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**Thomas Aquinas, Interpreter of
Aristotle: the Fundamental Continuity
between Aristotle and Aquinas
regarding the theory of *habitus* and
virtues.**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Anyone who studies Thomas Aquinas realizes that he owes a great debt to Aristotle for his philosophical and even theological doctrines. Aquinas, for example, borrows many of his most important metaphysical concepts from the Stagirite, without being afraid to take the best concepts from other sources, or make his own speculations.¹ It should come as no surprise then, that the same holds true for Aquinas' treatises on ethics: Aquinas borrowed a lot of the ontological framework from Aristotle and incorporated it into his moral theology, while taking into account the realities of grace and Revelation. In this context, it is tempting to investigate more closely the relationship of Aquinas to the Greek philosopher. All agree that Aquinas borrowed many of ideas from Aristotle. In general, does Aquinas maintain continuity with Aristotle, or does he tend to break with him? When Aquinas incorporates realities that Aristotle could not have known about (especially in theology), does the addition make an organic whole, or is he more eclectic?

It would be well beyond the scope of this paper to make a general critique of the degree to which Aquinas is a faithful interpreter of Aristotle. Instead, I will examine three areas of Aquinas' theory on virtues to see to what degree he is an "Aristotelian," and to what degree he incorporates new elements or refinements: his theory on *habitus* and their ontological status; the theory regarding virtues, in the light of the doctrine of *habitus*; and finally his treatment of the virtue of prudence. In each case, I will examine Aquinas' doctrine first and compare it with the corresponding passages in Aristotle's works (mostly the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but also other works that Aquinas used to make his system). I will show that there is a profound continuity between Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle in the doctrine on virtues, and that although Aquinas incorporates a lot of new material, the addition is in general organic and not eclectic. Since this is a philosophical, not a theo-

¹ For examples of how Aquinas incorporated and perfected Aristotle's metaphysical system, see A. CONTAT, "Le figure della differenza ontologica nel tomismo del Novecento (prima parte)", in *Alpha Omega* 11 (2008), 249–250.

logical, reflection, I will use as my basis the *Prima Secundae* of the *Summa Theologiae*, questions 49 to 58, the portion that does not deal directly with the infused virtues.

2. *HABITUS* AND THEIR ONTOLOGICAL STRUCTURE

The core of Thomas Aquinas' doctrine on the virtues is the theory of *habitus*, which depends heavily on the Aristotelian categories and notions of act and potency. This section is the longest, because I am interested in seeing whether there is agreement between Aquinas and Aristotle regarding the ontological structure of the *habitus*, which form the framework of the entire theory. Conformity to Aristotle on this most fundamental level is, it seems to me, the basic criterion for calling a theory "Aristotelian."

2.1 Thomas Aquinas regarding *Habitus*

Aquinas considers quality to be *quemdam modum substantiae*, specifying that *modum* means *quem mensura praefigit*.² Following Aristotle, he divides qualities into four species: first, *habitus* (ἕξεις) and *dispositiones* (διαθέσεις); second, what could be termed passive qualities (for Aristotle, δυνάμεις or ἀδυναμίαι) or active potencies;³ third, passible qualities (παθητικὰ ποιότητες, literally "qualities capable of feeling"), those that are not, as such, a principle of action, such as color, sweetness, coldness and warmth inasmuch as they are capable of being felt, and so on; and fourth, form and figure, which follow from quantity.⁴ Aquinas does not, however, accept Simplicius' division of qualities into "natural" (which for Simplicius seems to have meant "indelible") and "adventitious" (acquired,

² See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae: prima secundae, a quaestione I ad quaestionem LXX*, Rome, 1891, I-II, q. 49, a. 2, ad 1um.

³ Aristotle in his treatment in the *Categories* seems to regard the potencies as "abilities" such as being good at boxing. (See ARISTOTLE, *Categories*, trans. by H.P. COOKE, Cambridge, 1938, 9a14-17.) Aquinas, however, seems to say that faculties such as the intellect and the will would also be included. For example, see THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II, q. 56, a. 1, arg. 3um: *potentia est in secunda specie qualitatis*; in the context, the *potentia* in question is the *subiectum* of a virtue, which would presumably include the intellect and the will. See also M.F. ECHAVARRÍA, "Virtud y ser según Tomás de Aquino", in *Espíritu* 58 (2009), 11.

⁴ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II, q. 49, a. 2, co. For the fourfold division of quality in Aristotle, see ARISTOTLE, *Categories*, 8b25-10a14.

and hence changeable). Simplicius, says Aquinas, assigns the “adventitious” qualities to the first species, and distributes the rest among the other three species. In fact, there are *dispositiones*—hence members of the first species—that are natural (such as health and beauty) and members the other species that are adventitious (such as some passible qualities).⁵

What distinguishes the first species from the others, says Aquinas, is that it modifies a *subiectum* with respect to its very nature, not just a certain aspect; that is, qualities of this type render that *subiectum* good or bad *simpliciter*.⁶ In support of this, Aquinas cites Book H of the *Physics*, which says, ὅταν γὰρ λάβῃ τὴν αὐτοῦ ἀρετὴν, τότε λέγεται τέλειον ἕκαστον — τότε γὰρ ἔστι μάλιστα [τὸ] κατὰ φύσιν;⁷ a virtue, says Aristotle, makes whatever it modifies “fully in accord with nature” (μάλιστα [τὸ] κατὰ φύσιν).⁸ Citing Book B, Aquinas notes that a thing’s nature indicates its end or goal (*finis*, τέλος).⁹ Since a thing is good inasmuch as it reaches its end—here Aquinas cites Aristotle’s dictionary of philosophical terms in Book Δ of the *Metaphysics*—it follows that an *habitus* makes its *subiectum* good or bad without qualification: ἔξις λέγεται διάθεσις καθ’ ἣν ἡ

⁵ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II, q. 49, a. 2, co.

