

THOMAS AQUINAS'S VIRTUE ETHICS AND THE IMPLICATION FOR SINO-THEOLOGICAL ETHICS ¹

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I. Introduction

The contribution of recent research on Thomas Aquinas is the rediscovery of his role of a pastor and spiritual master.² Aquinas is basically a theologian, he never called himself a philosopher.³

¹ This paper was presented in the Twelfth Sino-American Symposium on Philosophy and Religious Studies Special Conference on Medieval Philosophy on 3rd-6th July, 2006 in Peking University.

² Thomas F. O'Meara, "Jean-Pierre Torrell's Research on Thomas Aquinas," *Theological Studies* 62, no.4 (2001): 787-802. David B. Burrell has the similar position that Aquinas is basically a theologian and the identification of Aquinas as philosopher is not deep enough to grasp the total picture of the theological ground of Aquinas's thought. See David B. Burrell, "Recent Scholarship on Aquinas," *Modern Theology* 18, no.1 (2002): 110. Burrell reviewed three books on Aquinas: John Bowlin, *Contingency and Fortune in Aquinas's Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); John I. Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); John Milbank & Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2000).

³ David Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought* (London: Longman, 1988), 242.

However, he absorbs the ideas of Aristotle into his theological construction and starts a new era of synthesizing of theology and philosophy in the middle ages.⁴ He builds up his understanding from the idea "grace perfects nature" (*gratia perficit naturam*) and christianizes Aristotle's philosophy to develop his idea of natural law and virtues.⁵ Under the influence of Alasdair MacIntyre, the Kantian universal moral rationality is being challenged,⁶ and the studies in Aquinas's virtue ethic have become more significant.⁷ As a Christian theologian, it is natural for me to concentrate on the theological ground of Aquinas's thought. It is also important for a Protestant theologian to understand Roman Catholic theology.⁸ In this paper, I would like to present the theological construction of Aquinas's virtue ethics in order to initiate a dialogue with Sino-theology in Mainland China. To conclude, I would emphasize the theological research on Aquinas, aiming at his spiritual formation and his philosophical interest served as an explanation for the truth of God.

⁴ Brian Davies, "Thomas Aquinas," in *A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jorge J.E. Gracia and Timothy B. Noone (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 656.

⁵ Eugene F. Rogers Jr., "Aquinas on Natural Law and the Virtues in Biblical Context," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 27, no.1 (1999): 29-57.

⁶ Marcel Becker, "Virtue Ethics, Applied Ethics and Rationality Twenty-three Years after *After Virtue*," *South Africa Journal of Philosophy* 23, no.3 (2004): 267-81. Brynjulv Norheim Jr. argues for the constructivist reading of Kant which gives similiar result as Thomas Aquinas's virtue ethics. See Brynjulv Norheim Jr., "The Theological Virtues: Aquinas Did, but Did Kant?" *Studia Theologica* 58 (2004): 108-22.

⁷ Thomas F. O'Meara, "Virtues in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas," *Theological Studies* 58, no. 2 (1997): 254-85. Jean Porter, "Recent Studies in Aquinas's Virtue Ethic," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 26, no.1 (1998): 191-216. John Inglis, "Aquinas's Replication of the Acquired Moral Virtues," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 27, no.1 (1999): 3-28.

⁸ Norman L. Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991).

II. The Theological Ground of Aquinas's Virtue Ethics

The foundation of Aquinas's virtue ethics is the relation between God and the world. Aquinas elaborates the role of Anthropology in the structure of the cosmological qualification of God. He understands the world is coming from God (*exitus*) and all things are orienting towards and returning to God (*reditus*).⁹ In this sense, God is the origin and the end of the world (*principium et finis*). Aquinas calls this orientation a supernatural ordo. This is an order of the universe, nature and grace.¹⁰ Before going back to the structure of Aquinas's virtue ethics, let us use the *Summa Theologiae* (ST) as an example to show Aquinas's theological ground of virtue ethics.

