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Tract 8: A Eucharistic Form of Life

In his path-breaking *Grammar of Assent*, John Henry Newman famously distinguished between “notional apprehension” and “real apprehension,” clarifying further that “theology properly and directly deals with notional apprehension; religion with imaginative.”¹ It is important to note two features of Newman’s reflection. First, it is not a question of either/or, but, decidedly, of both/and. Both intellect and imagination, mind and heart, reason and affection, must be engaged. Theology and religion are intimately, indeed indispensably, related.

Secondly, as the above quote indicates, “real” apprehension” may also be designated “imaginative.” For Newman, the passage from the merely notional to the real is mediated by the imagination, by evocative images which captivate the heart. Hence the aesthetic has a crucial role to play in the cultivation of a robust spiritual life.

Thus, later in the *Grammar of Assent* Newman makes appeal to the Church’s liturgical life as the fruit of real and not merely notional apprehension. It is “the imagination and the heart” that, creating hymns like *Veni Creator* and *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, convert notional propositions about the divinity of the Holy Spirit into objects of real apprehension and assent.²

We are all familiar with the transforming effect on the young Francis of the image of the crucified in the church of San Damiano. And Teresa

¹ John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, ed. I. T. Ker (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 82.

² Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 94. See the remark by Paul Murray, O.P., on Aquinas’s “Sequence” for the Feast of Corpus Christi: “In a work like *Lauda Sion* what offers sanction for belief is not simply the repetition of doctrinal statements, but the sharp and bright manner in which these statements are made, the sheer memorability of the lines” (*Aquinas at Prayer: The Bible, Mysticism and Poetry* [London: Bloomsbury, 2013], 231).

of Avila, after years of rather routine and rote religious life, experienced a renewed conversion through her encounter with a convent crucifix.

I dare say each of us can identify “images” (whether pictorial, sculptural, or musical) that have played a prominent part in the awakening and sustaining of our spiritual vision and commitment. Such vital, life-engendering images form an essential part of the religious life of every committed Christian.

But I think it important also to discern less wholesome images: images that are spiritually damaging, destructive, even demonic. There is the internet-fueled scourge of pornographic images which both demean and addict. The image of the Swastika unleashed legions of hatred in the past and still continues to enthrall some today. The human *imago Dei* has too often been perverted into *imago diaboli*, and images play a preponderant role in that degradation.

In this reflection I would like to offer a concrete instance of such a “negative” image that impacted me in a particularly profound way. As so often, mere happenstance led to the place and situation in question. But what was experienced there I count providential.

The place was the relatively small town of Litomerice in the Czech Republic, about forty miles northwest of Prague. A friend and I decided to drive out of Prague to savor something of the Czech countryside. As I recall, it was a sunny spring day, ideal for an excursion. Arriving at the town, we had lunch and then set out to explore. We soon came upon a Baroque church, in the Jesuit style, that we entered. However, instead of a quiet place of prayer, we found a scene of wanton destruction. We later learned that the church had been converted into a warehouse during the Communist regime and left slowly to decay – part of the roof missing.

But the dominant image (awful, yet revelatory) was the sight of eight side altars lining the central nave. From each of them the tabernacle had been gouged out, leaving mere emptiness, a gaping void. One sensed a truly malevolent action, opening upon a threatening abyss. Real presence had been defiantly rejected. Absence prevailed.

The apocalyptic scene was heightened by an exhibition that had been mounted in the desecrated church. It depicted emaciated figures who had been imprisoned by the Nazis in the forced labor camp near the town (whose German name was Leitmeritz when it formed part of the Sudetenland.) There were also letters and objects left by inmates of the nearby concentration camp of Theresienstadt. Recollections of those tortured under the Communist regime added to the desolation. The overwhelming sensation was that of a demonic inhumanity. The defacing of the altars was replicated

in the defacing of the tortured and murdered human beings. As though the demonic intent was to obliterate all traces of the Face of Christ.

What struck me, then, as revelatory was the nexus between the repudiation of presence represented by the violated tabernacles and the parallel violation of humanity. Of course, absence also assumes guises less stark, yet also deadening and deadly: loss of meaning and hope, resentment breeding hatred, desperation that turns destructive of self and others. I realized (in Newman's strong sense of the term) that one can fully appreciate and celebrate real presence only if one seriously comes to grips with its contradiction: real absence. The culture of death is fueled by a denial of presence, not only in its extraordinary manifestation in Litomerice, but in its all too ordinary appearances in our culture and our daily lives.

If this Dantean intuition resonates, then it suggests that the vocation of Christians, and especially Catholics, is to be stewards and witnesses of real presence in their lives and activities. To be so, they must be firmly rooted in faith in the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, as Benedict XVI affirmed in his rich apostolic exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*: "Every great reform [in the Church] has in some way been linked to the rediscovery of belief in the Lord's Eucharistic presence among his people."³

A crucial dimension of that "rediscovery" must be the firm conviction of the unique agency of Christ in the Eucharistic celebration. He is the one Priest as he is the one Savior. Indeed, salvation is the priestly work of Jesus himself, enacted once for all, and made present ever anew in the Eucharistic sacrifice. At a time when there is the persistent peril of "horizontalism" in our liturgical gatherings, the inversion of the community upon itself, Benedict's insistence is imperative.

The Eucharist is Christ who gives himself to us and continually builds us up as his body. Hence, in the striking interplay between the Eucharist which builds up the Church, and the Church herself which "makes" the Eucharist, the primary causality is expressed in the first formula: the Church is able to celebrate and adore the mystery of Christ present in the Eucharist precisely because Christ first gave himself to her in the sacrifice of the Cross. The Church's ability to 'make' the Eucharist is completely rooted in Christ's self-gift to her.⁴

³ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church's Life and Mission (2007), §6.

⁴ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, §14.

This agency of Christ, his ongoing self-gift, is, paradoxically, made possible because of his Ascension to the Father's Glory. The manifestations of this ongoing and multiform "giving" are manifold, as the Book of Revelation witnesses in the letters to the churches. The risen, ascended Lord stands at the door of the churches and knocks (Rev 3:20), bringing both judgment and healing. He does not exercise an absent Lordship, but present and active agency. And his presence and agency receive their fullest expression in the Eucharist. As Paul Griffiths rightly remarks: "The principal condition of the possibility of the Eucharist is exactly that Jesus has ascended. . . . After the Ascension, his flesh, veiled as bread, and his blood veiled as wine, can be touched and tasted everywhere and at once, without constraint by the metronome of time or the map grid of space."⁵

But this real presence of the risen, ascended Lord does not preclude the participatory presence of those gathered to celebrate; rather, it calls forth, enables, and indeed requires it. The "full conscious, and active participation" of the congregation, desired and promoted by the Second Vatican Council,⁶ is most fundamentally our participation in the Paschal Mystery, the death, resurrection *and* ascension of Jesus Christ. By this participation in the Eucharist we truly become the body of Christ, living members of the living Head.

Indeed, Benedict XVI recalls that "Christian antiquity used the same words, *Corpus Christi*, to designate Christ's body born of the Virgin Mary, his Eucharistic body, and his ecclesial body. This clear datum of the tradition helps us to appreciate the inseparability of Christ and the Church."⁷ In this regard the Australian theologian, Anthony Kelly perceptively comments: "The different aspects or realizations of Christ's body are so interwoven, that one has a sense of a corporeal field of incarnational communication rather than of separable entities."⁸

The *novum* of the Paschal Mystery inaugurates a new transformed order of relations constitutive of a new self. What Pascal calls the new *ordo caritatis* might fittingly be called the *ordo Eucharistiae*. For, Christians are nourished and schooled in the Eucharist to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 13:14), who is our "hope of Glory" (Col 1:27). Indeed, if our participation is "full, conscious, and active," then "we all with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from

⁵ Paul Griffiths, *Christian Flesh* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 51.

⁶ Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, §14.

⁷ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, §15.

⁸ Anthony J. Kelly, *Upward: Faith, Church, and the Ascension of Christ* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2014), 87.

one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor 3:18). Thus, Saint Paul exclaims with wonderment that “if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation” (2 Cor 5:17). In full harmony with this Pauline vision, Benedict XVI, drawing upon his beloved Saint Augustine, insists that, in the Eucharist, “Christ assimilates us to himself.” Consequently, “not only have we become Christians, we have become Christ himself.”⁹

This “Christification,” this incorporation into the body of Christ, is, of course, *in via*. As Gregory of Nyssa loved to insist, Christian life is both *telos* and *arche*: an ending which is ever a new beginning. In this vein, Kelly rightly comments: “Christ’s ascension does not mean disembodiment”; rather it is we who “are not yet fully embodied in him, as we are destined to be.”¹⁰ We are not yet “fully embodied in him,” fully transformed into our new selfhood as member of Christ’s body. To put it another way: *Jesus Christ is truly present in the Eucharist; it is we who are not fully present to him, to ourselves, and to others*. To the extent that we ourselves are deficient in our presence, we cannot hope to be advocates and witnesses of real presence to the world.

Hence the need to engage in practices of presence, practices that realize and enhance what *Sacramentum Caritatis* calls the new “Eucharistic form of life.”¹¹ It is the life to which we are summoned each time the celebrant admonishes at the beginning of the Eucharistic prayer, “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God!” and we consent by responding, “It is right and just!” Let us briefly consider, then, some practices by which we become more fully present to God, self, and others. Those I would underscore are attention, respect, reverence, adoration, and, permeating all, gratitude.

These practices need to be even more intentional in a secular culture that provides little external support to Christian faith. We need them to sharpen our “spiritual senses” in a culture where even our physical senses so often atrophy, dulled by sensory overload.

We might use the venerable image of a “spiritual ladder” to sketch briefly these indispensable practices.

The bottom rung of the ladder is *attention*. In a technological and media culture of countless distractions we need to cultivate the discipline of paying attention, of being alert to the present moment with its challenges and possibilities. Without concentrated attention, presence is lessened and absence prevails. Indeed, attention is the prerequisite for dialogue. It fosters

⁹ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, §36.

¹⁰ Kelly, *Upward*, 95.

¹¹ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, §§70–83.

the careful listening in whose absence conversation soon deteriorates into competing monologues.

A second rung of the ladder is *respect*. The word itself is suggestive. Its root meaning – *re-spicere* – is to look attentively. Not a quick passing glance, much less a looking down upon, a *de-spicere*, but a careful regard. Not the all-too-depreciating snapshot of some masterpiece of art as one dashes through a museum—pausing briefly for a selfie with the work of art dimly in the background: Mona Lisa and me!

Respect embraces care for the natural environment and even for material things. Saint Benedict in his *Rule* mandates a regard “for all the goods and utensils of the monastery as if they were sacred vessels of the altar, aware that nothing is to be neglected.”¹²

By contrast, much of our “throw away” culture, so often decried by Pope Francis, not only quickly discards things deemed “out of fashion,” but flippantly promotes actual abuse of the creation entrusted by God to human care.

A third rung is *reverence*. A recognition of the inviolable dignity of persons and the sense of a holy presence emanating from faces often weary and burdened. Such reverence is crucially needed in a late-capitalist society that too often spurns the poor, the elderly, the unborn. Once again the *Rule of Saint Benedict* offers salutary, if radical, counsel: “All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ”; indeed, “by a bow of the head or a complete prostration of the body, Christ is to be adored because he is welcomed in them.”¹³

But reverence for persons also requires that others never be treated as things to satisfy one’s desires, whether economic or sexual. In a Catholic Eucharistic form of life, social and sexual ethics form a “seamless garment.”¹⁴ Indeed, there is a much closer relation between them than is often admitted: both must address issues of power. And both are subjected to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, of whose body Christians are members. The Apostle Paul provides the ultimate foundation for the Christian practice of reverence: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6:19–20).

¹² *Rule of Benedict*, ch. 31, nos. 10–11 (*The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1981]).

¹³ *Rule of Benedict*, ch. 53, nos. 1,7.

¹⁴ Note the sections in *Sacramentum Caritatis* devoted to “the social implications of the Eucharistic mystery” (§89) and “the sanctification of the world and the protection of creation” (§92).

Attention, respect, and reverence as “practices of presence” yield a twofold fruit. They heighten the presence of the subject, enriching his or her sense of self. But they also permit the presence of the other to stand forth, disclosing their inherent mystery. Thus, in both subject and object, the ground is laid for what we yearn for at our truest and deepest: communion.

A final practice that is assuming greater importance, especially among young people, is that of *Eucharistic adoration*. Like the young Gerard Manley Hopkins, they turn “with a fling of the heart to the heart of the Host.”¹⁵ In adoration, Christ unveils the mystery of his presence and our own. To be present, in that reverential attention which is contemplation, to the presence of him who loves us and gives himself for us fosters our passage from the notional to the real in our relationship with Jesus who is Lord, Savior, and friend.

To eyes being transformed in faith, all intimations of presence find in the Eucharist their recapitulation and fulfillment. Here their true dignity and destiny stand revealed: they bear the form and face of Jesus Christ.

Thus the Eucharist becomes a school in which we develop our spiritual senses, learning to be attentive, respectful, and reverential and to carry these attitudes into our daily lives and our everyday relations with others. Indeed, a Eucharistic form of life transcends the separation of “contemplation” and “action” by forming believers into “contemplatives in action” whose lives are founded upon and guided by the Apostle’s injunction: “And be thankful [*eucharistoi ginesthe*], . . . Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks [*eucharistountes*] to God the Father through him” (Col 3:15, 17).

Becoming ever more fully conformed to the Eucharistic Christ, we allow his real presence to permeate our world. N.V

¹⁵ Gerard Manley Hopkins, “The Wreck of the Deutschland,” stanza 3. Hopkins’s poetry has helped so many to pass from a notional to the real apprehension that “the world is charged with the grandeur of God,” and that “Christ plays in ten thousand places, lovely in limbs, lovely in eyes not his.”

Tolle, Lege: Commencement Address at the Dominican House of Studies, May 13, 2022

MICHAEL ROOT
Catholic University of America
Washington, DC

Tolle, lege. Tolle, lege. “Take up, read.” Few such simple words have had such a crucial impact on the history of Christian theology. In the summer of 386, Augustine of Hippo was a torn man. He had come to believe the Gospel, but he could not bring himself to break with sinful habits, habits so ingrained he called them “necessities.” His soul was torn between two wills within him, he said, each pointing in a different direction. Nothing seemed able to be able to break the interior logjam. He says that he willed that he would will the good, but not with a complete will, and so he remained paralyzed. After hearing a friend and mentor describe the conversion of Victorinus, a famous Roman teacher of rhetoric, and another friend speak of the monastic retreat of St. Anthony, the spiritual conflict within Augustine reached a fever pitch and he retreated to a corner of the garden in the house he was staying at. Suddenly, from over the wall, he heard a child chanting the words *tolle, lege*: “take up, read.” He could not think of any childhood rhyme or chant that involved those words—they must be a sign from God. So, he rushed over to where a copy of St. Paul’s letters was lying, opened it, and read at random. His eye fell on Romans 13:13: “Let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy.” As he himself puts in his *Confessions*: “No further wished I to read, nor was there need to do so. Instantly, in truth, at the end of this sentence, as if before a peaceful light streaming into my heart, all the dark shadows of doubt fled away” (8.12.29).

You who are graduating are now coming to the end of a process that has involved a great deal of taking up and reading. I trust that the taking up and reading has not been to cure you of reveling and drunkenness, not to mention the rest of St. Paul's list, but rather to form you, most immediately within the discipline of theology and for many of you, within the vocation of the priesthood and the Dominican Order. Some of what you have taken up and read has, I hope, been inspiring. I hope that at least on occasion you felt as if a peaceful light was streaming into your hearts. Some of what you read, I would guess, you found mind-numbingly boring. But it is all part of the process.

Of course you did more than just take up and read. You thought about what you were reading. You compared it with other things you had read. You related it to your own experience. You discussed it with other students. You wrote about it in papers and on exams. The medieval university master had three tasks: *legere, disputare, praedicare*—read, dispute, and (in this context) present. You have done much the same thing—reading, arguing, presenting.

Reading with this kind of attention does not leave us unaffected. We do not just learn new information; we come to inhabit a different world, with a different landscape and a different population. It makes a difference whether one's effective world includes only places like Washington, New York, and Elizabeth, New Jersey, or also Jerusalem, the old Jerusalem and the new Jerusalem, the North Africa of Augustine, and the Paris of Thomas Aquinas. The person whose imaginative world is mostly populated by characters from *Friends* and *Game of Thrones* will be a different sort of person from the one whose imaginative world includes Abraham, David, St. Paul, Dominic, and Alyosha Karamazov. It is as much an exaggeration to say you are what you read as to say you are what you eat. But at least for some of us (and if you are graduating from Pontifical Faculty of the Immaculate Conception, you are probably in this group), at least some of what we read changes not only what we think, but who we are. Granted, I am a bookish nerd, but I think I could write my autobiography in terms of a small number of books I read at certain decisive points in my life: Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Thomas Merton's *Seven Storey Mountain*, Luther's *On the Freedom of the Christian*, the treatise on grace in Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*, the writings of my teachers in graduate school. Just as providence drew Augustine to that passage in Romans at the precise moment when it would provide the salutary splash of cold but cleansing water he needed, so providence has placed certain books in my way at certain important times, and that is probably true for many of you also.

There is an old debate within Catholic theology and between Catholic

and Protestant theology on whether theology is a contemplative or a practical discipline. Good arguments can be made for both perspectives. In the Lutheran tradition within which I worked for many years, the standard argument was that theology is a practical discipline: its primary task is to guide the evangelical preaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments. That answer is not simply wrong. Theology is called to help in the enterprise of guiding the Church's preaching and sacraments (though in the end, that task, thank goodness, is in the hands of bishops, not theologians). But even as a Lutheran, I argued against a merely practical understanding of theology. If I were stranded on a desert island and, by chance, a box of books was stranded with me, and if, even better, it included works of Aquinas and, to make matters a bit more interesting, works of John Duns Scotus (if I may mention his name here), I would study them, try to think along with them, take notes on the laptop that washed ashore with me. I would not do it just to occupy my time or just because that is the sort of thing I like doing. I would do it because thinking about God, reading about the Gospel, its meanings and its implications, is an inherently good thing to do. It is a praise of God with the mind and an intellectual form of contemplation, not the highest contemplation, not infused contemplation, but contemplation nonetheless. Contemplation is an end in itself, but it is also formative, it moves we who are pilgrims, *viatores*, closer to our end. When one takes up and reads under the influence of grace, in the context of the theological virtues, one grows in conformity to Christ.

What all this means is that I cannot say some things that are often said in commencement addresses. I cannot say that what you have been doing for the last years you are now to leave behind and, with this training completed, start something quite new. It cannot quite be like the old elementary school vacation-time chant: "no more pencils, no more books, no more teachers' dirty looks." Not just because no teacher on this faculty ever bestowed on a student what might be called a "dirty look," but because beyond graduation, you will still need to take up and read, because a certain amount of taking up and reading is central to the calling you have been working toward. This need is especially pertinent to the charism of the Dominicans, the Order of Preachers. Taking up and reading in the Dominican tradition are at the service of preaching, of sharing and proclaiming what has been taken up and read. In question 188 of the *secunda secundae* of the *Summa*, Aquinas addresses the different sorts of religious life: active orders, orders oriented to preaching or hearing confessions, contemplative orders, and even (rather odd to our ears) military orders. In article 6 of the question, he asks whether an order devoted to the contemplative life is better than an order devoted to

the active life. In general, he affirms the superiority of the contemplative life. But, as so often in Aquinas, important qualifications follow. Contemplation is higher than external works, such as almsgiving or receiving guests. But there is another kind of activity, activity that arises from the “fullness of contemplation, such as teaching and preaching.” This work, he says, “is more excellent than simple contemplation. For even as it is greater to enlighten than merely to shine—*maius est illuminare quam lucere solum*—so it is better to give to others the fruits of one’s contemplation than merely to contemplate. Thus, the highest place in religious orders is held by those which are directed to preaching and teaching.” Now, the cynic might say that it is no surprise that a member of the Order of Preachers would say this. He ranks the orders, and—surprise, surprise—the vocation of his own order is the highest! He does nuance his answer. For example, external works that end in martyrdom, a possibility for those in military orders, can in some cases take precedence over contemplation. The degree of charity embodied in an act makes a great difference. But, even if we finally want to say comparisons of this sort are of limited usefulness, it is hard to deny Aquinas’s basic point. Simple contemplation has a kind of eschatological priority: it is closest to heaven. My closest friend in college became a Trappist monk. Our teachers tried to persuade him to go to graduate school in biblical studies, but he knew that was not his vocation. I remember one night arguing with him about this, saying he should go to grad school like me, and he finally responded: “Fine, you will know about God and I will know God.” Beyond this eschatological priority, however, for us who are pilgrims, who are on the way, not yet home, contemplating and sharing is a high vocation, whether or not it is the highest. To illumine is indeed better than merely to shine.

We should note, though, just what Aquinas says. He commends activity that proceeds from the fullness of contemplation. I do not think he meant contemplation as something one did at some time in the past, in your graduate program. He meant the ongoing contemplation of Christian truth. The task of preaching in all its forms, of sharing the fruits of contemplation, must be rooted in a continuing engagement with the object of contemplation, Christian truth as presented by the Gospel.

Which brings me to a question of great importance I have so far postponed. Take up and read, but take up and read what? Well, lots of stuff. There certainly is much not worth reading, even material that is truly corrupting. But there is much more that is profitable. But what is necessary; what *must* one take up and read? When Augustine heard the chant *tolle, lege*, he took up the book that he had at hand, the letters of Paul. He sets us an example. One should take up and read many things, but one is never done with

taking up and reading the Bible. The Bible is in a sense inescapable in the theological life. It is present in every Mass; much of it is read in the yearly cycle of the Office of Readings. Theological work is constantly mentioning the Bible. The temptation—though a temptation I am not sure I have always overcome—is to let that wash of bits and pieces of Scripture that is always sloshing around theology suffice for our attention to the Bible, to depend only on our limited vocational attention to Scripture. That was certainly not the attitude of Augustine or Dominic or Aquinas. None of them were, as John Wesley claimed to be, “a man of one book,” the Bible and nothing else. One cannot imagine Aquinas without Aristotle. But there can be no doubt that Aquinas was a man of the Bible, as one can see by reading his scriptural commentaries. A mistake I made when I first studied the *Summa* and other similar Scholastic texts was to skip quickly over the *sed contra*s, which are often biblical quotations. I wanted to move on to the meat of the “I respond.” That is not, I think, the way the Scholastics understood what they were doing. The brief biblical quotations operate something like tent pegs that determine how the tent of theological exposition is then set up in the context of some particular question. The tent can be pitched various ways, some better than others, but the tent pegs are set. Nor are they proof texts taken out of context, but their context is often the total canon of Scripture as interpreted by the Church. To switch metaphors, I have come to see the biblical citations in Scholastic works as forming a network of guide posts pointing the theologian to where the treasure is buried.

When I was in graduate school, many years ago, about when the ice was receding from the last ice age, more traditional modes of reading the Bible were being rediscovered in Protestant theological circles. An important point made by my teachers was that, traditionally, the Bible was not read so that it could be fit into the world we know, but the Bible was the world into which all else we knew was to be fitted. Put so crudely, that is certainly too simple; there was always a back-and-forth between secular knowledge and Scripture, but there was no doubt about who had the last word. There was a fundamental conviction that the world we lived in was the world described in Scripture. As George Lindbeck put it, the Bible absorbed the world, not vice-versa. History begins with creation and ends with the descent of the New Jerusalem, and its decisive axis runs from Abraham’s call to leave the land of his fathers, through Moses, David, and the prophets, to Jesus and the Church. The world spins on *that* axis, anchored by *those* poles. I mentioned earlier the way reading shapes the landscape we live in and people who live there. The Christian life and theological reflection on that life means living and thinking in the landscape and among the people of the Scriptures. For

that, there is no substitute for taking up and reading the Bible, attentively and, in a sense, objectively, that is, not so much with the subjective question of its relation to me and my life, a dangerous question when it is asked too insistently and often, but with the question of what it tells me about the Christian life, the world, and God.

We know nothing about the child who was providentially chanting *tolle, lege* on the other side of that garden wall in Milan over sixteen hundred years ago. Augustine himself says he did not know if the voice was that of a girl or a boy. But the voice still says something we must hear. For the last few years, you who are graduating have been following the lead of that voice and will need to go on following its lead. We must continue to take up and read until that day when reading will be over, the eternal day on which we will simply see. N.V

The Causality of Prayer and the Execution of Predestination in Thomas Aquinas

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Introduction: The Question of the Reasonableness of Petitionary Prayer

In a lucid and witty essay published in 1945, C. S. Lewis addressed a common objection to the practice of petitionary prayer.¹ This practice is not confined to Christianity, of course, but at least in relation to the Christian conception of the deity, it can seem to make little sense. The problem is simple. If God is all-wise and all-good, what is the point of asking him for things? He is already perfectly aware of our true needs, and he already wants to provide for them. Many of our requests are ignorant and misguided, and the others, it seems, will be at best superfluous. Nevertheless, as Lewis observes, petitionary prayer is part of the whole Christian tradition. Jesus himself practiced it, urged his followers to do so, and taught them how. Lewis wanted to explain that the real purpose of the practice is not to inform God of our needs or to twist his arm. Rather, petitionary prayer functions as a kind of cause, a way of bringing things about. It does so by divine institution and as a kind of share in God's own causality. And so understood, it makes perfect sense. I think Lewis is right about this.

Another matter, however, is Lewis's particular way of conceiving the causality of petitionary prayer, especially as to its relation to God's own causality and care for the world. I grant that his conception is quite

¹ C. S. Lewis, "Work and Prayer," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1945), 104–7.

straightforward and clear, and that it even has a strong initial plausibility. Indeed, I suspect that it gives voice to the way in which many thoughtful people who pray for things conceive of what they are doing. This is why, even though it is not the main focus of the present essay, I think that it serves as a good way of entering to the topic. But I do hope to show that it contains some serious problems.

In what follows, I shall first set out Lewis's answer to the question of the reasonableness of petitionary prayer. Then I shall raise one of the problems that I think it faces. This has to do with another attribute that has traditionally been ascribed to the Christian God; namely, omniscience, the knowledge of all things, including all temporal events, past, present, and future. In the essay on prayer, Lewis does not address this problem. But from things that he says elsewhere about temporal events and how God knows them, I think we can gather how he would have solved it.

Rather than evaluating this solution myself, I shall turn next to another twentieth-century British thinker, the philosopher Peter Geach. Although Geach agrees with Lewis in ascribing a causal function to petitionary prayer, Geach's way of understanding temporal events and God's knowledge of them contrasts sharply with Lewis's. In fact, Geach argues—I think persuasively—that a position like Lewis's actually ends up making petitionary prayer unable to function as a cause, and therefore renders it pointless. At the same time, however, Geach's own account of how petitionary prayer fits into God's overall plan has something very important in common with Lewis's. And in my opinion, what they have in common is very problematic.

This will bring me to my main theme, which is Thomas Aquinas's view of the matter. Like Lewis and Geach, Thomas does regard petitionary prayer as a divinely instituted way of causing things. On their temporal status, his position is similar to Geach's. But on how prayer and its effects fall under God's providential plan, Thomas differs greatly from both authors. I find his account far more satisfactory. Unfortunately, it is also considerably more complicated and philosophically challenging, and my presentation of it will have to be correspondingly longer.

The distinctive features of Thomas's view mostly pertain to the metaphysics of divine transcendence. My main task will be to show how, in his account, the full determinacy of God's eternal plan, including that part of it called predestination, not only does not exclude human self-determination, but also helps to explain why our free conduct, and especially our prayers, can make enormous differences in the course of events in the world. I shall lay out Thomas's thought on the matter in several parts, following an order that I shall explain when I get there.

C. S. Lewis and Peter Geach on the Causality of Prayer

Lewis on Petitionary Prayer and Time

Lewis's basic strategy in defense of petitionary prayer is a *reductio ad absurdum*. If God's wisdom and goodness made praying for things senseless, he argues, then they would also make doing anything senseless. "If it is foolish and impudent to ask for victory in a war (on the ground that God might be expected to know best), it would be equally foolish and impudent to put on a mackintosh—does not God know best whether you ought to be wet or dry?"² Lewis presses this comparison between prayer and action. When we act, we cause things to happen. They would not happen if we did not act. They depend on our action. Of course our power to act is from God. But this is just how we should think of prayer: as a divinely ordained way of causing things. God has made some things depend on our prayer. They would not happen if we did not pray.

To be sure, there is a difference. In the case of action, at least its immediate effect is quite certain. "You can be sure that if you pull up one weed that one weed will no longer be there."³ Praying for things does not make them so certain. Prayer's efficacy is at God's discretion. This, however, is not because prayer is a weaker kind of cause, but because it is at least potentially far stronger. Prayer is not intrinsically limited by space and time as our physical action is. Hence God retains a discretionary power over it. Otherwise it would be too dangerous. We would risk what Juvenal envisaged: "enormous prayers which Heaven in anger grants."⁴ But this difference between prayer and action is no objection to prayer's causality. If God lets us cause things at all, there is no reason why he should not let us cause some things through prayer. Lewis quotes Pascal: "God 'instituted prayer in order to allow his creatures the dignity of causality.'"⁵ Lewis adds that really both prayer and action serve this purpose.

Lewis offers an easily understood analogy to convey the overall situation that he envisions:

God has not chosen to write the whole of history with His own hand. Most events that go on in the universe are indeed out of our control, but not all. It is like a play in which the scene and the general outline

² Lewis, "Work and Prayer," 106.

³ Lewis, "Work and Prayer," 106.

⁴ Lewis, "Work and Prayer," 107, citing Juvenal, *Satires* 4.10.111.

⁵ Lewis, "Work and Prayer," 106; see Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, no. 513 (Brunschvicg numbering).

of the story is fixed by the author, but certain minor events are left for the actors to improvise. . . . He made the matter of the universe such that we can (in those limits) do things to it Similarly, He made His own plan or plot of history such that it admits a certain amount of free play and can be modified in response to our prayers.⁶

As I said, it is my impression that this is how many people think petitionary prayer works. In any case, please keep in mind this comparison with a playwright. I shall be referring to it often.

Now let me bring up a problem for Lewis's account. As I mentioned, it has to do with God's omniscience. I grant that the account fits with God's being all-wise. Whatever happens, and whatever we may ask for, God will discern the best way to respond. What is less clear, however, is whether Lewis's account fits with God's being all-knowing. His wisdom enables him to judge rightly about any fact that is presented to him. But if he is all-knowing, then he should already know all the facts too. Yet, on the playwright analogy, what God eternally knows seems to be only the "outline" that he has ordained for the world's history. Certain events, at least some minor ones, are improvised by the actors. These include our prayers. God will know how to answer them. But to say that his plan "can be modified in response to our prayers" does at least sound as though he did not always know about them, and as though he is continually modifying his plan, in the sense of filling it in, as he learns of them. His initial information consists only of the original script. It does not include the various improvisations that the actors introduce. He learns of those only as they happen. They may not affect the story's overall path, but they do add something to what he originally had in mind. Our actions and prayers offer new information for him to integrate into his plan. At no time does he know everything that can ever be known.

How Lewis would probably resolve this issue comes out, I think, in other writings. It is a simple solution, but radical. He suggests that time itself is only "our mode of perception" and that things are not "really" in time.⁷ The way they really are is as God sees them, and to him they are all "present in an eternal Now."⁸ On this account, God eternally knows all that will ever happen, including our prayers, and he has eternally decided what to do about them. The "modifications" that they involve are eternal too. So God does always know everything after all.

⁶ Lewis, "Work and Prayer," 105–6.

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Miracles. A Preliminary Study* (New York: MacMillan, 1947), 183–84. See also C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 149–50.

⁸ Lewis, *Miracles*, 183.

On this basis, Lewis even argues that it can be sensible to pray for past events—that is, events we perceive as past—at least when we are unsure about how they have turned out. Such *ex post facto* prayer can make sense, because God is eternally aware of it and can eternally ordain an event that fulfills it—even though, as we see it, the event precedes the prayer.⁹

Instead of commenting on this directly, let me now turn to Peter Geach.

Geach on Providence and Petitionary Prayer

Geach is fully in agreement with Lewis on the reason why petitionary prayer makes sense: it enjoys some sort of causality. He doubts whether natural reason can know whether prayer has any real effects. But he is sure of the revealed teaching that prayer causes things to happen.

In his analysis of what this causality entails, however, Geach is led to reject entirely Lewis's proposal about the nature of time. Geach argues as follows. To say that an event happened because you prayed for it means that it depended on your prayer. This is to say that, had you not prayed, then—other things being equal—it would not have happened.¹⁰ Hence asking for something to happen supposes that both its happening and its not happening are possible. And this in turn means that, at the time of the prayer, the event must be both able to happen and able not to happen.¹¹ Nothing past or present, however, is of this sort. Nor is any future thing that is fully predetermined in its causes.¹²

Geach thus finds the idea of praying for past events absurd. It is not a question of what God can do, but of what we can intelligibly ask for. Whether or not we know that an event has occurred, we cannot ask for it to have occurred. This is because the very fact that we put it in the past means that we consider the matter closed, already settled or determined. In praying for such a thing, we would have to say something like this: "If that did happen at that time, thank you; but if it did not happen at that time, please make it to have happened at that time." We would be asking, at least conditionally, for something that involves a contradiction: that something have happened at the very time when it is assumed not to have happened. Geach is saying that what we pray for must be, or at least must seem to us to be, what is called a future contingent thing. This means something whose coming about or not has not already been determined in the course of the

⁹ Lewis, *Miracles*, 186.

¹⁰ Peter Geach, "Praying for Things to Happen," in *God and the Soul*, 2nd ed. (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 1969), 88–89.

¹¹ Geach, "Praying for Things to Happen," 89.

¹² Geach, "Praying for Things to Happen," 93–94.

world. And if pray is truly efficacious, then what we pray for must truly be such a thing.

Moreover, if some of the future is truly contingent in this way, then the future cannot be on an equal footing with the past and the present. That is, things must really be in time. They cannot all be present together in an eternal “Now,” with our merely perceiving them as successive and temporal.¹³ If they were all present, they would all be determined already. Our freedom of choice would be an illusion, and again, petitionary prayer would be senseless.

Geach also rejects the idea that God is seeing all things as present. Future events are not present (yet). To regard them as eternally present would be a mere error. In fact, Geach argues, God cannot be seeing them at all. This is because they simply are not there to be seen.

In saying this, Geach is not denying that God knows the future. He is saying only that God does not see the future, as a spectator does, with a speculative kind of knowledge—a knowledge derived from and conformed to the things known. “God’s mind,” Geach insists, “does not conform to the world.”¹⁴ But God can still know the world and its future events, because he can have practical knowledge of them. Geach likens it to a person’s knowledge of the intentional movements that he or she is going to perform. Often it is practically impossible for people to be mistaken about what they are on the verge of doing.¹⁵ They truly know what they are about to do.

For Geach, in other words, God knows the future “by *controlling* it.”¹⁶ His control is irresistible and infallible, unable to be impeded or to fail. Does this mean that everything is predetermined? Geach says no. Some events can still be contingent. He points out that sequences of contingent events, in which now this possible alternative occurs and now that, often show definite patterns or regularities.¹⁷ Regularity, order, is a work of reason. The ordination by divine reason can be infallible without predetermining every single event. In this way, our free actions and prayers fit into God’s plan. To convey the idea, Geach gives his own analogy—a chess game.

God is the supreme Grand Master who has everything under his control. Some of the players are consciously helping his plan, others

¹³ Geach, “Praying for Things to Happen,” 90–93.

¹⁴ Peter Geach, “Prophecy,” in *Truth and Hope* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 86.

¹⁵ See Geach, “Prophecy,” 85–87.

¹⁶ Peter Geach, “Omniscience and the Future,” in *Providence and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 57 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁷ Geach, “Praying for Things to Happen,” 95–96.

are trying to hinder it; whatever the finite players do, God's plan will be executed; though various lines of God's play will answer to various moves of the finite players. . . . No line of play that finite players may think of can force God to improvise: his knowledge of the game already embraces all the possible variant lines of play, theirs do not.¹⁸

But now consider this analogy. Is it not just like Lewis's analogy of the playwright? And does it not also collide with one of the attributes traditionally ascribed to the Christian God? This time, the problem does not regard God's omniscience; about that Geach can insist that omniscience means only knowing at any given time everything that can be known at that time. But the problem regards God's immutability or unchangeability.

Granted, the chess master's command of the game is always perfect and does not change. He does not become a better chess player. But he does have to see what the other players do in the course of the game. Geach says that various lines of God's play will "answer to" various moves of the finite players. A chess master may know in advance how to answer any possible line of play. But he cannot know in advance which line the other will choose. He knows this only by seeing the other's choice when it is executed. Then he adjusts his play in view of it. His response may always be perfect. But his knowledge of the moves that are actually made in the game changes as the game progresses.

So it sounds as though, even if at any given time God knows all the things that can be known at that time and is, in that sense, omniscient, over the course of time he will be adjusting his plan. It sounds as though he will undergo some changes. They may not seem important. The essential form of the plan, the grand scheme of things, remains the same. But big or small, such changes are still changes. Whereas, in the Christian God, "there is no change or shadow of alteration" (Jas 1:17).¹⁹

Now, Geach is definitely not a process theologian. "Process theology is not a live option."²⁰ He does not think God can change in any real way. He explicitly denies that God's knowledge "has to be changing to keep up to date"²¹ or that he has "different information available at different times."²²

¹⁸ Geach, "Omniscience and the Future," 58. See also Geach, "Prophecy," 86, 89.

¹⁹ For the teaching of the Catholic Church, see the First Vatican Council, *Dei Filius*, ch. 1 (third session, April 24 April 1870; Denzinger-Schönmetzer / Denzinger-Hünemann no. 3001 [old Denz. no. 1782]: "simplex omnino et incommutabilis").

²⁰ Geach, "Omniscience and the Future," 42.

²¹ Geach, "Omniscience and the Future," 41.

²² Geach, "Praying for Things to Happen," 93.

But how can he deny this? Not as Lewis suggests doing, by denying the very reality of time. As we saw, Geach insists on time's reality. But the only alternative seems to be that God already knows all future events, and this because he has already decided them. His control cannot be limited to general patterns. It must extend to every single thing that happens. But if so, then how has he not predetermined every single thing? How will any event be any less necessary than if it existed in an eternal present?

In fact, Geach himself admits that his account makes it very hard to explain how God could have foreknown individual sins, such as Judas's, without predetermining them. Geach's only answer to this is that sin is a mystery.²³ But as I see it, the problem applies to all events, not just to sins. It seems that either God only learns of them as they happen and "modifies" his plan accordingly, or else he predetermines them. Either there are events that God learns about only when they happen, or else he predetermines all events, and no action, or prayer, or object of prayer, is truly contingent. In short, not only for Lewis but also for Geach, there is the specter of determinism. And Geach himself insists that determinism makes petitionary prayer senseless.

What strikes me most, however, is something else. It is something that Lewis's playwright analogy and Geach's analogy of a chess master have in common. In both, God has a general plan that will be executed no matter what we do. Our actions never do anything more than fill in details, and neither do our prayers. If these details are indeed contingent, able to be otherwise—if they are not necessary or predetermined—it is only because they are, as Lewis calls them, "minor events," merely incidental to the overall plot of the drama or the outcome of the game. In short, the Lewis and Geach explanations succeed in making our actions and prayers sensible only by making them trivial. What matters is the execution of God's plan, and this is inexorable and does not depend on our choices or actions or prayers in any way. Perhaps Lewis and Geach would recoil from this thought, but what they say surely suggests it. I do think we should recoil from it.

Thomas Aquinas on the Metaphysics of the Causality of Prayer and Its Providential Setting

Petitionary Prayer as a Cause

Now let me turn to Saint Thomas. I shall lay out his view of the matter in six sections. In this one, I present his basic conception of petitionary prayer, and I indicate the extent to which he is in agreement with Lewis and Geach

²³ Geach, "Omniscience and the Future," 61–66; see also Geach, "Prophecy," 87–88.

about what makes it sensible. The next section concerns how Thomas thinks all things and all events are contained in God's unchanging knowledge. After that, I begin to try to explain how Thomas thinks the contingency of human things squares with the universal infallibility of God's providence. This is a difficult topic, to say the least, and it takes up two rather lengthy sections. Then, in the penultimate section, I call attention to a fundamental distinction that Thomas draws with respect to the work of providence and the role that creatures play in it. Finally, in the concluding section, I apply the foregoing considerations to prayer and show what they imply about the potential scope and significance of its causality.

Thomas is certainly in agreement with the view that what makes petitionary prayer sensible—or, as Thomas puts it, “suitable” (*conueniens*)—is its causality.²⁴ Like Lewis, Thomas argues that, if God's perfect wisdom and goodness ruled out asking him for things, then it would also rule out ordinary actions such as walking in order to get somewhere or eating in order to be nourished, which would be absurd.²⁵ Of course God gives us many things without our asking for them. Nevertheless, Thomas says, “God . . . wishes to bestow certain things on us at our asking.” He does so “for the sake of our good, namely, that we may acquire a certain confidence in turning to him, and that we may recognize in him the author of our goods.”²⁶

Thomas goes into the causality of prayer in some detail. In general, he explains, request or petition is one way in which reason causes things.²⁷ Another way is command. A command is an expression directed to some agent or power that is inferior or subordinate to the commander's reason. It puts that agent or power under a kind of necessity or obligation to carry out or fulfill what it says. A petition, by contrast, may be directed to an agent that is equal or even superior to the one making it. Of itself, it does not impose an obligation on the agent to whom it is directed. Nevertheless it does serve as a kind of cause of the agent's fulfilling it. It does so, Thomas explains, insofar as it “disposes” (*disponit*) for its fulfillment.²⁸

This seems to mean that to petition functions as a kind of moving or

²⁴ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] II-II, q. 83, a. 2. All translations of Thomas in this essay are mine.

²⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* [SCG], III, ch. 95/96, Marietti no. 2716.

²⁶ ST II-II, q. 83, a. 2, ad 3: “Deus multa nobis praestat ex sua liberalitate etiam non petita. Sed quod aliqua vult praestare nobis petentibus, hoc est propter nostram utilitatem, ut scilicet fiduciam quam accipiamus recurrenti ad Deum, et ut recognoscamus eum esse bonorum nostrorum auctorem.”

²⁷ ST II-II, q. 83, a. 1.