⁶ Aquinas’ exact words are that such a quality *habet rationem boni* or *mali*. In this way, he practically reverses Simplicius’ solution. See *ibid.*, I-II, q. 49, a. 2, co. See also A.M. GONZÁLEZ, “Las fuentes de la moralidad a la luz de la ética aristotélica de la virtud”, in *Sapientia* 56 (2001), 362.

⁷ ARISTOTLE, *Physics*, trans. by P.H. WICKSTEED and F.M. CORNFORD, vol. 5, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1934, H, 3, 246a13–16: “For whenever [something] acquires its own virtue [or excellence], then it is considered fulfilled—for then it is fully in accord with nature” (my translation). Aristotle in this context is discussing ἔξεις, and so I have translated ἀρετή as “virtue.” The Latin translation that Aquinas uses in q. 49, a. 2, co., however, is defective, but the mistranslation does not alter his point.

⁸ Aquinas takes it for granted that what Aristotle attributes here to *virtue* (ἀρετή) is applicable, *servatis servandis*, to any member of the first species of quality. Evidently, only good *habitus* and *dispositiones* render something good; and presumably only *habitus* can render something *fully* good or bad.

⁹ See ARISTOTLE, *Physics*, trans. by P.H. WICKSTEED and F.M. CORNFORD, Cambridge, 1934, B, 7, 198b3–4. The relevant text says, τὸ τί ἐστὶν καὶ ἡ μορφή: τέλος γὰρ καὶ οὗ ἕνεκα: “the essence (τὸ τί) is also the form; the end, however, is also ‘that for the sake of which’ ” (my translation). Immediately after, it says, ἡ φύσις ἕνεκά του: “Nature is ‘for the sake of this’ [i.e., for the sake of a certain end]” (my translation).

εὖ ἢ κακῶς διάκειται τὸ διακείμενον.¹⁰ *Dispositiones* are similar, except that they are not *difficile mobile*.¹¹

An *habitus*, says Aquinas, is for the sake of act (*habitus importet ordinem ad actum*).¹² The very notion of *habitus* implies this, because it entails either conformity or nonconformity with the nature that is its *subiectum*, and nature is the principle of operation.¹³ Some *habitus*, in addition, are specifically directed to operation thanks to the *subiectum* they modify, in particular when that *subiectum* is a faculty.¹⁴ The function of an *habitus* is to direct—or to use more Aristotelian language, to dispose (διατιθέναι)—its *subiectum* to certain actuations and not others; there is no room, says Aquinas, for *habitus* if the *subiectum* can only become actualized in one way.¹⁵ An *habitus* may dispose its *subiectum* to various types of actuality: namely, either to a form or nature (as in the case of health or beauty, which dispose the body to its substantial form, although, because of their impermanence, these do not qualify fully as *habitus*) or else to *operationes* (the actions produced by a faculty).¹⁶

¹⁰ ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, trans. by H. TREDENNICK, Cambridge, 1933, Δ, 20, 1022b10-11: “An *habitus* means a disposition by which what is disposed, is disposed well or badly” (my translation). Note that it is the *subiectum* of that *habitus*—which could be the substance itself or a potency—that is rendered good or evil *simpliciter*, not necessarily the substance. Thus, a man may be healthy or have a lot of knowledge: that state brings about the good *simpliciter* of the body or the intellect, but not necessarily the good of the man as such. Only the moral virtues (and, in a theological context, sanctifying grace and all the infused virtues, both theological and cardinal) can make a man good, inasmuch as he is a man.

¹¹ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II, q. 49, a. 2, ad 3um.

¹² *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 49, a. 3, co.

¹³ See *ibid.* This idea is given at least implicitly by Aristotle in *Metaphysics* Δ: he considers φύσις to be primarily and properly ἡ οὐσία ἢ τῶν ἐχόντων ἀρχὴν κινήσεως, “the essence of those things having a principle of movement” (ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, Δ, 1015a14-15), after showing that the meaning of φύσις can extend to any kind of οὐσία, even non-material (1015a13-14).

¹⁴ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II, q. 49, a. 3, co.

¹⁵ See *ibid.*, I-II, q. 49, a. 4, ad 3um. Such *subiecti* would normally be active potencies; what can confuse matters, however, is that there is a sense in which these potencies can be “virtues” in a broader sense, since they already bring about the perfection of the nature they modify. See ECHAVARRÍA, “Virtud y ser ...”, 12.

¹⁶ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II, q. 50, a. 1, co. The *habitus* in question are often called *entitativi* and *operativi*. Thomas Aquinas himself uses the latter term, for example, in I-II, q. 57, 1, but not *habitus entitativus*. It seems that only true *habitus* that disposes its *subiectum* to a form or nature is sanctifying grace. (See I-II, q. 50, a. 2, co.)

It follows that there are various possible *subiecti* for *habitus*: the body (in a loose sense, because it can, in fact, only support *dispositiones*),¹⁷ the essence (as with grace),¹⁸ and the various faculties.¹⁹ Strictly speaking, the *subiectum* of any accident—what it inheres to—is the substance. However, because there is order among the accidents, one accident can be considered the *subiectum* of another, just as the *subiectum* of color is said to be the surface; it is in this way that an *habitus* can be said to modify a particular faculty.²⁰ Operative *habitus*—those whose *subiecti* are faculties and are directed to action—are only possible in faculties that are themselves spiritual (such as the intellect and the will), or else operate *ex imperato rationis*; for example the concupiscible and irascible appetites. Purely “vegetative” faculties are capable of producing only a single, determined activity, and so are unable to be the *subiectum* of an *habitus*.²¹

As regards their origin, *habitus* can be “natural,” both in the sense that they constitute *propria* of a given species (that they are found necessarily in all members of the species, as with the *intellectus* of the first speculative principles), and in the sense that a given individual did not acquire them (as with good health, when it is not caused by medicines). In human beings, however, no *habitus* can be entirely caused by nature—whether taken as species or as individual—but must come to be partly through an external cause.²² Certain *habitus* can be brought about by actions, when a faculty that is *in actu* acts upon by one that is *in potentia*; for example, when the cognitive faculties act on the appetitive powers by presenting them with objects.²³ In the case of the appetitive faculties—which by

¹⁷ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II, q. 50, a. 1, co.

