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Disposition: An Approachable Ontology

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Abstract

Reformed Scholastic John Owen's appropriation and adaptation of Thomas Aquinas' development of the classical 'disposition' (Latin: *habitus*) concept offers practical insight into seventeenth century faculty psychology. This article argues that Owen not only borrows deliberately from Aquinas, he also attempts to simplify and even improve upon Aquinas' more complicated theological, philosophical, and psychological insights in this important area. While he deals with dispositions of the mind, will, and affections in a way that is broadly similar to Aquinas' ontological understanding, Owen's most significant contribution to seventeenth century faculty psychology and its theological use is a sustained and consistent emphasis on the necessity of virtuous affections in the pursuit of communion with God. Examining this concept also provides greater context for how the Reformed Scholastics were able to interact with their medieval counterparts. In this we see the Reformed Scholastics' continuity with the Christian tradition and their depth of understanding regarding human nature.

Keywords

Thomas Aquinas, John Owen, *habitus*, Reformed Scholasticism, faculty psychology

Disposition: An Approachable Ontology

The concept of 'disposition' (*habitus*) is both a key example of how Reformed Scholastic theologians appropriated medieval theology and how John Owen in particular borrows from the tradition of Thomas Aquinas. Though Owen develops the idea of disposition in a way that is broadly similar to the scholastic tradition and its interpretation of both Aristotle and Aquinas, there are some unique elements to Owen's explanation as well. Owen offers a simplification of Thomist ontology that is surprisingly approachable yet also retains many of Aquinas' key emphases. In this we see Owen's continuity with the Christian tradition and his depth of understanding regarding human nature.

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Disposition Itself

What then is a disposition? Aquinas defines a disposition (or habit), as a particular quality that is necessary in relation to certain acts.[1] In other words, 'disposition' refers to an aspect of a person's character or personality that provides direction and impetus for a movement towards an action.[2] One could describe a disposition simply as a 'learned capacity' or that which is 'halfway between a capacity and an action, between pure potentiality and full actuality'.[3] It does not ingrain the pattern in action (a habit), but it does provide a personal bent toward that action.[4]

A disposition is what is necessary for a person to develop the ability to make a task or mindset habitual. Though a disposition does not accomplish the task for a person, without the disposition that task will be considerably more difficult. It is necessary as a starting point towards accomplishing the task. A disposition takes us from mere ability; it provides power so that action is possible.

One of the central concepts Owen uses to describe this disposition is 'inclination'.[5] There is in the human soul 'an inclination and tendency to something extrinsic', something Aquinas calls a 'natural appetite'.[6] Both animals and humans have innate inclinations towards preservation of existence which stand behind the pursuit of food, sexual urges, and the care for their young, things that the inclination perceives of as good.[7] In animals we call this tendency instinct, but they act on it because it is their nature apart from any specific cognitive function. Human inclinations also operate on the basis of an unchangeable

[1] St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics), 1948, Q.49.1-4.

[2] The sort of *habitus* we are examining here deals not with 'actions of the body which are from nature' but 'actions which proceed from the soul, and the principle of which is the will'. St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.50.1.

[3] Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 150; Anthony Kenny, *The Metaphysics of Mind,* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), p. 84; Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind,* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 53.

[4] Pasnau points out that *habitus* go further than merely giving influence. 'Ideally, dispositions [*habitus*] perfect the capacities they inform; indeed, Aquinas simply defines a virtue as the perfection of a capacity (1a2ae 55.1c). Without dispositions, many kinds of action would be impossible'. In *Thomas Aquinas,* 150. Cf John Oesterle, *Ethics: The introduction to moral science,* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1957), p. 55.

[5] Owen describes 'the "spirit" of the mind' as 'the inclination and disposition in the actings of it'. John Owen, *The Works of John Owen,* ed. William H. Goold, (London: Johnstone and Hunter, 1850-5), iii.251.

[6] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, Q.78.1. Cf. Steven J. Jenson for a helpful summary of inclinations in Aquinas' development, in *Knowing the natural law: from precepts and inclinations to deriving oughts,* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2015), pp. 44-60. Cf. Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 200-9.

[7] Aquinas, *ST*, 1a2ae, Q.94.2.

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natural law by which we are driven towards ends that we perceive as good or offering happiness.[8]

Owen uses 'inclination' not only as a synonym for the concept of disposition but also to describe what dispositions do.[9] Inclination-related language reminds the reader of the necessity of the concept of ends, for human inclinations point human dispositions in a specific purpose-related direction. In other words, Owen's discussion of inclinations is inherently teleological.[10] It is important to note that both Owen and Aquinas point towards union and communion with God as that which is the ultimate end for humanity.[11] Human beings are created to find their ultimate happiness in God himself, and this inclination is built into human nature.[12]

Now due to sin, human inclinations are disordered in the powers of the soul.[13] This disorder leads to an inability to fully pursue either this ultimate goal or any temporal goal of happiness as well.[14] Natural teleology in a post-lapsarian world is inherently futile, and the internal disorder of the soul that follows is the source of human misery and suffering.