²⁸ ST II-II, q. 83, a. 1.

efficient cause.²⁹ Evidently its immediate, proper effect would be precisely a disposition that is favorable to its fulfillment. Whatever the case is with other petitions, however, at least in the case of prayer the person whom it disposes for the fulfillment is not the one to whom it is directed. Prayer neither informs God of one's need for what is requested nor bends his will toward granting it. The one whom prayer disposes is the one who prays. It does so by orienting toward God one's desire for what is requested.³⁰ The causality or efficacy proper to prayer, then, is this: its making the one who prays somehow fit to obtain from God what is prayed for. Theologians call this sort of efficacy "impetration." The word is from the Latin *impetro/impetrare*, which originally meant simply to achieve or to bring about. Later it came to mean to get or to obtain, and now it means to procure something precisely by asking for it.

As for exactly how the disposition for its fulfillment that prayer effects functions as a cause of the fulfillment itself, I shall be able to say a little more about that once I have discussed how Thomas understands its relation to God's own causality.³¹ But here let me say a little more about impetration. A good thing that results from a prayer may not be properly an effect of it as prayer. The thing may not be strictly impetrated, obtained precisely because it is requested. Rather, it may come about because of the prayer's being an act urged by charity. Prayer moved by charity, like any other charitable act, is meritorious. It deserves a reward. And God may reward it by bringing about the very thing that was prayed for. But the efficacy that is proper to prayer as prayer, the impetration of what is prayed for, is not a matter of merit.³² In fact, God sometimes grants the prayers of persons lacking charity, persons who do not merit anything.³³ God grants their prayers out of

²⁹ See *ST* I-II, q. 17, a. 1, obj. 1: "For Avicenna says that the moving cause is fourfold; namely, perfecting, disposing [*disponens*], commanding [*imperans*], and counseling." These are called efficient causes in Thomas Aquinas, *In II phys.*, lec. 5, Marietti no. 180 [5] (Marietti), and here the *disponens* (or *praeparens*) is said to make the matter or subject apt for the final completion of some motion or change, the completion being the work of the perfecting (*perficiens*) cause. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio libri peryermeneias* [*EP*] I, lec. 7, Marietti no. 86 [5], where optative speech is reduced to petition (*oratio deprecativa*), "because in relation to a superior, a man does not have moving power [*vim motivam*] except through the expression of his desire."

³⁰ *ST* II-II, q. 83, a. 2. See also aa. 15–16 and Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium theologiae* II, ch. 2.

³¹ See comments below at note 75.

³² See the very detailed and careful study by P. De Letter, S.J., "Merit and Prayer," *The Thomist* 19 (1956): 446–80.

³³ See, e.g., *ST* I-II, q. 114, a. 9, ad 1.

mercy. But evidently even these prayers do somehow dispose for receiving the things prayed for. Otherwise they would not be causes of receiving the things at all. The things would not be given in answer to them. These prayers do impetrate things.³⁴ The impetration of prayer, Thomas says, is chiefly a function not of charity, but of faith. Faith moves mountains. By faith one is certain of God's omnipotence and mercy, and thereby hopes for his gifts. It is prayer rooted in faith that impetrates.³⁵

The proper efficacy of prayer, then, is a function of confidence in God's loving fatherly care for us, or in other words, confidence in his providence. This brings us to the problem of the divine immutability. For the precise issue is the immutability of providence.

*Prayer and Its Effects as Temporal Events
Contained in God's Immutable Plan*

Prayer would of course be useless, Thomas observes, if God took no interest in the world.³⁶ There must be such a thing as God's providence, his overseeing and caring for what happens here below. Prayer would also be useless, Thomas says in the same place, if God's providence predetermined everything or made everything happen by necessity. If prayer makes sense, then God's plan for the world, or what Thomas calls the order of his providence, must allow for our making a real difference—by our choices, our actions, and our prayers—in the course that events in the world take. And so, as Geach insists, prayer presupposes real contingency in things.

It also presupposes the reality of time. What we can sensibly pray for are things that have not yet been determined. They must be future things. Like Geach, Thomas holds that there is contingency only in future things. "What has been done—that is, the past—is not contingent."³⁷ No matter how contingent an event is in its own nature, once it has happened it is no longer able not to have happened. "What's done cannot be undone."³⁸ Of course, the present state of affairs that a past event has brought about might be able to be undone or changed. And obviously the thought is not that all past events happened by necessity, as though they were all predetermined to happen. That would mean that none of them was ever contingent, even before they happened. If a past event was contingent, then the necessity of its having happened is not absolute, rooted in its own nature or in its causes.

³⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 83, a. 16, corp. and ad 2.

³⁵ *ST* II-II, q. 83, a. 15, ad 3.

³⁶ *ST* II-II, q. 83, a. 2.

³⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *In VI eth.*, lec. 2, Marietti no. 1138. See also *ST* I, q. 25, a. 4.

³⁸ *Macbeth*, 5.1.63–4.

The necessity is merely conditional—the condition being precisely its having happened. As past, the past is necessary. On this, Thomas and Geach agree.

Nevertheless—and this is where he definitely parts company with both Lewis and Geach—Thomas totally rejects the idea that our prayers (or, for that matter, our choices and actions) somehow fill in details that God's original plan leaves open.³⁹ For Thomas, the eternal plan of divine providence is perfectly determinate, covering every detail of every single event that ever occurs, however small or insignificant the event might be. And the plan is indeed eternal. Hence, no part of it is a result of creaturely input. God receives no new information from us. His knowledge of the world and of every event in it is always perfect and utterly changeless.

Now, Thomas does hold that God eternally “sees” each thing and each event in its own actual being and “presentness.”⁴⁰ For both Lewis and Geach, as we saw, this position entails that all things are eternally present together and not really in temporal succession, even though we perceive them in that way. Lewis accepts that idea, whereas Geach rejects it. But for Thomas, things really are in temporal succession. What is eternally present is only God's vision of them.⁴¹ We must not think of eternity as having no determinate relation to time. It is not mere abstract, indeterminate timelessness. It is simple, successionless, and without parts; but it “includes all time.”⁴² God's present is, so to speak, both before our past and after our future. “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). He is eternally beholding each thing in the being and presentness that it has, not eternally, but at the particular time of its existence.

How is such beholding possible? We must not be misled by the word “vision.” Thomas inherited the expression “knowledge of vision” (*scientia visionis*) as a way of referring to God's knowledge of things that actually happen at some time. Another expression, “simple understanding” (*simplex intelligentia*), was used to refer to God's knowledge of the things that are possible but never actually happen.⁴³ Despite how it sounds, however, the expression “knowledge of vision” does not mean the sort of knowledge that a mere spectator has. It is not speculative knowledge, gathered from

³⁹ *ST I*, q. 22, a. 3. On the relation between prayer and God's immutability, see the fine study by Rudi te Velde, “Thomas Aquinas's Understanding of Prayer in the Light of the Doctrine of *Creatio ex Nihilo*,” *Modern Theology* 29, no. 2 (2013): 251–63, which draws mainly on *SCG III*, ch. 95/96.

⁴⁰ His term is *praesentialitas*. See, for example, *ST I*, q. 14, a. 13.

⁴¹ See *ST I*, q. 14, aa. 9 and 13; *SCG I*, ch. 66; *EPI I*, lec. 14, Marietti nos. 194–95 [19–20].

⁴² *ST I*, q. 13, a. 1, ad 3.

⁴³ *ST I*, q. 14, a. 9.

the things known and measured by them. Rather, as Geach insists, it is practical knowledge. For Thomas, the difference between *scientia visionis* and *simplex intelligentia* consists in the fact that God's knowledge of the things that exist at some time is knowledge that causes the things known. It is unqualifiedly practical knowledge.⁴⁴ Elsewhere he explains that this is called *scientia visionis* simply because only what has being outside the seer can properly be said to be seen.⁴⁵ But this seeing is not caused by what is seen. It is not a result of input from temporal things. Nor is it conformed to the being of the things, as speculative knowledge is.⁴⁶ Rather, the being of things derives from and conforms to God's vision. Thus, his knowledge of vision can also be called *scientia approbationis*, knowledge of acquiescence.⁴⁷ Perhaps we can say that God eternally "visualizes" or "envisions" everything that ever happens.

Because God's knowledge of things does not depend on the things, it can be eternal even though they are not. As Boethius argued, knowledge is in the mode of the knower, not of what is known.⁴⁸ The mode of being that a thing has in itself is not always the same as the mode that it has insofar as it is an object of knowledge. This will also be important for us further on.

The Real Contingency, by God's Will, of Our Causality

The universality of God's causality, its extending to absolutely all things and all events, does not mean that he is the only cause. Thomas rejects

⁴⁴ *ST I*, q. 14, a. 16. Cf. Augustine, *Confessiones* 13.38.53: we see the things that God has made because they exist, whereas they exist because he sees them. Thomas cites a similar passage from Augustine's *De Trinitate* in *ST I*, q. 14, a. 8, sc.

⁴⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *In III sent.*, d. 14, q. 1, a. 2, qc. 2. See also *ST I*, q. 14, a. 9, corp. Evidently the thing would have to be known in its own presentness and not merely as contained in something else that the knower effects, for instance some temporally prior created cause; in that case, one would only be "foreseeing" the thing, not "seeing" it.

⁴⁶ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 5.

⁴⁷ *ST I*, q. 14, a. 8. On this topic, see Brian J. Shanley, O.P., "Eternal Knowledge of the Temporal in Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (1997): 197–224; on *scientia visionis* and *scientia approbationis*, see 216–17. See also Shanley, "Divine Causation and Human Freedom in Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (1998): 99–122. I render *approbatio* as "acquiescence," not "approval"; unlike "approval," *approbatio* does not always imply an endorsement or a positive willing. God knows sins, but he does not will them or approve of them. He only permits them. (Nor does his knowledge cause them; see *ST I*, q. 14, a. 10, ad 2. If the causality of his knowledge does somehow extend to what he merely permits—see *ST I*, q. 14, a. 9, ad 3—I think it must only be with respect to what is positive and good therein. On the sense in which he causes this, see comments below at n. 67.)

⁴⁸ Boethius, *De consolatione philosophiae* 5.pr.6.1–43; cf. *ST I*, q. 14, a. 13.

the view that God “operates” (*operat*) all things immediately and that no created power operates anything.⁴⁹ The world that God envisions includes created causes. Of course they get their causality from him. And he knows whether and how they will exercise it. They cause what he eternally envisions them to cause.

Moreover, Thomas explains, God makes different created causes function in different ways or according to different modalities.⁵⁰ Some of them produce their effects by necessity. This means that they have the potential to produce those effects and have *no* potential *not* to do so. Neither they nor any other creature can impede or prevent those effects. By contrast, other causes have not only the potential to produce their effects but also the potential not to. They are contingent causes. Their potential to produce their effects can be obstructed.

Here it is very important to notice what sort of modality—what sort of necessity and contingency—is properly ascribed to a creature or to a created cause. It is what Thomas calls “natural necessity or contingency.” It is a function of the real potential, or lack thereof, belonging to the thing to which the necessity or the contingency is ascribed. It is something other than what is called “logical necessity or contingency.”⁵¹ This is the necessity or contingency of a truth about something. What is logically necessary is a truth whose negation has a predicate that is incompatible with the subject, or in other words, a truth whose negation involves a contradiction. What is logically contingent is a truth that involves no contradiction and whose negation involves no contradiction either.

The distinction between natural and logical modalities is not trivial, because they do not always correspond to each other. For instance, not everything that is naturally necessary is such that its negation entails a contradiction. An example is the continuation in being of a spiritual substance. This is naturally necessary. Such a substance has no potential to cease to be. Yet its ceasing to be is logically possible, inasmuch as its being depends on God’s conserving influence and there is no contradiction in God’s suspending that influence and allowing the thing to cease.

For our purposes, the point is that, for Thomas, the proper judgment as to

⁴⁹ *ST I*, q. 105, a. 5.

⁵⁰ See *ST I*, q. 22, a. 4. See also, below, beginning with the eighth paragraph of the present subsection.

⁵¹ See Thomas Aquinas, *In IX metaphys.*, lec. 1, Marietti no. 1775. To be precise, this passage is about logical possibility and impossibility. But necessity is nothing other than impossibility not to be, and contingency is nothing other than possibility to be and not to be. See also *In V metaphys.*, lec. 14, Marietti nos. 971–73.

whether a real being, and a real cause, is necessary or contingent is not with respect to logical modality, but with respect to natural modality; that is, with respect to the necessity or contingency that belongs to things in their own natural being, according to the potencies that are real principles in them.⁵² Logical necessity and contingency properly belong to truths about things. Truths properly exist in a mind.⁵³ Of course, if a predicate is true of a thing, then the thing is so, as the predicate says. But that truth can be necessary without the thing's being so by any natural necessity. This can be the case if the truth in question is not the effect of the being of the thing. In the next section, we shall see how it is that natural contingency, which is contingency in the proper sense, can belong to created beings and created causes as they are in themselves, even though a certain logical necessity accrues to them as found in the divine mind.⁵⁴

Now, of those causes that have both the potential to produce certain effects and the potential not to—contingent causes—some of them are such that they themselves determine whether and how they will act. Our wills are such causes. This is what it means, for Thomas, to say that we have free choice. Thomas's understanding of the freedom of choice is what is now called "libertarian." On this understanding, freedom of choice is incompatible with predetermination. Right then, when you make a certain choice about some matter, it is in your power to obstruct that choice and either to make no choice about the matter or even to make an opposite choice. You are not predetermined to make the choices that you make. The notion of a predetermined choice is not even coherent. To choose is precisely to determine oneself with respect to the choice's object. You cannot determine what is already determined. There is nothing that eliminates or suppresses your power not to make the choices that you make, other than your making them. Not even God does so. The fact that he eternally envisions everything we do, and that it all depends on his will, does not mean that everything we do we do necessarily, being unable not to do it.

Here we have a clear difference between Thomas and Geach. As we saw, they agree in holding that God knows the future, not by contemplating

⁵² See Thomas Aquinas, *In I de caelo et mundo*, lec. 25, Marietti no. 248 [3]. See also *In IX metaphys.*, lec. 1, Marietti nos. 1774–75: logical things are called possible equivocally, by a likeness to natural potency.

⁵³ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 1. See also q. 10, a. 3, ad 3: "Necessary signifies a certain mode of truth."

⁵⁴ For fuller discussion of the distinction between logical and natural modalities, see Stephen L. Brock, "G. E. M. Anscombe and Thomas Aquinas on Necessity and Contradiction in Temporal Events," in *Analytical Thomism: Traditions in Dialogue*, ed. Craig Paterson and Matthew S. Pugh (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 283–302, esp. 290–94.

something that is not there and not fit to be contemplated, but by a practical sort of knowledge. But Thomas never says, as Geach does, that God knows what will happen in the very same way in which a man knows the intentional action that he is about to perform. If a man can be objectively certain that what he plans to do is going to happen, this is only insofar as his will can make the happening necessary in itself. His foresight of the doing can be infallible only if, or insofar as, he can make the power or agency that is supposed to execute the doing be fully determined to it. He must remove or suppress any potential that there is in things for the doing's failure. He must predetermine the doing. This is not how Thomas thinks God makes certain of the things and events that he plans for.

This cannot be easy to understand. For it is something altogether proper to God. Nothing within our experience, indeed nothing created whatsoever, is like that. We ourselves are certainly not like that. When we, in our limited domain, can make certain that something will happen, it is only because we can take away or block the potential for its not happening. I can make certain that my pen will fall a moment from now because it has the potential and tendency to fall and I can now remove every obstacle to its falling. I can make it be unable not to fall. But God does not have to make a thing unable to act otherwise at a given time in order to be certain of how it will act at that time. In other words, God knows everything that ever happens, but the certainty of his vision of things does not entail his making all of them necessary or predetermined. What it entails is his causing the very modalities according to which things exist or come about. This is what no created cause can do. Thomas's ultimate explanation for it is highly metaphysical.

"The divine will," Thomas says, "must be understood as outside the whole order of beings, as a cause pouring forth being as a whole [*totum ens*] and all its differences."⁵⁵ This does not just mean that God cause all the things that there are, all the beings. It means that He causes the nature of being itself, and he causes all the different modes of this nature. These differences of being, Thomas goes on to explain, include both contingency and necessity, which is to say, both the potential to be one way or another and the potential to be only one way. According to his plan, God makes some things come to be necessarily, with no potential not to come to be. But he makes others

⁵⁵ *EP* I, lec. 14, Marietti no. 197 [22]: "Voluntas divina est intelligenda ut extra ordinem entium existens, velut causa quaedam profundens totum ens et omnes eius differentias." A few lines later, Thomas says that *only* God can cause the modes of being of things; the passage is quoted below in note 71. See also, *inter alia*, Thomas Aquinas, *De malo*, q. 16, a. 7, ad 15; *ST* I, q. 19, aa. 6 and 8; q. 22, a. 4, ad 3.

come to be contingently, with potential not to come to be.⁵⁶ His plan never fails. If a created cause fails to produce some effect that it is apt to produce, the failure itself was part of his plan. But the certainty of God's knowledge of whether the cause will succeed or fail does not entail that the cause has no potential to do otherwise or that its potential to do otherwise has been impeded prior to its doing what it does. Of the contingent causes that have succeeded, God knew, infallibly, that they would not fail, but not because he knew that they could not; they could, and he knew it. And likewise with the contingent causes that have failed. The success or failure of such causes is not predetermined, not necessary. Of course, I am talking about natural necessity, necessity rooted in the natures of the causes themselves.

Granted, once an effect of a contingent cause exists, it has a certain logical necessity. When and so long as it exists, it cannot not exist. This is not because its cause lacked the potential to fail, but simply because not existing is incompatible with existing. "What is, while it is, necessarily is." This, however, is trivial. For the necessity is merely conditional, and most importantly, it does not explain the effect's existence. It only follows thereon. What is not trivial is whether or not the effect was predetermined by what it follows on; that is, whether or not its immediate cause could have failed to produce it.

*The Necessity of What God Knows and Wills—
in Its Being Known and Willed by Him*

Still, there is also another necessity about an effect that is not trivial, because it too is prior to the effect's production—not prior in time, but nonetheless prior in nature and somehow even in duration.⁵⁷ It is a necessity rooted precisely in God's knowledge of things, which is eternal and a cause of

⁵⁶ Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as potential not to be. There is no potential that is defined by or consists in order toward not being. Rather, something is said to have potential not to be inasmuch as it has potential for some form of being that is incompatible with the form of being that it has. Typically this means that it has matter with potential for a form that is incompatible with the form by which it exists. Hence, *per accidens*, it has potential not to be.

⁵⁷ On eternity as prior to the world in duration, see *ST I*, q. 46, a. 1, ad 8. Here and in ad 6, Thomas observes that we inevitably imagine a time before the production of the world. But if we thought of God's providence as really temporal, we could hardly also think of it as infallible without making all things predetermined and so excluding freedom of choice. This is why Boethius insisted that what God has is not *praeventia* but *providentia* (*De consolatione philosophiae* 5.pr.6.17). God is not in time foreseeing things, but eternally overseeing all time.

things.⁵⁸ Any effect that actually comes to be at some time is something that God eternally knows to be at the time when it is. He knows it in the presentness belonging to it at that time. And even though, as we saw, the logical necessity belonging to it at that time is only conditional, God's knowing it to be at that time is absolutely necessary, since everything in him, including all of his knowing, is absolutely necessary. And of course his knowing it to be at that time entails its being at that time.

Yet not even this makes the effect necessary in itself or in its own being. It makes the effect necessary only in the being that it has in God's mind.⁵⁹ It is the necessity of the truth of his knowledge of it. Our knowledge of a future event cannot be necessarily true unless the event is predetermined, such that its immediate causes have no antecedently unblocked potential to fail. But God's can.⁶⁰ Just as his knowledge of the presentness of things, and of the logical necessity that follows on it, can be eternal even though the presentness is not eternal in itself, so too his knowledge of the things themselves can be necessary even though they are not necessary in themselves. What is contingent in itself can be necessary insofar as it is an object of knowledge. Again, this necessity does not explain the event. It only follows on the knowledge of the event.

One might wonder whether this also holds for God's will, which is more properly a cause of creaturely events than his knowledge is.⁶¹ His will influences things. Even if, unlike his knowledge, his will for things is not absolutely necessary in itself, its fulfillment in things is. It is unimpedible, irresistible.⁶² Does every event that he wills therefore occur with absolute necessity? This would certainly be paradoxical, if Thomas is right that God's will extends to the modalities of things. It would mean that, by his will, what occurs contingently occurs necessarily. But there is no paradox, I take it, because here too the necessity is only logical and belongs to the events only as they are in the divine mind. God's willing an event to occur is an eternal reality, in God. It does entail the event's occurring (when he

⁵⁸ On eternity and being, see *ST I*, q. 10, a. 4, ad 3; on God's knowledge as a cause of things, see q. 14, a. 8.

⁵⁹ See *ST I*, q. 14, a. 13, ad 2; cf. Boethius, *De consolazione philosophiae* 5.pr.6.25–32.

⁶⁰ *ST I*, q. 14, a. 13, ad 3.

⁶¹ See *ST I*, q. 14, a. 8.

⁶² *ST I*, q. 19, a. 3, ad 6; a. 6. What is unable to be impeded is necessary (*EP I*, lec. 14, Marietti no. 183 [8]; see also *In II phys.*, lec. 8, no. 210 [4]). Acts of human free choice (*liberum arbitrium*) are not brought about by necessity and can be impeded, by the will itself (*De malo*, q. 6, a. un., corp. and ad 15; cf. *ST I-II*, q. 75, a. 1, ad 2). For fuller discussion of the general topic see Stephen L. Brock, "Causality and Necessity in Thomas Aquinas," *Quaestio 2*, no. 1 (2002): 217–40.

wills it to). But this, the entailment itself, exists only in God, and it is only a conditional necessity.⁶³ This necessity is not at odds with the contingency that the event has, by God's will, in its own being. This is so even though the event also depends on an influence, natural or supernatural, from his will into things. That influence is not God. It is created. And it does not necessitate the event for which he gives it. It is a contingent, fallible cause.⁶⁴ God infallibly ordains it not to fail, but he does not ordain it to be infallible. What is infallible is only his ordination, which is in him. His ordination is necessarily fulfilled, but the cause that fulfills it does not do so by any necessity of its own.

By the way, the question just addressed concerns only the events that God positively wills, not those that he merely permits—namely, sins. Of sins, his will is not a cause, so the question does not arise.⁶⁵ He influences and moves things toward the events that he wills, and the question is whether this makes those events necessary. He does not will sins or move sinners toward them. “Every sin stems from a defect in the proximate agent, and not from the influence of the primary agent.”⁶⁶ God's eternal knowledge of a sin does entail his willing to permit it, but this willing remains in him, and the permitting itself is only a negation, a not-preventing. Neither his knowledge nor this willing is an influence in the sinner.

⁶³ Thus, Thomas takes the necessity of “if God wills something, then it is” to be merely the necessity of a “true conditional” (*ST I*, q. 19, a. 8, obj. 3). The reply to this objection does not deny this. It says simply that this is the *only* necessity belonging to some of the things that God wills, being the only necessity that he wants them to have.

⁶⁴ *ST I*, q. 19, a. 8, corp. Thomas does hold that God “works [*operat*] in every worker [*operante*],” both by giving things the forms by which they work and by applying their forms to their works (q. 105, a. 5). But of course the forms of many things, whether substantial or accidental, can be impeded from working, and Thomas gives absolutely no indication that God's applying them to their works consists in his producing *any* sort of motion *in* them *leading toward* their works (I mean, any motion over and above their intrinsic, natural inclination thereto, which of course is from him)—let alone an infallible or predetermining one. Granted, in being applied to their works, they go from potency to act. But this does not entail any such middle motion. If it did, an infinite regress would follow. They would go from potentially to actually being so moved, which would entail yet another motion, etc. I mention this especially with a view to the question of an intrinsically infallible movement of grace; on this, see below, note 101.

⁶⁵ Geach says: “Everything . . . happens by [God's] effective or permissive will” (“Prophecy,” 86). To me this sounds too much as though God's permission were a cause of what is permitted. Of course sin would not happen if God did not permit it, but to say that his permission causes it would be to accuse him of permissiveness.

⁶⁶ *SCG III*, ch. 162, Marietti no. 3327: “Peccatum omne ex aliquo defectu provenit proximi agentis, non autem ex influentia primi agentis.”

Thomas does hold that all the action in a sin somehow derives from God's influence, so that he is in some way the action's cause. What he is not a cause of, either directly or indirectly, is the disorder that is joined to the action and that makes it a sin.⁶⁷ Still, I believe, the divine influence from which the action derives cannot itself be a movement or a tendency directly toward that very action. It hardly could be, at least in the case of action that is bad and sinful in species, that is, action that has sinful disorder attached to it *per se*.⁶⁸ For then the influence would involve at least an indirect tendency toward the disorder itself. Such action, by its own nature, deviates from God's order, and therefore surely from the tendency of his influence.⁶⁹ Only the sinner's will tends directly toward the action and, indirectly or secondarily, toward its disorder and sinfulness. This tendency does depend on things that result from prior divine influence, but it is a misuse of that influence, a partial and defective application of it, not altogether in line with the influence's own tendency. God does not move the sinner's will precisely toward any action that is *per se* sinful. Thomas is clear that only the sinner, not God, determines him to his specific act: "God moves a man's will as a universal mover to the universal object of the will, which is the good. And without this universal motion, a man cannot will anything. But a man determines himself, through reason, to willing this or that, which is truly good or a specious good."⁷⁰

⁶⁷ *ST* I-II, q. 79, aa. 1–2; *SCG* III, ch. 162, Marietti nos. 3323–28.

⁶⁸ See *ST* I-II, q. 79, a. 2, ad 2 and ad 3.

⁶⁹ Of course it is not that the overall tendency of God's action fails. It succeeds, however, only via further influence or influences that he ordains: punishment or inducement to repentance, or both (in different respects). See *ST* III, q. 86, a. 4; I, q. 19, a. 6; q. 103, aa. 7–8; I-II, q. 93, a. 6.

⁷⁰ *ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 6, ad 3: "Deus movet voluntatem hominis, sicut universalis motor, ad universale obiectum voluntatis, quod est bonum. Et sine hac universali motione homo non potest aliquid velle. Sed homo per rationem determinat se ad volendum hoc vel illud, quod est vere bonum vel apparet bonum." That God applies every form to its works (see note 64 above) does not entail his determining a man's will to all of its acts. He determines and applies the will to its *primary* act, the work that is natural and proper to it as the form that it is. This is the willing of universal good. By virtue of this act, the will can go on to apply and determine itself, through reason, to willing a particular good. To will universal good *is* to be apt to use reason to determine acts of will about particulars. The immediate and proper agent of this determination is the will itself, not God. (Not every application of an agent to its work is *immediately* from God; only the first or primary one must be [see *SCG* III, ch. 67, Marietti no. 2418].) This is why the determination can be bad, bearing on a merely specious good: the will's use of reason can be defective. Sometimes, it is true, God does *move* a man to will a specific (and true) good (*ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 6, ad 3). But not all *moving* is *necessitating*; some is only *inclining*. For a signal case of such moving, see the consideration of how significant the

But let me stress once more that the causality of God's providence is unique.

Now, the possible and the necessary are differences of being, and therefore necessity and contingency in things and the distinction of each according to the nature of their proximate causes originate from the divine will itself. For he has disposed necessary causes for the effects that he has willed to be necessary, and he has ordained causes acting contingently or the effects that he has willed to be contingent. And according to the condition of these causes, effects are called either necessary or contingent, although all depend on the divine will as on the first cause, which transcends the order of necessity and contingency. *This, however, cannot be said of the human will, or of any other cause, for every other cause already falls under the order of necessity or contingency.* Hence, either the cause itself must be able to fail or, if not, its effect is not contingent, but necessary. The divine will, on the other hand, is unfailing; yet not all its effects are necessary, but some are contingent.⁷¹

So the necessity belonging to God's causality is something strictly divine, uncaused. It remains in God. It does not spill over onto created causalities, even the necessary ones. God's causality is so necessary, so certain or infallible, that it cannot fail even in the production of effects that are mediated by contingent causes and that are therefore contingent in their own being. This is because he causes the very contingency of such causes. Among these causes are human beings. Far from suppressing the freedom of our conduct, the necessity of God's causality is the very thing that undergirds it.

things that depend on our prayer can be in the section "A Crucial Distinction about Providence in General and Predestination in Particular" below.

⁷¹ *EP* I, lect. 14, Marietti no. 197 [22]: "Sunt autem differentiae entis possibile et necessarium; et ideo ex ipsa voluntate divina originantur necessitas et contingentia in rebus et distinctio utriusque secundum rationem proximarum causarum: ad effectus enim, quos voluit necessarios esse, disposuit causas necessarias; ad effectus autem, quos voluit esse contingentes, ordinavit causas contingenter agentes, idest potentes deficere. Et secundum harum conditionem causarum, effectus dicuntur vel necessarii vel contingentes, quamvis omnes dependeant a voluntate divina, sicut a prima causa, quae transcendit ordinem necessitatis et contingentiae. *Hoc autem non potest dici de voluntate humana, nec de aliqua alia causa: quia omnis alia causa cadit iam sub ordine necessitatis vel contingentiae;* et ideo oportet quod vel ipsa causa possit deficere, vel effectus eius non sit contingens, sed necessarius. Voluntas autem divina indeficiens est; tamen non omnes effectus eius sunt necessarii, sed quidam contingentes" (emphasis added). See also *ST* I, q. 22, a. 4, ad 3.

*A Crucial Distinction about Providence in General
and Predestination in Particular*

So God infallibly knows, but does not predetermine, our choices, the actions that we freely choose to perform, and the prayers that we freely choose to address to him about things that we consider to be able to come about and able not to come about. This is extremely important: our prayers themselves are among the contingent things that fall under God's eternal plan.⁷² They do not come to it from the outside, so to speak, and lead him to change or modify it. Thomas knows that it can seem as though the immutability of God's plan makes prayer useless. But this, he says, is because we imagine that our prayers fall outside of his plan. We fail to consider that the very existence and efficacy of our prayers are themselves part of his plan.⁷³ We find it hard not to think that we are trying to give him information or to change his mind. I suppose that this is why the immutability of God and of his providence tend to disconcert us more when we are thinking of prayer than when we are thinking of our ordinary physical actions. When we are thinking about what to do, we are focused on the things around us, with God at least somewhat in the background. Even if we know that the success or failure of our actions depends on him, we are not led to imagine that our efforts are aimed at producing a change in him or in his plan. But when we are speaking directly to him, that is how it can look. We have to make a special effort to get past that look. We have to make a special effort of faith. While we can grasp that such a plan must exist, we cannot comprehend it. The modality of its causality does not correspond to that of the things planned for. There is no creaturely analogue for this.

In short, God has eternally arranged that some things happen because of and in answer to human prayer. If, as the saying goes, man proposes and God disposes, God disposes for the proposal too. "We pray," Thomas says, "not in order to change the divine disposition, but in order to impetrate that which God has disposed to be fulfilled by the prayers of the saints"; or in other words, "as Gregory the Great says, 'so that by asking, men may deserve to receive what Almighty God from eternity has disposed to give.'⁷⁴ And yet we pray freely—that too is part of the plan—and what happens because we pray for it would not happen if we did not.

In the preceding paragraph, I use the word "disposes" advisedly. It recalls

⁷² *ST* II-II, q. 83, a. 2. See also *SCG* III, ch. 95, Marietti no. 2716.

⁷³ *SCG* III, ch. 95, Marietti no. 2721.

⁷⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 83, a. 2. He is quoting a passage on predestination attributed to Gregory the Great (*PL*, 77:188).

the earlier discussion of prayer itself as “disposing” for its fulfillment.⁷⁵ If prayer does that, this is because God makes it do so. It therefore seems clear that the causality or moving power of prayer, with respect to its own fulfillment, is merely instrumental. The principal cause is God: “Our soul works under God as an instrumental agent under a principal agent,” and “an instrumental agent does not dispose for the perfection that the principal agent is to bring about except insofar as it acts by virtue of the principal agent.”⁷⁶ This, I think, makes it easy to see how God can truly be said to fulfill our prayers even though they have no effect on him. He is not subject to their causality, but he causes it. What we ask for, our asking for it, and its depending on our asking are all from him.

Now let us begin to consider how significant the things that depend on our prayer can be.⁷⁷

To repeat: on Thomas’s account, neither our actions nor our prayers fill in or modify God’s eternal plan. They do not affect the plan in any way. For Lewis and Geach, you recall, they do have some effect on the plan. However, it is a very small one. It fills in some details. The things that depend on our prayer would be incidental or marginal to God’s overall purposes, just as the actors’ improvisations are incidental to the plot of the drama and the amateur player’s moves are incidental the outcome of the chess game. But this is not at all how Thomas sees it. The crucial point is a distinction that he draws regarding divine providence.⁷⁸

One thing is the very *ratio* of providence. This is the plan for the world that God conceives and freely adopts.⁷⁹ It is divine providence itself.⁸⁰ It is something that remains in God.⁸¹ It is therefore simple and eternal.⁸² It

⁷⁵ See comments above at note 28.

⁷⁶ *SCG* III, ch. 149, Marietti no. 3218. Thomas often speaks of causes that function “instrumentally and dispositively.”

⁷⁷ I shall not go into it here, but it is noteworthy that Thomas, citing Augustine, thinks that God sometimes does what Juvenal said and grants prayers for sinful things (see comments above at note 4). He does so as a punishment (*ST* II-II, q. 83, a. 16).

⁷⁸ See *ST* I, q. 22, a. 1, ad 2; q. 22, a. 3.

⁷⁹ On the plan as something that God conceives and freely adopts, see *ST* I, q. 19, a. 4, ad 4; q. 23, a. 2, ad 2 and ad 3.

⁸⁰ *ST* I, q. 22, a. 1.

⁸¹ *ST* I, q. 22, a. 1; I-II, q. 91, a. 1.

⁸² See *ST* I, q. 22, a. 1, ad 3 (simple); ad 2 (eternal); I-II, q. 91, a. 1 (eternal). Indeed, the reality of God’s providence, as of that of any of his immanent actions (those of understanding and willing), is God himself; see *ST* I, q. 22, a. 1, ad 3, and q. 16, a. 5, and q. 19, a. 1. Providence does also involve a relation to creatures, but every relation of God to creatures is only a relation of reason. That is, it posits nothing real in him that is either shared with creatures or somehow proportioned to them (*ST* I, q. 13, a. 7).

is unable to fail, and it extends immediately to each and every creaturely reality, necessary or contingent.⁸³ Another thing, however, is the plan's execution. This terminates outside of God. It is temporal.⁸⁴ Of course, it comes about chiefly through God's own influence, but as already noted, the influence from God in creatures is not God. It is creaturely. It is not eternal but temporal. It is not simple but manifold. And only a part of it has a necessary causality. The causality of another part is contingent. Indeed, some of God's created influences in things actually do fail of their proper effects. He permits them to do so.

What is more, not all of God's plan is executed immediately through his influence. Some of it comes about by way of the doings of creatures. And the range and importance of what is mediated in this way is very great. In the formation of God's plan, we play no role at all, not even a small one. But in its execution, the role that we can play is huge. It is by no means confined to "minor events." At least, not unless the salvation of God's elect is a minor event. I refer to Thomas's understanding of that special part of divine providence which is called predestination.⁸⁵ This will take some spelling out.⁸⁶

His relations to creatures do not in any way compromise his absolute distinctness and self-sufficiency. Moreover, even though some of his relations of reason to creatures are temporal, not all of them are (*ST I*, q. 13, a. 7, obj. 3 and ad 3). Hence providence can very well be eternal. These considerations also apply to predestination; see *ST I*, q. 23, a. 2, corp. and ad 1.

⁸³ *ST I*, q. 22, a. 3; a. 4, ad 1 and ad 2, and ad 3; q. 103, a. 6.

⁸⁴ *ST I*, q. 22, a. 1, ad 2.

⁸⁵ For the distinction between predestination itself and its execution, the former being a part of the plan (*ratio*) of providence and existing only in God, and the latter being in those who are predestined, see *ST I*, q. 23, a. 2. The distinction between predestination itself and its temporal execution appears in Augustine's *Confessiones* 13.34.49.

⁸⁶ Scholars in the field will know that, in recent years, there has been considerable discussion of Thomas's doctrines, and those of later Thomists, concerning predestination, divine foreknowledge, grace, free will, and so forth. The literature is far too vast to canvass here, but I should acknowledge that some of my interpretations in the preceding two sections, this one, and the next, are potentially controversial. (For instance, see notes 64 and 70 above and notes 90, 95, 101, 102, and 104 below. In the last four of these notes, I take issue, reluctantly, with positions voiced by the great master of the spiritual life, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P. I do so because I find that they are both well known and widely assumed to be Thomas's views, and because I think that in fact they seriously misrepresent Thomas's teachings on grace and predestination and can hinder the understanding of his teaching on prayer—and of Garrigou-Lagrange's own teaching on prayer.) In any case, I hope my interpretations are both clear and not stale. One study that I would recommend is Lawrence Feingold, "God's Movement of the Soul through Operative and Cooperative Grace," in *Thomism and Predestination. Principles and Disputations*, ed. Steven A. Long, Roger W. Nutt, and Thomas Joseph

The eternal plan of predestination, Thomas explains, is quite certain and fixed, in every particular.⁸⁷ But this is not at all to say that those who are predestined will be saved no matter what they do, inexorably.⁸⁸ Their salvation depends on what they do. Nor are they predetermined to do it. They do it freely: up until they actually do it, they have the power and all the conditions needed in order to refrain from do it. God does not block that power or remove those conditions so as to clinch their doing it. Certainly he is a cause of their doing it. Whatever they do toward their salvation depends on his help, his inclining them to do it by his supernatural, gratuitous influence. They can do it only by applying or using that help. But they use it, and do what they need to do, freely.

Especially pertinent in this regard is a passage from Thomas's commentary on the Gospel of John. It concerns John 1:12—"He gave them power to become sons of God." Thomas says that, for adults, in the giving of the grace of justification (by which people become children of God), consent by a movement of free will—*consensus per motum liberi arbitrii*—is needed, and that, "because it is in a man's power to consent and not to consent, he [Christ] 'gave them power.'"⁸⁹ Christ did this, Thomas here explains, not only by producing and offering grace, but also by providing another needed help of divine grace. This grace is "not habitual but moving." It consists in "moving man's free will so that he may consent to the reception of grace."

Clearly what this moving grace directly tends toward is one's consent to grace. However, there is no suggestion that it altogether blocks the power to withhold consent.⁹⁰ Thomas terms this moving grace an interior "calling" (*vocatio*) and says that God calls by "instigating" (*instigando*) the will interiorly. This hardly sound like an irresistible or intrinsically infallible motion. In fact, in saying that "it is in a man's power to consent and not to consent,"

White, O.P. (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2016), 166–91. For a judicious overview of the whole history of the doctrine of predestination, see Matthew Levering, *Predestination: Biblical and Theological Paths* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁸⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 23, aa. 6 and 7.

⁸⁸ *ST* I, q. 23, a. 8.

⁸⁹ *Super Ioan* 1, lec. 6, Marietti nos. 153–54: "In datione gratiae requiritur in homine adulto ad iustificationem suam consensus per motum liberi arbitrii: unde quia in potestate hominis est ut consentiat et non consentiat, 'dedit eis potestatem.'"

⁹⁰ Can you do a thing freely if what moves you toward it totally impedes your power to do the opposite? That is, for freedom, is it sufficient that the root power to do the opposite is only blocked, not destroyed? Well, if it were, would other animals not act freely? Dogs have power to run and power to sit. What moves them to run does not destroy their power to sit, but only impedes it. But they do not run freely. See *ST* I, q. 82, a. 2, ad 3; I-II, q. 13, a. 2, ad 2.

Thomas is evidently referring to *one* power. Power to consent to something and power to withhold consent to it are inseparable. This is explicit in his account of consent in the *Summa theologiae*. Consent, he says, involves the application of appetitive movement to something, and this belongs only to agents that have their appetitive motion “in their power,” such that they can “apply it or not apply it to this or that.”⁹¹ The proper function of that gratuitous divine motion is to enable one to consent to the reception of grace. But, inevitably and indirectly, it also enables one to withhold that consent.

Leaving a person free to use it or not is by no means a peculiarity of the moving grace that makes possible one’s consent to the reception of habitual, sanctifying grace. Thomas says quite generally: “The inclination of grace does not impose necessity, but one who has grace is able not to use it and to sin.”⁹² What makes not using it possible, of course, is that one also has inclinations that are somehow opposed to it. The inclination of grace does not totally neutralize such inclinations. It only makes resisting them possible. With its help, people can and often do resist temptation. But people also, despite its help, can and sometimes do give in. Neither habitual grace nor any actual, moving grace is God. His infallibility regarding which graces will bear fruit and which will not does not entail that some of the graces be intrinsically irresistible and that the others be intrinsically inadequate.

The reprobate too are offered all the help they need to be saved. “God does not fail to do what is necessary for salvation.”⁹³ He is “ready to give grace to all, for he wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth,” so that “those alone are deprived of grace who offer an obstacle within themselves to grace; just as, while the sun is shining on the world, the man who closes his eyes is blamed if as a result some evil follows, even though he cannot see unless he is provided with sunlight.”⁹⁴ The sun might shine

⁹¹ *ST* I-II, q. 15, a. 2: “Brutum animal appetit quidem, sed non applicat appetitum motum ad aliquid. Et propter hoc non proprie dicitur consentire, sed solum rationalis natura, quae habet in potestate sua appetitum motum, et potest ipsum applicare vel non applicare ad hoc vel ad illud.” The consent required for receiving sanctifying grace is treated in I-II, q. 113, a. 3. (The term *consentit* appears there in the *sed contra*. Consent is a movement of *liberum arbitrium*, which is what this article is saying that justification requires.) The consent may be prior in time to receiving sanctifying grace; see ad 1 in the same article.

⁹² *ST* I, q. 62, a. 3, ad 2. Both here and in I-II, q. 113, a. 3, freedom is seen as the proper mode of rational *nature*. Notice that, for Thomas, “to use” (*uti*) is to *apply* a thing to some operation (I-II, q. 16, a. 1), and is proper to agents that have free choice, just as consent is (a. 2); see notes 64 and 70 above.

⁹³ *ST* I, q. 49, a. 2, ad 3. Also very pertinent is I-II, q. 106, a. 2, ad 2.

⁹⁴ *SCG* III, ch. 159, Marietti no. 3313.

equally on the closed eyelids of two equally drowsy men, yet induce only one to open them rather than to yield to the drowsiness.⁹⁵ Both using God's help to resist temptation and yielding to temptation despite his help are in one's power. Neither the help nor the temptation has to be overwhelming in order for God to be certain of the result. If his plan is that a given grace actually result in a good choice, then it will. But this is because his plan is infallible, not because the grace is. The grace would be infallible only if it altogether blocked the power for the opposite choice, and then its result would not be a choice at all. Nor could its result have merit. Only works of free choice merit.⁹⁶ A choice has causes, but they do not make the opposite choice impossible. Only the choice itself does.