¹⁸ See *ibid.*, I-II, q. 50, a. 2, co.

¹⁹ See *ibid.*, I-II, q. 50, a. 3, co.

²⁰ See *ibid.*, I-II, q. 50, a. 3, ad 2um.

²¹ See *ibid.*, I-II, q. 50, a. 3, co.

²² See *ibid.*, I-II, q. 51, a. 1, co. Even the *intellectus*, the *habitus* of the first speculative principles, is put into act by the first *ens* that “falls” into the intellect. (See, among many examples, *ibid.*, I, q. 55, a. 4, ad 1um, and also the passage from Aquinas’ commentary on Boethius’ *De Trinitate*, in which he says *primo sint intelligenda ens et non ens*: THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super librum Boethii De Trinitate: Super Boetium De Trinitate. Expositio libri Boetii De ebdomadibus*, Rome, 1992, q. 4, a. 1, co. 2.) The intellect (considered as a faculty) is in potency with respect to the things to be known, *sicut tabula rasa* (THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae: pars prima, a quaestione L ad quaestionem CXIX*, Rome, 1889, I q. 79 a. 2 co.).

²³ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II, q. 51, a. 2, co.

nature have many possible ways to be actualized—a single action is insufficient to bring about an *habitus*; repeated acts are necessary.²⁴ God, of course, can infuse *habitus* into men, and indeed only God can infuse them if attaining their end surpasses the power of human nature.²⁵ *Habitus* can grow and diminish—not, certainly, in the physical sense that quantity and certain quantifiable qualities do—but by increase or decrease of the intensity with which they are possessed.²⁶ Actions that are consistent with and more intense than an *habitus* cause its increase, or at least dispose it to that increase; if they are less intense, they dispose the it to decay.²⁷ If the actions are contrary, they bring about its decrease,²⁸ or if they are sufficiently strong, its outright destruction.²⁹

2.2 Comparison with Aristotle

Aristotle defines qualities as καθ' ἣν ποιοί τινες εἶναι λέγονται;³⁰ in other words, a quality is a determination of substance,³¹ which is in line with Aquinas' definition as *modum substantiae*. Aristotle defines ἕξεις and διαθέσεις in Book Δ of the *Metaphysics* as follows:

διάθεσις λέγεται τοῦ ἔχοντος μέρη τάξις ἢ κατὰ τόπον ἢ κατὰ δύναμιν ἢ κατ' εἶδος: θέσιν γὰρ δεῖ τινὰ εἶναι, ὥσπερ καὶ τοῦνομα δηλοῖ ἢ διάθεσις.
ἕξις δὲ λέγεται ἓνα μὲν τρόπον οἷον ἐνέργειά τις τοῦ ἔχοντος καὶ ἐχομένου, ὥσπερ πρᾶξις τις ἢ κίνησις ὅταν γὰρ τὸ μὲν ποιῆ τὸ δὲ ποιῆται, ἔστι ποίησις μεταξὺ: οὕτω καὶ τοῦ ἔχοντος ἐσθῆτα καὶ τῆς ἐχομένης ἐσθῆτος ἔστι μεταξὺ ἕξις.

²⁴ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II, q. 51, a. 3, co.

²⁵ See *ibid.*, I-II, q. 51, a. 4, co.

²⁶ See *ibid.*, I-II, qq. 52-53, which go into this problem in detail. When speaking of virtues in particular, due consideration must be given to the doctrine of the mean, which is dealt with in q. 66: in short, when a virtue is considered as an *habitus*, an increase in its intensity is always beneficial, whereas in its *exercise*, the mean is to be sought and the extremes avoided.

²⁷ See *ibid.*, I-II, q. 52, a. 3, co.

²⁸ See *ibid.*, I-II, q. 53, a. 2, co.

²⁹ As in the case of mortal sin and charity. See *ibid.* The destruction is possible, however, only if the *habitus* has an opposite. Thus, both *scientiae* and moral virtues can be destroyed, but the *habitus* of first principles (*intellectus*) cannot.

³⁰ ARISTOTLE, *Categories*, 8b25-26: “Those things according to which some [men] are said to be ‘thus’” (my translation).

³¹ See also the beginning of Book Z: ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, 1028a19-20. In the context of the *Categories*, Aristotle is discussing qualities that are best applied to men, but in the *Metaphysics* the discussion plainly applies to any substance.

[...]

