

St. Thomas Aquinas Understanding of Virtues

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Abstract – Virtues as positive character traits have been greatly deliberated upon in moral philosophy specifically and philosophy in general. The paper uses St. Thomas Aquinas' virtue ethical theory which is Aristotelian in both nature and scope. The world is currently yearning for values in its operations. The understanding has necessitated the consideration of the relationship between ethics and other fields as a science of the ought and how it could positively influence other disciplines in terms of applicative sense. The concern of this paper is how could ethics enhance the eradication of corruption as a societal challenge to the acquisition of the common good. In order to achieve the possible outcome of the problem that this paper aspires to address, analytic methodology guided by Aristotelian virtue theory has been used. The paper has realized that values which inform virtues are essential in the fight against corruption since the future of a society is anchored on values which ought to be inculcated in our education system for the sole purpose of learning is transformation.

Keywords: Thomas Aquinas, Aristotelian, virtue, value, common good, corruption, societal.

Introduction

This paper intends to firstly, lay the foundation of the understanding of virtues as a means of eradicating corruption. St. Thomas Aquinas' idea of virtues is very key in the fight against corruption. Virtues are to be analyzed herein for the study argues that it is through them that the vice of corruption could be addressed. Since St. Thomas' view of virtues is not founded without Aristotle, we are also to examine the categorization of virtues according to Aristotle who has been referred as "the father of virtues within the philosophical scholarly world." The chapter will end with St. Thomas' concept of the law and the truth for they are important values in the fight against the menace of corruption. The observance of the law leads to social order which provides an enabling environment for the realization of the common good.

Secondly, Aquinas' lived in the medieval epoch that is 1225-1274 and he dedicated his whole life in the service of man. Thomas being a great philosopher and a theologian, studied the ancient Greek philosophy which became his foundation for a deeper understanding of scriptures and also means to translate the scriptures better. In addition, to understand the church doctrine and dogmas which the church fathers had used in order to make the two comprehensible to the people. Therefore, Thomas found philosophy which uses human reason without supernatural assistance to be proper tool in expounding scriptures because philosophy and theology do not contradict each other rather they are complementary. This was clearly stated by John Paul II, that these two realities are like wings of the same bird that facilitate it in flying; in the same way they are two truths from different sources with the same destiny which cannot contradict each other.¹

Thomas being a Christian theologian and a philosopher used Aristotle's philosophy in order to teach the people of God and also to find solution in the major problems which were facing man in his time. The study uses Thomas Aquinas understanding of Aristotle virtues and Theological virtues, in order to assist the society to eradicate corruption that is threatening the development and coherence of many nations.

2.1. The Foundation of St. Thomas Aquinas' Understanding of Virtues

Aristotle was a student of Plato, who his great friend and mentor was Socrates. It was Socrates who was the first philosopher to teach about virtues. According to him, virtues is knowledge and they can be taught.

¹ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (Nairobi: Pauline Books & Media, 1998).

He believed that the best life can be lived by those people who understand virtues and live them in a practical life. In addition, this are the people who live a happy life.

In advising Protagoras:

He argues for the view that all of the virtues, justice, wisdom, courage, piety, and so forth are one. He provides a number of arguments for this thesis. For example, while it is typical to think that one can be wise without being temperate, Socrates rejects this possibility on the grounds that wisdom and temperance both have the same opposite: folly. Were they truly distinct, they would each have their own opposites. As it stands, the identity of their opposites indicates that one cannot possess wisdom without temperance and vice versa.” This thesis is sometimes paired with another Socratic, view, that is, that virtue is a form of knowledge (*Meno* 87e-89a; cf. *Euthydemus* 278d-282a). Things like beauty, strength, and health benefit human beings, but can also harm them if they are not accompanied by knowledge or wisdom. If virtue is to be beneficial it must be knowledge, since all the qualities of the soul are in themselves neither beneficial nor harmful, but are only beneficial when accompanied by wisdom and harmful when accompanied by folly.²

This show that Socrates believed that man can be transformed by being taught on how to acquire these virtues. In reality this was clearly manifested in Socrates irony where he was teaching the youth so that they could live a better life. That means choosing to do the right things in life which gives them happiness and satisfaction.

Following Socrates, the root that Aristotle takes while describing virtues is that of ethic, whereby he asserts that happiness is the rational activity in accord with virtue. He does not give clear definition of what rational activity and virtue are, but it seems clear that rational activity is the genus while virtue is the differentia.³

His communication in this statement is that all human beings are rational but their difference comes about because of their choices of virtues. This is due to the fact that people behave differently according to the way they have being trained in the society and what they have acquired, and more so their perception of life.

