person, virtues also require external stimulation to commence their developmental maturation. Specifically, prudence requires these inputs from the extramental world for its material contents. Considering that habit and virtue development formally begins at the onset of reason, this contingently impresses the fact that virtue habituation is a life-long process and moral enablers are needed for the moral formation of all human agents, particularly of juveniles. Aquinas explains this further:

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<sup>109</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 15.

<sup>110</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 49, a. 1.

<sup>111</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 3, ad. 3.

<sup>112</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 49, a. 3. “Man has a natural aptitude for docility even as for other things connected with prudence. Yet his own efforts count for much towards the attainment of perfect docility: and he must carefully, frequently and reverently apply his mind to the teachings of the learned, neither neglecting them through laziness, nor despising them through pride.”

<sup>113</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a.16.

Acquired prudence is caused by the exercise of acts, wherefore "its acquisition demands experience and time," hence it cannot be in the young, neither in habit nor in act.... Wherefore, in children who have been baptised but have not come to the use of reason, there is prudence as to habit but not as to act, even as in idiots; whereas in those who have come to the use of reason, it is also as to act, with regard to things necessary for salvation. This by practice merits increase, until it becomes perfect, even as the other virtues.<sup>114</sup>

It is evident from the above that Aquinas prefigures the role of older people in the training of children of early years to a life of virtues: "Hence in matters of prudence man stands in very great need of being taught by others, especially by 'old folks' who have acquired a sane understanding of the ends in practical matters."<sup>115</sup> The matter to be taught is clearly the province of the first principles of natural law which Aquinas believes are already grasped by 'old folks' due to their experience and abundance of memories.<sup>116</sup> Their syllabus, as it were, would be no less than the Gospel which teaches about the evangelical perfection: "The teaching of the Gospel is the doctrine of perfection. Therefore it needed to instruct man perfectly in all matters relating to right conduct, whether ends or means."<sup>117</sup> It can be inferred from this statement that derived practical truths from the first moral principles, which are "the secondary universal principles...are not inherited from nature, but are acquired by discovery through experience, or through teaching."<sup>118</sup> In this respect, the *Decalogue* and the *Beatitudes* are expressive of the first principles of moral law. Moreover, Aquinas stresses that "the common principles of prudence are more connatural to man"<sup>119</sup> thereby punctuating the influence of experienced people crucial in the habituation of human agents in the human virtues, and more specifically, in the virtue of prudence. All these assertions on the virtue-enabling capacity of 'old folks' may appear incongruently presumptuous and piously arrogant. However, Aquinas's attempt to elucidate the efficacy of virtue-enablers is based on the probable ideal rather than on the impossible absolute.

It would be arcane to posit the sufficiency of the above without further querying the qualifications of the so-called 'old folks,' apart from the presumption that they possess experience and abundant memories. Aquinas explains in his answer to question 117, article 1,

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<sup>114</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 14.

<sup>115</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 49, a. 3.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 49, a. 1.

<sup>117</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 56, a. 1.

<sup>118</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 15.

<sup>119</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 15.

in the *Prima pars* of the *Summa theologiae* – *Whether One Man Can Teach Another, As Being the Cause of His Knowledge?* – that it all depends on the commitment of ‘old folks’ to “lead the disciple from things known (to him as the teacher), to the knowledge of the things previously unknown to (the disciple.)”<sup>120</sup> This involves proposing “to the disciple the order of principles to conclusions, by reason of his not having sufficient collating power to be able to draw the conclusions from the principles.”<sup>121</sup> Aquinas’s preponderance on acquiring the first moral principles is comprehensively evident and his emphasis elevates these principles as indispensable criteria in determining the legitimacy of ‘old folks’ who are prudently cognisant of these principles. Those who embody the first moral principles are therefore considered as “wiser”<sup>122</sup> people from whom disciples seek counsel and “holy persons”<sup>123</sup> for seeking counsel themselves from God. These two qualifications or criteria express the practical indispensable role of ‘old folks’ whose role as teachers of virtues is vital in the nurseries of virtues.

These nurseries are exactly those schools of virtues where wise and holy people give practical witness to the first principles of the moral law. Since these virtue-enablers have already grasped the synderetic good, Aquinas presumes that they have genuinely established intimacy with the first principles of moral law. This affinity with the natural law presumes the capacity to prudentially deal with *contingent matters of action*<sup>124</sup> which characterise these schools of virtues. By facing up to the indeterminacy of their social environment armed with their acquired moral virtues, these wise and holy people concurrently uphold not just their own personal good, but also, the common good. This duality is anticipated since, as a social being, the moral agent operates within the confines of a given social environment: “since man is a part of the home and state, he must needs consider what is good for him by being prudent about the good of the many.”<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 117, a. 1.

<sup>121</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 117, a. 1.

<sup>122</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 52, a. 1.

<sup>123</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 52, a. 1.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 49, a. 6; also, II-II, q. 49, a. 3.

<sup>125</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 10.

## The Central Synthetic Function of Prudence

### *Prudence in General*

In Thomistic moral philosophy, it would be logical to assert that a prudent person is a person of virtues. This statement describes the multi-faceted and all-embracing nature of prudence in respect to the acquired moral virtues. In this regard, Aquinas declares: “Prudence is the principal of all the virtues simply.”<sup>126</sup> This statement points out Aquinas’s examination of the virtue of prudence in the *Secunda secundae* of the *Summa theologiae*, question 47, that prudence is a “special virtue”<sup>127</sup> because, as it is both an intellectual and a moral virtue, it “helps all the virtues, and works in all of them.”<sup>128</sup> This section explores the virtue of prudence (*prudentia*) as possessing a central synthetic function, a function that involves comprehensively incorporating and conjointly processing information from the universal moral principles and the contextual life conditions of human agents.

Aquinas contends that as an intellectual virtue, prudence’s formal object is the *truth* and as a moral virtue, the good. Prudence is in a unique position to engage with the best of both worlds, i.e., the world of the speculative or theoretical and the world of the practical. It should be recalled that prudence is “right reason applied to action.”<sup>129</sup> Being an intellectual virtue, it draws upon knowledge from practical reason. Classical Thomistic interpretation unequivocally asserts this seeming preponderance on natural law in its examination of *synderesis*. As will be delineated below, there is verity in considering a paradigm shift from natural law to virtues in respect to a broader insight into, as far as this research is concerned, the contents of the first principles of natural law. The virtue of prudence inherently possesses an intimate relationship with the first principles of natural law from where the ends or moral virtues are ordered. In fact, since *synderesis* moves prudence, this makes prudence “more excellent than the moral virtues.”<sup>130</sup> On the other hand, as a moral virtue, prudence’s operative role is to “regulate the means”<sup>131</sup> to be utilised for realising the ends appointed by practical reason. In article 3 of question 47, Aquinas explicates these dual operative functions of prudence:

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<sup>126</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 61, a. 2.

<sup>127</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 5.

<sup>128</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 5.

<sup>129</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 2.

<sup>130</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 6.

<sup>131</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 6.

To prudence belongs not only the consideration of the reason, but also the application to action, which is the end of the practical reason. But no man can conveniently apply one thing to another, unless he knows both the thing to be applied, and the thing to which it has to be applied. Now actions are in singular matters: and so it is necessary for the prudent man to know both the universal principles of reason, and the singulars about which actions are concerned.<sup>132</sup>

Further to the analysis of prudence as right reason applied to action, the moral virtue component in this definition specifies that the matter of prudence is the “contingent singulars.”<sup>133</sup> In order for prudence to be able to apply right reason, prudence must investigate the particular condition within which right reason is to be applied. Such operation entails the proper consideration of which specific moral principle is to be applied since the notion of ‘one moral principle fits all’ does not carry any weight in practical moral theology. The emphasis demonstrated by the Pharisees in the Bible on strictly keeping the Mosaic laws at all costs to the exclusion of any regard to the contextual capacity of human person to actually carry out specific precepts is atypical of prudence.<sup>134</sup>

The case of the Pharisaic ethical view mentioned above should attract “the ruling of prudence to decide in what manner and by what means man shall obtain the mean of reason in his deeds.”<sup>135</sup> This determination is essentially pivotal in the consideration of prudence’s virtue-operation as consisting of “the right estimate about matters of action.”<sup>136</sup> On account of this, two sub-topics are currently in order: (i) prudential mean, and (ii) how prudence makes a ruling. These two are mutually inclusive: the *mean* that is set by prudence is the cause of its ruling, and, prudence rules (or command) by enforcing the mean of virtues.

*The Prudential ‘Mean.’* In view of (i), prudential mean is analysed in reference to prudence’s relationship with the other moral virtues. According to Aquinas, moral virtues are only inclinations without prudence ordering them as to their specific means:

Moral virtue may be considered either as perfect or as imperfect. An imperfect moral virtue...is nothing but an inclination in us to do some kind of good deed, whether such inclination be in us by nature or by habituation. If we take the moral virtues, they are not connected: since

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<sup>132</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 3.

<sup>133</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 9.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Mt 12: 1-8.

<sup>135</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 7.

<sup>136</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 94, a. 4.

we find men who, by natural temperament or by being accustomed, are prompt in doing deeds of liberality, but are not prompt in doing deeds of chastity.<sup>137</sup>

James Keenan, SJ offers his interpretation of this text: “[W]ithout prudence the moral virtues are nothing more than inclinations. They are only inclinations because they cannot perfect; and they can cannot perfect because they cannot attain the right act.”<sup>138</sup> It needs to be stated on account of Keenan’s observation that “neither can we have prudence without the moral virtues: and from this follows clearly that the moral virtues are connected with one another.”<sup>139</sup> Though there is the priority of prudence in the hierarchy of acquired virtues, the infused virtues, most specifically the virtue of charity, limit the operations and effects of prudence. Aquinas confirms this: “Though charity surpasses science and prudence, yet prudence depends on charity, as stated: and consequently so do all the infused moral virtues.”<sup>140</sup> This limitation is based on the Thomistic assertion that acquired virtues are virtues only in a restricted sense. This simply means that the moral virtues, including acquired prudence, do not direct the human person to the ultimate end.<sup>141</sup> Be that as it may, this research has argued that acquired virtues are not in any way inefficacious since the attainment of proximate ends prepare, as it were, the natural elements of virtues to be transformed by infused virtues towards the ultimate end. This is simply akin to stating that the human person achieves a lifetime of proximate ends which, firstly, serves the fundamental ordering of natural moral development, and secondly, it anticipates the supernatural end by naturally pointing the human person, explicitly or implicitly, to the ultimate end (*beatitudo*).

Aquinas boldly claims that the “ends of moral virtue must of necessity pre-exist in the reason.”<sup>142</sup> Since prudence regulates the ends of moral virtues, it follows that its basis for determining the mean in the moral virtues are those ends which are pre-existing already in the human person. Since “moral virtue is said to observe the mean through conformity with right reason,”<sup>143</sup> Aquinas distinguishes between a rational mean from a real mean. This differentiation is owed to the dual nature of prudence being both an intellectual and moral

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<sup>137</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 65, a. 1.

<sup>138</sup> James F. Keenan, SJ, “Distinguishing Charity as Goodness and Prudence as Rightness: A Key to Thomas’s *Secunda Pars*,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 56, no. 3 (1992): 414.

<sup>139</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 65, a. 1.

<sup>140</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 65, a. 2.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 65, a. 2.

<sup>142</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 6.

<sup>143</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 64, a. 2.

virtue. This duality suggests that the prudential mean is not pre-determined as if all human experiences are the same. The uniqueness of being both an intellectual and moral virtue paves the way for a contextual analysis (counsel) of the moral situation prior to prudence's judgment and command. If prudence is to make a right estimate of the right action to be done, it then must necessarily consider those particular and contingent matters that relate to the moral situation. The bioethical principle of ordinary-extraordinary means is underlined by prudence in considering the moral calculus whether a medical treatment will provide reasonable benefit or undue burden in the real consideration of the present condition of patients (as moral agents).

*The Prudential 'Ruling.'* After establishing what prudential mean signifies, the discussion now turns to (ii) how prudence makes a ruling. Alongside determining the mean of all the moral virtues, prudence also appropriates the mean "between excess and deficiency"<sup>144</sup> which acquired moral virtues must contextually consider. As mentioned previously, Aquinas claims that prudence does not determine the end but only regulates them through the mean whose specificity is determined by analysing the moral situation and the moral agent. In addition, he explains that although there is such a thing as natural inclination, the universal mean is not able to realistically address the specificity of given moral situations. Hence, considering this given scenario observable in human situations, "the ruling of prudence is required."<sup>145</sup> The ensuing question now points to how prudence undertakes the rational process of determining the mean.

The *how* in prudence's operation of applying to action whatever is according to right reason is referred to by Aquinas as the 'chief act of prudence':

Now there are three such acts. The first is "to take counsel," which belongs to discovery, for counsel is an act of inquiry. The second act is "to judge of what one has discovered," and this is an act of the speculative reason. But the practical reason, which is directed to action, goes further, and its third act is "to command," which act consists in applying to action the things counselled and judged. And since this act approaches nearer to end of the practical reason, it follows that it is the chief act of the practical reason, and consequently of prudence.<sup>146</sup>

It is lucidly expressed in the above quote that there is the juxtaposition of the speculative and practical reasons in the operation of prudence. This is reflective of the objective of this thesis

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<sup>144</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 64, a. 1.

<sup>145</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 7.

<sup>146</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 8.



to bridge the reality between the first principles of practical reason apprehended by *synderesis* and the efficacy of acquired moral virtues. Prudence is that bridge which fuses the world of the universal and particular,<sup>147</sup> the intellectual and moral virtues,<sup>148</sup> in guiding moral agents to make a decision that is in accord with nature and their given circumstances. This thesis proposes the ongoing embodiment and contextualisation of the primordial good, i.e., *bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum*, via the acquired moral virtues. Virtues ensue formative and informative effects on the moral agents' knowledge and understanding of the good since it forms moral agents to be good people embodying human acts rather than acts of men and women. It also informs moral agents via habituation of virtues of those human acts which facilitate the knowing and understanding of the good. This good is evidently the principle apprehended by *synderesis* and innately proposed as the first principles of practical reason. The virtue of prudence, in particular, seeks this good which *synderesis* appoints as its end. By natural necessity, it can be acknowledged that these first moral principles evolve into secondary principles and into extended derivatives as the human mind of moral agents seeks knowledge and understanding of the world around them.

*Praecipuus actus rationis agibilium (Chief Act of Prudence)*

In article 8 of question 47 in the *Secunda secundae* of the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas asks the question: *Whether command is the chief act of prudence*. The *command* element in the text alludes to the extended function of prudence which is “the ensuing of good and...the avoidance of evil.”<sup>149</sup> It is apparent at the outset that prudence functionally relates to the first principles of natural law. Such closeness verifies the intimate relationship between *synderesis* and prudence: “that which is the chief act of reason in regard to action must needs be the chief act of prudence.”<sup>150</sup> The correlation between prudence and *synderesis* is even further specified in the *praecipuus actus rationis agibilium* which is premised on the prior act of “to take counsel” that involves *discovery* via *inquiry*. This specification is unequivocally pertinent since “(g)ood counsel is required in order that the good things discovered may be applied to action.”<sup>151</sup> The foundational knowledge that *synderesis* provides to prudence is paramount if prudence is able

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<sup>147</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 3.

<sup>148</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 4.

<sup>149</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 8, ad. 1.

<sup>150</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 8.

<sup>151</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 8, ad. 2.

to assist in the process of discovering and inquiring into the appropriate action that needs to be undertaken in light of the moral agent's situational context. In relation to this discovery and inquiry, Aquinas admits that the common principles of prudence are more connatural to man due to the acquisition of secondary universal principles by way of discovery through experience, or through teaching. This explanation further delineates what has already been stated earlier as regards prudence being the right reason applied to action. Secondary universal principles are derivatives of the first principles which are known habitually in contrast to primary universal principles which are known non-discursively, i.e., innate.<sup>152</sup>

In view of the above consideration of the requisites of discovery and inquiry, Aquinas saw fit to assert that: "Acquired prudence is caused by the exercise of acts wherefore 'its acquisition demands experience and time.'"<sup>153</sup> In addition, he stresses that "practice merits increase, until it becomes perfect."<sup>154</sup> Taking counsel, therefore, involves a lifetime of discovery and inquiry due to the dynamism and variety of human situations with which the human mind can only limitedly appraise and encounter. Aquinas refers to this phenomenon as the "infinity of the singulars."<sup>155</sup> With the faculty of reason at the disposal of the human person, the initial acts of discovery and inquiry advance the practical consideration of the human conditions prior to the rational act of judging. It would be imprudent then to act in the absence of the necessary discovery of the first principles of moral action and the proper inquiry into the complexities of contingent situations. Judging hastily produces acts which are not exhaustive of moral complexities that are commonly descriptive of human situations.

The thematic discussion hereafter will now focus on the determination of the relationship between *synderesis* and prudence which the prudential act of 'to take counsel' (*eboulia* = deliberate well) intimately demonstrates. The two remaining acts of prudence are left for

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<sup>152</sup> The reality of secondary universal principles points to the consequential consideration of the importance of determining moral culpability in the realms of human responsibility. The key element in this consideration is the *knowability* of principles which mitigates whether a moral agent is culpable on the basis that such knowledge is meant to be known without exception (first moral principles) or whether it can be derivatively known through human reflection and experience (secondary moral principles). Since secondary principles are drawn from the contingency of human actions proposing varying degrees of affiliation with the first principles and even secondary principles, the farther it is from these principles, the less culpable a person is on account of the determination of the varying qualities of knowledge present in determining the morality of an action. R. A. Armstrong defends this view: "the distinction between primary and secondary precepts of the natural law provides us that a criterion for allowing us to say with at least some degree of certainty, whether or not a person can be held entirely culpable, or whether there are grounds for some degree of diminished responsibility." See Armstrong, *Primary and Secondary Precepts in Thomistic Natural Law Teaching*, 139-142.

<sup>153</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 14.

<sup>154</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 14, ad. 3.

<sup>155</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 15.

external research, viz., ‘to judge’ (*synesis*) and ‘to command’ (*gnome*). The thematic segregation, however, is for analytical purpose only and does not ignore the fact that these three acts operate as a unit in its natural environment.

### *Quasi-Integral Parts of Prudence*

Aquinas breaks into parts the various elements that make up prudence stipulating them as the *quasi-integral parts of prudence*.<sup>156</sup> The Latin term, ‘*quasi*,’ indicates that these parts individually partake in the nature of prudence but not in its totality. He enumerates the following parts: (1) Memory,<sup>157</sup> (2) Understanding or Intelligence,<sup>158</sup> (3) Docility,<sup>159</sup> (4) Shrewdness,<sup>160</sup> (5) Reason,<sup>161</sup> (6) Foresight,<sup>162</sup> (7) Circumspection,<sup>163</sup> and (8) Caution.<sup>164</sup> Regarding Aquinas’s classification, he considers the first five as cognitive virtues and the last three as commanding and applying knowledge to action.<sup>165</sup> Expressive of prudence’s aspect to inquire into contingent matters of action, the latter group pursues appropriate knowledge from both the first moral principles and particular singular conditions supplied by the cognitive virtues. The cognitive virtues, on the other hand, seek counsel, i.e., obtain knowledge or data, from various sources such as past events (memory), innate first moral principles and particular singular conditions (understanding or intelligence, reasoning, shrewdness), and from prudent people (docility). Notwithstanding the fact that all the quasi-integral parts contribute individually to the attainment of the objective of prudence to seek counsel, only those parts mentioned above which have a direct relationship with the synderetic apprehension of the first principles of moral action will be relatively considered in depth in the ensuing discussion.

Aquinas contends that prudence requires “the memory of many things”<sup>166</sup> borne out of past experiences. Its importance presumes that they provide insights into the first principles of moral action. A similar presumption is made by the Angelic Doctor when he posited the importance

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<sup>156</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 49, aa. 1-8.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 49, a. 1.

<sup>158</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 49, a. 2.

<sup>159</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 49, a. 3.

<sup>160</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 49, a. 4.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 49, a. 5.

<sup>162</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 49, a. 6.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 49, a. 7.

<sup>164</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 49, a. 8.

<sup>165</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 48, a. 1.

<sup>166</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 49, a. 1.

of docility by which the human person seeks knowledge from the experiences of older people than we are whose experiences point to the first principles.<sup>167</sup> Past experiences, whether personally executed or witnessed, are stored in the internal senses leaving its spiritual footprints, aptly called *sensible species*, in the *vis memorativa*. As previously noted, the cognition of an extramental reality may take a sequence of external sensations, hence several *sensible species*, in order for the human mind to reach ideation or ideogenesis, i.e., the process of cognition or intellection where the human mind forms concepts or ideas. This process appears to be static, stable and mechanical. The habit of prudential understanding or intelligence helps the human mind seeks counsel from all these sources of the first moral principles, and concretely, of the secondary principles, while seeking counsel, too, by investigating the contingent matters of actions.

Of utmost interest in this research is the observation that imagination (*vis imaginativa*) did not make it to Aquinas's list of *quasi*-integral parts of prudence. Even considering the different sources from which Aquinas based his examination of prudence, viz., Tully, Plotinus, Macrobius, Aristotle and Andronicus, none of these directly or indirectly alluded to *vis imaginativa* as a possible source of knowledge.<sup>168</sup> Thomistic ideation does not merely and exclusively involve the extraction of *sensible species* from the *vis memorativa*. It involves, too, the action of *vis imaginativa* coalescing forms or ideas to create new knowledges (ideation, ideogenesis) even those types which have no bearing in reality itself. Citing Avicenna, Aquinas presents the possibility of a created reality via the powers of imagination: "as when from the imaginary form of gold, and imaginary form of a mountain, we compose the one form of a golden mountain."<sup>169</sup> *Vis imaginativa*'s function is an established faculty in Thomistic epistemology yet it is quite perplexing that Aquinas decided not to explicitly establish the link between prudence and imagination. A close investigation would unsurprisingly suggest that the Angelic Doctor is merely being consistent with his conceptual source and the intellectual climate during his time.

A probable intimation of this omission is found in question 51, article 3 in the *Secunda secundae* of the *Summa theologiae*:

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<sup>167</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 49, a. 3.

<sup>168</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 48, a. 1.

<sup>169</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 78, a. 4.

in speculative matters some are good at research, through their reason being quick at arguing from one thing to another (which seems to be due to a disposition of their power of **imagination**, which has a facility in forming phantasms), and yet such persons sometimes lack good judgment (and this is due to a defect in the intellect arising chiefly from a defective disposition of the common sense which fails to judge aright).<sup>170</sup>

The above quote reflects Aquinas's straightforward assessment of imagination as being not duly constituted of stable knowledge. He conceives of any reasoning by imagination as being noncommittal since imagination presents a variety of perspectives that can or may impede the determination of rational certainty. In his *Commentary of Aristotle's De anima*, he unequivocally states his indifference towards the nature of imagination which can lead the mind from the real good: "Appetition and imagination may be either right or wrong."<sup>171</sup> Aquinas's thinking is clearly an echo of the mind of the Philosopher who previously expressed the same thought: "All intellect, then, is right, but imagination and appetition may be right or not right."<sup>172</sup>

The insistence on the inclusion of *vis imaginativa* in prudential moral inquiry is focused on accessing a much broader epistemic perspective in acquiring knowledge that facilitates prudential judgment and command. As articulated above, there is an obvious probable risk in pursuing this issue due to the tentative temperament of imagination to provide a firm knowledge of things perceived. Experience suggests that the mind has the power of its own to meander away from the truth instead of contemplating on the practical good that is so essential for prudence to organically dispose the human mind to proceed to judge and to command. Notwithstanding, theology cannot and should not ignore recent developments in the human sciences, notably in psychology (neuroscience, neurobiology) and applied psychology (philosophy of education), which have already posited the importance of imagination in the moral development of the human person. As will be detailed below, these findings offer pioneering insights and cutting-edge outcomes that should open vistas never perceived before.

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<sup>170</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 51, a. 3. (Emphasis mine)

<sup>171</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri De anima*. trans. James H. Robb, *The Collected Works of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1984), IntelLex Past Master, lect. 15, §§ 826-827.

<sup>172</sup> Aristotle, *De anima* in Aquinas, *Sententia libri De anima*, 3.10.433a 9-433b 27.

## *The Synthetic Function of Prudence*

Responding to Benedict M. Ashley, OP's article, *The Anthropological Foundations of the Natural Law: A Thomistic Engagement with Modern Science*, Janet E. Smith claims that "the principles and precepts of natural law are not innate but they are easily known to the human person raised well, for we are designed to grasp them."<sup>173</sup> Her statement springs from Ashley's commentary on Aquinas's epistemology that: "From what we can observe about...sensed objects and their behaviours little by little we can come to understand something about our inner life in its obscure mystery."<sup>174</sup>

The Thomistic basis upon which Ashley stated his epistemological assertion is thematically well-established. We may recall here the Thomistic doctrine that states that nothing is in the intellect that was not previously in the sensible world. Through the ages, this doctrine has attracted a plethora of theological inquiries which has paved the way for a re-interpretation of the Aquinas's doctrine on the natural law. Such is being attempt by the ensuing discussion.

Having already reflected on the classical notion of natural law in the previous chapter, this section will now explore a contemporary speculative perspective regarding the Thomistic natural law. In this regard, Peter Spiel asserts that human agents can come to know natural law's primal goods through the speculative and practical reason:

[P]ractical reason does not function independently of speculative reason. Although it provides us with material for ethical inquiry, Aquinas maintains that practical experience of the ends to which we are oriented should be guided by the operation of the speculative reason in determining the truth about human nature as well.<sup>175</sup>

Seipel's statement was primarily expressed to counter-argue Daniel Mark Nelson's non-traditional position who posits in his book, *The Priority of Prudence*, the following:

The first principle of practical reason, or the first principle of natural law, does not tell us which goods in particular to pursue or how to

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<sup>173</sup> Janet E. Smith, "Character as an Enabler of Moral Judgment," in *St. Thomas Aquinas and the Natural Law Tradition: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. John Goyette, Mark S. Latkovic, and Richard S. Myers (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 21.

<sup>174</sup> Benedict M. Ashley, OP, "The Anthropological Foundations of the Natural Law: A Thomistic Engagement with Modern Science," in *St. Thomas Aquinas and the Natural Law: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. John Goyette, Mark S. Latkovic, and Richard S. Myers (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 8.

<sup>175</sup> Seipel, "Aquinas and the Natural Law," 30.

pursue them, and our natural inclinations are only toward the general kinds of goods with which our various powers are concerned. In order to pursue appropriate goods, and in order to act reasonably with respect to our inclinations, we are dependent on the virtues under the direction of prudence, which is right reason about how to act.<sup>176</sup>

Deviating from the classical reason-centred tradition, Nelson evidently stresses the role of prudence in providing the content of the practical good. He articulates Aquinas's teaching by explaining that it is due to prudence's acquired knowledge which gives rise to what is really practical in practical reason (*synderesis*):

The real issue between my interpretation and the usual reading of Thomas's ethics has to do with the scope of prudence's deliberations and the function of first principles. I readily acknowledge that Thomas assigns an important role to the insights of *synderesis* or to natural knowledge of first principles. I have tried to suggest, however, that such knowledge serves the **explanatory function** of accounting for how it happens that we come to reason practically and for the origin of the virtues. Thomas's general point is that we have a created, natural ability to act for the good appropriate to our nature and to develop the habits that perfect that capacity. Concrete knowledge of how to act, knowledge of right means to attain the good, depends on prudence, an acquired ability which is right reason about human action.<sup>177</sup>

Nelson's assertion that the first principles of natural law serve merely an explanatory function is bold and controversial<sup>178</sup> yet not without substantial proof from the teachings of Aquinas. Using article 16 of question 47 in the *Secunda secundae* in the *Summa theologiae* as his basis, he highlights the view of the Angelic Doctor himself on the insufficiency of the first principles of natural law in guiding concrete and practical moral actions. The Thomistic text cited exemplifies this assertion: "Prudence consists chiefly, not in the knowledge of universals, but in applying them to action. Wherefore forgetting the knowledge of universals does not destroy the principal part of prudence, but hinders it somewhat, as stated above."<sup>179</sup> This view echoes the description of the first moral principles in the previous chapter as being mere formal principles devoid of any practical content.

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<sup>176</sup> Nelson, *The Priority of Prudence*, 107.

<sup>177</sup> Nelson, *The Priority of Prudence*, 103. (Emphasis mine)

<sup>178</sup> See Thomas F. O'Meara, OP, "Virtues in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas," *Theological Studies* 58, no. 2 (1997): 256-257.

<sup>179</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 16.

It is apparent from Nelson's perspective that the argument from the human context holds the key to understanding the role of prudence in assisting the human mind form a judgement and command on the basis of a sound and appropriate counsel. Seipel, however, is opposed to such preponderance on virtues over natural inclination. He counters Nelson's claim by asserting the bigger picture which classical traditional interpretation generally upholds:

[P]ractical experience of our natural inclination towards certain goods provides us with the starting point for theoretical reflection. But that does not mean that we can apprehend the genuine good of human life in such a way that eliminates the needs for a speculative theory of human nature.<sup>180</sup>

The two theological positions rendered above represent two distinct approaches which have merits of their own. Seipel himself acknowledges this: "Nelson nevertheless articulates a careful and nuanced interpretation of Aquinas's understanding of human nature that poses a serious challenge to the account of natural law derivationism."<sup>181</sup>

Nelson's advocacy zeroes in on the metaphysical limitation of the universal first principles of natural law to grasp the particulars of contingent matters of action. His view logically asserts that "(h)uman laws are necessary because of the impossibility of applying the general and abstract principles of natural law to the great diversity and contingency of human affairs."<sup>182</sup> He specifically asserts the function of prudence which promotes the crucial nature of prudential counsel. It does so by delving into the infinity of singulars in order to properly and adequately informed the appropriate prudential command that needs to be undertaken. Here is where prudence functions as the synthesiser of the first principles of natural law and the infinity of singulars. Nelson's virtue-perspective interpretation does have theological validity most especially when considered from the perspective of virtue ethics. The consideration of the particular is essential and vital in the act of prudence. This research has been emphasising that while the innateness of the first principles of natural law is acknowledged, it stresses, too, that its apprehended goods of the natural law need discovery and inquiry for the human mind to inchoatively grasp the content of those goods. This necessarily requires, as previously

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<sup>180</sup> Seipel, "Aquinas and the Natural Law," 32.

<sup>181</sup> Seipel, "Aquinas and the Natural Law," 29.

<sup>182</sup> Nelson, *The Priority of Prudence*, 111. In the same vein, Aquinas asserts that: "The general principles of the natural law cannot be applied to all men in the same way on account of the great variety of human affairs: and hence arises the diversity of positive laws among various people." Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 95. a. 1.



expressed, experience and time in order for the full import of the good to take root in the human person. If the virtues need time to grow, the first moral principles also need the same time to grow. Smith makes a parallel observation: “[A]lthough we are naturally able to delight in what is good, we need experience of nature to teach us what is good.”<sup>183</sup>

To emphasise what can be practically known and habituated, as this research thematically purports, demonstrates no less a distinct mode of perfection depicting the hylomorphic unicity of the moral person. To exclusively rest on the innate first moral principles without considering the given rudimentary elements characteristic of the extramental world is, apart from being frivolous and impossible, a betrayal and ignorance of the Thomistic doctrine on epistemology. Prudence operates similar to a bridge which connects two ends: the rational end and the practical end. This means, prudence actively connects natural reason with acquired virtues habitually and not just intellectually. Prudence provides the synthesis of the divine in the human person and the human in the moral person, the harmony being achieved through the proper use of the undeserved freedom inherently designed to actuate human flourishing.

## Summary

Underlying the innate reality of *synderesis* is its habitual capacity to move prudence to facilitate moral development. Prudence accomplishes this by specifying the means through which the corresponding perfective ends of human acts as determined by either the imperfect moral virtues or the perfect infused virtues are achieved. Though acquired moral virtues only point to natural ends, infused virtues are able to elevate or transform these to merit supernatural ends. Natural ends appeal to all while supernatural ends are conditioned by an act of faith in God.

Specifically, the acquired moral virtue of prudence regulates the means of acquiring natural ends by inquiring about the first principles of natural law and the contingent matters of action (moral context). While the former is acquired via inquiry from virtue-enablers who would have already acquired an understanding of the first moral principles through experience and time, the latter is gained by analysing the different specificities relative to the moral agent’s contextual conditions. This thesis proposes the consideration of moral imagination in

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<sup>183</sup> Smith, “Character as an Enabler of Moral Judgment,” 20.

prudential moral inquiry owing to its inherent ability to form new ideas or concepts outside the province of sensitive knowledge. These new ideas are crucial in conceptualising different options, moral or not, prior to confirming a moral judgment and command. The next chapter will investigate further the beneficence of this proposition.

## Chapter 7

### The Beneficence of Moral Imagination in the *Act of Synderesis*

#### Introduction

The previous chapter elucidated the imperative of virtue habituation in developing the innate seed of the practical good apprehended by the habit of *synderesis*. It underlined the nature of *synderesis* as “a kind of prelude to the act of virtue.”<sup>1</sup> It can be recalled that *synderesis*, being “bestowed on us by nature,”<sup>2</sup> is both inherently intuitive (pre-cognitive) and developmentally apprehensive (cognitive).<sup>3</sup> This theoretical presentation of the Thomistic notion of *synderesis* echoes Mark Sultana’s own commentary on *synderesis* where he claims that the precepts of the primary moral principles remain rather empty and general and would “need to be fleshed out in more specific ways and...to be accompanied with an apprehension of particular circumstances.”<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, the previous discussion emphasized that the synderetic apprehension of the first principles of natural law is accomplished effectively via embodiment of virtues. This epistemic process consequently provides the necessary form (the virtuous life) and the information (the way of virtuous living) in view of moral development. From the ontological consideration of *synderesis*, the discussion descended into the practical consideration of prudence which is fittingly related to practical reason. This development is not unexpected since prudence, as an

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<sup>1</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 16, a. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 79, a. 12.

<sup>3</sup> See Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 16, a. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Sultana, “On Conscience and Prudence,” *The Heythrop Journal* 56, no. 4 (2015): 625.

acquired moral virtue, regulates the means to the ends of moral virtues which *synderesis* appoints.<sup>5</sup>

Aquinas is a realist in considering the capacity of every human person to seek the proper means of achieving the moral ends. His exhortation that “prudence is not about the ends, but about the means”<sup>6</sup> articulates fully this commitment. It is the reasonable opinion of this thesis, however, that Aquinas’s commitment to what prudence can realistically accomplish in view of moral inquiry is underdeveloped. Aquinas left out the faculty of moral imagination (*vis imaginativa*) in prudential counsel. It is on this account that this research hypothesizes that moral imagination, owing to its instrumentality in the prudential moral inquiry of the first principles of practical reason, ought to be included as one of the *quasi-integral parts of prudence*. Intrinsic to prudential inquiry is the imaginative process that allows both past and current concepts or ideas to produce new forms of knowledge. The inclusion of moral imagination is necessary if prudence is to avail of all possible avenues for sourcing knowledge within its gambit.

The following sections below will explore the arguments in favour of the consideration of moral imagination<sup>7</sup> in prudential moral inquiry. This will entail the investigation of the various historical influences that may have influenced the theological disposition of Aquinas. Alongside presenting the Thomistic doctrine on *vis imaginativa*, a cursory study of contemporary scholarship on moral imagination will be introduced to analyse the beneficence of moral imagination in moral development and functioning. An important inclusion in this chapter is the original proposition on the two metaphysical moments relating to the act of *synderesis*: the **intuitive actuation** and the **pre-cognitive procession**. These two metaphysical moments demarcate the most initial epistemological phases in human intellection. They point to the epistemological procession prior to what was previously referred to as ideogenesis or ideation. It is during these phases where the quality of sensitive experience is crucial if the necessary epistemic materials (phantasms) are to be assimilated for the purpose of the apprehension and maturation of the practical moral good.

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<sup>5</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 15.

<sup>7</sup> *Moral imagination* as used in this research broadly refers to the mental representation of the realities of ‘good’ and ‘evil,’ and specifically, points to the phantasmal representation of good habits (*virtues*) and bad habits (*vices*) which in their own particular way, either directly or indirectly, influence human reason to desire appropriate moral ends that lead ultimately to beatific vision. Unless specified, the terms ‘imagination’ and ‘moral imagination’ are used interchangeably in this research.

Prior to elaborating the beneficence arguments in favour of moral imagination, a brief commentary on the subject matter is in order. There is indeed much to be mystified by Aquinas's doctrinal predilection to except the import of imagination in prudence's quest for moral knowledge (moral certainty) in moral inquiries. Being an indispensable element in moral deliberations, prudential moral inquiry seeks the knowledge and understanding of moral landscapes of given moral situations. Though imagination's engagement in erotic fantasies is not unknown, its beneficence, however, is truly well-established in terms of its capacity to consciously produce appropriate moral contexts. The consideration of moral contexts is acknowledged by John Dewey when he analogously purported the reality of imagination as being akin to undergoing a dramatic rehearsal prior to any moral judgment: "Imagination is primarily dramatic, rather than lyric, whether it takes the form of the play enacted on stage, of the old story or silent soliloquy."<sup>8</sup> Mental moral contexts can also be construed as producing imaginative options in the course of moral deliberations. This practical phenomenon is captured by Mavis Biss in the following quote:

Imagination contributes to moral competence by testing the viability of options. The anticipation of potential consequences is linked to imagination because it involves mental imagery (pictorial imagination), and the mental representation of states of affairs that may result from future actions. The ability to vividly imagine the consequences of different parts of actions can be seen as a condition or aspect of moral judgment, because potential consequences partially determine which of the available options would be best to take.<sup>9</sup>

Though Aquinas would have been likely shaped by his time, it still raises important questions, not least of all academic, as to why he elected not to admit the potential benefit of imagination in moral deliberations. The following sections will now investigate possible rationales as to why Aquinas opted not to consider moral imagination as one of the *quasi-integral parts of prudence*.