The ST is divided into three parts. The first part starts from the Triune God to Anthropology. The second part deals with the destiny of human life under the grace of God. The second part is subdivided into two sections: the first section analyses the human psychology and the second section treats directly the content of cardinal virtues and theological virtues. The third part deals with the example of Jesus Christ as God's wisdom.¹¹

Interesting enough is the location of the virtue ethics between the doctrine of God in the first part and the third part of Christology and Sacraments. It could be explained by the practical training of the Dominican friars in preaching and hearing confession. The significance of Aquinas's formulation of virtue ethics is the avoidance

⁹ Norheim Jr., "The Theological Virtues: Aquinas Did, but Did Kant?" 111.

¹⁰ O'Meara, "Virtues in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas," 263.

¹¹ Thomas F. O'Meara, *Thomas Aquinas Theologian* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 62-63.

of a "heteronomous" understanding of Christian ethics. Although we could focus on Aquinas's use of natural law in his moral theology,¹² however it reflects only the application of the natural order for analogical thinking of the moral issue. According to Aquinas, *intellectus* is a way of theoretical reasoning with the intention towards an end (*intentio finis*), while *synderesis* is a way of practical reasoning adjusting the means to the end.¹³ Following the thoughts of Aristotle, Aquinas adopts the concept of *phronesis* in connection with the use of natural law.¹⁴ He uses the term *inclinations* in the elaboration of the function of natural law towards an end¹⁵ where the goal (*telos*) of human life under such natural order is of greater importance. Aquinas stands for the logic "ought implies can" by the function of virtue. When a person has virtues, he knows the goodness of nature and the end of life, he can choose to make the right decision and take the right action. Aquinas follows Augustine's idea of evil as the privation of goodness (*privatio boni*).¹⁶ He assumes that humans can know and apply the moral principle by *synderesis*. He presupposes that natural order reflects the goodness and human reason and inclines toward goodness. However, he does not underestimate the seriousness of human sin. Adam's original sin and human personal sin cause the alienation between human being and God. From the communal point of view, Aquinas uses the concept of *synderesis* and *inclinations* in

¹² See Roger Jr., "Aquinas on Natural Law and the Virtues in Biblical Context," 29-57.

¹³ Herbert McCabe, "Aquinas on Good Sense," in *Thomas Aquinas: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Brian Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 344-45.

¹⁴ Pamela M. Hall, "Towards a Narrative Understanding of Thomist Natural Law," in *Medieval Philosophy & Theology*, vol. 2, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Mark D. Jordan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 65.

¹⁵ Hall, "Towards a Narrative Understanding of Thomist Natural Law," 58.

¹⁶ Brian Davis, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 89.

the realm of Public *polis* for building up the applicability of natural law.¹⁷ The reason Aquinas wrote ST is to help the Dominican monks become the people they ought to be. Therefore, the main target is not the transmission of divine law, but the disclosure of the promised enjoyment of divine beatitude. Through the beatific vision of God the monks will develop passion for imitating Christ in their life and growing into the becoming self in the sight of God.¹⁸

III. The Epistemology of Aquinas's Virtue Ethics

It is a common misunderstanding that Aquinas proves the existence of God based only on human reason. Although the argument of naturalistic fallacy is in itself well justified, it is unlikely for proving the existence of the supernatural realm by the sense experiences from the natural world. However, this understanding of Aquinas misses an important point in his epistemology. It is correct that after Immanuel Kant's critique of metaphysics, it is impossible to talk about God beyond the limits of human reason. Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish the function from the limitation of human reason. Aquinas regards the knowledge of the triune God as the revelation of God and beyond the limit of human reason. However, human reason can grasp the unity of divine essence and the effects produced by God.¹⁹ Aquinas grounds the basis of ethics not only on human reason, but also on the God-human relationship, namely the

¹⁷ Hall, "Towards a Narrative Understanding of Thomist Natural Law," 60.

¹⁸ Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 118.

