

## Aquinas on the Relation of Goodness to Beauty

### Santo Tomás de Aquino sobre la relación de la Bondad con la Belleza

C. Scott SEVIER

College of Southern Nevada, Las Vegas

[Christopher.Sevier@csn.edu](mailto:Christopher.Sevier@csn.edu)

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**Abstract:** In the following, I will illustrate the relationship between goodness and beauty in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. In particular, I intend to show that the best way of understanding Aquinas' view of beauty is to dissect his terse, three-fold definition of beautiful things as "those which please when seen," and that, in so doing, we find several constituents of his view that relate beauty to goodness: (i) objective features of objects and events, (ii) the subjective features of human perception of such objects and events, and (iii) the pleasure attending the apprehension of the goodness of such objects and events. An investigation into the relationship between goodness and beauty could go in two different directions: First, it might focus on the objective features of the beautiful, and such would involve situating beauty within the scheme of the transcendentals. Second, it might focus on the relationship of the pleasure involved in the apprehension of the beautiful to the good, and such would involve situating beauty within the scheme of the ethical. The first of these two approaches has been more often attempted. Here, I attempt an investigation into the second avenue. I endeavor to show that, for Aquinas, following the Greek *kallokagathic* tradition, beauty falls not only into the aesthetic system of values, but also the ethical.

**Key words:** Thomas Aquinas, Aesthetics, Medieval, Good, *Bonum*, Beauty, *Pulchritudo*, *Honestum*, Appetite, Desire, Pleasure

**Resumen:** A continuación, voy a ilustrar la relación entre la bondad y la belleza en el pensamiento de Tomás de Aquino. En particular, quiero demostrar que la mejor manera de entender la perspectiva de Aquino sobre la belleza es diseccionar su concisa definición triple de las cosas hermosas como "aquellas que agradan cuando son vistas", y que, al hacerlo así, encontramos varios componentes de su punto de vista que relacionan belleza y bondad: 1) las características objetivas de los objetos y eventos; 2) los elementos subjetivos de la percepción humana de tales objetos y eventos; y 3) el placer ligado a la aprehensión de la bondad de este tipo de objetos y eventos. Una investigación sobre la relación entre la bondad y la belleza puede ir en dos direcciones diferentes: En primer lugar, podría centrarse en las características objetivas de lo bello, y esto implicaría situar la belleza dentro del esquema de los trascendentales. En segundo lugar, podría centrarse en la relación entre el placer derivado de la aprehensión de lo bello con lo bueno, y esto implicaría situar la belleza dentro del esquema de la ética. El primero de estos dos enfoques ha sido tratado con más frecuencia. Aquí, intento una investigación sobre la segunda alternativa. Me esfuerzo para demostrar que, para Aquino, siguiendo la tradición griega de la *kallokagathia*, la belleza recae no sólo en el sistema estético de los valores, sino también en el de la ética.

**Palabras clave:** Tomás de Aquino, Estética, medieval, Bueno, *Bonum*, Belleza, *Pulchritudo*, *Honestum*, apetito, deseo, placer.

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**Sumario:** 1. Introduction. 2. An Appetite for the Good and the Beautiful. 3. The Role of Pleasure. 4. *Honestum*. 5. Conclusion.

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### 1. Introduction

The view that we find in Aquinas regarding the nature of beauty has two notable aspects: an objective and a subjective aspect. On the one hand, there are objective features of things in the world, and the objective features provide the formal grounds for the experience of beauty. The three formal conditions of beauty, according to Aquinas, are proportion (or harmony), integrity (or perfection) and splendor (or color).<sup>1</sup> Most often, discussion of these features focuses not on beauty *per se*, but rather on beautiful things: people, animals, music and human acts. The beauty of these things is grounded in objective features of the things themselves. Viewed from this aspect, *beauty is objective*.

On the other hand, there are subjective conditions for the experience of beauty. The formal features may well be present, but without a cognizer to perceive and order these features intelligibly, there can be no aesthetic experience – neither aesthetic pleasure nor aesthetic judgment. Viewed from this aspect, *beauty is subjective*. A dual-aspect view of beauty as comprised of both objective and subjective features will be popularized by Kant some five hundred years later, though admittedly the similarities between Aquinas' and Kant's accounts are largely superficial.<sup>2</sup>

These two aspects – the objective and the subjective – come together in Aquinas' canonical definition of beauty in the *pars prima* of the *Summa Theologiae*, in a discussion on the transcendental property of goodness, where he asserts: "We call those things beautiful which please when seen."<sup>3</sup> In a way that is characteristic of Aquinas' *Summa*, he has provided a very terse definition that rewards exploration. For in this definition, we have at least

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<sup>1</sup> ST I.39.8 co.: *Nam ad pulchritudinem tria requiruntur. Primo quidem, integritas sive perfectio, quae enim diminuta sunt, hoc ipso turpia sunt. Et debita proportio sive consonantia. Et iterum claritas, unde quae habent colorem nitidum, pulchra esse dicuntur.*

<sup>2</sup> Kant is not concerned with the nature of beauty *itself*, but with aesthetic *judgments*, since he holds that beauty is not a property of things, but a consciousness of a subjective feeling attending the free play of the imagination (see, e.g., Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* §1, 5:203-204). For Kant, aesthetic *judgments* appear to have a dual aspect - both objective and subjective - but modern commentators are divided about this. Karl Ameriks thinks Kant endorses only the objective aspect of aesthetic judgment, while Hannah Ginsborg is critical of the view. See Karl Ameriks, "Kant and the Objectivity of Taste," in *British Journal of Aesthetics* 23 (1983): 3-17; and Hannah Ginsborg, "Kant on the Subjectivity of Taste," in Herman Parret, ed., *Kants Ästhetik* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> ST I.5.4 ad 1: *pulchra enim dicuntur quae visa placent.*

three discernible components, each of which invites examination. First, there are the *things themselves*, namely, the objects, and the relevant constituent features. An examination of the things themselves, as these relate to beauty, would involve an examination of the formal criteria of beauty. Such an examination would reveal the objective nature of beauty. Second, there is the *perception* involved in aesthetic experience. This investigation would take us into Aquinas' philosophical psychology, and into his account of perception in general. Such an examination would reveal one-half of the subjective aspect of beauty. Finally, there is the *pleasure* attending the experience of beauty, an examination into which would reveal the second-half of the subjective aspect of beauty.

An investigation into the relationship between the beautiful and the good has the potential of leading us into either of two different areas of inquiry. On one hand, it leads to a discussion of the transcendental nature of beauty. An investigation along these lines would require explaining the relation of beauty to the other transcendental concepts, especially to the good, since these are shared by all existing things and are said to be convertible. Since Aquinas affirms that the beautiful is the same (in one sense) as the good,<sup>4</sup> such an investigation would require us to determine the exact nature of this convertibility: the beautiful and the good may be identical, one may be a species of the other, or both may be partially-overlapping species of some higher genus. This discussion would no doubt appeal to those concerned with Aquinas' metaphysical views. In fact, this aspect of Aquinas' aesthetic views is the area that has been most impacted by recent scholarship. For that reason, I will for the most part ignore it in the present discussion.

On the other hand, we might be lead into a discussion of the ways in which both the good and the beautiful are objects of appetite. Because of the role that appetite plays in Aquinas' theory of the virtues, we would find that, for him, that in which one takes pleasure, including aesthetic pleasure, is a matter of moral concern, and so such pleasures can be subject to moral evaluation. This is so whether one is concerned with beautiful objects or with beautiful actions (or with the souls that produce them). Aquinas' concern with the latter arises in his discussion of an integral constituent of the virtue of temperance, namely, *honestum* or "moral goodness."<sup>5</sup> I will consider the case of *honestum* at the

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<sup>4</sup> *In de divinis nominibus* IV, lec. 5: *Quamvis autem pulchrum et bonum sint idem subiecto, quia tam claritas quam consonantia sub ratione boni continentur, tamen ratione differunt: nam pulchrum addit supra bonum, ordinem ad vim cognoscitivam illud esse huiusmodi.*

<sup>5</sup> ST II-II.145. The translation of *honestum* as "moral goodness" coincides with its usage of prior to Aquinas, as in both Cicero and Augustine. Cf. Cicero, *De officiis* I.5; and Augustine, *De diversis questionibus* LXXXIII, Q. 30. In some instances, the Fathers of the English Dominican Province translate it, instead, as "righteousness," as in ST I-II.8.3 ad 3: "For the useful and the righteous (*utile et honestum*) are not species of good in an equal degree..." The significance of the difference in translation seems to be merely stylistic, not substantive. In

end of this discussion. For the present, I would like to consider the relation of goodness to beauty with respect to appetite – an investigation that should prove of interest to those concerned with Aquinas' moral views. It is, in any case, the more neglected of the two lines of inquiry.