In book two of his ethics, Aristotle asserts that virtue is of twofold, that is, of the thought and of the character. Both of these virtues come about and grows mostly as a result of teaching which is why it requires experience and time. Aristotle assert that character which he calls *ethike* results from habit (*ethos*), and is the source of *ethike*.⁴

Therefore, it is clear that none of the virtues of character comes about in us naturally, since nothing natural can be habituated. For instance, a stone that moves downward cannot be habituated to move upward. Hence virtues come about in us neither by nature nor against nature, rather we are naturally receptive of them and are brought to completion through habit. St. Thomas and Aristotle are in agreement that man acquires habit by choice. Therefore it is through the free will that man becomes responsible in the society.⁵

It is in this perspective of Aristotle understanding of Socrates, which made Aristotle to contemplate more on what constitutes the virtues whereby he divided virtues into two categories that is, (a) Intellectual virtues. (b) Moral virtues.

In a nutshell, Aristotle laid the foundation of St. Thomas understanding of the growth or development of man as far as morality is concerned. This is due to the fact that St. Thomas Aquinas after studying Aristotle's philosophy he embraced it and took it to another level whereby he used it to teacher scriptures in order to help man to understand himself better.

²Martin Ostwald, *Nicomachean Ethics*(New York: Indianapolis, 1962), 33.

³C. D. C. Reeve, *Aristotle Nicomachaen Ethics* (Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2014), xlix.

⁴Reeve, *Aristotle Nicomachaen Ethics*, 21.

⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. trans. Fathers of English Province (Perrysburg, Ohio: Benziger Bros, 1947),814-817.

2.1.1. Aristotle's Intellectual Virtues

St. Thomas Aquinas, used Aristotle's understanding of virtues, in order to express or describe how human beings can achieve holistic development which will enable man to have cohesiveness and also experience harmony among themselves and the order of creation. This harmony can only exist in the universe when man as a rational being strives to attain that maturity that is expected of him. Therefore, Thomas Aquinas, uses Aristotle virtues in order to help man to better his relationship with other human beings and the creation at large. Thomas begins by studying and elaborating the intellectual virtues of Aristotle. According to Thomas intellectual virtues is the one that essentially resides in the rational faculty.⁶

The five intellectual virtues of Aristotle are:

- (a) **Understanding**; that is sound understanding, the quality in virtue of which we say that certain persons are men of understanding. This is the habitual knowledge of the primary self-evident truths that lie at the root of all knowledge. In other words this is self-consciousness knowledge which makes man to be a unique creature in the world.⁷
- (b) **Science**: this is the knowledge of those things which are observable by man. Therefore, anything that science knows, scientifically must exist by an unalterable necessity. The knowledge of science can be imparted by teaching and what is known by this way can be learned. In addition this is habit of conclusions drawn by demonstration from the first principles that is the habitual knowledge of the particular science.⁸
- (c) **Wisdom**: this is the habit of knowing things in their highest causes; an ordering of all principles and conclusions into one vast body of truth. Aristotle teaches two types of wisdom. That is practical wisdom and theoretical wisdom. Practical wisdom is the kind of wisdom whereby we may get hold of it once we get a theoretical grasp on a sagacious man. That is a man who understands the objective reality (objective truth). That is what conduces to the good life as a whole. This man or woman can be called wise because he/she is able to deliberate correctly about what is good and advantageous for himself not partially, but about what sorts of things further living well as a whole. Also when they rationally calculate well about what furthers some excellent end, concerning no craft exists. Therefore, in the case of the whole, it is the deliberative person who will be practically wise. While the theoretical wisdom, is to know not only what follows from the starting point but to grasp the truth where the starting points are concerned. Therefore theoretical wisdom must be understanding and plus scientific knowledge.⁹
- (d) **Art**: this is the habit of knowing how to make things, how to produce some external objects. This includes the mechanical, the liberal, and the fine arts. It follows that an art is nothing more or less than a productive quality exercised in combination with true reason. The business of every art is to bring into something which is capable of having such an existence and has its efficient cause in the maker and not in itself. This condition must be present, because the arts are not concerned with things that exist or come to be or to existence from necessity or according to nature, such things having efficient cause in themselves.¹⁰
- (e) **Prudence**: this is the habit of knowing how to act well, how to direct activity that does not result in tangible products and how to live a good human life. Aristotle asserts that this is the ability to govern and discipline oneself by use of reason. It is classically considered as one of the four cardinal virtues. The etymology of the word "prudence" is Latin word prudential meaning "foresight sagacity". It is often associated with wisdom, insight and knowledge. It is regarded as the ability to judge between virtuous and vicious actions, not only in general sense but with regard to appropriate action at a given time and place. Although prudence itself does not perform any actions and is concerned solely with knowledge, all virtues

⁶Aquinas, *Summa*, 57, art. 2, 828.

