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Human Nature and Original Sin in Thomas Aquinas

Harm Goris *(Tilburg University/Thomas Instituut Utrecht)*

Abstract

The contemporary debate on human nature concerns two distinct issues, identified here as issues of 'condition' and 'content'. These concern respectively the functional legitimacy or the formal use of the very concept of '(human) nature', and –when such a nature is asserted– its defining characteristics. The debate on nature took an important turn when Aquinas integrated the different views of Aristotle and Augustine, both with regard to the condition and the content issue. In this paper, I focus on the epistemological functions of 'human nature' as part of the 'condition' issue, and on the consequences of original sin and the four wounds of human nature in Aquinas's theology, as part of the 'content' issue.

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The very concept of 'human nature' has become increasingly questionable both in science and in late-modern society.[1] Not only academic biologists, philosophers, and social scientists, but also social activists and politicians deny that there is a human nature, that is, a universal, immutable human essence, shared by all humans, which sets them apart from all other beings. Some animal rights activists claim that 'speciesism', that is the idea that humans differ fundamentally from other animals, is similar to racism or sexism and therefore morally reprehensible. Sometimes they even compare industrial livestock production (factory farming) with the Shoa in Nazi concentration camps. In one of his stories, the Jewish author and Noble Prize laureate Isaac Bashevis Singer has the main character famously say: "In relation to [animals],

[1] In this paper, I make use of two earlier papers I wrote: 'Stripped and wounded : the medieval background of Roman Catholic views on the effects of the fall in (post)-Tridentine theology,' in: *A Landmark in Turbulent Times : The Meaning and Relevance of the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619)*, ed. by Henk van den Belt, Klaas-Willem de Jong, and Willem van Vlastuin (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022), 113-130. And: 'Acquired and Infused Moral Virtues in Wounded Nature', in: *The Virtuous Life. Thomas Aquinas on the Theological Nature of Moral Virtues*, ed. by Harm Goris and Henk Schoot (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 21-46. I also thank members of the Thomas Instituut Utrecht for their valuable comments during a presentation of an earlier version of the paper.

all people are Nazis; for the animals, it is an eternal Treblinka".[2] Another example are Chinese politicians who deny the universality of human rights laid down in the UN Declaration of Human Rights, because, allegedly, these rights are based on a historically contingent and culturally determined, Western construction of what 'human' means, not on an independently given, universal human nature. At the same time, these two examples also show why many others think that the very idea of a 'human nature' is indispensable, not only in ordinary folk discourse, but also in ethics, politics, law, and religion.[3]

The contemporary debate on 'human nature' concerns two distinct issues, which I label the 'condition' and the 'content' issue. The first one focuses on the notion of 'nature' itself, the other on the content of 'human'.[4] The examples I just gave illustrate the first issue: the functional legitimacy or the formal use of the very concept '(human) nature'. This issue covers a broad array of questions about the epistemological functions of natural kinds (prescriptive, descriptive, and/or explanatory) and about their metaphysical status (*ante res*, *in rebus*, *post res*).

The other issue in the contemporary debate focuses on the content of 'human'. Those who assert that there is something like 'human nature", disagree as to its content. What is or are the defining characteristic or characteristics of humans? Is it rationality, consciousness, freedom, a DNA-sequence or something else?

Both issues about human nature – the condition and the content issue – are not new. They have roots that go back to ancient Greek philosophy. The debate took an important turn in medieval Western theology, when around 1240 two very distinct conceptions of human nature began to be confronted with one another: Aristotle's and Augustine's.

In this article, I shall discuss how Aquinas integrated the different views of Aristotle and Augustine on human nature, both with regard to the condition and the content issue. With regard to the former, I shall limit myself to the epistemological functions of 'human nature' and bypass the question of the metaphysical status of *universalia*. With regard to the latter, I shall pay special attention to the consequences of original sin and the four wounds of human nature which Aquinas distinguishes. Aquinas thinks that all four morally relevant powers of human beings are affected or wounded by original sin. The will suffers from the wound of malice (*malitia*) and the

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[2] I.B. Singer, "The Letter Writer", in: *The Collected Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer*, translated by Saul Bellow et al. (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982), 271.

[3] Not to mention the discussions in biology about the 'human nature' as species, following upon David Hull's paper, 'On Human Nature'. *PSA: Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association* 1986 (1986): 3–13. http://www.jstor.org/stable/192787.

[4] Cf. Kronfelder's distinction between the "analytic-reflective issue" and the "empirical issue" in her book *What's Left of Human Nature?: A Post-Essentialist, Pluralist, and Interactive Account of a Contested Concept*, MIT Press, 2018, xvii). Roughly labels the two aspects in more felicitous terms as "adequacy conditions" and "substantial claims" for using the expression 'human nature': N. Roughley, "Human Nature", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), online at: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/human-nature/.

intellect from ignorance (*ignorantia*). Also, the two parts of the sensitive appetite are infected: the concupiscible part is subject to concupiscence (*concupiscentia*) and the irascible part to weakness (*infirmitas*). Aquinas does not say much about malice and ignorance as consequences of original sin. The interpretation I shall offer of these two wounds has little textual evidence in his works, but it will be, I hope, *ad mentem Thomae*. Before we get to these main questions, I shall first set out the differences between Augustine and Aristotle in their use and understanding of the concept of human nature.

