

Moral Beauty and Affective Knowledge in Aquinas

ALICE RAMOS*



1. Introduction

In his masterful book *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, Servais Pinckaers laments that modern ethicists have lost the sense of beauty to the extent that it is no longer associated with goodness. The Fathers of the Church, as Pinckaers shows, considered not only the beauty of God and creation but also the beauty that radiated from the interior of human persons and their actions. Good actions were also beautiful. Pinckaers calls for a rediscovery of beauty both in ethics and in theology¹. As beauty needs to be recaptured, so too honesty, according to Pinckaers. For Aquinas the notion of the “honest” good meant moral excellence, the good in conformity with man’s rational nature. Since today, according to Pinckaers, honesty has been reduced to a simple keeping of the law — although popular language does seem to have maintained a certain understanding and esteem for the word honesty—Pinckaers advises a recovery of the primacy of the honest good over the useful and delightful goods².

The theory of morality which Pinckaers presents lays the groundwork for a consideration of the moral good in terms of the beautiful and for an understand-

* Department of Philosophy, St. John’s University, Grand Central and Utopia Parkways, Jamaica, New York 11439

¹ S. PINCKAERS, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Sr. Mary Thomas Noble, O.P. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), p. 31. Armand Maurer in his book *About Beauty* (Houston, Texas: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1983) also points to the importance of St. Thomas’s identification of the moral good with beauty. See *Ibidem*, pp. 71-74.

² *Ibidem*, pp. 415-17. While the translator of Pinckaers chooses to translate Aquinas’s *honestum* as the “honest good”, a better translation would perhaps be the true good. *Honestas* can also be rendered as what is honorable. The honest man would thus be the honorable man or the truly good man.

ing of the necessity of good dispositions in order to embrace moral truths. Morality is not for Pinckaers principally a matter of obligations and commands, but rather is based on man's attraction for the true and the good³. In this, his thought echoes what Pope John Paul II says in *Veritatis Splendor*: «[K]nowledge of God's law in general is certainly necessary, but it is not sufficient: what is essential is a sort of "connaturality" between man and the true good. Such a connaturality is rooted in and develops through the virtuous attitudes of the individual himself...»⁴. Man becomes like the true good, he becomes connatural with it, when there is genuine virtue. An authentic admirer of the beauty of nature and of art, John Paul II is no less an enthusiast of the beauty of God and of the moral life. He in fact describes the moral life in aesthetic terms: «... all men and women are entrusted with the task of *crafting their own life*: in a certain sense, they are to make of it a work of art, a masterpiece»⁵.

In order to recover the beauty and honesty of the moral life and the connaturality which must obtain between man and the moral good, we will now turn our attention to St. Thomas and his consideration of the beautiful. While it is true that St. Thomas did not write a systematic treatise on the nature of the beautiful, and that when he does discuss the notion of beauty he invariably connects it to questions of metaphysical import or problems of speculative theology⁶, it is nevertheless the case that he did focus his attention on a particular type of beauty, that is, moral or spiritual beauty⁷. Aquinas approaches the notion of moral beauty through the notion of moral goodness and designates the latter *honestas*. He in fact has left us an interesting treatment of spiritual beauty in a question titled *De Honestate* and which appears in his treatise on temperance⁸. So while Aquinas's position on the transcendentalism of the beautiful —if the beautiful is in effect a transcendental⁹— has to be reconstructed, as it were, from his remarks on the beautiful scattered throughout his works, this is not the case with respect to his consideration of moral beauty. The placement of Aquinas's analysis of spiritual beauty within his examination of the virtue of temperance is meant not simply to focus in a general or abstract way on the notion of moral beauty, but ultimately to especially attribute spiritual beauty to a specific virtue, that is, to the cardinal virtue of temperance. The special attribution of spiritual beauty to temperance presupposes a knowledge of spiritual beauty in general, a consciousness of the beauty of virtue,

³ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

⁴ Pope JOHN PAUL II, *Veritatis Splendor* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1993), §64, p. 81.

⁵ Pope JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Artists* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1999), §2, p. 13.

⁶ G.B. PHELAN, *The Concept of Beauty in St. Thomas Aquinas*, in *Aspects of the New Scholastic Philosophy*, ed. C. A. Hart (New York: Benziger, 1932), p. 125.

⁷ C. CHERESO, O.P., *The Virtue of Honor and Beauty According to St. Thomas Aquinas, An Analysis of Moral Beauty* (River Forest, Illinois: The Aquinas Library, 1960), p. xi.

⁸ See *Summa Theologiae II-II*, q. 145, articles 1 through 4. Hereafter cited as *ST*.

⁹ See J. AERTSEN, *Beauty: A Forgotten Transcendental?*, in *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), pp. 335-359.

a recognition that the nature of virtue is to be beautiful¹⁰. The virtuous man, the morally good man, or the spiritually beautiful man will be for Aquinas the honest man¹¹.

