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Heather M. Erb

The Perennial Wisdom of St. Thomas Aquinas and the Great Books Tradition

It is sometimes said that Aquinas's contribution to the philosophy of education was his development of a notion of intellectual discipline through his powerful philosophical and theological enterprise,[1] while he doesn't develop systematic methods or forms of pedagogy, nor does he define a liberal education with the rigor and scope of a John Henry Newman.[2] Aquinas's thoughts on teaching and learning, including the necessary virtues and how grace informs the process, in some ways anticipate Newman's ideal of a general or liberal education and the philosophic habit of mind that results from it. Both knew that any activity is to be pursued in a way appropriate to its end or purpose,[3] and

Heather M. Erb — Great Books Academy, USA
e-mail: erb-viator@comcast.net ▪ ORCID: no data

[1] "Education: Thomist Philosophy," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Available online—see the section *References* for details.

[2] In *The Idea of a University* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1959), John Henry Cardinal Newman describes liberal education in terms of its contrast to servile education and in terms of the cultivation of a "philosophical habit of mind" involving "freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation, and wisdom" (Disc. 5.1).

[3] In discussing the teaching tools of the medieval *quaestio* and *disputatio*, Aquinas notes that "any activity is to be pursued in a way appropriate to its purpose" (*Quaestiones Quodlibetales* IV, q. 9, a. 3: "quilibet actus exequendus est secundum quod convenit ad suum finem" [ed. P. Fr. Raymundi Spiazzi (Marietti: Romae, 1949), 83]). Cf. Newman, *The Idea of a University*, Disc. 5.2: "[Liberal education] has a very tangible, real, and sufficient end, though the end cannot be divided from that knowledge itself. Knowledge is capable of being its own end. Such is the constitution of the human mind, that any kind of knowledge, if it be really such, is its own reward. And if this is true of

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both claimed a transcendent end of man, which practically speaking, puts education under the aegis of Mary, whom Aquinas calls "the mother of true wisdom," and "the scholar or disciple of the Child."[4] Indeed, Aquinas's views on teaching and learning are developed in the theological context of creation and redemption, and against the background of Jesus the teacher at various stages of His earthly life, and in his various Prologues, which give overviews of works' structures and purposes.[5] And as Aquinas says in *Puer Iesus*, his Sermon on the *Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple*, where our Lord is presented as a model for teenagers, we wonder at eternity advancing in age, at truth advancing in wisdom, and are amazed in finding that we are to advance in grace with Grace Himself.[6]

My aim is to show how Thomas's thoughts on education, permeated as they are with his metaphysics and theology, indicate the fittingness of matching the perennial wisdom with the Great Books tradition used in classical liberal arts education. Both are characterized by a communal inquiry, the object of which is the attainment of truth, under the guidance of the imagination, the heart, and reason, and both are complementary instruments of the special Providence by which we direct

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all knowledge, it is true also of that special Philosophy, which I have made to consist in a comprehensive view of truth in all its branches, of the relations of science to science, of their mutual bearings, and their respective values . . ."

[4] Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels Collected out of the Works of the Fathers*, vol. III, part I: *St. Luke* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1843), 103. Cf. Newman, *The Idea of a University*, Disc. 5.10: "We attain to heaven by using this world well, though it is to pass away; we perfect our nature, not by undoing it, but by adding to it what is more than nature, and directing it towards aims higher than its own."

[5] For an indication of some of the contexts and discussions of education in terms of teaching in Aquinas, see Vivian Boland, "St. Thomas's sermon *Puer Iesus*: a neglected source for his understanding of teaching and learning," *New Blackfriars* 88, no. 1016 (July 2007): 457–470.

[6] Vivian Boland, *Puer Iesu*s, part 2 (Sermo), in *Thomas Aquinas: The Academic Sermons*, trans. Mark-Robin Hoogland (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 88.

one another to our proper end. The "fitting order of learning," for him consists in logic, mathematics, natural science, moral science, and metaphysics, in that order, aiming at the study of first causes or divine science, which is the end of man.[7] But where do the points of contact lie, and how should the perennial wisdom both govern yet be informed by the search for truth through the variety of narratives comprising the Great Books?

It's a basic metaphysical fact that without a thing's essential principles, it cannot be.[8] What are the essential principles of a Christian liberal education? While answers to this are neither novel, nor simplistic, they need revisiting in the wake of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's lament over the de-Hellenization of the West,[9] and, by implication of the Church and its organs of teaching. Combining key elements of Aquinas's thought with the interdisciplinary scope that a program of Great Books of the West provides, I will show, the directed impulsion and the fruitful exchange or "swing" needed in liberal education such as Cardinal Newman, for example, envisioned it, in his *Idea of a University* 166 years ago.

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[7] Thomas Aquinas, *Super librum De causis expositio*, Prooemium, no. 5–6: "It must be, therefore, that the ultimate happiness of man which can be had in this life, consists in the consideration of the first causes—since that least which can be known of them, is more lovable and noble than all those things which are able to be known of lower things, as is evident from the words of the Philosopher in *De Partibus Animalium* I (644b32–34). Now accordingly as this knowledge is perfected in us after this life, a man is made perfectly happy, according to the words of the Gospel: *This is eternal life*, *that they should know thee*, *the true*, *living God*." Available online—see the section *References* for details. Cf. *S.Th.*, I, q. 1, a. 5, ad 1; I–II, q. 66, a. 5, ad 3; II–II, q. 180, a. 7, ad 3.

[8] *S.C.G.*, II, cap. 30, on the principles as necessary components in things.

[9] Pope Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason, and the University: Memories and Reflections," Regensburg Address (Sept. 12, 2006): "The thesis that the critically purified Greek heritage forms an integral part of Christian faith has been countered by the call for a de-Hellenization of Christianity—a call which has more and more dominated theological discussions since the beginning of the modern age . . ." Available online—see the section *References* for details.

The Great Books are the best expressions of the foundations of Western culture, and according to Adler, they have perennial significance, inexhaustible content, and broad relevance to the ideas that have formed Western civilization.[10] Understanding the nature of an exchange between Aquinas and the Great Books involves discerning ways in which Aquinas's thoughts on teaching and learning can inform the Great Books' "dialectical" method. It also involves understanding how Thomas's allegiance to truth, while it might be taught in a doctrinal way, under what Adler calls the "doctrinal" method, is in fact fitted well to the Great Books tradition's "dialectical method."[11] As Adler puts it, "finding contradictions in a book" (and between books) "puts one on the highroad to the pursuit of truth."[12] In this he follows Aristotle, who noted that no one is able to attain the truth adequately, and while we do not collectively fail, everyone says something true about the nature of things.[13] From Chenu's landmark[14] to Jordan's work on

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[10] Mortimer J. Adler, "Selecting Works for the 1990 Edition of the Great Books of the Western World." Available online—see the section *References* for details.

