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Aquinas, Hadot, and Spiritual Exercises

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Abstract

The work of Pierre Hadot can highlight understudied aspects of the work of Thomas Aquinas. Hadot offers two key concepts in his study of ancient philosophy: philosophy as a "way of life" and "spiritual exercises", which help us to approach Thomas, especially given his regular use of the term "spiritual exercise" and the concept of "exercise."

Keywords

Spiritual exercises, Aquinas, Hadot

The French philosopher Pierre Hadot identified a component missing from the world of modern philosophy. His great innovation came in identifying philosophy as a "way of life," accompanied by certain "spiritual exercises," an insight derived from his study of ancient philosophy. In this understanding, only when they lived their philosophy could philosophers properly be called philosophers. Hadot repeatedly quotes Henry David Thoreau: "Nowadays, there are philosophy professors, but no philosophers."[1] Thoreau's point, which Hadot heartily endorses, is that there is a difference between thinking and living, and in the modern world the great majority of our philosophical undertakings are concerned only with speculative knowledge or theoretical matters, and not with changing one's way of life. Hadot argues that, in the ancient world, while knowledge is important to the philosopher, it is only a part of a far more important project: the task of total self-cultivation. In this project, the philosopher is deeply concerned with working on his self, and only along with the conversion into something different can that philosopher come to "know" something about the universe.

[1] Epigraph of *What is Ancient Philosophy?* Hadot, Pierre, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* [Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?], (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 1.

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In my view the work of Pierre Hadot can also find fruitful application outside of the world of ancient philosophy and early Christianity, the two historical settings he focused on, and can in fact develop our understanding of the work of Thomas Aquinas. I am not the first to apply Hadot to Aquinas; Matthew Levering and Gilles Emery have both done so. They show the relevance of Hadot for interpretation of Thomas's more theoretical writings, like his work on the Trinity. This paper ranges over spiritual exercises in Thomas, including those which relate to the spiritual life and the formation of moral capability.

Hadot's work focused on the philosophy of Roman and Greek writers in the period between 400 BCE and 400 CE. He draws a sharp contrast between two types of thought: one which can be properly called "philosophy," while the other, drawing from the Stoics, is better labelled "*logos kata philosophian*," discourse about philosophical matters.[2] It is a recurring theme or criticism among philosophers that some are not actually doing philosophy, but only talking about it—think, for example, of Plato's criticism of the Sophists. This criticism is also directed at the medieval Scholastics. Hadot, in particular, sees the development of the university methods of learning in the 13th century as one instance of philosophy losing its practical core:

> If ancient philosophy established such an intimate link between philosophical discourse and the form of life, why is it that today, given the way the history of philosophy is usually taught, philosophy is presented as above all a discourse, which may be theoretical and systematic, or critical, but in any case lacks a direct relationship to the philosopher's way of life? The causes of this transformation are primarily historical: it is due to the flourishing of Christianity. As we have seen, Christianity presented itself very early as a "philosophy" in the ancient sense of the term . . . .Gradually, however, and for reasons we shall explore later, Christianity, particularly in the Middle Ages, was marked by a divorce between philosophical discourse and way of life . . . .All that persisted was the philosophical discourse of certain ancient schools, in particular the discourses of Platonism and Aristotelianism. Yet, separated from the ways of life which inspired them, they were reduced to the status of mere conceptual material, which could be used in theological controversies.[3]

This is a rather intriguing argument, and Hadot is certainly not the first to point to Scholasticism as problematic in a number of ways.[4] Still, there are several difficulties with Hadot's understanding

[2] Reference to *What is Ancient Philosophy?,* p. 25 and to Hadot's *Inner Citadel* 94–98. Hadot, Pierre and Marcus Aurelius*, The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* [Citadelle intérieure], (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

[3] *What is ancient philosophy?,* p. 253.

[4] Interestingly enough, Hadot is dependent on Jean Leclercq's *The love of learning and the desire for God: a study of monastic culture*, which offers a critical picture of the Scholastic spiritual life: Leclercq's argument is overstated.

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of Scholastic thought. Hadot has not approached Scholastic thought with the same keen eye he applied to Classical thinkers, and is guilty of overlooking the same aspects of their work which others missed in reading Classical thought before Hadot. This is unsurprising, as it is still the standard reading of Scholastics to focus only on their academic work, to dismiss their biblical commentaries and sermons as marginal, and instead to turn to the Monastic thinkers or "mystics" for commentary on the spiritual life.

