

“Bonum ex integra causa” Aquinas and the sources of a basic concept

“Bonum ex integra causa, malum ex particularibus defectibus”. Aquinas finds this phrase first of all in Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus*, which he read in the first years of his academic career when he was an assistant of Albert the Great in Colonia. We must remind that Dionysius was considered during the Middle Ages an *auctoritas*: he was considered a disciple of Saint Paul, a Saint. Therefore the content of his works was highly considered by medieval theologians. In particular: the fourth chapter of the *De divinis nominibus*, in which we find that phrase, concerns goodness and evil.

In the *Commentary upon Dionysius De divinis nominibus* we find: “...*bonum procedit ex una et perfecta causa, malum autem procedit ex multis particularibus defectibus*”(IV, XXII, 572). Sometimes we find *perfecta causa* (*perfectio*) and more often *integra causa* (*integritas*), which means also perfection, but from the negative point of view (which is the easiest for us, as we are finite beings). Sometimes also we find the word *singularibus* instead of *particularibus*. We find this phrase thirtythree times from the *Commentary upon the Sentences* to the last works, particularly, but not only when Aquinas is concerned with the matter of good, evil and ethics. But many other times we find the same topic, without the quotation of the Dionysius’ phrase. Integrity and perfection are connected in Aquinas’ works with terms like *bonum*, *malum*, *completus*, *proportio*, *convenientia*, *habitus* of parts among them, etc. It is also often connected with subjects like the health of the body, beauty etc¹. *Integrity* or

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- ¹ 319. — Praemissis duabus rationibus, hoc: ponit Philosophus tertiam, quae sumitur ex ratione boni et mali. Et dicit, [201], quod multipliciter contingit peccare; quia malum quod includitur in ratione peccati, pertinet ad infinitum secundum pythagoricos, et bonum secundum eos pertinet ad finitum: per oppositum est intelligendum quod recte agere contingit solum uno modo”.
 - 320. — Huiusmodi autem ratio accipi potest ex eo quod Dionysius dicit in libro de *Div. Nom.* (1), quia bonum contingit ex una et integra causa, malum autem ex singularibus defectibus; sicut patet in bono et malo corporali. Turpitudine enim, quae est malum corporalis formae, contingit quodcumque membrum indecenter se habeat. Sed pulchritudo non contingit, nisi omnia membra sint bene proportionata et colorata. Et similiter aegritudo, quae est malum complexionis corporalis, provenit ex singulari deordinatione cuiuslibet humoris. Sed sanitas esse non potest nisi ex debita proportione omnium humorum”. Et similiter peccatum in actione humana contingit quaecumque circumstantiarum inordinate se habeat qualitercumque, vel secundum superabundantiam vel secundum defectum. Sed rectitudo eius non erit nisi in omnibus circumstantiis debito modo ordinatis. Et ideo sicut sanitas vel pulchritudo contingit uno modo, aegritudo autem et turpitudine multis, immo infinitis modis; ita etiam rectitudo operationis uno solo modo contingit, peccatum autem in actione

perfection concerns in first place unity (the transcendental *unum*) and order. Integrity means that something has everything in order to be itself or does not miss anything in order to be itself (that means that it is in itself *complete*) and therefore good². *Integer* or *perfectus* is what is in itself fulfilled; *integer* is the unity which keeps the distinction and the relation of parts among them. There is integrity when a whole includes, determines, but does not suppress its parts, which are different among them (transcendental *aliquid* or *diversum*). Integrity means order and hierarchy of parts among themselves. Aquinas looks for what, inside the wholeness of being or inside the wholeness of a single being, is more simple, therefore is able to unify and put in a hierarchical order a multiplicity of beings, still preserving their unity and autonomy.

To sum up: *integritas* is connected with the transcendental *unum* (that means order), but also with the *aliquid* (something - the parts of the whole), the *bonum* (the dynamic meaning of being which is apparent in the tendency towards self-preservation and fulfilment) and the beautiful (*pulchrum*), which is connected with both the *verum* and the *bonum*. *Integrity* is a quality of beauty (with *claritas* and *consonantia*). Since all these qualities of being may increase or diminish, integrity has an analogous meaning³. Of course in the genesis of the concept of integrity the first principles of our knowledge, particularly the principle of contradiction and the principle according to that the whole is greatest than the part as well as our tendency towards the transcendental good, play a main role.

Aquinas like Dionysius holds what is good in an ontological sense is only what is one, united, complete, compact and what, in order to be such, requires a unique cause

contingit infinitis modis. Et inde est quod peccare est facile, quia multipliciter hoc contingit. Sed recte agere est difficile, quia non contingit nisi uno modo”.