Fig. 1. St. Thomas Aquinas, painting by Carlo Crivelli. National Gallery, London.

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the latter passage, for instance, *honestum* is referred to as a species of the good in general, and the translators may simply have been trying to avoid an awkward rendering.

## 2. An Appetite for the Good and the Beautiful

Aquinas has defined beauty, in part, with respect to the pleasure produced in the perception of beautiful things, and he has a fairly sophisticated account of human pleasure and desire. Aquinas discusses pleasure largely in the context of the passions (*passiones*), which are properly related to the sensory (*i.e.*, bodily) appetite. This suggests that Aquinas considers corporeal pleasure to be the most basic or, at least, the most immediate and accessible sort of pleasure for human beings. In his *Treatise on the Passions*,<sup>6</sup> Aquinas defines the passions as “the movements of the sensitive appetite.”<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, he classifies pleasure (or delight) as one of the passions of the sensitive appetite;<sup>8</sup> more specifically, pleasure is an *affectio*,<sup>9</sup> which can arise with respect to reason or with respect to external, *i.e.*, bodily, sources, when the object of desire is present.

For Aquinas, appetite is related to ends and is what moves creatures toward various good objects.<sup>10</sup> A difficulty is raised in the fact that Aquinas makes no firm distinction between appetite (*appetitus*) and desire (*desiderium*), for he uses both terms to refer to the movement of something toward some good object or away from some bad object, though he also on occasion uses appetite (*appetitus*) to refer to an inclination or tendency to movement.<sup>11</sup> This latter notion – inclination – also seems to overlap with his concept of love (*amor*).<sup>12</sup> So what we seem to have in Aquinas are two notions: one of movement

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<sup>6</sup> This is the name given by contemporary scholars (not Aquinas himself) to questions 22-48 of the *prima secundae* of the *Summa Theologiae*.

<sup>7</sup> ST I-II.31.1 co. Cf. ST I-II.22.3.

<sup>8</sup> ST I-II.23.4 co.

<sup>9</sup> ST I-II.33.2 co.

<sup>10</sup> ST I-II.8.1 co. Cf. Aristotle, NE I.1.

<sup>11</sup> For *appetitus* as inclination, see ST I-II.8.1 co. Cf. Aristotle NE I.1. For *appetitus* as a movement toward an object. See, *e.g.*, ST I-II.8.1 co. For *desiderium* as movement toward an object, see ST I-II.31.3 co.

<sup>12</sup> Aquinas' notion of “love” (*amor*) as the “principle of motion” (*principium motus tendentis*) towards a desired object seems to play the role of initiating movement to an end. An important distinction can be made between “desire” (*desiderium*) and “love” (*amor*) in Aquinas, though it is controversial since Aquinas sometimes seems to use these terms synonymously. Nevertheless, in his latest and most mature discussions of the subject, Aquinas specifically says that love always precedes and, by implication, is the cause or source of desire. ST I-II.27.4 ad 2: “Desire (*desiderium*) for a thing always presupposes love (*amor*) for that thing.” Cf. Christopher Malloy, “Thomas on the Order of Love and Desire: A Development of Doctrine,” in *Thomist* 71 (2007): 65-87. Likewise, love is called the root (*radix*) and principle (*principium*) of all of the affections (*omnis affectionis*), of which desire is one. See, *e.g.*, ST I-II.36.2 co.; ST I-II.62.2 ad 3; and ST II-II.19.9 ad 3.

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towards an object, and another of whatever it is that initiates that movement. Aquinas, at least in his more mature writings, seems to use *desiderium* consistently of the former, *amor* consistently of the latter, and *appetitus* for both. Though a bit confusing, it does not appear that anything of importance hangs on his choice of terminology, and the context is typically sufficient for suggesting the intended meaning. I will therefore treat “appetite” and “desire” as roughly synonymous, whose primary meaning is “movement towards an end,” unless context suggests he intends it as a tendency or an inclination to move towards an end.

Goodness and desire are intimately related in Aquinas’ thought. He says “the essence of goodness consists in this, that it is in some way desirable,” and the authority to which he appeals for this assertion is Aristotle’s famous dictum that “the good is what all desire.”<sup>13</sup> Aquinas does not mean by this that whatever object and human being desires is, on account of that desire, good – the desire does not *make* the object good (that is, there is a distinction between actual goods and merely apparent goods). Instead, the order of explanation goes the other way.<sup>14</sup> The goodness of an object elicits desire, with varying

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<sup>13</sup> ST I.5.1 co.: “the essence of goodness consist in this, that it is in some way desirable.” Cf. Aristotle, NE I.1, 1194<sup>a</sup>3: “the good is what all desire.” Cf. also Plato, *Meno* 77b; and Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* III.110. Contemporary philosophers often refer to this view as the “Guise of the Good” thesis, and it has been the subject of intense scrutiny in recent years. See, e.g., the recent collection of essays in *Desire, Practical Reason, and the Good*, edited by Sergio Tenenbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Aquinas does not say that appetite is drawn only to real goods because, in fact, human beings are easily deceived, and what is in fact good may not appear so to someone with disordered desires. See, e.g., ST I-II.18.4 ad 1. The notions of true and apparent good come apart when we get the proper ordering of goods (or our desire for various goods) wrong, as happens most often when we elevate temporal goods over goods that truly perfect human nature. See, e.g., ST I-II.84 1 co.; ST I-II.72.2 co. Cf. Augustine, *De diversis questionibus LXXXIII*, Q. 33.

<sup>14</sup> ST I-II.34.2 ad 3. Aquinas draws a parallel between the appetite/good relationship on the one hand and the cognition/truth relationship on the other. *De Veritate* I.2 co., ad 1. Aquinas holds that truth is something that resides in the intellect, *i.e.*, conformity of a natural thing to an intellect, but also that truth is a property of an act of being. That is, truth is the relation between a thing and its being, which is established by God. Given that this is so with respect to the cognition/truth relationship, it is true *a fortiori* with respect to the appetite/good relationship since he says, following Aristotle, that “good and evil are in things” whereas “the true and the false are not in things but in the mind” *De Veritate* 1.2 s.c. For Aquinas, both the good and the true are modes of being and so derive their character from being itself, though good is more correctly predicated of objects and truth of intellect. It seems correct to say that, for Aquinas, truth depends (in a way) on a cognizer, *i.e.*, truth relates to propositions which are in the intellect, and similarly, good depends (in a way) on a desirer (though not necessarily a sentient desirer), *i.e.*, the good is good for something. Both the good and the true ultimately reduce to or in some way qualify being, and so are rooted in the divine nature, which is absolute being, which is the ground of the objectivity of good and true. We can say, derivatively, then that beauty is also independent of human cognizers,

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levels of cognition. If an actual good, then it is a proper object of appetite; and if a false (or merely apparent) good, it elicits an improper or illicit desire, sometimes called *cupiditas* or inordinant desire.<sup>15</sup> The order of explanation must be this way (*i.e.*, the good determines what is desirable) because, according to Aquinas, the good (*bonum*) is a transcendental or primary (*prima*) entity, convertible with being (*cum ente convertitur*), and a primary entity cannot be explained by appeal to anything anterior since nothing is anterior to primary entities, and certainly not human desires. Instead, primary entities are understood by their consequents, just as causes are known by their effects. In this way are goods often identified, namely, by their desirability (whether real or merely apparent).<sup>16</sup> So the common feature of every well-ordered appetite is that it aims at or terminates in some actually good end, and the kind of appetite it is (*i.e.*, natural, sensory or rational) is determined by the level of cognition involved in the movement towards that end.<sup>17</sup>

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since the objective constituents of beauty (which we will take up in the next chapter) are always present to the divine intellect.