¹⁹ Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 96.

human union with God.²⁰ For Aquinas, *intellectus* is the *habitus* of the first principle, and *ratio* is the application of these principles in actual life.²¹ Faith in God directs our human intellect to understand the divine doctrine as science (*scientia*), and participate in God's rationality. Such faith is not an acceptance of the existence of the dimension of human openness or power of self-transcendence. It is an affirmation of the revelation of God in the historical Jesus, and through faith in Jesus Christ, we participate in the personhood of the Triune God. Without our faith in God, we could not understand what Aquinas means by "grace fulfills nature." Human understanding of God is a kind of "analogical knowing" which consists of the knowing of God negatively (*via negativa*) and positively. Aquinas's God is the maker of the universe and so God cannot be a being in it. It is logical to claim that God cannot be defined as a thing within the world and this way of denying God as a creature is a negative way of defining God.²² A common misunderstanding applies a dualistic categorization of revelation and reasoning without considering the understanding of reason in the Medieval Ages is quite different from the Enlightenment period. It is quite easy to generalize Aquinas's theology as using reason to prove the existence of God without considering how Aquinas uses terms like *intellectus* and *ratio*.

In *Summa contra Gentiles*, Aquinas understands the revelation of God through creation (*via per creaturas*) and through revelation (*via per revelationem*). These two ways of knowing about God belong

²⁰ A.N. Williams, "Argument to Bliss: The Epistemology of the Summa Theologiae," *Modern Theology* 20, no. 4 (2004): 506.

²¹ McCabe, "Aquinas on Good Sense," 345.

²² Brian Davies, ed., *Thomas Aquinas: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 11.

to the function of human intellect.²³ Intellect is also the center for human inclination and reflection on what is good.²⁴ In ST, part two, section two, Aquinas describes human psychology in three aspects: knowing, willing and feeling, which is Augustine's understanding of human soul. Under the principle that "grace brings nature to its full destiny" (*gratia perficit naturam*), Aquinas unfolds the "supernatural grace working in life" principle, the virtues and the instinctive modes of spirit (ST III, 62, 2; I-II, 66, 2).²⁵ It is not appropriate to limit Aquinas's virtue ethics to the rational dimension. It is meaningful to explore the role of passion in the area of spirituality. Philosophers can obtain knowledge based on God's effects in our world. According to Aquinas, knowing and loving should go hand in hand, "A man who knows because he is a man who loves."²⁶ Theology is the knowledge of God not as an object by philosophical proof, but as the origin of the world and human beings. Mankind has the desire to know and the desire for perfection. Something is perfect when it is fully actualized. The state of potentiality is not perfect. Knowledge is the actualization of human being's natural potentiality. This actualization process begins in the human intellect.²⁷ Being is to be perfect and being is to be good. Sensible things are effects of God and God is their cause.²⁸

²³ Rudi A. Te Velde, "Natural Reason in the *Summa contra Gentiles*," in *Medieval Philosophy & Theology*, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Mark D. Jordan, vol. 4 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 65.

²⁴ Eleonore Stump, "Aquinas's Account of Freedom: Intellect and Will," in *Thomas Aquinas: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Brian Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 277.

²⁵ O'Meara, *Thomas Aquinas Theologian*, 120.

²⁶ Étienne Gilson, *Wisdom and Love in Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1951), 5.

²⁷ Jan A. Aertsen, "Aquinas's Philosophy in Its Historical Setting," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 27.

²⁸ Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 98.

IV. The Structure of Aquinas' Virtue Ethics

There are two main sources for Aquinas's definition of "virtue," namely Aristotle's *Ethics* and Augustine's understanding as set out in Peter Lombard's *Sentences*.²⁹ For Aristotle, virtue is a voluntary habit leading to action by prudence. For Augustine, virtue is infused by God. By subordinating the understanding of virtue in Aristotle to Augustine, Aquinas turns philosophy into an instrument of theology.³⁰ According to Aquinas, the development of virtues is not only the product of the rational calculation of action, but also the interaction of sense and mind in intellect. Virtue itself is an operative habit in human intellect. According to Aquinas's point of view, there are four levels of intellectual virtue. The lowest level are the cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, justice and fortitude. The second level is intellectual virtue in practical intellect. The third level is intellectual virtue in speculative intellects like wisdom, science and understanding. The fourth level consists of theological virtues of faith, love and hope.³¹ For Aquinas, there are two kinds of intellectual virtues; three speculative elements of intellect: understanding (*intellectus*), science (*scientia*), wisdom (*sapientia*). Understanding grasps the basic principles; science uses these principles to reach the truth; wisdom is reasoning about God. The practical intellects are art (*ars*) and prudence (*prudential*). Prudence is a virtue of practical intellectual virtue or wisdom reasoning for good of the agent, and art is the correct reasoning of things to be done.³² Reason functions as speculative

²⁹ Mark D. Jordan, "Theology and Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 236.