- 321. — Et ponitur exemplum; quia facile est recedere a contactu signi, id est puncti sive in centro circuli, sive in quacumque alia superficie determinate signata, quia hoc contingit infinitis modis. Sed tangere signum est I difficile quia contingit uno solo modo. Manifestum autem quod superabundantia et defectus multipliciter contingunt, sed medietas uno modo. Unde manifestum est quod superabundantia et defectus ad malitiam, medietas autem ad virtutem pertinent; quia boni sunt aliqui simpliciter, id est uno modo; sed mali sunt multifarie, id est multipliciter...”.
- ² See *In Div. nom.* II, 1, 80. See also Angelo Campodonico, *Integritas. Metafisica ed etica in San Tommaso*, Nardini, Florence 1996, particularly pp. 10-11 and 173-175.
- ³ For instance there is integrity of a mechanism, of a single form, of forms among them and integrity of existence (*act of existing*). As I want to stress, integrity in the strong sense is a property of living beings and particularly of intelligent beings (ourselves).

or more causes, but united among them. On the contrary, in order to have evil, we need only one particular cause among many, only one deficiency or lack, which always presupposes ontological good and being.

The above phrase is often used by Thomas when he deals with the subject of good, both in the metaphysical and in the ethical sense; only one time he uses it also dealing with the subject of truth and false (cfr. *In Eth.* I, 12, 7-32); Aquinas quotes it in philosophical anthropology (dealing with the unity of the body and the soul⁴) and in theological anthropology (after the first sin man may become *integer* with the help of Grace). Integrity like *claritas*, *consonantia* and *proportio* concerns also Aquinas' aesthetics (cfr. ST I, 39, 8). Although Thomas does not speak about integrity when referring to the Trinity of God, we might hold that there is a kind of integrity in the Christian God as Trinity. In my opinion the phrase "bonum ex integra causa" is very important in ethics (which in Aquinas' thought is strongly connected with anthropology). Therefore ethics is, in particular, the topic of this paper.

. Let us look at the sources of the phrase "bonum ex integra causa". The phrase that Aquinas finds in Dionysius⁵, as he explicitly says, might be connected with another topic we find in the same IV book of the *Div. Nom.* which concerns the completeness of human action, when it is right. Cf. *De malo* XVI art 2: "Dupliciter igitur potest esse malum in appetitu hominis: uno modo quia apprehensio sensitiva non regulatur secundum rationem, et secundum hoc Dyon. dicit IV cap *De div nom.* quod malum hominis est *praeter rationem esse*: alio modo quia ratio humana est dirigenda secundum sapientiam et legem divinam, et secundum hoc Ambrosius dicit quod peccatum est *transgressio legis divinae*". We are going to consider it later. As we are

• ⁴ Cfr. In XII Met. 1118: "Nam si quaelibet pars est aqua, in unaquaque aqua sunt multae unitates in actu. Tantum vero significat collectiones partium in aliquo uno; et ideo in illis proprie dicitur totum in quibus, ex omnibus partis acceptibus simul, fit unum perfectum cuius perfectio nulli partium competit, sicut domus et animal"; ibid. 1489: "Se quaedam partes sunt, quae licet non sint priores toto animali hoc modo prioritatis, quia non possunt esse sine eo, sunt tamen secundum hanc considerationem, simul, quia sicut ipsae partes non possunt esse sine integro animali, ita nec integrum animal sine eis. Huiusmodi autem sunt partes principales corporis, in quibus primo consistit 'forma', scilicet anima; scilicet cor vel cerebrum".

• ⁵ Cf. *De div. Nom.* IV, 22, 237; IV, 30, 10-11

going to see, the topic of integrity might be connected with another topic we find in the same IV book of the *Div. Nom.* which concerns love and hierarchy of beings⁶.

Also we can find the same topic of integrity in the classical Neoplatonism, particularly in Proclus. See the work *De malorum subsistentia*, translated into Latin by the Dominican father William de Moerbeke, in which many topics are those of the IV book of *De divinis nominibus*⁷. Cf. also *The Elements of Theology* of Proclus - see the term *ολοκλήροσ*). In this book we find: “Every good tends to unify what participates it; and all unification is a good; and the Good is identical with the One”⁸. See also the *Liber de causis* (the term *completus* and *supercompletus*) and in a more remote way Plotinus and Plato (cf. *Rep.* II, 379c) and also Jamblichus (cf. *De Misteriis* IV, 7). In Dionysius this topic is connected with the topic of the contiguity of the degrees of being, among which the highest of the lower degree reaches the lowest level of the higher one. In the *Commentary of the book of de causis* terms like *completus* and *supercompletus* (God) are often used. Aquinas finds an analogous concept in Augustine, particularly in his hermeneutics of the phrase of the *Book of Sapientia* “omnia mensura, numero et pondere disposuisti” (cfr. *De natura boni* III, 502A)⁹. Cfr., in particular, *De malo* II, 4: “...bonum importat quandam perfectionem, cuius perfectionis privatio malum est, ut utamur large nominis perfectionis secundum quod in se comprehendit convenientem mensuram et formam et ordinem. Unde Augustinus in libro *De natura boni* constituit rationem boni in modo, specie et

• ⁶ *In de div. Nom.* IV, 10, 427–432 *passim*.

