

Introduction

T. Brian Mooney and Mark Nowacki

The influence of St Thomas Aquinas' theological and philosophical thought is immense; few have had as profound an impact on the theology and practice of Western Christianity in the past 1,000 years, and he occupies a secure place in the philosophical pantheon with Plato, Aristotle, and Descartes. Nonetheless, significant dimensions of Aquinas' intellectual achievements have yet to receive due consideration. The present volume contributes to several under-explored areas in contemporary Thomistic scholarship, and takes as its focus the relation between Aquinas and Eastern thought, specifically in regard to education. What can Aquinas teach us about the theory and practice of education? How do his views relate to the great traditions and thinkers of the East? This volume of new essays is thus an overture (and hopefully a catalyst) to further reflection and studies on these themes.

Aquinas has much to say on the philosophy and practice of education, but he nowhere in his vast corpus devotes himself to a systematic treatment of the field. The most extended discussion of a philosophical and theological approach to education occurs in Question 11 of the *Disputed Questions on Truth*, commonly referred to as the *De Magistro (On the Teacher)*. Much crucial context for the *De Magistro* is provided in the *Summa Theologica*, but relevant discussions are scattered throughout his works.

In the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas takes up the Augustinian (and Neoplatonic) image of education as a circle of enlightenment. (*ST I.89.1*) God is the source of all enlightenment, truth, and knowledge. God radiates out 'an intellectual light' that suffuses the entire created order. Understanding is assimilated or attenuated in relation to where a being is situated within the ontological hierarchy of created beings. Creatures ontologically closer to God participate more fully in this intellectual light

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and creatures at a further remove participate to a lesser extent. By implication, and given its relative proximity to God, an angel would participate more fully and interiorly in this intellectual light than would a human being.

It is this background thematic that permeates the seemingly odd question that opens the *De Magistro*: ‘Can a human teach and be called a teacher, or just God alone?’ For Aquinas, since God is the *fons et origo* of being and understanding, there is, for him, a deep sense in which all teaching, learning, and understanding derive from God, and God is our only true teacher. Aquinas, of course, admits a role for human teaching, but all human teachers teach only in an approximate and imperfect manner. No matter how gifted the human teacher may be, the pedagogical process requires acts of willing receptivity and interior judgement by the student. Throughout, God is a dynamic contributor to the process of education, simultaneously enlightening teacher, student, and what is taught.

These themes, which are also reflected in Eastern thinkers and traditions, are taken up in several essays in this volume. One rich vein for comparative work on Aquinas and Eastern traditions involves engagement with the Hindu and Buddhist understandings of *Jnana*, wisdom attained through meditation. In Hinduism, we encounter the notion that the highest forms of knowing involve a form of self-realisation, that *Atman* is *Brahman* and that *Brahman* is *Atman*, which parallels the Christian formula, that God became Man so that Man could become God. Or, in a Buddhist modality, we find that the highest form of awareness entails freeing oneself from conceptual encumbrances and divisions, which has theological echoes in the unity-within-diversity of the Christian Trinity. Moreover, for both Aquinas and Buddhists, attachment to the world is a source of suffering and division from our true selves. Conceptual elaboration of these tropes often prompts representatives of Eastern and Western traditions to draw upon similar conceptual resources and distinctions, as several of the contributors to this volume amply demonstrate.

At a practical level, and especially in regard to moral education, there are several points of contact between Aquinas and the great traditions and thinkers of the East. There is much agreement about what questions are important to ask, and there are startling commonalities and differences with respect to how those questions should be answered. How can morality be taught—if it can be taught at all? What is involved in moral knowing? How are virtues formed? Are there specific practices or perspectives that support or undermine virtue formation? How might we best compare and coordinate the views of Aquinas and profound thinkers of the East on understanding, teaching, and learning? How have (or perhaps should) Eastern and Thomistic insights be embodied in concrete educational practice? What implications either do or should these insights have, at an operational level, for education policy? These questions, in turn, are taken up by several of our authors.