1. Aristotle and Augustine on 'Human Nature': Condition and Content

Augustine's notion of 'human nature' had been dominant in Western intellectual thought till around 1240, when Aristotle's views on human nature as explained especially in his *Metaphysics, On the Soul, Politics, Nicomachean Ethics* found their way to European universities. Aristotle's anthropology entered a world very different from fourth-century Athens: a world shaped by a Christian theological framework, in which Augustine's doctrine of original sin, that is, the idea that human nature is somehow corrupted and fallen, played a fundamental role. Christian Western thought, molded by Augustine's way of thinking, had great difficulty with and often opposed to Aristotle's scientific notion of 'human nature'. In order to better understand the confrontation between the Augustinian and Aristotelian views, it is important to note that Augustine and Aristotle have very different ideas about 'human nature' with regard to both issues I mentioned above: its condition and its content.

With regard to the condition of the very concept 'human nature'. Augustine uses 'human nature' in a descriptive, historical, and theological sense. For him, true 'human nature' describes how the first human beings had once been created by God in Paradise and expresses how God willed them to be. Because of the fall, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's will, Augustine thinks that human nature has now changed. As he writes: "By that great sin of the first human being, our nature was changed for the worse and has not only become a sinner but also gave birth to sinners".[5] Augustine draws the conclusion that because of the fall 'human nature' is predicated equivocally of Adam and Eve before the fall, and of us, after the fall. We are no longer true human beings in the same sense as Adam and Eve were before the fall: "[N]ature … as it was originally created without fault is what is truly and properly called 'human nature'. But we use the word metaphorically (*translato verbo*) when we call 'nature' as how man is [now] born. And according to this use the apostle has said: We were once children of wrath by nature just like the others [Eph 2:3]".[6]

[5] *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* 2, 34, 57: "Unde illo magno primi hominis peccato natura ibi nostra in deterius commutata non solum est facta peccatrix verum etiam genuit peccatores".

[6] *Retractationes* I, 10.3: "natura(m) (…) qualis sine vitio primitus condita est: ipsa enim vere et proprie natura hominis dicitur. Translato autem verbo utimur, ut naturam dicamus etiam qualis nascitur homo, secundum

In contrast, for Aristotle, 'human nature' functions not as a descriptive, historical concept but as an analytical, prescriptive notion. In Aristotle's thought, 'human nature' is immutable and defines what intrinsic properties a thing must have in order to be classified as this kind of thing, e.g. a dog or a human. That is why the word 'human' always must have the same meaning; it is predicated 'univocally'.[7] Essences and definitions, Aristotle argues, are like numbers: if you add or subtract something to or from the number 3, it is no longer the number 3. The same goes for essences and definitions.[8] To illustrate the difference between Augustine and Aristotle on the condition issue: Augustine could say that a Neanderthal or Mr. Spock from Star Trek is truly a human being but in a somewhat different sense than you or me. Aristotle would not understand this. For him, either the Neanderthal or Mr. Spock are human in exactly the same way as you or me, or they are not human at all, even if they look like us.

A consequence of the difference between the Augustinian and the Aristotelian formal use of the notion of human nature is that the latter has much more explanatory force. Both Augustine and Aristotle see intellectual knowledge and willing (love) as the most distinctive features of humans in comparison to other animals. But Augustine explains both activities primarily in relation to divine agency, viz. illumination and grace, while Aristotle can attribute them to intrinsic human powers, viz. abstraction by the agent intellect and the natural intellectual appetite for the good.

The different views on the condition issue also has consequences for the content issue of 'human nature': which characteristics of our lives belong to human nature? Though Aristotle's formal use of 'human nature' is predominantly prescriptive, its semantic content is primarily based on observation: how do all humans in fact act and what can we infer about human nature from our observations of universal human behavior? For Augustine, in contrast, actual human behavior and experiences are not a reliable source for determining what truly belongs to human nature. Most of what we find humans do and feel is the result of the corruption of human nature and only divine revelation tells us what our true nature is. With the introduction of Aristotle's anthropology in the Latin West, the tension rose between theological normativity and empirical observation in determining the content of 'human nature'. The question became more urgent which aspects of the actual, present human life belong to our true human nature and cannot be changed, and which aspects have to be attributed to original sin and are therefore in principle changeable and redeemable? Late-medieval scholars discussed many of these aspects. Some examples may illustrate how wide the

quam locutionem dixit apostolus: fuimus enim et nos aliquando natura filli irae sicut et ceteri". Cf. also *De natura et gratia* 67, 81, *De Civitate Dei* 13.3 and *De libero arbitrio* III, 19, 54: "Sic etiam ipsam naturam aliter dicimus, cum proprie loquimur, naturam hominis, in qua primum in suo genere inculpabilis factus est, aliter istam, in qua ex illius damnati poena, et mortales et ignari et carni subditi nascimur; juxta quem modum dicit Apostolus: 'Fuimus enim et nos naturaliter filii irae, sicut et ceteri' (Eph. 2:3)".

[7] *Categories* 5, 3a34-35; *Posterior Analytics* I, 6, 75a19-38.

[8] *Metaphysics* VIII, 3, 1043b33-1044b2. Cf. also *Categories* 5, 3b33-4a9.

scope is of their discussions. First, questions on human freedom and ethics: is our will bound by sin, how much good can we do without divine grace, what are the precepts of natural law and can we fulfill them? Next, there is the psychological question of whether there is a natural conflict between reason and emotions or not. And economical questions such as: is private property a natural and inalienable right, an inviolable and sacred right as the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen' of the French Revolution later will phrase it, or is private property a remedy and punishment for original sin? Or the political question of whether the state is a necessary evil to prevent us from harming one another, or a means for human flourishing because, as political beings by nature, humans strive for the common good? And the biological-social question which, if any, differences in sex and gender belong to human nature as created by God? I shall not discuss these questions; I only mention them to point out the significance of the doctrine of original sin and the wide range of topics it involves.

In what follows, I shall limit myself to Aquinas' strategy for reconciling Augustine and Aristotle's conceptions of human nature and the direct effects of original sin on our natural powers.

