

ABSTRACT

A Thomistic Principle of Virtue Individuation

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[T]he knowledge by which one knows he has a habit presupposes the knowledge by which he knows what that habit is. For I cannot know that I have chastity unless I know what chastity is. (Aquinas, Disputed Questions on Truth 10.9)

In this dissertation, I aim to accomplish two goals. The first goal is to draw contemporary moral philosophers' attention to the need for a principled approach to virtue individuation. When we individuate virtues, we answer questions about the number of human virtues that exist and the ways in which they differ from one another. Most contemporary moral philosophers answer these questions in a haphazard way—a practice that is in no small way responsible for the chaotic and cacophonous state of contemporary virtue ethics. I spend the second chapter developing a case for a principled approach to virtue individuation and laying out the desiderata for such a principle. I suggest that whatever criterion of individuation we adopt, it should be flexible yet parsimonious, so as to respect and preserve the diversity within the virtues. Moreover, our criterion must connect to our foundational beliefs about human nature and the nature of virtues in a non-trivial way.

Having established the desiderata for a criterion of virtue individuation, I move to my second goal. This goal is to articulate Aquinas's approach to virtue individuation as a model for the way in which one might go about articulating one's own criterion. I argue that Aquinas individuates virtues based on their *subject*, their *object*, and their *mode*, and that this approach is an organic product of Aquinas's metaphysics of human nature. Accordingly, I dedicate the third chapter to sketching the relevant aspects of Aquinas's moral psychology and to situating Aquinas's account of *habitus*—which is commonly translated into English as “habit” or “disposition” and of which virtue is a species—within his moral psychology. The fourth chapter lays out Aquinas's account of virtues, paying special attention to the questions of virtue's subject, object, and mode. It also maps out the conceptual space—the taxonomy of virtues—that individual virtues may inhabit. With the conceptual apparatus thus established, in chapter five I explicate the Thomistic principle of virtue individuation. I demonstrate and test Aquinas's method by examining the virtues of generosity and magnificence, infused and acquired temperance, and, finally, a contemporary case of anger-regulating virtues.

A Thomistic Principle of Virtue Individuation

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DEDICATION

To my babushka, Leila Nagimovna Girfanovna, who loved me unconditionally and whom I miss dearly. And to my sister, Maya Alexandrovna Klisho. You are the strongest person I know, and your wide-eyed appreciation of the world inspires me to no end.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Virtue Individuation

Think of someone whose character you admire. Someone like Corrie Ten Boom, who, along with her family, hid the Jews in her home during the Nazi occupation of Netherlands, and whose strength of character and readiness to forgive her enemies has withstood the test of imprisonment in a concentration camp and the loss of her closest family members.¹ Or someone like Christian de Chergé, the prior of the Trappist monastery in Tibhirine, Algeria, who, along with his fellow monks, chose to remain in their community out of solidarity with those who were facing terrorism and violence at the hands of the Armed Islamic Group. Kidnapped, and eventually executed by the terrorists, Christian wrote a “Testament” shortly before his death. It is suffused with the love of people he had come to regard as his brothers and sisters. And it concludes with an incredible address to Christian’s future, yet unknown, executioner: “Yes, I want this THANK YOU and this GOODBYE to be a ‘GOD BLESS’ for you, too, because in God’s face I see yours. May we meet again as happy thieves in Paradise, if it please God, the Father of us both.”²

¹ Ten Boom recounts her experience in *The Hiding Place* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974).

² James Martin, SJ, “Brother Christian's Testament,” *America: The Jesuit Review*, November 14, 2015, accessed June 6, 2018, <https://www.americamagazine.org/content/all-things/dom-christians-testament>. Emphasis original.

What made Corrie and Christian be and act as the people they were, worthy of our admiration? And how can we go about becoming more like them? Virtue ethics suggests that at least a part of the answer to the first question lies in Corrie's and Christian's character, which can be described in terms of certain excellent dispositions, or virtues.³ One of the tasks of virtue ethics is to identify and explicate the particular virtues comprising these virtuous characters.

How could we go about identifying these particular virtues? We could begin by naming the obvious candidates. After all, an average person would probably say that, at the least, both Corrie and Christian exemplify courage, love, hope, faith, and humility. Right away, though, we stumble upon a difficulty. How can we say that Corrie and Christian have the same virtues if their characters and their actions seem so different from one another? Corrie's was a life of active and heroic resistance to evil, a life of constant exertion; while

³ For the sake of this dissertation, I assume that, *pave* such moral philosophers as John Doris and Gilbert Harman, virtues and vices do exist as character traits and causally influence our behavior. Moreover, since I subscribe to the rarity of virtue thesis, my fundamental assumption about the existence of virtues and vices is more or less empirically neutral. Even if it turns out that Christian Miller is right that the majority of us possess mixed character traits rather than full virtues and vices, the concepts of various virtues and vices would still play a significant normative role in moral instruction and thus in our moral formation.

For the situationalist critique of this assumption, see Gilbert Harman, "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error," in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 99 (1999): 315-331; "The Nonexistence of Character Traits" in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 100 (2000): 223-226; John Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). For a sample of the numerous responses to the situationalist critique, see Gopal Sreenivasan, "Errors about Errors: Virtue Theory and Trait Attribution" in *Mind* 111(2002): 47-68; Rachana Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of Our Character" in *Ethics* 114 (2004): 458-491; Nancy Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory* (New York: Routledge Press, 2010); Christian Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology* (Oxford University Press, 2014). Miller advances the mixed character trait framework in *Character and Moral Psychology*.

Christian's life appears to have been a life of contemplation, of quiet and non-extraordinary service to his community, and his greatest moment to have been a decision to *refrain* from acting—to not flee, but to remain in the war zone in solidarity with his Muslim neighbors.

This question uncovers the real difficulty, for it shows that simply naming the virtues does not do us any good. A major purpose of moral philosophy is to provide a conceptual background for practices of character formation. We study Corrie's and Christian's characters so that we can be inspired to become better people, and so that they can provide us with models for imitation and emulation. However, if we want to emulate Corrie and Christian, if we want to become virtuous ourselves, we need to know what these virtues are *like*—what does it mean to have courage, love, hope, faith, and humility? And, besides, why should we think that it is the virtues of courage, love, hope, faith, and humility that comprise Corrie's and Christian's characters? Maybe it is Christian's *humble love* and *hopeful courage* or Corrie's *courageous faith* that we should seek to emulate instead? Are there any criteria that would help us make the right decision? Ultimately, these questions are about virtue individuation.

Taking the project of character formation seriously requires that we take the task of virtue individuation seriously, as well. Imitating highly virtuous people or people particularly good at being a friend, a mother, or a teacher might allow us to cultivate good character traits and to foster good habits. Still, no matter which strategy for character formation we adopt, we will eventually reach the point where our moral progress will demand *some* ability to articulate which character traits we are aiming for and what makes these character traits admirable.⁴ This is because attempts to emulate (as oppose to merely imitate) our moral

⁴ For example, Nancy Snow's folk virtue or goal-dependent automaticity strategy requires that we eventually progress from good "habits of the folk" to the Aristotelian

exemplars will eventually require that we understand which aspects of the exemplar's character we admire and why. Therefore, an ability to individuate and to name the virtues and vices is highly beneficial in the quest for becoming a virtuous person, even if such an ability is not absolutely necessary.

The task of virtue individuation, however, is made difficult by the current state of virtue ethics. As a relatively young and growing field of moral philosophy, contemporary virtue ethics is subject to all the typical pains and joys of disciplinary adolescence. On the one hand, it is full of creative energy. There are so many untouched topics, so many questions where research needs to be deepened and nuanced, and so many connections with other disciplines to be made, that if one struggles to come up with an exciting and meaningful project to make their own, then one has a very dull imagination, indeed. On the other hand, the very thing that makes virtue ethics an exciting field also makes it a confusing territory to navigate. Various moral philosophers, like Robert Adams, Rosalind Hursthouse, Michael Slote, and Christine Swanton, offer drastically different accounts of virtue, while others, like Heather Battaly, attempt to reconcile these often-conflicting accounts into

virtues by reflecting on the intrinsic value of the good traits in question. Doing so presupposes an ability to articulate the *kinds* of good traits we are seeking to cultivate. For more on the folk-virtue strategy, see Nancy Snow, "From Ordinary Virtue to Aristotelian Virtue," in *The Theory and Practice of Virtue Education*, vol. 47, eds. Tom Harrison and David Walker (London: Routledge, 2018), 67-81. Another Snow's strategy for character formation is outlined in chapters 1 and 2 of *Virtue as Social Intelligence*. This is local-to-global traits strategy, and it requires a desire to expand our good local, domain-specific, traits. Accordingly, it also requires a fair amount of introspection and reflection on the kinds of traits one wants to cultivate and the kind one wants to avoid. The virtues-as-skills strategies, suggested by Julia Annas and Daniel Russell, similarly presuppose at least some ability to give a reasoned response as to which character traits are worth developing. See Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Daniel Russell, *Doing Better* (forthcoming).

unified pluralistic accounts of their own.⁵ Yet others, like Edmund L. Pincoffs, Robert B. Louden, and Robert C. Roberts, warn about top-down, theory driven approach to virtues, and advocate a bottom-up, observation-driven approach, instead.⁶ Accordingly, they tend to focus on conceptual analyses of individual virtues rather than unified accounts of virtue. Philosophers like Martha Nussbaum, Julia Annas, Rachana Kamtekar, Jean Porter and others offer to revive and reimagine the virtue accounts of such venerable figures as Aristotle, the Stoics, Plato, and Aquinas. Finally, a growing number of moral philosophers—partly in response to the situationalist challenge to character—seek to bridge the empirical study of character done by psychologists and the philosophers’/ethicists’ approach to virtues and character formation. Notable among these are Christian Miller and Nancy Snow.⁷

With so many different accounts of virtue around, the meaning of the term ‘virtue’ has become vague — so much so that, unless we specify that we are speaking about virtues in the same sense as Michael Slote, Christian Miller, Aristotle, or Rosalind Hursthouse, etc., it is not at all clear what we are talking about when we discuss the virtue of courage, for

⁵ Robert Merrihew Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Michael Slote, *Morals from Motives* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Even though Swanton identifies her approach as pluralistic, I separate it from such radically pluralistic accounts as Heather Battaly’s, who argues that the seemingly conflicting accounts (a qualified-agent account, agent-based account, and a target-centered account) get *some* aspects of the virtues right, and so should be upheld together (Heather Battaly, “A Pluralist Theory of Virtue,” in Mark Alfano, ed. *Current Controversies in Virtue Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 7-21).

⁶ Edmund L. Pincoffs, *Quandaries and Virtues: Against Reductivism in Ethics* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986); Robert B. Louden, “Virtue Ethics and Anti-theory,” *Philosophia* 20, no. 1-2 (July 1990): 93-114; Robert C. Roberts, *Emotions in the Moral Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁷ Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*; Nancy Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence*.

example. When we ignore this fact, we are susceptible to at least two pitfalls. First, we get mired in what looks like interminable debates at the level of analysis of individual virtues like courage, humility, or hope. For example, is the nature of courage such that a murderer might possess it? On this question, Foot and Hursthouse emphatically disagree with Roberts and Adams, and there seems to be no way to adjudicate between the disagreeing parties. This is because the real disagreement lies at a more fundamental level—the level of metaphysics, philosophical anthropology, and moral psychology. Accordingly, we should not expect to resolve the debates about the nature of individual virtues without acknowledging and addressing these deeper disagreements.

Second, we end up creating or discovering virtue-concepts at breakneck speed that threaten to undermine the very idea of a virtue-concept as something that can serve as a normative guide. Might this *modus operandi* suggest a certain lack of care on the part of the virtue ethics community? Daniel Russell is one of the very few moral philosophers who seems to be bothered by the seemingly unchecked proliferation of virtues. He has argued that we need a principle of virtue individuation that would restrict such proliferation.⁸ Russell believes that without one, the whole virtue ethics project might collapse. In Chapter One, I argue that Russell overstates the problem. Still, I believe that he is right to call our attention to virtue individuation. I have already mentioned the importance of virtue individuation for character formation, but this can be further specified.

First, when we are presented with an example of Corrie Ten Boom's extraordinary ability to forgive those who have done her significant harm, we might want to study this ability, and/or we might be inspired to become better persons—to become more like her.

⁸ Daniel C. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

To this end, we want to know what virtues enabled Corrie to forgive. Was it love, humility, meekness, or a combination of all three? To see what each of these virtues contributes to the excellence of Corrie's forgiveness, we need to be able to differentiate humility from love, and love from meekness.

Second, as parents and professional educators, we desire to teach in a way that would promote the growth of virtue in our students. To do so well, we need to pay careful attention to which virtues we are seeking to promote. For example, do we encourage our students to exercise charity or justice (or both, or something else) when they approach a text that challenges their presuppositions? The answer will depend on what we believe about the nature of charity and justice and about what makes each a unique virtue, different from the others.

Finally, the question of virtue individuation is of great importance to anyone conducting empirical research of character. For example, if I want to see whether or not regular practice of confession causes one to grow in compassion, I need to be able to measure the person's compassion in distinction from other virtues/character traits. For that, I need to understand both what compassion is and how it differs from and interacts with, say, humility or gratitude. Or, if I want to know why regular practice of gratitude increases not only a person's gratitude but also her humility, I will have to be able to tell how gratitude differs from humility, and what gratitude is.⁹

In addition to these practical considerations, virtue individuation plays an important theoretical role, as well. First, thinking about reasons we (or others) have for identifying a particular character trait as a unique virtue helps us gain a better understanding of that virtue.

⁹ This example is suggested to me by Robert Roberts.

But even more importantly, doing so reveals our (or their) metaphysical commitments and views on moral psychology and anthropology. This, in turn, helps us gain more clarity about our own, or another moral philosopher's, account of virtues, and puts us in a better position to engage in the MacIntyrean project of tradition-constituted inquiry.

Given the importance of virtue individuation for virtue ethics, it is surprising that so few moral philosophers have given it any systematic thought. Some, like Hursthouse, Swanton, and Adams, have indicated ways in which their distinctive accounts individuate virtues; while others, like Martha Nussbaum and J.O. Urmson, have sought to articulate the principle of individuation used by Aristotle.¹⁰ There have been a number of attempts to wrestle with the questions about virtue individuation with respect to particular virtues, such as Hursthouse's consideration of environmental virtues and Ryan West's challenge to good temper being a single, unique virtue.¹¹ Still, as far as I know, only Russell has provided a sustained treatment of virtue individuation and the various individuation schemes employed (wittingly and unwittingly) by different moral philosophers.

Because Russell is concerned with the unchecked proliferation of virtue, his main requirement for an individuation criterion is that it "not make the virtues too discrete, as (say) individuating them by their contexts of exercise does."¹² Russell calls this requirement a

¹⁰ Nussbaum suggests that Aristotle has individuated virtues based on the spheres of influence; while Urmson argues that virtue types are individuated by the corresponding emotion types. Martha Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (1987): 32–53; J. O. Urmson, "Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (1973): pp. 223–30.

¹¹ Rosalind Hursthouse, "Environmental Virtue Ethics," in *Working Virtue*, ed. Phillip J. Ivanhoe and Rebecca L. Walker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 155–71. Ryan West, "Anger and the Virtues: A Critical Study in Virtue Individuation," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 46, no. 6 (2016): 877–897.

¹² Russell, *Practical Intelligence and Virtues*, 178.

requirement of *connectivity*. A principle of individuation that exhibits connectivity will allow us to see underlying unity among superficially different actions and character traits. With the right principle in place, argues Russell, we would be able to pool distinct virtues together as virtues “of the same kind,” thus making our list of virtues “richer, rather than longer.”¹³

After critically examining several individuation schemas,¹⁴ Russell concludes that the most promising way to individuate virtues is based on a virtue’s characteristic reasons, which he takes to be the “sorts of considerations for which persons with that virtue characteristically take themselves to be called into action.”¹⁵ West, however, has shown that Russell’s proposal fails to account for such virtues as patience, courage, and humility.¹⁶ Following Roberts and Adams, West points out that these virtues belong to a class of virtues that *lack* characteristic reasons. Whatever reasons for action a virtuously courageous, patient, or humble person might have, these reasons are supplied by another class of virtues, which West, Roberts, and Adams call “motivational.”¹⁷ Rather than provide an alternative to Russell’s account, West suggests that a single criterion cannot be applicable to all of the

¹³ Ibid., 179.

¹⁴ The schemas that Russell considers, and ultimately rejects, are: *compartmentalization*, where virtues are individuated “in terms of how agents can compartmentalize different character traits”; *emotions*, where individuation happens “according to the emotions that each virtue specially concerns”; and *desires*, where “we individuate virtues according to types of practically intelligent desires to act, where these types are individuated according to certain characteristic object-circumstance pairs” (Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, 179-183).

¹⁵ Ibid., 183.

¹⁶ Ryan West, “A Critique of Pure Reasons-Based Virtue Individuation” (Presentation, American Philosophical Association Pacific Division Meeting, San Diego, CA, April 2014).

¹⁷ For Roberts’ account of the virtues of willpower, see “Will Power and the Virtues,” *The Philosophical Review* 93, no. 2 (1984): 227–247. For Adams’ account of structural virtues, see *A Theory of Virtue*, 33–35.

different varieties of virtue, and that different classes of virtues should be individuated based on different criteria.

Even though I do not share Russell's worries about the devastating effects of the potentially infinite proliferation of virtue on virtue ethics, I nevertheless share his aversion to the heedless proliferation of virtue. I worry that if we continue to splinter the virtues without good reason and "discover" new virtues at every turn, the concept of virtue will lose any real meaning, and certainly won't be of any practical use. Accordingly, I share Russell's desire to find a principle of virtue individuation that would keep such proliferation in check, while respecting and preserving the diversity among virtues. However, instead of endorsing Russell's wish that such a principle would promote virtue connectivity, I prefer to think that the looked-for schema of individuation should be based on the *principle of parsimony*: we should not multiply virtues without necessity. On the other hand, West's criticism of Russell should be considered, as well. Russell's proposed criterion proves to be deficient because it is not flexible enough—it cannot accommodate different types of virtue. This could mean that West is right, and that we should look for more than one single principle of individuation. Or, it could mean that we should try to come up with a more flexible principle. If such a flexible principle could be found, then we might have reasons to prefer an account that has only one principle of virtue individuation over an account that has multiple principles. Therefore, I propose that we include the requirement of *sufficient flexibility* for the *ideal* principle of individuation—even if, in the end, we will be forced to conclude that there is no *actual* principle that meets this requirement. Finally, an ideal principle of individuation will not be *ad hoc*. We should be able to see the connection(s) between one's foundational beliefs about human nature and the nature of virtues and the criterion one employs for virtue individuation. An absence of such connection would render the account suspect, since

it would expose a lack of care and/or a lack of consistency in the author's thinking about the virtues.

As Russell points out, the question of virtue individuation has attracted little attention, and it is evident that this topic remains under-researched. In this dissertation, I offer a detailed look at the way St. Thomas Aquinas individuates virtues in the dual hope of providing a model of carefully thought-out, flexible, and parsimonious principle of individuation and of furthering and stimulating the contemporary conversation on the topic.

The Thomistic Principle of Virtue Individuation

One may wonder, why choose Aquinas when looking for a model principle of virtue individuation? There are at least four reasons for doing so. First, in Aquinas, we have someone with an extremely well-developed, sophisticated moral psychology and anthropology. Building on the foundation laid by Aristotle, Aquinas goes much further in developing the accounts of human action, of practical rationality, of the will, and of the passions. This sophistication carries over into ways in which Aquinas identifies individual virtues. Unlike most contemporary accounts that focus on one criterion for individuation, Aquinas' principle offers three interrelated and mutually reinforcing criteria: the virtue's subject (i.e., the faculty of the soul the virtue perfects), the virtue's object (i.e., that which the virtue is about, its proper sphere of influence), and the virtue's mode (i.e., the way in which the virtue perfects its subject). Because Aquinas does not rely on one single criterion when individuating virtues, he is able to meet both Russell's and West's requirements—to individuate diverse types of virtues and to do so in a way that avoids unnecessary splintering of virtues.

Second, Aquinas's principle of individuation arises as a natural development of his metaphysics, anthropology, and moral psychology. However, the metaphysical foundations

of his moral theory always remain grounded in the world of concrete experience. This careful attention to lived-in experience illuminates and enriches Aquinas's moral philosophy. So, for example, he famously recommends sleep and a warm bath as one of the "remedies" for sorrow. This is because sleep and bath, by restoring our bodies to their "natural" state, give us some degree of pleasure—whether we notice it or not. And since any passion A lessens its contrary passion B to the extent that A is felt, the bodily pleasures of sleep and of a bath are able to mitigate even great mental sorrow (I-II.38.5). Here, the ordinary experiences of life and theoretical commitments prove to be mutually informative.¹⁸ The same is true of his principle of individuation—his fundamental theoretical commitments illuminate and are illuminated by the phenomenology of individual virtues.

Third, Aquinas is deeply interested in moral formation. He is a philosopher third, a theologian second, but a Dominican friar first. His life is dedicated to preaching and teaching—and this is evident in his preoccupation with human action. He is a confessor, and the teacher of future confessors. The whole of *Summa* II-II is a means of the soul's journey to its resting place—the beatific vision of God. Accordingly, he never loses sight of the fact that, ultimately, it is not the *disposition* to action, but the *actions* themselves that matter. This conviction provides the backdrop for his account of individual virtues. For example, Aquinas never permits his readers to forget that, on its own, a single virtue cannot give rise to a virtuous action—even though we do talk about individual actions manifesting single virtues. For example, we talk of generous or courageous actions because these actions arise

¹⁸ Thus, Aquinas is able to provide an explanation of an experience that has taken Augustine by surprise: at the time of his mother's death, Augustine has struggle to assuage and to suppress his grief, but even his prayers for relief were ineffectual. But then, Augustine writes with a sense of wonder, he "fell asleep, and woke again to find [his] grief not a little relieved" (*Confessions*, trans. F. J. Sheed, intro. Peter Brown, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 168).

from, and manifest, the virtues of generosity and courage. However, Aquinas reminds us again and again that for an action to be truly virtuous, all cardinal virtues—at the least—must lend a hand. The last point is especially important to keep in mind when considering the question of virtue individuation.¹⁹

The final reason for focusing on Aquinas is that his principle of virtue individuation has received little attention until now, even among Aquinas scholars. Even though Aquinas clearly operates with a well-developed principle of individuation in mind, there is no single place where he lays it out for the reader. Instead, it must be constructed from remarks scattered throughout the *Summa Theologiae* and his other works. What's more, some prominent passages (I-II.54.2; 60.5) suggest that virtues are distinguished *only* by their objects, and there has been no study, to my knowledge, that has provided a corrective to this potentially false impression. Accordingly, this dissertation addresses a lacuna not only in contemporary virtue ethics, but in Thomistic studies, as well.

Before I summarize this dissertation, I need to mention two manuscripts that go against the general trend of inattention to the question of individuation in Aquinas. First is a study by Joseph Pilsner, *The Specification of Human Action in Aquinas*. In this book, Pilsner works out in great detail a principle of specification of human action using five criteria: end, object, matter, circumstance, and motive.²⁰ Any serious scholar of Aquinas's moral philosophy ought to read Pilsner's monumental work. This dissertation, in particular, has benefited from Pilsner's elucidation of the various ways Aquinas employs the term "matter,"

¹⁹ Incidentally, it is a point that comes up in Chapter Five, when I consider whether meekness is a unique, single virtue that modifies our passion of anger.

²⁰ Joseph Pilsner, *The Specification of Human Actions in St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

and of the concepts of remote and proximate objects. To the extent that human actions serve to build character, this project and Pilsner's work overlap. Still, because Pilsner's account is restricted to the study of individual *actions*, it leaves important questions about individuation of *virtues* unanswered. This is because, as mentioned above, a single action is never a product of a single isolated habitus,²¹ just as it is never produced by one faculty of the soul, but by all of the faculties working together. Therefore, individuation of single actions does not have one-to-one correspondence with individuating of virtues.

The second study is by Nicholas Austin, *Aquinas on Virtue: A Causal Reading*, in which Austin seeks to revive the neglected way of thinking about virtues in terms of their four causes (material, formal, efficient, and final).²² He argues that describing the four causes of individual virtues paints that virtue's unique profile and thus gives us an invaluable insight into that virtue's nature. Still, while building a virtue's profile helps us see what makes this virtue different from other virtues, it is not directly concerned with answering the question of virtue individuation. Accordingly, a virtue's profile cannot be viewed as a substitute to a principle of virtue individuation. Moreover, a virtue's profile is not going to address Russell's proliferation worry. Therefore, as helpful as Austin's study is, there remains a need for a separate study of virtue individuation.

²¹ Among the readers of Aquinas, there has been a gradual shift from the once popular translation of habitus as "habits." This is due to the growing awareness that Aquinas understands habitus as continually relying on the use of the will and reason in ways that is alien to the contemporary view of habits as automated, reflexive behavior. See Chapter Three.

²² Nicholas Austin, *Aquinas on Virtue: A Causal Approach* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2017)

Dissertation Summary

This dissertation progresses in two stages. Chapter Two, “Virtue Individuation and Contemporary Virtue Ethics,” offers a detailed analysis of what Russell calls the enumeration problem and a survey of contemporary virtue accounts. Russell understands the enumeration problem to be the existential threat that the infinite proliferation of virtues poses to virtue ethics as a whole. I explicate Russell’s argument and show that it depends on an overly restrictive way of interpreting the commonly held belief that to be virtuous an action must be *overall* virtuous. Since we have no good reason to interpret the overall-virtuous condition in this overly restrictive way, Russell’s argument does not succeed. Still, even though Russell overstates the problem, we have good reasons to attend to the question of virtue individuation. In the second part of the chapter, I demonstrate that an investigation into virtue individuation must proceed from a MacIntyrean posture of tradition-constituted inquiry, and that in doing so we need to pay attention to the questions of metaphysics of human nature and of moral psychology—questions that, among others, shape our traditions.

In Chapters Two through Five, I develop the Thomistic principle of virtue individuation as an excellent example of such a tradition-based approach. Since Aquinas’s account of virtue is rooted in his account of human nature, Chapter Three, “Moral Psychology and the Importance of Habitus in Aquinas,” provides a sketch of the Thomistic moral psychology. The first part of the chapter elucidates Thomas’s understanding of the relationship between virtue and the human good. Since our ultimate good consists in the contemplation of the divine, and since both Aristotle and Aquinas maintain that moral virtues are not necessary for the perfection of our intellect, the question of why we should cultivate moral virtues is puzzling. I show that, by drawing an explicit connection between our ability to know God and our moral rectitude, Aquinas establishes our need to be

perfected by moral virtues. The second part of the chapter outlines Aquinas's moral psychology and his account of habitus, which he understands to be stable, morally valent, nature-directed, functional/operational dispositions that form their subjects and that are divided into virtues and vices.

Chapter Four, "Aquinas's Account of Virtue" builds on the foundation established in Chapter Three. Here, I look closely at the nature of virtue as a habitus that is set apart from other kinds of habitus, and I develop the concepts of a virtue's subject, object, and mode. In an exercise that begins to demonstrate how a virtue's subject, object, and mode shape Aquinas's thought about the relations between various types of virtue, I then proceed to lay out the complicated Thomistic taxonomy of virtues. Finally, Chapter Five, "A Thomistic Principle of Virtue Individuation," shows how the examination of cardinal virtues yields the first formulation of the Thomistic principle of virtue individuation. I showcase the principle's role within the Thomistic account by applying it to the virtues of fortitude and magnificence, as well as to the virtues of acquired and infused temperance. This discussion will allow us to refine the principle. Finally, I bring the Thomistic principle of individuation to bear on a question in contemporary virtue ethics, which is put forward by Ryan West.²³ West challenges the received wisdom of identifying meekness, or good temper, as a unique virtue that deals with excessive anger. I suggest that thinking alongside Aquinas helps us clarify the question posed by West and offers a solution that preserves the best of West's insights.

²³ Ryan West, "Anger and the Virtues."

CHAPTER TWO

Virtue Individuation in Contemporary Virtue Ethics

Introduction

In his 2009 book, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, Daniel Russell argues that it is important to develop a principled way to individuate virtues. According to Russell, virtue ethicists need such a principle to avoid what he calls an “enumeration problem”—a situation in which a potential infinite proliferation of virtues renders virtue ethics unable to provide an ethical evaluation of actions.¹ While I don’t think that enumeration problem presents a serious problem for virtue ethics, I believe that it is important to understand why this fails to be a problem. Moreover, I believe that Russell does a real service to contemporary virtue ethics by raising the hitherto-neglected issue of virtue individuation. Accordingly, in this chapter I will address two questions. In Part 1 I will explicate Russell’s argument for the enumeration problem and will show that it does not succeed. In Part 2, I will point out why virtue ethicists should, nevertheless, take the issue of virtue individuation seriously.

Part 1: The Enumeration Problem

The Enumeration Problem

What is the enumeration problem? In Russell’s opinion, it is a disastrous consequence of a certain approach to virtue individuation—where a lack of attention to

¹ Daniel C. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), ch. 5.

one's principle of individuation produces a potentially infinite proliferation of virtues. Take, for example, the virtue of courage. Such figures as Aristotle, Aquinas, Hume, and Foot, for example, consider courage to be a single virtue. But why should we follow their suit? Are we not familiar with the examples of people that reliably display courage in one sphere of their lives, such as the battlefield, the boardroom, or the operating room, while being deficient in courage in other spheres, such as romantic relationships, or painful memories of the past mistakes and traumas. Given the prevalence of these examples, perhaps we should think of courage in the battlefield, courage in the face of painful memories, courage of a surgent, etc. as distinct, independent virtues. But once we decide that there are many different kinds of courage, each comprising an independent virtue, what's stopping us from discovering more and more new types of virtues of courage? Let us look at the courage of a surgeon, for example. Doesn't it seem at least plausible that the courage she draws on while performing a daring procedure is different from the courage that she relies on while considering potential fall-out from litigation, or delivering the bad news to the patient, or delivering the bad news to the patient's parents? Moreover, why stop at courage-for-facing-litigation, while we could differentiate between courage for facing litigation while being absolutely certain that her decision is the right one and courage for facing litigation while having doubts about the ramifications of her decision? The list can go on, and it is Russell's worry that it can go potentially go on to infinity—that the proliferation of virtues might have no natural terminus.

To demonstrate how such infinite proliferation might happen, Russell looks at such diverse thinkers as Aristotle, Michael Slote, and Rosalind Hursthouse. For example, Russell argues that Slote's account is vulnerable to the threat of infinite proliferation, since Slote takes virtues to be traits that we find morally admirable, and there is "no limit to how many

traits we can admire in their own distinct way.”² Aristotle, according to Russell, has a similar problem, since Aristotle thinks that “where we have distinctive, new contexts and demands for virtuous action, we must also find distinctive, new virtues. But since distinctive, new contexts and demands are countless, so too will be the virtues.”³ Finally, Russell argues that insofar as Hursthouse is open to individuating virtues based on the compartmentalization of character traits (i.e., being willing to individuate the specific virtue of good parenting as opposed to the general virtues of compassion, etc.), she is also susceptible to the problem of infinite proliferation of virtue: “[I]f the lines we draw between the virtues match all the ways in which persons may do well despite serious shortcomings elsewhere, our theory will again posit infinitely many virtues.”⁴

Russell believes potential infinite proliferation of virtues to be devastating to virtue ethics, since it undermines the very notion of a virtuous action/agent. Consider the following: virtue ethicists evaluate actions and persons in terms of their being overall virtuous. That is, for an action to be excellent, or most fitting, or one that we can approve of, it must be in accordance not only with the one virtue that it is supposed to express, but with other relevant virtues as well. This “overall virtuousness” condition (hereafter, the OV condition) helps us make sense of someone like Javert—a character in Victor Hugo’s novel *Les Misérables*. A police officer, Javert relentlessly pursues the protagonist, Jean Valjean, for breaking parole. Even though the reader feels that there are plenty of exonerating circumstances to absolve Valjean of this fairly minor crime, Javert refuses to be moved by

² Ibid., 148.

³ Ibid., 149

⁴ Ibid., 148.

any considerations of pity, benevolence, and even prudence, in his insistence that Valjean should pay for breaking the law. The OV condition makes it clear that although Javert's actions seem to express one virtue (e.g., justice), they conflict with other virtues (e.g., benevolence), and therefore cannot be considered right either in the action-assessing sense or in the action-guiding sense.⁵ However, argues Russell, in the situation where we have potentially infinite proliferation of virtues, the OV condition can never be satisfied: "If right action is action in accordance with the virtues, and a virtuous person a person who has the virtues, but virtue ethics tells us that the virtues are infinitely many, then virtue ethics cannot say what right action is action in accordance with, or what it would be to be a virtuous person."⁶ The stalemate that results from the need to uphold an OV condition on the one hand and potentially infinite proliferation of virtues on the other is what Russell calls the enumeration problem.

So far, I have shown that the enumeration problem is supposed to arise in situations where infinite proliferation of virtues makes it impossible for any action or agent to fulfill the OV condition. It is, however, unclear just what is so bad about the fact that the OV condition cannot be satisfied, since there are two possible answers to this question. Accordingly, there are three possible readings of the enumeration problem—an ontological, an epistemological, and a pedagogical. I will now examine these readings.

⁵ For distinction between action-guidance and action-assessment, see Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁶ Russell, *Practical Intelligence*, p.146.

An ontological enumeration problem. Russell seems to have an ontological problem in view when he suggests that, unless the OV condition is satisfied, no person or action could be virtuous:

[T]here is no denying that questions of whether and to what extent a person is virtuous in one respect can be answered only by considering how this person also stands with respect to the virtues, taken in the plural. Given the enumeration problem, no such answers can be forthcoming, in principle. Here, the problem is more than an epistemic one: there is no way that a finite agent can stand with respect to an infinite number of virtues (Russell, 166).

Here is my attempt at formalizing Russell's statement:

- (1) OV condition: An agent exhibits one virtue, or an action is in accordance with that virtue, iff he/she/it rightly relates to other virtues.
- (2) If virtues are infinitely many, an agent/action must embody (or at least not violate) infinitely many virtues.
- (3) No agent/action can embody infinitely many virtues.
- (4) Therefore, no agent/action can satisfy the OV condition.

Premise 3 is my attempt to clarify the extremely vague phrase 'there is no way that a finite agent can stand with respect to an infinite number of virtues.' Mark Alfano points out that the problem with this reading of the enumeration problem is that (3) is clearly false. It is not true that there is no way for a finite agent to stand with respect to an infinite number of properties. "Compare it with the claim that there is no way a finite body can stand with respect to an infinite number of other bodies."⁷ It might take infinite time to verify the agent's relation to the infinite number of virtues, but this is a separate (epistemological) issue. Accordingly, Alfano argues, as long as we interpret the enumeration problem as ontological, Russell's argument is "a non-starter."⁸

⁷ Mark Alfano, "Review of *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*, ; *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory*, by Daniel Russell and Nancy Snow," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 16, no. 3 (2013): 671–73.

⁸ Ibid.

A pedagogical enumeration problem. Contrary to Alfano, I do not think that the ontological enumeration problem should be so quickly discarded. This is because it can, on a certain reading, morph into a pedagogical enumeration problem. This version of the problem would undermine our ability to *become* virtuous, and as such would be a serious problem, indeed. How would an infinite proliferation of virtues result in a pedagogical problem? We acquire virtues by performing actions in accord with virtues. However, if, as Russell insist, an action can be in accord with virtues only if it is in accord with all virtues, and if the number of these virtues is infinite, then a person would need to perform an infinite number of actions in order to become overall virtuous.

An epistemological enumeration problem. It is unclear whether Russell has the pedagogical enumeration problem in mind. Still, his main worry seems to be about virtue ethics' ability to provide a virtue ethical account of right action.⁹ And it's the epistemological reading of the enumeration problem that would undermine the virtue ethicists' ability to evaluate the rightness of an action both in terms of action guidance and in terms of action assessment. Therefore, I suggest that the problem should be interpreted as an epistemological one, about the conditions for knowing whether an action is morally right. Here is the suggested logical form:

- (1) The OV condition implies that the virtue ethicist must be able to say whether an action is overall virtuous if she wishes to be able to assess the action's moral rightness or wrongness.
- (2) If virtues are infinitely many, the virtue ethicist won't be able to say whether the action is overall virtuous.
- (3) Without the right principle of virtue individuation, virtue ethicists can't know that virtues are not infinitely many.
- (4) Therefore, without the right principle of virtue individuation, the virtue ethicist won't be able to assess the action's moral rightness or wrongness.

⁹ Cf. Russell, *Practical Intelligence*, 161-69.

- (5) To provide action guidance, one must be able to assess the action's moral rightness or wrongness.
- (6) Therefore, without the right principle of virtue individuation, the virtue ethicist won't be able to provide action guidance.

Since both the pedagogical and epistemological versions of the enumeration problem would, in fact, pose serious challenge to the project of virtue ethics, they should be taken seriously.

The latter reading makes it especially clear that Russell's argument depends on the concept of an agent/action being "overall virtuous." And all three readings draw our attention to the importance of a virtuous agent/action being in a right relationship with virtue in the plural.

The problem with these concepts is that they are extremely vague. In what follows, I argue that, once these are clarified, Russell's argument loses its power.

The Number of Virtues in "Overall Virtuous"

The meaning of "overall virtuous" can be disambiguated in many different ways. Russell suggests that we should take it to mean that an action/agent agent/action embodies (or at least does not violate) other virtues. However, this definition is still ambiguous. First, there is an ambiguity about the number of virtues that an agent/action must embody/not violate. Russell's argument works only if we require that the virtuous agent/action embodies/not violates *every single virtue* that there is. It is, however, far from clear that we should understand the OV requirement in this strict way.

Consider, for example, Christine Swanton, who, while explicitly stating that an act is right "if and only if it is overall virtuous," explains that this requirement arises out of the need to recognize that "we cannot claim that certain features always contribute positively (or negatively) to the overall virtuousness of an act, even if those kinds of feature

characteristically contribute positively (or negatively).”¹⁰ There are plenty of situations, says Swanton, where one and the same act can be described as virtuous (i.e., hitting the target of the virtue V) in one respect, but lacking the virtue (i.e., failing to hit the target of the virtue V) in another respect.

To understand what Swanton means, it is important to note that she distinguishes an act done *from* a virtuous state from a (merely) virtuous act. A virtuous act is an act that hits the target of a particular virtue, but it can do so accidentally. A person may perform an act of generosity (i.e., an act that hits the target of generosity) without possessing the virtue of generosity. An act done *from* virtue, on the other hand, “displays, expresses, or exhibits all (or a sufficient number of) the excellences comprising virtue,” where virtue is understood as a “disposition of acknowledging or responding to items in the field of a virtue in an excellent (or good enough) way.”¹¹ This means that a (merely) virtuous act is fully compatible with a person possessing vice and vice versa—a (merely) vicious act is compatible with possession of virtue. So, Swanton says, an action can be both just (i.e., hitting the target of justice) and malicious (i.e., performed *from* malice), or unjust (i.e., failing to hit the target of justice) and friendly (i.e., performed *from* friendship).

