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ARISTOTLE AND AQUINAS ON INDIGNATION: FROM NEMESIS TO THEODICY

Gayne Nerney

The intention of this essay is to examine the accounts of indignation in the philosophical psychologies of Aristotle and Aquinas, and, in particular, Aquinas's criticism of Aristotle's evaluation of the ethical significance of this emotion. It is argued that Aquinas holds the truth concerning the nature of indignation not to be obtainable on the grounds of theological neutrality. The reason for this is that the philosophical account of indignation calls for a forthrightly theistic reflection on the ultimate meaning of this emotion. Thus, the account of *nemesis* within philosophical psychology finds its completion only in *theodicy*. The paper concludes with a reflection on the criticism that Aquinas's devaluation of indignation could undercut the emotional basis of the virtue of justice.

In this essay I would like to consider the accounts of indignation in the philosophical psychologies of Aristotle and Aquinas. More specifically, I want to reflect on the implications for theistic ethics of the sharp and surprising disagreement that arises between Aristotle and Thomas regarding the ethical significance of this passion. While focusing on Aquinas's analysis of the various species of "sorrow for another's good," where, in the process of examining the sinfulness of envy, Thomas makes explicit his emphatic dissent from Aristotle's evaluation of the moral status of indignation,¹ I will also try to engage the hoary topic of the philosophical consequences of religious commitment. Assuming, at least in the case of 'the human things', that understanding and evaluation are indissolubly and reciprocally linked, it would follow that in this disagreement over the praiseworthiness of indignation—a seemingly small matter—we might contemplate an important, perhaps profound, difference between Aristotle and Aquinas. It is the thesis of this essay that reflecting on this difference of opinion confronts us with some of the surprising consequences religious commitment forces on philosophy and ethics. I will argue that what we see in this dispute is an implicit claim by Thomas Aquinas that the truth concerning the nature of indignation is not obtainable on the grounds of theological neutrality, let alone on the grounds of ethical neutrality. The reason for this, I will try to show, is that the philosophical account of indignation points toward, and calls for, a forthrightly theistic reflection on the meaning of this emotion in light of man's



ultimate spiritual vocation. In a phrase, then, I will argue that the account of *nemesis* within philosophical psychology finds its completion only in *theodicy*.

I. *The Place of Indignation in Aristotle's Account of Passionate Life*

Aristotle defines indignation (*nemesis*) as a sorrow or pain felt at the apprehension of undeserved good fortune.² He says that indignation is "in one sense" opposed to pity (*eleos*), pity being a sorrow or pain felt at the sight of undeserved misfortune.³ In another sense, however, these two passions are not utterly contrary because the capacity for feeling these two species of sorrow "is due to the same moral qualities," and these moral qualities "are associated with good moral character."⁴ Elaborating on this point, Aristotle observes that because "whatever is undeserved is unjust," it is "our duty both to feel sympathy and pity for unmerited distress, and to feel indignation at unmerited prosperity."⁵ The man of good moral character is duty bound to be distressed by the spectacle of injustice. Whether the injustice consists in a wicked man prospering or in a righteous man suffering does not matter; the very occurrence of such things ought to be felt as morally offensive. Clearly, for Aristotle, indignation is a passion felt by good men, even though the experience is in itself painful, just as malice (*epichairekakia*) is a passion felt by evil men, even though the experience is in itself pleasant.⁶ Indignation, especially when transformed into a disposition, would seem, therefore, like malice and envy (*phthonos*), to be an "extreme" to which the concept of the mean does not directly apply. This would seem to be the case notwithstanding the fact that later in the *Ethics*, when he tries, in a rough and ready fashion, to assimilate these emotions to the schema of the mean, Aristotle speaks of indignation as "the observance of the mean between envy and malice."⁷ In any event, Aquinas is perfectly correct in attributing to Aristotle the view that to suffer, and to be disposed to suffer indignation "belongs to good morals."⁸

To these points it must, however, be added that indignation is a passion that is, as such, good to suffer, if the judgments and beliefs on which the occurrence of this passion depends are accurate, i.e., in accord with right reason.⁹ In other words, the judgment or belief that the recipient of the good in question does not deserve or merit this good must be justified. Also, taking the other circumstance, the judgment or belief that what the undeserving one has received is really good must also be reasonable. For example, if the good that the undeserving one has received is money, it must not be the case that it is counterfeit. Thus, even those emotions that, according to Aristotle, are praiseworthy extremes, like indignation and pity, still require the stabilization of reason in order to be truly virtuous.

