



Book reviews

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EJSTA 42 (2024)

DOI:

10.2478/ejsta-2024-0008



M.A. Dauphinais, A. Hofer, R. Nutt (eds.), *Thomas Aquinas as Spiritual Teacher* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2023)

The books published in 1996 - Robert Barron's *Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master*, and especially Jean-Pierre Torrell's *Thomas d'Aquin, maître spirituel*, - had a significant impact on the popularization of a renewed view of Aquinas' person and work. By presenting Thomas's thought grounded in the historical context of his life - that is, that of a Dominican preacher and 13th-century *magister in Sacra Pagina* - they made it possible to discover in him an authentic master of the spiritual life, fervently dedicated to the mission of his order, which was defined as the service of "preaching the Gospel and saving souls." This ever-fresh perspective on the work of the Master of Aquino guided the organizers of the conference - "St. Thomas Aquinas as Spiritual Teacher: Theology in a Culture of Grace" - which took place at Ave Maria University in Florida in February 2022. The publication we are reviewing, which contains thirteen essays, is the fruit of that conference. As one of the editors of this volume - Andrew Hoffer OP - wrote in the Introduction: "The contributors give new insights into the sources, context, breadth, wisdom, and influences of Aquinas's spiritual teaching and reveal him to be extraordinarily fruitful in the Holy Spirit." Being constrained by the limited form of this review, instead of discussing individual articles, let me make a few observations.

Articles presenting a diversity of viewpoints and perspectives are arranged according to the following topics: Scriptural sources: John and the Letter to the

Hebrews, The Teaching of Knowledge and Wisdom, The Blessed Virgin Mary in Catholic Theology and Universities, Pray and Hope, The Sacred Liturgy of the Church. The reading makes us realize how fundamental to Thomas was his mission as a teacher, one who, as a master, leads his students to knowledge of the mysteries of the living God. Aquinas saw the model of such a vocation in the person of Christ himself - the Teacher, the Word who took on human nature to lead us to knowledge of the saving truth about the Father. Thus, St. Thomas understands himself as someone to help others come to know and love the triune God more deeply. Skipping this perspective in the study of Thomistic doctrine does not allow one to properly understand the person and intellectual work of the Dominican teacher. The goal of the Master of Aquino was not just to create theology as a logically coherent system of truths about God, but to help students on their personal journey toward knowledge of God, which, as in his case, would be the fruit of orderly, systematic theological reflection, but also, personal experience. At the same time, this refreshed perspective is proving fertile for us as well, especially in view of the dichotomy frequent in religious reality that opposes "heart" and "reason," theology and spirituality. As Serge-Thomas Bonino OP notes, Thomas' spirituality - that is, "his teaching on the way to live concretely in communion with God here below, looking toward the full communion of Heaven" - should "not be sought *alongside* his theology, but *in* his theology itself".

This inspiring view of Thomas' work is clearly present in the collected articles. By way of example, let us recall a few statements. Thomas G. Weinandy notes that for Thomas, "his love of learning was founded upon and cultivated on his love for the triune God." For Aquinas, practicing theology is an authentic "act of worship," in which he offers his whole heart and mind to the glory of God. Theology should not be merely an academic activity but should also become an evangelizing proclamation of the truth.

As Daria Spezzano demonstrates in her article, for Thomas the model of a theologian was St. John the Apostle, the beloved disciple. The depth of John's doctrine of the person of Christ was the fruit of great intimacy with the Teacher, as illustrated by the disciple's leaning on his breast at the Last Supper. According to many testimonies, Thomas, when he had difficulty understanding theological issues, prayed especially fervently, spending more than once whole nights with his head resting on the tabernacle.

For Thomas, as Bishop Daniel E. Flores writes, "charity is the sense of the mind in its approach to God." It enables a confident kind of connaturality with the known God, through participation in His own love. Without participation in this Trinitarian love, learning God's truths will remain merely looking at something largely incomprehensible.

It is also worth noting that many of the contributors to this volume often in their research do not limit themselves to Aquinas' systematic works but reach for his biblical commentaries. Thus, it is not difficult to conclude that they constitute an

exceptionally fertile source for the spiritual doctrine of the Dominican *magister in Sacra Pagina*, which until recently had been overlooked even by Thomistic scholars.

In the Introduction, Cardinal Ladaria states: “One comes away from the study of Aquinas with both mind and heart inflamed.” A reading of the present volume makes one agree with the opinion of the former prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. Recognizing in Thomas a wise, faith-filled teacher and revisiting his doctrine in this perspective, prove to be very inspiring for contemporary students of the Dominican master. His way of doing theology allows one to transcend the sterile and dangerous antagonism between academic theology and the emotional spirituality promoted today and allows one to turn systematic theology into a vibrant work of evangelization.