2. The *Status Naturae*

Aquinas integrated the two different views of Augustine and Aristotle regarding the condition issue of the concept of human nature by introducing the idea of *status naturae*. The *status naturae* is the state in which human nature actually and historically has existed or exists. Aquinas distinguishes the *status naturae integrae*, the state of integral nature with which God had created Adam and Eve, from the *status naturae corruptae*, the current state of human nature after the fall.[9]

Aquinas uses Anselm of Canterbury's expression 'original justice' to indicate the condition in which God created human beings. Aquinas is not very consistent in how he understands the term, especially when it comes to the question of whether original justice formally includes so-called sanctifying grace, which orders to the supernatural end of the beatific vision, or not. Was original justice a personal gift (*donum personae*) only to Adam and Eve, or was it a gift to human nature (*donum naturae*) and, therefore, transmissible to their progeny in the same way as original sin? In 1915, an intense debate on this question arose (again) among Thomists; it died out during the Second World War without a clear outcome.[10] I shall basically follow the

[9] A short note on the question of the historicity of the original creation of Adam and Eve and of the fall: Aquinas, like most pre-modern theologians, thinks that the account in Genesis 1-3 depicts an actual historical situation. In his theology, however, Aquinas uses the story about Paradise for analytical reasons, that is for understanding our actual situation by contrasting it with a hypothetical situation of a world without the fall. In this way, the story about Paradise has the same function as the 'natural state' of humanity in Hobbes, Locke or Rousseau, or – more recently – the 'original position' in Rawls.

[10] For a good summary of the discussion in the first half of the 20th century, see D. Houck, *Aquinas, Original Sin, and the Challenge of Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 57-74. Martin, Kors and

view of Jean-Pierre Torrell.[11] He separates original justice (or 'the state of innocence') as the condition in which Adam and Eve were actually created and which included sanctifying grace as a personal gift, from the transmissible state of integral nature, which does not include sanctifying grace by definition.[12] The state of integral nature consisted of a number of gifts, added to human nature, through which human nature could function perfectly in all respects. These extra gifts were, first, that the body was fully under control of the soul, granting immortality. Second, that the bodily sensory powers, desires, and passions functioned perfectly because they were totally under the guidance of the rational powers of the soul. And third, that the human will was completely attuned to God as the final end.[13] This final gift, Aquinas indicates, is the cause of the other two. In most texts, he leaves it open whether the final end regards the natural end, that is a contemplation and love of God as first cause, or whether it regards the supernatural end of the beatific vision, participating in the inner-trinitarian life of God Himself. In line with Torrell's reading, I would argue that in the case of Adam and Eve it actually was the supernatural end, but logically or in principle it refers only to the natural end. I shall come back to the distinction between the supernatural and natural end of human beings in the final section of this paper.

From an Augustinian perspective, the threefold original rectitude in the state of integral nature would be considered the true human nature. However, on Aristotle's concept of human nature, this rectitude is not part of human nature as such. The right order of the human mind to its (natural) end, the right order of the sensory powers to reason, and the full submission of the body to the soul do not necessarily and by definition belong to human nature. On Aristotle's view, it belongs to human nature that our body is corruptible and that we can and should organize our sensory and intellectual lives in an ordered way; the task of moral and intellectual self-realization is constitutive of human nature. Aquinas overcomes the contradiction between Augustine and Aristotle by introducing the idea of *status naturae*, that is, the state in which human nature actually, historically existed, exists, or will exist.[14]

Lottin defend the position that original justice does not formally include sanctifying grace and that Aquinas maintained this view throughout his career. Others, like Garrigou-Lagrange, argue that Aquinas changed his view in his later works, in which he included sanctifying grace in original justice. The roots of the debate go back to Capreolus and Cajetan. Houck's own position is that original justice necessarily includes sanctifying grace and that, therefore, it was not transmissible.

[11] J.-P. Torrell, 'Nature et grâce chez Thomas d'Aquin,' *Revue thomiste* 101 (2001), 167-202. Translated into English as 'Nature and Grace in Thomas Aquinas,' in *Surnaturel*, ed. S.-Th. Bonino, trans. R. Williams (Ave Maria, Fla.: Sapientia Press, 2009), 155-88. Torrell criticizes a specific element of the view defended by Martin and others in footnote 32 on pp. 179-180 but does not elaborate on it.

[12] Torrell, 'Nature et grâce', 183: "[L]'état de nature intègre désigne l'état d'Adam avant la chute, donc en possession des privilèges dont Dieu l'a doté au moment de sa creation, *mais abstraction faite de la grâce sanctifiante*" (italics by Torrell).

[13] Aquinas mentions this threefold ordering e.g. in *In Sent*. II, d. 20 q. 3 a. 2, *ScG* IV c. 56 nr 3 and 6, *STh* I q. 95 a. 5, *De malo*, q. 4 a. 2 and q. 5 a. 1, *Compendium Theologiae* I c. 186, *Ad Rom* c. 5 l. 3 nr. 416.