So, predestination is not predetermination.⁹⁷ As Saint John Damascene says, "God foreknows everything but does not predetermine everything, since he foreknows all the things that are in our power but does not predetermine them. For he neither wills malice nor compels virtue."⁹⁸ What Damascene calls "predetermination," Thomas explains, is the imposition of necessity, such as is found in natural things, which are predetermined to

⁹⁵ It may be objected that, *ceteris paribus*, one who has done good works must have gotten more grace or more help from God than one who has not; for, as Thomas says, God's love causes the goodness of creatures, and so if one creature is better than another, God must love that one more. See, e.g., Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *Predestination*, trans. Dom Bede Rose (St. Louis, MO: Herder, 1939), 315. He cites *ST I*, q. 20, a. 3. This article of the *ST*, however, says nothing about grace or any help, and I do not see how it supports Garrigou-Lagrange's argument. To do better works is to be better, but to get more help is not. That one person did good works and was saved, while another did not and was not, does not entail that God helped the first one more. It entails only that he loved the first one more, wanted him to use the help given, and permitted the second one not to use it. The help given, in itself, might be equal. Nor is this to deny that the help is a cause of the very use of it. It is. It inclines one to use it, and without this inclination, one cannot use it. The help is a cause of the use of it, even if its nature is that of a cause that can and sometimes does fail. Only God's will about the matter cannot fail. If, in creating, God causes diverse effects through *no* secondary causes, surely he can also obtain diverse results from *equal* causes.

⁹⁶ See *ST I-II*, q. 21, a. 4, ad 2; q. 114, a. 1.

⁹⁷ Nor is reprobation. If someone is reprobate, it follows necessarily that they will not be saved, but this necessity is merely that of a "true conditional" just as is the necessity by which the predestined are saved (see note 63 above). Moreover, reprobation does not cause the reprobate person's failure to accept or use the grace offered to him, thereby sinning. Reprobation means only that God foresees the person's sinning and wills to permit it and to punish it with damnation. See *ST I*, q. 23, a. 3, corp., ad 2, and ad 3.

⁹⁸ St. John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa*, ch. 44 (*PG*, 2:30), as quoted in *ST I*, q. 23, a. 1, obj. 1 and ad 1.

one.⁹⁹ To my knowledge, Thomas nowhere posits any special kind of help proper to the elect, let alone a help that, of itself, infallibly elicits works that lead to salvation.¹⁰⁰ In other words, Thomas seems very far from accounting for such works by graces that are “intrinsically and infallibly efficacious” and “predetermining.”¹⁰¹

Again, is such an account even consistent with Thomas’s doctrine of merit?¹⁰² In heaven, where God’s call is indeed irresistible, there is no merit.¹⁰³ His predestining a person to heaven certainly does not depend on his fore-knowing the person’s merits.¹⁰⁴ But equally certainly, it does not eliminate

⁹⁹ *ST I*, q. 23, a. 1, ad 1.

¹⁰⁰ What is called the “grace of predestination” (*gratia praedestinationis*) is something in God (his gratuitous love for those whom he predestines), not something posited in the predestined creature (*ST I-II*, q. 110, a. 1).

¹⁰¹ These expressions are from Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 311. On 315 he calls this intrinsically and infallibly efficacious grace “predetermining and non-necessitating.” In the next chapter (316–23), he tries to show that such a notion is not incoherent. I do not think he succeeds. As far as I can tell, what he really shows is only that God’s will is infallibly efficacious and non-necessitating. Throughout the chapter, tacitly, he is either identifying grace with God’s will or at least assuming that the mode of the one must extend to the other (as he also seems to do on 78–79). As I read Thomas, God’s will is indeed infallibly efficacious. But its being so does not require that the created instruments that it uses, among which is grace, be intrinsically infallible. No created thing can be a cause of the very modality with which its effects exist or act. One created active principle can predetermine another to act in a certain way only by insuperably obstructing its potential not to act so. God does not need to do that. If he did, no creature could have free choice.

¹⁰² Or, for that matter, demerit? Let us suppose that at least some graces are resistible, and that not resisting grace requires grace. Does a person’s not resisting a given resistible grace require *another, distinct* grace? If not, and if the person does not resist this one, then it is a grace that is not intrinsically infallible and that nevertheless, by itself, has the result to which it tends. So, in this case, intrinsically infallible graces are *not* always needed, after all, to assure the execution of God’s decrees. Why then should they even be the *normal* thing? On the other hand, if not resisting a resistible grace does require an additional, intrinsically infallible grace, then people’s having resisted grace cannot be the original reason why intrinsically infallible grace is withheld from them. Rather, its having been withheld from them will be the original reason why they have resisted. Does this not make God an indirect cause of sin?

¹⁰³ *ST I*, q. 62, aa. 8 and 9.

¹⁰⁴ See *ST I*, q. 23, a. 5. Let me stress that the view I am proposing does not entail that God be somehow passive. It is not that his knowledge of who does and who does not use grace is derived from their actually using or not using it. But if the certainty of his knowledge does not depend on creaturely information, neither does the infallible efficacy of his will require created instruments that predetermine or necessitate its effects. No infallible created cause is needed in order to “assure” the execution of his decrees (pace Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 80–81, 84). To say that such a cause

the possibility, or the need, of the person's performing works that merit heaven. Such works are typically included in the plan of predestination and integral to its execution.¹⁰⁵ Often the execution also includes other works, good but not properly meritorious, whose very nature is incompatible with causes that necessitate them or their proper effects—works such as the consent to the reception of sanctifying grace and prayers that impetrate needed things from God. And even if the impetratory causality of prayer is not a matter of merit, it still depends on faith; and the act of faith, belief, is essentially a matter of free choice. The choice must be helped by grace, of course, but it is helped in such a way as still to be free.¹⁰⁶ Does the notion of predetermining, intrinsically infallible movements of grace even square with the nature of faith? If not, then can it possibly square with the efficacy of petitionary prayer?

*How, and How Far, Prayer Can Contribute
to the Execution of Predestination*

In any case, it is on the role of prayer in the execution of God's providential plan that Thomas's view contrasts most with Lewis's and Geach's. I have argued that the necessity of the truth of God's knowledge of all creaturely doings is neither a function nor a source of necessity in all the doings themselves. To account for it, nothing outside of him should be invoked. And, while we can be sure that he has such knowledge, we cannot grasp what it consists in. To try to explain the infallibility of God's providential plan by appeal to created causes, whether natural or supernatural, is to run afoul of the transcendence of the divine nature.

But there is still the distinction between the plan of providence and its execution. As for the role of created, secondary causes in the execution of God's plan, Thomas goes so far as to say that predestination itself is "helped by the prayers of the saints":

Someone's salvation is predestined by God in such a way that whatever leads the man towards salvation also falls under the order of

is needed, I believe, not only rules out creaturely free choice but also subjects God's causality to created modalities, undermining his will's transcendence with respect to the nature of being.

¹⁰⁵ Again, see *ST* I, q. 23, a. 5.

¹⁰⁶ *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 9.

predestination; whether it be his own prayers or those of another, or other good works, and such like, without which one does not attain salvation. Whence the predestined must strive to work and pray well, because through means of this sort the effect of predestination is definitively accomplished [*certitudinaliter impletur*]. For this reason it is said: “Labor more that by good works you may make firm your calling and election” (2 Pt 1:10).¹⁰⁷

A few lines later, anticipating the remark by Pascal that Lewis cited, Thomas says that God uses such intermediate causes, lying between him and what he ultimately intends, not out of weakness, but “so that the beauty of order be observed in things, and to communicate even to creatures the dignity of causality.”¹⁰⁸ Clearly this beauty is no mere ornament. A great deal may hang on what a creature does. Indeed, on Thomas’s account, the things that it makes the most sense to pray for are the very biggest things: grace, virtue, final perseverance—you cannot merit final perseverance, but you certainly can and should pray for it¹⁰⁹—and heaven itself. Again, think how great are the things that Jesus teaches us to pray for in the Our Father.

In order to be sure of accomplishing his will, God does not need to limit our efficacy to minor things or incidentals. To say that he does is, in effect, to see his causality and ours as parts of a scenario that is larger than either of them. It is as though God were the majority shareholder in a commercial venture. He would make the big decisions, but our investments would still add a little capital to his. No. We are not praying to Jove. We are praying to Almighty God, maker of heaven and earth. Christian prayer, we may say, is an exquisitely metaphysical act—as is faith itself. Faith and prayer interface with the utterly universal agent, who is “outside the whole order of beings.”¹¹⁰

Creator and creature are not under a common order. Just as God is cause of the whole order of beings—cause of the nature of being and all its

¹⁰⁷ *ST I*, q. 23, a. 8: “Praedestinatur a Deo salus alicuius, ut etiam sub ordine praedestinationis cadat quidquid hominem promovet in salutem, vel orationes propriae, vel aliorum, vel alia bona, vel quidquid huiusmodi, sine quibus aliquis salutem non consequitur. Unde praedestinati conandum est ad bene operandum et orandum, quia per huiusmodi praedestinationis effectus certitudinaliter impletur. Propter quod dicitur II Petr. 1, satagite, ut per bona opera certam vestram vocationem et electionem faciatis.”

¹⁰⁸ *ST I*, q. 23, a. 8, ad 2: “. . . ut ordinis pulchritudo servetur in rebus, et ut etiam creaturis dignitatem causalitatis communicet.” See also q. 22, a. 3.

¹⁰⁹ *ST I-II*, q. 114, a. 9.

¹¹⁰ See above at note 55. On the “metaphysical” character of faith as supposing a power to know “universal good and being” and an “immediate order to the universal principle of being,” see *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 3.

differences—so is he cause of the nature of causality itself and all its modes and hierarchies. And so prayer can be extremely powerful. This is not *despite* the eternity and perfect determinacy of God's plan, but precisely because of them. For these are really identical with his transcendent causality, which does not nullify other causes, but infallibly ordains their modalities and their proper effects. Those effects can be as great as he pleases. No matter how great the proper efficacy of a created cause is, it is merely instrumental in relation to God's. Thus, Thomas says that the execution of predestination (like God's government generally) exists in God actively and in the predestined passively.¹¹¹ An instrument is an active, efficient cause, and it has its proper, positive effect, but it is nonetheless passive with respect to the action and the proper effect of the principal agent using it, the effect relative to which it is instrumental. The predestined do things, sometimes great things, that contribute to their salvation and are instrumental thereto. But it would certainly be wrong to say that they save themselves. Saving is proper to God.

One final thought. Thomas sees prayer as an act of the virtue of religion.¹¹² This virtue, he says, is really the same thing as holiness.¹¹³ It is the virtue by which we hand ourselves over to the worship and service of God. Some readers will be familiar with that great Platonic dialogue on holiness, *Euthyphro*. Toward the end, young Euthyphro suggests that, by sacrifices, we serve the gods, offering to them the honor, reverence, and gratitude that are their due, and that, in return, they give us the things we ask them for in prayer. Socrates disparagingly terms this a commercial arrangement.¹¹⁴ On Thomas's account, Socrates is quite right to disparage it. Thomas does of course make sacrifice a requirement of religion, and he takes it to be aimed at expressing our subjection to God and at honoring him as our creator and highest good.¹¹⁵ But prayer, at least when it is rightly offered, is aimed at that too. There is no *quid pro quo*. In prayer, we hand our very minds over to God, subjecting our thoughts and desires to him with reverence and, in a way, presenting them to him, to be used as he sees fit.¹¹⁶ All good prayer

¹¹¹ *ST I*, a. 23, a. 2.

¹¹² *ST II-II*, q. 83. For a masterful study of Thomas's understanding of the nature of prayer, see Lawrence Dewan, O.P., "St. Thomas and the Ontology of Prayer," in *Wisdom, Law, and Virtue: Essays in Thomistic Ethics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 365–73 and the notes on 602–6. Also instructive is Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P., "Providence et causes secondes: l'exemple de la prière," in *Études Thomasiennes* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2019), 625–46.

¹¹³ *ST II-II*, q. 81, a. 8.

¹¹⁴ Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14c–15a.

¹¹⁵ *ST II-II*, q. 85, a. 1.

¹¹⁶ *ST II-II*, q. 83, a. 3, ad 3.

has “Thy will be done” as its underlying motif. The better we understand the metaphysics of prayer, the more clearly we see that really it could not be otherwise.

I have been critical of C. S. Lewis and Peter Geach, but only reluctantly. They were both great minds and did extraordinary service to the Christian faith. Nevertheless they seem to have had only limited experience of the metaphysical vision of things that Saint Thomas offers us. It should not be allowed to fall into oblivion. The need is grave, and it is not merely theoretical.¹¹⁷ N.V

¹¹⁷ My thanks to Steven Jensen and an anonymous reviewer for very helpful comments on drafts of this paper.

Aquinas's Ethics beyond Thomistic Virtue Ethics: The Gifts of the Holy Spirit, Spiritual Instinct, and Complete Human Perfection

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This paper offers a new reading and interpretation of Aquinas's doctrine of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In the contemporary Thomist literature on ethics, there is far more discussion—and a far more developed discussion—of the nature and role of a virtue-*habitus* than a gift-*habitus*. Why might there be so little discussion of the gifts and their distinctive *habitus*? Is it because Aquinas devotes many more questions to the virtues than to the gifts? Is it because the majority of self-professed Thomist ethicists have not been taught the gifts, and are either unaware or have merely a notional awareness that the gifts have a principle of action distinct from and superior to that of the virtues?¹ Regardless of the reason, this paper seeks to mitigate the current paucity of analysis of the gifts and the gift-*habitus*.

This paper will discuss Aquinas's doctrine of the gifts of the Holy Spirit from a resolutely gift-centered perspective. I do so because discussions of the gifts often presume a virtue-centered perspective. That is, treatments of the gifts typically interpret what Aquinas says about the gifts through the lens of a pre-existing virtue framework, the gifts then being made to fit into that pre-existing framework. I will argue that we see this not only in interpretations of Aquinas on the gifts, but also in English translations of the *Summa theologiae* [*ST*] on the question of the gifts.

¹ The gifts are almost never discussed in terms of their being a *habitus*, and thus the fact of their being a *habitus* seems to have little or no impact on most discussions of the gifts.

As a result, in contemporary scholarship on Aquinas's ethics, the virtues typically receive extended treatment, whereas the gifts of the Holy Spirit receive no treatment at all. And when the gifts are addressed, their treatment is brief, with the main point being that the gifts provide assistance to the virtues, like a spiritual butler. In the best-case scenario, the gifts are like Jeeves to the virtues' Bertie—undoubtedly wiser, but rarely listened to.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first section compares and contrasts a gift-*habitus* and a virtue-*habitus*. The second section focuses on Aquinas's notion of *instinctus*. The instinct of the Holy Spirit (divine instinct) is the principle of motion Aquinas associates with the gifts of the Holy Spirit (*STI-II*, q. 68, aa. 1–2). I argue that—contrary to the judgment of most commentators—*instinctus* is a highly appropriate term to describe the character of the work of the Holy Spirit. In this section I also show how Aquinas's doctrine of *instinctus* has been made “invisible” in part by various translations of the *ST*, including the translation of Fr. Shapcote.²

In the third section, I analyze Aquinas' argument that the gifts are more perfective of human beings than the virtues (*STI-II*, q. 68, a. 8). This analysis also constitutes a “case study” of the ways in which Shapcote's translation (the dominant English translation for the last hundred years) contributes to misunderstandings of Aquinas's views on the relationship between the gifts and the virtues. In comparing and contrasting the virtues and gifts, an *original part of my argument is my claim that, while charity sometimes operates from a virtue-habitus, at other times it operates according to a gift-habitus*. Commentators have failed to adequately account for the fact that truly perfect (*simpliciter*) charity cannot be attained solely by the operations of virtue. The ultimate expression of charity requires a *habitus* superior to a virtue-*habitus*.³ While the wayfarer's expression of charity is always in one

² When I refer to the English translation of the *ST*, I am referring to the translation of Fr. Laurence Shapcote, O.P. (1864–1947). Because Fr. Shapcote wished to remain anonymous, the translation has been attributed to the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Fr. Shapcote is identified as the translator in Fergus Kerr, “Comment: The Shapcote Translation,” *New Blackfriars* 92, no. 1041 (2011): 519–20. Fr. Shapcote's translation was remarkably speedy, completing all but questions 80–189 of the *secunda secundae* between 1911 and 1917. Sent as a missionary to South Africa between 1920 and 1922, Fr. Shapcote completed the *secunda secundae*, the *supplementum*, and appendices. By 1923 he was translating the *Summa contra gentiles*. Fr. Shapcote's translation is the one freely available online and continues to be reproduced, including in the Latin–English Aquinas *Opera Omnia* project run by the Aquinas Institute at Wyoming Catholic College.

³ My use of “ultimate” is deliberate. I have in mind the level of perfection described by Servais Pinckaers as the third and final stage of moral and spiritual perfection (*Sources*

sense a gift from God, in that it relies on God's grace, as the wayfarer grows in charity, charity increasingly functions as a gift of the Holy Spirit, or perhaps the form of all the gifts.⁴

The fourth and final section focuses on how the gifts and infused virtues operate in the wayfarer who is growing in spiritual maturity. I argue that, although infused virtue-*habitus* and gift-*habitus* are given at baptism, facility in either typically grows slowly. Increasing facility in infused virtue-*habitus* will typically precede increased facility in a corresponding gift-*habitus*. *A second original part of my argument is my claim that the wayfarer does not act from an infused virtue-habitus and a gift-habitus simultaneously, but serially.* I claim this because, according to Aquinas, a person cannot act according to these two different principles of motion simultaneously. In this final section, I also analyze the source of judgment in a virtue-*habitus* versus a gift-*habitus*; reiterate the distinction between the gift as a *habitus* which is necessary for salvation, on the one hand, and the increasing facility in acting according to a gift-*habitus* which perfects the wayfarer, on the other; and finally, in light of my claim that the wayfarer acts from a virtue-*habitus* or a gift-*habitus* serially, I discuss when it is appropriate to describe an act as arising from a virtue, and when to describe an act as arising from a gift.

The title of the essay calls for a moral theology *beyond* a Thomistic virtue ethic. But what does "beyond" mean? It does not mean denigrating the significance of the virtues. The acquired and infused virtues are clearly central for a Thomistic ethic. Furthermore, the pursuit of perfection through acts of faith, hope, and especially charity, as well as acts of infused prudence, justice, courage, and temperance, remains in place. So what is different

of Christian Ethics [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995], 359–71 [originally in French in 1985]). In the first and second stages of moral and spiritual growth, the wayfarer is guided predominantly by virtue-*habitus*. However, by the time the wayfarer reaches Pinckaers's third and final stage of moral and spiritual development, she will act predominantly according to gift-*habitus*. At that stage the wayfarer is focused on receptivity to the Holy Spirit through her spiritual instinct as she pursues *ultimate* perfection, the most perfect, holy, and flourishing human life.

⁴ While making the argument is beyond the scope of this paper, I take it that Aquinas's theology of the gifts underwent an evolution beginning around the time he wrote the *prima secundae* (1271), continuing through the time he wrote the *secunda secundae* (1271–1272), his disputed questions on charity (1272), his *Contra retrahentes* (1272), and his commentaries on Romans and 1 Corinthians (1273). On the evolution of Aquinas's thought on the gifts, see Jean-Pierre Torrell (in *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and His Work*, and vol. 2, *Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royal [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996 and 2003], 1:146–47) and Edward O'Connor (in "Appendix 4: The Evolution of St. Thomas's Thought on the Gifts," in *Summa theologiae* [ST], vol. 24 [London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1973]).

about the approach being advocated? How is the call for greater emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the wayfarer significant? My claim is that, as Christians are drawn into the life of God and towards greater perfection, the role of discursive reason, and thus virtue, decreases in importance and is superseded by the receptivity of the entire human person to spiritual instinct. This is not a repudiation of *intellectus*, but an acknowledgement that, as we increasingly participate in the life of God, *intellectus* is increasingly displayed in what he calls “affective knowledge,” or “knowledge by connaturality,” which is an outworking of the wayfarer’s receptivity to the instinct of the Holy Spirit.⁵ But, as the wayfarer comes ever closer to God, the faithful disciple increasingly is moved by a principle of motion greater than a virtue-*habitus*, and in this way moves beyond what is possible according to a life of virtue—acquired or infused.

Virtue-*Habitus* and Gift-*Habitus*

For the wayfarer to be adequately guided to *beatitudo* by the Holy Spirit, wayfarers must act according to two different *habitus*.⁶ “A habit is a disposition whereby that which is disposed is disposed well or ill.”⁷ For Aquinas, a *habitus* is a quality. When we gain or lose a quality (e.g., the virtue of courage or the gift of wisdom), real changes go on in us.⁸

⁵ On affective knowledge in Aquinas, see Victor White, “Thomism and Affective Knowledge,” *Blackfriars* 24, no. 274 (January 1943): 8–16. Parts II and III of this essay appear in *Blackfriars* 24, no. 277 (April 1943): 126–31, and *Blackfriars* 25, no. 294 (September 1944): 321–28.

⁶ I will not translate *habitus* as “habit” in this paper, instead retaining the Latin. In English “habit” connotes a kind of unthinking and automatic response to a stimulus and excludes intellect or will. On the other hand, as Nicholas Austin, S.J., aptly puts it, comparing “habit” and *habitus*, “a virtue is a *habitus*, not because it generates automatic reactions but because it is a stable quality that perfects our capacity for rational agency and disposes us to deliberate, intentional human action” (*Aquinas on Virtue: A Causal Reading* [Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2017], 32–34).

⁷ *ST I-II*, q. 49, a. 1: “Quod habitus dicitur dispositio secundum quam bene vel male disponitur dispositum.” This definition is repeated in each of the other three articles of question 49, with the definition developing and expanding as Aquinas develops his argument. Unless otherwise noted, as in the case of Shapcote, translations are my own.

⁸ Aquinas also notes that *habitus* are “accidental” qualities in us in the sense that we can that we can gain or lose them, and that the gain or loss of such qualities changes who we are.

Virtue-*Habitus*

One of the two genera of *habitus* is virtue-*habitus*. With regard to human beings, a virtue-*habitus* is an operative habit; that is, it applies to actions.⁹ The defining characteristic (formal cause) of an act that flows from a virtue-*habitus* is that the act is “according to reason [*rationem*]” (*ST* I-II, q. 54, a. 3, resp.). That the act or *habitus* is “according to reason” is also its “measure” or “mode.”¹⁰ While Aquinas speaks of different kinds of virtues—intellectual, moral, theological, infused moral, and so on—the defining characteristic of any and all virtuous actions is that they are done according to the mode of reason.

For Aquinas there are two species of virtue-*habitus*: acquired virtue-*habitus* and infused virtue-*habitus*. They are different species because they are defined differently, the definition of infused virtues including “God’s working in us.” However, while they are different species of the virtue-*habitus*, acquired virtue and infused virtue are in the same genus. They are both virtue-*habitus*, because both operate according to reason (*ST* I-II, q. 51, a. 4, ad 4). When Aquinas defines virtue as “a good quality of the mind by which we live righteously” (q. 55, a. 4), he then elaborates on his definition in three ways: first, by “good” he is referring to “the good fixed by reason” (ad 2); second, “reason, or the mind, is the proper subject of human virtue” (ad 3); and third, righteous living includes acts ordered both to “due ends” (i.e., for the acquired virtues) and to “divine law” (i.e., for the infused virtues) (ad 4).¹¹

Gift-*Habitus*

The second genera of *habitus* is gift-*habitus*.¹² In his discussion of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, Aquinas is abundantly clear that, like the virtues, the seven

⁹ *ST* I-II, q. 55, a. 2: “Human virtue refers . . . to acts. Consequently, it is essential to human virtue that it be an operative habit.”

¹⁰ Note that the specific description of the mode will differ depending on the specific virtue being discussed.

¹¹ That by “due ends” and “divine law” Aquinas is including both acquired and infused virtues is evident by how he distinguishes acquired from infused virtues. Whereas the mean for acquired virtue is the rule of (unaided) human reason (*regulam rationis humanae*), the mean for infused virtues is the rule of divine law (*regulam legis divinae*) (*ST* I-II, q. 63, a. 4).

¹² For Pinckaers’s description of the three stages of moral and spiritual growth, from an emphasis on obedience to commands, to an emphasis on infused virtues, to an emphasis on gifts, see *Sources of Christian Ethics*, 359–71. Pinckaers’s point is that the wayfarer’s pilgrimage towards perfection (i.e., fulfilment) begins with obeying the commandments, and then develops primarily through practices of faith, charity, justice, courage, and the other virtues, albeit with some exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

gifts of the Holy Spirit—understanding, counsel, wisdom, and so on—are also *habitus*, that these gifts are interior dispositions in our souls. Like a virtue-*habitus*, a gift-*habitus* is an operative habit, leading to human actions.

When Aquinas introduces his thesis about the distinction between virtues and gifts in article 1 of question 68 of *ST I-II*, to be sure that his reader takes in the point, he repeats his thesis three times. While both are infused by God (*infunduntur a Deo*), it is by the gifts that a human being “is disposed to be readily moved by divine inspiration” (resp.), “rightly follows God’s instinct” (ad 3), and “is operated by divine instinct” (ad 4).¹³

Aquinas’s argument for the gifts being *habitus* is based on the authority of Jesus’s promise that the Holy Spirit will abide in believers. Thus the Holy Spirit, in the form of his gifts, must be in human beings as an abiding (*permanentes*) *habitus*, rather than abiding with the believer only occasionally (*I-II*, q. 68, a. 3). Aquinas draws a clear parallel between the capacities of a virtue-*habitus* and a gift-*habitus*.

The moral virtues are habits whereby the appetitive power is disposed to obey reason promptly; . . . the Holy Spirit’s gifts are habits whereby the human being is perfected by readily obeying the Holy Spirit.¹⁴

Here, Aquinas states two ways in which a gift-*habitus* is superior to a virtue-*habitus*. First, whereas a virtue-*habitus* guides one particular human power, a gift-*habitus* guides the whole human being. Secondly, whereas a virtue-*habitus* disposes a person to obey reason (which is imperfect), a gift-*habitus* disposes a person to obey an instinct in them which is of the Holy Spirit (which is perfect).

Noting the superiority of a gift-*habitus* to a virtue-*habitus* is something Aquinas does repeatedly in *ST I-II*, q. 68. When one has the gifts of the

However, the journey, if sustained, takes the wayfarer to a stage where she focuses less on acting virtuously, and more on receptivity to the Holy Spirit’s guidance through what Aquinas calls “spiritual instinct.” If the wayfarer grows to this level of moral and spiritual perfection, receptivity to spiritual instinct makes possible an unrivalled degree of earthly union with God.

¹³ Translating *instinctu divino* as “divine instinct” creates an ambiguity not present in the Latin. For, “divine” can be understood as a noun or an adjective. In the Latin it is an adjective, so Aquinas means something akin to “divinized instinct” or “divinely-implanted instinct.”

¹⁴ *ST I-II*, q. 68, a. 3, resp.: “Vires appetitivae disponuntur ad prompte obediendum rationi. Unde et dona spiritus sancti sunt quidam habitus, quibus homo perficitur ad prompte obediendum spiritui sancto.”

Holy Spirit, the moving principle in the person is (a spiritual) instinct rather than reason.

For those who are moved by divine instinct [*instinctum divinum*], it is not expedient to consult human reason, but to follow their interior instinct [*interiorem instinctum*], since they are moved by a better principle [*meliori principio*] than human reason; . . . the gifts perfect human beings for acts higher [*ad altiores actus*] than acts of virtue. (a. 1)

Aquinas is consistent with regard to the basic reason that a gift-*habitus* is inherently superior to a virtue-*habitus*. “The more exalted the mover, the more perfect must be the disposition.”¹⁵ He then adds that to receive still more effective guidance than that which is provided by virtues, “higher perfections must be present within a human being, according to which he is disposed toward this—that he be divinely moved” (“dispositus ad hoc quod divinitus moveatur”).

Aquinas on the Manner of the Work of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit as Instinct

Why Thomists Should Not be Afraid of Instinct

A generation ago, Servais Pinckaers encouraged us not to be afraid of *instinctus* as used by St. Thomas. His plea has not been heeded. Instead, Thomists continue to urge us against the use of it. For example, Andrew Pinsent says that “the connotations evoked by the modern word ‘instinct’ are unhelpful, given the association of the word with the behavior of animals rather than the union of persons.”¹⁶ In contrast, I want to argue that the fact that “instinct” is associated with the actions of non-human animals is one reason why it *is* appropriate to use it when trying to understand Aquinas. In addition, if we attend to our actual everyday use, we find that our use of

¹⁵ *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 1, resp.: “Quanto igitur movens est altior, tanto necesse est quod mobile perfectiori dispositioni ei proportionetur.”

¹⁶ Pinsent further notes that the term lacks a personalist dimension, failing to connote “interpersonal union” (*The Second Person Perspective in Aquinas’ Ethics: Virtues and Gifts* [London: Routledge, 2013], 32–33, 125n27). Contrary to this claim that “instinct” lacks a personalist dimension, I shall argue below that “instinct,” both for Thomas and in contemporary English usage, is a mode of knowing ordered towards both individual and interpersonal goods.

“instinct” captures important but often overlooked aspects of appropriate relationships between human persons and both God and neighbor.

The aversion of many Thomists to the language of “instinct” reveals a continuing intellectual captivity to a discredited Cartesian trope, namely that non-human animals act mechanistically, “instinct” denoting their “hard-wired” biology. Their captivity to this behavioristic picture of “instinct” unfortunately perpetuates an intellectual blunder associated with mid-twentieth-century psychology, evolutionary theory, and sociobiology.¹⁷ Today, no serious primatologist or ethologist (or for that matter animal trainer or pet owner) thinks of higher animal species in this behavioristic way. And neither did Aquinas. So why are some contemporary Thomists still waving Pavlovian and Skinnerian flags?

More importantly for the purposes of the argument of this essay, behavioristic assumptions about “instinct” run counter to the diversity inherent in our actual everyday use of “instinct.” For instance, we use “instinct” to refer to a particular skill that a person possesses, such as “when trying to finish off his tennis match, his killer instinct kicks in,” or “her diving save was pure instinct.” We also use the term when referring to a tacit or intuitive understanding in a particular situation: “his instincts told him not to go near that old shed”; “despite his seeming to be truthful and honest, her every instinct told her not to trust him.” We also use it of someone’s acting to protect herself or another person: “he sustained only a broken wrist because, as he fell, he instinctively put out his hands to break his fall”; “she instinctively ran to grab the child, ignoring the great danger involved”; “he instinctively jumped on the grenade to shield the rest of his platoon.” We also use “instinct” for a natural or intuitive ways of thinking: “I didn’t have as strong a mothering instinct as some other mothers.”

As we see from these examples, “instinct” is used to refer to many different human capacities. It may be a particular talent or gift, ability, capacity, facility, aptitude, skill, flair, feel for, genius in, knack, bent, and so forth. It also can refer to a particular drive or urge, but this is not the dominant contemporary usage. In general, “instinct” refers to the way that human and non-human animals act or react without employing discursive reasoning or

¹⁷ According to Anthony Kenny, behaviorism as a psychological theory arose with John Watson’s work, dating to 1929, and was still popular in the 1950s, but was already undergoing devastating philosophical critique by the early 1960s (see ch. 2 in his *Action, Emotion, and Will* [London: RKP, 1963]). Charles Taylor, whose *The Explanation of Behaviour* [London: RKP, 1964] launched a full-scale critique of behaviorism, notes that “instinct” traditionally means a “basic purpose” (221).

its analogue. Most typically, a person's instinct presumes some kind of skill, although it is often tacit in that one has a sense of what is going on.

What is crucial to recognize is that we almost always use "instinct" to refer to actions that are oriented to some good for a human person or a non-human animal. An instinctual action typically protects, preserves, or otherwise furthers a person's good. Thus, contra the behavioristic misunderstandings of some, "instinct" is a teleological term: it is ordered towards the good of the individual and/or to the common good.

The significance of the above account of our actual everyday *usage* of "instinct" (as opposed to the behavioristic bogeyman) is that it is akin to how Aquinas uses *instinctus*. Aquinas does not typically use *instinctus* to refer to something innate or fixed.¹⁸ As with contemporary usage, Aquinas uses *instinctus* in varied ways. For Aquinas, *instinctus* is "a combination of external and internal cognitions of appetites and local movements of all kinds."¹⁹

For example, natural instinct is the source of the desire for beatitude or flourishing. Since the end for humans (and other animals) is instinctual or given, Aquinas says that human free choice is about means rather than ends.²⁰ Similarly, it is by natural instinct that we know the first principles of theoretical reason and practical reason—the principles of non-contradiction and the desire for good and aversion to evils.²¹ One of the key powers involved in natural instinct is that of perception, which among other things is the cogitative power to size up a situation, to come to a good judgment of a particular situation. This is what Aquinas calls instinctive judgment.

In his work on Christian perfection, Aquinas notes that natural instinct is the starting point for love of self, neighbor, and the common good.

¹⁸ See John Deely, "Animal Intelligence and Concept-Formation," *The Thomist* 35, no. 1 (1971): 43–93.

¹⁹ See Julien Peghaire, "A Forgotten Sense, the Cogitative, according to St. Thomas Aquinas," *The Modern Schoolman* 20 (1943), 210–29, at 228, cited in Nicholas Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 23n14.

²⁰ "Although our intellect moves itself to some things, yet others are supplied by nature, as are first principles, which it cannot doubt, and the last end, which it cannot but will" (*ST I q. 18 a. 3*).

²¹ Aquinas calls this aspect of natural instinct "understanding," which is a part of practical reason, though not the notion of understanding that is an intellectual virtue. In discussing the kind of understanding that is a natural instinct and that is a part of the virtue of practical reason, Aquinas says "understanding denotes here, not the intellectual power, but the right estimate about some final principle, which is taken as self-evident: thus we are said to understand the first principles of demonstrations" (*ST II-II, q. 49, a. 2*). Furthermore, he also distinguishes this sense of understanding from that which refers to one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (ad 2).

Proceeding in an orderly fashion, Aquinas notes that since we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, we must first understand rightly ordered love (*dilectio*) of self. He begins by noting the way humans order the most basic natural goods (i.e., one's life, limbs, and livelihood).

Love prefers the greater to the lesser good. Now it is clear that of all human good the welfare of the soul is the greatest; next in degree comes physical well-being; and external goods occupy the last place. It is natural to man to observe this order in his preference. For who would not rather lose bodily eyesight than the use of reason? Who would not part with all his property in order to save his life?

This order of goods is natural in that very few people in practice fail to observe it.

Properly ordered love of neighbor follows similarly—one gives first priority to the neighbor's life, then to the neighbor's bodily integrity, and then to the neighbor's possessions.

We are commanded to observe the same order in the love of our neighbor that we ought to observe in the love of ourselves. Hence we must desire his welfare in the same manner as we ought to desire our own, i.e., first his spiritual good, then his physical prosperity, and then such goods as consist in extrinsic possessions. But if we wish our neighbor to have material goods harmful to his health of body, or physical welfare opposed to his spiritual profit, we do not truly love him.

Finally, Aquinas speaks of the ordering of love to the communion of all.

According to right reason the common good is to be preferred to the individual good. Each part is by natural instinct [*naturali instinctu*] ordered to the good of the whole. . . . In the communion in which all persons are united in their end of beatitude, each individual must be considered as a part, and God, in whom the beatitude of all consists, must be regarded as the common good of the whole. Hence according to right reason and natural instinct [*naturae instinctum*], each man orders himself towards God as a part is ordered to the whole.²²

²² Aquinas, *De perfectione vitae spiritualis*, ch. 14.

*The Meaning of Instinctus*²³

A proper understanding of *instinctus* is crucial to the argument of the paper for three reasons. First, *instinctus* is the principle of motion by which the Holy Spirit works in us through the gifts. Second, this manner of the Holy Spirit's working is unique to the gifts. It is to be contrasted with discursive reason, which is the manner through which the Holy Spirit works with regard to the theological or other infused virtues. Third, *instinctus* is a term Aquinas uses increasingly in his mature work, and his particular use of it is unique among Scholastic theologians of his time.²⁴ The facts that Aquinas departs from tradition and authority in his use of *instinctus* and that his use of it becomes most significant in his most mature work attest to its importance for Aquinas's mature understanding of the significance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the wayfarer.

When describing the nature of the Holy Spirit's motion, Aquinas variously employs three related terms: inspiration, instigation, and instinct.²⁵ When describing the Holy Spirit's motion through the gifts in particular, his choice is "instinct."

When Aquinas begins his discussion of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in *ST* I-II, q. 68, he initially says that the gifts dispose the wayfarer "to be ready to be moved by divine inspiration."²⁶ Divine inspiration is movement from outside, or exterior to, the wayfarer (q. 1). However, immediately after introducing the notion of inspiration in his *respondeo* in article 1, Aquinas changes his terminology. Abandoning the language of "inspiration" with its connotation of exterior movement, Aquinas speaks instead of the *instinctus* of the Holy Spirit. Aquinas transitions from speaking of the Holy Spirit's principle of motion as exterior inspiration (*motionem ab exteriori*) to speaking of the Holy Spirit's principle of motion as an interior instinct (*interiorem instinctum*).²⁷ While instinct is considered a principle of motion, it is more

²³ In this version of the paper, I do not compare "instinct" to "instigation." One way Aquinas seems to distinguish the two is that, while instinct is something that moves the individual who has it, instigation is what one does to another. So in Aquinas's discussion of guardian angels, he says that, while a human has a natural instinct to the good, the instigation of guardian angels invisibly enlighten humans that they may do good (*ST* I, q. 113, a. 1, ad 3).

²⁴ See O'Connor, "Appendix 4," 108n30, 130.

²⁵ In the *ST*, "instinct" appears more often than "inspiration" and "instigation" combined.

²⁶ Interestingly, "inspiration" appears surprisingly infrequently in the *ST*, its first substantive appearance occurring at the beginning of that discussion of the gifts.

²⁷ *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 2, ad 2. In the *prima secundae*, Aquinas contrasts the *habitus* (i.e., virtues and vices and gifts), which are discussed in qq. 49–89, to law and grace, which are discussed in qq. 90–114. Whereas Aquinas says that *habitus* are intrinsic principles

precisely a *principle of receptivity within us to being moved* by the Holy Spirit. From this point on in the *ST*, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are always referred to as enkindling “an interior instinct,” which is how a gift-*habitus* leads to actions of a particular kind.

Unlike “inspiration,” which almost always refers to the divine, *instinctus* is used in many contexts in the *ST* and in Aquinas’s later Scripture commentaries. Besides the divine instinct, rational instinct, the instinct of the Holy Spirit, and a special instinct of God, Aquinas speaks of a natural instinct to the good,²⁸ animal instinct, demonic instinct, prophetic instinct,²⁹ instinct of the mind,³⁰ instinct of grace,³¹ and instinct of lust.³² In all these cases, it is an interior principle of movement that leads a human being or a non-human animal to act in a particular way. Occasionally Aquinas likens an interior instinct to a natural inclination, but an interior instinct, as an existing *habitus* to act in a certain way, is for him far more determinative of one’s action than a mere inclination to an action.³³ With non-human animals, the animal will act according to natural instinct unless prevented by circumstances.³⁴ With human beings, to act according to natural instinct is to act according to the *habitus* of our nature.³⁵

How Instinctus Becomes Invisible

In the introduction, I claimed that the standard English translation of the *ST* has obfuscated Aquinas’s doctrine of instinct.³⁶ This claim requires

of human action (q. 49, pref.), law and grace are exterior principles of action (q. 90, pref.; q. 109 pref.)

²⁸ *ST* I, q. 113, a. 1, ad 3: “Men depart from the natural instinct of good on account of a passion ensnared by sin [homines a naturali instinctu boni discedunt propter passionem peccati].”

²⁹ *ST* II-II, q. 173, a. 4: “When a man knows that he is being moved by the Holy Spirit, . . . this belongs properly to prophecy; whereas when he is moved, without his knowing it, this is not perfect prophecy, but a prophetic instinct [*quidam instinctus propheticus*].”

³⁰ Aquinas, *Super Rom* 8, lec. 6, Marietti no. 707, commenting on 8:30, that those whom God predestined he also called. Aquinas says that God’s call may be “interior and is nothing other than an instinct of the mind whereby a man’s heart is moved by God to assent to the things of faith or of virtue.”

³¹ *ST* I-II, q. 108, a. 1; III, a. 69, a. 5.

³² *ST* II-II, q. 154, a. 8: “Adultery is sexual intercourse . . . in contravention of the marriage compact, whether through one’s instinct of lust, or by mutual consent [*proprie libidinis instinctu vel alienae consensu*].”

³³ See e.g., *ST* III, q. 60, a. 5; *Super Gal* 2, lec. 2, Marietti no. 94.

³⁴ By “circumstances,” I am including situations where the normal function of the instinct is inhibited or prevented.

³⁵ For Aquinas’s discussion of bodily *habitus*, see *ST* I-II, q. 50, a. 1.

³⁶ For more on Fr. Shapcote, see footnote 2. My criticism of Fr. Shapcote’s translation of

explication and defense. My claim is that Shapcote's translation of the question on the gifts of the Holy Spirit appears to contribute to a widespread misunderstanding of the significance of *instinctus* for Aquinas's account of the gifts. Shapcote obfuscates "instinct" by refusing to translate *instinctus* as "instinct" when the subject is "spiritual instinct," even though he almost always otherwise does so when translating other forms of *instinctus*.

For example, on the thirty or so occasions that *naturalem instinctum* appears prior to the discussion of the "the instinct of the Holy Spirit," *naturalem instinctum* is translated as "natural instinct" in every instance.³⁷ Shapcote readily renders *instinctus* as "instinct" when it comes to natural instinct—especially that of non-human animals. But as noted above, he resists doing so when the subject is the instinct of the Holy Spirit.

Even with regard to spiritual matters, Shapcote's aversion to *instinctus* appears. He has no objection to translating *inspiratio* as "inspiration." In the first article of *ST* I-II, q. 68 (the question on the gifts of the Holy Spirit), Aquinas uses *inspiratio* or *inspirazione divina* four times, all of which are rendered as "inspiration" or "divine inspiration." However, in the rest of question 68 (i.e., the rest of that article and the next seven articles), Aquinas uses *instinctum*, *instinctus*, or *instinctu* sixteen times. Of those sixteen uses, only three are translated as "instinct." There appears to be no rhyme or reason to the choices. *Instinctum divinum* is usually translated as "the divine promptings," but occasionally as the "divine instinct." Phrases like *instinctus Spiritus Sancti*, *instinctus rationis*, and *a Deo per specialem instinctum* always become, respectively, "the prompting of the Holy Spirit," "the prompting of reason," and "the special promptings of God." But to translate *instinctus* as "promptings" or "impulse" defies both the demands of accuracy and Latin grammar. It is clear that *instinctus* is a stable, interior principle of motion, which neither "promptings" nor "impulse" connote. Furthermore, how can one translate *instinctus* as "promptings" when *instinctus* is singular? Or as "impulse," with its connotations of irrationality? *Instinctus divinis* surely cannot imply that!