For Hadot, the problems of Scholastic thought did not end in the Middle Ages, but continue up to the present day. Given the connection of the rise of the university with the rise of scholasticism, and the endurance of university structures from that period, it is inevitable that one would find a continuation of many of the same forms and methods of teaching. Thus, for Hadot, the university system is predicated on a faulty concept of philosophy. Beyond the university, certain philosophical systems continue this division, as Hadot explains: "The partisans of neo-scholastic or Thomist philosophy have continued, as in the middle ages, to view philosophy as a purely theoretical activity." This is not necessarily a bold claim, and is certainly in line with the standard perception of scholastic thought over the centuries. But is it correct?[5]

For Scholasticism in general, and for the work of Thomas Aquinas in particular, this is surely not the case. Aquinas does not approach philosophy or theology as a purely theoretical activity, nor does he lack a concern for the transformation of the person through education and training. Hadot's argument overlooks several of the key features of Scholasticism in the 13th century in favor of his original characterization. In reality, Thomas is concerned with the whole person and his development, and though he does not identify the work of the Christian as the "philosophical life" as do other thinkers from around this period,[6] he is devoted to the concept of the *vita spiritualis,* the spiritual life.

Hadot is certainly aware of the concept of the spiritual life, and he does not believe that Christianity wholly lacks the understanding of philosophy held by Greek and Roman philosophers. Instead, he is making a specific argument about the nature of Scholastic thought,

[5] Speaking of neo-Scholasticism and neo-Thomism in general, it seems as if an argument can be made that this is not the case for all parties involved. One can look, for example, to the efforts of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, called the "Sacred Monster of Thomism," and see a number of works on the "Spiritual Life." These works, while they may continue to treat philosophy as a handmaiden as Thomas in some sense does, do view Christianity as a way of life, and seek to integrate theoretical material into a practical existence. They also employ spiritual exercises.

[6] Most notably Bernard of Clairvaux, but also Meister Eckhart and others. Bernard of Clairvaux is one figure who is critical of "university" learning, though at the time the universities were not fully established.

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and suggesting that it lost some of the values that Christianity once held. It is in fact from Christianity, and from scholarship on Christian theologians, that Hadot draws some of the more important concepts in his work. In "Ancient Spiritual Exercises and 'Christian Philosophy'" Hadot cites Paul Rabbow's work *Antike Schriften uber Seelenheilung und Seelenleitung auf ihre Quellen untersucht,* as a key source of inspiration. In this work, Rabbow describes the ancient practice of a "moral exercise,"[7] something which is then developed in Christianity into a "spiritual exercise." Rabbow writes:

> Spiritual exercises, then, which resemble moral exercises like a twin, both in essence and structure, were raised to their classical rigor and perfection in the *Exercitia Spiritualia* of Ignatius of Loyola. Spiritual exercises thus belong primarily to the religious sphere, since their goal is to fortify, maintain, and renew life "in the Spirit," the *vita spiritualis*.[8]

Admittedly, if one were to turn to the work of Thomas Aquinas, as well as those commentators on his work, the vast majority is not focused explicitly on the "spiritual life." Rather, one finds a strong emphasis on disputation about issues that appear to have no bearing on quotidian realities. But, as Hadot will emphasize about ancient authors, our approach to earlier texts often misses key aspects of the writer's thought because of the differences in our context. This lack of perspective, I argue, is true of the work of Thomas Aquinas, and Hadot and others have missed certain aspects of Thomas' work.

Thomas does in fact care about the spiritual life, and views Christianity as a way of life. In addition, he offers a variety of spiritual exercises that aid in the formation of a person, in order that the person may approach the world, other persons, and God in a different way. As a key example of this argument, one can turn to one of Thomas's lesser read works, the *De perfectione spiritualis vitae*, which offers an explanation of the spiritual life and examples of exercises that aid in its advancement. This work, though often dismissed as a polemic concerned only with the defence of the mendicant orders, in fact offers detailed teaching on the religious life and the appropriate way of life for all Christians. From this first source, we are provided with an alternative entry point to approach the *Summa Theologiae* and works of Thomas, one which highlights Thomas' understanding of the life

[7] Rabbow used "moral exercise" to distinguish non-Christian practices of philosophers from Christian exercises. As Hadot will note, "moral exercise" is an inadequate term and is rightly replaced by "spiritual exercise," as the practices referred to alter the whole person, and not just the ethical aspect.