To open out these questions in a more systematic fashion, the essays of this volume have been arranged into three Parts. In Part I, Aquinas and Education, our essayists take up the task of understanding and extending the thought of Thomas Aquinas. These essays provide necessary background for understanding the highly-nuanced view of St Thomas on education in general and on moral education in particular. In Part II, Aquinas and the East, our essayists adopt explicitly comparative approaches.

Aquinas' theological and philosophical thought is coordinated with a variety of significant thinkers within the Eastern and Western canons. Finally, in Part III, Education and the East, our essayists consider specific educational policies and proposals. Their handling of these proposals demonstrates, on the one hand, how Thomistic resources can be used to address current policy challenges, and on the other hand, how educational policy has been implemented within the context of an Eastern educational system with a Catholic heritage.

Our first essay, by Jānis (John) Ozoliņš, provides useful scholarly background and context for Aquinas' general accounts of understanding, teaching, and learning. Readers less familiar with the contours of St Thomas' thought would do well to start with this essay. Ozoliņš brings out how understanding the Divine role in education shapes what Aquinas counts as knowledge and what it means to say that someone has learnt. While his essay represents an insightful scholarly account of St Thomas' key themes on education, Ozoliņš is concerned throughout to connect up medieval concerns with their contemporary analogues in the practice and theory of education.

The second essay, co-authored by the Editors of this volume, aims to restore the traditional notion of connatural knowledge to its proper place in an acceptable account of teaching and learning. In the broadest sense, connatural knowledge is knowledge readily acquired by beings having a certain nature, much as dogs have a ready access to a world of scent much richer than that known to humans. Full possession of the virtues, we argue, involves connatural knowing. Connatural knowledge emerges as a knowledge by inclination which systematically tracks the specific moral interests humans possess precisely because they are human. This essay draws out the implications of a central Thomistic theme and provides a new angle on the connections among know-how, virtues, and skills. As a result, the essay provides a novel approach to themes in epistemology and, in particular, contributes to the fertile new field of virtue epistemology.

Andrew Pinsent's remarkable third essay charts what we consider to be an exciting new direction in virtue ethics. While it is true that Aquinas develops his ethics within the Aristotelian tradition, nonetheless St Thomas introduces several novel elements into his account of the moral life. Familiar Aristotelian virtues are interwoven with non-Aristotelian attributes: gifts, beatitudes and fruits. For instance, Aquinas holds that wisdom, properly understood, is a gift appended to the virtue of *caritas*, or divine friendship. Pinsent argues, following Aquinas and certain insights gathered from contemporary psychology, that the appropriate locus of virtue formation is not, as most would have it, at the level of the first person, but rather at the level of second-person relatedness. Pinsent educes the Thomistic insight that one's growth in the virtues requires a shared identification with the intentional stance of another person. He illustrates this with an analysis of the psychological phenomenon of joint attention and describes the manner in which it illuminates autism. The role of an educator can thus be seen to be inherently second-personal: the ancient understanding of the intimacy of the teacher/pupil relation then finds confirmation in contemporary science and, by implication, points to significant lacunae in contemporary educational theory and practice.

The fourth and final essay in Part I, by Thomas Ryan, brings Aquinas into dialogue with Elspeth Probyn, who has made significant contributions to the sociological study of shame. According to Ryan, the profile of shame elucidated by Probyn resonates well with the universalist tendencies of Thomistic ethics. Ryan hopes to gain a clearer picture of the educative and transformative function of shame in the personal, social, cultural and moral dimensions of human life. Given the ubiquitous normative force of shame in Asia, exploration of the experience of shame can help bridge ethical approaches found within Eastern and Western traditions.

Part II opens with an essay by Anh Tuan Nuyen, who advances the provocative suggestion that Aquinas' query 'Can a human teach and be called a teacher, or just God alone?' (*De Magistro*) should be understood as a question primarily about moral education. Interpreted thus, Aquinas could be seen to be providing an answer to the moral sceptic. This take on Aquinas allows for fecund comparisons with Confucian accounts of moral education, and in particular with the thought of Mencius. Further comparisons to Xunzi allow Nuyen to set an agenda for deeper and richer comparative speculation on how Eastern and Western traditions might be further articulated, particularly with respect to the cultivation of the self.