³⁰ Jordan, "Theology and Philosophy," 237.

³¹ Williams, "Argument to Bliss," 511.

³² Davis, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 241.

reasoning (*ratio speculative, ratio scientifica*) and practical reasoning (*ratio practica*) or reasoning about moral matters (*ratio operativa*). *Synderesis* is an enduring principle maintaining the right order of human nature. Conscience (*conscientia*) determines the right action according to *synderesis*. Practical wisdom begins with the end. It finds the ways of deciding our action here and now. Aquinas calls the practical reasoning the order of intention and action as the order of execution.³³

A. Acquired Moral Virtues

Aquinas divides virtues into natural and supernatural ones. Through natural revelation, humankind could have the ability to develop prudence, justice, courage and temperance. He shares Aristotle's understanding of virtue as an acquired disposition to choose correctly (*habitus electivus*). *Habitus* disposes human beings to act according to human nature. It is not a "habit" in modern sense, but a tendency to actualize one's potential. Aquinas emphasizes very much the virtue of practical wisdom (*prudential*) in Aristotle's term *phronesis*. The word *prudens* is a short form of the word *providens*. Aquinas identifies *prudential* with *providential* in ST (1.22.1). Theologically speaking, the acquired virtue of prudence is a form of providence of God in human life.³⁴

B. Infused Moral Virtues

Aquinas thinks that human happiness is the vision of God or beatitude (*beatitudo*). It involves knowing and enjoying (loving) God. A harmonious life is to act according to the rational understanding

³³ Ralph McInerny, "Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 207.

³⁴ Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism*, 120-21.

of human nature. The infused moral virtues consist of faith, love and hope which are supernatural gifts from God. Only by the grace of God can we overcome our weakness of will. For Aquinas, grace means raising grace (*gratia elevans*) and healing grace (*gratia sanans*). Human desire (*appetite*) causes the deficiency of the free will. Freedom of will (*liberum arbitrium*) is the ability to choose (*electio*) reaching the end. Salvation is the elevation of the natural order to supernatural end through the grace of God. John Inglis points out that pastoral and intellectual concerns has driven Aquinas to argue for the necessary orientation of the moral virtues toward the highest good.³⁵ Jean Porter points out that the remaining issue for Aquinas's virtue ethics is the relationship between a human being's initial desire to seek grace for virtue development and the providence of God.³⁶ In this paper, I would like to show that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ does motivate our virtuous passion in a person's spirituality to unite with the Triune God. Faith, love and hope are the virtues infused by the grace of God. Faith has the priority over the other two virtues and it works with love. The infusion of theological virtues is more than supplementing the cardinal virtues; the acquired moral virtues

³⁵ John Inglis, "Aquinas's Replication of the Acquired Moral Virtues," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 27 (1999): 1, 3.

³⁶ Jean Porter, "Recent Studies in Aquinas's Virtue Ethic," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 26, no. 1 (1998), 195-216. Porter reviewed six books and one article on Aquinas's virtue ethics: Daniel Mark Nelson, *The Priority of Prudence: Virtue and Natural Law in Thomas Aquinas and the Implication for Modern Ethics* (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992); Pamela Hall, *Narrative and the Natural Law: An Interpretation of Thomist Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1994); James Keenan, *Goodness and Rightness in Thomas Aquinas's "Summa Theologiae"* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1992); Daniel Westberg, *Right Practical Reason: Aristotle, Action and Prudence in Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Simon Harak, *Virtuous Passions: The Formation of Christian Character* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1993); Paul Waddell, *The Primacy of Love: An Introduction to the Ethics of Thomas Aquinas* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1992); Diana Cates, "A Selective Reading of Thomas's Theory of Acquired Moral Virtue," in *Choosing to Feel: Virtue, Friendship, and Compassion for Friends*, by Peter Brown (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1997).