[8] Hadot, Pierre and Arnold I. Davidson. 1995, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* [Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique.], (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1995) p. 127.

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of Christians as taking a specific form, accompanied by a process of self-formation.

As mentioned above, Hadot's work points to Christianity as the source of this problem in western thought, and specifically the Christian Scholasticism of the Middle Ages. It is important to note that, by the end of his life, Hadot had softened his stance on a number of these arguments. Instead of arguing for the almost complete absence of philosophy as a way of life from the modern world, Hadot started to turn his focus to those appearances of spiritual exercises in authors from the modern period. His final text, *N'oublie pas de Vivre,* is a study of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's writings, and an examination of his use of antique sources and the perspectives found therein, including a detailed explanation of his use of spiritual exercises.[9] He also wrote on Nietzsche and Spinoza, and Michel de Montaigne.[10]

Philosophy as a "way of life" is a concept offered by Hadot to describe the differences between theoretical philosophy and philosophy as practised by some in the ancient world. Hadot writes, "Philosophy then appears in its original aspect: not as a theoretical construct, but as a method for training people to live and to look at the world in a new way."[11] This does not mean that philosophy is limited to the ethical; instead, all aspects of philosophical thought are integrated into what is traditionally considered the ethical. Arnold Davidson writes that for Hadot, in his description of ancient philosophy, "the distinction between theory and practice is located within each of the parts of philosophy; there is a theoretical discourse concerning logic, physics, and ethics, but there is also a practical or lived logic, a lived physics, and a lived ethics."[12]

These three aspects also lead to three areas of concern for cultivation of the self: judgments, desires, and inclinations.[13] The activity of philosophical discourse related to logic actually provides a foundation for the functional implementation of logic in one's life: practicing logical thinking at a theoretical level forms one to be capable of thinking logically in the every day, and thus one is able to develop sound judgment. The same is true for physics and ethics: physics in this account relates to a tempering of desires and inclinations, for if one understands the nature of the world, its status as temporary

[9] Hadot, Pierre, *N'Oublie Pas De Vivre: Goethe Et La Tradition Des Exercices Spirituels,* Bibliothèque Albin Michel. Idées, (Paris: Albin Michel, 2008).

[10] *Philosophy as a way of life*, p. 107.

[11] Discussed in *What is Ancient Philosophy?* Ch. 12.

[12] *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, p. 24: referring to "la philosophie antique: une ethique ou une pratique" pp.18–29 and "Philosophie, discours philosophique, et divisions de la philosophie chez les stoiciens"; and Hadot, The inner citadel, ch. 5.

[13] This is an account of Stoic thought.

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and one's part in it as a human, then one does not cling to the same desires or foster the same inclinations.

The theoretical practice of ethics also relates to the actual practice of ethics. To the many people who would claim that they did not become moral by reading Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Hadot would have two responses: 1. We are not reading the text correctly; ancient texts must be read differently, and if the expectation is transformation, then one must be willing to engage in the practices recommended, sometimes subtly, by the text. As Aristotle himself says, "We become just by the practice of just actions, self-controlled by exercising self-control, and courageous by performing acts of courage."[14] Talking about a piece of philosophy, or reading a book, does not make one ethical unless it is implemented. 2. We have lost the oral accompaniment to ancient philosophy: ancient philosophy took place most often in the setting of a school; the everyday discourse of that school, which was almost never written down, is an interpretive key to understanding the implementation of that way of life.

Understanding these two components of the reading of ancient texts ought to inform our reading of the works of Thomas Aquinas. Though a text like the *Summa Theologiae* is a step away from our immediate actions, it will provide advice on what practices are necessary to acquire the virtues and become the character recommended by the text. These references to practices are in fact references to spiritual exercises.