Owen and Aquinas point to God's grace as the source of new dispositions believers receive from God. These dispositions provide a 'new spiritual bent and inclination of the soul'.[15] Now the concept of inclinations necessitates an examination of the faculties of the soul to see

[8] Aquinas, *ST*, 1a2ae, Q.90.1; Q.94.1-5; Q.1.7-8; Owen, *Works*, iii.592. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book Alpha.1. Cf. P.M.S. Hacker, *Human Nature,* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 175-80. On problems connected with happiness as humanity's ultimate goal see Oesterle, *Ethics,* pp. 22-9. Brian Davies points out that Aquinas uses two different terms for happiness, one referring to an 'earthly happiness' and the other referring to the 'ultimate good'. See Brian Davies, 'Happiness', in Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 231-2.

[9] Cf. Owen, *Works*, iii.302, 383, 473, 543, 621.

[10] Cf. Jenson, *Knowing the Natural Law,* p. 60.

[11] Aquinas*, ST*, 1a2ae, Q.3.1; Owen, *Works,* ii.5-6, 9. Kelly Kapic has written extensively on Owen's development of this concept in *Communion with God,* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2007), passim.

[12] Owen, *Works,* xi.337-8. For more on how both Aristotle and Aquinas define this happiness cf. Christopher Cleveland's *Thomism in John Owen,* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), p. 70, pp. 73-4.

[13] Aquinas*, ST*, 1a2ae, Q.85.5; Owen, *Works*, iii.488, 642. See Kapic, *Communion with God*, pp. 54-5.

[14] For more on the beatific vision, cf. Owen, *Works,* vii.336; i.239; i.292ff; Aquinas*, ST*, Suppl., Q.92. For the differences between how Aquinas and Owen formulate the beatific vision cf. Suzanne McDonald, 'Beholding the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ: John Owen and the "Reforming" of the Beatific Vision', in Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones (eds), *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 141-58; Simon Francis Gaines OP, 'Thomas Aquinas and John Owen on the Beatific Vision: A Reply to Suzanne McDonald', in *New Blackfriars*, vol.97, No.1070, July 2016, pp. 432-46.

[15] Owen, *Works*, iii.484. This inclination comes as a result of the infusion of a 'disposition of heart and soul', in *Works*, iii.483. Aquinas*, ST*, 1a2ae, Q.63.3. Intellectual virtue refers to

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how human powers are to be rightly ordered to their proper goal.[16] In classical ontology, humans possess certain powers and these powers are able to produce acts. The middle step between power and act is disposition. The tendency of a disposition toward a certain act is called an inclination.

Owen emphasises that inclinations are how dispositions drive a person towards certain ends. Dispositions give inclinations, and these inclinations in turn lead from potentiality to actuality. Though Owen sometimes uses the terms inclination and disposition interchangeably, his emphasis on inclinations is that new dispositions give the soul the inward drive that is necessary to pursue union and communion with God with the whole of one's being.

Powers of the Soul

Dispositions produce inclinations, but which parts of humans have dispositions? Owen's development of the idea of disposition emphasises that the powers of mind, will, and affections are all impacted by a new and gracious disposition.[17] These three faculties, which Owen describes as the 'natural faculties of the soul', form the primary way Owen divides the powers of the soul.[18]

What then is the soul? Aquinas describes the soul as the 'first principle of life'.[19] Owen uses the Genesis account of creation to describe how God creates Adam with a physical body but then imparts to him

virtues of the mind, and moral virtue refers to virtues of the will and passions. Cf. Aquinas, *ST*, 1a2ae, Q.58.3.

[16] Cf. Herbert McCabe, in Brian Davies (ed.), *On Aquinas*, (London: Burns and Oates, 2008), pp. 73-8. Cleveland helpfully explores what infused dispositions do and what they are for. Cf *Thomism in John Owen*, pp. 69-120. The purpose of this paper is to examine what dispositions are and where in the human soul they are located.

[17] Owen, *Works*, iii.468–9.

[18] Ibid. 168; cf. iii.222, 238, 315, 318-319, 330-335, 469, 482-4, 493-6, 529, 568. Owen is not unique in focusing on these three powers, but his consistent emphasis on all three is notable. Cf. Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service,* ed Joel R. Beeke, trans. Bartel Elshout, (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1995), i.320-5, iii.5, 7-8, and Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr, trans. George Musgrave Giger, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997), v.10.8-9, for two contemporary continental theologians who emphasised the primacy of the mind and the will, though à Brakel does regularly reference the affections as well; *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, iv.254-5 notably exemplifies this exception. For more on the use of faculty psychology among the Reformers and the Reformed Orthodox cf. Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics,* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), i.355-9. See also Kapic, *Communion with God*, pp. 45-57. Owen also uses the term 'heart' as a representative summary of all these faculties. Cf. Owen, *Works*, iii.326. William Fenner emphasises the importance of the heart, especially in relation to the affections in *A treatise of the affections,* London: R.H., 1642, Wing / F707, pp. 16-35.

[19] Aquinas, *ST*, 1a, Q.75.1.

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a 'living soul' which animates that physical body.[20] Both Aquinas and Owen refer to a union of body and soul.[21] While the soul houses the faculties or powers of mind, will, and affections, these faculties have an impact upon how the body perceives and acts as well. Though thinking, choosing, and feeling flow from the soul, they also have embodied aspects. But what are these powers or faculties?