are the character development for this earthly life, and the infused theological virtues are the preparation required for eternal life.³⁷ Faith is a rational activity transcending human reason,³⁸ and it is a vision for the supernatural world.³⁹ Most importantly, faith is a wilful acknowledgement of God's sovereignty.⁴⁰

V. Grace as the Source Integrating Acquired and Infused Virtues

According to Aquinas, grace is a divine presence and participation in the deeper life of God. It is the grace of God motivating human beings to desire goodness. Human intellect will judge the goodness of an action and will enter God in the beatific vision by the grace of God, and the will makes the choice (*electio*). However, human intellect shows the goodness of the end in order to move an appetite, so it is the final cause of the will.⁴¹ Human Inclination is a rational appetite depending on intellect, however, passion can also influence the intellect. Theoretically speaking the passion (*passio*) is subject

³⁷ Jordan, "Theology and Philosophy," 239.

³⁸ Thomas Aquinas, "Treatise on the Theological Virtues," in *Nature and Grace: Selections from the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. A.M. Fairweather (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), 224. "Faith implies intellectual assent to that which is believed."

³⁹ Aquinas, "Treatise on the Theological Virtues," 225. "The light of faith enables us to see what we believe."

⁴⁰ Aquinas, "Treatise on the Theological Virtues," 242. "On the first point: faith does not make use of inquiry by natural reason to demonstrate what it believes. But it does inquire into the evidence by which a man is induced to believe, for example, into the circumstance that such things are spoken by God and confirmed by miracles. On the second point: as we have said above, the word 'to think' is here understood as it applies to the intellect, not as meaning an act of the cogitative power. On the third point: the intellect of the believer is determined by the will, not by reason. Hence assent is here understood to mean the act of the intellect as determined by the will."

⁴¹ Stump, "Aquinas's Account of Freedom: Intellect and Will," 276.

to the will, but different kinds of people choose to follow goodness in different measures toward the end of life. In Aquinas's opinion, human freedom of will (*liberum arbitrium*) works in accordance with the goal (*telos*) of life while choosing the suitable means.⁴² Aquinas mentions "eleven kinds of passions: the six concupiscible passions of love, hate, desire, aversion, joy and sorrow; the five irascible passions of hope, despair, confidence, fear and anger."⁴³ The passion is psychologically based potencies of the sensitive appetite towards a target. The infusion of virtues presupposes the necessity of transformation in human life.

Basically, Aquinas does not suggest the polemic opposition of reason and revelation, human freedom and God's sovereignty. However, there are differences go between these concepts. There is continuity and discontinuity between them and the grace of God entering the human realm and expanding its supernatural dimension. When Aquinas supposes human beings are free; he means that the human being is not under the control of other creature, but he does not mean that the human being is free from the sovereignty and providence of God.⁴⁴ Hence the design of the human being's destiny is to obtain perfect vision of blessedness. It implies that human nature depends on higher nature. Our natural knowledge is insufficient. By the grace of God, human being can get illumination through the natural light of reason; and also by the habit of virtue, faith is being strengthened in God.⁴⁵ However, the transformation of the human

⁴² Stump, "Aquinas's Account of Freedom: Intellect and Will," 285.

⁴³ Peter King, "Aquinas on the Passions," in *Thomas Aquinas. Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Brian Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 353.

⁴⁴ Davis, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 177.

⁴⁵ Aquinas, "Treatise on the Theological Virtues," 245-46.

being is not simply adding something supernatural to the natural dimension. We should not neglect Aquinas's doctrine of original sin. It is a tragedy that human beings bear the guilt of original sin. Through the incarnation of Christ, human being is reconciled with God and the broken relationship between human beings and God is restored. By the grace of God, the human intellect is being renewed and it loves the truth earnestly.⁴⁶ According to Aquinas, there are different aspects of human soul, like intellect, passion and will. The grace of God renews and fulfills the function of these faculties that God originally designed.⁴⁷

VI. Aquinas's Goal for the "Vision of God" and the Spirituality of the Theologian

In my opinion, we could consider Aquinas's theology under three categories, namely truth, goodness and beauty. Aquinas builds up his theological ethics under the category of the goodness of nature and creation. However, we should not neglect his search for beauty and truth. The aim of his search for the vision of the Glory of God is to experience perfect happiness in life. This seeing of God is not an uninvolved observation nor an analysis of the theological terminology of "God." This comprehension of God fosters a human being's spiritual yearning.