• ⁷ Cf. Proclus, *De malorum subsistentia* 40, 110, 111, 123).

• ⁸ Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, prop. 13. See also: “For it belongs to the Good to conserve all that exists (and it is for no other reason that all things desire it); and if likewise that which conserves and holds together the being of each several thing is unity (since by unity each is maintained in being, but by dispersion displaced from existence): then the Good, wherever it is present, makes the participant one, and holds its being together in virtue of this unification.

• And secondly, if it belongs to unity to bring and keep each thing together, by its presence it makes each thing complete. In this way, then, the state of unification is good for all things”.

• ⁹ 39 «modus - bonum»: *De diversis quaestionibus* LXXXm, 6. *De vera religione* 55, 113: «suis finibus salva». 18, 36: «nulla autem res obtinet integritatem naturae suae, nisi in suo genere salva sit. Ab eo est autem omnis salus, a quo est omne bonum». La determinazione di forma di una realtà (natura) data da «*numerus*», «*aequalitas*», etc. è la sua «salvezza» («*salus*»). Il concetto teologico mostra le sue implicanze filosofiche a partire dall'idea di forma, di perfezione e di bontà. Cfr. W. Theiler, *Porphyrios und Augustin, in Forschungen zum Neuplatonismus*, Berlin 19è p. 174 e 200 s.

ordine, et in horum privatione rationem mali. Manifestum est autem quod non est eadem perfectio propria omnium, sed diversa diversorum...”.

According to Augustine *integer* is God, *integer* is the man saved and reintegrated by God. *Integritas* is also a main character of beauty (cfr. Beierwaltes pp. 165-66). In the first works of Augustine, in which the neoplatonic and porphyrian influence is very strong, integrity and unity are the characters of ontological and ethical good. Integer and unified is the man who is “in himself” and not “in the exterior” (Porphyrius). See *De ord.* 2, 36 (where *integritas* concerns the morphology of the words). *Integer* is the speech (*discursus*) when you use the right words in the right place (*integre loqui – integritas locutionis*) of the sentence. (Cf. also *De doct Chr.* 2, 19; 3, 7; 4, 5). In the later works of Augustine, integrity becomes the virtue of the man who keeps his faith *integra* and also his body *integrum* and his soul *integra* (cf. *De mend.* 10). See the virtue of chastity and the integrity of the Virgin Mary. Very interesting might be the analogy between the integrity of the speech and the integrity of the body. In general in the later works of Augustine integrity misses the prevalent aesthetic character it had in his first works and acquires more and more an ethical character in the works of maturity (particularly in the *De civitate Dei*), without losing, according to the platonic tradition, its aesthetic value.

Of course the concept of integrity is in principle also an aristotelian one (since Aristotle – we must not forget that - is a disciple of Plato). Yet Aristotle does not use neither this phrase (nor perhaps the same concept) in the works we know. Still it is noteworthy to highlight that Thomas quotes this phrase of Dionysius just when commenting the second book of Aristotle’s (cfr. *In Eth.* V, 1106 b 35 (also 28-37), in which Aristotle stresses that it is not so easy to reach the *mesotes* (*medietas*), that means the right middle chosen by *phronesis*, by which the ethical virtue is achieved. Here he quotes the pitagorean tradition (“malum quod includitur in ratione peccati, pertinet ad infinitum secundum pythagoricos, et bonum secundum eos pertinet ad finitum”) and also an unknown author – “we can be good in one way, bad in many different ways”). Still in Aristoteles the subject of integrity or perfection of the

human action, though present, seems to have a more empirical meaning, according to his philosophy and his general attitude. Thanks to the ontological meaning and relevance of the neoplatonic phrase of Dionysius (which is often commented with reference to the famous phrase of the *Book of Sapientia* quoted by Augustine: “*Omnia mensura, numero et pondus disposuisti*”), the subject acquires in Aquinas a strength and an incisiveness which we do not find in Aristotle (although everything that Aristotle affirms is saved and strongly highlighted by Thomas). We can find here – on the ethical level - somehow the same process, which happens inside the metaphysical structure of Aquinas’ thought. Evil requires the ontological good as its ground and condition, but it breaks the compactness of the good.. Also human action needs ontological completeness and fulfilment, stressing the aristotelian character, according to which we distinguish in the human action among the form (end-intention) and the matter. According to Thomas both are necessary in order to reach the ethical good. In Aquinas’ ethics the will (*voluntas*), as a faculty and the intention (*intentio*) of will (Augustine?)¹⁰, both unknown by Aristotle, play a main role, unifying the human action and stressing human freedom and responsibility ¹¹. Therefore Aquinas’ idea of action acquires a new metaphysical and also aesthetic density and compactness, still saving and stressing the autonomy of the practical level (which differs from the speculative dimension). This happens because in his thought the dynamic character of reason, considered as a whole inside a man considered as a whole (with the distinction and the connection between the practical end and the speculative end of the same reason) is stressed. Hence the practical dimension acquires in Aquinas’ thought a deep analogous meaning.