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<sup>8</sup> John Dewey, "Experience and Nature," in Steven Fesmire, *John Dewey and Moral Imagination: Pragmatism in Ethics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 76.

<sup>9</sup> Mavis Biss, "Moral Imagination, Perception, and Judgment," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 52, no. 1 (March 2014): 5.

## Imagination's Absence in Prudential Inquiry: *Dominus falsitatis*

In view of determining the rationale behind the absence of imagination in prudential inquiry, a probe into the (a) contextual milieu and the (b) thematic lineage of Aquinas's teaching on virtue is in order. This thesis contends that if prudence were to comprehensively guide the human person cognitively and affectively, it must consider all possible sources of prudential inquiry that are within the epistemic reach of the human intellect. Though it is outside the scope of this research, it needs to be mentioned that the affect (passion) contributes also to prudential moral inquiry. Emotions (or feelings) are spliced into perceived sensitive knowledge which informs the intellect of moral contexts.<sup>10</sup>

This research contends that the absence of imagination gravely misses what nature itself is providing for the ongoing moral development of the human person. Aquinas's teaching on the internal sensoria underpins this argument: "As nature does not fail in necessary things, there must needs be as many actions of the sensitive soul as may suffice for the life of a perfect animal."<sup>11</sup> At the disposal of the human person is nature's gift of imagination whose function, though potentially corrupted at times, is ultimately necessary for the perfection of human life. Such is its necessity that in prudence's judgment and command, if it were to possess a well-grounded basis for its apprehensive function, imagination must be sought for prudential moral inquiry. This prudential action, needless to say, fulfils what Aquinas reveals about divine generosity: "God provides for everything according to the capacity of its nature."<sup>12</sup>

### Contextual Milieu: The Condemnation of Imagination

The consideration of the *contextual milieu* proffers circumstantial insights into the mind of Aquinas. History will attest to the well-known fact that medieval scholars preferentially thought that speculating on imagination was not within the academic interest at that time. This

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<sup>10</sup> This research agrees with Mavis Biss who affirms that: "Emotions that arise in association with anticipated states of affairs, or emotional "images," could also be part of imaginative moral judgment." See Mavis Biss, "Moral Imagination, Perception, and Judgment," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 52, no. 1 (March 2014): 5. The reference to the affective part of the soul is not foreign to the consideration of *synderesis* with St. Bonaventure himself assigning it as a *desire for the good* and most recently, Benedict XVI reflected on it as an "inner sense." See St. Jerome, *Commentary on Ezekiel*, 1.7 in Potts, *Conscience in Medieval Philosophy*, 79-80; Benedict XVI, *Values in a Time of Upheaval*, 92.

<sup>11</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 78, a. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 1, a. 9.

observation is spelt out by Clarke W. Norris, SJ who commented that Aquinas and many other medieval scholars were:

all primarily oriented in the intention of their philosophical work more toward the fullest possible understanding of the real world already given them by God as a fixed, unchanging order than in creating something truly new, that is, in expressing their participation in God's own creativity as an intrinsic part of their human dignity under God.<sup>13</sup>

Probing further, there appears to be a deeper rationale for the unfavourable demise of imagination during medieval times. Richard Kearney makes this important observation in relation to the perception of imagination as mere substitute of the original reality:

This acknowledgement of the ambiguous status of imagination of the *epistemological* plane was expressed in a general attitude of suspicion – a suspicion exacerbated by the adherence of medieval philosophy to the *ethical* condemnation of imagination found in Holy Scripture. The combination of these two foundational authorities (Greek ontology and Judeo-Christian theology) resulted in a largely hostile view of imagination.<sup>14</sup>

The extent of the influence of the ethical condemnation of imagination found in Holy Scriptures intimated in the above quote should not be overlooked nor underestimated. In biblical theology, which extensively influenced medieval thinking, the account of the Fall in the *Book of Genesis* is construed thematically as the genesis of human imagination whereby Adam's transgression, which universally represents humanity's desire for immortality,<sup>15</sup> manifests his personal desire to be 'God's equal.' His intention is confirmed by his acquiescence to the serpent's temptation: "for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."<sup>16</sup> The attempt by the serpent to engage in a dialogue with Adam explicates right from the outset its wicked plot to drag Adam's power of imagination beyond its preternatural bounds. Gerhard von Rad provides an exegesis:

What the serpent's insinuation means is the possibility of an extension of human existence beyond the limits set for it by God at creation, an increase of life not only in the sense of pure intellectual enrichment but

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<sup>13</sup> W. Norris Clarke, SJ, *The Creative Retrieval of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Essays in Thomistic Philosophy, New and Old*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (NY: Fordham University Press, 2009), 213.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture* (London: Routledge, 1988), 131.

<sup>15</sup> R. Norman Whybray, *Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 42-45.

<sup>16</sup> Gn 3:5.

also of familiarity with, and power over with, mysteries that lie beyond man. That the narrative sees man's fall, his actual separation from God.<sup>17</sup>

Resulting from Adam's action is the birth of imagination which "enables man to think in terms of opposites – good and evil, past and future, God and man."<sup>18</sup> The notion of opposites is striking in this respect as it alludes to the bifurcation of the power of imagination which could either manifest the good or the bad (evil) depending on the use or abuse of this power. Acutely, it implies that the human self is split and eternally torn between opposing tendencies.<sup>19</sup> These opposites are graphically rendered by Cain's murder of his brother, Abel, where Cain succumbed to one of the opposites at par with Adam's betrayal of his relationship with God – his disobedience to God's law.

Even in the midst of all this, the word of God was still revealed to Cain in respect to imagining the good as the moral way to overcome personal failures: "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it."<sup>20</sup> In the advent of opposites, humanity then is ordered to master his or her own power in order to achieve moral development. The expedience of this matter is paramount since life after the Fall has the potential to navigate itself away from the good and towards the bad (evil) while imagining the consequences of obedience or betrayal of God's offer of friendship. Although human imagination *per se* has not lost its goodness, human disposition is weakened, and concupiscence has become humanity's perpetual reminder of the Fall.

Analogous to the existence of *synderesis* in every rational soul, human agents have access to imagination which they can use freely and for a specific teleological purpose. It should be recalled that St. Jerome held that *synderesis* was not even extinguished in the breast of Cain after he was turned out of Paradise and St. Paul himself recognised it as the "law written on their hearts."<sup>21</sup> Reflecting on the inevitable encounter with opposites, Kearney offers a way forward in establishing moral integrity in the exercise of freedom: "But whether he decides to redirect his creative imagination to the way of divine creation – pursuing the way of imitation

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<sup>17</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1966), 87.

<sup>18</sup> Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture*, 40.

<sup>19</sup> See Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, § 13. This text portrays the interior human conflict brought about by original sin.

<sup>20</sup> Gn 4: 6-7.

<sup>21</sup> Rom 2:15.



– or to continue his wandering through the desert of idolatrous fantasies, man’s ethical choice remains a free one.”<sup>22</sup>

The above discussion unambiguously provides an insight as to why Aquinas could have abandoned any further speculative foray into the realm of *vis imaginativa* beyond his treatises in the *Summa theologiae*. The notion of imagination would have likely been prejudicially contaminated by the prevailing biblico-theological understanding of Adam’s original sin which consequently has either diminished or totally dismissed its referential relevance.<sup>23</sup> The investigation below on the thematic lineage will produce further evidence as to why imagination was probably omitted by the Angelic Doctor in prudential counsel.

#### Thematic Lineage: The Aristotelian Influence on Thomistic Imagination

Most likely influenced by his contemporaries, Aquinas was not alone in disregarding or dismissing the importance of imagination. In fact, Tully, Plotinus, Macrobius, Aristotle and Andronicus, all of whom the Angelic Doctor had mentioned in his *Summa theologiae*, shared the same disregard towards imagination.<sup>24</sup> By citing them, the Angelic Doctor was apparently establishing legitimacy and providing justification to his assertion.

The probative investigation below reveals that doctrinal fidelity to the Philosopher, whose teachings on the interior sensoria are the counterpart origin of the Thomistic doctrine on the interior senses, would have likely formed part of Aquinas’s thought-consideration to let go of imagination. The following text appears to demonstrate Aquinas’s disposition that *vis imaginativa* may not be a stable source upon which the certitude of reason could be established. In his *Commentary of Aristotle’s De anima*, he unequivocally states his indifference towards imagination:

Appetition and imagination (motive-principles likewise) may be, on the other hand, either right or wrong. Hence if we act amiss it, in the last analysis, because we fall short of what we intellectually know; our previous conclusion stands, that the final-motive comes from the object of desire. Now this object is either a real good or a seeming good: it is real good if the mind’s original correct judgment is maintained; it is

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<sup>22</sup> Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture*, 50.

<sup>23</sup> Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture*, 50.

<sup>24</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 48, a. 1.

only a seeming good if appetite or imagination cause a deflection from that judgment.<sup>25</sup>

Aquinas's view in the above quote echoes the mind of the Philosopher who originally expressed the same thought: "Now thought is always right, but appetite and imagination may be either right or wrong."<sup>26</sup>

Noteworthy, the exclusion of imagination observes the inclusion of memory as one of the cognitive virtues attendant to prudence. Aquinas apparently gave doctrinal preponderance to *vis memorativa* over *vis imaginativa*. This could probably be weighted on the fact that memory draws information from the cogitative sense (*vis cogitativa*) which provides knowledge relating to that which is either pleasurable or unpleasurable, beneficial or harmful, good or evil. This information is seriously sought by prudence and Aquinas appears to believe that memory is the lone-sufficient faculty to access the first principles of practical reason. Considering that information obtained via imagination has the potential to be absurdly irrational, Aquinas would have considered admitting memory as a firmer and a more stable source of knowledge. Indeed, experience will confirm that "imagination suffers from certain inexactitudes and failures of detail which that presence would relieve. The fact is, we are never sure that what is imagined corresponds exactly to what was originally experienced."<sup>27</sup> In addition, imagination has its own limits which could jeopardise the operation of memory:

An inability to remember some past event may be due to the failure of imagination to retain the image.... The memory, relying on these images, is liable to be misled and to falsely judge of a past event. In other words, the imagination has the tendency to fill in gaps of memory, and this causes errors in remembering.<sup>28</sup>

A closer analysis of the functions of memory and imagination would suggest that "imagination supplies a basis for memorial procedures."<sup>29</sup> It is not difficult to imagine how this may proceed in the human mind since Aquinas specifically nominated to each of these interior sensoria their specific functions maintaining that "nature does not fail in necessary things."<sup>30</sup> When memory

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<sup>25</sup> Aquinas, *Sententia libri De anima*, lib. 3, lect. 15, §§ 826-827.

<sup>26</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima*, 3.10.433a21-433b4.

<sup>27</sup> Brennan, OP, *A Philosophic Analysis of the Nature of Man*, 128.

<sup>28</sup> Marie I. George, "Imagination as Source of Falsehood According to Aquinas" (paper presented at the Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, 1993), 191.

<sup>29</sup> Brennan, OP, *A Philosophic Analysis of the Nature of Man*, 129.

<sup>30</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 78, a. 4.

recalls the past, it necessarily entails the use of imagination. Experientially, their difference is elucidated by this articulation: it is easier to remember (memory) what a rainbow looks like than imagine when was the last time one has seen a rainbow.

The doctrinal bias against moral imagination has effectively delimited and constrained a broader scope for prudential moral inquiry. This is where this limitation ushers in a cognitive and affective deprivation that malnourishes the human soul of the intellectual and affectual dynamism that it necessarily deserves. Imagination allows the human mind to inquire and to probe the deepest recesses of human cognition and affection and brings to the fore the moral truth that any human decision desires to rely upon.

The negativity surrounding imagination should not be surprising and perplexing. The allusion to its existence is uncompromisingly negative and damnatory. For example, imagination is viewed by Immanuel Kant as autocratic in its operation which needs to be harnessed by prudence.<sup>31</sup> From being construed as autocratic, Martha Nussbaum closely asserts imagination as being “too often egoistic and self-indulgent, too concerned with particulars and with their relation to the self.”<sup>32</sup> It is this reference to the ego or the self that imagination has also been typified as naturally “prone to frivolous fancy and opposed to reason... (having) little relevance to practical issues.”<sup>33</sup> In the same vein as being a voluntary activity of one’s ego or the self, Ludwig Wittgenstein is convinced that imagination “does not instruct us about the external world.”<sup>34</sup> Owing to its origin, imagination is considered as the antithesis of rational thinking. This is basically due to its etymological affiliation with the Greek word, *phantasia*, that imagination has become synonymous with ‘fantasy’ – a fanciful term which could pejoratively mean baseless, impossible, make-believe and absurd. Marie George sums up the above unfavourable scrutiny: “Imagination cannot be relied upon for judgment of natural things, since it can represent things as not existing in sensible matter and, also, as existing in sensible matter but other than they are.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. Louis Infield (NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, Incorporated, 1963), 140.

<sup>32</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (NY: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1992), 76.

<sup>33</sup> Fesmire, *John Dewey and Moral Imagination: Pragmatism in Ethics*, 61.

<sup>34</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe and Basil Blackwell, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1981), 109.

<sup>35</sup> George, “Imagination as Source of Falsehood According to Aquinas,” 194.

The unsurprisingly negative manner in which imagination has been thought of above discloses nonetheless of its persisting and indispensable presence in the human mind. After all, speaking as a moral theologian, Philip Keane, SS articulates that “there is no area of human life which we do not need to be imaginative.”<sup>36</sup> If imagination is being hunted due to its pernicious role in the banishment of Adam and Even from Paradise thereby causing the fracture of humanity, or simply because it has been leading people to imprudence, to idleness, to complacency, and to individualism, these are all indicative of the power of imagination to enthrall the human mind to seek beyond the confines of the sensitive world.

Aquinas himself, echoing Aristotle, contributed to the perceptual mistrust of imagination by distinguishing it as “the master of falsity” (*dominus falsitatis*).<sup>37</sup> Moreover, his allusion to the possible capacity of imagination to be influenced by the *devil* did not help either. He claims that devils are capable of overpowering the imagination by causing it to form images of evil nature.<sup>38</sup> Considering the possibility of imagination going awry, Aquinas nonetheless stresses the positive influence of virtue on creative imagination:

[V]irtue is destroyed or lessened through cessation from act. The same applies to the intellectual habits, which renders man ready to judge aright of those things that are pictured by his imagination. Hence when man ceases to make use of his intellectual habits, strange fancies, sometimes in opposition to them, arise in his imagination; so that unless those fancies be, as it were, cut off or kept back by frequent use of his intellectual habits, man becomes less fit to judge aright, and sometimes is even wholly disposed to the contrary, and this the intellectual habit is diminished or even wholly destroyed by cessation from act.<sup>39</sup>

### **Thomistic Doctrine on Imagination: *Passio phantasiae***

In Thomistic epistemology, ideogenesis or ideation partly involves the imaginative apprehension of “a thing not only at the actual time of sensation, but also when it is absent.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Philip S. Keane, SS, *Christian Ethics and Imagination: A Theological Inquiry* (NY: Paulist Press, 1984), 83.

<sup>37</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 1, a. 11. “[T]he imagination usually apprehends a thing as it is not, since it apprehends it as present though it is absent. Consequently, the Philosopher says, ‘Imagination, not sense, is the master of falsity.’” See also Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 17, a. 2. “Falsity is attributed to imagination, as it represents the likeness of something even in its absence.”

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 114, a. 4; also, I-II, q. 80, a.3.

<sup>39</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 43, a. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 78, a. 4.

In his *Commentary on Aristotle's De anima*, Aquinas articulates imagination as a conscious act: "A passion of phantasy (*passio phantasiae*) is in us when we will because it is in our power to form something as it were appearing before our eyes."<sup>41</sup> Imagination is bringing back on the "screen of consciousness"<sup>42</sup> those of which have been sensed extramentally. Aquinas, agreeing with Avicenna, further extends the power of imagination to "combine and divide imaginary form[s]"<sup>43</sup> which allows for previously sensed forms or ideas to be reproduced and produced.<sup>44</sup> The function of combining and dividing forms is specifically accomplished by creative (productive) imagination. In his classic example of what imagination can produce, Aquinas imaginatively conceives of a golden mountain put together from previous separate conceptions of an imaginary form of gold and an imaginary form of a mountain.<sup>45</sup>

Consistent with this teaching on the empirical nature of his epistemology, Aquinas explains that the imaginative content of prophecies originate from previously sensed matters: "The prophet does not need a new infusion of the species of those things which he has seen, but only an orderly grouping of the species retained in the storehouse of the imaginative power, which can suitably designate the thing to be prophesied."<sup>46</sup> By extension, an essential understanding concerning the Thomistic doctrine on imagination is the fact that the creative production of imaginary forms reveal the human capacity "to generate new possibilities for realising moral ends."<sup>47</sup> These moral ends are the province of prudence to which it intends to guide moral agents to their acquisition via imagination.

The question regarding the difference between memory and imagination is an important epistemological phenomenon. According to Brennan, the fundamental difference lies in their underlying temporal context. When memory reminisces persons, events, etc., it recalls them as part of a distant past. On the other hand, imagination represents images as if it is presently occurring. Brennan states unequivocally that "[m]emory always recognises its revived products as images of past events, tracing them back to their origin in perceptual experience and placing

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<sup>41</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Treatise on the Soul.*, trans. R.A. Kocourek (St. Paul, MN: College of St. Thomas, 1946), lib. 3, lect. 4, § 633.

<sup>42</sup> Brennan, OP, *A Philosophic Analysis of the Nature of Man*, 126.

<sup>43</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 78, a. 4.

<sup>44</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 78, a. 7. "Wherefore it is clear for the intellect to understand actually, not only when it acquires fresh knowledge, but also when it applies knowledge already acquired, there is a need for the act of the imagination and of the other powers."

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 78, a. 4.

<sup>46</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 12, a. 7.

<sup>47</sup> Biss, "Moral Imagination, Perception, and Judgment," 3.

them in a definite temporal context. Imagination does none of these things.”<sup>48</sup> Memorative and imaginative contextualisation is undoubtedly necessary in moral inquiries. Though the latter reproduces static images from the memorial past, memory is viewed by Aquinas as a legitimate source of information for prudential moral inquiry. This was more likely the reason why Aquinas favoured *vis memorativa* over *vis imaginativa* in his consideration of the *quasi-integral parts of prudence*.

The latter, on the other hand, produces dynamic images brought about by its capacity to freely divide and combine previously sensed forms. Since the process of combination and division involves the potential securing of a multi-dimensional cognitive perspectives, it permits the play of thoughts and suspension of judgment until prudence is adequately prepared to make a judgment.<sup>49</sup> Archimedes, who discovered the physical law of buoyancy while taking a bath, would have imaginatively played with his thoughts before discovering what is now called the Archimedes Principle. The displacement of water upon his immersion in the bathtub filled with water would have been in his conscious mind when he was trying to imaginatively suspend his judgment<sup>50</sup> on the possible solution to the king’s request to him to determine the gold content of his crown after suspecting that his own goldsmith cheated on him by adding silver into it.<sup>51</sup> As well with other discoveries and inventions, creative imagination would have been instrumental in moving the human reason and will to produce proto-types or mental images of impending discoveries or inventions before taking them out into the physical realm. Thereto, Biss reflects on imagination “as a bridge between understanding and action.”<sup>52</sup>

Having considered the conscious element in imagination, it would be remiss to deny the occurrence of unconscious play of thoughts in dreams where there is evidence of free play producing images that may be grotesquely inaccurate and irrational. Though it must be stressed that freedom in creative imagination is not absolute as it is limited only by the moral agent’s experience and perceptual knowledge that has been admitted into complete ideation, “imagination...is [still] the necessary condition for the freedom of empirical man in the midst

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<sup>48</sup> Brennan, OP, *A Philosophic Analysis of the Nature of Man*, 129.

<sup>49</sup> See Keane, SS, *Christian Ethics and Imagination: A Theological Inquiry*, 81-84.

<sup>50</sup> Alex F. Osborn claims that based on a study the deferment-of-judgment principle produces more ideas from which a solution can be chosen from as compared to when judgments are made swiftly. See Alex F. Osborn, *Applied Imagination: Principles and Procedures of Creative Problem-Solving*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Revised ed. (NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1979), 124-129.

<sup>51</sup> “About Eureka!” Bellarmine University, accessed July 20, 2020, <https://www.bellarmino.edu/learningcommunity/eureka/about/>.

<sup>52</sup> Biss, “Moral Imagination, Perception, and Judgment,” 1.

of the world.”<sup>53</sup> Imagination realises human freedom in seeing through the mind’s eyes multi-perspectival moral options for determining the practical nature of the good, alongside the concrete means of discerning how to avoid evil. This pertinently includes the imaginative capacity to be in someone else’s shoes (empathy) in order to better understand a person’s moral situation and moral thinking. There is truth therefore in Keane’s declaration that: “Imagining is our natural way of coming to moral principles.”<sup>54</sup>

Of the two Thomistic types of imagination, *creative imagination* is of particular interest in this thesis, more than the *reproductive imagination*, as this function truly allows for creative exploration when it comes to prudential moral inquiry. In contrast to *reproductive imagination* which “picture things as more or less exact copies of original experiences,”<sup>55</sup> *creative imagination* permeates scenarios that would not have been otherwise experienced in real time but is made to be virtually (imaginatively) present to provide a dynamic mental context. Such is Patricia Werhane’s view when it comes to asserting the necessity of creative imagination: “Without moral imagination, it would appear that one cannot make the links between practical and the theoretical.”<sup>56</sup> Creative imagination therefore is posited in this thesis as the psychological capacity to mentally represent moral contexts in view of moral ends. The practical and the theoretical find their convergence via prudence whose incorporation of moral imagination in its inquiry provide a moral context which could either instigate or foment the development of the primary moral principles which *synderesis* apprehends. Creative imagination therefore may specifically engender the knowledge of the first principles of natural law either through its capacity to causally influence the *intuitive actuation* and *pre-cognitive procession* of *synderesis*. The meaning of these two original concepts will be elaborated below.

### **Moral Imagination’s Role in the Act of Synderesis**

Moral imagination is nature’s gift to moral agency that has the potential to assist the *intuitive actuation* of *synderesis* and the synderetic *pre-cognitive procession* en route to the intelligible

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<sup>53</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (NY: The Citadel Press, 1948), 270.

<sup>54</sup> Keane, SS, *Christian Ethics and Imagination: A Theological Inquiry*, 94.

<sup>55</sup> Brennan, OP, *A Philosophic Analysis of the Nature of Man*, 127.

<sup>56</sup> Patricia H. Werhane, “Moral Imagination and the Search for Ethical Decision-Making in Management,” in *New Avenues for Research in Business Ethics*, ed. Jeanne Liedka and R. Edward Freeman (NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), 20.

apprehension of the first principles of natural law. On the basis of Thomistic epistemology, two metaphysical moments<sup>57</sup> are acknowledged in this research: first, the moment of *intuitive actuation* occurring during the pre-cognition stage, and second, the moment of *pre-cognitive apprehension* in the *turn to phantasm (conversio ad phantasmata)* phase. Collectively, both processes comprise the *act of synderesis*. Speculatively, each moment, organic in their ontological operation, has an integrated co-relationship with *vis imaginativa*.

A good grasp of Aquinas's understanding of self-evident principles is pertinent in understanding the speculative investigation currently being undertaken in this section. The habit of *synderesis*, understood as the capacity to know the first principles of natural law, intuits the self-evident knowledge of these principles "immediately" (*statim*).<sup>58</sup> In *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, Aquinas alluded to the 'the rule of Dionysius' ('axiom of continuity') mentioned in the previous chapter in his discussion of the topic on *synderesis*. Aquinas asserts that human agents have the capacity to know immediate and non-discursive truths like the angels who come to knowledge "without investigation or movement of reason."<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, human agents, being the highest form of corporeal creatures in the hierarchy of beings, depends on the material world to attain knowledge of truth by way of discursive inquiry. Aquinas confirms this:

Hence, the human soul, according to that which is highest in it, attains to that which is proper to angelic nature, so that it knows some things at once and without investigation, although it is lower than angels in this, that it can know the truth in these things only by receiving something from sense.<sup>60</sup>

Inferring from this elucidation, Aquinas insists that no knowledge is completely and absolutely innate since human agents "are not born with a knowledge of self-evident principles.... Rather, [human agents] come to a knowledge of the truth of such propositions after [they] have come to understand the nature and meaning of the terms involved."<sup>61</sup> The intermediary placement of

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<sup>57</sup> 'Moment' in this discussion is metaphysically considered for analytical purposes only. It does, however, point to that psychological event when extramental matters impinge on the external senses eliciting a response from the internal senses.

<sup>58</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 1, a. 12. See also Mary Christine Ugobi-Onyemere, IHM, *The Knowledge of the First Principles in Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Bern, Switzerland: International Academic Publishers, 2015), 65-66.

<sup>59</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 16, a. 1.

<sup>60</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 16, a. 1.

<sup>61</sup> Armstrong, *Primary and Secondary Precepts in Thomistic Natural Law Teaching*, 31-32.



rational beings in Aquinas's hierarchy of beings locates the meaning of self-evident principles in explaining how human agents apprehend the universal principles via the habit of *synderesis*.

Keane's work on moral imagination is instrumental in the following discussion. He propounds conversion and abstraction as the two main movements in Thomistic epistemology.<sup>62</sup> He formulates the reciprocal relationship between the two where the universal and the particular coalesce to effectuate the appropriate grasp of reality. Via conversion, the particular is cognised while via abstraction, the universal is extracted. He maintains that "it is precisely...the perennial need for an adequate relationship between the concrete and the universal – which makes imagination such a crucially vital theme for all human knowing, including moral knowing."<sup>63</sup>

Following Keane's paradigm, this thesis speculates on the two moments mentioned above in reference to the initial actuation of *synderesis* when the discovery of the first principles of natural law is instantiated and which consequently leads to its epistemic maturation that is constructed in time and through experience.

#### Pre-Apprehension: Intuitive Actuation

*Synderesis*, being innately self-evident, "proceeds from the understanding of certain things – viz., those which are naturally known without any investigation on the part of reason."<sup>64</sup> Qualifying how *synderesis* grasps those certain things that reason naturally knows, Aquinas, following Boethius, asserts that there are "certain axioms or propositions [which] are universally evident to all...[and] whose terms are known to all."<sup>65</sup> The first principles of natural law are self-evident and are known by the human reason without the need for investigation or inquiry. In light of this statement, it is imperative to raise this question: *Does every human person have the capacity to know the first principles of natural law without the need to investigate or to inquire?* This question presupposes the innate reality of *synderesis* which necessarily requires actuation prior to its act. The *act of synderesis* takes place the moment the

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<sup>62</sup> Keane, SS, *Christian Ethics and Imagination: A Theological Inquiry*, 80.

<sup>63</sup> Keane, SS, *Christian Ethics and Imagination: A Theological Inquiry*, 80-81.

<sup>64</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 79, a. 12.

<sup>65</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

*reasoning* mind interacts with the outside world. This thesis has referred to this metaphysical moment as the pre-cognitive or intuitive process. Nothing is intelligible at this stage except for the awakening of the natural inclination to the good. Epistemologically speaking, the understanding of the terms that Aquinas refers to in self-evident truths is not reached yet at this initial stage. The cognitive process naturally proceeds from this metaphysical phase. The apprehensive or cognitive process that ensues facilitates the initial awakening to embody materiality that characterises corporeal existence. This is the process where the good assumes intelligibility beyond the undefined inclination to the good. The intelligibility is reached by human agents at varying degrees; some are cognised with fewer instances of epistemic contact than others.

This thesis specifically posits that imagination enables the human mind to grasp the meaning of the terms in self-evident truths. Since cognition involves not only sense but imagination as well, perceived terms conceptually develop its content via subsequent sensitive experiences and via imagination. This research further speculates that imagination has a part in the discovery process of those terms. Both cognition and reasoning are involved in the lifelong process that begins with an initial contact with the social environment. In the practical realm, children in their early sensitive years will need time and repeated experiences in order to understand and develop the inclination to the good. It is inconceivable that the awakening mentioned above takes place overnight and the resulting outcome would be fully defined in the subject. Children should be able grasp the notion of the good inchoatively but certainly not at the first instant. Even their biological inclination is still developing, let alone their psychological capacities. Thus, there is merit in asserting that imagination subconsciously contributes to the awakening process whereby it assists in the creation and production of phantasms that bear not only the universal good but also the particular good. These phantasms should be able to help the growing mind conceive images of what is morally good from the perception of goodness in the social environment. During this metaphysical and subconscious experiences, some of these phantasms will be retained while others will be lost. Ordinary human experience suggests that there is limit to perceptual knowledge as not everything that is perceived can be recalled by memory. But for those which have been retained in the storehouse of *vis imaginativa*, they will be of use somehow in the inchoative process of understanding the terms in self-evident truths such as the first principles of natural law.

In view of actuating the habit of *synderesis* and of sustaining the effects of its apprehension, moral education therefore is crucially essential in the early stages of a child's moral development. Drawing from the postulate articulated earlier regarding the interior sensoria as *materia causae*, imagination in the pre-cognition stage yields sensible forms aplenty for two important epistemological reasons: abstraction and conversion. The material bases for the process of abstraction are the sensible species which bear the universal nature in them. Reiterating a metaphysical assertion noted earlier, the sensible forms are still unintelligible at this pre-cognition stage. They are indeterminate raw materials yet crucial in the inchoative process of understanding the terms of the universal moral principles. What is absorbed by the human mind subconsciously from the social environment is determinant of how these terms are grasped. Certainly, for terms relating to moral truths, it is only imperative that children are exposed to situations and conditions that are productive of moral virtues for phantasmal assimilation. As neuroscientific studies will suggest in the discussion hereafter, the experiences of young children who grow up being loved and cared for by their parents will be in possession of raw moral materials (phantasms) that will have impact on their moral development. Their experiences will continue assimilating other raw and already-formed moral materials through the years in order to hone their moral understanding. Therefore, intuition entails the espousal, as it were, between the awakening phase and the cognitive phase where imagination operates in-between these phases to subconsciously create and produce a horizon for moral development. Extending the analogy, the progeny in this espousal is none other than virtue-embodiment which renders the moral agent good and which fosters the moral life good as well.

The above depiction of intuition can be further explicated on the basis of a careful reading of article 7 of question 84 in the *Summa theologiae's Prima pars*.<sup>66</sup> This text profoundly relates to the "dependence of all...human thinking on the imagination as a springboard"<sup>67</sup> where in the specific process of abstraction, "[t]he release of the universal from the concrete is attributed to the illumination of the phantasm by the agent intellect (*intellectus agens*)."<sup>68</sup> In this process of illumination, traditionally called *excessus ad esse*, loosely translated as "an excess or openness toward being, toward God,"<sup>69</sup> the particular or sensible is met on the "infinite horizon

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<sup>66</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 84, a. 7.

<sup>67</sup> Clarke, SJ, *The Creative Retrieval of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 154.

<sup>68</sup> John M. McDermott, SJ, "The Analogy of Knowing in Karl Rahner," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 36, no. 142 (June 1996): 210.

<sup>69</sup> Keane, SS, *Christian Ethics and Imagination: A Theological Inquiry*, 25.

of intelligibility”<sup>70</sup> by the *intellectus agens* whose role is to infuse (illumine) divine knowledge into the particular or sensible.<sup>71</sup> From such movement from the particular or sensitive towards God, first, it paints the practical dynamism and creativity of imagination (phantasm), and second, it presents the divine involvement in human cognition. It is on the basis of the latter that the synderetic notion of intuition or pre-apprehension (pre-cognition) is inferred. Through illumination understood in the Thomistic sense, the *intellectus agens* arouses the human rational soul which tells the moral agent to do and pursue the good and to avoid evil. Although all of these take place on the metaphysical and subconscious level, the illuminative movement (or abstraction) demonstrates the human soul’s imaginative creativity in discovering the universal good. It is during this ontological moment where *vis imaginativa*’s phantasms, together with *vis memorativa*’s phantasms, traverse the *infinite horizon of intelligibility* towards the realm of the universal principles. In other words, *synderesis* meets up with the *intellectus agens* to own the first moral principles which Divine reason has instilled in the human soul. On the other hand, the former, i.e., the practical dynamism and creativity of imagination, reveals the inherent capacity of imagination to en flesh, as it were, the skeletal moral framework of the universal first principles which, at this stage, is still devoid of any practical contextualisation. It is this particularisation of the universal that is at the heart of the *conversio ad phantasmata* - the subject matter that will be next discussed vis-à-vis imagination.

#### Turn to Phantasm: Pre-Cognitive Procession

From the indeterminate particular to the universal, the second moment metaphysically and subconsciously proceeds from the universal to the particular via *conversio ad phantasmata*: “for the intellect to understand actually its proper object, it must of necessity return to the phantasms in order to perceive in the universal nature existing in the individual.”<sup>72</sup> The *turn to phantasm* is necessary in order to specifically identify the object that is being perceived. As

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<sup>70</sup> McDermott, SJ, “The Analogy of Knowing in Karl Rahner,” 210. In reference to Karl Rahner, SJ’s dissertation, *Spirit in the World*, he included a chapter investigating the possibility of metaphysics. He views *excessus ad esse* as a pathway to acknowledging ‘being’ beyond the realm of imagination. See Karl Rahner, SJ, *Spirit in the World* (NY: Herder and Herder, Inc., 1968), 387-408.

<sup>71</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 84, a. 5. “And thus we must needs say that the human soul knows all things in the eternal types, since by participation of these types we know all things. For the intellectual light itself which is in us, is nothing else than a participation likeness of the uncreated light, in which are contained the eternal types.”

<sup>72</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 84, a. 7.

hylomorphic moral agents, this particularisation is essential since the moral agent does not live in the universe of essences but in the actual physical world. It is worth noting here that:

As incarnate beings who begin with sense knowledge, our way of coming to the truth in moral matters or any other area, is very much an imaginative way.... It seems very difficult if not impossible to hold to the essence of the natural law tradition without acknowledging the human imaginative process in and through which we are able to form natural law judgments. We simply would not know the natural law in a human way without participating in such a process.<sup>73</sup>

As synderetic apprehension involves pre-cognition, the above quote elevates the issue that for *synderesis* to apprehend the first principles of natural law, moral imagination needs to be considered as integral to this process. While this could still be in the pre-apprehension moment, moral imagination allows the *act of synderesis* to consider various forms of universal entities. Simply put, since the first principles of natural law are universal and abstract in form and bear no material content, it is necessary for them to embody practical contextualisation for it to be apprehended by the human soul. “To do and pursue good and to avoid evil” is critically a universal principle. The human soul is only able to grasp its moral force if both sense and imagination apprehend its contextualised moral meaning.

Based on the above, it needs to be emphasised that Benedict XVI’s inner sense has a moral object and so does Aquinas’s law of our mind. The human agent senses what is good by imagining: e.g., how good is given witness to by agents of moral virtues such as parents and teachers. The human agent discovers the law of our mind by imagining, e.g., how good becomes the standard moral way of relating to people. The abstract and universal synderetic act comes humanly alive when it reaches the stage of specificity, albeit only in phantasms. This unequivocally raises the importance of the influence of virtues, specifically the virtue of prudence, to the formation and information of *synderesis*. We recall here how prudential inquiry is of utmost importance prior to its judgment and command and how this quest for moral knowledge is essential to moral development.

The *turn to phantasm* has therefore two pertinent epistemological implications to Christian morality: (i) it is pretexted that upon the cognitive ‘return,’ it will find previously sensed and

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<sup>73</sup> Keane, SS, *Christian Ethics and Imagination: A Theological Inquiry*, 99.

formed phantasms that are morally potent and virtue-laden,<sup>74</sup> and (ii) it foresees moral options where its ethical specificity anticipates inevitable distancing from its universal ethical basis. The former (i) highlights the necessity of practical moral stimuli that will be transformed into phantasms benefitting moral development. The existence of morally potent and virtue-laden phantasms does not only promote the *intuitive actuation* of *synderesis*, but it also does ease the *pre-cognitive procession* of the synderetic first moral principles.

While the promise of an environment where moral virtues can be effectively acquired is incontrovertible, this impinges nonetheless on the real potential of every moral agent for moral development. Aquinas agrees to this statement: “Before habits of virtue are completely formed, they exist in us in certain natural inclinations, which are the beginnings of the virtues. But afterwards, through practice in their actions, they are brought to their proper completion.”<sup>75</sup> He also concurs with the fact that for this to happen, there needs to be proper moral stimuli coming from those who are habituating the virtues themselves. In this respect, the Angelic Doctor explains:

Now in discovery...one person is said to teach another inasmuch as, by signs, he manifests to that other the reasoning process which he himself goes through by his own natural reason. And this, through the instrumentality, as it were, of what is told him, the natural reason of the pupil arrives at a knowledge of the things which he did not know. Therefore...a man is said to cause knowledge in another through the activity of the learner’s own natural reason, and this is teaching. So, one is said to teach another and be he his teacher.<sup>76</sup>

In reference to the above quote, the reality of teachers, such as parents and educators, holds a critical and pivotal role in the virtue-formation and virtue-information particularly of children in their early sensitive years. Aquinas conceives of these teachers as habitually exemplifying in prudence where docility is an integral part of its exercise. Aquinas, quoting Aristotle, points out the meaning of this insight:

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<sup>74</sup> Thomistic moral philosophy underscores the tremendous advantage of having an imagination that is “well stocked with phantasms” due to its capacity for combining images in cognition. Aquinas speaks of this importance in relation to phantasms that ‘teachers’ are able to impart to ‘pupils’ since they have *more perfect* concrete knowledge than the vague knowledge that ‘pupils’ have. See Mary Helen Mayer, *The Philosophy of Teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Milwaukee, WI: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1929), 140-141. See also Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 11, a. 2, ad. 4.

<sup>75</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 11, a. 1.