[11] Mortimer Adler contrasts the "doctrinal" and "dialectical" approaches to the Great Books in his "Great Books, Democracy, and Truth," in his *Reforming Education* (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1989), xxvii–xxviii: "The doctrinal method is an attempt to read as much truth as possible (and no errors) into the work of a particular author, usually devising a special interpretation, or by discovering the special secret of an author's intention . . . it is the opposite of the right method to be used in conducting great books seminars in schools and colleges where the aim is learning to think and the pursuit of truth . . . The doctrinal teaching of disciples enables them to learn what the master thinks. The dialectical teaching of students enables them to think for themselves . . . the doctrinal method is most appropriate in reading a sacred book . . . But it is totally inappropriate in liberal education . . ." Here, Adler cites Leo Strauss as an exemplar of the doctrinal method.

[12] Adler, "Great Books, Democracy and Truth," in *Reforming Education*, xxvi.

[13] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, bk. II, 993a30–b4. Available online—see the section *References* for details.

[14] Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Introduction a l'étude de Saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Montreal: Institut d'Études Médiévales, 1950), translated by Albert M. Landry and Dominic Hughes as *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas* (Chicago: Regnery, 1964).

the plurality of discourses,[15] and much of *Ressourcement* Thomism, we are reminded of the wide berth Aquinas gives to the pedagogy of error in his *quaestio* and *disputatio* method.[16]

Adler's teaching of the Great Books uses a method of discursive rationality that is familiar to Thomists. We are rational, in opposition to purely intuitive, Aquinas says, due to the weakness of our "intellectual light." The way of reason is from what is known to what is unknown as from effect to cause, and this process stems from our being incarnate minds, dependent on lowly sense experience.[17]

In this regard, discussions on the broad insights about human nature expressed in the Great Books can bridge the distance set up by enthusiasts of "criticism" and the objects of their inquiry. In the academy, texts are often selected according to their perceived ideological use. Relativistic, often anti-theoretical criticism perpetuates the view that the task of an academic discipline is not to find out about reality, but rather to measure how we *speak* about reality.[18] Opposed to this is

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[15] Mark D. Jordan, *Ordering Wisdom: The Hierarchy of Philosophical Discourses in Aquinas* (South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986).

[16] Cf. Adler, "Great Books, Democracy, and Truth," in *Reforming Education*, xxiii: "I think it necessary to examine truth and error in the great books, and their bearing on the proper way to conduct discussions of them, which is the dialectical method, not the doctrinal style employed by Allan Bloom and his teacher, Leo Strauss."

[17] Aquinas, *In 2 Sent.*, d. 3, q. 1, a. 6; *S.Th.*, I, q. 58, a. 3, for example. Cf. Jan Aertsen, *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas's Way of Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 194.

[18] The turn to subjectivity in academic disciplines affects the sciences as much as it does the humanities. With the rise of quantum physics, the distance between the observer and the observed and the claim to objectivity that this implies, is replaced by the "uncertainty principle" of Heisenberg. In this spirit, academics often pride themselves in their presumed aversion to tradition, theory, and the speculative intellect. Yet even before Alasdair MacIntyre's insights concerning the inescapability of tradition in the discipline of philosophy (especially ethics), Étienne Gilson argued against the absurdity of a traditionless and thus "impartial" perspective, built on the sands of subjectivism. In the medieval West, for example, there was no *ex nihilo* truth invented by any one person or nationality. Rather, the plurality of intellectual cultures unified through receiving a preceding tradition and intellectual context. See Étienne Gilson, "Medieval Universal-

the discipline of the Great Books, which bypasses what Adler calls the more "sophistic" and scholarly approach which aims exclusively at understanding and critiquing the author. In contrast, Great Books practitioners cast their net much deeper and wider, adopting what Adler calls the "philosophical" approach, which aims at sifting the truth from the errors found in a text, as it is informed (or not) by the universal experiences that define human nature.[19] In this, they affirm what Gilson calls the "sound rationalism" of the Greeks, who affirmed that the human mind is right only when it conforms to reality.[20]

In addition to reckoning with the roles of realism and the sound rationalism based on our common human nature, a description of the alliance between the Great Books and Aquinas must also account for the groundswell of objections and misunderstandings about an education by way of Great Books. Reversing what Robert Hutchins once referred to as the education of "rudderless rabbits" who roam freely through the enclosed field of the modern university, nibbling idly on poisonous weeds, or who sail on a sea of inexperience "without chart, compass, or even rudder,"[21] entails clearing the ground of objections.

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ism and Its Present Value," in *The Wisdom of Catholicism*, ed. Anton Pegis (New York: Random House, 1949), 899.

[19] Mortimer J. Adler, "Two Approaches to the Authors of the Great Books," in *The Great Ideas Today: 1986*, ed. Mortimer Adler (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1986), 181–182. Yet, Adler is aware of the benefits of a scholarly approach to the Great Books, as well. He notes that a focus on the intentions and expressions of a particular author will require studying not just one, but his entire corpus, and that acquiring a scholarly knowledge of a work (its history, reception, interpretations) serves as a beneficial prelude to wrestling with the philosophical content and implications of it (*ibid.*, 181). The danger, however, in emphasizing the scholarly over the philosophical approach is the easy substitution of coherence and consistency for the deeper and more difficult truths (or falsehoods) in a text.

[20] Gilson, "Medieval Universalism and Its Present Value," 905.

[21] Robert M. Hutchins, *Education for Freedom* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1943), 90.