ἄλλον δὲ τρόπον ἕξις λέγεται διάθεσις καθ' ἣν ἢ εὖ ἢ κακῶς διάκειται τὸ δια-
κείμενον, καὶ ἢ καθ' αὐτὸ ἢ πρὸς ἄλλο, οἷον ἢ ὑγίεια ἕξις τις: διάθεσις γὰρ ἐστὶ
τοιαύτη. ἔτι ἕξις λέγεται ἂν ἢ μὴ μόνον διαθέσεως τοιαύτης: διὸ καὶ ἡ τῶν μερῶν
ἀρετὴ ἕξις τίς ἐστίν.³²

Some clarifications are in order: first of all, for Aristotle, *διάθεσις* or *dispositio* has a broad meaning which entails the ordering, or arrangement (*τάξις*), of the parts in a whole. Thus, *διάθεσις* could—if one understands the parts as spatial—be included in the category of *situs* or *κεῖσθαι* (literally “to lie,” the “orientation” of a physical thing).³³ If, however, one understands the parts in a way that does not necessarily refer to physical divisions, then *διάθεσις* could be a quality, as Aristotle clearly implies when he says that a *ἕξις* is a type of *διάθεσις* by which a *subiectum* is disposed to good or evil (in line with his fourfold division of quality in the *Categories*).³⁴ In a similar way, the term *ἕξις* or *habitus* is ambiguous, because (in both Greek and Latin) it literally means a “having” or “possession,” or as Aristotle says, *ἐνέργειά τις τοῦ ἔχοντος καὶ ἐχομένου* (“an act of the haver and the had”). In the *Categories*, Aristotle places this type of *ἕξις* in the eighth category.³⁵ Aristotle, however, is explicit in saying that *ἕξεις* and *διαθέσεις* can also be understood as qualities: like Aquinas, he places them in the first species, and he distinguishes between

³² ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, Δ, 20, 1022b2-14: “‘Disposition’ means an arrangement of something that has parts, [whether those parts are arranged] according to place, or potency, or idea [i.e., form or species]: for there must be a certain ‘placement’ [‘position,’ *θέσις*] as the word ‘disposition’ [*διάθεσις*] makes apparent. *Habitus* means, in one sense, as it were, a type of act [*ἐνέργεια*] of the haver and the thing that is had, as with certain kinds of action or movement, for whenever something makes and something is made, between them there is ‘making.’ Likewise, between having clothing and the clothing had there is *habitus*. [...] In another sense, *habitus* means a disposition by which what is disposed, is disposed well or badly, whether *per se* or in relation to something else; for example, health is an *habitus*, for disposition is like this. Moreover, *habitus* means a portion of a disposition of this kind; therefore, the virtue of parts is a certain kind of *habitus*” (my translation).

³³ See ARISTOTLE, *Categories*, 1b25-2a4, where Aristotle gives one of his two complete lists of the ten categories; the other is ARISTOTLE, *Topics*, trans. by E.S. FORSTER, Cambridge, 1938, I, 9, 103b24.

³⁴ Aquinas addresses this issue in I-II, q. 49, a. 2, ad 3um. It is curious that he does not make use of his more developed notion of parts—integral, subjective, and potential—as found in II-II, q. 48. (See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae: secunda secundae, a quaestione I ad quaestionem LVI*, Rome, 1895, II-II, q. 48, a. 1, co.)

³⁵ See ARISTOTLE, *Categories*, 1b25-2a4. Here and in the *Topics* Aristotle uses the term τὸ ἔχειν (to have) rather than ἕξις, but the concept is clearly the same: as examples of τὸ ἔχειν, he uses the wearing of shoes (*ὑποδέδεται*) or being armed (*ὄπλισται*).

them according to their stability. Διαθέσεις are ταχὺ μεταβάλλοντα (easily changed), whereas ἕξεις are οὐδ' εὐμετάβολον (not changeable, difficult to change):³⁶ διαφέρει δὲ ἕξις διαθέσεως τῷ πολὺ χρονιώτερον εἶναι καὶ μονιμώτερον.³⁷ Every ἕξις, he says, is a διαθέσεις, but not every διάθεσις is a ἕξις.³⁸

That Aristotle considers ἕξις to be directed to act can be deduced from the connections that he makes between ἕξις and nature, and between ἕξις and end.³⁹ A virtue (ἀρετή), as we saw above, renders its *subiectum* fully in accord with its nature, and in general a ἕξις disposes its possessor well or badly, ἢ καθ' αὐτὸ ἢ πρὸς ἄλλο.⁴⁰ If it does so καθ' αὐτὸ, then the ἕξις is primarily concerned with the nature of the *subiectum*, as in the case of health (ὑγίεια), which is the example that Aristotle himself offers.⁴¹ It is more difficult to interpret the meaning of πρὸς ἄλλο, but since all of the other ἕξεις that Aristotle discusses (whether they involve the intellect or the appetites) have to do with disposing faculties to the action proper to them, Aquinas' interpretation of this expression as *in ordine ad finem* seems reasonable.⁴² The doctrine of the mean supports the idea that ἕξεις dispose a faculty to certain acts and not others: ἔτι τὸ μὲν ἀμαρτάνειν πολλαχῶς ἔστιν [...] τὸ δὲ κατορθοῦν μοναχῶς⁴³ A purely “natural” tendency—one that entirely determined by nature—is not subject to ἕξεις: οὐθὲν γὰρ τῶν φύσει ὄντων ἄλλως ἐθίζεται.⁴⁴ In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle makes a threefold “partition” of the soul: there is a part, he says, that is rational, and another that is non-rational (τὸ μὲν ἄλογον αὐτῆς [ψυχῆς])

³⁶ See ARISTOTLE, *Categories*, 8b35-37.

³⁷ *ibid.*, 8b27-28: “For ἕξις differs from διάθεσις in being more enduring and stable” (my translation).

³⁸ See *ibid.*, 9a10-12. See GONZÁLEZ, “Las fuentes ...”, 360.

³⁹ See *ibid.*, 364.

⁴⁰ ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, Δ, 20, 1022b12: “either *per se* or in relation to something else” (my translation).

⁴¹ See *ibid.*, Δ, 20, 1022b13.

⁴² THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II, q. 49, a. 4, co.

⁴³ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by H. RACKHAM, vol. 19, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1926, B, 6, 1106b30: “Yet there are many ways to err, [...] but only one way to be upright” (my translation).