In situations where we attempt to evaluate an act that can be described as both virtuous and lacking in virtue we need to be guided by the overarching direction/target of the relevant virtues. Swanton illustrates her point by envisioning a situation in which Tim—a young philosopher at a conference—leaves a fascinating conversation on moral philosophy

¹⁰ Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 239, 242.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 233.

that he is eager to be a part of to talk to a stranger who stands forlornly in a corner during the reception. Although Swanton judges this to be a “kind act,” the act is not overall virtuous. This is because “Tim is always doing this kind of thing, sacrificing his interests in the performance of such kind acts. He has resolved to be more self-protective and strong, and encourage others to do their share of burdensome tasks. But he consistently fails to abide by the resolution.”¹² Since performing an act of kindness, in Tim’s case, conflicts with and impedes his progress in personal growth, Tim’s kindness actually “contributes negatively to the overall virtuousness of the act.”¹³ Tim’s example, Swanton argues, demonstrates that sometimes a virtuous action is not the right (i.e., overall virtuous) thing to do. So, at least in Swanton’s account, the “overall virtuous” requirement is far from being the requirement that an action rightly relates to every single virtue. Rather, it is a requirement for an action to be “the, or a, best action possible in the circumstances.”¹⁴

In Swanton, we have an example of one virtue ethicist who explicitly argues for the necessity of the “overall virtuous” condition without accepting that a virtuous action must rightly relate to *every* existing virtue. Robert C. Roberts provides us with different example. Recognizing that “the situations of life often make more than one kind of demand on virtue,” Roberts argues that virtues form “a kind of web of character traits such that a

¹² Ibid., 244.

¹³ Ibid., 243-44. Here, I merely report, without endorsement, Swanton’s evaluation of the situation. As far as I am concerned, it is an open question whether Tim’s act should be evaluated as overall lacking in virtue or as tending toward being overall virtuous.

¹⁴ Ibid., 239-41. Swanton’s account is not clear on how one would go about figuring out which particular virtue(s) we should be acting from in a given situation, but this question is different from the one about the meaning of “overall virtuous,” and since I don’t intend to provide a comprehensive exposition of Swanton’s account here, I will not pursue this inquiry further.

weakening in one virtue can cause sagging or underperformance in another.”¹⁵ So, he suggests that it’s possible to perform acts characteristic of a virtue without these acts being virtuous overall. For example, since the virtue of courage lacks a motivational component, a courageous act is going to be “fully virtuous” only if it “borrows” motivation from another virtue such as justice or compassion.¹⁶ Likewise, the successful performance of an act characteristic of compassion might depend on the agent’s possessing the virtue of courage. It appears, therefore, that Roberts would endorse at least some version of the OV condition¹⁷. However, the image of an interconnected web, mentioned above, suggests that there are natural limitations to the potentially infinite number of ways in which an act/agent might relate to other virtues. On a Robertsean model of interdependence of virtues, an act must (always) be supported by a cluster of relevant virtues in order for it to be fully/overall virtuous. However, which virtues make up this supporting cluster, will depend on the particular situation that presents a demand on human character, although it is safe to assume that every such cluster will have at least some kind of prudence.

We typically acquire an ability to identify these relevant virtues in the process of our moral formation, and we use this ability when faced with a particular challenge or presented with a description of a given situation. It is generally true that the richer the description, the easier it’s going to be for us to identify those virtues that will make up the relevant

¹⁵ Robert C. Roberts, *Emotions in the Moral Life*, 1 edition (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 210.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Roberts does not believe that virtue ethics is required to be concerned with giving an account of right action, and so does not specify conditions under which an action can be evaluated as overall good or right. It is, nonetheless, instructive to attempt to construct a Robertsean-style response to Russell’s claim that the OV condition implies an act’s or agent’s right relation to every possible virtue. In what follows, I construct such a response.

supporting cluster. However, occasionally even a brief sketch of the situation's circumstances will suffice. For example, when Jane Austen first tells us in her novel *Persuasion* that Anne Elliot broke off her engagement to Frederick Wentworth, we have difficulty deciding whether this was an act of weakness on Anne's part, or whether she was right in doing what she did. It's only at the end of the novel that we are ready to agree with Anne when she says that she "was perfectly right in being guided by [Lady Russell]." ¹³ We come to see that in breaking the engagement she was moved by a combination of courage, love, friendship, and respect for a genuine authority, but we are able to see this only after learning more about Anne's character, her situation in life, and her interaction with various sorts of people. On the other hand, when we first encounter Mrs. Jellyby in Dickens' *Bleak House*, we are immediately struck by the wrongness of her conduct. ¹⁴ This is because from the simple (though colorful) sketch of her family's living conditions, we can quickly tell that her unrelenting philanthropic activity conflicts with the virtues of charity, prudence, justice, and most likely with other virtues, as well.

Likewise, the number of relevant virtues that a fully virtuous action will either embody or at least not violate will depend on the action's particular circumstances. When we evaluate an action's /agent's overall conformity to virtue, we intuitively follow the principle of concentric circles—that is, we look at what seems to be an immediately relevant context of virtues/vices, and if the action in question expresses/doesn't go against these, we move on to the less relevant virtues, and so on. Note that the question of which virtues are more,

¹³ Jane Austen, *Persuasion* in Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), chapter 23.

¹⁴ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* in Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), chapter 4.

and which are less relevant, will change depending on the context. For example, when we think about Jean Valjean's decision to expose himself as a parole-breaker to save a man from being sent to prison in his place, we naturally see such virtues as honesty, charity, justice, prudence, courage, and mercy (toward the workers who depend on him being free for their livelihood) as immediately relevant for evaluating his action. And we see such virtues as temperance, chastity, and meekness as less relevant. On the other hand, if we evaluate Othello's action of killing Desdemona, then the virtues of chastity and meekness become immediately relevant. It is important to recognize that this process of considering less and less relevant virtues does not continue until we compare the proposed action's relation to *every* single virtue. Some virtues are so distant from the situational context, that, for various reasons, we feel no need to examine their relation to the action in question.¹⁸ Accordingly, the worry about the potentially infinite proliferation of virtues is not going to be relevant here. This is because in this account our ability to know whether a particular human action/agent is overall, or fully, virtuous does not depend on our ability to analyze its relationship to *every* virtue on the list.

In this section, I have focused on the way we can disambiguate the “overall” in ‘overall virtuous.’ I have argued that Russell's argument for the gravity of the enumeration problem depends on a particular interpretation of the OV requirement, where “overall virtuous” is taken to mean that the virtuous agent/action relates rightly to *every single virtue* that there is. By pointing to the examples of Roberts and Swanton, I hope to have demonstrated that there are other ways to understand the OV requirement - ways that do

¹⁸ Numerous external and internal pressures—lack or abundance of time and resources, various passions and emotions, the absence or presence of virtues or vices, etc.—influence the particular stopping point of our deliberative process.

not generate the enumeration problem. I now turn to the other ambiguity in Russell's account.

Right Relationship Between Virtues

As mentioned above, Russell suggests that virtue ethics, as a whole, is committed to the OV principle, which states that

an action is right iff it is overall virtuous.

This, in turn, means that

an action exemplifies (or at least does not violate) other virtues (in the plural).

In the previous section of this chapter, I began looking at possible ways to interpret the “overall virtuous” requirement. I’ve argued that the enumeration problem arises only if we interpret the “overall virtuous” requirement to mean that an action must embody and/or not violate *every single virtue*. I have shown that if one rejects such a strict interpretation, one avoids the enumeration problem.

Still, what if someone wishes to affirm that “overall virtuous” means that an action/agent embodies or at least does not violate *every* other virtue, as do those who affirm the stronger version of the unity of the virtues thesis? Here another ambiguity in the OV principle comes into play. Russell’s argument seems to rely on one particular model of what it would take for us to know that an agent/action stands in the right relations to virtues in the plural. What he seems to have in view is a process where the potential virtuous action/agent is evaluated against its conformity to, or consistency with, the succession of virtues as these pass before one’s mind’s eye one at a time. It’s easy to see how such model, combined with the commitment to the unity of virtues thesis and the supposition that virtues are infinitely many, would generate the epistemological enumeration problem. It

would require that we perform an infinite number of operations before we decide that an action in question does or does not relate rightly to other virtues.

This, however, doesn't seem to be the model that the unity of virtue ethicists use. Consider John McDowell, who argues that particular virtues exist in name only—in order to help us mark “similarities and dissimilarities among the manifestations of a single sensitivity which is what virtue, in general, is: and ability to recognize requirements which situations impose on one's behavior.”¹⁹ For McDowell, individual virtuous acts are made possible not by a conglomeration of particular virtues, but by virtue, in general. Since an action is virtuous if and only if it is expressive of virtue in general, it is going to be analytically true that a fully virtuous act stands in the right relationship with all other virtues.

Russell's rejoinder to someone like McDowell consists in pointing out that even on the unity of virtues view, we still have to understand the whole in terms of its parts: “Granting that virtue is a whole, we still must ask what that whole is—what are its attributes? If its attributes are infinite, then there is no accounting for ‘overall virtuousness’ in terms of that whole.”²⁰ This criticism seems misguided. What McDowell and other unity of virtue advocates are saying is that we can make sense of each individual virtue only in light of virtue in general, and that when we cultivate virtue in general—that sensitivity to requirements on one's behavior that is imposed on us by various situations—in so doing we cultivate particular virtues. This account amounts to the claim that in grasping virtue in general we grasp the whole without necessarily being able to account for particulars that constitute its parts. And this latter claim surely is true to our everyday experience. The

¹⁹ John McDowell, “Virtue and Reason,” *The Monist* 62, no. 3 (1979): 331–50. 333.

²⁰ Russell, *Practical Intelligence*, 160.

concept of a number 2 is fully intelligible and useful even in the light of knowledge that we would never be able to name every real number that adds up to 2. Likewise, we have no trouble identifying a being sitting in the next chair as a human, even though there exists an infinite number of variations in persons' appearance. We could multiply examples like these. It appears, therefore, that for McDowell and others who affirm the strong unity of virtues the enumeration problem does not arise.

Part 2: Why We Need the Principle of Virtue Individuation

In Part 1, I argued that Russell's enumeration problem does not pose a serious threat for virtue ethics. This conclusion, however, should not undermine the importance of Russell's original observation, viz., that most contemporary virtue ethicists have a very haphazard approach to virtue individuation. In the remainder of this chapter I will explain why, the failure of the enumeration problem notwithstanding, the question of virtue individuation deserves our careful attention.

Virtue Individuation and the Task of Virtue Ethics

In his 2013 book, Roberts revisits the argument he has presented on several occasions in the past.²¹ He contends that when virtue ethicists engage in building foundations for their ethical theories, they lose sight of the real goal of the study of virtues, i.e., the development of moral wisdom in themselves and in their readers. Accordingly, Roberts calls for a "return" to the conceptual development of individual virtues, with special

²¹ Robert C. Roberts, *Emotions in the Moral Life*. See also "Character Ethics and Moral Wisdom," *Faith and Philosophy* 15, no. 4 (1998): 478–499.

attention paid both to real life examples and to psychologically rich narratives of such authors as Dickens, Dostoyevsky, Austen, etc.²²

Some recent developments in virtue ethics have added a new dimension to Roberts's call. As a response to the situationist challenge, philosophers like Christian Miller argue that most people possess mixed character traits, but not the traditional moral virtues or vices. Moreover, Miller suggests that most people have what he calls Surprising Dispositions. These are wide-spread, unconsciously held character traits that are "non-virtuous in their motivational and/or behavioral effects" yet are "causally influential in many morally relevant situations."²³ In light of these facts, Miller argues, the new challenge for virtue ethics is to "develop one or more realistic and empirically informed ways for most human beings to avoid falling short of virtues in the course of their upbringing *because of the presence and role of the Surprising Dispositions*, or if they have already fallen short by adulthood, to *overcome their Surprising Dispositions* so that they can still develop a virtuous character over time."²⁴

Investigating possible strategies for dealing with Miller's challenge is beyond the scope of this dissertation. It is clear, though, that both answering Roberts's call and tackling Miller's challenge will require at least two things. First, we will need to know which virtues we want to study and to facilitate in people, and second, we will need to know what these virtues are (what they look like). Both tasks require a principled way of individuating virtues. Imagine, for example, that we want to understand and to promote the kind of humble love

²² Roberts, *Emotions in the Moral Life*.

²³ Christian Miller, "Russell on Acquiring Virtue," in *Current Controversies in Virtue Theory*, ed. Alfano Mark (Routledge, 2015), 111.

²⁴ Ibid., 112. Emphasis original.

that is displayed by Fanny Price (a character in Jane Austin’s novel *Mansfield Park*) or by Sonia Marmeladova (a character in Dostoyevsky’s novel *Crime and Punishment*).

Understanding how humility differs from love would allow us to see what exactly is contributed by humility, and what by love, to the goodness and beauty of the “overall” phenomenon.²⁵ Likewise, an educator who wants to implement classroom tactics that encourage her students’ growth in fair and charitable dealing with their intellectual opponents will need to know how charity differs from justice, as well as how both of these moral virtues differ from the intellectual virtues of wisdom and understanding.²⁶ There are other question that we will need to be able to answer, if we set character formation as the ultimate goal of virtue ethics. For example, do we specifically aim at cultivating the virtue of *intellectual* humility, or do we cultivate the general, moral virtue of humility in hopes that its effects spread to every area of our lives, including the life of the mind? Or, when presented with unique challenges to our moral character that are caused by the changes in our world, do we attempt to stretch the sphere of the traditional virtues to cover these new challenges presented by advances of science and technology? Or do we discover and cultivate novel virtues, unknown to the likes of Aristotle, Aquinas, and Hume—such as the virtues of ecological mindfulness and respect for nature that are advocated by Hursthouse?²⁷ Our answer to these and other questions will depend on the way we individuate virtues.

²⁵ The example of humble love has been suggested to me by Robert Roberts.

²⁶ Here I adopt the Thomistic/Aristotelean distinction between intellectual and moral virtues.

²⁷ Rosalind Hursthouse, “Environmental Virtue Ethics,” in *Working Virtue*, ed. Phillip J. Ivanhoe and Rebecca L. Walker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 155–71.

Any attempt to articulate a principle of virtue individuation, however, will bring us face to face with the fact that the field of contemporary virtue ethics is mired in myriad disagreements on the topic. Contemporary virtue ethicists disagree widely about the nature, the number, and the purpose of virtues, as well as the nature of individual virtues and their relationships to each other. To begin with, there is the obvious fact that various moral, religious, and socio-cultural outlooks produce very different lists of virtues. So, for example, while Aristotle, Hume, and Nietzsche regard humility as undesirable and even harmful trait, it occupies a central place on any “traditional” Christian list.²⁸ Moreover, even when various traditions agree on counting a particular trait as a virtue, the description of this virtue changes greatly from one tradition to another. The Aristotelean fortitude, for example, looks (fundamentally) different from the ways that the Stoics, Mengzi, and Aquinas present it; and when Mengzi describes benevolence, it looks very different from the ways that Hume and Aquinas talk about benevolence and charity, respectively.

To complicate the matter further, contemporary accounts of virtue often draw from historically diverse sources in a fairly indiscriminate fashion, while at the same time attempting to address contemporary questions, concerns, and sensitivities. These include, but are by no means limited to, the necessity to address the sorts of findings of contemporary empirical psychology that gave rise to the situationist critique. As a result, unless a contemporary philosopher explicitly states that she uses the term “virtue” in the sense that Michael Slote, Rosalind Hursthouse, Christian Miller, Aristotle, or another use the

²⁸ I distinguish between the vice of pusillanimity and the character trait of humility. For a detail description of the differences between the two, see Rebecca DeYoung, “Aquinas’s Virtues of Acknowledged Dependence: A New Measure of Greatness,” *Faith and Philosophy* 21, no. 2 (2004): 214–227.

term, it is not at all clear what she is talking about when, for example, she talks about the virtue of courage.

The fact that various traditions define both particular virtues, and virtue in general, in widely different ways suggests that ‘virtue’ is a non-univocal term. We cannot, therefore, expect that *one* principle of virtue individuation will be acceptable or even useful for every virtue account. However, we should expect that moral philosophers take the question of virtue individuation seriously, and that they have *an* account of for how they individuate virtues. I have argued that a criterion of individuation needs to be both parsimonious and flexible, curbing the needless proliferation of virtues while respecting their diversity. I have also suggested that each moral philosopher’s criterion needs to be rooted in his or her metaphysics of human nature and moral psychology. In the remaining part of this chapter, I will clarify and defend this claim.

Human Nature and Tradition-Constituted Inquiry

Ever since MacIntyre called our attention to the fact that every moral account is embedded in a particular way of life,²⁹ more and more virtue ethicists acknowledge the importance of locating the analysis of the individual virtues within particular moral outlooks.³⁰ This growing awareness has brought *some* clarity to the general discourse about

²⁹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988). I do not wish to claim that MacIntyre was the *first* to assert that moral claims are always imbedded in practices and ways of life. Many have made similar claims before (e.g., Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Anscombe, etc., as well as the whole host of phenomenologists). However, the message did not seem to have really taken root in the minds of the broader ethical community until the publication of *After Virtue*.

³⁰ Consider, for example, the recently published volume on virtues and vices that is edited by Timpe and Boyd (Kevin Timpe and Craig Boyd, *Virtues and Their Vices* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2014]). Out of ten authors that treat individual moral virtues and/or vices, seven explicitly acknowledge the fact that they are constructing accounts

individual virtues. On the one hand, it made us aware that what often looks like substantive disagreements over the status of *one and the same* character trait are really instances of moral outlooks talking past each other. For example, this approach makes it patently clear that Hume’s “monkish virtue” of humility is *not* what Christians have in mind when they treat humility as one of the most important virtues. On the other hand, the McIntyrean approach helps explain why, when the misunderstanding mentioned above is clarified, moral outlooks *still* disagree over the moral status of a particular trait. This is because the real disagreement between the various accounts lies at the level of fundamental questions. These are the questions of whether the concept of the virtue is derivative from the concept of human nature, what human nature is, whether it has an end, the number and the nature of these ends, the nature of our relationship with the divine, etc.³¹ Once this becomes clear, we realize that it makes no sense to think of virtues in abstraction, and that tradition-constituted inquiry is the only way that we can make any real progress in our understanding of particular virtues and of their individuation. Moreover, pursuing virtue individuation from within a particular moral outlook is going to be crucial not only for the broadly teleological accounts of virtue, but for the non-teleological accounts, as well.³² I will briefly examine both types of the accounts to show why this is the case.

rooted in particular moral and religious outlooks, as opposed to universally generic concepts of these virtues, ones that are “neutral to all cultures” (Daniel McInerney, “Fortitude and the Conflict of Frameworks,” in *Virtues and Their Vices*, 75).

³¹ For a more detailed discussion of ways in which one’s conception of human nature and of one’s relation to the world, to God, and to others affect one’s understanding of particular virtues, see Robert C. Roberts, “How Virtue Contributes to Flourishing,” in *Current Controversies in Virtue Theory*, ed. Mark Alfano (New York: Routledge, 2015), 36–49.

³² For the purposes of this classification, an account is teleological if, in one way or another, it considers virtues to be traits that help us fulfil our *telos*, or final end. Most of these accounts fall into the category of eudaimonistic virtue ethics, although there are some

Consider, for example, three different teleological accounts.³³ The first is Roberts', in which virtues are individuated by their functions, or by their contributions to the life of virtue.³⁴ Roberts thinks of virtues as having specific tasks that each contributes to living a good life, and argues that these tasks will be determined "by human nature in the context of the world we live in."³⁵ This is because what a good human life looks like, and, accordingly, which dispositions/powers are going to be dispositions/powers of proper functioning, is going to be determined by human nature-in-context. Different moral outlooks, however,

accounts that don't fully fit the profile. For example, because of his strong anti-theoretical sympathies, Robert Roberts resists the foundationalist project of grounding the concept of a virtue solely in the concept of *eudaimonia*.

Non-teleological accounts, on the other hand, argue that the concept of virtue is fundamentally independent from the concept of *eudaimonia* despite the fact that there exists a close connection between these two concepts.

³³ There are, of course, more than three version of a teleological account of virtue. For example, I am leaving out Philippa Foot's account, although it might be the clearest in terms of showing the importance of the concept of human nature for virtue individuation. Arguing that virtues are corrective of human tendency to fall prey to certain generic temptations and deficiencies of motivation for acting well, she individuates virtues by the spheres in which the said temptations and deficiencies of motivation might occur. She writes that "there is, for instance, a virtue of industriousness only because idleness is a temptation; and of humility only because men tend to think too well of themselves." Moreover, "if people cared about the rights of others as they care about their own rights no virtue of justice would be needed to look after the matter" ("Virtues and Vices," in *Virtues and Vices: And Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 9). It is easy to see, Foot writes, that whether we view courage, temperance, justice, etc. as virtues depends entirely on what human nature is like. Accordingly, she acknowledges that the traditional list of virtues might be challenged on the basis of a claim that "the theory of human nature lying behind the traditional list of the virtues and vices puts too much emphasis on hedonistic and sensual impulses, and does not sufficiently take account of less straightforward inclinations such as the desire to be put upon and dissatisfied, or the unwillingness to accept good things as they come along" (Ibid, p. 11).

³⁴ Private correspondence.

³⁵ Ibid.

have often greatly different conceptions of human nature-in-context. Accordingly, when we think about virtue individuation, we must do so from within the confines of a particular moral outlook.

The second is Hursthouse's account, where virtues are most commonly individuated by characteristic reasons to which a virtuous person might be responsive, and so by the particular goods that the virtue might help us secure or particular evils that the virtue might help us avoid.³⁶ Hursthouse understands virtues to be character traits that enable their possessors to live a characteristically good human life and to function excellently as a specimen of human beings. Accordingly, it is one's articulation of human nature-in-context—an articulation that will be determined by one's moral outlook—that will set the parameters for what exactly counts as goods/evils that are appropriate for the virtuous person to pursue/avoid.

The final teleological account to consider is that of Martha Nussbaum's, who individuates virtues by "sphere of human experience that figures in more or less any human life."³⁷ Nussbaum argues that these spheres are constituted by questions/issues that any person must confront in the course of her life, and that every person will necessarily respond to these questions in either proper or improper ways. "Everyone has some attitude, and corresponding behaviour, towards her own death; her bodily appetites and their management; her property and its use; the distribution of social goods; telling the truth; being kind to others; cultivating a sense of play and delight, and so on."³⁸ So where does the

³⁶ Rosalind Hursthouse, "The Virtuous Agent's Reasons: A Response to Williams," in *Aristotle and Moral Realism*, ed. Robert Heinaman (Westview Press, 1995), 26-30.

³⁷ Martha C. Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," 35.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

concept of human nature, as determined by one's moral outlook, come to play in this account? It does so on two levels. First, which patterns of attitude and corresponding behavior count as proper or improper—the content of the individual virtue—will vary from one moral outlook to another, precisely because of the differences in the respective outlooks' ways of understanding human nature. Take, for example, the sphere of experience that concerns attitude and actions with respect to one's own worth. In this sphere, Aristotelean *megalopsuchia* (i.e., the greatness of the soul), Christian humility, and Confucian *xi* (i.e., humility, shamefulness) each represent a possible pattern of attitudes and actions. Whether or not we will see these as virtues, as vices, or as neutral character traits will depend largely on our articulation of human nature. Second, consider such Christian virtues as charity, faith, and hope. These virtues lie at the heart of a Christian account of moral life, because these allow us to relate to God as to our final end, and to do so rightly. However, all three are absent from Aristotle's account, since on Aristotle's conception of human nature, human final end is firmly situated in this life. This example shows that the very question of what spheres are common to human life—what are the situations and experiences that a typical human will need to respond to—can be answered only with a reference to one's account of human nature as it is articulated within a particular moral outlook.

That virtue individuation is to be pursued within a particular moral outlook which articulates a particular account of human nature is not a very surprising conclusion if we restrict our inquiry to the teleological accounts of virtue. After all, if an account sees virtues as traits that contribute in some way to a good human life, it would be strange if that account could identify and individuate these traits without some idea about what a good human life looks like. And, as Roberts points out, what 'human' in 'human life' means is going to vary from one moral outlook to another. Still, what about the non-teleological accounts of virtue?

I suggest that even for these, the concept of human nature-as articulated by a moral outlook plays an important role in virtue individuation.

Two Non-Teleological Accounts

First, consider Robert Adams, who understands virtues to be “persisting excellence[s] in being for the good,”³⁹ where the good is (an) object(s) possessed of intrinsic value—an object that is worthy of love and admiration.⁴⁰ He argues that the relationship between our understanding of virtues and of human nature should proceed in the opposite direction from that of the teleological accounts.⁴¹ For various reasons, Adams finds it unhelpful to ask, “What kind of life constitutes human flourishing/*eudaimonia*? And which character traits contribute to this human flourishing/*eudaimonia*?” Instead, he suggests that we should begin with the recognition of the fact that we see some goods/excellences as intrinsically valuable, and that we see some ways of being *for* the abovementioned goods as excellent. He argues that we should use this recognition to understand what a good human life is like.

This reversal of the order of understanding of virtues and of a good human life is what makes Adams’ account non-teleological. It would be, however, a mistake to think that because of this reversal, a concept of human nature plays no role in conceptualization and

³⁹ Robert Merrihew Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 14.

⁴⁰ Adams suggests that besides persons, these goods may include “physical objects; certain some kinds of abstractions (such as poems or mathematical proofs), qualities (such as beautiful shade of blue); deeds; lives” and character traits (*Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 17).

⁴¹ Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 50-52.

individuation of virtues. Consider, for example, such traits as aesthetic sensitivity and sensitivity to other person's feelings. It is clear that whether these traits are going to be seen as virtues will depend on 1) whether the objects of these traits are genuine goods, and 2) whether these traits are excellent ways of being for their objects.⁴² Human nature will play some role in addressing both of these questions. There are, of course, some goods that are not nature-dependent. The prime example of such a good is the transcendent excellence of God, from whom, as Adams insists, all other goods derive their excellence insofar as they "resemble or imitate God."⁴³ There are also finite/created nature-independent goods, such as a flower, a beautiful piece of music, or a person. However, there are some goods/excellences that are nature-dependent, viz., the virtues. For virtues are both excellences/goods (inasmuch as they have intrinsic value, worthy of our love and admiration) and excellent ways of being for the good. As excellent ways of being for the good, virtues are always going to be nature and moral outlook specific. For, presumably, a human's excellent ways of being for the ocean is going to be very different from both the dolphin's ways and those of an angel;⁴⁴ and an a-sexual, benevolent alien's being for the good of human sexuality is going to differ from a human being's being for the good of human sexuality.⁴⁵ But as long as virtues, as excellent ways of being for the good, are going to depend on one's concept of a human nature, virtues as goods will also depend on an

⁴² Ibid., 20-22.

⁴³ Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 28-29.

⁴⁴ My thoughts and intuitions about ways in which an angel may or may not be excellent are based on Thomas Aquinas' account of angelic natures, which is one of the most developed accounts to date.

⁴⁵ I thank Alex Pruss for this example.

articulation of human nature. For again, presumably, such traits as a developed aesthetic sensitivity, or sensitivity to other people's feelings, etc. are all excellent ways of being human and not of being an angel, for example; nor is it possible for angels to possess the virtues of faith and hope. Once this clarification is made, the question of human nature-as-articulated-by-an-outlook and of its importance to virtue individuation is placed back on the table.

Finally, there is Christine Swanton, who in her pluralistic account seeks to preserve insights from every type of virtue account—the eudaimonistic accounts like the one promoted by Hursthouse, agent-based accounts akin to the one promoted by Michael Slote, and excellences-based accounts like that of Robert Adams. Swanton takes virtues to be dispositions to respond well to the items in its field(s), which may include situations, physical inanimate objects, persons, abstract objects, agent's inner states, etc. and which make demands on us as we move through the world.⁴⁶ This flexible definition allows her to argue that while plenty of virtues such as courage or temperance are constitutive of human flourishing, there exist virtues that are expressive of this flourishing (e.g., the virtue that “the ability of the heart to be ‘seized by engaging tenderness’”), as well as virtues that promote, appreciate, and (or) respect objects that are worthy of promotion, appreciation, and (or) respect regardless of any instrumental value these object's might have for our flourishing.⁴⁷

For Swanton, virtue individuation is going to be a complicated matter that will be based both on a virtue's field(s) and in the mode(s) of responsiveness to the objects in that virtue's field. The latter is going to be determined by 1) the objects' value, status,

⁴⁶ Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*, 19-21. The movement through the world is both physical and temporal, as Swanton pays careful attention to the fact that agents grow and mature throughout their lives.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 92-5.

good/benefit, and bonds between the object and the agent, and 2) the various ways in which an agent might appropriately respond to the objects of the given virtue. Swanton suggests that while the notions of human flourishing and human nature may not play a role in determining the aspects of the world (i.e., potential spheres of concern) to which a virtuous agent will be attuned, they will be extremely important in determining the appropriate modes of responsiveness to the objects in the virtues' fields.⁴⁸ She underscores the need for well-developed accounts of human nature that would include accounts of human psychology by pointing to the difficulties of distinguishing between instances of apparent and genuine virtue (e.g., vicious pride vs. 'solid sense of self-confidence', or vicious vs. healthy ambition). Here, the difficulty of discerning the inward motivation that drives the person's outward behavior is only a part of the problem. The greater difficulty lies in the fact that, in order to be useful, one's account of both healthy and of vicious pride needs to be deeply rooted in and connected with not only an understanding of what it means to be human, but also with what it means to be human in a particular cultural network.⁴⁹ Swanton suggests that in these tasks a virtue ethicist should rely not only on the insights of psychologically-minded philosophers like Aristotle, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard, but also on research done by philosophically-minded psychologists who share the basic assumptions of virtue ethics, since these psychologists' training and experience take them "closer to the 'coal face' of human nature."⁵⁰ At the same time, Swanton warns that even empirical psychological research is

⁴⁸ Ibid., 8. Besides, Swanton notes that by definition, a virtue is "an excellent or good feature of a human being: that is, it is partially constitutive of goodness qua human, or qua human-in-a-role" (ibid., 92). It is, therefore, obvious to Swanton that a proper account of a human being is going to be fundamental for any moral theory that involves human virtue.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 10-11.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 13.

always done from a perspective that is informed by one's philosophical and moral commitments. Accordingly, she constantly reminds her readers that one's understanding of virtue should be connected with one's understanding of human nature in the context of the lived-in world.

Aquinas and the Principle of Virtue Individuation

To recap, I have shown that the concepts of human nature—as it is articulated by a particular moral outlook—plays a crucial role in both the teleological and non-teleological accounts of virtue. Accordingly, any attempt to articulate a principle by which a particular account individuates virtues will be influenced by that account's conception of human nature. It is, therefore, lamentable that many virtue accounts provide us with only a sketch of their respective conception of human nature and of human psychology. It is even more lamentable and ironic in light of the fact that the very article that is widely credited with being a catalyst for the contemporary virtue ethics revival adjures us to cease doing moral philosophy until we have made solid progress in philosophy of psychology. In “Modern Moral Philosophy,” Elizabeth Anscombe famously champions describing particular actions in virtue terms as opposed to (what she argues to be) the informative and meaningless terms of “moral ought.” Still, she notes that the would-be virtue ethicist has an obstacle that needs to be overcome before the virtue ethics account would be able to supply us with an answer to the question of whether a person may ever commit an injustice:

One man—a philosopher—may say that since justice is a virtue, and injustice a vice, and virtues and vices are built up by the of the action in which they are instanced, an act of injustice will tend to make a man bad; and essentially the flourishing of a man qua man consists in his being good (e.g. in virtues); but for any X to which such terms apply, X needs what makes it flourish, so a man needs, or ought to perform, only virtuous actions; and even if, as it must be admitted may happen, he flourishes less, or not at all, in inessentials, by avoiding injustice, his life is spoiled in essentials by not avoiding injustice—so he still needs to perform only just actions. That is roughly how Plato and Aristotle talk; but it

can be seen that philosophically there is a huge gap, at present unfillable as far as we are concerned, which needs to be filled by an *account of human nature, human action, the type of characteristic a virtue is, and above all of human "flourishing."*⁵¹

Even though this charge is often ignored or addressed only superficially in contemporary virtue ethics, we do have examples of virtue accounts built on a fleshed out conception of human nature. Mengzi, Aristotle, and Hume can each provide us with a model of building one's understanding of virtues and virtue individuation upon one's understanding of human nature and psychology. Given how important virtue individuation is for the overall project of virtue ethics as it is envisioned either by Roberts or by Miller, and given how important a particular articulation of human nature is for virtue individuation, it would be extremely beneficial for virtue ethicists to examine either of the accounts mentioned above. No one, however, has such an integrated and well-developed description of human nature, its philosophical and moral psychology, and its virtues and vices, as Thomas Aquinas. Moreover, in Aquinas we find someone who is thinking very carefully about the concepts of character traits, habits, virtues, and ways in which one virtue differs from another. It is to Aquinas I now consequently turn—to see whether and what he can teach us about individuating virtues within the confines of a moral outlook's articulation of human nature.

⁵¹ G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 1–19, 15. Emphasis mine.

CHAPTER THREE

Moral Psychology and the Importance of Habitus in Aquinas

Introduction

When attempting to reconstruct Aquinas' account of human nature, one can hardly do better than follow Aquinas's own organizing principle and begin with his account of the human soul as a subsistent form of a body (I.75).¹ Such a beginning allows for an immediate appreciation of two points that are going to shape Aquinas's moral account, each in a distinct way. The first is Aquinas's deep commitment to the Aristotelian notion that humans are embodied souls. Unlike fully spiritual substances (i.e., angelic beings), our souls have no proper operation apart from our bodies. Imagining a unicorn, sensing danger and resisting the temptation to run away from danger, rejoicing over the good news that a friend received an offer of a tenure-track job, choosing a dress for the dinner party, fumbling for an answer to a logic puzzle, or contemplating the meaning of life—all of these activities ultimately depend on the basic building blocks of thought, which are sensible perceptions that we receive as a result of our senses' interaction with the world. Aquinas' insistence that human soul is the form of a body, and as such does not exist as a complete entity apart from its union with the body, has broad implications for his moral theory. For one thing, it implies that the relationship between body and soul is natural, and, as such, is good and fitting. It is

¹ Unless specified, references from Aquinas are from *Summa Theologiae*, Latin-English Opera Omnia, ed. The Aquinas Institute, trans. Fr. Laurence Shapcote, OP (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2012).

not a source of moral failure/sin. This means that whatever our explanation of human moral life in general, and of human moral goodness and badness in particular, such an explanation must account for the essential goodness of the body and of its essential relationship with the soul.

The second implication of the idea that the soul is a subsistent form of the body is Aquinas' deep commitment to the Christian doctrine of the immortality of the soul. The soul is not *just* a form of a body—it is a *subsistent* form, and as such, it survives separation from the body in a way no other form can. This deep commitment reveals that Aquinas's moral account cannot be seen as a chapter or subdivision within the Aristotelian moral philosophy.² Rather, as Mark Jordan convincingly argues, we must see Aquinas as a theologian who “exercises confident freedom in appropriating Aristotle’s text. [Aquinas] excerpts it, corrects it, transforms it by juxtaposition”³ in pursuit of the higher science of Christian theology. As a result, Aquinas the theologian often radically transforms such

² Although, as Denys Turner points out, Aquinas himself clearly doesn't believe that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is contrary to, or even absent from, Aristotelian account of the soul (*Thomas Aquinas: A Portrait* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013, 76-7), it is also clear that Aquinas' reading of the *De Anima* iii 5 is influenced by his Christian commitments. For, as Christopher Shields writes, the enigmatic passage from *De Anima* that appears to be posing the notion of a separable intellect has been subject to strikingly different interpretations from antiquity to the present day: “So varied are their approaches, in fact, that it is tempting to regard *De Anima* iii 5 as a sort of Rorschach Test for Aristotelians: it is hard to avoid the conclusion that readers discover in this chapter the Aristotle they hope to admire” (“The Active Mind of *De Anima* iii 5,” a supplement to “Aristotle’s Psychology,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2016, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-psychology/index.html>).

³ Mark Jordan, *The Alleged Aristotelianism of Thomas Aquinas*, The Etienne Gilson Series (Wetteren, Belgium: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1992), 40.

familiar Aristotelian concepts as virtue, passions, and ways of understanding the relationship between intellect and will.⁴

Accordingly, this chapter sketches out Aquinas' moral psychology to show how his account of virtue is rooted in his account of human nature. The first part of the chapter elucidates the Thomistic understanding of the relationship between virtue and human good. I show that Aquinas builds on the Aristotelian answer to the question "Why do we need moral virtues?" by making an explicit connection between our ability to know God and our moral rectitude—the rectitude that requires virtue. The second part provides an outline of Aquinas' moral psychology and of his account of *habitus* - of the stable, morally valent, nature-directed, functional/operational dispositions that inform their subjects and that are divided into virtues and vices. The foundation for understanding virtue thus established, I proceed to examine Aquinas' account of virtue and its individuation in Chapters Four and Five.

Part 1: Relationship Between Virtue and Human Good

The Two-fold Human Telos

Nowhere is the Thomistic re-interpretation of the Aristotelian framework as apparent and as far-reaching as in Aquinas's re-envisioning of the concept of human happiness. Aquinas endorses the Aristotelian notion that every human action is done for the sake of an end (I-II.1.1-3) and, ultimately, for the sake of a *final* end. This pursuit of the final end is what makes all and every human action intelligible (I-II.1.6. ad.3). Like Aristotle,

⁴ Ibid., pp. 29-30. For a detailed account of ways in which Aquinas transforms the Aristotelian notion of virtue, see Bonnie Kent, "Habits and Virtues (Ia IIae, qq. 49-70)" in Stephen J. Pope (ed.), *The Ethics of Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 116-130.

Aquinas believes that humans are ultimately seeking their own perfection (I-II.1.5), that is to say, the life fully characteristic of human beings, and that in achieving our perfection we obtain the good in possession of which our desires fully rest (I-II.1.5). Since both Aquinas and Aristotle believe that the good or perfection of a thing is determined by its nature, and since both believe that the defining feature of a human person is rationality, both believe that the good of a human is constituted by an activity of the soul in accordance with reason (NE I.7; I-II.3.2 ad.2; *In Ethicorum* I.10.123-27).⁵ Since it is through virtues that we are disposed to act well/in accordance with reason, it follows that the good of a human consists in activity according to the best, or highest, virtue of a human (NE I.7, X.7; *In Ethicorum* I.10.128, X.10.2080). Finally, since speculative intellect is “the highest element in us,” both Aquinas and Aristotle argue that the highest human activity—the one that constitutes happiness—is the intellectual activity of contemplation (NE X.7).

This, Aquinas believes, is a point where Aristotle runs into a two-fold problem. Although it is unclear what Aristotle himself thought about the nature of the relationship between happiness achieved through contemplation and happiness achieved through active life,⁶ Aquinas clearly takes Aristotle to be saying that complete, or ultimate, happiness can be

⁵ Unless specified, all quotations from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* are from *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2nd ed., trans. and ed. by Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁶ Martha Nussbaum, for example, argues that chapters X.6-8 “do not fit into the argument of the [*Nicomachean Ethics*]; indeed that they represent a line of ethical thought that Aristotle elsewhere vigorously attacks” (*The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 377). Nussbaum concludes that in extolling the activity of contemplation as the most noble human activity and the virtue of theoretical wisdom as the highest and most important of human virtues, Aristotle articulates not his own, but a Platonist view of human happiness with a view to setting these two views side by side for comparison. “Although for the most part [Aristotle] articulates a conception of a life complexly devoted to politics, love, and reflection, he also feels... that really fine reflection may not be able to stand side by side with anything else; we

achieved only in the life of contemplation of the highest metaphysical realities. To afford complete and perfect happiness, however, this contemplation needs to be continual and perpetual—and continuity and perpetuity do not exist in this life. Therefore, Aquinas argues, Aristotle must have known that the true and complete happiness found in uninterrupted activity of contemplation is not fully achievable in this life (*In Ethicorum* I.10.128, X.13.2136).