Let us consider now the main points of Aquinas’ ethics, in which we can find the influence of Dionysius’ phrase and of the authors whom we have quoted:

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 - ¹¹ Martin Rhonheimer, *Praktische Vernunft und Vernünftigkeit der Praxis. Handlungstheorie bei Thomas von Aquin in ihrer Entstehung aus dem Problemkontext der aristotelischen Ethik*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 1994.
 - p. 211: In Tommaso *voluntas* non, significa solo la *boulesis* o la *prohairesis* di Ar.(che sono degli atti) , ma diventa anche una facoltà. Così pure c’è un nuovo termine di origine agostiniana (*intentio*).
 - 276: *Intentio* (storia del termine. La struttura intenzionale dell’atto di volontà.

1) The human action is good when the hierarchical order in the acting man and between man and God is considered

First of all man is a unity of body and soul. Therefore his actions are more human when they are done with body and soul, reason¹² and passion¹³ (Aquinas speaks about a *resonantia* of the passions) but considered in their hierarchical order (from the top: God, human reason, human passion). But man is completely fulfilled (*integer*) only by God and by supernatural Grace. Cf. *De malo* II, 4: “...bonum et malum in actibus humanis consideratur secundum quod actus concordat rationi informatae lege divina, vel naturaliter, vel per doctrinam, vel per infusionem: unde et Dyon. dicit IV cap. *De div. Nom.* ¹⁴ quod animae malum est praeter rationem esse, corpori praeter naturam”.(cfr . IV, §32).. See *De div nom:* .;”demonstratum est aliud esse desideratum et aliud factum. Igitur malum est praeter viam et praeter intentionem et praeter naturam et praeter causam et praeter principium et praeter finem et praeter diffinitionem et praeter voluntatem et praeter substantiam. Igitur, privatio est malum et defectus et infirmitas et incommensuratio et poecatum et sine intentione et sine pulchritudine et sine vita et *sine mente* et sine ratione et imperfectum et non collocatum et sine causa et indefinitum et sine germine et vacuum et non operans et inordinatum et dissimile et infinitum et obscurum et sine substantia et ipsum nullo modo usquam nihil existens”. See the same subject in Proclus, *De malorum subsistentia*, 134, 135, 149). Cf. also *De malo* II, 12 sed contra: “...dicit Glossa quod peccatis humanae naturae integritas violatur. Non autem violatur integritas nisi per diminutionem. Ergo peccatum diminuit bonum naturae”.

2) Human action is good if it considers the “ordo amoris”

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- ¹² Cf. *Summa theologiae* I-II, 58, 4 ad 3; 58, 4 ad 2; 65, 1. According to Thomas, the good action is not caused only by reason (against Socrates and Plato), but it is done with reason (*cum ratione*).
 - ¹³ Cf. *Summa theologiae* I-II, 24, 3.
 - ¹⁴ Cf. *De div. Nom.* IV, 22, 32, 244-245; ed. crit. IV 31-32.

Another main change of the aristotelian ethics concerning the subject of integrity is due to the influence of Dionysius and of Augustine who stress a platonic basic topic, connecting the integrity of human love with the metaphysical hierarchy of beings. In the *Commentary upon the div. Nom.* we find: “ Unde et Dionysius hic quattuor modos amoris ponit: et primus est secundum quod inferius amat suum superius; et hoc est quod dicit quia propter bonum et pulchrum et ipsius gratia, minora, idest inferiora, amant meliora, idest superiora, convertendo se ad ea, quia in eis habent suam perfectionem; secundo, ponit modum, quo aequalia amant aequalia; et dicit quod ordinata, idest ea quae sunt unius ordinis, amant coordinata, idest aequalia communicative, idest in quantum communicant cum eis vel in specie vel in quocumque ordine; tertio, ponit modum quo superiora amant inferiora; et dicit quod meliora, idest superiora amant minora, idest inferiora provisive, idest in quantum provident eis ut sub se contentis; quarto, ponit modum quo aliqua amant seipsa et dicit quod ipsa singula amant seipsa contentive, idest in quantum unumquodque in seipso continetur”¹⁵. In the same book, after having said that there are two kinds of love, *amor amicitiae* (“tendit ergo amor dupliciter in aliquid : uno modo, ut in bonum substantiale, quod quidem fit dum sic amamus aliquid ut ei velimus bonum, sicut amamus , sicut amamus hominem volentes bonum eius”) and *amor concupiscentiae* (“alio modo, amor tendit in aliquid, tamquam in bonum accidentale, sicut amamus virtutem, non quidem ea ratione quod volumus eam esse bonam, sed ratione ut per eam boni simus”), Aquinas holds:” ...in utroque igitur modo amoris affectus amantis per quamdam inclinationem trahitur ad rem amatam, sed diversimode: nam in secundo modo amoris, affectus amantis trahitur ad rem amatam per actum voluntatis, sed per intentionem affectus recurrit in seipsum; dum enim appeto iustitiam vel vinum, affectus quidem meus inclinatur in alterum horum, sed tamen recurrit in seipsum , quia sic fertur in praedicta ut per ea bonum sit ei; unde talis amor non ponit amantem *extra se*, quantum ad finem intentionis. Sed cum aliquid amatur primo modo amoris, sic affectus fertur in rem amatam, quod non recurrit in