In order to form oneself to live as a philosopher, Hadot identifies certain activities which he calls "spiritual exercises," with the precedent for the term coming from Ignatius of Loyola (via Rabbow). Once more, these exercises are a defining feature of early philosophy and are, according to Hadot, mostly lost from the world with the rise of Scholastic thought. Hadot, again in describing the philosophical schools of the first millennium, writes:

> All schools agree that man, before his philosophical conversion, is in a state of unhappy disquiet. Consumed by passions, torn by worries, he does not live a genuine life, nor is he truly himself. All schools agree that man can be delivered from this state. He can accede to genuine life, improve himself, transform himself, and attain a state of perfection. It is precisely for this that spiritual exercises are intended. Their goal is a kind of self-formation, or *paideia*, which is to teach us to live, not in conformity with human prejudices and social conventions—for social life is itself a product of the passions—but in conformity with the nature of man, which is none other than reason.[15]

[14] Aristotle and Martin Ostwald, *Nicomachean Ethics*, The Library of Liberal Arts, Vol. 75, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), p. 34, 1103b.

[15] *What is Ancient Philosophy?,* p. 102,

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Spiritual exercises take a number of forms, a brief list of which might include: research, investigation, reading, listening, attention, meditations, therapies of the passions, remembrance of good things, self mastery, and the accomplishment of duties.[16] The common thread is that they have an effect on the self, and the soul in particular (hence, spiritual), and are a key component of moral training. Even when taking the form of a bodily action, like occupying a certain location or practices of generosity, the importance is secondarily upon the action,[17] and primarily the impact that action has on the soul. Through repetition of these exercises, and the formation of habits of thought and practice, one is aided in the formation of virtues.

Important to this overview is the fact that the practices of logic, disputation, and speculative thought all fall under the umbrella of spiritual exercise in Hadot's understanding. Hadot argues this because he recognizes that philosophers of the ancient world were not concerned only with developing a better knowledge of the world from their speculation; instead, thinkers would derive a definition of "justice" for example, not simply so they would know what justice is, but rather that they become persons who are capable of the complex thought, prudent effort, and effective action in order that the implementation of that conceived justice is made a real possibility.

As mentioned above, the use of Hadot in reading Aquinas has already been noted. Levering[18] and Emery have both shown that Thomas's theoretical work has practical concerns, and is connected with spiritual exercises. For example, the explanation of and meditation on a doctrine like the Trinity is not simply an exercise about the increase of knowledge, but also has an impact on the way a person lives. Emery's article "Trinitarian Theology as a Spiritual Exercise in Augustine and Aquinas"[19] discusses the purpose of Trinitarian theology in Thomas, as well as the purpose of speculative theology in general. He cites from the *Summa Contra Gentiles*:

> In order to manifest this kind of truth, one must provide likely, probable reasons (*rationes aliquae verisimiles*) for the exercise and comfort of

[16] Ibid., p. 84.

[17] Not from the standpoint of the moral worth of the action, but rather from the perspective of formation. That is, the significance of undertaking a fast is not the action of not eating, but the effect fasting has on the soul to curb one's need for food generally, and for fine food in particular. The significance of avoiding food is secondary to the significance of forming one's soul to restrain its desires for food.

[18] Levering, Matthew, *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology,* Challenges in Contemporary Theology, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 23–46, esp. 34–39. Hadot is mentioned only briefly, but serves as foundation to Levering's discussion of "Theologizing as a Wisdom-exercise."

[19] Emery, Gilles, *Trinity, Church, and the Human Person : Thomistic Essays, Faith & Reason* : Studies in Catholic Theology & Philosophy, (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2007) pp. 33–70.

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> the faithful (*ad fidelium quidem exercitium et solatium*) and not in order to convince opponents; for the insufficiency of these reasons would rather confirm them in their error if they thought that we adhered to the faith for such weak reasons.[20]

For Emery, the two most important words in this passage are "exercise and comfort." Comfort, *solatium*, has a broad range of meaning in Thomas that is lost in our English word "comfort." Emery summarizes these meanings:

> The search for "reasons" in order to manifest the faith procures for believers support, remedy, defense, and spiritual consolation by giving them a grasp of the intelligibility of their faith and showing them that this faith resists the objections (heresies and rational arguments) that are posed to it.[21]

This is one important aspect of establishing the theme of theology as a way of life in Thomas, as theology thus gives the student confidence in his beliefs, freeing him to live accordingly. Hadot points to a similar argument among Stoic thinkers of the Hellenistic period, who sought to provide a rationale for following their way of life while recognizing that the only conclusive demonstration of its authenticity came from the full experience of living in that manner. Solace and confidence in one's way of life is one part, but it is secondary in Hadot's and Emery's understanding to the practice of exercise.