Forging the Great Books/Aquinas alliance also involves an adept handling of the tools of learning, namely, knowing the place of the intellect, the will, and the passions, and the key principles of the education of free minds. Interweaving insights about man and his end with the Western treasury of literature, history, philosophy and science provided in the Great Books tradition, we will see, furthers Newman's ideal of the "philosophic habit" cultivated by a good liberal education—something distinct from knowing a particular area of study or discipline, and closer to what he calls a "view" of the world grounded in the reality of things.[22]

In the beginning of his widely known *De remediis utriusque fortunae* ("On Remedies for Good and Bad Fortune"), Petrarch says that nothing helps one relieve the burden of the human condition more than conversations with wise men, and "the continual reading of the records of noble writers which are a living fountain of sane counsel on the earth."[23] The ancient writers are spoken of as guides in a storm:

> In the midst of souls' perpetual billows, like so many bright stars affixed to the firmament of truth, like so many pleasant and happy breezes, so many industrious and skillful sailors, they show us the port of peace, move there the slow sails of our will, and guide the rudder of the wavering soul until, tossed about by such storms, it at last steadies and tempers its deliberations.[24]

To use another analogy from the active life, the Aquinas/Great Books alliance has its parallel in the balanced achievement of harmony and direction that a horseman experiences through the classical art of dressage. A robust liberal arts education, arguably, consists in a delicate harmony between sound philosophical principles and the spiritual free

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[22] See note 3 above.

[23] Petrarch, quoted in Robert E. Proctor, *Education's Great Amnesia*: *Reconsidering the Humanities from Petrarch to Freud* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1988), 151. Petrarch died in 1374.

[24] *Ibid.*

play unleashed by contemplation of, and conversations on the literature, philosophy, history, religion and science found in the Great Books. Newman would agree with the analogy which lends motion and play to the tranquil study of ideas emerging from the dialectic between the Great Books and philosophical rigor.[25] The contact and sympathy between teacher and student, and between the two traditions, mirrors the silent exchange between horse and rider in what Germans call *Schwung* —the relaxed, supple and free swinging momentum of energy which is the goal of riding, the way the horse should go along by the gentle direction of the rider's aids.[26]

How this unspoken dialogue resembles the student's own internal conversation and his spoken dialogue with others, those reflections and exchanges of mind and heart that form a liberal education in Newman's sense, lies partly in the meaning we can assign to "motion" as educators. One mark of a mind formed by a liberal education is its entering into the mobility or interconnection and direction of ideas, which, if they are the fruit of union with reality and not phantoms, turn the hu-

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[25] See, for example, Newman, *The Idea of a University*, Disc. 7.7: "In the cultivation of literature is found that common link, which, among the higher and middling departments of life, unites the jarring sects and subdivisions into one interest, which supplies common topics, and kindles common feelings, unmixed with those narrow prejudices with which all professions are more or less infected. The knowledge, too, which is thus acquired, expands and enlarges the mind, excites its faculties, and calls those limbs and muscles into freer exercise which, by too constant use in one direction, not only acquire an illiberal air, but are apt also to lose somewhat of their native play and energy. And thus, without directly qualifying a man for any of the employments of life, it enriches and ennobles all. Without teaching him the peculiar business of any one office or calling, it enables him to act his part in each of them with better grace and more elevated carriage . . ."

[26] Walter Zettl, *Dressage in Harmony: From Basic to Grand Prix* (Boonsboro, Md.: Half Halt Press, 1998), 11, 13: "In German, we use the word *Schwung* to describe the proper forward movement of the horse. It is like a swing arcing forward. The concept includes swinging through the back and a powerful elasticity of the steps . . . It requires a soft, giving hand that keeps connection with the mouth . . . Only when the horse has *Schwung* can one ride in a relaxed rhythm, with contact, supple, straight and collected."

man person to his proper end. Just as the horse's energy, if unblocked, relaxed, and free, moves from his powerful hindquarters towards the reins and back into the rider's hands, there to be gently channeled, so the rich and energizing content of the Great Books naturally propels a young person's reasoning by furnishing his imagination with examples and ideals.

Through conversation among friends, ideas are, as Newman said, pushed up to their principles, but only after being ruminated on by the heart, which is then lightly directed by a kind of collaborative reason. Eventually, the student gains a worldview—not a set of facts or information, and not Newman's vice of "viewiness," a kind of parroting of theories without experience or love, but a "view" of things, a philosophical habit.[27] And back to riding for a moment—without the relaxed momentum of *Schwung*, harmony, impulsion, and grace are lost,[28] and riding becomes the job of completing school figures, or circles, corners, and turns, on a map. So, without the balance and engagement of sound principles with the breath of exempla breathed in the literary word, the historical situation, or the struggle of imagination, liberal education becomes merely a series of propositions and theories that gorge the memory without moving the will or touching the heart, in the end, a malle-

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[27] Newman, *The Idea of a University*, Preface: "When the intellect has once been properly trained and formed to have a connected view or grasp of things, it will display its powers with more or less effect according to its particular quality and capacity in the individual. In the case of most men it makes itself felt in the good sense, sobriety of thought, reasonableness, candour, self-command, and steadiness of view, which characterize it . . . Someone, however, will perhaps object that I am but advocating that spurious philosophism, which shows itself in what, for want of a word, I may call 'viewiness', when I speak so much of the formation, and consequent grasp, of the intellect. It may be said that the theory of University Education, which I have been delineating, if acted upon, would teach youths nothing soundly or thoroughly, and would dismiss them with nothing better than brilliant general views about all things whatever . . ."

[28] Zettl, *Dressage in Harmony*, 5: "The goal of all dressage riding should be to bring the horse and rider together in harmony. By harmony, I mean a oneness of balance, purpose and athletic expression . . . harmony . . . requires sensitive communication . . ."

able tool in the hands of clever agendas that conceal both ignorance and the truth.

Further, the exchange of teaching and learning in Aquinas is one dominated by a form of friendship, since it is grounded in trust and a common love. Forming a person by a communal inquiry into the great ideas not only grounds him in the virtues of study, but by reversing the fragmentation of the modern self, builds an alternative to the false and narcissistic intellectual community of anti-civilization. A community of participation, then, is formed by the classical therapies of commitment which know the disorienting therapy of the modern self for what it is, namely one which MacIntyre tells us “knows no other morality than the expression of its own desires and principles.”[29] Authentic community is built on *universal* experiences, which defy the Humean vision of the mind as a kind of theatre in which an infinite variety of perceptions make their appearance, then pass into nothingness, without identity, order, or lasting effect.[30]

Education and the Order of Providence

Aquinas develops his thoughts on teaching and learning, interestingly, within a theological context of the divine and angelic minds, while considering the order of the universe. At the beginning of *Contra Gentiles*,[31] the pursuit and teaching of wisdom is linked to the order of Providence by an argument that the end of creation itself is truth, because its origin is mind. The ultimate end of the universe, he argues, must be “the good of an intellect—or truth” since the end of a thing is

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[29] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 68.