Now, in order to believe that the circumstances for righteous indignation could even arise, one must believe that there are real goods that can accrue

to the worthy and unworthy alike. For Aristotle and Aquinas the goods of the soul, or spiritual goods, cannot in principle accrue to the unworthy. Further, the good that is friendship (*philia*), even though it is an external good,¹⁰ is also not a good that can accrue to the unworthy; one always has the friends one deserves.¹¹ It follows from this that in order to believe that there is such a thing as virtuous indignation, one must believe that there are non-psychic, non-spiritual goods, other than friendship, that really are goods. To commend, then, the passion of indignation implies a commendation of temporal goods, e.g., health, wealth, and honor, the perception of the unmerited possession of which is the *causa sine qua non* of undergoing this emotional reaction.

Aristotle and Aquinas are in perfect agreement concerning the commendation of pity and the censure of envy and malice. They are also in agreement as to the praiseworthiness of zeal, or emulation (*zelos*), and as to the importance of distinguishing this passion from envy, with which it is often confused. Zeal, or emulation, is, like indignation and pity, a passion felt by those of good moral character. While superficially like envy, being a pain felt at the sight of another's deserved good fortune, the pain of emulation is felt "not because others have these goods, but because we have not got them ourselves."¹² Zealous pain is self-accusatory; one may feel this pain and at the same time be gladdened by the success of our rival or friend, gladdened for him and yet pained by what his success reminds us about our own lack of accomplishment or unfulfilled promise. Emulation may, thus, spur one to positive action in the pursuit of excellence. Envy, on the other hand, certainly does not beget such attempt, tending, rather, to provoke only reactive denigration, if not an endeavour actually to supplant or hinder one's 'competitor'.

Summing up Aristotle's account of indignation, pity, envy, malice and emulation, we note that there are nine combinations of pain/pleasure, unmerited/merited, and misfortune/good fortune associated with this group of sorrows and joys. With this set of emotions that concern "what is happening to our neighbor," or what is happening to "those we know, if only they are not very closely related to us,"¹³ there are nine instead of eight such combinations because, as indicated above, PAIN at MERITED GOOD-FORTUNE formally describes two different emotions, namely, envy and emulation. The following chart spells out (only) these nine passional possibilities.

1. PAIN at the spectacle of UNMERITED MISFORTUNE is *Pity*.
2. PAIN at the spectacle of UNMERITED GOOD-FORTUNE is *Indignation*.
3. PAIN at the spectacle of MERITED MISFORTUNE is *Misplaced Pity*.
4. PAIN (other-begrudging) at the spectacle of MERITED GOOD-FORTUNE is *Envy*.
5. PAIN (self-critical) at the spectacle of MERITED GOOD-FORTUNE is *Emulation*.

6. PLEASURE at the spectacle of UNMERITED MISFORTUNE is *Malice*.
7. PLEASURE at the spectacle of UNMERITED GOOD-FORTUNE is *Impious Ingratitude*.
8. PLEASURE at the spectacle of MERITED MISFORTUNE is *Anger Fulfilled*.
9. PLEASURE at the spectacle of MERITED GOOD-FORTUNE is *Love Fulfilled*.

For five of the nine possibilities (1,2,4,5,6) the Aristotelian name for the emotional complex is given by definition. The last two cases (8,9) describe, respectively, the fulfillment of anger (or, possibly, hatred) and love.¹⁴ Speaking explicitly about case #8, PLEASURE at MERITED MISFORTUNE, Aristotle says, commending this emotional reaction, that “[if] you are pained by the unmerited distress of others, you will be pleased, or at least not pained, by their merited distress. Thus no good man can be pained by the punishment of parricides or murderers.”¹⁵ Case #9, PLEASURE at MERITED GOOD-FORTUNE, describes nothing less than the consummation of loving friendship, since, for Aristotle, friendship, or love, involves wishing for our friend what one believes to be good things, not for our sake but for his.¹⁶ For case #3, PAIN at MERITED MISFORTUNE, an Aristotelian term is not ready to hand. However, besides his indirect comment about the virtual duty to take pleasure at the spectacle of deserved punishment, this case describes just the kind of “morbid sentimentality” or “misplaced pity” that Aristotle believes tragedy serves to correct.¹⁷ The strange case #7, PLEASURE at UNMERITED GOOD-FORTUNE, as stated, seems to involve taking pleasure in *another person’s* undeserved good luck. However, besides making more sense (and being more interesting), if one thinks of this emotional possibility as the taking of pleasure at *one’s own* unmerited good fortune, it is possible to find an Aristotelian explanation for this passion in his remarks on “power.” From this angle, this possibility would describe the situation where one takes pleasure in one’s good luck while remaining utterly oblivious to the fact that it is undeserved. To react in such a fashion is to be utterly without a sense of gratitude: “[Good fortune] does indeed make men more supercilious and more reckless; but there is one excellent quality that goes with it—piety, and respect for the divine power, in which they believe because of events which are really the result of chance.”¹⁸ As we will see, this possibility is important for Aquinas’s sketch of how divine grace, not chance, works on the souls of unworthy but correctable human beings.