[14] Hugh of St. Victor already mentions a threefold 'status naturae' (before the fall, after the fall, and in the eschaton): *De Sacramentis* I p. 6, c. 10 (ed. Berndt, 2008, 145). It was used as a bridge between Aristotle's and

Aquinas argues that, in Paradise, human nature did not exist in a purely neutral state. Human nature had the extra gratuitous gifts of moral-rational, emotional and physical rectitude. In the 19th century, theologians would introduce the term 'preter-natural', derived from the Latin preposition *praeter*, besides nature, for these extra gifts to human nature.[15] At the same time, Aquinas can also bring in the term 'supernatural' (above nature) for sanctifying grace: this grace is totally above nature and we cannot even acquire it through natural virtuous activity.[16] It seems that historically speaking, Aquinas is largely responsible for coining *supernaturalis* as a technical expression.[17] While earlier scholastics, under the influence of Augustine's notion of nature, focused on grace as healing the moral damage to human nature caused by original sin *gratia sanans*), Aquinas, with the help of Aristotle's notion of nature, was in a better position to distinguish and accentuate the role of grace as deifying, as raising us to an end and to activities that surpass our natural desires and powers (*gratia elevans*).[18]

Apart from the threefold rectitude in the state of integral nature as a gift to human nature (*donum naturae*) and the personal gift of supernatural, sanctifying grace (*donum personae*), Adam and Eve were also endowed with other preternatural personal gifts: they had fully developed, mature bodies from the very beginning of their existence, possessed full knowledge of all the sciences and skills, and had all the natural virtues.[19]

As a *donum naturae*, only the threefold rectitude was hereditary and would have been transmitted to their progeny if Adam and Eve had not sinned.[20] Unlike their

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Augustine's concepts of 'human nature' by William of Auvergne in his *De Anima* (written around 1240): R.J. Teske, *Studies in the Philosophy of William of Auvergne, Bishop of Paris (1228-1249),* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press), 2006, esp. 242-245. It was also used by Albert the Great: *II Sent*. d. 19 a. 2 (ed. Borgnet, 1893-4, vol. 27 p.330b), *III Sent*. d. 15 a. 6 (ed. Borgnet, 1893-4, vol 28, 276b). See also *Summa Halensis* II, inq. 4, tr. 4, s. 2, q. 1, tit. 1 ad 5 (ed. Quaracchi 1928 vol. 2, 563a), III, tr. 1, q. 1, c. 1 sol. (ed. Quaracchi 1948, vol. 4, 6b) and III, tr. 2, q. 2, c. 2, a. 2 (ed. Quaracchi 1948, vol. 4, 124b). And Bonaventure: *I Sent* d. 3, a. 1, q. 3, resp. (I, 7), *II Sent* d. 29, a. 1 q. 2 (II, 698). I am grateful to Jörgen Vijgen for providing me with the references to Albert and to the *Summa Halensis*.

[15] See: W. Principe, 'Preternatural' in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. Vol. 11 (Detroit: Gale, 2003) 686-687.

[16] In contrast with supernatural sanctifying grace, the preternatural gifts are not fully outside of the range of our natural powers. Cf. C. Gallagher, "Concupiscence," *The Thomist* 30.3 (1966): 228–59, 243: "That man was integral (by reason of [the] preternatural gift in view of the grace of the state of original justice) meant that he was capable of directing his life with a singleness and effectiveness of purpose which is not a natural phenomenon, although many may approach that status asymptotically by natural endeavour". Gallagher paraphrases J.P. Mackey.

[17] Cf. J.P. Kenny, *The Supernatural* (New York : Alba House, 1972), 39: "St. Thomas stands out above all others as deserving most credit for shaping *supernatural* into a technical term of the first importance and for ensuring its circulation in the theology of the West"; 95: "He himself is enamored of the word".

[18] Kenny, *The Supernatural*, 23-24, 39-43. Kenny relies on the work by Artur Landgraf, *Dogmengeschichte der Frühscholastik*, Erster Teil, Die Gnadenlehre, Band 1 (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1952), e.g. 42, 82, 94, 151, 156, 159, 183, 195, 201, 265.

[19] See e.g. *De Veritate* q. 18 a. 4, *STh* I q. 95 a. 3. In my two earlier publications (see footnote 1), I did not clearly distinguish the preternatural personal gifts (possession of all scientific knowledge and of all the natural virtues) from the preternatural natural gift (the threefold rectitude).

[20] *ScG* IV, c. 52, non enim; *STh* I, q. 100 a. 1, *Compendium Theologiae* I c. 187.

parents, the children of Adam and Eve would be born as infants without mature bodies and they would have to acquire by their own effort scientific knowledge and virtues.[21] However, without the fall, the children would not have suffered from old age and would have been immortal.[22] Next, their sensory powers, in particular the sensory appetite, would have been fully governed by the intellect.[23] Finally, their rational will would have been attuned to God as their final natural end – and also as their supernatural end if the children had received supernatural sanctifying grace as a personal gift. Although the children would not immediately have all the virtues like their parents had, the harmony between their will and God included "the perfect knowledge of what is to be chosen and what to be avoided, which belongs to prudence," as Aquinas writes in *De Veritate*.[24] In the *Summa Theologiae*, he formulates it as: "They would have had sufficient knowledge to direct them in the works of justice, in which humans are directed by the universal principles of law".[25]
So, before the fall, human nature existed in state of integral nature. After the fall, the state has changed: we now live in the state of fallen, wounded, or corrupt nature. What the consequences are of this new state of nature, I'll discuss in the next two sections.