[30] David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), bk. I, part IV, section 6: “Of Personal Identity,” 252–253.

[31] *S.C.G.*, I, cap. 1.

intended by its author, and the first mover is an intellect. Creation itself is God's first form of teaching, then and created minds participate in the contemplation and speech about that truth in teaching.

The order of providence is not that of a deist watchmaker but one in which God governs and guides things in specific ways,[32] conserving them in being and giving them powers by which they affect other creatures. Angels can enlighten humans,[33] interfere with our senses and imagination,[34] but cannot change our will.[35] Man, a participant in providence,[36] cooperates with God's plan in understanding and freedom, and men can teach another by providing the help of propositions and examples, and by pointing out to each other the order of principles to conclusions, which is a kind of strengthening of our power to know.[37] In another way, he can reveal to others, including angels, the secrets of his heart, while in their preaching, the apostle taught the angels some divine mysteries.[38]

God also providentially gives forms their powers to reach their ends, and permits some creatures a share in conducting other creatures to their ends. The power of knowing is not given to an agent beyond us, as Averroists would have it in the one world intellect, nor is it merely the power of remembering, as Plato had it in his view that our souls are really sleeping angels,[39] for these approaches deny the gratuitous quality of providence either by misconceiving our place in things, or by emp-

[32] *S.Th.*, I, q. 103–104.
[33] *S.Th.*, I, q. 111, a. 1.
[34] *S.Th.*, I, q. 111, a. 3–4.
[35] *S.Th.*, I, q. 111, a. 2.
[36] *S.Th.*, I–II, q. 91, a. 2.
[37] *S.Th.*, I, q. 117, a. 1.
[38] *S.Th.*, I, q. 117, a. 2.
[39] On this description of Plato's view, see Jacques Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1943), 30.

tying out empirical experience of its value.[40] Thomas's idea of teaching as a tool of providence stems from his idea of just what "acquiring knowledge" means. All knowledge, he tells us in *De Veritate*,[41] is derived from general pre-existing principles in us (*primae conceptiones intellectus*), namely, our understanding of being and unity. These principles exist in us in the active sense, which allows us to acquire knowledge independently, through discovery. Learning by instruction occurs when an external agent assists nature, in a way analogous to medicine, which effects a cure by strengthening nature. So also, the student is led to his proper end by the teacher, who causes knowledge in him by assisting his own natural reason. This occurs through "setting before the pupil signs of intelligible things" by which he comes to know,[42] where the teacher is a ministerial agent in the art cooperating with nature.[43]

The theological dimension of the act of teaching and learning goes beyond the recognition that the end of the universe is truth. Because the natural principles of knowing are implanted in us by God as a reflection of the uncreated truth, God alone teaches interiorly and principally, just as nature alone heals interiorly and principally.[44] The human teacher is an artist, showing in others the process by which he himself acquired knowledge of the unknown, and he is one who waits

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[40] On this, see, e.g., Vivian Boland, "The Healing Work of Teaching: Thomas Aquinas and Education," in *Towards the Intelligent Use of Liberty: Dominican Approaches to Education*, ed. Gabrielle Kelly and Kevin Saunders (Adelaide, Australia: ATF Press, 2014), 33f., and Vivian Boland, "Truth, Knowledge and Communication: Thomas Aquinas on the Mystery of Teaching," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 19, no. 3 (2006): 292–293.

[41] *De Ver.*, q. 11, a. 1.

[42] *Ibid.*, q. 11, a. 1, ad 11.

[43] Cf. Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads*, 30.

[44] *De Ver.*, q. 11, a. 1.

on an unquantifiable mystery intrinsic to the awakening of insight in those sparked by love.[45]

The intimacy of teacher and student may be an instance of instrumental causality, but also has the mark of friendship, which, according to Aquinas, involves the sharing of one's secrets. The teacher's words, he says, are "more proximately disposed to cause knowledge [even] than things outside the soul."[46] As teachers of this kind, the Great Books are apt examples of Thomist pedagogy. When a teenager in our classes encounters Tolstoy's Prince André lying mortally wounded on the battlefield at Austerlitz in *War and Peace* looking at the lofty, infinite sky, and recognizing for the first time his true place in things, if he listens intently, he comes to know how he too can "ascend to the heavens of experience, and love, and err, and repent, and glimpse for a second the meaning of his own life."[47] When he watches Shakespeare's Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice* confessing to Antonio that what he owes is lost, and realizes with him that love involves risking all against a world deceived with ornament, he feeds the early seeds of conscience within, taking up the task of morality by joining it to the hazards of love. He recognizes that not only his own freedom, but that of the other must be confirmed in the truth to be good. By comparing the mercy of Achilles with that of Portia, he gives his own moral judgments the weight of the real and makes the otherwise sterile bear fruit through his own passive receptivity. So, what happens through the symbolic mode where the teacher and learner meet is not mere transference of informa-

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[45] In "Aquinas's Views on Teaching" (*New Blackfriars* 82, no. 961 [2001]: 111), Patrick Quinn likens Aquinas's views on teaching as a kind of awakening, to Gadamer's notion that teaching elicits a quality of mystery found in therapeutic relationships, and to Marcel's view that interpersonal presence generates an element of mystery that is e-lusive and enigmatic.

[46] *De Ver.*, q. 11, a. 1, ad 11.

[47] Cf. Alexander Nemser, "The World Writing," *The New Republic* (December 31, 2007). Available online—see the section *References* for details.

tion, because it is the learner's affectivity and will, not just his intellect, which is raised from potency to act, or awakened.[48]

Theology and Dispositions

As an Aristotelian, Thomas knew that virtues are what make a thing perform its function well, and so are necessary to the act of learning. Not only moral virtues such as docility, which is a part of prudence, and patience and perseverance, as forms of courage, as well as honesty, a form of justice, but also the special virtue of *studiositas*, a form of temperance, regulate, direct, and balance our desire to know the good and the true.[49]

In addition to the moral virtues, there are at least four dispositions Thomas would add as conditions of success in education, which the Great Books communal inquiry approach provides. These dispositions have a theological pedigree found in his Biblical commentaries that elevates the vocation of teaching to a level of community and the heart, in addition to its intellectual dimension. The first is willingness to be part of a discipline within a community which is "on the way" to a destination. This is analogous to the religious state, which is, says Thomas, a "school and exercise for tending to perfection"[50] involving obedience, where those on an intellectual "way" are invited to undertake a common apprenticeship to truth. When lit by the fire of charity, these disciples of reason can even help their teachers grow towards

[48] Cf. *De Ver.*, q. 11, a. 1, ad 6: "We do not say that a teacher communicates knowledge to the pupil, as though the knowledge which is in the teacher is numerically the same as that which arises in the pupil. It is rather that the knowledge which arises in the pupil through teaching is similar to that which is in the teacher, and this was raised from potency to act . . ."