<sup>76</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 11, a. 1.

It is right to pay attention to the undemonstrated assertions and opinions of such persons as are experienced, older than we are, and prudent, than to their demonstrations, for their experience gives them an insight into principles.... Now it is a mark of docility to be ready to be taught.<sup>77</sup>

This theme regarding ‘teachers’ will be further explored in the following chapters.

The latter consideration above (ii), which pertains to the moral implications of the movement from universal to particular, anticipates the decreasing ‘enforceability’ of universal moral principles as they proceed to consider distant particular situations. There is often the tension between moral principles vis-à-vis moral context where the emphasis on the former is viewed as absolutism while the complete regard for the latter is considered a form of relativism. Absolutism and relativism are the antithesis to creative imagination. Aquinas could have envisioned via imagination that natural law would need to penetrate the various possible moral scenarios for it to be apprehensible and efficacious. He could have imagined what it would have been like if natural law were absolutised. He would have articulated this realisation in this manner: “The practical reason...is busied with contingent matters, about which human actions are concerned: and consequently, although there is necessity in the general principles, the more we descend to matter of details, the more frequently we encounter defects.”<sup>78</sup>

The descent into the particulars can be mirrored by looking into the structural dynamism of the Aristotelian practical syllogism. In this analytical manner of representing human reasoning, the middle or minor term, (a.k.a. *conscientia*), draws moral guidance from the major premise (primary moral principles) in view of making a practical conclusion or judgment. It can be observed that the function or role of the middle or minor term is intimately akin to the nature and operation of the virtue of prudence. While the middle or minor term seeks moral guidance from the major premise, it also analyses the moral context or situation in order to discern which action is morally sound. Prudence does the same by studying given moral contexts and applicable moral principles prior to making any judgment. It is within this dynamism that moral imagination is outstandingly important since it operates by investigating creative possibilities via *compositio et divisio* for a human act to be realised in the here and now while rightfully considering the dictates of the primary moral principles. This provides clear evidence as to why

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<sup>77</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 49, a. 3.

<sup>78</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 4.

moral imagination is, and should have been, considered as a necessary integral part of prudence by Aquinas.

The discussion above necessitates the consideration of memory itself which is undoubtedly the preferred source of knowledge for prudential moral inquiry over imagination. Aquinas states this preference in this manner: “memory of the past is necessary in order to take good counsel for the future.”<sup>79</sup> He does, however, implicitly seem to be not wholly convinced about the absolute reliability of memory. The Angelic Doctor, acknowledging the inherent limits to cognition due to the corporeal nature of human beings, advocates the perfecting of one’s memory. This observation is made explicit when he admits that “we remember better what we saw when we were children.”<sup>80</sup> It is in this respect that he recommends that human agents “carefully consider and set in order”<sup>81</sup> their memory, be “anxious and earnest about the things...[they] wish to remember,”<sup>82</sup> and to “often reflect on the things they wish to remember”<sup>83</sup> since memories are fleeting like human aging. This analysis presents another argument as to why imagination should not have been overlooked considering that either memory or imagination has natural flaws in them. These flaws, without a doubt, may potentially influence the truth-reliability of whatever is sensed or imagined.

Considering further the above notion of prudential reasoning, if the *infinite horizon of intelligibility* were to be esteemed by moral consciousness, there is clearly the need for an imaginative exploration by both entities, i.e., major premise (primary moral principles) and minor premise (moral context, prudential reasoning) in order to foster a dialogical movement towards moral competence. In the wise words of Biss: “Moral imagination completes practical reason by generating new possibilities for realising moral ends.” In addition, Mark Johnson, offers this insight:

What is involved in moving rationally from the formulation of a supreme moral principle to specifying particular imperatives as they apply to the messy and intricate circumstances of our lives? .... My

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<sup>79</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 49, a. 1, ad. 3.

<sup>80</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 48, a. 1, ad. 2.

<sup>81</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 49, a. 1, ad. 2.

<sup>82</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 49, a. 1, ad. 2.

<sup>83</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 49, a. 1, ad. 2.



suggestion will be that the notion of rationality involved here must be a very broad and rich one, involving imaginative processes.<sup>84</sup>

Hence, Johnson's statement endorses what George has articulated in this regard: "Those who are virtually devoid of imagination will have difficulty discovering anything."<sup>85</sup>

Foraying into the disciplines of theology and psychology will be the task of the ensuing chapter. It will delve into a comparative and analytical investigation between the thoughts of Aquinas and the American professor of psychology, Darcia Narvaez, regarding their views on intuition (*synderesis*), imagination, and ultimately, virtues and human flourishing. The beneficence of moral imagination will be demonstrated to have scientific support which would set in order the importance of virtue formation in the actuation of *synderesis* and the inchoative moral development of the moral good in human agents.

## Summary

The beneficence of moral imagination is proved by its efficiency in constructing imaginative knowledge beyond sensitive knowledge. Imaginative knowledge offers wide-ranging possibilities which provide the latitude for moral contexts and the universal moral principles to dialogue and judiciously produce a course of action which is morally sound and perfective of the human person. Creative imagination allows the human mind to step-in someone else's world to discover the first principles of natural law. To empathise with those who have already experienced the moral good is an effective practical way of activating and stimulating the primary moral principles in human agents. The advocacy for the inclusion of moral imagination in prudential moral inquiry is therefore advanced on this basis.

By Aquinas's definition, a prudent person is someone who is habitually disposed to grasp the knowledge of the first principles of natural law and to act them out in the social environment. Essentially crucial for the first moral principles to actualise and to develop, the habituation of

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<sup>84</sup> Mark Johnson, "Imagination in Moral Judgment," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 46, no. 2 (1985): 266.

<sup>85</sup> George, "Imagination as Source of Falsehood According to Aquinas," 196.

prudence occasions the proper formation and information of moral imagination. Virtues form human agents to be good persons and inform them how to live their lives as good persons.

*Synderesis* is correlative to virtues. Considered as practical reason by Aquinas himself, *synderesis* determines and moves the will to its proper moral ends. This is accomplished by moral virtues which operate through the human will. This highlights the metaphysical reality that the *act of synderesis* does not end in the apprehension of the practical good (*intuitive actuation*) but rather, it guides human agents further through the discovery of what the practical good really means in actual life (*cognitive procession*).

This thesis speculates on the vital importance of phantasmal assimilation of raw moral materials in view of the metaphysical and subconscious process of the intuitive apprehension of the first principles of natural law. This is in view of the role of imagination in assisting the human mind to be in possession of appropriate phantasms that bear the universal good and particular good. These phantasms serve as epistemic materials for the human mind to consider in understanding the terms in self-evident truths such as the first principles of natural law. Imagination is posited as having a contributory factor in the creation and production of phantasms to aid this understanding.

The academic interest in moral imagination is precipitated by the observable omission of the interior sense of imagination by Aquinas in his consideration of prudential moral inquiry. While the omission may be attributed to an inferior understanding of psychology and neurobiology during medieval times, modern scientific research now ascertains the efficient value of moral imagination in moral development. These discoveries will provide greater depth in the human understanding of moral development as aided by moral imagination.

## Chapter 8

### *Synderesis* and Psychology's Global Ethical Mindsets

#### **Introduction**

In an interview published in the American magazine, *The Saturday Evening Post*, the German theoretical physicist, Albert Einstein, said quite poetically: "I am enough of the artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the word."<sup>1</sup> For the uninformed, to attribute the revolutionary scientific discovery of the theory of relativity to imagination seems utterly preposterous. But the truth of the matter is: "Imagination is one of the most powerful tools we have at our disposal. Without this ability to speculate about what might be, we would be imprisoned in a world of fatalism waiting for whatever might befall us."<sup>2</sup>

This chapter investigates the correlation between the minds of St. Thomas Aquinas and Darcia Narvaez who both dealt with the concepts of intuition (*synderesis*), virtues and moral imagination in their theological and psychological fields respectively. After carefully analysing specific details of Narvaez's evolutionary psychology, its main elements will be compared and contrasted against Aquinas's epistemological approach to *synderesis*. The discussion will explore the scientific and psychological bases of how *synderesis* can be transformative and generative in the lives of moral agents. *Synderesis* has the potential to transform human agents when its inaugural actualisation is sustained by the acquisition of moral virtues. It is also

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<sup>1</sup> George Sylvester Viereck, "What Life Means to Einstein," *The Saturday Evening Post*, October 26, 1929, 117.

<sup>2</sup> Colin Beard and John P. Wilson, *Experiential Learning: A Best Practice Handbook for Educators and Trainers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Kogan Page Limited, 2006), 267.

generative in so far as it has the potential to effectuate moral development in human agency. Its generative capacity encompasses the power to engender moral witnessing that can motivate other people in the community, especially young children, to personally cultivate their natural inclination to seek the good end and the end's good. The final section under this chapter highlights the correlation between *synderesis* and moral imagination. Moral imagination, which is exercised via the intellectual and moral virtue of prudence, contributes to the transformative and generative development of *synderesis*. Moral imagination has the potential to transform moral reasoning and to generate moral judgments via creative imagination. By and large, Aquinas's epistemology (*synderesis*) and virtue ethics (moral development) are generally substantiated by evolutionary psychology which, not only does it validate its content, also "expand[s] and enrich[es] the horizons of reason."<sup>3</sup>

### **St. Thomas Aquinas vis-à-vis Darcia Narvaez**

Aquinas lucidly made it evident in the *Prologue* of his *Summa theologiae* that "to instruct beginners...whatever belongs to the Christian religion"<sup>4</sup> is his main reason for writing his theological reflections on the sacred doctrine (*de sacra doctrina*). His belief is founded on the doctrine of the necessity of humanity's salvation which he considers to be "a teaching revealed by God beyond the philosophical disciplines, which are investigated by human reason."<sup>5</sup> Differentiating it from practical or positive science, the Angelic Doctor maintains that sacred doctrine is a speculative science which is "chiefly concerned with God."<sup>6</sup> Further specifying the nature of theology, Aquinas asserts that sacred doctrine is "partly speculative and partly practical...[which] transcends all others."<sup>7</sup> He explains this by stating that the sacred doctrine "derives its certitude from the light of divine knowledge, which cannot be misled...[since] this science treats chiefly of those things which by their sublimity transcend human reason; while other sciences consider only those things which are within reason's grasp."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, *Address to Participants in the Summer Course of the Vatican Observatory* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 26 June 2014), [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/june/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140626\\_astronomi-specola-vaticana.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/june/documents/papa-francesco_20140626_astronomi-specola-vaticana.html).

<sup>4</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 1, pr.

<sup>5</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 1, a. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 1, a. 4, s.c.

<sup>7</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 1, a. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 1, a. 5.

Although Aquinas was speculatively explicating the contents of the sacred doctrine, he nonetheless found it inevitable from time to time to particularly cite elements drawn from the realms of the positive sciences. Among others, he postulated, for example, on the anatomical position of the head for the purpose of imagination: “For man’s superior part, his head, is turned towards the superior part of the world, and his inferior part is turned towards the inferior world.”<sup>9</sup>

It is without doubt that scientific research, particularly in experimental psychology, has progressed extensively and it would not be surprising at all if Aquinas’s medieval scientific references would have already been regarded by these scientific disciplines as either unfounded or obsolete. Needless to say, it ought to be stated that “Thomas Aquinas was first and always a theologian – in the university, in the pulpit, and in his room writing.”<sup>10</sup> Though he asserted that the study of the sacred doctrine falls under the realm of speculative science, this needs to be understood only in so far as theology requires philosophical evidence in articulating the contents of the revealed faith.

In view of this, Denis Larrivee and Adriana Gini, after inquiring about the neuroscientific significance of the Thomistic notion of habits, made this not-unexpected commentary: “Aquinas’s observations, therefore, limited necessarily to those of whole systems, cannot be a guide to particular empirical events that underline systems operations.”<sup>11</sup> Viewing it from a broader perspective, Mirosław Mroz affirms the Thomistic conceptualisation of virtues which he assesses as finding concordance with modern neuroscientific evaluations. He states: “Thomas Aquinas was neither a physician nor a psychiatrist but against the background of his teaching on virtues... he presents a certain mechanism of their formation or resistance in their shaping which may serve as a foundation for a possible discussion on modern neurobiology.”<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Giuseppe Butera recognises in Thomistic psychology the potential for cooperation with neuro-treatment: “Aquinas’s philosophical psychology can serve as a theoretical framework for CT [cognitive therapy]... since [it] provides a profound and cogent philosophical framework for CT, which in turn is able to draw out much that is only implicit

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<sup>9</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 91, a. 3, ad. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas F. O’Meara, OP, “Thomas Aquinas and Today’s Theology,” *Theology Today* 55, no. 1 (1998): 47

<sup>11</sup> Denis Larrivee and Adriana Gini, “Is the philosophical construct of ‘habitus operativus bonus’ compatible with the modern neuroscience concept of human flourishing through neuroplasticity? A consideration of prudence as a multidimensional regulator of virtue,” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 8, no. 731 (18 September 2014): 3.

<sup>12</sup> Mirosław Mróz, “Physiological and Psychological Foundation of Virtues: Thomas Aquinas and Modern Challenges of Neurobiology,” *Scientia et Fides* 6, no. 2 (2018): 117

in Aquinas's thought."<sup>13</sup> Clearly perceptive of Aquinas's works as a faith-based endeavour, Walter Freeman is objectively circumspect with his assessment: "While most of his work is irrelevant to neuroscience, those parts in which he describes his ideas on phenomenology and the functions of the body and brains in humans and animals are highly relevant."<sup>14</sup>

The above analysis insinuates the academic limitation and inherent freedom that are necessary for both theology and science to accomplish their specific objectives. The practical foresight of Misiak and Staudt stands timeless in providing guidance to the rightful relationship between theology and psychology:

When psychologists confine themselves to the study of human behaviour, as it can be experimentally studied, they are merely restricting their field of inquiry; they are not necessarily denying the existence of the soul. They are simply not studying the soul. That is to say, they are making a distinction between scientific psychology and philosophical psychology, and they are electing the former as their particular specialty and realm of investigation. One does not denounce the biologist for not studying the soul when he busies himself with a study of the body's vital functions.<sup>15</sup>

In a more contemporary appropriation, Juan G. Roederer explains the possible cooperation between faith and science:

Religious faith should recognise that one cannot challenge scientific truth with ideas alone and that many more unforeseen natural phenomena previously held world views may still be discovered. Science, in turn, should recognise that there will always be people – including scientists – who need religion for spiritual guidance and comfort, and that there will always be questions regarding the "why of things" to which the scientific method cannot provide answers.<sup>16</sup>

The question stemming from this implicit limitation and freedom is whether both theology and psychology can each claim their absolute independence from each other while at the same time

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<sup>13</sup> Giuseppe Butera, "Thomas Aquinas and Cognitive Therapy: An Exploration of the Promise of the Thomistic Psychology," *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* 17, no. 4 (2010): 347.

<sup>14</sup> Walter J. Freeman, "Nonlinear Brain Dynamics and Intention According to Aquinas," *Mind and Matter* 6, no. 2 (2008): 211

<sup>15</sup> Henryk Misiak and Virginia M. Staudt, *Catholics in Psychology: A Historical Survey* (NY: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1954), 13.

<sup>16</sup> Juan G Roederer, "Neurobiological Foundations of Religion and Science," in *Divine Action and Natural Selection: Science, Faith and Evolution* (2009), 891-92.

demonstrating amiable openness and honest objectivity and transparency in the pursuit of the truth.

The following is an attempt to compare, and at times to incorporate, the research of psychologist Darcia Narvaez with the work of Aquinas. This methodological approach is underlined by Craig Steven Titus's assessment of Thomism who said that: "Aquinas's approach to virtue and the Christian life continues to be studied [because].... [h]is thought and model of dialogue with the sciences offer a constructive contribution to a Christian perspective on positive psychology."<sup>17</sup>

### **Triune Ethics Theory**

With a doctoral degree in educational psychology and cognitive science, the American psychologist, Darcia Narvaez, proposes her *Triune Ethics Theory* (hereafter *TET*) to advance psychological goals relative to moral development and moral reasoning. She bases her assertions on three 'evolutionary roots' from which moral dispositions or motivations arise expressive of their multi-faceted origins:

First are the brain strata that MacLean noted and related to different global states.... Second, emotion and cognitive systems that have been studied by affective neuroscientists map onto these different strata.... Third, the evolved developmental niche gives insight into human nature... These evolutionary inheritances provide insight into the neurobiological mechanisms for the ontology of different mindsets that develop from optimal and suboptimal care.<sup>18</sup>

Generally considering the three 'evolutionary roots' mentioned above prior to their specific and broader investigation below, Narvaez claims that human agents exhibit three global ethical mindsets expressive of main behavioural motivations or orientations which are considered biological inheritances emerging from human evolution over a period of time and "are influenced by early care and social environments."<sup>19</sup> These global ethical mindsets, viz., the

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<sup>17</sup> Craig Steven Titus, "Aquinas, Seligman, and Positive Psychology: A Christian Approach to the Use of the Virtues in Psychology," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 12, no. 5 (2017): 448.

<sup>18</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 194-195.

<sup>19</sup> Darcia Narvaez, "The Emotional Foundations of High Moral Intelligence," *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development* 129 (2010): 81.

safety ethic, the engagement ethic, and the imagination ethic, are behaviourally demonstrated or becomes an ethic when either of the dispositions or motivations are triggered and trump other values to promote affordances that are descriptive and respective of each ethical type. The type of ethic that is triggered by social experiences “emerges from the affective stance underlying the ethic that imbues ongoing experience with a particular moral value.”<sup>20</sup> Narvaez presents the “emerging view...that character or personality is rooted in emotion systems shaped by enactive interaction with the social world early in life.” Corollary to the evolutionary roots mentioned above, Narvaez’s theory (also a meta-theory, i.e., a theory based on a theory) delineates the following three goals in psychology:

First, it attempts to harvest critical findings from neurobiology, affective neuroscience, and cognitive science and to integrate them into moral psychology for the purpose of informing psychological research on the moral life of persons.... Second, it seeks to explain differences in moral functioning through a person by context interaction.... Third, it suggests the initial conditions for optimal human moral development.<sup>21</sup>

These three goals in psychology point to Narvaez’s overarching objective in positing the *TET*: to affirm the human “capacity for virtuous morality, which requires taking the path toward the fulfilment of human essence, socially and personally.”<sup>22</sup>

With these three goals being made evident in the discussion below, it is important to state at the outset that several elements in Narvaez’s theory intersect with the teachings of Aquinas particularly on *synderesis* (intuition), *vis imaginativa* (moral imagination) and *virtus* (virtue ethics). Not unexpectedly, there will be fundamental differences between the teachings of Aquinas and Narvaez as determined by the specificity of their respective disciplines. As Narvaez is theorising from the perspective of psychology, it would not be unpredictable that the crucial doctrine which Aquinas vigorously defended, i.e., the immaterial soul, will be found to be excluded. The focus of her scholarship is none other than the brain-body dyad, for that is what is naturally expected to come out of a neuroscientific study of human behaviour and relationship. It is, however, foreseeable that on account of her pedagogical framework and affinity, that a recourse beyond the physical is tenable. The discussion below will demonstrate

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<sup>20</sup> Narvaez, “The Emotional Foundations of High Moral Intelligence,” 81.

<sup>21</sup> Darcia Narvaez, “Triune Ethics: The Neurobiological Roots of Our Multiple Moralities,” *New Ideas in Psychology* 26 (2008): 95.

<sup>22</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 6.



just how creative and imaginative Narvaez is in terms of opening the floodgates of the positive sciences towards the realms of the spiritual and the supernatural.

Further, it also needs to be pointed out that the one thing that psychology, neuroscience and neurobiology are particularly held to account for is their propensity towards physicalism. Broadly, physicalism, as the name implies, regards physicality or materiality as the sole rational explanation for earthly existence. In effect, it seeks to explain human existence via ascription to atoms and molecules. It maintains that “[a]ll moral, emotional and religious experiences will be explained eventually by the physical sciences.”<sup>23</sup> Further, a type of physicalism denies the existence of the human soul.<sup>24</sup> These two aspects of physicalism are worth noting at this juncture in view of the consideration below of the nature of evolutionary psychology that is inspired by the Darwinian evolutionary theory: “This science considers how the biological forces of genetics and neurotransmissions in the brain influence unconscious and conscious intentions, and proposes that these features of biology undergo subtle but continuous change through evolution.”<sup>25</sup>

### Evolutionary Inheritances

Narvaez’s ‘evolutionary inheritance’ mentioned above refers to the scientific findings of Paul D. MacLean who pioneered the *Triune Brain Evolution* postulating that: “Evidence based in comparative anatomy, ontogeny, phylogeny, and palaeontology indicates that the human forebrain has evolved and expanded to its great size, while retaining commonalities to reptiles,

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<sup>23</sup> Alison J. Gray, “Whatever happened to the soul? Some theological implications of neuroscience,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 13, no 6 (2010): 642.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Derek S Jeffreys, “The Soul is Alive and Well: Non-reductive Physicalism and Emergent Mental Properties,” *Theology and Science* 2, no. 2 (2004). See also Saša Horvat, “Neuroscientific Findings in the Light of Aquinas’ Understanding of the Human Being,” *Scientia et Fides* 5, no. 2 (2017): 128-132.

<sup>25</sup> Laurence R. Tancredi, *Hardwired Behavior: What Neuroscience Reveals about Morality* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6. It is worth noting what Tancredi says about moral culpability in light of brain functions: “Recent neuroscience discoveries on brain biology as it relates to specific moral precepts, and in time all of them will be seen as originating, to some degree, in biology. This understanding might suggest that under certain conditions, ‘immoral’ behaviour is not necessarily the product of wilful acts. By controlling behaviour, brain biology might be responsible for some of the extreme manifestations of these bad behaviours. In that case, some individual ‘sins’ may not be ‘sins’ at all.”

early mammals and late mammals.”<sup>26</sup> The attribution of *Triune* is in respect to the three evolved features relating to the ancestral origin of the modern human forebrain.

The forebrain is classified as the largest section of the brain which includes, among other sub-parts, the limbic system where the amygdala, which is responsible for emotions, is located. The forebrain is also held to be responsible for cognitive complex activities such as memory and imagination, motivation, consciousness, organisation of sensory information, decision-making and learning. Though the theory of the *Triune Brain Evolution* has already been debunked within the scientific world, Narvaez claims nonetheless that MacLean’s “theory does provide a helpful understanding of global mindsets that can drive human behaviour.”<sup>27</sup> In addition, she claims that “many of our genes are shared with other animals.”<sup>28</sup>

Global moral mindsets are crucial to the understanding of the *TET* since brain functions contribute to moral functioning. The theory maintains that emerging from behavioural actions from each of the three global moral mindsets, an ethical orientation typical of each mindset is observably generated. These global mindsets, representing basic moral orientations or propensities, possess multiple subtypes which account for the multiple behavioural possibilities an ethical mindset may effectuate.<sup>29</sup> Thus, these tri-partite affective ethical mindsets – the *safety ethic*, the *engagement ethic*, and the *imagination ethic* – are underscored by “shifting moral mindsets emerging from the shifts in brain functions”<sup>30</sup> and “are fostered by distinctive early experience and general cultural milieu.”<sup>31</sup> Both of these factors consequently mitigate brain circuitry or neuronal activity which facilitates emerging dispositions expressive of these three global moral mindsets.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Paul D. MacLean, “Evolutionary Psychology and the Triune Brain,” *Psychological Medicine* 15, no. 2 (1985): 219. See also Paul D. MacLean, “Triune Brain,” in *Comparative Neuroscience and Neurobiology*, ed. George Adelman, Readings from the Encyclopedia of Neuroscience (MA: Birkhäuser Boston, Inc., 1988), 126; Paul D. MacLean, *The Triune Brain in Evolution: Role in Paleocerebral Functions* (NY: Plenum Press, 1990), 8-18.

<sup>27</sup> Darcia Narvaez and Todd Junkins, “Disposition Formation and Early Moral Development,” in *Habits in Mind: Integrating Theology, Philosophy, and the Cognitive Science of Virtue, Emotion, and Character Formation*, ed. Gregory R. Peterson et al., Philosophical Studies in Science and Religion (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2017), 95.

<sup>28</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 21.

<sup>29</sup> Darcia Narvaez, “The Co-Construction of Virtue: Epigenetics, Development, and Culture,” in *Cultivating Virtue: Perspective from Philosophy, Theology, and Psychology*, ed. Nancy E. Snow (NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 259.

<sup>30</sup> Narvaez and Junkins, “Disposition Formation and Early Moral Development,” 95.

<sup>31</sup> Narvaez, “The Co-Construction of Virtue,” 259.

<sup>32</sup> As evidenced by the consistent inclusion of these tri-partite global mindsets in her public speeches and publications, the *Triune Ethics Theory* appears to hold a particularly significant place in Darcia Narvaez’s pedagogical framework.

Narvaez attests that global moral mindsets which originate from human evolution elicit certain behavioural responses that have neurological bases. These global moral mindsets are held to be evolved perceptual affordances that express certain types of moral action that are acted out to meet the moral needs of human persons. Being evolutionary, these mindsets underscore the various social contexts that have occurred and continue to persist through human history and which have shaped and formed how human persons behave the way they do. This account for the general inconsistencies in human behaviours which are due to the specific type of mindset that is triggered.<sup>33</sup>

Narvaez's *TET* is arguably unique among developmental theories in psychology in the sense that it is an interdisciplinary approach covering theoretical and experimental research particularly in psychology, anthropology, neuroscience, neurobiology.<sup>34</sup> This piece of information is crucial in understanding her theory where the evolutionary thrust is unequivocally evident and comprehensively advanced. Being foundational to her evolutionary pedagogy, Narvaez highlights the development of processes and systems which have progressively formed over the course of human evolution.<sup>35</sup> These processes and systems are natural by-products of evolution and indicate the evolutionary footprints of evolved aspects of human existence such as learning patterns and emotive behaviours. Within this scientific framework, she introduces the Darwinian conclusion that moral sense is "the pinnacle of human evolution."<sup>36</sup> This moral sense<sup>37</sup> emerges as a behavioural disposition of human beings to act out prosocial behaviours such as helping community members. Citing a text from Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man*, Narvaez highlights the activity of "the social instincts [that]

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Darcia Narvaez, "Neurobiology and Moral Mindset," in *Handbook of Moral Motivation: Theories, Models, Applications*, ed. Karin Heinrichs, Fritz Oser, and Terry Lovat (Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Brill Sense Publishers, 2013), 323.

<sup>34</sup> Experimental studies relative to Darcia Narvaez's scientific claims can be found in at least two of her book publications: Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*; Darcia Narvaez, *Embodied Morality: Protectionism, Engagement and Imagination* (London: Palgrave Pivot, 2016). On pp 7-8 in the latter publication, she lists the various interdisciplinary scholarships involved in TET: evolutionary theory, anthropology, clinical studies, neurobiology, developmental theory and research, philosophy and cognitive science, morality and positive psychology and cultural history theory.

<sup>35</sup> Darcia Narvaez, "Baselines for Virtue," in *Advances in Virtue Development: Integrating Perspectives*, ed. Darcia Narvaez, Julia Annas, and Nancy E. Snow (NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 15.

<sup>36</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 3-4.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Narvaez, *Embodied Morality*, 12. Narvaez outlines her belief in evolutionary morality: "In *Descent of Man*, Darwin identified four evolutionary stages in humanity's 'moral sense' through the tree of life to human propensities: [1] the development of *sympathy or concern for others* [visible in mammals, especially social mammals]; [2] cognitive awareness allowing for comparison of past and future behaviour, and dissatisfaction with mismatched expectations – a very human capacity but also seen partially in dogs; [3] social rules constructed by the community which, in concert with cognitive awareness, foster shame when group expectations are not met [*conscience*]; [4] *habit* or practice, allowing for transmission of culture and changes in behaviour."

lead an animal to take pleasure in the society of its fellows, to feel a certain amount of *sympathy* [sic] for them, and to perform various services for them.”<sup>38</sup> Based on this observation, it follows that Narvaez views moral development as an evolutionary path towards human flourishing, i.e., human behaviours have biological bases.

Connected to the global moral mindsets is the second ‘evolutionary inheritance’ which alludes to the cognitive and emotive human attributes that underlie moral motivations or dispositions emerging from global moral mindsets. Narvaez claims that the conceptualisation of ideas in the human brain is not just simply the result of the social environment making an impression on the human mind. Rather, her theory conceives of an embodied interplay of both external and internal influences that catalyse human emotive and apprehensive reactions to trigger. Internally, brain circuitry involving interconnected neurons fires up and transmits electrical activity from one neuron to a network of neural circuits to facilitate endogenous cranial processes via reception of electrochemical information. This brain circuitry is considered to be the underlying neuroscientific rationale which brings about epistemic and emotive responses, not excluding non-verbal responses which Narvaez considers as expressive of the human capacity for intuition.<sup>39</sup>

In contrast to the emphasis of Aquinas on reason as the driving force behind human willing, Narvaez claims a predominantly intuitive basis for human activity. She asserts that: “Recent empirical findings across the behavioural sciences have thrown rationalism on the rocks, indicating that conscious deliberate reasoning rarely directly guides moral decisions and actions in the moment. Instead, implicit processes are now assumed to govern most decisions and actions.”<sup>40</sup> It is in this respect that Narvaez makes the following conclusion: “Morality is influenced by all sorts of physiological systems, most of the time without our awareness. Their misdevelopment influences moral conceptions and the types of societies we adults create.”<sup>41</sup> Narvaez’s intuitionism will be discussed further below. Beyond rationalism, she claims that the brain responds emotively and cognitively in different ways according to the “initial template structure and a transforming plastic structure.”<sup>42</sup> This observation is based on the

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<sup>38</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* in Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 4.

<sup>39</sup> Darcia Narvaez, “Moral Complexity: The Fatal Attraction of Truthiness and the Importance of Mature Moral Functioning,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 5, no. 2 (2010): 167. Narvaez propounds that: “Tacit knowledge systems operate on a non-verbal level most of the time, which means humans know things they cannot verbalise.”

<sup>40</sup> Narvaez, *Embodied Morality*, 2.

<sup>41</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> Narvaez and Junkins, “Disposition Formation and Early Moral Development,” 91.

study of neuroplasticity which propounds that the brain has an inherent neuronal capacity for non-linear processes to occur. Brain functions are far from being exclusively predictable and paradigmatic. The overt differences in the moral behaviour of children brought up by the same parents proves how brain circuitry is personal and embodied.

In the third of the ‘evolutionary inheritances,’ Narvaez conceptualises the so-called *Evolved Developmental Niche* (hereafter *EDN*) as the archetype of the social environment that promotes the fulfilment of the human essence. Narvaez claims that the ancestral communities called *small-band hunter-gatherers* (hereafter *SBHG*) “encompassed 99 percent of human genus existence”<sup>43</sup> that resembles the *typical* lifestyle that engenders authentic human flourishing. She considers these nomadic foraging ancestral communities as the normative lifestyle on earth for over “thirty million years of social and human mammalian development”<sup>44</sup> which engendered a lifestyle that is characterised by a “mindful morality...[which] involves ‘full beingness with others’...that promotes flourishing in the broadest sense.”<sup>45</sup> The *EDN* also reflects the optimal ancestral caregiving practices for the young children of the *SBHG* communities that include, but not limited to, the following: “responsiveness to child needs, natural childbirth, two to five years of breastfeeding, frequent and pervasive positive touch, extensive free play, multiple adult caregivers, and positive social climate and support.”<sup>46</sup> Narvaez conceives of moral development along the lines of baseline virtues that the *SBHG*’s<sup>47</sup> lifestyle whose nomadic foraging communities around the world lived “peacefully and happily in a companionship culture of shared activities.”<sup>48</sup>

Narvaez contends that the present-day lifestyles are *species-atypical* as they fail to represent the *species-typical* behaviours that are expressive of the *SBHG*’s ancestral lifestyle.<sup>49</sup> She lists

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<sup>43</sup> Darcia Narvaez, “The 99 Percent - Development and Socialization Within an Evolutionary Context: Growing Up to Become ‘A Good and Useful Human Being,’” in *War, Peace, and Human Nature: The Convergence of Evolutionary Cultural Views*, ed. Douglas P. Fry (NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 341.

<sup>44</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 254.

<sup>45</sup> Narvaez, “The Co-Construction of Virtue,” 261.

<sup>46</sup> Narvaez, “The Co-Construction of Virtue,” 255.

<sup>47</sup> Experimental studies on the small-band hunter-gatherers still existing around the world today have been the data sources from where Darcia Narvaez advances her *Triune Ethics Theory*. See Melvin Konner, *The Evolution of Childhood: Relationships, Emotion, Mind* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>48</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 8.

<sup>49</sup> Darcia Narvaez, “Revitalizing Human Virtue by Restoring Organic Morality,” *Journal of Moral Education* 45, no. 3 (2016): 223, 225-226.

a roster of factors<sup>50</sup> that support her observations and research that “many humans have become oriented to self-focused values and behaviours such as tribalism and hierarchy, hoarding and ecological mindlessness.”<sup>51</sup> Narvaez believes that: “Humans are not who they used to be. People seem to be getting less social, and less socially capable, even though sociality is a key component of human adaptation.”<sup>52</sup>

Analysing the evolutionary trajectory, Narvaez has taken note of how far human beings have departed from the primordial moral sense of the ancestral lifestyle which ancestors have inculcated in themselves. She believes that the “substantial mismatch between our contemporary society and the conditions under which the genus *Homo* has evolved”<sup>53</sup> has increasingly retarded the moral development of the human species. This statement observably serves as the overarching premise upon which Narvaez postulates for a “return to humanity’s moral heritages.”<sup>54</sup> This is in view of re-securing for the present generation and beyond the positive effects of moral development that promote genuine human flourishing. Narvaez proposes practical virtuous ways of dealing with this mismatch in order that human beings of today may reach their potential as human beings.

### The Tri-partite Global Ethical Mindsets

Narvaez’s *Triune Ethics Theory* is indubitably revolutionary and on the cutting-edge of recent advances in developmental psychology. Apart from her attestation that “the dominance of reasoning in behaviour is undermined by empirical evidence showing that much of

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<sup>50</sup> See Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 1-2. Drawing data predominantly from the United States, Narvaez enumerates a sampling of trends over the past 50 years which demonstrates the *atypical* lifestyle conditions indicative of the present generation: “Societal trust has deteriorated at all ages in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; participation in social leisure groups has decreased, as has the least average number of confidants individuals have; more than 50 percent of adults are single, and single-adult households have become the most common type of household; avoidant attachment in college students, and perhaps narcissism in this population as well, has been trending upward for decades and has increased significantly in the past decade; anxiety and depression are at epidemic levels for all age groups; the percentage of young children with psychosocial problems and the percentage of young children on psychotropic medication have risen dramatically; one out of every five children has diagnosable psychiatric disorder, and one out of every 10 suffers from a mental illness severe enough to impair everyday living.”

<sup>51</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, xxvii.

<sup>52</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 1.

<sup>53</sup> Narvaez, “The 99 Percent - Development and Socialization Within an Evolutionary Context: Growing Up to Become ‘A Good and Useful Human Being’,” 341.

<sup>54</sup> Darcia Narvaez, “Returning to Humanity’s Moral Heritages,” *Journal of Moral Education* 45, no. 3 (2016): 256.

behaviour is initiated before conscious thought or decision,”<sup>55</sup> Narvaez also insists that “[r]esearch shows a complex interaction between genetic vulnerability and environmental effects, favouring the power of experience.”<sup>56</sup> She professes further that human behavioural manifestations are not merely genetically determined, but also, social experiences account for and contribute towards the formation of human character. She regards the nature versus nurture argument as a false dichotomy since both nature (genes) and nurture (social experiences) influence moral development.<sup>57</sup> The global moral mindsets of *safety*, *engagement* and *imagination* emerge from these interactions which indicate depth of moral development, or lack thereof, of any human agent. When human agents receive proper care specifically during their early childhood years expressive of the *EDN*, they either demonstrate or are on way to experiencing the fullness of the human essence.

The following sub-sections will now describe the three global ethical mindsets of the *Triune Ethics Theory*, viz., the Ethic of Safety, the Ethic of Engagement, and the Ethic of Imagination.

### *The Ethic of Safety*

The *safety ethic* mindset is triggered in response to perceived threats to the self or the ego. A global moral mindset shared by all animals, it depicts the “instincts for survival.”<sup>58</sup> It is held to have evolved out of the limbic system of reptiles that instinctively sends an alert signal when they are in danger. In modern neurobiology, this is determined to be located in the human brain stem and the lower limbic system. Generally, the emotive-cognitive response is one of either fight or flight. When the behavioural response to a certain stimulus is directed by the *safety ethic*, the protection of one’s well-being is pursued (hence, *self-protectionism* or *self-preservation*). When a surfer is under attack by a great white shark, the flight response is most likely initiated obviously for personal safety reason. However, the fight response, where possible, could also be initiated when the only course of action available is to ward off the great white shark by punching it or pushing it away. This response becomes a moral decision when,

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<sup>55</sup> Narvaez, “The Emotional Foundations of High Moral Intelligence,” 78.

<sup>56</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 20.

<sup>57</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 20.

<sup>58</sup> Narvaez, “The Co-Construction of Virtue,” 259.

for example, one is publicly accused of being deceitful. The accused could either fight the accuser or take flight and perhaps avoid any escalation of the situation.