The use of the term "exercise" as Emery explains:

> As for the word "exercise" (*exercitium*), it indicates the nature and purpose of the theologian's study. St Thomas often applies this theme of exercise (*exercitatio* and *exercitium*) to study and teaching sustained by perseverance, training, and frequent practice. The study and teaching of wisdom are counted among the "spiritual exercises" (*spiritualia exercitia*) that lead one to know God and to love him.[22]

Thus, for Thomas, even "speculative" activity is involved in the formation of persons. This scheme of exercise fits into Thomas' work as a whole. For the intellectual aspect of the person, the study of sacred doctrine and Trinitarian theology contributes to the development of the mind and increases its ability to understand divine things. Emery continues: "The exercise consists in passing from corporeal realities to spiritual realities, from light things to those that are more arduous, from a simple teaching to a more subtle teaching, from faith to a spiritual understanding of the faith."[23] Emery and Levering have

[20] Ibid., p. 58.

[21] Ibid., p. 59.

[22] Ibid., p. 60. Referring to SCG III.132 "*studium sapientiae, et doctrina, et alia huiusmodi spiritualia exercitia*." See also ST II-II.122.4 ad 3. Also important is the fact that to grow in the love of God, the virtue of charity, is the purpose of the spiritual life.

[23] Ibid., p. 60.

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shown, therefore, that even when discussing aspects of speculative theology, Thomas is interested in the formation of the human person[24]

Though the term is little discussed by commentators, Thomas employs the term "spiritual exercises," and does so in different contexts. The principal instances are found in reference to the acquisition of wisdom, and secondly in regard to the religious life. One example is found in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*:

> Now if it were necessary for followers of voluntary poverty to make their living by manual labor, the result would be that they might take up the greater part of their lives in this kind of work; consequently, they would be kept away from other, more necessary activities, such as the pursuit of wisdom and teaching, and other such spiritual exercises (*spiritualia exercitia*).[25]

In this instance, the spiritual exercises are related to the increase of knowledge and the formation of students. Thomas is perhaps best known for his focus on academic work, so that he would place those activities in the category of spiritual exercise is not surprising.

In the next instance, however, from the *Summa Theologiae*, other specific activities which accompany the religious life are identified as spiritual exercises. This is perhaps a less studied aspect of Thomas, but one that is central to his own way of life. He includes activities which fall under the vows of the religious state that aid in the avoidance of sin and increase in charity:

> As was shown above (II-II.188.1), the religious state is a spiritual schooling (*spirituale exercitium*) for the attainment of the perfection of charity. This is accomplished through the removal of the obstacles to perfect charity by religious observances; and these obstacles are those things which attach man's affections to earthly things. Now the attachment of man's affections to earthly things is not only an obstacle to the perfection of charity, but sometimes leads to the loss of charity, when through turning inordinately to temporal goods man turns away from the immutable good by sinning mortally. Hence it is evident that the observances of the religious state, while removing the obstacles to perfect charity, remove also the occasions of sin: for instance, it is clear that fasting, watching, obedience, and the like withdraw man from sins of gluttony and lust and all other manner of sins.

[24] Wayne Hankey brings together Hadot and Thomas, though with the focus on Hadot's reading of neo-Platonism. Hankey also argues, however, that Hadot misreads the Scholastics in general and Aquinas in particular, seemingly preferring "non-religious" or "less religious" philosophy, exemplified by the Stoics in contrast to figures like Porphyry or Plotinus. Hankey, Wayne J, "Philosophy as Way of Life for Christians? Iamblichan and Porphyrian Reflections on Religion, Virtue, and Philosophy in Thomas Aquinas." *Laval théologique et philosophique* 59, no. 2 (2003), pp. 193–224.