⁷Aquinas, *Summa*, 827-847.

⁸Aquinas, *Summa*, 828.

⁹Aquinas, *Summa*.

¹⁰Aquinas, *Summa*, 829.

are regulated by it. It also distinguishes courageous acts from reckless and cowardly acts. Due to this fact some Greek and medieval philosophers such as St. Thomas Aquinas, considered this virtue as the mother of all virtues because it is the cause, the measure and form of all virtues. It is the cause in the sense that virtues which are defined to be the “perfected ability” of man as a spiritual person (spiritual personhood in the classical and modern epoch means having intelligence and free will) achieves their perfection only when they are founded upon prudence, that is to say upon the perfected ability to make right decisions. For instance, a person can live temperance only when he has acquired the habit of deciding correctly the actions to take in response to his\her instinctual cravings. Therefore it is considered to be the measure of moral virtues since it provides a model of ethically good actions.¹¹

2.1.2. Aristotle’s Moral Virtues

Aristotle, having been a student of Plato borrows heavily on his understanding of virtues more so when it comes to the organization of the society. The four cardinal virtues are given an analogy within the society which is important when analyzing the operations of the human activities. According to Plato, the traditional Greek virtues are associated with the class structure of the ideal state which is meant to deliver the common good to its citizens. Temperance is the unique virtue of the artisan class; courage is the virtue peculiar to the military class; and wisdom characterizes the rulers. Justice, the fourth virtue, characterizes society as a whole. It was the duty of the rulers to execute that justice within the society.¹²

The just State is one in which each class performs its own function well without infringing on the activities of the other classes. Plato divides the human soul into three parts: the rational part, the will, and the appetites. The just person is the one in whom the rational element, supported by the will, controls the appetites. An obvious analogy exists here with the threefold class structure of the State, in which the enlightened philosopher-kings, supported by the soldiers, govern the rest of society.

Though all the intellectual virtues have some reference to the moral life, prudence is the most directly concerned because it enters into and illumines every act of moral virtues? When we speak of practical intellect, we are using a shorthand expression of intellect when it is acting on the basis of our desire for some end or good. Prudence is the virtue of the practical intellect in moral matters, for every virtuous act is going to be an act stemming from both prudence and the moral virtues. Aristotle defined four cardinal virtues that is, prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude.

- (a) **Justice:** this is the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and the neighbours. It is to act in a fair manner towards other people. This is being fair in every situation of life which calls for a high degree of responsibility and accountability in the society. In the Kenyan society corruption make people to be irresponsible and not accountable when executing their duties and obligations because they are not honest. Majority of Kenyans have no integrity.¹³
- (b) **Prudence:** this is the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it. This is the wisdom that assist any human being or person in that matter, in a way that upholds his dignity.¹⁴
- (c) **Fortitude:** this is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. The moral agency in the society has to have fortitude because transforming the society is difficulty work. One needs courage from the personal level to the society level. That means collective responsibility of the society for the holistic development of man.¹⁵

¹¹Aquinas, *Summa*, 831.

¹²Plato, *The Republic*, G. R. F. Ferrari ed. and trans. Tom Griffith (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Bk. II

¹³Plato, *The Republic*, 822.

¹⁴Plato, *The Republic*, 832.

¹⁵Plato, *The Republic*, 824.

(d) **Temperance:** this is the virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasure and provides balance in the use of created goods. Just as courage in the strictest sense is concerned only with certain fearful things, so too, temperance in the strictest sense pertains only to certain pleasures.¹⁶

These two types of virtues which Aristotle asserts that they help to mold people's character when are practiced properly, were taken by St. Thomas in order to express himself while teaching philosophy and theology. Since St. Thomas was not a puppet of Aristotle, he manifested both types of virtues as tools to help man to develop both spiritually and physically. Due to the respect he accorded to Aristotle, he corrected Aristotle's works so that he can be understood and his work become more comprehensible and of more help to many people.