To explain this point, it is necessary to examine Aquinas' layout of the human soul. There are five powers or faculties in Aristotelian faculty psychology: the vegetative power, the locomotive power, the sensitive power, the intellectual power, and the appetitive power.[22] Of these, the vegetative and locomotive powers have no bearing on the subject of dispositions, at least as relates to Owen, since they are merely the faculties responsible for growth and movement and have no connection to the subject of virtue. The sensitive power is then further divided into exterior and interior sense.[23] Neither of these external or internal sensitive powers relates specifically to virtue, as they are powers that influence one's reason but are not themselves subject to reason. The remaining two powers do have significant bearing on this discussion.

Aquinas distinguishes between the 'appetitive' power and the 'intellectual' power; the intellectual power consists of mind or reason, and the appetitive power is further subdivided between the sensitive appetites and the intellectual appetite.[24] Owen uses mind, or the intellectual power, and will, or the intellectual appetite, in largely the same way as Aquinas, as we shall see. Both Aquinas and Owen agree that the intellect is a guiding faculty and the will is a ruling faculty.[25] Both theologians agree that there are dispositions of the mind and of the will.[26] It is in the way they refer to the sensitive appetites, desires, passions, and affections, that there is some distinction.

Mind

Owen describes the mind as the 'guiding and leading' or 'leading, conducting faculty'.[27] This is the faculty that Aquinas describes as the

[20] Owen, *Works*, iii.99-101.

[21] Aquinas, *ST*, 1a, QQ.75-76; Owen, *Works*, iii.100.

[22] Aristotle develops this most succinctly in his work *De Anima,* which Aquinas then borrows from and builds on in his *Summa Theologiae*. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, Q78.1.

[23] The exterior sensitive sense is what we call the five senses: taste, touch, smell, hearing, seeing, and the internal sensitive sense is the basis for common sense, phantasy, imagination, estimation, and memory. Aquinas*, ST*, 1a, Q78.3-4.

[24] Ibid. Q.78.1

[25] Ibid. Q. 82.5; Owen, *Works*, iii.238.

[26] Aquinas*, ST, 1a2ae*, 50.4-5; Owen, *Works*, iii.330-35.

[27] Owen, *Works*, iii.238, 330. Cf. Kapic, *Communion with God*, pp. 46-50, for more on the importance of the mind in Owen's theology.

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intellect.[28] The mind is the power responsible for apprehension and consideration, the 'faculty of the rational soul by which man understands and judges between intelligible things presented to him'.[29] It is the part of a human that we could say thinks, that determines and evaluates. Aristotle and Aquinas held that the intellect was the most noble power in humanity, and Owen follows this hierarchy.[30] The mind is the faculty or power responsible for reason and rationality.

Despite the fall of humanity resulting in a diminished capacity of the mind, Owen emphasises the continued functionality of the mind. There is an innate knowledge of God's law, even if only in a shadowy sense.[31] This diminished capacity relates specifically to divine concepts rather than to natural concepts. In an unregenerate state human minds are capable of learning and understanding 'things natural, civil, or political, or moral', and also exploring the concepts of natural theology.[32] The noetic effect of sin limits human rationality, but it does not erase it.[33] Though the impact of sin upon the mind does not mean that unregenerate humanity is wholly irrational, it does mean there is no natural understanding of that which is spiritual.[34]

In those whom the Holy Spirit regenerates, the mind is renewed and enabled to rightly understand the truth of scripture. Through regeneration the mind is convinced 'through an immediate influence and impression of [God's] power' and is 'effectually renewed'.[35]

Through the Spirit's work the mind is given the ability to function according to its true capacity for spiritual knowledge.[36] Faith is essential in order for the mind to function correctly, but Owen still emphasises that humans must make use of their rational faculties in

[28] Cf. Aquinas, *ST*, 1a, Q.79.

[29] Owen, *Works*, iv.82-83. Turretin*, Institutes*, 1.8.1. Cf. à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, i.314-20; Aquinas*, ST*, 1a, Q.77.4, Q.79; Kenny, *Metaphysics of Mind*, pp. 123-39.

[30] Aquinas, *ST*, 1a, Q.82.3; Owen, *Works*, iv.88.

[31] Aquinas refers to an innate and infallible knowledge of God's law as *synderesis*, and it stands behind the conscience. Cf. Aquinas, *ST*, 1a, Q.79.12-3. See Tobias Hoffmann, 'Conscience and *Synderesis*', in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas,* pp. 255-64. Owen does not use the term *synderesis*, but he deals extensively with the conscience in his *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* vol.vi, and his treatments of sin and temptation, in *Works* vol.vi.

[32] Owen, *Works*, iii.248; Aquinas*, ST*, 2a2ae, Q.2.3-4; Owen, *Works,* x.496; *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, i.7. For more on natural theology cf. Aquinas, *ST*, 1a, QQ.2-27; Turretin, *Institutes*, i.3-4; Muller, *PRRD,* i.270-310.

[33] Aquinas argues that if reason were destroyed altogether, then humans would essentially become beasts and would no longer be capable of sin. *ST*, 1a2ae, 85.2

[34] Owen, *Works*, iii.331. On the distinction between aided and unaided reason, see Owen, *Works*, iii.263-4, 268; iv.92.