Aristotle and Aquinas are in virtual agreement in eight of these nine cases, with respect both to the characterization of the emotional state in question and the evaluation of its ethical significance. Where the Philosopher and the Angelic Doctor part company, where their disagreement is emphatic and

instructive, is on the issue of the praiseworthiness of indignation. According to Aquinas, taking his stand on “the teaching of faith,” neither the feeling of indignation nor the disposition to feel indignation is praiseworthy *per se*. In fact, it is forbidden for the faithful to indulge this kind of sorrow. Thomas’s comment runs as follows:

Thirdly, one may grieve over another’s good, because he who happens to have that good is unworthy of it. Such sorrow as this cannot be occasioned by virtuous goods, which make a man just, but, as the Philosopher states, is about riches, and those things which can accrue to the worthy and the unworthy; and he calls this sorrow *nemesis*, saying that it belongs to good morals. But he says this because he considered temporal goods in themselves, insofar as they may seem great to those who look not to eternal goods; but, according to the teaching of the faith, temporal goods that accrue to those who are unworthy are so disposed according to God’s just ordering, either for the correction of those men, or for their condemnation, and such goods are as nothing in comparison with the goods to come, which are prepared for good men. Therefore sorrow of this kind is forbidden in Holy Writ, according to Ps. 36. 1: “Be not emulous of evil doers, nor envy them that work iniquity,” and elsewhere (Ps. 72. 2, 3): “My steps had well nigh slipped, for I was envious of the wicked, when I saw the prosperity of sinners.”¹⁹

What leads Thomas to this view, and what does this disagreement reveal about the deeper issues separating him and Aristotle? How precisely does a reflection on the nature of indignation lead into a discussion of the nature of divine providence? How does understanding the nature of indignation contribute to answering the questions of the perplexed concerning the prosperity of the wicked?

II. *Religious Commitment and Philosophical Truth*

One may begin to appreciate the significance of this disagreement by considering the fact that Aquinas does not choose to situate his full treatment of indignation, emulation, and envy, these “sorrows for another’s good,” in that part of the *Treatise on the Passions* where he deals with the other varieties of sorrow. Thomas does indeed mark the place where this topic would fit into the plan of this treatise,²⁰ but he chooses to deal with these subjects in his discussion of the sin of envy in the *Treatise on Faith, Hope, and Charity*. Put simply, Aquinas foregoes considering indignation in the more theoretical context of the *Treatise on the Passions* in favor of the more straightforwardly apologetical context of the *Treatise on Faith, Hope, and Charity*. For Thomas it seems that understanding passions like indignation and envy leads one into the heart of the religious life, or that this is one of those subjects where the *philosophical* truth can be grasped only by taking a *religious* stand. Let me attempt to clarify this rather controversial statement.

In this passage of the *Summa* where indignation is discussed, Aquinas takes

a stand on “the teaching of the faith.” This raises immediately two issues. In the first place, this taking of a religious stand in the process of determining the ethical status of indignation seems to confront us with the spectacle of Thomas “confusing” the philosophical and theological orders.²¹ If it is Thomas’s intention to state *the* truth about the moral meaning of indignation, it would seem, *prima facie*, as illegitimate to rest such a claim on some (more or less) specific religious premise (i.e., a premise not *de facto* universally held) as it would be to make such a claim on the basis of a partisan political commitment. And yet, as Gilson reminds us in his account of the Thomistic view of the relationship between faith and reason, “it is impossible to pretend that a mind of [Thomas’s] temper is not fully conscious of its aim,”²² especially on this issue. If, then, this “confusion” is merely apparent, would it not follow that in this passage Thomas means to imply that the *philosophical* truth concerning indignation can be grasped only by an appeal to “the teaching of the faith”? In other words, and assuming for the moment that “the faith” in question is the Christian faith, could it not be that Thomas considers the historical fact of Christianity to have *philosophical* consequences, which it would be impermissible for the *philosopher* to ignore, not merely for the sake of historical accuracy, but for the sake of philosophical truth itself?²³ Is this one of the places in the *Summa* where we see Thomas—the Common Doctor—making the implicit claim that “through the Christian ‘revelation’ of grace as the experienced intrusion of transcendence unto human life” *philosophy* has attained the highest level of “differentiated knowledge” yet?²⁴ If this conjecture is plausible—and I have framed it as a question to underscore the fact that it is a *conjecture*—Thomas would not simply be arguing *ex cathedra* in his discussion of indignation; he would be taking his stand on Christian *philosophy*, and not simply on Christian religious doctrine. Granting such a conjecture, there would be here no “confusion” of philosophical and theological orders, but rather an implicit claim that there are some *factual* conditions conducive, perhaps even necessary, to the discovery of timeless truth, and that among these are the *philosophical* implications of Christianity. In sum, and to make the paradox clear, granting this conjecture, we would have an implicit claim that an intellectual orientation grounded in a faith whose proper articles are beyond reason is, nonetheless, *the* stance from which can be discovered the philosophical truth about this aspect of human nature, *viz.* the ultimate meaning of the passion of indignation.