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, ST I-II.84.1 co. for Aquinas' characterization of *cupiditas* as *appetitus inordinatus*, that is, a desire for mutable goods (*boni temporalis*) as opposed to goods that truly perfect human nature. Aquinas is following the example of Augustine, who frequently uses *cupiditas* with this negative connotation. Cf. also ST I-II.30.2 ad 2. Cf. Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus LXXXIII*, Q. 33. Cf. also ST I-II.18.4 ad 1. However, Aquinas is not entirely consistent in his use. See, for example, ST I-II.30.3 co., where Aquinas uses *cupiditas* for a desire that exceeds the purely natural desires (*i.e.*, a desire involving reason). Aquinas also (again following Augustine's practice) frequently uses *cupiditas* to mean simply "desire," as in ST I-II.25.2 s.c. Cf. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* XIV.7, 9.

<sup>16</sup> In *NE* I, 1094<sup>a</sup>1-18, L.1, n. 9. Aquinas seems to worry that his readers will think that Aristotle means that good is always identified with the thing desired rather than taking the good as the principle of (*i.e.*, what accounts for) desire. Strictly speaking, good is related to being, since the two are convertible, and this means that ultimately desire is for being, albeit being as picked out *sub ratione boni*. Just as cognition grasps being (as true), appetite seeks being (as good). Likewise, beauty may be understood as being that is perceptually manifested (*i.e.*, being as perceived).

<sup>17</sup> Aquinas, following Aristotle, points out that human appetite has two objects as ends, it is drawn to good objects and avoids evil objects. And, in fact, the same object can be good or bad depending upon circumstances or under different aspects. One of these, the good, has a perfecting or completing aspect, and so is an appropriate terminus for the appetite. Such an end is what Aristotle refers to as a thing's *τελος* (Aquinas' use of *finis* often has this connotation as well, though this can only be determined by the context). Because appetite *per se* has this twofold orientation (*i.e.*, it cannot make comparisons or judgments), cognition is required to aid the appetite in distinguishing its proper and perfecting ends from those that are instead harmful. Aquinas says that the appetitive power is drawn simply to a thing in itself, but that the apprehensive power is able to discern the thing under the aspect of intention. This explains why a person might be drawn to food when hungry but not when full. For if one is hungry, then consumption of food has a perfecting role (it promotes health), while if one is already full, then consumption of food has a defective role (it

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The tendency to move towards an end can occur without any knowledge, by a purely natural inclination (*naturalem habitudinem*) or natural appetite (*appetitus naturalis*), as is the case with plants and inanimate objects.<sup>18</sup> This movement can occur with some knowledge, but not under the aspect of the good (*sub ratione boni*), as is the case with animals and, often, human beings when moved entirely by sensation (*appetitus sensitivus*) without reason.<sup>19</sup> Finally, this movement can be accompanied by knowledge of the object perceived *sub ratione boni*, in which case it is a movement (or is accompanied by a movement) of the will (*voluntas*), and this is often the case with human beings.<sup>20</sup> Thus is displayed a basic hierarchy among the appetites, deriving from the degree of cognition involved in the movement of the appetite. For Aquinas, the two kinds of desire or appetite most relevant to the study of human psychology are sensory appetite and intellectual, *i.e.*, rational, appetite, each having its own corresponding pleasure.<sup>21</sup>

Following Aristotle, Aquinas asserts that both the kind and quality of desires are ultimately determined by their objects: typically, particular sensory objects elicit sensory desire, the obtaining of which result in sensory pleasure (*delectatio*), while objects of the intellect elicit intellectual desire, and result in intellectual pleasure, namely, joy (*gaudium*) or enjoyment (*fruitio*).<sup>22</sup> Aquinas holds that humans and lower animals are capable of sensory pleasure, but that only rational beings are capable of enjoyment, since this involves apprehending the attainment of the object as falling under the universal

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promotes infirmity). ST I-II.22.2 co.; ST I-II.45.4 co. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VI.4, 1027<sup>b</sup>17-1028<sup>a</sup>5.

<sup>18</sup> ST I.59.1 co.: “it must be born in mind that, since all things flow from the Divine will, all things in their own way are inclined by appetite (*appetitum inclinatur*) towards good, but in different ways. Some are inclined to good by their natural inclination (*naturalem habitudinem*), without knowledge, as plants and inanimate bodies. Such inclination towards good is called ‘a natural appetite’ (*appetitus naturalis*).”

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*: “Others, again, are inclined towards good, but with some knowledge; not that they know the aspect of goodness, but that they apprehend some particular good; as in the sense, which knows the sweet, the white, and so on. The inclination which follows this apprehension is called ‘a sensitive appetite’ (*appetitus sensitivus*).”

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*: “Other things, again, have an inclination towards good, but with a knowledge whereby they perceive the aspect of goodness; this belongs to the intellect. This is most perfectly inclined towards what is good; not, indeed, as if it were merely guided by another towards some particular good only, like things devoid of knowledge, nor towards some particular good only, as things which have only sensitive knowledge, but as inclined toward good in general. Such inclination is termed ‘will’ (*voluntas*).”

<sup>21</sup> This is a standard mid-thirteenth century view. See Simo Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and medieval Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 239.

<sup>22</sup> ST I-II.31.3 co. Nevertheless, Aquinas also asserts that the will (the rational appetite) can take pleasure in sensible goods as well as in rational goods, though not *vice versa*.



category of end and good (*universalis ratio finis et boni*), which belongs to rational souls alone.<sup>23</sup> Sensory pleasure, on the other hand, results when a sensory object is apprehended as having an aptitude or “fitness” to the appetite (*i.e.*, it appears to satisfy the desire), and when, through the movement of desire, the object has been obtained and the subject rests in the object, which is its end.<sup>24</sup> The movement toward a sensory object apprehended as good is called sensory desire, and these movements are also called the “passions of the soul” (*passionis animae*). The generic sensitive appetite is further subdivided into two species: the concupiscible and the irascible appetites, which are likewise distinguished by their objects (the concupiscible appetite has, as its object, good and evil *simpliciter*, while the irascible appetite has, as its object, good and evil apprehended as arduous).<sup>25</sup> I am going to ignore this division here, though it may be helpful to understand that the virtue of temperance (of which *honestum* is a constituent) relates to the concupiscible appetite (since the forms of the virtue relating to the concupiscible appetite are aimed at “tempering” sensory desires), and the virtue of courage relates to the irascible appetite (since the forms of the virtue relating to the irascible appetite have the end of overcoming some hardship or threat to well-being). Ultimately, it is the good object that is responsible for the movement of the passions.<sup>26</sup> The good object provides the reason for the movement; it is the movement’s final cause. It is both the origin of that movement and its terminus.

### 3. The Role of Pleasure

Human pleasure arises in the context of obtaining an object of desire, namely, some object perceived *sub ratione boni*.<sup>27</sup> An object can be considered “good” under many, sometimes competing, aspects. An apple, for instance, is good for the nourishment of the body and also good as pleasing to the palate. We can be attracted to it when we’re hungry, because we see that it is good to satisfy hunger. We can be attracted to it when we’re choosing between various options, each of which would satisfy hunger, because we see that among the available options it is the tastiest. In either case, we are

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<sup>23</sup> ST I-II.11.2 co.; ST I-II.10.3 ad 3; and ST I-II.35.2 ad 3. Cf. Aristotle, NE III.10, 1118<sup>a</sup>16-18, 23-1118<sup>b</sup>15.

<sup>24</sup> ST I-II.25.2 co.

<sup>25</sup> ST I.81.2 co. Cf. I-II.23.1 co., ad 3.

<sup>26</sup> ST I-II.7.4 co.: “the motive and object of the will is the end”; and ST I-II.7.4 ad 2: “Although the end (*finis*) is not part of the substance of the act, yet it is the most important cause of the act, inasmuch as it moves the agent to act. Wherefore the moral act is specified chiefly by the end.”