[Paweł Klimczak, Dominican House of Studies Kraków]

William C. Mattison III, *Growing in Virtue. Aquinas on Habit*, (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2023)

Presented with a new book on Thomistic virtue ethics, the reader might ask: ‘another one?’. At least this reader did. To mention but two recent examples: the studies of Knobel and Sullivan were significant contributions to an understanding of respectively Aquinas’s theory of the infused virtues and the notion of habit in general. But Mattison’s study adds to the literature by bringing together much of the recent literature, and giving a coherent and substantial presentation of how Aquinas believes we obtain virtues and grow in them.

There are three main parts to the book, followed by a disputed question on virtue in the appendix. The first three chapters offer a basic taxonomy of habits. Chapter one unpacks the notion of habits as second nature: they are *second*, because they build on powers already present in the person, giving them further specification. And they are *nature* in the sense that they stably order the person. Mattison gives a division in three levels, complete with visual representation, that he uses throughout the book: activity, habits, and the person. In the chapter, he also stresses the importance of natural law: since habits are nature, we need to understand what ‘nature’ means to appreciate their proper orientation. In the second chapter he works on carefully distinguishing habit from disposition, the former being distinct because of its stability and specification by rationality. This functions as the basis for the third chapter, on nature and nurture, or more specifically on nature and custom. These cause dispositions in us, and also form the basis for habits: “Accustoming means simply the process of formation through repeated activity whereby a person attains or a custom disposition or a habit, the latter only when stable specification is provided by rationality” (52).

In chapters four and five, Mattison studies the acquired virtues. Having established that virtue is not *habitude* (Pinckaers) and having discussed nature and

custom as causes, he works out how we can understand that repeated action causes habits. At some point, admittedly indeterminate, a person “crosses the line” and is no longer simply disposed but habituated to certain action. Because they are willed rationally in relation to ends, “habits are more truly ‘one’s own’ than dispositions” (68). “End” is taken here in a dynamic sense. The last end is not simply a fixed goal, but “an ongoing activity of bringing coherence to our lives”, which implies that “there is room for growth” in this coherence (84). Especially in children, these habits can be formed through education. Virtue is instilled not when a person is maximally virtuous, but virtuous enough: “What constitutes crossing the line is enough involvement of rationality to supply a *causa immobilis*, and enough stability (within the virtue and across virtues) for activity to be consistent, prompt, and pleasant” (109). These habits then grow by way of ‘intensification’ or ‘extension’. Mattison explains that this growth does not happen primarily by lessening contrary dispositions. If a habit can change by growing, it can also decrease and ultimately cross the line again and be lost.

Chapters six and seven turn to grace as a cause of virtue. The discussion mirrors that of the two previous chapters, pointing out commonalities and differences between the two types of virtue. The re-creation wrought by grace, requires new virtues by which a person is related to the supernatural end since in Mattison’s view the acquired virtues are unable to be ordered to supernatural happiness. “Everything changes”, this much is clear but especially in the discussion the gifts of the Holy Spirit it becomes clear that we also touch upon the limits of what we can say about virtue, since it now also involves speaking about the action of God in the human person. As with their acquired counterparts, the growth of infused virtues does not consist in decreasing contrary dispositions. The striking difference is of course that they can be lost by a single act of mortal sin. Even though it looks like ‘habit formation’ in general, the purpose of education in the infused virtues is not to bring about their existence but to accompany the process of graced growth in them. What happens with the acquired virtues? Mattison nuances an earlier claim that the acquired virtues are “literally” trans-formed: “acquired virtues do not become infused virtues, any more than dispositions become habits” (175). Because infused virtues do not entail prior acts, it is *more* possible for them to exist alongside contrary dispositions. He cites agreement with Knobel’s claim that “lessening or eliminating contrary dispositions (...) is not a process of increasing the virtue per se but more akin to removing impediments to the exercise of the virtue” (178).

In the appendix, Mattison addresses the coexistence theory of the virtues in the form of a disputed question. Unsurprisingly to those familiar with his work, he denies the possibility of the coexistence of acquired and infused virtues. It is separate from the rest of the book because it can be distinguished from the claims on growth in virtue. This appendix highlights how Mattison, like Aquinas himself, takes

opposite argument seriously and discusses them respectfully, acknowledging what is true and valuable about them.

Mattison leaves no stone unturned, which means that the reader sometimes has to go deep into the discussions with him. But to those following the debates in Thomistic virtue ethics, this book is a great synthesis of contemporary scholarship, presented carefully and with great clarity.