Moreover, Aristotle's notion that human happiness is found in a life of contemplation of metaphysical truths runs into an even greater problem. Following Aristotle, Aquinas argues that the nature of the speculative intellect is such that it is satisfied only when it reaches the knowledge of the final cause of all being—and not with just any kind of knowledge, but with the knowledge of the essence, or nature, of this final cause. This means that as long as the intellect merely knows *that* the final cause exists, or knows the final cause through its *effects*, the intellect will not be perfectly happy. "Consequently," Aquinas argues, "for perfect happiness the intellect needs to reach the very Essence of the First Cause. And thus it will have its perfection through union with God as with that object" (I-II.3.8). But herein lies the problem: Aristotle's own assumptions regarding the nature and operations of the human intellect will show us that, by its own natural powers, the intellect is unable to comprehend the divine essence.

cannot have a harmonious fusion of the human and the divine. ... In a sense there is a decision for the mixed view, but the other view remains, not fully dismissed, exerting its claim as a possibility" (Ibid.).

In contrast, Sarah Broadie argues that the concept of contemplative life as being the highest type of life and as constitutive of complete happiness is integral to the overall message of *NE*. She reads Book I as not only hinting at, but preparing the way for the argument developed in X.6-8 ("Philosophical Introduction," introduction to Broadie, Sarah and Christopher Rowe, eds., *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics: Translation, Introduction, Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 14-16; 76).

This inability stems both from the nature of knowledge and from our nature as knowers. Aristotle and Aquinas understand knowledge to be constituted by the known object's existence in the knower, and hold that the mode of the knower sets a limit to ways in which the known can be present in the knower.⁷ As creatures who (naturally) exist only in individual matter, we can have natural knowledge only of other things that exist in individual matter. Through our immaterial intellect, we are able to abstract these objects' forms from their individual matter, and so we are able to know the universals—but only *as* universals. We can never have direct acquaintance with an *essence*, or nature, of a particular thing. When we understand an essence, we do so through abstraction. When we apprehend *this* particular thing, we do so with our senses, and so we apprehend its sensible form, but not its essence.⁸ Moreover, even this mediated knowledge of the essences is restricted to knowledge of essences of those substances that are also composed of matter and form—whose essence exists only in the individual matter. Since God's essence is self-subsistent (i.e., God is His

⁷ See I.84-89 for detailed explanation of human intellective process.

⁸ “The intellect naturally knows natures which exist only in individual matter; not as they are in such individual matter, but according as they are abstracted therefrom by the considering act of the intellect; hence it follows that through the intellect we can understand these objects as universal” (I.12.4). See also I.86.1, “Our intellect cannot know the singular in material things directly and primarily. The reason of this is that the principle of singularity in material things is individual matter, whereas our intellect... understands by abstracting the intelligible species from such matter. Now what is abstracted from individual matter is the universal. Hence our intellect knows directly the universal only. But indirectly, and as it were by a kind of reflection, it can know the singular, because ... even after abstracting the intelligible species, the intellect, in order to understand, needs to turn to the phantasms in which it understands the species, as is said *De Anima* iii, 7. Therefore it understands the universal directly through the intelligible species, and indirectly the singular represented by the phantasm. And thus it forms the proposition ‘Socrates is a man.’” For detailed discussion of Aquinas' account of perception, see Daniel D. De Haan, “Perception and the *Vis Cogitativa*: A Thomistic Analysis of Aspectual, Actional, and Affectional Percepts,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 88, no. 3 (2014): 397–437.

own essence and is His own existence),⁹ it follows that God's essence is unknowable not only to us, but to any created intellect (I.12.4).

So it turns out that Aristotle's quest for complete or perfect happiness is doomed to frustration. We cannot achieve the kind of knowledge of the essence of the Final Cause that we long for and the contemplation of which constitutes perfect happiness. We not only lack an ability to devote our lives to uninterrupted contemplation, we actually lack the capacity for being united to the Final Cause /God in the way that would satisfy our deepest desire. That is why, Aquinas concludes, a charitable reading of Aristotle must see the latter as developing in his political and ethical writings an account of *imperfect* happiness, which is the kind of happiness that *can be* had in this life:

For, in regard to the full understanding of truth, men can attain it only through enquiry, and they are utterly deficient in regard to objects which are most intelligible in their nature, as is clear from what we have said. And so, felicity in its perfect character cannot be present in men, but they may participate somewhat in it, even in this life. And this seems to have been Aristotle's view on felicity (SCG.III.48.9).

Still, Aquinas argues, Aristotle must have realized that the desire for happiness is a natural desire, and as such it cannot be completely in vain. So, it must be that perfect happiness (beatitude) is "reserved for man after this life" (*In Ethicorum* I.16.202).¹⁰ But how

⁹ I.3.3-4.

¹⁰ Here, Aquinas seems to be developing an argument from desire similar to the one championed by C.S. Lewis. Lewis writes, "Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for these desires exists. A baby feels hunger; well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim; well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire; well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world" (*Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 136-137). For an elucidation of Aquinas' argument, and its relation to other types of argument from desire, see John Haldane, "Philosophy, the Restless Heart and the Meaning of Theism," *Ratio* 19, no. 4 (2006): 421-440.

can Aquinas maintain that perfect happiness is available to us (though in afterlife), given that he just established that we cannot know God's essence by means of our natural intellectual capacities? Aquinas's argument is two-fold. First, he argues that a natural power may receive an added disposition that would elevate it "to a condition beyond its own nature" (I.12.5). Second, relying on the authority of the Scriptures, Aquinas argues that through an act of God's grace, our intellect is raised beyond its nature when God (1) adds to us a new power of intellectual understanding by which we become capable of seeing divine essence—the process to which Aquinas refers as "illumination" —and (2) confers a new disposition on our intellect, through which it is readied for the reception of the vision of the divine (Ibid.).

To summarize, Aquinas recognizes two final ends / kinds of happiness that are available to a human person.¹¹ The first kind is constituted by an Aristotelian ideal of a virtuous life of contemplation. This happiness is a natural human *telos*, which can be achieved in this life. The second kind consists in a unitive vision of God's essence (i.e., beatific vision), which is the supernatural human *telos*. The beatific vision can be achieved only in the after life¹² and is made possible only through God's gracious act of illumination of our natural intellect. This act of illumination both enables us to see God's essence and

¹¹ Among the Thomist scholars, the question of whether Aquinas endorsed two distinct human ends or whether he saw the natural *telos* as fully subordinate to the ultimate *telos* (and the specific ways in which this subordination might work) is a matter of some controversy. For a survey of the relevant debates, and for a detailed account of the two ends, see Denis J. M. Bradley, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999).

¹² Aquinas argues that as long as we exist in this life, our intellect "does not naturally know things unless they have a form in matter or can be known through things of this sort" (ST I.12.11). The only exception is the instances of beatific vision that are granted to certain saints during their earthly lives - and in those instances their minds are "elevated - supernaturally and beyond the common order [that is, without the use of their bodily senses] - all the way up to the vision of His essence" (I.12.11. ad.2).

confers on us a new, supernatural disposition that enables us to achieve our supernatural end.

The Role of Moral Virtues

Aquinas's reinterpretation and modification of Aristotle allows him to answer the question that is left mostly unresolved by Aristotle, viz., "What is the relationship between the life of contemplation and the active life of a virtuous person?" Or, to state this question more directly, "Why do we need to cultivate moral virtues that prepare us for an active life if our ultimate happiness is found in the life of contemplation?" This question arises from the fact that, according to Aristotle (as well as Aquinas), contemplation is concerned with unchangeable truths - as opposed to practical reasoning that is concerned with right/good/appropriate choice (*NE* VI.2,7). To contemplate well, our theoretical intellect must be properly formed by the three intellectual virtues—scientific knowledge (*episteme*), theoretical wisdom (*sophia*), and intuitive understanding of the first principles (*nous*) (*NE* VI.3). And while Aristotle argues that practical wisdom (*phronesis*) is inextricably connected with the virtues that perfect the appetites (i.e., moral virtues), he makes no such argument when it comes to theoretical wisdom (*sophia*) (*NE* VI.12). Accordingly, Aristotle seems to be acknowledging what we from experience know to be true: it is possible for a person to achieve the heights of theoretical contemplation while being sexually promiscuous, or gluttonous, or greedy, or vain about her looks, etc. Hence, a reader of Aristotle is presented with a puzzle: if complete human happiness is found in the life of contemplation, then why do we need to develop moral virtues?

To answer this question, Aquinas points out (and some Aristotle commentators have agreed with Aquinas's estimation)¹³ that Aristotle considers the active life a human life properly speaking. This is because humans are the only ones that are capable of life where passions and volition obey the voice of reason. Lower animals have passions, but not reason, whereas the only activity the "gods" engage in is contemplation (*NE* X.8). So whatever qualities or virtues train the passions and volition train that which is properly human in us and so contribute to happiness in a secondary sense. What Aristotle does not say—but what, at least according to Sarah Broadie, can be implied from the rest of Aristotle's work - is that only a person with a properly formed will and passions will see the contemplative life as worthy of choice and will enjoy it in a proper way.¹⁴

Broadie's interpretation finds indirect support in Aristotle's treatise on friendship. For Aristotle contends that "without friends no one would choose to live, *though he had all other goods*" (*NE* VIII.1). There are many reasons why people might develop friendships—be it personal gain, utility, pleasure, need to be needed, etc. But the true and perfect friendship is one where the friend is loved not because of anything that adheres *to* her—not because of her accidental qualities—but because of what inheres *in* her — who she truly is (*NE* VIII.3). This is because she herself, and not merely her accidents, are good. And since only virtuous people are good in themselves, it follows that only virtuous people are capable of forming true friendships. Moreover, it takes a certain rectitude of moral character to desire the true friendship in the first place and to value it for the great good that it is, apart from the accidental benefits that might come from it. And so, even though it is universally true that

¹³ E.g., Broadie, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, 79-81; 448-49.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

no one would choose to live without friendship, only truly virtuous people have the right reasons for valuing friendship so highly. And if it is the virtuous person who judges friendship to be necessary for, and constitutive of, human happiness, then we should take this to be the case. This means that the contemplative life of Book X need not be—and ideally is not—the life of self-sufficient isolation. Even if the sage could arrange his life in such a way that all his daily needs are met so that he would not need to interact with the polis at large, without a true friend his life would be incomplete. But to have a true friend, one must be the kind of person who is capable of forming a true friendship. That is, one must have a good moral character, and so one needs to cultivate moral virtues.

So we have two possible answers to the Aristotelian puzzle about moral virtues. Still, Aristotle himself does not resolve the issue for us—the solution, though implied, must be uncovered by what often amounts to reading between the lines. Aquinas, on the other hand, makes the explicit connection between a properly-formed will and the attainment of theoretical wisdom. He argues that because our perfect happiness lies not in a mere life of *philosophical* contemplation of the highest good, but in a *union* with the essence of God, the properly formed will is essential for the achievement of such happiness. Aquinas states that two things are necessary constituents of happiness. First is the essence of happiness, which is an act of the intellect that consists in the beatific vision. Second is happiness's proper accident,¹⁵ which consists in delight that results from the beatific vision and which pertains to the will (I-II.3.4). Since to delight in an act of obtaining a particular good the person needs

¹⁵ For Aquinas, as well as Aristotle, proper accident is something that always (inseparably) accompanies a substance without constituting, or explaining it.

to see it *as* a good and to desire it as such, to be able to delight in the act of beatific vision the person needs to actually love God as her final end.¹⁶

This means that not only her reason, but her appetites as well need to be ordered rightly both prior to and concomitantly with the beatitude (I-II.4.4). However, without moral virtues to form them, the appetites lack such proper orientation, since in their untrained state the appetites are naturally promiscuous, since they are moved by *any* object that we perceive to be suitable / pleasant. Likewise, in its unformed state, any object the intellect sees as good will move our will. And although every object that our appetites find suitable/pleasant has goodness in and of itself, it is not ultimately good for us to pursue just any object that attracts us. The great value of moral virtues is in forming our will and sense appetites in such a way that these come to operate in accordance with the rule of reason in a consistent and reliable way: they develop steady dispositions to be attracted to those things which are good for us and to be repulsed by what leads us away from our ultimate end.

Thus, moral virtues turn out to be necessary for the achievement of ultimate happiness because they form the appetites in a way that orients them to their final end. However, now it is Aquinas who appears to run into two problems. The first problem has to do with the nature of the moral virtues. The moral virtues that Aristotle has envisioned - the ones that perfect the appetites by making them subject to reason and which can be acquired by habituation - make us excellent human beings and thus enable us to achieve the kind of happiness that is *natural* to humans. But Aquinas has just established that our perfect, or ultimate, happiness consists in something above human nature, viz., in a *supernatural* union

¹⁶ Aquinas argues that although beatific vision constitutes every person's ultimate end, not everyone recognizes it as such. As a result, people are liable to look for the fulfillment of their perfection elsewhere (I-II.1.7). For a more detailed explanation, see Haldane, "Philosophy, the Restless Heart and the Meaning of Theism."

with God. This happiness cannot be achieved by habituation that conforms us to the demands of practical reason alone. So how can our natural, acquired, moral virtues help us to achieve our ultimate, supernatural, end? The second problem is due to the fact that Christian orthodoxy maintains that the gift of grace is not conditioned upon our moral perfection. Theological virtues of charity, faith, and hope orient us toward our final end, and these are given to us gratuitously. Moreover, these are often given to individuals who not only lack virtues but who are actually vicious. Thus, it would seem, the moral virtues are not necessary to the achievement of supernatural happiness. Grace alone may suffice. In light of this teaching, how can Aquinas maintain that we need moral virtues to orient us toward God?

Aquinas's solution of these joint problems is highly nuanced, and I will give only a broad overview of it here. Addressing the first problem, he acknowledges that since ultimate happiness lies beyond the capacity of human nature, we won't be able to achieve it by means of the acquired, natural virtues described by Aristotle. We will need supernaturally added theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, and we will need the infused moral virtues. The latter, which are God-given correlates of the acquired moral virtues, operate similarly to their counterparts, but instead of orienting us toward Aristotelian *eudaimonia*, they orient us toward beatitude.¹⁷ Finally, we will need the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which Eleonore Stump

¹⁷ There exists a lively debate among the Thomists about the nature and the relationship between the acquired and infused virtues in Aquinas. For a helpful overview of this literature, see Angela McKay Knobel, "Can Aquinas's Infused and Acquired Virtues Coexist in the Christian Life?" *Studies in Christian Ethics* 23:4 (2010), 381-396.

explains in terms of second-personal traits that arise as a result of the relationship between a Christian and the indwelling Holy Spirit.¹⁸

Given Aquinas's response to the first problem, the second problem comes into greater relief: since theological and infused virtues are fully capable of perfecting our appetites, do we really need to cultivate the acquired moral virtues? Addressing this problem, Aquinas maintains that the acquired moral virtues do play an important role in our achievement of perfect happiness for at least two reasons.¹⁹ First, even though they are not strictly speaking *necessary* for receiving theological and infused virtues, acquired moral virtues prepare our will in such a way as to make the reception *easier*. So, he argues, the acquired virtue of courage removes fear that "hinders faith" (II-II.4.7), and humility prepares the will by removing an obstacle of pride and thereby making us "submissive and ever open to receive the influx of Divine grace" (II-II.161.5. ad.2; 4.7). Second, in an important sense Aristotelian *eudaimonia* (i.e., the life of contemplation that is supported by an active life of virtue) constitutes true human happiness. And insofar as a life that is lived in accordance

¹⁸ Eleonore Stump, "The Non-Aristotelian Character of Aquinas's Ethics: Aquinas on the Passions," *Faith and Philosophy*, 28, no. 1 (2011): 37-50. For a thorough treatment of the topic of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Aquinas, see Andrew Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas's Ethics: Virtues and Gifts* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁹ Brandon Dahm identifies four different ways in which acquired moral virtues contribute to our moral life: "(a) as perfections of the human good, (b) as practical models of how to increase infused virtues, (c) by disposing us to receive the infused virtues, and (d) by aiding the infused virtues in helping us resist sin and assisting in the performance of virtuous acts" ("The Acquired Virtues Are Real Virtues: A Response to Stump," *Faith and Philosophy* 32, no. 4 (2015), 463). I believe that Dahm's argument for the importance of acquired moral virtues is essentially correct. However, because I am not wholly persuaded that acquired moral virtues remain in the Christian alongside the infused moral virtues, I reserve judgment on whether Aquinas has in mind the fourth (d) way when thinking of the role of the acquired virtues in the moral life of a Christian.

with the virtues can be truly called happy—even if not in a sense of perfect happiness—we can truly say that acquired virtues enable us to live a happy life.

Here, then, is broad overview of the way that Aquinas both appropriates and modifies the Aristotelian view of human happiness and of human virtues that are essential for happiness. Perfect happiness—our final *telos*—is unattainable in this life, since it consists in the beatific vision. The happiness that can be achieved in this life—the true, even if imperfect, happiness (our natural *telos*)—consists in the Aristotelian ideal of a life of contemplation that is supported by active life:

Therefore the last and perfect happiness, which we await in the life to come, consists entirely in contemplation. But imperfect happiness, such as can be had here, consists first and principally in contemplation, and secondarily in an operation of the practical intellect directing human actions and passions, as stated in *Ethic. x, 7,8*” (I-II.3.5; See also 4.5).²⁰

Since what is needed to live a good life is virtue, we have two sets of virtues that orient us toward our *telos*: the acquired virtues perfect our appetites and intellect with respect to our natural *telos*, and the gracious gift of theological and infused virtues perfect our appetites and intellect with respect to our supernatural *telos*.²¹

²⁰ This passage raises questions of the relationship between the Aristotelian contemplation and Christian contemplation in this life. Unlike the Aristotelean Unmoved Mover, the God that is contemplated by Christians is actively involved in their lives. For a Christian, the activity of contemplation is subordinated to the activity of worship. Finally, a Christian contemplation and worship is, ultimately, a communal affair. All of this makes Christian contemplation look very different from the activity described in Book X of *Nichomachean Ethics*. Still, important as it is, pursuing this topic will take us too far from the present project. Therefore, I note that these questions should be considered further, and move on with my task at hand.

²¹ For more on the relationship between theological, acquired moral and infused moral virtues, see chapter four.

Part 2: Thomistic Moral Psychology and the Habitus

So far, I have talked about virtues perfecting our appetites and intellect in respect to a *telos* without giving any explanation of what virtue is, what perfection of our appetites/intellect in respect to a *telos* means, or why the virtues are necessary for such perfection. I will now begin to address these questions with a sketch of the features of Aquinas' moral psychology that ground his account of the virtues. Accordingly, the rest of the chapter will consist of three parts. The first part will explicate Aquinas' account of the powers of the human soul and their distinction from one another, and will show that for some of these powers, proper operation requires formation of *habitus*.

Here, I must pause and explain my decision to use the Latin term instead of the commonly used English translations of this term as "habit" or "disposition." Among the readers of Aquinas, there has been a gradual shift from once popular translation of *habitus* as "habits." This is due to the growing awareness of the fact that Aquinas understands *habitus* as continually relying on the use of the will and reason in ways that is alien to the contemporary view of habits as automated, reflexive behavior. In fact, Robert Miner in a note to his own reasons for avoiding the use of "habit," states that "[t]he warnings" against translating *habitus* as "habit" "have by now become commonplace."²² Anthony Kenny

²² Robert Miner, "Aquinas on Habitus" in *A History of Habit: From Aristotle to Bourdieu*, eds. Tom Sparrow and Adam Hutchinson (Blue Ridge Summit: Lexington Books, 2013), note 7. Miner's claim is supported by even a brief literature survey. Authors who warn against the use of "habit" include Servais Pinckaers, "Virtue is Not a Habit," trans. Bernard Gilligan, *Cross Currents* 12 (1962): 65-81; Brian Davies, *Aquinas* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 124; Nicholas E. Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 102, note 37; Bonnie Kent, "Habits and Virtues (IaIIae, qq. 49–70)," 116, in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 513–38; Nicholas Austin, *Aquinas on Virtue: A Casual Reading* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2017), 23-5, 32-4.

dislikes the word “habit,” as well, but prefers to use the word “disposition.”²³ However, for reasons that will be elaborated later in the chapter, both Davies and Miner urge against the use of “disposition,” as well.²⁴ Accordingly, since neither “habit” nor “disposition” capture the precise meaning of Latin *habitus*, I refrain from translating the word, preferring to use the Latin term, instead.

The second part of this chapter will sketch the account of *habitus*, namely its definition and nature, as well as delineate the causes of *habitus*’ formation, increase, and corruption. The third part will describe distinctions between *habitus* (plural) and explain the basis on which these distinctions are made. Having established a conceptual framework for the discussion of virtue proper, I proceed to that discussion in the next chapter.

The Powers of Human Soul

As with the general account of the soul, Aquinas adopts Aristotle’s view of the soul’s powers, while modifying it to make it his own. On Aquinas’s reading of Aristotle, the latter identifies five classes of powers, or capacities, of the soul in *De Anima* II: nutritive, sensitive, appetitive, locomotive, and intellective.²⁵ Aquinas explains that these powers, or capacities

²³ Anthony Kenny, “Introduction” in *Summa Theologiae: Volume 22, Dispositions for Human Acts: 1a2ae. 49-54* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), xx-xxi.

²⁴ Davies, *Aquinas*, 124; Miner, “Aquinas on Habitus,” 69-71.

²⁵ Even though contemporary scholars are not absolutely sure which powers are presented in *De Anima* II as fully autonomous (see, for example, Christopher Shields, “General Introduction,” introduction to Aristotle, *De Anima* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), xi-xliv), it is clear that Aquinas understands Aristotle to be quite decided on this account, and defends his own taxonomy of the five genera of powers by appealing to *De Anima* II.3 (*ST* I.78.1.co).

It is also important to keep in mind that Aristotle declines to take a strong stance on the ontological status of the parts within the soul: “It does not matter for the moment whether these elements are separate like the parts of the body or anything else that can be physically divided, or whether they are naturally inseparable but differentiated in thought,

for activity, are distinguished from one another by the sets of activities that each is capable of performing, and that activities are distinguished on the basis of their formal objects (I.77.3, 78.3-4). Thus, we distinguish the powers of sense perception from intellective powers on the basis of their acts and their formal objects: while sense perception apprehends sensible/perceptible objects, the intellect apprehends intelligible species that are abstracted “from the individuating conditions of matter” (I.84.2) and is concerned with universal being and truth (I.77.1).

Here, it is important to note one important departure that Aquinas makes from Aristotelian psychology. Following Avicenna and Averroes, Aquinas identifies the cogitative power, or *vis cogitiva*, as an additional internal sense power. He does this because he takes the cogitative power to have its own formal object that is distinct from the formal object of other powers of sense perception. Whereas the powers of the external sensorium (i.e., the five external senses, plus common sense) have *per se* sensibles for their object (e.g., Socrates’s color, shape, etc.), the cogitative power has *per accidens* sensibles (e.g., “the son of Diaries,” “old,” etc.) that we incidentally sense alongside and concurrently with any *per se* sensible object. Moreover, the cogitative power has its own characteristic activity. It accounts for the *seeing as* phenomenon, where we see the picture in front of us *as* a rabbit instead of seeing it *as* a duck, and for seeing *this* particular apple as edible and desirable as opposed to seeing it *as* a poisonous murder weapon. Since the cogitative power plays an extremely important role in moral perception, it is important to mention it here, even though its full explanation lies

like the convex and concave aspects of a curved surface” (NE, I.13).

outside the scope of this dissertation,²⁶ and even though I now move on to the distinction between appetitive powers from the powers of apprehension.

The apprehensive powers—the powers of sense perception and the intellect—are concerned with the object’s apprehension, which is a process by which, in a manner of speaking, the *object* is brought into the soul. In contrast, the appetitive powers move us toward the object—we are the ones who are moved (I.81.1; 82.3; 80.2). Moreover, the apprehensive powers are directed at the object’s *intellective* or *sensible species*, as, for example, the power of sight apprehends the apple’s color, and the intellect grasps the fact that this particular Golden Delicious in front of me belongs to the species of apple that belongs in the genus of fruit. In contrast, the appetitive powers move a person to desire not the apple’s sensible or intellective species, but the apple *itself* (I.78.1.ad.3; 81.1; 82.3; I-II.22.2).

But what does it mean that the appetite is moved to the apple itself? The answer depends on which appetite we are talking about. As I discuss below, Aquinas distinguishes two kinds of appetitive powers—the rational, or intellective appetite, and the sensitive appetite. As Robert Miner points out, the standard answer to the question of what object moves the appetite is “the sensitive appetite tends toward concrete singulars that are apprehended by the senses [i.e., *this* individual apple], whereas the rational appetite tends toward universal goods that are perceived by the intellect [i.e., this apple as a token of the type ‘apple’].”²⁷ However, Miner has successfully argued that this standard answer

²⁶ For a detailed account, see Daniel De Haan, “Perception and the *Vis Cogitativa*” and “Moral Perception and the Function of the *Vis Cogitativa* in Thomas Aquinas’s Doctrine of Antecedent and Consequent Passions” in *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* XXV (2014): 289–329.

²⁷ Robert Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on Passions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 21.

oversimplifies the picture. This is because for Aquinas, the object of the sensitive appetite can be a concrete particular [*this* apple] and what Miner, following Collingwood, calls “generalizing representations”—that is, “*any* [apple] that *has relevant qualities*,” such as having a certain taste, smell, crunch, look, etc.²⁸

The principle that powers are distinguished by their object and their acts allows Aquinas to move beyond the Aristotelian taxonomy of the soul’s powers, and to defend certain distinctions within the appetitive powers that are only hinted at in the Aristotelian account. Aquinas develops what he takes to be a tacit Aristotelian distinction between two kinds of appetite, i.e., intellective and sense appetites (I.80.2 sc). He then follows Gregory of Nissa and John of Damascus in further dividing sense appetite into concupiscible and irascible (I.81.2 sc).

I will first address the distinction between the sense appetite and the intellective appetite, or the will. Aquinas suggests that whenever we apprehend a material object (e.g., an apple), our appetites are presented with two²⁹ distinct formal objects. The first is the product of powers of sense perception, most notably of cogitative power, or *vis cogitiva*, which see the apple as either suitable (e.g., beautiful, tasty, appetizing, etc.) or unsuitable (e.g., unappetizing, tasteless, ugly, etc.).

This object engages our sense appetite and moves it either toward or away from the apple-as-it-is-perceived. Note that the way we perceive a material object is nearly always

²⁸ Ibid., 23.

²⁹ Actually, we can distinguish more than two formal objects within the phenomenological unity of our apprehension, since we can focus on every formal object of each individual power of sense perception (i.e., color, shape, sound, tactile feel, etc.). However, for the sake of demarcating the intellectual and sense appetites, I focus only on the unified end-result that is the product of cooperation between these sensory powers.

determined and conditioned by our environment, natural abilities, acquired memories, etc. Moreover, since no real act of cogitative power is performed in isolation from the intellect, the will, and the sense appetites, the cogitative power's perception is always influenced by the feedback it receives from these other powers of the soul.³⁰ For example, a toddler might not perceive an apple to be desirable at first, but with repeated encouragement from parents, from repeated exposure to its taste and texture, from sheer hunger, etc., her acquired perceptual perspective on apples might change from "non-desirable" to "desirable." Thus, our acquired perceptual perspective can be formed in better or worse ways, and can be changed with time and additional experiences.

The other formal object is the product of the intellect. Unlike the sense perception, the intellect apprehends the apple not simply as desirable/suitable or undesirable/unsuitable, but as *good* or *evil*, where 'evil' doesn't necessarily have the connotation of moral depravity, but rather designates any lack or defect. This object engages our intellectual appetite, or will, which then moves us either toward or away from the apple-as-it-is-understood (I.80.2. ad.2).³¹ Most of the time, the two formal objects overlap—we simultaneously perceive

³⁰ See Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion*, 21-5 for a discussion of the relation between appetite, sense perception, and the cognitive evaluation of the object's relevance to the subject that is performed by the cogitative power. For an erudite discussion of moral perception, see De Haan, "Moral Perception and the Function of the *Vis Cogitativa*."

³¹ A completed human action will have the three-fold structure, with the will and the intellect operating in tandem at each stage. First, the will desires the end as it is apprehended by the intellect, and so moves the intellect to deliberate about the means for reaching the end. Second, the will consents to the best means, as it is presented by the intellect, and - if there is more than one best means - chooses or settles on one course of action. Finally, upon making the choice, the will commands the intellect to activate the proper powers (powers of locomotion, etc.) and uses these powers to achieve the desired end (I-II.10-17). For a full treatment of Aquinas' theory of human action, see Daniel Westberg, *Right Practical Reason: Aristotle, Action, and Prudence in Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 119-83.

something to be desirable and understand it to be a good. There are times, however, when these come apart, as manifested by the fact that we can always legitimately ask the question, “X is attractive, but is X good?”

An illustration helps put this picture together. Imagine Jane, who watches a documentary about horrible conditions in which pigs are raised in large-scale factory farms. She contemplates what she can do to rectify this unjust situation, and decides that, at the very least, she can give up all factory-farmed pig products. The next morning, Jane wakes up to the smell of frying bacon, and this wonderful smell gets her out of bed and brings her to the kitchen. Jane’s sensible appetite is attracted by the smell and the sound of frying bacon. The will endorses this attraction since it is accustomed to consider bacon as a good. However, even as she is about to help herself to several strips of meat, Jane remembers the documentary and the resolve she has formed. She realizes that even though the bacon still smells and tastes delicious, it would be wrong for her to eat it, since by eating she would contribute to the type of suffering she became aware of yesterday. So Jane puts down her plate and walks away, lest she be tempted beyond her power to resist. What happened? Notice that this change of heart, so to speak, comes not as a result of a shift in Jane’s perception of bacon, as if it were a case of seeing poison where before one saw a delicious snack; Jane still perceives *this* bacon-on-a-plate (and all bacon, for that matter)³² as delectable and very much edible. The change takes place in the intellect. Moved by the images of the suffering pigs, Jane’s passions, in turn, move the intellect to form a new judgment about the factory-farm bacon. While it used to apprehend bacon-in-general as a good, now it sees

³² See Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions*, 21-25 for compelling defense of the notion that sensitive appetite has not only particular, but, in a sense, universal intentions (e.g., *any* piece of bacon that meets certain criteria) for its object.

factory-farmed bacon as an evil, because it understands factory-farmed bacon to be a product of the system that perpetuates animal suffering. The intellect communicates this new apprehension to the will, and the latter is repulsed by the thought of bacon-as-evil, even as Jane's sense perception of bacon-as-pleasant remains the same.³³

I return to the topic of the will later in this chapter. Now I move to the second division within the appetitive powers: the irascible and the concupiscible. In I.81.2, Aquinas again invokes the principle that variation in formal objects results in variation of acts and of powers that are capable of these acts, to argue that "one generic power" of sense appetite is divided into concupiscible and irascible species. It is helpful to note Pasnau's observation that we can conceive of the appetite's formal object in two ways: as something that acts on the appetite and as something toward which the appetite tends, or as an object *per se* and as our appetitive percept of the object.³⁴ Earlier we drew the distinction between the will and sense appetite because these powers are affected (i.e., acted upon) by distinct formal objects, and so the emphasis was on the object *per se*. To show the distinction between the concupiscible and the irascible appetites, we look again at the distinction in the appetites' formal objects, but this time the focus is on the object as that toward which our appetites tend/that which moves us—we focus on the way we perceive the object. At different times

³³ Whether the initial repulsion is going to last depends on many factors: the overall state of Jane's character (i.e., whether she is virtuous, vicious, or somewhere in between), the strength of the documentary's impression on her, her repeated consequent decisions - or lack thereof - to abstain from pork, etc. At the *very least*, standing in the kitchen with bacon in hand, Jane might be double-minded: she may have a second-order desire not to eat the bacon, even if she still has a first-order desire to eat it.

³⁴ Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 176-77. This distinction is not to be understood as a Kantian distinction between *noumenal* and *phenomenal* objects, but rather as an Aristotelian distinction between *objects as they are in themselves* and *objects as they are in relation to us*.

and in different circumstances we perceive some objects as simply suitable (i.e., pleasant/useful) or unsuitable (i.e., painful/unpleasant/useless), and at other times and circumstances we might perceive the very same material objects as suitable but difficult to attain, as obstacles that stand in our way of obtaining that which is suitable, or as something that is undesirable yet is difficult to avoid. The former perceptions serve as proper objects of the concupiscible appetite, the latter of the irascible. The proper acts of these appetites are the passions, which are the movements of the appetites whereby we are drawn toward /away from the appetite's formal objects. The main passions of the concupiscible appetite are love (*amor*), hate (*odium*), sense desire (*concupiscentia*), aversion (*fuga*), pleasure (*delectatio*), and pain/sorrow (*dolor*). The main passions of the irascible appetite are hope (*spes*), desperation (*desperatio*), fear (*timor*), daring (*audacia*), and anger (*ira*). Most of these passions can be specified further (e.g., the species of anger include wrath [*fe*], bitterness [*mania*], and fury [*furor*]) without ceasing to be specific movements of an appetite.

To recap, Aquinas follows Aristotle in identifying five basic powers of the human soul: vegetative/nutritive, locomotive, sensitive, intellective, and appetitive. The appetitive power is divided into intellective (i.e., the will) and sense appetites. In turn, sense appetite is divided into concupiscible and irascible appetites. Aquinas argues that some of these powers' proper functioning requires formation of *habitus*. To show why, as well as which powers Aquinas has in mind, I will provide a brief account of the nature of *habitus*.

Habitus

Aquinas's discussion of *habitus* comes on the heels of his discussion of human actions and passions, which, in turn, is preceded by his discussion of the powers of the human soul. If we keep in mind that *Summa Theologiae* as a whole is written in a pattern of

exitus et reditus,³⁵ with the whole order of existence in general, and human existence in particular, proceeding from God and seeking to return to God, the rationale behind Aquinas's ordering of moral matters becomes clear. Having examined the question of human nature in general, and having situated it within the scope of creation in Book I, it becomes both necessary and possible to examine the means by which humans may return to God. In taking up this task, Aquinas first addresses the questions of what it means for a human person to act and to be acted upon. He then proceeds to build on this foundation by examining the intrinsic and extrinsic principles of human action. The two extrinsic principles that move us toward God are law and grace, and Aquinas treats these immediately after *habitus* (I-II.90 pr). The intrinsic principle of action is found in the powers of the soul and in *habitus*. Since the nature of the powers, as operational capacities, has already been examined in Book I, *habitus* is the only intrinsic principle of action that is left to examine at this point. Aquinas will return to an even closer examination of *habitus* in Book II-II when he will look at individual virtues and vices in detail. But for now, Aquinas suggests that we consider the following questions: "First, the substance of *habitus*; second, their subject; third, the cause of their generation, increase, and corruption; fourth, how they are distinguished from one another" (I-II.49 pr). In what follows, I roughly follow Aquinas's outline.

³⁵ See, for example, the prologue to the second question of the *Summa*: "Because the chief aim of sacred doctrine is to teach the knowledge of God, not only as He is in Himself, but also as He is the beginning of things and their last end, and especially of rational creatures, as is clear from what has been already said, therefore, in our endeavor to expound this science, we shall treat first, of God; second, of the rational creature's advance towards God; third, of Christ, Who as man, is our way to God" (I. q. 2, pr). For a summary of the treatment of procession and return in Aquinas, see Paul Rorem, "'Procession and Return' in Thomas Aquinas and His Predecessors," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 13, no. 2 (1992): 147-163.

The preceding discussion has already provided us with a clue to the nature of *habitus*: it is an intrinsic principle of human action. This clue shows that, for Aquinas, an investigation of *habitus* presupposes an understanding of what constitutes a human action. However, since the full treatment of Aquinas's account of human action is neither possible nor necessary for this investigation, my remarks here are very limited. Aquinas famously defines human action (*actus humanus*) by contrasting it with various involuntary or reflexive movements that a human body can perform, but of which we have little to no control (I-II.1.1). This lack of control may be due to the automatic nature of the movements (e.g., salivating, knee-jerk reflexive movements, twitching of the cheek muscle), to our bodies being physically affected by other objects/agents/forces (e.g., falling down when pushed), or to our genuine ignorance (e.g., dropping something without realizing it), etc. These actions, Aquinas says, can be called actions “of a human” (*actus hominis*), since it is a human body that is involved in these motions, but they do not proceed *from* a human, in a proper sense. In contrast, properly human actions are such that human agency is their source—they “proceed from deliberate will” (I-II.1.1; 1.1, ad.3.).

Here it is important to mention two things. First, the fact that human action is tied to the presence of “deliberate will” does not exclude such “automated” actions as walking, driving, bike riding, etc. from being human actions. Although upon the mastery of the action we no longer deliberate the particulars of its performance, it is still true that the actions of these sort remain very much under the command of the will. Moreover, in certain circumstances even such typically reflexive actions as breathing can become human actions, as, for example, when a person attempts to calm herself by taking deep breaths or when she practices her breathing technique during her voice lessons.

Second, the question of whether Aquinas would consider as human actions the kinds of actions that Daniel Kahneman's attributes to System 1³⁶ is largely under-researched. Having not done any serious research on the topic myself, I nonetheless would venture to make a suggestion that Aquinas would see a large part of the System 1 activity as belonging to the cogitative power of the soul. As such, this activity is responsive to deliberative will in ways similar to the passions' responsiveness to reason and will (see below for a detailed discussion of the relationship between passions and reason/will).

Since will's deliberation is always end-directed—the will being the intellective appetite that is attracted/repulsed by the good/evil as it is understood by the intellect—it follows that human actions will necessarily have an end-directed structure (I-II.1.1; 1.1. ad.2). So, for example, it is true of an average human person that she performs 15-20 acts-of-a-human (*actus hominis*) per minute by blinking.³⁷ It is also true that an average human person can blink deliberately, and that in so doing she would be acting for a particular end—to communicate with her partner in the game of “Mafia,” to explain the meaning of the word “blink” to a child, to clear her visual field, etc. If the blinking is done with an end in view—if it's done deliberately, such blinking constitutes a human action (*actus humanus*).

³⁶ Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013). Kahneman posits two modes of human thought: fast thinking (System 1) and slow thinking (System 2). System 1 is intuitive, emotional, answers easier questions, and is poor at logic and statistics. It performs such tasks as facial and (typical) speech recognition, intuitive pattern recognition, and so on. It continuously generates impressions, intuitions, intentions, and emotions, which serve as suggestions for System 2. The slow and deliberate thinking of System 2 has a high energy cost, and so is engaged only when System 1 is not sufficient.

³⁷ Tamami Nakano, et. al., “Blink-related Momentary Activation of the Default Mode Network While Viewing Videos,” in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* 110, no. 2 (2013), 702.