<sup>27</sup> ST I-II.31.1 ad 1; ST I.82.2 ad 1. Cf. Aristotle, *De Anima* II.1, 412<sup>a</sup>22-28.

attracted to something about the apple that we perceive as good in some way. Appetite always aims at the good.<sup>28</sup> In fact it is impossible to be attracted to anything unless it is apprehended in this way, which explains why we can be attracted to something harmful, for nothing that exists is wholly instrumentally bad.<sup>29</sup> The movement of the appetite toward the good object so apprehended is, as we have seen, what Aquinas refers to as desire. And desire, when fulfilled by obtaining its object, is rewarded with pleasure.<sup>30</sup> If a sensory desire is fulfilled, the reward is sensory pleasure (*delectatio*); if an intellectual desire, the reward is intellectual pleasure or joy (*fruitio* or *gaudium*).<sup>31</sup> If a desire is only partially fulfilled, some pleasure may still result.<sup>32</sup> Much of Aquinas' taxonomy of what contemporary thinkers call the "emotions," but which Aquinas refers to simply as "affections," arises in the context of enumerating the possible responses to the relative ease or difficulty associated with obtaining the objects of desire.

To the extent that Aquinas' moral theory is committed to psychological eudaimonism, desire, emotion, and pleasure are all intimately tied to his account of the virtues, which are central to his moral theory.<sup>33</sup> In short, it

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<sup>28</sup> ST I.5.1 co. Cf. Aristotle, NE I.1, 1094<sup>a</sup>3.

<sup>29</sup> ST I-II.27.1 ad 1: "Evil is never loved except *under the aspect of good (sub ratione boni)*, that is to say, in so far as it is good in some respect, and is considered as being good simply."

<sup>30</sup> ST I-II.25.2 co.: "pleasure is the enjoyment of the good." Cf. ST I-II.31.1 ad 1. Cf. Aristotle, *De Anima* II.1, 412<sup>a</sup>22-28. It must be added that, for Aquinas, merely obtaining the object of desire is not sufficient to produce pleasure. What is also required is an awareness of having obtained the object of desire. See, e.g., ST I-II.31.1 co.

<sup>31</sup> Aquinas is not entirely consistent in his use of the terms *delectatio* and *fruitio*. His usual term for general delight is *delectatio*, though he often employs this term to mean specifically corporeal or sensory pleasure. His use of *fruitio* and *gaudium* is more consistent, almost always referring to intellectual pleasure (or restricting its application to rational beings, as in ST I-II.11.2 co.), though there are exceptions. ST I-II.25.2 is an example of *fruitio* used in the general sense.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, ST I-II.12.2-3.

<sup>33</sup> Psychological eudaimonism is the view that human beings cannot but desire happiness, and human actions are always performed because they are perceived to progress the agent toward ultimate happiness. For both Aristotle and Aquinas, the happy life for man is a life characterized by the natural virtues attainable in this life through man's natural capacities and effort (both moral and intellectual). Aquinas' view, however, has an added layer of complexity since while he agrees with Aristotle that there is a kind of happiness that can be more or less attained in this life through habituation in the virtues, among other things (according to Aristotle and Aquinas, and in contrast to Plato and the stoics, virtue is necessary but not sufficient for happiness), Aquinas does not think that this is the highest form of happiness available to man. In order to attain the highest form of happiness, man must attain a higher level of virtues (the "infused virtues" that are analogous to the human virtues, but apart from human effort, and the theological virtues of faith, hope and love without which man cannot please God) that he cannot achieve through his own effort but

implies the connection between psychology, ethics, and aesthetics. Some of this is familiar territory. However, it may not be clear exactly how desire, the emotions, and pleasure are related to the virtues, or how they form the link between beauty and virtue.

First of all, desire and pleasure are central to Aquinas' ethics. Without looking at any specific passages, we might note that the very structure of the *Summa Theologiae* suggests this. For instance, there is general agreement about the basic structure of the *Summa*: *pars prima* is devoted to the science of God (*i.e.*, God's nature and works), *pars secunda* to the science of human beings, and *pars tertia* to the science of Christ and the sacraments. This division is common to medieval *summae* of Aquinas' day, which was established by the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. Not accidentally, this division also follows the Neoplatonic pattern of *exitus-reditus*, with the world of created things issuing forth from God (the Source), most importantly (for Aquinas and for our discussion) in human beings, and then returning to God (the Terminus), via Christ and the sacraments. In this scheme, the Christian view of God as *alpha* and *omega*, beginning and end, is superimposed onto a Neoplatonic framework.

Included within the *pars prima*, the section devoted primarily to a study of God, we find what has been called Aquinas' *Treatise on Human Nature*, comprised of questions 75-89. The reason we find a discussion of human nature here, in *pars prima*, is because after first treating of God's essence in the first 43 questions, the remainder of the *pars prima* is devoted to an investigation into the works of God in general, namely, the procession of creatures – including human beings. *Pars secunda*, therefore, treats primarily not of human beings as part of creation (since that has already been covered), but of human acts.

After first treating of the end or goal of human life and action (QQ. 1-5), Aquinas turns to an examination of the acts required to obtain that end (QQ. 6-48). The section that is devoted to the study of the passions falls within this section and is comprised of questions 22-48. This section, the so-called *Treatise on the Passions*, is by far the longest unit on a single theme in the entire *Summa Theologiae*, and its length relative to the whole is an indication of its centrality and importance.<sup>34</sup> This is not, by itself, definitive, but it is

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only by divine gift. Aristotle (on happiness), NE I.2, 1094<sup>a</sup>19-23; I.7, 1098<sup>a</sup>17-20; I.9, 1100<sup>a</sup>3-5; I.10, 15-17; I.12, 1102<sup>a</sup>5-6; (on virtue), NE I.13, 5-7; the whole of NE books II-V concern the virtues. Aquinas, ST I-II, QQ. 1-5 concern happiness; QQ. 55-67 concern the virtues, as does the entirety of his *Quaestiones disputatae de virtutibus*, edited by E. Odette (Taurini-Romae: Marietti, 1965).

<sup>34</sup> Not only is it the longest treatise in the *Summa Theologiae*, it was by far the longest treatment of the passions that had ever been written. The longest historical precedents, both of which Aquinas draws upon in his discussion, were Nemesius of Emesa's short treatise on the passions in his *De natura hominis* (which Aquinas misattributes to Gregory of Nyssa), in

suggestive, especially when we consider the compact and efficient style of the *Summa*, coupled with Aquinas' expressed goal of economy of discussion. He says, for instance, in the *prologue*, that he is eager to avoid the kinds of errors that cause trouble especially in the instruction of beginners (for whom the *Summa* was written), examples of which include "the multiplication of useless questions, articles, and arguments" as well as "frequent repetition" which, he says, produces "weariness and confusion" in the student. His aim is to set forth only what is necessary "as briefly and clearly as the matter itself may allow."<sup>35</sup> It is clear that Aquinas sees as his project to address only those matters that are absolutely necessary and only to the extent required for an understanding of the subject under investigation. In light of this, we are well advised to take the structural features of the work as significant for determining what Aquinas deems most important. It is plausible to presume that the passions of the soul in general are of central importance to the overall project of the *Summa*, and to the investigation into the nature of human actions, that is, of his moral theory. Furthermore, on account of the centrality of desire and pleasure in his account of the passions, these are *a fortiori*, of the utmost importance to Aquinas' ethics.

The reason desire is of such central importance to Aquinas' moral theory is on account of its connection to the good. Since what is perceived as good is what elicits and attracts desire, what we desire likewise shows what we take to be good. Because there is often a gap between what is really good and goods that are merely apparent, one of the main goals of moral education is to train us to desire what is in fact good as opposed to that which merely appears to be so. Training in the virtues is of utmost importance in this regard.

Aquinas' ethics places the acquisition of the moral virtues in a place of prominence. The primary moral virtues – what came to be called the "cardinal virtues" on account of the centrality of their subject matter – are, for Aquinas, the same that we find in the classical world: prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude.<sup>36</sup> The cultivation of the virtues was, for Aquinas as for Plato and Aristotle, a necessary component of a happy life, which is the goal of ethics (that is, of living in general), since a virtue is simply that which makes

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the fourth century, and John Damascene's treatise on the passions in his *De fide orthodoxa*, in the fifth century. Though Aristotle left no systematic treatment of the passions, as did Nemesius and Damascene, nevertheless his treatment of the passions in the second book of the *Rhetoric* is the longest sustained discussion of the passions prior to Aquinas' *Treatise*. Cf. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* II.1-17, 1377<sup>b</sup>15-1391<sup>b</sup>7.