• ¹⁵ In de div.nom. IV, 9, 407.

seipsum, quia ipsi rei amatae vult bonum, non ex ea ratione quia ei exinde aliquid accidat . Sic igitur talis amor extasim facit, quia ponit amantem extra seipsum”. Therefore ethics is fulfilled when man reaches the *substantiale bonum*, loving the other man, because he is a human being. This is an exstatic love, because the lover considers the loved outside himself. Then the topic of love is connected again with the topic of the hierarchy of beings: “ ...potest enim illud substantiale bonum , in quod affectus fertur, tripliciter se habere: uno modo, sic quo illud bonum sit perfectius quam ipse amans et per hoc amans comparetur ad ipsum ut pars ad totum, quia quae totaliter sunt in perfectis partialiter sunt in imperfectis, unde secundum hoc, amans est aliquid amati. Alio modo sic, quod bonum amatum sit eiusdem ordinis cum amante. Tertio modo, quod amans sit perfectius re amata et sic amor amantis fertur in amatum, sicut in aliquis suum”¹⁶.

In Augustine the same platonic topic of love and of the hierarchy of beings is connected with integrity (*integritas*). Cf. in particular *De doct. christ.* I, XXVII, 28). : Ordo praecepti. XXVII. 28: “ Ille autem iuste et sancte vivit qui rerum integer aestimator est: ipse est autem qui ordinatam dilectionem habet, ne aut diligat quod non est diligendum, aut non diligat quod est diligendum, aut amplius diligat quod minus est diligendum, aut aequae diligat quod vel minus vel amplius diligendum est, aut minus vel amplius quod aequae diligendum est. Omnis peccator in quantum peccator est, non est diligendus; et omnis homo in quantum homo est, diligendus est propter Deum, Deus vero propter seipsum. Et si Deus omni homine amplius diligendus est, amplius quisque debet Deum diligere quam seipsum. Item amplius alius homo diligendus est quam corpus nostrum: quia propter Deum omnia ista diligenda sunt, et potest nobiscum alius homo Deo perfrui, quod non potest corpus; quia corpus per animam vivit qua fruimur Deo”.

The integer and good man is not only he who considers the order inside the acting person (as I have highlighted before - cf. 1) and all the dimensions of the action (as I am going to stress – cf. 4), but he who gives to every thing the right ontological

• ¹⁶ *In de div. Nom.* IV, 10, 427–432 *passim*.

value, acknowledging the *ordo amoris*, and who, knowing and somehow implicitly feeling the goodness in its wholeness (*integritas*), can order hierarchically the other finite goods¹⁷. Also in this case the concept of integrity changes the aristotelian ethics in an ontological sense. In fact the aristotelian finalism is grounded on an ontological hierarchy, that allows to ground the aristotelian ethics of virtue on the principles of the natural law – developing topics that there are also in Aristotle (cf. the distinction among being, life and intelligence *De anima II*), but stressing the axiological and also ontological dimension of good and *the amor amicitiae* more than *the amor concupiscentiae*.