⁴⁶ Aquinas, "Treatise on the Theological Virtues," 223. "The true is the good of the intellect, but not of any appetitive virtue."

⁴⁷ Aquinas, "Treatise on the Theological Virtues," 223. "Now, since faith perfects the intellect, whereas hope and charity perfect the appetitive part of the soul...."

Aquinas does not separate reason from faith. He tries to use reason to explain faith and receive grace from God to enrich his faith. He does not use the five-way argument to prove the existence of God, instead he shows the rational justification of the presence of God everywhere. He regards metaphysics as the philosophical science of the divine (*scientia divina*) which studies God only in an indirect way. For him, philosophy is not the source of truth, but the divine revelation of God.⁴⁸ Aquinas does not put theology and philosophy in conflicting positions, but he tries to bridge the gap between them.

Philosophers have missed much of the main concern of Aquinas to seek wisdom humbly and to practise love.⁴⁹ Therefore, I would like to invite our philosophers to understand him theologically and appreciate his spirituality. In my opinion, it is meaningful to explore how Aquinas interprets Christian faith from the aspects of truth, good and beauty. According to Aquinas, human knowledge has no final authority. Even Plato differentiate idea from opinion; *a priori* an idea is a firm knowledge whereas opinion is just a relative understanding. Although Aquinas treats knowledge as a medium to convey supernatural truth, human knowledge has no absolute certainty.⁵⁰ For Aquinas, good is divided into the befitting (*honestum*), which is desired for its own sake, the useful (*utile*), which is desired for something else, and the pleasing (*delectabile*), in which the appetite comes to rest.⁵¹ Good consists of three features: *modus*,

⁴⁸ John F. Wippel, "Metaphysics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 86.

⁴⁹ Gilson, *Wisdom and Love in St. Thomas Aquinas*, 37.

⁵⁰ Aquinas, "Treatise on the Theological Virtues," 278. "Faith is a divine gift, while knowledge, wisdom and understanding falls short of the certainty of the word of God."

⁵¹ Jan A. Aertsen, "Beauty in the Middle Ages: A Forgotten Transcendental?" in *Medieval Philosophy & Theology*, vol. 4, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Mark D. Jordan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 92.

species, and *ordo*. "Good" means "perfect". The perfection of a thing is realized in its form. The form is an inclination toward an end and relates to order.⁵² In relation to the good, Aquinas thinks that human happiness is an imperfect actualization of the ultimate end of human life. Beatitude exists in the natural knowledge of God and love of God and it is attainable in this life and in eternal life. Aquinas differs from Aristotle in saying that happiness is neither complete nor self-sufficient in this life. Aquinas identifies three types of happiness: 1) happiness of the active life according to moral virtues, 2) happiness of the contemplative life, 3) happiness in beatitude involving one's speculative intellect and resurrected body in eternal life.⁵³ Beatitude abides only in the vision of the divine essence of goodness.⁵⁴ Aquinas takes beauty to be the splendor of truth. Beauty is a transcendental property of being; beauty is good and delightful, beauty is also the object of contemplation. The essence of beauty consists of three parts: Integrity (*integritas*) or completeness (*perfectio*), Due proportion (*debita proportio*) or harmony (*consonantia*), Clarity (*claritas*) (ST I.39.8).⁵⁵ Aquinas does not only approach God with objective rational argumentation, but also with love and passion.⁵⁶

Aquinas proposes the combination of active life and contemplative life. Even Aquinas is a mystic in the sense that he is encouraging union with Christ in the Christian life.⁵⁷

⁵² Aertsen, "Beauty in the Middle Ages: A Forgotten Transcendental?" 92.

⁵³ Don Adams, "Aquinas on Aristotle on Happiness," in *Medieval Philosophy & Theology*, vol. 4, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Mark D. Jordan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 99.