Now in connecting virtue, beauty, and *honestas* St. Thomas is following a threefold tradition: scriptural, patristic, and philosophical. From Scriptural references, Aquinas draws a parallel between the morally good and the beautiful on the one hand, and the morally evil and the ugly on the other. He also refers to things that are *honestas*, as those things which are well-formed, whereas the *inhonestas* are lacking in form¹². The Church Fathers, St. John Damascene and St. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, permit a further consideration of the beauty of virtue as opposed to the “disgracefulness” or ugliness of vice¹³. And among the philosophers, St. Thomas relies not only on Aristotle but also on Cicero. The latter identifies moral beauty with the whole of virtue; in fact, the moral beauty of his just and orderly society is the moral beauty of Aristotle’s good life¹⁴. Cicero equates the *honestum* with virtue, and the *honestum* is the beautiful¹⁵. For Cicero human actions that are truly good are also fitting and honorable, whereas base actions are disgraceful. The virtuous life of man will, according to Cicero, radiate beauty because of its order and harmony with man’s reason¹⁶. However, in this paper I wish first of all to underline Aristotle’s consideration of virtuous action within an the context of the *kalon* (the beautiful) as the backdrop for Aquinas’s own thought on moral beauty. And once we have considered the relationship between virtue, beauty, and *honestas* as it is developed in Aquinas, and the special attribution of

¹⁰ C. CHERESO, op. cit., pp. xii-xiii.

¹¹ *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 1 and 2.

¹² See references to St. Paul’s Corinthians regarding the comely (*honestas*) and uncomely (*inhonestas*) parts of the body in *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 2, sed contra and resp; a. 4, ad 3; elsewhere St. Paul tells us to promote the proper, not the disgraceful (*1 Cor. 7, 35-36*) and to do things properly and in order (*1 Cor. 14,40*).

¹³ See C. CHERESO, op. cit., pp. xvii-xviii for exact references to the Patristic foundation of Thomas’s doctrine on spiritual beauty.

¹⁴ Charles J. O’NEIL, *The Notion of Beauty in the Ethics of St. Thomas*, in «The New Scholasticism», XIV (1940), p. 352.

¹⁵ See *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 1, ad 1: «... Tully says (*De Inv. Rhet. ii. 52*) that *some things allure us by their own force, and attract us by their own worth, such as virtue, truth, knowledge*. And this suffices to give a thing the character of honest».

¹⁶ See *De Officiis*, Bk I, ch. 28 (98): «For just as physical beauty attracts our attention because of the perfect harmony of its component parts and is a source of great delight because of their matching charm, so this ‘decorum’ which shines forth in life, stirs the admiration of all around us because of its logical consistency and reasonableness in all its words and deeds». According to Cicero what is most fitting for man is that he follow his nature and its inclinations—that rational nature which distinguishes him from the other animals. As Cicero says: «... nothing is more fitting than complete consistency of life and individual actions, and this cannot be achieved if we neglect our own natural inclinations and follow those which belong more properly to others», in Bk I, ch. 31 (111). In his treatise on natural law Aquinas was no doubt influenced by Cicero in his enumeration of the natural inclinations.

spiritual beauty to temperance, we will focus on the necessity of rectified appetite for the judgment of prudence, for the practical judgment of the intellect, since as we shall see the apprehension of spiritual or moral beauty requires a type of knowledge which is appetitive or affective. We will then end this paper with a brief consideration on ethical order and its relationship to metaphysical order, since according to St. Thomas order is the «chief beauty in things»¹⁷.

2. Aristotle and “Seemly” Action

Although the nature of things does play a fundamental role in Aristotle’s ethics and provides a public setting or a common framework in which moral decisions are made, knowledge of human nature and of its good is not the decisive factor in determining man’s choice of the supreme human good. The determining is effected rather by human choice and decision. The starting point of ethics as practical science is in the agent; man is the source of his own actions¹⁸. The starting point of human action is choice¹⁹. So, while Aristotle places important emphasis on the nature of man and the nature of the good, the decisive factor in human action is not simply a knowledge of these natures. A man may know what differentiates human nature from other natures and the type of activity that given his nature will result in happiness, but he is free to choose otherwise. Man chooses the good which is relative to his disposition, to his appetitive state. The starting point of ethical reasoning is therefore not the good that a study of human nature shows to be the best. As Aristotle puts it: «... in conduct our task is to start from what is good for each and make what is without qualification good good for each»²⁰. Of course, this does not mean that ethics is a purely private or subjective matter, for according to Aristotle what is to assure objectivity and universality in making the right choice in conformity with the nature of things is education in the virtues. It is the moral virtues which dispose the individual to make the right moral decision, the right choice. However, although these virtues are oriented, as it were, to choosing, they do not impose a rigid determination, for the determination of human action always lies in the agent, in his power to choose²¹. One might think, therefore, that if individual choice is determined neither by nature nor by educa-

¹⁷ *Summa contra Gentiles III*, ch. 71.

¹⁸ *NE III*, 5, 1113b18.

¹⁹ *NE VI*, 2, 1139a31.

²⁰ *Metaph. Z*, 3, 1029b 6-7, quoted in J. OWENS, *The Grounds of Ethical Universality in Aristotle*, in «Man and World», 2, 2 (1969), p. 180.

²¹ Aristotle says: «Choice is the starting point of action; it is the source of motion but not the end for the sake of which we act (i.e., the final cause). The starting point of choice, however, is desire and reasoning directed toward some end... choice is either intelligence motivated by desire or desire operating through thought, and it is as a combination of these two that man is a starting point of action», in *NE VI*, 2, 1139 a31-33, 1139 b4-5.

tion, by correct habituation, then the individual can choose to disregard nature and his moral education, can in fact choose that which is contrary to what ought to be done. This is not however the case in Aristotelian ethics, for although the agent is not necessitated to make the right choice, to perform the good action, he is aware, in his role of deciding, that the good action is the fitting one and what becomes him as a rational agent.