To summarize this section: introducing the notion of *status naturae* enables Aquinas to integrate Augustine's idea of a change in human nature with Aristotle's idea of an unchanging nature. For Aquinas, human nature itself remains the same, but the state in which it actually exists, is different: once it existed in the state of integral nature, endowed with extra, gratuitous, preternatural gifts, but now it exists in the state of fallen or wounded nature. And one day, we hope, it will exist in the state of glorified nature. This means that for Aquinas 'human nature' is a doubly abstracted concept. First, as a universal, it abstracts from concrete human persons. And secondly, and more importantly, it abstracts from the state in which human nature actually exists or existed or will exist. In other words, while I think it is true that for Aquinas no human person ever lived in *natura pura* or *in puris naturalibus*, the same also goes for human nature itself: human nature has never been nor will ever be in a purely natural state: there is no *status naturae purae*.[26]

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[21] *De Veritate* q. 18 a. 7 and a. 8, *STh* I q. 99 a. 1, q. 101 a. 1.
[22] *In II Sent*. d. 20 q. 2 a. 1, *STh* I q. 99 a. 1 ad 4.
[23] *De Malo* q. 4 a. 8.
[24] *De Veritate* q. 18 a. 7: "Sed tamen aliquam scientiam in eis perfectam ponere oportet, scilicet scientiam eligendorum et vitandorum, quae ad prudentiam pertinent, quia sine prudential ceterae virtutes non ess non possunt".
[25] *STh* I q. 101 a. 1 ad 3: "[P]ueri habuissent sufficientem scientiam ad dirigendum eos in operibus iustitiae in quibus homines diriguntur per universalia principia iuris".
[26] This comes close to Rahner's idea of (human) nature as a "Restbegriff" (remainder concept): K. Rahner, "Über das Verhältnis von Natur und Gnade," in *Schriften zur Theologie* 1 (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1954), 340. In contrast with Rahner, I would emphasize the intrinsic corruption or wounding by original sin.

3. Original Sin as a Corrupted Habit

The notion of *status naturae*, discussed in the previous section, gave an answer to the question of how Aquinas sees the formal status or condition of the concept of human nature. But in the previous section I also sketched the outlines of what Aquinas thinks about the other main question in the contemporary debate on human nature, that is the question about the semantic content of the concept of human nature. What does the concept 'human nature' imply? Above, it became already clear that the preternatural gifts that Adam and Eve and their offspring received in Paradise (and also supernatural sanctifying grace) do not belong to human nature itself. But also the consequences of original sin as these exist in the state of fallen nature, do not belong to human nature as such, in spite of Aquinas' frequent use of the expression 'sin' or 'vice of nature' (*peccatum* or *vitium naturae*) for original sin.[27]

At this point, we find a development in Aquinas. In his early works, in particular the *Commentary on the Sentences*, he uses a definition of original sin that was attributed to Anselm of Canterbury and had become quite popular as of around 1220. Anselm himself defines original sin as "absence" or "nakedness of the justice that is owed" (*absentia* or *nuditas debitae iustitiae*). Later scholastics, like Aquinas, slightly changed the wording into privation or lack (*privatio, carentia*) of original justice. What is more important is that, unlike Anselm, these later scholastics applied this definition within the context of the new, Aristotelian idea of human nature. Anselm himself had worked with an Augustinian idea of human nature, and had thought of original sin as a change in and of human nature. But when his absence or nudity definition was related to the Aristotelian notion of nature, the meaning of the definition changed. It no longer meant an intrinsic change of human nature itself, but only the removal of gifts that were added to human nature in Paradise, that is the removal of supernatural sanctifying grace and of preternatural rectitude. In this way, the fall would have no further consequences for human nature itself. So, Aquinas writes in the *Commentary on the Sentences*: "when the first human being sinned, human nature, which was in him, was left to itself so that it remained according to the constitution of its principles".[28] In short, in his early works, Aquinas thinks of original sin as a kind of lapse of human nature into a state of pure nature, that is *in puris naturalibus*.

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[27] E.g. *ScG* IV, c. 52 nr. 8, *STh* I-II, q. 81 a. 1. In these cases, the term *natura* has the specific connotation of birth or nativity: we are born with this sin.

[28] *In II Sent* d. 32 q. 1 a. 1: "unde factum est ut primo homine peccante, natura humana quae in ipso erat, sibi ipsi relinqueretur, ut consisteret secundum conditionem suorum principiorum". See also *In II Sent* d. 30 q. 1 a.1: " [R]elictus est homo in illis tantum bonis quae eum ex naturalibus principiis consequuntur". Cf. also d. 32 q. 2 a. 2 ad 3 "originalis infectio est corruptio illius boni quod principia naturae non sequitur"; d. 33 q. 1 a. 1 ad 4: "corrumpitur solum quantum ad id bonitatis quod naturae superadditum fuit"; d. 33 q. 2 a. 1: "Defectus autem qui per originem traducitur (…) non est per subtractionem vel corruptionem alicujus boni quod naturam humanam consequitur ex principiis suis; sed per subtractionem vel corruptionem alicujus quod naturae superadditum erat". However, Aquinas is not consistent in the *Scriptum*. Elsewhere, he adopts the Augustinian idea of a change of human nature due to the fall: In *II Sent* d. 32 q. 1 a. 1, he writes: "[E]x

However, in his later works, Aquinas is more pessimistic, or should we say realistic, and more Augustinian about the effects of original sin. In a well-known passage from *Summa Theologiae* I-II q. 85 art. 1, he distinguishes three meanings of the term 'good of nature' (*bonum naturae*) as it relates to original sin. The first meaning concerns the "principles of [human] nature, which constitute the nature itself, for example the powers of the soul and the like". This good of nature is not affected by original sin. That does not go for the third meaning of *bonum naturae*, which is the gift of original justice "bestowed on the whole of human nature". That gift, which consists in the threefold preternatural rectitude, is completely lost by original sin.[29] But compared with the commentary on the Sentences, Aquinas introduces another meaning of 'the good of nature' and that is the natural inclination to virtue, which is given with being rational. Although the idea of a natural inclination virtue has an Aristotelian ring to it, its roots are more in Stoic thought. Aquinas refers to Cicero as source of the idea of a natural inclination to virtue.[30] He uses other expressions for it, like the 'beginnings' (*inchoationes*), 'seeds' (*semina*), 'seed-beds' (*seminaria*) and 'principles' (*principia*) of virtue and he values them 'nobler' (*nobiliora*) and 'higher' (*altiora*) than the actually acquired virtues themselves.[31] This natural inclination to virtue is not unaffected (like the first good of nature) nor completely lost (like the third good of nature), but diminished by original sin – and also by each actual sin. As a true Aristotelian, Aquinas makes an effort to argue that the diminishment does not concern the root (*radix*) or foundation (*fundamentum*) of our natural inclination to virtue. The root or foundation is and remains our unchanged rationality. However, original sin results in all kinds of inner obstacles that impede the inclination in reaching its goal, that is acquiring virtue.[32] By introducing the diminishment of the natural inclination to virtue, Aquinas complements Anselm's privation or absence definition of original sin: "Original sin, he says, is not a pure privation but some corrupted habit".[33] In this way, Aquinas also restores the original meaning that the privation-definition had in Anselm.