What seems to be good, but with different values of goodness in our everyday moral experience of natural law (being, life, reason), on the theoretical and metaphysical ground looks actuated in different ways by the act of existing¹⁸. Since

• ¹⁷ Cf. *In Eth.* I, 185-87; 215-218; II, 3, 153-160 – Cfr Melina, p. 58-59

• ¹⁸ See *ST I-II*, 94, 2: "Quia vero bonum habet rationem finis, malum autem rationem contrarii, inde est quod omnia illa ad quae homo habet naturalem inclinationem, ratio naturaliter apprehendit ut bona, et per consequens ut opere prosequenda, et contraria eorum ut mala et vitanda. Secundum igitur ordinem inclinationum naturalium, est ordo praeceptorum legis naturae. Inest enim primo inclinatio homini ad bonum secundum naturam in qua communicat cum omnibus substantiis: prout scilicet quaelibet substantia appetit conservationem sui esse secundum suam naturam. Et secundum hanc inclinationem, pertinent ad legem naturalem ea per quae vita hominis conservatur, et contrarium impeditur. Secundo inest homini inclinatio ad aliqua magis specialia, secundum naturam in qua communicat cum ceteris animalibus. Et secundum hoc, dicuntur ea esse de lege naturali quae natura omnia animalia docuit, ut est coniunctio maris et feminae, et educatio liberorum, et similia. Tertio modo inest homini inclinatio ad bonum secundum naturam rationis, quae est sibi propria: sicut homo habet naturalem inclinationem ad hoc quod veritatem cognoscat de Deo, et ad hoc quod societate vivat. et secundum hoc, ad legem naturalem pertinent ea quae ad huiusmodi inclinationem spectant: utpote quod homo ignorantiam vitet, quod alios non offendat cum quibus debat conversari, et cetera huiusmodi quae ad hoc spectant". *ST I-II*, 94, 4: "Just as being is the first thing grasped simply speaking, so the good is the first thing grasped by practical reason which is ordered to action, for every agent acts for the sake for an end, which has the character of good. Therefore, the first principles of practical reason is grounded in the notion of good: the good is that which all things desire. This, then, is the first precept of the law: good should be done and pursued and evil avoided. All other precepts of the law of nature are grounded in this one, such that all those things that are to be done or avoided pertain to precepts of natural law which practical reason naturally grasps as human goods.

Because good has the note of end and evil has the contrary note, reason naturally grasps as goods all those things to which man has a natural inclination and consequently as to be pursued in action, and the contrary of these are grasped as evils to be avoided. Therefore, there is an order of the precepts of the law of nature that follows the order of the natural inclinations. For there is in man a first inclination to a good of the nature he shares with all substances, insofar as each substance seeks the preservation of the existence it has according to its own nature, and following this inclination the things by which the life of man is preserved and the contrary prevented pertain to natural law. Second there is in man an inclination to more special things, according to the nature he shares with other animals. Following on this, what nature teaches all animals are said to be of natural law, such as the joining of male and female, and the raising of young, and the like. In a third way there is an inclination in man to the good according to the nature of reason, which is proper to him: man has a natural inclination to know the truth about God and to live in society. Accordingly those things which look to this inclination pertain to natural law, for example, that a man should avoid ignorance, that he should not offend others with whom he must live, and other such things which are relevant to this".

on the ground of our ethical experience of reality goodness contemplates different degrees of good, the act of existing contemplates different degrees of actualisation (*integrity*). As on the theoretical level the *actus essendi* actuates the different ontological perfections which without it would not exist (in particular being, life and reason) and this also holds for God, whose essence is his act of being, so on the level of practical reason the perception of the completeness of the human fulfilment or of the good we must do, allows us to give order by means of the precepts of the natural law to the different inclinations which are connected with the different goods. Therefore the practical reason is able to form the precepts of the natural law. In general: what is practical is continuously interpreted in a speculative-theoretical way and what is fruit of a speculative-theoretical consideration fulfils the practical dimension of reason, because, according to Aquinas, there is only *one* reason.

Furthermore, since the human nature is not naturally *integer*, it requires the help of Grace in order to get the complete integrity, natural virtues require theological virtues which are a gift of God. Only God is the *integritas* in a complete and unique way. Here the influence of Augustine and of the Bible is apparent.

3) There is no good action without right reason (*recta ratio*) O The good action is grounded on right reason (*recta ratio*)

Let us highlight an important consequence of the hierarchical order of being. According to Aquinas the ethical good is not reached, the virtuous action is not done only through the aristotelic *medietas* (the right middle), which is not a sufficient criteria in order to determine what is good here and now. In fact, more than in Aristotle, in Aquinas our practical reason (*intellectus practicus*) determines the ‘right middle’, the rightness of the action (which is not a geometric middle)¹⁹. It is noteworthy how often Aquinas holds that, from the ethical point of view, human action is good only when it is grounded on right reason (*recta ratio*). For instance :

• ¹⁹ Cf. Rhonheimer, *Praktische Vernunft*...p. 101.

“In human acts good and evil is said with reference to reason, because as Dionysius says in *On the Divine Names* 4, the good is to be in accord with reason and evil to be outside reason. The good of a thing befits its form and its evil is what is outside its form. Clearly then the differences of good and evil considered in the objects relates *per se* to reason, insofar namely as the object is fitting or not fitting to it. An act is a human or moral act insofar as it is from reason. Thus it is manifest that good and evil make moral acts specifically different, for differences divide a species *per se*”²⁰.