⁵⁴ Fredrick Copleston, S.J., *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 401.

⁵⁵ Aertsen, 70.

⁵⁶ Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 275. "Love presupposes knowledge of the object loved. The sense of beauty or good is at the source of sensible love."

⁵⁷ Aidan Nichols, *Discovering Aquinas: An Introduction to His Life, Work, and Influence* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 176.

VII. The Relationship between Spirituality and Virtue Ethics

From Aquinas's point of view, the beatitude is the ultimate fulfillment of the human being's inner being (ST 1.12.1). The beatific vision of God stimulates human beings to search for their own identity. As we understand the meaning of life from the perspective of God's creation, we will have the motivation of becoming a spiritual and a moral being (ST 1-2.1-5). Through identification with the humanity of Jesus, we could reach the Creator, God the Father.⁵⁸ Theologically speaking, Aquinas's virtue ethics centers on the grace of God as the source; beatitude is the contact point with the supernatural, and participation in the divine life is through union with Christ in the Holy Spirit.⁵⁹

In response to the current trend of virtue ethics, it is important to trace back to the tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas. Aquinas's significance for the discussion of virtue ethics comes in his theological foundation and the implications for human spiritual development. In my opinion, union with Christ and life in Holy Spirit can be grouped under the concept of life in the Triune God. Through the life experience with God, human life transcends into a new one. Faith in God empowers human beings to realize the dark side of the human inner being. Without a realistic self-understanding, human beings will always live a self-centered life. Faith in God enables human beings to recognize the reality of "otherness", and demands respect for others. Faith in God leads to a change of worldview and it motivates us to love others as ourselves. Faith in God is not only a conceptual affirmation of the existence of a kind of power creating

⁵⁸ Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism*, 131.

⁵⁹ Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism*, 132.

the world, the God Aquinas believes in is the God of Jesus Christ who has sent His only Son in human form Jesus. It is the God of love and who is willing to suffer for the sins of humanity. Faith in God provides a chance for a God-human encounter. Phenomenologically, it is an interaction with the sacred dimension. Aquinas puts virtue ethics among the doctrine of God and Christology and the Church's Sacrament, with the intention that the Dominican monks could receive the grace of God through the sacraments. Since the cross of Christ is the basis for human salvation, the weekly or daily participation in the Eucharist is a means of gaining a mystical connection with God. From a Protestant point of view, the mystical relation with God is not only confined to Church sacraments; it is more important to have a discipline of daily prayer to worship God. For Aquinas, prayer presupposes the providence of God.⁶⁰ Prayer is a way to receive the grace of God. Prayer integrates the active life and contemplative life, fulfills our earthly life, and expands our vision for supernatural dimension. Prayer binds us together with the Holy Spirit, and through the Holy Spirit we can appreciate the beauty of God. The contribution of virtue ethics is to point out that ethics is not a set of rational calculations, but the formation of character. When we go into the area of character formation, it touches the issue of the renewal of life and the change of personality. Then we face a basic question or why should I be a moral person, why should I have the responsibility for others? For Aquinas, it is the salvation of God that moves us to practise the Christian values in the secular world.

⁶⁰ Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 178.

VIII. Aquinas's Virtue Ethics and the Development of Sino-Theological Ethics

Aquinas points out that perfect happiness of human life is to see the essence of God (*beatitudo*). In my opinion, the current Tillichian interpretation of God as Ultimate Concern does not necessarily presuppose an Ultimate Reality. The "God Talk" is more or less an anthropological self-expression for the urge of self-transcendence. I think the Sino-Theologians need to develop ethics not only at the natural level, but also try to get insight from Aquinas's virtue ethics. According to Aquinas, the purpose of human law is to promote common good. Human natural law reflects the natural inclination (*inclinatio naturalis*), but natural law is only a derivative of eternal law. Eternal law helps human beings to reach the final end of life, namely, the union with God. Aquinas thinks that eternal law is based on the unchangeable nature of God. As far as I know, Sino-Theological Ethics seldom deals with the relationship between eternal law and natural law in the ethical construction. Therefore, I would like to contribute my paper to further discussions.