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actu naturae, qui est carnis propagatio, relinquitur quaedam dispositio inclinans ad malum in ipsa natura generati, quae concupiscentia (...) dicitur; (...) illa naturae corruptio in se virtutem peccati, ex quo causata est, continens (...)".

[29] Cf. *STh* I-II q. 85 a. 3.

[30] *In III Sent* d. 33 q. 1 a. 2 qc. 1. For Cicero, see *De Inventione* II.53.160: "Eius [sc. Iustitiae] initium est ab natura profectum" (Loeb, LCL 386:328) and *Tusculan Disputations* III.2 (Loeb LCD 141:226): "Sunt enim ingeniis nostris semina innata virtutum".

[31] *STh* I-II, q. 63 a. 2 ad 3. See also *In III Sent* d. 33 q. 1 a. 2 qc. 1-3, *De Virt* q. 1 a. 8 co. and ad 10, *De Ver* q. 11 a. 1 and q. 14 a. 2, *STh* I-II q. 94 a. 3, *In IX Meta* c. 7, nr. 1855. In *S.Th* I-II q. 63 a. 1, Aquinas distinguishes between the presence of virtue "according to some beginning" in human reason (both speculative and practical) and in the human will: "Utroque autem modo virtus est homini naturalis secundum quandam inchoationem. Secundum quidem naturam speciei, inquantum in ratione homini insunt naturaliter quaedam principia naturaliter cognita tam scibilium quam agendorum, quae sunt quaedam seminalia intellectualium virtutum et moralium; et inquantum in voluntate inest quidam naturalis appetitus boni quod est secundum rationem".

[32] Cf. *STh* I-II q. 85 a. 2.

[33] *STh* I-II, q. 82 a. 1 ad 1: "Peccatum originale non est privatio pura sed est quidam habitus corruptus"

Aquinas points out that in the expression 'corrupted habit', 'habit' should not be taken in the sense of an inclination of a power to act in a certain way, but in the sense of a "disordered disposition", which is "turned as it were into a nature".[34] It is a habit in the sense of "some natural disposition that belongs to the human species".[35] In other words, Aquinas makes clear that the corrupted habit of original sin is rather a metaphysical than only a moral issue. Of course, the corrupted habit has moral consequences, but its core is more fundamental. It is disordered disposition that inheres in the soul and has consequences for all four powers of the soul that are morally relevant. These powers are now wounded. With reference to Bede, Aquinas specifies each wound that affects a morally relevant power.[36] The first and main wound is in our will, which suffers from malice (*malitia*). Second, the intellect suffers from ignorance (*ignorantia*). Finally, our sensitive appetite is wounded. This goes both for the so-called concupiscibilis (desiring part), which is now infected by concupiscence (*concupiscentia*) and for the so-called irascibilis (agressive part), which now suffers from weakness (*infirmitas*).

In the next section, I shall give an interpretation of each of these wounds. This will shed more light on the semantic content of the term 'human nature'.

4. Four Wounds of Original Sin in Human Nature

I shall begin with the wounds in the sensitive appetite. As mentioned above, the *irascibilis* part of the sensitive appetite suffers from weakness (*infirmitas*), while the *concupisciblis* part suffers from concupiscence (*concupiscentia*). The latter has to be understood in the Aristotelian sense of the word as a disordered *sensitive* desire, rather than in the Augustinian sense, which also – and mainly – includes a disorder in the rational appetite. Because of original sin, both parts of the sensory appetite are seriously damaged in their natural amenability to reason. Aquinas thinks that precisely as *human*, our passions, in contrast to those of other animals, obey by their nature to reason.[37] That is why the obedience of the senses to reason should not be understood as an oppression of the passions by means of a tyrannical or despotic rule. Taking his cue from Aristotle, Aquinas speaks of a political or constitutional rule, which makes our passions flourish.[38] In the fallen state, this natural obedience to or

[34] *STh* I-II q. 82 a. 1. Later scholastics would call it an 'entitative' habit as distinguished from an 'operative' habit. See also *STh* I-II q. 49 aa. 1-3

[35] *STh* I-II q. 51 a. 1.

[36] *STh* I-II q. 85 a. 3. On the historical origin of the 'four wounds,' see O.-H. Pesch, *Die Sünde*, Deutsche Thomas-Ausgabe, Band 12 (Vienna: Styria, 2004), 626-628.

[37] *De Malo*, q. 4 a. 2 ad 4: "[A]liquid potest esse naturale homini dupliciter. Uno modo in quantum est animal: et sic naturale est ei quod concupiscibilis feratur in delectabile secundum sensum communiter loquendo. Alio modo in quantum est homo, id est animal rationale; et sic naturale est ei quod concupiscibilis feratur in delectabile sensus secundum ordinem rationis".