Here we can see again the influence of Dionysius. In fact, according to Dionysius and Proclus “evil is without measure, without mind and without reason” (“malum est sine mensura, sine mente et sine ratione”). It is noteworthy that *mensura*, strictly connected with the meaning of *integritas* (see the Augustine’s phrase), is the root of the meaning of *mens* (*a mensurare*). According to Thomas, the aristotelian ethics of virtue is grounded on the ethics of natural law (of the first principles of the *intellectus practicus*). We often can know a priori, even without being virtuous, if something is ethically wrong, that means against the natural law²¹.

4) There is no good action without considering all the aspects of it

Particularly Aquinas applies the phrase “bonum ex integra causa” to the character of the moral action: we must contemplate every aspect of our action if we want our action to be moral. That means: its end (*finis*), its matter (*materia*) and its circumstances (*circumstantiae*): “...the species of human act are drawn formally from the end, and materially from the object of the exterior act”²². Let us look now at some quotations from the questions 18-20 of *Summa theologiae* I-II. ST I-II, 19, 6):

- “...it can happen that an action is good in its species or according to circumstances but is ordered to an evil end and conversely. But it is not a good action simply

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- ²⁰ ST I-II, 18, 5. . Cfr. also *De malo* XIV, art. 1: “ Dicendum, quod sicut Dionysius dicit IV cap. *De div. nom.*, malum animae est praeter rationem esse; unde in quibuscumque contingit a regula rationis discedere, in his contingit esse peccatum: nihil enim est aliud peccatum quam actus inordinatus sive malus”
 - ²¹ Aristotle knows the topic of the natural law (see *Nic. Eth.* V, 7, 1134b 18 - 1135a 15; in particular: 1034b 18-21 e 1135a 1-8.), but he does not develop it as the Stoics and the Christian ethics will do.
 - ²² ST. I-II, 18, 6.

speaking unless all these goodnesses are present, because any single defect causes evil, but the good is due to the integral cause...”²³.

- “...in order for something to be bad a single defect suffices, although a single good is insufficient for it to be simply good. For that, integral goodness is required. Therefore, if the will is good from its proper object, and from the end, the exterior act is good as a consequence, but the goodness of will which is from the intention of the end does not suffice for the exterior act to be good. But if the will is evil from the end intended or from the act willed, as a consequence the exterior act is evil”²⁴.

- “...as Dionysius says in *On the Divine Names* 4, the good comes about from the integral cause, but evil from single defects. Therefore, in order for that on which the will bears to be called evil it suffices that it is either evil in itself or that it is apprehended as evil. But in order to be good, it must be good in both ways”²⁵.

In this case we are not facing a problem of casuistic, but of the very source of the unity of the action²⁶. We have to pay attention not only to the interior action, but also to the exterior one. The *intentio* alone is not enough in order to make an action good²⁷. Again evil is easier than good. We are justified only when we act and when we act in the right way, considering every aspect of our act. On the contrary we might do sins of omission without acting ²⁸.

If sometimes is apparent which actions are always bad (according to the principles of natural law), it is not always apparent which actions are good “here and now”.

• ²³ ST.I-II, 18, 4, ad 3.

• ²⁴ ST. I-II, 20, 2.

• ²⁵ ST. I-II, 20, 6 ad 1.

• ²⁶ It is necessary to grasp intentionally the whole action (*finis, materia, circumstantiae*) . The good end alone does not justify the human action from the ethical point of view.

• ²⁷ Cfr. *De ver.* 14, 4 ad 13: “...consensus delectationis sine consensu operis non sufficit ad merendum, sufficit autem ad demerendum”; ST. III, 90, 2: “...licet peccatum perficiatur in consensu cordis, ad perfectionem tamen poenitentiae requiritur et contritio cordis et confessio oris, et satisfactio operis”.

• ²⁸ Cfr. ST. II-II, 79, 3, ad 4: “ ...omissio directe opponitur iustitiae ...non enim est omissio boni alicuius virtutis nisi sub ratione debiti, quod pertinet ad iustitiam. Plus autem requiritur ad actum virtutis meritorium quam ad demeritum culpae: quia “bonum est ex integra causa, malum autem ex singularibus defectibus”. Et ideo ad iustitiae meritum requiritur actus: non autem ad omissionem”.

Only the moral judgement of the wise man (*phrónimos*) can decide that²⁹. Therefore the phrase “bonum ex integra causa”, the topic of wholeness (*plenitudo*), make us able to distinguish and to connect ethics of law and ethics of virtue: in fact, according to the natural law, it might happen that an action is in principle always bad. In general: thanks to Dionysius and the Christian ethics the topic of the integrity of moral action is more stressed by Thomas than by Aristotle, although aristotelian *phronesis* as such requires a deep insight (a deep hermeneutics) into every aspect of the human action. As I said before, will as a faculty and the intention (*intentio*) of will (Augustine?)³⁰, both unknown by Aristotle, play a main role, unifying the human action and stressing human freedom and moral responsibility.