In his ethics, Aristotle stresses «the appeal of the goodness appropriate to human actions, a goodness expressed in Greek by the neuter of the adjective that means beautiful in an aesthetic context, the *kalon*. ... One may convey the Aristotelian meaning by saying that the seemly presents itself to the human mind with an obligatory force of its own. The obligation is expressed in Aristotle by means of the Greek *dei*. It is what ought to be, or what should be. No other reason is given by him»²². Virtuous actions are presented as possessing an intrinsic character of seemliness and it is this very seemliness that shows the deliberating agent that he should perform the action. Obligation arises solely from the seemliness of the action. All morally good actions, whether means or end, all moral starting points are characterized by seemliness. This aspect is given in each virtuous action, even apart from man's consciously orienting the action to the correct supreme goal²³. The texts of Aristotle repeatedly present us with the nobility or beauty of virtuous acts, acts which are performed because they are noble, beautiful. All vice is base or disgraceful and deserves blame, whereas virtue is noble and is to be praised²⁴. Although no further explanation is given by Aristotle regarding the inherent beauty or seemliness of virtuous actions which gives rise to their obligatory character, he is nevertheless aware that each act of human choice «is a new beginning, a beginning not determined by anything that preceded it... every act of choice results in a determination that springs from itself and not from anything antecedent. It in fact sets up on each occasion a starting point that adds to the order in the universe and that was not previously contained in it»²⁵. Because human choice is an intellectual act, it reflects upon itself, that is, it

²² J. OWENS, *The Grounds of Ethical Universality in Aristotle*, in «Man and World» 2, 2 (1969), pp. 183-84. See also O.J. BROWN, *Natural Rectitude and Divine Law in Aquinas* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Studies and Texts 55, 1981), p. 20 and p. 56, note 63. See *NE III*, 7, 1115 b12-13; IV, 1, 1120 a23-24.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ See for example in *NE III*, 7, 1116 a10; IV, 1, 1120 a24-25, 1120 b23-35; IV, 2, 1122 a24-25; IV, 7, 1127 a28-30, 1127 b1-5.

²⁵ J. OWENS, op. cit., p. 177. According to Aristotle, as a man begets his children so is man the begetter of his actions. The starting point of human action is always traced back to ourselves; we are responsible for the scenario, as it were, that we create. To this effect, we will give one of the interesting examples that Aristotle presents: «Let us assume the case of a man who becomes ill voluntarily through living a dissolute life and disobeying doctors' orders. In the beginning, before he let his health slip away, he could have avoided becoming ill: but once you have thrown a stone and let it go, you can no longer recall it, even though the power to throw it was yours, for the initiative was within you», in *NE III*, 5, 1114 a15-19.

recognizes that it is deciding and that it is the cause of whatever follows; thus, it is aware of its responsibility and of its dignity. Man is the originator or master of the new events that he brings about in the universe, events for which he is responsible and for which he will be praised or blamed—all this is spontaneously given to his reflection²⁶. In making a choice, then, we are engaged in an action that makes us aware of our dignity and calls for a response which corresponds to that dignity. The decisions we make thus call for a respect for the natures of things. «In the responsibility and dignity of bringing a new direction, no matter how small, into the universe lies the obligatory appeal to do the thing in a befitting way. This would appear to be the explanation of what Aristotle means by doing the seemly for the sake of the seemly, or of doing a thing as it ought to be done»²⁷. Every act of choice thus faces not only the natures of things and the moral culture in which one has been educated, but also the responsibility for originating something new in the universe. Cognizant of this, our act of choice «sees in the proposed course of conduct a congruence that may be termed seemliness, or an incongruence that may be called unseemliness. Inherent in the seemliness appears the obligation to act accordingly, in the unseemliness to avoid the action»²⁸.

According to Aristotle, the person who will be most attuned to the seemliness or attractiveness of virtuous action and to its obligatory force will be that person whose character «somehow has an affinity for excellence or virtue, a character that loves what is noble and feels disgust at what is base»²⁹. But this seems to be the rare person, for the majority of people are dissuaded from base action not because it is disgraceful and from a sense of shame but rather because they fear punishment. Aristotle characterizes most people as living under the influence of emotion, and thus pursuing pleasures as well as the means leading toward pleasures, and avoiding pains. Such people do not know what is truly beautiful and pleasant, since as Aristotle says, «they have never tasted it»³⁰. Aristotle proves that virtue is beautiful, good, and pleasurable by referring to the judgment of a good man. On this Aquinas comments the following: «[A good] man, since he has the right feeling for human works, judges them correctly. In another field the man with a healthy sense of taste will make correct judgments on flavors. But a good man judges that actions in accord with virtue are eminently pleasurable, noble [or beautiful], and good, so much so that he puts them before any other pleasures, beauties, or goods»³¹.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 184.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 185.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 186-87.

²⁹ *NE X*, 9, 1179 b29-30.

³⁰ See *NE X*, 9, 1179 b10-16.

³¹ *In Ethic.* I, 8, 1099 a22-25; 160. St. Thomas ends by saying: «Since, therefore, happiness consists in virtuous actions, it follows that happiness is the best, most beautiful, and most pleasant». Man's final end, happiness, can thus also be explained in terms of the beautiful.