Let me now briefly address the second question raised by Thomas’s procedure in this passage. In spinning out the interpretive conjecture articulated above, I suggested we assume that “the faith” mentioned by Thomas is the Christian faith. Now, I personally have little doubt that whenever Thomas speaks of “the faith” without qualifications, he means the one, universal, Christian faith. When we inspect, however, the biblical references in

Thomas's text, we see that they all refer to what Christians call the 'Old Testament'. In other words, it seems that the theological premises needed to grasp the truth about indignation are not specifically Christian; Aquinas's specific biblical references carry the implication that "the faith" in question could be either Christianity or Judaism. It is, then, an orientation in terms of a commitment to some form of theism that apparently offers the superior philosophical standpoint on this issue.²⁵ Further, since, as we will see below, the theologem in question concerns nothing more (or less!) than the general strategy by which a religion deals with the theodicy problem generated by the apparent worldly prosperity of the wicked (simply using the word, 'apparent', in this connection is the key aspect of such a strategy), it would seem that "the faith" relevant to this issue could be Islam or (theistic) Hinduism, as well as Christianity or Judaism.²⁶

III. *The Theodicy of Nemesis*

Turning now to Aquinas's account of indignation, we recall that Aristotle and Aquinas agree that those things unequivocally good—the goods of the soul or spiritual goods—cannot in principle be possessed by the unworthy. Aquinas goes on, however, to say that when a temporal good accrues to someone unworthy, the pious soul will not feel sorrow at this unworthy's undeserved good fortune. According to Aquinas, the believer will perceive this situation as indicating either of two alternative possibilities, both of which are, in some sense, 'happy', or, if painful, then certainly not painful in the sense of being "sorrow for another's *good*."

The first alternative describes the situation in which the perception of an unmerited 'reward' will (and ought) be taken by the theist as a divinely ordered device for the correction of the unworthy one. Now, the unworthy are such because of, among other things, their lack of concern for spiritual goods, or their oblivion as to the very distinction between spiritual and temporal goods, a distinction they tend to acknowledge only 'notionally,' if at all. Thus, if they are to be corrected by an intrusion of transcendence into their lives, the unworthy must be addressed at their own level, namely, at the vulgar level of temporal goods. In this situation it is *possible* for an unworthy *but correctable* man to acknowledge, while thanking fortune, that he does not deserve the 'good' that has accrued to him. Thanking 'his lucky stars', this person *may* shift his attention away from the ostensible good that has come his way, away, that is, from the pleasure that the possession of such a 'good' habitually prompts in him, and toward the fact of his unworthiness, toward, that is, his existential condition of guilt. Gratitude for good luck, and an inchoate sense of guilt, may be transformed into gratitude for divine providence and prayer for God to make him worthy. An unworthy but correctable man may, thus, respond to his undeserved good luck by blushing at

his unmerited prosperity, and, realizing his spiritual poverty, might exert himself to seek the kingdom of heaven.²⁷ Even on the presumption of predestination, it is only on the basis of such an exertion that a man might become such as could receive divine grace, i.e., only on the basis of such a 'work' could he become 'matter' made ready for the superimposition of a *forma spiritualis* upon his *forma naturalis*.²⁸ In sum, according to Aquinas, the theist's soul feels anything but pain for his 'neighbor' on such an occasion. He, in fact, feels pleasure, perhaps even something approaching the love of soon-to-be-possible friendship.

The second alternative will (and ought) be the perception by the pious soul of this situation—a situation in which an unworthy ostensibly reaps a good—as a divinely ordered device for the condemnation or punishment of the unworthy one. Precisely because such an unworthy one, by hypothesis unworthy *and uncorrectable*, will not regard the unmerited fulfillment of his appetite for temporal goods as a 'punishment' or even as a 'temptation,' it follows that what he takes to be his 'good luck' is in reality a curse that sediments him in his sinful oblivion and vicious habits. This will be the case even if he thinks just the opposite, and laughs scornfully at the very thought that matters might be otherwise. The believer's soul will not, then, perceive such a situation as one of unmerited good fortune, but rather as one of merited misfortune, i.e., as an act of divine justice, fittingly laced with irony. This is a situation which, in one sense, gladdens the pious men—the sinner is, after all, punished—but which, in another sense, saddens him—it is a sorrowful thing to see a soul fall. The believer here might, following the example of Abraham, attempt to bargain with God for the soul of even this unworthy one; he might persist in the hope, against hope, that even such an apparently uncorrectable unworthy might eventually be corrected by God's paradoxical punishment, even if only at death's door. In such situations the pious man may grasp in awe, or righteous fear, the gravity of the divine gift of freedom as he trembles before the very thought of a Being capable of such love—the love involved in granting a freedom of which it is foreknown that it will be grievously abused.