5) There is no good action without the unity (integrity) of the ethical virtues

Finally, according to Aquinas and his integrity criteria, also the ethical virtues (but not the epistemic ones) are connected among them, because practical reason and the virtue of *prudentia*, which are the root of the ethical virtues, are *one*. See, for instance, *In Eth.* VI, 11, 150-54: “...si essent diversae prudentiae circa materias diversarum virtutum moralium, sicut sunt diversa artificiorum genere, non prohiberet unam virtutem moralem esse sine alia, unaquaque earum habente prudentiam sibi correspondentem. Sed hoc non potest esse; quia eadem sunt principia prudentiae ad totam materiam moralem, ut scilicet omnia redigantur ad regulam rationis. Et ideo propter prudentiae unitatem omnes virtutes morales sunt sibi connexae”.³¹ While also Aristotle stresses the unifying role of *phronesis*³², Aquinas holds that, on the supernatural level, charity is the very root of the unity of all the ethical virtues³³.

• ²⁹ Cfr. Melina, p. 226

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• ³¹ Cf. *Summa theologiae* I-II, 65, 1; I-II, 65, 1 ad 3; II-II, 47, 14.

• ³² See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI, 13 a.

• ³³ Cf. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, 65, 2; 65, 3.

Conclusion

To sum up: according to Thomas, when he is acting, the good man must consider together the wholeness and integrity (*integritas*) of himself with its ontological order and the wholeness and integrity of the situation where he is acting with its ontological order. To be a moral man means to answer here and now with the wholeness (integrity) of ourselves to the wholeness (integrity) of being .

This developement and sometimes conversion (change) from the inside of the aristotelian anthropology and ethics, thanks to the neo platonian tradition, takes place because there is also a previous strong influence of the Bible on Aquinas' thought. In particular: like Augustine and Dionysius, Aquinas reads the platonian topic of the unity as ontological good, from a Christian point of view. Unity is good, as the unity of the experience of man is good, according to the Gospel's phrase that Augustine often quotes:” For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”³⁴. See ST I-II, 73, 1, 3: “...dicendum quod amor Dei est congregativus, in quantum affectus a multis ducit in unum: et ideo virtutes, quae ex amore Dei causantur connexionem habent. Sed amor sui disgregat affectum hominis in diversa, prout homo scilicet se amat appetendo sibi bona temporalia, quae sunt varia et diversa; et ideo vitia et peccata, quae causantur ex amore Dei non sunt connexa”. Here connection means integrity (among virtues). The love of God is the very root of the connection of ethical virtues among them. Evil and the vices are the opposite of ethical integrity. Also the unity among the disciples of Christ is good. See, for instance, *In Johannem XVII*, 2: “Dicit ergo hoc rogo ‘ut omnes unum sint’. Nam ut Platonici dicunt ab hoc quaelibet res habet unitatem a quo habet bonitatem. Bonum enim est quod est rei conservativum; nulla autem res conservatur nisi per hoc quod est una. Et ideo Dominus petens discipulorum perfectionem in bonitate, petit quod sint unum”.

• ³⁴ Mt. 16, 26.

The Platonic tradition, particularly Dionysius and Proclus, allows Thomas to give a more ontological, aesthetic and also ethical value to Aristotelian ethics, which seems to be a more empirical and eudemonistic one, reading it from a Christian point of view. This topic is important also from the point of view of contemporary philosophy. Nowadays the topic of integrity in anthropology and in ethics seems to be very important in the first place for the great role played by hermeneutics in considering the characters and the circumstances of the ethical action; in the second place, because, in a period of a crisis of ethics, it shows the criteria useful to value one ethics in comparison with another one. Which attitude considers every aspect of the action, which misses any aspect? Which attitude considers coherently every value? These are very important questions. In the third place, the topic of integrity connects also ethics and aesthetics (*integritas* is a basic character of beauty), allowing to read in the moral action a beauty, which has appeal. This character has been missed by modern and kantian ethics.

To sum up: integrity allows us also to stress together, in the field of ethics, the instances of contemporary phenomenology (the ethics of value) and of the kantian and neo-kantian ethics of law (the topic of responsibility and of ecstatic love), but without their risks (still natural law, according to Thomas, has an ontological ground – his ethics is not a formal one). It stresses as well the neoaristotelian ethics centred on the tendency toward the ends and the fulfilment of man (ethics of virtue) and on the role of the others (communitarianism). I believe that all these aspects that we can find together in the thought of Aquinas are still very important for contemporary ethics.