[49] E.g., *S.Th.*, II–II, q. 166–167; cf. Boland, "Truth, Knowledge and Communication," 303–304.

[50] *S.Th.*, II–II, q. 186, a. 5.

happiness, in the same way as the seed of a great tree is virtually greater than an actual small tree, as Thomas says in comparing some men to angels.[51]

The second disposition a student needs is trust. Aristotle said that the disciple must believe,[52] and the student must trust in the reliability and knowledge of his teacher. "How," Thomas asks, "would anyone be able to live unless he believed someone?,"[53] and in his *Commentary on John*, learning involves accepting the words of the teacher, and love's learning, in addition to the intellect's hearing. Mary's question to the angel shows the student's zeal to learn follows on accepting the Word—love leads to knowledge of the truth, as the Holy Spirit teaches us the truth about the Son. This second disposition of trust overturns Aristotle's notion that the inequality of teacher and student bars friendship. On the basis of trust, and the sharing of secrets that marks friendship, students, like the disciples of Christ who know all that has been revealed to Him, go out to become teachers of the world.[54] On the side of the teacher, this means listening a great deal, allowing and not crushing what Maritain calls the "timid sproutings" of his soul.[55]

The third disposition concerns the teacher, and is modeled on Christ, Whose every act and gesture, whose life, teaches us by example. Jesus teaches while washing the disciples' feet, but teaches also like a

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[51] *S.Th.*, I, q. 117, a. 2, ad 3.

[52] Aristotle, *Sophistical Refutations*, 2.165b3, quoted in *S.Th.*, II–II, q. 2, a. 3.

[53] Thomas Aquinas, *In Symbolum Apostolorum, scilicet "Credo in Deum" expositio*, Prologus, #866. Cf. *The Sermon-Conferences of St. Thomas Aquinas on the Apostles' Creed*, trans. and ed. Nicholas Ayo (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 23: "If everyone were willing to believe only those things that they might know with certitude, they would not be able to live in this world."

[54] John 6:12, and Thomas Aquinas, *Super 6 Ioannem*, lectio 1, #864. Available online—see the section *References* for details.

[55] Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads*, 43.

master, while sitting.[56] So our souls know and understand when our minds reach a state of rest—that is why he repeatedly places first philosophy or divine science almost last in the order of pedagogy.[57] While learning is a laborious movement from potency to act, it flows from love, and through inner tranquility and peace.

The fourth disposition marks the teacher, and then by extension, the student, and seems to be in tension with the third. Augustine's image of Jesus on the Cross as a *magister* on his chair teaches us what it means to abide in suffering in the service of truth. We are encouraged to ask this most excellent doctor and teacher questions about the place of love in serving truth and to recognize that this form of teaching is the highest, and imprinted directly on the hearts of his hearers.[58] Whether in the poetic mode of parables, or in questions to Peter and the disciples which are designed to provoke the silence where spiritual hearing is possible, Jesus places us in a kind of watchful waiting and active readiness—what von Balthasar calls "the moist loam" in which He imprints Himself.[59]

One question is how these theologically inspired dispositions, which paradoxically serve as both conditions and ends of education,

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[56] Aristotle, *Physics*, bk. 7, part 3; Aquinas, *In De anima*, bk. 1, lectio 1, #125 (cf. Boland, "Truth, Knowledge and Communication," 301).

[57] On the order of pedagogy in Aquinas, see, for example, Pierre H. Conway and Benedict M. Ashley, *The Liberal Arts in St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Dominican Fathers, Province of St. Joseph, 1959), 46, quoting the "fivefold order of learning" found in *In de Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 4. This pedagogical pathway starts with the care of the body, moves to the moral virtues, followed by the intellectual virtues, and the art of thinking or logic, mathematics, natural philosophy, and moral philosophy; last in line is divine science or metaphysics, subordinated only to the theology of Sacred Scripture, ordered to our final end.

[58] See Thomas's question on whether the teaching of Christ ought to have been in writing, or in action: *S.Th.*, III, q. 42, a. 4.

[59] Von Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord: Theological Aesthetic*, vol. 1, cited in Raymond Gawronski, *Word and Silence: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Spiritual Encounter between East and West* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 115.

relate to the aims of education as envisaged by Maritain.[60] While Aquinas's thoughts on teaching are developed in a theological context, Maritain views formal education as only *indirectly* affecting the will, and as tilling the soil for moral development, by concentrating the intellect and practical reason, so there seems to be a tension.[61] Wisdom is gained, Maritain implies, less through method than by spiritual experience, and intuition and love are gift and freedom, not the result of training or even education.[62] In this he concurs with Aquinas that in a sense, God is our only teacher, because He moves us interiorly—examples give way to being led "by Another," and often to where you do not want to go—calling us to be a true original, and not a copy.[63] He also admits that the knowledge, strength of judgment and moral virtues by which we attain the conquest of our spiritual freedom, are found in addressing the person as an image of God, which transcends his individuality.[64] So, communal inquiry into the Great Ideas derails both pragmatism's and intellectualism's "progressive animalization" of consciousness by enlarging our spiritual energies and leading them towards a contemplative end.

Maritain also lists several natural dispositions in the learner that are needed, and which are fostered by the Great Books approach. These are first, the love of truth, good and justice, and a simplicity and openness with regard to existence. To learn truly is to be a being "who exists gladly, is unashamed of existing, stands upright in existence, and for whom to be and to accept the natural limitations of existence are mat-

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[60] Outlined in his *Education at the Crossroads*.

[61] *Ibid.*, 27–28, where he says that the teacher only indirectly teaches morality, by focusing on avoiding a deformation of the will by the imagination and passions.

[62] *Ibid.*, 23.

[63] *Ibid.*, 36.