[35] Owen, *Works*, iii.319, 315

[36] Ibid. 331.

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order to correctly understand scripture and theological concepts.[37] The Spirit's activity is critical to giving life to the mind and the understanding, which result in their proper functionality.[38] As a result of this divine work, the natural mind is renewed and illuminated so that it can understand, even if incompletely, God's self-revelation to his people.

The mind, then, requires a specific disposition to function appropriately.[39] Owen also refers extensively to the need for being 'spiritually minded' as an example of the right disposition of mind in action.[40] He refers to the disposition of the mind as that which directs the mind to appropriately learn and apply spiritual concepts. It is essential for the right interpretation of scripture, and it guards against either overemphasising or deemphasising the use of the mind. The influence of the mind is a core part of how Owen explores the topic of human ability to correctly understand and apply God's purposes for human living.

Will

The second component of Owen's triad of human faculties is the will. He defines the will as 'the ruling, governing faculty of the soul' or that which is responsible for choice.[41] Owen points to the significance of

[37] On the relationship between reason and faith in Owen's theology cf. Turretin, *Institutes,* i.8-11; Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 2002, pp. 109-28; 'John Owen on Faith and REASON', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*, pp. 31-48. The importance of mind in Owen's theology comes out particularly in his interactions with both 'enthusiasts' and 'rationalists'. Cf. Samuel Parker's *A defence and continuation of the ecclesiastical politie by way of letter to a friend in London* 1671 for the sort of 'rationalism' Owen attacked. For a brief summary of Quakers and their association as 'enthusiasts' with the likes of theologians such as Owen, cf. Kapic, *Communion with God*, pp. 199-202, and 'The Spirit as Gift', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology,* pp. 120-1 with particular attention to fn 31.

[38] Owen, *Works*, iii.332-4.

[39] Cf. Muller, *PRRD,* i.356-59, for more on the different dispositions of mind that are involved in the processes of knowing and believing. While Owen does make use of these various *habitus* that Muller references, when he refers to a disposition of the mind in relation to the other faculties of the triad, he is usually referring to a general disposition towards the right use of that faculty, from which flow the other dispositions of mind that Muller explores.

[40] Cf. the first part of *Works,* vii.263-394 for Owen's development of the importance of mind in the process of responding rightly to temptation. The second half of the work is devoted to the impact of spiritual mindedness on the affections.

[41] Owen, *Works*, iii.238. For a Thomist response to Gilbert Ryle's scepticism on the existence of the will in *The Concept of Mind,* (London: Penguin Books, 1949), cf. Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 234-35 and Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind*, pp. 84-6. Gavin John McGrath points out that 'while no one faculty was considered more important than the others by Baxter and Owen', there is a pronounced 'prominence, but not dominance, of the will's response to God's initiatives in the divine/human encounter'. Cf. *Puritans and the human will: voluntarism within mid-seventeenth century Puritanism as seen in the works of Richard Baxter and John Owen,* unpubl. PhD diss. Durham 1989, pp. 1-3. McGrath argues that a focus on voluntarism in Owen's theology helps one 'appreciate the *willingness* in the Christian life' that is

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the will in Aristotelian ontology, as 'all moral [dispositions] are seated in the will', and intellectual dispositions have a significant influence upon the will.[42] If the mind is corrupt and unable to function properly because of sin, the central problem of the fallen will is that it needs life. It is from the will's 'depravation by nature that we are said to be dead in sin'.[43]

Though the will is naturally enslaved to sin, it is freed through 'a reaction between grace and the will, their acts being contrary, and that grace is therein victorious, and yet no violence or compulsion is offered unto the will'.[44] Through this process God gives life to the will. The will's renewal is a divine work rather than a function of unregenerate humanity's ability.[45] Though Owen's exploration of the fallen human will is a largely negative portrayal, when dealing with the wills of believers he points to the necessity of the will to be 'freed, enlarged, and enabled to answer the commands of God for obedience' in the process of sanctification.[46]

Owen denies that apart from or prior to a work of God's grace there can be anything properly referred to as a free will in humans.[47] Human nature, including the will, is born into slavery because of sin. It is only through a divine intervention that the will can be liberated. This is one aspect of Owen's development of disposition where he both heavily borrows from and seemingly departs from Aquinas, for Aquinas emphasises that justification comes as a result of an infusion of grace so that humans are enabled to move towards God of their own free will.[48] In Aquinas' discussion of the category of free-will it

so key to gaining a holistic perspective on puritan spirituality, in *Puritans and the human will,* p. 72. For the broader problem of identifying voluntarism in Protestant thought, particularly as it relates to the development of ethics, cf. Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 54-69.

[42] Owen, *Works*, iii.502-3. Aristotle focuses on the will as the faculty responsible for voluntary action in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, iii.1-5.

[43] Owen, *Works*, iii.334.

[44] Ibid. 319.

[45] Ibid. 334. Regarding Owen's theology of the will, Kapic points out the 'dynamic relationship between the sovereign Creator and his living creation' in *Communion with God*, 51. Joel Beeke and Jan van Vliet warn against overemphasising the importance of voluntarist emphases in reformed theology. Cf. 'The Marrow of Theology', in Kelly M. Kapic and Randall Gleason (eds), *The Devoted Life,* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004), pp. 56-64.