<sup>35</sup> ST prologue.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, ST I-II.61.2 co. Cf. *Quaestiones disputatae de virtutibus, Q. 5: de virtutibus cardinalibus* (hereafter *QD virt. card.*) a. 1 resp. Cf. also Cicero, *De Inventione* II.159-165; Plato, *Republic* IV, 427e-434d.

something perform its characteristic activity well.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the moral virtues are those virtues that pertain only to created rational beings, specifically, humans.<sup>38</sup> For Aquinas, each of the moral virtues perfects a particular power of the soul: Prudence perfects the intellect. Justice perfects the will (*i.e.*, the rational appetite). Fortitude (or courage) perfects the irascible passions (*i.e.*, sensory appetite that relates to the arduous, e.g., dangers or hardships). Temperance perfects the concupiscible passions (*i.e.*, sensory appetite that relates to sensory goods, e.g., food, drink and sex).<sup>39</sup> It may be obvious that justice, fortitude, and temperance relate to appetite, since justice relates to the rational appetite and both fortitude and temperance relate to the two divisions of the sensory appetite. What may be less apparent is that prudence also relates to appetite. Though relating most proximately to intellect, Aquinas states that prudence involves applying right reason to action, which cannot be done without a rightly ordered appetite; and therefore prudence is not only an intellectual virtue, but also a moral virtue – the only virtue to fall into both categories.<sup>40</sup> Aquinas, following Augustine, also affirms that prudence essentially involves knowing what things to seek (*appetere*) and what things to avoid.<sup>41</sup> Thus, all four of the cardinal virtues, for Aquinas, involve and perfect the appetite.

It may now be clearer why desire plays such an important role in Aquinas' moral theory. Just as the virtues perfect the appetite, so our desires reflect the degree to which the soul has been conformed to right reason through the exercise of and habituation in the virtues. Our desires are, therefore, morally good if they, in fact, aim at real, and not merely apparent, goods. They are, on the other hand, morally bad if they aim at merely apparent goods, especially if those apparent goods are pursued in a way that precludes pursuit of some greater good. Therefore, if we know what a person desires, what appears good to her, then assuming we know whether the object in question really is good, and whether it ought to be desired or not, we can tell whether she is of virtuous or vicious character.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Quaestiones disputatae de virtutibus, Q. I: de virtutibus in communi* (hereafter *QD virt. com.*) a. 1 resp. Cf. Aristotle, NE II.6, 1106<sup>a</sup>17. Though, according to Aristotle, and in contrast to both Plato and the Stoics, virtue is insufficient for happiness. See, e.g., Aristotle, NE I.5, 1095<sup>b</sup>29-1096<sup>a</sup>2; VII.13, 1153<sup>b</sup>14-28.

<sup>38</sup> The moral virtues apply also to angels (since they are also created rational beings), with whom I am not concerned in this essay.

<sup>39</sup> *QD virt. card.* a. 1 resp.; and *QD virt. com.* a. 12 ad 25.

<sup>40</sup> ST II-II.47.4 co.

<sup>41</sup> ST II-II.47.1 s.c. Cf. Augustine, *De diversis questionibus LXXXIII*, Q. 61.

<sup>42</sup> ST I-II.34.4 co.; ST I-II.34.4 ad 3. Cf. *QD virt. com.* a. 10 ad 18.

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Another way of expressing this idea is to say that a person's desires betray or reveal her character. This is what Aristotle meant when he said that the pleasures or pains a man experiences when performing certain acts are "signs" (*σημεία*) of the states of character since pleasures and pains are the things with which moral excellence (*ηθικη ἀρετη*) is concerned, and because the virtues have to do not only with actions but also with feelings (*παθη*).<sup>43</sup> Thus we get his definition of moral virtue as "the quality of acting in the best way in relation to pleasures and pains."<sup>44</sup> Aquinas, commenting on this passage, concurs, stating "in every moral virtue it is requisite that a person have joy (*delectatio*) and sorrow (*tristitia*) in the things he ought (*oportet*) ... because the purpose of any moral virtue is that a man be rightly ordered in his pleasures and in his sorrows."<sup>45</sup>

Morality, for Aquinas, is primarily an interior matter, *viz.*, a matter of reason and will,<sup>46</sup> and only partly related to exterior activities since outward appearances do not tell the whole story. A man may do the right thing for the wrong reason, in which case the action is in fact immoral. An external action may simply be morally ambiguous apart from knowledge of the agent's motivation. Outward acts are sometimes sufficient for moral evaluation, however, as when an external action is unambiguously wrong; for though an action that is morally permissible may be performed in a way that renders it immoral (e.g., a soldier may kill an enemy combatant out of bloodlust rather than duty), an action that is unambiguously immoral cannot be performed in

<sup>43</sup> Aristotle, NE II.3, 1104<sup>b</sup>3-9, 14-16. Cf. NE II.5, 1105<sup>b</sup>26; II.2, 1104<sup>b</sup>14; II.6, 1106<sup>b</sup>17, 25.

<sup>44</sup> Aristotle, NE II.3, 1104<sup>b</sup>27-29.

<sup>45</sup> Aquinas, *In NE II*, 1104<sup>b</sup>3ff, L. 3, n. 3: *Hoc enim requiritur in omni virtute morali, ut aliquis delectetur et tristetur in quibus oportet*. In the Latin text of Aristotle that Aquinas has received, Aristotle's *λυπην* (generally translated into English as "pain") has been rendered *tristetur* (generally translated into English as "sorrow"). Presumably, this is to emphasize the fact that in performing an odious activity, one may, but need not, experience physical pain, while one almost always experiences some form of psychic pain or "sorrow." We should note that the section of the *Summa* concerning the virtues was written at the same time as his commentary on Aristotle's *Ethics* and his *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, and it is believed that his own ethical views were heavily influenced by his study of Aristotle's account of the virtues. There is sufficient historiographical evidence available to show conclusively that Aquinas's commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, his *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, and the *Secunda Secundae* of the *Summa Theologiae*, which includes the section on the virtues, were all composed simultaneously in Paris in 1271-72. J.-P. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume I: The Person and His work*, revised ed., translated by Robert Royal (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 205, 227, and 329.

<sup>46</sup> ST I-II.18.5 co.; ST I-II.18.6 co. The proper end of the action is the object of the will rather than the object of the exterior action. Therefore, since human actions derive their species from the end (ST I-II.18.6 s.c.), good and evil is primarily attributed to the act of the will.

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such a way as to render it morally good (e.g., one cannot commit adultery in a way that is virtuous or morally praiseworthy).

Aquinas, like Aristotle, thought that the pleasures associated with the life of virtue were the highest pleasures, and that the happiest person is the one whose life is not only characterized by virtuous activity, but whose virtuous activity is also accompanied by pleasure. Therefore, we can see that just as appetite for an object can inform us regarding the moral praiseworthiness or blameworthiness of a person's character, so also can a person's pleasure inform us of the same. When we know in what sorts of things a person takes pleasure and to what extent,<sup>47</sup> then we may be in a position to evaluate the moral status of that person's character; that is, assuming that we have access to the relevant criteria.

The issue of beauty comes into this discussion because Aquinas has defined beauty, or at least beautiful things, in terms of pleasure; that is, he states: "we call those things beautiful which please when seen."<sup>48</sup> So just as we can say that what a man desires and in what a man takes pleasure both tell us something about his character, so also can we say that what a man finds beautiful likewise tells us something about his character. What we desire, what gives us pleasure and what we find beautiful all have this in common: they are all susceptible to moral evaluation, according to Aquinas. And perhaps this is what we should have suspected. For in the same passage where Aquinas gives his famous definition of the beautiful, he also says, "beauty and goodness in a thing are identical fundamentally; for they are based on the same thing, namely, the form; and consequently goodness is praised as beauty. But they differ logically."<sup>49</sup> Given this formal equivalence between goodness and beauty, since the good is what all things desire and is the object of desire, and since our character is subject to moral evaluation on the basis of what we desire (*i.e.*, on the basis of what we perceive as good, and since as has been shown Aquinas takes it that good is objective and judgments about the good

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<sup>47</sup> ST I-II.31.6 co. Cf. ST I-II.25.2 ad 1; and ST I-II.27.4 ad 1.