What makes these mistranslations of *instinctus* initially puzzling is that Aquinas uses *instinctus* extensively and in many contexts in the *ST*. With so many contexts to consult, one would expect that a translation would be

ST I-II, q. 68, a. 8, should in no way be understood as diminishing his monumental accomplishment in translating Aquinas into English. In many ways, the problem is not with Shapcote, but with the widespread view that Shapcote's is a completely "literal" translation. However, to make the best sense he could of what Aquinas was saying, Shapcote had to make many judgments, and these judgments did not always lead, as we shall see, to a literal translation.

³⁷ When the topic is non-human animals, "instinct" appears in the English even when it is not in the Latin!

relatively straightforward. Furthermore, it would seem that the influence of this translation is not limited to those unfamiliar with the Latin. Scholars still overwhelmingly reproduce Shapcote's translation, even with the problems I have noted. To be fair, inaccurate translations of question 68 are not unique to Shapcote.

Why Instinctus is Key for Rightly Understanding a Gift-Habitus

Commentators from Edward Schillebeeckx to Andrew Pinsent explicitly reject translating *instinctus* as "instinct," although not all of them do so because of a perceived connection with animal instinct.³⁸ While the view that natural instinct and spiritual instinct are incompatible may make such commentators good Cartesians, it does not make them good Thomists. When Thomas comments on Rom 8:14, as to the meaning of "Those who are led by the Spirit of God become children of God," he says as follows:

"Those who are led by the Spirit of God," that is, as ruled by a General [*ductore*] and Commander, which the Spirit does in us, inasmuch as he enlightens us inwardly about what we ought to do: "let your good spirit lead me" (Ps 143:10).

However, on the one hand, one who is led [*ducitur*] is merely ordered what to do. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit not only instructs the spiritual person regarding what to do, but also moves the spiritual person's heart. Therefore, we need a better understanding of what is meant by "those who are led by the Spirit of God."

Those who are led [*dicuntur*] are moved by a higher instinct [*superiori instinctu*]. It is said of the beasts that they do not act but are acted upon, that they do not perform actions from their own motion. Similarly, the spiritual person does not move in the first place from his own motion, but is driven by the instinct of the Holy Spirit to act. As it says in Isaiah, "when the spirit of God comes he will compel us like a rushing river" (Isa 59:19), and in Luke: "Jesus was driven by the spirit into the wilderness" (Luke 4:1).³⁹

³⁸ In a review of Max Seckler's 1961 book *Instinct and Faith in Thomas Aquinas*, Schillebeeckx writes that "a modern reflection on faith will avoid the term 'instinct.'" See Pinckaers, *The Pinckaers Reader*, 386. Pinsent says: "The connotations evoked by the modern word 'instinct' are unhelpful, given the association of the word with the behavior of animals rather than the union of persons" (*Second Person Perspective*, 38). Even Mark Jordan says that *instinctus* "certainly cannot be rendered as our 'instinct,'" although he does not expressly say why ("Democratic Moral Education and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 44, no. 2 [2016]: 246–59).

³⁹ Aquinas, *Super Rom 8*, lec. 3, Marietti no. 635. I am grateful to Dominic Legge, *The*

Here Thomas is telling us that as God moves non-human animals to their ends naturally and surely (i.e., connaturally), so even more the Holy Spirit moves—even compels—the children of God to their proper ends, and further moves their hearts, making the understanding of divine things connatural to the wayfarer. What does Aquinas mean by “moving their hearts?” For example, with regard to the gift of wisdom, it means the wayfarer is given connatural knowledge of divine things, to know God and other creatures from a divine standpoint. The gift of wisdom furthermore gives the wayfarer an affective experience of the goodness of God, enabling the wayfarer to taste the sweetness of God.⁴⁰

So, contrary to those who think the language of “instinct” is inappropriate for understanding how the Holy Spirit works in us, Aquinas’s point is precisely to make the connection between animal instinct and spiritual instinct. Spiritual instinct is the supernatural analogate to natural instinct. God providentially gives other animals instincts to perfect them according to their specific nature. So too God equips wayfarers with the necessary instincts to fully perfect them. It is this instinct which enables wayfarers to act according to the divine nature, and to thus be led safely and securely to their appropriate end, that of perfect beatitude.

The Gift-*Habitus*: Perfecting the Wayfarer beyond the Limits of a Virtue-*Habitus*

In the previous section, I presented what Aquinas means by *instinctus* and how and why it is absolutely central to his account of the gifts. I argued that, without it, a proper understanding of Aquinas’s view of the gifts is simply not possible. Furthermore, I presented extensive evidence that Shapcote’s not translating *instinctus* as instinct has contributed to widespread ignorance among English-speaking Thomists regarding the significance, or even the existence, of spiritual instinct for Aquinas’s account of the gifts and what constitutes a gift-*habitus*.

In this section, my argument proceeds from a close reading of *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 8, Thomas’s analysis of the relationship between virtues and gifts. I shall present in detail Aquinas’s extensive and fully consistent argument for the superiority of a gift-*habitus* to a virtue-*habitus*. Since this article is typically read very differently, it will be necessary for me to deconstruct

Trinitarian Christology of Thomas Aquinas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), for bringing this quote to my attention, as well as for his excellent translations.

⁴⁰ See *ST* II-II, q. 45, aa. 2 and 4.

Shapcote’s translation as I proceed through this section. This genealogical reading of Shapcote’s translation opens up the conceptual space necessary for readers to more fully engage my arguments regarding Aquinas’s view of the relationship between a gift-*habitus* and a virtue-*habitus*. Secondly, we shall see how Shapcote’s translation practically imposes a misreading of this article on unsuspecting readers who do not attend to the Latin. Furthermore, even for those who do attend to the Latin, Shapcote’s translation continues to influence the language used, and thus the reading of the relationship between gifts and virtues. The problems with the Shapcote translation begin with the title of article 8, which is an interpolation into the text.

In Shapcote’s translation, one reads that the topic of article 8 is “Are the Virtues *More Excellent* than the Gifts?” From this beginning, readers of Shapcote’s translation are led to interpret this article in something like the following way: Aquinas’s initial answer is that the gifts are more excellent than the virtues. But then Aquinas makes a distinction between theological virtues, on the one hand, and the intellectual and moral virtues, on the other (or between the infused virtues and the acquired virtues). And while the gifts of the Holy Spirit are more excellent than the latter, the theological virtues are superior to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. For many scholars, this “standard reading” of this article settles the matter, and shapes their reading of the gifts more generally.

However, the following close examination of Shapcote’s translation of article 8 seeks to show that the above “standard reading” of this article, no doubt influenced by Shapcote’s translation, is seriously misleading. I present two translations of the title.

Latin	Revised Translation	Shapcote Translation
Utrum virtutes <i>sint praeferendae</i> donis	Whether the Virtues <i>Have Precedence</i> to the Gifts?	Whether the Virtues Are <i>More Excellent</i> than the gifts?

Contra Shapcote, *praeferendae* is not “more excellent,” but rather means something like “precedes,” “comes before,” “is in front of,” or “is prior to.”⁴¹ It is a much weaker affirmation than “more excellent.” When a comparison is to address degrees of perfection, Aquinas uses terms like *perfecta*, *eminentia*, or *excellencia*. This mistranslation of the title sets up the misreading of the entire article.

⁴¹ Note that any of these translations at times convey the sense of “is preferable to.” *Praeferendae* typically connotes subjective preference, as it is used in the *ST* at times to express a preference for something less objectively worthy, or even something evil.

Aquinas's objections in article 8 have a specific logical relationship to each other.⁴²

Latin	Objections	
	Revised Translation	Shapcote Translation
Videtur quod virtutes <i>sint praeferendae</i> donis. Dicit enim Augustinus, de caritate loquens, nullum est isto Dei dono <i>excel-lentius</i> Dantur et alia per spiritum sanctum munera, sed sine caritate nihil prosunt. Sed caritas est virtus. Ergo virtus est <i>potior</i> donis spiritus sancti.	Obj. 1: It seems that the virtues <i>should take precedence over</i> the gifts. Augustine, in speaking of charity, says: "There is no gift of God more <i>excellent</i> than this one.' . . . Other gifts are also given by the Holy Spirit, but without charity they count for nothing." But charity is a virtue. Therefore a virtue <i>ranks above</i> the gifts of the Holy Spirit.	Obj. 1: It would seem that the virtues are <i>more excellent than</i> the gifts. For Augustine says while speaking of charity: "No gift of God is <i>more excel-lent</i> than this. . . . Other gifts are bestowed by the Holy Spirit, but, without charity, they avail nothing." But charity is a virtue. Therefore a virtue is <i>more excellent than</i> the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
Praeterea, ea quae <i>sunt priora naturaliter</i> , videntur esse <i>potiora</i> Ergo virtutes <i>sunt potiores</i> donis.	Obj. 2: Further, that which <i>by nature is prior</i> seems to be <i>of higher rank</i> Therefore the virtues <i>rank above</i> the gifts.	Obj. 2: Further, that which is <i>first naturally</i> , seems to be <i>more excellent</i> Therefore the virtues are <i>more excellent than</i> the gifts.
Praeterea, virtutibus nullus male uti potest, ut Augustinus dicit. . . . Ergo virtutes sunt <i>digniores</i> donis spiritus sancti.	Obj. 3: Further, Augustine says that <i>the virtues cannot be used to evil purpose</i> . Therefore the virtues <i>make suitable</i> the gifts of the Holy Spirit.	Obj. 3: Further, Augustine says that <i>the virtues cannot be used to evil purpose</i> . Therefore the virtues <i>are more excellent than</i> the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The first objection asserts that the virtues precede the gifts because the gifts of the Holy Spirit presuppose the gift of charity. The objection concludes that, since charity is a virtue, it would seem that at least the virtue of charity ranks above the gifts. Note here that the heart of the objection is Augustine's

⁴² I have abbreviated the objections because my interest is twofold: first, to recognize the *topic* of the objection, and second, to recognize Aquinas's assumption regarding the magnitude of the objection, i.e., what conclusions would be drawn if the objection were to be sustained.

view that the gift of charity ranks above the *other* gifts of the Holy Spirit. Although the objection includes a quote from Augustine that “no gift of God is more excellent than the gift of charity,” the objection never repeats the language of “excellent,” but claims only that the gift of charity (and only charity is mentioned) *ranks higher* than the other gifts.⁴³ The second objection is that the virtues precede the gifts because they are by nature prior to the gifts. Since what precedes is in some sense a cause of what follows, and a cause is typically seen as greater than the effect, so the cause ranks higher. The third objection asserts that the virtues precede the gifts in that they are the necessary roots out of which the gifts must flower, that the gifts are limited to further perfecting only what the virtues initially perfect. It is crucial to note that none of these objections *even claim that the theological virtues are more excellent than the gifts*. The seemingly half-hearted nature of the objections offer a clue as to what we can expect in Aquinas’s response.

With seemingly no serious objection to address, Aquinas’s response systematically lays out the relationship between the virtues and the gifts, and will do so using an important and original analogy.⁴⁴ I will work slowly through his response, analyzing it in three parts. After that, I turn to Thomas’s response to objections, showing how they further support his argument. Finally, I return to Aquinas’s initial answer (the *sed contra*), reading it in light of his full response and replies.⁴⁵

⁴³ *Potiori* is an interesting and somewhat puzzling choice of terms, especially if it has a military connotation.

⁴⁴ According to O’Connor, this analogy is original and highly innovative, an innovation that could occur only once Thomas established that the gifts of the Holy Spirit, like the virtues, are a kind of *habitus* (“Appendix 4,” 122–24).

⁴⁵ The attentive reader will notice that I divide up the response differently than does Shapcote (in the Latin the response is not divided up into separate paragraphs). Shapcote’s division of paragraphs makes it appear that his conclusion pertains only to the other infused (or even merely the acquired) virtues. I have divided the response differently for four reasons. First, it more adequately holds together the analogy that is central to the response. Second, it cleanly separates the discussion of “precedence” from “perfection” and avoids the translation’s confusion with regard to different types of comparisons. Third, in Latin, *quia* normally begins a sentence where the definitive reason for one’s conclusion is being provided, and thus is the logical place to begin a new paragraph. Fourth, the way I divide the response actually answers the question that is presumed in the rest of the response, that the comparison being made in the article is between the theological virtues and the gifts.

	Respondeo Part I	
Latin	Revised Translation	Shapcote Translation
<p>Respondeo . . . sunt enim quaedam virtutes theologicae, quaedam intellectuales, quaedam morales. Virtutes quidem theologicae sunt quibus mens humana Deo coniungitur; virtutes autem intellectuales sunt quibus ratio ipsa <i>perficitur</i>; virtutes autem morales sunt quibus vires appetitivae <i>perficiuntur</i> ad obediendum rationi.</p> <p>Dona autem spiritus sancti sunt quibus omnes vires animae disponuntur ad hoc quod subdantur motioni divinae.</p>	<p>I answer that, . . . some are theological, some intellectual, and some moral. The theological virtues are those whereby man's mind is conjoined to God; the intellectual virtues are those whereby reason itself is <i>perfected</i>; and the moral virtues are those which <i>perfect</i> the powers of appetite in obedience to the reason.</p> <p>On the other hand, the gifts of the Holy Spirit dispose all the powers of the soul <i>to be subject to</i> the Divine motion.</p>	<p>I answer that . . . some are theological, some intellectual, and some moral. The theological virtues are those whereby man's mind is united to God; the intellectual virtues are those whereby reason itself is <i>perfected</i>; and the moral virtues are those which <i>perfect</i> the powers of appetite in obedience to the reason.</p> <p>On the other hand the gifts of the Holy Spirit dispose all the powers of the soul <i>to be amenable to</i> the Divine motion.</p>
<p>Sic ergo eadem videtur esse <i>comparatio</i> donorum ad virtutes theologicas, per quas homo utitur spirituali sancto moventi; sicut virtutum moralium ad virtutes intellectuales, per quas <i>perficitur</i> ratio, quae est virtutum moralium motiva.</p> <p>Unde sicut virtutes intellectuales <i>praefereuntur</i> virtutibus moralibus, et regulant eas; ita virtutes theologicae <i>praefereuntur</i> donis spiritus sancti, et regulant ea.</p>	<p>In the same way, therefore, that the gifts <i>are related to</i> the theological virtues (which conjoin a human being to the moving Holy Spirit), the moral virtues <i>are related to</i> the intellectual virtues (which <i>perfect</i> the reason, and which move the moral virtues).</p> <p>As the intellectual virtues <i>have precedence to</i> the moral virtues and direct them, so the theological virtues <i>have precedence to</i> the gifts of the Holy Spirit and direct them.</p>	<p>Accordingly the gifts <i>seem to be compared to</i> the theological virtues, by which man is united to the Holy Spirit his Mover, in the same way as the moral virtues <i>are compared to</i> the intellectual virtues, which <i>perfect</i> the reason, the moving principle of the moral virtues.</p> <p>As the intellectual virtues are <i>more excellent</i> than the moral virtues and control them, so the theological virtues are <i>more excellent</i> than the gifts of the Holy Spirit and regulate them.</p>

Aquinas begins by describing the functions of the various virtues and gifts: theological virtues conjoin (*coniungitur*) the wayfarer's mind to God; intellectual virtues perfect (*perficitur*) reason; moral virtues perfect (*perficiuntur*) the appetites to obey reason; and gifts dispose all the wayfarer's powers to be subject to (*subdantur*) the Holy Spirit. The standard translation reads *subdantur* as "amenable," which implies merely an openness to being led, such that the one being led could simply decide otherwise. But *subdantur*, with its military connotation, means that being "subject to" is like the relationship between the private and the general, or between the servant and the master. Here we see that there is no easy way to compare the virtues and gifts, because they operate in such different ways.

Despite these difficulties, Aquinas comes up with a way to relate the virtues and the gifts *analogically*. His analogy is that, as the intellectual virtues are to the moral virtues, so the theological virtues are to the gifts.

Intellectual Virtues : Moral Virtues :: Theological Virtues : Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Since Aquinas's goal is to understand the relationship between the theological virtues and the gifts, we should begin with an examination of the analogates, the intellectual and moral virtues. This is a relatively straightforward task, because Aquinas has painstakingly laid out their relationship in a number of articles just prior to the discussion of the gifts.

*Aquinas's Gift-Virtue Analogy Part I:
The Analogy with Intellectual and Moral Virtue*

Aquinas's analogy is based on three aspects of the relationship between the intellectual and moral virtues:

1. The intellectual virtues precede (*praeferuntur*) the moral virtues.
2. The intellectual and moral virtues need each other to function well.
3. Each is more perfect (*perficitur*) than the other, but in different ways.

The intellectual virtues precede (praeferuntur) the moral virtues. Discussing the relationship between the quasi-intellectual virtue of prudence in relation to the other moral virtues, Aquinas says that intellectual virtue precedes (*praeferitur*) moral virtue, because one must apprehend the good before one can act to pursue it.⁴⁶ Aquinas also uses *praeferitur* to compare the

⁴⁶ ST I-II, q. 66, a. 1: "The cause and root of human goodness is reason. Thus, since prudence perfects the reason, its goodness precedes [*praeferitur*] the goodness of the

theological virtues and gifts. As noted above, *praeferetur* connotes primarily a logical relationship (e.g., in terms of formal causality), rather than one of degree of perfection. Prudence is *praeferetur* to the other moral virtues because its exercise is a necessary pre-condition for the exercise of the other moral virtues.⁴⁷ We find analogous distinctions stated in terms of *praeferetur* elsewhere in the *ST*: intellect precedes will; knowledge precedes love; and Christ as Word (who is associated with intellect) precedes the Holy Spirit as Gift (who is associated with will).

The intellectual and moral virtues need each other to function well. While acknowledging the initial priority of the intellectual to the moral virtues, it is not a continuing priority. Although initially “budding” moral virtues must be directed by “budding” prudence, from then on there is a circular or mutual relationship and dependence between the intellectual and moral virtues. For prudence to reason well—that is, to actually function as prudence—it must be already directed to the right end. In other words, the wayfarer’s loves must be rightly ordered. To be directed to the right ends, and to avoid straying from them, the wayfarer needs the moral virtues to guide the intellectual virtues.⁴⁸ Aquinas makes it clear that intellectual virtue is not prior to moral virtue in all senses.

Further, “every act of the will is preceded [*praeceditur*] by an act of the intellect: but a certain act of the will precedes [*priori*] a certain act of the intellect. For the will tends to the final act of the intellect, which is beatitude. And consequently right inclination of the will is required antecedently for beatitude, just as the arrow must take a right course in order to strike the target.”⁴⁹ This should lead us to conclude that “come before” is referring not to degrees of excellence, but to different forms of causality. Whereas the intellectual virtues “come before” in terms of formal causality, the moral virtues “come before” in terms of the necessary disposition, i.e., efficient causality.

The intellectual and moral virtues are each more perfect (perficitur) than the other. This third point further supports the above claim. Aquinas explicitly

other moral virtues, which perfect the appetitive power, insofar as the appetitive power partakes of reason.”

⁴⁷ *ST* I-II, q. 58, a. 4: “There can be no moral virtue without prudence.” In a. 2, he says, “in the same way that appetite is distinguished from reason, so moral virtue is distinguished from intellectual virtue.”

⁴⁸ *ST* I-II, q. 65, a. 1: “One cannot have prudence unless one has the moral virtues: since prudence is right reason about things to be done, and the starting point of reason is the end or thing to be done, to which end one is rightly disposed by moral virtue.”

⁴⁹ *ST* I-II, q. 4, a. 4, ad 2.

asks if the intellectual virtues are “pre-eminent” (*praeeminent*) in relation to the moral virtues.⁵⁰ Or more literally, do the intellectual virtues “stand out the more”? His answer is a stalemate of sorts, related to the point above regarding causality. On the one hand, the intellectual virtues are inherently more noble (*nobilior*), because they are more purely rational, which is the wayfarer’s essential nature as an intellectual creature. But the moral virtues are more noble (*nobilior*) as a principle of human action, because to be a principle of action is closer to the essence of a virtue. In other words, moral virtues are those that people first think of as virtues because it is moral virtues that dispose us to act well.⁵¹ To put this more technically, the intellectual virtues, like the intellect more generally, “come before” at the level of specification. However, the moral virtues, like the will more generally, “come before” at the level of exercise.⁵²

*Aquinas’s Gift–Virtue Analogy Part II:
Applying the Analogy to the Theological Virtues and Gifts*

Returning to the question of the relationship between the theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, let us examine the same three points for the analogical relationship:

⁵⁰ *ST* I-II, q. 66, a. 3.

⁵¹ In *ST* I-II, q. 58, a. 4, Aquinas says that “moral” has two meanings: it can refer to a natural inclination or quasi-natural inclination of the appetitive power to some particular action, or it can refer to a societal custom. He says the second meaning is similar to the first, in that customs become a “second nature” and become like natural inclinations. So moral virtues have to do with directing our appetitive powers to good actions. But, for moral virtues to function, they require at least two of the intellectual virtues—prudence and understanding. They require these intellectual virtues because, in order for the wayfarer’s moral virtues to guide her appetites correctly (what she does according to moral virtues), the wayfarer must reason adequately about the ends to be sought, and that requires these intellectual virtues. As he summarizes it in ad 1, “the inclination of moral virtue is with choice: consequently in order that it may be perfect it requires that reason be perfected by intellectual virtue.” Aquinas puts the matter more vividly in ad 3: “The natural inclination to a good of virtue is a kind of beginning of virtue, but is not perfect virtue. For the stronger this inclination is, the more perilous may it prove to be, unless it be accompanied by right reason, which rectifies the choice of fitting means towards the due end. Thus if a running horse be blind, the faster it runs the more heavily will it fall, and the more grievously will it be hurt.”

⁵² Michael Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 169–70, has been very helpful in terms of articulating this point more lucidly than I otherwise could have done. On this point, see also Daniel Westberg, “Did Aquinas Change His Mind about the Will,” *The Thomist*, 58, no. 1 (1994): 41–60.

1. Do the theological virtues precede the gifts of the Holy Spirit?
2. Do the theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit need each other to function well?
3. Are the theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit each more perfect (*perficitur*) than the other?

Do the theological virtues precede the gifts? While Aquinas clearly states, “so the theological virtues come before [*praeferuntur*] the gifts of the Holy Spirit,” do they “come before” as the intellectual virtues come before the moral virtues? Aquinas likens the relationship between the theological virtues and the gifts to (1) the precedence of the procession and mission of the Son to those of the Holy Spirit, and (2) the precedence of intellect to will.⁵³ This, as seen above, implies the same logical relationship, such as one of formal causality, as with the relationship between the intellectual and moral virtues. On the other hand, it is Aquinas’s view that the wayfarer receives a theological-virtue-*habitus* and a gift-*habitus* simultaneously at baptism. If that is so, how can the theological virtues “come before” the gifts?

With these two points in mind, there are three different ways one can assert their precedence. First, since charity is also the form of the gifts, the wayfarer must perform acts of charity before the wayfarer can act according to a gift-*habitus*.⁵⁴ Second, charity regulates the gifts, in that the instinct of the Holy Spirit in the wayfarer perfects her in a way consonant with charity. Third, the wayfarer must have considerable facility in the theological and other infused virtues before developing facility in the gifts, because the gifts further perfect the wayfarer who is already living out the theological and other infused virtues. If the wayfarer does not possess these virtues, what can the gifts perfect?

Do the theological virtues and the gifts need each other to function well? Here again the analogy works well. Aquinas says that the theological virtues need the guidance and power of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in order to be rightly and consistently guided to the supernatural end.⁵⁵ If that were not the case,

⁵³ This passage continues by referring to the divine missions of Christ and the Holy Spirit, who are the source of all charity: “The gift of charity which is appropriated to the Holy Spirit, and by the gift of wisdom, which is appropriated to the Son: so that each work belongs by appropriation, but under different aspects, both to the Son and to the Holy Spirit” (*ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 8, ad 5).

⁵⁴ See *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 4. It is debatable whether in this context charity should be understood more properly as a virtue or as a divine gift.

⁵⁵ Without the gifts, the theological virtues are unable to safeguard the wayfarer from

then it would make no sense to insist that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are necessary for salvation.⁵⁶

So, as with the relationship between the intellectual and moral virtues, the theological virtues and the gifts have a reciprocal relationship. And thus similarly, at least initially the theological virtues, like the intellectual virtues, precede acts of the gifts of the Holy Spirit—a priority in terms of formal causality. On the other hand, like with the moral virtues, the gifts and their perfecting power are required antecedently for beatitude. So, as with the moral virtues, the gifts of the Holy Spirit “come before” in terms of efficient causality.

Are the theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit each more perfect than the other, but in a different way? In the immediate context of the first part of the response in *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 8, the full analogy is not spelled out. Here the focus is on charity regulating the gifts. This is a partial response to objection 3, reminding the reader that the gifts always function in harmony with the theological virtues, that they cannot be turned to evil purposes.

As noted above, in the first part of the response, Aquinas does not complete the analogy in that he says nothing about the superiority of the gifts to the theological virtues. It is when we get to the third part of the response that we will see Aquinas complete the parallel. That is, while here he affirms that the theological virtues precede the gifts at the level of specification, there he will affirm that the gifts precede the theological virtues at the level of exercise.

	Respondeo Part II	
Latin	Revised Translation	Shapcote Translation
Sed si <i>comparemus</i> dona ad alias virtutes intellectuales vel morales, dona <i>praeferuntur</i> virtutibus.	But if we <i>relate</i> the gifts to other virtues, intellectual or moral, then the gifts <i>have precedence to</i> the virtues.	But if we <i>compare</i> the gifts to the other virtues, intellectual and moral, then the gifts have <i>the precedence of</i> the virtues.

In this second part of the *respondeo*, following the analogy, Aquinas “tidies up” the formal relationships by noting that “the gifts precede [*praeferuntur*] the other [infused] virtues.” So in terms of formal causality:

sinning. “Human reason as perfected . . . by the theological virtues . . . is unable to avoid folly and other like things” (*ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 2 ad 3).

⁵⁶ *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 2, ad 3.

theological virtues → gifts of the Holy Spirit → infused intellectual and moral virtues

This completes his discussion about precedence in terms of formal causality.⁵⁷

Having now almost completed the analogy, Aquinas comes to his conclusion regarding the relationship between the gifts and virtues. Aquinas is here again repeating his argument that the gifts have a superior principle of motion (that is, spiritual instinct), an argument he has reiterated consistently in his question on the gifts.

	Respondeo Part III	
Latin	Revised Translation	Shapcote Translation
<p>Quia dona <i>perficiunt</i> vires animae in <i>comparatione</i> ad spiritum sanctum moventem,</p> <p>virtutes autem <i>perficiunt</i> vel ipsam rationem, vel alias vires in ordine ad rationem.</p> <p>Manifestum est autem quod ad altiorem motorem oportet maiori <i>perfectione</i> mobile esse dispositum.</p> <p>Unde <i>perfectiora</i> sunt dona virtutibus.</p>	<p>To conclude: the gifts <i>perfect</i> the soul's powers <i>in relation to</i> the moving Holy Spirit,</p> <p>whereas the virtues <i>perfect</i> reason itself or other powers in accordance with the order of reason.</p> <p>Also, it is obviously necessary that the loftier the Mover, the greater the <i>perfection</i> with which the one moved be thus disposed.</p> <p>Thus the gifts are <i>more perfect</i> than the virtues.</p>	<p>Because the gifts <i>perfect</i> the soul's powers <i>in relation to</i> the Holy Spirit their Mover;</p> <p>whereas the virtues <i>perfect</i>, either the reason itself, or the other powers in relation to reason: and</p> <p>it is evident that the more exalted the mover, the <i>more excellent the</i> disposition whereby the thing moved requires to be disposed.</p> <p>Therefore the gifts are <i>more perfect</i> than the virtues.</p>

A striking feature of this conclusion is that here Aquinas's key terminology diverges from the rest of the response. Up to this point in his response, the relationship between virtues and gifts has been described in terms of precedence, with the language of perfection used only to compare different kinds

⁵⁷ Note that, here, Aquinas again makes it abundantly clear that he has in mind the *infused* intellectual and moral virtues. For, the theological virtues and gifts clearly do not precede the acquired virtues in terms of formal causality, since nature precedes grace. Rather, the infused virtues precede the acquired virtues in terms of their perfection.

of virtues. But here in the conclusion, the language of perfection dominates. Here Aquinas works out the logic of perfection in all the relationships he has discussed in the response. And his conclusion, which necessarily follows from his argument of superior motion, is that the gifts are more perfect than the virtues.

Arguably, this is the most significant argument in the entire question on the gifts. Thus, it is fitting that it appears here, since this response concludes not merely this article, but the entire discussion of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Here he completes his analogy that argues for the superiority of the gifts to the theological virtues.

Having drawn our conclusions regarding Aquinas's analogy, it is now time to draw conclusions about Shapcote's translation. Readers may well wish to contest my translation of *praeferuntur* as something to the effect of "precedes" rather than "more excellent." However, readers should be aware that there is strong evidence for the accuracy of my translation from Shapcote himself. He provides us with two pieces of evidence to seriously question his translation at this point.

First, we note that *praeferunder* or a variant appears around 140 times in the *ST*. Of these 140 uses by Aquinas, Shapcote translates *praeferuntur* as "prefers," "precedes," "stands before," or the like around 125 times. That is almost 90 percent of the time. On the other hand, Shapcote translates *praeferuntur* as "more excellent" only six times in the entire *ST*, about 4 percent. Furthermore, the majority of all of his uses of "more excellent" occur in this very article. In other words, his translation of "more excellent" for *praeferuntur* in the *ST* is practically unique to this article.

Secondly, we see contradictions when *praeferuntur* is translated as "more excellent." In article 8, "virtutes intellectuales praeferuntur virtutibus moralibus" is translated as "the intellectual virtues *are more excellent than* the moral virtues." However, in article 7, the *exact* same Latin phrase has been translated as "the intellectual virtues *have the precedence of* the moral virtues."

These two data—how *praeferuntur* is translated more generally in the *ST* and the fact that contradictory translations are provided on the few occasions that *praeferuntur* is translated as "more excellent"—constitute strong evidence that the translation is highly problematic, at least as a literal translation. Add that to the fact that, in article 8, five different Latin terms are translated as "more excellent than," and it seems clear that this English translation should not be relied on as a *translation* of Aquinas's claims regarding the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

With regard to Shapcote's translation, my conclusion is that regardless of whether my particular reading is fully convincing, further study of this

question will need to rethink how to translate question 68. It would also seem to follow that scholarship on the gifts and their relation to the theological and other infused virtues that has followed Shapcote's translation will need to be reconsidered. Furthermore, I contend that almost all scholarly work on the gifts in English appears to accept Shapcote's translation. If I am correct, then English-language scholarship on the gifts will require some re-evaluation.

*Aquinas Confirms and Develops His Case
for the Superiority of Gift-Habitus to Virtue-Habitus*

	Reply to Objections	
Latin	Revised Translation	Shapcote Translation
Ad primum ergo dicendum quod caritas est virtus theologica; de qua concedimus quod sit <i>potior</i> donis.	Reply Obj. 1: Now, it is said that charity is a theological virtue; and charity we concede <i>ranks above</i> the gifts.	Reply Obj. 1: Charity is a theological virtue; and such we grant to be more <i>perfect</i> than the gifts.

Table continued overleaf

Latin	Revised Translation	Shapcote Translation
<p>Ad secundum dicendum quod aliquid est <i>prius</i> altero dupliciter. Uno modo, ordine <i>perfectionis</i> et dignitatis, sicut dilectio Dei est <i>prior</i> dilectione proximi. Et hoc modo dona sunt <i>priora</i> virtutibus intellectualibus et moralibus, posteriora vero virtutibus theologicis. Alio modo, ordine generationis seu dispositionis, sicut dilectio proximi <i>praecedit</i> dilectionem Dei, quantum ad actum. Et sic virtutes morales et intellectuales <i>praecedunt</i> dona, quia per hoc quod homo bene se habet circa rationem propriam, disponitur ad hoc quod se bene habeat in ordine ad Deum.</p>	<p>Reply Obj. 2: There are two ways in which one thing <i>is prior to</i> another. In one way, it is prior in the order of perfection and dignity, in the way that love of God <i>is prior to</i> the love of neighbor: and in this sense the gifts <i>are prior to</i> the intellectual and moral virtues, though <i>posterior to</i> the theological virtues. In the second way, something is prior in the order of generation or <i>habitus</i> in the way that the love of neighbor <i>precedes</i> love of God as far as acts are concerned. In this sense the moral and intellectual virtues <i>precede</i> the gifts. For by the fact that a man has the right relation to his own reason he is disposed towards having the right relation to God.</p>	<p>Reply Obj. 2: There are two ways in which one thing <i>precedes</i> another. One is in order of <i>perfection</i> and dignity, as love of God <i>precedes</i> love of our neighbor: and in this way the gifts <i>precede</i> the intellectual and moral virtues, but <i>follow</i> the theological virtues. The other is the order of generation or disposition: thus love of one's neighbor <i>precedes</i> love of God, as regards the act: and in this way moral and intellectual virtues <i>precede</i> the gifts, since man, through being well subordinate to his own reason, is disposed to be rightly subordinate to God.</p>
<p>Ad tertium dicendum quod sapientia et intellectus et alia huiusmodi sunt dona spiritus sancti, secundum quod caritate informantur; quae non agit perperam, ut dicitur I ad Cor. XIII. Et ideo sapientia et intellectu et aliis huiusmodi nullus male utitur, secundum quod sunt dona spiritus sancti. Sed ad hoc quod a caritatis <i>perfectione</i> non recedant, unum ab altero adiuvatur. Et hoc est quod Gregorius dicere intendit.</p>	<p>Reply Obj. 3: Wisdom and understanding and the like are gifts of the Holy Spirit, after they are formed by charity, "which deals not perversely" (1 Cor 13:4). And so no one can make bad use of wisdom and understanding and the like insofar as they are gifts of the Holy Spirit. But one gift is aided by another in order that they not withdraw from the <i>perfection</i> of charity. And this is what Gregory intends to say.</p>	<p>Reply Obj. 3: Wisdom and understanding and the like are gifts of the Holy Spirit, according as they are quickened by charity, which "dealeth not perversely" (1 Cor 13:4). Consequently wisdom and understanding and the like cannot be used to evil purpose, insofar as they are gifts of the Holy Spirit. But, lest they depart from the <i>perfection</i> of charity, they assist one another. This is what Gregory means to say.</p>

First Response—Charity Is Also a Gift. While the first objection contended that a virtue ranked above the gifts, in that objection Aquinas does not affirm that charity as a virtue ranks above the gifts. In the objection, Aquinas says that the gift of charity ranks above the other gifts of the Holy Spirit. Combined with what he says elsewhere, I contend that Aquinas is speaking of charity as a gift and not as a virtue. This requires an analysis of why Aquinas would distinguish the gift of charity from the virtue of charity. He distinguishes them because all virtue-habitus have inherent limits that are not inherent in the gifts. Thus charity, if it is to be fully perfected in the wayfarer, must increasingly function from a gift-habitus rather than from a virtue-habitus. This evolution will occur as the wayfarer increasingly grows in moral and spiritual perfection. To that I now turn.

As discussed earlier, Aquinas says that the distinguishing feature of all gifts as opposed to all virtues is the source of motion, what Aquinas refers to as the *manner* or *mode* of being moved.⁵⁸ There are two important conclusions to be drawn from this. First, some kinds of human excellences—depending on the “mover”—will operate either as virtues or as gifts. In other words, an act of wisdom can arise either from a virtue-*habitus* or from a gift-*habitus*. But it cannot operate as both at the same time. The same is true with charity. An act of charity can follow from either a virtue-*habitus* or a gift-*habitus*.

In *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 2, when comparing the theological virtue-*habitus* to the gift-*habitus*, Aquinas emphasizes the reason-driven character of the theological virtues. In his contrast between a virtue-*habitus* and gift-*habitus*, Aquinas says explicitly that, whereas reason is the mode of virtue-*habitus*, God is the mode of gift-*habitus*.⁵⁹ As he puts it:

⁵⁸ In the article where Aquinas makes his categorical distinction between a gift-*habitus* and a virtue-*habitus*, he responds to the objection that many of the gifts also seem to be virtues. Gifts such as “wisdom, understanding, and knowledge are intellectual virtues, counsel pertains to prudence, piety to a kind of justice, and fortitude is a moral virtue. Therefore it seems that the gifts do not differ from the virtues” (*ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 1, obj. 4). To this, Aquinas responds that, while wisdom is to be considered a virtue to the extent it operates according to the judgments of reasoning, “on the other hand, it is called a gift insofar as it operates from a divinely inspired instinct” (ad 4). Aquinas then says that this principle applies to the other virtues.

⁵⁹ *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 1. Contemporary scholars such as William Mattison, John Meinert, and Anton ten Klooster claim that, in this article, Aquinas is only distinguishing gift-*habitus* from acquired virtue-*habitus* (see, e.g., Meinert, “*Donum Habituele: Grace and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in St. Thomas Aquinas*” [PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 2015], 78–83, later published as *The Love of God Poured Out: Grace and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in St. Thomas Aquinas* [Steubenville, OH: Emmaus

In matters directed to the supernatural end, to which man's reason moves him, according as it is, in a mode, and imperfectly, informed by the theological virtues, the motion of reason does not suffice, unless it receive in addition the instinct and motion of the Holy Spirit."⁶⁰

Thus the conclusion that in terms of the wayfarer's ability to act charitably, Aquinas's view is that reason is the mode of the *virtue* of charity.⁶¹

Besides his claim that the exercise of any and all virtues is constrained by the inherent limits of a wayfarer's reason, there is a second way in which the exercise of the specifically theological and other infused virtues is limited. Since God is the end of the theological virtues, they are especially limited because of the difficulty of pursuing the supernatural end according to the mode of human reason. Aquinas confirms this point when he compares the acquired and infused virtues. By the acquired virtues, humans can strive only for the goods of their nature, that is, acts that are *connatural* to the power of human reason.⁶² When by grace the wayfarer is given the assistance of the theological and other infused virtues, her reason is given an additional supernatural perfection by the theological virtues, but it is possessed more imperfectly because of the nature of the end being pursued:

Now there are two ways in which human reason is perfected by God: (1) by its natural perfection, that is, in accord with the natural light of reason, and (2) as was explained above [q. 62, a. 1], by a certain supernatural perfection through the theological virtues. Even though this second sort of perfection is greater [*maior*] than the first, nonetheless, the first is had in a more perfect way than is the second. For a human being fully possesses the first sort of perfection, as it were, whereas the second is possessed imperfectly, since we love and know God imperfectly.⁶³

Academic, 2018]). However, Aquinas says in his response that the point is to find a distinguishing criterion "which would apply to all the virtues, and to none of the gifts, or vice versa." Furthermore, in the *sed contra* of a. 1, Aquinas explicitly states that the point is to distinguish the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit "from the three theological virtues, . . . [and] from the four cardinal virtues."

⁶⁰ *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 2.

⁶¹ This logic also of course applies to all other virtues.

⁶² *ST* II-II, q. 23, a. 2. As Aquinas puts it, God bestows "on each thing the form whereby it is inclined to the end appointed to it by God."

⁶³ *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 2.

Note that, in this passage, Aquinas says explicitly that, through the virtue-*habitus* by which the theological virtues operate, human reason is given a “supernatural perfection.” In other words, human reason is not simply superseded. Rather, reason is given an additional form of perfection. This also confirms by claim that, when it is a virtue-*habitus* moving charity (or other infused virtues), human reason definitively limits the exercise of charity itself.

It is specifically at this point, where Aquinas acknowledges the inherent limits of a virtue-*habitus*, that he distinguishes acts of charity which can operate according to a virtue-*habitus* from acts of charity that operate according to a gift-*habitus*. While it is true that both the wayfarer’s acts of charity and the wayfarer’s possession of the virtue of charity are limited in her earthly life, they are limited in different ways. On the one hand, while we receive supernatural aid to act according to the virtue of charity, as *rational* agents we are limited as vessels of this supernatural aid to perform acts of charity. On the other hand, the wayfarer’s ability to perform acts of charity is not ultimately constrained by the limitations of a virtue-*habitus*, because the Holy Spirit bestows on wayfarers gift-*habitus*, through which wayfarers can further perfect their exercise of acts of charity.

We see Aquinas pointing in this direction when he begins to increasingly emphasize in the *prima secundae* (and especially in the *secunda secundae*) the gift character of charity.⁶⁴ At the beginning of his questions on faith, he says that “the sanctification of a creature by grace, and its consummation by glory, is also effected by the gift of charity.”⁶⁵ Why would Aquinas so regularly speak of the gift of charity, if the *virtue* of charity were sufficient? After his discussion of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in question 68, Aquinas increasingly emphasizes the gift character of charity.⁶⁶ Especially in the

⁶⁴ This is not to say that Aquinas’s conviction regarding the unsurpassing goodness of charity as a gift is not already present in the first part of the *ST*. For example, one reads in I, q. 43, a. 5, ad 2: “Because the Holy Spirit is Love [*Amor*], it is by the gift of charity that the soul is assimilated to the Holy Spirit, hence, accordingly the gift of charity parallels the mission of the Holy Spirit [Et quia Spiritus Sanctus est amor, per donum caritatis anima spiritui sancto assimilatur, unde secundum donum caritatis attenditur missio Spiritus Sancti].”

⁶⁵ *ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 8 ad 5. This passage continues by referring to the divine missions of Christ and the Holy Spirit, who are the source of all charity: “The gift of charity which is appropriated to the Holy Spirit, and by the gift of wisdom, which is appropriated to the Son: so that each work belongs by appropriation, but under different aspects, both to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.” Aquinas consistently refers to the mission of the Son as prior to the mission of the Spirit, as wisdom precedes charity (III, q. 7, a. 13).

⁶⁶ Aquinas’s references to the gift of charity (as opposed to the virtue of charity) increase

secunda secundae, Aquinas repeatedly speaks of the perfection of charity as requiring not only a virtue-*habitus*, but beyond that a gift-*habitus*. I present only one example of this development in the *secunda secundae*.