3. Aquinas on Spiritual Beauty

Since Aristotle does not give an explicit treatment of the beautiful in the moral order, although the notion does seem to pervade his whole moral philosophy, we will turn now to Aquinas' teaching on spiritual beauty in order to round out Aristotle's considerations of the seemingly, of the beautiful, in human action. St. Thomas' reference to Cicero enables him, I believe, to connect virtue, beauty, and *honestas*. Etymologically, St. Thomas tells us that «honesty means an honorable state», so that a thing will be called honest because it is “worthy of honor”, and honor is given to what is excellent: «... the excellence of a man is gauged chiefly according to his virtue, as stated in *Phys.* vii.17. Therefore, properly speaking, honesty refers to the same thing as virtue»³². St. Thomas's explanation of the *honestum* has a foundation identical to that of virtue, that is, the *honestum* is desirable for itself (although it may also be desired for the sake of a more perfect good), and is rooted in man's internal choice and thus reflects, as Aquinas puts it, «internal rectitude»³³. We can then say that *honestas* is the same as virtue.

But what of the relation of the *honestum* to the beautiful? In answer to this question, St. Thomas refers to the words of Dionysius: «... beauty or comeliness results from the concurrence of clarity and proportion... God is said to be beautiful, as being the cause of the harmony and clarity of the universe»³⁴. The beauty of creatures is thus due to their splendor and harmony or due proportion, and this beauty is referred to God as its cause. Aquinas notes however the difference between corporeal beauty and spiritual beauty: the beauty of the body consists in well proportioned members and brilliant color, whereas spiritual beauty consists in a man's activities being well proportioned according to the spiritual light of reason³⁵. According to Aquinas, this spiritual beauty is what is meant by the *honestum*, which he considers to be the same as virtue, for virtue moderates or measures human action according to reason. The virtuous life is a life proportioned according to the clarity of reason, an ordered life, desirable for its own sake; the *honestum* is thus the same as spiritual beauty³⁶. In stressing that the *honestum* is identified with man's spiritual excellence, Aquinas refers to Augustine's clarifica-

³² *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 1, *resp.*

³³ *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 1, ad 1 and 3. Virtue is desired for itself, although it is also desired for something else, namely, happiness. In *De Veritate*, q. 24, a. 1, ad 11, St. Thomas notes that the honest good is the object of freedom of choice: «Our will is brought to bear upon an end or upon a means to an end. And the end may be honorable, useful, or pleasurable in accordance with the threefold division of good into honorable, the unuseful, and the pleasurable. In regard to an honorable end Bernard lays down freedom of choice. In regard to a useful good, which is a means, he lays down freedom of counsel. In regard to a pleasurable good he lays down freedom of liking».

³⁴ *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 2, *resp.*

³⁵ *Ibidem.*

³⁶ J. O'NEIL, *op. cit.*, p. 356.

tion regarding the *honestum*: «By honesty I mean intelligible beauty, which we properly designate as spiritual, ... many things are beautiful to the eye, which it would be hardly proper to call honest»³⁷. Through these words of Augustine, Aquinas wants to make it clear that the *honestum*, that man's excellence, «consists radically in the internal choice»³⁸, in internal rectitude, and not merely in something that is external. So it is precisely the *honestum*, the intelligible beauty of the virtuous man, of the honest man, which may be said to move him closer to the source of all honor and beauty³⁹.

Aquinas thus establishes the identification of the *honestum* with spiritual beauty through virtue: the well-proportioned life of man according to the light of reason is what the *honestum* or spiritual clarity consists in. At this point in his inquiry on the *honestum*, St. Thomas makes it clear that the identification of the *honestum* with spiritual beauty does not confuse the order of finality, of goodness, with the order of formality, of the beautiful. While it is objected that the *honestum* is derived from appetite, since the *honestum* is «what is desirable for its own sake,” and the beautiful regards rather the cognitive faculty to which it is pleasing»⁴⁰, St. Thomas's answer removes any confusion regarding the incompatibility of the *honestum* and the beautiful due to the diversity of appetite and cognition. He answers the objection in the following way: «The object that moves the appetite is an apprehended good. Now if a thing is perceived to be beautiful as soon as it is apprehended, it is taken to be something becoming and good. Hence Dionysius says (*Div. Nom.* iv) that the beautiful and the good are beloved by all. Wherefore the honest, inasmuch as it implies spiritual beauty, is an object of desire...»⁴¹. It is not therefore the beautiful as such that is identified with the *honestum*, but rather the beautiful as a kind of moral good⁴². As we said before, the *honestum* is identified with spiritual beauty through virtue. Virtue is desired because it perfects man, making him, as well as his activity, good. St. Thomas points out, however, that the excellence of virtue is only fully explained in terms of the excellence of man's ultimate end, happiness and God. In fact, the happiness which is attained through virtuous actions is described as «the best, most beautiful, and most pleasant»⁴³. Virtue is ordered to man's final happiness and it is the latter which gives virtue its meaning, its intelligibility. So if man desires happiness, he will desire virtue as a means to that happiness⁴⁴. Virtue's excellence, however, is not exhausted in its role as a means to happiness. In its function of leading to an end, whether its own intrinsic end or the ultimate end, virtue exhibits a rational proportion to

³⁷ *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 1, ad 3.

³⁸ *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 1, ad 3.

³⁹ J. O'NEIL, op. cit., p. 357.

⁴⁰ *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 2, obj. 1.

⁴¹ *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 2, ad 1.

⁴² C. CHERESO, op. cit., pp. 47-48.

⁴³ *In Ethic.* I, 8, 160.