[25] SCG 3.132.14

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> Consequently it is right that not only those who are practiced (*exercitati*) in the observance of the commandments should enter religion in order to attain to yet greater perfection, but also those who are not practiced (e*xercitati*), in order the more easily to avoid sin and attain to perfection.[26]

Thus the religious state is a "*spirituale exercitium*". It is in the context of the religious life and in describing religious observances that Thomas is most vocal about the role of spiritual exercises, something which James Keenan notes.[27]

Thomas also refers to certain outward physical actions as a spiritual exercise, describing the practice of kneeling in prayer as a "spiritual exercise" for the inner soul:

> This is a symbol of humility for two reasons. First, a man belittles himself, in a certain way, when he genuflects, and he subjects himself to the one he genuflects before. In such a way he recognizes his own weakness and insignificance. Secondly, physical strength is present in the knees; in bending them a man confesses openly to his lack of strength. Thus external physical symbols are shown to God for the purpose of renewing and spiritually training (*exercitium spirituale*) the inner soul.[28]

And finally, in an explanation of the purpose of baptism[29]:

> Secondly, this is suitable for our spiritual training (*spirituale exercitium*): namely, in order that, by fighting against concupiscence and other defects to which he is subject, man may receive the crown of victory. Wherefore on Romans 6:6, "that the body of sin may be destroyed," a gloss says: "If a man after baptism live in the flesh, he has concupiscence to fight against, and to conquer by God's help."[30]

These references, taken together, provide the scope of spiritual exercises in Thomas, which is admittedly rather broad. They cover the full range of the moral and intellectual virtues, and also, by implication, have an impact on the reception and preservation of the theological virtues. The range of spiritual exercises suggested by

[26] ST II-II.189.1

[27] Keenan, James F, *Goodness and Rightness in Thomas Aquinas's* Summa Theologiae, (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1992), p. 51. "In later questions, the concept of *exercitium* appears with uncanny regularity. Indeed, Thomas develops the notion of attaining perfection through exercise most fully in his writings in the *Summa Theologiae* on the religious life."

[28] Aquinas, Saint Thomas, Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians, Commentaria Biblica, (Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute, 2012). In Eph 3:14 [#166]

[29] The role of the sacraments in increasing moral capability and progressing in the spiritual life is central to Thomas's work. It is, unfortunately, outside of the direct subject matter of this work, however, so will be not treated in sufficient detail.

[30] ST III.69.3

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Thomas is not limited to those areas where he explicitly identifies an activity as an "exercise." Instead, because Thomas uses the term generally, any exercise for developing virtue, disposing one to relationship with God, or for preventing the enactment of sinful habits found in Thomas can be considered a spiritual exercise.

The spiritual exercises that Thomas describes bear a close resemblance to those offered by earlier thinkers. Hadot, citing Philo, Galen, and others, includes research, thorough investigation, reading, listening, attention (*prosoche*), self-mastery, indifference to indifferent things, meditations, therapies of the passions, remembrance of good things, and the accomplishment of duties.[31] Hadot further divides spiritual exercises into four categories: 1. Attention 2. Meditations 3. Intellectual 4. Practical. Each of these four categories is found in Aquinas, albeit at times in different ways than in ancient thinkers.

The category of attention (prosoche) as a spiritual exercise is a well developed notion in Thomas. Attention as a practice of the human person, according to Hadot, is grounded in the Delphic maxim, "know thyself." As he writes: "Although it is difficult to be sure of the original meaning of this formula, this much is clear; it invites us to establish a relationship of the self to the self, which constitutes the foundation of every spiritual exercise."[32] For Thomas, attention takes several forms, including that of solicitude, a part of the virtue of prudence, whereby one is called to awareness of one's activities and vigilance against being led astray. As Thomas will say in his Commentary on Hebrews, "He says, watch. For each one of you ought to consider in himself what condition he is."[33] Keeping oneself from sin and sinful desires requires that persons be "continuously scrutinizing their consciences,"[34] that is, aware always of their intentions, their actions, and their thoughts, such that they can be properly directed. Developing this awareness is an essential part of becoming a moral person for Thomas, as he writes, "For the first thing that occurs to a man who has discretion, is to think of himself (*seipso cogitet*), and to direct other things to himself as to their end, since, the end is the first thing in the intention."[35]

Meditations are also found in Aquinas. Repeatedly we are encouraged, from the Psalms and elsewhere, to meditate on all of God's

[31] Philosophy as a Way of Life, p. 84.

[32] Ibid., p. 90.

[33] Aquinas, Saint Thomas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Hebrews,* Commentaria Biblica, (Lander, MD: Aquinas Institute, 2012). ch. 3 lec. 3 – "*Dicit ergo, videte. Unusquisque enim in se debet considerare in quo statu sit."*

[34] Ibid. – "*. . . continue scilicet discutiendo conscientiam suam*."