Anton ten Klooster [Tilburg University]

Ryan Connors, *Rethinking Cooperation with Evil. A Virtue-Based Approach* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2024)

Ryan Connors provides with his book a very interesting insight in the way moral theology has dealt with the problem of cooperation with evil. The author goes into details in a mostly pleasant way and manages to draw the attention to the various aspects of the matter. Sometimes the level of details, specifically when it comes to describing biographies of protagonists in the book, seems a bit exaggerated. However, the author has a broad view with thorough descriptions, when it comes to the various ways in which one has tried to justify a certain level of cooperation with evil, to “avoid unnecessarily limiting one’s collaboration with the world”, as the author identifies Saint Alphonsus’s view (p. 50). The author himself, however, shows a rather strict view as to what ‘unnecessary’ means.

The entire book can be brought down to a substantiation of the thesis that cooperation with evil should always be considered under the aspect of virtuous acting. Virtuous acting, in its turn, always has to do with an act that is by its very nature a good act, with a good object. It becomes clear quite from the beginning of the book, that the author draws away from too easy yielding to reasons for cooperation with evil. What is more, he considers the classical ways in which cooperation was allowed, as not sufficiently convincing and a flawed moral analysis.

This regards particularly the division into formal and material cooperation and the proximity of the cooperation. Although generally, the proximity to the evil that is done, is seen as a useful tool in the consideration of the permissibility of the act, the author deems proximity to be a too extrinsic factor, which is not helpful. Every element in the analysis of the human act of cooperation with evil, should be linked to the nature of the act itself that one actually does. All the chapters of the book continue to point in this direction.

In his overview, the author returns often to the moral analysis of Thomas Aquinas, to show that he – despite the fact that ‘cooperation with evil’ as such was studied only later – already gives enough reasons for a good judgment on the moral permissibility of such a cooperating act. This moral analysis focuses on the nature of the act itself, and not on other factors like formal or material cooperation. With an often-returning example of the dilemma of ‘the servant and the ladder’, the author

wants to identify the problems at hand in the evaluation of cooperation with evil. The example depicts a servant who holds the ladder for his master, so that the latter is facilitated in sinful acting. Various evaluations appear to be possible, but also here the author always stresses the need to return to the nature of the act itself. This means that not the sinfulness of the act that one cooperates with, counts, but the object of the act of the actual cooperation. The quest for the intrinsic nature of the human act is an always returning refrain in the whole book. The author begins with Aquinas's elements of the human act, including the important focus on its object, and ends with the vast judgement of *Veritatis Splendor* that has the same focus.

As a sort of result from this focus on the object of the human act, also in the case that this act is 'merely' cooperating with someone else's evil, is that the moral analysis refrains from subjective elements like someone's intention. This fact is brought up by the author quite a lot. Also, the author highlights often that 'duress' cannot provide a sufficient reason to make some act morally permissible. Indeed, duress is a common reason for engaging in cooperation with evil. The word 'evil', after all, contains in itself that the act is different from a straightforward good deed. The will to be involved in evil, requires therefore a specific motivation. Duress can indeed be this motivation, because the acting person will have the idea, that he or she is not able to escape the involvement in someone else's evil-doing.

In stressing the importance of the object of the act of a person who cooperates with evil, the author wants to make clear that the intention cannot be used for the determining the permissibility. He wants to focus, not only on the evil act, but also on what the cooperating person actually does. This is the way in which the author arrives at introducing virtue as the leading element in the moral analysis. Not the absence of proximity or formal cooperation makes an act justifiable, but the fact that the cooperating act itself can be seen as virtuous.

Although the author goes at great length to make his point, and it has to be said that many of his arguments are convincing, there are also some weaknesses. Firstly, the way in which he surpasses the classical division between formal and material cooperation, and also the reflection on the proximity to the actual evil-doing, is a bit too rigid. The author considers these elements either to be focusing too much on the intention or too distant from the question, what the cooperating person is actually doing. However, they provide useful information in understanding better what someone does while acting. The encyclical letter *Veritatis Splendor*, much applauded in this book, stresses that to know the object of an act, one should assume the perspective of the first person. The mentioned classical elements of cooperation with evil are still helpful in having that perspective.

Secondly, the author often laments an arbitrary judgement in matters of cooperation of evil. Through his thesis of focusing on virtues, he wants to avoid these subjective conclusions. Although there is much truth in his thesis, it should not be forgotten that moral analyses are never cold calculations and neither is the determination of the object of a human act. Specifically, his reference to the importance

of a connatural judgement, indeed typical for virtuous acting, makes it difficult to merely focus on the object of the act.

However, the author gives an impressive overview of the various elements that are considered in the history of moral theology. To his credit, also by means of a critical tone, the author gives a good insight in what cooperation with evil entails in terms of deliberations. The virtue-based approach in this matter is indeed to be commended. At the same time, from the nature of the matter itself, cooperating with evil will still always cause doubts and uncertainties. And rightly so.

Lambert Hendriks [Rolduc Major Seminary]