Human instinctive responses to social triggers may also necessarily fall within the moral purview. In the face of moral situations or dilemma, a moral agent's experience of the primary moral principles should mitigate the kind of moral response that is acted out. If a moral agent has particularly habituated the virtue of prudence, moral situations will be instantaneously analysed by taking counsel from the dictates of the first principles of moral action. Stored memories and creative imaginative production of past moral situations will assist the moral agent reach a personal judicial response. A prudent teenager will self-restrain from physically retaliating after being smacked from behind by his or her parents. Likewise, a prudent wife or husband will not recourse to 'revenge porn' after discovering her husband's or his wife's infidelity. These examples underline the importance of experience, time and duration in the intuitive apprehension of the first principles of moral action. Should access to the primary principles be momentarily absent (due to passion) or have failed to develop (due to ignorance or a weak will) from a young age, the appropriate moral response is expected to be compromised or vitiated. Narvaez is forthright in stating in this respect that: "How well needs are met, especially in the early life, plays a large role in the shaping of neurobiology, personality, and morality."<sup>59</sup> As will be revealed by its connection to the other global mindsets, *safety ethic's* generic response of either fight or flight is relative to and dependent upon the kind of moral development, or lack thereof, of young children. When habituated, the *safety ethic* could morph and polarise to either withdrawal or aggression. In principle, this conceptualisation is intimately linked to the Thomistic notion of virtues where the habituation of virtues promotes self-fulfilment and self-perfection. Inversely, when evil or immoral acts are persistently habituated, they could turn into vices, e.g., white lies becoming a pathology (*mythomania, psuedologia fantastica*). Prudence, in the face of perceived physical assault, assists on inquiring about which course of moral action to take: fight (aggression) or flight (self-preservation). Imprudence, on the other hand, does consider fight and flight, too, with little or without recourse to any moral inquiry.

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<sup>59</sup> Narvaez, *Embodied Morality*, 13.



## *The Ethic of Engagement*

The second ethical mindset is the *engagement ethic* which evolved out of the paleomammalian brain where the emotions are located. The amygdala is considered to be the seat of human emotions located in the temporal lobe of the forebrain. This moral mindset generates intimate and emotional relationship with people brought about by an optimal environment marked by social caring and human bonding. The *engagement ethic* is particularly crucial in the early years of a child's human and moral development where prosocial activities which engender cooperation and social competence<sup>60</sup> are introduced to foment supporting relationships. A child of early years who lacks proper care from parents and grows in a nonoptimal environment where there is distrust and enmity will, instead of engaging, *disengage* relationally from people. When the *engagement ethic* is triggered at a young age and honed through the moral development of a young child, the values of compassion, openness and tolerance are facilitated.<sup>61</sup> Applying the *Triune Ethics Theory* in moral development, Daniel Fleming and Thomas Ryan underline the important role of emotions in motivating and directing specific values that shape human behaviour.<sup>62</sup> Further, echoing Narvaez's stress of the role of emotion in the development of innate moral knowledge, they assert that "moral motivation rests at the level of affectivity, not rationality."<sup>63</sup> Narvaez claims that, as opposed to *safety ethic*, the *engagement ethic* is not innate but developmental, being primed by an optimal environment and supportive care nurturers.<sup>64</sup> Further, she considers Darwin's consideration of the *moral sense* as being underpinned by the *engagement ethic*.<sup>65</sup>

The *safety ethic* and the *engagement ethic* combined can be observed as being broadly related to the *intuitive actuation* and *pre-cognitive procession* by *synderesis* mentioned earlier respectively. Analytically, the self-preservation (flight) in the *safety ethic* can be construed as a way of acquiescing to the primordial good apprehended by *synderesis*. When moral agents follow their moral intuition, they manifest their desire to preserve the primordial good that ontologically orients all human persons to God. To depart from the primary moral principles (fight and, in some sense, flight) is to destroy, instead of actively preserving, what naturally

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<sup>60</sup> Narvaez, "The Co-Construction of Virtue," 257.

<sup>61</sup> Narvaez and Junkins, "Disposition Formation and Early Moral Development," 96.

<sup>62</sup> Daniel Fleming and Thomas Ryan, "Witness, the Pedagogy of Grace and Moral Development," *The Australasian Catholic Record* 95, no. 3 (July 2018): 266.

<sup>63</sup> Fleming and Ryan, "Witness, the Pedagogy of Grace and Moral Development," 265.

<sup>64</sup> Narvaez, "The Co-Construction of Virtue," 260.

<sup>65</sup> Narvaez, "The Co-Construction of Virtue," 260-261.

constitutes the human person. Further, the *ethics of safety*, when assisted to develop into an *ethic of engagement*, develops into virtues which are perfective of the human person. Positive inter-personal human engagements, e.g., parent-child relationship, loving one's neighbour and enemies, foment the primordial orientation of moral agents towards the good enhancing their ontological good-ness and making their actions morally good. It needs to be stated that though comparison may be drawn between the first principles of moral action and the *ethics of safety*, metaphysically speaking, the former precedes the latter. It is only because of the assumption that all human beings are created good that the first principles of natural law admit no exceptions. The reality, however, situates all human persons as almost always being fundamental confronted by good and evil tendencies. It is in this respect that opportunities for moral development must be introduced to the lives of young children if matured growth is truly envisaged.

### *The Ethic of Imagination*

Considered as the most recently evolved of the three mindsets is the *imagination ethic*. This mindset is thought to have evolved out of the neomammalian brain of modern primates which, in modern man and woman, is located in the frontal lobe of the forebrain. This mindset enables the human person "to abstract from present moment and consider alternatives."<sup>66</sup> It allows for creativity and ingenuity in navigating relationships via the generation of adaptive skills and foresights which attend to concerns beyond the present. It is also via the *imagination ethic* that the coordination of instincts, intuitions and principles are located.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, Narvaez claims that: "Imagination comprises executive functions that include metacognition about morality."<sup>68</sup> This observation underscores the human capacity of all human agents to self-reflect on their actions as either good or bad. These therefore establish the environmental foundations for imagination to consider the contingencies of human situations and varying social factors that impinge on moral behaviours. It is within these realms where prudence and practical reason are considered and could potentially flourish when provided with proper nurturing and care.

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<sup>66</sup> Narvaez and Junkins, "Disposition Formation and Early Moral Development," 96.

<sup>67</sup> Narvaez, "The Co-Construction of Virtue," 260.

<sup>68</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 193.

Narvaez differentiates two types of sub-mindsets under this heading: “When coupled with a prosocial orientation and using humanity’s fullest reasoning capacities, it reflects a *communal imagination*. When it is coupled with the threat-oriented emotions of the *security ethic*, a *vicious imagination* results.”<sup>69</sup> She later added a third one, the *detached imagination*, which, as the name suggests, is disconnected or disengaged from emotional connection.<sup>70</sup> That said, these sub-mindsets reflect their possible propensities when they are either supported or not during the early years of a child’s rearing. The theme of *imagination ethic* will be further developed in the ensuing discussion.

Narvaez declares that: “Everyone has morality – that is, everyone aims for what she perceives to be good in the moment.”<sup>71</sup> Owing to evolutionary determinations, the three-mindset ethics are within the disposable of almost everyone during their lifespan. Depending on the stimuli, the appropriate affected ethical mindset responds emotive-cognitively and may necessarily involve all other different *ethics* and their sub-types at varying degrees of intensity. Narvaez contends that the default ethic is the *safety ethic* where the human agency’s personal and immediate affective-moral disposition is that of self-preservation.<sup>72</sup> She maintains, however, that “when we remain in a safety ethic, even when we know better, when we nurse it and knowingly use imagination for safety ends, *we cease being a human self to others*.”<sup>73</sup> The habituation in an *ethics of safety* may also possibly translate into selfishness, passivity, dissociation, or defensive action during occasions when the ego is under pressure or attacked. The negative effects of a traumatised early childhood characterised by the negation of the *EDN* may necessarily contribute to the demise of the reality of self-fulfilment which the ethical mindsets can be poised to attain.<sup>74</sup> Be that as it may, when basic human needs that foment human flourishing are attended to during a human person’s lifespan, particularly during the early childhood years, the *ethics of engagement* and *imagination* become the moral motivation or disposition that engenders the “normative human telos”<sup>75</sup> according to Narvaez.

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<sup>69</sup> Narvaez and Junkins, “Disposition Formation and Early Moral Development,” 96.

<sup>70</sup> Narvaez, “The Co-Construction of Virtue,” 261.

<sup>71</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 206.

<sup>72</sup> Darcia Narvaez, “Human Flourishing and Moral Development: Cognitive and Neurobiological Perspectives of Virtue Development,” in *Handbook of Moral and Character Education*, ed. Larry Nucci and Darcia Narvaez (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2008), 314-316.

<sup>73</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 207.

<sup>74</sup> Narvaez, “The Co-Construction of Virtue,” 259.

<sup>75</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 207.

Of the three brain moral mindsets, the *imagination ethics* is of specific concern in this chapter owing to its potential correlative value to the Thomistic notion of moral imagination. The ensuing discussion below will highlight this potential. The question on a possible correlation between *Triune Ethics Theory* and Aquinas's *lex naturalis* (and *synderesis*) will be investigated in the following chapters.

### **Thomistic Synderesis vis-à-vis Narvaez's Empirical Moral Intuition**

An important element in human flourishing is moral functioning. Narvaez claims that “both intuition and reasoning are integrated into the realms of moral functioning.”<sup>76</sup> Specifically, Narvaez's intuitionism, categorised as a form of empirical moral psychology,<sup>77</sup> is analysed herein against the theological notion of intuitionism as propounded by Aquinas in his presentation of his doctrine on *synderesis*. This is carried out in view of determining the possibility of a neurological basis for intuition and how it can temporally influence moral functioning (virtue habituation). Pivotal to the critical analysis of Narvaez's concept of intuition, the following section will analyse two Thomistic realities germane to *synderesis*: (1) *synderesis* by nature is innate, and (2) *synderesis* appoints the ends to moral virtues.

#### *Synderesis* by Nature is Innate

Aquinas maintains that *synderesis* is innate. There exists in every created being a natural habitual disposition called an *inner sense* or the *law of our mind* which equips moral agency with the disposition of doing good and the avoidance of evil. It is doctrinally held that *synderesis* is divinely implanted to sustain the implicit ordering of moral agency towards God. Explicitly, virtues assist in this respect by formally integrating material contents to *synderesis* via interaction with the environment without which, it remains unrecognisable by the human intellect.

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<sup>76</sup> Narvaez, “Moral Complexity,” 164.

<sup>77</sup> See discussion of the thoughts of Darcia Narvaez vis-a-vis Jonathan Haidt on intuitionism, two representative approaches from the perspective of empirical moral psychology, in Michael Lacewing, “Expert Moral Intuition and Its Development: A Guide to the Debate,” *Topoi: An International Review of Philosophy* 34, no. 2 (2015): 409-425.

Limited by the purview of her research, Narvaez does not seem to extend her conceptualisation of intuition beyond its neurological basis. She explains at length:

We know now that neither moral reasoning nor moral intuition is set in stone but that each is cultivated within the dynamic interplay among the developing organism; environment; and the time, duration, and intensity of interaction. If moral reasoning and intuitions are not innate blueprints but are artifacts that are shaped and moulded by culture and experience, normative questions become of utmost importance.<sup>78</sup>

While Narvaez treats intuition extensively, it is apparent from the above quote that her conceptualisation of intuition is incompatible with the Thomistic notion of *synderesis* from the fundamental perspective of its origin. As earlier mentioned, Aquinas's *synderesis* is of divine origin while Narvaez's intuition is dynamically cultivated. However, the epistemology underlying its operation appears to be intimately similar. Recalling the discussion on 'self-evident principles' relating to the knowledge of the first principles of natural law, this suggests that data from the social environment is part and parcel of the knowledge of the universal moral principles. This evidently relates to the reference to artifacts in the above text. Narvaez's temporal-based intuition scientifically grounds Aquinas's assertion that knowledge apprehended by *synderesis* necessitates epistemic materials from extramental realities.

Having already affirmed that the origin of Narvaez's intuition is temporal as opposed to *synderesis* being divinely implanted, she posits that "most of what we learn and know is tacit."<sup>79</sup> Thereto, she describes intuition as "that feeling of knowing without explanation."<sup>80</sup> In the two synderetic moments mentioned earlier, i.e., *intuitive actuation* and *pre-cognitive procession*, Narvaez's intuitionism dimly alludes to both processes although with the exclusion of the element of illumination that is enacted by the *intellectus agens*. Evidently, *TET* does not express the full Thomistic notion of *synderesis* since, having no divine origin as the ultimate source of its existence, Narvaez's intuition is

formed from unarticulated person-environment exchanges that occur implicitly between environment stimulation and the individual's phenomenological experience.... The tacit system operates with little effort or deliberation, often without conscious awareness, according to

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<sup>78</sup> Narvaez, "Moral Complexity," 171-172.

<sup>79</sup> Darcia Narvaez and Daniel K. Lapsley, "The Psychological Foundations of Everyday Morality and Moral Expertise," in *Character Psychology and Character Education*, ed. Daniel K. Lapsley and F. Clark Power (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 147.

<sup>80</sup> Narvaez, "Moral Complexity," 167.

“nonintentional, automatic acquisition of knowledge about structural relations between objects or events.”<sup>81</sup>

This elaboration purports remotely the nature of *synderesis* conceived as an *inner sense* which intuitively makes the human person desire the good without investigation. Likewise, *synderesis* construed as the *law of our mind* may be intimately linked to an implicit moral disposition towards the good since “individuals have moral knowledge more than they can express.”<sup>82</sup> As pointed out earlier, Narvaez accommodates the scientific observation of the existence of non-verbalised knowledge which she claims to be the basis of most human intellection.<sup>83</sup> Her claim seems to find evidence in the human experience of knowing that ‘*I have a heart that keeps me alive*’ yet ‘*I don’t know how my heart does it.*’

#### *Synderesis* Appoints the End to Moral Virtues

Moral ends are pre-determined by *synderesis* serving as practical reason which habitually disposes the human person towards the first principles of natural law. Morally self-evident, if *good is to be done and pursued, and evil avoided*, moral ends are consequently achieved. Referring to the earlier-discussed synderetic metaphysical moments, this denotes the *pre-cognitive procession* that inchoately advances the knowledge of the first principles of natural law. The enfleshing, as it were, of the knowledge of the first principles of moral action takes on a journey which involves repeated ontological events of *conversio ad phantasmata*, some of which take place instantaneously while others a lifetime.

On account of the evolved global mindsets where ethical propensities are real possibilities under optimal conditions, Narvaez confidently bases, and thereby presupposes, the reality of intuition or tacit knowledge in moral development. This aligns somehow with the role of *synderesis* in determining the ends of moral virtues. Recalling the thoughts of Aquinas, *synderesis*, since it bears the knowledge of the universal principles, points the moral virtues to their appropriate ends. Global brain states somehow do the same pointing when *SBHG*’s

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<sup>81</sup> Narvaez, “Moral Complexity,” 166.

<sup>82</sup> Narvaez, “Moral Complexity,” 149.

<sup>83</sup> Narvaez, “Moral Complexity,” 167.

ancestral lifestyles are introduced resembling optimal conditions favourable to human flourishing.

The strength of the arguments above admittedly misses the mark when viewed from the theological perspective. Without the categorisation of the origin of *synderesis* as emanating from God, intuition may probably succumb to what Narvaez refers to as *truthiness* – “the attachment to one’s opinions because they ‘feel right.’”<sup>84</sup> The role of the *intellectus agens* in illuminating human reason is beyond merely emotional. Rather, it turns human reason to the mind of God to receive knowledge in the way angels receive them directly from God. As discussed earlier, scientific conceptualisations would not be unexpectedly limited to the physical realm since it maintains the positive sciences as its province. However, to imaginatively cross the *infinite horizon of intelligibility* and to subsequently postulate a scientific proposition that admits the assumption of a supernatural deity may not necessarily be unexpected on the basis of the self-evidence of the truth in any given scientific research outcome.

Evident in Narvaez’s theory is the pointer towards moral functioning via virtue habituation. Though for a while it portrays the exclusive involvement of human temporal faculties, she has, in fact, underlined a far deeper grounding for these ethical dispositions to materialise. In discussing pathways to wisdom in her award-winning publication, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, Narvaez spoke of the human capacity for transcendence:

At the highest levels of practice, the individual becomes a cocreator. In fact, this is what the world “theology” meant. Theology is not talking *about* God in linear, rational discourse but actually about *participating* in the *logos* (or creative intelligence) of *theo* (God) as it shapes itself into new forms through unitive seeing, a timeless creativity.<sup>85</sup>

Without a doubt, the transcendental characterisation of the search for wisdom alluded to in the above quote elucidates perfectly, albeit implicitly, the essence of *synderesis*. Narvaez, imputing perhaps an original conceptualisation, purports the neurobiological assignation of *synderesis* as a participation in the creative intelligence without articulating the term itself. The depiction is sound and sensible since, being an articulation from the neurobiological perspective, the quest for the truth (wisdom) points to the physical intuitive intelligence reaching out to the

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<sup>84</sup> Narvaez, “Moral Complexity,” 163.

<sup>85</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 234.

metaphysical creative intelligence. This, in effect, is the surreal marriage between theology and science: the human mind intuiting the mind of God who in turn illumines the human mind with eternal wisdom.

### **Thomistic Imagination vis-à-vis Narvaez's Ethic of Imagination**

The arguments previously proposed for the inclusion of moral imagination as one of the *quasi-integral parts of prudence* rest on the importance of its capacity to provide the all-important information required in prudential moral inquiry. It was earlier argued that moral imagination engenders the contemplation of various situations and options that are required for prudence to make a reasonable judgment and command. The virtue of prudence therefore operates naturally by inquiring about universal moral principles and particular situations before making a conclusive judgment. Prudence is able to undertake moral deliberation owing to the capacity of imagination to compose and divide (*compositio et divisio*) phantasms of sensible objects that allow broader and deeper insights into realities and possibilities that can be mentally produced as images. Images of possible scenarios that have never been conceived before are all conceivable for as long as previously conceived sensible species exist as phantasms in the *vis imaginativa* and in the *vis memorativa*. This is essentially the creative imagination that Aquinas alludes to in his discussion of the interior sensoria.

The argument for inclusion of moral imagination should be further bolstered by the following investigation into its neuroscientific basis as well its neurobiological foundation.

Narvaez explicates that as one of the evolved global brain states, the *imagination ethic* is able to “to sort out multiple elements involved in moral decision-making and action in particular situation.”<sup>86</sup> Implicit in this statement is the extent of the landscape which the moral imagination has to deal with in order to produce the fruits of good decision-making. This points congruently to the fact that “moral functioning is dynamic and shifting moment to moment.”<sup>87</sup> It is in this light that Daniel Fleming and Terence Lovat underscore the ethics of imagination

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<sup>86</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 107.

<sup>87</sup> Narvaez, *Embodied Morality*, 17.



in fostering the “vision of dialogue”<sup>88</sup> in fostering interreligious relationship in the midst of differing worldviews. Imagination engenders dynamism that creates possibilities for congruence never envisaged before. Analysing this statement further, Narvaez contends that “experience and the shifting social environments induce epigenetic changes and reorganisations of the brain/mind during development.”<sup>89</sup> This concept is evidently traceable within the evolutionary process. Mind functioning is non-linear, and so is the social environment. The evolution of the brain presupposes shifts that necessarily require adaptative responses for “self-preservation, affiliation and reflection.”<sup>90</sup> For Thomism and the *TET*, it is during everyday shifting moments that imagination is most useful and vital to moral functioning. Though the extramental world is forever in a flux, human imagination is able to capture moments of perceived never-ending movements and represent them via imagery in the human mind, albeit these movements have receded into the past.

On account of shifting social and moral conditions, Narvaez acknowledges the inherited evolutionary role of imagination in facilitating moral functioning. She firmly advocates that “nothing makes sense in moral development outside of evolutionary systems, specifically, evolutionary developmental systems.”<sup>91</sup> Being a given evolved function of the *imagination ethic*, moral imagination enhances moral development through its specific contribution to the acquisition of knowledge needed to succeed in a particular environment.<sup>92</sup> Evolutionary responses to shifts involve both the body and brain. Studies in neurobiology have been able to confirm that “front lobes are critical in situations of free choice or situations of ambiguity...since [its prefrontal cortex] is the only part of the brain capable of integrating information from the outside the world with information internal to the organism itself.”<sup>93</sup> This modern scientific delineation of the function of the frontal lobe provides neurobiological evidence to the function of the medieval interior sensoria. Moreover, it confirms a number of Thomistic propositions which have been earlier raised.

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<sup>88</sup> Daniel Fleming and Terence Lovat, “When Encounters Between Religious Worldviews Are A Threat: Applying Triune Ethics Theory in A Religiously Diverse Landscape,” *Journal of Moral Education* 43, no. 3 (2014): 384.

<sup>89</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 5.

<sup>90</sup> Narvaez, *Embodied Morality*, 17.

<sup>91</sup> Narvaez, *Embodied Morality*, 12.

<sup>92</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 111.

<sup>93</sup> Narvaez, “Triune Ethics,” 104.

## Imagination Ethic Affirms Sensitive Empiricism

On the scientific basis of the frontal lobes' capacity to integrate information from the outside to information that is held internally, this discovery fundamentally substantiates the empirical nature of the Thomistic epistemology. With respect to the medieval understanding of the interior sensoria, this sheds light upon the integrative function of the Thomistic common sense in determining the particularity of sensible species. Moreover, it maintains hold of the species' commonality under the one and the same sensed object. Aquinas is therefore accurate in his philosophical observation that psychology is never isolated from sociology.<sup>94</sup> Intellections generally begin in the sense that act as the initial point of contact between the human agent and the social environment. This manner of philosophical thinking is evident in the consideration of the association between the *imagination ethic* and the *engagement ethic*. Through this linkage, Narvaez is able to formulate the concept of *communal imagination*.

Narvaez formulates the connectivity between the *imagination ethic* and the *engagement ethic* in view of the *ethic of engagement's* indispensable connection with the social environment. She claims in fact that "the Ethic of Imagination coordinates the older parts of the brain using humanity's fullest reasoning capacities to adapt to ongoing social relationship and to address concerns beyond the immediate."<sup>95</sup> Underlying this is her belief that "[h]umans are at their most moral...when the Ethic of Engagement is linked with the Ethic of Imagination."<sup>96</sup> As the latter brings about face-to-face social interactions, the *imagination ethic* enhances possibilities on living in communion with others. Hence, the socially engaged imagination is referred to by Narvaez as *communal imagination* which is

grounded in embodied social experience that establishes a sense of the limits but also the promise of humanness. Communal imagination does not mean "making things us," but seeing what is true and that which may not be manifest. It means understanding that experience and mind and linked – that human agency is not an insertion of "will" into an animal body, but a collaborative movement in relationship. It understands that morality is integrated into one's being and into one's relationship as they occur, instead of adopted as a separate, intellectual

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<sup>94</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 3, arg. 19.

<sup>95</sup> Narvaez, "Triune Ethics," 96.

<sup>96</sup> Narvaez, "Triune Ethics," 107.

code of ethics. The capacities of engagement ethic...are extended into communal imagination as a framing for relationship and for being.<sup>97</sup>

The interrelation between human agency and the social environment is one reality that is well pronounced both in virtue embodiment and in moral functioning. This will become clearer when moral functioning is discussed in relation to virtues in the next section.

### Imagination Ethic Affirms Intuitive Knowledge

Moral imagination possesses the capacity to provide images of the social environment even when it is absent or not visibly present before the human eyes. Bearing in mind the implications of its inevitable state of shifting, this capacity is most beneficial in discerning the moral framework and moral ground of a situation under moral consideration. In addition, these shifting social environments and situations do not just require immediate socio-cognitive interpretation and discernment, but reciprocally, it forces human agency to ‘shift gears,’ as it were, to actuate appropriate emotional and intellectual responses given the observable changing environmental states. Sensible knowledge, including perceptible shifts impinging on the exterior senses, is essential in the imaginative process. Patience, however, may be required in this endeavour since apprehended knowledge is “accumulated slowly and with repeated experience (but also sometimes after only one impressive exposure) whereby associations of simultaneously experienced stimuli are retained largely unconsciously and expressed primarily nonverbally.”<sup>98</sup> This configuration expresses the Thomistic imaginative acts of *composition* and *division* alluded to earlier.

It was intimated earlier that intuition is located in the *ethic of imagination*. This should not come as a surprise since apprehended knowledge, where imagination and sense are constitutive of its cognition, is operationally governed by both intuition and reasoning. Considering the relation between intuition and reason, “[d]eliberation allows one to assess the signals of intuition and the construction of reasons and to scrutinise their validity. Reason assesses the rationale behind instinctive attitudes, whereas intuition evaluate signals for reasoning’s

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<sup>97</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 118-119.

<sup>98</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 111.

products.”<sup>99</sup> Moreover, it is only logical that as imagination deals with shifting social environments, intuition’s malleability should be a perfect complement. Narvaez believes that it is the case since “[m]oral intuitions are malleable under the right circumstances and with the appropriate guidance. New information can change cause-consequence chains of reasoning that undergird an intuition, leading to a different intuition.”<sup>100</sup> For example, some pro-choice advocates of abortion have had a change of heart when they were shown the video of how an unborn foetus was pushing away the surgical forceps which were surgically trying to terminate the pregnancy. Following on, it should be pointed out here again that intuition is empirically-based according to the mind of Narvaez and is non-verbal in many of its projection. Tacit knowledge or intuition may be analogous to knowing how to send text messages yet one does not how the mobile phone does it.

Acknowledging the frontal lobe of the brain as the location of the *imagination ethics*, Narvaez advances the scientific observation that “[t]he frontal lobes are considered the pinnacle of human evolution. They are the source of our deliberative thinking, which includes much more than rational thought in the traditional sense.”<sup>101</sup> Pre-supposed in this statement are other functions of moral imagination already intimated in the above discussion such as creative imagination, perspective thinking and planning into the future.<sup>102</sup> These three functions, among others, certainly express a connection with Thomistic imagination. It is interesting to recall that these descriptions resonate the earlier attribution to imagination as a play of thoughts and suspension of judgment. The confirmation of the frontal lobe’s capacity for imaginative moral thinking substantiates a solid argument for moral imagination’s consideration as a veritable source of information for prudential moral inquiry. Without access to the capacity ‘to see beyond the now’ (foresight) and ‘to be in some else’s shoes’ (empathy, perspective-taking), prudential judgment will be like walking blindfolded in the dark. Through imagination, one gains moral vision in the midst of life’s darkness and moral certainty beyond life’s ambiguities.

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<sup>99</sup> Narvaez, “Moral Complexity,” 169.

<sup>100</sup> Narvaez, “Moral Complexity,” 170.

<sup>101</sup> Narvaez, “Triune Ethics,” 104.

<sup>102</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 111; Narvaez, “Triune Ethics,” 104.

## Imagination Ethic Affirms Imaginative Discernment

Immediately related to the above, moral perception and cognition are not merely based on sense but also on moral imagination. In situations of free choice or situations of ambiguity, moral imagination is able to discern the appropriate course of response via composition and division of images, from both current and previously cognised forms or ideas. This observation is obviously stated in Thomistic language. The ability to be perceptive and sensitive to what moral conditions dictate is evidently a capacity which moral imagination is able to foster. Narvaez provides an explanation for this: “moral imagination requires being sensitive to the morally-relevant aspects of situation, envisioning different alternatives for action, and thinking about the ramifications of an action for people involved.”<sup>103</sup> This capacity for imagination is relevant specifically to the consideration of prudence since it attempts to open up possibilities as either reflections on past experiences or those of which have been generated artificially by creative imagination.

As earlier described, one of the benefits of communal imagination is the possibility to explore someone else’s state of mind. This imaginative exercise, empowered by the imaginative capacity for abstraction and freedom from time constraints, allows human agency to empathise with others. Empathy moves the human agency to seek the welfare of others. Along this line, Narvaez mindfully states that:

Failure to help others commonly occurs because empathy is not engaged [since]...[f]or individuals who do not imaginatively regulate and heighten their emotional response adaptively, ‘sympathy is easily aroused but quickly forgotten.’<sup>104</sup>

Moreover, communal imagination which fosters empathy is adopting a ‘heart’ view by allowing oneself to be connected to others not intellectually but on an emotional level.<sup>105</sup> Empathy engages moral imagination to “step outside of the usual boxes of habit or intellectual detachment”<sup>106</sup> in order to experience the freedom of choice to emotionally relate to others and to liberate oneself from the baggage of uncertainty which can cripple the brain or the mind from empathising with others. Certainly, prudence would be better off if an imaginative inquiry

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<sup>103</sup> Darcia Narvaez and Kellen Mrkva, “The Development of Moral Imagination,” in *The Ethics of Creativity*, ed. S. Moran, D. H. Copley, and J. C. Kaufman (NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 29.

<sup>104</sup> Narvaez and Mrkva, “The Development of Moral Imagination,” 31.

<sup>105</sup> Narvaez and Mrkva, “The Development of Moral Imagination,” 37.

<sup>106</sup> Narvaez and Mrkva, “The Development of Moral Imagination,” 37.

is accommodated to allow the mind to *represent* itself in someone else's shoes and to *feel* what it is like from the perspective of another person. Biblically, Christ often incited his listeners to be intuitively imaginative: "but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant."<sup>107</sup>

Moral imagination's capacity to operate in situation of free choice or situation of ambiguity is owed specifically to the "ability of the frontal lobe structures to elaborate on the external world [which] increases problem-solving and learning capabilities."<sup>108</sup> According to Narvaez, one of the indicators of a mature moral functioning is "the employment of moral imagination, taking time to deliberate when appropriate while being aware of the fallibilities of both intuition and reason."<sup>109</sup> Once again, this credibly links moral imagination with prudential moral inquiry. Taking time is to the advantage of prudential moral inquiry since it allows more insights and broader perspectives in view of gaining sufficient moral knowledge prior to prudential judgment and command. Practising the virtue of prudence is like buying time or haggling before buying in order to gain moral reasoning that is critical for discovering the truth.

### **Thomistic Virtue and Narvaez's Virtue Embodiment**

The theological paradigm, *exitus-reditus*, attributed to the soteriological theme of Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*, finds resonance in Narvaez's *TET*. Narvaez has definitely heard of the medieval saint as evidenced by her scant references to his thoughts in a few of her many publications<sup>110</sup> and the specific use of the Thomistic conception of virtues<sup>111</sup> which she refers to almost always in concomitant with Aristotle. Narvaez's moral empirical psychology appears to be more particularly aligned with Aristotelianism, most notably her empirically-based ideas on intuition and human flourishing (virtue). Regarding intuition, Narvaez claims that "[t]he Aristotelian emphasis on intuition development evident in traditional character education is more empirically aligned with everyday human behaviour."<sup>112</sup> On the other hand, her views on

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<sup>107</sup> Mt 23:11.

<sup>108</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 111.

<sup>109</sup> Narvaez, "Moral Complexity," 172.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 92 and 239; Darcia Narvaez and Timothy S. Reilly, "Character, Virtue, and Science: Linking Psychological and Philosophical Views," *Philosophy, Theology and the Sciences* 5, no. 1 (2018): 63; Narvaez, "Baselines for Virtue," 15.

<sup>111</sup> Darcia Narvaez and Timothy S. Reilly, "Character, Virtue, and Science: Linking Psychological and Philosophical Views," *Philosophy, Theology and the Sciences* 5, no. 1 (2018): 56.

<sup>112</sup> Narvaez, "Human Flourishing and Moral Development," 311.

human flourishing see her affirming the western philosophy of Aristotle: “As Aristotle pointed out, human flourishing necessarily includes individuals and communities, a perspective corroborated by the biological and social sciences.”<sup>113</sup> Empiricism which is closely linked to *TET*'s proposition on everyday morality is apparently the underlying principle governing the positive sciences.

The seeming intimacy of Narvaez's work with Aristotelianism should not be considered as a hindrance in explicating her thematic parallelism with Thomism, particularly her view on elevating human nature to what it can potentially achieve. The theme of transgression to redemption is implicit in the *TET*'s evolutionary conceptualisation of the theme, mismatch to human flourishing. The theme of transgression biblically refers to the infraction committed by Adam and Eve when they ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. Their disobedience merited their banishment from the so-called Paradise by God's command.<sup>114</sup> Narvaez, on the other hand, conceives of the theme of the mismatch on the basis of the scientifically-based discrepancy between the life of *SBHG* ancestral communities and today's generation. The extent of the mismatch is at the grandest scale:

The human genus spent 99 percent of its existence in a lifestyle that is egalitarian, emphasising individual autonomy, immersed in nearly constant pleasurable social activity – whether gathering, hunting, social leisure, or sleeping, attending primarily to the here and now with minimal possessions or planning for the distant future. So different from the modern Western context, it is not surprising that the two environments foster different moral personalities.<sup>115</sup>

The effect of the Adam and Eve's disobedience also had had a punitive effect on future generations through the inheritance of original sin:

And to Adam he said,  
“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,  
and have eaten of the tree  
about which I commanded you,  
‘You shall not eat of it,’  
cursed is the ground because of you;  
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;  
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;

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<sup>113</sup> Narvaez, “Human Flourishing and Moral Development,” 316.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Gn 3:1-24.

<sup>115</sup> Narvaez, “The 99 Percent - Development and Socialization Within an Evolutionary Context: Growing Up to Become ‘A Good and Useful Human Being’,” 350.

and you shall eat the plants of the field.  
By the sweat of your face  
you shall eat bread  
until you return to the ground,  
for out of it you were taken;  
you are dust,  
And unto dust you shall return.”<sup>116</sup>

Both themes of transgression and mismatch underline a compelling need and an expedient thrust towards a return to former glory: the return of humanity’s sinful state to the redeeming grace of God according to the mind of Aquinas<sup>117</sup> and the return to humanity’s moral heritages represented by the ancestral lifestyle of the *SBHG* communities in the evolutionary psychology of Narvaez.<sup>118</sup> Under both perspectives, every human agent must personally commit to the co-construction of global humanity. If redemption is humanity’s goal for Aquinas, human flourishing is for Narvaez. To reach the end, both Aquinas and Narvaez have an almost identical proposition – the path of virtues.

The concept of virtue is espoused by Aquinas and Narvaez on varying degrees. However, because of their dissimilarity in the contextualisation of human nature, their ultimate goals are evidently different, so it seems. If we take Narvaez to be confined by her scientific commitment, then, the ultimate end for her would be human flourishing achieved via virtue embodiment. However, if we subscribe to her openness to the pathway to wisdom or what she refers to as the goals for a deeper conscience, then, her virtue embodiment would be akin to Aquinas, and such virtue embodiment would be their ultimate end. For Narvaez, the pathway to wisdom is

to apprehend the truth by bringing into alignment the three centres  
(intellect, body, and emotion). The aim is not so much to experience a

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<sup>116</sup> Gn 3:17-19.

<sup>117</sup> Reflecting on the words of St. Paul regarding salvation, Aquinas quotes Saint Augustine: “God wills all men to be saved that are saved, not because there is no man whom He does not wish saved, but because there is no man saved whose salvation He does not will.” Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 19, a. 6, ad 1.

<sup>118</sup> Darcia Narvaez states her argument as to why a ‘return’ to the ancestral lifestyles of nomadic foraging communities is good for moral development: “Some might argue that we cannot go back to earlier lifestyles, and besides who wants to live outside with bugs and predators? The purpose of using evolutionary baselines is not to romanticise the past. A proper evolutionary baseline can help us understand today’s human behaviour and health outcomes are normative for human beings – part of their natural nature, or maladaptations that emerge from a mismatch between evolved needs and current environments. Sometimes researchers find mismatch and assume there is nothing that can be done. The point here is that there truly is something that we can do to shift our current baselines for human development in a way that fosters greater wellbeing, not only in humans but also for the natural world.” See Narvaez, “The 99 Percent - Development and Socialization Within an Evolutionary Context: Growing Up to Become ‘A Good and Useful Human Being’,” 353.



mystical vision but seeing reality in a lucid and objective manner that, in contrast to the ordinary way of seeing, seems visionary.<sup>119</sup>

Somewhere in her description, a Thomistic undertone is present most specially when Aquinas's explanation of *Whether God is Truth?* in the *Prima pars* of the *Summa theologiae* is considered:

Truth is found in the intellect as it apprehends a thing as it is; and in things according as they have been conformable to an intellect. This is to the greatest degree found in God. For His being is not only conformed to His intellect, but it is the very act of His intellect; and His act of understanding is the measure and cause of every other being and of every other intellect, and he Himself is His own existence and act of understanding. Whence it follows not only that truth is in Him, but that He is truth itself, and the sovereign and first truth.<sup>120</sup>

There is no attempt here to commit the academic sin of unwarranted doctrinal imputation, but rather, the least that can be proposed is the discovery of the connection between Aquinas and Narvaez. It may appear that what can be at least proposed is to state that Narvaez has taken Aquinas to where he could not go. Narvaez actually grounds and expands Aquinas's assumptions on the capacity of human nature to achieve self-fulfilment and self-perfection. In characterising what virtue is, Aquinas states that "virtue implies the perfection of power."<sup>121</sup> The following quote situates the existential commonality between Aquinas and Narvaez:

From the beginning of life, humans are embodied creatures who are shaped by experience. The trajectory for a unique start is set in early life as the brain is being moulded by relationship with caregivers. Each person's universe is different from that of another, setting up a unique moral grammar for social life that shifts among engagement, security, and imagination from moment to moment, situation to situation, relationship to relationship.

Yet individuals have power to change themselves. Although the beginnings of the self are established by caregivers before a child can select for herself, with autonomy throughout life, individuals can shift their personalities, capacities and virtue, 'growing themselves.' Individuals can deliberately foster an ethic or another in themselves or others by the activities they choose, -- activities that enhance the ego, fear and the security ethic, or activities where they let go of the ego through interaction with nature and with others in social delight,

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<sup>119</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 234.

<sup>120</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 16, a. 5.

<sup>121</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 55, a. 1.

encouraging an engagement ethic and communal imagination. The world is overfilled with the former and needs more of the latter.<sup>122</sup>

On the basis of this quote, the discussion will now deal with the two fundamental factors that relate to the human power to change: (1) virtues and the changing social environment, and (2) moral education to human flourishing. Virtues and moral education constitute two factors that immediately and directly relate to *synderesis* and its growth during the critical years of growing young children.