IV. Indignation and the Pursuit of Justice

This discussion of indignation, which is 'footnote' to Aquinas's discussion of the various species of sorrow, supplies a concrete explication of what Jews and Christians mean when they speak of divine intervention into nature, or of the transformation of human nature by grace. If 'nature' is a source or principle of movement in that to which it primarily belongs,²⁹ and if passion is itself a movement of the sensitive appetite,³⁰ then if the *capacity* for a passion is changed, that thing's capacity for movement as such has been changed. If this is so, then the very nature of that thing has been changed.

The believer's soul should not, according to Aquinas, *have* the capacity for indignation. The natural form of such a man would have been altered by the superimposition of a spiritual form, which graciously frees such a man from *this* species of sorrow, granting him others instead. In sum, the theodicy of nemesis sketched above has the clear implication that a Christian simply ought not (and will not, if blessed) feel pain at the unmerited good fortune of the unworthy.

Even though my own pose up to this point has been simply that of a philosophically interested reporter, it is difficult to suppress a question as to the plausibility of this view (or of my reading of Thomas's views). I raise, thus, this question of truth both for its own sake and for the sake of my interpretation. One wonders, quite frankly, whether or not such a proposed reformation of the human soul would not, in effect, undercut the virtue of justice. To put the point baldly, does not this sublime denigration of indignation suggest something of an escape into an a-political other worldliness that would (like a-political cynicism on the other extreme), in effect, cooperate in the delivery of the world over to the forces of evil and injustice? Is not the piety engendered by such a sublime denigration of indignation in reality a despairing of man and his world?³¹

What we are asking here is whether the passion of indignation is not one of the necessary (albeit not sufficient) ingredients of an authentic concern for justice, both distributive and commutative justice, even where the latter is conceived as "fraternal correction." One need not, in this connection, argue, in vulgar Marxist fashion that the 'sense of justice' is just another name for the passion of indignation.³² No, the point is quite simply whether in the order of the passions themselves, or, more precisely, in that ready-for-action order constituted by the virtuous alliance of reason and passion, the diminution or eradication of that sorrow called 'indignation' would not effectively subvert the will to justice.

In my opinion the answer to all of these serious questions is simply, No. It should be obvious that the brand of Christianity articulated and defended by Saint Thomas Aquinas, while no doubt taking its lead from the vision of eternal goods and not from the beacon of politics, is in no way prepared to surrender man and his world to the forces of evil and injustice. The reason that this commitment is compatible with his religiously motivated transvaluation of indignation is that this passion, this species of sorrow for another's (putative) good is not a necessary (let alone a sufficient) condition of an unfeigned love of justice. In the order of the passions as conceived by Aquinas, besides the *love* of justice and the *hatred* of injustice (and the *desire* for the one and the *aversion* for the other), the passions perhaps necessary to the endeavour for justice are *fear*, *pity* and (perhaps above all) *anger*. Not

only is indignation not necessary, it may, in fact, be an actual stumbling block to the pursuit of justice.

In order to appreciate the surprising irrelevance of indignation to the virtuous aspiration for justice, we should take a closer look at the circumstances that could lead one to think that this passion really figures in this pursuit. This situation, we remember, is one in which an unworthy has apparently gained a good that he does not deserve. Further, and in order to characterize the situation so that it will clearly bear on the issue of justice, we should also assume that our unworthy one has reaped this *undeserved* good by means of an unjust act; the (putative) good in question is undeserved precisely because it has been obtained by foul means. Thus, we will assume that the unworthy's possession of this unmerited good is not just a matter of dumb luck.

Now, as Thomas points out, one of the sorrowful reactions to such a state of affairs is simply *an effect of fear*—namely, the fear that the unworthy's prosperity may threaten to be an occasion of harm to oneself and/or one's friends. This sorrowful reaction to an enemy's prosperity is, according to Thomas, often confused with envy, zeal and indignation.³³ To be sure, this fearful sorrow can arise even if the enemy unworthy's prosperity is simply due to luck. But the kind of fearful sorrow in question here will be all the more reasonable and understandable if the unworthy's threatening prosperity is the result of vicious action. Certainly, the *prima facie* justice of a preemptive attack that might be provoked by such a fear would be all the more credible if the unworthy one's prosperity were the result of a known disposition to unjust action.³⁴

To the extent that responses to such fearful sorrow are manifestations of the pursuit of justice (qua avoidance of suffering injustice), it is obvious that indignation is irrelevant. In fact, the focus of the appetite is here on the *future evils* that may be suffered by oneself and/or one's friends at the hand of the 'lucky' unworthy, and *not* on the undeserved good possessed by the unworthy. One wonders whether an appetite focusing on the good-unworthily-possessed (rather than on the future evils that may-will be done) would even prompt the useful, just and (perhaps) noble act of preemptive attack, or 'retaliation before the fact.'