⁴⁴ C. CHERESO, op. cit., p. 48.

the end. Virtue is in itself a consonance which participates in the clarity of reason and thus its splendor attracts us⁴⁵. Now, as stated above, virtue is desired as a means to happiness, but it cannot be desired unless it is known. In the knowing of virtue, the mind is taken by its consonance and clarity, which are both constituents of beauty. Thus, virtue is apprehended not only as a means but also in its beauty. Since this beauty is desirable to the cognitive faculty as an end, and the *honestas* of virtue is its attractiveness as an end, then virtue's *honestas* is identical to its spiritual beauty. In addition to its goodness as a means to happiness, virtue has in itself an "aspect of goodness", that is, its beauty which, desirable for its own sake, is its *honestas*. In the moral order, *honestas* and beauty are formally the same⁴⁶. The formal identity between *honestas* and beauty is confirmed in the following statements of Aquinas: (1) «...*honestum*, inasmuch as it implies spiritual beauty, is an object of desire...»⁴⁷ (2) «... a thing is said to be *honestum*, insofar as it has a certain beauty through being regulated by reason...»⁴⁸ (3) «... a thing is said to be *honestum* as having a certain excellence deserving of honor on account of its spiritual beauty...»⁴⁹. Now in order to emphasize that *honestas* and spiritual beauty are formally identical, Aquinas raises the question of the relationship between *honestas*, utility, and delight. He says that the latter are materially the same and formally distinct. The *honestum*, the useful, and the delightful are found in the subject of virtue and this accounts for their material identity. But virtue has three distinct formalities: *honestas*, because of the beauty of virtue in regulating man's life and action in accordance with the order and clarity of reason; delight or pleasure because the appetite rests in the virtue possessed, in the possession of the naturally fitting good, and usefulness because virtue is referred to happiness as its end⁵⁰. Now to speak of beauty and the useful in the same subject does not mean that beauty is to be used. It simply means that nothing which is repugnant to honesty, to spiritual beauty, can be useful, since it would be contrary to man's final end, which is «a good in accordance with reason»⁵¹. When man is ordered to his final end by virtuous actions, then his duly proportioned life according to reason radiates clarity. When this ordination is not present, however, neither are the clarity of reason nor beauty present⁵².

This brings us then to the connection between *honestas* and temperance in St. Thomas. The virtue of temperance is important here precisely because it inclines

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*. It should be recalled that for Aquinas consonance and clarity are features of the beautiful.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 48-49. See *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 1, ad 1 and also *In De Div. Nom.*, cap. IV, lect. V, n. 356, cited in C. CHERESO. See also note 15, regarding Aquinas's use of Cicero.

⁴⁷ *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 2, ad 1.

⁴⁸ *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 3.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 3, *resp.* See C. CHERESO, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁵¹ *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 3, ad 3.

⁵² C. CHERESO, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

man to the good of reason and in so doing shares in reason; as Aquinas puts it: «... the good of man is to be in accordance with reason... temperance evidently inclines man to this, since its very nature implies moderation or temperateness, which reason causes»⁵³. Thus in safeguarding the ordination of reason, temperance also safeguards beauty. Intemperance is to be reproached precisely because it is “repugnant to human excellence”, to that excellence which resides in man’s reason; it is likewise to be blamed «because it is most repugnant to man’s clarity or beauty; inasmuch as the pleasures which are the matter of intemperance dim the light of reason from which all the clarity and beauty of virtue arises»⁵⁴. Because the virtue of temperance is principally concerned with moderation, with proportion, there is a definite affinity between temperance and spiritual beauty or *honestas*⁵⁵.

That *honestas* pertains to temperance Aquinas shows by arguing that both *honestas* or spiritual beauty and temperance are opposed to disgracefulness and unbecomingness in man: «... honesty belongs especially to temperance, since the latter repels that which is most disgraceful and unbecoming to man, namely animal lusts. Hence by its very name temperance is most significative of the good of reason to which it belongs to moderate and temper evil desires»⁵⁶. Since disgrace is opposed to honor and glory, intemperance robs man, as it were, of his honor, of his excellence, and of the clarity of reason⁵⁷. Intemperance is contrary to man’s rational nature. Thus, «... greater honor is due to temperance, because the vices which it holds in check are the most deserving of reproach»⁵⁸. But temperance holds in check not only its own opposite vices, but also other vices which occupy man’s soul when his actions are not measured by reason. This is the case because the passions of the irascible appetite presuppose the passions of the concupiscible appetite⁵⁹. Hence Aquinas notes that «while temperance directly moderates the passions of the concupiscible appetite which tend towards good, as a consequence, it moderates all the other passions, inasmuch as moderation of the passions that precede results in moderation of the passions that follow: since he that is not immoderate in desire is moderate in hope, and grieves moderately for the absence of the things he desires»⁶⁰. Therefore, because of the control and moderation which temperance exercises over all the passions, it is an excellent and honorable virtue. In exercising a rule and measure on man’s tendency to renounce reason for the pleasures of brute nature, it can be said that temperance is «the

⁵³ *ST II-II*, q. 141, a. 1, *resp.*

⁵⁴ *ST II-II*, q. 142, a. 4, *resp.*

⁵⁵ In fact, St. Thomas says that «... *honestas*, as being ascribed for a special reason to temperance, is reckoned... as an integral part or condition attaching thereto». *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 4, *resp.* «The more necessary a thing is [to the common good], the more it behooves one to observe the order of reason in its regard».

⁵⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁷ *ST II-II*, q. 142, a. 4, *resp.*

⁵⁸ *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 4, ad 3.