### Virtues and the Changing Social Environment

Narvaez particularly accommodated the virtue theory framework in explaining the nature of dispositions which is her more preferred nuance over the ubiquitous Aristotelian and Thomistic concept of virtue as *good habits repeatedly done*. She is aware of the common understanding of equating virtue with disposition such as: “a set of sensibilities and capacities (perceptions, orientation, attitudes, feelings, thinking, motivation, action) that become natural with practice and essential to oneself”<sup>123</sup> and as “schemas developed from patterns of experience.”<sup>124</sup> While Narvaez grounds her understanding of virtue specifically on the ideas of the Stagirite, she nonetheless claims that her work is “enriched by psychological insight.”<sup>125</sup> Hence, she defines disposition in the following terms:

Dispositions are stance toward experience and represent response tendencies to that experience. Dispositions are composed of such things as embodied memory, genetic expression, unique experience, and personal agency. A disposition is primarily an unconscious frame that is deeply tied to learning, both conscious and unconscious, and associative and non-associative.<sup>126</sup>

As Aquinas’s moral virtue is grounded in the theory ofhylomorphism where it involves the operations of reason (soul) and passions (body), Narvaez conceives of an embodied morality,

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<sup>122</sup> Darcia Narvaez, “Neurobiology, Moral Education and Moral Self-Authorship,” in *Moral Education and Development: A Lifetime Commitment*, ed. Doret J. de Ruyter and Siebren Miedema (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2011), 39.

<sup>123</sup> Narvaez and Reilly, “Character, Virtue, and Science,” 54.

<sup>124</sup> Narvaez and Reilly, “Character, Virtue, and Science,” 55.

<sup>125</sup> Narvaez and Junkins, “Disposition Formation and Early Moral Development,” 92.

<sup>126</sup> Narvaez and Junkins, “Disposition Formation and Early Moral Development,” 92.

i.e., brain/mind and body. This is an important concept in virtue theory since dispositions, apart from its genetic template, are also transcriptional. This means that dispositions are products of neurobiological interconnections whose networks “encode all of our memories, emotions, and behaviours, interacting and integrating information.”<sup>127</sup> The neuronal transcriptions allow for brain impulses to send electrical impulses between networks of neurons to other networks not just within the brain but to the different parts of the body. This basically characterises physical motions that are motivated by brain activities. An important element in this consideration in respect to virtue formation is the assertion that while the “majority of our brain structure is formed after birth, much of this is guided by experience, influencing how genes are expressed (epigenetics). Therefore, our environments play a significant role in shaping our brains.”<sup>128</sup> As epigenesis takes places, human emotions and understanding grow as they interact with the world outside the human brain.<sup>129</sup> Narvaez adds that in response to experience, neurons expand in numbers continually by creating new neuronal connections which fortify existing networks or establish new neurons.<sup>130</sup> This forms part of Narvaez’s basis that “individuals have the power to change themselves,” which could also mean that every individual has the potential to be virtuous and to live a virtuous life (moral self-regulation). In the words of Aquinas, “virtue is a good habit, productive of good works.”<sup>131</sup>

The above description demonstrates how extramental impulses causally create an internal experience which not only could materialise into epigenesis, but it could also potentially translate into ideogenesis. The neurological factor in this process is the plasticity of neurons which is characterised by its capacity to generate those internal responses from external stimuli. Dispositions, which are expressions of the brain’s neuroplasticity, demonstrate the following dynamism:

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<sup>127</sup> Narvaez and Junkins, “Disposition Formation and Early Moral Development,” 93.

<sup>128</sup> Narvaez and Junkins, “Disposition Formation and Early Moral Development,” 94.

<sup>129</sup> Caution is advised here by Darcia Narvaez since: “there is much more to do before a synthesis in moral psychology makes sense. We have hardly begun to study, let alone understand, how ‘the human brain is a self-organised, complex adaptive system that encodes stimuli with context-sensitive constraints.’” Also, speaking of virtues, she maintains that “it is by no means clear how virtues are to be understood as psychological constructs or how to understand their causal role in behaviour. To say that virtues are *traits* that produce enduring dispositions to act in certain ways is to say something controversial, although this might come as a surprise to the lay reader.” See Darcia Narvaez, “The Embodied Dynamism of Moral Becoming: Reply to Haidt (2010),” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 5, no. 2 (2010): 186; Darcia Narvaez and Daniel Lapsey, “The Having, Doing, and Being of Moral Personality,” in *The Philosophy and Psychology of Character and Happiness*, ed. Nancy E. Snow and Franco V. Trivigno (London: Routledge, 2014), 133.

<sup>130</sup> Boyce, Barry, et al, *The Mindfulness Revolution* in Narvaez and Junkins, “Disposition Formation and Early Moral Development,” 94.

<sup>131</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 55, a. 3.

[It] emerge[s] from the patterns of neural networks built from experience, and they are continually refined. These are not mechanical responses, but complex and dynamic processes of contextualised understanding, responding, and learning. Neural integration, in terms of strong, dense, and high quantities of neuron connections, represent a history of understanding the world around us, and allow for efficient use of our powers.<sup>132</sup>

It can be inferred from the above that the expanse in the numbers of neurons is mutually related to the moral growth of a person. This means that while neuronal responses exhibit a personal neurological capacity, it also reveals the character of a person.

The influence of the social environment is undeniably paramount in the virtue formation and information of moral agents, particularly acquired moral virtues. There are therefore many elements in the social environment that could potentially induce positive changes to a human person. This factor would have led Narvaez to define virtue as “[behaving] in the right way at the right time according to the particular situation.”<sup>133</sup> Framed in the Scholastic sense, it needs to be asked what sort of sensible objects could positively actuate human potentials? The next section will attempt to answer this question.

### Moral Education to Human Flourishing

The habituation of virtues is achieved through moral education. Narvaez claims that “[t]he context for development...[is] the early caregiving environment that supports moral development.”<sup>134</sup> The underlying principle supporting this statement suggests that “morality is an embodied aspect of humanity that grows from interaction with the world from the beginnings of life.”<sup>135</sup> This process is underscored by various neurobiological states of the modern human brain which determine the required optimal states for moral functioning. Optimal moral functioning means that the human person is primed to be formed by virtues and is living a virtuous life. To understand this fully, the evolution and development of the brain need to be understood.

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<sup>132</sup> Narvaez and Junkins, “Disposition Formation and Early Moral Development,” 95.

<sup>133</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 6.

<sup>134</sup> Narvaez and Junkins, “Disposition Formation and Early Moral Development,” 100.

<sup>135</sup> Narvaez and Junkins, “Disposition Formation and Early Moral Development,” 100.

Backed by researched science, Narvaez stresses that the critical age for virtue formation of a growing young child is from conception<sup>136</sup> till five years of age. She explains:

Over the course of human evolution encompassing such things as bipedalism, human babies became increasingly helpless and immature at birth, emerging from the womb nine to eighteen months early, compared to other animals. Humans have 75 percent of the brain left to develop over a lengthy period of maturation (over 20 years) but most of it by age 5.<sup>137</sup>

This scientific data underpins Narvaez's *EDN* constituting, as earlier mentioned, the ancestral caregiving practices<sup>138</sup> that promote the optimal social environment for virtue formation. When appropriate caregiving is provided to growing young children by caregivers, e.g., mother, father, etc., moral formation moulds young children into virtuous people during their early years of age. Evolutionary history suggests that the ancestral lifestyle of the *SBHG* communities prove to be an effective social environment where virtue formation can truly and effectively foment.<sup>139</sup>

Virtue formation is conclusively not just a neuroscience affair but a social matter as well. Narvaez categorically specifies this by stating that: "Virtue learning, like all learning, is *biosocial*."<sup>140</sup> This statement points to the value of caregivers who are instrumental in providing an environment where virtue could be sown and grown, as it were. Aquinas himself acknowledges the importance of being trained in the virtues:

Man has a natural aptitude for virtue; but the perfection of virtue must be acquired by man by means of some kind of training.... Now it is difficult to see how man could suffice for himself in the matter of this training.... Consequently a man needs to receive this training from another, whereby to arrive at the perfection of virtue. And as to those

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<sup>136</sup> Darcia Narvaez claims that: "Co-construction of a child's capacities begins from conception, when the developing embryo reacts to the environment provided by the mother; she in turn is affected by the community support she receives during pregnancy." See Narvaez, "Neurobiology, Moral Education and Moral Self-Authorship," 32.

<sup>137</sup> Narvaez, "The Co-Construction of Virtue," 253.

<sup>138</sup> Darcia Narvaez lists some of the early life childrearing practices common among small-band hunter-gatherers: "soothing perinatal experience; responsivity (needs met promptly); constant physical presence, including touch with movement (carrying and holding); breastfeeding (frequent, infant-initiated, 2-5 years, average weaning age, 4; multiple adult caregivers; positive social support; free play in nature with multi-aged mates." See Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 30.

<sup>139</sup> Since the subject matter of *small-band hunter-gatherers* is a huge topic, the discussion is limited only to citing the fundamental basis upon which Darcia Narvaez postulated her conception of the ideal and optimal social lifestyles and environments wherein virtue formation would best thrive. See Darcia Narvaez, "Revitalizing Human Virtue by Restoring Organic Morality," *Journal of Moral Education* 45, no. 3 (2016): 225-226.

<sup>140</sup> Narvaez, "Baselines for Virtue," 16.

young people who are inclined to acts of virtue, by their good natural disposition, or by custom, or rather by the gift of God, paternal training suffices, which is by admonitions.<sup>141</sup>

On such pretext, Narvaez proposes the combination of the *engagement ethic* and *imagination ethic* as the ideal configuration that best enhances an environment that is conducive to moral formation in today's environment. She states:

EDN-consistent care fosters a disposition towards relational attunement in-the-moment that relies on capacities for emotional presence and emphatic embrace, an Engagement orientation takes into account the welfare of the face-to-face other. With development and maturation, Engagement capacities form the foundations for Communal Imagination – an inclusive use of abstracting capabilities. In this case, autonomy is kept within the bounds of empathy – actions are taken with the welfare of others in mind. The human inheritances of Engagement and Communal Imagination are egalitarian and attuned to the social world.<sup>142</sup>

The aforementioned quote clearly reveals that the process of virtue formation necessarily requires key players in order for virtues to be imparted, at least by some form of witnessing. In this process, the growth of virtue formation is envisaged as a 'bottom-up' process where initial data and experience are built on by subsequent experiences. This also means that knowledge and experience begin in early life and mature as the human person grows to maturity.<sup>143</sup> These people who have grown in maturity would be likely candidates to be the virtue experts. In the realm of neuroscience, an expert in virtue is one who "is more experienced and has developed a more complex understanding of the domain in terms of conceptual associations, action skills, and conditional knowledge."<sup>144</sup> Moreover, "experts have a richer declarative and procedural knowledge base that increases processing speed, directs attention and perceptual pick up, and triggers automatic, goal-dependent skill usage."<sup>145</sup> More importantly, in view of virtue-related traits, "*moral exemplars* in the fullest sense demonstrate moral (knowing good) and practical wisdom (knowing how to carry it out in the situation). Moral expertise is applying the right virtue in the right amount of time at the right time."<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 95, a. 1.

<sup>142</sup> Narvaez, "Baselines for Virtue," 19-20.

<sup>143</sup> Narvaez, "The Co-Construction of Virtue," 262.

<sup>144</sup> Narvaez and Lapsley, "The Psychological Foundations of Everyday Morality and Moral Expertise," 150.

<sup>145</sup> Narvaez and Lapsley, "The Psychological Foundations of Everyday Morality and Moral Expertise," 151.

<sup>146</sup> Narvaez, "Human Flourishing and Moral Development," 312.

A thought-provoking observation in the *TET* scheme is Narvaez's insistence on the priority of the quality of caregiving consistent with the *EDN* configurations over consideration of the identity of the caregiver. She formulates her point in this manner:

As it turns out from extensive anthropological and epidemiological research, children's well-being benefits most from multiple committed caregivers. It does not matter who the several caregivers are, but how much they support the child through responsiveness and provisioning. Historical evidence indicates that the nuclear family has existed only for about 100 years. The government and business policies supporting nuclear families at the expense of other family configurations were put in place with deliberation and forethought, based on information, reasoning, and intuitions that have turned out to be incorrect.<sup>147</sup>

While the above assertion may be controversial, it does prove that human relationships are not a given. Human relationships obviously involve a lot of hard work, patience, love and caregiving. Consequently, this raises the contemporary question regarding the effectiveness of the traditional composite of the human family as the viable locus for parents, biological or not, same-sex or not, for the rearing of a child, let alone for bringing up a child into a life of virtues. The following chapters will further shed light on this matter.

When Aquinas considered the acquired moral virtue of prudence, he was aware of the benefits of the process of moral inquiry particularly from virtue experts or moral exemplars: "Hence in matters of prudence man stands in very great need of being taught by others, especially by 'old folks' who have acquired a sane understanding of the ends in practical matters."<sup>148</sup> Akin to Narvaez's claim, it is evident from this statement that it is not so much the identity of the 'old folks' that really matters, but rather, the quality of an old folk's knowledge of the first principles of practical reason. Needless to say, the age of a person may not necessarily indicate depth of knowledge.

Teachers are given an important place in the teaching of Aquinas since "they teach the truth and enlighten the mind."<sup>149</sup> Teachers are able to lead pupils, using Aquinas's terminology, either through discovery or by instructions. A teacher's role is obvious when it comes to guiding pupils to learn by instructions. Aquinas presupposes, however, that the natural mind is able to grasp the unknown things through the aid of natural reason. This does not seem to be

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<sup>147</sup> Narvaez, "Moral Complexity," 163.

<sup>148</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 49, a. 3.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 11, a. 1.

absolute since a pupil may still need to be led to the knowledge of the primary moral principles.

Aquinas points this out:

Now, in discovery, the procedure of anyone who arrives at the knowledge of something unknown is to apply general self-evident principles to certain definite matters, from these to proceed to particular conclusions, and from these to others. Consequently, one person is said to teach another inasmuch as, by signs, he manifests to that other the reasoning process which he himself goes through by his own natural reason.<sup>150</sup>

As abovementioned, the manner of knowing via discovery is one critical task in prudential moral inquiry. Prudence seeks to know the primary moral principles in order that the judgment of the mind will be in consonance with the truth. It also investigates the *infinity of singulars*, and the primary moral principles as well, in order to proceed towards enacting a sound and reasonable prudential judgment. In and through all of these, the human mind is not merely digging up from a storehouse of static and unrelated data. Rather, there are scores of phantasms created by the brain circuitry to facilitate ideogenesis, including via division and comparison. Imagination participates in the search for truth and is never without it. Being both related to the cognitive and affective parts of the brain, imagination contributes its own fact-finding mechanism to the quest for truth, where memory appears handicapped in bringing about the desired outcome. In this respect, Narvaez focuses on the role of caregivers in fostering the emotional development of young people: “In moral development, the caregivers first provide the relational environment that wires the brain for sociality.”<sup>151</sup> Stemming from this experimental observation, a child will more than likely experience serious problems in socially interacting with people and would exhibit passivity and reclusion from the social environment without the proper emotional nourishment from caregivers. Narvaez’s claims seem to suggest that the affect carries a meaning which reason can so verify. There is profundity in why St. Bonaventure located *synderesis* in the affect and why Benedict XVI thought of *synderesis* as an *inner sense*. While it may not categorically be found in the teachings of Aquinas, there are compelling reasons to consider why *synderesis* may actually be driving moral agency not just cognitively but affectively as well. If a desire for the good is indeed in us, there is argument for feeling such a desire to grasp intuitively the first principles of practical reason due to our natural inclination. Natural inclination moves the heart, as it were, to discover the good that

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<sup>150</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 11, a. 1.

<sup>151</sup> Narvaez, “The Emotional Foundations of High Moral Intelligence,” 89.



frees the moral agent from the cloud of darkness and uncertainty. Beyond the *intuitive actuation* of *synderesis*, there is experiential evidence of the persistence of the human desire for the good and the truth, remaining and inviting the mind, the body and the soul to move towards the good, for it is only through this movement that moral agency will eventually and ultimately achieve its ends. *Synderesis* will never fail in pointing human agents to their beatific *telos*.<sup>152</sup>

### ***Synderesis* and Moral Imagination: A Comparative and Synthetic Analysis**

The above discussion has demonstrated how Narvaez's *TET* provides discriminate scientific support to Aquinas's doctrine on *synderesis*. This support, however, is limitedly functional rather than categorically doctrinal. Though Narvaez makes references to Aquinas's thoughts in some of her publications, in none of these is *synderesis* ever directly and explicitly inferred. Her thoughts on intuition fundamentally differ from Aquinas regarding its origin. Aquinas's intuition originates via divine implantation (*synderesis*) and is actualised by sensitive experience while Narvaez's intuition is had via experience within a social environment (empirical). Their empirical similarity is conclusively proximate save for the aspect of divine implantation. Without the supernatural aspect, Narvaez's intuition would appear to be fundamentally aligned with Thomistic epistemology, albeit unintended but empirically sound. Narvaez's empiricism would be no different from Thomistic epistemology in so far as the cognitive process emanates from and is stimulated by the material world. Narvaez would agree with Aquinas that knowledge is acquired via sense and imagination. She would, however, insist on the unconscious aspect of acquiring sensitive knowledge which underlines the origin of tacit or intuitive knowledge.<sup>153</sup> The unconscious element in Narvaez's intuition may indirectly allude to the unconscious or innateness of *synderesis* in the human person. As *synderesis* is constitutive of pre-cognitive (non-cognitive) and cognitive processes, Narvaez's intuitionism is basically akin to Thomistic epistemology.

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<sup>152</sup> According to Aquinas, *synderesis* is "never destroyed" (Cf. Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 16, a. 3.) and there is "no error in it" (Cf. Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 16, a. 2.). *Synderesis* only fails when a person suffers from some form of brain impediment or when intellect is consumed by passion or bad habits (vices) so as to deflect the proper use of reason. This failure is understood only as the failure to apply the universal moral principles to particular situations and not necessarily the extinguishing of the innate habit.

<sup>153</sup> Darcia Narvaez claims that "[a]s a result of implicit learning...the effects of prior experiences are manifest in a task even though previous learning is not consciously evident to the performer. In other words, implicit learning is 'phenomenally unconscious.'" See Narvaez, "Moral Complexity," 167.

Narvaez's fundamental disposition towards the positive sciences in theorising on the dependence of human experience on the social environment<sup>154</sup> affirms indisputably the importance of sensitive knowledge in permeating the human mind with the necessary epistemic materials for human intellection. Jonathan Haidt agrees with Narvaez in this respect by maintaining that "moral reasoning is ubiquitous [and] it is best studied not as a private search for truth but as an aspect of our sociality."<sup>155</sup> Further extending this assertion, Michael Lacewing also agrees with Narvaez that the human person has the capacity to "seek out situations that will bring about change in our intuitions or adopt other means of indirect influence, such as mindfulness training and psychotherapy."<sup>156</sup> It is in this respect that the interior sensoria of Aquinas, which would have been placed by Narvaez in the frontal lobe where cognitive processes take place, possess key roles in acquiring sensible forms pregnant with moral contents necessary for the actuation of *synderesis* and the inchoative maturation of the knowledge of the first principles of practical reason. Without these moral contents obtained from the social environment, *synderesis* would be deeply disadvantaged, and eventually, seriously malnourished, in fomenting the understanding of the practical good. Narvaez's theory underpins this assertion when she elevates the social practices and lifestyle of the *SBHG* ancestral communities as the typical environment conducive for human flourishing. She particularly gives preponderance on the provision of appropriate and constant caregiving by adult members of the community to very young members of the community.<sup>157</sup> Hence, if the social environment is the key to human flourishing, the same can be said of moral situations in effectively actuating the habit of *synderesis* and the inchoative maturation of the knowledge of the practical good. Aquinas would agree with Narvaez that this, in the end, may potentially deliver human flourishing. He would, however, posit further that this may possibly pave the way for the realisation of *beatitudo*, i.e., happiness with God.

Narvaez's *imagination ethic* is generally and loosely expressive of the Thomistic conceptualisation of *vis imaginativa* as well. Apart from the obvious fact that imagination takes place in the absence of existing objects before the human eyes, Narvaez's description of

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<sup>154</sup> Darcia Narvaez maintains that: "Virtue is fostered through extensive immersion in good environments (fostering intuitions) and mentoring (fostering deliberation and assisting in the selection of environments for intuition development). One learns intuitions from the environments in which one is immersed." See Narvaez, "Neurobiology, Moral Education and Moral Self-Authorship," 38.

<sup>155</sup> Jonathan Haidt, "Moral Psychology Must Not Be Based on Faith and Hope: Commentary on Narvaez," *Perspective on Psychological Science* 5, no. 2 (2010): 182.

<sup>156</sup> Lacewing, "Expert Moral Intuition and Its Development: A Guide to the Debate," 413.

<sup>157</sup> Darcia Narvaez asserts that: "Trajectory for a unique self is set in early life as the brain is being moulded by relationship with caregivers." See Narvaez, "Neurobiology, Moral Education and Moral Self-Authorship," 39.

imagination depicts the Thomistic capacity and potentiality of imagination to divide and compose forms or ideas either previously or recently acquired. This affiliation is not unexpected considering Narvaez's subtle affiliation with Aristotelianism. Narvaez's attributions of abstraction, perspective-taking and mental re-organisation, to name a few, as expressions of the global moral mindset of *imagination ethics* are brought about by the mind's capacity and potentiality to re-arrange one's thoughts, as it were, to creatively produce new mental forms or ideas. The neuroscientific affirmation that imagination is an integral global mindset ascertains imagination's pivotal role in human psychology and epistemology. Unlike in the Thomistic consideration where imagination, as it were, 'failed to capture Aquinas's imagination' in his teachings on prudence, Narvaez has just informed Aquinas that imagination is an indispensable constitutive element of human psychology that enriches human knowledge, both tacit and deliberative.

In the mind of Narvaez, imagination is pivotal in fomenting tacit and deliberative knowledge, most specifically in life situations where a moral tenor subsists. This assertion substantiates the argument of this research that moral imagination is and should be an indispensable faculty in Thomistic prudential moral inquiry. Since virtue helps moral agency in the actuation of *synderesis* and the growth of the practical good in the human person, moral imagination helps the mind sort out various and possible scenarios where the human agency can best achieve self-fulfilment and self-perfection. Imagination can help prudential moral inquiry weigh options and consider hypothetical solutions prior to making judgments. Narvaez should be then wondering why Aquinas bypassed imagination in his appropriation of prudential moral inquiry considering its organic functional role in human cognition. Imagination can help a moral agent have a feel of the moral situation via empathy. Not only does moral imagination metaphysically and subconsciously assist in the actuation of *synderesis*, it does also help extend the presence of *synderesis* in and through ongoing human endeavours by making it sure that moral agency does not lose sight of what is truthfully and practically good. Nonetheless, Narvaez cautions any oversimplification of the function of the human brain explaining that "our experience and our brains are more complicated than simply applying moral principles as situations arise."<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Narvaez and Junkins, "Disposition Formation and Early Moral Development," 112.

Intuition and imagination are both indispensable and instrumental in the habituation of virtues. Narvaez considers virtue habituation as a bio-psycho-social reality.<sup>159</sup> It engages the entire human person – mind and body – that is not independent of the community and the social environment from where one acquires their meaning. Aquinas, on the other hand, also considers the integrity of the human person – soul (mind) and body – where the habituation of moral virtues that prepares the moral agent towards being perfected by the divinely-infused virtues actively takes place. Both Aquinas and Narvaez advocate the critical importance of the social environment in transforming human agency to where it needs to be. Each recognises humanity's fractured reality, i.e., Aquinas's transgression and Narvaez's mismatch, that is in need of transformation. Narvaez considers the necessity of the so-called virtue experts<sup>160</sup> in the community to provide moral education to young people. Aquinas, on the other hand, views the lives of 'old folks' who have discerned the first principles of practical reason as potential teachers of virtue to young people. He upholds their example as crucial to young people's moral formation and education.

Aquinas asserts the inviolable importance of virtue in the actuation of *synderesis* and its influence in sustaining within the confines of moral agency the synderetic order of the practical reason. Though Narvaez does not have the reality of *synderesis* in her *TET*, she does, however, positively assign the origin of human values from the lifestyle of ancestral *SBHG* ancestral communities. These values are arguably expressive of the practical good that *synderesis* apprehends.<sup>161</sup> There is evidently a vast difference between the understanding of the notion of good from the psychological and theological perspectives. Narvaez attributes the notion of

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<sup>159</sup> This refers to Darcia Narvaez's claims of the so-called *evolved developmental niche (EDN)* which serves as the *early caregiving environment which supports optimal moral development*. *EDN* is viewed to have "effects on the bio-psycho-social wellbeing of the child for the long term. For example, a mother with less social support and greater stress during pregnancy yields a more irritable baby." See Narvaez and Junkins, "Disposition Formation and Early Moral Development," 100.

<sup>160</sup> Darcia Narvaez provides examples of the moral expertise of these virtue experts: "Experts in ethical sensitivity are better...at quickly and accurately reading a moral situation, taking the perspective of others, and determining what role they might play. Experts in ethical judgment solve complex moral problems by reasoning about, for example, codes, duty, and consequences for a particular situation. Experts in ethical focus revere life and deepen commitment. Experts in ethical action know how to keep their 'eye on the prize,' enabling them to stay on task and take the necessary steps to get the ethical job done. Experts in a particular excellence have more and better organised knowledge about it, have highly tuned perceptual skills for it, have deep moral desire for it, and use at least some highly automatised, effortless responses." See Narvaez, "Moral Complexity," 171.

<sup>161</sup> Darcia Narvaez's conception of what virtues are is framed in evolutionary terms, not theological. Hence, her descriptions of the effects of virtues are couched in socio-behavioural terms rather than ideologically formal terms such as 'do good and avoid evil.' Thus, she describes the effects of an adoption of ancestral lifestyles in these terms: "Children whose mothers has positive attitudes about all ancestral parenting practices display more joy, consideration, empathy, and imagination and social attunement." See Narvaez, "The 99 Percent - Development and Socialization Within an Evolutionary Context: Growing Up to Become 'A Good and Useful Human Being'," 352.

good as generally living a virtuous life in harmony with the community. Specifically, she considers the good as that which people perceptibly aim for emotionally and cognitively as their response to social triggers.<sup>162</sup> She would view this as virtue embodiment, understood from the neurological perspective, which implies that:

morality “goes all the way down” to neurological function, to habitual resonance with others (and, over the course of development, resonance with ideas that guide actions which promote flourishing). Morality involves social and situation activation of different physiological patterns with corresponding thoughts and emotions, based on prior experience. These “somatic markers” signal which actions are better or worse. “Embodied (sensorimotor) structures are the *substance of experience*” and “*experiential structures*” motivate “conceptual understanding and rational thought.” And these are not soloist matters. The individual resides in a flowing world of relationships, of movement toward and away from humans and nonhuman entities.<sup>163</sup>

Aquinas, on the other hand, conceives of the notion of good as reaching the *summum bonum* of human relationships, i.e., friendship with God. This fundamentally differentiates the notion of moral good between the perspectives of psychology and theology. Beyond the present order, Narvaez would be thinking of improving and eventually displacing the mismatched moral lifestyles of the present generation with that of lifestyles of the nomadic foraging ancestral communities. She envisages that the virtues of the ancestral communities, which had dominated the ninety-nine percent of genus history, will offset the one percent that now has defined contemporary lifestyles. On the other hand, Aquinas’s teleology goes beyond the natural progression of events to the supernatural life. It does, however, entail the habituation of virtues that perfects earthly life in preparation for the supernatural life with God. As *synderesis* appoints the ends to moral virtues, and in turn, prudence determines the mean of the practical reason, virtues cannot escape the necessity of heeding the demands of *synderesis* in growing human consciousness towards an awareness of all the moral goods that are perfective of human nature. *Synderesis* would be bereft without moral virtues; moral virtues would be imperceptive without *synderesis*. Not without prudence, *synderesis* facilitates the moral consistency of human affairs pointing moral agency, via virtues, towards its natural origin – the heart and mind of God.

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<sup>162</sup> Narvaez, “The Co-Construction of Virtue,” 261.

<sup>163</sup> Narvaez, *Embodied Morality*, 35.

## Summary

The academic interest in moral imagination is precipitated by the observable omission of the interior sense of imagination by Aquinas in his consideration of prudential moral inquiry. While the omission may be attributed to an inferior understanding of neurobiology during medieval times, modern scientific research now ascertains the efficient value of moral imagination in moral development. A comparative and analytical study between the *Triune Ethics Theory* of Darcia Narvaez and the doctrine of *synderesis* of St. Thomas Aquinas demonstrates an intimate correlation between their assertions on intuition (*synderesis*), virtues and moral imagination. Apropos of Aquinas's *synderesis*, Narvaez's scientific observations based on evolutionary psychology affirm the following Thomistic assertions: (i) sensitive stimuli are necessarily required to actuate the first principles of natural law by *synderesis*, (ii) the habituation of virtues is essentially the path to moral development, and (iii) moral imagination facilitates moral development by empowering human agents to discover their own moral paths that will lead to their flourishing. These affirmations summarily confirm that there is considerable science behind Aquinas's teaching on *synderesis*.

In respect to Narvaez's initial observation mentioned above, Aquinas's *synderesis* is without a direct attribution in her *Triune Ethics Theory*. Its absence is understandable considering that the research objectives of scientific endeavours pertain to the material or physical and not to the spiritual or metaphysical. Nonetheless, the recognition of external stimuli which effectuate neurotransmissions affirms Aquinas's epistemology that apart from imagination, human intellection must proceed from sensitive experience of the social environment. On account of the second observation, the reality of sensitive experience highlights the importance of practical moral virtues in realising the actuation of *synderesis* and its role in the development of the knowledge of the first principles of natural law. It is here where both Narvaez and Aquinas concur that positive witnessing from community members is essential in moral development particularly among young children. With both Aquinas and Narvaez agreeing on this, moral exemplars, virtue-enablers or 'old folks,' whatever terminology is used, their role in providing authentic virtue-formation to the next generation is indispensable and vital for human flourishing. Lastly, the third observation affirms that with the benefit of prudence as a moral virtue that engenders prudential moral inquiry of the first principles of moral action, human

agents are able to forge a moral path by and through which the realisation of not only human ends, but most importantly, the supernatural ends could come about.

A key theological proposition in this chapter is the emphasis on moral imagination as the power within the moral agent's reach to facilitate moral reasoning and judgment. Specifically brought into play via the acquired moral virtue of prudence through which prudential moral inquiry is exerted, the power of moral imagination both forms and informs the human mind about the primary moral principles. It is formative in so far as it contributes to the pool of epistemic materials (phantasms) during pre-cognition where primary moral principles begin merely as a formless entity devoid of any material content. Moral imagination is also informative as it creates and re-creates mental realities that enable the human mind to cognise that which makes human actions morally good and thus become perfective of human nature. Without moral imagination, the human mind is impeded and hindered from morally assessing moral contexts where knowledge is incipiently drawn and where its intricacies and complexities express the materiality of moral dilemmas without which nothing is ever in existence.

## Chapter 9

### *Naturalis inclinatio* and *Triune Ethics Theory*

#### **Introduction**

This chapter principally studies the reality of the natural law whose natural inclinations are expressed in and through human nature. By its etymology, it should clearly point to the hylomorphic unicity of the human person as the starting point of its investigation. Its objective is to demonstrate that the teaching of Aquinas on the first principles of natural law is both knowable and imaginable. As previously asserted, knowing and imagining the primary moral principles have ethical implications in guiding moral deliberations that bear on the *telos* of human agency.

*Synderesis* operates in and through human agency by illuminating the human soul about the moral good that is not only humanizing but also salvific. This operation highlights the imperative for *synderesis* to be understood as an immanent and historical act in its intuitive apprehension of the perfective good.<sup>1</sup> This task involves the hermeneutical consideration of the universal moral principles and the contingencies of human historicity without which the knowledge of the first principles of natural law is left unintelligible and inept in bringing about moral formation. By studying the natural inclinations of human beings, the historicity and

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<sup>1</sup> For readers of ancient philosophy, the pursuit of a physical (as opposed to metaphysical) understanding of the (*moral*) *good* is a *fait accompli* on the basis of an understanding of its Greek etymological origin. The notion of ‘good’ is believed to have originated from the word, ἀγαθος (*agathos* = the proper execution of a social function by a nominated person), and even more specifically, ἀρετή (*arete* = the quality of a person whose allocated social functions are performed well) where its meaning is attributed to those specific qualities relating to the discharge of a person’s designated role in maintaining order in society. MacIntyre also opines that ‘arete’ is usually and misleadingly translated as ‘virtue.’ See Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1966/1998; repr. 2010), 5-13.



contingency of human conditions are given empirical foundation and its operations are given not just cognitive determination, but physiologically (neurobiologically) as well. The Thomistic doctrine of hylomorphism underlines and necessitates this consideration.

Aquinas's alleged and contentious physicalist perspective on his doctrine on natural law will be treated below. Following the methodological approach of *from below*, the question on whether the natural law should be discerned from the perspective of the order of nature or of the order of reason will be explored in the proceeding section. It is essential and inevitable that in any study involving the historicity of the human person that science is necessarily accommodated. Thus, this chapter will take a closer look at the parallelism and distinctions between Narvaez's scientific propositions and Aquinas's theological assertions. It will come as a surprise, but not unintelligible, that convergences in their thoughts and observations make it appear as if Narvaez is generally echoing the medieval teachings of Aquinas in contemporary scientific language. Without becoming overly confident, this research bridges the centuries-apart understanding of what is nature and natural which facilitates the practical grasp of contextual key issues relating to human flourishing in the present generation. It explores how natural law can be imagined today in the hope of creating moral pathways that will fulfill humanity's essence and the acquisition of the supernatural end - the vision of God, for those whose journey decidedly embraces the contemplation of the truth about God.

As this research has been focusing all throughout on moral agency, it once again affirms that the main purpose of the discussion below is to particularly assist society's moral exemplars or virtue-enablers in their virtue-formation by proposing practical matters on how they could fulfill their task in society. Generally, it envisages these same practical matters for all human agents in view of their moral development. By and large, all these attempts echo the query of the biblical personality on how to gain the supernatural ends: "Good Master, what good thing shall I do to, that I may have eternal life?"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mt 19:16.

## Two-Pronged Natural Law: Reason vis-à-vis Nature

The Vatican's *International Theological Commission* published in 2009 the document, *In Search of a Universal Ethic: A New Look at the Natural Law*, to specifically evaluate age-old concerns regarding the natural law and to recommend ways on how to move forward. At the outset, the document acknowledges the problem that it wishes to address:

It is true that the term “natural law” is a source of numerous misunderstandings in our present cultural context. At times, it evokes only a resigned and completely passive submission to the physical laws of nature, while human beings seek instead – and rightly so – to master and to direct these elements for their own good. At times, when presented as an objective datum that would impose itself from the outside on personal conscience, independently of the work of reason and subjectivity, it is suspected of introducing a form of heteronomy intolerable for the dignity of the free human person. Sometimes also, in the course of history, Christian theology has too easily justified some anthropological positions on the basis of the natural law, which subsequently appeared as conditioned by the historical and cultural context.<sup>3</sup>

The above observations by the *International Theological Commission* present the most recent attempt by the Catholic Church to explicitly identify and address the pressing concerns surrounding magisterial teachings on natural law. It sets out its goal in the following terms: “It is...important today to set out the traditional doctrine of the natural law in terms that better manifest the personal and existential dimension of the moral life.”<sup>4</sup>

Such an attempt, noble as it may be owing to its honest intention to consider the personal and existential dimensions of human agents' moral lives, appears to be an inadequate attempt to interpret the natural law as a universal ethic with a new look. This is evidenced by the fact that after around four years after its publication, the collated results arising from the *Preparatory Document* published in November 2013 by the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops for the purpose of surveying peoples' views on the family, reveals that ecclesial concerns regarding the interpretation of natural law remain. The *Instrumentum laboris*, which contains the collated results of the global survey and subsequently published for the convocation of the *III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Pastoral Challenges of the*

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<sup>3</sup> International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic,” § 10.

<sup>4</sup> International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic,” § 10.

*Family in the Context of Evangelisation*, delineates just how seriously persistent the concerns are regarding the inadequacy of the natural law teaching in its current form. The ecclesial document sums up the general orientation of the collated results: “In a vast majority of responses and observations, the concept of natural law today turns out to be, in different cultural contexts, highly problematic, if not completely incomprehensible.”<sup>5</sup> The results of the survey did not actually reveal anything new about how people generally perceive the natural law.

Public perceptions regarding the natural law are well too familiar to the Catholic Church as these concerns have been articulated many times before, the most recent being the already-mentioned publication by the *International Theological Commission* four years prior.<sup>6</sup> By and large, the survey results distil the following concerns: (i) the term ‘natural’ is easily misconceived since it proposes different meanings in different cultures and contexts,<sup>7</sup> (ii) the perspective of science predominates peoples’ views about what actually governs human life and not some abstract law such as the natural law,<sup>8</sup> and (iii) “the natural law is perceived as an outdated legacy.”<sup>9</sup> On account of these compelling observations, the document further echoes the proposals expressed by the survey respondents: “[to bring] the issue to public discussion and [to develop] the idea of biblical inspiration and the ‘order in creation,’ which could permit a re-reading of the concept of the natural law in a more meaningful manner in today’s world.”<sup>10</sup> The honest interest in discovering a new pedagogy in imparting the doctrine on natural law to people demonstrates an invigorated desire arising from the grassroots to imagine the natural law in dialogical consideration of the historical contingencies of human persons.