... Uncreated Wisdom [i.e., the Holy Spirit], which in the first place unites itself to us by the gift of charity, and consequently reveals to us the mysteries the knowledge of which is infused wisdom. Hence, the infused wisdom which is a gift is not the cause but the effect of charity.⁶⁷

Infused wisdom is for Aquinas a gift of the Holy Spirit. The charity here gifted by the Holy Spirit builds on, but also extends beyond, the virtue of charity in terms of its degree of perfection. For as a virtue charity is unable to give us the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, as charity is not merely a virtue but also the form of all the virtues, so too it is charity that unites all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. And in discussing how charity unites the gifts, charity is not referred to as a virtue, but as itself a gift. Here Aquinas makes a direct and unmediated connection between the charity that is the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit's gifts: "The Holy Spirit dwells in us by charity, according to Rom 5:5: 'The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, Who is given to us.'"⁶⁸

Second Response—Generative versus Perfective Priority: Aquinas's second objection was that, since nature is prior to grace, so the virtues (which are directed at least in part by reason) have precedence to the gifts, which are directed by the Holy Spirit. Aquinas says we can look at priority in two ways. Something can be prior temporally (what Aquinas calls "the order of generation"), or prior in "the order of perfection." Aquinas uses the example of the relationship between love of God and that of neighbor to show the difference. Whereas the love of neighbor is prior in the order of generation, the love of God is prior in terms of perfection. So the gifts are prior to the infused virtues, because the gifts are more focused on the love of God than are the infused virtues.⁶⁹

not only in the rest of the *ST*, but in a number of his other late works. An analysis of this development is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁶⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 45, a. 6, ad 2.

⁶⁸ *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 5.

⁶⁹ At this point Aquinas adds that the theological virtues are prior to the gifts, because in terms of ordering our love of God, the theological virtues must function prior to the gifts being able to further perfect the love of God. But note that Aquinas refers to the

Third Response—Why Charity and the Gifts Need Each Other. Here Aquinas confirms that charity brings the gifts to life, and the gifts perfect charity in the wayfarer. Aquinas here is speaking of how charity in itself needs perfection by gift-*habitus*, rather than a virtue-*habitus*. We shall see how Aquinas very strongly confirms this view in the next main section of the paper.

The Gifts Are Superior in Remedying the Virtues

Having shown how the replies confirm Aquinas's answer, we now finally address his direct answer to the question posed at the beginning of the *ST* I-II, q, 68, a. 8: do the virtues have precedence to the gifts?

	Sed Contra	
Latin	Revised Translation	Shapcote Translation
Sed contra est quod dona dantur in adiutorium virtutum contra defectus . . . et sic videtur quod <i>perficiant</i> quod virtutes <i>perficere</i> non possunt. Sunt ergo dona <i>potiora</i> virtutibus.	On the contrary, The gifts are bestowed to assist the virtues and to remedy certain defects, . . . so it seems that they <i>perfect</i> what the virtues are not able to <i>perfect</i> . Therefore the gifts <i>rank above</i> the virtues.	On the contrary, The gifts are bestowed to assist the virtues and to remedy certain defects . . . so that, seemingly, <i>they accomplish</i> what the virtues <i>cannot</i> . Therefore the gifts <i>are more excellent than</i> the virtues.

At this point, we can summarize the three ways in which the gifts are superior to the virtues. With regard to the first way in which a gift-*habitus* is superior to a virtue-*habitus*, we have already seen in the first section on *instinctus* that the gifts are superior in their mode of action. Second, whereas the inferior motion of the virtues necessarily leads to defects of reason, leading to sin and error, or at least not doing the most charitable acts, the motion of the gifts generates consistently good acts. Third, the gifts are more perfect than any and all of the virtues (note that they are not more perfect than the *acts* of charity), since, if and when the wayfarer acts receptively to the gifts, she can perform greater acts of charity than are possible when she acts according to her reason through the virtues, even when those virtues are infused with God's grace.

theological virtues only in one of the comparisons, because the theological virtues do not fully fit into the schema of contrasting the gifts and the other infused virtues.

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit: The More Excellent *Habitus*

To make sense of how Aquinas thinks about the relationship between the theological virtues and the gifts, we must understand two distinctions between an acquired virtue-*habitus*, on the one hand, and a theological virtue-*habitus* and gift-*habitus*, on the other. With an acquired virtue-*habitus*, such as justice, a person must act justly in a regular and stable way before the person can be said to have the acquired virtue of justice. In other words, with acquired virtues, acts precede the *habitus*. With theological virtue-*habitus* and gift-*habitus*, it is the opposite. For, the wayfarer is not able to perform acts of either a theological virtue-*habitus* or a gift-*habitus* before she receives the infused *habitus*. Only after receiving a theological virtue-*habitus* and a gift-*habitus* in baptism can the wayfarer perform acts of theological virtues or gifts. Which leads us to the second distinction.

Second, upon receiving them, the wayfarer likely has little or no facility to act in accord with the infused virtues and gifts.⁷⁰ She will find it difficult to act according to the theological and other infused virtues for two reasons. First, growth in any virtue requires habituation. Second, the theological and other infused virtues are disproportionate to human nature, and thus it is more difficult to perfect the infused virtues than it is to perfect the acquired virtues.⁷¹

In addition, wayfarers baptized as adults who have little facility with the

⁷⁰ One example of those who will have no facility to act according to infused virtues and gifts initially are those persons baptized as infants, who have no facility to perform any human acts (as Aquinas defines human acts). Besides the case of infants, Aquinas also assigns the infused virtues and gifts to human persons who never in their lives are able to perform a human act, those persons with a severe mental illness (*furiosi*) or with a severe mental impairment (*amentes*). Those who are without the use of reason “from birth, and have no lucid intervals, and show no signs of the use of reason” should be baptized for the same reason the Church baptizes infants. In baptism, those without the use of reason are given the gift of wisdom (II-II, q. 45, a. 5, ad 3). Those with the gift of wisdom do not need intellectual virtues, since they have this wisdom connaturally (a. 2, resp.). The gift-*habitus* of wisdom is fitting for infants because, in “being reared from childhood in things pertaining to the Christian mode of life, they may the more easily persevere therein” (III, q. 68, a. 9). Baptism regenerates the Christian infant and gives them a “leg up” on their wayfaring through life, assisting them in persevering in the Christian life. Persons with a severe mental impairment who have been baptized have been cleansed from original sin. Furthermore, they have been endowed with the Holy Spirit’s gift of wisdom as a *habitus* in their soul, and they are also unable to sin. Since those persons with a severe mental impairment are unable to separate themselves from the love of God, they may be seen as sacramental icons of heavenly life.

⁷¹ See *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 2. The relevant passage is quoted later in this section.

acquired virtues will also struggle to act in accord with the newly received infused virtues-*habitus* and gift-*habitus*. The notion of having a *habitus* and yet not being able to act according to it will be strange at best to those whose paradigm of a *habitus* is an acquired virtue (or vice), but it is essential to Aquinas's account of infused virtues and gifts.

Do Infused Virtues and Gifts Operate Simultaneously?

Aquinas's assertion that the wayfarer receives both the infused virtue-*habitus* and gift-*habitus* at baptism raises a whole series of questions: Although a wayfarer possesses both *habitus* simultaneously, does the wayfarer act according to both simultaneously? Or must the wayfarer act according to one *habitus* or the other at any one time? If the former, can the wayfarer act increasingly according to both *habitus* simultaneously? If the latter, does the wayfarer suddenly stop acting according to the one *habitus* and start acting according to the other *habitus*? If so, is this a change that occurs only occasionally, or does the wayfarer constantly go back and forth from acting according to the virtue-*habitus* to the gift-*habitus* and then back again? Let us take up each of these questions in turn.

Having been given the infused virtue-*habitus* and the gift-*habitus* at baptism, when the wayfarer acts, is she acting from one of these *habitus*, or both? Many commentators seem to think of the gifts as aiding the infused virtues, and that they grow together. The dominant viewpoint is that these two *habitus* operate simultaneously.

But the view that the wayfarer acts from both a virtue-*habitus* and a gift-*habitus* simultaneously is problematic. Strictly speaking, a person cannot act by two *habitus* simultaneously. With an infused virtue of, say, courage, God's grace functions to help the wayfarer better see and will to do the courageous act. With the gift of courage, the wayfarer puts aside her own limited reason and will and becomes receptive to the sweet and impeccable instinct of the Holy Spirit. When Aquinas compares the modes of virtue and gift activity, he does *not* say that those who are moved by the Holy Spirit's gifts are given "super-charged" reasoning and willing. He says that wayfarers moved by the instinct of the Holy Spirit do *not* act according to their discursive reason. Since there is clear incompatibility between a virtue-*habitus* and a gift-*habitus* as sources of the wayfarer's movement, it would seem to follow that the wayfarer does not act according to a virtue-*habitus* and a gift-*habitus* simultaneously.

Furthermore, if acting according to the gifts is a superior form of movement, then, if the wayfarer can act fully receptively to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, acting according to the infused virtues becomes superfluous.

Or worse, at a certain point of spiritual maturity, acting according to a virtue-*habitus* may hold back the wayfarer from progressing in perfection towards full unity with God.

So I conclude that, while the wayfarer possesses both infused virtue-*habitus* and gift-*habitus*, she acts only according to one of these *habitus* at any one time. So, does the wayfarer initially act exclusively according to one *habitus* and then change to the other permanently? Or does the wayfarer continually go back and forth between these two *habitus*?

As we saw in the previous section, Aquinas gives us guidelines to think through this question. First, the theological virtues precede the gifts in order of generation (i.e., in order of temporal priority). This makes sense because, for Aquinas, a criterion for the authenticity of the gifts is that they are in conformity with and further perfect the acts that arise from the theological and other infused virtues. So, in the same way that acts of faith are prior to acts of charity in terms of generation, so are the acts of the theological virtues prior to the acts of the gifts in generation.⁷²

However, once the wayfarer has sufficiently perfected acts of the theological virtues, will the wayfarer suddenly begin to act exclusively in response to the gifts, and no longer according to the theological virtues? Are virtue-*habitus* and gift-*habitus* so incompatible that we must think of the wayfarer as acting according to the human mode through acts of virtue up to a certain point in moral and spiritual development, and from then on according to a “superhuman” mode through spiritual instinct and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

This strict incompatibilist view does not seem to make sense for four reasons. First, Thomas never speaks in this way, as if any wayfarer ceases to act virtuously. Second, it makes little or no sense psychologically, with regard to our experience of how human beings act. Third, it seems out of character with Aquinas’s gradualist account of moral and spiritual growth and change. Fourth, it would entail that wayfarers who do not progress very far in terms of perfection would never act from a gift-*habitus*, having not gotten to a level of virtue necessary to be able to authentically act in that way.

Having eliminated other viewpoints, the one that remains which makes the most sense is that the infused virtues and the gifts operate serially in the

⁷² Aquinas regularly contrasts the order of generation with the order of perfection. (e.g.: *ST I*, q. 85, a. 3; *I-II*, q. 62, a. 4; q. 68, a. 8, ad 2). For example, within the theological virtues themselves, faith is first in the order of generation, but charity is first in the order of perfection. Similarly between the theological virtues and the gifts, acts of the theological virtues are first in order of generation, but the act of the gifts are first in order of perfection.

life of the wayfarer, that both operate, but only one at a time. Furthermore, since virtue-*habitus* are first in order of generation, they predominate at first. But since the gift-*habitus* are first in the order of perfection, as the wayfarer grows in perfection, the gift-*habitus* will gradually come to predominate. Thus, I posit that the wayfarer, as she grows in moral and spiritual maturity, acts according to a virtue-*habitus* and a gift-*habitus* in a roughly inverse relationship. As the wayfarer acts increasingly in receptivity to the Spirit's gifts, she acts progressively less from a virtue-*habitus*. Aquinas writes in his *Commentary on John's Gospel* that, as one begins to act according to gift-*habitus* given at baptism, the Holy Spirit gifts the wayfarer additionally, enabling the wayfarer to increasingly act according to a gift-*habitus*:

We should say that it is characteristic of the gifts of God that, if one makes good use of a gift granted to him, he deserves to receive a greater gift and grace. . . . No one can love God unless he has the Holy Spirit: because we do not act before we receive God's grace, rather, the grace comes first: "he loved us first" (1 John 4:10). We should say, therefore, that the apostles first received the Holy Spirit so that they could love God and obey his commands. But it was necessary that they make good use, by their love and obedience, of this first gift of the Holy Spirit in order to receive the Spirit more fully. And so the meaning is, "if you love me," by means of the Holy Spirit, whom you have, and obey my commandments, you will receive the Holy Spirit with greater fullness.⁷³

For example, Aquinas contrasts wisdom as a virtue-*habitus* with wisdom as a gift-*habitus*. Whereas the wisdom that is a virtue makes judgments regarding divine things "from the investigation of reason," the wisdom that is a gift-*habitus* provides right judgment about divine things according to a "certain connaturality" with divine things.⁷⁴ Now, that is not a call for irrationality, but a recognition that acting according to spiritual instinct is the reception of the Holy Spirit's *intellectus*, where the wayfarer immediately and impeccably discerns the most fitting moral and spiritual response in

⁷³ Aquinas, *Super Ioan.* 14, lec. 4, Marietti no. 1909 (aquinas.cc/la/en/~Ioan.C14.L4.n1909).

⁷⁴ *ST II-II*, q. 45, a. 2. Kieran Conley argues for the centrality of "affective knowledge" in the supernatural order, and further that affective knowledge in the supernatural order is always gift knowledge, that it is not present in the theological virtues (*A Theology of Wisdom* [Dubuque, IA: Priory, 1963], 117–19).

situations that are faced.⁷⁵ As the spiritual instinct of the Holy Spirit grows in the wayfarer, her need for the use of the discursive reasoning inherent in virtue-*habitus* concomitantly diminishes.

*The Nature of the Motion: Why Gift-Motion is More Perfect
than (Even) Infused Virtue-Motion*

We now return to the comparison of gift-motion with virtue-motion, which was briefly mentioned previously. I will now argue in more detail that the wayfarer who acts from a gift-*habitus* is able to perform acts of charity that are both superior to and more consistently good than what is possible when the wayfarer acts according to a virtue-*habitus*.

In *ST I-II*, q. 68, a. 1, Aquinas's analysis begins with his assertion that the degree of perfection of actions is proportionate to the perfection of the "mover."⁷⁶ The two "movers" Aquinas is referring to are reason and spiritual instinct. He continues that "the more exalted the mover, . . . the more perfect must be the *habitus* whereby the one moved is made proportionate to the mover." Aquinas's point here is clearly that a gift-*habitus* is superior to a virtue-*habitus* by virtue of its mover.

Some contemporary accounts of the infused virtues challenge the account given here, arguing that, in question 68, Aquinas is only distinguishing the gifts from the acquired virtues, or perhaps the acquired virtues from the infused moral virtues. These commentators take Aquinas's definition that "God works in us without us" to mean that reason is not at the heart of the infused virtues. However, Aquinas is clear that the complete definition of virtue applies to the theological and other infused virtues, and part of the definition of any virtue is that the fundamental "mover" is reason.⁷⁷

More fundamentally, the whole point of article 1 is to find a criterion which is true of all the gifts and not true of any of the virtues.⁷⁸ If Aquinas were merely distinguishing the gifts from the acquired virtues, or the acquired virtues and the infused moral virtues, why would he go to so much trouble to critique the dominant patristic and Scholastic texts which *are* trying to distinguish between the gifts and the theological virtues? In the

⁷⁵ This point could be further specified by distinguishing acting according to infused prudence and acting according to the gift of counsel.

⁷⁶ "Whatever is moved must be proportionate to its mover" (*ST I-II*, q. 68, a. 1).

⁷⁷ Part of Aquinas's definition of a virtue is that it is "a quality of the mind." See also footnote 11.

⁷⁸ *ST I-II*, q. 68, a. 1: "They have not assigned a suitable reason for this distinction, a reason, to wit, which would apply either to all the virtues, and to none of the gifts, or vice versa."

first two articles of question 68, he makes his distinction between the gifts and the (theological) virtues in four different places.

First, Aquinas contrasts the seven virtues (i.e., including the theological virtues) with the seven gifts in terms of how they function as responses to vice.⁷⁹ He says that “to the extent the vices are *contrary to the good of reason* [*bonum rationis*], they are *contrary to the virtues*.” Whereas “to the extent that they are *contrary to divine instinct*, they are *contrary to the gifts*.”⁸⁰ He completes the response by saying that “the same thing [vice] is contrary to both God and reason.” He clearly and repeatedly associates a theological virtue-*habitus* with reason, and a gift-*habitus* with divine instinct.

Second, in responding to another objection that the virtues cannot be distinguished from the gifts, Aquinas again explains the distinction. On the one hand, virtue “must be understood to concern that rectitude of life which accords with the rule of reason.” On the other hand, a gift is “distinguished from an infused virtue, in that a gift is given by God in relation to God’s motion, which makes a person follow her instinct in the right way.”⁸¹

Third, in discussing the limitations of the theological virtues, Aquinas says that, “in matters directed to the supernatural end, *to which man’s reason moves him*, . . . informed by the theological virtues, *the motion of reason does not suffice*.”⁸² Here again Aquinas emphasizes that the fundamental principle of motion of all virtues, including the theological, is reason.⁸³

Fourth, just to make sure the reader is clear, Aquinas says that the wayfarer’s

reason is perfected by God in two ways: first, with its natural perfection, to wit, the natural light of reason; second, with a supernatural perfection, to wit, the theological virtues, as stated above [*ST* I-II, q. 62, a. 1]. Though this latter perfection is greater than the former,

⁷⁹ In *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 1, ad 2 and ad 3.

⁸⁰ *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 1, ad 2 (emphases added).

⁸¹ *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 1, ad 3: “Potest dici id quod datur a Deo in ordine ad motionem ipsius; quod scilicet facit hominem bene sequentem suos instinctus.”

⁸² *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 2: “Sed in ordine ad finem ultimum supernaturalem, ad quem ratio movet secundum quod est aliquid et imperfecte formata per virtutes theologicas, non sufficit ipsa motio rationis.”

⁸³ Note that the context of this article is the necessity of the gifts of the Holy Spirit for salvation. Aquinas’s main point in this article is that the wayfarer cannot be adequately guided to salvation by the virtues, and this inadequacy includes the theological and other infused virtues. It is because of the inherent inadequacy of all the virtues without the gifts that Aquinas concludes that the wayfarer also needs the gifts of the Holy Spirit to attain salvation.

yet the former is possessed in a more perfect manner than the latter: because [the wayfarer has the natural light of reason in her] full possession, whereas [she possesses the theological virtues] imperfectly, since we love and know God imperfectly.⁸⁴

For the fourth time in two articles, Aquinas makes the same two points. First, human reason is a definitive characteristic of all virtues. Second, without the gifts, the wayfarer's moral and spiritual growth will be stunted, and in two ways. Without the aid of the gifts in the most basic way, human reason, even with the help of the theological virtues, is inadequate to guide the wayfarer to salvation. This is not possible, Aquinas says, unless "the instinct and motion of the Holy Spirit descend from above."⁸⁵ The connotation here is of the Holy Spirit as "superhero," who comes to rescue us, so to speak.

Here Aquinas has repeatedly emphasized the fundamental distinction between the infused virtues and the gifts—they differ in terms of their moving principle. The moving principle of all virtues is reason. The moving principle of the gifts is divine instinct. Thus he concludes:

[For] those who are moved by divine instinct, there is no need to take counsel according to human reason, but only to follow their inner instinct, since they are moved by a principle higher than human reason. This then is what some say, that the gifts perfect man for acts which are higher than acts of virtue.⁸⁶

There is a second key distinction between how one is guided by a virtue-*habitus* and by a gift-*habitus* that has been operative throughout the paper, but is worth returning to now in making a fuller comparison between the gifts and virtues than has so far been made. An infused virtue gives the wayfarer guidance from the Holy Spirit, but one has to then use one's reason and discernment to make proper use of it. However, the gifts

⁸⁴ *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 2: "Ratio autem hominis est perfecta dupliciter a Deo, primo quidem, naturali perfectione, scilicet secundum lumen naturale rationis; alio modo, quadam supernaturali perfectione, per virtutes theologicas, ut dictum est supra. Et quamvis haec secunda perfectio sit maior quam prima, tamen prima perfectiori modo habetur ab homine quam secunda, nam prima habetur ab homine quasi plena possessio, secunda autem habetur quasi imperfecta; imperfecte enim diligimus et cognoscimus Deum."

⁸⁵ *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 2: "Nisi desuper adsit instinctus et motio spiritus sancti."

⁸⁶ *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 1: "Quod his qui moventur per instinctum divinum, non expedit consilium secundum rationem humanam, sed quod sequantur interiorem instinctum, quia moventur a meliori principio quam sit ratio humana. Et hoc est quod quidam dicunt, quod dona perficiunt hominem ad altiores actus quam sint actus virtutum."

give the wayfarer spiritual instinct, to which the wayfarer has not so much to act as to be adequately receptive to the Spirit's guidance. We might think of the following analogical example to distinguish how the Holy Spirit works through the virtues and the gifts. In this example, one needs to find one's way over a treacherous mountain in blizzard-like winter conditions. One may receive all kinds of maps and suggestions and tips on how to find the one safe path to the other side. While that is certainly helpful, one can still expect to run into trouble. Alternatively, an expert guide shows up and offers to take you by the hand, guiding you through every twist and turn. One only has to be receptive to that guidance, which is in itself a choice.⁸⁷

An additional and very important indication—perhaps the best indication—that the acts of the gifts are superior to the acts of the virtues is what Aquinas says about the beatitudes. Aquinas notes that the beatitudes are actions, and the most perfect actions possible. And Aquinas clearly states that the acts of the beatitudes are possible not by a virtue-*habitus*, but only by a gift-*habitus*.⁸⁸ Since the beatitudes are the most perfect actions of a wayfarer, so too are the gifts the most perfect *habitus* as those from which the acts of the beatitudes flow. In his discussion of the beatitudes, Aquinas systematically shows the superiority of acts flowing from a gift-*habitus* in comparison with acts flowing from a virtue-*habitus*.

First, in the affluence of external goods, . . . from which man is withdrawn by a virtue, so that he uses them in moderation, and by a gift, in a more excellent way, so that he despises them altogether. Hence the first beatitude is: "Blessed are the poor in spirit." . . . From following the irascible passions man is withdrawn by a virtue, so that they are kept within the bounds appointed by the ruling of reason—and by a gift, in a more excellent manner, so that man, according to God's will, is altogether undisturbed by them. Hence the second beatitude is: "Blessed are the meek." In man's relations with his neighbor, . . . by way of duty, . . . we are disposed by a virtue, so that we do not refuse to

⁸⁷ Torrell (as well as Sherwin) also uses the language of the Spirit taking us by the hand: "According to a formula that Thomas often repeats, the gifts are granted 'to help the virtues [*in adiutorium uirtutum*]' to attain their final goal, despite our timidities, lukewarmness, pettiness. Certainly nothing goes beyond faith or charity, but our reason, which hesitates and calculates, does not always allow them a free path. God then intervenes and takes us by the hand, so to speak, in order to make us advance more surely on his pathways" (*Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 2:214).

⁸⁸ *ST* I-II, q. 69, a. 1, ad 3: "[Among the beatitudes are included] . . . meekness . . . justice and mercy . . . though these might seem to be virtues, they are nevertheless ascribed to gifts."

do our duty to our neighbor, which pertains to justice, and by a gift, so that we do the same much more heartily . . . Hence the fourth beatitude is: “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice.” With regard to spontaneous favors, we are perfected by a virtue, so that we give where reason dictates we should give, such as to our friends or others united to us, . . . and by a gift, so that, through reverence for God, we consider only the needs of those on whom we bestow our gratuitous bounty. . . . Hence the fifth beatitude is: “Blessed are the merciful.” (*ST I-II*, q. 69, a. 3)

Discursive Reason versus Intellectus

As alluded to above, while Aquinas is saying that those who are moved by divine instinct do not need to follow human reason, he is not advocating irrationality. Rather, he is contrasting following human knowing with following divine and/or angelic knowing.⁸⁹ Whereas human knowing is discursive,⁹⁰ divine and angelic knowledge is intellective. Knowledge is discursive when one has to reason how to get from various first principles to the knowledge that comes from them. Knowledge is intellective, as it is for the Holy Spirit and the angels, when all that follows from first principles is immediately apprehended. As Aquinas puts it, “human souls, which acquire knowledge of truth by the discursive method, are called *rational*; and this comes of the feebleness of their intellectual light.” But the discursive method would *not* be necessary if humans, like the Holy Spirit and the angels, “possessed the fullness of intellectual light” (*ST I*, q. 58, a. 3).

When the wayfarer is moved primarily by the infused virtues, the wayfarer reasons about what to do, with all its inherent feebleness and imperfection. When the wayfarer is moved primarily by the spiritual instinct

⁸⁹ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 8: “To understand [*intelligere*] is simply to apprehend intelligible truth: and to reason [*ratiocinari*] is to advance from one thing understood [*intellecto*] to another, so as to know [*cognoscendum*] an intelligible truth. And therefore angels, who according to their nature, possess perfect knowledge of intelligible truth, have no need to advance from one thing to another, but apprehend the truth simply and without mental discussion [*discursu*], as Dionysius says (*Div. Nom.* vii). But man arrives at the knowledge of intelligible truth by advancing from one thing to another; and therefore he is called rational. Reasoning, therefore, is compared to understanding, as movement is to rest, or acquisition to possession, of which one belongs to the perfect, the other to the imperfect.”

⁹⁰ *ST I*, q. 58, a. 3: “[Human] intellects obtain their perfection in the knowledge of truth by a kind of movement and discursive intellectual operation; in other words, as they advance from one known thing to another.”

that is the motion of the gifts, the wayfarer is directed by the Holy Spirit to the good immediately and perfectly. In conclusion, to act according to the instinct of the Holy Spirit is to act more “intelligently” than to act according to human discursive reasoning. So, while spiritual instinct is a *habitus*, since it does not involve discursive reason, it is not, per se, a virtue.⁹¹

Salvation Perfection versus Complete Perfection

While I am arguing that acts done primarily in response to the instinct of the Holy Spirit are of a more perfect kind of act than those performed according to the infused virtues, a further clarification is helpful to avoid a potential misunderstanding. Aquinas says: “The gifts surpass the ordinary perfection of the virtues, not so much as to the kind of activities (in the manner that the counsels surpass the commandments), but as regards the manner of action.”⁹² It would be natural to conclude from this that the gifts do not allow the wayfarer to do acts more perfect than those that can be accomplished by the infused virtues. Rather, the interior instinct of the Holy Spirit merely allows the wayfarer to perform virtuous acts more consistently.

To grasp Aquinas's point, one must carefully understand the objection to which Aquinas is responding in this statement from *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 2, ad 1. The objection claims that the gifts are *not* necessary for salvation. What is the basis for that objection? Since the gifts assist the wayfarer to perform the most perfect acts, and since such acts of perfection are not required for salvation, they are thus not necessary for salvation.

In response to the objection, Aquinas asserts that the gifts are indeed necessary for salvation. This is because the gifts are necessary not only for living out the counsels (or, e.g., the beatitudes), but also so that the wayfarer can readily obey the commandments. However, in emphasizing the necessity of the gifts in order to obey the commandments consistently, Aquinas is not thereby denying the necessity of the gifts in order to act according to the counsels. Acting according to a gift-*habitus* also enables the wayfarer

⁹¹ The lack of discursive reasoning is not unique to acts according to spiritual instinct. Contemplation is a form of *intellectus* that does not involve ratiocination. Both of these forms of intellect provide a foretaste of heavenly contemplation.

⁹² *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 2, ad 1. When Aquinas refers to the “ordinary perfection” of the virtues, he may well be referring to a distinction more common in his earlier work, but which still appears in places in the *ST*, the distinction between “ordinary” and “heroic” virtue. Klooster argues that Aquinas's early distinction, following Aristotle, between ordinary and heroic virtue, gets replaced in Aquinas's later writings by the distinction between the virtues and the gifts. On this evolution in Aquinas's thought, see Anton ten Klooster, *Thomas Aquinas on the Beatitudes: Reading Matthew, Disputing Grace and Virtue, Preaching Happiness* (Louvain: Peeters, 2018), esp. 133–40.

to do more perfect acts than are possible by acting primarily according to a virtue-*habitus*.

So Aquinas holds two claims simultaneously. On the one hand, the gifts are necessary for salvation. That is, the wayfarer must possess them as a *habitus* in order to readily obey the commandments, even if the wayfarer is not adept in acting according to the gifts. On the other hand, when the wayfarer acts according to a gift-*habitus*—what Thomas refers to as acting according to the instinct of the Holy Spirit—the wayfarer is capable of acts superior to those done by a virtue-*habitus* such as faith, charity, or infused justice, which function according to infused reason.

The Superior Mode of Action and Act-Description for the Virtues and Gifts

The superior manner of action of the gifts (i.e., spiritual instinct) is what enables the wayfarer to do more perfect acts. So, for example, the wayfarer can do more perfect acts of faith and charity when they are perfected by the gifts of understanding, knowledge, and wisdom. When such acts are performed, they arise from (at least predominantly) a gift-*habitus*. One might call an act of faith perfected by a gift-*habitus* either an “act of understanding” or an “act of faith with understanding.” What one can no longer properly call this “act of faith with understanding” is an act of the virtue of faith. For it not actualized by the power of the virtue of faith, but by the greater power of the gift of understanding. Similarly, an act of charity that is perfected by the gift of wisdom remains an act of charity, but it is now properly seen as an act of charity according to the gift of wisdom, because the wayfarer can perform such an act of charity only because she is acting (at least predominantly) according to a gift-*habitus*.⁹³

Conclusion

Having established the key points regarding the gifts of the Holy Spirit set out in the introduction, there remain only a few final points. First, this paper is by no means a treatment even of all the essential topics for understanding Aquinas’s views on the gifts. A comprehensive treatment would need to address his treatment of law, especially the New Law, his account of grace more generally, and how his account of the gifts is an expression of the missions of the Son and Spirit, especially the Holy Spirit as Love and Gift. It would also address aspects of Aquinas’s Christology, such as the

⁹³ They are thus of a different kind from acts done predominantly by an infused virtue-*habitus* either of faith or of charity.

mission of the Son, the descent of the Spirit on Christ at his baptism, and the significance of spiritual instinct for understanding Christ's full humanity. In addition, it would take up how each of the gifts function in the moral and spiritual life; how each perfect their associated virtues so that the wayfarer can perform acts of charity more consistently and perfectly than would otherwise be possible.

Second, to again summarize the various arguments of this paper, I have argued three central claims, as well as working out some of the implications of these three claims. First, being moved by spiritual instinct is necessarily superior to being moved by one's discursive reason. Second, only the gifts can enable acts of the highest degree of perfection. Third, the gifts allow the wayfarer to avoid sin in a way not possible if the wayfarer acts only according to a virtue-*habitus*.

Returning to the introduction, the arguments of this paper are intended not only to provide a more fulsome account of Aquinas's view of the moral life, but also to move towards a Thomistic ethics that, in more clearly delineating the function of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the wayfarer's life, better integrates the moral and spiritual life. Unfortunately, the assumption that the moral and spiritual life can and should remain separate (dominant from Trent to the Second Vatican Council), even if not explicitly stated, continues to be embodied in most of the current literature in Thomistic ethics.

Because of God's great love, wayfarers are gifted with a spiritual instinct. As Aquinas says, God unfailingly guides non-human creatures to their ultimate end through the natural instinct they have been given by God. As he puts it, these non-human creatures are moved to their end connaturally. Since God's love for human persons is certainly no less than God's love for other creatures, how could God then give human beings less sure guidance to their ultimate end? For Aquinas, since human beings are creatures of choice and virtue and have a supernatural end, the natural instinct which God places in human beings is obviously inadequate to bring human beings securely to their final spiritual end. They need another power from God. And this is the power of spiritual instinct, whereby God brings human beings to the ultimate end as surely and sweetly as is providentially provided for all of God's other creatures. Thus Aquinas also speaks of the gifts as guiding wayfarers connaturally, rather than by the investigation of reason.⁹⁴ Aquinas's doctrine

⁹⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 45, a. 2. This also brings us Aquinas's analogy between the acquired moral virtues and the gifts in *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 3, where he makes three comparisons: "[1] The gifts of the Holy Spirit are human perfections by which one is disposed to rightly follow the instinct of the Holy Spirit. The moral virtues perfect the appetitive power after it participates in reason, that is, insofar as it has been formed and moved by reason's

of spiritual instinct is not only true to his account of the moral and spiritual life; it is also another way in which Aquinas communicates God's great love for us, and how God assures wayfarers that they have been provided with all they could possibly need to bring their journey to a successful end, of full and complete friendship with God. And that is the greatest of all possible love stories.⁹⁵ N.V

command. [2] So, the way in which the gifts of the Holy Spirit possess a human being in relation to the Holy Spirit, is as the moral virtues possess the appetitive power in relation to reason. [3] Moreover, the moral virtues are *habitus*, whereby one's appetitive power is disposed to readily obey reason. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are also *habitus*, whereby a person is perfected to readily obey the Holy Spirit." And so, (1) in the way the moral virtues perfect *a person's appetites* through exercising reason, so also the gifts of the Holy Spirit perfect the whole person by a spiritual instinct. (2) In the way that, through reason, the moral virtues control the person's appetites, so too through the Holy Spirit the gifts control the whole person. (3) Both the moral virtues and gifts are *habitus*, one perfecting obedience to reason, the other perfecting obedience to the Holy Spirit. What Aquinas does not specifically add here is how the acquired virtues and the gifts are both different from the infused virtues. As noted earlier, the infused virtues are inherently imperfect to their supernatural task. On the other hand, as the acquired virtues can fully perfect a person towards their natural end, because reason as mover is connatural to the natural end, so too the gifts can fully perfect a person towards their supernatural end, because the Holy Spirit as mover is connatural to the supernatural end.

⁹⁵ I wish to acknowledge the unflagging support and encouragement I have received from Prof. Gene Rogers (University of North Carolina, Greensboro) over the last number of years. His insights have improved all facets of this paper. Without his encouragement, this paper may never have been completed. Of course, he is in no way responsible for the flaws in it. I received assistance from D. Stephen Long and especially from Robert Miner on the penultimate draft. In addition, I have benefited from many conversations on the topic of this paper with Monica Marcelli-Chu, whose 2021 doctoral dissertation, "Gifted Beyond Reason, Affected By Grace: Human Action, Passion, and the Gifts of the Spirit in Thomas Aquinas," will undoubtedly be a major contribution to this area of Thomistic scholarship.

Locating Heaven: Modern Science and the Place of Christ’s Glorified Body

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It seems only fitting to respond to mysteries of faith with awe and astonishment, but there is something dangerous about being embarrassed by them. Unfortunately, when it comes to the mystery of the Ascension, Christians sometimes cannot help but gravitate toward the latter response. There are those nagging “why” questions, as we wonder if things would not have been better off if Christ had stayed on earth. On top of that, there are the dumbfounded “where” questions by which we wonder where Christ went when he left the Apostles’ sight and where he actually is right now, if anywhere. These are not new questions, of course, and the tradition of the Church offers a great deal of reflection to guide us, reflection which seems quite apt at answering the “why” questions, but which can appear inadequate to answer the “where” question.¹

Every Sunday, Catholics profess: “He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.” The Church has always been clear that the “right hand of the Father” should not be understood physically, for the

¹ As a brief look into the “why” question, we can use Thomas Aquinas’s responses. In *Summa theologiae* [*ST*] III, q. 57, a. 1, resp., he argues, first, that it was not fitting for Christ’s glorified body, now living an “immortal and incorruptible life,” to remain in a “place of generation and corruption.” (He goes further to argue that “Christ’s Ascension into heaven, by which his bodily presence was removed from us, was more useful to us than his corporeal presence would have been” (ad 3). In expounding this benefit, he quotes from Augustine and Leo the Great. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations from the *ST* are from the Benziger edition of the Dominican Father translation.

Father has no body, no physical hands; but does that mean we should understand everything about the Ascension in some non-physical sense, too?² If Christ is “in heaven” only in a sort of spiritual sense, not a physical one, is he somehow non-physical too? If so, is he still human? If not, where is this body of his? It is hard—arguably impossible—to conceive of any physical body that is not in some place, let alone a living human body that is not in a place. What would it mean for a body to exist completely disconnected from any relation to other physical things? These would seem to be pressing questions for the mystery of the Ascension, but they are questions that, like the Ascension itself, are little talked about by theologians. A recent scholar has summed it up curtly by saying of the Ascension: “Once it was seen as the climax of the mystery of Christ. . . . Today it is something of an embarrassment.”³

Doubt and embarrassment about where Christ’s glorified human body is breeds doubt and embarrassment about the present existence of Christ’s human body, and there are a whole host of theological problems which arise if we deny the present existence of that body. In this paper I will first look at the theological importance of Christ’s glorified body, from Scripture, the theological tradition, and particularly from the mystery of the Eucharist. Then, I will consider where ancient and medieval theologians thought Christ’s glorified body was and point out the contemporary difficulties of their positions. Finally, I will argue that contemporary physics presents new avenues for a reasonable imagining of where the glorified body of Christ could be.

The Importance of the Glorified Body

The Scriptures make it quite clear: even though there was something new about Christ’s body after the resurrection, it really was a human body, and specifically the same human body he had before his death, identifiable most

² See St. John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa* 4.2: “By ‘the Father’s right hand’ we understand the glory and honor of divinity, where he who exists as Son of God before all ages, indeed as God, of one being with the Father, is seated bodily after he became incarnate and his flesh was glorified” (quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], §663; immediately before the quoted text, Damascene explicitly states that “we do not hold the right hand of the Father is an actual place. For how could he that is uncircumscribed have a right hand limited by place?” (trans. from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd ser., vol. 9, revised by Kevin Knight at newadvent.org/fathers/33044.htm).

³ Douglas Farrow, *Ascension and Ecclesia: On the Significance of the Doctrine of the Ascension for Ecclesiology and Christian Cosmology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 9.

especially by the very wounds of his crucifixion.⁴ While the senses could be fooled in the resurrection appearances, the sense of touch in particular was used to confirm both the reality of his body and its identity, most memorably when he told Thomas to probe his wounds.⁵ Aquinas argues in the *Summa theologiae* [*ST*] that, for a “true resurrection of Christ, it was necessary for the same body of Christ to once more be united to the same soul.”⁶ If these resurrection appearances are not a manifestation of the continuity between the body that was crucified and the one in this new glorified state, then they seem to be mere parlor tricks used to assuage the disciple’s fears or, worse, mislead them.

While Christ took pains to manifest that he had the same human body, it clearly operated under different rules from the corruptible physical world we are so familiar with, disappearing from sight, entering locked rooms, even ascending into the air.⁷ Nevertheless, it could and did interact with “normal” corruptible bodies physically and by contact, even if it was not meant to do so for long.⁸ Mary Magdalene was told to “stop holding on to me” because, while it was possible to touch the Lord, his new body was not meant to stay in this world.⁹ To summarize this scriptural witness, after the resurrection, Jesus Christ is the same human being with the same human body, even if that human body has acted differently at times.¹⁰

⁴ Luke 24:39–43; John 20:19–20, 24–29; Matt 28:9; Acts 1:9 (all quotations from Scripture in this article will be taken from the *New American Bible*). See also *CCC*, §645; *ST* III, q. 54, aa. 1 and 4.

⁵ Luke 24:15–16, 30–31, 36–43; John 20:14–16, 24–29. See also *CCC*, §645; *ST* III, q. 55, aa. 5 and 6.

⁶ *ST* III, q. 54, a. 1, resp.

⁷ Luke 24:31, 51; John 20:19, 26; Acts 1:9–10. See also *CCC*, §645–46, 659. Interestingly, Aquinas divides the various strange occurrences after the resurrection into, on the one hand, those that are powers of the glorified soul commanding the glorified body, like disappearing from the apostles’ sight (*ST* III, q. 54, a. 1, ad 2) or ascending upwards from the earth (q. 57, a. 3, resp.) and, on the other, those that are properly miracles, like passing through a locked door (q. 54, a. 1, ad 1; *ST* III Supp, q. 83, a. 4) or passing through the impenetrable heavenly spheres on the way to the empyrean heaven (*ST* III, q. 57, a. 4, ad 3).

⁸ *ST* III, q. 54, a. 2, ad 2.

⁹ John 20:14–18. See also *ST* III, q. 55, a. 6, ad 3.

¹⁰ Various patristic sources attribute a number of special qualities or powers to the resurrected body of Jesus Christ. By the time of Aquinas, the standard four were clarity, agility, impassibility, and subtlety. Notably, unlike some other authors, Aquinas does not attribute these new qualities to some material change in Christ’s resurrected body or any significant change in the bodily powers. Rather, they are the natural bodily powers that are now completely subservient to Christ’s glorified soul and empowered by supernatural grace (*Summa contra gentiles* [*SCG*] IV, ch. 86). For other Scholastic

The mystery of the resurrection brings about a significant and perceptible change in Christ's human body, a foretaste of the resurrection we are all promised. The mystery of the Ascension is not the end of the resurrection or of his glorified body, but the end of its physical presence in this world. It is not some further physical transformation; rather, as Christ explains, he is taking his resurrected body and "going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" to "prepare a place for you," and as described in Hebrews, he will now "appear before God on our behalf."¹¹ Aquinas argues explicitly that, "by the fact that Christ ascends to heaven, nothing is added to him [in regard to his already resurrected glory] as far as that which is of the essence [*essentia*] of glory, either according to the body or according to the soul, nevertheless something is added to him according to the fittingness of place, which is for the greater existence [*esse*]) of glory."¹² If the Ascension does not fundamentally change Christ's mode of existing, of living, then his glorified body is still very much a body right now, which necessarily means it has some size and shape, and by that very fact has a place proportioned to that size and shape.¹³

The physical reality of Christ's humanity, here and now, is not simply a matter of taking seriously the truth of the resurrection and the meaning of the Scriptures. His Ascension "in the flesh" and continued existence as a living glorified human being played a significant role in anchoring the Church Fathers through controversies over Gnostic rejection of bodily creation, Arian denials of divinity, and later attempts to drive a wedge in the hypostatic union.¹⁴ Temptations towards a more "spiritual" or dismissive understanding of Christ's humanity were checked by the ancient creedal belief in the Ascension "in the flesh." The dichotomy of the absent fleshly

theories on the resurrected body see, e.g., Marilyn McCord Adams, "The Resurrection of the Body according to Three Medieval Aristotelians: Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, William Ockham," *Philosophical Topics* 20, no. 2 (1992): 1–33.

¹¹ John 20:17; 14:3; Heb 9:24. See also *ST* III, q. 57, a. 1, resp. For further scriptural references to the Ascension see Farrow, *Ascension and Ecclesia*, 275–80.

¹² *ST* III, q. 57, a. 1, ad 2.