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, B, 6, 1106b10-20: “For nothing [none of the things that are] by nature is habituated otherwise [i.e., contrary to nature].” See GONZÁLEZ, “Las fuentes ...”, 361.

εἶναι, τὸ δὲ λόγον ἔχον).⁴⁵ The non-rational part, in turn, is subdivided into a part that participates in reason (μετέχουσα λόγου) and another that does not,⁴⁶ or else the rational part is divided in two, one part having reason in itself, and the other being ready to “listen” to reason (ὡσπερ τοῦ πατρὸς ἀκουστικόν τι, “as someone listening to his father”).⁴⁷ These three levels can be called “rational” (λογὸν ἔχον), “appetitive” (ὀρεκτικόν), and “vegetative” (φυτικόν); the rational and appetitive faculties are the subjects of the ἕξεις that Aristotle deals with in the *Ethics*.⁴⁸

As regards the origins of the ἕξεις, without being explicit in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle’s treatment of φύσις and οὐσία in the *Metaphysics* and the *Categories* is consistent with the distinction that Aquinas makes between two types of nature. As Aristotle makes clear in *Metaphysics* Δ, in its most general sense, φύσις can be identified with οὐσία,⁴⁹ and οὐσία, in turn, can be thought of in a “primary” sense (the individual) and in a “secondary” sense (the species).⁵⁰ Actions can bring about ἕξεις—καὶ ἐνὶ δὴ λόγῳ ἐκ τῶν ὁμοίων ἐνεργειῶν αἱ ἕξεις γίνονται⁵¹—and it is clear from the example he gives (various τέχνες and virtues) that they require repeated can grow and diminish, as would be expected.⁵²

⁴⁵ “the ‘non-rational’ of [the soul] and ‘that which has reason’ ” (my translation), ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, B, 13, 1102a25.

⁴⁶ See *ibid.*, B, 13, 1102b14,30.

⁴⁷ See *ibid.*, B, 13, 1103a1-2. See also S. MAS TORRES, “El tema de la virtud: A. MacIntyre, lector de Aristóteles”, in *Revista de Filosofía* 8 (1996), 170.

⁴⁸ See ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, B, 13, 1102b16,29.

⁴⁹ See ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, Δ, 1015a14-15.

⁵⁰ Οὐσία δὲ ἐστὶν ἢ κυριώτατά τε καὶ πρώτως καὶ μάλιστα λεγομένη, ἢ μήτε καθ’ ὑποκειμένου τινὸς λέγεται μήτε ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ τινὶ ἐστὶν [...] δεύτεραι δὲ οὐσῖαι λέγονται, ἐν οἷς εἶδεν αἱ πρώτως οὐσῖαι λεγόμεναι ὑπάρχουσιν, ταῦτά τε καὶ τὰ τῶν εἰδῶν τούτων γένη: “For substance (οὐσία) is in its principal and first and fullest sense said to be what is said to be neither concerning a subject [i.e., predicated of a subject] nor in a subject; [...] secondary substances (οὐσῖαι) are said to be those in whose species the first substances (οὐσῖαι) are, and those also which are genera of species” (my translation), ARISTOTLE, *Categories*, 2a10-15.

⁵¹ “And so in a word, from similar actions the *habitus* are brought about” (my translation), ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, B, 1, 1103b20-21.

⁵² See, for example, *ibid.*, B, 1103a25-1103b25.

2.3 Evaluation of the Doctrine on *Habitus*

An *habitus*, then, in Aquinas' doctrine, is a stable quality that modifies its *subiectum* so as to render it good or evil as such, directing it to acts that are in accord with its nature (and hence its end) or not; a *dispositio* is similar, except that it is more easily modified. Aristotle is less systematic—he has no unified treatise on the virtues,⁵³ as in the *Summa theologiae*—but a careful reading of the texts that Aquinas brings together (especially from the *Metaphysics*, the *Physics*, and the *Categories*, even though the *Nicomachean Ethics* is his principal inspiration) we see that Aristotle's doctrine is essentially the same.

Aquinas, of course, has to take positions where Aristotle or his interpreters are ambiguous. He rejects Simplicius' rigid division of qualities into “natural” and “adventitious,” for example, and whereas Aristotle seems to consider (at least in *Metaphysics* Δ) ἕξις as a special “type” of διάθεσις, Aquinas prefers to separate *habitus* and *dispositio* neatly.⁵⁴ He also describes in much more detail in what way *habitus* are directed to act and under what conditions, and how they relate to their *subiecti*; in all these cases, his refinements seem to be necessary conclusions from Aristotle's understanding of οὐσία, φύσις, and quality. Moreover, Aquinas renders Aristotle's framework open to the truths of Sacred Doctrine, so as to prepare for his treatment of grace and the infused virtues. Despite these differences, as regards the essential ontological structure of first-species qualities, it seems necessary to conclude that Aquinas has faithfully followed and interpreted his master.

⁵³ *De virtutibus et vitiis* is regarded as spurious; in any case, it makes no mention of the ontological structure of ἕξις.

⁵⁴ *Dispositio non fit habitus*, THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II, q. 49, a. 2, ad 3um. Aquinas leans toward this interpretation without committing to it firmly.

3. VIRTUE IN GENERAL

I now proceed to the second most basic element of the theory on virtues: the characteristics of virtues and what distinguishes them from the other *habitus*. At the core of the reflection is the definition of virtue that Aquinas uses in Question 55: do Aristotle’s ἀρεταί also fit the fundamental elements of that definition?