Now, if the nature of a *human* action is such that it is always end-oriented and that it always involves at least a degree of free choice, it follows that the habitus, as the principle of human action, will also always be characterized by involvement of volition. Aquinas never wavers in his opinion on this point, as seen from his consistent approval of “the Commentator’s” (Averroes) statement that “[*habitus*] is that whereby we act *when we will*” (I-II.49.3 sc; II-II.171.2 sc; III.11.5 ad.2; *SCG* II.60.12, emphasis added).³⁸ This insistence on the volitional aspect of habitus has two implications. First, it means that habitus is inextricably tied to rationality—that only creatures with intellective appetite can have habitus. Whatever natural disposition to action is found in animals (e.g., the swallow’s disposition to build nests out of mud, or the beaver’s disposition to fell trees to build a dam) is due to natural instinct, and not to a habitus. Second, Aquinas’s emphasis on volitional aspect of habitus runs contrary to the contemporary notion of a habit as nearly involuntary, automated behavior. Aquinas believes that habitus puts us more in control of our actions—not less, as it would be on the automated view of a habit.³⁹ This means that no degree of habituatedness is sufficient to compel the will with the force of necessity. We always retain an ability to act contrary to even the most entrenched habitus (*De Malo* VI.1. ad.24). This is both good and bad news, since this means that even the fully vicious person is capable of reforming, and that even a fully virtuous person’s virtue may be corrupted (I-II.53.1-3).

³⁸ Bonnie Kent notes that Aquinas quotes this dictum “again and again, not only in the *Summa theologiae* but also in other works, from his youthful commentary on the *Sentences* onward, despite the fact that Aristotle himself claimed no such relationship between habit and will” (“Habits and Virtues (IaIIae. qq. 49-70),” 117).

³⁹ Ibid., 118-9; Nicholas Austin, *Aquinas on Habits* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2017), 32-4; Robert Miner, “Aquinas on the Habitus,” 79-81.

Next, since *habitus* is a principle of human action, it follows that as such it will also always have some orientation toward an end. However, *habitus* doesn't orient to just any end—it imparts to us an orientation to our ultimate *telos*. Aquinas states that “it is essential to [*habitus*] to imply some relation to a thing's *nature*.” Because *habitus* is essentially related to the nature of the thing (I-II.49.2), and because the nature of a power of the soul lies in being an operational capacity, a power's *habitus* orders it either toward or away from that power's proper act (I-II.49. a.3). In so doing, it directs the whole organism toward or away from its nature, where nature is understood as the organism's final end (I-II.49.2). Nicholas Austin explains this point well:

Human nature, for Aquinas, entails certain rational powers or capacities oriented to act. Yet these powers in and of themselves are incomplete and indeterminate. ... Just as a pianist cannot hope to fulfill the end of piano playing without acquiring certain musical habits and dispositions, so too a human being can reach the human end only through acquiring and exercising human habits. For that is what human habits are: realization of a human's incomplete natural powers.⁴⁰

The preceding discussion already expands on the traditional Aristotelean definition, adopted by Aquinas, where *habitus* is understood as a “disposition whereby someone is Human nature, for Aquinas disposed, well or ill” (I-II.49.2). The latter classifies *habitus* as a quality, and further defines it as a disposition.⁴¹ Aquinas understands *habitus* to be not just any kind of disposition, but rather a disposition that is stable, operative, valent, and nature-directed.⁴² The last characteristic of *habitus*—its nature-directedness—grounds the other

⁴⁰ Austin, *Aquinas on Habits*, 39.

⁴¹ Aristotle understands disposition as “the arrangement of that which has parts, in respect either of place or of potency or of kind” (*Metaphysics*, trans. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924), V.19).

⁴² Austin, *Aquinas on Habits*, 29-30.

three.⁴³ The stable nature of *habitus*—the fact that once acquired, *habitus* is not easily lost—is grounded in the fact that insofar as *habitus* orients us toward or away from our nature, it renders us more set in a particular way of being. Because of *habitus*, we become less flighty, less impulsive, much less influenced by our circumstances, and, accordingly, less susceptible to changes even in the face of great temptations. The fact that *habitus* is something that is “difficult to change” and something that is “not easily lost” is what distinguishes it from a disposition (I-II.49.2. ad.3). Here, disposition is understood not in a generic way (as a genus in which the species of *habitus* belongs), but as a species of quality that is opposed to *habitus*. I-II.49 apparently offers the reader three distinct, and conflicting, ways to understand the relationship between *habitus* and disposition. Miner convincingly argues that this inconsistency is only apparent. He suggests that the reader should understand I-II.49 to be an exercise of dialectical pedagogy, and that within the article we should recognize a move “from an initial appearance (habits = dispositions) through a qualification (habits = dispositions grown up) to his ultimate position (habits ≠ dispositions).”⁴⁴

Likewise, the nature-oriented character of *habitus* grounds its operative quality. As mentioned above, the powers of the human soul are operational capacities—they are oriented toward actions. For these powers, being formed by *habitus* implies being ordered in such a way as to be *capable* of operating well.⁴⁵ This holds true even for such dispositions as

⁴³ Ibid., 40-41. Also, see Miner, “Aquinas on the Passions,” 69-70; Bernard Ryosuke Inagaki, “*Habitus* and *Natura* in Aquinas” in John F. Wippel, ed. *Studies in Medieval Philosophy* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1987), 169-72.

⁴⁴ Miner, “Aquinas on the Passions,” 68.

⁴⁵ When it comes to evil, or corruptive, *habitus*, the story remains essentially the same. Miner argues that evil *habitus* are “capable of taking root in the soul when they are connected with acts that the agent perceives as suitable in some respect. Like virtuous

health and beauty, even though these ultimately fall short of being full/perfect habits because they lack the necessary stability and a volitional aspect, and so are considered quasi-habitus (I-II.49.3. ad.3; 50.1; 50.3). The quasi-habitus of health disposes its subject in such a way as to enable bodily activities to be performed well. Accordingly, even health serves as “the enabling condition of some operation.”⁴⁶

Finally, the fact that habitus orders its subject toward or away from nature implies that no habitus is morally neutral. Aquinas argues that “when the mode [or determination] is suitable to the thing’s nature, it has the aspect of good: and when it is unsuitable, it has the aspect of evil” (I-II.49.2), and then uses this principle to differentiate between the good and the bad habitus—between virtues and vices. This point deserves a closer look. If habitus actualizes a power’s capacity for operation, and if it orders the power in such a way as makes it capable of operating well, then how can any habitus be bad? Here, George P. Klubertanz is helpful in drawing the following distinctions between various senses of the habitus’ goodness.⁴⁷ First, there is a sense in which any act is better than a mere potency to act or the loss of the potency to act (i.e., privation). The act of seeing is better than mere capacity for seeing, and it is better than a privation of sight. In this sense, *any* habitus can be said to be good, since all habitus determine their powers to action.

Second, Klubertanz points out, a habitus can determine a power in a way that enables it to operate successfully, or it can impede the power’s operation.⁴⁸ In this sense, a

habitus, vicious habitus are intrinsically connected to the agent’s apprehension of what he or she desires *sub ratione boni*” (“Aquinas on Habitus,” 70).

⁴⁶ Ibid., 70.

⁴⁷ George P. Klubertanz, *Habits and Virtues* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1965), 162-63.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 162.

habitus of science that forms the intellect is good, since it enables the intellect to reach the truth reliably and with ease. And a habitus of walking with a limp is bad, since it impedes the proper operation of the locomotive power. However, notice that in this sense, a habitus of intemperance can also be said to be good, since it forms the concupiscible appetite in such a way as to make it operate reliably and with ease. An intemperate person doesn't struggle with herself, isn't torn between her desire to eat the cake and to eat healthy—while eating the cake she does what she wants, and she enjoys doing it.

And this brings us to the third, full sense in which habitus can be said to be good. At this point, Klubertanz suggests that we look not only at whether a power is being determined to an act (which is good), or whether the habitus makes the operation of the power easy and reliable, but also at whether the habituated operation is suited or unsuited to the specific sort of nature that possesses the power.⁴⁹ A habitus is good in this final sense of goodness if it disposes its power to acts that are suitable to human nature, and bad if it disposes the power to acts that are “discordant” with human nature (I-II.54.3). On this final analysis, the habitus of intemperance turns out to be bad. Even though this habitus makes it easy for us to act intemperately, intemperate actions degrade our nature as *rational* animals, and so we rightly see intemperance as a vice—as a bad habitus. Science, on the contrary, is a good habitus, because the aptness it confirms on the intellect is the aptness for an activity that is decidedly proper to human nature.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 163.

Habitus of the Powers of the Human Soul

Having provided a brief overview of Aquinas's account of *habitus*, I now return to the questions of a power's need for *habitus*. Which powers are capable of acquiring *habitus*? Which powers benefit most from such formation? Are *habitus* necessary for a power's proper function, or are they merely beneficial?

Let us start with the first question: which powers can be formed by a *habitus*? Speaking of the nature of *habitus* in general, Aquinas explains there are three preconditions for something to require a disposition and a *habitus*. First, the thing that is disposed by *habitus* must be distinct from that toward which it is disposed. In other words, it must exist in a state of potency. "If there is a being whose nature is not composed of potentiality and act, and whose substance is its own operation, which itself is for itself, there we can find no room for habit and disposition, as is clearly the case in God" (I-II.49.4). Second, the thing must be capable of being determined in various ways and toward different things: "If something be in a state of potentiality in regard to something else, but in regard to that only, there we find no room for disposition and habit: for such a subject from its own nature has the due relation to such an act" (I-II.49.4). For example, since the fire's natural tendency is to move upward, it exists in potency toward one thing only, and so it cannot take on a *habitus*. Finally, "The third condition is that in disposing the subject to one of those things to which it is in potentiality, several things should occur, capable of being adjusted in various ways: so as to dispose the subject well or ill to its form or to its operation" (I-II.49.4). In this respect, health and beauty provide good examples of dispositions, since many different factors must converge in just the right way to produce these qualities.

Examining human functions in light of these requirements, we can immediately discern that the nutritive power, which is naturally oriented toward one single end—the

preservation and growth of the body—is not capable of forming a *habitus*. Nor does it need to be formed in this way. Its functions are fully determined—it naturally and automatically reacts to the appropriate stimuli by performing its respective actions, and this natural response is in no way responsive to the commands of either reason or of the will. No matter how hard I wish, I cannot make my body stop digesting and absorbing calories present in that second donut, nor can I stop my body converting those calories into extra fat deposits.

Unlike the nutritive power, locomotive powers are responsive to reason and to the will in a special way. Although plenty of our movements happen (sometimes literally) as a knee-jerk reaction, as a response to a certain stimulus, it is undeniable that most of the time our body moves in response to our volition. Unlike the stone, we can move in many different ways, and we all, at some point, have learned to move in new and sometimes surprising ways following the command of reason and at the bidding of the will. This is why Aquinas distinguishes between voluntary and non-voluntary movements of the “outward members,” and assigns morally significant status to the former (I-II.24.1). Accordingly, the locomotive powers can develop *habitus*—although in a secondary sense.

When it comes to the powers of sense perception, the picture gets even more complicated. On the one hand, it is true that given the right amount of light and the absence of a physical obstacle the eye does only one thing—it sees, nor can it choose not to see.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ So, in *Disputed Questions on Virtue*, Aquinas writes, “The capacities that are only acted upon are those that only act if they are moved by other things. It is not up to them whether they act or not; they only act in accordance with an impulse from a [power] that moves them. Our powers of sense are like this considered in themselves. That is why Aristotle says that the senses are not principles of any actions. These capacities do indeed need something extra to complete them for their activities. However, this is not in them like some form that is immanent in its possessor, but rather only in the manner of a passive experience, like an image on the retina. That is why the ‘virtues’ of these sorts of capacities are not [*habitus*], but rather the capacities themselves, insofar as they are actively acted upon by their corresponding active powers (*DQVirGen* 6, resp.).”

However, it is also true that two people can look at the same physical arrangement of bodies, shapes, and colors, and see very different things. This phenomenon suggests that in an important sense, *what* we see when we open our eyes is up to us. This is because the powers of sensation are divided into the powers of the external sensorium (the five external senses, plus common sense) and the powers of the internal sensorium (imagination, memory, and the cogitative power) (I.78.3, 4). Reason and will have little influence on the former, even though directed attention and/or desire to see, smell, hear, etc. might render these powers more or less sharp, so to speak. In contrast, the powers of imagination, memory, and cogitative power are highly responsive to reason and will (I.78.4. ad.5). The joint operation of these powers accounts for our ability to construe what we experience through the powers of external sensorium as dangerous, menacing, pleasant, beautiful, ugly, awe-inspiring, etc.,⁵¹ and from experience we know that these powers can be trained in ways that either augment or debilitate our ability to see the world rightly. Aquinas follows Aristotle and Cicero in corroborating this experience, and states that the powers of the internal sensorium can be formed by habitus (I-II. 56.5). In particular, such habitus as memory and cogitation form conditions that are required for possessing prudence, and so form prudence's quasi-integral parts (I-II. 56.5., ad. 3; II-II.49.1, 2. ad.3).

Sensitive appetite is even more susceptible to the influence of reason and of will. This influence is two-fold: indirect and direct. First, reason/will influence sensitive appetite *indirectly* through the appetite's object. This is due to the fact the sense appetite's object is presented to it by the cogitative power (I.81.3) which, in turn, is habituated to perceive

⁵¹ With the caveat that the deliverances of the external sensorium provide certain limits to what the internal sensorium can deliver.

things in a certain way by the intellect/will (I.81.3). Such indirect influence is humorously illustrated by Huckleberry Finn's aversion to the food from the Widow Douglass's table and his longing for the kitchen scraps from "the barrel of odds and ends," where "things get mixed up, and the juice kind of swaps around, and the things go better."⁵² Huck's cogitative power has been habituated to perceive the kitchen scraps from the slop bucket as desirable, and so he perceives dishes that are served separate from one another as overly dry and tasteless.

Second, reason/will influence sensitive appetite *directly*, when passion follows reason's judgment and the will's endorsement of that judgment.⁵³ Aquinas calls passions that are caused by the judgment of reason *consequent*, as opposed to the antecedent passions that are caused directly by sense perception.⁵⁴ The following example might be helpful for

⁵² Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), chapter 1.

⁵³ See, for example, *De Malo*, 12.1: "anger can be consequent to the judgment of reason, such that after reason has judged and ordered the proper manner of retribution, then the passion rises up to execute the action."

⁵⁴ In defining antecedent and consequent passions in terms of causality, I follow Steven Jensen ("Virtuous Deliberation and the Passions," *The Thomist*, 77 no. 2 (2013): 197-202). Jensen has identified four possible ways of thinking about the distinction between antecedent and consequent passions. First, there is the *temporal* view, which Lombardo attributes to Giuseppe Butera ("On Reason's Control of the Passions in Aquinas's Theory of Temperance," *Mediaeval Studies*, 68 (2006): 133-60) and which is espoused by Robert Pasnau (*Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, p. 263). On this view, "antecedent passions are identified as those that temporally precede the judgment of reason; consequent passions are those that temporally follow the judgment of reason" (Jensen, "Virtuous Deliberation and the Passions," 197). Second – "*objective*" – account is briefly put forward by Lombardo, only to be ultimately rejected as inadequate. According to this view, "antecedent passions are the same as disordered passions" (Ibid., 198). Third, there is the *causal* account, which is ultimately championed by Jensen, Lombardo, and, as Jensen argues, by Butera. This is the account that is given above. Finally, Jensen identifies a fourth approach that has not been anticipated by Aquinas. This approach would allow room for a *third kind* of passions – those that "temporally precede the judgment of reason but do not influence the judgment. As such, they are not antecedent passions, but then neither are they consequent..." These

understanding the interplay between the judgments of reason and consequent passions. Imagine that Tom, as a new intern at a busy city hospital, is so overwhelmed with the passions of compassion and pity that he struggles to get through his workday. Upon seeking and receiving good advice from seasoned doctors, he sets out to change his raw passionate reaction to each patient to a more tempered/rational one—one that enables him to interact with and serve his patients better. Now, imagine that a few years into his work at the hospital Tom becomes desensitized to his patients' humanity and suffering, and loses the sense of compassion and respect he had once had toward them. A particular event at work brings this fact to Tom's attention, and he realizes that the lack of passionate response impairs his professional judgment and effectiveness. Tom decides that he needs to do something to rekindle the dulled passions, and so engages in a number of practices that are aimed at making the patients' humanity and their need for holistic support salient to him again.

Tom's example shows several ways that reason can cause passions. First, we have a case of the raw, unfiltered "initial reaction" of sense appetites transformed by the judgment of reason. Second, reason's judgment that it is good for Tom to be moved by his experiences with his patients plays a causal role in his recovery of compassion.⁵⁵ In a fully virtuous person, whose passions are habituated to follow the reason's lead, this direct interaction between passions and reason is going to be seamless, instant, and effortless: a temperate

passions would simply exist "with no bearing whatsoever upon the person's reasoning or choice" (Ibid., 201).

⁵⁵ I have constructed this case after a helpful conversation with John Haldane.

person judges that *this* amount of food is appropriate for *this* meal, and her desire for food easily adjusts to that judgment.⁵⁶

The reason that the sensitive appetite is open to the influence of reason/will is that its object is underdetermined. Since the world is full of potentially pleasant or repulsive objects, and since the degree to which a particular object strikes us as pleasant or repulsive varies with circumstances and from object to object, the sensitive appetite is not drawn to *any* particular object with the force of necessity. Since it can be attracted to or repulsed by any of these objects, it can be “persuaded” by reason/will to incline one way or the other (IaIIae.50.3). In the end, the more underdetermined a power is in its operations, the more it is open to the command of reason and will, and the more it benefits from forming a good *habitus*.

We have seen that the powers of the internal sensorium, as well as of the sense appetites, have ample capacity for being formed by *habitus*. Still, this capacity for being formed is nowhere as prominent as in the powers of intellect and of will. Both are nearly fully underdetermined in their operations. They are *nearly* fully underdetermined because reason necessarily ascends to the truth of the first principles and to the truth of the necessary propositions once it grasps the meaning of the terms and the fact that the proposition is in

⁵⁶ Note two things about consequent passions. First, although Aquinas suggests that all the passions of a virtuous person are consequent to the judgment of reason, this does not mean that the virtuous person’s deliberation is always stoically free from the influence of passions. As Jensen argues, deliberation is a complicated process that provides several opportunities for the passions’ virtuous influence on reason (Jensen “Virtuous Deliberation and the Passions”). Second, it is fully possible for a passion to be consequent and not be virtuous. A young child who decides that (for whatever reasons) she should be afraid of the shadows on the wall and who will become afraid because of that decision will experience a consequent passion, but her fear will not be an expression of any virtue. Moreover, it is fully possible for reason to err in its judgment, and so the consequent passion that arises based on that erroneous judgment will not be virtuous.

fact necessary. In a similar manner, the will necessarily inclines to the final end and to that which reason presents to it as necessarily related to the final end (I.82.2). Even so, the operations of reason and of the will are underdetermined. The intellect's operations are undetermined when it deals with contingent propositions—as is the case in every practical matter—or with propositions that are not self-evidently necessary propositions (I.94.4). Since contingent propositions are not easily (if ever) traceable to necessary truths, Aquinas argues that in contingent matters “reason may follow opposite courses”⁵⁷ and either accept or reject the truth of a given proposition (I.83.1; I-II.10.2. ad.2).

This indeterminacy of reason leads to the indeterminacy of the will. Aquinas explains that for an object to move the will, it must be presented to us not only as good, but also as suitable. However, there is one object that is suitable for us in every possible scenario, and that is the happiness that comprises our final end. With every other object, it is always possible to will the contrary, since the contrary might be (more) suitable from the perspective of other considerations (I-II.10.2, *De Malo*, VI.1). For example, even though we know that the medicine is good and suitable for restoring our health, we also perceive its bitter taste as unsuitable to our taste buds, and so every time we take the bitter medicine we do so after making a choice between the competing goods. In a similar way, all practical decisions involve *some* degree of divergent possibilities, with each holding at least some degree of attraction.

How, then, is the will actually able to move? Aquinas suggests that three interconnected factors can “nudge” it in a direction of a particular object (*De Malo* VI.1). First, one particular good might be clearly and unequivocally superior to another competing good.

⁵⁷ “Ratio enim circa coningentia habet viam at opposite” (I.83.1).

So, for example, a mother will see the good of saving her drowning child as dwarfing her concern for keeping her clothes dry. Second, external or internal circumstances might direct our attention toward one particular good and away from others. So, a spouse who is absorbed in reading a book might hear, but not register, her partner's request to hand him the keys, and the lighting in a dressing room might influence a shopper's choice between two dresses. Finally, the will might be influenced by the person's disposition. Aquinas writes:

And so the will of one who is angry and the will of one who is calm are moved in different ways regarding an object, since the same object is not suitable to both persons, just as a healthy person and a sick person regard food in different ways.⁵⁸

The person may be disposed to regard an object in a particular light as a result of a particular, individual passion (I-II.9.2). This happens, for example, when a typically mild-tempered person experiences a sudden surge of anger. However, the will-influencing disposition can also be a product of a *habitus* (*De Malo* VI.1). So, a person who has developed the vice of wrath will have a generally skewed perception of the objects he regularly encounters. In fact, this has been the Aristotelean and Thomistic claim all along—that our sudden, knee-jerk reactions are influenced by our *habitus* to such a degree as nearly to carry the force of necessity (*De Malo* VI.1. ad.24).

This last point underscores the importance of the role that *habitus* plays in our moral life, especially considering that its impact is not just one factor among many that influence

⁵⁸ “Unde aliter movetur ad aliquid voluntas irati et voluntas quieti, quia non idem est conveniens utrique; sicut etiam aliter acceptatur cibus a sano et aegro” (*De Malo* VI.1). Whether the will follows such disposition out of necessity will depend on whether the disposition – be it a result of a *habitus* or of a passion – is of a natural kind. Natural dispositions incline us to understanding, to *eudaimonia*, and to the preservation of our existence. To these objects the will inclines by necessity yet without being constrained (since the inclination is a result of internal compulsion). All other dispositions incline us to particular goods that lack the necessity of natural appetite, and so the will is free to follow or to reject such inclinations.

the will. All of the factors that sway the will are interconnected, so that a *habitus* of seeing certain things and ignoring the others (e.g., humility's inattention to flattery or competition) brings it about that in a particular situation the person's attention will be directed to one particular thing and not to others. Likewise, a *habitus* can dispose a person to value one type of object over others (e.g., a greedy person inordinately values money and things that money can buy), with the consequence that in the moment of decision her reason prioritizes the habitually highly-regarded object. Finally, as has been shown above, passions that are so capable of affecting the will can themselves be formed by a *habitus*. Whether they are formed by good or bad *habitus* makes a big difference for our moral life. Having given a brief account of *habitus*' nature, its relation to the powers of the human soul, and its importance to Aquinas's moral anthropology, I now turn to the question of *habitus*' formation/degeneration and to the criteria by which *habitus* are distinguished from one another.

Formation and Corruption of Habitus

The Roots of Habitus

At this point, it should be clear that *habitus* plays an extremely important role in our moral formation and life. But where do they come from? How can we cultivate the good *habitus* and/or get rid of the bad ones? Let us begin with the first question. Following Aristotle (*NE.II.1*), Aquinas argues that the full-blown *habitus* are not in us by nature, even though nature does provide us with the *habitus*' seeds, so to speak, in the form of natural pre-dispositions (*I-II.51.1*). Aquinas points out that these predispositions are natural to us in two ways. First, as members of *homo sapiens*, we all have certain abilities, capacities, and

propensity to certain activity.⁵⁹ The nature of the intellectual soul is such that it has certain predisposition to grasp the first principles—both theoretical and practical. Accordingly, the “natural understanding” (*intellectus*) and natural practical intelligence (natural capacity for deliberation [*eubulia*] and judgment [*gnome* and *synesis*]) form the natural predisposition to habitus in every human being (*QDV.1.8*). The appetitive powers technically have no natural predisposition to habitus because the appetites’ very nature consists in being inclined to their proper objects. So, in a sense, the very existence of the appetites serves as a predisposition to forming a habitus in every human.⁶⁰

Second, natural predisposition can be understood as each person’s unique propensity to enjoy certain smells, tastes, etc., to be strong or weak, to be easily angered, or ready to laugh, or be melancholy. One source of diversity in these natural propensities is found in individual persons’ bodily dispositions. A person might have good or bad eyesight, have good or bad hearing, be a “super-taster” with greater-than-average number of taste buds that results in heightened sensitivity of taste or “no-taster” with fewer than average number of taste buds, etc. In addition, Aquinas believes that each person has a unique “bodily temperament” (*corporis complexionem*) that inclines one toward good or bad habitus, such as chastity, meekness, wrath, or gluttony (I-II.51.1).

Alongside the diversity of bodily constitution, powers of the soul are also naturally predisposed in ways that contribute to or hinder the person’s ability to form habitus. For example, take two sisters—Mary and Jane. Jane is what people commonly call “gifted.” Her

⁵⁹ This is meant to be a normative, and not an empirical, claim. It is clear that severely cognitively impaired persons will prove an exception to this rule.

⁶⁰ This, however, does not mean that the appetites themselves remain unchanged as they are “taken up” into a habitus. Rather, a habitus that forms the appetites will re-form them in a way that would streamline their varying inclinations. More on this in chapter four.

mind is naturally sharp, her memory is excellent, her natural temperament is mild and compliant, and her disposition is sunny. Mary, on the other hand, is a slow thinker, forgetful, has trouble concentrating, is stubborn, and is easily angered. It is clear that, all things remaining equal, the task of cultivating virtue will be easier for Jane than it will be for Mary. However, in real life things never remain equal, and natural talents do not guarantee moral virtue. More often than not, natural talents can actually prove an impediment to moral development. While it wouldn't take much for Mary to recognize that she needs to work hard on developing virtues, Jane could be tempted to mistake her natural predispositions toward virtue for the thing itself. I am currently witnessing an analogous scenario unfold in my classroom. One of my students is a foreign exchange creative writing major from Hong Kong. She is far from fluent in her mastery of English, and she is very aware of this limitation. Yet, she consistently outshines her native English-speaking classmates in written assignments. This is because she is aware of her handicap and works very hard to overcome it, while her classmates complacently rely on their ability to cobble something together at the eleventh hour. It is, therefore, not surprising that Aquinas warns us that a person's natural predispositions, however promising, are "not yet... complete virtue, since that requires the moderation of reason... Anyone who followed an inclination of [natural temperament] without rational discernment would frequently sin" (*DQV.1.8*).⁶¹

⁶¹ Interestingly enough, "the full-blown virtue involves the predisposition to virtue that is in the higher part being ordered to the virtue of the lower part. Thus, someone is suited for the virtues of the will by the predispositions found both in the will and in the intelligence; and for the virtues of the irascible and concupiscible appetites by the predispositions to virtue found both in them and in the higher parts. The converse is not true" (*DQV.1.8*).

The Cause of Habitus

Given that habitus are not in us by nature, how do we come to possess them? At the first glance, Aquinas appears to be merely restating Aristotle. The habitus of the appetites (and some habitus of the cogitative power) are caused by habituation, that is, by repetition and multiplication of actions of similar kinds (I-II.51.3). However, the resemblance to Aristotle's account diminishes when we begin looking at the habitus of the intellect. In Aristotle, the mode of acquisition of intellectual virtues distinguishes them sharply from the moral virtues, since he famously states that intellectual virtues are taught, while virtues of character are acquired by habituation (*NE* II.1). Aquinas makes no such distinction. Instead, he distinguishes between habitus that are produced by a single act and those that are produced by a multiplicity of acts, and notes that intellectual habitus do not fit squarely into either of these categories. Some habitus of the intellect may be caused by a single act of apprehension: since the truth of self-evident propositions presents itself to the intellect in an overwhelming way, the intellect immediately and firmly assents to the truths of such propositions. Accordingly, the habitus that deal with the eternal and self-evident truths can be produced through a single act. Such are the habitus of understanding and (in a more limited sense) of science (I-II.51.3). However, since probable propositions do not appear to the intellect as overwhelmingly true, the intellectual habitus that deal with contingent matters require a multiplicity of acts just as habitus of the appetites require the repetition of the similar acts (*ibid.*).

Moreover, Aquinas's explanation of why habituation is necessary also differs somewhat from Aristotle's. The latter compares virtue acquisition with the acquisition of a skill. He uses commonsense examples of a person becoming a harpist by playing a harp and a builder by building to explain why virtues of character require repeated similar activity (*NE*

II.1). Moreover, Aristotle points out that the manner in which we perform the activity (as well as the quality of guidance and instruction we receive) determines whether we become good or bad builders and harpists. If we have a good example set before us, and if we consistently imitate this example well, we will become good builders and harpists—or just, temperate, and courageous persons (ibid.). Notice that, on this picture, it is up to the individual either to become virtuous or to sink into vice. Of course it is true that a person’s luck in respect of her natural predispositions, her upbringing, her socio-economic situation, etc. will play a role in her actual ability to achieve virtue. Still, it is significant that, *ceteris paribus*, when it comes to the starting point, everyone begins in the neutral, indeterminate state and from there proceeds either toward virtue or toward vice.

This is not the picture that we get in Aquinas. For Aquinas, we all begin in a heavily disadvantaged, handicapped state that is due to the effects of original sin. He argues that even in their prelapsarian state, first humans relied on grace for the right orientation of the powers of the soul, i.e., the intellect’s subjection to God, the appetite’s and other lower powers subjection to reason, and the body’s subjection to the soul (I.95.1; I-II.82.3). This was the state of original justice, and it was lost when Adam first turned away from God (I-II.82; *SCG* IV.52.6). Without original justice that “held all the soul’s parts together” in harmonious subjection to reason and of reason to God, the various powers of the soul have various and often contradictory inclinations (I-II.82.2. ad. 3-4). Aquinas argues that this general malaise, the disorder of the soul’s powers, is the disposition of original sin (I-II.82.1). Anyone who sets out to acquire virtue, must work “uphill” so to speak, to overcome the bad

habitus of original sin and the various contrary inclinations in the various powers of the soul that result from this bad habitus.⁶²

These contrary inclinations can be overcome in two ways. First, there is the familiar Aristotelian way of habituation that has been mentioned above. Just as many drops of water will eventually hollow out a stone, repeated acts that are contrary to a particular habitus will not only eventually weaken that habitus but will actually produce a contrary one (I-II.52.3). The second way contrary inclinations can be overcome is completely foreign to Aristotle—and that is by the act of divine grace. Aquinas argues that since of our own power we are incapable of orienting ourselves to God as to our true final end, God himself infuses us with the theological virtues (i.e., habitus that orient us toward God), the gifts of the Holy Spirit (i.e., habitus that make us able to obey the guidance of the Holy Spirit), and the counterparts of all the acquired moral virtues (I-II.51.4; 63.3; 68.1-3; 65.3).

In the next chapter I treat at length the distinction between acquired and infused virtues, as well as Aquinas' reasons for thinking the moral infused virtues are necessary. For now, I want to note direct infusion by God as a decidedly non-Aristotelean cause of a habitus, and move on to the question how habitus can grow and diminish.

The Growth and Corruption of Habitus

The fact that habitus can come in degrees appears almost too commonsensical for philosophical consideration. We praise some people for their great compassion and revile others for their great pride and vainglory. This allotment of praise and blame implies that in

⁶² In fact, as Austin points out, Aquinas views the four cardinal virtues as remedies for the four “wounds” of the original sin: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance are to heal our ignorance, malice, weakness, and concupiscence (I.85.3). (Austin, *Aquinas on Virtue*, 116).

both cases the habitus in question are greater than those of an average person. In the Gospel of Luke, we read that Jesus grew in wisdom (Luke 2:52), and we ask, along with the first disciples, for God to increase our faith (Luke 17:5). However, while we don't hesitate to affirm that habitus come in degrees and can be increased or decreased, the question of how this happens is somewhat more mysterious. Aquinas suggests that in answering it, we must keep the nature of the habitus in mind.⁶³ Habitus is a quality—it's a power's form. As a quality, it doesn't have an independent existence apart from existing in its subject. This means that it is impossible for habitus to grow greater or less independently of its subject. So, for example, there is no greater or less "whiteness" apart from some objects being more or less white. However, this does not mean that the increase of habitus amounts to nothing more than a subject "putting on" the habitus to a greater degree. Since habitus is a form, which is the actualization of a subject's potentiality, whenever a subject's participation in the form increases (i.e., the subject becomes more actualized), the form itself becomes greater (*DQV* 1.11, *ST* I-II.52.1). This means that we can speak of the habitus *itself* being greater or less, and of the *subject's* being more or less intensively *rooted in* or formed by the habitus (*Ibid*).

Aquinas suggests that the process of habitus' growth or diminishing happens in two ways. First, it is possible for the habitus to grow greater by the process of addition, as when the habitus extends to more and more objects (I-II.52.2; 66.1)). This kind of growth can be

⁶³ Aquinas suggests that most of the mistaken opinions on the matter can be traced to failure to keep the fact that habitus in general, and virtues in particular, are forms. He begins his *respondeo* in *DQV* by warning us that, "Many make mistakes about *forms* by treating them as if there were substances. This seems to happen because forms are described by using nouns, just as substances are, albeit abstract nouns, such as whiteness or virtue, and so on. That is why some are led by this way of speaking to treat them as if they were substances" (*DQV* 1.11).

called extensive, and it is available for the habitus (plural) of the intellect: a person who has the science of mathematics adds something previously lacking to her habitus of science when she discovers / learns a new proof (ibid.); a person who has the art of jewelry making adds something previously lacking to her habitus of art when she learns a new technique; etc. The habitus of the appetites, however, do not grow by addition. This is because the nature of the moral habitus (i.e., its simplicity and indivisibility) is such that it extends to all possible objects of that habitus—so that insofar that the person has full-blown temperance, she will be temperate about *any* kind of food, drink, or sexual pleasure (I-II.66.1). *If* a person is temperate, her temperance will not have anything *added* to it as a result of her temperate reaction to a new kind of temptation—e.g., temptation by a cake vs. temptation by shrimp, for example, or sexual temptation at a frat party vs. sexual temptation at an academic conference—although the temperance might increase in strength as a result of the person overcoming the new temptation. On the other hand, if the virtue were to extend to some other object—if it were to extend to something other than food, drink, or sex, then it would no longer be temperance, but something else.

Second, a habitus can increase in intensity as a result of repeated acts that “correspond in proportion to the intensity of the habitus, or even surpass it” (I-II.52.3). If Jane is temperate, her temperance will strengthen every time she exercises it in routine circumstances—she is acting in proportion to the intensity of her habitus. In addition, Jane will most likely find herself in situations that will put her temperance to a greater-than-ordinary test. For example, if Jane has a horrible day at work, feels like she is failing as a parent, and is stressed about money, some red wine and chocolate cake might sound like a great way to “unwind” and to treat herself. She knows that she isn’t hungry, thus she would not be eating the cake to satisfy a real need for sustenance. If, instead of indulging, Jane

remains temperate in her choices of food and drink that evening, her habitus of temperance will deepen and grow. On the other hand, to relieve her stress and anxiety Jane might allow herself the indulgence of pleasure that cake and wine affords. In this case, she would not necessarily lose the habitus of temperance—since Aquinas argues that habitus is not lost as a result of an occasional and isolated action⁶⁴—but her habitus would diminish (I-II.52.3). And if she does this repeatedly, she will eventually lose the habitus altogether. Aquinas writes,

For it has been stated that habitus are destroyed or diminished directly through some contrary agency. Consequently all habitus that are gradually undermined by contrary agencies which need to be counteracted by acts proceeding from those habitus, are diminished or even destroyed altogether by long cessation from act, as is clearly seen in the case both of science and of virtue (I-II.53.3).

The mechanism of habitus’ diminishing and growth is the same for good and bad habitus—for virtues and for vices. A person who consistently feeds her vice of anger will see that habitus become stronger and deeper; a person who persistently resists her desire to lash out will see the grip of the vice gradually lose its power.

When it comes to infused habitus, the mechanism of growth and diminishing changes. Since these habitus are direct products of divine activity, they are not dependent on human actions for their generation and for their growth (I-II.55.4; 63.2). Still, this does not

⁶⁴ Aquinas writes, “Sin is compared to virtue, as evil act to good habit. Now the position of a habit in the soul is not the same as that of a form in a natural thing. For the form of a natural thing produces, of necessity, an operation befitting itself; wherefore a natural form is incompatible with the act of a contrary form: thus heat is incompatible with the act of cooling, and lightness with downward movement (except perhaps violence be used by some extrinsic mover): whereas the habit that resides in the soul, does not, of necessity, produce its operation, but is used by man when he wills. Consequently man, while possessing a habit, may either fail to use the habit, or produce a contrary act; and so a man having a virtue may produce an act of sin. And this sinful act, so long as there is but one, cannot corrupt virtue, if we compare the act to the virtue itself as a habit: since, just as habit is not engendered by one act, so neither is it destroyed by one act as stated above [Question 63, Article 2, ad 2]” (I-II.71.4).

mean that human actions have no role in their growth—repeated actions that are proportionate or surpassing to the intensity of the infused habitus dispose us for reception of the divine grace that, in turn, produces the growth of the infused virtues (*DQV* 1.11; *ST* I-II.55.4. ad.6).⁶⁵ Moreover, the process of diminishing and corruption is going to be different for the infused habitus, as well. Every infused habitus stems from the infused virtue of charity, and charity, in turn, depends directly on the presence of divine grace. It is possible for a single act—i.e., an act of mortal sin⁶⁶—to destroy charity and to cut us off from grace. Thus, it is possible for a single act of mortal sin to destroy the rest of the infused habitus, since destruction of charity leads to the destruction of all the infused habitus (I-II.71.4).

Individuation of Habitus

Habitus' Simplicity

Aquinas notes that there exist various schemes by which we distinguish one habitus from another, and the suitability of each scheme will depend on our end goals. Yet, he

⁶⁵ Since a longer treatment of the growth of the infused virtues would take this present account too far off course, I limit my treatment of the topic to the remark above. For a detailed treatment of the topic, see Jared Brandt's dissertation "The Growth in Infused Virtues in the Work of Thomas Aquinas" Ph.D. Dissertation, Baylor University, 2018.

⁶⁶ Aquinas gives the following explanation of the difference between mortal and venial sins: "Now the difference between venial and mortal sin is consequent to the diversity of that inordinateness which constitutes the notion of sin. For inordinateness is twofold, one that destroys the principle of order, and another which, without destroying the principle of order, implies inordinateness in the things which follow the principle: thus, in an animal's body, the frame may be so out of order that the vital principle is destroyed; this is the inordinateness of death; while, on the other hand, saving the vital principle, there may be disorder in the bodily humors; and then there is sickness. Now the principle of the entire moral order is the last end, which stands in the same relation to matters of action, as the indemonstrable principle does to matters of speculation (*Ethic.* vii, 8). Therefore when the soul is so disordered by sin as to turn away from its last end, viz. God, to Whom it is united by charity, there is mortal sin; but when it is disordered without turning away from God, there is venial sin" (I-II.72.5).

suggests that regardless of the scheme we choose, one thing will remain constant, and that is that the *habitus* proper will remain simple and indivisible (I-II.54.4). Aquinas argues that this follows from the nature of *habitus*. Insofar as a *habitus* disposes its power to function in a stable, valent, and nature-directed way, it forms the power—it is that power’s form (I-II.54.4 sc). And since all forms are simple and cannot be made up of many different forms, it follows that *habitus* is simple, as well. This means that a full-fledged *habitus* (single) is not made up of other *habitus* (plural). So we should not take cardinal virtues (e.g., fortitude) to be conglomerations of other, “lesser” virtues (e.g., confidence, patience, perseverance, and magnificence). Rather, each cardinal virtue is as much a specific virtue as any of the virtues that are grouped under it. This principle works in reverse, as well. Consider the Aristotelian virtue of “good temper.” In his article, “Anger and the Virtues: A Critical Study in Virtue Individuation” Ryan West argues that “if ‘good temper’ is a single trait, it supervenes on a combination of other traits, each of which makes its own contribution to the agent’s good temper.”⁶⁷ I will investigate this claim more fully in the next chapter, but *if* it turns out that good temper is nothing but a conglomeration of other virtues, then the Thomistic principle of virtue’s simplicity would lead us to conclude that good temper is not an independent, stand-alone virtue.