⁵⁹ *ST II-II*, q. 141, a. 3, ad 1.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem.*

point of contact between the brute and the rational in man. It is the fundamental requirement for reason's entry into matters animal. For, while the vices opposed to the other virtues are unreasonable, they nevertheless exhibit something of reason in their very activity—even though this be an erroneous judgment of reason. The vice of intemperance, on the other hand, anesthetizes reason, exercising its activity not only unreasonably, but in a virtual divorce from reason»⁶¹. While intemperance disgraces man, is unbecoming to man, temperance ennobles and dignifies man⁶². It is thus truly a virtue of honor and of beauty.

Now, as we saw above, temperance moderates all the passions, beginning with the passions of the concupiscible appetite. This appetite which is distinguishable from the will or intellectual appetite is man's lower appetite as it is the principle of these natural tendencies which man shares with irrational animals. This lower appetite is meant to obey reason. «Because of its subjection in a rational soul, it is natural for this appetite to be 'one' with reason—both in its dispositions and activity. In other words, it is natural for the lower appetite in man to be so ordered and subservient to reason, as to contribute to the formation of an integrally whole human nature»⁶³. Therefore, when the lower appetite is not ordered to reason then the integrity of man, as well as his clarity and proportion, and thus his spiritual beauty are at stake. Man becomes less than a man and therefore is ugly; Aquinas states: «... those things which are less than what they should be, are for that very reason ugly...»⁶⁴. Temperance safeguards man's integrity, for it «withdraws man from things which seduce the appetite from obeying reason»⁶⁵ wherein his integrity and the perfection of his nature lie. In addition, where the proportioning and harmonizing according to reason are lacking, man will find himself in a state of disharmony. This is the case because matters of temperance are «so close to the fibres of man's being that any disorder in them is a fundamental disorder for the whole man»⁶⁶. In order to thus live a harmonious and duly proportioned life, man must exercise the virtue of temperance. In so doing, he will experience the peace, the tranquillity of order, inherent in a temperate life. He will also experience the light and clarity of reason to guide him, for intemperance is corruptive of right reason, of prudence.⁶⁷ The vice of intemperance «cuts man off from all contact with reason's prudential light, and hence from the clarity of man's spiritual beauty»⁶⁸. Given the harmony, proportion, and clarity which characterize the temperate life, it is not surprising that Aquinas should say that although beauty is found

⁶¹ C. CHERESO, op. cit., p. 59.

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 60.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 63.

⁶⁴ *ST I*, q. 39, a. 8, *resp.*

⁶⁵ *ST II-II*, q. 141, a. 2, *resp.* and ad 1.

⁶⁶ W. FARRELL, *A Companion to the Summa* (New York: Sheed & Ward), 1940), vol. III, pp. 413-414. See *ST II-II*, q. 153, a. 3, *resp.* See C. CHERESO, op. cit., p. 64.

⁶⁷ *ST II-II*, q. 153, a. 5, ad 1.

⁶⁸ C. CHERESO, op. cit., p. 65.

in all virtues, it is, in a special or excellent way, ascribed to temperance. How beauty is attributed to this virtue is best described in the following words of Aquinas: «First, in respect of the generic notion of temperance, which consists in a certain moderate and fitting proportion, and this is what we understand by beauty ... Secondly, because the things from which temperance withholds us, hold the lowest place in man, and are becoming to him by reason of his animal nature ... wherefore it is natural that such things should defile him. In consequence beauty is a foremost attribute of temperance which above all hinders man from being defiled. In like manner *honestas* is a special attribute of temperance: for Isidore says (*Etym.* x): «An honest man is one who has no defilement, for honesty means an honorable state.’ This is most applicable to temperance, which withstands the vices that bring most dishonor on man...»⁶⁹. We can thus conclude that temperance is a virtue both of honor and of beauty. And that with respect to these, temperance is a radical virtue, as it expels that vice which is most destructive of the ordination of man’s reason, of his integrity, proportion, and spiritual clarity.

4. Affective Knowledge

From what we have said above, it is evident that the right reason about things to be done, namely, prudence, requires that man have the moral virtue of temperance, and in addition, the other moral virtues⁷⁰, for in making a judgment about what is to be done, prudence is influenced by appetite. Because the appetites seek to possess the object that they are attracted to, the object that, broadly speaking, they love, the appetites must be rectified by moral virtues so as to be oriented to the true good, which is in keeping with man’s rational nature, with his excellence and thus beautiful; if not, the man led by passion, by the movement of the sensitive appetite, may choose against the judgment of reason. The influence of appetitive dispositions on the practical judgment is a fact of experience. That a thing appear to us as good or bad will depend not only on the objective goodness or evil of the thing, but also on the disposition of the subject. When we are under the influence of a passion, we will consider things differently than when we are not so influenced. In this way the sensitive appetite can move the will, on the part of the object, that is, through the practical judgment of the intellect⁷¹.

According to Aquinas passions such as concupiscence or anger will hinder reason from judging in particular what it normally holds in general; the judgment of reason will thus follow the inclination of passion and consent to the object to which the passion is tending as though it were good in itself⁷². Since prudence is

⁶⁹ *ST II-II*, q. 141, a. 2, ad 3.