[64] *Ibid.*, 8.

ters of equally simple assent."[65] This basic priority of nature to grace reflects his view that "a child of man must be first a good animal in exhibiting the features of . . . gentleness proper to humanity."[66] These existential conditions ground his fidelity to work, to the uprooting of evils, and to developing his interiority. They are mirrored by the teacher's generosity, in affirming the mysterious identity of the child's soul, which is unknown to himself and which, Maritain says, no techniques can reach or formulas express.[67] A child's intuitive power, he says, is liberated by encountering figures in the Great Books, where he struggles with the inner life of a given person, and works of the imagination must precede rational inquiry into their logic—we must first hear the Mozart sonata, and be delighted in it, before we understand the score.[68] "Beauty," he reminds us, "makes intelligibility pass unawares through sense-awareness."[69] In discussing Adler, Maritain likens the young's experience of the Great Books to a puppy gnawing on the marrow of a large bone—being quickened and delighted by their truth and beauty despite being unable yet to perfectly sharpen their mind's distinction of the true and false they convey.[70]

The Role of Human Conversation

Not only is the teacher an instrument awakening our natural principles towards their human end; conversation itself under the guidance of the Great Books, nurtures a way of seeing the world differently than from the lens of amusement or distraction, or even from rigorous phi-

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[65] *Ibid.*, 37.
[66] *Ibid.*
[67] *Ibid.*, 41.
[68] *Ibid.*, 44, note 52.
[69] *Ibid.*, 61.
[70] *Ibid.*, 70, note 71, on Adler's address "The Order of Learning" (1941).

losophical proof. Conversation, says Aquinas, in commenting on Aristotle, "builds the city" (*communicatio facit civitatem*),[71] though not in the confusion of Babel. It is, as one writer puts it, a search for a partner, a lover, for a teacher, for God, and the most important events of our lives are the meetings of such individuals. Conversations lose their depth to the extent that we despair of the transcendent.[72] Even the atheist betrays longing in his expressed desire to kneel down in churches, as we see with André Comte-Sponville and Alain de Botton.[73] For Aquinas, human speech is geared towards more than the expression of sadness and delight, expressed through "simple voice," for it reaches towards justice by setting up the home and the state.[74]

There is also a theological relationship between Aquinas's Trinitarian theology and the conversation style of the Great Books. By seeking a rightly ordered life together, our conversation echoes the Wisdom that orders all things well.[75] But echoing first involves hearing and receiving. Listening teaches the art of silence, which precedes the word, while our speech is, in a way, the gift of love proceeding from our silence and our word. As Aquinas put it, The Logos is not just any word,

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[71] *In Eth.*, bk. I, lec. 1 (see Vivian Boland, "Boring God: Theology and Preaching," in Michael Monsheau, *The Grace and Task of Preaching* [Dublin: Dominican Publications, 2006], 56–58).

[72] Boland ("Boring God," 59–60) details this point, as expressed by George Steiner (*Real Presences: Is There Anything in What we Say?* [London: Faber & Faber, 1989]).

[73] André Comte-Sponville, *A Small Treatise on the Great Virtues: The Uses of Philosophy in Everyday Life*, trans. Catherine Temerson (New York: Metropolitan Books / Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 148: "Humility . . . may well be the most religious of virtues. How one yearns to kneel down in churches! Why deny oneself? . . . I would say it is because I would have to believe that God created me—and that pretension, at least, is one of which I have freed myself. What little things we are, how weak and how wretched! Humanity makes for such a pathetic creation: how can we believe a God could have wanted *this*?" Cf. Alain de Botton, *Religion for Atheists: A Non-Believer's Guide to the Uses of Religion* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012).

[74] *In Eth.*, bk. I, lec. 1.

[75] Wis. 8:1.

but *Verbum spirans amorem*, the "Word breathing forth love."[76] The Great Books nurture in us what is specifically human, by obliging us to think "really," as Maritain describes the humanities, and by leading us to the level of universality, they convey us into the transcendentals. But, they not only free us in mind and judgment in an internal self-mastery; they have as their frontier the weight of the Christian Word. An openness and receptivity, the seeds of a loving contemplation in us, make both our echo of wisdom possible, and give voice to our reply to it as well. This kind of response within an echo[77] as Boland puts it, is the mysterious dimension opened through conversation as a form of teaching. It is by echo and response, flowing from silence and into a kind of spiritual music, that the liberal arts awaken in us the aesthetic and religious principles stressed by Maritain as the fruit of education: truth, freedom, integrity, beauty, courage, justice, love, and humility.[78]

Objections & Replies to the Great Books Tradition

We can easily imagine objections to partnership between Aquinas and the Great Books, beyond the somewhat trivial objections against the Great Books approach lodged against Hutchins and Adler. But rehearsing a bit of the "Chicago Fight," helps prepare us for the more philosophical objections that might be lodged by Thomists as well.

The Hutchins-Adler Great Books Seminar at the University of Chicago began shortly after the pair teamed up in the late 1920's to reform liberal education by means of introducing the greatest works of

[76] *S.Th.*, I, q. 43, a. 5, ad 2.

[77] See Boland, "Boring God," 64–65.

[78] As listed by Maritain in *The Education of Man*, ed. Donald and Idella Gallagher (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1962), 84. Boland ("Boring God") discusses the movement from silence, to speech, to music, in relation to prayer, theology, and preaching.

Western civilization in a dialogue setting.[79] They encountered several objections that provided Hutchins the opportunity to list the misconceptions of a liberal education in his *Education for Freedom*, of 1942.[80] Interestingly enough, much of the complaint lies in what was seen as a too close affinity between the Great Books and Aristotelian Thomism, and the latter's inability to meet the demands of a scientific, democratic, and utility-based society.

The objections to the Great Books approach can be grouped in several ways; all of them either assume rather than argue for the nature of the "good life," and some suppress the question. The first group contrasts the material plenty of pragmatic and technical skills to the poverty generated by liberal studies—they are the approaches of skepticism, presentism, scientism, and anti-intellectualism.[81] These approaches echo Callicles' ridicule of Socrates, the clericalist skeptics of Newman's innovative classical program of study, and the Deweyites dominating the mid-century University of Chicago. In short, everything is viewed as a matter of opinion and the appeal to reason is vain, or through the cult of immediacy with its denial of tradition and the past, or as a celebration of scientific progress in the name of social improvement, or as reducible to emotive sentimentalism.[82]

A second group either opposes or deepens the first group's attacks. The historical method, if taken as the dominant path of inquiry, frees the student from inquiring into the truth of the work itself, while the ecstatic approach (so named by Hutchins[83]) measures a work's ex-

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[79] See, for example, Mortimer J. Adler, "The Chicago Fight," *The Center: Kentucky Center for the Arts Magazine* 10, no. 5 (1977): 50–60.