[35] ST I-II.89.6 ad 3, with reference to Zechariah 1:3 – "*Primum enim quod occurrit homini discretionem habenti est quod de seipso cogitet, ad quem alia ordinet sicut ad finem, finis enim est prior in intentione.*"

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works.[36] The virtue of prudence, likewise, includes memory as one of its quasi-integral parts, the aspects of a virtue required for its perfection. Thomas cites Aristotle in the question of "whether a habit can be caused by one act": "But with regard to the lower apprehensive powers, the same acts need to be repeated many times for anything to be firmly impressed on the memory. And so the Philosopher says (*De memor. et remin*. 1) that "meditation strengthens memory (*meditatio confirmat memoriam*)."[37] In another instance, Thomas describes how our consistent and repeated reflection on prior experiences keeps them fresh in our mind, and thus able to serve us in future moral consideration.[38] Finally, Aquinas repeatedly recommends meditation on the scriptures, an admonition found throughout his writings.

This leads to the third category, intellectual exercises. As Hadot writes, "the exercises of meditation and memorization require nourishment. This is where the more specifically intellectual exercises . . . come in."[39] For Aquinas, nourishment comes from academic work, from the reading of the scriptures and works of theology. Thus, the intellectual practices for Aquinas are legion. It is possible to understand the entirety of Thomas's corpus as representing a form of spiritual exercise, in particular the *Summa Theologiae*.[40] The ability to think in disputational form, to engage in the methodology of the *quaestio*, requires that a person be able to produce both the argument and the counterargument to any given matter. Furthermore, the study of scriptures and theology gives students resources for meditation and contemplation.

Practical exercises are described by Hadot as "those intended to create habits," and he cites as examples the practice of indifference to indifferent things and freeing oneself from the control of the passions.[41] These exercises are of particular importance to the religious life for Thomas, and each of the vows can be understood as a practical exercise. Poverty frees our affections from material things, chastity frees our affections from other humans, and obedience frees our affections from ourselves. With our affections withdrawn from earthly things, it is possible to devote them fully to our affection

[36] SCG II.1.6 – *Praemittit namque primae operationis meditationem, cum dicit, meditatus sum in omnibus operibus tuis: ut operatio ad divinum intelligere et velle referatur. Subiungit vero de factionis meditatione, cum dicit, et in factis manuum tuarum meditabar: ut per facta manuum ipsius intelligamus caelum et terram, et omnia quae procedunt in esse a Deo sicut ab artifice manufacta procedunt.*

[37] I-II.51.3

[38] II-II.49.1 – "Whether memory is a part of prudence?" – see especially ad 2.

[39] Philosophy as a Way of Life, p. 86.

[40] For a discussion of disputatio/quaestio as an "intellectual exercise," see Rosemann, Philipp, *Understanding Scholastic Thought with Foucault*, The New Middle Ages, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999). Especially chapter 3, "Scholastic Intellectual Practices."

[41] *Philosophy as a Way of Life,* p. 86.

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for God, and then according to the order of charity, our souls, our neighbors, our bodies. Practical exercises are also seen in the moral virtues; the activities associated with temperance are especially noteworthy in this regard, in that the restraint of the sensitive appetite is best accomplished through the adoption of certain habits of eating, of refraining from illicit sexual thoughts, and from inappropriate relations with material objects.

Taken together, these exercises form the *askesis* of Aquinas. Not to be confused with asceticism, an *askesis* is simply the set of exercises offered by a certain thinker, philosophy, or school. Each *askesis* is different and reflects the theological or philosophical tenets of the different groups they belong to. Aquinas's askesis, to speak in general terms, is more intellectually oriented than the Stoics or Epicureans, for example, in that there is a greater emphasis on the full understanding of Christian theology. It also, however, contains many of the same practical exercises and components as these earlier philosophies, an aspect of his work which is significantly underappreciated.

Thus Hadot's ideas can be applied fruitfully to understudied aspects of the work of Aquinas. Thomas is still often characterized as someone whose faith was purely intellectual, whose sensibilities do not relate to what is now called "spirituality." This reading is quite inadequate, and overlooks the innumerable practices which accompany the love of God.

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