⁷⁰ *ST I-II*, q. 58, a. 5, *resp.*

⁷¹ See *ST I-II*, q. 9, a. 2, *resp.*

⁷² *De Veritate*, q. 24, a. 10, *resp.* In the continent this is not necessarily the case.

right reason about particular things to be done and right reason requires principles from which to argue about particular things, both universal and particular principles will be necessary for reason to judge rightly about particular cases. Man is rightly disposed by the natural understanding of universal principles whereby he knows that the good is to be done and evil avoided. But as Aquinas says, this is not enough: «For it happens sometimes that the aforesaid universal principle, known by means of understanding or science, is destroyed in a particular case by a passion: thus to a man who is swayed by concupiscence, when he is overcome thereby, the object of his desire seems good, although it is opposed to the universal judgment of his reason. Consequently, as by the habit of natural understanding or of science, man is made to be rightly disposed in regard to the universal principles of action; so, in order that he be rightly disposed with regard to the particular principles of action, viz., the ends, he needs to be perfected by certain habits, whereby it becomes connatural, as it were, to man to judge aright to the end. This is done by moral virtue: for the virtuous man judges aright of the end of virtue, because such as a man is, such does the end seem to him (*Ethic.* iii. 5). Consequently the right reason about things to be done, viz., prudence, requires man to have moral virtue»⁷³. This example shows us how reason when influenced by a passion and evil inclination can be so obscured that it does not see clearly. We thus discern rightly or not according to the disposition which we have in affectivity.

What is of special interest here is how the whole person is involved in action. Since acts are carried out in individual cases, the good grasped by the universal reason moves the will only through the mediation of a particular apprehension. As Aquinas puts it: «... by the passion of the sense appetite, the cause of which can sometimes be the bodily make-up or anything undergone by the body from the fact that sense appetite uses an organ, the particular apprehension itself is impeded and sometimes entirely inhibited so that what higher reason dictates in a universal way is not actually applied to this particular case»⁷⁴. It is in this way that the will moves itself to the good presented to it by the particular apprehension and thus foregoes the good apprehended by universal reason. Aquinas notes, however, that the will still has the power to restrain the passions so that the use of reason is not impeded. Now since the passions can be responsible for a certain bodily disposition, the apprehension of the internal senses, namely, the imagination and the cogitative sense, is influenced not only by the object (in so far as it is good or bad for the subject) but also by the somatic disposition of the subject. In the imagination are found not only the forms of sensible things as they are received from the senses but also forms that are the result of some bodily transformation (as in the case of those who are asleep or angry)⁷⁵. The passions thus cause a mod-

⁷³ *ST I-II*, q. 58, a. 5, *resp.*

⁷⁴ *De Veritate*, q. 22, a. 9, ad 6.

⁷⁵ *ST II-II*, q. 173, a. 2, *resp.*

ification in the operation of the internal senses: we observe that men who are dominated by a passion cannot easily turn their imagination away from those things that so intimately affect them⁷⁶. So the passion, through the internal senses, modifies the judgment of the practical intellect, which in knowing is dependent on the data supplied by the senses; the apprehension of the imagination, as we have seen, and the particular judgment of the cogitative sense (also known as particular reason, since it participates in reason and is the only sense faculty which directly communicates with reason and even makes particular judgments regarding what is convenient or inconvenient⁷⁷) are modified by the passion and thus cause a change in the intellectual judgment. Aquinas says: «... the judgment of the reason often follows the passion of the sensitive appetite, and consequently the will's movement follows it also, since it has a natural inclination always to follow the judgment of the reason»⁷⁸. Since the passion transforms or deforms, as it were, the object, making the imagination consider only the good aspects of the object and concealing its bad aspects, then the apprehension of the imagination and of the cogitative sense, modified by the bodily disposition, immediately presents the data to the intellect, which will judge according to what it has been presented.

The importance of the bodily disposition at the moment of the practical judgment is emphasized by Aquinas: «... for the good man that thing is an object of willing which is truly worthy of being willed, i.e., good in itself. But for the wicked or vicious man that thing is the object of willing which attracts him, i.e., whatever seems pleasing to himself. [Aristotle] exemplifies this in things of the body. We see that for men whose bodies are in good health those things are healthful that are really so. But for the sick, certain other things are healthful, namely, those that moderate their diseased condition. Likewise things really bitter and sweet seem bitter and sweet to those who have a healthy taste, things really warm seem warm to those who have a normal sense of touch. Those who have normal bodily strength properly estimate the weight of objects; those who are weak think light objects heavy»⁷⁹. It is interesting to note that Aquinas, like Aristotle, often compares the influence of the appetitive dispositions on the judgment of reason to the judgment of taste which follows the disposition of the tongue⁸⁰. In the same way that taste will discern flavors according to its disposition (whether that disposition be healthy or unhealthy), man's mind will judge the object of his action according to his habitual disposition, since habit (virtue or vice) makes whatever is suitable to it seem good and whatever is unsuitable seem bad⁸¹. Now when the

⁷⁶ *ST I-II*, q. 77, a. 1, *resp.*

⁷⁷ See *ST I*, q. 81, a. 3, *resp.*, and q. 78, a. 4, ad 5.

⁷⁸ *ST I-II*, q. 77, a. 1, *resp.*

⁷⁹ *In III Ethic.*, lect. X (493).

⁸⁰ On taste, see *ST I-II*, q. 77, a. 1, *resp.*, II-II, q. 24, a. 11, *resp.*, II-II, q. 46, a. 2, *resp.*, *In III Ethic.*, lect. X, 493.