The problem with this principle of simplicity is that it seems to contradict Aquinas’s claim that cardinal virtues have integral, subjective, and potential parts (e.g., II-II.48.1). What are we to do with this apparent contradiction? First, let us note that subjective and potential parts of virtue are to be understood not as actual parts of a principle virtue, but as subspecies of the principle virtue. So, for example, subjective parts of prudence are military, domestic,

⁶⁷ West, Ryan, “Anger and The Virtues: A Critical Study in Virtue Individuation,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 46, no. 6 (2016): 877-97.

political, and governing prudence—all of which are subspecies of the regular prudence by which a person governs herself well (II-II.48.1, 50). And potential parts dispose us rightly toward formal objects that are related to those of the principle virtue, but which are either narrower in scope or don't pose as much of a temptation as those of the principle virtue (II-II.48.1, 143.1). For example, potential parts of temperance regulate our appetites in matters less enticing than the pleasures of touch (II-II.143.1). Thus, the fact that a virtue can have potential and subjective parts doesn't threaten that virtue's simplicity and indivisibility.

But what about the integral parts? In II-II.48.1, Aquinas explains that integral parts are parts of the principle virtue in the same sense “as wall, roof, and foundations are parts of a house.” This language certainly does suggest that the principle virtue is *made out of* its integral parts—which would stand in direct contradiction with what Aquinas says about virtue being simple and indivisible. However, in the article II-II.49 (i.e., the one that immediately follows II-II.48), the same virtues that are numbered among the integral parts of prudence in II-II.48 (i.e., memory, understanding, intelligence, docility, shrewdness, reasoning (*ratio*), foresight, circumspection, and caution), are referred to as quasi-integral parts of prudence. Moreover, the Latin preface of II-II.48 talks of “*de partibus quasi integralibus*” of prudence—that is, of prudence's *quasi*-integral parts, even though the body of the article names them as simply integral. Combined with the fact that throughout the rest of the *Summa*, Aquinas talks only of *quasi*-integral parts of cardinal virtues, this evidence points to a conclusion that in II-II.48 Aquinas uses “integral” as a short-hand for “quasi-integral.” Accordingly, we should realize that our initial impression that several virtues might constitute building blocks for another virtue, which is the impression we might get from reading II-II.48, is inaccurate. Moreover, instead of reading the house metaphor as suggesting that *habitus* consists of parts, we should read it as suggesting that just as walls, a

roof, and a floor form a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for a structure to be a house, so the presence of quasi-integral parts forms a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for the simple, indivisible principle virtue's existence.

But still, how can Aquinas maintain that *habitus* is simple and indivisible? Isn't it true that *habitus* is typically acquired gradually, as if the virtue or vice is gradually being pieced together? And isn't it true that such broadly-reaching *habitus* like courage or vainglory seems to be made up of many different components? Isn't it undeniable that someone may be brave on the battlefield and yet crumble in the face of religious persecution, or that a person may be vain of her artistic abilities while being fully unconcerned about her academic performance? In reply to these objections, Aquinas acknowledges the gradual nature of *habitus* development, as well as the fact that there is some "multiplicity" within individual *habitus*—that fortitude on the battlefield *does* look different than the fortitude of a martyr (I-II.54.4). Still, he argues that it's important to keep in mind that just as one power extends to various materially distinct but formally similar objects (e.g., the power of sight picks up the color—be it the color of an apple, a truck, or a bird), so too a *habitus* can extend to various materially distinct but formally similar objects and situations (e.g., fortitude helps us deal with fear—be it fear of death in the battlefield, fear of dangerous illness, or fear of ridicule).

Moreover, even while affirming that the growth in *habitus* happens gradually and over time, Aquinas refuses to accept the modular model of *habitus* acquisition.⁶⁸ He denies that "one part [of *habitus* is] being engendered after another" (I-II.54.4. ad.1). Instead, what we get in Aquinas, is slow and gradual taking up—through one action at a time—the gestalt

⁶⁸ For an excellent critical review of various modular models of virtue acquisition, see Rachana Kamtekar, "Becoming Good: Narrow Dispositions and the Stability of Virtue," in *Developing the Virtues: Integrating Perspectives*, ed. Julia Annas, Darcia Narvaez, and Nancy E. Snow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

of a simple habitus (Ibid.). The fact that people do often get the knack of a particular habitus in a restricted form (i.e., generosity to family members but not to strangers, or courage while sailing in rough seas but not while facing your boss) can have many reasons. Here is just one example that shows how difficult the task of pinpointing the precise reason can be.

First, consider Jerry, who has a natural predisposition to courage, which he does not develop into a virtue. However, Jerry does acquire a habitus of vanity. Because of his vanity, he now might be afraid of confrontation in general, and especially with those whom he perceives as important. As a result, Jerry has no courage when it comes to confronting his peers and those he perceives to be his betters, but he finds it easy to be courageous in situations involving storms, wildfires, and various crisis situations—especially if he has an appreciative audience to cheer him in his courageous activity. So, Jerry becomes a ‘brave firefighter,’ while being a complete coward when it comes to standing up to people. Aquinas would point out that the ‘modularity’ of Jerry’s perceived virtue is actually a result of a double deficiency of Jerry’s character—his having the vice of vanity and his having not bothered about developing his natural predisposition to courage into a real virtue. This example generalizes: the fragmentation, the restriction of habitus to a domain or type of activity, indicates that we do not possess the real/true habitus, but something deficient, something to which the name of habitus applies only by analogy.⁶⁹ In short, contrary to Adams, Aquinas flat out denies that “virtue, or virtues, can come in fragments.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Thus, Aquinas provides indirect support to Christian Miller’s claim that most of us do not possess full virtues or vices, but rather a whole lot of mixed character traits. For the discussion of mixed trait framework, see Christian Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁷⁰ Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 130.

Habitus' Distinction Based on a Power's Potentiality

Having established the simple and indivisible nature of habitus, let us return to the differences between the habitus and to the criteria that can help us sort out the habitus. We have ascertained that the habitus are seated in the powers of the soul, and only in those powers that exist in a state of potentiality. Now, Aquinas notes that a power can exist in a state of potentiality to nature or to operation/function (I-II.54.1). Accordingly, the first level of distinction between the habitus is based on whether a habitus disposes its power to nature, or whether it disposes it to acts. First, there are the habitus that are dispositions to nature, and to nature alone. These are *quasi habitus* - although they are valent and nature-directed, they lack stability and an operational nature. Among those are health, beauty, strength and weakness (I-II.54.1). Second, there are the habitus that are first and foremost dispositions to function. These are the habitus in the full sense—they have both functional nature and stability in addition to being valent and nature-directed.

Distinction Between Operational Habitus

A habitus proper can be thought of not only as a habitus, but also as a form of a power (I-II.54.2), and this allows us to draw two kinds of distinctions. When we think of habitus as forms, we see that habitus are distinguished from one another by their respective *active principles*—i.e., by the powers in which habitus are seated (I-II.54.2). Thus, we recognize the habitus of the will, of the concupiscible and of the irascible appetites, and of the intellect. When we think of them as habitus, we recognize that one of the fundamental things that distinguish habitus from one another is their relation to (human) nature (I-II.54.2,3). But there are two ways in which a habitus can be related /oriented toward nature. First, there's a question of whether a particular habitus disposes its agent toward or away from the agent's nature. This gives us a distinction between virtues and vices (I-II.54.3). Vices are those

habitus that dispose the agent to act in ways that are not appropriate, or not suitable, for its nature. Virtues are the habitus that dispose the agent to act in ways that are appropriate, or suitable, for its nature. These, in turn, are divided into imperfect acquired virtues, perfect acquired virtues, infused virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Much more could and should be said about the division between these types of habitus, and I will do so in the next chapter. For now, we should note that habitus can be good (i.e., virtues), as well as bad (i.e., vices); that there is more than one kind of virtue; and that the good habitus include not only virtues, but also gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The final distinction that Aquinas puts forward is that between the kinds of nature toward which a habitus disposes its agent. Aquinas suggests that while most virtues dispose to acts that are appropriate, suitable, or befitting our human nature, some virtues dispose us to acts that are suitable/befitting higher nature (I-II.54.3; cf. NE VII.1). The former are human virtues, the latter are Godlike, or heroic, virtues. These Godlike/heroic virtues dispose us in a “more perfect mode, inasmuch as one is disposed to good in a higher way than is common to all” (III.7.2, ad.2). Since these are the rarest of the habitus, possessed by only an exceptional few, and since they differ from regular human virtues only by the degree of perfection for which they dispose their subject, I will omit them from consideration for the rest of the dissertation. Still, it is important to register the existence of Godlike/heroic virtues, not least because these are the virtues that Christ had (III.7).

Given all of the distinctions discussed above, we can now put together a taxonomy of habitus that will both shed light on the nature of virtues, and help us in discovering the principle Aquinas uses for individuating specific virtues.

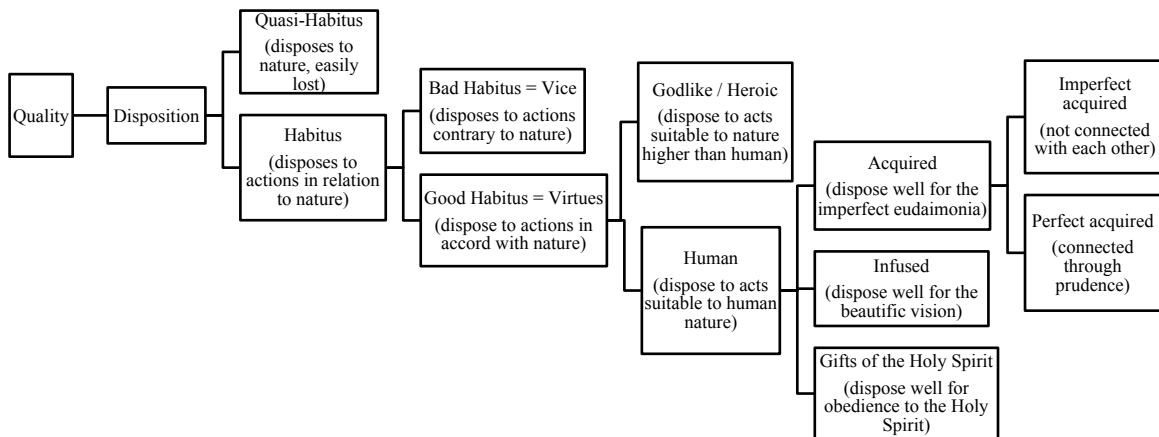


Figure 3:1. Taxonomy of habitus in Aquinas

A full habitus is a disposition that is stable, nature-directed, operative, and morally valent. Good habitus dispose us to function and act in ways that are befitting/in accord with our nature. These are virtues. Bad habitus dispose us to function and act in ways that are not befitting/not in accord with our nature. These habitus are vices. Some extremely rare, Godlike or heroic, virtues dispose us in a way that surpasses human nature, but the rest—human—virtues dispose us toward actions, emotions, perceptions, deliberations, judgments, and desires that befit human nature. These we can acquire either by habituation or by God’s infusion. The former mode of acquisition results in the acquired virtues, whereas the latter mode results in the infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Finally, the acquired virtues come in degrees, so to speak. There are perfect, as well as imperfect, acquired virtues—the former are connected with each other through prudence and the latter are not.

Conclusion

We are now ready to proceed to the discussion of virtue. We have seen that Aquinas understands virtue to be a species of habitus, that it’s a good operative habitus, that it disposes its subject well in relation to nature, and that in so doing it confers a form on a

subject. We have seen how Aquinas argues that certain powers of the soul, namely the appetitive and intellective powers, are not only *suited* to receive virtues, but actually *require* virtues for proper functioning. Virtues perfect these powers by disposing them to operate well, and that “operating well” means operating in a way that is suitable for human nature. This, in turn, means that powers of the human soul operate under the guidance of the rule of reason and in a way that orients us explicitly toward eudaimonia/beatitude in our actions, thoughts, and passions. Moreover, Aquinas has consistently argued that in virtues, like in any true/full-blown habitus, there’s always present a volitional aspect, which keeps virtues from constraining our conscious and unconscious behavior with the force of necessity. Finally, we know that as a habitus and as a form, a virtue is simple and indivisible, but also that there are many different kinds and types of habitus. We can, therefore, anticipate that there will be many different kinds of virtues, as well, and that these different kinds will support each other in orienting us rightly toward our final end.

CHAPTER FOUR

Aquinas's Account of Virtue

Introduction

I have aimed to accomplish two things in the previous chapter. The first was to support a claim that Aquinas's virtue account is built on a solid foundation of moral psychology and philosophical anthropology. I have shown that Aquinas understands habitus in general, and virtues in specific, to be perfections/actualizations of the operative potential of the powers of the human soul. This relation between the powers and the habitus grounds every other quality that a habitus possesses—its nature-directedness, its moral valence, as well as its stable and operative nature. My second aim was to lay the groundwork for elucidating a Thomistic principle of virtue individuation. The discussion of the nature and varieties of habitus has provided such a groundwork. I now turn to the discussion of virtues proper. Since the goal of this dissertation is to establish a Thomistic principle of *virtue* individuation, I pass over the question of the *vices* and the *gifts* of the Holy Spirit. Within the virtues category, however, I examine every type of virtue: not only the acquired, but also the infused; not only moral, but also intellectual virtues.

The first part of this chapter looks more closely at the nature of virtue as a habitus that is set apart from other kinds of habitus. I have especially emphasized the concepts of virtue's subject, object, and mode, since these concepts are crucial for individuating virtue. The second part lays out the complicated taxonomy of virtues—an exercise that begins to demonstrate how virtue's subject, object, and mode shape Aquinas's thought about the relations between various types of virtue. With all the pieces of the Thomistic principle of

virtue individuation on the table, I conclude the chapter by inviting the reader to proceed to the next chapter, where the principle finally comes into full focus.

Virtues - Their Nature

Let us start out with the Augustinian¹ definition that Aquinas endorses: “Virtue is a good quality of the mind, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us, without us (I-II.55.4. ad.1).” This definition earns Aquinas’s full approval, since “the perfect essential notion of anything is gathered from all its causes,” and this definition “comprises all the causes of virtue” while distinguishing virtues from other good qualities of the mind (I-II.55.4 co). Setting aside for a while the puzzlement about the last clause (i.e., “which God works in us, without us”), let us examine each part of this definition more closely.

First, noting that the definition could be made more precise if “good habitus” was used instead of “good quality” since habitus is virtue’s more “proximate genus,” Aquinas points out that “good quality of the mind” states virtue’s formal and material causes. Thus, the definition reaffirms what Aquinas has established in the article immediately prior to this (I-II.54), and which I have touched upon in the preceding chapter—that virtues are habitus of the rational powers of the human soul (I-II.55.1; cf. 54.3). Because these powers are indeterminately inclined to many potential acts, they need to be determined/formed by habitus to operate well, that is, to operate easily and consistently. As mentioned in the

¹ This definition first appears in Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*, where he attributes it to Augustine. As Nicholas Austin points out, “This is not a direct quotation from Augustine, but a patchwork gathered from various of his works, especially *On Free Choice of the Will* and *Retractions*.” Still, “[w]ith the Bishop of Hippo’s unrivaled authority behind it, and its presence in the primary scholastic textbook, this definition became the received formula for centuries” (Austin, *Aquinas on Virtue*, 59).

previous chapter, *all* habitus—be they virtues or vices—confer such determination on their respective powers, and so in a certain sense it can be said that even vices enable their power to function well (I-II.55.3. ad.2).² What makes virtues different from other habitus is that they determine/form the soul's powers in ways that not only enable them to operate well in and of themselves, but to operate well in ways that are good/fitting/proper to the human nature in which these powers reside. Since a human nature is a rational nature, any act that is proper to human nature is going to be performed in accordance with the rule of reason. Moreover, since it is the nature of a human person to be teleologically oriented toward happiness that ultimately consists in beatitude (*beatitudo*) and, in a limited way, in civil happiness (*felicitas*), the rule of reason necessarily orients us toward our final end(s). As Klubertanz writes, virtue “not only makes the power or the operation of the power good, it makes the man good.”³ The perfective nature of virtue is emphasized by the definition's stress that virtue differs from other habitus that can be used for bad or for good, in that “no one can make bad use” of it (I-II.55.4).

This last point brings us to the question of virtue's final cause. Aquinas suggests that the definition alludes to it by stating that “we live righteously” by means of virtue. Earlier, Aquinas has argued that virtues are operative habitus—that their final end is production of good acts, or acts in accord with reason (I-II.55.2-3). But how are we to understand the nature of a virtuous/good action? What is and what is not included in its scope? Unsurprisingly, the answer to this question is complicated. In the most important sense, virtues give rise to human *actions* (*actus humanus*). These are both intentional and volitional—

² For more detailed and highly illuminating discussion, see George P. Klubertanz, *Habits and Virtues*, 162-66.

³ Ibid., p. 163.

meaning that they are both end-oriented and “sanctioned” by the will. However, human intentionality⁴ and voluntariness come in degrees, and so it might be helpful to think of various types of human actions as forming a fairly broad spectrum.

On the one end of the spectrum are such deliberate actions as writing a sentence in a philosophy paper, baking a cake, using a racial slur to express one’s disdain, donating money to charity, solving a math problem, picking out an outfit for the dinner party, etc. All of these actions are highly intentional and voluntary. They require deliberation (however brief), choice, and attention in execution—even if no external action takes place. Somewhere in the middle of the spectrum, there are such nearly-automated actions like riding a bike, driving a car, saying “thank you” when someone hands you a requested item, etc. These actions are clearly voluntary. Moreover, they are intentional, since they retain the means-ends structure even though the habituation-to-near-automaticity may make this structure less immediately apparent.⁵ Finally, there are human actions that seem barely to register on the intentionality and voluntariness spectrum. Here, I am mainly thinking about passionate responses to external and internal situations. Examples of such actions include getting angry at someone who just cut us off in traffic, being sad at having to say goodbye to our friends, feeling dread at the thought of a looming deadline, feeling the unique combination of guilt, anger, frustration, and hopelessness after an episode of parental failure, feeling the unique combination of love, tenderness, and joy while watching our children play, etc. All of these

⁴ By intentional action I mean an action with a means-ends structure.

⁵ For an excellent overview of the structure of the human action, see Ralph McInerny, *Ethica Thomistica: The Moral Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 60-76. In cases of highly habituated actions, the structure of willing the end—choosing the means—execution is “collapsed” but it is nonetheless present.

passionate responses count as human actions, because even though passions arise in the sense appetites, ultimately they are consented to by the will due to the fact that the passion's object is construed in a certain way by the cogitative (or particular) reason.⁶ *To the extent* that a particular passionate response can be sinful or meritorious, that passionate response counts as a human action, and so is subject to virtuous habituation.⁷

The virtues' role in producing good human actions is further complicated by the porous nature of the human actions' boundaries. Each action—baking a cake, for example—can be potentially broken down into further discrete actions. Deliberating about the cake's color or shape, executing particular steps in the technical process of baking (e.g., folding the whipped egg whites into the dough or releasing the baked layers from the form into the cooling rack)—all of these actions can be seen as distinct acts. On the other hand, baking a cake can itself be subsumed into such larger actions as “throwing a party,” “learning to bake,” “winning a baking contest,” and so on. Virtues are concerned with all potential human actions, be they large (e.g., learning to bake) or small (e.g., a split-second decision to make the frosting blue).

⁶ Here, I am eschewing the language of consequent and antecedent passions, and talk about passions consented to by the will, instead. This is partly because the distinction between the consequent and antecedent passions doesn't track the distinction between a human action and an action of a human; and partly because there is no clear consensus among Thomistic scholars on the question of what constitutes the distinction between the consequent and antecedent passions (see note 54, Chapter Three).

For thorough treatments of Aquinas' account of the passions, see Nicholas Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotions* and Robert Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions*. See also Stephen Loughlin, “Similarities and Differences Between Human and Animal Emotion in Aquinas's Thought,” *The Thomist* 65, no. 1 (2001): 45-65.

⁷ Aquinas follows the long-standing theological and philosophical tradition in arguing that certain passionate responses are sinful—apart from any external actions that these passionate responses might motivate. For a contemporary argument in favor of emotions being under (at least a degree) of volitional control, see Robert C. Roberts, *A Spiritual Emotions*, 22-29.

Finally, it seems that for the virtues truly to perfect a power, the operations of that power would need to be fully and completely conformed to the rule of reason. This would mean that in a virtuous person, even the first flickers of passion—even the movements of the sensitive appetites that we experience before these movements become fully recognized by reason and endorsed by the will—should be formed by virtue, and so be in accord with reason.⁸ Readers of Aquinas, however, disagree about *the mechanism* by which such formation could happen. There are two main ways of thinking about the appetite's perfection. Some scholars believe virtues to be dispositions that shape our sense appetites in such a way as to make our passions spontaneously aligned with the would-be judgments of reason. This means that the passions flowing from the virtuously habituated appetite are aligned with the judgments of reason prior to, and independent of, the said judgments. So, Jean Porter argues that a virtuously formed agent

spontaneously desires and seeks what is in accordance with the truly good life that he is trying to lead (I-II.55.4). ... To the extent that [virtuous formation] has been successfully carried out, *the individual's immediate emotional responses, his likes and dislikes, will accord with what his more considered rational judgments on the matter would be.* And that is precisely why the truly virtuous person does not require constant conscious deliberation on his final end in order to act in accordance with it. *His immediate responses will reliably direct him to act appropriately,* at least in normal circumstances.⁹

Other scholars in this camp, like Robert Pasnau, are less optimistic about the prospect of completely spontaneous virtuous passions. Nonetheless, they want to argue that *some*

⁸ The first movement of the sensitive appetite constitutes an activity of a human power without yet being a full-fledged human act. It becomes a human act only *if* the will endorses this first movement of the appetite.

⁹ Jean Porter, *The Recovery of Virtue: The Relevance of Aquinas for Christian Ethics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 103. Emphasis added.

positive “weight in moral reasoning” should be afforded even to the antecedent passions that flow from a virtuously habituated appetite.¹⁰

What would Porter make of the movements of the appetite that we experience before attending to these movements? Although she doesn’t address the question directly, we can attempt to reconstruct her position based on her stated view of the affective virtues. It is clear that Porter believes that antecedent passions (i.e., passions that causally precede the judgment of reason) rising from the well-formed appetite will be spontaneously virtuous. And since it’s often the case that we first experience antecedent passions first as passions-prior-to-being-attended-to, there is an important sense in which passions-prior-to-being-attended-to overlaps with the antecedent

¹⁰ Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 263. Although here Pasnau allows that antecedent passions can be virtuous, he seems to be arguing against this position when he points out that the lingering effects of the original sin make it impossible for the lower powers to be completely subjected to reason in this life (261).

Eleonore Stump also advances a modified argument for the virtuous passion’s independence from reason when she champions the role of the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit in the moral life of a believer: “For Aquinas, then, the contribution of the fruits of the Holy Spirit to the moral life is not a matter of the *passions* being governed by reason, any more than it is in the case of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Rather, the fruits of the Holy Spirit are a matter of having *emotions, spiritual analogues to the passions*, transformed in second-personal connection to God” (“The Non-Aristotelian Character of Aquinas’s Ethics: Aquinas on the Passions,” 42. Emphasis added). Unfortunately, Stump’s argument suffers from the lack of nuance in thinking about the role that reason plays in generating the desires of the will, as well as from near-equivocation on the words “passion” and “emotion.” The quoted passage paints a scenario in which passions (*passio*) are being governed by reason against a scenario in which emotions (*affectio*) are transformed by the Holy Spirit. But this is not an either-or case for Aquinas. Precisely because passions are *not* the same as the desires of the will (what Stump in this passage calls ‘emotions’), our full perfection demands that our desires *and* passions be transformed. Since passions and desires of the will differ in nature, however, the way their perfection is achieved will differ as well. And for passions, perfection does consist in willing and ready obedience to reason – in other words, in “being governed by reason.”

passion.¹¹ Accordingly, Porter should see the first movements of a well-formed appetite as spontaneously virtuous, as well.

Practically speaking, Porter's position would imply that a virtuous person will have no wayward desires, inclinations, or passions whatsoever. Consider virtuous Jane, for example. Her concupiscible appetite is fully formed by temperance, so that she always desires the right amount of food, at the right time, for the right reason, etc. and enjoys her food in a properly human way.¹² Imagine that one day she is invited to a co-worker's birthday celebration, and is offered a small piece of cake. Normally, she would enjoy eating it, since doing so would be a good and fitting thing to do. However, this particular celebration takes place during Lent, and Jane has given up sweets for the

¹¹ I say that this is often the case, because antecedent passions are not co-extensive with passions-prior-to-being-attended-to. Since a passion being antecedent or consequent is not a matter of a passion *temporally* preceding or succeeding the judgment of reason, but a matter of a passion *causally* preceding or succeeding the judgment of reason, it's perfectly possible to experience an antecedent passion with no 'lag' in recognition/attention from reason. So, for example, when a normal person steps onto the glass observation deck hanging over the Grand Canyon, she will experience at least a mild passion of fear, even while she might be telling herself that she is not in actual danger and that she should not be afraid. This passion will be both antecedent (since it's causally prior to the judgment of reason), and fully attended to at the first moment of its occurrence. Moreover, a passion does not cease to be antecedent once it becomes attended to, since the fact that a passion is attended to does not change the fact that the passion arose causally prior to the judgment of reason.

¹² Diana Fritz Cates, who might also belong to the camp that endorses the spontaneity of virtuous passions, provides a beautiful picture of what a properly human enjoyment of food might look like when she recalls a story told by G. Simon Harak: "I had a friend who described once the delight of biting into a freshly picked, vine-grown tomato. When, from within that delight, she reflects on the generosity of God, on God's giving her the ability to delight in this tomato, on God's nurturance of the whole world, she experiences joy. She has found the meaning of her delight. And that, for Thomas, would be rational, human, moral passion" (G. Simon Harak, S.J., *Virtuous Passions: The Formation of Christian Character* (New York: Paulist, 1993), 94, quoted by Diana Fritz Cates, "The Virtue of Temperance (IIa-IIae, qq. 141–170)," in *Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 323).

duration of the season. Accordingly, her concupiscible appetite would no longer “see” the offered cake as fitting/pleasant, and Jane would experience no desire for cake whatsoever—her appetite would of its own accord remain unmoved by what is usually seen as a desirable object.

The scenario that I just described doesn’t strike me as very plausible. However, this might be due to the lack of virtuous imagination on my part. In any case, it represents one way of thinking about the appetite’s perfection. What about the other way? Another group of scholars, led by Giuseppe Butera, protests that antecedent passions could be virtuous only if the appetites could determine what constitutes the appropriate response in each given situation independently of practical reason.¹³ But, these scholars point out, the appetites’ nature is such that they are not capable of making this decision. What constitutes a virtuous response must always be determined by reason. Accordingly, Butera argues, it is wrong to think that virtuous formation of an appetite yields spontaneously virtuous passions. Rather, it consists in forming the appetite in such a way that it readily and reliably follows the command of reason. On this view, there *could* be a first movement of the appetite that is out of step with the judgment of reason. In a virtuous person, such a first movement would be immediately checked by the will, and the appetite would readily and easily re-direct itself to what reason judged appropriate. For example, our temperate Jane might experience an initial desire for the offered cake, but upon remembering her Lenten vows, her desire for the cake would immediately

¹³ Giuseppe Butera, “On Reason’s Control of the Passions in Aquinas’s Theory of Temperance.” Other scholars who endorse, with modifications, Butera’s reading of the relationship between passions and reason, include Steven Jensen (“Virtuous Deliberation and the Passions”) and Daniel De Haan (“Moral Perception and the Function of the *Vis Cogitativa* in Thomas Aquinas’s Doctrine of Antecedent and Consequent Passions”).

subside without any lingering regret or struggle. The immediate response of the concupiscible appetite to the judgment of reason is an indication that Jane's appetite is formed by temperance. It sets the temperate Jane apart from the incontinent Ben, and the absence of any lingering regrets sets her apart from the merely continent Jerry.

I find this scenario to be much more realistic than the one described above. Moreover, I find Butera's overall argument supported by Aquinas's insistence that, in this life, "the lower powers cannot be so subject to reason as never to impede the act of reason" (*QDV* 24.9c). Accordingly, I am sympathetic to Butera's main argument, even though I share Steven Jensen's worry that Butera's account minimizes the role of the passions in the decision-making process.¹⁴ However, a proper adjudication between Butera and Porter would require an investigation into the way powers interact and support one another, the way our faculties are affected by original sin, the nature and character of the perfected virtues (i.e., virtues that remain in the beatified state), and other equally complicated and important topics. Since such an investigation is clearly beyond the scope of this dissertation, I refrain from passing judgment on the Butera-Porter debate. At this point, I am content to merely state both positions and to show their respective implications for the possibility of the virtuous first movements of the appetite.

We have now looked at virtue's formal, material, and final causes. The only thing that remains for us to investigate is the virtue's efficient cause. And this brings us to the final clause of the definition that states virtue to be what "God works in us, without us" (I-

¹⁴ Jensen writes, "Butera is correct in his main assertion: virtuous passions do indeed always follow upon the judgment of reason; they do not arise spontaneously, apart from reason. At the same time, I wish to argue that virtuous deliberations are not always dry deliberations; sometimes our passions assist us in judging what is to be done" ("Virtuous Deliberation and the Passions," 194-5).

II.55.4). Here, Aquinas explains, Augustine¹⁵ has in mind infused virtues (Ibid.). For these, God is the only proper efficient cause, even though, as we will see later, humans do play a contributing role in the growth of the infused virtues. To the infused virtues, the Augustinian definition applies fully. But where does this leave virtues that we develop through habituation? Some readers of Aquinas, notably Eleonore Stump, see this passage as a confirmation that Aquinas denies the status of “real virtues” to the acquired virtues.¹⁶ Such a reading, however, is misguided, since in the same passage Aquinas goes on to say that “If we omit this phrase [i.e., “which God works in us, without us”], the remainder of the definition will apply to *all virtues in general, whether acquired or infused.*” (I-II.55.4, emphasis added).¹⁷ And, as Aquinas argues in the earlier article, the non-infused, acquired virtues, are formed in us by repeated actions that remove the contrary inclinations—that is, by habituation (I-II.52.3). I will return to the discussion of the relationship between the infused and the acquired virtues later. For now, let us proceed in our investigation of Aquinas’s account of virtue by looking at virtues’ subject, object, and mode.

Virtue’s Subject, Object, and Mode

Virtue’s subject. In the previous chapter, I have looked at the question of which powers of the soul can take up a habitus. Now, I turn to the question of which powers of

¹⁵ Although the statement Aquinas has in mind is Peter Lombard’s, Aquinas believed it to be Augustine’s. See note 1, Chapter Four for more explanation.

¹⁶ Eleonore Stump, “The Non-Aristotelian Character of Aquinas’s Ethics: Aquinas on the Passions.” For similar, but more modest, claims, see Andrew Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas’s Ethics*.

¹⁷ For a convincing and thorough argument against Stump, see Brandon Dahm, “The Acquired Virtues are Real Virtues.” See also Austin, “Graced Virtue” in *Aquinas on Virtues*, 168-89 for a discussion of Aquinas’s view regarding virtues’ efficient cause.

the soul can be formed by virtue. In a way, the answer to this second question is an extension of the answer to the first. Since virtues are habitus, we should expect that to possess virtue the power must meet the same conditions that it must meet to possess a habitus. It must be in a state of potency, it must be capable of being determined in various ways and toward different things, and that being disposed toward that for which a power exists in potentiality must require many things coming together in just the right way (I-II.49.4). Moreover, the power in question must be rational, which means that it must in some way participate in reason and its commands.

There are four kinds powers of the soul that meet these criteria: the powers of the internal sensorium, sense appetites, will, and intellect. All four have been shown to be capable of acquiring habitus (pl.). Does this mean that the same four are capable of acquiring virtue? Not necessarily. Aquinas reminds us that “virtue is a perfect [habitus], by which it never happens that anything but good is done” (I-II.55.6). The fact that virtue is perfective—not only of the power’s operations considered in themselves, but of those powers’ operations as they contribute to the life of a person as a whole—has implications for this, and other instances where we might be tempted to see virtue as just another habitus.

One of the implications is that the powers of the internal sensorium are not the kind of powers that can be perfected by virtues. Remember that virtues result in nothing but good human actions (broadly understood). This means, argues Aquinas, that virtue “must needs be in that power which consummates the good act” (I-II.55.6). To put it in a slightly different way, virtue must be “in the capacity that is the principle of human activity (*DQV* 1.4)”. The powers of the internal sensorium do not in and of themselves get at the knowledge of the truth, but merely contribute to the judgments of reason—they do not themselves consummate the good act, but assist it, and so cannot be the principles of human

acts. This means that though there are some habitus in the powers of the internal sensorium, these habitus do not rise to the level of virtue proper or even to the level of skills and intellectual virtues (I-II.55.6).

Other implications of virtue's being a perfective habitus can be seen in the surprising ways that the powers of the intellect, the will, and the sense appetites are transformed by virtues. The will, Aquinas notes, has a natural orientation toward the good of reason. In fact, "inclining to the good is related to the will in the way that inclining to pleasure is related to the sensual [appetites], or attending to sound is related to the hearing" (*DQV* 1.5).

Therefore, the will *does not need* virtue—it aims at the person's proper good all by itself. Still, there are times when the will must aim at something greater than a person's individual good—as when we are called to desire the divine good and the good of other individuals. In these cases, the will's automatic, natural orientation toward the good is not going to sustain it, and so it will have to be formed by the virtues. Justice—and its many parts—is the virtue by which we learn to be well inclined to other people's goods. However, since divine good far exceeds our human nature, no amount of proper habituation would be sufficient to orient our will properly. The virtues that *can* form us in this respect must, therefore, be given to us directly by God. These are the virtues of charity and of hope, and in being formed by them our will is "raised to aim at a good that exceeds the boundaries of human good" (*DQV* 1.5; cf. *ST* I-II.56.6).

What about the intellect and sense appetites? Unlike the will, both are indeterminately inclined toward their objects, and both have movements that precede and follow the will. Let us look at the intellect first.

The intellect both moves the will by presenting it with the will's formal object, and is moved by the will to consider (or to overlook) a particular set of propositions,

circumstances, facts, etc. Both of these aspects can and need to be perfected by virtue.

Whenever the intellect is perfected as that which moves the will, it is perfected for its proper operation, which is the knowledge of truth. Among the habitus that perfect the intellect's ability to apprehend and understand the truth are theoretical wisdom and scientific knowledge (in the speculative intellect) and skill (in the practical intellect). Aquinas argues that these habitus are not virtues simply speaking (*simpliciter*), but only in a relative sense (*secundum quid*). This is because in apprehending its proper object (i.e., the truth), the intellect is not oriented to it as to a good/desirable thing. Aquinas famously writes, "That is because having knowledge does not make one willing to consider the truth; it just makes one adept at doing so, and so the consideration of truth is due to knowledge not insofar as that consideration is willed, but insofar as one's considering is directly trained on its object" (*DQV* 1.7; cf. *ST* I-II.56.3). In other words, these intellectual habitus perfect the operations of the subject, *without* making the person good. So why does Aquinas still call these habitus "virtues," even if in an analogous sense? This is because the knowledge of truth is a properly human activity, and so in enabling the intellect to operate properly, intellectual habitus form us in accordance with nature.

Here is an example to illustrate and motivate Aquinas's point. My husband and I are teaching our 5-year old twins Katherine and Elizabeth the Children's Catechism. As things stand right now, they both want to learn it because they are intensely curious about the world, God, and ways that God relates to the world. Imagine, though, that Elizabeth loses her interest and starts slipping behind Katherine. To motivate her, we could do a number of things. We could try to rekindle her desire to learn about God, we could create an atmosphere of competition between her and Katherine, and/or we could incentivize her learning by promising her a piece of candy for every X number of questions memorized.

Notice that any of these tactics (if they work at all) will do the trick—she would not need to be motivated by her desire to *learn* about God to learn her catechism. Elizabeth could learn it just as well as Katherine (if not better) by being motivated to earn candy or to beat her sister in a competition. But would we be satisfied with this result? Ideally, of course, we would want them to not only know true things about God, but to know Him *as* good, and for the learning to be motivated by love. However, the principle goal of this exercise is to provide her with a basic theological education, a body of knowledge that she could access whenever (and if) she chose or had a need. In this sense, her learning the catechism is akin her learning the alphabet, and as long as she has a firm grasp of its content, her motivation in learning it makes no practical difference. It is true that by incentivizing Elizabeth’s learning, or by encouraging her to compete with Katherine, we might be sowing in her the seeds of moral *vices* (e.g., the vices of greed, vanity, pride, or envy). This would prove to be a parental failure, indeed. But even if Elizabeth would go on to develop these vices, these would affect her *moral* character and her ability to *love* God and people without diminishing her capacity to *know* and to recite the catechism—just as the fallen angels retain their knowledge of God’s greatness and power without loving God or seeing him as good. The very sad fact that these scenarios are possible serves to underscore Aquinas’s points that, considered in itself, the intellect does not desire its object; that knowing the truth does not entail being attracted to it; and that habitus which perfect the operations of the intellect in itself can be called virtues only in an analogous sense.

Still, the intellect does not operate in isolation from the will, and so it must be considered not only as the mover of the will, but as something that is moved by the will’s command. And for the intellect (and for human as a whole) to function well, it needs to be well disposed in this respect. The habitus that form the intellect to follow the will well are

faith (in the speculative intellect) and prudence (in the practical intellect) (*DQV* 1.7; *ST* I-II.56.3). Aquinas argues that these habitus are true virtues (*simpliciter*), since their object is truth not merely as truth, but as that which is desired as the/a good by the will. Thus, the virtues of faith and prudence both depend on the will's rectitude, but in different ways and for different reasons.

The virtue of *faith* depends on the will, because its object surpasses the capacity of human intellect.¹⁸ We cannot comprehend God, nor can we arrive at the true knowledge of Him as a result of own mental activity. Faith's propositions are neither self-evident nor derived from self-evident principles through series of logical steps. Rather, the intellect assents because it is compelled to do so by the will, "which chooses to assent to one side definitely and precisely because of something which is enough to move the will, though not enough to move the understanding, namely, since it seems good or fitting to assent to this side" (*De Ver.* 14.1).