In the next essay, Doug Mikkelsen brings to light some implications of the indisputable fact that Aquinas and Dōgen devote considerable thought to the moral education of 'beginners' in the religious life. A key strategy employed by both is that of proposing moral exemplars. The exemplars adduced range from central cases—Christ and Buddha—to expert, but less exalted, practitioners (saints?) in their respective traditions. Interestingly, the centrality of exemplars in moral education has all but disappeared from contemporary moral philosophy. Mikkelsen's timely analysis reminds us of the value and importance of the sapiential dimension of philosophy, which formerly provided much of the justification for philosophy as a choice-worthy pursuit for human beings, and which motivated recognition of philosophy as a distinct way of life.

The metaphysical simplicity of the Ultimate has long been a central theme in Eastern and Western philosophical and religious traditions. St Thomas' commitment to God's absolute simplicity is one of, if not the central, metaphysical insight that drives his philosophical theology. This commitment creates immediate tensions in Aquinas' thought since he also maintains the orthodox Christian position that God is Triune. After exploring these dimensions of St Thomas' thought, Joseph O'Leary calls attention to and elucidates Eastern analogues of this problematic. The insight that the Ultimate must be simple is upheld against a backdrop of logical and experiential considerations that militate in favour of multiplicity.

Cecilia Wee, our final essayist in Part II, illuminates our understanding of Aquinas by comparing his theory of knowledge and philosophy of education with the views of John Locke. As Wee demonstrates, there are significant points of contact between the two broadly empiricist philosophers. She points to important commonalities between Aquinas' account of *scientia* and Locke's account of knowledge, and notes that both philosophers hold that this higher form of human knowing is to be distinguished from lesser epistemic states such as belief and opinion. Wee sketches an

account of how accepting an empiricist theory of knowledge shapes one's theoretical understanding of learning and, in particular, impacts one's understanding of the role of the teacher in learning.

In Part III, our essayists take up a different perspective and roll up their sleeves to talk about educational policy. The first essay, by Jude Chua, takes up a suggestion by Francis Davis and Nathan Koblitz that Catholic schools in England and Wales should be reorganised into social enterprise zones. Chua extends this idea in two directions. First, he suggests that schools so organised be re-conceptualised as 'play schools', wherein stakeholders playfully participate in the project of education. Second, he argues that inculcation of a social enterprise dimension allows schools to become springboards for what he terms 'gifted education'; namely, an epistemological and moral awakening with respect to one's own normative biases. Chua's essay explicitly draws on Aquinas' metaphysics of Divine play, and teases out implications of the social embeddedness of the educational enterprise, thereby engendering a dialogue on ends and means among participants both internal and external to the school.

In the final essay, Andrew Crow and Thomas O'Donoghue reflect upon educational reform in the Philippines—a country with deep roots in Catholic social and education practices yet located within a distinctively Eastern context. As is appropriate given the policy focus of the paper, the authors provide an impressively detailed but concise historical review of Philippine educational practice and policy during the past two decades. The resultant narrative displays how policy makers concretely go about the difficult task of educational reform whilst trying to align public expectations, educational research, and principles of universal access against evolving global benchmarks and standards. Their essay does not address Aquinas at the surface level. Nonetheless, the construction of their narrative, and more particularly, the principles of selection they employ for what is included (and excluded), together with the underlying social principles taken as normative, conjointly display a deep engagement with the Thomistic educational tradition in concrete practice and ethos. This is an example of how policy makers actually argue and support their positions, and Crow and O'Donoghue are explicitly engaging policy makers in their own terms. The essay thus provides us with a blueprint for how philosophical principles can be translated into a mode accessible to policy makers and thereby effectively shape the implementation of educational initiatives.