3.1 Virtue according to Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas, following the clear example of Aristotle, places the virtues in the species of *habitus*.⁵⁵ The term *virtus*, however, in a broad sense simply means “strength” or “power,” and by extension “excellence;”⁵⁶ in this sense even the active potencies that are entirely fully determined by nature can be called *virtutes*. Since, however, man’s potencies are not determined in their actuation, human virtues are properly *habitus*.⁵⁷ This difference of usage is analogous to that of ἀρετή in Greek, whose root meaning is “excellence.”⁵⁸ We saw that an *habitus* disposes its *subiectum* to act, and that the act can be of various kinds. In this sense, health is a good *dispositio* of the body (matter) to the soul (substantial form). This type of *dispositio*, however, is not specifically human but is common to all the animals. The only other *subiecti* that are capable of a manifold actuation (and hence are apt for receiving *habitus*) are the potencies that stem from the soul, and the *habitus* that modify these are always for the sake of *operatio*. Thus, concludes Aquinas, the human virtues, properly, are always operative.⁵⁹ Since the notion of virtue always en-

⁵⁵ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II, q. 55, a. 1, co. and ARISTOTLE, *Categories*, 8b29.

⁵⁶ Etymologically, it is connected with *vir*, and thus originally meant “manliness.” See D.P. SIMPSON, *Cassell’s Latin Dictionary*, Wiley, New York 1968⁵, 645.

⁵⁷ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II, q. 55, a. 1, co.

⁵⁸ It is related to ἀγαθός (good) and especially to its comparative (ἀρείων) and superlative (ἄριστος). See M. ÁLVAREZ MAURI, “Perspectivas actuales sobre la virtud. Estudio bibliográfico”, in *Pensamiento* 192 (1992), 464.

⁵⁹ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II, q. 55, a. 2, co.

tails excellence and perfection, virtue must always be a good *habitus*: it cannot comprise evil, which is a privation of due perfection.⁶⁰

In the light of these reflections, Aquinas defends the definition of virtue inspired by Augustine, *Virtus est bona qualitas mentis, qua recte vivitur, qua nullus male utitur, quam Deus in nobis sine nobis operatur*,⁶¹ showing how it includes all of the causes of virtue. Formally, it is a “good quality” (though it would be better to say a “good *habitus*”); materially, it has both a *materia circa quam* (which cannot enter the definition because it specifies the type of virtue) and a *materia in qua*—its *subiectum*—which is the *mens*, or roughly, the rational part of the soul;⁶² its final cause is the activity it produces, which (for virtue) always entails “living righteously” and avoiding bad “use;” and the efficient cause is God. Thus, the definition is specific to infused virtues; if the phrase *quam Deus in nobis sine nobis operatur* is omitted, the definition can apply also to acquired virtues.⁶³

Virtues, like all *habitus*, partially actuate their *subiecti*, and so it is impossible for any one of them to inhere in more than one *subiectum*. A plurality of *subiecti* entails a plurality of *habitus*, but not the other way around.⁶⁴ Virtus can inhere in any of the faculties either produced directly by the soul, or else those which, while being sensitive, participate in reason (*participant rationem*):⁶⁵ the intellect,⁶⁶ the will⁶⁷, and the sensible appetites.⁶⁸ The sensitive powers of apprehension (*vires apprehensivae sensitivae*) are not capable of having virtues: the external senses evidently cannot, because they are fully determined by the objects that stimulate them; the internal senses can have *habitus* (such as a good memory),

⁶⁰ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II, q. 55, a. 3, co.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 55, a. 4, arg. 1um.

⁶² As we saw, each virtue inheres “proximately” in a faculty, but ultimately in the substance; always, however, inasmuch as it is rational.

⁶³ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II, q. 55, a. 4, co. We might add that the definition seems to be best suited to the *moral* virtues; it seems difficult to say that we “live righteously” and avoid all “bad use” by means of intellectual virtues.

⁶⁴ See *ibid.*, I-II, q. 56, a. 2, co. In fact, the *habitus* derives its *esse in actu* from its *subiectum*; the *subiectum* is its “support” and “substrate.”

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 56, a. 4, co.

⁶⁶ See *ibid.*, I-II, q. 56, a. 3, co.

⁶⁷ See *ibid.*, I-II, q. 56, a. 6, co.

⁶⁸ See *ibid.*, I-II, q. 56, a. 4, co.

but not really virtue (which entails perfection), because their action is only preparatory for knowledge.⁶⁹

3.2 Comparison with Aristotle

Aristotle uses the term ἀρετή in much the same way that Aquinas uses *virtus*: he speaks of the virtue of the eye (τοῦ ὀφθαλμοῦ ἀρετή) and of the horse (τοῦ ἵππου ἀρετή),⁷⁰ as well as human virtue (ἀρετή ἀνθρωπίνη). The last, he says, is of the soul, not the body,⁷¹ and it always involves a rational choice (it is προαιρετική). Since (human) virtue is produced and corrupted by means of like actions, as we saw, it follows that virtues are principally directed to actions.⁷² “Virtue” means excellence, and so it necessarily entails the notion of good: ἡ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀρετή εἴη ἂν ἢ ἕξις ἀφ’ ἧς ἀγαθὸς ἄνθρωπος γίνεται καὶ ἀφ’ ἧς εἶ τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ἔργον.⁷³ Aristotle distinguishes between ἡ ἀρετή ἡ διανοητική and ἡ ἀρετή ἡ ἠθική (intellectual and moral virtues),⁷⁴ and he gives examples of virtues that inhere in the *subiecti* that we expect; for example, intellectual virtues such as knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and prudence (φρόνησις),⁷⁵ justice (δικαιοσύνη),⁷⁶ courage (ἀνδρεία),⁷⁷ and temperance (σωφροσύνη).⁷⁸

3.3 Evaluation of the Doctrine regarding Virtues

By a careful analysis of Aristotle’s texts, we see that his conception of virtue fits Aquinas’ definition very well. Formally, as we saw, ἀρετή ἀνθρωπίνη is a ἕξις that brings

⁶⁹ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II, q. 56, a. 5, co.