An act of assent might seem good or fitting to the intellect for two reasons First, the intellect might become convinced by the weight of circumstances, "that it ought to believe what is said, though that conviction is not based on objective evidence" (II-II.5.2). Second, a person may assent to the truth of propositions because she is drawn to that truth as to her good (*ST* II-II.5.2). These reasons hold both for the virtue of faith, whose object is the Divine Truth, and the kind of faith that Aristotle has in mind (and what is most commonly designated by "faith"), and which deals with a "conclusion which does not follow, of

¹⁸ It is important to keep in mind that Aquinas draws a sharp distinction between the *virtue* of faith and the faith "commonly so called" (II-II. 4.1). The former's object is Divine Truth and things pertaining to our journey to beatitude. The latter's object is much more broad, and is not easily delineated – a fact that is attested by the seemingly intractable debates on the nature of faith in contemporary epistemology.

necessity, from ... premises" (II-II.4.5. ad. 2). For both types of faith, the will commands both the *act* of the intellect (i.e., the assent) and the intellect's object (i.e., the content of the belief) (*DQV* 1.7; *ST* II-II.4.1-2, 4).

The difference between the common-type faith and the virtue of faith is that the common-type faith is often going to be misplaced and, as a result, our reasoning is often going to be faulty. As such, common-type faith cannot be considered perfective of the intellect, and, therefore, is not a virtue. So what makes the virtue of faith a virtue? Simply the fact that its object is the Divine Truth, "which is infallible, and consequently its object cannot be anything false" (II-II.4.5. ad. 2).¹⁹ Faith as a virtue *is* perfective of the intellect, because in ascending to the propositions that communicate the knowledge about God we are *always* ascending to the truth (II-II.1.).

Security of the object, however, cannot be the only thing that makes faith a virtue, since we know that it is possible for someone to know some truths about God without being properly oriented to Him as to the good (e.g., demonic knowledge or the knowledge retained by an apostate). And while faith that arises out of love for God is clearly a virtue (since it perfects and rightly orients the whole person), what are we to make of lifeless faith? What is the difference between it and the living faith? Aquinas argues that the difference lies in the orientation of the person's *will*. If a person's will is transformed by charity, she is oriented toward God as to her good, and such a person has living faith. If, however, a person rejects charity, her intellect is still formed by faith, but such faith no longer orients the person toward her final end. Therefore, while lifeless faith remains a virtue—in the same way that

¹⁹ I realize that my brief account of common-type faith is very inadequate. However, since full treatment of the topic is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I will restrict my inquiry to faith as a virtue.

theoretical wisdom and science are virtues—it cannot be said to be a virtue in the absolute, perfect sense. (II-II. 4.4).

Unlike faith, *prudence* does not receive its object from the will, since the whole point of prudential deliberation is to arrive at the knowledge of what the appropriate / fitting / good in each given circumstance is. However, the intellect formed by prudence does rely on the will for the specification of the end (i.e. the good that the deliberation aims to achieve) and for the command to act (i.e., to begin deliberation that will issue in a command of what to do) (*DQV* 1.7). It will, therefore, make a big difference for prudence’s status as a virtue whether the will is well or ill formed. If an ill-formed will specifies bad ends for the intellect, the fact that the intellect is well-formed to deliberate and to follow the will’s command is going to be actually detrimental to the person and will make the person bad, since her deliberation (and the resulting command to action) will be toward a bad end. Think, for example, of an SS commander who is very efficient in carrying out the task of eliminating a local Jewish population, because he is committed to the cause of the Third Reich. Such a person, Aquinas argues, does not have the virtue of prudence, but a virtue’s counterfeit, and the word “prudent” would apply to him only in an analogous sense (II-II.47.13).

Aquinas’s treatment of faith and prudence’s dependence on the rectitude of the will is yet another sign that reveals the pastoral heart that lies at the core of all his work. Aquinas is not content to provide an analysis of various *habitus* in abstraction from one another and in abstraction from their contribution to human actions. His is a mind of a confessor; he ultimately wants to guide his readers to good actions, actions that are proportionate to and flow from the virtuous dispositions. So, Aquinas reminds us that “for the perfection of an act proceeding from two active principles, each of these principles must be perfect: for it is not possible for a thing to be sawn well, unless the sawyer possess the art, and the saw be

well fitted for sawing” (II-II.4.2). For the acts of faith to be perfect/virtuous, it is not enough for the intellect to be formed by the virtue of faith—the will must be formed by the virtue of charity, as well. For an act to be prudent, and not merely shrewd, the intellect must be so formed as to be able to deliberate and to command well—but it also must receive a good end/direction from moral virtues.

The same concern for individual human actions being good underlies Aquinas’s understanding of the role of virtues in formation of *sense appetites*. Answering the question of whether sense appetites need to be formed by virtue, he points out that in dealing with pleasures and pains, the rightly formed intellect and will are not going to be sufficient to produce a perfect/fitting/virtuous act:

For if the immediate principle of what is done is incomplete, the action itself will be incomplete, no matter how complete the higher principle is. That is why *unless* the tendency of the lower appetite to carry out the commands of reason were complete, any action that had the lower desire as its proximate principle would not be completely good: the sensory desire would offer some resistance. As a result, the lower desire would suffer a kind of unease because it was being forced, so to speak, by the higher one. This happens to someone who has strong sensual desires, but does not follow them because reason forbids this (*DQV* 1.4).²⁰

Strictly speaking, sense appetites are not rational, and so, considered in and of themselves, they cannot be subjects to virtue (*DQV* 1.4; I-II.56.4). This is one of the reasons why there cannot be a virtuous dog or a virtuous pig. Human sense appetites, however, are rational in a non-accidental way. To borrow Matthew Boyle’s description, human rationality “transforms

²⁰ It is interesting to note that in the *Summa*, Thomas argues for the necessity of the virtues of sense appetite by appealing to the same analogy of the craftsman and his tool that he uses to explain that the virtuous act of faith requires the perfection of both intellect and will: “Because an act, which proceeds from one power according as it is moved by another power, cannot be perfect, unless both powers be well disposed to the act: for instance, *the act of a craftsman cannot be successful unless both the craftsman and his instrument be well disposed to act*” (I-II.56.4, emphasis mine).

[the powers of sense apprehension and appetite] in a way that makes our perceptual and desiderative capacities essentially different from those of nonrational animals.”²¹ Human sense appetites can follow the commands of reason, or they can resist its commands. So, for example, someone who is determined to eat healthier may come to ‘see’ a salad as a delectable and appetizing dish. At a different time and under different circumstances, however, the same person can be so taken by the smell of Krispy Kreme doughnuts wafting through the air that she rebels at the thought of a nice healthy salad and stuffs herself with doughnuts, instead. Accordingly, human sense appetites are both suitable for, and are in need of, the formation that virtues provide.

We now have the answer to the question I asked at the beginning of this section. Out of the four kinds of powers of the human soul capable of taking on a habitus, three have been shown to be capable of taking on a virtue: the powers of the human intellect, the will, and the sense appetites. However, the closer examination of these powers provided us with an additional nuance in Aquinas’s account of moral psychology. Aquinas consistently maintains that a habitus (and so, a virtue), perfects a *single* faculty/power of the soul. Given that habitus is a form that actualizes a power’s potential, and that virtue is a habitus that perfects the power’s operation in accordance with the rule of reason, the notion of a habitus/virtue residing in only one faculty/power makes perfect sense. The intellectual virtues of faith and prudence, however, seem to challenge this paradigm—both virtues seem to engage the intellect *and* the will. How can we make sense of this?

²¹ Matthew Boyle, “Additive theories of rationality: A Critique,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 24, no. 3 (2016), 528. For an elucidation of Aquinas’s transformative account of human rationality, see Candace Vogler, “The Intellectual Animal,” *2017 Aquinas Lecture*, Blackfriars, Oxford, March 2, 2017.

To understand how a virtue can appear to reside in more than one subject, we need to be aware of two things. First, is the Thomistic notion that changes in the higher powers give rise to the effects in the lower powers through what he calls an overflow process.²² So, for example, Aquinas argues (following Augustine), that in human beatitude, the happiness of the soul will “overflow on to the body, so that this too will obtain its perfection” (I-II.4.6). Likewise, he argues that the intense (or “vehement”) movements of the will typically overflow into the lower appetites and stir up its’ passions of fear, joy, anger, etc. (*De Ver.* 26.7; 26.3. ad. 13; 26.4. ad. 13), and that the intellectual joy (*delectatio*) of contemplation of truth overflows into sense appetites, assuaging pain and sorrow, and enabling us to have joy (*gaudium*) in the midst of tribulations (I-II. 38.4. co, ad.3).²³ Moreover, this overflow of the changes in one power into another is not one-directional. The changes in the lower parts affect the higher powers, as well.²⁴ Both antecedent and consequent passions can influence the will and the intellect by directing our attention, so to speak, to certain features of the world and away from others (I-II.10.3; *De Malo* VI.1). We are all familiar with the phenomenon of people being “blinded” by their anger or prejudice, as well as with the

²² For an insightful application of this Thomistic principle to the study of neuroplasticity and addiction, see Daniel De Haan, “Thomistic Hylomorphism, Self-Determination, Neuroplasticity, and Grace: The Case of Addiction,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 85 (2012): 99-120.

²³ For distinction between affections (*affectus*) and passions (*passio*) in Aquinas, see Robert Miner “*Affectus* and *Passio* in the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas,” forthcoming.

²⁴ Some contemporary research echoes this Thomistic account of the relationship between the lower and the higher powers of the soul. See, for example, Barbara Fredrickson’s paper, “Positive Emotions Broaden and Build” on how “positive” emotions enhance thought processes (Barbara Fredrickson, “Positive Emotions Broaden and Build” in *Advances on Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 47, eds. Patricia Devine and Ashby Plant (San Diego: Academic Press, 2013), 1-53. I thank Robert C. Roberts for bringing this to my attention.

stories where a person's love for their child or their beloved enabled them to perceive and/or understand what was hidden from everyone else. It is obvious, however, that love can just as easily impair, and hate can aid, a person's reason. Inordinate love blinds Mrs. Steerforth to her son James' real moral defects, and hate makes Inspector Javert an unusually perceptive and sharp detective.²⁵

Second, Aquinas recognizes another kind of overflow—and that is of the effects of one virtue on to the subjects of other virtues:

the qualities of prudence overflow on to the other virtues in so far as they are directed by prudence. And each of the others overflows on to the rest, for the reason that whoever can do what is harder, can do what is less difficult. Wherefore whoever can curb his desires for the pleasures of touch, so that they keep within bounds, which is a very hard thing to do, for this very reason is more able to check his daring in dangers of death, so as not to go too far, which is much easier; and in this sense fortitude is said to be temperate. Again, temperance is said to be brave, by reason of fortitude overflowing into temperance: in so far, to wit, as he whose mind is strengthened by fortitude against dangers of death, which is a matter of very great difficulty, is more able to remain firm against the onslaught of pleasures. (I-II.61.4)

This double overflow (i.e., from one power to another power and from one virtue to others) largely accounts for the appearance of the double subject in a given virtue. Take charity, for example. It forms the will, but its effects are seen in other powers. When we are united to God in charity, we suddenly are able to 'see' our neighbors in a new light—so much so that our anger or hatred abates and we are able to have compassion even on the formerly perceived enemy (II-II.27.7). Likewise, the will that is formed by charity directly moves the intellect to ascend to the truth of the propositions offered to us in revelation, and so produces faith.

²⁵ Mrs. Steerforth and James Steerforth are characters in Dickens's novel *David Copperfield*; Inspector Javert is a character in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérable*.

To summarize, an individual virtue, being a form/perfection of a power of the soul, is always going to be seated primarily in that one power that it perfects. Its effects, however, can be manifested in more than one power—either because perfection of one power directly affects the functioning of other powers, or because acquiring one virtue makes it easier to acquire other, related, virtues. This cooperation and mutual support of virtues is so common, that it is very rare for an individual virtuous action to proceed from one single virtue. Still, this is not to deny that most of the time it is possible to identify one or two primary virtues that give rise to an action. So, for example, Aquinas identifies almsgiving as an act of charity, even though any virtuous act of almsgiving would have to involve at least prudence and generosity (and most likely other virtues). And he identifies martyrdom as an act of infused fortitude, even though it is supported by other virtues like charity and piety. We can identify these acts as (primarily) acts of charity and fortitude, because we recognize that each action is (primarily) concerned with a specific object. An act of almsgiving is more specific than generosity—it’s not simply about giving one’s money away. It is about serving one’s neighbor in a particular way for the sake of our love of God (II-II.32.1). And martyrdom is more specific than any act of charity—it requires steadfast adherence to faith in divine promises in the face of imminent death (II-II.124.2. ad.2). Since these examples show that virtue’s object plays a more crucial role in individuating virtues and actions to which virtues give rise than virtue’s subject does, let us now proceed to examine the notion of virtue’s object.

Virtue’s object. Aquinas so often states that human acts and habitus are specified by their objects, that a reader could form an excusable impression that an object is the only thing that individuates habitus (pl.). Even though I argue below that there is more to the Thomistic principle of virtue individuation than a virtue’s object, it is nevertheless true that

the object plays a very prominent role in virtue individuation. However, the concept of *obiectum* is a complex one, and, as Joseph Pilsner observes, it can have at least three meanings:

(1) On one level, the word *obiectum* in Aquinas simply signifies that to which an action relates. (We mean something similar in English when we say that someone is the object of another's affection or hatred, for example.) ... (2) On a second level, *obiectum* implies a certain technical meaning, one not ordinarily understood in the English term 'object'. Thomas asserts that an object possesses as an essential constituent a certain 'formal aspect' which is responsible, properly speaking, for the specification of a related action, habit, or power. ... (3) Finally, there is a third meaning of 'object'. It often happens that Thomas must discuss a state of affairs where one end is being sought for the sake of another; he typically alludes to Aristotle's example of someone stealing in order to commit adultery. In some cases, ... he will use the word 'end' by itself to refer to a further end and the word 'object' to refer to that more immediate end sought for the further end's sake.²⁶

I am going to pass over the third meaning of "object" identified by Pilsner, since it surfaces only in the discussions that have to do with specification and assessment of individual actions—not habitus. The first two meanings of "object," on the other hand, apply to habitus, and so require some unpacking.

The first meaning is the broadest and the most straightforward, but is also the least illuminating. Object, here, is the "matter *about which*" an action or the habitus is concerned, or, as Aquinas puts it, is "the field of [virtue's] activity" (II-II.129.1).²⁷ As Pilsner carefully documents, there is a wide range of realities that, for Aquinas, can serve as an object of a virtue. Internal and external actions, actual physical objects, passions of the sense appetite, or the result or effect of an action—all of these realities can be referred to as a virtue's

²⁶ Pilsner, *The Specification of Human Actions in St Thomas Aquinas*, 72-3.

²⁷ This use of object needs to be distinguished from the "matter *in which*" a habitus exists, which is the habitus' subject (I-II.55.4). It is important to flag this difference, since Aquinas uses the term "matter" freely to refer both to the virtue's object and its subject, which can be potentially confusing.

obiectum.²⁸ Upon a closer examination, this bewildering plentitude yields the following schema:²⁹ Each virtue has a set of objects with which it is immediately concerned (i.e., the proximate object) and a set of objects with which it is concerned only remotely (i.e., the remote object). The *proximate object* is the matter, so to speak, to which each virtue imparts form. This matter on which virtue works is human acts. And, as have been stated above, human acts can be comprised of the external, as well as internal, actions (which includes passionate voluntary responses). Accordingly, different types of virtues will have different proximate matter to form. For example, the proximate objects of the intellectual virtues are the internal operations of the intellect, whereas justice, along with its parts, is immediately concerned with the external acts and the internal operations of the will. Finally, temperance and courage, along with their respective parts, will have the passions for their proximate matter (I-II. 60. 2).³⁰

²⁸ Pilsner, *The Specification of Human Actions in St Thomas Aquinas*, 76-82.

²⁹ The following discussion of the virtue's proximate and remote objects is greatly influenced by Nicholas Austin's analysis of what he calls "material object" (*Aquinas on Virtue*, 111-12). Unfortunately, Austin's decision to combine virtue's proximate and remote objects under one term "material object" or, alternatively, "objective matter," obscures his otherwise insightful analysis of the topic. Moreover, it introduces an unnecessary confusion, since, as discussed below, "material object" is widely used by contemporary readers of Aquinas in contrast with "formal object," where the former term refers to the *per se* sensible object which grounds the manifold of the *per accidens* sensibles.

³⁰ Notice that although virtue's proximate object is comprised of passions and operations, it is not co-extensive with the virtue's subject. There are several reasons for this. First, and most importantly, the matter to which virtues impart order is *individual human acts*, as opposed to the powers of the soul, which are *capacities* for human acts. Second, a single power of the soul is perfected by more than one virtue. The will, for example, is perfected not only by justice, but also by hope and charity. And third, some individual virtues are concerned with multiple passions and operations at once. So, for example, the proximate matter of fortitude, is the passions of fear and daring.

Now, the passions and operations that serve as proximate objects for the virtues have objects of their own (i.e., the realities that passions and operations are concerned with), and it is these objects that serve as *remote objects* of virtue (e.g., I-II.57.1. ad.2). So, for example, the object of fear (which serves as matter for the virtue of fortitude) is a future evil that is difficult to avoid, and the object of the kind of pleasure that serves as matter for the virtue of temperance is food, drink, and sexual activity.

To avoid potential confusion, it is important to keep in mind the distinction between material and formal objects. For it is patently obvious that multiple passions and operations of the will can be directed toward one and the same *material* object. So a princess locked up in the castle will evoke love in one knight and despair in another, or love and consequent despair in one and the same knight. This is because the knight-in-love perceives the princess under the formal aspect of beautiful, good, desirable, etc., whereas the knight-in-despair perceives the princess as beautiful, good, desirable, etc., but completely and utterly out of his reach. Likewise, a graduate student will alternate between the passions of hope and dread when contemplating her dissertation defense depending on whether she sees the defense as a good that is distant, but in-principle attainable, or as a distant, but encroaching, evil. And just as various passions will have different formal objects and so remain distinct while being directed at the same material object, so virtues will have the same material object but differ due to their formal objects being distinct. Consider, for example, the virtues of charity and hope. They are directed toward the same material object—viz., union with God. Yet, charity regards union with God “simply,” while hope regards it as something that is “difficult to

attain” (II-II.28.4. ad 2). Whenever Aquinas speaks of the objects of passions and/or operations, he always uses ‘object’ in this technical way.³¹

But how is virtue’s formal object related to its proximate and remote objects? The following chart illustrates the relationship.

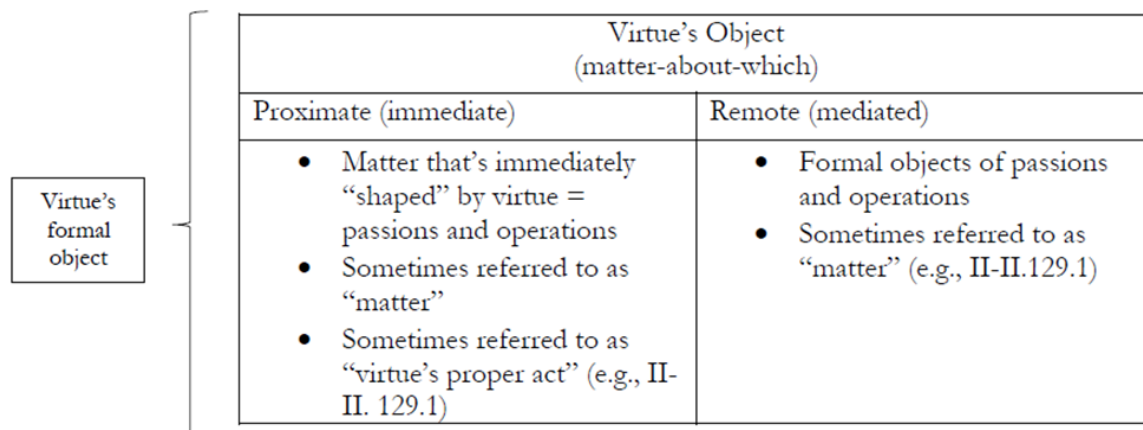


Figure 4:1. Virtue's Formal Object

As the chart shows, a virtue will have one formal object that is made up of proximate and remote objects. Take, for example, the virtue of temperance. What temperance forms, the ‘stuff’ that it perfects, is our desire for the natural pleasures which, Aquinas argues, form the greatest pull on our appetites (II-II.141.4). These natural, strongest pleasures are the proximate matter of temperance. But any pleasure must have an object—it must be a pleasure of (in) something, be caused by something. Aquinas suggests that the cause of the most natural, strongest pleasures is the tactile presence of food, drink, and sexually attractive bodies, and so these form the object of our strongest desires (Ibid.). As the object of our strongest desires, the tactile presence of food, drink, and sexually attractive bodies constitutes temperance’s remote matter. But temperance isn’t concerned with our ability to

³¹ Peter King, “Aquinas on the Passions,” *Aquinas’s Moral Theory*, eds. Scott MacDonald and Eleonore Stump (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 107.

derive strong pleasure from certain objects, nor is it concerned with actual physicality of food, drink, and sex. Rather, temperance is needed where our potential for experiencing intense pleasure is brought into actuality by the presence of food, drink, and sex. And so, temperance's one, unified, formal object is the pleasures of touch with respect to food, drink, and sex.

Consider a couple of other examples. The proximate matter of the virtue of humility—that with which it is most immediately concerned—is the passion of hope. This passion, in turn, has for its object “great things” (II-II.161.4), and so “great things” are the remote objects of humility. When we put the proximate and remote matters together, we get the formal object of humility, which is the passion of hope of attaining great things. On the other hand, the proximate matter of magnanimity is the double movement of the irascible appetite—the passions of hope and despair. These two passions have the same object, that is “great things” (II-II.161.1; 129.4. ad.2), and so great things are the remote objects of magnanimity, as well. Accordingly, the formal object of magnanimity—what magnanimity is about—is hope and despair of attaining great things.

The examples of humility and magnanimity help illustrate the notions of proximate and remote objects, but they also bring me to my next point. As I mentioned earlier, virtue's object does most of the heavy lifting when it comes to virtue individuation. In fact, there are passages in Aquinas that could easily give the impression that the virtue's object is the only factor involved in specifying (or individuating) a virtue. For example, to show that prudence is a virtue distinct from other intellectual virtues, Aquinas writes, “Since acts and habits take their species from their objects... any habit that has a corresponding special object, distinct from other objects, must needs be a special habit, and if it be a good habit, it must be a special virtue” (II-II.47.5). And writing about the distinction between the three theological

virtues, Aquinas states, “God is the object of these virtues under different aspects... and a different aspect of the object suffices for the distinction of habits” (II-II.17.6). When we look at humility and magnanimity, however, we understand that virtue’s object alone is not sufficient for virtue individuation. Both virtues perfect the irascible appetite by regulating the movement of the appetite toward great honors. Thus, these virtues are found in the same subject (irascible appetite), and are about the same object (hope for great honors). Yet, the virtues are distinct from one another. Why? Because each follows a distinct mode in regulating the passion of hope. Virtues’ mode, then, is the last piece in the puzzle of a Thomistic principle of virtue individuation. It is to this concept that I now briefly turn.

Virtues’ mode. In the most general terms, virtue’s mode is the rule of reason that the virtue imparts to its formal object, since it is conformity with the rule of reason that makes human actions good (DQV 1.13). As conformity with the rule of reason, virtue’s mode can be understood in two interrelated ways. First, the mode can be understood as a guiding standard/rule/mean. On the one hand, we can think of the mean as the “measuring stick” that we apply to the individual human actions to determine whether they are good/right/in accordance with reason. On the other hand, we can think of the mean as that which the action itself has or that which it follows when it is good. The first view of the mean is external to the action, the second is internal to it. Both ways of thinking about the mean are appropriate: a virtuous person’s actions will follow/conform to the mean as determined by reason, and we judge a person (and her actions) to be virtuous when her actions measure up against the standard/rule/mean as determined by reason. Austin points out that we should understand the mean to be not a middle point between two extremes, but “equality with

reason.”³² And the latter is determined by a set of “seven or eight circumstances of a human act (depending on how one counts) that are relevant to its moral evaluation.”³³ These circumstances include, for example, the time of the action, the manner in which it is performed, and the reason for which it is done.

Second, the mode can be understood as a *method* by which the rule/mean of reason is confirmed upon the human acts (I-II.54.2. ad.2).³⁴ So it belongs to magnanimity to “urge [our irascible appetite] on to the pursuit of great things according to right reason,” while it belongs to humility to “temper and restrain the mind, lest it tend to high things immoderately” (II-II.161.1). Thus, magnanimity’s mode is to incite, and humility’s mode is to restrain, the irascible appetite.

This brief explanation of the concept of the virtue’s mode is bound to leave some important questions unanswered. One such cluster of questions has to do with the rule of reason that is active in determining (specifying) the virtue’s mean. Where does it come from? How are we to discern it? I will set these questions aside, with an intention of revisiting them during the discussion of infused and acquired virtues. For now, I propose to start looking at ways in which Aquinas employs the concepts of virtue’s subject, virtue’s object, and virtue’s mode to individuate virtues and to sort these virtues into different categories.

³² Austin, *Aquinas on Virtue*, 119. Austin argues that “Aquinas would agree with [Rosalind] Hursthouse... that moral virtue is not by some mysterious symmetry necessarily opposed by two and only two contrary vices. What is essential for Aquinas is that a virtue causes its objective matter to be ‘equal’ but not ‘exceed’ or ‘fall short’ of the rule of reason” (Ibid.).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Fr. Austin has identified further ways in which we can understand the mode of reason. In addition to the mode being understood as the *method* and the *measure* (i.e., the guiding principle) of the virtue, Austin suggests that the mode should also be understood as the *limit* and as *proportion to the end* (Ibid., 35).

Intellectual, Moral, and Theological Virtues

There are many ways we could approach the project of mapping out the Thomistic taxonomy of virtues. Here, I will follow Aquinas's lead and start with the three basic categories, namely intellectual, moral, and theological virtues.³⁵ It is tempting to think that the main criteria for the distinction between these categories is the distinction between the powers of the soul. The presence of theological virtues, however, problematizes this would-be schema. For there is no one power of the soul that theological virtues perfect, since faith perfects the intellect, while hope and charity perfect the will.

One way to deal with theological virtues is to stop thinking of them as an independent class of virtues and to subsume them under the two-fold taxonomy of intellectual and moral virtues, instead.³⁶ Aquinas, however, rejects this approach, and

³⁵ Aquinas's preference for seeing these this grouping as basic shows in the structure of both *Prima Secundae* and *Secunda Secundae Pars*. In the so-called "Treatise on the Virtue" of the *Prima Secundae*, after discussing the nature (q. 55) and subject (q. 56) of the virtues Aquinas spends the next six articles examining distinct types of nature. These types are: intellectual virtues (qq. 57-58), moral virtues (qq. 58-61), and theological virtues (qq. 62). Likewise, the whole of *Secunda Secundae* is grouped around *theological virtues* of faith, hope, and charity, their precepts, corresponding gifts, and opposing vices (qq. 1-45), the *intellectual virtue* of prudence, its parts, precepts, the corresponding gift, and vices that oppose it (qq. 50-56), and the *moral virtues* of justice, fortitude, and temperance, their parts, precepts, corresponding gifts and opposing vices (qq. 57-170).

³⁶ In fact, in I-II.62.2, Aquinas considers this very approach to theological virtues. Here is how he formulates an objection to seeing theological virtues as distinct from intellectual and moral virtues: "It would seem that the theological virtues are not distinct from the moral and intellectual virtues. For the theological virtues, if they be in a human soul, must needs perfect it, either as to the intellective, or as to the appetitive part. Now the virtues which perfect the intellective part are called intellectual; and the virtues which perfect the appetitive part, are called moral. Therefore, the theological virtues are not distinct from the moral and intellectual virtues" (I-II.62.2. obj.1).

maintains that theological virtues form a distinctly separate class. This indicates that Aquinas has some other criteria in mind when he identifies the three major classes of virtues. These criteria are none other than these virtues' formal objects and modes. Intellectual virtues have as their *formal object* the apprehension of truth. Moral virtues have as their formal object right action in the realm of civic life, where action is broadly construed to include passions and operations of the will. Finally, theological virtues have for their formal object God himself. Because Aquinas holds knowledge to be categorically different from desire, he sees intellectual virtues as generically distinct from moral virtues. Moreover, since God is categorically different from any other object of virtue, it follows that virtues which enable us to act rightly toward God are also generically distinct from other virtues, even though they perfect the same subjects as intellectual and moral virtues.³⁷

Formal object, however, is not the only thing which sets theological, intellectual, and moral virtues apart from each other. The *modes* of these virtues differ from one another, as well (I-II.64). Moral virtues observe the rule/mean that is set for it by the intellect, where the mean is determined by reference to human nature and human final end (I-II.64.1). To put it somewhat crudely, the mean is determined by answering the question "what is good for a human person?" This rule of reason is conferred on human acts by means of the appetites being brought into ready and full obedience to reason (I-II.58.2). Intellectual virtues, on the other hand, have reality itself as their rule and measure, since intellect's perfection consists in

³⁷ Aquinas writes, "As stated above, habits are specifically distinct from one another in respect of the formal difference of their objects. Now the object of the theological virtues is God Himself, Who is the last end of all, as surpassing the knowledge of our reason. On the other hand, the object of the intellectual and moral virtues is something comprehensible to human reason. Wherefore the theological virtues are specifically distinct from the moral and intellectual virtues" (I-II.62.2). Responding to an objection, he continues: "The intellectual and moral virtues perfect man's intellect and appetite according to the capacity of human nature; the theological virtues, supernaturally" (I-II.62.2. ad.1)

being conformed to the truth, or to the way things really are (I-II.64.3). Among intellectual virtues, prudence stands out as the virtue that both observes and sets the mean/measure for other virtues. As an intellectual virtue, its rule/measure is the rightness of reason about the contingent truths. As the virtue that enables us to determine the appropriate/fitting action in a given circumstances, it sets the rule/measure for moral virtues (I-II.64.3, 58.2. ad.4).

Finally, theological virtues have God himself as their rule/measure: “our faith is ruled according to Divine truth; charity, according to His goodness; hope, according to the immensity of His omnipotence and loving kindness” (I-II.62.4). Aquinas means by this cryptic statement that the rule and measure sets the right/fitting way of response to a particular sphere of interest/object of passion or operation. The right measure of knowing and believing in God—which is what the virtue of faith enables us to do—is determined by Divine reality; the right measure of desiring and loving God by God’s goodness; and the right measure of hope in God’s ability to secure our union with Him by God’s omnipotence and loving kindness. When we consider, however, that God is the ground of all being and truth, and that His goodness, omnipotence, and loving kindness are infinite, we recognize that it is impossible to know, love, and hope in God too much. Accordingly, the mode of theological virtues differs from that of moral virtues. In moral virtues, the measure/rule of reason follows a mean between excess and deficiency. In theological virtues, the measure/rule of reason admits of no mean, because “never can we love God as much as He ought to be loved, nor believe and hope in Him as much as we should. Much less therefore can there be excess in such things. Accordingly the good of such virtues does not consist in a mean, but increases the more we approach to the summit” (I-II.64.4).

The uniqueness of theological virtue’s mode is due to the transcendent nature of these virtues’ formal object. This is especially true when we consider theological virtues’

mode-as-method. Since the formal object of these virtues (i.e., God) is utterly beyond human reach, we cannot by our own efforts impart rightness to our actions toward this formal object. It follows that we need God to act in us and for us in order for us to get things right (I-II.55.4; *DQV* 1.10). And so, God directly creates theological virtues in us—infuses, in the traditional medieval parlance. Therefore, the causal story behind theological virtues—that is, how it is that the right measure/rule comes to be imparted to the actions within the domain of theological virtues—is going to be radically different from the causal story behind the intellectual and moral virtues.

The example of theological virtues allows us to see how the combination of the virtues' formal objects and of their modes enables us to distinguish between the three classes of virtues. Still, at this point the taxonomy of virtues remains incomplete. This is because theological virtues are not the only ones that are infused directly by God and that have Him as the object. There is another class of infused virtues—the class of infused moral virtues.

Acquired and Infused Virtues

What are the infused moral virtues? How are they different from theological and acquired virtues? And why do we need these infused moral virtues, anyway?³⁸ Since the first two questions are interrelated, let us begin by examining them together. As mentioned above, infused moral virtues are virtues that are created in us by God to “enable us carry out

³⁸ Robert C. Roberts has pointed out to me that the term “acquired” might be misleading, since, strictly speaking, infused virtues are also acquired by us in the same way that a gift is acquired by its recipient. What distinguishes one class of virtues from the other is the mode of acquisition, namely acquisition by infusion and acquisition by habituation. Therefore, it might be more felicitous to call the latter kind of virtues “habituated moral virtues.” I fully concede the point. However, for the sake of continuity in scholarly discussion, I have decided to retain the traditional designation of the habituated moral virtues as acquired.

activities that are ordered towards the end (*finem*) of eternal life (*DQV* 1.10).” Unlike theological virtues, which have no analogues in either moral or intellectual virtues, infused moral virtues at first appear to be duplicates of the ordinary moral virtues. There are infused temperance, fortitude, justice, and prudence, along with these virtues’ subjective and potential parts, just as there are acquired temperance, fortitude, etc. Both kinds of virtue seem to be doing the same thing: perfect the same subject in the same way in respect of the same formal object. This appearance, however, is deceiving.

Like the acquired moral virtues, infused moral virtues perfect the appetites. But instead of bringing these into obedience with reason-formed-by-wisdom-and-prudence, infused virtues bring the appetites into obedience with reason-formed-by-faith and *the will formed by charity*. Moreover, the rule/measure which is observed by the infused virtues is also different from that of the acquired virtues. The acquired virtues’ mode is derived by considering the question of what is good/fitting for attaining natural human happiness, while the infused virtues’ by considering the question of what is good/fitting for attaining beatitude. The former task is accomplished by practical reason that is guided by acquired prudence, but when it comes to setting the measure/rule for infused virtues, acquired prudence lacks the necessary resources. This is because acquired prudence is concerned with “behaving well in respect to human affairs,” while infused virtues are concerned with “behaving well in respect of their being fellow-citizens with the saints and of household of God” (Ibid.). Accordingly, a new source of measure/rule is needed for infused virtues, and this source is supplied by the divine law (I-II.63.4).

But why, one might ask, do we need to posit separate infused moral virtues? Granted, a virtuous Christian will be guided by a different set of principles and considerations, and will have a different ultimate end, than a virtuous pagan. But can’t this

difference be explained by the perfecting effects of charity on the *acquired* moral virtues?

Almost half a century after Aquinas's death, John Duns Scotus asked these very questions. Scotus concludes that there are only three types of virtue—theological, acquired moral, and acquired intellectual virtues, and that theological virtues, along with the four acquired cardinal virtues, are fully sufficient for perfecting a human person.³⁹ Even though Aquinas clearly cannot have Scotus in mind, he anticipates this objection. He offers two arguments in defense of the necessity of the infused moral virtues—an argument from perfection of an activity, and an argument from proportionality. Jared Brandt notes that both arguments depend on the scholastic maxim that Aquinas states in I-II.65.3: “God operates no less perfectly in the works of grace than in the works of nature.”⁴⁰ The argument from proportionality states that

Effects must needs be proportionate to their causes and principles. Now all virtues, intellectual and moral, that are acquired by our actions, arise from certain natural principles pre-existing in us, ... instead of which natural principles, God bestows on us the theological virtues, whereby we are directed to a supernatural end... Wherefore we need to receive from God other habits corresponding, in due proportion, to the theological virtues, which habits are to the theological virtues, what the moral and intellectual virtues are to the natural principles of virtue (I-II. 63.3).

Since “God operates no less perfectly in the works of grace than in the works of nature,” from observation that our human nature is such that certain principles of virtue give rise in us to acquired virtues, we can infer that our state of grace would have similar design. We know that by giving us theological virtues, God gives us a new set of principles that direct us

³⁹ Bonnie Kent points out that in his argument Scotus invokes a principle known as “Scotus’ principle” in the fourteenth century, but which is better known as “Okham’s razor” (“Rethinking Moral Dispositions: Scotus on the Virtues” in *Cambridge Companion to Scotus*, ed. Thomas Williams (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 354).

⁴⁰ Brandt, “Growth in Infused Virtue in the Work of Thomas Aquinas,” 101.

to our supernatural end. Accordingly, we should expect that this new set of super-natural principles would give rise to a new set of super-natural virtues. Moreover, because theological virtues correspond to the natural principles of virtue, we should expect that the new set of super-natural virtues would correspond to the acquired virtues, as well. And these are the infused moral virtues.

The argument from the perfection of an activity begins with the explicit statement that “God operates no less perfectly in the works of grace than in the works of nature.”

Aquinas then proceeds to argue that,

In the works of nature, we find that whenever a thing contains a principle of certain works, it has also whatever is necessary for their execution: thus animals are provided with organs whereby to perform the actions that their souls empower them to do. Now it is evident that charity, inasmuch as it directs man to his last end, is the principle of all the good works that are referable to his last end. Wherefore all the moral virtues must needs be infused together with charity, since it is through them that man performs each different kind of good work (I-II.65.3).

Since we observe that, in the natural order, whenever a creature has a principle of certain works, it has whatever is necessary for their execution, we conclude that if we find in ourselves a principle of certain works, we would also have whatever is necessary for their execution. Charity is a principle of all the good works that are aimed at our super-natural end. Therefore, since virtues are necessary for the performance of good works, we should have virtues that enable us to perform good works aimed at our super-natural end. And since the acquired moral virtues cannot give rise to works that are aimed at beatitude, we must conclude that other, super-natural, virtues are given to us along with charity.

In defense of the last premise of this argument, and almost anticipating Scotus’s objection, Aquinas invokes the same analogy of the craftsman and his tool that he used to demonstrate the necessity of virtues that perfect sense appetites:

In order that the act of a lower power be perfect, not only must there be perfection in the higher, but also in the lower power: for *if the principal agent were well disposed, perfect action would not follow, if the instrument also were not well disposed*. Consequently, in order that man work well in things referred to the end, he needs not only a virtue disposing him well to the end, but also those virtues which dispose him well to whatever is referred to the end: for the virtue which regards the end is the chief and moving principle in respect of those things that are referred to the end. Therefore it is necessary to have the moral virtues together with charity (I-II.65.3. ad.1, emphasis mine).⁴¹

Because virtues are the forms that perfect our powers of the soul for particular kinds of activity in accordance with nature, it is not sufficient for us to be changed in our ultimate orientation through charity. For our actions to be perfect, *all* the principles and forms of our action must be perfect, as well. And so, along with charity, God supplies a new set of principles and forms of our actions, which is a new set of infused moral virtues.

Since my concern here is not so much with the historical debate between Aquinas and Scotus, as with reconstruction of Aquinas's understanding of the role of the infused virtues in the overall hierarchy of habitus, I will omit discussion of Scotus's account of the infused and the acquired virtues.⁴² I now move to the following question: Since we are rightly oriented to God by infused virtues alone, it follows that only infused virtues orient us toward our proper end, and so they alone can be considered truly perfect virtues. But what

⁴¹ Compare this passage with the argument in I-II.56.4: "Because an act, which proceeds from one power according as it is moved by another power, cannot be perfect, unless both powers be well disposed to the act: for instance, *the act of a craftsman cannot be successful unless both the craftsman and his instrument be well disposed to act*" (emphasis mine)

⁴² See Bonnie Kent, "Rethinking Moral Dispositions: Scotus on the Virtues" for an excellent overview of Scotus's position. For a survey of responses to Scotus offered by the later Thomists, see Brandt, "Growth in Infused Virtue in the Work of Thomas Aquinas," 107-10. Brandt identifies and critically evaluates two common responses before offering a novel and promising response of his own.

are we to make of the acquired virtues? Do we need to admit that acquired virtues are not real, or true, virtues? Not surprisingly, the answer to this question must be nuanced.