[46] Owen, *Works*, iii.396.

[47] Ibid. 494-6. Kenny explains that there are two sense of the will, 'the ability to have volitions' and 'the power to act voluntarily'. Cf. Kenny, *Metaphysics of Mind,* pp. 81-2. Aquinas distinguishes between these two senses of the will in *ST*, 1a, QQ.82-83. Owen, however, denying the concept of free-will apart from regeneration, generally elides both of these senses of the will. Cf. *Works*, iii.80-1. For the distinction between voluntary and free acts see Oesterle, *Ethics,* pp. 64-100.

[48] Aquinas, *ST,* 1a2ae, Q.113.8. Aquinas states that a free will is required in order for humans to be rational creatures and to be able to respond to external commands, promises, and warnings, *ST*, 1a, Q.83.1. But though he emphasises the importance of natural free-will,

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is not entirely clear that his understanding of free-will is precisely the same as that which Owen attacks.[49] Owen however, in typically Reformed fashion, completely repudiates any notion of free-will, at least rhetorically. Owen's response to the concept of free-will is that it is a Pelagian notion that essentially means 'God promiseth to convert us, on condition that we convert ourselves'.[50] The very nature of sin means it enslaves the will in the deadness of sin, and if the will is dead because of sin, then there cannot be any sort of freedom in the will of unregenerate humanity. But this creates a different problem for Owen, for he emphasises both that if the will is 'compelled, it is destroyed', and that God renews the wills of humans without 'violence or compulsion unto the will'.[51] How does this work, and are Owen's explanations and distinctions coherent?

Owen's answer is that freedom of the will can only come about as a direct work of God. 'As it is a free principle, it is determined unto its acts in this case by the powerful operation of the Holy Ghost, without the least impeachment of its liberty or freedom; as hath been declared'.[52] Prior to the Spirit's work, humans are only able to choose sin and are completely unable to choose true righteousness. But by giving the will life, God frees the will from its slavery to sin and turns the will toward God. How is this different than Aquinas' infused grace resulting in the freedom of the will? Owen's response is that God not only gives life to the will, he also works with such an 'internal efficiency of the Holy Spirit on the minds of men', that his work on their wills 'is infallible, victorious, irresistible, or always efficacious'.[53] God does not merely enable the turning of the will, he actually moves the human will himself. How then is there no compulsion?

Here Owen again depends upon Aquinas. 'The will, in the first act of conversion (as even sundry of the schoolmen acknowledge), acts

he seems cautious about how far to push the idea, even making God the ultimate cause behind the freedom of the will, *ST*, 1a, Q.83.1.ro3. He later defines the impact of sin and the loss of free will not as the loss of 'natural liberty, which is freedom from coercion, but as regards freedom from fault and happiness', *ST*, 1a, Q.83.2.ro3. Kenny describes Aquinas' view on this point as 'soft determinism'. Cf. Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind,* pp. 75-88. Pasnau comments on Aquinas' use of Augustine in a discussion of disposition and the will, 'Aquinas resists the Augustinian suggestion that he never could have overcome his weakness on his own. Augustine, in giving all the credit to God, implies that we are helpless in the face of our own weakness. This is quite alien to Aquinas's approach'. In *Thomas Aquinas,* p. 252. For more on how Owen and Aquinas disagree on the relationship between infused dispositions and justification cf. Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, pp. 116-20.

[49] Aquinas asserts both that God's grace is necessary prior to any meritorious act of the will and that apart from such grace the human will cannot in any way be changed or change itself. Cf. Aquinas, *ST*, 1a2ae, Q.109.6-7.

[50] Owen, *Works*, iii.326.

[51] Owen, *Works*, iii.319.

[52] Ibid. 334.

[53] Ibid. 317.

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not but as it is acted, moves not but as it is moved; and therefore is passive therein, in the sense immediately to be explained'.[54] The first act of regeneration upon the wills of unbelievers is a creating of faith and a changing of the disposition of the will so that those whom the Spirit draws are effectively renewed. The Spirit gives life to the dead wills of the unregenerate and transforms those wills so that they are brought willingly to himself. Owen, aware of the tension in what he is explaining, describes this process further. As to the will considered 'subjectively', it is 'merely passive' and only acted upon, but considered 'efficiently', the 'will, as being acted', also 'acts itself'.[55] This is the 'reaction' he wrote of. As the Spirit moves the will and creates life in it, so also the renewed creature desires this process of movement. The will is created with the capacity to be transformed by the Spirit of God, and through God's grace it is both disposed to be moved and also through that disposition consents to movement itself as well.[56]

Affections

Whereas writers such as à Brakel and Turretin emphasise the mind and will as the higher faculties of human consciousness and the passions or affections as a lower faculty, Owen regularly refers to dispositions of the mind, will, and affections as parallel categories with analogous functions.[57] What then are these affections?