⁷⁰ See ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, B, 2, 1106a18-20.

⁷¹ See *ibid.*, A, 1, 1102a14-17.

⁷² See, for example, *ibid.*, B, 1, 1103b20-21.

⁷³ *ibid.*, B, 2, 1106a23-24: “The virtue of man is the *habitus* by which a man will become good and by which he will do his work well” (my translation).

⁷⁴ See *ibid.*, B, 1, 1103a14-15.

⁷⁵ See *ibid.*, Z, 3, 1139b15-18.

⁷⁶ See *ibid.*, E, 1, 1129b1-4.

⁷⁷ See *ibid.*, Γ, 9, 1115a1-5.

⁷⁸ See *ibid.*, Γ, 13, 1117b25-28.

about the perfection of its *subiectum* (that is, it is a *good* ἔξις, not a bad or mixed one). Materially, it inheres either in the νοῦς (intellect) or in one of the appetites.⁷⁹ Aristotle did not, of course, ever develop a system of cardinal virtues, each inhering in a distinct faculty, but it seems clear that Aquinas’ refinements build organically from basis that Aristotle provided. Aristotle is, in any case, quite clear that only the rational part of the soul, and those appetitive parts that “listen” to reason, can possess virtues, as we saw. Thus, he could be in agreement that the *subiectum* of the ἀρεταί is ultimately the *mens*. Aristotle insists that living virtuously entails discarding a relatively large number of *wrong* ways to act (which fall short of the mark either by excess or defect) and choosing the *correct* measure (which is necessarily within a relatively narrow range); this choosing the *right* measure—which is seldom the arithmetic mean—indicates that the final cause of virtue is precisely *recte vivere* and *nihil male uti*. Aristotle was not, of course, aware that God could infuse virtues in a soul, and so the agreement between Aristotle and Aquinas remains on the level of the human virtues, not the infused virtues.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Aristotle in his *De Anima* does develop extensively the notion of νοῦς as well as the three familiar appetites βουλήσις, ἐπιθυμία, and θύμος (will, concupiscence, and irascibility). It is not clear whether he understands the will as a “rational appetite” as Aquinas does: he states that it is “absurd to divide” the will from the other two appetites. On the other hand, Aristotle is clear, as we saw, that virtue is the result of rational choice (προαίρησις), which seems to contain the concept of rational appetite *in nuce*. See ARISTOTLE, *De Anima*, trans. by W.S. HETT, Cambridge, 1957, Γ, 9, 432b1-7. See also See THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I, q. 80, a. 2, co. and R. PASNAU, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature: A Philosophical Study of Summa Theologiae, 1a 75-89*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, 237-238.

⁸⁰ Nevertheless, it seems to me that the doctrine of the infused virtues does not do any violence to Aristotle’s framework, but complements it.

4. PRUDENCE

Prudence serves as a case study for seeing just how far Aquinas is in continuity with Aristotle, because it is at the crossroads of the cognitive and appetitive faculties. Therefore, it is a good test for the limits of the theory. Moreover, it is on this point, perhaps, that there is the least amount of agreement, because Aristotle's treatment of φρόνησις is very short in comparison with Aquinas'.

4.1 Thomas Aquinas on Prudence

Aquinas, using the formula from Aristotle, defines prudence as *recta ratio agibilium*,⁸¹ which means that it regards judgments that concern action, not simply the truth for its own sake. In this regard, it has a lot in common with *ars* (τέχνη). The two virtues are easily distinguished, because *ars* merely confers the facility to do certain works well, whereas prudence not only ensures that the *thing* produced is well made, but that the *act with which it is made* is a good act. It enables the appetites to be employed in a proper way, whereas *ars* does not involve the appetites *per se*.⁸²

Just as speculative reason is possible thanks to an *habitus* of first principles (the *intellectus*), practical reason possesses its own *habitus* with practical principles; for human acts, what functions as “principles” for the intellect are, in fact, the *ends*—the correct actuation of the individual according to his nature.⁸³ Prudence is necessary for living well

⁸¹ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II, q. 57, a. 4, co. and *ibid.* Aristotle's exact words are, ὅστ' ἀνάγκη τὴν φρόνησιν ἔξιν μετὰ λόγου ἀληθῆ περὶ τὰ ἀνθρώπινα ἀγαθὰ πρακτικῆν, “Thus it is necessary to hold that prudence is a true *habitus* accompanied by reason with respect to the human goods regarding action” (my translation), ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Z, 1140b20-21.

⁸² One can easily grasp the idea in cases where an art is used for corrupt ends: for example, the filmmakers who used their talents to make Nazi propaganda. The films may have been brilliant *technically*, but they certainly did little to perfect the filmmakers as men.

⁸³ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II, q. 57, a. 4, co. as well as ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, H, 1151a16. Aquinas is referring to the *synderesis*: see THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* II-II, q. 47, a. 6, ad 1um. See also R. MINER, “Non-Aristotelian Prudence in the ‘Prima Secundae’”, in *The Thomist* 64 (2000), 404.