Perfect and Imperfect Virtues

Aquinas recognizes two ways in which a virtue can be said to be imperfect. First, he distinguishes virtue *simpliciter* from virtue *secundum quid* (virtue in a manner of speaking) based on each habitus' nature. Virtues *simpliciter* are good operative habitus. They form their subjects in ways that both *enable* them to operate well and *make* them operate well. Virtues *secundum quid*, however, merely *enable* their subjects to operate well, leaving the subjects underdetermined about whether they will actually operate well. Since these latter habitus come short of the full quality of virtue *simpliciter*, the name “virtue” is applied to them only in a manner of speaking (I-II.61.1).

This distinction lies at the root of the division between moral and (most) intellectual virtues. It is, however, not going to be helpful for our present purposes of deciphering the status of the acquired moral virtues, since the acquired moral virtues are virtues *simpliciter*—they not only confer an ability, but make their subjects operate well. The other way of identifying the various degrees of perfection in virtues is more promising. It is based on whether and to what extent these virtues are connected with other virtues through prudence and/or charity (I-II.65.1-2; *DQV* 5.2). Application of these criteria yields three levels of perfection:

(i) Virtues that lack connection with other virtues either through prudence or through charity are *altogether imperfect, or wholly imperfect, virtues*. Two kinds of dispositions belong to this category. First, some dispositions are localized, so to speak, to a particular task or a particular sphere of life—something that Rachana Kamtekar might call stable narrow

dispositions.⁴³ Aquinas argues that these lack the quality of virtue because “the good which [they take] for an end, is not the common end of all human life, but of some particular affair; thus when a man devises fitting ways of conducting business or of sailing a ship, he is called a prudent businessman, or a prudent sailor” (II-II.47.13).

Second, some good natural dispositions have been acted upon enough to form a stable part of the person’s character. These dispositions lack the qualities of virtue if (when?) the person has been acting upon them unreflectively. So, for example, one might often give to charity because one simply enjoys being beneficent and generous, without giving much thought to whether being generous in this way, toward these people/projects, under these circumstances, etc. is the fitting/good thing to do. In this case, a person’s natural dispositions might harden into stable character traits, but these traits would have no support from prudence and other virtues, and so would not be reliable in producing good actions. An example of someone with such dispositions is John Jarndyce of Dickens’s *Bleak House*. Unquestionably kind, generous, and beneficent, he is revered and praised for his heart of gold. Still, the reader comes to question the prudence (and, ultimately, the goodness) of some of Jarndyce’s key charitable projects. He consistently refuses to see through the leech-like character of Skimpole, and unfailingly supports Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle in their appalling works of “philanthropy.” It is Jarndyce’s support that enables these three to inflict grave, and even deadly, harm on those so unfortunate as to fall into their sphere of influence.⁴⁴ Thus, Jarndyce’s sunny and generous disposition, developed apart from

⁴³ Rachana Kamtekar, “Becoming Good: Narrow Dispositions and the Stability of Virtue.”

⁴⁴ Harold Skimpole, Mrs. Jellyby, and Mrs. Pardiggle are characters in Dickens’s *Bleak House*. Naturally charming, and professing to be “child-like” and ignorant of the ways of the society, Skimpole leeches money from anyone he comes in contact with. He plays a sinister

prudence, illustrates Aquinas's contention that "Someone can... misuse this sort of inclination even in a harmful way, if one uses it without discernment, just as a horse that is blind bangs into things harder the faster it runs. ... That is why such inclinations, when they lack practical wisdom, do not possess the character of virtues in a perfect way" (*DQV* 5.2).

Notice that, insofar as stable narrow dispositions and natural dispositions are directed toward a genuine human good, they do have something in common with full virtue. In principle, it is good for the person to be kind, generous, and obedient to authority. And, in principle, it is good for a person to be prudent, or courageous, or just, in a particular sphere of life. However, these dispositions lack the full character of virtue because they do not, and cannot, give rise to good acts reliably. Natural dispositions that have been cultivated in an unreflective way, apart from considerations of prudence, cannot reliably produce good acts because they lack the mode of reason. There is nothing, besides personal inclinations, that could serve as a guide and a measure of what action is fitting in each particular case. And personal inclinations, unschooled by prudence, don't prove reliable guides. The narrowly developed dispositions cannot reliably give rise to good acts outside of their respective narrow spheres either, since they also lack the mode of reason. This is because a person with such dispositions learns to relate her activity in navigation, business, etc. to the end/goal of that activity (i.e., to the safe sailing of the ship, or to successful growth of

role in at least two tragic storylines of the novel – that of Jo and of Richard Carstone – and causes at least some pain to most with whom he comes in contact.

Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle each carry out their "philanthropy" in a way that is hurtful (and, in case of Mrs. Jellyby, even deadly) to the would-be recipients of their "good works." Not only the philanthropical work of these ladies is appalling, but the way their respective families suffer because of each lady's dedication to her work is appalling, as well.

business), but does not relate this activity to her final end.⁴⁵ Therefore, Aquinas suggests, we may call these dispositions “virtues” as long as we remember that the term applies only in an analogous, secondary sense.⁴⁶

(ii) The *altogether perfect, fully perfect*, or virtue *simpliciter* is “a habit that inclines us to do a good deed well” (II-II.65.1). As such, it must be connected with other virtues through prudence and through charity. Prudence is needed, because we cannot reliably do good deeds *well* without it. And charity is needed because it is the only virtue that can orient us toward our ultimate (supernatural) end. Without charity and the rest of the infused virtues that accompany it, we cannot do *good* deeds—ones that are “in proportion to a supernatural last end” (II-II.65.2). And since only the infused virtues are connected through charity, it follows that only “the infused virtues are perfect, and deserve to be called virtues simply: since they direct man well to the ultimate end” (Ibid.)

(iii) Finally, there are virtues that are not connected through charity, but are connected through prudence. These are the kinds of virtues that Aristotle writes about—ones that are acquired by habituation by someone who doesn’t have charity—the virtues of a non-Christian. Some heavyweight theological authorities, like Augustine, have doubted the

⁴⁵ Redrick “Red” Schuhart – a character in Arkady and Boris Strugatsky novel, *Roadside Picnic* – illustrates this Thomistic notion well. An extremely shrewd and very patient *stalker* (i.e., a treasure hunter of sorts), he lacks both self-control and prudence in personal life. Moreover, in a moment of an existential crisis, Redrick realizes that his customary “prudent” way of thinking is not only useless, but puts him at a disadvantage for figuring out his true purpose in life and answering the question of what would make him and other people happy. Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, *Roadside Picnic*, trans. Olena Bormashenko (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2012).

⁴⁶ Robert Roberts has pointed out that there might be another reason for the natural dispositions’ failure to reliably produce good actions, namely that the reason for which the actions are performed are deficient. If an action derives its identity at least partially from the reason for which it is performed, the acts that result from natural dispositions (as opposed to virtuous) will not reliably have the right identity.

status of such dispositions, suspecting that these might be nothing but splendid vices.⁴⁷ And there are good reasons for taking this position: if virtue is supposed to incline us to do good deeds well, and if the only way for us to be inclined to a true good is by the virtue of charity, then it follows that, without charity, we are not inclined to a true good, and so whatever dispositions we have cannot be virtues.

Aquinas, however, has another take on the so-called pagan virtues. He asserts that “it is possible by means of human works to acquire moral virtues, in so far as they produce good works that are directed to an end not surpassing the natural power of man: and when they are acquired thus, they can be without charity, even as they were in many of the Gentiles” (I-II.65.2). Aquinas’s claim, therefore, is that the acquired moral virtues are “perfect in one way, in relation to human good, but not unqualifiedly perfect” (*DQV* 5.2). To understand how Aquinas can make this claim, we need to look at the distinction between ultimate and proximate ends and between ultimate and proximate goods.

The ultimate / proximate ends and goods distinction is the basis for the third way of thinking about the levels of perfection in virtue. It is based on the way virtues orient their subjects. The end/good is *ultimate* if it is pursued for its own sake. A *proximate* end/good, however, is something that is pursued for its own sake but which can also be related to the

⁴⁷ Augustine’s exact position on the possibility of “pagan virtue” is a matter of scholarly controversy. While everyone agrees that Augustine thought that a pagan could never acquire true virtue, there is no consensus about the *extent* of Augustine’s negative attitude toward pagan virtue. Terence Irwin, for example, argues that Augustine regards them to be *more* than splendid vices. Irwin sees Augustine’s position to be similar to Aquinas’s conception of imperfect virtue (“Splendid Vices? Augustine For and Against Pagan Virtues,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 8 (1999): 105-127). Jennifer Herdt, on the other hand, argues that for Augustine, “even the best pagan virtue thus remains... an instance of *superbia*, pride, ordering all things to self” (*Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of Splendid Vices* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p.50).

ultimate end/good. For example, a person who grew up in an abusive home might set the goal of being a good parent and breaking the cycle of domestic violence as his ultimate goal in life. Upon reflection, this person might realize that to succeed, he will need to be surrounded by supportive community, and that he will need professional psychological help. Accordingly, he becomes very intentional about forming and maintaining meaningful and true friendships and engages in a rigorous process of self-examination. On the one hand, every effort that this person makes is ultimately driven by his ultimate good. And yet, his friendships and his mental health are not just instrumental goods that are pursued *merely* for the sake of being a good parent. No, they are true goods, worthy of pursuit for their own sake. However, these true goods can be related to, or subordinated to, the good of excellent parenting (just as they could potentially be subordinated to other goods). For our person who is determined to break the cycle of domestic violence, friendship and mental health are proximate goods.

How does this distinction between ultimate and proximate goods help in ascertaining the status of the acquired virtues? It helps by introducing the concept of “true, but not ultimate/perfect” into the conversation. Aquinas writes,

Virtue is ordered to the good, as stated above. Now the good is chiefly an end, for things directed to the end are not said to be good except in relation to the end. Accordingly, just as the end is twofold, the last end, and the proximate end, so also, is good twofold, one, the ultimate and universal good, the other proximate and particular. The *ultimate and principal good* of man is the enjoyment of God, according to Ps. 72:28: “It is good for me to adhere to God,” and to this good man is ordered by charity. *Man's secondary and, as it were, particular good* may be twofold: one is truly good, because, considered in itself, it can be directed to the principal good, which is the last end; while the other is good apparently and not truly, because it leads us away from the final good. ... If we take virtue as being ordered to some particular end, then we speak of virtue being where there is no charity, in so far as it is directed to some particular good. ... *[And if] this particular good be a true good, for instance the welfare of the state, or the like, it will indeed be a true virtue, imperfect, however, unless it be referred to the final and perfect good* (II-II.23.7, emphasis mine).

Since habitus are virtues insofar as they orient us toward our good, and since only theological virtues and infused moral virtues are directed toward the ultimate human good, only these virtues are true virtues absolutely speaking. This much is agreed upon by most of the theologians. Aquinas now argues that because proximate ends that can be related/oriented to the ultimate end are genuinely *good* ends, virtues that orient us toward such proximate ends are *true* virtues, even though they are not unqualifiedly perfect. And this is what the acquired moral virtues orient us toward—toward genuine, although not perfect, human goods. These are the goods of dealing justly with fellow humans, being able to enjoy the pleasures of food, drink, and sex in a proper and distinctly human way, being able to do what reason deems to be right even in the presence of the greatest fear, etc. Accordingly, the acquired moral virtues are imperfect, but true virtues.

Notice, however, that when it comes to proximate ends, Aquinas recognizes two possibilities. One is that the end is *pursued as* good and *is* genuinely good. The other, is that the end that is pursued is only an *apparent* good, but is actually an evil (*malo*). Pursuit of such an apparent good would harm us, since it would move us further away from our final end. It follows, then, that habitus directed to such apparent goods are not virtues at all, but are counterfeit virtues. On this point, Aquinas happily sides with Augustine, quoting the latter's statement, "the prudence of the miser, whereby he devises various roads to gain, is no true virtue; nor the miser's justice, whereby he scorns the property of another through fear of severe punishment; nor the miser's temperance, whereby he curbs his desire for expensive pleasures; nor the miser's fortitude, whereby as Horace, says, 'he braves the sea, he crosses mountains, he goes through fire, in order to avoid poverty'" (II-II.23.7).

Conclusion

So far, I have talked about differences between intellectual, moral, and theological virtues; between acquired and infused virtues; and between fully perfect, fully imperfect, and true, but imperfect, virtues. We can put the relationships among these categories in the following way:

	Acquired			Infused
	Counterfeit	Altogether Imperfect (virtue in analogous sense, or <i>secundum quid</i>)	True but Imperfect	Altogether Perfect (virtue <i>simpliciter</i>)
Intellectual	1	2	3	4
Moral	5	6	7	8
Theological	9	10	11	12

Figure 4:2. Taxonomy of virtues

Shaded boxes represent impossible states of affairs. No theological virtue could be acquired, neither can it be counterfeit, virtue in a secondary sense, or true but imperfect virtue.

Theological virtues can only be, and are, altogether perfect (virtue *simpliciter*). Non-shaded boxes, on the other hand, represent real possibilities. A moral virtue can be either acquired or infused; if it is infused, it will be a perfect virtue, if it is acquired, it can be either counterfeit, virtue by analogy, or true but imperfect. Finally, boxes 3 and 4 are unique, since the only virtue that can fit in it is prudence.

There is, however, a glaring hole in this taxonomy—one that would be noticed by any person who is even remotely acquainted with Aquinas on the virtues. This glaring

omission is the category of cardinal virtues. Where, on the schema that I have so far laid out, do they fit? I have put off looking at cardinal virtues until now, because we need to have had established all the categories listed above in order to be able to place cardinal virtues within the Thomistic taxonomy. Prudence, being an intellectual virtue, can appear in boxes 1-4, but not in any of the other boxes. As noted above, it is unique in being the only virtue in boxes 3 and 4. That is, prudence is the only intellectual virtue that can be infused, and it is the only acquired intellectual virtue that can attain the status of true by imperfect virtue. This is because it is the only intellectual virtue that not only confers aptness on the intellect, but also reliably gives rise to good actions. Courage, temperance, and justice, being moral virtues, can appear in boxes 5-7, but not in any of the others. Consider, for example, courage. Courage can be either acquired or infused. If it is infused, it is altogether perfect. If it is acquired, it could be counterfeit, like the courage of a murderer.⁴⁸ Or it could be an altogether imperfect virtue—one that is not unified through prudence with other virtues, like the courage of a police officer who is willing to face death in the line of duty, but who also harbors racist prejudices. Or it could be a true but imperfect virtue, the courage of someone whose courage is united with all the other virtues through prudence, like the courage of Mahatma Ghandi or Socrates.

Seeing how the virtue categories are identified by reference to the virtues' formal object, virtue's mode, and virtues' subject, gives us some inkling of the way Aquinas employs these concepts to differentiate between individual virtues. Looking at cardinal virtues,

⁴⁸ Aquinas's claim that in a vicious person a would-be virtue is actually a counterfeit virtue invites a question of how such habitus should be characterized. It's not a virtue, nor is it a virtue *secundum quid*, but what is it? At the moment, I cannot offer a definitive answer to this question – this topic needs to be further researched. One option would be to see a counterfeit virtue as a vice, since, on the whole, it makes its possessor worse. Still, this option is very counterintuitive, and so accepting it would come at a cost.

however, brings the Thomistic principle of individual into real focus, and I propose to do just that in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Thomistic Principle of Virtue Individuation

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I began building on the foundation established in Chapter Three, which laid out the relevant Thomistic principles of human moral psychology and of habitus. Chapter Four looked more closely at human virtue, examining its nature, its subject, its object, and its mode. Furthermore, it mapped out the conceptual space—the taxonomy of virtues—that individual virtues may inhabit. These exercises establish a conceptual apparatus for pursuing the main goal of this investigation, which is to explicate the principle of virtue individuation operative in Aquinas’s moral philosophy—the task which I pursue in this chapter. First, I show how the examination of cardinal virtues yields the first formulation of the Thomistic principle of virtue individuation. I then showcase the principle’s role within the Thomistic account by applying it to the virtues of fortitude and magnificence, as well as to the virtues of acquired and infused temperance. This discussion will allow us to refine the principle. Finally, I bring the Thomistic principle of individuation to bear on a question in contemporary virtue ethics, which is put forward by Ryan West. West challenges the received wisdom of identifying meekness, or good temper, as a unique virtue that deals with excessive anger. I suggest that thinking alongside Aquinas helps us clarify the question posed by West and offers a solution that preserves the best of West’s insights.

The Three-Pronged Principle of Virtue Individuation

Cardinal Virtues

In chapter four, we saw that virtue's subject, object, and mode play a determinative role when it comes to identifying virtue categories. Now, I propose that we look at the way the combination of these concepts helps us identify individual virtues. Let us begin with cardinal virtues, which are individuated based on three criteria. Each virtue perfects a distinct, single subject; each virtue has a distinct formal object; and each virtue perfects its subject in a distinct mode.

Consider virtue's subject. Aquinas reminds us again and again that a perfect action requires that not only the performer be perfect, but the instrument as well. For Aquinas, this means that virtue involves more than knowledge of what is appropriate in a given situation and more than willingness to act on that knowledge. All of the soul's powers that are involved in the action must be perfected—not only reason and will. And perfection of a power involves its formation in such a way that it can perform well in accordance with the rule of reason. Since every power of the soul has its own proper formal object, as well as its own proper mode of operation, each power's perfection will look different. This means that, contrary to Socrates, there exist *at least* four distinct virtues, perfecting four rational powers of the soul. This also means that the difference between these four virtues amounts to more than a distinction in their subject. The difference will extend to the virtues' modes (the way each virtue forms its power), and to the virtues' formal objects.

The intellect, whose proper object is the truth about theoretical matters and about things to be done, is perfected by the virtue of prudence. This is because prudence is the only intellectual virtue that results not only in a capacity to act well, but in actual good actions (I-II.61.1; II-II.47.4). Formed by prudence, the intellect deliberates in such a way that

its acts of deliberation are not deficient in any way, nor are they inappropriately influenced by the passions. In other words, prudence makes the very act of reason good—makes it hit the right rule in any action or passion.

The rest of the cardinal virtues, on the other hand, impart the rule of reason to the powers of the soul that are rational not essentially, but by participation. These are moral virtues, and their role is to perfect the appetites by “directing [them] to good as defined by reason,” where this good is “that which is moderated or directed by reason” (I-II.59.4). The intellectual appetite, or will, is not a subject of passions, but serves as the principle of human action. Accordingly, the virtue that perfects it—justice—is about our actions toward others and our use of things whenever such use concerns others (II-II.58.8). Justice, then, is a unique virtue that perfects the will in directing it to observe the rule of reason in our interactions with other people. The concupiscible power, which tends to be drawn away from the rule of reason by all kinds of desires for lesser goods, is the subject of temperance. This virtue moderates our desire for sex, food, and drink, since these objects exercise the strongest pull on our appetites.¹ Finally, fortitude perfects the irascible power, which is involved in pursuing a good that is perceived to be difficult to obtain. Fortitude bolsters and rouses the irascible appetite as it pursues the good of reason in face of the strongest fear of

¹ Aquinas writes, “As stated above [Article 3], temperance is about desires and pleasures in the same way as fortitude is about fear and daring. Now fortitude is about fear and daring with respect to the greatest evils whereby nature itself is dissolved; and such are dangers of death. Wherefore in like manner *temperance must needs be about desires for the greatest pleasures. And since pleasure results from a natural operation, it is so much the greater according as it results from a more natural operation. Now to animals the most natural operations are those which preserve the nature of the individual by means of meat and drink, and the nature of the species by the union of the sexes. Hence temperance is properly about pleasures of meat and drink and sexual pleasures. Now these pleasures result from the sense of touch. Wherefore it follows that temperance is about pleasures of touch*” (II-II.141.4, emphasis added).

all—the fear of death. Thus, the four cardinal virtues are distinguished from one another in being seated in four different faculties of the soul — the intellect, the will, the concupiscible appetite, and the irascible appetite.

I will examine temperance and fortitude in greater detail later. But before we move on to see how the three-pronged approach to virtue individuation works for other virtues, we need to pause and note a peculiarity about the cardinal virtues' formal object. Just now, I said that it is the good as determined by the rule of reason, considered in itself or as imparted to actions and passions. But in Chapter Four I said that the formal object of justice is the good of reason in dealing with other people; the formal object of temperance is pleasure of touch in matters of food, drink, and sex; and the formal object of fortitude—the fear of death. Which account is correct?

Both accounts are right in their own way. Aquinas accepts Gregory the Great's claim that each single cardinal virtue involves the other three, that "there is no true prudence, unless it be just, temperate and brave; no perfect temperance, that is not brave, just and prudent; no sound fortitude, that is not prudent, temperate and just; no real justice, without prudence, fortitude and temperance" (I-II.61.4. ob.1, ad.1). He expands Gregory's claim by arguing that *any* virtue, or virtuous act, requires the four qualities exemplified in the four cardinal virtues. These qualities are firmness of the soul, which is characteristic of fortitude; moderation of passions and actions, which is characteristic of temperance; "rectitude of the mind, whereby a man does what he ought in any matters," which belongs to justice; and "rectitude of discretion" in any action or matter, which is supplied by prudence (I-II.61.4). Each of these qualities aims either at establishing the rule of reason in deliberation (prudence) or at imparting the good of reason to actions and operations (justice, fortitude, temperance).

In addition to these *general* conditions of every virtuous act, Aquinas identifies *specific* virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. He defends his decision by pointing out that not only do these form distinct powers of the soul (i.e., distinct *subjects*), but that they each have a distinctive domain (i.e., *formal objects*) and perfect their subject according to their own particular *modes* (I-II.61.4; II-II.47.5; 58.7; 123.2; 141.2). Thus, Aquinas's discussion of cardinal virtues enables us to formulate his principle of virtue individuation:

The Principle: We should identify a virtue as specifically distinct *iff* it perfects a single power of the soul, has a distinct formal object, and a distinct mode.

But, some might object, cardinal virtues are easy to individuate. How will this principle fare in more marginal cases? How will it address Daniel Russell's worry that a wrong principle of virtue individuation might lead to infinite proliferation of virtues? I propose that we look at the cases of magnificence and of fortitude to see the principle in action.

Magnificence and Fortitude: The Principle in Action

Aquinas follows Aristotle in counting magnificence as an independent virtue for the following reasons. First, it has a proper subject—magnificence perfects the *irascible appetite* (II-II.134.4). Second, magnificence has a distinct formal object—the difficulty of giving away large sums of money in a way that achieves a great public good (II-II.129.2, 134.3). Finally, magnificence's *mode* consists in forming the irascible appetite in such a way that it perseveres in something “arduous and difficult,” namely, accomplishing great work that involves large expenditure (II-II.134.2, 3).

For our purposes, magnificence serves as a good test subject, because some recent studies in economics, cited by Daniel Kahneman, cast doubt on the notion that it will always be harder for a person to part with a large amount of money than with a small or moderate amount of money. In fact, these studies suggest that someone with \$2 million in the bank

might have a much easier time parting with \$200,000 than someone whose monthly income is \$2000 would have parting with \$20.² Accordingly, most contemporary moral philosophers would not distinguish magnificence from liberality.

Unaware of this research, Aquinas does seem to think that the status of magnificence as an independent virtue depends partly on whether right orientation to a large sum of money is sufficiently different from right orientation to a moderate amount of money. And so, we are faced with two distinct problems. First, can the status of magnificence as an independent virtue be maintained in light of Kahneman's claims? This problem is external to Aquinas's account, since it does not threaten Aquinas's consistency. If it turns out that magnificence cannot be salvaged as a virtue because its formal object is not sufficiently distinct from that of liberality, then our rejection of magnificence's special status would only be in keeping with Aquinas's principle of virtue individuation. I will delay addressing this problem until later.

The second problem is more important, because it is internal to Aquinas's account. Even if we ignore Kahneman and grant Aquinas the distinction between orientation to large and moderate amounts of money, isn't Aquinas acting *ad hoc* in effectively claiming that the distinction holds for virtues that regulate our relationship to money or honor, but not for other virtues that regulate other aspects of our sensitive appetites? For example, he doesn't distinguish fortitude on the battlefield from fortitude in situations where fear for one's life is not immediately present. Instead, Aquinas argues that fortitude is most properly concerned with fear of death in a battle, where the notion of "battle" can be extended to any individual virtuous action that is performed under the direct threat of death (II-II.123.5). He states that

² Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 269-88.

all other manifestations of fortitude (e.g., taking care of a neighbor who is sick with smallpox) depend on fortitude in the primary sense. This way of understanding fortitude seems very different from the way he treats liberality. It seems that, to be consistent, Aquinas should distinguish two separate virtues under the general heading of fortitude—one that deals with the fear of death on the battlefield, and another that deals with lesser kinds of fear.

However, were Aquinas to create two distinct kinds of fortitude, why should he stop there? If fortitude can be split into two different virtues based on the degree and kind of fear that it needs to overcome, why not distinguish three, four, five, etc. kinds of fortitude? We could have fortitude that deals with fear of death on the battlefield, fortitude that deals with irrational phobias, fortitude that deals with fear of embarrassment, etc. Moreover, a similar question could be asked about liberality. Why stop at the distinction between liberality and magnificence and not split liberality into additional distinct virtues? Why not distinguish liberality in times of financial hardship from liberality in times of plenty, liberality with friends and family from liberality toward strangers, etc.?

Is there anything in Aquinas' principle that would prevent such a seemingly endless proliferation of virtues? Perhaps Aquinas should bite the bullet and say that magnificence is not distinct from liberality, but is its special application. This parsimonious approach would be sufficient to prevent the problem of virtue proliferation. However, it does seem at least intuitively plausible that someone like Bill Gates stands in a different relationship to money than my generous college friend.³ And Aquinas definitely thinks that the difference between such types of people is real. Moreover, if, while holding this conviction, he forcibly fuses two

³ I thank Brandon Dahm for pointing this out to me.

potentially distinct virtues for the sake of tidying up a theory, then his account is going to be more suspect than ever.

What are we to make of this conundrum? I suggest that we take a closer look at the difference between liberality and magnificence. If we understand why these two are counted as separate virtues, we will be in a better position to see why fortitude is left alone, as well as why liberality is not further divided. In thinking about these matters, I venture beyond Aquinas's stated account, but I believe that the result is something that Aquinas could agree with.

At first glance, magnificence and liberality appear to be very similar. Both are concerned with the same external good (i.e., money), and both aim to dispose their subject rightly toward this good. Both are needed precisely because even a small amount of money can generate a pull on our desires that might divert the appetite from its proper good. However, Aquinas locates liberality in the concupiscible power, but places magnificence in the irascible power. Why? Aquinas argues that liberality is concerned with the love/desire of money in general, which is the passion of the concupiscible appetite (II-II.134.4. ad 1). Magnificence, on the other hand, is not so much concerned with the *love* of money as with the *difficulty* of giving large sums of money *in a manner that results in great public good*. Since magnificent acts aim at accomplishing some great work, where "great work" is understood as some public service and/or good, such acts will typically require a degree of perseverance and endurance (II-II.134.3. ad.3). This endurance on the part of the magnificent person is not something that will be called for in actions that are typically characteristic of liberality. Aquinas states that "magnificence regards expenditure in reference to hope, by attaining to difficulty not simply . . . but in a determinate matter" (II-II.134.4. ad 1). Therefore, according

to Aquinas, magnificence must engage and perfect the irascible powers of the soul in order to attain its object.

Because of the emphasis on endurance in overcoming obstacles, magnificence is counted as a species of fortitude. Liberality, on the other hand, is regarded as a species of justice. Why? Aquinas maintains that a liberal person is not only free from the excessive love of money but also sees his fellow humans in such a light as to be attentive to their needs. Therefore, a liberal person recognizes that it is fitting for her to assist even strangers when they are in need. Even though, strictly speaking, she is not obligated to help others in the same way that she is obligated to pay her debts, a liberal person nevertheless considers it her moral duty to perform this assistance when it is appropriate (II-II.117.5. ad.1). Accordingly, Aquinas claims, liberality belongs to the genus of justice.

The most illuminating comment about the nature of magnificence, however, is found in an almost throw-away line in II-II.134.3. ad.3. Here, responding to an objection that magnificence cannot be a virtue because it seems odd that our ability to possess virtue depends on our financial well-being, Aquinas acknowledges that “greatness” is a relative term. Therefore, he allows that, in the right circumstances, a poor person can be magnificent when she accomplishes something that is “great by comparison to some particular work, which, little in itself, can nevertheless be done magnificently in proportion to its genus” (II-II.134.3. ad.3). This concession is extremely significant, for it indicates (and in this I depart from Aquinas’s explicit argument) that magnificence is really not about great expenditure, but about doing great public good which is *typically*, but not necessarily, accompanied by great expenditure. The Gospel of Mark provides us with an example of such magnificent act:

While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this

ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her. But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her” (Mark 14: 3-9, NRSV).

In this story, a nameless woman anoints Jesus’s head with wonderful perfume. Although this is a “very costly” action, it pales in comparison with the kind of expenses that, for example, Herod incurred in building the Second Temple in Jerusalem. The woman is ridiculed and derided by those present, because the bystanders can envision many other, better ways to spend the money. Still, Jesus commends her action as outstanding. Somehow, she has managed to accomplish something that no other person could—she performed a great action aimed at a great public good, in the face of considerable opposition. It took perseverance, courage, and a visionary ability to see the best possible way to use the money. If she were to listen to the bystanders and to give the money to the poor, her action would be a generous one. What she actually did was magnificent. If this reading of Aquinas’s account of magnificence is correct, then the worries regarding the empirical research that Kahneman alludes to become irrelevant. Magnificence turns out to be not about the ease of parting with money per se, but about perseverance in parting with money in the service of some great public good.

So, in the end, Aquinas proposes that, despite their similarities, magnificence and liberality differ from each other in a way that prevents them from being united even for the sake of theoretical parsimony. They perfect different powers of the soul, and their formal object is different enough for each to be classified as a part of a different cardinal virtue. When it comes to fortitude, these distinctions are lacking. Regardless of the degree of fear or immediacy of its object, the faculty involved in overcoming fear will always be the irascible

power. Likewise, the various kinds of fortitude will always be united under the same genus of fortitude and will always have the same object, namely the fear of impending evil. The only thing that might potentially distinguish battlefield fortitude from the fortitude involved in attending to a sick neighbor is the immediacy and degree of danger present, and this difference is not significant enough to overcome the principle of parsimony.

Thus, Aquinas can provide an account of why magnificence and liberality constitute two distinct virtues, while fortitude constitutes only one. Can he show that his principle of virtue differentiation shouldn't result in liberality being split into several distinct virtues? The apparent difficulty in doing so lies in determining the point at which objects of a particular virtue become distinct from objects of some similar virtue to such a degree that an acknowledgment of the two virtues being distinct from each other becomes necessary. In other words, it seems that Aquinas would need to establish a principle that would allow him to determine that the object of magnificence *is* sufficiently different from that of liberality, whereas the object of liberality-in-times-of-plenty, for example, is *not* sufficiently different from that of liberality-in-times-of-need. However, once the search for such a principle begins, it is unclear how one can ever arrive at a stopping point that is not going to appear *ad hoc*. In fact, situationist ethicists might argue that there is no stopping point, and that this is precisely why it makes no sense to speak of virtues in general.

Aquinas, however, does not appear to be tempted to pursue this project. His principle of virtue individuation depends not on one but three criteria. This means that the question of whether two virtues are distinct from one another is never going to depend only on these virtues' objects being sufficiently different from one another. When determining whether a certain habitus is a distinct virtue, Aquinas assumes the principle of parsimony. He is not swayed by arguments that aim to demonstrate that there are sufficient distinctions in

the virtue's object, *unless* there is also good reason to think that in a particular case the supposedly distinct virtues also perfect distinct subjects *or* do so in a distinct manner. This is why he does not differentiate between various kinds of fortitude, as has been shown above. Accordingly, if all potential kinds of liberality can be shown to reside in the same subject and perfect that subject in a similar manner, then it wouldn't matter whether the circumstances of the giving, or the exact amount of money given, differ sufficiently from one typical situation to another.

And it seems that Aquinas should be able to demonstrate this. Whether we consider liberality with small or with medium amounts of money, liberality in times of need or in times of plenty, or liberality with one's friends or with strangers, the central thing that liberality is concerned with is bringing the concupiscible appetite's desire for money under the rule of reason. Likewise, liberality achieves its end by disposing the person to part easily with her possessions whenever she perceives that they might be needed elsewhere. Thus, both the subject and the manner in which liberality disposes its subject to the good are going to remain the same across the board. However, when the habitus in question concerns something other than our desire for and attraction to money, or when it disposes its subject toward money in some other manner, then Aquinas identifies this habitus as something other than liberality. For, as we remember, several virtues may come together to assist liberality in attaining its goal without threatening the status of liberality as a unique virtue. Therefore, if a person easily gives away her money in times of poverty, she does so as a liberal person, yet if she does it while being concerned for her financial safety, in performing this liberal act she might also rely on the virtue of fortitude. Likewise, when giving in times of plenty, the liberal person might call on prudence to help her decide which worthy cause would benefit most greatly from her help. Since in both cases what makes each act an act of liberality remains the

same, it makes no sense to split one virtue of liberality into liberality-during-poverty and liberality-in-times-of-plenty. Accordingly, Aquinas's principle of virtue individuation is able to account for liberality remaining a single distinct virtue, rather than several different ones.

Let us recap. So far, I have proposed that, in his moral account, Aquinas utilizes a three-pronged principle of virtue individuation. I have also shown that using this principle enables Aquinas to remain internally consistent in individuating magnificence as a virtue distinct from liberality while preserving the virtue of fortitude as one single virtue. Now I want to draw attention to a puzzling feature of Aquinas's account that requires an adjustment of the proposed principle of virtue individuation.

The Naming Puzzle: Acquired and Infused Temperance

In Chapter Four, I explained that Aquinas believes that humans may possess two distinct species of virtue—the infused and the acquired. The proceeding discussion should make it clear that the reason for the specific difference between the infused and acquired virtues lies in the fact that these have two *distinct formal objects* and that they operate under two *distinct modes of reason* (I-II.63.4; *DQV* 5.4). But herein lies the puzzle. Take acquired and infused temperance, for example. If these are specifically different virtues, why do we call both by one name, “temperance”? In *Second-Person Perspectives in Aquinas's Ethics*, Andrew Pinsent suggests that we use one name for these two virtues because they share a common matter.⁴ Unfortunately, Pinsent does not specify what he means by the virtue's matter, and, as we have seen, this word has multiple meanings in Aquinas. It can mean the virtue's material object, it's proximate matter, or its remote matter. To see which meaning Pinsent

⁴ Pinsent, *Second-Person Perspectives in Aquinas's Ethics*, 15.

could have in mind and, consequently, whether his explanation of the naming puzzle is correct, I propose taking a closer look at the two virtues in question.

Acquired temperance. Let us begin with acquired temperance. As mentioned before, Aquinas follows Aristotle in arguing that temperance perfects the concupiscible appetite—that is, the appetite by which we are drawn toward pleasant things and away from painful things. To be more specific, temperance perfects the concupiscible appetite primarily by restraining its attraction to the tactile pleasures of food, drink, and sexual activity and to other pleasurable sensations—such as pleasant taste, smell, and visual appearance—which make the tactile pleasures more potent to us (*DQV* 5.1; *ST* II-II. 141.5).

What about temperance’s *formal object*? Here, Aquinas notes that both food and drink, which nourish our bodies, and sexual activity, which ensures the propagation of the human species, are among the most basic necessities of life. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that these objects exercise the strongest pull on our concupiscible appetite. Temperance regulates these desires, which we share with animals, so that we are able to enjoy food, drink, and sex in a way that is appropriate for a human being and in a way that contributes to a generally well-lived human life. This means that it not only moderates our desire for these things so that they no longer rule our lives, but also enables us to desire them in an appropriate way. Accordingly, while reason dictates that some amount of food and drink is necessary for our survival, and that at least some instances of sexual intercourse are necessary for the survival of the human species, it also tells us that we do not live lives that are “becoming” of a human being if we take just enough sustenance to keep from starvation. Hence, temperance enables our concupiscible power to enjoy pleasant things in a way that contributes both to the health of the body and to the healthy procreation of the human race (II-II.141.1. ad.1; 141.6. ad.2). Moreover, temperance allows us to enjoy even those things that do not directly

contribute to our health, by ensuring that we use them in moderation and in a way that is becoming of a person living in community with others (II-II.141.6. ad.2).

But how can such a formation be achieved? What does the formed appetite look like? Aquinas suggests that when acquired temperance forms our concupiscible power, we barely feel the disruptive pull of the desire (*DQV* 5.10). If we truly care about living a healthy, fully human (in the best sense of this word), and just life, we will strive to act in ways that reflect this concern when it comes to food, drink, and sex. In turn, these efforts—which at first might be entirely dependent on strong will power—will eventually lead to the restructuring of our appetites so that we actually begin to desire those things that reason judges to be appropriate for a healthy, just, and good human life, and to desire them because reason judges them thus.

In this process, both the appropriate concern *and* our determined efforts to act on the concern play an important role. When an overweight person truly becomes concerned with her health, she will repeatedly refuse to continue eating after she becomes full—she will practice continence. In turn, these repeated acts of refusal will train her appetite to desire the appropriate amount of food. When a person addicted to pornography realizes how much this addiction harms him and those he cares about, he may be able to begin the long process of retraining his appetites—by consistently refusing to look at pornographic websites one urge at a time, and by focusing his attention on loving his wife and children instead.

The best illustration of this process can be found in our ability to “tune out” the noisy conversations in a coffee shop when we begin to concentrate our attention on writing or reading a difficult paper, or when we are absorbed in a conversation with someone at our table. The noises themselves don’t actually disappear, but they no longer distract us—we no longer “hear” them—because our attention is directed to something else. So, the temperate

person's appetites learn to listen for the voice of reason, and, as a result, "tune out" the distracting voices of those objects that are particularly appealing to our concupiscible appetites. This is why a temperate person is reliably and typically attracted by healthy foods and drinks. We can, however, imagine situations in which a person's insistence on healthy food, or on a moderate amount of food, would run counter to the good of the community. In these situations, the appetites that have been formed by temperance will follow the command of reason, and will become attracted by the not-so-healthy food or by more-than-necessary amount of food. For example, John Cassian recalls that during his visit to the Egyptian Desert Fathers, he and a companion were surprised to find that the famous hermits were willing and ready to break their usually strict fasting habits for the sake of showing the two travelers hospitality. He remembers one hermit in particular: "[H]e invited us to eat, and though we had eaten he urged us to eat more. I said I could not. He replied, '*I have already given meals to six different visitors, and I have eaten with each of them, and I am still hungry. And you who have only eaten once are so full that you cannot eat with me now?*'"⁵ This gentle rebuke offered by the hermit gets at the root of what it means to have temperance. The appetite is not temperate because it is attracted by healthy food and not by junk food, but rather because it easily follows the judgment of reason (and it so happens that a virtuous person's reason typically judges healthy food to be the appropriate food to desire). Thus, temperance makes concupiscible appetite distinctly human: By forming it in such a way as to make it ready to follow reason, temperance softens the appetite's unreflective, "animal" attraction to sensible objects. This is what ultimately makes temperate actions easy and pleasant for us.⁶

⁵ *Apophthegmata Patrum* 13.3 (emphasis mine).