The circumstances that can provoke indignation or the more useful passion of fearful sorrow can also occasion other emotional reactions. If, for example, the undeserved good has been acquired by the commission of a vicious act, then it is possible to notice as a major component of this scene the person or persons whose undeserved suffering have provided our unworthy with his 'goods.' Both Aristotle and Aquinas agree that it is one of the marks of a man of good moral character to feel pity for the victim of undeserved misfortune, whether this misfortune be the result of undeserved bad luck or of an unjust act. We ask, following Aquinas, if it is not much more commendable

to feel pity for the victim of injustice than to indulge one's soul in a fit of indignation. Is it not more praiseworthy to permit oneself to feel the pain of undeserved misfortune as if it were one's own than to let oneself sorrowfully focus on the good-unworthily-possessed?

In any event, the passion of pity, like fearful sorrow, may suffice to prompt the pursuit of justice, especially that species of commutative (or *redistributive*) justice called "fraternal correction." On the basis of the Christian maxim that one is obliged to "hate not our neighbor's nature, but his fault," Aquinas goes so far as to say that one ought to act in such circumstances precisely so that "our reproof may be the outcome not of hatred, but of pity."³⁵ Clearly indignation has no place in such an attitude.

But let us return to our consideration of the manner in which pity may prompt the pursuit of justice. In the view of both Aristotle and Aquinas, the man of good moral character cares about others, whether this care arises from family ties, friendship, business or political association, or merely "because of the nature [he has] in common" with them.³⁶ Because the man of good moral character is obviously not a selfish man, it is not only possible but almost certain that the pity he feels for the sufferers of injustice will provoke anger directed at the evildoer who has brought about such unmerited misfortune.³⁷ Here we must note that neither Thomas's acceptance of the traditional inclusion of anger among the capital sins, nor his acknowledgement that the passion of anger is not perfectly rational, is inconsistent with his quite emphatic stress on the positive role of anger in moral life.³⁸ It is the *act* of anger wherein the sense appetite is arrayed in word and deed against the eternal law, ignoring "the command of reason" and obstructing the path of virtue, that is the "sin of anger," and thus "fittingly" included among the capital sins.³⁹ Neither the act of anger *per se* nor the passion of anger is sinful as such. Quite to the contrary, not only is the passion of anger "in a manner," natural to man, but it also presupposes both the respectful conviction that the doers of injustice are men, i.e., free agents who can, and ought, be held responsible for their actions, and a social sense of belonging to a moral community that deserves loving loyalty.⁴⁰ As Thomas says, given that anger "denotes application of good to evil," it follows that "to wish evil to someone under the aspect of justice may be according to the virtue of justice, if it be in conformity with the command of reason."⁴¹ Of particular interest on this score is the following passage from Thomas's commentary on Aristotle's *Ethics*:

Anger is a desire for vengeance. Hence one who is not angry at the things he should, accordingly does not punish the actions he ought to punish. This is blameworthy. However, this explanation is not to be understood as if another vengeance cannot be taken according to the judgment of reason without anger, but as if the movement of anger stirred up by the judgment

of reason makes one more prompt to take vengeance in the right way. If the sensitive appetite did not help to carry out the judgment of reason, it would be useless in human nature.⁴²

While it may be of moral worth to seek justice merely from the passion of anger,⁴³ Aquinas believes, as the passage quoted above indicates, that justice can be pursued simply on the basis of reason and will. Characterizing the truly virtuous individual, he says of such a person that “a man, by the judgment of his reason [may choose] to be affected by a passion in order to work more promptly with the co-operation of the sensitive appetite.”⁴⁴ It is the very *telos* of human moral development that reason and passion be brought into such a symbiotic relationship.

No passion, let alone indignation, is, thus, a *necessary* ingredient of the pursuit of justice. This is so even though it is also true that human nature has been so framed that passion may be in perfect harmony with reason, passion serving reason as its consummate helpmate. Action in the name and spirit of justice may be built on, and is in fact fortified by, the passions of fear, pity and anger. In all three instances it is the unworthy as doer or potential doer of (other) evil acts, and not the unworthy as possessor of a putative good, that is the focus of the sensitive appetite. Clearly indignation is not necessary for the pursuit of justice; the soul purged of indignation is not a soul eviscerated of its capacity for seeking this arduous good. Indeed, the Thomistic account of the ethical status of indignation, which at first glance could appear as sheer “foolishness” to “the wisdom of the world,” appears on reflection to offer another proof of the hard saying that idealism is (ultimately) the surest form of practicality. Perhaps it is only after being freed from indignation by a divine, soul-transforming grace that the pursuit of justice and the higher goods can truly commence. It is in this light, then, that we should understand Thomas’s criticism of Aristotle’s view of the ethical status of indignation.