¹³ *In III sent.*, q. 3, a. 3, qa. 1, arg. and ad 1. Aquinas considers the objection here that Christ cannot be "above the highest heaven" because he must "necessarily be in a place" but above the heavens in "not a place" according to Aristotle's cosmology. Aquinas simply seems to accept the first premise without comment and argues that Christ is not outside all of the heavens, but is in the highest part of the empyrean heavens.

¹⁴ For a fuller discussion of the role of the Ascension in the writings of the Church Fathers and the councils and arguments that some of these developments result from a failure to fully embrace difficulties inherent in the "ascension in the flesh," see Farrow, *Ascension and Ecclesia*.

reality of Christ's humanity and the present spiritual reality of his divinity raised a certain tension and required a certain balance to avoid slipping into various Christological heresies. Arguably, no doctrine brought this dichotomy and tension more to the forefront than the doctrine of Christ's presence in the Eucharist.

The Eucharist and the Glorified Body

In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* we read that Christ is present

in his word, in the Church's prayer, "where two or three are gathered in my name," in the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned, in the sacraments of which he is the author, in the sacrifice of the Mass, and in the person of the minister. But "he is present . . . most *especially in the Eucharistic species*."¹⁵

We see that the Eucharist stands out amongst a variety of particular circumstances where we rightly want to call Christ present. According to Aquinas, the Church attributes the language of "being present" and "being in" to Christ in three distinct ways. As a person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is in all things by "essence, presence, and power" because all things are present to God and are held in existence by him in whom "we live and move and have our being."¹⁶ This presence pertains to the Trinity as Creator of all that is, present to all that God sustains in being. Furthermore, God the Son is present in a second and distinct way when grace, a participation in the very life of the Trinity, is at work in rational creatures who know and love him.¹⁷ Aquinas argues, further, that there is a third presence of the Son of God in the world in virtue of the hypostatic union. God the Son renders himself present in a distinct way precisely in virtue of his union with our humanity. All human beings can come to know of this personal presence of the incarnate Son, by the grace of Christ. He offers all this grace insofar as he is Head of the Church, one who offers union by grace to all persons, expressed by the gifts

¹⁵ CCC, §1373. The last sentence of this quotation is a quote from the Second Vatican Council's *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §7, with the emphasis added in the CCC. The earlier parts of the quotation reference Rom 8:24 and Matt 18:20 and 25:31–46, as well as §48 of Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium*.

¹⁶ Acts 17:28; CCC, §300; *ST I*, q. 8, a. 3.

¹⁷ CCC, §1997; *ST I-II*, q. 100, a. 1.

of faith, charity, and finally glory.¹⁸ It is by these second and third types of presence, in the grace the works in individual people and in Christ as Head of the Church, that we are able to recognize Christ in our neighbors, in the Church at prayer, and in the sacraments.

The presence of Christ in the Eucharist builds off of this last presence, or is in fact a sacramental mode of that same presence of Christ as Head of the Church. In this Eucharist, the incarnate Son of God is present, body, blood, soul, and divinity, a point the Church has emphasized repeatedly in the strongest terms. In it we find not a presence by power or grace, but “the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and “therefore, *the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially* contained.”¹⁹ In the celebration of the Eucharist, the Church takes Christ at his word. When he said “this is my body” and “this is my blood,” we believe that he really meant it, and when we “do this in remembrance of [him],” his body and blood truly become present.²⁰ This doctrine of transubstantiation implies not the presence of divine power or grace, nor simply an affinity to Christ’s humanity, but the actual presence of Christ’s human body and human blood. He who has become human, and who is now exalted in heaven—that is to say, whose humanity has obtained a glorified state—is rendered truly present to us in the Eucharist. If these claims are to have real significance, then the doctrine must require certain truths about Christ’s body and blood if they are really going to be present in the Eucharist. To make sense of this, it will be helpful to look into some of the details of Aquinas’ treatment of transubstantiation and the Eucharist to make clear exactly what those truths about Christ’s body and blood are.

Present under the Species of Bread and Wine

One of the first objections Aquinas presents to the very idea that Christ is truly present in the Eucharist is that “no body can be in several places at the one time. . . . But Christ’s is a true body, and it is in heaven. Consequently, it seems that it is not in very truth in the sacrament of the altar.” In response, he does not redefine or compromise on the way that Christ’s glorified body exists and is in a place, but instead argues that “Christ’s body is not in this sacrament in the same way as a body is in a place, which by its dimensions is commensurate with the place; but in a special manner which is proper to

¹⁸ CCC, §771–776; ST III, q. 8, a. 3.

¹⁹ CCC, §1374 (quoting the Council of Trent’s 1551 *Decree on the Sacrament of the Eucharist*, from Denzinger-Schönmetzer [DS] no. 1651).

²⁰ Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:19–20. Cf. Matt 26:26–29; 1 Cor 11:23–25.

this sacrament.”²¹ This special manner in which Christ’s body is made present in the sacrament is that, “by Divine power, . . . the whole substance of bread is changed into the whole substance of the body of Christ, and the whole substance of the wine in the whole substance of the blood of Christ,” but with all of the accidents of bread or wine remaining and none of the accidents of the body or blood of Christ present in their usual natural mode.²² Importantly, while Aquinas will refer to the body and blood of Christ being “under” the species, or accidents, of the bread and wine respectively, he makes clear that “these accidents are not in the substance of the body and blood of Christ as in a subject.”²³ This is impossible: because “the substance of the human body cannot be affected by such accidents,” a human body cannot actually be the subject of the accidents of bread; it cannot look, and taste, and feel like bread, and still be a human body. Further, the body of Christ is “glorified and impassible,” making it impossible for it to be altered in a way that would allow it to receive these accidents. From this, we see that the consecration of the bread and wine do not in any way change the inherent properties of Christ’s glorified body, including its proper place. Nevertheless, looking at the mode in which Christ is present in the Eucharist reveals just how central his glorified body is to this sacrament.

Aquinas addresses an entire question in the *ST* to the “mode in which Christ exists in this sacrament,” and the most important question, for our purposes, is the first, “whether the whole Christ is under this sacrament.”²⁴ While he unsurprisingly answers affirmatively, he makes an important distinction, namely, that there are two different ways in which different aspects or parts of Christ are in the sacrament.

Present “by the Power of the Sacrament”

The first way that a part of Christ is present in the Eucharist is that the things named in the words of consecration are made present “by the power of the

²¹ *ST* III, q. 75, a. 1, obj. and ad 3.

²² *ST* III, q. 75, aa. 2–6. The “whole substance” would normally naturally include not just the composite of prime matter and substantial form that is the substance, but also any accidents that exist in the substance: the size, weight, taste, smell, etc. In discussing the Eucharist, with its unique mode of change, possible only by divine power, Aquinas uses the “whole substance” to refer specifically and only to the composite of prime matter and substantial form, not to any accidents. This means that neither the matter nor substantial form of bread and wine remain, only their accidents. He devotes the entirety of question 77 to justifying how these accidents can exist, by divine power, without a subject to exist in.

²³ *ST* III, q. 77, a. 1, resp.

²⁴ *ST* III, q. 76, a. 1.

sacrament” or “by the power of the conversion.”²⁵ Thus, by the words “this is my body,” the whole substance—matter and form—of the body of Christ is made present under the accidents of bread, and by the words “this is my blood,” the whole substance of the blood of Christ is made present under the accidents of the wine.

Yet, a reasonable objection to this first claim is that, if Christ is truly alive right now, there is no separate physical substance of his body or his blood, and if we were to identify the actual formal principle of either, we would look to the soul of Christ, which is the proper substantial form of a living human being and all of its parts. To this objection, Aquinas notes that, while “the soul is the form of the body giving it the whole order of perfect being, namely being, and corporeal being and animated being, and so on,” what is made present in this sacrament is “the form of the body of Christ insofar as it gives corporeal being, but not according as what gives animated being such as the soul.”²⁶ The body of Christ and the blood of Christ are each currently only a material part of the full living human being, Jesus Christ, but they are each at least potentially divisible from it. This is made clear from the fact that, in Christ’s Passion and death, his blood was separated from his body and his soul from them both, meaning each had (or, in the case of the soul, was), at least temporarily, a separate independent substantial form.²⁷ Thus it is not incoherent to take seriously the idea that the terminus of the conversion of the sacrament is the whole substance of Christ’s body, because we are not claiming that this is being removed from the rest of Christ or somehow instantiated anew and independently. Neither is there any addition to or subtraction from the glorified body of Christ. Rather, focusing on the words of consecration spoken over the bread, a potentially separable part of Christ—namely, his body—is made present “by the power of the sacrament” as a whole substance, under the accidents of bread by divine power. That sacramental power has no direct bearing or effect on the parts not named, the blood, or the soul, for instance. This happens without removing this part, the body, or changing it in any way.

²⁵ Aquinas uses the phrase *vi sacramenti* or “power of the sacrament” throughout his corpus when discussing the Eucharist, beginning with the *Sentences* commentary, and it is the only phrase used in most works. He uses the phrase *vi conversionis* of “power of the conversion” only rarely, but throughout the corpus as well; for instance, it shows up once in the *Sentences* commentary. The second phrase does not appear in the *ST* but is the primary term used in discussing transubstantiation in the *SCG*. It does not appear that he intends the two to have a significant difference in meaning.

²⁶ *ST* III, q. 75, a. 6, ad 2.

²⁷ *ST* III, q. 81, a. 4, ad 2 and ad 3.

In particular, it does not change the way this part is properly related to and dependent on those other material and formal parts of Christ, his blood, and his soul. The body of Christ in its glorified living state is not altered, but it is rendered truly present to us in its very substance.²⁸

Present by "Natural Concomitance"

The fact that Jesus Christ, the living glorified human being, is in no way changed when his body is made present "by the power of the sacrament" leads directly to and underlies the second type of presence Aquinas identifies in the Eucharist, "natural concomitance" or "real concomitance."²⁹

Because Jesus Christ is a living human being, his body and his blood are actually naturally physically united at this very moment, with blood pumping through his circulatory system and interspersed throughout all of his organs. In every place we find his body, we also actually find his blood, and in every place we find his blood, we actually find his body, each contributing to the natural functioning of the other.³⁰ Furthermore, the natural formal principle of both his body and blood, by which they actually exist as body and blood with all of their properties and powers, is Jesus Christ's human soul, which is present throughout his physical human body.³¹ There is no place that we actually find Christ's body or that we find Christ's blood that is not actually informed by his soul.

Because of this natural unity between the body, blood, and soul in the living glorified Jesus Christ, Aquinas argues that, when any one part or aspect of Jesus Christ is made present "by the power of the sacrament," nothing has changed about the natural union of his humanity, and so the rest of

²⁸ *ST* III, q. 76.

²⁹ As with the phrases "power of the sacrament" and "power of the conversion," Aquinas usually uses *naturali concomitantia*, or "natural concomitance," and more rarely *reali concomitantia*, or "real concomitance." The second only appears in the *ST* and the commentary on 1 Corinthians and becomes the more frequently used phrase in the *ST*. Again, there does not seem to be any intended difference in their meaning. These phrases are used exclusively in the discussion of the Eucharist, although the word *concomitantia* is a general term that Aquinas uses for a close natural or intellectual association: "An act of the sensitive appetite is *concomitant* with some transmutation of the body" (*ST* I, q. 20, a. 1, ad 1); "because patience serves fortitude on the part of its first act, endurance, hence it is *concomitant* to praise the martyrs for their patience" (II-II, q. 124, a. 2, ad 3).

³⁰ While Aquinas thinks that some bodily functions, like eating and drinking, will be possible but superfluous for glorified human beings, like Jesus Christ, some natural bodily functions will continue, and he specifically names motion of the heart as one of these (*De potentia*, q. 5, a. 10, ad 8).

³¹ *ST* I, q. 76, a. 8.

him must be present as well. The blood and soul of Christ are not explicitly made present “by the power of the sacrament” under the species of bread, because they were not named in the words of consecration spoken over the bread: “This is my body.” Nevertheless, they are actually naturally united with the body of Christ, so wherever the body of Christ is made present by divine power in the sacrament, they are present by “natural concomitance.” Similarly, though not named in the consecration and thus made present “by the power of the sacrament,” the body of Christ and his soul are actually present under the species of wine by “natural concomitance.”

Finally, in addition to the natural union of the body, blood, and soul of Christ as a human person, there is a higher union, unique in all creation. In the Incarnation, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity assumed a human nature. As affirmed in the Council of Constantinople, “there is but one *hypostasis* [or person], which is our Lord Jesus Christ, one of the Trinity.”³² Thus, by the “hypostatic union,” there is no distinction between the human and divine persons in Jesus Christ and his full human nature—body and soul—is permanently united to his divinity. Therefore, by the same principle of “natural concomitance,” the divinity of Christ is present whenever either the body or the blood is made present “by the power of the sacrament.” Furthermore, as the Holy Trinity is, by nature, one God and actually inseparable, and though the Father and the Spirit are not human, they are present as well with the Lord, both in his glorified body and in the Eucharist.

Making the Eucharist Reasonable

While strange and unfamiliar, these distinctions in the ways that different aspects of Christ’s humanity are present in the Eucharist make the teaching and worship of the Catholic Church reasonable and consistent. Because it is the body of Christ that is made present under the species of bread and the blood of Christ that is separately made present under the species of wine “by the power of the sacrament,” they are unbloody signs and representations of the one real bloody sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. Simultaneously, by real concomitance, the whole glorified Christ is actually present in the Eucharist, he who was and is the victim and the priest of that sacrifice. Further, reception of the Eucharist under either species is a means of union with the whole Christ—body, blood, soul, and divinity—and none of the sacramental grace or power is lacking. After the consecration, both species are independently worthy of great reverence and the highest form of worship, during the Mass, when reserved in the tabernacle, and when displayed for adoration.

³² CCC, §468, quoting the Second Council of Constantinople from DS, no. 424.

Importantly, the lynchpin holding all of these distinctions together and maintaining the coherence of Eucharistic practice is the actually existing, living, and glorified human body of Christ. It follows from all this that we must take seriously the reality of the human nature of Christ, his physical body, and even the question of his exalted "place" or location. If Jesus Christ is not presently alive somewhere in his full humanity and divinity, he cannot be the principle by which his soul and divinity are present in the Eucharist as well.³³ If the words of consecration are not making present sacramentally a reality that exists somewhere in its proper natural form, then they must be making that reality come to be anew. If the glorified body of Christ does not actually exist right now in some place, either our worship of the Eucharist is idolatry or the Son of God is being repeatedly incarnated every time we celebrate the Mass. Losing faith in the fact that Christ's body actually is somewhere threatens to undermine the "source and summit of the Christian life."³⁴

The Problem of Place

Given that we know, by faith, that Christ really exists in his full glorified human body right now, an obvious question comes to mind: where exactly is he? We might look for guidance from theologians of the past, but it seems like their answers will not do. Many ancient and medieval Christian thought they knew exactly where the heaven Christ ascended to was. In short, he just went up until he could not go up any farther. Christ is present above the highest part of the visible heaven. For many of the Church Fathers, following a broadly Platonic cosmology, this meant the highest "fiery" heaven above the earth, water, and air. Augustine, for example, ridicules objections against the possibility of the Ascension from the "heaviness" of Christ's earthly body by appeal to divine power.³⁵ While he is insistent that "we must believe that it is in heaven," by which he means the highest part of the cosmos, he

³³ St. Thomas Aquinas even speculates that, if the sacrament of the Eucharist had been celebrated during Christ's three days in the womb, after he had truly died and his soul was separated from his body, then his body would be present under the species of bread and his blood under the species of wine but his soul would in no way be present. This hypothetical drives home the importance of the current actual mode of existence of Christ in his proper physical, living, and glorified body as the principle of his presence in the Eucharist (*ST III*, q. 76, a. 1, ad 1; a. 2; q. 81, a. 4).

³⁴ CCC, §1324, quoting *Lumen Gentium*, §11.

³⁵ St. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 22.11.

discourages as “over-curious and superfluous” too much curiosity about exactly “where and in what manner the Lord’s body is in heaven.”³⁶

By the medieval period, a tradition of commentary on the opening chapter of Genesis, which was passed through the *Glossa ordinaria* and was spread widely by Peter Lombard in his *Sentences*, named the outermost celestial realm the “empyrean heaven.” Aquinas and many other Scholastics merged this with the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmos and placed the empyrean heaven outside the impassable heavenly spheres of planetary motion, just beyond the outermost sphere of the stars.³⁷ The notion of an empyrean, or fiery, heaven was thought to be a real physical place, but a precursor to the glory of the new creation, a precursor which already enjoyed the perfection of incorruptibility and exuded the very light of glory.³⁸ It was separated from our corruptible order by the perfectly incorruptible heavenly spheres and beyond the reach of any natural observation. Not only was it physically difficult to get there, but even assuming you could find an Aristotelian airplane or rocket ship to get off the ground, it would literally take a miracle, the direct action of divine power, to pass through the solid, incorruptible heavenly spheres to get there.³⁹ According to Ptolemy, the radius of the fixed stars, the outermost sphere of the heavens, was about twenty thousand times the size of the planet earth, putting Christ very far away from his Church, but

³⁶ St. Augustine, *De fide et symbolo* 13.

³⁷ *ST III*, q. 57, a. 5. St. Thomas attributes the idea of the empyrean heaven as the place of the blessed to Basil the Great and Venerable Bede. He notes similar ideas in Augustine and Isidore of Seville, but recognizes that they did not share Aristotle’s cosmology and would not have completely separated the empyrean heavens (see *ST I*, q. 61, a. 4; q. 66 a. 3). Among Scholastics, as in all things, there was much debate about the existence and nature of the empyrean heavens and its relation to the lower heavens. Although it has a primarily theological origin, some felt the empyrean heaven added a missing piece to Aristotle’s cosmology by giving a fixed “place” or container for the outermost sphere of stars. Others like John Duns Scotus, Jean Buridan, and Albert of Saxony argued that it was an unnecessary and unfitting addition to add such an unmoving sphere, since the perfection of the heavenly spheres was their motion. Concerning these Scholastic debates, see Edward Grant, “Cosmology,” in *Science in the Middle Ages*, ed. David C. Lindberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 274–80.

³⁸ *ST I*, q. 66, a. 3.

³⁹ *ST III*, q. 57, a. 3, a. 4, ad 3. Somewhat surprisingly, but consistent with his natural philosophy and understanding of the resurrected body, Aquinas argues that the ascent of Christ’s body was not a violent motion, but one proper to the power of his glorified body, absolutely full of divine grace. That said, He still needed direct divine action, a miracle, to pass through the incorruptible heavenly spheres to his proper place above the highest heavens (see *ST III Suppl.*, q. 83, aa. 2–4).

it was a conceivable, finite distance.⁴⁰ Further, this distance was balanced by solid arguments from fittingness for the need for some sort of separation and for the appropriateness of the empyrean heavens as a dwelling place for Christ.⁴¹ In the thirteenth century, this seemed the best explanation of the plain meaning of the words “he ascended into heaven.” Where is Christ? Go as far up as you can see, and he is just beyond that.

For us, with our understanding general relativity, our experience of space flight, probes traveling beyond the solar system, and the Hubble Space Telescope looking deep into the emptiness of space, going up simply will not do. Up goes really far. The radius of the visible universe is an unimaginable forty-six billion light years.⁴² Ptolemy's estimate of twenty thousand earth radii would put the edge of his universe a bit inside the actual distance to the sun, a large but not unimaginable distance. For scale, if the earth were the size of a ping pong ball, the edge of Ptolemy's universe would be four hundred meters away, about four football fields. On the same scale, the edge of the visible universe would still be 146 light years away, a distance that is easy to write but, even when scaled down, hard to conceive.⁴³ And that is

⁴⁰ Bernard R. Goldstein, “The Arabic Version of Ptolemy's Planetary Hypotheses,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 57, no. 4 (1967): 3–55, at 11.

⁴¹ *ST* III, q. 57, a. 1, ad 3.

⁴² J. Richard Gott III et al., “A Map of the Universe,” *The Astrophysical Journal* 624, no. 2 (May 10, 2005): 463–84, at 465. As Gott and his coauthors note, this is larger than the current best estimate for the age of the universe (13.7 billion years) times the speed of light because, while the light we might see from any source at the edge of the universe has travelled for only 13.7 billion years, any sources at the “edge” of the visible universe and what has become our galaxy and solar system have been moved apart by the general expansion of the universe.

⁴³ As C. S. Lewis points out in ch. 7 of *Miracles* ancient and medieval thinkers were perfectly aware of how insignificant the earth was compared to the size of the universe. For instance, Ptolemy notes in *Almagest* 1.6 that “the Earth has, to the senses, the ratio of a point to the distance of the sphere of the so-called fixed stars” (trans. G. J. Toomer in *Ptolemy's Almagest* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998], 43). While the size of the earth was sensibly negligible for the majority of Ptolemy's astronomical work, he still claimed to be able to calculate a distance to the stars with respect to the radius of the earth and got a number that was large but relatively familiar: 19,865. My point here is not to rehash the false argument that ancient and medieval thinkers did not understand that the Earth was a miniscule part of the universe, but that they could at least imagine the universe “as a whole.” They could even build a relatively functional model of everything in the universe like the armillary sphere, with the earth being an insignificant point in the middle. What has changed is that the scale and scope of the visible universe, with everything in it, cannot come close to being imagined directly, even by a simple analogy or model. We need nested layers of analogies to begin to imagine the scope, and then we have no tools to tell us how much farther we have to go to get

just the limit of what we can, in principle, see. The full extent of the unobservable part of the universe is larger than the measurable visible universe, almost certainly many times larger.⁴⁴ Our best observations cannot even rule out the mathematical possibility that the actual universe is infinitely large, although that would raise a whole host of other philosophical issues.⁴⁵ At the very least, this should make clear that, if we want to imagine Christ traveling “up” beyond the furthest extent of our universe, then he is unknowably, unimaginably far away.

As an alternative, we might try to imagine Christ being somewhere closer to us, in some far off, but not seemingly infinitely far off, corner of our visible universe. Some early Christians did speculate that Christ in his glorified state is still “within” the physical world as we know it. Ultimately, though, this will not do. While we can imagine that “life” on some distant planet around some distant star would be very different from that on earth, it ultimately can be only a rearrangement of the familiar patterns of life—and chemistry and physics—that we see on earth. We know that the stars are not part of some fixed spheres made of an incorruptible aether, but instead are dispersed throughout a vast amount of emptiness and made of a particularly beautiful and powerful combination of the same elements that we can find

to the “whole” universe. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing this point and the Lewis reference.

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- ⁴⁵ There is no physical evidence yet observed that can suggest a size of the universe, either finite or infinite. Our best tool for understanding the shape of the observable universe is the cosmological curvature constant, which was measured by the Planck mission to be $\Omega_k = 0.000 \pm 0.005$, which is consistent with a flat (zero curvature universe). Even if we knew whether the curvature was exactly zero or nonzero, there are finite and infinite geometries that satisfy both conditions. Some new theory would be necessary for physics to tell us the size of the universe. Aristotle and Aquinas and other ancient and medieval thinkers consistently argued against the possibility of an actual infinity, either in number or in size, in the real world (see, e.g., *ST* I, q. 7, aa. 2–4). These arguments are often dismissed because they wrote before the advent of modern mathematics and because contemporary physicists have become used to “dealing” with infinities in Quantum Field Theory and other fields. Still, there are strong arguments to be made against the possibility of an actually infinite quantity or magnitude in the physical world from the perspective of modern mathematics and physics. See, for instance, George F. R. Ellis, Krzysztof A. Meissner, and Hermann Nicolai, “The Physics of Infinity,” *Nature Physics* 14, no. 8 (August 2018): 770–72.

here on earth. When we understand that Carl Sagan was right when he said, "we are made of star-stuff,"⁴⁶ no part of this visible universe, despite the amazingly beautiful pictures astronomers are constantly taking, seems distinct enough to be a fitting place for the resurrected and glorified Christ. It ultimately seems absurd to imagine his incorruptible glorified humanity inhabiting a distant, corruptible exo-planet around a distant corruptible star in a corruptible galaxy far, far, away. If it is still part of our corruptible universe, what is so heavenly about that?

Further, it seems strange to think that we could, in theory, physically come into contact with Christ one day by traveling far enough through natural means of transport. Chances are that most of the places in the visible universe will be practically inaccessible to human travel. Nevertheless, in principle and given enough time, we could travel anywhere in the visible universe. It seems improper to think that Christ is spending his days in a place we could actually travel to with the right technology and patience. There seems to be something fitting to the idea that there should be some sort of barrier preventing human beings, or any other corruptible things, accidentally stumbling upon the resurrected Jesus Christ, until he is ready to come again in glory. It seems reasonable to expect the place Christ is to be not simply *somewhere* else, but *somehow* else as well. A place physically more adapted to his glorified nature, with some different rules for how the things around him act and react, and separated in some way from the normal corruptible stuff we are used to.

It might seem as if we are painting an impossible picture, confronted by the incompatibility of the medieval imagination with contemporary science. Perhaps hitherto our reflections have shown only the juxtaposition and incompatibility of traditional Catholics self-understanding and the presumed modern enlightened vision of the physical cosmos. If only there were room in our scientific worldview for some real place that would not be absurdly far away but would be, in principle, beyond the reach of normal physical power and would have properties that would be completely unfamiliar to us, like the medieval thought they had.

Thankfully, there is.

⁴⁶ Carl Sagan, *The Cosmic Connection: An Extraterrestrial Perspective*, ed. Jerome Agel, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 190. He also used the quote in his *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage* television series in the episode called "The Shores of the Cosmic Ocean."

A Multiplicity of Places

There are in fact whole classes of such places in a variety of physical theories. In what are colloquially referred to as “multiverse” theories, physicists have for some time proposed different types of physical places that are inaccessible to us but help explain confusing physical phenomena.

Of course, not all multiverses are created, or at least imagined as if they were created, equal. In his popular science book *The Hidden Reality: Parallel Universe and the Deep Laws of the Cosmos*, physicist Brian Greene catalogs nine distinct classes of multiverses, with varying levels of complexity and testability.⁴⁷ Some of the theories, drawing on the fact that our familiar physical space could be infinite, simply describe some of those far off places that we could never hope to encounter as “separate” universes. In some cases they are just like our universe, with the same physics and chemistry, but exceedingly far away.⁴⁸ In others, they are not only far off, but physically inaccessible, even in principle, with unfamiliar physical properties.⁴⁹ Beyond this, some theories propose more exotic ideas for the very structure of space and time, where our experience of length, breadth, and height flowing through time is a subset of a more expansive reality with additional dimensions or directions that we do not directly notice. This opens up the possibility that there could be other subsets, perhaps similar to or quite different from our own, if only we could search for them in some of these other directions.⁵⁰ Other theories do not try to label different parts of one disparate and varied physical entity, but propose that there are separate physical entities to account for every conceivable historical or physical reality, or even every imaginable mathematical model of reality.⁵¹ Each of these theories has its supporters

⁴⁷ Brian Greene, *The Hidden Reality: Parallel Universes and the Deep Laws of the Cosmos* (New York: Vintage, 2011). Another helpful summary and taxonomy of various multiverse theories is Max Tegmark, “Parallel Universes,” in *Science and Ultimate Reality: Quantum Theory, Cosmology, and Complexity*, ed. John D. Barrow, Paul C. W. Davies, and Charles L. Harper Jr., illustrated ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 459–91. The “Levels” mentioned in the following footnotes are drawn from Tegmark.

⁴⁸ These would include what Tegmark lists as Level I parallel universes.

⁴⁹ These would include most of what Tegmark lists as Level II parallel universes.

⁵⁰ These are theories deriving from string theory that propose the existence of ten or eleven space-time dimensions where we exist on limited a four-dimensional “brane” in a multi-dimensional “bulk.” Tegmark includes these as a subset of Level II parallel universes.

⁵¹ These theories include the “many-worlds interpretation” of quantum mechanics and related ideas that propose some actual physical existence for every possible quantum

and detractors, but a good number of them are taken very seriously by the physics community, and some of them might even be true.

I do not bring up multiverse theories to claim that science can offer a solution to the mystery of the Ascension. In truth, I am generally dubious of positing unobservable entities to explain scientific phenomena. Many of the theories underlying various types of multiverses have given rise to serious debate not simply about whether such theories are true, but also about whether they really constitute scientific theories, since so many of them are formally, or at least practically, impossible to observe experimentally.⁵² In addition to the disputes over their scientific value, many of these theories are philosophically and theologically problematic as well. One could posit that an infinite universe should contain an infinite number of possible worlds or sub-worlds within it, but this does not mean that the universe is infinite or that there are such possible worlds. Clearly, we should be skeptical of theories that argue that every possible history or every possible mathematical structure actually exists, a notion that would destroy God's freedom to create and lead to the implicit denial of our real human free will, among other things. Part of our realistic experience is that only finite effects occur, some and not others, based on finite events, and based also on human volition, to choose this and not that. More fundamentally there is the contingency of finite being as such: God has freely communicated being to the world but need not have. If we acknowledge the reasonableness of these traditional metaphysical claims, then our theories about infinite possibilities have to be examined critically. Even those theories that simply assume the universe is actually infinite in size lead to serious philosophical difficulties, since they imply that every possible finite configuration of finite entities must exist an infinite number of times, including ones that look remarkably like you and me.⁵³

mechanical history (what Tegmark lists as Level III parallel universes), as well as theories claiming some reality for every possible mathematical structure, including every mathematically conceivable universe (what Tegmark lists as Level IV parallel universes).

⁵² While these debates are not new, there has been a renewed flurry of debate recently. See, for instance, Paul Davies, "A Brief History of the Multiverse," *The New York Times*, April 12, 2003, nytimes.com/2003/04/12/opinion/a-brief-history-of-the-multiverse.html. For a summary of the discussion, as well as an argument that certain theories should be considered only mathematical, as opposed to physical, see George Ellis and Joe Silk, "Scientific Method: Defend the Integrity of Physics," *Nature News* 516, no. 7531 (2014): 321–23, at 321.

⁵³ It is helpful to note that, while the physics behind modern multiverse theories is very new, many of the philosophical questions they raise are quite ancient. For example, Aristotle rejects a type of multiverse drawn from the thought of the atomists (see *Physics*

In my opinion, the most useful version of the “multiverse” for grappling with the notion of the Ascension is one that comes out of string theory known as “brane cosmology.” In a nutshell, the idea is that our three-dimensional universe exists as a membrane or “brane” inside of a larger dimensional structure, known as the “bulk.” As a visual analogy, think of a two-dimensional sheet or “brane” that exists in a larger three-dimensional bulk. The electrons, photons, quarks, and other particles that make up our visible universe are constrained to move only on our three-dimensional “brane” and cannot move in the other directions or dimensions.

Why would a physicist propose such a strange structure, and why would other physicists listen to him? Because there are a number of facts about the universe that physics does not currently offer a self-consistent explanation for, and many physicists would very much like to have such an explanation. One of these big open questions is the “hierarchy problem,” which asks why the force of gravity is 10^{24} times weaker than the weak force for the same type of particle. A number of possible solutions have been suggested to the hierarchy problem and a number of them draw on the notion of extra dimensions, like “brane cosmology.” If gravity acts in the “bulk” as well as the “brane,” while the other forces are restricted to just the “brane,” this would help explain why it is comparatively so weak.⁵⁴

If this “brane cosmology” were true, there could be other three-dimensional “branes” with physical objects constrained to move along them, perhaps with different laws for their interaction. What we have is a collection of places that need not be very far away, but that are physically impossible for our familiar material objects to get to, and whose basic physical rules might be very different from ours. This seems to check most of our medieval boxes, but we need to be careful.

First, the other “branes” in this theory are not completely isolated from us, even if the stuff we are made of could never travel to them. The theory usually claims that at least gravity and perhaps some other exotic particles or

3.4.203b27) and warns against assuming that whatever is imaginable can or does exist (3.8.208a15–20).

⁵⁴ The notion of extra dimensions as a tool for solving physics problems dates back to the 1920s but was considered more seriously with the advent of string theory in the 1980s. In 1998, Nima Arkani-Hamed, Savas Dimopoulos, and Gia Dvali proposed their ADD model which could explain the weakness of gravity, and in 1999 Lisa Randall and Raman Sundrum developed their RS models which have spurred various related theories which could, in principle, be testable with current technology. For a brief summary of the history, the technical details, and references see the review “Extra Dimensions” in Particle Data Group et al., “Review of Particle Physics,” *Progress of Theoretical and Experimental Physics* 2020, no. 8 (2020): 083C01.

forces can move through the extra dimensions of the bulk. Secondly, even if the particles and forces that are constrained to other three-dimensional branes are very different from ours, the fact that they interact in some way gravitationally means that they must be corruptible material beings. Our best models for physical interactions always involve the exchange of energy between particles or fields (in this case, gravity and whatever exotic matter is on the other “branes”), which seem to suggest that some sort of physical change, and thus generation and corruption, is happening. Finally, we do not actually have evidence that such parallel “branes” exist, although parts of the theory underlying them are in principle testable, especially the way extra dimensions would change the details about how gravity acts at various scales.⁵⁵

The point of bringing up the multiverse theories, and “brane cosmology” in particular, is not to claim that contemporary science has “found” the place where the glorified Christ is. It has not. Even if we were somehow able to prove one of these other “branes” existed, Christ would almost certainly not be in one of them, as they would still be full of corruptible matter. Rather, the point is that physicists have thought deeply about the physical makeup and structure of the world and learned to imagine “places” that are very different from those that make up the world we are used to seeing and thinking about. If there are such exotic places and states of matter as yet unknown to us, then by analogy there could be “room” in, or at least near, our cosmology for glorified matter, present but of an alternative sort, supernaturalized. I do not want to claim that we should simply follow wherever physicists’ imaginations lead, as that can often lead into philosophical questionable territory. My point is that, in the case of the Ascension, the theological truths push us to speculate about a very odd and unfamiliar place, and it is significant to acknowledge that, for very different reasons, physicists have speculated about places that are qualitatively comparable. It is true that we could also find company with L. Frank Baum’s *Wizard of Oz* or a whole host of parallel universes in science fiction or fantasy, but it is rhetorically more powerful, particularly in a contemporary context, to find yourself among seriously considered realistic and scientific claims. If we cannot explain

⁵⁵ The best tools we currently have for testing the consistency of gravity include laboratory experiments for short distance changes and precision measurements of planetary orbits in the solar system. There are also constraints that can be placed on “brane” cosmologies from analysis of data from the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) and from various astro-physical sources. For a review of the physics of “extra dimensions” and the observational constraints on them see the “Extra Dimensions” in Particle Data Group et al., “Review of Particle Physics.”

the physical universe comprehensively and can reasonably have recourse to hypotheses of parallel dimensions of reality on the plain of the natural sciences, then perhaps the teaching of supernatural faith pertaining to the body of Christ, somehow outside our world and yet present to it, not of our world but present at times in it, is not entirely incongruent with modern scientific reasoning.

The Place of Christ

Reflection on the destination of the Ascension of Christ began with the most plain reading of Scripture and the cosmos: he went up to the heavens, “above the highest heavens,” which was strange but non-unimaginable. By the medieval period, the place of Christ became well defined, if stranger and more unfamiliar, being above and physically separate from the corruptible world we are familiar with. There was a fittingness, if a complexity and strangeness, to this place set aside for the glorified Christ, but it could at least, in theory, be placed on a map.

Astronomers and physicists have convinced us that we cannot find anywhere that is “above” the earth that is a fitting destination for the Ascension, and there seems to be no reasonable place for him in our map of the universe. Nevertheless, some serious members of that scientific community have also begun imagining that there might be real places that are not simply “above,” but in some unforeseen direction. While the places they describe are not “heaven,” the fact that they are not treated as fantasy and wishful thinking can strengthen the imagination of Christians trying to grapple with the fact that the glorified body of Christ truly is somewhere, right now. We can imagine that Christ truly is somewhere, perhaps not even that far away from us, in a place that would be at once familiar and yet very different from the places we find on earth, just in a direction that we cannot naturally travel. This is a strange thought, but it is not an irrational or unreasonable thought, and there lies all the difference.

It is by faith that we believe and profess in the Creed that Christ “ascended to the right hand of the Father.” It is by further reflection on that faith that we understand just how central and important is the truth that Christ ascended “in the flesh” and continues to live as a human being. While the Christian faith does ask us, at times, to believe things that cannot be confirmed by science or by human reason, it does not and should not place us in a position of having to choose one or the other. With the Ascension we find, yet again, that the apparent tension between faith and reason opens up to a more fitting compatibility, although perhaps in a way that might not

have entered in to the minds of ancient and medieval Christians. We can believe what the Church has always taught, that the risen glorified Christ “ascended in the flesh” and exists right now in heavenly glory awaiting his return, and we might even imagine, without embarrassment, where he might be. N.V.

Efficacious Grace and Free Will: Six Inadequate Arguments

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During the *de auxiliis* controversies, the idea of efficacious grace was used extensively as an attempt to explain the manner in which God infallibly achieves his will at the level of supernatural grace. One meaning of efficacious grace has often been considered inconsistent with the idea of free will. The inconsistency—if there is any—depends upon a particular meaning, according to which efficacious grace has three important characteristics: it is an infallible physical pre-motion. (1) Efficacious grace is “physical” because it moves after the manner of an efficient cause rather than after the manner of a final cause (which would be called a “moral” motion).¹ (2) The motion is prior (or a pre-motion) because it causally precedes the act of the will to which it gives rise. Finally, (3) the motion is infallible because that toward which it moves the will in every case must be achieved.

Suppose, for instance, that God gives Jerry an efficacious grace to help Jane, who is in need. The grace is not merely the enticement of some good (a moral movement), but is the movement of an efficient cause, after the manner by which fire heats water. Furthermore, the grace is efficacious prior to Jerry’s actual choice and does not depend upon his will for its efficacy. Finally, once Jerry is moved by this grace, he will of necessity (or infallibly) choose to help Jane.

In what follows, references to efficacious grace will refer to this particular

¹ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, trans. Dom Bede Rose (Rockford, IL: Tan., 1939), 241, 263–66.

understanding, with these three characteristics. Other conceptions of efficacious grace, such as that given by Jacques Maritain, are not relevant to this paper.²

The combination of these three characteristics is sometimes thought to be inconsistent with a particular understanding of free will, according to which the will is the only created cause that determines itself to its final action. Since efficacious grace is a created cause (and not the divine will), since it is an efficient cause, since it is causally antecedent to the final act of the will, and since it determines the will to act, it is inconsistent with free will. Or so the argument goes, at any rate. Whatever the details of this argument, most people will concede that there is, at the very least, an intuitive inconsistency between free will and efficacious grace. To be moved infallibly by an efficient cause seems incompatible with the movement of the will, the agency of which is free, and which therefore is not moved determinately to some effect.³

Those who wish to defend efficacious grace have advanced a contrary claim—that efficacious grace is consistent with human free will—which might be called the Consistency Thesis. Apparent inconsistencies are nothing more than apparent. In defense of the Consistency Thesis, a multiplicity of Thomistic arguments are offered by authors such as Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Steven Long, and Taylor O'Neill.

This paper is concerned to show neither the truth nor the falsity of the Consistency Thesis. Rather, it considers six of the arguments defending the thesis and finds all of them wanting. Whatever their merits for other purposes (and often their merits are great), these arguments are inadequate to the task of defending the Consistency Thesis. They are often not bad arguments; they are simply insufficient. They are not enough to show a consistency between efficacious grace and free will. This goal, although modest, is significant, for when confronted with the six arguments readers can be left with the impression that the question is settled.

² See, for instance, Jacques Maritain, *God and the Permission of Evil*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce, 1966).

³ Petr Dvořák, "The Concurrentism of Thomas Aquinas: Divine Causation and Human Freedom," *Philosophia* 41, no. 3 (2013): 617–34, at 630–31; Mark K. Spencer, "Divine Causality and Created Freedom: A Thomistic Personalist View," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 14, no. 3 (2016): 919–63, at 949–50; Brian J. Shanley, "Divine Causation and Human Freedom in Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (1998): 99–122, at 116.

The Problem Clarified

The enemies of efficacious grace suggest the following implication: if the will is moved to act by an infallible physical pre-motion, then the will is determined. The Consistency Thesis may be defended by denying the implication. Even when moved by an infallible physical pre-motion such as efficacious grace (so the defense will argue), the will can remain undetermined. All the arguments discussed below (if they are indeed arguments in defense of the Consistency Thesis) take this approach, although the fourth argument does so only in a very indirect manner.

The first argument claims that efficacious grace requires only a conditional (or composite) necessity; it implies no absolute necessity in the will. The second argument claims that efficacious grace is consistent with the will being undetermined with regard to particular good objects. The third argument claims that efficacious grace does not cause violent determination in the will. The fifth argument claims that efficacious grace does not move the will after the manner of a necessary cause but only after the manner of a contingent cause. The sixth argument claims that efficacious grace works together with sufficient grace, by which the agent has the ability either to act according to grace or not.

Although the fourth argument is advanced in a manner strongly suggesting a defense of the Consistency Thesis, it does so only indirectly, by way of the thought of Aquinas. According to Aquinas (so this argument claims), God moves the will—even at a natural level—after the manner of an infallible physical pre-motion, of which efficacious grace is a supernatural example. Even supposing this interpretation of Aquinas is correct, it might follow, nevertheless, that the will is determined in its action. How, then, is this argument a defense of the Consistency Thesis? Through the supposition that Aquinas maintains the freedom of the will. Aquinas himself, then, maintained both that (1) God moves the will after the manner of efficacious grace and that (2) the will is not determined. If Aquinas is a good guide (a point granted by many of the opponents of efficacious grace), then efficacious grace must be consistent with the freedom of the will.

This paper argues that all six of these arguments are inadequate to the task. They do not suffice to defend the Consistency Thesis. The first three of these arguments maintain that the will lacks determination. The arguments are inadequate because the particular forms of indetermination involved are indeed necessary for free will but they are not sufficient. These three arguments successfully establish some lack of determination in the will, but they fail to argue for the correct indetermination. They fail to argue that

the will remains undetermined by the causality of efficacious grace. The lack of absolute necessity (argument 1), the lack of necessity with regard to the object of the will (argument 2), and the lack of necessity from violence (argument 3) are all indeed consistent with efficacious grace. They are also consistent with a necessary determination arising from efficacious grace. Therefore, they do not effectively establish the Consistency Thesis.

The fourth argument is inadequate because it provides insufficient evidence in support of its interpretation of Aquinas. It relies upon few texts of Aquinas. This alone would be no mark against the argument, if the texts themselves were unequivocal. As it is, they do not say what the argument claims. Those already convinced that God's physical pre-motions move infallibly may see this claim within the texts. Indeed, they may find it difficult to see anything else. Nevertheless, the texts do not make this claim. This paper, for its purposes, need not show that these texts have been interpreted incorrectly. It requires only a weaker claim, namely, that these texts are reasonably open to alternate interpretations. One such alternative—reasonable within the context of Aquinas's thought—will be offered below. This interpretation does not deny that God moves by way of physical pre-motions; it simply maintains that some of these pre-motions are not infallible. Indeed, in much of what follows the point of contention concerns the fallible or infallible nature of God's movements.