Related to this issue is the role of natural reason and faith in Aquinas's theology. Rudi A. Te Velde points out that Aquinas uses the twofold mode of truth (*duplex modus veritatis*) to defend Christian faith against Islamic Aristotelianism in *Summa contra Gentiles*. That means we can profess the truth about God in various ways but there is truth beyond our natural reason.⁶¹ In *Summa contra Gentiles*, Aquinas does not use the expression "Catholic truth" as in the *Summa Theologiae*, but is concerned with the "truth value" of the meaning of universe. Aquinas admits that there are people with a

⁶¹ Te Velde, "Natural Reason in the *Summa contra Gentiles*," 45.

sapiential interest in Christian theology, but without Christian faith. At this point, Aquinas is willing to investigate Christian truth by means of human reason.⁶² He searches for philosophical language to convey Christian truth. On the other hand, he transforms philosophical language into theological language. Aquinas put "natural human happiness" (*Felicitas*), the Latin translation of Aristotle's *Ethics*, as a dialogical partner of Christian "beatific vision" (*Beatitudo*).⁶³ As philosophy is a common platform for Christian and non-Christian to search for the Truth together, Aquinas reminds us of the deficient (*deficiens*) function of natural reason. He never reduces the theological ground to an anthropological term. When he uses a philosophical term, it is a tool for the transmission of the Christian message. Although it is not necessary to refer to basic church doctrines, and it could be argued from natural reason, its intention is to witness the truth. Aquinas's theology shows how to travel from Jerusalem to Athens and back from Athens to Jerusalem. The great thinker Aquinas passes his wise word on and reminds us that philosophy cannot provide happiness and the philosopher cannot be sinless. This great thinker builds his thought upon the authority of sacred Scripture which is indeed an example for the realm of academic world.⁶⁴

⁶² Te Velde, "Natural Reason in the *Summa contra Gentiles*," 48.

⁶³ Velde, "Natural Reason in the *Summa contra Gentiles*," 52.

⁶⁴ Aquinas, "Treatise on the Theological Virtues," 226-27. "The reasons which are adduced by holy men in order to prove the things of faith are not demonstrative reasons. They are either persuasive, showing that what faith believes is not impossible, or else, as Dionysius says (2 Div. Nom.1, *lect.* 1), they are grounded on principles of the faith itself, such as the authority of sacred Scripture. These principles are sufficient to prove something for believers, just as the principles of natural knowledge prove something for all men. In this way, theology is indeed a science, as we said at the beginning of this work (Pt. I, Q.1, Art 2)."

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to interpret Aquinas's virtue ethics from a theological perspective. Aquinas understands the goal of life as an orientation toward God, however, it is a common misunderstanding that his proof of the existence of God is based only on human reason. The fact is one may neglect the supernatural ground of Aquinas's philosophy. As for Aquinas, grace is the source that integrates acquired and infused virtues. Aquinas interprets Christian faith from the perspectives of truth, good and beauty. He considers not only the role of natural order, utility, but also the passion and the appetite. This paper will argue that Spirituality is the basis for Aquinas's virtue ethics. The glory and beauty of God attracts human beings to participate and share the life of God. From that understanding, this paper will contribute to the dialogue with the Sino-theologians who regard Aquinas as only a philosopher .

撮 要

本篇論文主旨是從神學角度詮釋亞奎那的美德倫理。亞奎那認為生命的目的是朝向上帝；但是許多人誤解亞奎那只根據人類理性論證上帝存在的觀點，他們忽視了亞奎那哲學中超自然部分。對亞奎那來說，恩典是將成長的美德 (acquired virtue) 及灌入的美德 (infused virtue) 整合的根源。亞奎那從真、善、美的角度演繹基督教信仰，他不單考慮自然秩序及功利的角色，同時關注情感 (passion) 及意慾 (appetite) 的影響。本篇論文要論證靈修學及亞奎那美德倫理的基礎。上帝的美和榮耀吸引人參與及分享上帝的生命。在這個基礎上，本篇論文的貢獻在於與那些視亞奎那只是哲學家的漢語神學進行對話。