Specifically, the historicity of each and every human person in relation to natural law is traditionally considered under the order of reason versus the order of nature debate. Through the order of nature, human agents are able to reach the knowledge of the natural law via reflection on how human nature works. God being the source, natural law is already embodied

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<sup>5</sup> General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, *The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelisation, Instrumentum laboris* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2014), § 21, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20140626\\_instrumentum-laboris-familia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20140626_instrumentum-laboris-familia_en.html). (Accessed 8 December 2020)

<sup>6</sup> See George M. Regan, “Natural Law in the Church Today,” *The Catholic Lawyer* 13, no. 1 (Winter 1967): 2-41, then 91; Charles E. Curran, *Directions in Fundamental Moral Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 119-172; Michael B. Crowe, “The Pursuit of the Natural Law,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (1977): 3-29.

<sup>7</sup> General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum laboris*, §§ 22 and 30.

<sup>8</sup> General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum laboris*, § 22.

<sup>9</sup> General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum laboris*, § 22.

<sup>10</sup> General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum laboris*, § 30.

in human nature. On the other hand, the order of reason underlines the role of human rationality in serving the purpose of grasping the knowledge of natural law through human experiences “taken in all its complexity and its relationships.”<sup>11</sup> Through reason, human agents are able to discover human potentials in human experiences that are perfective of human nature.

It is held that this debate entered the public square as early as during the high Middle Ages<sup>12</sup> and its influence continues to be felt in the present times where magisterial teachings “vacillate between two polarities – naturalism and idealism”<sup>13</sup> – which are expressive of the order of nature and order of reason tendencies respectively. These two sides of the argument, emanating from the alleged ambiguity found in Aquinas’s doctrine on natural law in the *Summa theologiae*, point to the variances regarding the source of moral law and the epistemological manner in which human agents are able to grasp knowledge of the natural law. Curran makes the following observation in view of these variances:

The Thomistic natural concept vacillates at times between the order of nature and the order of reason. The general Thomistic thrust is towards the predominance of reason in natural law theory. However, there is in Thomas a definite tendency to identify the demands of natural law with physical and biological process.<sup>14</sup>

Curran’s analysis of Aquinas’s doctrine on natural law unearths a subtle openness to a possible physicalist interpretation of natural law. His observation is based on the text of Aquinas himself in the *Summa theologiae* where the Angelic Doctor spoke of human natural inclinations in the context of natural law: “Wherefore according to the order of natural inclinations, is the order of the precepts of the natural law.”<sup>15</sup>

The alleged physicalist interpretation of the natural law is drawn from this unidentified quote in the *Summa theologiae*: “which nature has taught to all animals” (*quae natura omnia animalia docuit*).<sup>16</sup> This quote, however, is traditionally attributed to Ulpian (c. 170-228), a

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<sup>11</sup> Richard M. Gula, SS, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989), 239.

<sup>12</sup> Gula, SS, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality*, 223.

<sup>13</sup> Curran, *Directions in Fundamental Moral Theology*, 127. See also Gula, SS, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality*, 231-238. Gula traces the varying tendencies in magisterial declarations in expressing either the order of nature or the order of reason perspectives in the Catholic Church’s official doctrinal pronouncements.

<sup>14</sup> Curran, *Directions in Fundamental Moral Theology*, 127.

<sup>15</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

Roman lawyer, who distinguished *ius naturale* (natural law) from *ius gentium* (human law) where the former is proper to all animals while the latter is proper to humans exclusively.<sup>17</sup> According to Michael Crowe, Aquinas's use of Ulpian's natural law definition is "something a little puzzling"<sup>18</sup> considering his well-known bias towards the natural law of reason. There is no question about Aquinas's preference for Ulpian's natural definition which he had used consistently in his works.<sup>19</sup> The ensuing use of this definition by Aquinas has, however, become problematic. The danger lies in interpreting the natural law in purely physicalist or biological terms and ignoring its personalist interpretation. Richard Gula, SS offers his observation:

The interpretation of natural law which corresponds to the "order of nature," or generic natural law, in St. Thomas is influenced by Ulpian's definition of *jus naturale* [*sic*]: what nature has taught all animals. This way of understanding natural law emphasizes human physical and biological nature in determining morality. It suggests a "blueprint" or "maker's instructions" theory of natural law which supports physicalism over personalism.<sup>20</sup>

Further, Gula stresses that physicalism "emphasise[s], or even...absolutise[s], the physical and biological aspects of the human person and human action independently of the function of reason and freedom."<sup>21</sup> He explains that since God is acknowledged as the source of moral order, natural law reveals this order. Hence, "the human task is to examine the givens in nature in order to understand their arrangement and purpose. Moral obligation can be read off what nature requires in order to fulfill its inherent design."<sup>22</sup>

Further into Aquinas's preference for Ulpian's definition of natural law, he demonstrates what could be interpreted as an unprecedented prejudicial shift towards the order of nature over the order of reason. Discussing the issue regarding the morality of sexual matters, Aquinas wrote:

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<sup>17</sup> Curran, *Directions in Fundamental Moral Theology*, 128.

<sup>18</sup> Crowe, "The Pursuit of the Natural Law," 7.

<sup>19</sup> See Curran, *Directions in Fundamental Moral Theology*, 127-131, esp. 128. Curran discusses Ulpian's definition of the natural law and its influence on Thomistic doctrine. Citing Aquinas's use of the definition in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, Curran wrote: "Thomas maintains that the most strict [*sic*] definition of natural law is the one proposed by Ulpian: *ius naturae est quod natura omnia animalia docuit*."

<sup>20</sup> Gula, SS, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality*, 226.

<sup>21</sup> Gula, SS, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality*, 226.

<sup>22</sup> Gula, SS, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality*, 227. The physicalist understanding of natural law is, according to Gula, the basis of many ecclesial moral norms particularly in the area of sexual ethics, e.g., Pius XI's *Casti connubii* (1930) where it pronounces that the conjugal act between man and a woman is based on nature, and, Paul VI's *Humanae vitae* (1968) where it declares that sexual activity must be confined within the marital life that is open to the transmission of life.

Now the principles of reason are those things that are according to nature, because reason presupposes things as determined by nature, before disposing of other things according as it is fitting. This may be observed both in speculative and in practical matters. Wherefore just as in speculative matters the most grievous and shameful error is that which is about things the knowledge of which is naturally bestowed on man, so in matters of action it is most grave and shameful to act against things as determined by nature.<sup>23</sup>

The above text provides a clear deviation from the rational orientation of Thomistic moral philosophy. Aquinas underlines this paradigm shift by stipulating an equally valid philosophical presupposition to justify the pre-eminence of the order of nature over the order of reason in respect to the nature of moral acts: “Just as the ordering of right reason proceeds from man, so the order of nature is from God Himself: wherefore in sins contrary to nature, whereby the very order of nature is violated, an injury is done to God, the Author of nature.”<sup>24</sup> This paradigm shift attunes moral philosophy to the truth regarding the primacy of God in moral theology. Even before reason is able to grasp any knowledge of God, it must ground itself first in nature since it is only through it being grounded in nature that the intellectual process proceeds. Nature bears the footprints of God, as it were, not immediately discoverable by any stretch of imagination, but via heuristic pondering on the works of human nature. Hence, the order of nature must take precedence over the order of reason by reflecting the reality of nature which is expressive of the nature of God. On account of Aquinas’s logic, reason must conform to nature since it must express the truth in reality, a reality whose origin is God. Be that as it may, reason is not, however, absolutely beholden to nature since reason has its own qualities that originate from God. For example, *synderesis* bears the vestiges of original humanity that expresses the unadulterated presence of God in human agents. Through nature, reason accomplishes its intrinsic role in the human soul, i.e., for the human mind to open up to the *infinite horizon of intelligibility* and discover the laws of nature that express God’s eternal laws in human history.

In addition, the quote cited above further reveals Aquinas’s inconsistency when it comes to his doctrine on the natural law. Nature appears to take precedence over reason in the moral determination of human acts. His inconsistency nonetheless could imply the possibility of a restrictive physicalist interpretation of his natural law doctrine. It is proposed to be a restrictive

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<sup>23</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 154, a. 12.

<sup>24</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 154, a. 12, ad. 1.

interpretation since, if it is taken to its extreme, biologism could possibly take hold and effectively deny that the human person is composite of body and soul. Hence, echoing Curran's affirmation: "[T]here is in Thomas a tendency to identify the demands of the natural law with physical and biological processes. Thomas, too, is a historical person conditioned by the circumstances and influences of his own time."<sup>25</sup>

The affirmation of the possibility of a restrictive physicalist interpretation of Aquinas's doctrine of natural law counterbalances what could be generally perceived as an idealist presentation of natural law. Based on this perception, moral laws are believed to be:

abstract, *a priori*, and deductive. It wants to cut through the concrete circumstances to arrive at the abstract essence which is always true, and then works with these abstract and universal essences. In the area of moral theology, for example, the first principles of morality are established, and then other universal norms of conduct are deduced from these.<sup>26</sup>

It has been previously stated that synderetic apprehension necessitates the element of sensitive experience since Thomistic epistemology identifies sense and imagination as the two sources of knowledge. Contact with the social environment is indispensable in Thomistic epistemology, including the synderetic apprehension of the practical good. This demonstrates the indispensable complementarity between intellective experience and the sensitive experience in the development of human moral awareness.

Complementary as they are, understanding human nature as manifested via human inclinations is still the key, according to Aquinas, to reason's proper grasp of human reality. Nature's role is obviously to be 'on the ground' and 'to be grounded' in history in order to experience the contingencies of human conditions. The corporeal nature is the only medium human agents possess which mediates the possibility for reason to know the truths existing outside the human mind. It is apparently through an inductive process, rather than a deductive process, that human agents move from the reflection on their human experiences to making conclusions about moral concerns via recourse to primary moral principles. In this endeavour, it should be noted that "historical consciousness as a methodology is an abstraction, but an abstraction or theory that tries to give more importance to particular, concrete historical reality."<sup>27</sup> This consideration is

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<sup>25</sup> Curran, *Directions in Fundamental Moral Theology*, 127.

<sup>26</sup> Curran, *Directions in Fundamental Moral Theology*, 140.

<sup>27</sup> Curran, *Directions in Fundamental Moral Theology*, 140.

of primary importance in moral development since morality is fundamentally human acts that express human agents' disposition to do and pursue the good while effectively avoiding evil in the historical circumstances of their existence.

The complementarity between the order of reason and the order of nature is indisputable, at least from the perspective of this thesis. What is directly being proffered, however, is the dynamic reasonableness of an inductive approach in effectively grasping knowledge of the natural law in due consideration of human contingencies. Certainly, when the first principles of natural law are spoken of, it need not be exclusively stated as absolute, definitive and moribund categories whose universal applicability is presumed to be valid to the disregard of any practical knowledge of the historical plane upon which it operates. The dynamism of reason affords the human intellect to draw from human contingencies pieces of information, both known and discoverable, in forming conclusions about moral realities. There is therefore personal freedom that is exercised in attempting to piece together relevant information in view of determining the ethical weight of a moral situation or dilemma. This freedom rests on the human capacity to interact, and even interfere, with human contingencies to allow for the truth to be seen, felt, heard, smelt, tasted and eventually remembered and imagined. Rahner speaks of this freedom quite eloquently:

Nowhere more than in the Christian religion is man the free partner of God, so much so that he does not passively undergo his eternal salvation but must *achieve it in freedom* (even though this achievement considered as his free act is given to man by God, his creativeness and grace).<sup>28</sup>

Moral imagination expresses human freedom in concrete ways in the reproduction and creation of images performed at the service of seeking knowledge of being and the historical truth. Epistemologically, imagination draws data from the external social environment which emphatically drives the truth about the indispensability of human and material involvement in their consideration by the universal moral principles. Rahner explicates humanity's necessary involvement in existential creativity in history:

Man today has clearly and definitely entered in his historical development into the phase of peculiar creativeness and has become

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<sup>28</sup> Karl Rahner, SJ, "The Man of Today and Religion," in *Theological Investigations: Concerning Vatican Council II* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, Ltd., 1969), 10.



the rationally planning master of action and power both with regard to himself and with regard to his environment.<sup>29</sup>

The ability of moral imagination to foster dynamism in its endeavour to produce and create phantasms suits the requirements of moral inquiry to explore the historicity of human agents and their social environment fully and adequately. To speak once again here of reaching the *infinite horizon of intelligibility* via *conversio ad esse* which happens when the *intellectus agens* opens up the human mind to the truths about God, nature and reason converge to be illuminated by such openness to being and to truth. This *infinite horizon of intelligibility* engenders an appreciation of the marriage between nature and reason, the practical and theoretical, the empirical and ideal, where it allows a deeper cognitive penetration into the intricacies and vicissitudes of human life. It is through this marriage that the objective finds its practical base in the subjective providing a unity that could only benefit the cause of the knowledge of moral truth. Curran uses a modern analogy to stress this point: “The modern cinema confronts the viewer with a very subjective view of reality that calls for imagination and perceptivity on the part of the viewer.”<sup>30</sup> Imagination therefore must be considered as a necessary faculty in moral inquiry for without it, human agents ignore potential avenues for reaching ethical resolutions that seek only the moral truth. Moreover, imagination is a must in terms of grasping knowledge of the natural law and appropriating its demands in the context of human history. If natural law is meant to provide at least some form of guidance in understanding moral precepts proceeding from the first principles of natural law, the human mind must engage the services of moral imagination in order to arrive at specified depths and breadths in the moral assessment of social conditions. Curran agrees that Aquinas “did leave room for the virtue of prudence and the creativity of individual[s]”<sup>31</sup> to know their self-creaturehood within the confines of human historicity.

The question regarding the capacity of the human intellect to lead the moral mind to discover the truth via imagination has already been settled. What needs to be further asserted is the service which moral imagination provides to prudential moral inquiry. The discovery of the truth via prudential moral inquiry may be likened to putting together the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. It would require the mental task to imagine how the small pieces fit in together, working out imaginatively what pieces lock in together in relation to the overall picture or image that

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<sup>29</sup> Rahner, SJ, “The Man of Today and Religion,” 5.

<sup>30</sup> Curran, *Directions in Fundamental Moral Theology*, 153.

<sup>31</sup> Curran, *Directions in Fundamental Moral Theology*, 155.

the puzzle represents. There would be times when a small puzzle piece would have to be turned clockwise or counter-clockwise in order to find out which side locks in with another piece. It would also involve the work of imagination in determining how a piece could lock in with another piece which was previously held. Overall, the play of imagination will serve the ultimate purpose of locking in all together the jigsaw puzzle pieces. In real life, the play of imagination serves the *horizon of prudence* in unearthing the truths discoverable via the first principles of natural law and the practical truths embedded in historicity.

The *horizon of prudence* is the locus where eternity meets ephemerality, where divinity meets humanity, where *synderesis* meets the *Zeitgeist*. In the perduring convergences of these realities throughout a lifespan, moral imagination facilitates the marriage, as it were, of both ends of the spectrum to effectuate an honest and thorough assessment of given realities for the purpose of assisting human agents to make prudential conclusions or judgments when confronted with moral situations or dilemmas. When human agents dwell on the *horizon of prudence*, their experience affords them the guidance of the first principles of natural law and the sensitivity to the historicity of human affairs. As given realities coalesce, human nature is illumined by reason which presents pathways and possibilities that are perfective of natural and supernatural ends. Human agents are not mere passive spectators on this *horizon of prudence* but are directly and intrinsically involved since the realities of the spectral ends that inter-play are their own human knowledge and experiences. The *horizon of prudence* is like a playing field where human agents actively interact and wrestle with known and discoverable truths and the contingencies of human affairs. The time spent on the playing field varies but certainly, the longer time spent on it would translate to a more thorough evaluation of realities. The length of time would also avert any extreme relativity or absolute subjectivity that would tend to create tension between realities that potentially may negate or disrupt the appropriation of telic goals. The reported vacillation of the Catholic Church's moral predisposition between the order of reason and the order of nature takes place on this *horizon of prudence*. Ecclesial history attests to the fact that when there is an over-emphasis on the absolute moral norms, the particularity of human affairs is neglected. On the other hand, when there is a heavy preponderance on human experience, the likely tendency is to completely ignore the moral principles. The *horizon of prudence* is not a moral fulcrum that operates by striking a balance or finding the moral mean that will satiate both ends of realities. Rather, the *horizon of prudence* is the moral plane where human agents discover the will of God that promotes freedom of action which fulfills the human essence and telic ends. The *intellectus agens* allows for this discovery and

experience via the *excessus ad esse* – the opening of the human self to the illuminating grace of God’s presence in one’s personal history.

### ***Naturalis inclinatio and Triune Ethics Theory***

Benedict XVI maintains that: “moral development and scientific research must go hand in hand.”<sup>32</sup> Implicit in this statement is the real potential for mutual co-operation between theology and science in pursuit of the common good. This pursuit of the common good which natural law promotes is a multi-faceted undertaking which no entity should be allowed to monopolise: “Academic and scientific reflection on the cultural, political, economic, moral and religious dimensions of our social existence nourishes this reflection on the common good of humanity.”<sup>33</sup> In clearest terms, the *International Theological Commission* states that: “Christianity does not have the monopoly of the natural law. In fact, founded on reason, common to all human beings, the natural law is the basis of collaboration among all persons of good will, whatever their religious convictions.”<sup>34</sup> In the hope of achieving this, it insists that all efforts must “transcend egotistical and partisan tendencies and develop a global approach of the ‘ecology of values’ without which human life risks of losing its integrity and its sense of responsibility for the good of all.”<sup>35</sup>

A respectful acknowledgement of the unique objective pursuits of the specific disciplines of theology and psychology should not cause any tension nor dissent. That said, while the synthesis between Aquinas’s moral theology and Narvaez’s *Triune Ethics Theory* reveals a generally close relationship, with the exception of the reality of the soul which psychology does not recognise being a non-physical entity, further speculative analysis on the notion of natural law and its derivatives should build on what has already been established previously regarding moral agency.

Expressive of the starting point for any study in psychology, Narvaez’s bottom-up understanding of moral learning focuses on human agents’ immersion in experience starting in

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<sup>32</sup> Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, § 31.

<sup>33</sup> International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic,” § 2.

<sup>34</sup> International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic,” § 9.

<sup>35</sup> International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic,” § 10.

early life.<sup>36</sup> This scientific approach parallels the proposed restrictive physicalist approach in the interpretation of natural law in Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* where such a perspective is accommodated in view of understanding the historicity of human agents. Notwithstanding, the Christian hylomorphic anthropology of the human person undergirds this speculative approach. The attempt in this thesis to speculate from the bottom up does not intend to disregard the body-soul unicity. Rather, it attempts to employ the transcendental methodology where drawing from the contingent nature of the human person, observations are made by elevating those experiences and reflectively evaluating them through the lens of moral principles, specifically, the first principles of natural law. In this inductive process, human historicity is viewed not as an added-on exercise, but rather, this approach is underlined by the truth that: "Man does not merely have a history: he *is* history."<sup>37</sup> And it is within this history where the *infinite horizon of intelligibility* rises to illuminate the human soul of the truths about human creaturehood and the ends of human existence. The search for a universal ethic, therefore, if it truly intends to provide a new outlook, must establish its starting point from the historicity of the human person in order to discover the practical content of natural law:

With the help of his reason, man seeks for concrete norms, the content of natural law, which will serve his effort at self-realisation, and reject those which radically contradict it. In its recognition of what is natural law, reason is not autonomous. There are data which man must necessarily take into account. His "natural inclinations" give a first general orientation as to the goals to which human conduct should be directed.<sup>38</sup>

These natural inclinations, construed as *primal goods*<sup>39</sup> that promote the realisation of natural ends, point to the laws of nature which every person (1) "has in common with all substances" (*in qua communicat cum omnibus substantiis*),<sup>40</sup> (2) "has in common with other animals" (*in qua communicat cum caeteris animalibus*),<sup>41</sup> and (3) is proper to him "according to the nature

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<sup>36</sup> Narvaez, "The Co-Construction of Virtue," 262.

<sup>37</sup> Johannes Gründel, "Natural Law," in *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Raher, SJ (London: Burns and Oates, 1975), 1019.

<sup>38</sup> Gründel, "Natural Law," 1018.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. International Theological Commission, "In Search of a Universal Ethic," § 48.

<sup>40</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2. *Secundum igitur ordinem inclinationum naturalium, est ordo praeceptorum legis naturae. Inest enim primo inclinatio homini ad bonum secundum naturam in qua communicat cum omnibus substantiis, prout scilicet quaelibet substantia appetit conservationem sui esse secundum suam naturam; et secundum hanc inclinationem, pertinent ad legem naturalem ea per quae vita hominis conservatur, et contrarium impeditur.* (Emphasis mine)

<sup>41</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2. *Secundo inest homini inclinatio ad aliqua magis specialia, secundum naturam in qua communicat cum caeteris animalibus; et secundum hoc dicuntur ea esse de lege*

of his reason” (*secundum naturam rationis*).<sup>42</sup> Aquinas specifies that these natural inclinations have a moral character, which means that the pursuit of these is good and the neglect or violation of these is evil. The teleological attribute of the good delineates natural law’s moral orientation and its role to cause human agents to will that which natural inclinations point reason to will in view of human perfection and self-realisation. Aquinas states this in this manner:

Since, however, good has the nature of an end, and evil, the nature of a contrary, hence it is that all those things to which man has a natural inclination, are naturally apprehended by reason as being good, and consequently as objects of pursuit, and their contraries as evil, and objects of avoidance. Wherefore according to the order of natural inclinations, is the order of the precepts of the natural law.<sup>43</sup>

It is important at this junction to succinctly clarify the relationship between the order of natural inclinations and the order of the precepts of the natural law. Human agents discover the natural law through reflection of their natural inclinations within their lifespan of experiences. These natural inclinations point to the goods which promote the fullness of humanity:

Every human being who attains self-awareness and responsibility experiences an interior call to do good. He discovers that he is fundamentally a moral being, capable of perceiving and of expressing the call that... is found within all cultures: “One must do good and avoid evil.”<sup>44</sup>

Through experience and reflection that gradually pave the way for the discovery of the natural law inscribed in human hearts, these goods, which are construed as ends as well, are therefore rendered as the ontological bases upon which practical reason apprehends that which is good for the human person.<sup>45</sup> “By searching for the moral good,” the *International Theological Commission* propounds, “the person contributes to the realisation of his nature, beyond impulses of instinct or the search for a particular pleasure. This moral good testifies to itself

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*naturali quae natura omnia animalia docuit, ut est commixtio maris et feminae, et educatio liberorum, et similia.* (Emphasis mine)

<sup>42</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2. *Tertio modo inest homini inclinatio ad bonum secundum naturam rationis quae est sibi propria: sicut homo habet naturalem inclinationem ad hoc quod veritatem cognoscat de Deo, et ad hoc quod in societate vivat; et secundum hoc ad legem naturalem pertinent ea quae ad huiusmodi inclinationem spectant, utpote quod homo ignorantiam vitet, quod alios non offendat cum quibus debet conversari, et cetera huiusmodi quae ad hoc spectant.* (Emphasis mine)

<sup>43</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

<sup>44</sup> International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic,” § 39.

<sup>45</sup> Crowe, “The Pursuit of the Natural Law,” 10-11.

and is understood from itself.”<sup>46</sup> By this clarification, it maintains that the order of natural inclinations is correlative to the order of the precepts of the natural law. It should also be maintained that both ‘orders’ constitute the one and the same reality: the human person acting as a moral agent. Hence, natural law:

designates an orientation of the practical reason which indicates to the moral subject what kind of action is in accord with the basic and necessary dynamism of his being that tends to its full realisation. This law is normative in virtue of an internal requirement of the spirit. It springs from the heart itself of our being as a call to the realisation and transcending of oneself. It is not therefore a matter of subjecting oneself to the law of another, but of accepting the law of one’s being.<sup>47</sup>

It is thus important to keep in mind when reflectively dealing with the *order of the precepts of the natural law* and the *order of natural inclinations* that:

the human subject is not a collection or juxtaposition of diverse and autonomous natural inclinations, but a substantial and personal whole, who has the vocation to respond to the love of God and to unify himself by accepting his orientation towards a last end that places in the hierarchical order the partial goods by the various natural tendencies. [Also], in this organic whole, each part preserves a proper and irreducible meaning, which must be taken into account by reason in the elaboration of the overall mission of the human person.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, as previously alluded to, these natural inclinations require temporal specificity in order for practical reason to historically address its configurations within the confines of human experiences. While “[t]he perception of the fundamental moral goods is immediate, vital, based on the connaturality of the spirit with values,”<sup>49</sup> the *International Theological Commission* is adamant that the practical reason’s grasp of the natural law “is often imperfect, still obscure and dim...[dealing] with the data of the most simple and common experience, implicit in the concrete action of persons.”<sup>50</sup> It evident from this statement that while some very basic understanding of the natural law is grasped at the moment of conscious awareness of the external world, the apprehension of the contents of natural law is by no means a foregone conclusion. Moral agency must continue to actively and reflectively engage with the social

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<sup>46</sup> International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic,” § 40.

<sup>47</sup> International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic,” § 43.

<sup>48</sup> International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic,” § 79.

<sup>49</sup> International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic,” § 44.

<sup>50</sup> International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic,” § 44.

environment in order to foment what was initially grasped. This entails, too, the facility of the faculty of imagination which is also a source of knowledge according to Aquinas. Thus, the apprehension of the first principles of natural law is meant to be a dynamic rational and emotional experience which fosters growth at all levels of human moral development. The *International Theological Commission* posits that: “This natural law is not at all static in its expression. It does not consist of a list of definitive and immutable precepts. It is a spring of inspiration always flowing forth for the search for an objective foundation for a universal ethic.”<sup>51</sup> It is not as if *synderesis* has finally done its job the moment the conscious awareness of the external world has actuated the first principles of natural law. Reiterating what was earlier stated, *synderesis* continues to seek and guide moral apprehension since it is its nature as an innate disposition of the practical reason to lead human agents to always find themselves “immediately in the sphere of morality.”<sup>52</sup> In this realm of morality, a morality that is historically present, Narvaez’s evolutionary psychology has much to contribute towards heightening the human awareness and understanding of the nature and content of these natural inclinations.

The moral (religious) contents of natural law (and its derived natural inclinations) impose no specific obligation to psychology since “natural law which is the basis of social and political order does not demand the adherence of faith, but of reason.”<sup>53</sup> This does not mean, of course, that “the natural law would be binding on all ‘even if there were no God,’”<sup>54</sup> as the modern rationalist model of natural law would insist. This statement invites once again the consideration of the notions of the order of reason and the order of nature in regard to the interpretation of natural law. Whichever approach is undertaken, or both as exemplified by the magisterium of the Catholic Church, it does not, and should not for that matter, ignore in either case the element of faith. Theology expects psychology to make pronouncements in relation to the sciences and not to faith. It would be unreasonable for psychology to propose matters of faith when it is evidently outside its province. When psychology faces the limits of its scientific domain, theology could only hope that it will make the ‘leap of faith’ to posit the congruence of science as an ally of theology rather than its nemesis. As will be elaborated below, Narvaez’s

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<sup>51</sup> International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic,” § 113.

<sup>52</sup> International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic,” § 40.

<sup>53</sup> International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic,” § 99.

<sup>54</sup> International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic,” § 32.

evolutionary psychology offers and affirms invaluable scientific observations that are nothing short of providential and beneficial to moral theology.

Regarding these tiers of natural ends where their universal applicability to all human persons is recognised and affirmed, every human agent bears the moral obligation to fulfill the demands of the various natural inclinations. In the mind of Aquinas, the order of natural inclinations implies the moral obligation accruing from this order. Gula explains that: “The origin of our specific moral obligation lies in these natural inclinations which give content to the fundamental requirements to do good and avoid evil.”<sup>55</sup> This line of thinking assumes that these three fundamental expressions of natural law are derivatives of the first principles of natural law, i.e., *good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided*. Since the primary moral principles are construed as *formal principles*, the natural inclinations frame the natural law in practical terms. Thus, the good that is grasped by the order of reason is the *telos* that perfects and fulfills every human agent. When fundamental inclinations are realised, human agents acquire a holistic existence where the natural ends are met and which, if pursued further, the supernatural ends may ultimately be obtained. Moreover, the universal nature of this holistic experience unites every human person with all created things or substances, with fellow animal creatures and with themselves.

Gradually, the moral weight of these natural inclinations become more demanding as it descends from the universal to the particular. The characterisation of this descent as being more demanding is based on the order of reason that recognises ultimately that the natural inclination to know the truth about God is paramount. That said, it is certain in the mind of Aquinas that human persons, as naturally social beings,<sup>56</sup> necessarily exist not in isolation but in a history that is shared by all. The social dimension of human existence discloses something about the human agents’ involvement in human history:

Man is a social being; and as social is involved in historical development; his actions cannot be judged by reference to an abstract metaphysical nature. Man’s nature is part of the development – it is changing and man himself is in some way author of change – which increases, not diminishes, man’s responsibility.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Gula, SS, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality*, 225.

<sup>56</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 96, a. 4.

<sup>57</sup> Crowe, “The Pursuit of the Natural Law,” 23.



In relating the above to Narvaez's *Triune Ethics Theory*, the *telos* of moral development via the 'evolved nest' (*Evolved Developmental Niche*) for optimal development is aimed at "foster[ing] emotion systems and mindsets that skilfully guide prosocial moral action."<sup>58</sup> This moral obligation to oneself extends to and effectuates the moral obligation to the community by "bring[ing] awareness to the mind, courage to the heart and strength to each other so that [human agents] can construct a society and world where all thrive."<sup>59</sup> These considerations in psychology overlap those theological realities pertaining to the derivative expressions of the natural law, i.e., the natural inclinations.

Since the epistemological perspective of knowing the natural inclinations has already been dealt with, the focal point of the ensuing discussion will be the synthetic investigation of the natural inclinations in relation to the global moral mindsets appertaining to Narvaez's *Triune Ethics Theory*.

*"In qua communicat cum omnibus substantiis"* vis-à-vis Safety Ethic

Aquinas suggests that *in common with all substances (in qua communicat cum omnibus substantiis)*, all human persons possess the natural inclination to seek "the preservation of its own being, according to its nature."<sup>60</sup> Based on the fact of the created-ness of human life that is integrally part of the created universe, the moral obligation to conserve human life can be drawn. Reason recognises that since human life has meaning and purpose, i.e., life is considered a good within the web of interrelationships in the universe, there is a moral obligation to fulfill that which perfects the ends of the human person. It would obviously be mute to speak of the natural ends in the absence of an actually existing subject that freely rationalises and commands the inclinations. Aquinas's teaching on the preservation of life is subsequently explicated in his treatment of suicide and killing in self-defence.

In relation to the former, Aquinas frames his position against suicide by utilising secular reasoning in his first two arguments (that universally apply to all including non-believers),

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<sup>58</sup> Narvaez and Lapsey, "The Having, Doing, and Being of Moral Personality," 149.

<sup>59</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 306.

<sup>60</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

while the third and last ultimately grounds the sinful nature of suicide to divine ownership of human lives:

It is altogether unlawful to kill oneself, for three reasons. First, because everything naturally loves itself, the result being that everything naturally keeps itself in being, and resists corruptions so far as it can.... Secondly, because every part, as such, belongs to the whole.... Thirdly, because life is God's gift to man, and is subject to His power.<sup>61</sup>

In view of the latter, Aquinas maintains the primacy of the preservation of life even in cases of self-defence by considering the moral value of the life of not just the victim, but of the offender as well:

Wherefore if a man, in self-defence, uses more than necessary violence, it will be unlawful: whereas if he repel [*sic*] force with moderation his defence will be lawful.... Nor is it necessary for salvation that a man omit [*sic*] the act of moderate self-defence in order to avoid killing the other man, since one is bound to take more care of one's own life than of another's.<sup>62</sup>

Narvaez's Security or Safety Ethic projects the global moral mindset of self-preservation which is relatively expressive of Aquinas's natural inclination to the preservation of life. An additional detail in Aquinas's articulation of his natural inclination doctrine includes the action phrase, 'warding off its obstacles,' which relates to the specific type of human reaction to various life-endangering stimuli. Narvaez claims that: "At birth we emerge with a set of phylogenetically ancient basic emotions systems that we use for survival. These self-protection mechanisms ensure that the organism has the equipment to stay alive through exploration and under threat."<sup>63</sup> Her claims sufficiently provide a plausible scientific foundation to the natural inclination to preserving life. Brain structures are equipped with neurological mechanisms that stimulate the mind to either fight or take flight in the face of danger or stress situations. The notion of 'warding off its obstacles' characterises this neurological reaction to danger and stress stimuli. The behavioural propensity that has been in existence since evolutionary ancient times suggests that human beings have always experienced either or both of their natural disposition to self-love or to view life as part of a bigger reality. Aquinas's third argument relating to life's preservation due to its divine origin (God is the creator of life) may not necessarily and

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<sup>61</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 64, a. 5.

<sup>62</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 64, a. 7.

<sup>63</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 146.

immediately enter into people's worldview yet but may be experientially introduced, directly or indirectly, as life progresses.<sup>64</sup>

Narvaez confirms that the Safety or Security Ethic is the default global mindset, which when not conditioned in early life, may tend to dominate personality.<sup>65</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, children in their early years require caregiving patterns that promote genuine interrelationships (e.g., touch, physical presence of caregivers, etc.). This necessarily involves quality time provisions by caregivers towards children. When caregiving is present and sufficient, it fosters a well-developed brain that, in the face of danger or stress situations, is able to manage its survival system responses to these stimuli. In other words, emotions are able to be managed during these types of situations.

On the other hand, the absence of these elements will likely leave a traumatic upbringing which pronounces the Safety Ethic in situations of danger or threat. When the Safety Ethic dominates personality, the behavioural reactions of fight or flight are activated and become the immediate behavioural response. The fight reaction in view of perceived security threat could exhibit behaviours such as, among many other predictable behaviours, an “impulsive hostile aggression”<sup>66</sup> or *rage* that aim to neutralise the perceived danger and to “return to homeostasis – a feeling of safety.”<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, the flight reaction in the face of threatening situations activates the “self-focused survival systems”<sup>68</sup> which involves, but not exclusively, behavioural reactions such as narcissistic dispositions, fear, panic, withdrawal from social life, defensive behaviours, the development of pathologies such as obsessions and compulsions, and many other behavioural patterns that serve only one thing: self-preservation.<sup>69</sup>

The preservation of life has been a contentious issue since time immemorial. Narvaez's claims of the mismatch lifestyle of the current generation compared to the ideal ancestral lifestyle of the *small-band hunter-gatherers (SBHG)* are indicative of the serious concerns regarding the

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<sup>64</sup> See John Paul II. *Encyclical of the Supreme Pontiff to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Relationship between Faith and Reason, Fides et ratio*. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, September 14, 1998), § 28, [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091998\\_fides-et-ratio.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html). John Paul II reflects that: “The search for truth...is not always so transparent nor does it always produce such results. The natural limitation of reason and the inconstancy of the heart often obscure and distort a person's search. Truth can also drown in a welter of other concerns. People can even run from the truth as soon as they glimpse it because they are afraid of its demands.”

<sup>65</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 155.

<sup>66</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 155.

<sup>67</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 157.

<sup>68</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 155.

<sup>69</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 157-158.

contemporary valuation of human life. If from the onset of human life children are not receiving the kind of caregiving that will promote a well-developed brain that manages emotions and behaviours well in social life, then there is every chance that the children of this generation and beyond will fail to come out of the mismatch. Narvaez is not wrong in positing that those self-focused contemporary behaviours displayed these days are indicative of the decadence of what is meant to be a flourishing community. The reigns of individualism and subjectivism in contemporary societies are symptomatic of the lack or absence of a sense of commitment towards the preservation of life. Based on Narvaez's assertion, it is not difficult to infer that caregiving is seriously affected by individualism and subjectivism. Caregiving involves 'going out of one's way' to look after another person, let alone one's child. But when the stress is ill-placed on promoting self-fulfilment at the expense and neglect of committing one's time and energy to the moral development of other people such as into child caregiving, a traumatic child upbringing will more than likely result in the development of behavioural patterns that do not reflect the *baseline virtues* that are developmentally essential for personal and communal flourishing.

#### *"In qua communicat cum caeteris animalibus"* vis-à-vis Engagement Ethic

Aquinas posits that *in common with all animals (in qua communicat cum caeteris animalibus)*, all human persons seek the preservation of the human race through "sexual intercourse, education of offsprings [*sic*], and so forth."<sup>70</sup> The earlier-mentioned physicalist interpretation of the natural law is evident in this articulation expressing the natural disposition of all human persons to the prolongation of life, just like all animals which possess the same capacity. Aquinas's preference for Ulpian's definition of natural law mentioned earlier elucidates how he conceives this law as emanating from nature itself.<sup>71</sup> By adopting this definition, Aquinas evidently views nature itself as the material cause of the natural disposition to sexual intercourse. The fact that this specific natural inclination is presented as being "in common with all animals" tells of a very fundamental disposition that excludes rationality, a characteristic feature which obviously inheres only and exclusively in human beings.

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<sup>70</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

Once again, in what could be perhaps considered as a Thomistic explanation rendered in secular, non-religious terms, Aquinas further addresses the specific question of the nature of the prolongation of the human race in the *Summa theologiae* under the subject matter of *The Parts of Lust (De luxuriate partibu)*.<sup>72</sup> In the following quote, Aquinas points out morality's dependence on the *order of nature* regarding what natural law demands of every human person:

[W]herever there occurs a special kind of deformity whereby the venereal act is rendered unbecoming, there is a determinate species of lust. This may occur in two ways: First, through being contrary to right reason, and this is common to all lustful vices; secondly, because, in addition, it is contrary to the natural order of the venereal act as becoming to the human race: and this is called "the unnatural vice." This may happen in several ways. First, by procuring pollution, without any copulation, for the sake of venereal pleasure: this pertains to the sin of "uncleanness" which some call "effeminacy." Secondly, by copulation with a thing of undue species, and this is called "bestiality." Thirdly, by copulation with an undue sex, male with male, or female with female.... Fourthly, by not observing the natural manner of copulation, either as to undue means, or as to other monstrous and bestial manners of copulation.<sup>73</sup>

Subsequently, Aquinas presents the theological (religious) rationale behind the prioritisation of the order of nature in the consideration of what is 'natural' in the order of sexual activity: "Just as the ordering of right reason proceeds from man, so the order of nature is from God Himself: wherefore in sins contrary to nature, whereby the very order of nature is violated, an injury is done to God, the Author of nature."<sup>74</sup> This argument has proved to be useful in many ecclesial declarations in justifying the order of nature as the basis for human morality. The use of this rationalisation is well known in supporting some form of ethical biologism evident in a number of Catholic Church's magisterial declarations specifically in the area of sexual ethics. The case of the Catholic Church's teachings on homosexuality holds true in this regard.