<sup>48</sup> ST I.5.4 ad 1.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* Here also we see, perhaps, a remnant of the Greek dualism of the fine (*το καλόν*) and the good (*τ' αγαθόν*). According to Nicholas Riegel, though the notion of the beautiful (*το καλόν*) is evidently important in Plato, its precise relation to the good (*τ' αγαθόν*) has yet to be specified. This is due, in part, to the fact that there typically seems to be little difference in use between the two concepts. Riegel, in fact, argues that, for Plato, the two notions are, in concrete particulars, coextensive, though they are formally distinct, and that, contrary to what we might expect, for Plato the good is discovered primarily through the beautiful. The human virtues, for instance, are known to be good because they are first perceived as beautiful. See Nicholas Riegel, *Beauty, το καλόν, and its Relation to the Good in the Works of Plato*, Ph.D. Dissertation (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), especially chapters two (on the coextension of the beautiful and the good in concrete particulars) and three (on their formal distinction).

can be more or less accurate), perhaps it was inevitable that we should determine that what a person finds beautiful also to be subject to moral evaluation.

It is one thing to say that what one finds aesthetically pleasing is subject to moral evaluation, and it is another thing altogether to make this practicable. Whether it can be made practicable or not will depend in large part on whether there is an objective and accessible standard to which we may compare any individual aesthetic pleasure. Though this may seem a hopeless project, we ought to note that it is no more or less difficult than the analogous project of measuring and evaluating non-aesthetic pleasure. We know that a person has virtuous character when what she perceives as good actually is good. There is the epistemological problem of accessibility to the actual good, of course, and this is the same problem we find with respect to moral evaluation of aesthetic values.

It may be that there are objective goods that are accessible to all. These may be found, for instance, in something like Augustine's hierarchy of values, in which the good is grounded in being. Aquinas follows Augustine's lead in adopting the view that a thing is good to the extent that it exists or is actual.<sup>50</sup> If the beautiful is convertible with the good, as it is in Aquinas, then it would seem that the beautiful is also intimately related to being, and that a thing is therefore beautiful to the extent that it exists or is actual. Its beauty, as its goodness, ought to be directly related to its existence or actuality. God is the being with the highest degree of being, goodness and beauty because God exists most fully.<sup>51</sup> Everything else has being and, consequently, goodness and beauty by participation in God who is being itself, good itself, and beauty itself. The goodness and beauty of created things is, therefore, derivative and proportionally related to its proximity to absolute goodness and beauty.<sup>52</sup> Ugliness, like evil in general, is directly related to a defect or privation of being.<sup>53</sup>

But this discussion presupposes that the connection between goodness and beauty has been secured at the transcendental level, a connection for which I have not argued here. Nevertheless, this connection must be made if there is to be an objective basis for comparison, without which there could presumably be no basis for moral evaluation of the aesthetic. This is a project for another time. Nevertheless, without arguing for it, if we simply assume that such a ground could be established by way of convertibility of the beautiful and the good, then we can make some observations. I am particularly interested in the

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<sup>50</sup> ST I.5.1 co. Cf. Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* I.32.35; *De libero arbitrio* III.7.

<sup>51</sup> ST I.44.1 co.

<sup>52</sup> ST I.4.2 co.; ST I.44.4 co.

<sup>53</sup> ST I.47.1 co.



issue whether this view could support a moral view of aesthetics that does not, in the end, disenfranchise those who do not bear up to our society's model of beauty. This is a problem shared by any view that seeks to find an intimate relationship between the aesthetic and the moral, and no one is looking for an additional reason for society to privilege its more attractive members over the rest of us.

One possible source of tension in Aquinas' view arises from the fact that since beauty is tied to goodness, and the goodness of human beings is expressed in the human virtues, especially the moral and intellectual virtues, then it seems reasonable that a human being would increase in goodness as one ages, since presumably one becomes wiser with experience. And *ex hypothesi* as one's goodness increases so ought one's beauty. Yet in most cases, actual experience does not bear this out. There seems to be an inverse relationship between aging and beauty, which seems to peak rather early in one's developmental cycle. Does Aquinas' view therefore imply that we ought to judge the elderly as morally inferior to their younger counterparts? This, I think, is a worry that many people share with respect to moral aesthetics. We do not need any additional justification for the marginalization of one of the most vulnerable groups of society. I think an answer to this tension can be found in considering what Aquinas has to say about *honestum*, that is, moral goodness, and considering its relation to beauty *vis-à-vis* the hierarchy of values.

#### 4. *Honestum*

In the *pars secunda* of the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas addresses the topic of man. This study begins with a discussion of man's end, and leads through a discussion of the passions and habits, including the virtues. The last section deals with the issues of fortitude and temperance, near the end of which Aquinas includes a question (Q. 145) on *honestum*.<sup>54</sup> After having argued, in

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<sup>54</sup> ST II-II.145. This very short question is comprised of only four questions, regarding (1) the relation between the honest (*honestum*) and the virtuous (*virtutem*), (2) its relation to the beautiful (*decorem*), (3) its relation to the useful (*utile*) and the pleasant (*delectabile*), and (4) whether honesty is part of temperance? The Fathers of the English Dominican Province inform us in a footnote (ST II-II, p. 1775) that the meaning of *honestum* is "moral goodness," and so it is to be understood that, in the second question regarding its relation to the beautiful, *decorem* means "moral beauty." Altogether, Aquinas' terminology related to beauty can be very confusing. Aquinas makes use of several terms for what we may be tempted to translate simply as "beauty." In this question, because Aquinas is primarily concerned with moral beauty, his primary term is *decorum*. Nevertheless, he also employs the term *pulchritudo*, which is his most general term for beauty, but with qualifiers such as *spiritualis* or *intelligibilem* to distinguish the subject of this question from natural beauty. Occasionally, for clarity's sake, he will add the qualifier *corporalis* to *pulchritudo* where this relates to natural or physical beauty. As we will see, for Aquinas, *honestum* sometimes

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the first article, for the identity of *honestum* and virtue, in the second article, regarding the relationship between *honestum* (moral goodness) and *decorum* (moral beauty), Aquinas makes the following comparison between natural and moral beauty:

Spiritual beauty (*pulchritude spiritualis*) consists in a man's conduct or actions being well proportioned (*bene proportionata*) in respect of the spiritual clarity of reason (*spiritualem rationis claritatem*). Now this is what is meant by *honestum*, which we have stated to be the same as virtue (*idem esse virtuti*); and it is virtue that moderates according to reason all that is connected with man. Wherefore *honestum* is the same as spiritual beauty (*honestum est idem spirituali decori*). Hence Augustine says: "By *honestum* I mean intelligible beauty (*intelligibilem pulchritudinem*), which we properly designate as spiritual (*spiritualis*)."<sup>55</sup>

A virtuous act is a beautiful act for the same reason that a virtuous body is a beautiful body: because they exhibit Aquinas' familiar formal constituents of

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means "beauty" (though he seems to confine its use to moral, and not natural, *i.e.*, physical, beauty), and it can sometimes mean "virtue." He makes these identifications clear in the first two articles of our present question. Since Aquinas did not have access to the works of Aristotle in the original Greek, he knew them only in Latin translation. Because of this, he was likely unaware that where Aristotle often distinguishes between *το καλόν* and *τ' αγαθόν*, both of these typically come to him as simply *bonum*. Nevertheless, Terrence Irwin, in a recent presentation, pointed out the striking fact that both Albert and Aquinas seem often to treat *bonum* as *honestum* in the very places where Aristotle used *το καλόν* rather than *τ' αγαθόν*. Terrence Irwin, "Moral Goodness: The *Kalon* and the *Honestum*," presentation at the Classical Philosophy Conference, Ancient Theories of Beauty, Princeton University, December 4, 2011. One explanation for this is that they simply employed the terminology they had at their disposal for interpreting Aristotle's intention. They may have assumed that Aristotle had used the same term for both but that, as is true of many words, that it had a range of meanings. Whether this explanation is correct, the fact remains that quite often (though certainly not always) their use of *honestum* tracks Aristotle's use of *το καλόν*. It is also possible that Albert and Aquinas recognize the distinctions in Aristotle because of their familiarity with Cicero's distillation of Aristotle's thought. Cicero, it has been noted, typically renders *το καλόν* as *honestum* (and hardly ever as *pulchrum*) in his own translations. See, *e.g.*, J. G. F. Powell, "Cicero's Translations from Greek," in J. G. F. Powell, ed., *Cicero the Philosopher* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 299.