These cardinal virtues, play a pivotal role in the molding of the character and are acquired by human effort. That means man using his rationality to choose that which can make him be humane. They are not like the sanctifying grace which is infused at baptism. We have to struggle or work hard to acquire them and to live that virtuous life.¹⁷

The good life acquired through these virtues involve developing good character, which assist a person to mature holistically. These kind of people become responsible and accountable in the society, where this is manifested in their behavior while interacting with the members of the community. They become caring people, they express a lot of generosity within their society both in terms of sharing their talents and wealth.¹⁸

In addition, they are just in their lives as they interact with the rest members of the society. Justice is the kind of state from which people are doers of just things. That is, from which they do just actions and wish or desire for what is just.¹⁹

Persons who have not acquired virtues, live unjust lives. That is the state from which people do injustice and wish or desire for what is unjust.²⁰ Therefore, just people are law-abiding citizens while unjust people have no respect to the rule of law. The consequence of all these is that, what is just will be what is lawful and what is fair, while what is unjust will be what is unlawful and what is unfair.²¹

These virtues they help people to reach self-realization or awareness of who they are, that is acquiring the characters which make them realize their humanness. This creates harmony in the society due to the fact that people have grown or matured and are ready to give themselves to all kind services that are needed in the society including sharing their wealth with the members of society. Virtues then help people to be generous and detached from material things in order to achieve happiness which is the greatest desire of any human being.²²

The intellectual and moral virtues both they help people to have good relationships in thus becoming friends to one another. Friendship is a kind of virtue or involves virtue because both rich and poor, desire to have friends. This is due to the fact that friends are regarded as the only refuge in one's life. For young people friends are important so that they can guide them. That is the reason why parents ought to be friends to their children; so that they can teach them to choose those valuable things and to avoid errors.²³ Old people too need friends who can take care of them and give them love.

Therefore, friendship holds cities together and that legislators take it more seriously than justice. Also if people are friends there is no need of justice, whereas people who are just need friendship in addition to justice. In a nutshell, in all just things, the most just of all seems to be fitted to friendship.²⁴

¹⁶ Plato, *The Republic*, 826.

¹⁷ Plato, *The Republic*, 846-850

¹⁸ Reeve, *Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics*, 87-90.

¹⁹ Reeve, *Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics*, 88.

²⁰ Reeve, *Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics*, 89.

²¹ Reeve, *Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics*, 89.

²² Reeve, *Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics*, 90.

²³ Ronald Polansky, ed., *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 319.

²⁴ Polansky, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, 324.

In conclusion friendship is not only something necessary but also something noble, since we praise those who love their friends and their friendship is something noble. These are the same people who are considered to be good men\women and friends. True friendship admits of differences in degrees. That is, all people who are virtuous come together despite of their uniqueness.²⁵

This friendship makes the members of the society to experience unity (harmony) and happiness. This harmonious co-existence helps to alleviate poverty because majority of the people becomes conscious of the suffering of their neighbours. As a consequence every action is performed for the common good of every member in the society.²⁶

2.2. The Theological Virtues

St. Thomas asserts that both the intellectual and cardinal virtues are natural and revealed in nature, while they are binding on everyone. As a Christian philosopher and theologian, he introduces three theological virtues which cannot be disregarded as far as human spiritual and physical development is concerned. In a matter of fact, they enhance or facilitate human growth that prepares him for his destiny and also assist man to reach perfection. These virtues are, faith, charity and hope.²⁷

They are regarded as supernatural and are distinct from other virtues because their object is God, and the accomplishment of the relationship between God, man and the universe at large.

- (a) **Faith:** Thomas teaches that faith is self-surrender to God. This happens or takes place when the mind knows the truth. God's essence and existence are identical to truth. Therefore, the object of faith is God or truth (Divine Truth).²⁸
- (b) **Hope:** hope is said to arise from merits, as regard the thing that is hoped for, in so far as we hope to attain happiness by means of the grace of God. Or as regards the act of the living hope. Therefore, merits of attaining hope flows from the grace alone.
- (c) **Charity:** this is the virtue which help us establish a loving relationship between God and the neighbours. St. Augustine asserts that charity is a virtue which when our affections are perfectly ordered, unites us to God, for by charity we love God. St. Thomas says that, charity is both the object of good and of the will. Therefore charity is in the will as its subject.²⁹

Thomas Aquinas asserts that:

Man is perfected by virtue, for those actions whereby he is directed to happiness. One kind of happiness is proportionate to human nature that is happiness to wit which man can obtain without divine assistance, that through natural principles. The other kind of happiness surpasses man's nature, and which man can obtain through the power of God alone. This happens when man participates in the life of Godhead which is found in the writing of the Holy Scriptures. Due to the fact that this happiness surpasses the capacity of the human nature, man natural principles which enable him to act well according to his capacity, do not suffice to direct man to this same happiness. Hence it is necessary for man to receive from God some additional principles, whereby he will be directed to super natural happiness, even as he is directed to his connatural end, by means of his natural principles, albeit not without divine assistance. These principles are called theological virtues.³⁰

Aquinas says that the object of theological virtues is God Himself, since He is the creator of everything, and as a consequence He is the end of all things. God therefore surpasses the knowledge of human reason.

²⁵ Polansky, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, 326.

²⁶ Polansky, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, 328.

²⁷ Aquinas, *Summa*, 851.

²⁸ Aquinas, *Summa*, 852.

²⁹ Aquinas, *Summa*, 852.

³⁰ Aquinas, *Summa*, 853.

What is the purposes of the intellectual, moral and theological virtues? According to Thomas, the purposiveness of these virtues is the holistic development of man or human beings so that they can attain perfection which will enable them to acquire that state of perfect happiness or a deeper union with God. At the same time, to help man eliminates vices in the society by being responsible and accountable to God and his fellow human beings.

Vices like corruption in our country which threatens the unity of this nation can only be fought by people becoming virtuous. There is no two ways about it. Thomas is very clear and precise that to eradicate corruption in the society members have to strive to live virtuous.

These virtues can be attained or acquired by learning and through experience within a given period of time. It is only when man has attained this level or stage of development that he is able to relate in harmony with his fellow men and women and creation at large.³¹

Thomas assert that at this level man demonstrate clearly that he has a destiny which has been ordained by a creator. In simple terms the end of man is God. Thomas teaches that for man to reach or achieve this holistic growth or development (that is the unfolding of the inner capacity of man), so that to reach his destiny, he must abide to laws provided by His creator, that is natural law and moral law. Natural laws governs the whole creation, creating order in the universe; where man as the apex of creation can interfere with natural law at his own expense because that creates disaster in the universe.³²

Good example is the globalization which man as conscious being is experiencing as a result of destroying ecosystem. Ecosystem means the community of living organisms (plants, animals and microbes) in conjunction with the non-living components of their environment (things like air, water and mineral soil). While the moral law or divine law is instituted chiefly in order to direct men to God. Apart from these two laws there is the human law which is instituted in order to direct men in relation to one another. Therefore moral laws assists man to have friendship with God and human laws creates that harmonious co-existence between human beings.³³

2.3. St. Thomas Aquinas on the Purpose of Laws in Man's Live

Thomas Aquinas teaches that, the law a dictate of reason as far as the ruler is concerned. This means that the subjects are governed using this law which creates order in the society. It is not the law that creates the order but rather observance of the laws by the subjects.

He asserts that:

The virtue of any subordinate thing consists in being well subordinated to that by which it is regulated; thus we see that virtue of the irascible (easily excited to anger) and concupiscible faculties consists in their being obedient to reason and accordingly the virtue of every subject consist on his being well subjected to his ruler. However, every law aims at being obeyed by those who are subject to it. Consequently, it is evident that the proper effect of the law is to its subject to their proper virtue; and since virtue is that which makes its subject good, it follows that the proper effect of law is to make those to whom it was given, good, either simply or in some particular respect. For if the intention of the lawgiver is fixed on the true good, which is the common good regulated according to divine justice, it follows that the effect of the laws is to make men good simply. If, however, the intention of the giver is fixed on that which is not simply good but useful or pleasurable to himself, or in the opposition to divine justice; then the law does not make men good simply, but in respect to that particular government. In this way good is found even in things that are bad of themselves: thus a man is called good thief, because he works in a way that is adapted to his end.³⁴

³¹ Aquinas, *Summa*, 996.

³² Aquinas, *Summa*, 999.

³³ John A. Coleman and William F. Ryan, eds., *Globalization and Catholic Social Thought* (New York: Orbis Books, 2005), 12.

³⁴ Aquinas, *Summa*, 1001.

This shows that Thomas was concerned that man as a creature of God has to live according to the dictates of the divine laws for him to achieve all missions that are entrusted to him by His creator. This entails making the universe a better place for creatures. Thomas believes that man cannot embark on this mission without the empowerment of God.