The affections, in Owen's development, are the capacities for 'fear, love, delight'; this is what Owen refers to as the 'disposition of heart and soul'.[58] In believers the affections are 'the sensitive part of the soul' which are 'implanted' with 'a prevailing love' which make the soul be filled with 'delight and complacency to cleave to God and his ways'.[59] They are capable of sanctification, and they also are influenced by the inclination. Human affections are naturally disordered apart from the work of the Spirit, so in order to function correctly they require cleansing and training in holiness.[60] Through regeneration, the affections are enticed so that the Spirit's work 'carries no more repugnancy unto our faculties than prevalent persuasion doth'.[61] Likewise, the

[54] Ibid. 319–20. Cf. Aquinas, *ST*, 1a, Q.83.1.ro3

[55] Owen, *Works*, iii.322; cf. also à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, ii.209-10.

[56] Owen, *Works*, iii.322.

[57] Ibid. 472-3; cf. ibid. 643, 240.

[58] Ibid. 483.

[59] Ibid. 335.

[60] Ibid. 315, 427. Cf. à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service,* i.320-5 and iii.5, 7-8 for a contemporary development of the importance of the affections in the triad of human faculties.

[61] Owen, *Works*, iii.318.

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affections are changed through the 'circumcision of the heart'.[62] This change is accomplished through a work of the Spirit as he puts new affections into the believer's soul.[63]

In Owen's writings, 'affections' figure as a rough equivalent for what Aquinas calls 'the passions'.[64] Owen tends to refer to the affections neutrally or even positively and to the passions negatively, though when he modifies the term 'affections' he is usually using it negatively.[65]

[62] Ibid. 335.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Cf. Aquinas, *ST*, 1a2ae, Q.22.2-3, Q.24.3; 1a Q.80.2. Atkins and Williams define Aquinas' use of passions as 'emotion, passive experience. A *passio* is a state of being affected by something or being acted upon, the opposite of an *action* or "action". Often the word refers to those experiences which we call "emotions" which Aquinas characterises under seven main types: love, hate, joy, sorrow, fear, hope, anger'. In *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, ed E. M. Atkins and Thomas Williams, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 281. See Robert Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions: study of Summa Theologiae 1a2ae 22-48,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 29-57 and Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas,* pp. 241-4 for more on the specifics of how Aquinas defines the passions. In Aquinas' reception of Aristotelian ontology, passions are movements of the sensitive appetites, whereas affections that are passionless are movements of the intellectual power. As the intellectual power is the more noble of these faculties, it has a relational superiority over the sensitive appetites. For more on the distinction between passions and affections generally cf. Thomas Dixon, *From passions to emotions: the creation of a secular psychological category*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 39-48; for a brief description of intellectual emotions see McCabe, *On Aquinas,* p. 73. Owen explicitly connects affections with desires generally and the principal passions specifically. Cf. Owen, *Works*, iii.277, 448, 239; vi.22; vii.446; Aquinas, *ST,* 1a2ae, Q.25.4.

[65] Owen's comments on the necessity of believers to mortify sin are representative of his use of the term passions. Cf. Owen, *Works*, iii.554-555. He does also refer to carnal affections and inordinate affections from time to time, as shown above. See ibid. 593. But his positive use of affections is his much more common usage. Cf. Owen, *Works,* xiii.72. He defines the original righteousness of Adam at the first creation as containing rightly ordered affections, Owen, *Works*, iii.101. Richard Muller defines *passiones* as '*passions, emotions;* roughly synonymous with the Greek $\pi\alpha\theta\acute{\eta}\mu\alpha\tau\alpha$', and *affectio* as 'affection; viz., passion or desire, a disposition toward someone or something; synonymous with *passio and affectus*. Specifically, the *affectio animi*, or affection of soul, that is the faculty of desire', in *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 219, 29. There was a shift from the medieval use of the term 'passions' to refer more generally to the movement of the sensitive appetites, to in the mid-18th century referring to those movements as 'affections', and using 'passions' largely for more extreme mental perturbations. Cf. Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions*, pp. 62-3 and Amy M. Schmitter, 'Passions and Affections', in Peter R. Anstey (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 445-6. Owen's use of both 'affections' and Aquinas' 'passions' is largely consistent with this development, and he would have understood 'passions' and 'affections' as referring more or less to the same property of the sensitive appetitive. In a more technical sense, Owen's use of 'affections' is similar to what Aquinas described as 'ordinate passions', and Owen's use of 'passions' is similar to Aquinas' use of 'inordinate emotions' or sometimes simply 'passions'. Cf. Aquinas, *ST,* 1a2ae, 59.5. For more on the early Reformed understanding of passions and affections cf. David S. Sytsma, 'Analysing the Affections in Early Reformed Orthodoxy', in Jordan J. Ballor, David S. Sytsma, Jason Zuidema (eds), *Church and School in Early Modern*

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This usage is not universal throughout his writings, but it is certainly his normal practice.

One of Owen's most significant contributions to the idea of disposition is the way he emphasises the importance of the new disposition for fighting affections that oppose the work of the Spirit. Rather than merely moderation the affections, he emphasises that godly affections need to replace corrupt affections. Owen has a strong view of both the impact of sin on human affections and the importance of virtuous affections for the Christian life.