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NOTES

1. *The Summa Theologica*, trans. Dominican Fathers (Chicago, 1952), II-II, 36, 2.
2. *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts in *The Rhetoric and the Poetics of Aristotle*, ed. Edward P. J. Corbett (New York, 1954), II, 9; p. 115.
3. *Ibid.*, II, 8; p. 113.
4. *Ibid.*, II, 9; p. 115.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham (London, 1926), II, vi; p. 97.
7. *Ibid.*, II, vii; p. 105.

8. S.T. II-II, 36, 2.

9. For a discussion of the indispensable role of cognition in Aristotle's theory of the passions see William W. Fortenbaugh, *Aristotle on Emotion* (New York, 1975), pp. 12-18 (& passim.), as well as Fortenbaugh's essay, "Aristotle's *Rhetoric* on Emotions" in *Aristotle: The Classical Heritage of Rhetoric*, ed. Keith Erickson (Metuchen, NJ, 1974), 205-234.

10. *Rhetoric*, I, 5; p. 38. While not a psychic good, the good of friendship most emphatically refers to the soul. Friendship, a good without which Aristotle says it would almost not be worth living (*Nicomachean Ethics* VIII, i; p. 451), refers to the soul, in that in order to have friends one must be, in one's soul, the kind of person another would want for a friend.

11. The present context does not permit an adequate explanation of this hard saying. Suffice it to say that Aristotle does not believe that bad men can experience the true form of friendship, i.e., "only good men can be friends for what they are in themselves" (*Nicomachean Ethics* VIII, iv; p. 467). The friendships of bad men, besides being inconstant, can ultimately be based only on pleasure or utility. Thus, the spectacle of two bad men taking "pleasure in each other's wickedness" (*Ibid.*, VIII, viii; p. 483), would not provoke the passion of indignation in a good man, for he would regard their shared pleasure as a merited misfortune and not as an instance of undeserved prosperity. If true friendship can be shared only by the good, i.e., the virtuous, then the non-virtuous always, in a sense, deserve the inferior forms of friendship they must inevitably share.

12. *Rhetoric*, II, 11; p. 120.

13. *Ibid.*, II, 9 & 8; pp. 115, 114. As the word "spectacle" in the chart indicates, the focus here is, with one exception (case #7), on what befalls 'the other' and not 'oneself' (i.e., not 'those very closely related to us'—our alter egos, as it were). One might, with an expanded chart that included other variables like "practical/non-practical" (Fortenbaugh, *Aristotle on Emotion*, 79-83) and "to oneself/to others," try a comprehensive classification of all the passions Aristotle discusses in the *Rhetoric* (including the correlatives Aristotle does not mention).

14. *Ibid.*, II, 2 & 4; pp. 92, 100, 103.

15. *Ibid.*, II, 9; p. 116.

16. *Ibid.*, II, 4; p. 100. Unlike Spinoza, who says, "As for pleasure arising from another's good, I know not what to call it," Aristotle knows of love as something quite other than "merely 'pleasure accompanied by the idea of an external cause.'" See Spinoza, *The Ethics*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis, IN, 1982), pp. 117-18 (Part III, Scholium, Proposition 22), 112-113 (Part III, Scholium, Proposition 13).

17. See Laurence Berns, "Aristotle's Poetics" in *Ancients and Moderns*, ed. Joseph Cropsey (Chicago, 1964), pp. 77; S. H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art* (New York, 1951), pp. 265-66; and Milton, *Samson Agonistes*, 759-765.

18. *Rhetoric*, p. 128; II, 17.

19. S.T. II-II, 36, 2.

20. At S.T. I-II, 35, 8, ad 2, Aquinas answers an objection to Damascene's division of sorrow into four species with a promissory note that is cashed in at S.T. II-II, 36, 4, i.e.

more than 600 dense pages down the textual road. Clearly, Thomas is a man who keeps his promises.

21. See Etienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Edward Bullough (Cambridge, 1924), pp. 24-26, 28-30.

22. *Ibid.*, 25. For two interesting glosses on the hermeneutical principle Gilson uses here see: Jorge Luis Borges, "The Mirror of Enigmas" in *Labyrinths* (New York, 1962), p. 211; and Leo Strauss, "Preface to the English Translation" in *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, trans. Elsa M. Sinclair (New York, 1965), p. 2.

23. See Eric Voegelin's first letter responding to Alfred Schutz's critique of *The New Science of Politics* in *The Philosophy of Order: Essays on History, Consciousness, and Politics*, ed. P. J. Opitz & G. Sebba (Stuttgart, 1981), pp. 450-51; and Harry V. Jaffa, *Thomism and Aristotelianism* (Chicago, 1952), pp. 25-27.

24. Voegelin, 450-451.

25. Defining 'Theism' after the manner of Kant's, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A631:B659-A642:B670, or Voltaire's definition of 'Theist' in *The Philosophical Dictionary*.