The fifth argument is inadequate because it makes two ungrounded assumptions. It begins by noting that sometimes God achieves an effect infallibly even while that effect itself remains contingent or even when the effect is brought about by a contingent cause. The argument supposes, however, that God must achieve an effect infallibly by way of an infallible physical pre-motion. Another possibility, expressly mentioned by Aquinas, is ignored. Furthermore, the argument assumes that cases of free will are themselves cases in which God chooses to achieve an effect infallibly.

Finally, the sixth argument is inadequate by way of an equivocation. It claims that the freedom of the will is safeguarded on account of a different kind of grace, namely, sufficient grace. The argument works, however, only by way of equivocating on what it means to be sufficient.

Before proceeding, a couple of caveats are in order. First, the advocates and the detractors of efficacious grace might well be working under different notions of what it means for the will to be free. In some sense, of course, a free will is not determined, but different views might disagree over the nature of this lack of determination. The detractors, for instance, might claim that a free will cannot be determined by any efficient cause besides its own act. The advocates, on the other hand, might claim that a

will remains free when determined by efficient causes, or at least by certain kinds of efficient causes, just so long as the will is not determined by its object. I do not in fact perceive any great difference on this matter. In any case, everyone involved seems to be in agreement that the will should not be determined by efficacious grace.

Second, discussions of grace and free will eventually touch upon the topics of divine providence and predestination, two particularly thorny issues. The idea of efficacious grace is inextricably intertwined with a particular understanding of providence and predestination. Fortunately, the modest aims of this paper need neither prove nor disprove this particular understanding. Rather, it need show only that this particular understanding is not the only realistic possibility within the context of the thought of Aquinas.

Third, the six arguments presented below are apparently advanced by various authors in defense of the Consistency Thesis. Perhaps, however, the authors do not in fact intend the arguments to apply to the Consistency Thesis. Perhaps they intend to use the first argument, for instance, only to exclude absolute necessity from the will; they do not intend to apply the argument to the apparent necessity arising from efficacious grace. Similarly limited intentions might apply to the other arguments.

If these are their intentions, then the authors cited in this article have done a poor job of clarifying their position. Steven Long, for instance, twice uses the first argument immediately after explaining how grace moves the will.⁴ The same can be said of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange.⁵ Long does the same for the second argument, and Garrigou-Lagrange explicitly applies it to efficacious grace.⁶ Taylor O'Neill and Garrigou-Lagrange apply the third argument to physical pre-motion in general, of which efficacious grace is a particular example.⁷ Garrigou-Lagrange offers the fourth argument to explain that the will is moved infallibly and then immediately notes that the will is not moved necessarily.⁸ Long offers the fourth argument as establishing physical pre-motion for free acts of the will, of which efficacious grace

⁴ Steven A. Long, "St. Thomas Aquinas, Divine Causality, and the Mystery of Predestination," in *Thomism and Predestination: Principles and Disputations*, ed. Steven A. Long et al. (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2016), 59, 66.

⁵ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 81, 277–78.

⁶ Long, "Divine Causality," 58–59; Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 318–19.

⁷ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 268; Taylor Patrick O'Neill, *Grace, Predestination, and the Permission of Sin: A Thomistic Analysis* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 22–24.

⁸ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 80–81.

is a particular example.⁹ The fifth argument appears in Garrigou-Lagrange's defense of physical pre-motion and in O'Neill's account of how God moves the will.¹⁰

Perhaps the authors consider these arguments insufficient to the task. Indeed, perhaps they never presented the arguments in order to defend the Consistency Thesis. If so, they will have no complaint against the general thesis of this paper, except to suggest that it is wholly unnecessary. As it is, however, it seems to be necessary, for the presentation of the arguments typically leaves the impression that they serve in defense of the Consistency Thesis.

The remainder of this paper consists of eight sections (and a conclusion). Six of these address the six arguments: the second section ("Composite and Divided Senses of Necessity") addresses argument 1; the fourth ("The General Object of the Will") addresses argument 2; the fifth ("God Moves the Will Interiorly") addresses argument 3, the sixth ("God Is the First Mover of All Agents") addresses argument 4; the seventh ("God Wills Contingent Causes to Act Contingently") addresses argument 5; and the ninth ("Sufficient Grace Preserves Freedom") addresses argument 6. The remaining two sections develop various ideas needed to clarify earlier points: "Active and Passive" in the third section and "The Special Problem Posed by the Will" in the eighth.

Argument 1: Composite and Divided Senses of Necessity

Following the lead of Aquinas, authors such as Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Steven Long, and Taylor O'Neill use the distinction between the composite and divided senses of necessity in order to defend human free will.¹¹ Long and O'Neill, for instance, ask how God can cause free human actions, a question placed within the context of infallible physical pre-motions such as efficacious grace, and then they turn to this distinction for an answer.

⁹ Long, "Divine Causality," 54–58; see also Joseph G. Trabbic, "Praemotio Physica and Divine Transcendence," in Long et al., *Thomism and Predestination*, 152–165, esp. 153–55.

¹⁰ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 243–44; O'Neill, *Grace*, 27.

¹¹ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 81, 277–78; Long, "Divine Causality," 59; Steven A. Long, "Providence, Freedom, and Natural Law," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 4, no. 3 (2006): 557–605, at 585; O'Neill, *Grace*, 28–32; R. J. Matava, *Divine Causality and Human Free Choice: Domingo Banez, Physical Premotion, and the Controversy De auxiliis Revisited* (Boston: Brill, 2016), 83–88.

Garrigou-Lagrange uses it to explain how efficacious grace can be infallible while the will remains free.

The following example illustrates the distinction. Ben does not sit of necessity because he could be standing. Still, the following proposition is true: necessarily, if he is sitting, then he is sitting. Ben cannot be standing while he is sitting. This kind of necessity (the composite or conditional sense) indicates nothing about the inherent nature of Ben as he sits. The sun shines of necessity (in the divided or absolute sense), but Ben does not sit of necessity (in the divided or absolute sense). It is of the very nature of the sun to shine, but it does not belong to Ben, in his nature, to sit, for he can also stand. Nevertheless, conditional necessity applies both to the sun and to Ben. Necessarily, if the sun shines, then it shines; likewise, necessarily, if Ben sits, then he sits. This conditional necessity does not reach to the nature of the reality; it reaches only to the necessary relation between two propositions.

The distinction is indeed valid, and it does apply to divine movement and free will. Nevertheless, the argument is insufficient to defend the Consistency Thesis. It can be applied with equal validity to all contingent events, even those that are not free. The sun shines of necessity, but a castle (in chess) does not rest on the space $E4$ of necessity. By its nature, the castle can be on any space, or off the chess board entirely. Nevertheless, if the castle is on $E4$, then necessarily the castle is on $E4$. The castle, however, is not free. As she plays, Hanna moves it across the board with complete determination.

Absolute necessity is not the same as determination. The castle is on space $E4$ with no absolute necessity, but it is determined to be on $E4$. A contingent event, in Aquinas's view, is one that has the potential to be otherwise. The nature of the sun (in his physics) is to shine; it has no potential to be otherwise. The chess piece, however, has the potential to be in multiple places. It ends up being in this place rather than in that place by a kind of determination. Nevertheless, it remains contingent. It has no inherent necessity but only a necessity that comes from outside.¹²

The distinction between contingency and freedom may be brought home with another example. Ben is sitting, but he is sitting freely (we are told), because he could be standing. It turns out, however, that Ben is an invalid who cannot stand of his own accord. Still, Hanna can lift Ben into a standing position. Whether he is in a standing position or a sitting position, then, is a contingent matter. He is, however, rather like the chess piece. He himself cannot make the determination but must be moved by Hanna.

¹² Stephen L. Brock, "Causality and Necessity in Thomas Aquinas," *Quaestio* 2, no. 1 (2002): 217–40, at 221–22.

In relation to Hanna, Ben is precisely in the situation of someone under the influence of efficacious grace. Ben cannot stand of his own accord, but if Hanna lifts him, then he will be standing. Similarly, Jerry will never help Jane unless he is given efficacious grace, in which case necessarily he will help her.

The analogy, however, breaks down on one point that may prove to be crucial: the manners in which Ben and Jerry are moved are not the same. Hanna moves Ben with an external force while God moves Jerry by an interior movement. Perhaps the interior movement of efficacious grace can save Jerry's freedom. This question will be examined below (in the section entitled "Argument 3: God Moves the Will Interiorly").

At the moment, however, it suffices to recognize that the distinction between two senses of necessity, composite and divided, does not by itself save Jerry's freedom. It establishes only contingency, not freedom. This argument, in other words, does not conclude that acts of the will are simply undetermined, which is an impossibility. Rather, it argues that acts of the will are not determined in relation to a particular cause. In this case, they are not determined by the necessity of the nature of the will. They still might be determined by some other cause, such as efficacious grace.

Aquinas himself, someone might object, uses the composite and divided senses of necessity in order to defend the freedom of the will.¹³ In fact, he uses the distinction (as will be examined below) only to deny necessity in the will, as the distinction itself allows.¹⁴ Even if we suppose that he is concerned about freedom in the will (which is something more than lack of necessity), it does not follow that the argument is adequate, in Aquinas's mind, to protect free will from efficacious grace. It would follow only if Aquinas thinks that God moves the will by efficacious grace, which is open to dispute. If Aquinas has another conception of how God moves the will, then his argument might be adequate for that conception. Aquinas is simply arguing that God does not move the will by a kind of necessity in the will itself.

Another way of making this point is to distinguish between the divine will and the movement of efficacious grace. Aquinas's argument is well adapted for its target, which is the divine will. It is not well adapted for another

¹³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] I-II, q. 10, a. 4, ad 3.

¹⁴ Taylor O'Neill, on the other hand, cites two texts that are excellent examples of the distinction, but they are not, as he claims, texts in which Aquinas addresses the consistency of the divine movement and human freedom (*Grace*, 28–29). The first text (ST I, q. 19, a. 3) addresses the lack of necessity in the divine will, not the human will, and the second text (*Summa contra gentiles* [SCG] I, ch. 67, no. 10) addresses the consistency between divine foreknowledge and human free will.

target, the infallible nature of efficacious grace. Garrigou-Lagrange, Long, and O'Neill, however, apply this argument not simply to the divine will; they apply it to efficacious grace as well.¹⁵

Active and Passive

The merits of this argument and of the arguments that follow can be better understood the better we understand the agency of the will. So far, we have seen that the agency of the will is contingent. We may take a first step at a better understanding by recognizing that the will is an active potential and not merely a passive potential.

Ben can be in the standing position, but he can realize this position (given his disability) only by being placed in this position by Hanna. Reed, on the other hand, is able to stand on his own. If he wishes to stand, he needs no assistance from Hanna. It is as true for Reed as it is for Ben, however, that if he is sitting, then necessarily he is sitting.

Both Ben and Reed are potentially in the standing position, but they have two quite diverse potentials. Ben has the potential to be moved into this position; Reed has the potential to move himself into this position. The two differ as passive and active potentials. With a passive potential one thing is able to be changed by another. With an active potential, one thing is able to change another.¹⁶ The passive potential and its realization remain within the subject, which receives actuality from outside. The active potential has its own actuality within one subject (or one part of a subject) and moves out to realization in another subject (or another part of a subject); as Aquinas puts it, following Aristotle, "An active principle is the principle of some change in another insofar as it is another."¹⁷ Water has a passive potential to be heated, because it can receive heat within itself from some outside source. Fire has an active potential to heat because from its own heat it can bring about heat in the water.

The example of Reed reveals that the distinction of subjects is not always clear-cut. The fire heats an entirely distinct subject, namely, the water, but Reed moves himself. Even this self-movement, says Aristotle, involves one

¹⁵ Long, "Divine Causality," 66; O'Neill, *Grace*, 28–29; Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 81 (on the other hand, see 279).

¹⁶ Aquinas, *In IX metaphys.*, lec. 1, nos. 1776–77; see also *ST I*, q. 25, a. 1.

¹⁷ *In IX metaphys.*, lec. 1, nos. 1776: "Principium activum, quod est principium transmutationis in alio in quantum est aliud." All translations from the works of Aquinas are my own.

part moving another part.¹⁸ The muscles, for instance, have the capacity to move the bones, which thereby move the limbs. The active potential within the muscles still moves out of itself—although not outside of Reed—to move the distinct subject of the bones.

Even the chess piece, within Aquinas's physics, has a quasi-active potential to move downward. It moves outside of itself in this limited sense: it moves outside its current place. The chess piece, then, has both the passive possibility to be moved by Hanna to this space or to that space and the quasi-active potential to move downward by its own weight.¹⁹

Contingency applies to both active and passive potentiality. Clearly, however, freedom belongs to active potentiality. In relation to freedom, then, it does little good to point out that Ben sits contingently. His entirely passive ability to stand in no way indicates that he is free to stand. Contingency establishes merely that Ben is not necessitated by his very nature; he still might be necessitated by something else besides his choice, such as efficacious grace.

In the modern era, we tend to think that all causes, excepting possibly the will, are necessitated. Aquinas, however, had no scruples describing natural causes as contingent.²⁰ For Aquinas, a contingent cause is simply one that can be frustrated. The downward movement of a rock can be frustrated by some obstacle, as when the rock rests on top of a pillar. Remove the obstacle and the movement flows from the nature of the rock, which has weight.

Active potentialities can be frustrated precisely because they, in some manner, move outside themselves. Consequently, some obstacle can intervene between the active potential and the subject in which the change might come to be. To use an example that does not transfer entirely to our modern physics, some insulating substance might intervene between the fire and the water.

We might be inclined to call such causes necessary. After all, if the obstacle is absent, then the cause will necessarily act, but if the obstacle is present, then the cause will necessarily not act. Aquinas is quite willing to concede this description of the situation, but he will insist that the cause is contingent: that toward which it is moving might not come about. The cause is not defined, as is often the case in our post-Humean world, by the entire situation. Rather, the cause is defined by the internal impetus of the active

¹⁸ Aristotle, *De motu animalium* 702a21–703a22. See *In IX metaphys.*, lec. 1, nos. 1776.

¹⁹ Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 6, a. 3, ad 7.

²⁰ Aquinas, *In I peryrmeneias*, lec. 14, no. 8; *In II phys.*, lec. 8, no. 210; *ST I*, q. 115, a. 6. See Brock, "Causality and Necessity."

potential.²¹ The fire is moving out to heat, even if something in the current conditions prevents it from heating. The rock has an impetus to a downward place, even if something in the current situation prevents it from actually moving downward. These contingent causes, then, might be described as conditionally necessary: their effect will come about on the condition that no obstacle intervenes.

Argument 2: The General Object of the Will

Garrigou-Lagrange, Long, and O'Neill use another argument to defend the Consistency Thesis.²² The will is free, so the argument goes, because it is fixed only upon the good itself and not necessarily upon this or that particular good. Consequently, when a particular good is presented to it, the will is not determined to move toward it.²³ The good of eating pizza, for instance, is only a particular good and does not exhaust the object of Jerry's will. As such, he need not move to this good. His will can, so to speak, focus upon that which is lacking in the good.

This argument is fine so far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. When giving the argument, Aquinas himself draws a parallel with the sense of sight.²⁴ An object partly colored and partly transparent, he says, need not be seen by the power of sight. If you happen to look at the transparent part, then you will not see it. Clearly, however, the power of sight is not free. Given that it is directed to the transparent part, then it will not see the object; given that it is directed to the colored part, then it will see the object. The power of sight itself, however, cannot direct itself this way or that; rather, it must be directed.²⁵

The inadequacy of the argument can be better understood by recognizing that the will belongs to a very interesting subset of active potentials. It belongs to those that are active but also passive.²⁶ Because they are passive, they can receive some determination to a particular effect.

In Aquinas's physics, fire is entirely active and in no way passive. The

²¹ *In II phys.*, lec. 8, no. 210.

²² Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 318–19; Long, "Divine Causality," 58–59; Long, "Providence," 564; O'Neill, *Grace*, 25–28.

²³ *ST I-II*, q. 10, a. 2.

²⁴ *ST I-II*, q. 9, a. 4.

²⁵ See Michael D. Torre, *God's Permission of Sin: Negative or Conditioned Decree? A Defense of the Doctrine of Francisco Marin-Sola, O.P., Based on the Principles of Thomas Aquinas* (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2009), 222.

²⁶ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 2; *I-II*, q. 1, a. 3.

power of sight, however, is in some way active and in some way passive. When Jane sees a table, we attribute the act of seeing to her. At the same time, we recognize that she is acted upon by the table. She has, thinks Aquinas, an active capacity to see color. This active capacity, however, must passively receive the likeness of the particular color. Consequently, the active capacity to see is open to multiple particular actions, such as seeing green or seeing blue, and the capacity is itself passively determined to one particular action by the object seen.

The will, like the power of sight, is an active potential that is also passive. It actively moves out to attain various goods, but it is passively moved by reason to this or that particular good; it receives the goods from the perception of reason.²⁷ Jerry, with his will, desires to eat because reason has presented eating as a particular good. Just as the power of sight is directed to color but must have its activity specified to this or that color, so the will is a power directed to the good, but it still must have its activity specified to this or that good.

Aquinas argues for the freedom of the will, then, by noting that particular specifications to this or that good do not fully encompass the object of the will, which is for goodness itself. What is good in some particular way is also not good in some other way. Presented with the object of pizza, then, Jerry need not move toward it with his will, for the pizza has some aspects about it that are not good.

This argument is inadequate to defend the Consistency Thesis, for (as Aquinas himself states) it addresses only part of the freedom of the will.²⁸ It concerns the passive element of the will, the determination it receives from its object. Free will, however, has another part, which Aquinas attributes to the exercise of the action rather than to the object of the action. In contrast to the power of sight, the power of the will is free to exercise itself or not.²⁹ Explaining only the inadequacy of the object does not, in fact, distinguish the will from many other powers, including the power of sight.

Efficacious grace does not move simply after the manner of an object, for which reason its movement is called physical. Rather, it moves like an efficient cause. It moves with regard to the exercise of the act. Pointing out that the will is free with regard to its object, then, is of little help in relation to efficacious grace, which does not move by way of the object of the will. Jerry may not be determined by the good of the pizza, but if he, like the power of sight, is directed (rather than directs himself) to look at the good

²⁷ *ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 1.

²⁸ *ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 4.

²⁹ *ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 3.

part of the pizza, then he will indeed move to the pizza. If his will is just like his power of sight, which cannot direct itself but must be directed, then his desire will be fixed and determined based upon the power that does the directing, which turns out to be efficacious grace.

Once again, this argument does not establish what is needed for the Consistency Thesis. It establishes that acts of will are not determined in relation to a particular cause, namely, by particular good objects. The Consistency Thesis requires something else, namely, that the will is not determined by efficacious grace.

The general object of the will has an unexpected aspect. While it is the source of free will, it also provides one avenue, for Aquinas, by which God can move the will irresistibly.³⁰ If the power of sight is presented with an object that is entirely colored and in no way transparent, then it will necessarily see this object. Similarly, if the will is presented with an object that is entirely good and in no way deficient in good, then it will necessarily desire this object. Such is the state of the blessed in heaven. They see God, who is in all ways good; consequently, they must love God. A similar irresistible movement might be found in certain other cases, perhaps even in the infusion of sanctifying grace.

This irresistible movement does not save the Consistency Thesis, for it is a movement according to object or final cause. In contrast, efficacious grace acts according to efficient cause.

Argument 3: God Moves the Will Interiorly

Garrigou-Lagrange, Long, and O'Neill point out a distinctive feature of efficacious grace—in contrast to other efficient causes—that might help the Consistency Thesis.³¹ The power of sight is moved by an exterior power, such as the will. In contrast, God moves the will precisely by inspiring an interior impulse. For this reason (so the argument goes), the will can remain free even in the face of the directive power of God.

This argument as well is inadequate to the task. Aquinas himself gives this argument to show that God can move the will according to its nature.³² Although God is external to the will, he need not move the will violently. The chess piece can be moved from the outside by Hanna, which movement Aquinas considers violent, or it can be moved from its own internal weight,

³⁰ *De ver.*, q. 24, aa. 8–9.

³¹ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 82, 268; Long, "Providence," 560–61; O'Neill, *Grace*, 22–24.

³² *ST I-II*, q. 9, a. 6; q. 10, a. 4; I, q. 83, a. 1, ad 3.

which movement Aquinas considers natural. Since God moves the will with an interior impulse, he does not move it violently, even though he himself is external to the will.

The purported problem with efficacious grace, however, is not that it moves the will violently; rather, the problem is the manner of its movement; it moves the will infallibly to a particular good. The movement of efficacious grace is not God himself; rather, it is something within the will, as the argument now being considered insists. This very interior movement, however, is an infallible movement to some particular good. Its interiority does not remove this feature of efficacious grace.

The argument, then, rightly concludes that efficacious grace does no violence to the will; acts of the will are not determined by an external moving cause. It is inadequate to conclude that the will remains free in the hands of efficacious grace. Garrigou-Lagrange, Long, and O'Neill may well be using this argument, following Aquinas, only to assert that God moves the will naturally without doing violence to it. Then the argument is well taken. Nevertheless, it is no defense of the Consistency Thesis. The Consistency Thesis might follow from this argument, however, if it were buttressed by a further claim, namely, that God, as an external cause, moves the will precisely after the manner of efficacious grace. The fourth argument attempts to establish precisely this further claim.

Argument 4: God Is the First Mover of All Agents

The fourth argument in defense of the Consistency Thesis does not directly concern efficacious grace. Rather, it concerns God's movement of the will according to nature rather than according to supernature. This natural movement has the same (supposedly) objectionable feature of efficacious grace, namely, its infallible movement. If the natural acts of the will are free despite this irresistible movement, then there is no reason to suppose that an irresistible movement at the supernatural level is opposed to human free will.

The infallible natural movement is at the heart of this fourth argument. It is founded upon the following syllogism. (1) God's movement (or causality) cannot be frustrated. Therefore, (2) if God moves some creature (such as the will) to some effect, then it will infallibly achieve this effect. But (3) God must move all creatures, including the will, to their activities. It seems to follow that (4) the effect (including the act of the will) must follow infallibly.

The argument seems to have impeccable metaphysical pedigree. It notes that God must be the first mover of all creaturely action, including the acts

of the will.³³ Consequently, even at the natural level, God must move the will to some particular good. If it were otherwise, the will would have some actuality that did not come from God. If, for instance, God moved the will simply to the good in general and left the will itself to make a determination to particular goods, then this determination would arise independently of God. Aquinas, however, clearly states that God must move the will to its actuality.³⁴ It follows that God must move the will by directing it to a particular good, leaving nothing to be determined by the creature itself. Otherwise, the power of the will has an actuality that does not arise from God, who must be the first mover of all action.

The argument is presented as if the chief contention concerns premise (3) in the syllogism above. The other premises are considered beyond dispute. One text of Aquinas is taken to be incontrovertible vindication of the view.

Movement in bodies requires not only the form that is the principle of motion or action; it also requires the motion of the first mover. But the first mover in the order of bodies is a celestial body. Consequently, however much fire has perfect heat, it will not bring about change except by the motion of the heavenly bodies. Clearly, however, just as every bodily motion is reduced into the motion of the heavenly bodies as into a first corporeal mover, so all movements, whether bodily or spiritual, are reduced into the very first mover, which is God. Therefore, however perfect the nature of a body or spirit, it cannot proceed to its action unless it is moved by God, who does not move according to the necessity of nature, as with the movement of the heavenly bodies, but who moves according to the wisdom of his providence.³⁵

This passage certainly confirms premise (3), but this premise does not in fact pose the difficulty for the Consistency Thesis. The supposed trouble with efficacious grace is not that God is its ultimate source. Rather, the trouble concerns the manner in which efficacious grace operates, namely, infallibly. In short, the real difficulty does not seem to be premise (3), but premise (2). In agreement with premise (3), someone might well concede that when the fire heats water, its movement must ultimately originate in

³³ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 80–81; Long, “Divine Causality,” 54–58; Long, “Providence,” 558–64; O’Neill, *Grace*, 13–22, 34–37; Trabbic, “*Praemotio Physica*,” 153–55.

³⁴ *ST I-II*, q. 9, aa. 4 and 6; *De malo*, q. 6; *SCG III*, ch. 89.

³⁵ *ST I-II*, q. 109, a.1.

God while at the same time denying, in opposition to premise (2), that the fire is moved infallibly to heat the water. The above quoted text indicates nothing to the contrary.

It might be objected that premise (2) follows from premise (1), but no sane Thomist will deny premise (1). But is it really true that premise (2) follows from premise (1)?

The best reason to question the inference arises from Aquinas's teaching on contingent active causes, which he says might fail to bring about their effects on account of some obstacle. These contingent causes may also be identified as sufficient causes.

A sufficient cause, for Aquinas, should not be confused with contemporary philosophical notions of sufficient causes or sufficient conditions. According to these modern notions, sufficient causes necessarily bring about their effects. In contrast, Aquinas's sufficient causes line up with contingent active potentials, which can be frustrated. In effect, a sufficient cause means what its name implies: it is enough to bring about the effect, although it might not necessarily bring about the effect. Aquinas says, for instance,

If every effect proceeded from a natural cause and if every cause produced its effect of necessity, then it would follow that every cause is a necessary cause. But both antecedents are false. Some causes, even though they are sufficient, do not produce their effects of necessity, because they can be impeded, as is plain in every natural cause.³⁶

With its tendency to move downward, a rock is a sufficient cause of the downward motion. Nevertheless, it might be impeded. If it sits on top of a pillar, for instance, then it will not move down. Similarly, a fire that has enough heat to boil a pot of water might fail to do so, if some insulating material is interposed between the fire and the water.

Contingent causes are sufficient—and not efficacious (or infallible)—for two reasons. First, they move outside the agent; second, the agent is not the only cause in the universe.³⁷ The rock is moving outside itself, to a place where it is not, but the pillar is vying for the same intervening space. Likewise, the fire is moving out toward the water, but the insulating material is a separate cause that vies for the same intervening space. If the rock did not move outside itself, then another cause could not interpose between the rock and its effect. On the other hand, if the rock were the only cause in the

³⁶ *De malo*, q. 6, ad 21. See also q. 16, a. 7, ad 1; *ST* I-II, q. 75, a. 1, ad 2.

³⁷ *ST* I, q. 19, a. 6.

universe, then nothing could interpose to prevent its effect, even though it moves outside itself.

We now seem to be faced with a conundrum. Aquinas asserts that God must move all creatures to their actions, but God's movements must always attain their effects. Otherwise, creatures could resist God's movement. But then what are we to make of Aquinas's teaching that contingent causes can be frustrated? If fire is to heat, then God must move it to heat; but God's movement is infallible; therefore, if God moves the fire to heat, then it must heat. On the other hand, fire is a contingent cause, so it need not always heat. Put differently, it is a sufficient cause, so its activity can be frustrated from attaining its effect.

Two possible resolutions to this dilemma present themselves. The first notes that God gives fire the ability to heat, and in this manner fire is a contingent cause of heat. It does not follow that God always moves the fire from the ability to the actual act of heating. When there is no obstacle, God moves it to the act of heating; in the presence of an obstacle, God does not move it. When God moves the fire, then, he moves it infallibly, so it will indeed heat. Nevertheless, the fire is a contingent cause, because it does not always heat (in Aquinas's physics), although it always has the power to heat. This resolution aligns with the manner in which efficacious grace operates.

Unfortunately, this first resolution does not accord well with the manner in which Aquinas speaks of the failure of contingent causes. They fail because an obstacle intervenes. The obstacle itself seems to have the causal efficacy to prevent the action from attaining its effect. The first resolution suggests, in contrast, that in the presence of an obstacle there simply is no action because in that case God does not move the creature to act.

A second resolution is more in accord with the notion of an intervening obstacle. God does indeed achieve something inexorably; it is the very movement of the secondary cause. If God moves the fire, then the fire necessarily moves beyond itself. The fire does not and cannot resist this movement of God. Nevertheless, the fire can fail to achieve the goal of this outward movement. Its success depends upon the absence of obstacles.

The point can be clarified by a distinction between two different senses in which something might act. When we speak of some thing acting, we primarily refer to the accomplishment of the action. If we say, for instance, that Barb kills Scott, we mean that she brings about the death of Scott. In a secondary way, however, we can refer to a failed action. Suppose, for instance, that Barb plans on killing Scott, aims her gun, and pulls the trigger, but then the gun jams and Scott gets away. We might say that Barb "tried" to kill Scott. Alternately, we might say that she performed a failed act of killing,

for what is most essential to the action is its telos, its movement out to some goal.³⁸ Barb is moving out to the death of Scott, even though his death is never achieved. Most essentially, then, her action is an act of killing, but it is a failed act. This movement toward a goal is something real in the thing. In Barb, we might identify it with an act of the will, such as intending, but it is real also in the fire, which is moving out to heat the objects around it.

God moves the fire to the most essential element of action; he moves it to an impulse beyond itself to some goal. He infallibly achieves this most essential element. Nevertheless, this movement in the fire does not necessarily accomplish its goal. The outward movement might be frustrated, as is Barb's action of killing. If God wishes to accomplish the goal, then he will do so (as will be suggested in the next section) not by making the secondary cause infallible; he will do so by assuring that no other secondary causes frustrate the movement.

If the first resolution of the dilemma is established conclusively as the view of Aquinas, then it seems to follow that when God moves the will naturally, he moves it infallibly to some particular action. If this natural movement is consistent with free will, then it seems to follow that efficacious grace, which likewise moves infallibly to some particular action, will also be in accord with free will, however much appearances might suggest otherwise.

On the other hand, if the second resolution is correct, then God infallibly moves the will to have some impulse toward an action, but he does not move it infallibly to carry through with this impulse. The natural movement, which God has given to the will, might be prevented from achieving its goal on account of some obstacle. The manner of this prevention will be discussed below.

The standard proof text (quoted above) for God's movement of all creatures, however, does not in any way suggest the first resolution. It conforms perfectly well with the second resolution. Consequently, premise (2) does not follow conclusively from premise (1), at least not without additional argumentation. This fourth argument, then, is itself inadequate to the task of defending the Consistency Thesis.

³⁸ Steven J. Jensen, *Good and Evil Actions: A Journey through St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 232–33.

Argument 5: God Wills Contingent Causes to Act Contingently

Garrigou-Lagrange, Long, and O'Neill have recourse to another inadequate argument in defense of the Consistency Thesis.³⁹ When God moves the creature infallibly to a determined effect, the cause and effect are nevertheless contingent because God wills them to be contingent, for God's will extends not only to what happens but also to the manner in which it happens. Irresistibly, then, God makes the creature to act contingently. As Aquinas says in a reply to an objection,

From the fact that nothing resists the divine will, it follows not only that those things happen that God wills to happen but also that they happen contingently or necessarily according to his will.⁴⁰

On one reading of this passage, God makes something to be and then he also gives it the quality of being contingent or necessary. On another reading of this passage, God decides that he wants something to happen and he decides that he wants it to happen contingently, so then he prepares a contingent cause to bring it about. This latter interpretation is precisely that given by Aquinas in the body of the article.

God wills some things to be done necessarily and other things contingently in order that there might be an order in things for the completion of the universe. Therefore, for some effects he adapts necessary causes, which cannot fail and from which the effects arise of necessity, but for other effects he adapts contingent causes, which can fail and from which the effects arise contingently. Consequently, the effects willed by God do not happen contingently because the proximate causes are contingent but rather because God wanted them to arise contingently and then prepared contingent causes for them.⁴¹

In short, Aquinas is not claiming that the following proposition is false: events happen contingently because they arise from contingent causes. Rather, he is claiming that a crucially different proposition is false: events happen contingently *only* because they arise from contingent causes. The addition of "only" excludes other causes; most especially, it excludes the

³⁹ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 243–44, 270; Long, "Providence," 561, 567–68, 592; O'Neill, *Grace*, 27.

⁴⁰ *ST I*, q. 19, a. 8, ad 2. See also q. 22, a. 4, ad 1.

⁴¹ *ST I*, q. 19, a. 8.

divine will and the divine wisdom. It is as if God makes certain causes, some of them necessary and some of them contingent, and then he is left to face the consequence that some events will happen necessarily and others contingently. Instead, says Aquinas, God first of all wants some things to be necessary (such as the sun shining or the movements of the heavenly bodies) and other things to be contingent (such as fire heating water or rocks falling). For this reason he makes some causes to be necessary causes and other causes to be contingent.

This second interpretation, however, seems to face a difficulty. If God prepares a contingent cause—contingent in reality and not only in words—then it is possible for the effect to fail. By the original supposition, however, God decides that he wants the effect to happen (and that he wants it to be contingent). But if God wants the effect to happen, then it will happen and there is no possibility that it will fail.

Even human beings, however, can use contingent causes with a certain necessity. A contingent cause will bring about its effect as long as there is no obstacle in the way. If we remove all obstacles, then the effect will follow. If Hanna lets a rock drop after having made sure that no obstacle is in the way, then it will indeed drop to the ground.

God, of course, can more surely remove obstacles than any human being.⁴² He can assure, then, that a contingent cause will bring about its effect. He will do so not by changing the way that he moves the contingent cause. Rather, he will do so because he controls the other causes as well.⁴³ The effect will come about not because God moved it infallibly to come about. Rather, he moved it with the possibility of failure, but then he also removed that which might cause the failure. In precisely this manner, Aquinas explains the way in which God's will must always be fulfilled.

Something can happen outside the order of some particular agent cause but not outside the order of a universal cause under which all the particular causes are contained. A particular cause fails from its effect on account of the impediment posed by some other particular cause, which is contained under the order of the universal cause; consequently, an effect is in no way able to go outside the order of the universal cause. . . . Since the will of God is the universal cause of all things, it is impossible for the divine will not to attain its effect.⁴⁴

⁴² *De ver.*, q. 23, a. 4, ad 2.

⁴³ *ST I*, q. 103, a. 7, ad 3.

⁴⁴ *ST I*, q. 19, a. 6. See also q. 103, a. 7.

The Special Problem Posed by the Will

This obvious way in which God can use contingent causes to achieve an effect with necessity may not be so obvious if one's inquiries begin with the will, as is apt to be the case in a consideration of grace. The will, like many other created causes, is a sufficient cause. God moves it to some end, but an obstacle might still prevent the will from carrying out this end. In the case of the will, however, the obstacle is different. The obstacle to fire is found in something outside itself, as is the obstacle to the downward movement of the rock. In contrast, the will places its own obstacle to action.

The cause that makes the will to will something does not always achieve its result out of necessity. For the will itself can place an impediment in the way, either by removing the consideration that leads it to will or by considering its opposite, namely, that the object proposed as good is also not good in another respect.⁴⁵

Neither in the objection nor in the reply does Aquinas identify the cause that moves the will to a particular action, but only three plausible possibilities present themselves: either Aquinas is speaking of God, who is the external cause of the action in the will, or he is speaking of a consideration of the intellect, or he is speaking of a desire within the will itself, which can be the cause of another desire. These latter two possibilities, however, collapse into a single possibility, for intellect and will together combine in order to move from one desire to another, even as Jerry moves himself from the desire for health to the desire to take medicine by way of considering the means to health.⁴⁶

The first possibility will not do. God is not a contingent cause and his efficacy cannot be impeded by some obstacle. It remains that Aquinas is speaking of the second (united) possibility. Indeed, in the body of the article, Aquinas explicitly states that "the will moves itself and all other powers" to the execution of its actions, after the manner of an efficient cause.⁴⁷ The causality of some first desire, then, is sufficient to bring about the second, but it can be impeded by the will itself.

We can now see why the will is a problematic place to start in understanding God's movement of contingent causes. The will places its own

⁴⁵ *De mal.*, q. 6, ad 15.

⁴⁶ *De mal.*, q. 6; *ST I-II*, q. 9, a. 4.

⁴⁷ *De mal.*, q. 6.

impediment to the divine movement. God himself cannot place the impediment, or he would be responsible for sin.

The contingency of the will, then, seems to lack one avenue of control that is available for other contingent causes. God can move a rock to go down contingently, and he then can assure that it will go down by removing all obstacles, or he can assure that it will be frustrated by placing an obstacle. If God moves the will to a good action contingently, however, he cannot assure the accomplishment of his plans in the same way.⁴⁸ He cannot place an obstacle, nor can he remove all obstacles. He absolutely cannot place an obstacle, because then he would be the cause of sin. He cannot remove all obstacles—or at the very least he will not typically remove all obstacles—because it is within the contingency of the will to place its own obstacle.

In the case of the human will, then, God cannot assure the fulfillment of his own will in the same way as in the case of other contingent causes. If we begin with the human will, we might conclude that God moves creatures infallibly to some action, but at the same time he assures that the mode of the action remains contingent. On this view, God can infallibly move a human being to the material action of sin, and yet this action can remain contingent, arising fallibly from the human will.⁴⁹ Having begun with the human will, we then might conclude that God moves all contingent causes in this manner. Does not Aquinas himself say,

God moves even the will unchangeably because of the efficacy of his moving power, which cannot fail. Nevertheless, because of the nature of the will moved, which relates indifferently to diverse goods, it is not led with necessity but remains free. Thus, in all things, divine providence works infallibly, but from contingent causes come contingent effects insofar as God moves all things proportionately, each thing in its own manner.⁵⁰

This text, however, should not be read in isolation. It could mean, in line with efficacious grace, that God moves the will infallibly to some particular action but the action is still contingent because the will itself is contingent. On the other hand, it might mean that God infallibly moves the will to

⁴⁸ With his middle knowledge, Luis de Molina fell into the trap of supposing that God arranges the will just as we might arrange natural causes.

⁴⁹ Thomas M. Osborne, “How Sin Escapes Premotion: The Development of Thomas Aquinas’s Thought by Spanish Thomists,” in Long et al., *Thomism and Predestination*, 192–213.

⁵⁰ *De mal.*, q. 6, ad 3.

desire some action, but then it remains free to carry through with this movement or not.

According to the interpretation given above (in my sixth section, “Argument 4: God is the First Mover of All Agents”), God infallibly moves the fire to heat only in the sense that he gives the fire an impulse to pass on heat; given God’s movement, the fire cannot but have this impulse. Nevertheless, God does not infallibly move the fire actually to pass on the heat, for the impulse that he gives to the fire can be impeded. The same might be said for the will. God infallibly moves the will to desire some good, perhaps some particular good action, but he does not infallibly move the will to actually carry out this desire, since the will like other sufficient causes can be impeded. In the case of the will, however, the impediment is placed by the will itself.

This latter interpretation accords well with what Aquinas says only a little farther along.

In some respect, the human will can diverge from the divine will, namely, insofar as the person wills something that God does not want him to will, as when he chooses to sin. At the same time, God does not will that the human will not choose this action, because if that were God’s will, then it would happen, for everything that God wills happens. And even though the human will does diverge from the divine will with respect to its movement, nevertheless, it cannot diverge with regard to the outcome or result. For the human will always achieves this result, namely, that God fulfills his will in the man.⁵¹

The manner in which the human will falls under the divine will with regard to the outcome or result is more clearly stated elsewhere.

We see that what seems to recede from the divine will in one order will return to his will according to another order. According to what he is in himself, for instance, a sinner recedes from the divine will by sinning, but he falls into the order of the divine will when, through God’s justice, the sinner is punished.⁵²

In other words, if a person sins, then he goes against what God wishes him to do, but he falls under the order of divine justice, so that the result still conforms to the divine will.

⁵¹ *De mal.*, q. 6, ad 5.

⁵² *ST I*, q. 19, a. 6.

An analogy might help convey the idea. Ben is Hanna's son and she is teaching him to play chess. She always wants him to make good moves and she directs him to such actions. She sees that he is now making a terrible blunder, but she permits him to do so—she does not intervene to correct his move—because she thinks that she can teach him through his own mistakes. She permits the mistake, then, insofar as she can use it for teaching. Similarly, God permits our sins insofar as he knows that he can still work with them, bringing good out of evil, at the very least by way of punishment.

The contingency of the human will is especially difficult because with regard to it God has a permissive will. He does not will that a person should sin, but he does permit him to sin. As Aquinas expresses the matter, “God neither wills that evil should be done nor does he will that evil should not be done, but he wills to permit that evil should be done, and this permission is a certain good.”⁵³ God's will, then, is fulfilled in the very permission of the possibility of sin but not in the sin itself, which is contrary to his will. Still, even the sin falls under God's will as an object of his punishment.

Aquinas identifies two orders of divine providence.

The order of divine providence may be considered in two ways. First, in general, insofar as it arises from the cause that governs everything. Second, in particular, insofar as it arises from some particular cause that carries out the divine government.⁵⁴

God is the governing cause of everything and can never be resisted because he orders all causes. Efficacious grace, or any other movement from God, is a particular cause carrying out the order of the divine government. Such particular causes, at least if they are contingent, can be resisted.⁵⁵ Efficacious grace is a particular cause that gives rise to a contingent effect; nevertheless, it is never in fact resisted; it always infallibly achieves its goal.

In fact, God need not make his will irresistible by way of an infallible created cause (efficacious grace). God's will is irresistible because God holds within his hands all causes, including the different natural desires within the will. The sinful person takes one of these natural desires apart from the order of the whole, thereby thwarting the purpose toward which it is properly directed. As a consequence, he also acts against God's will. Nevertheless, he does not resist the divine will, which places the sin and the sinner under

⁵³ *ST I*, q. 19, a. 9, ad 3.

⁵⁴ *ST I*, q. 103, a. 8.

⁵⁵ *ST I*, q. 103, a. 7.

another divine order. God accomplishes his will even in those situations in which the particular causes that he sets in motion are obstructed by an obstacle that he himself does not place.

Because God is outside the temporal order, we can never fully understand how God achieves his will. For causes besides the will, we can recognize that God himself can choose to place an obstacle or he can choose to assure that no obstacles will be placed. We often achieve our own wills in precisely this manner. Molinism makes the mistake of applying the same reasoning to the will. In the case of the will, however, God cannot achieve his will in this manner, because the human will itself places or does not place an obstacle to the divine movement.

In order to avoid Molinism, one might suppose that God achieves his will by a special kind of movement, by an infallible physical pre-motion, realized at the supernatural level in the form of efficacious grace. When this movement is declared not to be special but to be the ordinary way in which God moves creatures, then the whole structure of divine providence, which achieves its goals by way of sufficient causes that fit within the entirety of causes, is lost.

The enigma of the will leaves our minds affirming certain truths without understanding the manner in which they are all true. We recognize that God himself does not place an obstacle to the movement of the will; only the sinner himself places the obstacle. We also recognize that God still submits the sinner and his sin to his divine will. This submission need not arise from a particular cause that moves the will toward sin. It need not arise from a created cause that is infallible; nor need it arise from the withholding of such causes.