⁸¹ *ST II-II*, q. 24, a. 11, *resp.*

habit is a vice, it will see the object as proportionate to it: if a man acts from the habit of injustice, then what is unjust befits the habit and is pleasant to the man⁸². Whereas the man who acts from the virtue of chastity sees what is chaste as good and fitting, and thus being possessed of the virtue judges and decides rightly about matters concerning chastity⁸³. Where virtue is present, the passion still exists but is now oriented by reason and so there arises a connaturality between the virtuous man and the true good, such that he always judges rightly. The judgment based on connaturality or on virtuous inclination is best described by Aquinas in the following commentary of a text of Aristotle: «... the virtuous person correctly passes judgment on individual things that pertain to human activity. In each case that which is really good seems to him to be good. This happens because things seem naturally pleasurable to each habit that are proper to it, i.e., agree with it. Those things are agreeable to the habit of virtue that are in fact good because the habit of moral virtue is defined by what is in accord with right reason. Thus the things in accord with right reason, things of themselves good, seem good to it. Here the good man differs very much indeed from others, for he sees what is truly good in individual practicable matters, being as it were the norm and measure of all that is to be done because in these cases a thing must be judged good or bad according as it seems to him»⁸⁴.

The virtuous man is thus, for both Aristotle and Aquinas, the rule and measure of human actions, because in each instance he will discern correctly what is good and what is bad; he will judge by way of inclination, by connaturality with respect to the object of his virtue. His virtuous inclination refers to his affectivity, such that the passions of his appetites will now be virtuous passions. Man's affectivity is thus integrated in the discernment, in the judgment by connaturality. His infallibility, as it were, on each occasion in which he discerns or judges correctly is due to the fact that his virtue puts him in consonance with the true good, since the virtue itself consists in this consonance. As may be recalled, we spoke above of virtue as a consonance which is resplendent with reason's clarity and that in the knowing of virtue the mind is taken by this consonance and clarity, such that virtue is apprehended in its beauty. Moreover, as we saw earlier, the beauty of virtue, that is, its *honestas*, is desirable for its own sake. As both Aristotle and Aquinas agree, what is in accord with right reason is of itself good. What is fitting for the virtuous man will spontaneously appear to him as good. The discernment of the virtuous man is described as an intuitive judgment, such as the judgment of sense or as the discernment by the intellect of the first principles of speculative reason. Aquinas thus says: «Just as man assents to first principles, by the natural light of his intellect, so does a virtuous man, by the habit of virtue, judge aright of things concerning that virtue»⁸⁵. The discernment is spontaneous

⁸² *ST II-II*, q. 59, a. 2, *resp.*

⁸³ *ST II-II*, q. 60, a. 1, *resp.*

⁸⁴ *In III Ethic.*, lect. X (494).

⁸⁵ *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 2.

because, as we have said, through the virtue man is in consonance with the good object, which has been perceived, known, as such, and has been immediately grasped as pleasing. When virtues orient affectivity, then the will delights in the good apprehended by the intellect: it delights in the true good. This true good, the honestum, is the morally beautiful. The knowledge that understands the true as good and fitting⁸⁶ is what may be called affective knowledge or knowledge by connaturality. From such knowledge follows delight, love. The object of the virtuous man's affective knowledge is thus that true good, which befits his rational nature, and is spiritually beautiful.

5. Ethical Order and Metaphysical Order

It is evident, from what we have said above, that the beauty of human acts, which is something spiritual, results from «due proportion of words or deeds in which the light of reason shines forth»⁸⁷. It is characteristic of reason to illuminate, and also to order. When man's reason is blinded by intemperance, his whole life is then disordered; intemperance keeps man from the good of reason, from its light; it is due to this that emphasis has been given to the virtue of temperance. Man's rational nature is what sets him apart from everything else in the universe; through his reason, man is not only *capax entis*, but also *capax Dei*. His reason enables him to discover the order of the universe, that order resplendent with light, with intelligibility, with goodness and beauty, because it proceeds from the light of the Divine Mind.

Man's reason, however, not only discovers order, it also makes order. This making of order on the part of reason is what we could call man's ethical life. Man reaches perfection «by using his reason to put order in his operations so that he will accustom himself to perform acts which will be fitting to the order he has in nature»⁸⁸. Man perfects himself, therefore, by conforming his actions to his rank, that is, to his order in nature. The metaphysical status of things is such that they are in order and this metaphysical order is, as St. Thomas puts it, «the chief beauty in things»⁸⁹. In the ethical realm, there is order also, or at least there should be, but this is an order which man makes by disposing himself in a proper way, such that he will have a morally good life⁹⁰. Thus, when man orders his dispositions through virtue, through the rule or measure of reason, he is heeding that appeal in his nature for the order that God places in creatures. «This appeal urges man to live so that the higher appetites of man... must control the lower»⁹¹, so that he

⁸⁶ *ST I-II*, q. 9, a. 2, *resp.*

⁸⁷ Th.C. DONLAN, *The Beauty of God*, in «The Thomist», X (1947), p. 197.

⁸⁸ F. YARTZ, *Order and Moral Perfection* (Diss. St. Louis, 1968), p. 137.

⁸⁹ *SCG III*, 71.

⁹⁰ F. YARTZ, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-144.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 128.

choose the true good, the beautiful, the “seemly”. Reason, in deliberating, puts order in the operations of the will and the order from the latter flow into the operations of the lower appetites. Through this ordering man becomes truly master of his actions⁹², and it is thus that man will bring a new dimension into the universe that is fitting to its inherent order. Thus he will not only perfect himself, beautify himself, but will also bring about the ultimate formation of the universe, its ultimate beauty.

⁹² *Ibidem*, pp. 146-147.