(in accord with nature) because not only *what* someone does (the end) is important but also *how* he does it (the means).⁸⁴ Prudence’s proper act is to “command” (*imperare*)—that is to choose the means to be applied, here and now.⁸⁵ It does not set or produce the ends: these, rather, are discovered by the *synderesis*.⁸⁶ Prudence, in fact, can be regarded as a moral virtue with regard to its matter, which is *agibilia*; however, it is “formally” intellectual, because what it does *per se* is to perfect the intellect. (Prudence, that is, helps the intellect to judge better.)⁸⁷ Moreover, prudence and the properly moral virtues are mutually dependent: the moral virtues depend on prudence, because although these virtues incline the appetitive faculties to their due end, only prudence can choose the means. Of course, prudence depends on the moral virtues, because if the inclination to, or tension toward, the due end is lacking, prudence is then unable to choose the means.⁸⁸

4.2 Comparison with Aristotle

With Aristotle, too, φρόνησις is set at the boundary between intellectual and appetitive. He categorizes φρόνησις among the intellectual virtues,⁸⁹ and yet it is entirely involved in action: specifically action that seeks “human goods” (τὰ ἀνθρώπινα ἀγαθὰ).⁹⁰ Whereas ἐπιστήμη deals only with things that can be known *per se*,⁹¹ both φρόνησις and τέχνη study what can be different from itself (that is, contingent), but πράξις, the object

⁸⁴ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II, q. 57, a. 5, co.

⁸⁵ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* II-II, q. 47, a. 8, co.

⁸⁶ See *ibid.* Otherwise man would *produce* his own morality. The means, however, are under the control of the individual, for not only are there good and bad means, but there is even a multitude of good means.

⁸⁷ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II, q. 58, a. 3, ad 1um.

⁸⁸ See *ibid.*, I-II, q. 58, a. 4, co. Of course, the mutual dependence does not constitute a vicious circle, because they depend on each other in different ways: the moral virtues provide the necessary *élan* for the appetitive faculties, whereas prudence aids the intellectual discernment. An analogy might make it clearer. Suppose a family decides to drive to Paris: this decision would be analogous to the final end. Being lovers of art history, they have a great desire to see the Louvre, which would be analogous to moral virtue. The process of deciding which highway to take would be analogous to prudence. Removing either the love of art history or the map-reading skills would cancel the trip.

⁸⁹ See ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Z, 3, 1139b15-18.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, Z, 1140b20-21.

⁹¹ See *ibid.*, Z, 1139b20-24.

of φρόνησις, is fundamentally different from ποίησις.⁹² Where as the goal of τέχνη is to bring something into being⁹³, the goal of φρόνησις is human goods, we saw; in other words, whereas πράξις is its own end, the end of ποίησις is something other than itself.⁹⁴ Aristotle does not discuss a *synderesis*, but the idea is there, it seems to me, *in nuce* when he says that for πράξις, the end is the ἀρχή (principle).⁹⁵ That φρόνησις and the moral virtues are mutually dependent, moreover, is suggested when Aristotle endorses defining the moral virtues as always being κατὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον (in accord with right reason).⁹⁶

4.3 Evaluation regarding Prudence

Again, it seems difficult to see anything except a deep indebtedness of Aquinas to Aristotle in the area of prudence. Aristotle's doctrine on φρόνησις is not as mature as Aquinas', but it seems inevitable to conclude that Aquinas took his principle ideas from the *Nicomachean Ethics*. It needs to be emphasized that in the *Prima Secundae*, up to Question 58, Aquinas is discussing principally the *human* virtues, not the infused virtues of any kind (whether theological or cardinal). It would be a mistake, it seems to me, so say that Aquinas is not Aristotelian' because his conception of prudence (human and infused) changes, or is perfected, when he takes into account of the reality of grace. For example, Aquinas regards the human virtues as imperfect with respect to the corresponding infused virtues;⁹⁷ clearly, Aristotle would not have maintained this, but neither did he know that grace and infused virtues existed. Of course, Aquinas is not afraid to make adjustments to Aristotle's framework when necessary, as he does by adopting the four cardinal virtues.

⁹² See ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Z, 1140a1-5.

⁹³ See *ibid.*, Z, 1140a11.

⁹⁴ See *ibid.*, Z, 1140a1.

⁹⁵ See *ibid.*, H, 1151a16. It is interesting that Aristotle assigns both φρόνησις and πολιτική under the same ἔξις, which shows the close connection between φρόνησις and the common good; see *ibid.*, Z, 1141a23 and also MAS TORRES, "El tema de la virtud: A. MacIntyre, lector de Aristóteles", 172-175. Aquinas, for his part connects the natural living of the virtues with man's social nature; see THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II, q. 61, a. 5, co.

⁹⁶ See ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Z, 1144b20-23 and MINER, "Non-Aristotelian Prudence in the 'Prima Secundae' ", 407.

⁹⁷ THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I-II, q. 65, a. 2, co.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on my comparisons in these three areas, my conclusion is that there is, in general, profound communion between Aristotle and Aquinas. The continuity is easiest to see at the level of *habitus*: Aquinas appears to have been a very good student and thorough scholar of Aristotle, because he has succeeded in stitching together a coherent system from many sources. On the level of *habitus*, moreover, the considerations are above all ontological and general, and so there is less of a need to take into account the realities dealt with moral theology (such as grace and the infused virtues). Regarding the doctrine on the virtues in general, there is, once again, substantial agreement between Aristotle and Aquinas, but the latter takes theological realities into account that Aristotle could not have known about. It is interesting, however, that the framework offered by Aristotle proves to be open to the realities of grace without much modification.⁹⁸ Perhaps the greatest discrepancies are visible in the treatment of the virtue of prudence: it is telling, however, that apart from genuine refinements and systematization on Aquinas' part, the differences between Aristotelian φρόνησις and Thomistic prudence seem to arise when only when they involve relationships with the infused virtues; otherwise, Aquinas' refinements seem to be organic and plausible. It seems to me, therefore, that there is no problem in calling Aquinas' theory on virtues "Aristotelian."

⁹⁸ A comparison could be made to digging a system of canals and then seeing what happens when water is run through them for the first time: the system looks different when the water is in it, but the fundamental structure is the same.

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