[80] On the Chicago critics, see, for example, Adler, "The Chicago Fight," and Anna-Dorothea Schneider, *Humanities at the Crossroads: The Chicago Neo-Aristotelian Critics and the University of Chicago 1930-1950* (Nomos, 2019).

[81] Hutchins, *Education for Freedom*, 30–34.

[82] *Ibid.*, 43–44.

[83] *Ibid.*, 55.

cellence by the emotive response it evokes. Both critiques sacrifice the pursuit of wisdom and virtue by suppressing questions of human nature and moral goodness. But "how," asks Hutchins, "can we consider man's destiny unless we ask what he is? How can we talk about preparing men for life unless we ask what the end of life may be?" The objections against the principle-seeking wisdom of the Great Books are, at base, a rejection of metaphysics itself.[84]

The Great Books, in concert with the study of St. Thomas, were said to reverse the modern role of philosophy set by Dewey, as a handmaid of science, and substituted for it an arcane metaphysics of substance that promoted a changeless, ahistorical human nature. For Hutchins, the rejection of Thomism and the Great Books is basically a revolt against metaphysics, the speculative intellect, and unity. The "dogmatic deification" of Aristotle and Aquinas was said to make Hutchins incapable of heading a university, which requires a commitment to pluralism, a democratic curriculum, and a therapeutic role for philosophy.

For Hutchins, the objections strip education of its hierarchy, order, and ends, leaving in its wake a Neopositivist scientism, relativism, and skepticism. If forming human minds and characters in terms of an ideal of civilization is the proper end of education, where the ideals are material and subjectivist, education shrinks to vocationalist, professional, and specialized aims, and moral values give way to the motive of shrewd self-interest.

But Adler was wrong if he thought his substitution of secular metaphysics for medieval theology as a tool of unity, would survive the invective against scholasticism and the soul itself.[85] The metaphysician,

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[84] *Ibid.*, 24.

[85] Interestingly, Étienne Gilson also pointed to the power of reason and the universality of human nature as important (if partial) causes of the unity found in medieval scholasticism: "Humanly and naturally speaking, there is no unifying force above reason. It could even be said that, absolutely speaking, it really is the only unifying force. What is rationally true is universally true, for the only thing that lies behind truth is reality itself,

no less than the sage and medieval doctor, was derided as an escape artist, hinging his hopes on eternal things which only increase our wandering—reminiscent of Petrarch's view of us as "travellers, who for a brief and hostile time, as during a rainy day in winter, make a long and difficult journey."[86] Moderns believe that therapies of unconscious desire and of power might begin to heal our longing to transcend the self into something greater and beyond. Adler and Aquinas knew that dialectic and science are insufficient to strengthen the mind and bind the self to the common good; the understanding of ideas and values involves first a cultivation of the affections, and involves mysteries imperceptible to experimental science and barren logic.[87]

There are other objections more familiar to Aquinas himself. One is the fact that although he drew on the sequence of the trivuum and quadrivuum in several places as preludes to moral philosophy and *sacra doctrina*, he would also have drawn a sharp distinction between philosophical reasoning and the symbolic, poetic mode. He may have picked up the poetic use of language, we're told,[88] as a philosopher on holi-

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which is the same for all . . . Medieval realism . . . always stood firm on the Greek platform that the human mind is right when it conforms to reality . . ." (Gilson, "Medieval Universalism and Its Present Value," 905). He viewed the modern prejudice against medieval scholastic philosophy as a form of "mental slavery" borne of a denial of "sound rationalism," realism and personalism (*ibid.*, 908).

[86] Petrarch, *De familiari*, I, 7, 13–14, quoted in Proctor, *Education's Great Amnesia*, 102.

[87] Cf. Francis Bethel, *John Senior and the Restoration of Realism* (Merrimack, N.H.: Thomas More College Press, 2016), 183, in his description of Senior's defense of the poetic mode of knowing: "Philosophy deals more directly with mysteries such as love and beauty than experimental science is capable of . . . it must accept some sort of intuition, an obvious although obscure knowledge, before it operates on its level to resolve problems. One must first recognize that the rainbow is beautiful before being in a position to ask how and why it is so, and what beauty is . . . St. Thomas's definition of beauty as 'what, when seen, pleases' means nothing to us unless we have had the experience of a rainbow, of a mountain, or of a river."

[88] G. K. Chesterton, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: 'The Dumb Ox'* (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1956), 21.

day, but never confused it with the dialectical method by which a *quaestio* or its extreme version, the *quodlibet*, a "disputation on anything," was conducted. He knew the contrast between an intellectual joust, in which, after examining arguments based on reason and authority, the master arrives at a doctrinal solution by an act of determination that confirms his magisterial function, and an enduring melody or *cantus firmus* embellished with florid polyphony, that was beginning to develop in his day, in the work of Perotin, for instance.

In addition to this objection from the incommensurable modes of knowing, there is the suspicion that the texts and pedagogy of the Great Books interferes with the specialization of sapiential *habitus*. If the Great Books in many cases stress imagination and feeling over intellect and rational debate, then they distract students from the intellectual work of dutifully straining towards its prize, a kind of mental squandering or dissoluteness of disciplines from their proper objects. The Great Books' literary and historical narratives represent no unified system of thought, and weaken the rigor of developing a philosophical habitus, which requires sustained and focused dialectic. They might even cite Aquinas, who said that "a man gets far more pleasure from knowing something by understanding it than by feeling it . . . for intellectual knowledge is more highly prized: a man would rather lose his sight than his sanity."[89]

Finally, there is the objection Maritain notes, that the liberal arts[90] is for us a "separated world," in isolation from our daily concerns, and exist in a kind of "illusory eternity." In response to this, Maritain reminds us that these arts take us to the very roots of our culture and civilization. On its own, philosophy is incapable of restoring the "integrity of natural reason," for we are a spiritual unity in search of a supe-

[89] *S.Th.*, I–II, q. 31, a. 5.