[38] [38] Aristotle, *Politics* I c.5, 1254b5 (*Aristotle: The Complete Works*, 1990). See also: N. Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire : Aquinas on Emotion* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 99-101, 112, including

guidance by reason is impaired and that explains our experience of a rebellion of the passions against reason. The healing of the wounds of *infirmitas* and *concupiscentia* may occasionally imply an oppression of unbridled passions but for Aquinas it is first of all a matter of cultivating the passions.

Aquinas is rather silent about the wounds of *malitia* in the will and of *ignorantia* in the intellect. When the term '*malitia*' occurs in his writing, it almost always concerns "sinning out of (determined) malice" (*ex* (*certa*) *malitia*) or 'on purpose (*ex industria*), which means to sin knowingly and deliberately.[39] However, this cannot be the malice that is the natural wound in the human will.[40] We saw above that Aquinas does not identify original sin as a habit in the sense of a virtue or vice, let alone as a sinful act.[41] Moreover, sinning out of malice implies sinning knowingly, without any cognitive impairment. But in original sin the malice of the will goes together with ignorance in the intellect.

I would like to suggest that the *malitia* that affects the nature of our will should rather be understood as a kind indeliberate disorder of the will to the final end, not only our supernatural, but also our natural end.[42] Our true final end is the supernatural beatific vision, to which we are ordered, not by nature but by supernatural sanctifying grace. However, by the fall Adam and Eve not only lost sanctifying grace and no longer willed the beatific vision as their ultimate end, also the natural orientation of their will was somehow distorted. For argument's sake, I leave aside the vexed question of whether there is a natural desire for the supernatural end and focus on the idea of a natural end or a natural beatitude for human beings. This, too, is hotly debated among Thomists. Does Aquinas think that such a natural end actually exists, and if so, in what does it consist?

Aquinas often describes the natural end of human beings as "loving God above all things," that is loving God as the universal cause and the common good.[43] In a much quoted passage in *Summa Theologiae* I-II q. 109 a. 3, Aquinas asks if the human being can love God above all things by his natural powers (*ex puris naturalibus*), without the help of grace.[44] He answers that human beings could do that in the state of integral nature, without the gift of (sanctifying) grace added to nature (*absque*

references. Not all commentators agree with this 'positive' interpretation of passions in Aquinas: cf. N. Kahm, *Aquinas on Emotion's Participation in Reason* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 5-6 and passim. I agree with Lombardo and think Aquinas's 'negative' passages about the rebellious emotions should be read as referring to the fallen state of human nature.

[39] Cf. *STh* I-II q. 78, *De Malo* q. 3 aa. 12–15, *In Job* c. 21 (Leonine edition, vol. 26, 124) c. 24 (ibid., 138).

[40] See *STh* I-II q. 85 a. 3 ad 2.

[41] In *De Malo* q. 4 a. 2 ad 4 Aquinas points out that 'sin' is used equivocally when it is said of actual sin and of original sin.

[42] In the sense of what Garrigou-Lagrange called the 'innate natural love of God' as distinguished from the 'elicited natural love of God': see A. Knobel, "Ends and Virtues," *Journal of Moral Theology* 3.1 (2014), 105-117, here 109-110. See also Houck, *Original Sin*, 113-115.

[43] E.g. in *STh* I q. 60 a. 5, *STh* II-II q. 26 a. 3, *Quodlibet* I, q. 4 a. 3.

[44] Also in *In II Sent* d. 3, q. 4, a. 1, ad 5, Aquinas suggests that because of original sin we lost loving God above all things.

superadditione gratuiti doni). But now, in the state of fallen nature, our will can no longer love God above all: "because of the corruption of nature, [the will] pursues a private good (*bonum privatum*), unless it is healed by divine grace".[45] In other words, the human will is no longer actually orientated to our natural end, which is a preternatural gift, but also the natural possibility of such an orientation is hampered and is in need of divine healing. Does Aquinas mean that in reality, with the help of healing grace, some human beings do pursue the natural end of loving God above all, without pursuing the supernatural end of the beatific vision, that is of participating in the inner-trinitarian life of God himself? His formulations are ambiguous. Aquinas does not explicitly say that when assisted by healing grace human beings could now indeed love God above all things. He only says by way of a negation that with the help of healing grace, the human will would no longer pursue a private good, suggesting that through healing grace the human will would pursue a non-private, common good, whether natural or supernatural. But at the end of the same passage (*STh* I-II q. 109 a. 3), he suggests in a positive formulation that through healing grace, the human being can love God above all things.[46] However this may be, it is remarkable that when Aquinas lists what human beings now actually take for the final end of their lives (rightly or wrongly), he does not mention the natural end of loving God above all things.[47] Besides the beatific vision (which is the true final end), riches, fame, pleasure, power and many more are mentioned but not loving God above all things. It seems then that for Aquinas the natural end of loving God above all things does not function as a separate, independent final end that people actually can will. Rather, it serves analytical purposes, enabling Aquinas to explain the scope and impact of original sin on our will. In real life, the natural end of loving God above all things can exist only as implied by the supernatural end of the beatific vision. In short, there are only two real possibilities: a person is either in the state of mortal sin, having a created good as his or her final end, or in the state of (sanctifying) grace, having the participation in God's inner life as his or her goal. *Tertium*, that is having the natural end of the love of God as universal cause and common good, *non datur.*

Also, the wound original sin causes in the nature of the human intellect, viz. ignorance, has to be distinguished from 'sinning out of ignorance'.[48] I would like to suggest that the wound of ignorance regards our knowledge of the principles of

[45] "Sed in statu naturae corruptae homo ab hoc deficit secundum appetitum voluntatis rationalis, quae propter corruptionem naturae sequitur bonum privatum, nisi sanetur per gratiam Dei".