<sup>55</sup> ST II-II.145.2 co. Cf. Augustine, *De diversis questionibus LXXXIII*, Q. 30. Because of the possible confusion of translating *honestum* as "honesty" (as the Fathers of the English Dominican Province have done), I have left it and its cognates untranslated. In this passage it also seems clear that Aquinas uses "spiritual" (*spiritualem*) and "intellectual" (*intelligibilem*) interchangeably. Where the Fathers of the English Dominican Province have translated *intelligibilem pulchritudinem* as "intellectual beauty," I have translated it as "intelligible beauty" for the sake of consistency.

beauty, namely, *bene proportio* and *claritas*.<sup>56</sup> In the case of the body, *bene proportio* concerns the harmonious relation of the parts to the whole or of the whole to its ideal exemplar, and *claritas* relates to color or brightness. In the case of a virtuous act, these two things, *bene proportio* and *claritas* are closely related. Aquinas says that a morally good action is well proportioned to the spiritual *claritas* of reason. Presumably, by this he means that the action is consonant with (*i.e.* directed by) reason. It is the light of reason that provides *claritas* here, and an action that is well ordered to reason is also called well proportioned. This is consistent with what Aquinas says elsewhere about virtuous activity, namely, that it is activity in accordance with reason.<sup>57</sup> Hence, Aquinas can say that *honestum* (moral goodness) is identical to *decorum* (spiritual beauty).

In the third article, Aquinas adds that “a thing is said to be *honestum* if it is desired for its own sake by the rational appetite, which tends to that which is in accordance with reason.”<sup>58</sup> The link between virtue, the *honestum*, and conformity to reason is therefore reiterated, and since Aquinas has already asserted the identity of the *honestum* with spiritual beauty, the ethical link to beauty is reaffirmed. A virtuous act is a beautiful act, and it is beautiful because the external action we can see reflects a virtuous (or morally good) interior, namely a will that is in conformity with reason, of which the external action is but an expression.<sup>59</sup> This is an example (rare perhaps in Aquinas, but abundant in his contemporary Bonaventure) of beauty conceived as a sign; in this case, the beauty of an external action is taken as a sign of a rightly ordered character.<sup>60</sup>

Aquinas considers an objection to his view, namely, that “it seems that *honestum* is not the same as the beautiful” (*videtur quod honestum non sit idem quod decorum*), an objection that seems to arise from an erroneous

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<sup>56</sup> Aquinas’ usual formulation includes *proportio* and *claritas*, but a notable exception to this, where he also includes a third constituent, *integritas*, can be found in ST I.39.8 co.

<sup>57</sup> ST I-II.55.4 ad 2.

<sup>58</sup> ST II-II.145.3 ad 1.

<sup>59</sup> ST II-II.145.1 ad 3. Cf. ST I-II.55.4 co.; ST I-II.55.4 ad 2; ST II-II.145.1 co.; ST II-II.145.2 co.; and ST II-II.145.3 ad 1.

<sup>60</sup> See, *e.g.*, Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis ad Deum*. For Bonaventure, every created thing bears the *vestigia* of the Creator. Therefore natural beauty can be taken as signs that point to the goodness of the Creator just as virtuous acts can be taken as signs that point to a human being’s well-formed character. It should be noted, however, that Bonaventure objects to Dionysius’ identification of the good and the beautiful, asserting instead that while they are found in the same things, as different aspects, they are nevertheless distinct. See Bonaventure, *In I Sent.* 31.II.1.3 ad 3 (Quarrachi edition, vol. I, 545). For a thorough treatment of Bonaventure’s aesthetics, see Emma J. M. Spargo, *The Category of the Aesthetic in the Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1953).

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reading of Cicero.<sup>61</sup> The objection states: “the *ratio* of *honestum* is derived from the appetite, since *honestum* is *what is desirable for its own sake*. But the beautiful (*decorum*) regards rather the faculty of vision to which it is pleasing. Therefore the beautiful is not the same as the *honestum*.”<sup>62</sup> The worry seems to be that while *honestum* is or relates to some intrinsic good, something that appeals to the appetite as an end, the beautiful is or relates to some instrumental good, namely, pleasure. Here he seems to have in mind the distinction, borrowed from Aristotle, between the *bonum utile*, the *bonum delectabile* and the *bonum honestum*.<sup>63</sup> To this objection, Aquinas responds:

The object that moves the appetite is an apprehended good (*bonum apprehensum*). Now if a thing is perceived to be beautiful (*apparet decorum*) as soon as it is apprehended, it is taken to be something becoming and good (*conveniens et bonum*). Hence Dionysius says that *the beautiful and the good are beloved by all*. Wherefore the *honestum*, inasmuch as it implies spiritual beauty (*spiritualem decorem*), is an object of desire, and for this reason Tully says: *Thou perceivest the form and the features, so to speak, of honestum; and were it to be seen with the eye, would, as Plato declares, arouse a wondrous love of wisdom.*<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> ST II-II.145.2 obj. 1. Cf. Cicero, *De Inventione*. II.53: *Quod aut totum aut aliqua ex parte propter se petitur, honestum nominabimus. Quare, cum eius duae partes sint, quarum altera simplex, altera iuncta sit, simplicem prius consideremus. Est igitur in eo genere omnes res una vi atque uno nomine amplexa virtus... Habet igitur partes quattuor: prudentiam, iustitiam, fortitudinem, temperantiam*. Cicero’s suggestion is that we call *honestum* anything that is sought for its own sake, in two ways: either wholly or in part. Here, he is discussing the first way, namely, what is sought for its own sake *in toto*. Everything falling into this class, he says, falls under the name of virtue. Virtue, he says, has four parts, namely, wisdom, justice, courage and temperance. The *honest*, then, is understood completely only when we understand the meaning of each of its four parts. He says, further, in *De Inventione* II.54, that *temperantia* is reason’s moderation of *libido* and other improper impulses of the mind (*non rectos impetus animi*).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, NE II.3, 1104<sup>b</sup>30-34, where Aristotle lists the pleasant (*ἡδυσ*), the useful (*συμπερω*), and the fine (*καλόν*) as the three objects of desire; and also the whole of NE VIII, especially 1156<sup>a</sup>5-1156<sup>b</sup>24, where these classes are employed to characterize the three sorts of friendship possible among human beings, namely, friendships based on pleasure (*ἡδονη*), friendships based on utility (*χρησιμος*), and friendships based on virtue (*αρετη*). In Aquinas’ use, these appear as the *bonum honestum* (the “virtuous good” or “good” *simpliciter*), *bonum utile* (the “useful good”), and *bonum delectabile* (the “pleasant good”). In ST I-II.39, he contrasts the *bonum honestum* with the *bonum utile*. In *De malo* Q. 1, a. 5 s.c. 3, he contrasts the *bonum honestum* with the *bonum delectabile*. All three appear together in *In NE VIII*, l. 2 n. 2.

<sup>64</sup> ST II-II.145.2 ad 1. Cf. Dionysius, DN IV.7; Cicero, *De Officiis* I.5.