[90] Maritain (*The Education of Man*, 85–86) is speaking of the Greek and Latin authors.

rior balance supplied by theological and religious formation. Just as philosophy is best practiced within a theological regime, so the success of the formation it provides depends on a complexity of causes, which as Maritain reminds us, cause one another.[91] Newman also examined the charge of separateness, and the view that Great Books promote inutility, and are often produced in atmospheres like religious hothouses.[92] Battling utilitarians of his day, he knew that a liberal education carries its own end *within* its practice, as opposed to being driven to ends dictated by artificially created desires. The modern university, or rather Baconian polytechnicum, offers training to generate material commodities, and is in many cases merely a factory for the servile arts, as Hütter has argued,[93] careening between scientific determinism and postmodernism, on the one hand, and trans-humanist autonomy, on the other, lurching towards a Promethean liberation from our own nature and our dystopian future that comes with it.

Yet a pairing of Aquinas's realism and the Great Books can equally be argued as complementary, not opposed. Works of art are valuable because their beauty is shaped by intelligence, and we respond to them in delight because they match our nature.[94] In *De Veritate*, Aquinas likens the process of thinking and speaking with that of art, for "an artist first intends his work of art, next shapes it in his mind and fancy,

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[91] Maritain (*ibid.*, 81–82) is citing Aristotle, "Causae ad invicem sunt causae."

[92] Newman, *The Idea of a University*, Disc. 1.1, where he discusses the objections of a Great Books education in terms of its supposed "inutility" and "religious exclusiveness."

[93] Reinhard Hütter, "Polytechnic University," *First Things*, no. 237 (Nov. 2013).

[94] Cf. Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, trans. J. F. Scanlan. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), 23: "Beauty is essentially the object of *intelligence*, for what *knows* in the full meaning of the word is the mind, which alone is open to the infinity of being. The natural site of beauty is the intelligible world: thence it descends . . ." For Aquinas, beauty has four primary standards: actuality, proportion, radiance, and integrity (*S.Th.*, I, q. 39, a. 8c). A thing's beauty flows from its existence and form. Everything is what it is because of its form; therefore, a thing has more goodness [and beauty] when it achieves a higher level of perfection in its form (cf. *S.Th.*, I, q. 5, a. 5).

and then in his material. Similarly, a speaker first conceives the meaning he intends to convey, afterwards finds a sign for it [language], and finally pronounces it."[95]

To answer the objection concerning habitus, we can distinguish the natural intelligence from the intelligence of the intellectual virtues, as Maritain himself does.[96] Universal knowledge is possible only at the level of natural intelligence, where students gain an integrated though imperfect understanding about the nature of man and reality, falling short of scientific knowledge. This mode is steeped in the imagination, which provides a kind of intuitive unity that mirrors human nature's existential condition, as it is immersed in the natural world, and whose supreme perfection consists in love. Thomas's psychosomatic unity of the human person affords the philosophical key for interpreting the treasury of Western culture, as something which makes us more human, and more able to discern what is worthy of our attention and love.

Conclusion

St. Augustine lamented our tendency to go abroad and wonder at the marvels of nature while passing by ourselves without wondering.[97] The Great Books' rich content and the dialectical method to which this tradition lends itself highlight the ministerial function of the imagination and will to the intellect. In the resulting exchange, the mind's philosophical labors become at once more mysterious, merrier, and yet

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[95] *De Ver.*, q. 4, a. 1.

[96] Maritain, *The Education of Man*, 49–50. On pages 51–52, he speaks of liberal education in relation to the existential conditions of man, straining towards the freedom of grace.

[97] Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, chap. 8: "[M]en go abroad to admire the heights of mountains, the mighty billows of the sea, the broad tides of rivers, the compass of the ocean, and the circuits of the stars, and pass themselves by . . ." Available online—see the section *References* for details.

more solemn,[98] while the will hastens towards its end by reason directing it on the right road.[99] If the perennial wisdom is as welcome to the Great Books student as the sight of land is to men that swim,[100] these texts are also the tributaries that flow into a river, only to enrich philosophy by laying at her feet the universality of the human condition. One is reminded of Divine Wisdom in the text of Proverbs, setting up her mixing bowl, dispensing Her goodness which takes care of every being.[101] We are inspired to express truth in ever-new ways.[102] Old meanings shimmer with rich images and narratives to produce new meanings, to the delight of her followers, who grow and progress in wisdom and grace.

The Perennial Wisdom of St. Thomas Aquinas and the Great Books Tradition

SUMMARY

In this article I argue for the pedagogical complementarity of the perennial wisdom of St. Thomas and Mortimer Adler's dialectical method of the Great Books, where the

[98] Cf. *S.Th.*, I–II, q. 27, a. 1: "[L]ove implies a certain connaturalness or complacency of the lover for the thing beloved, and to everything, that thing is a good, which is akin and proportionate to it. It follows, therefore, that good is the proper cause of love."

[99] Cf. *S.Th.*, I–II, q. 27, a. 2: "[G]ood is not the object of the appetite, except as apprehended. And therefore love demands some apprehension of the good that is loved . . . knowledge is the cause of love for the same reason as good is, which can be loved only if known."

[100] In the tearful reunion of Odysseus and Penelope, in Homer, *The Odyssey*, bk. 23, line 230f: "[W]elcome as is the sight of land to men that swim, whose well-built ship Poseidon has smitten on the sea as it was driven on by the wind and the swollen wave . . . even so welcome to her was her husband, as she gazed upon him, and from his neck she could in no wise let her white arms go."

[101] Wis. 9:2–12.

[102] Cf. Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Hugh Bredin (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 146.

Great Books highlight the ministerial function of the imagination to the will and intellect in the order of learning. Characterized by communal inquiry, the thought of St. Thomas and the Great Books are shown to be well matched instruments of the special Providence by which we direct one another to our proper end. A review of key Thomistic dispositions of teaching and learning, the nature of authentic conversation, and various objections and replies to the Great Books method of education and its alliance with the thought of St. Thomas focus the analysis. Several points of contact enrich the task of liberal learning. The Great Books are seen to supply students of St. Thomas with the spontaneous play of associations, rapprochements and comparisons as they strive to apply texts to the practices of virtue and truth seeking, while the perennial wisdom directs the students' personal exegesis through the rigor of philosophical principles, logic, and distinctions.

KEYWORDS

Thomas Aquinas, Mortimer J. Adler, *philosophia perennis*, perennial wisdom, Thomism, The Great Books, teaching, learning, conversation, liberal education.

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