Following the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion, the believer is made 'good and holy', with the result of a 'subsequent change of affections and amendment of life'.[66] Owen points out that this work affects the whole person, all of one's faculties, yet he distinctly emphasises the result on the affections as well. Rightly ordered affections replace disordered affections. The affections themselves are renewed and enabled to function properly through a change in their object.[67] Where previously the affections were drawn only through natural or even carnal desires, now they are set upon things which are good and bring glory to God, 'even God himself'.[68] The Holy Spirit works directly on human affections, moulding them through enticement to what is beautiful, and using the faith of the believer as a sort of eye, shows believers the 'truth, reality, subsistence, power, and efficacy of spiritual, mysterious things' in a way that has a profound impact on their affections.[69]

The affections, then, are not merely passive, though they do have a passive role as a response to external stimuli. Rather they point the will and the mind in the direction they are meant to go. The mind apprehends what is good, the will is directed towards what is good, and the affections sense or feel what is good. Natural affections are unreliable guides. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in the new disposition, natural affections are both unpredictable and volatile.

The affections are a significant focus on the Holy Spirit's work of renovation through the new disposition. Not only does Owen repeatedly list the affections with the mind, the will, the understanding, and the conscience, he also takes special attention to emphasize specifically how the affections are changed and that they are indeed a subject of the Spirit's work of renewal. This means, for Owen, that any full discussion of disposition needs to include comment on its impact on the affections.

Protestantism, (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 471-88; William Fenner, *A treatise of the affections* 1642; Edward Reynolds, *A treatise of the passions and faculties of the soul of man,* London, for Robert Bostock, 1656. Wing / R1297

[66] Owen, *Works,* iii.236-7.

[67] Ibid. 239-40.

[68] Ibid. 305.

[69] Ibid. 318.

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Owen's Simplification of Ontology

Each of these faculties of the triad is the subject of a disposition or inclination and has a distinct role in the way humans function. People are disposed to think, to act, and to feel in certain ways. In examining how these faculties function, Owen's analysis here is every bit as psychological as it is theological. His examination of this triad of faculties is the basic building block of his faculty psychology and is deeply connected to the rest of his theological development.

Though Owen clearly has a scholastic ontology behind his understanding of how humans operate, he presents a simplification of that ontology in his theological works. Aquinas' structure is visible in the background of Owen's writing, but what Owen emphasises is a much less complicated framework. Despite this simplified terminology in Owen's account of the soul, he is surprisingly able to keep many of Aquinas' key emphases on faculty psychology in his works. There are two main ways that Owen's treatment of faculties of the soul builds on Aquinas' development.

First, Owen collapses the more complicated Aristotelian faculty psychology into the triad of mind, will, and affections. Owen draws his triad of faculties from a summarised Thomist ontology, but he omits the parts of this psychology that do not apply to his topic. Rather than taking the whole of Aquinas' understanding of the powers of the soul as a cohesive unit, Owen instead picks out the pieces that are the most relevant to his theological project and places them in a less cumbersome setting.

What Owen describes as the impact of the disposition on the triad fits with what we commonly experience. His regular use of the terms mind, will, and affection, or some similar combination emphasises the thinking, willing, and feeling faculties of human nature. We think, we choose, and we feel. This ontology helpfully explains daily practice. We may not always be aware of which faculty is driving our response to a given situation in the moment, but we can often after the fact, and fairly easily, distinguish between these three faculties. Owen describes complex faculty psychology in an accessible fashion, and that helps make his development of the concept of disposition more approachable.

This simplification of Aquinas' ontology to Owen's triad is readily grasped as referring to the whole human soul. Though there is a voluntarist flavour to Owen's ontology which borrows, at least in part, from William Ames, he does not allow it to come at the expense of a similar emphasis on the mind and the affections.[70] Owen repeatedly insists

[70] Owen, *Works*, iii.502; William Ames, *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity* 1642, pp. 197-8. Cf. also John von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), pp. 69-71.

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that the Holy Spirit's work of sanctifying his people consists in a complete work, one in which the whole human nature is changed.[71] He is clear that the affections are every bit as responsible for human sin as are the faculties of mind and will.[72] This is also true of Owen's understanding of spiritual growth as well. One does not grow spiritually only in the will or the mind without also growing in the affections. Both in vice and in virtue, the whole person is involved. The 'whole soul' is changed through the work of the Holy Spirit.[73]

The idea of disposition is one that encompasses all these different aspects of human consciousness. We do not have to parse exactly how a disposition impacts the different faculties in a specific instance or at which point which faculty is being impacted. In fact, to do so is not really possible; we are far more complex and intertwined in our thinking and feeling than that, and we are rarely that aware of ourselves. Yet this disposition does have an impact on everything about how a person feels, wills, thinks, desires, and acts. It stands behind all these faculties. Owen's use of the triad in place of Aquinas' psychological terminology aids him in this explanation.

Second, Owen frequently simplifies the terminology he uses when he describes these faculties. Owen does use the standard scholastic nomenclature for these specific faculties, their dispositions, and their acts, but neither as frequently nor as consistently as one might have expected.[74] Considering his reliance on both Aristotle and Aquinas for these concepts, he makes very little of the distinction between powers and appetites. Having been trained in Thomist ontology, Owen was clearly aware of Aquinas' distinctions in this matter, and he demonstrates throughout his writings that this framework was behind his understanding of human nature even when his usage stands in noticeable contradiction to Thomist ontology. Nowhere is this more evident than in his concept of the affections. Owen describes dispositions or inclinations of the affections. Now if the affections are equated with the sensitive appetites, then they are the subjects of dispositions as are the mind and the will. If, however, the affections are equated with the passions, then, properly speaking, they are not the subjects of dispositions, for passions do not have dispositions. Owen's use of affections is frequently inconsistent with this distinction, as he uses affections both in

[71] Owen, *Works,* iii.468–9. Owen shortly thereafter emphasises again that the supernaturally infused disposition works directly on all three faculties: 'according to the nature of all habits, it inclines and disposeth the mind, will, and affections', Ibid. 472-3.