This shows that God's manifestation is in the intellectual being that have been entrusted to take care of creation for the common good. The creation or the universe makes man to wonder and helps him to understand his position in the universe.

In a nutshell, Thomas is teaching human beings that virtue is of twofold; that is, acquired and infused virtue. The actions of men contribute to both though in different ways. The intellectual and moral virtues, are acquired by our actions and they arise from certain natural principles pre-existing in us. While theological virtues are infused to us and as such we are directed to a supernatural end.³⁵

In claiming that both just and unjust laws make people virtuous in some sense, we can safely infer that Aquinas primarily intends human positive law since only this kind of law can be unjust. According to Aquinas, "Law is a dictate of reason commanding something."³⁶

Thus considered, law embodies the determination of reason as to the nature of what is good for man, and it is a command that is to be obeyed by those subject to it. Each of these aspects leads to virtue in different respects and by different means.³⁷

From these two aspects of law, therefore, when Aquinas considers the relationship between law and obedience to it, he distinguishes three ways a subject may obey a law, for example, either from virtue, fear, or as dictate of reason.³⁸

It is not always through the perfect goodness of virtue that one obeys the law, but sometimes it is through fear of punishment, and sometimes from the mere dictate of reason, which is a kind of beginning of virtue.

Thus, with respect to our specific problem, if virtue can be an effect of law, law must be able to be obeyed because of some principle other than virtue. That is, if law is to effect virtue, it must do so in those who do not already possess virtue. Aquinas, in the passage above, identifies the principles of obedience in those who do not yet possess virtue as fear and reason. For Aquinas, each aspect of law, for instance, as rational and as commanding, has a corresponding principle in the citizen subject to law, example reason and fear. As a result, each of these principles allows for the development of virtue in the citizen³⁹.

Therefore, the purpose of law is to assist man to attain that true maturity which makes him true custodian of the universe.

He asserts that God is the giver of the law, as a consequence the union between God and man becomes paramount as far as holistic development of man is concerned.

This union between God and man, can be regarded as vertical relationship that is, a relationship which exists between creator and a creature through voluntary or free decision of man to surrender himself to God. This becomes the pivot or the Centre of the driving force of man's achievement of his responsibility, while the horizontal relationship expresses the harmony of the creation (relationship between human beings themselves and the rest of creation).

³⁵Finnis, John, "Aquinas' Moral, Political and Legal Philosophy," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N.Zalta (ed.), URL=<https://Plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/aquinas-moral-polical>.>. (Accessed 3rd May 2019).

³⁶John, "Aquinas' Moral, Political and Legal Philosophy."

³⁷John, "Aquinas' Moral, Political and Legal Philosophy."

³⁸John, "Aquinas' Moral, Political and Legal Philosophy."

³⁹John, "Aquinas' Moral, Political and Legal Philosophy."

This makes man to experience happiness because of the harmonious co-existence with his fellow men and the rest of the creation. Also man grows towards self-realization or maturity, being a sign of awareness towards his destiny.

Aquinas asserts that this is achieved because of man observing the law which is something that pertains to reason. Since God is the giver of the law, then it means that, the extrinsic principle moving to good is God.⁴⁰

Therefore, God is the one who instructs human beings by means of his law and at the same time assist men and women by his grace. This happens because of the fact that God sustains man from the point of view of existential causality (existential order) which makes man to be dependent.⁴¹

2.3.1. Natural Law According to St. Thomas Aquinas

The natural law is promulgated by God by the very fact that God instilled it into man's mind so as to be known by him. A law is an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by him who has care for the community, and promulgated by Him.⁴²

The promulgation that takes place extends to future time by reason of the durability of the written characters, which means it is continually promulgated.

This gives man power to be the custodian of the universe. The whole creation is entrusted to him but he is part and partial of the same creation though unique because of rationality, a characteristic that makes him participate in the spiritual realm and physical realm. Therefore, man must use the things of the world in a responsible manner, because he is answerable to God. This becomes the function of moral law, in order for all these to be effective and achievable.⁴³

2.3.2. Moral Law According to St. Thomas Aquinas

Moral law or divine law is instituted chiefly in order to direct men and women to God. Thomas believes that human actions are good or evil. Moral actions are the acts of men which are performed or executed with full responsibility.⁴⁴

According to Thomas Aquinas, man must always be guided by the moral law so that he can live or act in line with the absolute good, which is the common good and more so the destiny of man.