⁶ Cf. *NE*. II.3: "[T]he man who abstains from bodily pleasures and delights in this very fact is temperate, while the man who is annoyed at it is self-indulgent, and he who

Still, Aquinas believes that no one whose concupiscible appetite is formed by acquired temperance is completely immune to the call of the natural objects of desire.⁷ Just as an especially loud or shrill noise in the aforementioned coffee shop scenario can break our concentration, making all the noises around us salient to us again, so a particular apprehended pleasant or painful object might so influence our appetites as to make them cry out louder than the voice of reason. Consequently, even a temperate person might fail to act/feel/think in accordance with temperance—though, for reasons explained in Chapter Three, such occasional lapses would not cause her to lose the habitus of temperance (I-II.52.3; 53.3; *DQV* 1.10, ad.16).

So, here we have all the elements that make acquired temperance a distinct virtue. First, it perfects a particular *subject*, viz., the concupiscible power. Second, it has a distinct *formal object* (i.e., pleasures of touch in eating, drinking, and sex, as these activities contribute to the health of the body, to a good human life, to the demands of other virtues, and to propagation of the human race). Finally, acquired temperance has a distinct *mode*—it regulates these activities according to the *rule of reason*, which is derived from the consideration of the needs of life oriented toward natural happiness, and it does this by

stands his ground against things that are terrible and delights in this or at least is not pained is brave, while the man who is pained is a coward. For moral excellence is concerned with pleasures and pains; it is on account of the pleasure that we do bad things, and on account of the pain that we abstain from noble ones. Hence we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought; for this is the right education.”

⁷ Concerning passions which incline us contrary to reason, Aquinas writes, “It should be said that passions inclining to evil are not completely taken away by either acquired or infused virtue, except maybe miraculously. There always remains the struggle between the flesh and the spirit, even with moral virtue” (*DQV* 1.10. ad.14). He acknowledges, therefore, what orthodox Christianity has traditionally taught – that we can never become completely temperate (or virtuous in general) in this life.

tempering and *restructuring* the concupiscible appetite to such an extent that it becomes rational/human, as opposed to merely animal.

Infused temperance. Now let us examine the virtue of infused temperance. It too perfects the concupiscible power, so it has the same subject as acquired temperance. Like its acquired counterpart, infused temperance is concerned with the tactile pleasures of food, drink, and sexual activity—with one important difference. Unlike someone with acquired temperance, a person with infused temperance pursues the objects of tactile pleasure not only as it befits a rational creature, but does so also “through faith and love of God” (II-II.146.1. ad.1). This means that, while infused and acquired temperance share a material object, they have different formal objects. Accordingly, although a temperate pagan and a temperate Christian⁸ might both refuse a second Boston cream doughnut, the reasons for their refusal will be fundamentally different, and so each will perform a different kind of action.

What about the *mode* of infused temperance? Here too we find both differences and similarities with acquired temperance. Infused temperance is not primarily concerned with natural human happiness that requires a sound body, an ability to enjoy appropriately those things that make life pleasant and dignified, and healthy offspring to carry on one’s name and one’s genes, but rather with the ultimate human happiness, which is found only in union with God. Accordingly, in regulating our appetites infused temperance follows the rule of

⁸ For the purpose of this dissertation, “Christian” designates someone who has the infused virtue of charity. The question of whether infused charity is available to a devout Muslim, or a devout Jew, is beyond the scope of this dissertation, and so I will not explore it here. Moreover, it is clear to me that a person might self-identify as a Christian without possessing the virtue of charity. Accordingly, my use of the word does not fully track with its ordinary use.

the divine law as it is promulgated through the Old and New Testaments, as well as in the councils and laws of the church. This means that the *rule* that the concept of infused temperance sets up for its subject for meeting its object deviates from the rule of acquired temperance, which is guided by the dictates of right reason alone (I-II.63.4). So, for example, where reason dictates that it is fitting and good for a person to engage in sexual activity within the bounds of marriage for the sake of procreation and, ultimately, for the sake of common good, divine law tells us that it might be better for a person to forego the pleasures of sexual intercourse—and, consequently, to give up an opportunity for procreation—for the sake of giving oneself to contemplation of God (II-II.152.2; I-II.64.1.ad.3). Likewise, reason tells us that we should enjoy our food and drink in moderation, as is appropriate for rational beings as opposed to mere beasts, and with consideration for people in our community. The divine law, on the other hand, tells us that we should regularly abstain from food for the sake of bringing our body into subjection to the spirit, so that we can better contemplate heavenly things (II-II.147.1).

Finally, the *method* by which infused temperance perfects the concupiscible appetite is both different from and similar to that of acquired temperance. Both virtues, when fully developed, constitute the *tempering* of our natural appetites in such a way that they are able to follow the voice of right reason. The “when fully developed” caveat is important, since Jared Brandt has recently successfully argued that, in Aquinas’s view, there are three stages of each infused moral virtue—the beginner stage, the progressing stage, and the perfect, or fully developed, stage.⁹ The person in the beginner stage of infused temperance will continue to

⁹ Brandt, “Growth in Infused Virtue in the Work of Thomas Aquinas,” Chapter 4. Brandt bases his argument on Aquinas’s discussion of the degrees of charity in II-II.24.9: “In like manner the divers degrees of charity are distinguished according to the different pursuits to which man is brought by the increase of charity. For at first it is incumbent on man to

experience the “tug” of sensory objects on her concupiscible appetite, but will be reliable in overcoming her inordinate desires (*DQV* 1.10. ad.14). As Brandt notes, “Aquinas’s views commit him (despite never explicitly endorsing the position) to the idea that the first stage of infused virtue is continence.”¹⁰ And although, ideally, a Christian will grow in infused temperance beyond the stage of continence, Aquinas is well aware that many Christians will not experience this progress (*DQV* 1.10.15), and might continue to struggle against adverse passions throughout their lives. Still, he notes that even though the beginning stage of temperance does not make temperate actions easy and pleasant, it does ensure that we act temperately without the inner regret. And, citing Aristotle on bravery as his authority, he argues that because even at the beginning stage of infused temperance regret is absent, infused temperance counts as full virtue (*Ibid.*).

Since, by definition, the beginning stage is not the fully developed version of infused temperance, it cannot serve as a base for our understanding of the way infused temperance perfects its subject. For that, we need to look at perfect infused temperance. And here, the picture looks much the same as with acquired temperance. Brandt writes that, at the stage of perfect infused temperance, “for the more part... passions of the sensitive appetite will be consonant with divine law. We must say for the most part, because Aquinas follows

occupy himself chiefly with avoiding sin and resisting his concupiscences, which move him in opposition to charity: this concerns beginners, in whom charity has to be fed or fostered lest it be destroyed: in the second place man’s chief pursuit is to aim at progress in good, and this is the pursuit of the proficient, whose chief aim is to strengthen their charity by adding to it: while man’s third pursuit is to aim chiefly at union with and enjoyment of God: this belongs to the perfect who ‘desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ.’”

¹⁰ Brandt, “Growth in Infused Virtue in the Work of Thomas Aquinas, 179.

Augustine in affirming that contrary desires are a permanent feature of this life (*QDV* 1.10 ad 14).”¹¹

The naming puzzle. At this point, it should be apparent that infused and acquired temperance really are two distinct species of virtue. However, it is not at all clear why these two distinctly specified virtues share the same name. As mentioned previously, Pinsent suggests that we refer to acquired and infused temperance by one name because they have the same matter. Since Pinsent does not specify what he means by “matter,” I cannot do justice to his proposal without at least attempting to clarify what Pinsent might mean. The best way to do this is to look at every possible way that “matter” is used in Aquinas—one in which “matter” refers to material object, one in which it refers to proximate matter, and another in which it denotes remote matter of infused and acquired temperance—and see whether his proposal works in any of these scenarios. And since we have just looked at the infused and acquired temperance in some detail, we should be able to do this fairly quickly.

What happens if we interpret Pinsent’s statement to refer to material object? First, this interpretation of the statement that infused and acquired temperance share the same matter makes it true: infused and acquired virtues do have the same material object, namely, pleasures of touch in eating, drinking, and sex. However, Pinsent’s suggestion that the sameness of matter explains the sameness of name turns out to be wrong. On numerous occasions Aquinas points out that, when it comes to individuating virtue, we look at the formal and not the material object—since one material object can be considered under various formal aspects. This principle is demonstrated in the example of charity, faith, and hope. All three have God as their shared material object, but each considers him under a

¹¹ Ibid., 181.

different aspect. This shows that the fact that two (or three) virtues have the same material object does not give us sufficient reason to call these virtues by one name.

What about remote matter? This interpretation will render Pinsent's statement false, since infused virtue and acquired virtue have different remote matters—one is concerned with food, drink, and sex as these pertain to a good civic life, and the other is concerned with food, drink, and sex as these pertain to our ultimate end of beatitude. Therefore, we can eliminate this interpretive option.

Thus we have only one option left—the proximate matter. On this interpretation, Pinsent's statement comes out true, but his suggestion turns out to be wrong. As mentioned above, proximate matter is that to which each virtue imparts form. Moral virtues typically have passions for their proximate matter, and so acquired and infused temperance do have the same proximate matter, which is the passion of pleasure (primarily arising from the sense of touch). But, as Aquinas frequently points out, the same proximate matter often is the object of two (or more) distinct virtues. So, for example, the passion of hope for achieving great things is the proximate matter of the virtues of humility and magnanimity—with humility restraining the passion, and magnanimity spurring it on (II-II.161). We must, therefore, conclude that Pinsent's proposal (i.e., that acquired and infused temperance share the name “temperance” because they share common matter) turns out to be wrong in any possible interpretation.

I now propose a new solution to the naming puzzle. Infused and acquired temperance have different formal objects, and their mode-as-rule differs as well. However, they perfect the same subject and, what's most important, do so in similar enough way. I suggest that it is this similarity in mode-as-method that allows infused temperance to keep

the same name as its acquired counterpart. This principle will extend to other pairs of acquired and infused virtues.

Revised principle of virtue individuation. It appears that the Thomistic principle of virtue individuation that I proposed earlier in this chapter does help us answer nuanced questions, and so stands up to the test of practice. However, the immediately preceding discussion suggests that the principle needs to be adjusted so that it reflects not only the principle of virtue *individuation*, but also helps us in *naming* the virtues. And so, the adjusted principle reads:

The Adjusted Principle: We should identify a virtue as specifically distinct *iff* it perfects a single power of the soul, has a distinct formal object, and a distinct mode. Two specifically distinct virtues share the same name only if they perfect the same power of the soul by a sufficiently similar method.

The following flow chart offers a visual representation of the process of virtue individuation based on the adjusted principle:

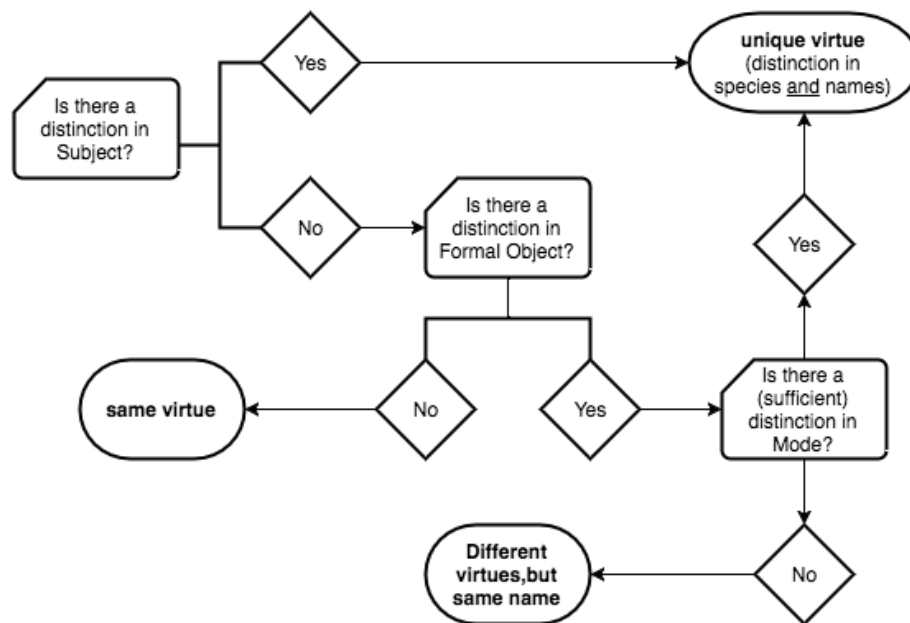


Figure 5.1. The Thomistic Procedure of Virtue Individuation

So far, I have showcased the way the principle of individuation functions in Aquinas's account of virtues. In the remainder of this chapter, I want to begin to sketch out a way in which Aquinas's principle can be applied to questions about virtue individuation that are raised by contemporary moral philosophers. For this purpose, I take up the question of anger-regulating virtues, which has been recently proposed by Ryan West.

Contemporary Virtue Ethics and the Thomistic Principle of Virtue Individuation

"Anger and the Virtues": A Test Case

In "Anger and the Virtues: A Critical Study in Virtue Individuation," Ryan West takes up a problem of individuating virtue(s) pertaining to anger.¹² He challenges the received Aristotelean schema in which anger is regulated by a single virtue—*πραότης* (variously translated as good temper, meekness, gentleness, or mildness). Aristotle considers this virtue, which West labels good temper, to be a mean between the extremes of irascibility (*οργιλοτης*) and inirascibility (*αοργησια*). Contrary to this account, West argues that if good temper is a character trait, it is "it is constituted by aspects of a combination of other virtues."¹³ This means that there are several virtues that must come together to ensure that we get angry "at the right things and with the right people, as well as in the right way, at the right time, and for the right length of time" (*NE* IV.5). Accordingly, West identifies three types of virtues that dispose us well to anger. First, there are virtues that (potentially) dispose

¹² West, "Anger and the Virtues."

¹³ Ibid., 878. Even though West himself is noncommittal regarding the status of good temper as a unified character trait, his account makes the likelihood of its being so very small.

us *to* anger. Among these are the virtues of self-respect, love, and justice. Second, there are virtues that delay, mitigate, and qualify anger in a number of ways.”¹⁴ Among these are the virtues of humility, patience, and love, with the latter’s disposition to “forgivingness” and its disposition to see the offender not *merely* as an offender but also as someone who is worthy of love).¹⁵ Finally, he identifies self-vigilance and self-control as virtues that enable us to keep our anger from getting out of control. Accordingly, West argues, “these many and varied dispositions are not merely *external aids* that come alongside the virtue of good temper and scaffold it. They are the very dispositions in which good temper *consists*; they are the latter virtue’s *ingredients*.”¹⁶

West’s demonstration of the ways in which various virtues contribute to regulation of anger is compelling. Yet the connection between this demonstration and West’s conclusion that there is no one unique virtue of good temper that regulates anger is not immediately apparent. For it is plausible that we can affirm that piety and honesty, for example, constitute parts of justice without denying that justice is a unique virtue in and of itself. West does not offer an argument that would make the connection explicit. I will now attempt to supply the missing connection.

As far as I can see, there are two possible ways of reading West. The first reading denies that good temper is a unique virtue because good temper is shown to be *superfluous*. Here is how such an argument would run:

¹⁴ Ibid., 888-89.

¹⁵ Ibid., 886. “Forgivingness” is the name that West, following Robert Roberts, gives to the virtuous disposition to forgive. Roberts identifies this disposition in “Forgivingness,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (1995): 289–306.

¹⁶ West, “Anger and the Virtues,” 887 (emphasis original).

1. If there are virtues that make a person virtuously disposed toward anger, then we shouldn't posit an additional, unique virtue of good temper to dispose that person virtuously toward anger.
2. There are combinations of virtues (e.g., love, justice, and self-respect; love, patience, and humility; self-vigilance and self-control) that dispose a person in such a way that her anger meets the conditions for being virtuous.
3. Therefore, we shouldn't posit an additional, unique virtue of good temper to dispose that person virtuously toward anger.

The second reading of West denies that good temper is a unique virtue based on the supposition that being rightly disposed to anger *necessarily* involves a combination of virtues.

Here is the argument:

1. If we can be virtuously disposed to a particular activity or emotion only by a combination of virtues, then there is no one unique virtue that disposes us toward that activity or emotion.
2. A person is virtuously disposed to anger only if (A) the person gets angry at the right things and with the right people and (B) in the right way/manner, at the right time, and for the right length of time.
3. A person must be disposed to (A) by a combination of motivational virtues (e.g., love, justice, and self-respect), and to (B) by a combination of motivational and structural virtues (e.g., love, patience, and humility; self-vigilance and self-control).
4. Therefore, a person is virtuously disposed to anger only by a combination of virtues.
5. Therefore, there is no one unique virtue that disposes us toward anger.

With West's argument thus filled out, what are we to make of it? Should we be persuaded? Can the Thomistic principle of virtue individuation be of any use in helping us decide what to do in this case? In what follows, I suggest that looking at the question from a Thomistic perspective can help us get clarity in thinking about meekness¹⁷ and anger.

¹⁷ I prefer to use "meekness" as a translation of *πραότης*. Since "good temper" is often treated synonymously with "good character," I worry that by translating *πραότης* "good temper," we might inadvertently skew our judgment on the matter toward thinking that getting anger right is a matter of *good character* – and so, a combination of virtues – rather than a matter of one single virtue.

Following Aristotle, Aquinas recognizes a special virtue of meekness and an additional virtue of clemency (II-II.157.1). Clemency perfects our external actions—it mitigates punishment that we justly inflict on others. It is opposed by the vice of cruelty (157.1. ad.3). Meekness, on the other hand, perfects the irascible appetite by moderating the passion of anger “according to right reason” (157.2). It is opposed by the vice of anger (157.1. ad.3). If we look at meekness from the perspective of the Thomistic principle of virtue individuation, it makes sense why meekness is recognized as a distinct virtue: It perfects a single power with respect to a distinctive formal object and according to its own mode (that is, according to right reason in a way that tempers and mitigates anger). But surely Aquinas would agree with West that we need all the virtues that West mentions (and then some) to regulate our anger rightly. Why, then, does he not take the same route as West in relegating the mitigation of anger to a combination of virtues?

For Aquinas, West’s route is not an option. Remember, Aquinas understands virtues to be *forms* of particular powers/faculties of the soul. It is metaphysically impossible for a form that perfects one power of the soul in respect of one object to perfect *directly* another power of the soul or even the same power in respect of another object. Virtues of love, justice and proper pride (which I suggest would be a Thomistic version of self-respect) perfect the *will*, and patience and humility perfect the irascible appetite with respect to *sorrow caused by hardship* (II-II.136.4) and with respect to *hope for attaining great things* (II-II.161.4), respectively. Thus, it is impossible for love, justice, proper pride, and humility and patience to perfect the irascible appetite with respect to anger directly. If the irascible appetite is to be thus perfected—if it is to be so formed as to follow the judgment of reason readily and with ease—then it has to take on a new, unique form, which is the virtue of meekness.

At the same time, it is a feature of Aquinas's account that any one virtue will *indirectly* perfect other powers. He is committed to the interdependency of virtues, in which the effects of one power's perfection overflow into other powers. This is why the effects of charity are felt throughout the whole soul, even though charity directly perfects the will alone. Likewise, the virtue of temperance, by directly perfecting the concupiscible appetite with respect to food, drink, and sex, ends up indirectly influencing both intellect and will: A temperate and an intemperate person will be preoccupied with different things, will have different thoughts, dreams, and images habitually present before the mind's eye, and will have different options for thought, feeling, and action to choose from. And this is precisely why prudence, although seated in the intellect, requires the rectitude of the appetites—because what the appetites present to the intellect as the end goal, and as the “fodder” for consideration, will make a significant difference in the intellect's ability to deliberate well about things to be done.

Thus, we can establish a distinction between direct and indirect influence of a virtue on a particular passion that is based in moral psychology. In addition, Robert Roberts has suggested that we might draw a distinction based on the virtues' causal history.¹⁸ He points out that most of us have to control our anger explicitly. When I get angry at my kids for spilling their drink for the *n*th time, I have to consciously mitigate *that* anger. Over time, such exercises can form a habitus (of meekness), so that I no longer have to manage my anger, but meekness manages it for me, so to speak. Since the habitus of meekness has this causal origin, it can be said to apply *directly* to anger. However, we can imagine a person who is graced with supernatural prudence and charity, and so never has to explicitly control her

¹⁸ In private correspondence.

anger. She loves and understands other human beings (and their circumstances) in such a way that she doesn't get inordinately angry with them. Since such prudence and charity have a causal history that doesn't include explicit anger-control, it can be said to govern anger only *indirectly*.

In the end, whether Aquinas would endorse Roberts's suggestion or fall back on an explanation based on moral psychology, he would endorse West's thesis that getting anger right requires input from many virtues. However, Aquinas would maintain that, since all the other virtues regulate the passion of anger *indirectly*, meekness is not rendered superfluous by the work of these supporting virtues. We still need a virtue that would regulate our anger *directly*.

Conclusion

Most of this chapter was dedicated to the formulation of a Thomistic principle of individuation and to testing that principle within Aquinas's moral account. In the last several pages, I have begun to sketch a way in which Aquinas's principle can be applied to questions about virtue individuation that have been raised by contemporary moral philosophers. It is most likely that these questions will be of varying types and will concern different aspects of virtue individuation. Accordingly, at this point it is impossible to say whether Aquinas's principle will prove applicable or helpful for every contemporary moral philosopher. Still, the test of Aquinas's principle against the problem presented by West has shown at least two things.

First, regardless of whether a contemporary moral philosopher agrees with Aquinas's final assessment of good temper/meekness, Aquinas's introduction of the concepts of virtues' direct and indirect influence in moral formation does add clarity to the discussion. And so, it might be worth paying attention to the way Aquinas individuates virtues even if

we don't agree with his outcome. And second, the concepts of direct and indirect influence are organic byproducts of Aquinas's principle of virtue individuation, which, in turn, grows organically from his metaphysics of human nature. Thus, it appears that Aquinas is able to offer us added clarity and to enhance our understanding of right relation to anger *because* his account of the virtue's nature is built on a solid metaphysical foundation.

The last point brings this dissertation full circle. In Chapter Two, I argued that any virtue account that hopes to articulate its principle of virtue individuation needs to pay attention to the more foundational questions of moral psychology and the metaphysics of human persons. In Aquinas, we have an example of someone for whom such attention yields ample benefits.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

This dissertation has aimed to accomplish two goals. The first goal is to draw contemporary moral philosophers' attention to the question of virtue individuation. The second goal is to articulate Aquinas's principle of virtue individuation as a *model* for how one might go about articulating one's own criterion of individuation. In what follows, I briefly summarize my arguments for why this question is worthy of attention, provide a quick walk-through of the way in which Aquinas engages in the project of individuation, and suggest a few directions for further research on the topic.

The Need for a Principle of Virtue Individuation

Any moral philosopher whose work touches on the topic of virtues must eventually discuss individual virtues. Consequently, this philosopher will face the question of virtue individuation. For example, should she think of compassion as a virtue, and as a virtue that is distinct from benevolence? In his offensive against virtue ethics, John Doris regards compassion as a paradigmatic "traditional virtue," and moral philosophers who respond to Doris tend to take compassion's status as a virtue for granted.¹ However, many traditional lists of virtues (e.g., those of Aristotle, the Stoics, and Aquinas) do not include compassion, and although it features prominently on Hume's list, his compassion looks quite different

¹ Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*. Moral philosophers who, in response to Doris, grant compassion the status of a virtue include Miller, *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); *Character and Moral Psychology*; and Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence*.

from the target that Doris seems to have in mind. Given this disagreement, what stance should we adopt on compassion? Or consider what Rosalind Hursthouse terms the virtues of good parenting.² Should we think that such special virtues exist? If yes, what kind of virtues would these be, and how would they relate to the other virtues? If no, why? Answering these and similar questions in a way that does not lead to the unnecessary proliferation of virtues requires a thought-out criterion of virtue individuation. Such a criterion must be both parsimonious and flexible enough to “catch” all types of virtues. Moreover, as I have argued in Chapter Two, this criterion must be sensitive to the moral philosopher’s more fundamental commitments in the area of the metaphysics of the human person and moral psychology.

To my knowledge, most contemporary virtue accounts either lack an articulation of such a criterion or offer a criterion that does not meet one or more desiderata listed above. This state of affairs indicates that work remains to be done in thinking about virtue individuation. Of course, if my claim is true that our commitments in the area of the metaphysics of human nature and moral psychology impact our views on the nature of virtues and our views of individual virtues, it is unrealistic to think that we could discover one principle that would apply to every virtue account. This is because various virtue accounts have very different fundamental commitments. For example, it is to be expected that Christine Swanton’s criterion for virtue individuation will be very different from that of Aquinas—precisely because Swanton and Aquinas have such different starting points and such different understandings of what virtue is.

² Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 213.

Still, even if paying attention to the way in which we individuate virtues does not result in a neatly unified list of virtues, doing so will clarify our fundamental commitments and have many benefits. For example, it will aid in our conceptual analysis of individual virtues because it will enable us to identify the underlying source of many disagreements between virtue accounts—disagreements which, otherwise, might appear to be only about the right conceptual analysis of individual virtues. An example of such a disagreement is the difference between Foot/Hursthouse’s and Adams/Roberts’s conceptual analysis of courage—namely, the question of whether a vicious person (e.g., a murderer) can possess the virtue of courage. In an important sense, this debate is really not about courage, but about the nature of virtue, and showing that this is the case will help move the discussion forward. Likewise, the disagreement between Christian Miller and Daniel Russell about the best approach to character formation is also at least in part a disagreement about the nature of virtues and, ultimately, about human moral psychology. Given that Miller believes virtues to be constituted by (and identical to) clusters of traits that give rise to good actions, while Russell understands virtues in fairly straightforward Aristotelian terms, it is to be expected that the two would disagree about the ways in which we can become more virtuous.³ Accordingly, clarifying the foundational commitments to each virtue account can help advance the discussion about virtue ethics’ contribution to our understanding of character formation.

³ Miller provides the following definition of virtues: “Virtues are all and only those good traits of character which are such that, when they directly lead to action (whether mental or bodily) the action is (typically) a good action and is performed for the appropriate reason” (*Moral Character: An Empirical Theory*, 24. For Russell’s account of the nature of virtue, see Chapter 1 of *Doing Better* (forthcoming). For Russell and Miller’s disagreement about the pathways to moral improvement, see Daniel Russell, “From Personality to Character to Virtue” and Christian Miller, “Russell on Acquiring Virtue” in *Contemporary Issues in Virtue Ethics*, ed. Mark Alfano (New York: Routledge, 2015), 91-122.

When we look at the project of moral formation, the need to pay attention to the criteria of virtue individuation becomes even more obvious. If we are to believe Aristotle and Aquinas, most of us do not possess a virtuous character; and, as Doris and Miller have made clear, empirical findings support this claim. Miller nicely formulates the question most of us face: How do we close the “character gap” between what we are and what we ought to be?⁴ There are several strategies, and they all presuppose *some* ability to individuate virtues. Whether we see individual virtues as ideals that provide us with a sense of “destination” on the road to character formation or as idealized representations of ways in which a human character can improve, we won’t get far in our project of character formation without *some* map of the possible virtuous human character.⁵ However, to create such a map, we must know which individual virtues compose the landscape of a virtuous character, as well as how these individual virtues relate to one another.

Finally, the question of virtue individuation is crucial for those empirical psychologists—and those philosophers who avail themselves of the psychologists’ research—who study human character. The old adage, “what one is looking for determines what one sees,” applies directly to the ways in which psychologists set up their experiments. For example, psychologists have conducted numerous experiments in which the subjects failed to show cross-situational consistency in exhibiting *helping behavior*. Many philosophers have interpreted these results as representing the absence or presence of the virtue of *compassion* and of its corresponding vice. Miller, in particular, uses these studies to reach the

⁴ Miller, *The Character Gap: How Good Are We?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁵ For a discussion of two distinct ways to understand the role of “ideal” in virtue ethics, see the first chapter of Russell’s *Doing Better* (forthcoming).

conclusion that most people do not possess the virtue of compassion. He also argues that, because the lack of helping behavior was also inconsistent, most people don't have the vice of cruelty. The cases of cruelty and compassion generalize, so Miller argues that most people possess neither virtues nor vices, but "mixed helping traits."⁶ This claim is problematic for several reasons. First, it is not clear which character trait (or lack thereof) is being measured when we measure helping behavior. For example, Aquinas says that virtuous helping behavior can result from more than one virtue. Such virtues as generosity, charity, mercy, and (in certain circumstances) even justice can all give rise to helping behavior. However, such hard-to-detect vices as vanity, pride, or greed can give rise to helping behavior as well. In fact, psychologists John Sabini and Maury Silver have argued that some of the research Miller cites is better interpreted as showing that what initially looks like inconsistent helping behavior is actually the subjects' attempts to mitigate or avoid embarrassment.⁷ It is plausible to interpret the presence of inordinate fear of embarrassment as indicative of the vice of vanity. If this is the case, we have a good reason to question Miller's conclusion that most people lack vices. More work must be done to determine whether Miller is correct about the prevalence of vice in humans.⁸ If we find that Aquinas's argument that virtuous helping behavior can result from more than one virtue is plausible, we might want to conduct additional studies with the aim of determining each virtue's unique contribution (or lack thereof) to the helping behavior. To that end, we would need to devise empirical

⁶ Miller, *The Character Gap*, 153-200.

⁷ John Sabini and Maury Silver, "Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued," *Ethics* 115 (April 2005): 535-562.

⁸ Miller makes a similar suggestion in "Character and Situationism: New Directions," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 20, no. 3 (2017): 459-71.

psychological studies and develop a way to isolate the correct vice or virtue. Doing so would require thinking about individuation, and a worked-out criterion would help in making these decisions.

Given that the question of virtue individuation has both theoretical and practical implications, it is surprising that, with few exceptions, contemporary virtue ethics has paid little attention to the question. This project has aimed to remedy this omission. I spend the first chapter establishing desiderata for a principle of individuation. I conclude that a good principle will be both flexible and parsimonious, and that it must connect to one's foundational beliefs about human nature and the nature of virtues. I then offer Aquinas's way of individuation as a *model* of how we should articulate such a principle.

At this point, I must reiterate that I do not claim Aquinas has *the* right principle. I focus on Aquinas mainly because he has an extremely well-developed and nuanced moral psychology and because he is attuned to the types of theological considerations I see as important for understanding human character.⁹ Still, though I do not claim that a Thomistic principle of virtue individuation is *the* principle, I have shown that Aquinas's three-fold criterion does meet all the desiderata. Accordingly, we can learn a lot by examining the way in which Aquinas develops his criterion of individuation.

A Thomistic Principle of Virtue Individuation

So far, I have provided reasons for moral philosophers to pay attention to virtue individuation. In the remainder of this chapter, I summarize the Thomistic approach and suggest an agenda for further research.

⁹ These considerations include the topic of original sin and its effects on human moral psychology, as well as of the role that the gracious acts of God play in the believer's moral formation.

Aquinas understands virtues to be species of *habitus*, and he understands *habitus* to be a form of a specific power/faculty of the soul. This means that *habitus* is a stable quality (disposition) of a power/faculty of the soul that actualizes the power's potential for functioning in a specific way. As such, *habitus* functions as an intrinsic principle of human action. All *habitus* are stable, operative, valent, and nature-directed. The last characteristic of *habitus* grounds the other three. The stable nature of *habitus*—the fact that, once acquired, *habitus* are not easily lost—are grounded in the fact that insofar as *habitus* orient us toward or away from our nature, they render us more set in a particular way of being. Because of *habitus*, we become less flighty, less impulsive, and much less influenced by our circumstances—and, accordingly, less susceptible to changes, even in the face of great temptation. The nature-oriented character of *habitus* grounds their operative quality as well. The powers of the human soul are operational capacities—they are oriented toward actions. For these powers, being formed by *habitus* implies being ordered in such a way as to be *capable* of operating well. Aquinas argues that certain powers of the soul—namely, the appetitive and intellective powers—are not only *suit*ed to receiving *habitus*, but actually *require* them for proper functioning. Finally, the fact that *habitus* order their subjects toward or away from nature implies that no *habitus* is morally neutral.

Virtues differ from other kinds of *habitus* in that virtues form their respective powers in such a way as to dispose them to operate *well*, where “operating well” means operating in a way that is suitable for human nature. This, in turn, means that powers of the human soul operate under the guidance of the rule of reason and in a way that orients us explicitly toward eudaimonia/beatitude in our actions, thoughts, and passions. Moreover, Aquinas has consistently argued that in virtues, as in any true/full-blown *habitus*, a volitional aspect is always present, one that keeps virtues from constraining our conscious and unconscious

behavior with the force of necessity. We always retain an ability to act contrary to even the most entrenched *habitus*, so that even the fully vicious person is capable of reforming, and even a fully virtuous person's virtue may be corrupted.

Just as different kinds of *habitus* exist, so do different kinds of virtue. The taxonomy of virtues includes intellectual, moral, and theological virtues; acquired and infused; perfect and imperfect; and the cardinal virtues. By examining the latter, I have formulated Aquinas's criterion for virtue individuation:

We should identify a virtue as specifically distinct *iff* it perfects a single power of the soul, has a distinct formal object and a distinct mode. Two specifically distinct virtues share the same name only if they perfect the same power of the soul by a sufficiently similar method.

An examination of the cases of generosity, magnificence, and courage has allowed me to test the flexibility of Aquinas's criterion, and to determine whether it can help us keep the proliferation of virtues at bay while preserving diversity among the virtues. I have argued that, because Aquinas does not rely on one single criterion but on a combination of three factors (i.e., virtues' subject, virtues' object, and virtues' mode), his method of individuating virtues meets the desiderata of a good principle of virtue individuation.

Finally, I have applied the Thomistic criterion to the case of virtue(s) related to anger. This case is put forward by Ryan West, who recently suggested that, *pace* Aristotle, we have reasons to think that no one unique virtue regulates anger. Instead, West argues, we should think of meekness as consisting of three types of virtues—virtues that (potentially) dispose us *to* anger; virtues that delay, mitigate, and qualify anger in a number of ways; and virtues that enable us to prevent our anger from getting out of hand. After examining West's suggestion from the perspective of the Thomistic principle of virtue individuation, I suggest that, although we should attend to the ways in which getting anger 'right' requires input from many virtues, we nonetheless have good reasons

to retain meekness on the list of specifically unique virtues. This is because meekness is concerned with *direct* regulation of anger, while all the other virtues regulate it *indirectly*. Accordingly, the work of these supporting virtues does not render meekness superfluous.

Aquinas's principle may not apply to every puzzle case or prove helpful to every contemporary moral philosopher. Still, as I have suggested above, he gives us a model for articulating our criteria of virtue individuation. His attention to the foundational questions of moral psychology and the metaphysics of human persons yields a dividend in the form of the ability to articulate a criterion of individuation which is an organic part of his moral philosophy, and which is able to curb the needless multiplication of virtues while preserving diversity among the virtues.

Future Research

Many questions about Aquinas's approach to individuating virtues invite further research. I will highlight three such questions, though this list is by no means exhaustive. The first question deals with Aquinas's moral psychology. He argues that a fully vicious person cannot possess virtue. This means that the apparently excellent character traits (for lack of a better word) possessed by a vicious person are virtues' counterfeits—they are virtues in name only. This position is different from that of Philippa Foot, who has argued that, in a vicious person, virtue *operates* as a vice.¹⁰ Aquinas's position invites the question of how to characterize such a trait. Take, for example, the proverbial Nazi who, at the risk of his own life, carries out the orders to exterminate the concentration camp prisoners. In doing so, he displays a character trait that looks like courage. How are we

¹⁰ Foot, "Virtues and Vices."

to understand this trait? Aquinas is clear that it is not a virtue, nor is it a virtue *secundum quid*, but he does not offer a positive account of what this trait is. What are we to make of this? One possibility is to say that counterfeit virtue *is* a vice because, on the whole, it makes its possessor worse. Still, accepting this option would come at a cost because this option is quite counterintuitive. Another possibility would be to accept Foot's account and say that, due to the vicious person's 'sickness' of the soul, a virtue *functions* in her as a vice. This option is problematic as well because it would require us to accept that one and the same *form* can operate in contradictory ways. Clearly, more research is needed before we accept either of the options or develop another possible solution.

Another question is about the individuation of particular virtues. In this dissertation, I have discussed the distinctions between two virtues involving money: generosity and magnificence. However, Aquinas tells us that almsgiving—an act flowing from charity—is also directly concerned with money. Hence, the puzzle: How is almsgiving related to the acquired and the infused virtues of generosity? Given the increasing interest in 'civic' virtues, and the fact that the virtue of generosity is under-researched, the topic of the relationship between magnificence, generosity, and almsgiving is one that warrants further investigation.

Finally, there is a question of the relationship between the virtues of Christ and regular human virtues. It is no exaggeration to say that Christ's moral psychology differs from ours in very important respects. For example, the "overflow" process, whereby changes in the higher powers give rise to effects in the lower powers, is blocked in Christ "by a special dispensation," so that the glory of his soul does not overflow into his body, and so that the joy of beatific vision does not overflow into concupiscible appetite so as to overwhelm the passions of sorrow or pain (III. 15.5. ad.3; 15.6). Moreover, in Christ,

the overflow of the changes in the lower parts into the higher parts was blocked as well. This means he has experienced the passions of sorrow, fear, anger, etc., not as full passions, but as “propassions”—those that do not overwhelm the soul but remain in the sensitive appetites without inordinately overflowing into the intellect and the will (III.15.4).¹¹

What’s even more important, Christ did not experience the *fomes peccati* (“the spark of sin”), which is the sensitive appetites’ inclination away from the rule of reason, and inclination toward sin (III.15.2).¹² Finally, Christ’s human nature subsists in a unique hypostatic mode of the Incarnate Son of God.¹³ All these points add up to a picture of Christ as an absolutely unique human being. Therefore, we should expect that the virtues he possesses, as well as the way he possesses them, to be unique as well. Accordingly, we should exercise caution when using the virtues of Christ as models for understanding regular human virtues. Still, we *are* called to emulate Christ, and that includes the call to emulate his character and his virtues. How are we to understand this call? Given these drastic differences in our moral psychology, what would the emulation of Christ look like? What can we learn when we look at the virtues of Christ? All these questions are of

¹¹ For an excellent discussion of propassions in Christ, see Nathan Cartagena, “Thomas Aquinas’s Psychology of Fear,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Baylor University, 2018, 190-201.

¹² For a discussion of *fomes peccati*, see Mark Johnson, “St Thomas and the ‘Law of Sin,’” *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales* 67, no. 1 (2000): 80-95; Cartagena, “Thomas Aquinas’s Psychology of Fear,” 178-80. Although the usual translation of *fomes* is “tinder,” Cartagena argues that such a translation is potentially misleading, and should be replaced with “spark.”

¹³ On the psychological complexity of the Incarnate Word, see Thomas Joseph White, “The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision,” *The Thomist* 69 (2005): 497-534.

utmost importance with respect to our ability to construct a robustly Christian account of virtues.

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