[72] Ibid. 297-8.

[73] Ibid. 332.

[74] Owen's use of 'affections' to refer to both 'passions' and the appetite which produces them is not unique in his time. For more on the use of faculty psychology among the reformers and the Reformed Orthodox cf. Sytsma, 'Analysing the Affections in Early Reformed Orthodoxy', in *Church and School in Early Modern Protestantism,* p. 473; Muller, *PRRD*, i.355-9.

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place of the passions and in place of the sensitive appetites, sometimes even switching between these distinctions without signalling that he is doing so.[75]

This inconsistency between Aquinas' and Owen's terminology may be carelessness on Owen's part, as at times Owen is neither consistent nor precise in his writing. Owen's combining of the sensitive appetite with the passions is technically imprecise; they are not the same thing, and it makes Owen's treatment of the affections incoherent if one does not understand what he's doing.

In spite of these limitations, Owen's simplification has significant benefits that commend his approach. In fact, Owen's imprecision may actually turn out as a net gain for him, because his usage fits better than Aquinas' with ordinary human experience.[76] Owen's usage could be a sensitivity to the fact that most people do not distinguish between their emotions and the source of their emotions.[77] For example, when we feel love for something, we don't usually distinguish which faculty or power of the soul is responsible for that feeling of love. We simply know that, as we say today even if it were not how Aquinas or Owen would have said it, we *feel* a sort of love for something; we may not even know why. Owen's simplification of the vocabulary of ontology fits with this common experience.

Aquinas' ontology, while technically precise and often psychologically valid, is hardly intuitive. That is not to argue that is it not useful; a technical vocabulary is often necessary for many concepts whether or not we use that vocabulary daily. But sometime a more technical approach can obscure the concept for the average reader. Owen's purpose wasn't to provide an in-depth examination of the powers of the soul. Few would argue that Owen's writings on any subject are intuitive, as his writings have long had a reputation for being cumbersome, but this simplification of Aquinas' ontology may be one area where Owen is attempting to meet his readers halfway.

Now Owen writes of the affections as if they are a parallel faculty to the mind and the will.[78] Aquinas and Aristotle held that the passions (affections in Owen) were a subordinate faculty to the mind and the will, and Owen technically maintains this categorisation. Yet his regular pattern of usage suggests he wants his readers to understand a certain correspondence between all three faculties of the triad. Aristotle, Aquinas, and Owen all agree that the passions can lead the mind and the will astray. Owen and Aquinas, however, see the

[75] Cf. Owen, *Works*, iii.168, 225, 240, 350, 483,

[76] Owen references his own experience as standing behind his treatment of the mind and affections in *Works,* vii.263.

[77] McCabe points out that Aquinas was not unaware of this complexity, in *On Aquinas,* pp. 79-80.

[78] Cf. Owen, *Hebrews*, v.482; *Works*, iii.288, 309, 469, iv.370.

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problem of the human condition as deeper than merely having disordered passions. The affections are prone to desire created things rather than the Creator. The depravation of this faculty is such that it makes serious opposition to efforts at reformation. Thus, the solution for both Aquinas and for Owen is much more radical than merely reordering the affections: the affections themselves need to be transformed, and both new objects for and sorts of affections need to be instilled.

Owen's use of dispositions of the affections is a key point of Aquinas' development of disposition. Robert Miner points out that Aquinas 'displays no tendency to exalt reason by denigrating the passions, or to exalt the passions by condemning the rule of reason'.[79] Both intellect and affections are critical components of human functionality in Aquinas' development, and Owen retains this crucial emphasis. A flourishing human is one in whom the passions or affections and reason rightly function in relation to each other. Despite Aquinas' explanation of the passions seeming to remove moral agency from humans on account of their passions, he still puts a moral responsibility on human beings for the various attendant circumstances and dispositions that result in their passions.[80] Owen's simplification of Aquinas' terminology on the passions allows him to emphasise both the importance of the affections themselves and their responsiveness to command.[81]

Conclusion

Disposition in Owen's development is a whole-person inclination. Every aspect of the soul is impacted by this disposition. These three pieces of human consciousness, mind, will, and affections, form a triad of faculties that Owen regularly uses together. While Owen's ontology is expressed in a rather simplified form when considered next to Aquinas, there is much overlap between their ontologies. The importance of this triad in understanding how and why we function the way we do is a key similarity between Owen and Aquinas.

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[79] Miner, *Thomas Aquinas*, p. 90.

[80] Cf. *ST,* 1a2ae, Q.77.7; Miner, *Thomas Aquinas,* pp. 100-8.

[81] Cf. Roberts*, Spiritual Emotions: a psychology of Christian virtues,* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), pp. 22-31.

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