When he was then Prefect of the *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger issued the document, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, and presented the Catholic Church's moral teaching on homosexuality. It can be observed that the order of nature appears to be the guiding principle

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<sup>72</sup> Aquinas views lust as "seeking venereal pleasures not in accordance with right reason." See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 154, a. 1.

<sup>73</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 154, a. 11.

<sup>74</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 154, a. 12, ad. 1.

in this ecclesial pronouncement. Its declaration that homosexual “inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder”<sup>75</sup> is premised on the moral understanding that the “union of the sexes is directed to the common good of the human race.”<sup>76</sup> This unequivocally posits that the complementarity of sexes, i.e., man and woman, is inscribed in natural law which guarantees that the prolongation of the human race – which is a common good – is pursued as a moral concern. Homosexual activity specifically is viewed as an ‘objective disorder’ because of its inability to fulfill the dictate of natural law: “Homosexual activity is not a complementary union, able to transmit life.”<sup>77</sup> This and many other ecclesial documents uphold the validity of the order of nature argument, explicitly or implicitly, which, in a positive way, points the direction of the moral consideration of the matter towards the historical or humanistic perspective, although admittedly not far enough. In this strict respect, the historicity of the human person must not be limited to biological or physical determinations. Human morality must explore the depths and breadths of what it means to be fully human in order that a just consideration of the morality of human acts can be achieved. Moreover, to pursue the ‘objective order’ must necessarily include the ‘subjective order’ since without the consideration of both, there is no human morality to speak of. Equally, the application of the first principles of natural law must consider the historical nuances of the human person before a prudential conclusion could be morally justified and executable.

The natural inclination to the prolongation of the human race expressed in this specific form does not have a counterpart in Narvaez’s *Triune Ethics Theory*. However, the nuancing of the Engagement Ethic is more descriptive of the underlying physical nature of the second natural inclination:

Engagement ethics are about communion in the here and now: ‘It’s about me and being with you (us).’ This represents a dual universe (instead of the solo universe of the safety ethic) – losing oneself trustingly in the moment to attune to the Other.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1 October 1986), § 3, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19861001\\_homosexual-persons\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19861001_homosexual-persons_en.html). (Accessed 14 December 2020)

<sup>76</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 154, a. 2.

<sup>77</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons,” § 7.

<sup>78</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 191.

For a while one may think here that Narvaez is talking about marital love. But the truth of the matter is, Narvaez is speaking about the quality of relational attachment that humans are capable of and is developed right at the crucial period of a child's early years of receiving parental caregiving. This therefore stresses once again the importance of the 'evolved nest' where, when optimal environments are created by parents for their children, children's moral development are on an uphill trajectory. Narvaez supports this claim by asserting that:

Infants are endowed with the 'set-goal' of staying close to mother, a characteristic that evolved to increase infant survival by motivating them to remain close to their primary source of safety. At the same time, infants are equipped with a motivation to use the mother as a "secure base" for exploration, quickly returning to her when becoming scared.<sup>79</sup>

The scientific assertion rendered above surprisingly moves far deeper than and beyond merely presenting the natural inclination towards the prolongation of the human race in terms of the physical act of sexual intercourse. Narvaez's narration centres on emotional relationship rather than biological activity which far describes the behaviour of the animal kingdom in contrast to Aquinas's 'materialistic' approach. She attributes this to an early-life supportive care environment marked by "presence, synchrony and intersubjectivity, empathy, mentalising and perspective taking."<sup>80</sup> She articulates the quality of relationship that is formed out of this care environment as demonstrating "close relationship with others, feelings of empathy."<sup>81</sup> Narvaez refers to this phenomenon as "vicinity companionship"<sup>82</sup> which descriptively expresses the closeness of the parent-child relationship that is developing.

Narvaez points out that the Engagement Ethic could either be characterised by "calm or distressed."<sup>83</sup> She suggests that when the Engagement Ethic is not fully formed in terms of emotional regulations, the human person "may have a cacostatic reaction, either overinvolvement (*entanglement* in relationships, codependency, helicoptering) or underinvolvement (*empathic distress*), shifting attention to the self."<sup>84</sup> Evidently, when trauma defines a person's early childhood years, the default system of the Safety Ethic dominates

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<sup>79</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 70.

<sup>80</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 191.

<sup>81</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 191.

<sup>82</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 191.

<sup>83</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 193.

<sup>84</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 193.

human behaviours. Thus, the ‘shift to the self’ is expressive of this default ethic that is stimulated when the Engagement Ethic is unavailable.

The Ethic of Engagement’s link to the natural inclination to the prolongation of the human race is evidently underscored by the human natural propensity to inter-relate (engage) and respond in an emotionally stable manner to stressors in life. This form of relationship is most sublime in the “engagement of the heart”<sup>85</sup> that can be expressed in manifold relational ways and not just through sexual intercourse. Accordingly, ‘engagement’ in the mind of Narvaez is “about connecting and bonding in the moment, right now, on an equal basis, person to person, entity to entity.”<sup>86</sup> This statement points to the depth of human interrelationships that the act of sexual intercourse in itself is not able to offer. That said, although Narvaez considers the Ethic of Engagement as providing the foundation “for higher moral capacities, [it is] “insufficient for the moral life of an adult.”<sup>87</sup> What will be sufficient is the Ethic of Imagination, the topic that is next-in-line for discussion.

#### “*Secundum naturam rationis*” vis-à-vis Imagination Ethic

The third natural inclination focuses on that which every human person has *in common with each other - rationality (secundum naturam rationis)*. Owing to this specific nature, human persons are naturally disposed “to know the truth about God, and to live in society.”<sup>88</sup> According to Gula, “This is the ‘order of reason’ strain of interpretation of natural law, which is consistent with St. Thomas’ fundamental definition of natural law as the human participation in eternal law through the use of reason.”<sup>89</sup> Aquinas holds that the knowledge of God is metaphysically tenable (self-evident) since in articulating that ‘God exists,’ the predicate itself contains and provides the truth about the reality of God. In other words, nothing mitigates between God and His existence since both expressions are true and point to the same truth.

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<sup>85</sup> Narvaez uses the term “engagement of the heart” in reference to the Ethic of Engagement since this ethic is involved with deeply affective interpersonal relationship. What best describes the depth of ethic is ‘empathy’ where a person is able to enter into someone else’s mind, as it were, to care and feel with that person. “Engagement of the Heart” is the title of Chapter Four in Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 69-106.

<sup>86</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 94.

<sup>87</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 193.

<sup>88</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

<sup>89</sup> Gula, SS, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality*, 226.



Experientially, however, it is only through demonstrations that human persons are able to know some truths about God:

"God exists," of itself is self-evident, for the predicate is the same as the subject, because God is His own existence.... Now because we do not know the essence of God, the proposition is not self-evident to us; but needs to be demonstrated by things that are more known to us, though less known in their nature - namely, by effects.<sup>90</sup>

Since the knowledge "that God exists in a general and confused way is implanted in us by nature,"<sup>91</sup> experience therefore is exigent in actuating what is implanted in us by God. The *Quinque viæ* or the *Five Proofs of the Existence of God*<sup>92</sup> are Aquinas's ways of demonstrating how human agents are able to acquire some knowledge of the truth about God. In this regard, Aquinas is confident in the human capacity to grasp those truths which can be known naturally: "[T]here is nothing to prevent a man, who cannot grasp a proof, accepting, as a matter of faith, something which in itself is capable of being scientifically known and demonstrated."<sup>93</sup>

Accordingly, that the third natural inclination is in a sense not universal is meant to be understood that knowledge of God is not immediately available to the human mind. Though reason is present only among human beings and not in all created substance, let alone animals, it is not guaranteed, however, that the human mind will freely seek truths about God. Though *synderesis* is viewed by Aquinas as the 'law of our mind,'<sup>94</sup> the ordering of reason which facilitates the motion of human agents towards the active perfecting of their human essence does not always come to fruition due to the influence or the perversion of "passion, or evil habit, or an evil disposition of nature."<sup>95</sup> Thus, the innate existence of *synderesis* in all human persons is a not a practical guarantee that every human person will live moral lives. The natural disposition to the moral good is a reality that requires human commitment and diligence in order for it to foment in human lives. *Synderesis* therefore needs to be understood within the framework of natural inclinations which are responsible for driving nature towards the realisation of practical actions to which human agents commit. This means, while there is the innate disposition to apprehend the first principles of natural law, *synderesis* needs to be

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<sup>90</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 2, a. 1.

<sup>91</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 2, a. 1, ad. 1.

<sup>92</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 2, a. 3.

<sup>93</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 2, a. 2, ad. 1.

<sup>94</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 1, ad. 2.

<sup>95</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 4.

understood as capable of developing co-operatively with natural inclinations in view of leading human agents towards a growing understanding of the truth which could lead to the Ultimate Truth, who is God. It is evident from this narration that acquiring some knowledge of God is a gradual developing experience that requires a personal commitment. *Synderesis*, being the seed of moral life, is reinforced by natural inclinations to dispose human persons to those which are perfective of human nature. Ultimately, the perfection of human nature is realised by seeking the truths about God.

While the ultimate and necessary goal of the third natural inclination is God, the process that Aquinas is proposing to achieve it is accordingly historical, i.e., the use of natural capacities will enable human persons to know something about God. This means therefore that the faculty of reason possesses in itself the capacity to lead human agents to acquire some degree of understanding and knowledge about the moral life. Reason is the natural vehicle that can take human agents to wherever they ought to be based on their very nature. It is generally and casually said that humans are limited only by their imagination. Aquinas, without doubt, used imagination to conceptualise the *Quinque viæ*. It could not have been otherwise. He made use of sensitive experience in order to penetrate the knowledge of the transcendence. For example, he made use of the human experience of motion in order to inductively conclude that there must be the primordial source of all earthly movements since otherwise, it will be a vicious circle trying to determine the beginning of life in the universe.<sup>96</sup> To posit God through this sensitive experience can only be a product of imagination.

The involvement of imagination in the consideration of natural law is not only inevitable, but essential. The intellective process is not fully achievable without imagination. For the human mind to penetrate the *infinite horizon of intelligibility*, this requires the imaginative process. Similarly, for the human mind to dwell in the *horizon of prudence*, moral imagination is necessary in order to know the different manifestations of the truth (and untruth) appearing on the moral landscape. In both of these horizons, the human experience of *excessus ad esse* allows human agents to imaginatively discover and appreciate the moral good that is perfective of the human self. Moreover, moral imagination ensures that morality is not kept to the secular

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<sup>96</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 2, a. 3. (The Argument from Motion: the first of the *Quinque viæ* or Five Ways or Proofs of the Existence of God)

minimum but rather, is prudentially ingenious and explorative in considering that the manifestation of the truths could transcendently lead to the Ultimate Truth, who is God.

It is in this respect that Narvaez considers the Imagination Ethic as belonging to a higher order among the global ethical mindsets. This ethic builds on human interrelationships (Engagement Ethic) which facilitates a beyond-now awareness between you-and-me and which “enlarge[es] the field of possibilities and broadening the landscape for action.”<sup>97</sup> This description of imagination reflects previous attributions on imagination, specifically *imaginative prudence*, where the human soul enquires about given realities and moral principles in view of providing human agents a determination to which moral course of action to take. The determination essentially involves the imaginative consideration of human contingencies (beyond-now awareness of you-and-me) and the discovery of various possibilities and scenarios (‘landscape for action’) while attending to the concrete application of the moral principles (*syneidesis*) in consideration of these practical realities. Narvaez adds: “Imagination intervenes deeply in our moral lives as the ‘capacity to concretely perceive what is before in light of what could be’; it ‘amplifies perception beyond the immediate’ and ‘constitutes an extension of the environment to which we respond.’”<sup>98</sup>

Narvaez’s moral imagination encompasses a broad systematic investigation on its possible stimulants, its internal operations, and its synthetic organic ability. She reports on the causal effect of external triggers on moral imagination such as contextual cues, environmental affordances, social influence and situation press.<sup>99</sup> She also attributes to moral imagination the internal processing of principles (e.g., being a kind person, being a team player), gut feelings, current goals and preferences, past and current reactions and outcomes (of self and others), mood and energy.<sup>100</sup> Likewise, she ascribes to moral imagination the capacity to “coordinate the interrelations of multiple elements by evaluating the logical coherence of action possibilities with one’s self-image,...remembering and filtering the present through prior experience,...balancing one’s goals and needs with the goals and needs of others in the circumstances,...and “consciously letting go of conflicting (sometimes moral) goals.”<sup>101</sup> All of these attributions point to the dynamic and complex reality of moral imagination and to the

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<sup>97</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 193.

<sup>98</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 107.

<sup>99</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 107-108.

<sup>100</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 108.

<sup>101</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 108.

external and internal realities of how moral imagination consummates its inherent operations. They provide scientific evidence as to why the Imagination Ethic is characterised as belonging to a higher order than the Safety Ethic and the Engagement Ethic.

In reference to three global ethical mindsets, the role of the emotions appears to be more pronounced in Narvaez than in Aquinas whose epistemology arguably favours reason over the affect. Aquinas has shown his cautious approach regarding passions (emotions) while Narvaez is fearless in presenting her *Triune Ethics Theory* as fundamentally affective in orientation. Although it may be outside the scope of this study to investigate how much of the affect is reflected in Thomistic epistemology, Aquinas never discounts the effect of emotions on moral actions: “Although the passion of the sensitive appetite is not the direct object of the will, yet it occasions a certain change in the judgment about the object of the will.”<sup>102</sup>

## Summary

Aquinas’s natural law and its three natural inclinations find parallel synthetic conceptualisation in Narvaez’s global ethical mindsets. The outcome of the synthesis scientifically provides substance to Aquinas’s medieval observations regarding moral agency. Somehow, it also thwarts the notion of the impossibility of any conceptual convergence due to the extent of the diversity of both disciplines. The possibility of a restrictive physicalist reading of Aquinas’s natural law allows for the discussion to speculate via empirical perspective. Having such an approach as the starting point of the speculative investigation, it maintains human nature as the common springboard upon which moral development can be analytically studied. The three natural inclinations resonate in Narvaez’s *Triune Ethics Theory* revealing thematic links which generally and legitimately affirm Aquinas’s assertions in moral philosophy and moral psychology. Inversely, it also broadly asserts the possibility of grounding scientific research in Thomistic philosophy and psychology. Aquinas’s natural inclinations to preservation of human life, to preservation of human population, and to seek the truth, all find congruence in the Ethic of Safety, Ethic of Engagement and the Ethic of Imagination respectively. This congruence validates the basicity of natural law as truly being founded in nature and by extension, as a fundamental element in human evolution. Specifically, Narvaez’s scientific research has given

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<sup>102</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 77, a. 1, ad. 1.

ascendancy to the reality of imagination as a necessary faculty in cognitive and moral development. Considered by her as expressive of human evolution reaching its pinnacle, imagination supports the theological assertion that the faculty of reasoning images God's presence in every human being. Since imagination is constitutive of the moral agent as an intelligent being in a moral universe, there is no reason why prudential moral inquiries should be disenfranchised by disregarding moral imagination as one of its sources of knowledge. Narvaez's scientific research indisputably confirms that moral development is handicapped without the services of moral imagination. When the moral mind is underperforming, moral development suffers where moral outcomes may not just be detrimental to natural ends, but more importantly, to supernatural ends.

## Chapter 10

### Conclusion: Imagining the Natural law

#### **Introduction**

Moral development is viable due to moral imagination. Moral imagination, specifically *imaginative prudence* which serves practical reason in moral inquiries, fosters the moral determination of human acts that are complete and perfective of the human essence. The moral ends of human acts are always necessary since being moral good themselves, they serve as natural and supernatural ends of human acts. According to Aquinas, moral ends are sought naturally by human agents since every human person has the capacity for God (*capax Dei*). This quest, however, requires imagination to effectuate a moral change in the disposition of human agents. Imagination opens the moral mind to the *good of life*, to the *good of sexual intimacy*, and to the *good of the truth*. These goods are humanly achievable, but it would necessitate change, both personal and communal, in order that human completion and perfection are achieved.

The scientific research of Darcia Narvaez will continue to be explored in this chapter following on the previous chapter. In concert with Aquinas, she also emphasises the important reality about the human agent's capacity to change. Narvaez believes in internal and external factors that allow the possibility for human agents to adapt to their changing environment and to

habituate in the moral virtues even at a later stage in their lives.<sup>1</sup> She states the following in this respect:

First, like everything human, morality emerges from biology and embodiment – our lived experience.... Second, our morality is multidimensional and arises from our evolved brain propensities. Through epigenetics and developmental plasticity, early experience shapes not only how well the body works but also how our social capacities function...neurobiological beginnings matter for all [human] capabilities, including emotional, intellectual, and moral. Third, cultures are malleable. Cultures foster or undermine health and well-being and encourage or discourage our highest human nature. A society can intentionally foster greater capacities in its citizen.... Fourth, individuals can self-author virtue and wisdom capacities to facilitate change. They can join together to reauthor their communities and make them places where all thrive. With mindful self-cultivation and communal choices, humans together can develop relationships and institutions that stimulate and foster well-being and flourishing for every individual in the lifescape.<sup>2</sup>

Narvaez's assertions above are expressive of Aquinas's thinking that human agents are not consigned to the resulting effects of Adam's fall. Aquinas believes that: "Man's nature is changeable" ("*Natura autem hominis est mutabilis*").<sup>3</sup> Thereto, Aquinas believes that change is good for human nature: "For as far as we who feel pleasure are concerned, change is pleasant to us because our nature is changeable."<sup>4</sup>

The transformation that is envisaged by Aquinas's *exitus et reditus* principle is anchored in the capacity of all intelligent beings to change. Likewise, Narvaez's intent to overcome the mismatch between the present generation's lifestyle and to recover the ancestral lifestyle of the small-band hunter-gatherers is realisable on account of the moral person's capacity to change. In this respect, Aquinas gives his advice on how to go about embracing change in human life: "if we do what we can, that is, follow the guidance of natural reason, God will not withhold from us that which we need."<sup>5</sup> Natural reason espouses imagination since this human faculty

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<sup>1</sup> See Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 28-30. Darcia Narvaez discusses the general malleability of brain in human beings.

<sup>2</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 11-12.

<sup>3</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q, 57, a. 2, ad. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q, 32, a. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 11.

is divinely given in order for all human persons to overcome their human limitation and thereby cross its boundaries in view of achieving their telic ends.

The ensuing discussion presents Narvaez's idea of *primal wisdom* that is observed to be behaviourally linked to the indigenous lifestyle that gave rise to the optimal environment called "evolved nest." If *primal wisdom* may have had a hand in this lifestyle optimisation, there is reason to believe that apart from merely being understood as a social practice, *primal wisdom* may actually reflect the *primal goods* (natural inclinations) of Aquinas. This reflection is underlined by the moral value of these goods and wisdom in effecting change and fostering moral development. Imagining natural law today is vital in occasioning the growth of practical knowledge which *synderesis* intuits and apprehends. Moral imagination specifically helps in this endeavour by creatively providing perspectives, both representational and hypothetical, in forging a moral path that serves the purpose and goal of human life. Further, *imaginative prudence*, when habituated, assists moral agents by inquiring about the perspectives of the universal moral principles and the *infinity of singulars* prior to committing to a moral act.

Both Aquinas and Narvaez agree on the need for discernment in this respect. Apart from the mental calmness that it provides, discernment engages the moral mind to contemplate on the expediency of change for moral development to take effect and maturate in the human person. Discernment lends the imagination of the natural law the locus for ethical changes to take shape in human life. It makes it certain that any moral act that is decided upon has gone through imaginative consideration of the various contingencies of human historicity. Truthfully, *synderesis* can only and truly serves its purpose if temporal conditions are deliberately considered in prudential moral inquiries. When the moral mind attempts to imagine the natural law, it should imagine *synderesis* for the practical good that it pursues and the evil that it avoids in real life.

### **Aquinas's *Primal Goods* and Narvaez's *Primal Wisdom***

The science of psychology can only speak of human agents as potentially capable of acquiring the natural ends. To speak of supernatural ends is the concern of practical theology. Aquinas's *primal goods* and Narvaez's *primal wisdom* both consider the historical dimension of human affairs which when their potentials and capacities are realised can practically achieve human



natural ends. The difference lies, however, in that the *primal goods* achieved via acquired moral virtues are viewed as imperfect yet preparative of the supernatural ends. Narvaez's *primal wisdom* falls within the imperfect although its existence is absolutely beneficial in enabling human persons discover the limits and potentials of human nature in achieving the supernatural ends alluded to in Catholic moral theology.

Though Narvaez expectedly appears to be silent on the terminological articulation of natural law, she, however, posits the reality of the *primal wisdom* which seems to express very proximately the idea of the Thomistic fundamental universal ethics or natural law. Her idea of *primal wisdom* "appears to be part of human essence"<sup>6</sup> whose social practices foster the survival and human flourishing of *small-band hunter-gatherers* at both the individual and community levels.<sup>7</sup> There is an observable parallelism between these concepts that rests on the fact that both deal with human nature and human (moral) agency. Both claims that the path towards fulfillment of human goods (Aquinas) and wisdom (Narvaez) is multifarious. Aquinas claims that "everything desires its own perfection...that which he desires as his perfect and crowning good."<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, Narvaez confirms that "[t]here is more than one route to wisdom."<sup>9</sup> She admits, however, that the present generation cannot return to this ancient lifestyle at this stage but assumingly asserts that "maybe we can learn from them in order to shift our own cultures in a direction more in line with our human essence."<sup>10</sup>

The proceeding discussion attempts to outline possible learnings that can be drawn from this *primal wisdom* in view of the natural law.<sup>11</sup> For Narvaez, wisdom "is a body of knowledge that crosses cultures and historical periods and has interdisciplinary support."<sup>12</sup> She purports that *primal wisdom* is integrated in the lifestyle of nomadic foragers and various indigenous and aboriginal peoples and "is broader than what is discernible from the writings and practices of Western wisdom traditions."<sup>13</sup> It needs to be reiterated here that Narvaez's understanding of the development of the moral self in early life "begins with the development of implicit procedural knowledge, based on pattern of cognition."<sup>14</sup> This implies that this manner of

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<sup>6</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 235.

<sup>7</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 236.

<sup>8</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 255.

<sup>10</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 236.

<sup>11</sup> Darcia Narvaez identifies five kinds of primal wisdom, three of which are discussed in this thesis. See Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 235-240.

<sup>12</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 255.

<sup>13</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 235.

<sup>14</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 64.

acquiring knowledge precedes the capacity for reflective self-awareness<sup>15</sup> (or discursive knowledge).

In reflecting on these social practices that represent the ninety-nine percent of global optimal lifestyle that forms the *evolved developmental niche* accrued from the study of numerous existing *small-band hunter-gatherers* around the world, it discloses natural dispositions that are expressive and comparable to the contents of the Thomistic natural law. Not only does studying this ancient lifestyle provide clarity on some of the aspects of natural law, but they also affirm and confirm how ‘natural’ natural law is since the practical dispositions emanating from the primary moral principles appear to be consistently present throughout human history. The following discussion on Narvaez’s *primal wisdom* can be found to be beneficially informative as it provides a deeper and broader understanding of the three natural inclinations that Aquinas purports as *primal goods* which emanate from the primary principles of natural law.

### Natural Law Appeals Universally

The *International Theological Commission*’s search for a universal ethic is premised on the teaching of natural law as a given reality:

This law, in substance, affirms that persons and human communities are capable, in light of reason, of discerning the fundamental orientations of moral action in conformity with the very nature of the human subject and of expressing these orientations in a normative fashion in the form of precepts or commands.<sup>16</sup>

It is evident from the above that if an ethic is meant to be ‘natural’, i.e., etymologically understood as that which is present at birth, it would necessarily have to have a universal appeal. Such is Narvaez’s understanding of human agency within the *primal wisdom* perspective: “the self is expansive, communal, and multidimensional.”<sup>17</sup> If Narvaez maintains that “[t]here is no solitary self, but instead a sense of self as part of the larger *common self* that

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<sup>15</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 64.

<sup>16</sup> International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic,” § 9.

<sup>17</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 236.

is shared with all entities,”<sup>18</sup> this reflects Aquinas’s understanding of the human person as “naturally a social being.”<sup>19</sup> The social nature of all human beings points to their natural state as interrelated to all created beings or entities. Observably, Aquinas points out that the first natural inclination is “in common with all substances.” This foundational assertion is pivotal in ascertaining that all created beings are not merely subjective realities, but also objective realities who are deeply linked with the life and dynamism of the social environment around them. In this respect, Narvaez states that “[i]n this type of worldview, the subjective and objective are not really distinctive.”<sup>20</sup> This *primal wisdom* lends substance to the essence of the first natural inclination to the preservation of life. The interrelatedness of human person, specifically with fellow creatures, is a natural given that stresses the moral imperative for every human person to not just have a regard for oneself but more universally, to each and every human person on earth. Along this line, Narvaez emphasises the scientific finding that “for the small-band hunter-gatherer, suicide is a ridiculous notion.”<sup>21</sup> On this basis, the regard for the sanctity of human life is therefore not merely a Christian construct. It can be argued that as a *primal wisdom*, it has a universal appeal that evidently underlines Aquinas’s appeal to preserve life as a *primal good* based on natural inclination. The social dimension of suicide is often demonstrated by the community’s mourning and grieving upon the death of a community member.

### Natural Law Espouses Equal Partnership

Intimately linked to the above is the *primal wisdom* which asserts that “[a]ll are partners in the oneness of reality.”<sup>22</sup> This reality goes deeper than the previous *primal wisdom* and penetrates the heart of human existence: “A real human being does not violate others, whether human or non-human, with a lack of courtesy, generosity, or respect.”<sup>23</sup> As previously articulated, the preservation of life particularly encompasses not just the subjective life, but also the objective life, i.e., the life of each and every person in the global community. *Primal wisdom* underscores the intrinsic value of equality as governing human and ecological relationships. Specifically,

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<sup>18</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 236.

<sup>19</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 96, a. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 236.

<sup>21</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 236.

<sup>22</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 237.

<sup>23</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 237.

the acquired moral virtue of justice is clearly at the heart of human relationship. Aquinas posits that justice is “rendering to each one his right.”<sup>24</sup> Every person enjoys equal right and the right to life is inherent in every person. This implies that as every person has the right to life, killing encroaches upon other people’s right to life. People’s right to life therefore limits other people’s right to life, with the exception of a duly considered morality of self-defence.

Inversely, Aquinas’s first natural inclination specifically espouses the preservation of human life via the universal respect for the human race. This necessarily leads to Aquinas’s second natural inclination which points out the equal responsibility of all human beings to preserve the human race via the propagation of the human population through sexual intercourse and the education of offspring. The preservation of the human race is a shared responsibility and is considered as ‘a law inscribed in human hearts’ where human agents are expected to take necessary steps in realising this *primal good*. Biologically, this shared responsibility naturally falls upon heterosexual couples to procreate for the sake of the common good. This common good also extends to the proper rearing of children. Narvaez’s insistence on quality caregiving or companionship care of children underscores and emphasises the essence of this *primal good*. The emphasis on establishing optimal early child care conditions is crucial since its neglect will most likely lead children to experience dysfunctional lives in their adult life.<sup>25</sup> In Catholic sacramentology, the institution of matrimony safeguards the *primal good* by contextualising procreation and education of children as constitutive of family life which has been elevated to the level of a “domestic church.”<sup>26</sup> The sanctity of marriage upholds not just the natural responsibility of parents to procreate, but also to protect the right of children to be cared for appropriately by their parents, most particularly by looking after their moral development. The second natural inclination is therefore at the epicentre of human survival (Safety Ethic) and in the flourishing of human interrelationship (Engagement Ethic). When optimal conditions are provided to children during their early years of life, homeostasis<sup>27</sup> will define their social and psychological states during their adulthood.

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<sup>24</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 58, a. 1.

<sup>25</sup> See Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 132-134. Darcia Narvaez underscores the stress of poor early care on children and may be responsible for psychological disorders experienced in later life such as borderline personality disorders. Companionship care at the beginning stage of children’s life is crucial in providing social and psychological homeostasis in their adult life.

<sup>26</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, § 11.

<sup>27</sup> Darcia Narvaez defines homeostasis as “a mechanism for keeping the organism in balance with the environment” throughout a lifespan of “interfacing with the world, actively getting needs met for food, shelter, warmth, and, for human, social connection.” See Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 127-129.

## Natural Law Seeks Beauty and Goodness in the Truth

Narvaez declares that “[t]he agile brain/mind is mesmerised by the beauty of the earth.... It does not just call us to growth, but it is a transforming presence wherein we unfold towards growth almost before we realise it.”<sup>28</sup> She observes that among the community of *small-band hunter-gatherers*, beauty is sought in the wholeness of creation where art, science and social life are integrated.<sup>29</sup> Her observation implies that seeking and seeing beauty in the social sphere is part and parcel of the day-to-day life of *small-band hunter-gatherers*. She compares this *primal wisdom* to the traditional wisdom represented by Aquinas who, as she interprets him, “contended that truth, goodness, and integrity belong, in essence, to beauty.”<sup>30</sup>

Aquinas equates beauty and goodness synonymously based on form, i.e., people basically perceive beauty and goodness in things around them. This perception of beauty and goodness resonates in the *primal wisdom* which Narvaez cites above. Aquinas, however, further differentiates goodness and beauty logically, i.e., goodness is appetitive while beauty is cognitive.<sup>31</sup> Being an appetite, goodness points to the human disposition which seeks moral good as an end of moral acts. Hence, the third natural inclination to seek the ‘truth about God’ is understood as seeking a good end. On the other hand, beauty, being a cognitive faculty, relates to that which pleases the human mind upon perception. When human agents see something beautiful, they cognise the elements of beauty present in such a particular thing. The perceptual knowledge that is brought upon by the sight of beauty could be perhaps what Narvaez views as the transformative effect of beauty. But for Aquinas, truth as a *primal good* has a far deeper transformative causality.

The third natural inclination presents the human disposition to seek the ‘truth about God.’ As stated earlier, though it is a *primal good* and is meant to be self-evident, the knowledge about God is not immediately known. To know God entails the freedom to seek the ‘truth about God.’ When it does happen that human agency takes the human intellect to seek the ‘truth about God,’ not only does it transform the human person intellectually, it also transforms the whole of the

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<sup>28</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 238.

<sup>29</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 238.

<sup>30</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 239.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 5, a. 4, ad. 1.

person integrally. Truth is transformative owing to its very nature as exclusively belonging to God Himself who is Truth *par excellence*:

[T]ruth is found in the intellect according as it apprehends a thing as it is; and in things according as they have being conformable to an intellect. This is to the greatest degree found in God. For His being is not only conformed to His intellect, but it is the very act of His intellect; and His act of understanding is the measure and cause of every other being and of every other intellect, and He Himself is His own existence and act of understanding. Whence it follows not only that truth is in Him, but that He is truth itself, and the sovereign and first truth.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, seeking the truth means seeking the ultimate good end. This underlines the teleological inclination of the third *primal good*. We recall the words of Christ: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father through me.”<sup>33</sup> This statement is understood in salvific terms; the road to human salvation is by having faith and following the footsteps of Christ who is Truth Himself. The integrative disposition of the *primal good* concerning beauty points to the universal truth which brings about wholeness and salvation. If the *primal good* of beauty integrates the self to the cosmos, the *primal good* extends this beyond the cosmos to God who is the sole Creator of the universe. This is the truth according to Catholic doctrine where, when beauty and goodness meet in the *infinite horizon of intelligibility*, an encounter with God takes place.

As earlier intimated, it is on this *infinite horizon of intelligibility* where the human mind discovers the first principles of natural law through *synderesis*. The *excessus ad esse* experience, traditionally understood as the ‘openness towards God,’ marks the meeting of the divine with the human, of the universal with the particular, of eternity with historicity through the instrumentality of the *intellectus agens*. This encounter ushers in the experiential knowledge of the presence of divine in the human, of the universal in the particular, and of perpetuity in the contingent. It is through this experience where natural law ceases to be merely an abstraction, but rather, takes on human historicity as its locus of enlightenment or illumination. Further, it is on this same *infinite horizon of intelligibility* where *imaginative prudence* operates to morally guide human agency towards enactment that is self-realising and self-fulfilling, and that which likewise fosters human flourishing via acquisition of natural

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<sup>32</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 16, a. 5.

<sup>33</sup> Jn 14:6.

ends, and hopefully supernatural ends. The *horizon of imaginative prudence* looms large in the *infinite horizon of intelligibility*.

The proceeding discussion endeavours to elaborate more on the dynamism inherent in this *infinite horizon of intelligibility* where, through *imaginative prudence*, the natural inclinations which are expressive of the natural law are reflected as determinants of the moral order. The *horizon of imaginative prudence* inserts itself in the *infinite horizon of intelligibility* in order to serve as vehicle for the moral discernment of contingent matters. This would have important practical implications in moral agency as the encounter should involve dynamic flexibility on the part of universal principles in considering the different facets of human vicissitudes.

### **Imagining the Natural Law Today**

The pursuit to imagine the natural law today lies at the heart of appropriating the historicity and contingencies of human experiences in the consideration of the first principles of natural law. What it hopes to achieve is the cognitive and appetitive grasp of the moral context through which a moral discernment could aptly be determined. This attempt of contextualising the application of the natural law via prudential moral inquiry, whose nature originally stems from the science of hermeneutics, avoids abstractionism and universalism in decision making which sees it generally ignore human experiences and conditions. What is required, henceforth, is a thorough and open dialogue between moral principles and human contingencies in view of avoiding the neglect, not just of the first principles of natural law and their derivatives, but of crucial contextual facets that are inherent in the lived experiences of human agents. The first principles of natural law make practical sense only when viewed from the lens of the moral concerns of human agents. On its own, the first principles of natural law are *of no use and do not govern anything*. Considered within human historicity, it becomes an illuminating factor in the search for appropriate teleological moral paths. In this respect, to posit the opposition between the law and humanity is, henceforth, absurd since, as St. Paul reminds his followers, people should delight in the law of God, who is present in their inner being.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Rom 7:22. “For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being.”

The methodological approach *from below* rather than *from above* is advanced in this thesis in view of unravelling the intricacies of human contingency that are vital and crucial for moral discernment. If we go by the scientific premise of Narvaez that today's generation represents only one percent of human history that is *species-atypical* in contrast to the *species-typical EDN* representing ninety-nine percent of human genus history, the value of the Ethic of Imagination is vitally important for moral development. On the other hand, the virtue of *imaginative prudence* is necessary if human agency is to give itself the indispensable opportunity to discern conscientiously the moral path when faced with ordinary and contentious moral dilemmas. Acquiring *imaginative prudence* (as well other acquired moral virtues for that matter) nullifies the realities that may impede the seed of *synderesis* from maturing in the lives of human agents. Ignorance, passions, weak will, evil habits, sin and concupiscence may potentially stall this maturation but when human agents habituate in the virtues, specifically in the virtue of prudence that accords the discernment of the first principles of natural law vis-à-vis the real contingencies relative to the moral dilemma in consideration, human agents penetrate the *infinite horizon of intelligibility* where moral paths are resolutely determined. Virtue-enabling is therefore expedient in human agents so that, as moral exemplars, they can both achieve moral self-authorship and at the same time concretely contribute to humanity's journey towards achieving its potential natural ends. If human agents are truly virtue-enabled, accessing the *infinite horizon of intelligibility* and the *horizon of prudence* become second nature. This certainly equips them with the necessary qualities in guiding children of early years towards their moral development. When *imaginative prudence* is exercised by virtue-enablers, moral decisions centre on acquiring the natural ends for the good of human agents and the greater humanity. Consequently, if human agents abound in virtues, so to speak, then imparting or giving witness to the practical good would not be an imposing herculean undertaking. Figuratively speaking, virtues have a mind of their own to effectuate a reflection of its nature from its bearer without the necessity of the reason or will.

#### Absolutism vis-à-vis Realism

A brief commentary on the methodological approach *from below* necessarily needs to be undertaken in order to position itself against any form of philosophical thinking that manifest the tendency to fully depart from considering particular historical conditions in moral inquiries.



The clarification can be best elaborated by eliciting Pope Francis's statement in his *Post-Synodal Exhortation Apostolic Exhortation, Amoris laetitia*, on 'discernment' vis-à-vis an alternative interpretation of the Aquinian text the Roman Pontiff used to this effect.