[46] "Et ideo dicendum est quod homo in statu naturae integrae non indigebat dono gratiae superadditae naturalibus bonis ad diligendum Deum naturaliter super omnia; licet indigeret auxilio Dei ad hoc eum moventis. Sed in statu naturae corruptae indiget homo etiam ad hoc auxilio gratiae naturam sanantis". The 'hoc' in the final sentence clearly refers to 'diligendum Deum super omnia'.

[47] See e.g. *STh* I-II q. 2, *ScG* III cc. 26-36.

[48] For sinning out of ignorance, see e.g. *STh* I-II q. 76, *De Malo* q. 3 a. 6. Some of Aquinas's predecessors, like Hugh of St. Victor and the author of the *Summa Sententiarum*, mention ignorance as part of original sin besides concupiscence; cf. J.-B. Kors, *La justice primitive et le péché original d'après s. Thomas* (Paris: Vrin, 1930), 48, 51. This also goes for Bonaventure: *II Sent* d. 30, a. 2, q. 1-2 (II, 721-726).

natural law. As mentioned above, in the section on original sin as corrupted habit, Aquinas talks about the principles, beginnings, seeds, or seedbeds of virtue. He identifies them with the first principles of natural law.[49] He also characterizes synderesis, that is the natural habit (*habitus*) of the first principles of practical reason, as a seed-bed (*seminarium*) of the whole body of moral knowledge.[50] Aquinas suggests that our knowledge of the first principles in practical reasoning is also affected by original sin and is in need of healing by grace. As we saw earlier in the section on the *status naturae*, Adam's and Eve's children would have had "perfect knowledge of what is to be chosen and what to be avoided, which belongs to prudence" and, somewhat differently phrased, "they would have had sufficient knowledge to direct them in the works of justice, in which humans are directed by the universal principles of law". I suggest the following interpretation. In itself, the primary principle of moral reasoning is: good must be done and pursued and evil avoided.[51] But 'good' and 'evil' are only very formal notions here: the good is whatever one strives for, and evil is whatever one avoids. What we actually take or experience to be good and to be evil, is something else.[52] So what is distorted by the wound of ignorance is our knowledge of the real hierarchy of goods, including the true final end. In the state of integral nature, human beings had this knowledge as a preternatural gift, but in the state of fallen nature, we have to struggle hard to acquire it.

5. Conclusion

By introducing the notion of the *status naturae*, Aquinas can integrate Augustine's historical and descriptive idea of 'human nature' with Aristotle's analytical and prescriptive conception of 'human nature'. In this way, *status naturae* marks the transition of the (Aristotelian) categorical analysis of moral theory (*scientia moralis*) to the (Augustinian) hermeneutics of the Christian experience of factual human life and its sinfulness and of the Christian confession of the goodness of God's creative and

[49] *De Ver*. q. 14 a. 2: "principia iuris naturalis quae sunt semina virtutum moralium; *STh* I-II q. 51 a. 1: "principia iuris communis dicuntur esse seminalia virtutum".

[50] *De Ver*. q. 16 a. 1: "Unde et in natura humana … oportet esse cognitionem veritatis sine inquisitione et in speculativis et in practicis … Unde et hanc cognitionem oportet homini naturaliter inesse, cum haec quidem cognitio sit quasi seminarium quoddam totius cognitionis sequentis … Sicut igitur humanae animae est quidam habitus naturalis quo principia speculativarum scientiarum cognoscit, quem vocamus intellectum principiorum; ita etiam in ea est quidam habitus naturalis primorum principiorum operabilium, quae sunt universalia principia iuris naturalis; qui quidem habitus ad synderesim pertinet. Hic autem habitus non in alia potentia existit, quam ratio". See also A. McKay, "Synderesis, Law, and Virtue," in M. J. Cherry (ed.), *The Normativity of the Natural: Human Goods, Human Virtues, and Human Flourishing* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), 33-44, here 39-40. And M. Cline Horowitz, *Seeds of Virtue and Knowledge* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 50-53.

[51] Cf. *STh* I-II q. 94 a. 2.

[52] Cf. D. Bradley, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good: Reason and Human Happiness in Aquinas's Moral Science* (Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 315: "[T]he principle does not itself provide any criteria for discriminating between really and apparently morally good ends".

redemptive activity.[53] Aristotle's moral theory is essential in Aquinas' thought but its function is limited. The analysis of 'human nature' as such, as it were in a hypothetical, purely natural state, should not be confused with a description of actual human life, whether in Paradise or in the present world. It serves only as a tool to unravel part of the complexity of our real historical, existential situation in relation to God's creative and redemptive activity.

It seems to me that among Thomists the *status naturae* has not always received the attention it deserves. There may be – at least – two reasons for this lack of attention. First, during the 16th and 17th centuries, the Scotist idea became dominant in Catholic theology, also among Thomists, that original sin consists only of the loss of the super- and preternatural gifts. In this view, there is no room for internal damage or wounding of human nature. The fall is considered as a mere relapse into a purely natural state.[54] As a result, the theological focus in Catholic theology shifted to discussions about the relation between nature and grace, while the gravity of original sin was left to the Protestants. Second, there has been a tendency, at least since the late 19th century, to separate Aquinas's philosophy from his theology. This fostered a reading of Aquinas' moral theory that remained isolated from the broader theological framework of the fallen state of human nature. Bringing the two together results in a view on human nature that is both more faithful to Aquinas' thought and more realistic and relevant to our actual situation.

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[53] Cf. R. te Velde, "Evil, Sin, and Death. The Christian Doctrine of Original Sin," in R. te Velde, *Thomas Aquinas on the Good, Moral Life, and Happiness* (Leuven: Peeters, 2024), 85-108, esp. 94-96.

[54] See my 'Stripped and wounded,' 121-125.