This means that man has been ordained by God to live in harmony with one another. If all the individuals in the world adhere to this call, then it means that we shall all experience moral sobriety, because both vertical and horizontal relationships will be harmonized. If then, human beings live contrary to their calling it means that they will not achieve their mission.⁴⁵

St. Thomas asserts that:

Just as in every artificer there pre-exists a type of the things that are made by his art, so too in every governor there must exist the type of the order of those things that are to be done by those who are subject to his government. And just as the type of things yet to be made by art is called the art or exemplar of the products of that art in him who governs the acts of his subjects, bears the character of law. God by His wisdom is the creator of all things in relation to which he stands as the artificer to the products of his art. He governs all the acts and movements that are to be found in each single creature. The purposes of the law are to direct human acts by ordaining them

⁴⁰John, "Aquinas' Moral, Political and Legal Philosophy."

⁴¹Leo J. Elders, *The Metaphysics of being of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: E.J. Brill Publication, 1993), 92-93.

⁴² Aquinas, *Summa*, Vol. II, q, 90, Art. 4. 993-995.

⁴³ Aquinas, *Summa*, Vol. II, q, 90, Art. 996.

⁴⁴ Aquinas, *Summa*, Vol. II, q, 90, Art. 997.

⁴⁵ Aquinas, *Summa*, Vol. II, q, 90, Art. 997.

to the common good. This means that they are in themselves different, may be considered as one, according as they are ordained to one common thing. Wherefore the eternal law is the one, since it is the type of this order.⁴⁶

Therefore, in this article, Aquinas is teaching us that the whole creation belongs to God, where by man has been given the responsibility of taking care of creation, but not owning the creation because there are laws which are governing creation and man is part of that creation. Man has to live by the law because through him as the custodian of creation there is unity in the universe.⁴⁷

By accepting the law, man lives according to the will of His maker and therefore, despite of the multiplicity and diversity of things God unites all things, because of that very union which subsist between God and man.⁴⁸

For this to happen, man surrenders his will freely to God; so that the grace of God can lead man and transform him to be a true custodian. This means that man becomes faithful to his vocation or call.

Observing the current global situation, it appears things have fall apart. The moral decadency has gone too low for instance murder, theft of all kinds, corruption by those who are in the government and also citizens themselves. Many disasters are being experienced in the whole world and people are in a state of wonder. They are asking questions which can only be answered by way of transformation of the whole society. From our observation there is nothing wrong with world but almost everything has gone wrong with the societies of the world who are the custodian of the universe. It appears that many societies have lost the sense of reality or the truth, because they are not abiding to the moral laws or natural laws or even positive laws. As a result, many disasters are being experienced because there is no harmony of the vertical and horizontal relationship between God and man.

2.2.4 The Truth According to St. Thomas Aquinas

St. Thomas teaches that:

Truth is found in the intellect according as it apprehends a thing as it is; and in things according as they have been comfortable to an intellect. This is to the greatest degree found in God, because His being is not only conformed to His intellect, but it is the very act of His Intellect; and His act of understanding is the measure and the cause of every other being and of every other intellect, and He Himself is His own existence and act of understanding. Whence it follows not only that the truth is in Him, but that He is the Truth itself, and the sovereign and the first Truth.⁴⁹

The world itself was created by God, therefore creation is a reality. When the human mind fails to grasp this reality and live by it, by honoring the laws of God, disasters arise out of this dichotomy. That is, man who is outside the truth will always try to create his own false truth in order to comfort himself.

Since God is the Truth, man cannot create truth because the truth which is equated to God is beyond him. Trying to do this kind of action is absurdity. Due to this man lives in a lie, and creating association for his own comfort, for instance forming groups of trade whereby people are registered, enrolled and they end up merging into having their own identity. In these groups people are striving after a certain unity or a kind of unity which cannot be achieved through material gains.

As a consequence, societies have greatly lost the value of truth. Therefore, our world is no longer united, because both vertical and horizontal relationship are not there in spite of them being vital for any human development. That is the reason why societies are in agony, looking for a redeemer. Since when societies live without God the whole world becomes a victim due to the fact that man is the care taker of the creation.

Lack of this vital unity between man and God in universe is caused or linked to the existence of greedy persons who are amassing wealth to themselves with the purposes of controlling other people for their own selfishness

⁴⁶ Aquinas, *Summa*, Vol. II, q, 90, Art. 1008.

⁴⁷ Aquinas, *Summa*, Vol. II, q, 90, Art. 1010.