Pope Francis's interpretation of Aquinas's text mentioned in section 304 received numerous adverse commentaries<sup>35</sup> particularly on its seeming implication that universal moral principles are rendered nugatory when moral situations being considered are far too remote to be addressed by moral principles. Pope Francis claims that there are real instances when moral principles "cannot provide absolutely for all particular situations"<sup>36</sup> due to the possibility of "forms of conditioning and mitigating factors."<sup>37</sup> Pope Francis's statement is an attempt to reflect Aquinas's thoughts that "the more we descend to matters of details, the more frequently we encounter defects."<sup>38</sup>

Pope Francis upholds the credibility of the primary moral principles explicating that "general rules set forth a good which can never be disregarded or neglected."<sup>39</sup> It may be understandable why certain moral ambiguity may arise from his statement; however, he seems to be mainly suggesting that absolute moral norms would have to contend with real contingent matters. This manner of articulation similarly expresses the earlier articulation of this research that the first principles of natural law are *of no use* and *do not govern anything* outside the spectrum of the contingent world. In other words, the first moral principles are immaterial without the material world. This philosophical way of reading Pope Francis would not in any way appease the strict followers of Aquinas who, rightfully so, would desist from interpreting Thomistic texts in isolation from the totality of all his doctrines. Appended to their interpretation of Aquinas above is the strict observance of the traditional moral teaching which considers some acts as morally evil without any qualifications: "there exists acts which, per se and in themselves, independently of circumstances, are always seriously wrong by reason of their object."<sup>40</sup> This

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<sup>35</sup> For example, see Richard A. Spinello, "The Morality of *Amoris Laetitia* Is Not Thomistic," *Crisis Magazine: A Voice for the Faithful Catholic Laity*, 14 November 2017, <https://www.crisismagazine.com/2017/morality-amoris-laetitia-not-thomistic>. Richard Spinello is adamant in stating that there is little comparison between *Amoris laetitia* and St. Thomas Aquinas. He claims that Pope Francis's interpretation of Aquinas is "far removed from Thomistic principles."

<sup>36</sup> Pope Francis, *Amoris laetitia*, § 304.

<sup>37</sup> Pope Francis, *Amoris laetitia*, § 305.

<sup>38</sup> Pope Francis, *Amoris laetitia*, § 304.

<sup>39</sup> Pope Francis, *Amoris laetitia*, § 304.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation to the Bishops, Clergy and Faith on Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church Today, Reconciliatio et poenitentia* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2 December 1984), § 17, [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_02121984\\_reconciliatio-et-poenitentia.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_02121984_reconciliatio-et-poenitentia.html).

text is often rendered regrettably with the exclusion of its immediate following sentence which reads: “These acts, if carried out with sufficient awareness and freedom, are always gravely sinful.”<sup>41</sup> This sentence explicitly qualifies the previous sentence specifying that in cases where there is insufficient awareness and freedom, acts may not necessarily be gravely sinful. In effect, it does emphatically declare that extenuating circumstances vitiate culpability and the imputability of sin. The moral tradition in the Catholic Church teaches that for an act to be considered a mortal sin, it “require[s] *full knowledge* and *complete consent*.”<sup>42</sup> This traditional moral teaching is never negated by Pope Francis in his exhortation, but rather, it resonates in itself the necessity to seriously consider the contingent experiences of human persons in discerning the appropriation of moral principles on human acts. In the end, a person may after all be “in an objective situation of sin [and] which may not be subjectively culpable.”<sup>43</sup>

Pope Francis’s specific discussion of the plight of those who are in irregular marital situations without the benefit of the Catholic Church tribunal’s declaration of nullity is seriously attempting to engage people to discern with him and with these people to avoid the fallacy of thinking “that everything [is] black and white.”<sup>44</sup> Leading by example, it is evident that the Roman Pontiff is demonstrating the virtue of *imaginative prudence* in finding moral resolutions to an age-old moral dilemma that has estranged so many of Christ’s followers. The real world is not a world of lifeless abstract entities, but rather, it is an ever-dynamic, malleable, contingent world where moral principles are “written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”<sup>45</sup>

### On Contemplation and Mindfulness Exercises

Both Aquinas and Narvaez would agree that discernment is vital if the present generation is to sojourn ahead to achieve a better future. A quick look at the dictionary suggests that discernment is the ability to “discriminate”<sup>46</sup> truth from error. Basic as the definition maybe, the path to moral excellence is really doing and pursuing good and avoiding evil. This thesis

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<sup>41</sup> John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, § 17.

<sup>42</sup> CCC, no. 1859.

<sup>43</sup> Francis, *Amoris laetitia*, § 305.

<sup>44</sup> Francis, *Amoris laetitia*, § 305.

<sup>45</sup> 2 Cor 3:3.

<sup>46</sup> *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “discriminate,” accessed 14 January 2020, <https://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/discriminate>.

contends that the discernment processes of contemplation<sup>47</sup> and mindfulness<sup>48</sup> are indispensable exercises in moral development. In consonance with other mental exercises, contemplation, which is far from being merely a bodily posturing exercise, can move human agents to certain ethical actions. Mindfulness, on the other hand, “engage[s] in mindful *observation* of sensations, perceptions, emotions, and beliefs without *detaching* from one’s social and environmental context.”<sup>49</sup>

According to Aquinas, contemplation ultimately involves the “contemplation of truth.”<sup>50</sup> In addition, he maintains that prior to contemplation, the mental act of meditation necessarily takes place. He defines meditation as the “process of reason from certain principles that lead to the contemplation of some truth.”<sup>51</sup> He regards meditation as “personal study”<sup>52</sup> that synthesises various sources of information and experiences. Citing Richard of St. Victor’s six species of contemplation<sup>53</sup> in his *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas explains that knowing something about the truth follows an ascending motion towards the contemplation of God.<sup>54</sup> The ascent to the truth according to Richard St. Victor is had through the aid of reason and imagination. In fact, he appears to suggest that the contemplation of truth is preceded by imagination. This points heavily to the reality that imagination serves as vehicle in contemplating the truth which, when not employed in contemplative exercises, unnecessarily causes disservice to the very nature of the truth. The third natural inclination mentioned above, a disposition in which human agents have in common with all rational beings, manifestly reveals the necessity for imagination in contemplating on the perfective truth. As a *primal good* it is, it logically follows that human reason is able to arrive at the knowledge of the other two natural inclinations via imagination as well.

Narvaez places serious importance on affording attention to the self (self-authorship) through the espousal of the meditative exercise, mindfulness, where human agents attend to their “embodied experience in the here and now...[by] being physically, emotionally, and cognitively present to what is happening in oneself and the vicinity.”<sup>55</sup> Moral knowledge,

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 180, aa. 1-8.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 269, 283-284.

<sup>49</sup> Warren Kinghorn, “Presence of Mind: Thomistic Prudence and Contemporary Mindfulness Practices,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 35, no. 1 (Summer 2015): 96.

<sup>50</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 180, a. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 180, a. 3, ad. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 180, a. 3, ad. 4.

<sup>53</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 180, a. 4, arg. 3.

<sup>54</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 180, a. 4, ad. 3.

<sup>55</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 269.

which is instantiated tacitly first and then discursively in Narvaez's virtue epistemology, begins in the early years of a child's life where through the course of a lifespan, the human agent "constructs a moral universe based on social experience."<sup>56</sup> The personal effort in constructing one's moral universe entails, as a necessary part of it, the development of virtues that must remain the focus of mental attention.<sup>57</sup> This includes, as well, the kind of environment and activities human agents elect to undertake.

Mindfulness according to the above description provides human agents the opportunity to experience their "*being-ness*"<sup>58</sup> which effectuates the discernment of the movements of their various dispositions, be it actual, emotional or cognitional. According to Narvaez, "[p]ractising mindfulness and attending to one's micro reactions to situations lead to the awareness of ethical shifting."<sup>59</sup> These shifts account for the ethical swings human agents experience which alert them, for example, to instances when shifts go the wrong direction.<sup>60</sup> Implying more is required than mindfulness, Narvaez suggests the next stage of moral reflection which "allows post-hoc self-examination of perceptions, motives, and biases in one's past."<sup>61</sup> Mindfulness and moral reflection account for the possibility for the human awareness of ethical discrepancies. That said, Narvaez insists that it would take "moral fitness"<sup>62</sup> to effectuate real change in human behaviours. Moral fitness means developing human skills to thwart ethical downshifting. Narvaez certainly believes in the human capacity to develop behavioural processes for upshifting rather than downshifting and action habits.<sup>63</sup> This assertion applies to Aquinas's process of contemplation as well which specifically relates to the power of the mind to seek and to be aware of the truth. Correspondingly, being a rational power, contemplation has the potential to change the appetitive (behaviours) and emotive (feelings) dispositions of human agents.

It can be gleaned from the above considerations that the overarching notion of discernment, exercised as contemplation and mindfulness, is truly indispensable in moral deliberation. The imagination that is involved in the discernment exercises provides the necessary broader perspective in meditating and minding what is true or false, what is good or evil, what is right

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<sup>56</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 6.

<sup>57</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 7.

<sup>58</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 269.

<sup>59</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 283.

<sup>60</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 283.

<sup>61</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 284.

<sup>62</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 284-285.

<sup>63</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 284.

or wrong. For *synderesis* to foment, it is expedient that human agents engage in discernment since it alerts moral agents of the corresponding downshifts in their ethical mindsets. Discernment truly creates opportunities for human agents to experience freedom from what is false, from what is evil and from what is wrong. To engage in discernment exercises therefore is not just an act of being morally being responsible, but rather, it is a noble personal act of fulfilling the human essence.

### Discernment in the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises

The value of discernment has long been appreciated and practiced in the Catholic Church. The *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola* (a.k.a. Thirty-day Retreat) is generally known for its emphasis on the “discernment of the spirits”<sup>64</sup> which empowers human agents to desire and choose “only what is most conducive for [them] to the end for which [they] are created.”<sup>65</sup> Though discernment was already widely practised in monasticism during medieval times,<sup>66</sup> it was St. Ignatius who gave its momentum in Catholic spirituality. The discernment involved in imaginative contemplation has become a standard method of prayer in parishes, schools, retreat programs and many other spiritual exercises. It certainly has been and can be adopted for personal and private use. It involves becoming sensitive to the “motions of the soul”<sup>67</sup> such as the movements of passions, thoughts, imagination, attraction and repulsions. The internal operation of the *Spiritual Exercises* resonates the behavioural movements of upshifting and downshifting in Narvaez’s scientific observations. The above elaboration lucidly demonstrates the human capacity to experience and observe not just the external world, but the human interiority as well.

Of specific interest to this thesis is *The Second Contemplation* which takes place during the second of the four weeks of the *Ignatian Spiritual Exercises*. This involves the imagination of *The Story of the Nativity* where people (retreatants) engage with the story and its characters.

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<sup>64</sup> Moshe Sluhovsky, “St. Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* and their Contribution to Modern Introspective Subjectivity,” *Catholic Historical Review* 9, no. 4 (October 2013): 662

<sup>65</sup> David L. Fleming, SJ, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading* (St. Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), 22.

<sup>66</sup> David Lonsdale, SJ, *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear: An Introduction to Ignatian Spirituality* (London: Darton Longman and Todd Ltd., 1990), 85.

<sup>67</sup> “Discernment of Spirits,” n.d., accessed 29 January 2021, <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/making-good-decisions/discernment-of-spirits/>.

The virtual interaction can be very intimate depending on the disposition of the person. The use of imagination makes the story come vividly alive and allows people to structure and design the story as they see fit. The invitation to engage with the characters and the narrative context helps draw and understand intended moral lessons which elicits a personal response in return: “We explore the stories and images with the mind, respond to them with our feelings, interact with them in imagination, reflect on them in solitude and calm and allow these varied activities ultimately to influence our choices and commitments.”<sup>68</sup>

Directly or indirectly, discernment creates mental possibilities that impinge upon moral undertakings. There is an underlying ethical reason as to why imaginative contemplation and mindfulness are essential in delivering the necessary outcomes for imaginative prudential moral inquiries. Warren Kinghorn would fully agree with this assertion with himself declaring that:

Mindfulness has become a modern practical value; for some in Western culture, it may be the greatest of the virtues. But when considered in the context of Christian reflection on the virtues, a striking parallel begins to emerge. In the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas, drawing on sources unrelated to Buddhism, also described a practical virtue that renders humans more attentive to context, more aware of body and emotions, and more capable of confronting the challenges of living and developing secure relationships. He called it not “mindfulness” but *prudentia*.<sup>69</sup>

Contemplation and mindfulness establish opportunities for human agents to gain clarity of mind and soul required for effectively reflecting on *particular singulars* prior to making any moral judgment. Through the virtue of *imaginative prudence*, the first principles of natural law are reflected upon, not on its own, but vis-à-vis the historical contingencies of human affairs within the confines of a calm and conducive headspace. Kinghorn provides his own perspective on this matter:

Prudence is the virtue that integrates the theoretical knowledge of *synderesis* and the other intellectual virtues with the attention to context that results in clear-sighted and wise practical action, taking note not only of universal principles of reason but also of singulars. In doing so, prudence aims at what is also a significant goal for modern mindfulness

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<sup>68</sup> Lonsdale, SJ, *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear: An Introduction to Ignatian Spirituality*, 89.

<sup>69</sup> Kinghorn, “Presence of Mind: Thomistic Prudence and Contemporary Mindfulness Practices,” 88.

practice; namely, to render the acting person more able to notice and to attend to the relevant context of his or her action.<sup>70</sup>

This is the pivotal underlying factor which, as the quote below suggests, potentially motivate human agents to specifically translate the process of contemplation into prudent moral deliberations:

While this kind of contemplation engages the whole person with the varied capacities and powers that belong to the human person, it also gives a special place to imagination and the different levels of feeling and commitment which can be touched and moved through imagination.<sup>71</sup>

To have a better understanding and feeling of St. Ignatius's imaginative contemplation, *The Second Prelude* in *The Second Contemplation* is rendered below. It describes how imagination is used to become *mindful* of the story being discerned. The exercise invites retreatants to still the body and to enter into silence. After the initial recounting of the *Nativity Story of Jesus* (*The First Prelude*), the following takes place:

*The Second Prelude.* The composition, by imagining the place. Here it will be to see in imagination the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Consider its length and breadth, whether it is level or winds through valleys and hills. Similarly, look at the place or cave of the nativity: How big is it, or small? How long or high? And how is it furnished?"<sup>72</sup>

The exercise allows for the retreatants to be mindful of their interior motions. It is allowing the Spirit of God to work through the human soul and not the other way around. It is the same Spirit who will work through human attempts to be imaginatively prudent without discriminating the state of the person's interiority.

Although the *Ignatian Spiritual Exercises* was intentionally designed for monastic lifestyles, its operating principle is adaptable for day-to-day use, even in non-religious or secular environments. The experience of God certainly is not bound by the four walls of worship places nor monopolised by any organised religion. Learning from St. Ignatius himself, he sees

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<sup>70</sup> Kinghorn, "Presence of Mind: Thomistic Prudence and Contemporary Mindfulness Practices," 93.

<sup>71</sup> Lonsdale, SJ, *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear: An Introduction to Ignatian Spirituality*, 89.

<sup>72</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary*, trans. George E. Ganss, SJ (St. Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), 58-59.

contemplation as “finding God in all things.”<sup>73</sup> God-like attributes such as those of moral virtues and their derivatives may still inspire, form and move the human will and appetites to loving action even when the divine element that may be present in particular history is obscured or unintelligible. Non-gospel stories and daily ordinary events may be used as sources for ethical guidance. They may resemble as a *praeparatio evangelica* akin to the *International Theological Commission’s* recognition of the existence of ethical truths present in the wisdom traditions of the different religions around the world.<sup>74</sup> Non-gospel stories may include the lives of the saints, e.g., St. Maximilian Kolbe’s celebrating the Holy Eucharist while imprisoned at Auschwitz with smuggled bread shared to fellow inmates as Eucharistic food, or, the story when he volunteered to take the place of a fellow prisoner, Franciszek Gajowniczek, who was originally handpicked to die by starvation but pled for his life on account of his family.<sup>75</sup>

In addition, a powerful and meaningful non-gospel story may include the 2008 occasion when the then-Prime Minister Kevin Rudd offered a national apology to Australia’s Indigenous Peoples, particularly to the Stolen Generation who suffered the unimaginable effects of forced separation from their families in view of the government’s policy of indigenous assimilation.<sup>76</sup> When human agents commit to imaginatively contemplate using these stories and many others, immersing themselves in these narratives open the ‘mind’s eyes’ to possible values or moral lessons that stories possess. The human mind should work by coalescing past experiences embedded in phantasms and stored in one’s memory with new stories recalled and imaginatively re-created. Additional data are accrued from memory and imagination. Memory and imagination contribute by introducing phantasms of events bearing moral lessons, both implicit and explicit, to the narrative. It is worth noting that the preparative elements found in acquired moral virtues in view of the infused virtues could very well inhere in non-religious contexts. Aquinas reminds us where God is: “[A]ll things are in God; inasmuch as they are contained by Him.”<sup>77</sup>

From the perspective of those inclined to prayer, imaginative contemplation of the Gospel stories may be introduced quite easily. Having them to do it, of course, is another concern. For

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<sup>73</sup> Lonsdale, SJ, *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear: An Introduction to Ignatian Spirituality*, 91.

<sup>74</sup> International Theological Commission, “In Search of a Universal Ethic,” § 12.

<sup>75</sup> “St. Maksymilian Maria Kolbe,” 4 January 2021, accessed 25 January 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Maksymilian-Maria-Kolbe>.

<sup>76</sup> “National Apology to the Stolen Generations,” 13 February 2008, accessed 25 January 2021, <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/national-apology>.

<sup>77</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 8, a. 1, ad. 2.



those who have no or little religious background at all, the scenario might be more challenging. Be that as it may, if initial groundwork is made to focus on day-to-day human stories, whether personal or otherwise, this will have more appeal since identification and resonance with the meaning of those stories would be more than likely proximate. This also implicitly addresses the fact that Aquinas himself understands that knowledge of God is not immediately known. For those who have religious background, the contemplation of the truth in the Gospel story of the *Good Samaritan*<sup>78</sup> will be a truly developmental exercise for virtue-formation and would likewise be a wonderful source of moral knowledge in general. Through imaginative contemplation, immersing in the story and engaging with the Good Samaritan's thought process of seeing a near-dead person lying on the road while on his way to Jericho, human agents may engage with his character on a personal dimension and discover how he is prudentially weighing up the good and the evil, i.e., to help the injured person or to ignore him. Contemplation and mindfulness exercises are not meant to be a one-off thing; rather, it is supposed to be an ongoing element of moral development. Akin to the formation of moral virtues through the repetition of appropriate habits, the truth may come to the awareness of the human agent immediately or perhaps after some period of time.

Narvaez's Ethic of Engagement can provide the rationale as to why the Good Samaritan was disposed to help the injured man. His possession of a well-educated executive functions (e.g., emotion system and self-control) and a well-constructed companionship care experience<sup>79</sup> would have to be Narvaez's neurobiological explanation to his behaviour. Under these conditions, human agents demonstrate behaviours that match the *EDN* responsible for human flourishing for thousands of years prior to the last one percent of human genus history. Narvaez considers this type of social sphere as the optimal environment for virtue-formation and virtue-enhancement. Suboptimal conditions may also promote flourishing but not as stable and enduring as when the normative optimum is established during early years of children's life.

Furthermore, Narvaez subscribes to the neurobiological finding that the Ethic of Imagination "emerges from the Ethic of Engagement."<sup>80</sup> The Imagination Ethic is understood to manifest humanity's highest capacities such as an *ethic of love, sympathetic action, and egalitarian*

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<sup>78</sup> Lk 10:30-37.

<sup>79</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 167.

<sup>80</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 237.

*respect*.<sup>81</sup> Imagination fosters these behaviours since it “provides the fodder of possibility”<sup>82</sup> to various forms of social relations which the Ethic of Engagement lays the foundation. Under these social relationships, empathy and perspective-taking, among many others ethical roots of Engagement Ethic, provide a spectrum of basic behaviours which imagination is able to take to another level.<sup>83</sup> Relationships and being therefore benefit when imagination upshifts through various social triggers. The sight of an injured man on the road would have triggered an upshifting of behaviour and which then would have caused the Good Samaritan to exhibit compassion (empathy) and ‘to feel for the man’ (perspective-taking). Empathy, according to Narvaez, refers to the “attunement with another’s feelings and needs”<sup>84</sup> while perspective-taking is “the ability to imagine another’s viewpoint and understand what might be motivating their behaviour.”<sup>85</sup> Narvaez concludes that these ethical roots are developed during early life where “mutually responsive and intersubjective relationships”<sup>86</sup> are fostered between caregivers and young children. She accounts the neurobiological basis of a human agent’s imagination of another person’s mental state to quality companionship care during children’s early life.

The Ethic of Imagination has several elements in the mind of Narvaez and one of them strikes at the heart of this research: “Communal imagination employs abstraction capabilities to solve moral problems.”<sup>87</sup> Principally akin to the basic notion of abstraction in the Thomistic sense of extracting the universal essence from sensible species, abstraction by imagination purports the capacity similar to discernment, i.e., to discriminate between truth from error, good from evil, right from wrong. Imagination accomplishes this by surveying the contingent landscape of human historicity which eventually discloses those which are truthful against falsehood, moral against immoral, accurate against fallacious. Imagination permeates the human consciousness of a “sense of bondedness to the other as part of the self”<sup>88</sup> (*an ethic of love*), “compassion for others and concern for their well-being”<sup>89</sup> (*sympathic action*), and the “relational awareness and expectations for equal treatment and the capacities for intersubjectivity and perspective

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<sup>81</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 119.

<sup>82</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 118.

<sup>83</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 119.

<sup>84</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 98.

<sup>85</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 99-100.

<sup>86</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 100.

<sup>87</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 118.

<sup>88</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 119.

<sup>89</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 122.

taking”<sup>90</sup> (*egalitarian respect*). *Imaginative prudence* specifically underscores these behaviours as authentically expressive of those *primal goods* accruing from the natural law.

It is discernible in Narvaez’s neurobiology that when optimal social interactions and environment are present in the sensitive early life of children, a ‘secure attachment’ develops out of the parent-child relationship where trauma has not been experienced. In this social environment, children develop not only self-regulation and self-autonomy capacities (Ethic of Safety), but they also grow socially connected and intersubjectively present. Narvaez adds: “Under conditions of companionship care, the self is not divided but coherent as shown in the alignment of intuition and reasoning, implicit and explicit knowledge, procedural and deliberative skills.”<sup>91</sup> Trauma is most likely experienced when companionship care is absent. A traumatic childhood upbringing has lasting consequences where downshifts in behaviours can occur as immediate responses to social stimuli. Hence, ethical and social downshifting can occur nullifying behavioural homeostasis.

Communal imagination is the assumed ethical mindset when optimal social conditions are in-play during the early years of childhood. A traumatic upbringing (as well as an underdeveloped emotional system) will likely impede the natural emergence of communal imagination. The downshifts in behavioural responses to social stimuli could either be *vicious imagination* and/or *detached imagination*. Both responses could also be brought upon by cultural reasons and not just neurobiological.<sup>92</sup> As will be shown below, either response indicates a shifting away from prosocial affordances, hence, a departure from the *primal wisdom* and the *primal goods* that Narvaez and Aquinas construe as integral to moral development respectively.

*Vicious imagination* sees the downshift of both the Ethic of Safety and Ethic of Engagement to behaviours that are characterised by strong withdrawal from communal engagement and consequently the elevation of the superiority of the ego. Narvaez describes *vicious imagination* as “those moments of intentional separation from others – a planful divorce from engagement based on deep-seated anger or fear.”<sup>93</sup> The resulting superiority or ego inflation is also referred to by Narvaez as pride. It is interesting that Catholic traditional teaching identifies pride as the reason for the fall of humanity due to humanity’s first parents’ desire to be more superior to

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<sup>90</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 122.

<sup>91</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 167.

<sup>92</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 170.

<sup>93</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 170.

God.<sup>94</sup> Viewed as “combative morality”<sup>95</sup> by Narvaez, *vicious imagination* is accompanied by anger (and fear) due to a sense of injustice and resentment. On this basis, the human agent rejects these forms of maltreatment and decides to take the superior stance. Alongside, the element of manipulative control of people and the distrust of them are embedded in the notion of superiority. Germany’s Adolf Hitler’s antisemitism is considered as a scapegoat excuse for the German defeat in the First World War which irresponsibly created the myth that Jews were responsible for their demise.<sup>96</sup> Hitler’s Nazi ideology which claimed the superiority of the Aryan race is believed to have been born out of this myth.<sup>97</sup> Likewise, Australian Pauline Hanson’s fear of Australia “in danger of being swamped by Asians”<sup>98</sup> is believed to be based on her personal perception of being a victim of anti-white racism. Her espousal of a certain form of ‘reverse racism’ calls for an ideology of ‘us-versus-them’ that views Asians as existential threats to Australian security and lifestyle.<sup>99</sup> In consideration of these ideologies, Hitler’s superiority claim and Hanson’s perception of threat are behavioural manifestations typical of *vicious imagination*. Discernment’s discrimination against what is false, evil, and wrong trumps what is true, good and right in *vicious imagination*. If it were to influence the *primal goods*, it will reject the natural law as a whole since the stance of ‘me versus them’ that *vicious imagination* espouses does not express the other-centred dimension of human nature. Aquinas, himself, will reject this on the basis of his understanding that the human person is naturally a social being.

Another type of behavioural withdrawal is what Narvaez labels as an *emotionally-detached imagination* (iced morality). This type of withdrawal is understood to be a disassociation from social emotion. It can likely be expected that when companionship care in the early years of a child’s life is deprived, human development in the realm of the affect will be severely undernourished and underdeveloped. Such is the underlying principle in this type of imagination where the “intellect alone is used to make moral decisions.”<sup>100</sup> *Emotionally-*

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<sup>94</sup> CCC, no. 57.

<sup>95</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 162-163.

<sup>96</sup> “Hitler’s antisemitism. Why did he hate the Jews?,” n.d., accessed 25 January 2021, <https://www.annefrank.org/en/anne-frank/go-in-depth/why-did-hitler-hate-jews/>.

<sup>97</sup> “Nazi Racism,” n.d., accessed 25 January 2021, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/nazi-racism>.

<sup>98</sup> “Pauline Hanson’s 1996 maiden speech to parliament: Full transcript,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2016, accessed 25 January 2021, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/pauline-hansons-1996-maiden-speech-to-parliament-full-transcript-20160915-grgjv3.html>.

<sup>99</sup> Kurt Sengul, “Pauline Hanson built a political career on white victimhood and brought far-right rhetoric to the mainstream,” *The Conversation* (22 June 2020). <https://theconversation.com/pauline-hanson-built-a-political-career-on-white-victimhood-and-brought-far-right-rhetoric-to-the-mainstream-134661>.

<sup>100</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 179.

*detached imagination* may appear to be contentious due to the consideration of the affect in decision-making. Emotions (passions) are generally discredited due to their perceived instability and insecurity. However, should this same argument be applied to reason, it begs the question as to why the intellect can be trusted over imagination when it certainly can be likewise a source of error and falsehood? In her strongest assertion, Narvaez claims that “[d]etached imagination might be the greatest source of evil today as we have undermined emotion development in early life, denigrated emotion generally and promoted detached imagination in nearly every realm of life.”<sup>101</sup> Aquinas’s omission of imagination referred to earlier reveals how moral knowledge can be deprived of the input of imagination as a vehicle of human emotions which conveys human passions that are naturally attached to certain knowledge. Socially, when there is an exclusive emphasis on reason, there can be an expectation of a lack of deep relationships. Relationships are vital in community life without which moral disengagement arises. Aquinas’s natural law is very clear about relationship since it is on this basis that the natural law presents human agents as relating *to all substances, to all created animals, and to all rational beings*. Someone who displays an ‘iced morality’ may find it uneasy to go through some form of contemplation or mindfulness exercises since these forms of mental exercises may involve the affect. Certainly, the contemplation on the truth cannot be fully achieved without the element of passion in the process of having a loving relationship with God. That said, Narvaez has already stated earlier that humans have the capacity to change even if they have been subjected to a traumatic upbringing. Claims in neurobiology underlines the scientific outcome that “[d]evelopmental plasticity emphasises the general malleability of an individual’s brain and body...[exhibiting] the capacity...to reorganise its structure or function, generally in response to a specific event or perturbation.”<sup>102</sup> On this basis, self-authorship and self-organisation are possible in remaking human agents in many ways.<sup>103</sup>

In circling back to the ethical significance that was intimated earlier concerning the motions of the spirit, the notion of sin in Catholic morality comes to the fore. This term is, however, considered a nondescript in psychology due to the fact that it does not posit a deity against whom a sin is committed. Aquinas attests to this: “The theologian considers sin chiefly as an offense against God; and the moral philosophy, as something contrary reason.”<sup>104</sup> Psychology will certainly not consider downshifts in human behaviours as expressive of sin or evil and the

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<sup>101</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 179.

<sup>102</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 28-29.

<sup>103</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 37.

<sup>104</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 71, a. 5, ad. 6.

upshifts in human behaviours as determinants of virtues or even holiness. In Narvaez's mind, these are merely indicators of either the presence or absence of, among others, trauma that promotes or vitiates human flourishing. In Catholic morality, however, these may be evaluated on the basis of the natural law whose origin is God's eternal law. Of interest in this research is the earlier alluded state of incontinence (weakness of will). In view of this, Narvaez asserts:

Human brains seem easily to morally *downshift* when threat is perceived, making the safety, detached, and vicious mindsets easy pathways for moral decisions and action. This is especially so for those whose early experience did not fully foster the engagement and communal ethics – they are incontinent (not interested and not able), using Aristotle's term, in terms of prosocial morality. The “want self” must be reeducated after a childhood of misdevelopment, and it takes time.<sup>105</sup>

Further, Narvaez suggested that moral agents can learn to upshift their morality, both personally and culturally. She adds: “We can learn to be continent (interested but struggling to behave), controlling our self-protective instincts when they occur. With practice, we can go beyond continence toward virtue (desire with capacity to act).<sup>106</sup> Narvaez's observation of the incontinent person appears to be consistent with Aquinas's since this behaviour which affects the will is fleeting unlike the intemperate person's behaviour which is entrenched. The intemperate person's behaviour would probably fall under extreme trauma in Narvaez's books where this behaviour would have been “fostered in a corrosive or eroded social system that emphasises detachment and intellect, manipulation and control, and lead to lowest-common-denominator morality.”<sup>107</sup> This observation somehow echoes Pasnau's comment on the intemperate person: “The intemperate person seems to have somehow lost the disposition of *synderesis*, or at least to have driven it into hiding.”<sup>108</sup> All things considered, what truly is indicative of the seriousness of this behaviour, or vice for that matter, is that the person knows that it is wrong or evil and yet still decided to do it. Generally speaking, this is certainly the kind of behaviour that will make the acquisition of human ends problematic and, at a larger scale, raises questions regarding what sort of values are being imparted by today's generation to the next.

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<sup>105</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 301.

<sup>106</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 301.

<sup>107</sup> Narvaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality*, 194.

<sup>108</sup> Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 244.

It is apparently clear from the discussion above that moral exemplars or virtue-enablers have an essential role in shaping the future of the present generation. In his publication, *The Spirituality of the Church of the Future*, Rahner beautifully states that “the Christian of the future will be a mystic or he will not exist at all.”<sup>109</sup> By a mystic, he refers to human agents who dare go through an authentic experience of God by discerning the motions of the Spirits in their lives. The fruit of *synderesis* is the opportunity to journey through the discovery of the moral good that defines the ontology and teleology of human existence.

Towards the end, imagining the natural law today is the indispensable responsibility of modern-day mystics, most prominently but not exclusively, contemporary moral exemplars or virtue-enablers who possess the task of forming the current generation in their future role and responsibility of looking after the community. It needs to be stressed, however, that this is fundamentally a communal responsibility in view of advancing the capacities and potentials of universal humanity. The important thing in the mystic’s life is the continual nourishing of imagination: “For the education of the imagination and feelings, in which values are apprehended, is as critically important for authentic human living.”<sup>110</sup>

## Summary and Conclusion

To understand the ontology of Aquinas’s *synderesis* and how the first principles of natural law it intuitively and apprehends can foment in the life of human agents have been the noble task of this research project. Though every human agent has immediate awareness of the first principles of natural law upon contact with the social environment, its initial epistemic form remains obscure and faint. The practical good that *synderesis* apprehends is essentially inchoative, which means human agents would require time and experience, a lifespan for that matter, for the notion of the good to mature in them. The notion of the practical good has many forms and complexities; a lifetime would not be sufficient to exhaust its meaning owing to temporal contingencies which affect the moral appropriation of what is ethically good. Moral

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<sup>109</sup> Karl Rahner, SJ, “The Spirituality of the Church of the Future” in *Theological Investigations: Concern for the Church*, (NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981), 149.

<sup>110</sup> Walter E. Conn, *Conscience: Development and Self-transcendence* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1981), 212.

education is therefore indispensable for the good to flourish and effectuate the acquisition of human ends within the limits of human conditions and capacities.

Moral formation encompasses moral education which commences the moment a young child's reasoning capabilities are actuated. Due to the nature of *synderesis*, moral education is necessary in intuiting and apprehending the first principles of natural law. In the *act of synderesis*, phantasms that bear raw moral epistemic materials are crucial if moral agents, particularly young children, are to be assisted metaphysically and subconsciously in the discovery of the universal and particular good. It is in this respect that moral imagination is vital in leading the human mind, albeit non-cognitively or pre-cognitively, to begin inclining towards the moral good. Virtue habituation enables natural inclination to foment in and through the dynamism of human experiences.

The habituation of moral virtues is envisaged by moral education. Based on Aquinas's teachings, virtues are responsible for both forming human agents as virtuous people and for informing their actions as perfective of their being. Moral virtues, although considered as merely preparative in view of the infused virtues, are not devoid of any practical significance for moral development. As hylomorphic individuals, human agents are constituted to live as historical beings in a socially dynamic contingent world. Their historical existence means that acquiring natural ends cannot be ignored as human ends. Though natural ends are imperfect by nature, they lay the foundation for the grace of God to work through human nature in realising the supernatural ends. Human agents by their own means are not capable of obtaining the supernatural ends.

Among the acquired moral virtues, prudence stands apart owing to its dual nature of being both a moral and intellectual virtue. Moreover, it has the specific capacity when lived to guide human agents to make decisions in accord with their human nature. It does so by allowing the hermeneutical dialoguing in moral inquiries between the first principles of natural law and the contingent historicity of human conditions. Through this dialogue, human agents penetrate the *infinite horizon of intelligibility* where the *intellectus agens* illumines human awareness of the primary moral principles which *synderesis* intuit and apprehends. This process of illumination contextually takes into consideration whatever moral quandaries or dilemmas human agents need resolving. It is in this respect that this thesis has argued for the consideration of imagination in prudential inquiry. Aquinas's treatment of imagination does not seem to



demonstrate the true potential of prudence in moral deliberations. One of imagination's marvellous capacities is to be able to mentally re-create situations which facilitate the presentation of possibilities for human actions prior to judgment. This capacity enables the past to have a part in mapping out future moral judgements that could be pivotal for acquiring natural ends.

The value of imagination in the moral development of the first principles of natural law in human agents is essential and salvific, understood in both secular and theological terms. Narvaez affirms through her observations based on numerous scientific fields such as evolutionary psychology and human anthropology that imagination is the height of mammalian evolutionary development. Studying her *Triune Ethics Theory* against Aquinas's doctrine on the natural law, a parallel understanding can be adduced. Narvaez propounds that evolution has produced three global ethical mindsets which are behaviourally expressed via social triggers. The Ethic of Safety, the most primitive of the mindsets, is exhibited when human life or security is threatened. This generally aligns with Aquinas's first natural inclination where, in common with all substances, human agents seek the preservation of life. The unrehearsed alignment confirms that through neurobiology, the inclination to life's preservation is indeed a natural disposition in human beings.

The second global ethical mindset is the Ethic of Engagement where, as the name implies, manifests the disposition of human agents to form human relationships. In Aquinas's thinking, the second natural inclination, which is in common with all animals, addresses the natural disposition of human agents towards sex and the education of offspring. On several points, the second natural inclination expresses Narvaez's Ethic of Engagement which demonstrates the human agents' propensity for intersubjective relationship, including sexual relationship and friendship. The ancestral lifestyle of what Narvaez labels as the *small-band hunter-gatherers* exhibits the aspect of communal living as necessarily integrative within their personal lives.

And lastly, the third global mindset, the Ethic of Imagination points to the highly developed human capacity to synthesise and integrate acquired data and information by forming images in the human mind. One of the several functions of imagination is the capacity to discriminate data helpful in sorting out what is beneficial or not to human flourishing. In common with all rational beings, Aquinas assigns the third natural inclination for the human capacity to know the truth about God. While there is no concept of God in the *Triune Ethics Theory*, the capacity

for imagination reveals the power of the human mind for moral deliberation and for moral development.

Not only do Narvaez's scientific observations posit the plausibility of a theoretical co-operation between theology and science, but it likewise verifies the credibility of Aquinas's assertion when it comes to the natural law. As a law that expressively governs human nature, it does emphatically articulate an order of nature that is underscored by an order of reason which guides moral order in society. The ethical contents of natural law are maintained and pursued for practical observance and realisation since the order that it sustains is for the common good.

Through the affirmed complementarity between Aquinas's theological teachings and Narvaez's scientific observations, imagination's role for moral development must always be utilised in moral deliberations, most particularly by moral exemplars or virtue-enablers who hold the essential responsibility of forming society's future generations through quality caregiving and companionship care. Specifically, *imaginative prudence* is the key habit in moral deliberations that could determine the realisation of human *telos*.

Rahner proffers that it will be mystics who will be compositive of future generations. These mystics will be those who dare to explore and experience the great mystery behind the *primal goods* and the origin of human essence. Our global society indubitably needs them to be as bold and confident as St. Paul who said: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."<sup>111</sup> Mysticism is the moral pathway that should lead human agents to contemplate on the Truth who is God: the origin, cause and goal of *synderesis*. From the anthropological perspective, mysticism will ensure the inseparability and continuance of the divine-human relationship. And beyond mysticism, *synderesis* will sustain the relational order that bespeaks the divine-human relationship. After all, *synderesis* is inextinguishable. To do and pursue the good is undeniably natural. By doing so, moral agents come to the knowledge of the biblical truth that "we are from God"<sup>112</sup> and "we are what God has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which he prepared beforehand to be our way of life."<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> 1 Cor 11:1.

<sup>112</sup> 1 Jn 5:19.

<sup>113</sup> Eph 2:10.

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