26. Given what Cicero says about the assumptions of religious piety, one might even wonder if the theism built into this theologem is necessarily monotheistic: see *The Nature of the Gods*, trans. H. C. P. McGregor (Harmondsworth, 1972), pp. 69-70 (*De Natura Deorum*, I, pref.). Of course, if this is so (i.e., if even Greek polytheism provides a sufficient basis for the pious repudiation of indignation), then the fact that Aristotle does not endorse a 'theistic' evaluation of the ethical status of indignation may be taken as a rejection of this alternative, and not simply the result of his having been born too early, or of his having been ignorant of the wisdom of the ancient Hebrews. For a comprehensive treatment of the differences between Aristotle and Thomas on this issue of theism/a-theism in reference to the understanding of moral virtue, see Jaffa, pp. 117-20, 146-48, 150, 187.

27. Here we have an example of how Thomas's analysis of "PLEASURE at the spectacle of UNMERITED GOOD-FORTUNE," what I have called "impious ingratitude" (See note #18 above, and the passage to which this note is attached), the theistic perspective articulated by Aquinas deepens the understanding of Aristotle's characterization of this psychic possibility.

28. Aquinas, S.T. Ia, 23, 6: "Thus we might say that God preordained to give glory on account of merit, and that He preordained to give grace to merit glory."

29. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V, 4; *Physics* II, 1.

30. Aristotle, *Physics* III, 3; *De Anima* I, 3.

31. Jaffa, 28-29.

32. See the "Introduction" to Marx's *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* for the roots of this vulgar Marxist viewpoint; see also in this connection, Thomas G. West, "Marx and Lenin," *Interpretation*, 11 (1983), 73-85, especially pp. 74-76.

33. Aquinas accepts Damascene's division of sorrow into four species, namely, acedia, distress (or, following Gregory of Nyssa, anxiety), pity and envy; S.T. I-II 35, 8. Here 'envy' is being used in a generic or broad sense, which includes zeal, indignation, and envy properly speaking. In the broad sense envy means simply "sorrow for another's good"; in the narrow sense it means sorrow for another's good precisely because he has

it, and because his good surpasses the envious one's. This latter is the mortal, spiritual, and capital sin of *envy*.

34. The Thomistic doctrine of justified warfare precludes neither the preemptive attack as such nor the type of deception that would ordinarily be involved in such justifiable actions; S.T. II-II, 41, 1 & 3.

35. S.T. II-II 34, 3 and II-II 33, 5, where Thomas quotes from Augustine's *De Serm. Dom. in Monte*, ii, 19.

36. S.T. I-II 47, 1, ad 2.

37. Pity (like indignation, zeal, and even envy) is a passion that arises, in the first place, as a result of witnessing "what is happening to our neighbor" (*Rhetoric* II, 9). There is, thus, a certain passivity, or spectator quality to an emotion like pity. Fortenbaugh makes sense of this aspect of pity (and like emotions) with his distinction between "practical" and "non-practical" emotions. A "non-practical" emotion like pity would be an emotion "not logically tied" to action; it would not be an emotion involving in its very structure the idea of a goal calling for action (*Aristotle on Emotion*, 79-83). For Aquinas these observations about pity (and like emotions) would be explained by noting that pity, as a species of sorrow, is a concupiscible passion denoting in its very nature the termination of appetitive movement. Nonetheless, it is possible, according to Thomas, for the sorrow that is pity to provoke the irascible appetite of anger if the psychological-moral identification upon which this passion is founded is strong. Pity can provoke anger if the suffering endured by the person pitied is conceived not only as something that could happen to one, but as an injury that in some sense has already been suffered by the person feeling pity. It is also necessary that the person so roused have some hope of returning this shared slight with a conspicuous revenge (S.T. I-II 25, 1; I-II 47, 1).

38. S.T. I-II 84, 4, where Thomas accepts the specification of the seven capital sins by Gregory I. Anger is not perfectly rational where it follows merely "the denunciation of reason," but not necessarily "the command of reason"; S.T. I-II 46, 4, ad 1.

39. S.T. I-II 71, 3; I-II 71, 6; I-II 46, 4, ad 2.

40. S.T. 46, 5. See Walter Berns, *In Defense of Liberal Democracy* (Chicago, 1984), pp. 144-47 for an incisive account of these virtuous aspects of anger.

41. S.T. I-II 46, 6.

42. *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. I. Litzinger (Chicago, 1964), I, p. 350, paragraph #805.

43. As "...it is more praiseworthy to do a work of charity from the judgment of reason than from the mere passion of pity" (S.T. I-II 24, 3, ad 1), so it is no doubt more praiseworthy to seek justice at the prompting of reason than merely from the passion of anger. Unlike Kant, Aquinas does not deny all moral worth to acts done from passion.

44. S.T. I-II 24, 3, ad 1.