⁴⁸ Aquinas, *Summa*, Vol. II, q, 90, Art. 1010-1012.

⁴⁹ Aquinas, *Summa*, Vol. II, q, 91.

gains. This is the result of the world or man eradicating God in his life or in our own societies, whereby we have become too much materialistic to the extent there is a clear emphasis on having at the expense of being further interfering with the concept of intersubjectivity.⁵⁰ Since man wants to be happy, we cannot achieve this happiness at the expense of the majority of persons who are suffering due to rampant corruption in the world which we have a duty and obligation to take good care of both for us and the future generations. Happiness and true development becomes an illusion in such a situation for outside God there is no happiness.

This situation in the world has been prophesied by the late John Paul II, who shows this clearly in his document *Redeemer of Humankind*:

In his encyclical *Redemptoris Hominis* (Redeemer of Humankind), the Pope warned the world of becoming materialistic. He asserts that, what is in question is not just the multiplying of things, but the advancement of persons. It is not so much an issue of having more, but of being more. The danger is while making advances in its dominion over things, humanity might be subjected to the world, becoming the slave of things, of the economic system and of production. A purely materialistic civilization condemns humanity to such slavery, even though it might not be intentional. If we describe humanity's situation as far removed from the demands of the moral order, the exigencies of love, then we do that because all this is confirmed by well-known facts. The actual situation is marked by many differences historically explicable, but ethically uncontrolled. The rich, highly developed societies have a surplus of goods, while many other societies are suffering from hunger. The freedom of one group limits the freedom of others. We all know this gigantic development of the parable of the rich banqueter and the poor Lazarus. So wide spread is this occurrence that it brings into question the financial, monetary, and other mechanisms that support the world economy. We have here the drama that can leave no one indifferent. The one who profits on one hand and suffers on the other hand is always the human person. Add to this the misuse of the goods by the rich, the fever of inflation, and the plague of unemployment. They are further symptoms of the moral disorder in the world today requiring daring creative steps to preserve people's authentic dignity.⁵¹

This prophesy of the pope reflects our situation in the world today. Whereby majority of people in this world have become poor as a result of corruption where minorities have amassed the public funds.

Despite the fact that minorities of the societies have amassed wealth; it is evident that they are not happy, for happiness has a negligible chance to be derived from material realities. This problem cannot be solved from external but from internal. It requires man to enter into the self, and look at himself from the inside (introspection) which facilitates his transcendence.

Since the vital analogical relationship between God and man is not there, the society is experiencing that brokenness in so many ways manifested through the daily activities. This means that our world has alienated itself from God who sustains the whole creation, by the fact that He is the creator or the author of life. Due to the fact that God is the foundation of the creation, He is the truth, because His very Essence is identical to His Existence. Therefore, the brokenness of our world can only come to an end if man accepts to live in the light of God who is the sole Truth.

Aquinas teaches that spiritual experiences can include being connected to a large reality, yielding a more comprehensive self, joining with other individuals or the human community and with the nature or the cosmos, centered in the divine life that protects, sustains and perpetuates.

Thomas says that, human being's realization depends on his awareness of the presence of God; because in existential order we depend on God totally for He is the first cause that is uncaused. Therefore, as the apex of creation we are given that responsibility of making the world a better place for the generation that will come after us. This mission cannot be accomplished outside God, because everything begins in God and ends in God.

⁵⁰ Cf. Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, trans. Katharine Farrer (New York: Robert MacLehose and Company Limited, 1949).

⁵¹ Joseph G. Donders, ed., *John Paul II, The Encyclicals in Every Day Language* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 11-12.

Thomas believe that God is the foundation of our morality, and there can never be a meaningful development achievable without spirituality being the background or foundation of this human development either physical or inner development core components towards holistic human development.⁵² Due to this factor, morality cannot be separated from people way of live. Therefore, the virtues become the foundation of our moral lives by choice.

Conclusion

This paper has looked at St. Thomas Aquinas' understanding of virtues from the background of Aristotle's moral philosophy as a foundation for the social approach to the vice of corruption in the world that is threatening all of us irrespective of our colour, religion, political affiliation, gender or social status. It has been realized that, virtues from Aquinas' understanding play a unique and worthwhile role in the eradication of corruption since this vice is first and foremost a moral issue of which virtues facilitate in the formation of our characters as second nature as a form of perfecting our personalities.

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⁵² Aquinas, *Summa*, q. 20, art. 2, 681.