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What Aquinas seems to be saying is that the *honestum*, though a species of good, is not on account of that disqualified from being identified with the beautiful (*decorum*), for while an object or act moves the appetite under the aspect of the good, as a species of good that is visually perceived, it is also apprehended as beautiful. It is one and the same object that is moving the appetite under the aspect of the good *simpliciter* and under the aspect of the beautiful simultaneously. This is an instance in which we see well-illustrated the concept, first raised in the *pars prima*, that beauty and goodness in a thing are the same (*pulchrum et bonum in subiecto quidem sunt idem*) since they are founded on the same thing (*super eandem rem fundantur*), namely, the form (*formam*).<sup>65</sup> Beauty and goodness are identical in an object or act that is apprehended visually, and so beauty is but the good perceived in a certain way, namely, visually (and also, presumably, audibly). We might think that here, again, beauty is taken as a sign; in this case, beauty (visible goodness) is a sign of invisible or internal goodness. Additionally, Aquinas addresses this worry even more explicitly in the following article regarding whether *honestum* differs from the useful and the pleasant, where he states:

The *honestum* concurs in the same subject (*in idem subiectum*) with the useful and the pleasant, but it differs from them in aspect (*differ ratione*). For, as stated above (A. 2), a thing is said to be *honestum*, in so far as it has a certain beauty (*decorem*) through being regulated by reason. Now whatever is regulated in accordance with reason is naturally becoming (*conveniens*) to man. Again, it is natural for a thing to take pleasure in that which is becoming to it. Wherefore the *honestum* is naturally pleasing to man: and the Philosopher proves this with regard to acts of virtue. Yet not all that is pleasing is *honestum*, since a thing may be becoming to the senses, but not according to reason.<sup>66</sup>

Whereas the useful and the pleasant may fail to be *honestum* (since something may be useful in some sense or pleasant without being in accordance with reason), the *honestum* (since it is necessarily ordered to reason, whereby it is also beautiful) is naturally pleasant and, presumably, naturally useful; for Aquinas says here that these three may concur in the same subject (though they differ in aspect). Therefore, the *honestum* is not necessarily in conflict with the useful or the pleasant. Even if the beautiful is understood as a species of the pleasant good, it may still yet coincide with the *honestum*, so long as it is in accordance with reason. The *honestum* and the *decorum*, the good and the beautiful, coincide in action that is in accordance with reason, *viz.*, in virtuous action.

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<sup>65</sup> ST I.5.4. ad 1.

<sup>66</sup> ST II-II.145.3 co. Cf. Aristotle, NE I.8, 1099<sup>a</sup>14-17.

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Finally, in the fourth article in this question regarding *honestum*, Aquinas addresses the issue of whether the *honestum* is a part of temperance. In the course of giving an affirmative answer to this question, he again appeals to his statement in the second article regarding the relation of *honestum* to beauty. However, whereas in the version that appears in article three he says that *honestum* “has a certain beauty,” here he makes the perhaps slightly stronger claim that *honestum* “is a kind (*quaedam*) of spiritual beauty.”<sup>67</sup> There is little likelihood that the change is intended to be significant, since both are explicitly intended to refer to the claim in article two that *honestum* “is the same (*idem*) as spiritual beauty.”<sup>68</sup> Thus, in the space of three short articles, we have three variations of what appears to be essentially the same claim, namely, the identification of *honestum* (the moral good) with *decorum* (the spiritual or moral beauty).

From his discussion of *honestum*, it is clear that, for Aquinas, there is a kind of beauty attributed to the soul, an interior and in some sense invisible beauty, which is made known to us only through external acts. It is a moral beauty. It is what the ancients attributed to the virtuous person, a certain fineness or nobility of the soul. Given the prominent place Aquinas gives in his writings to moral matters, it is perhaps not surprising that he has more to say about this sort of beauty than he does about physical beauty, even though he sometimes speaks of the moral beauty by comparison to physical beauty (as he does in ST 145.2 co). Presumably, he makes this sort of comparison because human beings are, in general, more familiar with sensory or natural beauty than with moral beauty, the former being derived primarily from the senses, while the latter (even though mediated through the senses) must be perceived under the aspect of its relation to right reason or virtue, which is not equally accessible to all, but is dependent upon one’s perceptual and valuational training. Hence, again, the importance and aim of moral education, namely, to teach one to love the beautiful, is evident.

Aquinas repeatedly demonstrates that when it comes to beauty, his primary concern – indeed, his paradigm of beauty – is moral, intellectual or spiritual beauty. In his longest treatment of beauty, his commentary on Dionysius’ *The Divine Names*, he is careful to note that the aim of the work is not to discuss sensible names as they relate (analogously) to God, but rather to discuss intelligible names.<sup>69</sup> Thus, when Dionysius speaks there, in the long fourth

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<sup>67</sup> ST II-II.145.4 co.: *sicut supra dictum est, honestas est quaedam spiritualis pulchritudo*. Cf. ST II-II.145.3 co.: *honestum, sicut dictum est, habet quondam decorum...*

<sup>68</sup> ST II-II.145.2 co.: *Et ideo honestum est idem spirituali decori*.

<sup>69</sup> *In de divinis nominibus* IV, lec. 4: *Non enim est intention huius libri, tractare de nominibus sensibilium translates in Deum, sed de nominibus intelligibilibus*. According to Dionysius, the sensible names of God were treated in his (possibly fictitious) *Symbolic Theology*.

chapter, of “Beauty” as one of the names of God, we are to understand this primarily as a moral or spiritual beauty. Certainly, this is how Aquinas understands him. Where we find beauty in creatures, primarily in virtuous behavior but also in physical features, this is merely a likeness to, an approximation of, and so a sign pointing to, the divine Beauty.<sup>70</sup> And this divine Beauty is God himself, the cause of beauty in created things, namely, the *consonantia* and *claritas* in things.<sup>71</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

To return, then, to our problem case, our investigation into Aquinas’ use of *honestum* can help explain why a moral aesthetics, at least one based on Aquinas’ thought, cannot be used to justify the marginalization of the old, the disfigured or the infirm. The reason is that beauty is of two types: physical or natural beauty and spiritual or moral beauty. While it is true that we expect one’s physical beauty to diminish over time, we do not expect one’s moral beauty to likewise diminish. If beauty as a species of good is directly tied to proximity to the highest good, this explains why one sort of beauty would diminish while the other would increase over the course of a lifetime. On the hierarchy of values, spiritual (*i.e.*, eternal) goods rank higher than do physical (*i.e.*, temporal) goods. Goods of the soul are eternal and goods of the body are temporal. All physical goods are subject to corruption and ultimate degradation. This is one reason Augustine exhorts us merely to use goods of this sort and not to love them. The human body, though part of the human being, is nevertheless a physical good and so corruptible in this sense. The human soul, on the other hand, is not subject to corruption in this way. Any defect is related to its proximity to the Source, which, for rational beings, is tied to choice. The human soul can approach the Source through the inculcation of the virtues or it can retreat from the Source through their neglect. We might expect then that as a person ages and gains experience in living, she comes to value the life of virtue rather than the alternative. On the view at hand, then, as she increases in moral goodness, she is correspondingly increasing in spiritual or moral beauty, even though her physical beauty, in contrast, decreases. Since, for Aquinas, spiritual or moral beauty is of greater (perhaps infinitely greater) value than physical beauty, as this person ages and

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, lec. 5: *pulchritudo enim creaturae nihil est aliud quam similitudo divinae pulchritudinis in rebus participata.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*: *Dicit ergo primo quod Deus qui est supersubstantiale pulchrum, dicitur pulchritudo propter hoc quod omnibus entibus creatis dat pulchritudinem, secundum proprietatem uniuscuiusque: alia enim est pulchritudo spiritus et alia corporis, atque alia huius et illius corporis. Et in quo consistat pulchritudinis ratio, ostendit subdens quod sic Deus tradit pulchritudinem, in quantum est causa consonantiae et claritatis in omnibus.*

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increases in virtue, she likewise increases in the sort of beauty that really matters. This beauty, while not as readily apparent to the observer as physical beauty, is nevertheless also outwardly apprehended, but in the evidence provided by her good deeds. The moral beauty expressed in self-sacrificial or philanthropic activities is a sign of the goodness of that person's soul in a way that is analogous to the physical beauty of youth, which may be thought of as a sign of that person's bodily strength and health. All things considered, it would be better to have both sorts of beauty simultaneously, though this is likely to be quite rare, since it requires that one either achieves virtue and so moral beauty relatively early in life or else retain one's physical beauty relatively late. Nevertheless, if one had to choose, Aquinas' view implies that it is far better to have moral, rather than physical, beauty. Such a view, if attractive, implies that our culture places the higher value on the wrong sort of beauty. This is a problem that has moved philosophers to challenge the culturally accepted values elevating the virtues of the body over the virtues of the soul since Socrates, though admittedly most of these challenges have not ended so poorly for the philosophers as in that case. But neither sadly have the results of such projects had much lasting effect upon the cultures in which they are raised. Humans seem, as a group, strongly inclined to favor outward over inward beauty. But those who would follow Aquinas' thinking, at least, will have no justification for doing so.<sup>72</sup>

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