We recognize that when no obstacle is placed, then the sufficient movement that God has placed in the will achieves its goal. We also recognize that God is outside time, so that he is equally present to the initial sufficient movement and to its achievement. Without the addition of a special created cause, then, the divine will is accomplished with certainty.

Beginning with the difficult case of the will, one might be tempted to escape from this enigma by making a particular cause, efficacious grace, that is both needed for a good action and is never resisted for a good action. When this particular cause is withheld, then sin follows necessarily (or one might say “in all cases,” if one wishes to avoid the word “necessarily”).⁵⁶ Nevertheless, sin follows contingently, because God wills that it be so (that is,

⁵⁶ O'Neill, *Grace*, 41–43; Long, “Providence,” 587–88.

God wills that it be contingent). Having made this inauspicious beginning, one might take this model of causality and apply it to all created movement.

One might also apply this model when approaching texts of Aquinas. Article 4 of question 10 in *Summa theologiae* I-II, for instance, asks whether God moves the will from necessity. This article can be read in two distinct ways, depending upon which model of contingent causes one has in hand when approaching it. According to the model of efficacious grace, God moves things with infallible physical pre-motions but their actions and effects are nevertheless contingent because God wills them to be so. According to the model of sufficient causes, God moves creatures beyond themselves in such a way that they can be impeded by another created cause.

In the corpus, Thomas says,

It does not belong to divine providence to destroy nature but to preserve it. Therefore, God moves everything according to its condition, so that by way of the divine motion from necessary causes the effects follow from necessity and from contingent causes the effects follow contingently. Since the will is an active principle that is not determined to one but relates indifferently to many, God so moves it that it is not determined from necessity to one but its motion remains contingent and not necessary, except in those things to which it is naturally moved.⁵⁷

Through the lens of the first model, someone might conclude that God moves the will infallibly to some particular action but nevertheless the action is contingent. With the second model, one might suppose that God does not move the will infallibly, since that is not according to the nature of the will; rather, he moves the will as a sufficient cause that might fail.

All of the replies to the objections, as well, can bear these dual readings. The first reply reads,

The divine will extends not only to [the fact that] something is done by the thing that it moves but also to [the fact that] it is done in the manner fitting to the nature of the thing. Therefore, it would be more repugnant to the divine motion if the will were moved from necessity—which would not be fitting to its nature—than if it were moved freely, as is fitting to its nature.

⁵⁷ *ST* I-II, q. 10, a. 4.

Through the lens of the model of efficacious grace, this reply means that God moves the will infallibly to a certain action but that action is nevertheless contingent. Without the lens, it simply means that God moves the will to some action contingently, such that it can be impeded.

In the second reply, only the last line need concern us. It reads, “God wills that it is natural for everything to be subject to the divine power.” Given the model of infallible physical pre-motion, “being subject to the divine power” means being moved infallibly. Without this lens, the phrase simply means that God moves something according to its nature, which is sometimes to move contingently—with the possibility of some obstacle—rather than infallibly. As noted above, of course, God—who sits outside time and wills both the sufficient cause and its achievement (realized when no obstacle is placed)—might still achieve his will infallibly, although the creature is moved fallibly.

Finally, it is worth considering the third reply in greater detail, for in it Aquinas introduces the distinction between the composite and divided senses of necessity, the distinction used by the first inadequate argument. Aquinas says, “If God moves the will to something, it is impossible, given this supposition, that the will is not moved to it. Nevertheless, it is not impossible simply speaking. Therefore, it does not follow that the will is moved of necessity by God.”

Depending upon the model of contingent causality used, this text has two quite distinct meanings. On the model in line with efficacious grace, God moves the will infallibly to something, but the only necessity involved is conditional. Necessarily, given that God moves Jerry to take medicine, Jerry wills to take medicine. Nevertheless, Jerry does not will to take medicine of necessity.

On the model of contingent causality in line with sufficient causes that can be impeded, God does not move the will infallibly. Rather, he moves Jerry to take medicine much as he moves the fire to heat. He gives the fire an impetus to move out beyond itself, to give its heat to something else. This movement, however, can be impeded. What God infallibly achieves, through this movement, is the impetus within the fire. The actual heating of the water does not follow infallibly from this movement, since it might be impeded through some insulating obstacle. Of course, if God wishes the water to be heated, then he can achieve it infallibly by assuring that no obstacles are in the way. He does not achieve his will infallibly by making the very movement of the fire infallible; he achieves it because he is the first cause of all causes, including potential obstacles.

God moves Jerry to take medicine by way of the desire to seek health. Just

as the impetus of the fire moves beyond itself but can be impeded, so the desire for health moves beyond itself to the desire for the means for health, but it can be impeded. Suppose that Jerry places no obstacle, and he proceeds to desire to take medicine, but suppose that he has diverse medicines that he might take. He must further determine which medicine to take. Now he has another impetus moving beyond itself. He has the desire to take medicine moving beyond itself to the desire for some particular medicine. Once again, this movement can be impeded. This pattern is followed—as it is with any chain of ends and means—until Jerry comes to some first action that he must choose.⁵⁸

At each step, the desire is in the will only because God so moves the will. And at each step (until the last), the desire is moving beyond itself to another desire. But at each step, this movement can be impeded. If it is not impeded, then the chain continues. If it is impeded, then the movement does not reach the next contingent effect (which is another desire in the will).

Consider the middle step in the chain above, the step in which Jerry desires to take medicine (but has not yet determined which particular medicine). When considered in relation to God's movement, this step might be characterized in two ways. On the one hand, God is moving Jerry to this very desire, that is, to the desire to take medicine. On the other hand, God is moving Jerry—in this desire—to a further desire (the desire for some particular medicine).

The reply to the third objection can be viewed in terms of either of these characterizations. Viewed in terms of the first characterization, it is impossible—given that God is moving Jerry to this desire—for Jerry not to have the desire. On the other hand, since God moved Jerry to this desire only by way of the first desire (the desire for health), which could have been impeded, it is not impossible, simply speaking, for Jerry not to have this desire. God moved Jerry to this desire by way of a sufficient cause, namely, by way of Jerry's desire for health. Since Jerry placed no obstacle, this movement was not impeded; consequently, it achieved its object, which is the desire currently under consideration, the desire to take medicine. This desire did not happen from necessity.

Nevertheless, God can achieve his will with certainty. Because he is outside time, willing both the initial desire and its achievement, he has no need to place a cause within creation that is prior to the achievement but

⁵⁸ For a more detailed account of the interplay between reason and the will, see Steven J. Jensen, *Sin: A Thomistic Psychology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 238–84.

attains it infallibly. He can move two separate wills to the same good action, and he can move them by the exact same kind of created causes, causes that are sufficient and can be impeded. One will places an obstacle, the other does not. He still submits the first will (which placed an obstacle) to his own will by placing it under another order within creation, such as punishment. For the second will (which did not place an obstacle), he can still achieve his will with certainty but not because he has placed a different kind of cause. No new cause is needed, since the initial movement was sufficient to achieve the good action. As Aquinas notes, operating and cooperating grace are not two different graces; they are the same grace considered with regard to different effects.⁵⁹ Nothing new in creation is needed, then, to realize the goal. And nothing new in creation is needed to make the goal certain, for within creation it is not certain but contingent. Its certainty lies within God's eternal will.

In light of God's movement, Jerry's desire to take medicine can also be viewed as God's movement to the further desire, that is, the desire for some particular medicine. Viewed in terms of this second characterization, it is impossible—given that God is moving Jerry to the desire for some particular medicine—that Jerry is not moved to the desire for some particular medicine. On the other hand, God is moving Jerry to this desire (for some particular medicine) in such a way that it can be impeded. Jerry is not moved, therefore, of necessity.

The first of these two possibilities fits more precisely with what Aquinas actually says. In either event, however, the passage does not take on the meaning that follows from the model of efficacious grace. In either event, God does not move the will infallibly. He moves it according to its nature, which is contingently, such that it can be impeded.

When God moves Jerry to some particular desire, then, he does so by way of a prior desire, and this prior desire is a contingent cause. It is a sufficient cause that can be impeded. When no obstacle is placed, then the subsequent desire is realized, but only contingently, since it arose from a cause that could have been impeded.

Argument 6: Sufficient Grace Preserves Freedom

We will close with a final inadequate argument in defense of the Consistency Thesis. This argument involves another kind of grace, namely, sufficient grace. By this grace, someone has enough grace to perform the good action.

⁵⁹ *ST* I-II, q. 111, a. 2, ad 4.

When Jerry is given sufficient grace, for instance, he has enough to perform the good action of helping Jane. At this point, it is up to him whether he acts according to the sufficient grace or not. It is his choice whether he will reject God's grace. With his free will, he makes the determination.

Just as stated, this account certainly seems to leave room for free will. Indeed, it closely parallels the alternate account given above. Sufficient grace, however, does not tell the full story. As it turns out, Jerry will in fact act upon the sufficient grace only if God also gives him efficacious grace.⁶⁰ Furthermore, if God gives him efficacious grace, then necessarily (or infallibly) Jerry will act upon the sufficient grace. The introduction of efficacious grace as a necessary element in the good action is what poses the problem. It seems to undermine Jerry's free will. Indeed, it seems to undermine the sufficiency of the sufficient grace. The sufficient grace is not in fact enough for Jerry to do the good deed; he also needs efficacious grace.

The word "sufficient" overlaps with the terminology of sufficient cause, discussed above, but it is not clear whether the two ideas—of sufficient grace and sufficient cause—have any overlap beyond the verbal.

We might find within Aquinas's operative grace a sufficient cause, but it does not follow that it is a sufficient grace, as described above. Aquinas's operative actual grace can act in much the same way as natural desires.⁶¹ God gives Jerry a natural desire for health, but he can also give Jerry a supernatural desire for the beatific vision. Or he might give Jerry a supernatural desire for a particular good deed, such as helping Jane in need.⁶² These desires, while sufficient for the good action, are contingent. Jerry might place an obstacle. He might act under some other desire besides the desire arising from grace, such as the desire to avoid inconvenience. The operative grace, then, might not lead to the meritorious action. Nevertheless, it is enough. In itself, it has what it takes to bring about the good action, although an obstacle might prevent its realization.

The sufficient grace described above, which is a kind of correlative of efficacious grace, is another matter. It does not have enough to bring about the meritorious action. Rather, an additional grace—an efficacious grace—is needed for the meritorious action. Supposedly, the sufficient grace makes

⁶⁰ O'Neill, *Grace*, 78–80.

⁶¹ See Maritain, *God and Permission of Evil*; Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, trans. Lewis Galantieri and Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Pantheon, 1948); Lawrence Feingold, "God's Movement of the Soul through Operative and Cooperative Grace," in Long et al., *Thomism and Predestination*, 166–91.

⁶² *ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 6, ad 3.

Jerry able to perform the action. The ability, however, is only a passive potential, not an active potential.

The idea may be conveyed with the following analogy. Ben is able to stand in the sense that he is able to be lifted into a standing position by Hanna. His potential is entirely passive. But now let us suppose he is not able to stand even in this passive sense; he is completely rigid, so that he cannot even be moved by another into a standing position. Hanna is able to shake him, however, and loosen his joints, so that thereafter he can be lifted into a standing position. In this manner, she gives him the passive potential to stand. It is passive because he still cannot stand on his own but must be lifted by Hanna. He is, nevertheless, one step closer to standing. At least he is able to stand in the passive sense. The shaking up is like sufficient grace. It does make Ben able to stand (that is, perform a meritorious action), but it does not give him an active potential to stand.

In contrast, Reed has an active potential by which he can stand. Let us go further and say that this active potential is already moving him into a standing position, even as the weight of a rock is moving it downward and the impetus of fire is moving it outward to heat other objects. By this active potential, Reed will stand unless some obstacle is placed in the way. Perhaps a bar might be placed in the way, preventing his upward movement. If Reed himself places the bar, then we have an analogy for Aquinas's operative grace. God gives Reed a movement to the meritorious action (standing), which will reach fulfillment as long as Reed himself does not place an obstacle in the way.

This operating grace can truly be called sufficient. The sufficient grace described at the beginning of this section, on the other hand, is sufficient in name alone.⁶³ It is not, in fact, enough for the good action. It is only a passive potential to receive the good action. If Hanna shakes Ben (gives him sufficient grace) but does not lift him into a standing position (give him efficacious grace), then he cannot stand. The further thing needed to put him into a standing position is not given. This notion of sufficient grace, then, is inadequate to defend human freedom.

Given this inadequate notion of sufficient grace, efficacious grace becomes determinative.⁶⁴ A passive potential is contingent, but lacking a movement outward, it can only receive its actuality. It cannot give the actuality it has

⁶³ See Torre, *God's Permission*, 217.

⁶⁴ O'Neill, *Grace*, 76.

(which in fact is only potentiality) to anything else. Such a passive potential has nothing of its own leading to action. It can only receive an action.⁶⁵

When the supernatural analysis is carried over into the natural domain, so that the human will is always moved passively, the way that a chess piece is moved across the chessboard, then human free will appears to be lost not only at the supernatural level but at the natural level as well. Sufficient grace that is not enough—sufficient grace in name alone—is the destruction of free will. When carried over into the domain of all nature, this passive movement transforms the secondary causality of nature into the impotent potentiality to receive; the active potential to give has been lost.

Conclusion

On the face of it, efficacious grace is inconsistent with free will. Several authors, however, have presented arguments that suggests the consistency between efficacious grace and free will, which we have called the Consistency Thesis. This paper has examined six of these arguments and has found all of them wanting. They are not adequate by themselves, nor cumulatively, to defend the Consistency Thesis.

The fallible movements of the human will should not lead us to doubt the love of God. On the contrary, they should assure us that God does not simply decide to refuse us his grace, independent of our own sin. His grace is always flowing and drawing us sweetly to himself. N.V.

⁶⁵ Sufficient grace, it will be insisted, does indeed give the capacity for the good action. It is just that the person will not realize this capacity unless God wills it, which he wills by way of efficacious grace. Indeed, God will always give efficacious grace as long as the person does not resist sufficient grace (Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 238–39). The capacity is there within the sufficient grace (O’Neill, *Grace*, 146). These statements concerning sufficient grace have the appearance of a desperate attempt to keep the sufficiency despite the fact that efficacious grace has taken all the sufficiency for itself.

“An Encyclopedic Pico della Mirandola”? Rethinking Aquinas on Christ’s Infused Knowledge

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Introduction

In what has come to be known as Thomas’s account of the triple knowledge of Christ, the infused knowledge holds a tenuous place. It stands awkwardly between two kinds of knowledge, beatific and acquired, which are explicitly linked to the fulfillment of Christ’s redemptive mission.¹ Christ’s earthly

¹ For an excellent review of the complexities involved in the debate over Christ’s infused knowledge, see Simon Gaine, “Is There Still a Place for Christ’s Infused Knowledge in Catholic Theology and Exegesis?,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 16, no. 2 (2018): 601–15. Gaine nods at the sort of interpretation of Aquinas that I provide below and is clear that contemporary arguments for Christ’s infused knowledge are not, in fact, the same as Saint Thomas’s argument. In his article, Gaine adopts a view that shares some commonality with the views I criticize below, but with the crucial difference that he offers his position as a constructive account that goes *beyond* Aquinas’s text. Specifically, he aims to understand the interplay between the beatific and infused knowledge, and more specifically, the role that the infused knowledge plays in Christ’s earthly teaching. In this regard, his work aims at a more distinct end than the present article, which leaves to the side the vital question of how the infused knowledge functions in Christ’s earthly ministry. Further, Gaine gestures at a solution to the question of the role of the infused knowledge which is consonant with this article’s argument: “This solution lies in the fact that infused knowledge, unformed in our minds by ourselves and obviously not derived from a beatific vision that we do not yet possess, would seem to be part of the charismatic life of God’s people. . . . Just as the beatific vision of the members of the Body depends on the beatific vision of Christ, the Head and Savior, just as the sanctifying grace of the members depends on the sanctifying grace of the Head, so we may suppose that the infused knowledge in the minds of some members depends somehow on the

beatific knowledge, controverted though it may be, nevertheless has for Thomas a definite soteriological end.² As the author of salvation, Christ, from the moment of conception, had to possess *in actu* the very knowledge to which he was to lead the rest of humanity, namely, the supernatural and beatific knowledge of the divine essence and of all things in it. Christ's acquired knowledge is also ordered to our salvation; it is necessary on account of exigencies arising from the integrity of human nature. In the assumption of a complete human nature, it was necessary for Christ to possess acquired knowledge, for without an agent intellect having its proper operation (i.e., abstracting intelligible species from phantasms arising from the senses), Christ's humanity would have been incomplete, imperfect.³ Thus, according to the patristic dictum that what is not assumed is not redeemed, Christ's redemption of human nature would have been imperfect. In contrast to these two types of knowledge, it is not clear whether and how the infused knowledge contributes to human salvation. Unlike the beatific knowledge, the infused knowledge does not belong intrinsically to the state of the *comprehensor*, for beatitude does not consist in a knowledge of created things in themselves, but in God;⁴ and unlike the acquired knowledge, the infused knowledge is not necessary for the assumption of an integral human nature.⁵ Add to this Thomas's passing description of Christ's infused knowledge as "proportioned to the angelic nature," encompassing all intelligible species of things knowable through nature and through the light of grace. In this vein, the infused knowledge threatens to transform Christ into a caricature of a man—turning Christ into what É. H. Wéber has disparagingly called an "encyclopedic Pico della Mirandola."⁶

fact of infused knowledge in the mind of the Head" (613–14).

- ² For more on Christ's beatific knowledge, see my article "The Necessity of Beatific Knowledge in Christ's Humanity: A Re-Reading of *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 9," *The Thomist* 86, no. 4 (2022): in production.
- ³ On the acquired knowledge, see Kevin Madigan, "Did Jesus 'Progress in Wisdom'? Thomas Aquinas on Luke 2:52 in Ancient and High-Medieval Christology," *Traditio* 52 (1997): 179–200.
- ⁴ See Augustine, *Confessions* 5.4.7: "Lord God of truth, surely the person with a scientific knowledge of nature is not pleasing to you on that ground alone. The person who knows all those matters but is ignorant of you is unhappy. The person who knows you, even if ignorant of natural science, is happy. Indeed the one who knows both you and nature is not on that account happier" (trans. Henry Chadwick [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998]).
- ⁵ Philippe-Marie Margelidon, "La science infuse du Christ selon saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue thomiste* 114 (2014), 379–416, at 379. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own (both the modern French and the Scholastic and other Latin).
- ⁶ É.-H. Wéber, *Le Christ selon Saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Desclée, 1988), 224: "When

Herein lies the problem. Given the acquired and beatific knowledge, what use is there for the infused knowledge? The knowledge of all that can be known by nature is already attributed to Christ through his acquired knowledge; further, the knowledge of all the mysteries of grace is accessible to Christ through his beatific knowledge of God and all things *in Verbo*. While humans, as *viatores*, gain knowledge through the senses, and, as *comprehensores*, behold God through an elevation of the soul through glory, it is unclear whether a third kind of knowledge, the infused knowledge, is necessary and, if so, to what end. If, according to the Scholastic dictum, God and nature do nothing in vain, what sense can be made of Christ's infused knowledge?

At least since the seventeenth century, Thomists have typically sought to resolve this tension by appealing to the unique role of infused knowledge in Christ's *earthly transmission* of knowledge. Thus, the infused knowledge fills a gap between the beatific and acquired modes of knowing, providing Christ's soul with a mode of knowledge which enables him to communicate supernatural truths, the *mysteria gratiae*,⁷ otherwise known in the blessed vision of the Word, through created and, therefore, humanly *communicable* intelligible species. Christ's acquired knowledge, restricted to what is naturally knowable, is insufficient to lead "many brothers to glory," while the beatific knowledge, though saving, nevertheless remains unconceptualizable and therefore incommunicable in mode.⁸ According to this view, therefore, the necessity of the infused knowledge arises as a bridge of continuity between the beatific and acquired knowledge, enabling Christ to communicate the truth of the kingdom of God in a way that is proportioned to the human nature *in via*.

Such an account has two clear points in its favor. First, by highlighting the gulf between the beatific and acquired modes of knowledge, it makes room for a distinct, third mode of knowledge. Second, and related to the first point, by accounting for the infused knowledge based on its function in Christ's earthly ministry, this account clarifies the scope and purpose of

he designates the object of this knowledge in the entirety of truth discernable by the agent intellect proper to man, our theologian thinks nothing, contrary to the scholastics of the Renaissance and of the rationalist epoch, of an encyclopedic Pico della Mirandola. As the immediate context indicates, it is a question above all, for Christ the Revealer of God, Judge of all men, and Head of the Mystical Body (integrating even the angelic spirits), of the knowledge of 'hearts,' that is, of created persons in their choice concerning salvation."

⁷ See Aquinas, *Compendium theologiae* [CT] I, ch. 216.

⁸ Margelidon speaks of this continuity ("La infuse science," 409).

the infused knowledge, enabling an amendment to Thomas's insufficiently human portrait of Christ: through the infused knowledge Christ is given only that knowledge necessary for his earthly ministry. The infused knowledge thus has an immediate analogue in the gratuitous gift of prophecy, with the key difference that it is an abiding form, a permanent and stable *habitus*, not merely a *habilitas*.⁹ In this way, the disciple of Thomas avoids turning Christ into an encyclopedic Pico.

This interpretation (hereafter referred to as the "earthly utility account") provides a clear *ratio* for Christ's infused knowledge: the infused knowledge translates the unconceptualizable knowledge of things in the Word for the sake of the communication of supernatural truth in Christ's earthly life. While providing an appealing reason for the necessity of Christ's infused knowledge, however, the earthly utility account encounters two significant difficulties. First, there is little in the text of Saint Thomas to support such a reading. This is made clear by the various arguments Saint Thomas posits in favor of the infused knowledge. In the absence of texts, proponents of the earthly utility account are forced to rely on the subtlest "hints" and "clues" in the development of Thomas's thought to render their reading plausible.¹⁰ Second, and more seriously, the earthly utility account contradicts Saint Thomas's explicit argument for Christ's infused knowledge. Relying on Aristotle,¹¹ Saint Thomas argues for Christ's infused knowledge based on the natural potency of the human intellect to become all things. Any unactualized potency of the possible intellect (with respect to the possession of all intelligible species *in habitu*) would represent an imperfection in Christ's human nature.¹² To be clear, this is an argument from perfection. According to Saint Thomas, it was necessary that Christ, "in order not to be imperfect," possess this knowledge in its fullness, possessing the intelligible species of *all* things. Theologians are justified in their concern that such an argument relies on extra-biblical notions of perfection rather than the text of Scripture

⁹ See *ST* II-II, q. 171, a. 2. See also Margelidon, "La science infuse," 395–97.

¹⁰ See Jean-Pierre Torrell, "S. Thomas d'Aquin et la science du Christ: une relecture des questions 9–12 de la *tertia pars* de la *Somme de théologie*," in *Publié avec le concours du Centre National des Lettres: colloque du centenaire de la Revue thomiste, Toulouse, 25–28 mars 1993*, ed. Serge-Thomas Bonino (Paris: Édition Saint-Paul, 1994): 349–409, at 404–9.

¹¹ See Aristotle, *De anima* 3.4–5.

¹² It is important to note that the possession of all intelligible species *in actu* through the infused knowledge is distinct from Christ's soul knowing all the infused species according to second act, i.e., in operation. Thus, *in actu* in the context of Christ's infused knowledge refers to the actualization of the possible intellect with respect to the possession of intelligible species *in habitu*.

itself.¹³ Yet, by so quickly retreating to an account that lacks any real textual basis in Aquinas's work, it is possible and indeed likely that we risk missing an important insight in the Angelic Doctor's thought.

In this paper I argue that the earthly utility account obscures a more fundamental Christological basis for Thomas's teaching on the infused knowledge of Christ. By grounding the necessity of Christ's infused knowledge most proximately in his earthly ministry (i.e., the knowledge implied in his proclamation of the kingdom, his supernatural knowledge of things occurring at a distance, of the secret of men's hearts, etc.), interpreters of Saint Thomas have overlooked the central role of Christ's humanity as the source of grace, as the head of the Church. The perfection of Christ's knowledge is not only necessary for what Christ says and does in his earthly life (i.e., in his earthly communication of truth through human words); more fundamentally, it is necessary for the role that the humanity of Christ plays, from the first instant of conception, as the instrument of the divinity, communicating grace to all the members of his body according to every time and place. This is a function of Christ's headship as the universal source of all grace. "From his fullness we have all received, grace for grace" (John 1:16). According to Saint Thomas, it is by possessing the fullness of grace and truth that Christ in his humanity can be the cause of grace and all its effects in those who are *in via*.

After summarizing the contemporary approach, I show how Aquinas's broader account of Christ's grace as head, his capital grace, provides the framework for understanding why it was necessary for Christ to possess the infused knowledge of all things.¹⁴ As the universal cause of grace, Christ must possess *in actu* that which he brings about in others. In this context, the argument from perfection provides an explanatory basis for the role of Christ's humanity as the cause and source of all graces bestowed on humanity. If Christ must possess the beatific vision *in actu* in order to reduce it from potency to act in *comprehensores*, he must similarly possess the fullness of grace and graced knowledge (i.e., the infused knowledge) by which he

¹³ For an explanation of Saint Thomas's appeals to perfection, see Joshua H. Lim, "The Principle of Perfection in Thirteenth-Century Accounts of Christ's Human Knowledge," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 24, no. 3 (2022): 352–79.

¹⁴ As has been noted by Theophil Thschipke, the instrumentality of Christ's humanity is one of Saint Thomas's major Christological developments (*L'humanité du Christ comme instrument de salut de la divinité*, trans. Philibert Secrétan [Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2003]). Thomas's account of Christ's fullness of grace and truth can be understood as providing the conditions for Christ's humanity as instrument such that, through his *acta et passa*, treated later in the *tertia pars*, he is capable of bringing about salvation; see *ST* III, 48, a. 6, corp.

leads *viatores* to this end. Since the effects of grace through the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the gratuitous graces encompass the natural knowledge of all things, such knowledge must also already be present in Christ the head, for Christ's humanity, as the instrument of the divinity, is the source of all the graces received by the members of Christ's body in every time, place, and state.

Two Variations of an Account for Christ's Infused Knowledge from Earthly Utility: Jean-Pierre Torrell and Philippe-Marie Margelidon

As Simon Gainé notes, the earthly utility account likely finds its origin in John of Saint Thomas (Jean Poincot).¹⁵ This reading appears to have arisen initially as a complement to Saint Thomas's argument from perfection. Unlike the argument from perfection, Poincot's argument from earthly utility had the advantage of more clearly highlighting one obvious function of Christ's infused knowledge in his earthly life. Yet, as Gainé states, even Poincot seems to have considered Saint Thomas's argument from perfection to be the superior argument. At some point, the distinction among accounts was lost, such that the two arguments appeared to be variations of one and the same account.¹⁶ Eventually, Poincot's complementary account would eclipse Saint Thomas's own argument, such that the argument from perfection would come to be seen as a variation of the earthly utility argument based upon fittingness, ultimately dependent upon medieval notions of

¹⁵ This approach to the necessity of Christ's infused knowledge (though it is also applied with respect to Christ's beatific and acquired knowledge by many Thomists), is often treated as Aquinas's own. In fact, this way of reading Aquinas appears probably in the seventeenth century with John of St. Thomas (Jean Poincot). See Gainé, "Is There Still a Place?" 605: "Hence, in the seventeenth century, the commentator John of St. Thomas (Jean Poincot) added his own explanation of Christ's infused knowledge by way of his teaching needs to Aquinas's argument for infused knowledge from the mind's required perfection, together with another argument of his (Poincot's) own from Christ's meritorious acts, which were said to be largely of a kind to require regulation by a supernatural knowledge beyond the beatific vision. Though Poincot counted Aquinas's argument from perfection as the 'best' one of the three, perhaps regarding it as straightforwardly best in terms of proof, he seems nevertheless to have regarded his own argument as at least having the advantage of being clearer in regard to the actual workings of knowledge and meritorious activity in Christ's earthly life."

¹⁶ Gainé explains how Poincot's three arguments becomes one argument in Reginald-Garrigou Lagrange: "While he agreed that infused knowledge answered to Christ's teaching needs, Garrigou-Lagrange presented this not as a distinct argument for this knowledge, *but merely as a clarification of Aquinas's own argument from perfection*" ("Is There Still a Place?" 606).

perfection judged alien to Scripture. Among modern Thomists, undoubtedly influenced by concerns surrounding the historical Jesus, Poinson's complementary account would displace Saint Thomas's argument from perfection, its main advantage being to significantly limit the scope of Christ's infused knowledge, rendering him more obviously "like unto us in all things except sin." It is the more recent version of the earthly utility account that is the focus of my critique.

The "Christic" Knowledge: Torrell

The most concise version of the earthly utility account is found in the work of Jean-Pierre Torrell. According to Torrell, the infused knowledge is distinct from the ineffable and unconceptualizable knowledge of vision and functions within Christ's triple knowledge to enable Christ to know and communicate divine truths in a way that is proportioned to his human mind.¹⁷ Without the infused knowledge "the soul of Christ would have had no use of any humanly transmissible knowledge."¹⁸ It is only through the immediate gift of divinely infused species that "the humanity of Christ was able to accomplish his mission and express in human language the message of which he is the bearer."¹⁹

Against the backdrop of modern concerns to highlight the full authenticity of Christ's humanity, the earthly utility account has come to be contrasted explicitly with Thomas's own argument from perfection. Thus, Édouard-Henri Wéber depicts the Salamanticensian account of Christ's perfection in infused knowledge as portraying the Savior as "an encyclopedic Pico della Mirandola."²⁰ According to the Renaissance Scholastics, who took the argument from perfection to its logical conclusion, Christ is the greatest philosopher, musician, scientist, doctor, and so on. As Torrell notes, this could hardly have been Saint Thomas's intention. Against such a view, modern interpreters see in the earthly utility approach a path that leads us towards not only a more realistic, more recognizably human portrait of Christ, but one that is, in fact, more faithful to Saint Thomas's true intention.

¹⁷ *ST* III, q. 9, a. 3, corp., quoted in Torrell, "S. Thomas d'Aquin," 396.

¹⁸ Torrell, "S. Thomas d'Aquin," 397.

¹⁹ Torrell, "S. Thomas d'Aquin," 397.

²⁰ See Wéber, *Le Christ*, 224. This is repeated by Torrell, "S. Thomas d'Aquin," 397; Margelidon, "La science," 396; and Charles Rochas, *La science bienheureuse du Christ simul viator et comprehensor: selon les commentaires bibliques et la Summa theologiae de saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Cerf, 2019), 121. Torrell's description of the Salamanticensian view is illuminating: "Christ must be considered not only as the great dialectician, philosopher, mathematician, doctor, moralist, or politician, but even as the great orator, musician, painter, farmer, sailor, etc." ("S. Thomas d'Aquin," 397n2).

Notably, Torrell and others attempt to preserve the intention of the Angelic Doctor by moving away from his stated argument from perfection, thereby limiting Christ's infused knowledge only to those truths (i.e., the *mysteria gratiae*) which are strictly necessary for the accomplishment of his earthly mission. For all intents and purposes, this has become the standard account among recent Thomists, even the most ardent defenders of Saint Thomas's doctrine of Christ's earthly beatific knowledge.²¹ Christ did not need to know all that can be known through his infused knowledge, as the Salamanticenses mistakenly thought; rather, in Torrell's words, he required only that knowledge which belongs to the "religious domain."

In order to bypass Saint Thomas's explicit argument, proponents of the earthly utility account are forced to look to clues arising from the development of Saint Thomas's doctrine. For his part, Torrell finds indications of this

²¹ See Jacques Maritain, *On the Grace and Humanity of Jesus*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 89–125. Maritain writes: "In order that Christ as viator might express to Himself, say to Himself, in His consciousness of man like unto us, His infused science (caused in His soul *ex unione ad Verbum*, III, 12, 2, ad 3), it was necessary that this infused science not find itself only in the supraconscious paradise of the soul of Christ; it was necessary also that, in proportion as the sphere of the consciousness or of the here-below of the soul of Christ forms itself, His infused science hold sway in this other sphere, where it is subject to the regime connatural to the human soul and where, in order to translate into a properly human lexicon its infused ideative forms, more angelic than human, it could use instrumentally concepts formed under the light of the agent intellect, and without which we cannot speak to ourselves" (94–95). See also Thomas Joseph White, *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017), 257: "As Aquinas and many Thomists after him have rightly insisted, then, the knowledge of Christ's vision is 'communicated' to his ordinary human consciousness through the medium of a so-called infused prophetic science." Commenting on Aquinas's argument that Christ knew all things through his acquired knowledge, White suggests it best to restrict the infused and acquired knowledge to what was necessary for his earthly mission (355n41). Other Thomists follow suit: Rochas, *La science bienheureuse*; Jeremy D. Wilkins, *Before Truth: Lonergan, Aquinas, and the Problem of Wisdom* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 316–51; Romanus Cessario, "Incarnate Wisdom and the Immediacy of Christ's Salvific Knowledge," in *Problemi teologici alla luce dell' Aquinate (Atti del IX Congresso Tomistico Internazionale)*, Studi Tomistici 44 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1991), 334–40; Guy Mansini, "Understanding St. Thomas on Christ's Immediate Knowledge of God," *The Thomist* 59, no. 1 (1995): 91–124; Marie-Joseph Nicolas, "Voir Dieu dans la 'condition charnelle,'" *Doctor Communis* 36 (1983): 384–394, at 392; Bernard Lonergan, *The Ontological and Psychological Constitution of Christ*, vol. 7, ed. Michael Shields, Frederick Crowe, S. J., and Robert Doran S. J. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Wéber, *Le Christ*, 224–25; Paweł Klimczak, *Christus Magister: le Christ Maître dans les commentaires évangéliques de saint Thomas d' Aquin*, 117 (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2013), 91–111.

in perceived "hesitations" in the trajectory of the development of Thomas's teaching.²² Torrell points to the change from Thomas's earlier account in the commentary on Lombard's *Sentences* (the *Scriptum*) and *De veritate* (*DV*) to the later account found in the *Compendium theologiae* (*CT*) and the *Summa theologiae* (*ST*). In the earlier works, Thomas clearly limits the scope of Christ's infused knowledge to what is naturally knowable. Later, however, he expands the scope of the infused knowledge to encompass even supernatural knowledge, what he calls, in the *CT*, the knowledge of the mysteries of grace. Accordingly, Torrell views the mature emphasis on the supernatural content of Christ's infused knowledge as revealing Saint Thomas's true intention. Specifically, Torrell sees the purpose of the infused knowledge as pertaining not to the perfection of Christ's possible intellect as such (Thomas's primary argument), but to the knowledge of supernatural truth for the sake of its earthly communication. Torrell finds confirmation of this most of all in the *tertia pars* of the *ST*, where Saint Thomas spells out the scope of the infused knowledge specifically in terms of the *mysteria gratiae*. Christ knew "all that men know by divine revelation, that which arises from the gift of wisdom, or from the gift of prophecy, or from any other gift of the Holy Spirit."²³

The argument from the perfection of the possible intellect, consistently present throughout Thomas's intellectual career, is not to be understood as his primary argument, but as a *post facto* argument from fittingness. Based on Torrell's interpretation, the disciple of Saint Thomas is more faithful to the master's intention by bracketing the maximalist argument from perfection, thereby precluding the embarrassing consequence of Christ as an astrophysicist, or expert climate scientist. "We are on the wrong track," Torrell writes, "if we imagine that this is a matter of allowing Christ's human soul to know all that can be known. It is rather a question of providing him with a knowledge of God and of divine things *in a human mode*."²⁴ Having identified the true reason for Christ's infused knowledge, Torrell and others think it possible and indeed salutary to dispense with the argument from perfection as an uncritically accepted assumption from an extra-biblical, philosophical *a priori*.²⁵

²² See Torrell, "S. Thomas d'Aquin," 404 (esp. the section "Les hésitations de S. Thomas").

²³ *ST* III, q. 11, a. 1, quoted in Torrell, "S. Thomas d'Aquin," 397.

²⁴ Torrell, "S. Thomas d'Aquin," 403. Torrell states that without the infused knowledge Christ would have been "completely helpless in the religious domain."

²⁵ It is precisely on this basis that Jean Galot criticizes Aquinas's teaching of the triple knowledge of Christ. See Jean Galot, "La Christ terrestre et la vision," *Gregorianum* 67 no. 3 (1986): 429–50. See also Maritain, *On the Grace and Humanity of Jesus*, 47–48.

Margelidon on the Adamic Parallel for Christ's Infused Knowledge

While many have followed in Torrell's footsteps, some have sought to do so while nevertheless acknowledging some theological basis for Thomas's argument from perfection. One such attempt can be found in Philippe-Marie Margelidon's article "La science infuse du Christ selon saint Thomas d'Aquin."²⁶ Margelidon rightly sees that the doctrine of Saint Thomas is not one simply inherited from the Scholastic tradition, but that, "as with everything he receives, [Thomas] seeks to ground and justify it (by reasons of fittingness) as much as possible in the light of the mystery of Christ, the revealer, doctor, and master."²⁷ In contrast to Torrell, Margelidon recognizes that Saint Thomas never argues for the necessity of Christ's infused knowledge from the ineffability of the knowledge of vision.²⁸ Its existence must be justified by recourse to a distinct *ratio*. While Margelidon ultimately concludes to a position similar to that of Torrell, the way that he arrives there provides an insight which enables us to understand Saint Thomas more accurately. For our purposes, Margelidon's key insight is to see the basis for Aquinas's argument from perfection in a comparison to the first man, Adam.²⁹

As the New Adam, Christ possesses a greater perfection than the first Adam, whose infused knowledge had as its express purpose the fulfillment of his earthly role as principle and governor of the human race. Margelidon writes: "The idea, shared by Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, and others, is that Christ the new Adam must possess the perfection of the knowledge of Adam before sin, a mode of knowledge superior to the common, experimental mode, namely, the infused mode [*indita*]."³⁰ Notably, Margelidon sees Aquinas as intentionally restricting the full scope of Adam's infused knowledge with a view to Christ's relatively greater perfection. Margelidon thus sees the perfection argument as proximately grounded in the comparison to Adam.

The primary text for Margelidon's comparison of Christ's infused knowledge to that of Adam is found in question 20 of the *DV*, on the knowledge of Christ, where Saint Thomas states in passing that Christ had this knowledge more fully (*pleniorem*) than Adam.³¹ This is the only place in any of Thomas's

²⁶ Philippe-Marie Margelidon, "La science infuse du Christ selon saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue thomiste* 114, no. 3 (2014): 379–416.

²⁷ Margelidon, "La science infuse," 379–80.

²⁸ Margelidon, "La science infuse," 396, 398, 408.

²⁹ Margelidon, "La science infuse," 398.

³⁰ Margelidon, "La science infuse," 381.

³¹ See *De veritate* [*DV*], q. 20, a. 6, resp. The comparison appears at the very end of the

various treatments of Christ's knowledge where a direct comparison is made to Adam. From this single instance, however, Margelidon draws a broader conclusion: "The Thomasian and medieval conception of the science of Adam in the prelapsarian state *very closely conditions and overdetermines* the scope that St. Thomas grants to the science of Christ the New Adam."³² In support of this reading, Margelidon looks ahead to the treatment of Adam's infused knowledge in the much later account of the *prima Pars* of the *ST*, where Thomas has recourse to an argument from perfection that clearly parallels the argument for Christ's infused knowledge:

Those things which are in potency are reduced to act only through something in act. . . . Thus, just as the first man was instituted in the perfect state as to his body, in order that he might immediately be capable of generating offspring; thus, he was also instituted in the perfect state as to his soul, *in order that he would be capable of instructing and governing others*.³³

Not only is the argument posed in terms of potency and act, but Adam's perfection in infused knowledge is justified explicitly in terms of its role in his instruction and governance of the human race, that is, in terms of earthly utility. As the first man, it was necessary that Adam possess the knowledge, both natural and supernatural, to govern the human race. That the earthly function of Adam's knowledge determines his perfection in infused knowledge is made clearer by Saint Thomas's exclusion of various objects of knowledge which are unnecessary for Adam's fulfillment of his role: "But those things . . . that are not necessary for the governance of human life, the first man did not know; as, for instance, the thoughts of man, future contingents, and certain singulars, as for example the number of stones in a river, and other such things."³⁴ Here, perfection is directly and explicitly conditioned by earthly utility. This same principle, suggests Margelidon, is at work in the perfection of Christ's infused knowledge. The argument of perfection is therefore relative to the first Adam. "If Christ recapitulates Adam, he must possess the gnoseological perfection more perfectly."³⁵ For Christ, as the second Adam, must be greater (i.e., more perfect) than the first.

Yet, if the Pauline comparison between Christ and Adam grounds

response and without adding anything substantial to Thomas's account.

³² Margelidon, "La science infuse," 399 (emphasis mine).

³³ *ST I*, 94, a. 3, resp. (emphasis mine). See Margelidon, "La science infuse," 399–400.

³⁴ *ST I*, 94, a. 3, resp.

³⁵ Margelidon, "La science infuse," 403.

Thomas's argument for Christ's relatively greater perfection in knowledge, it nevertheless does not provide a reason for the Savior to have a *maximally* perfect infused knowledge. Here Margelidon sees the restriction of Adamic infused knowledge as an ad hoc way to highlight Christ's perfection in infused knowledge. Yet, there is no need for Christ's possible intellect to be fully reduced to act such that his soul possesses *in habitu* the intelligible species of all that is knowable. According to Margelidon's account, Christ's knowledge need be only *relatively* greater than Adam's. The desire to emphasize the superiority of Christ vis-à-vis Adam leads Aquinas to an over-determined account of maximal perfection.

Having understood the purpose of the infused knowledge solely in terms of its earthly utility, Margelidon finally rejects Thomas's argument from the possible intellect: "Certainly, the perfection of [Christ's] supernatural knowledge of the revealed mysteries corresponds to the end of the redemptive Incarnation, but the extent and infused mode of Christ's knowledge appears as the daring result of a complex construction far too distant from the Gospels."³⁶ If the scope of Christ's infused knowledge is, as Margelidon claims, conditioned by the Adamic knowledge of innocence, there is no compelling reason to believe that Christ knew all things. Rather, the argument from perfection, which ostensibly aimed at highlighting the relative superiority of Christ as the New Adam, nevertheless concludes too much. In brief, the argument from perfection, as presented by Margelidon, still requires a rejection of Saint Thomas's main argument from perfection.³⁷

While Margelidon's reading enjoys greater textual support than Torrell's, his assumption of the earthly utility account, justified through the comparison to Adam's infused knowledge, paints Saint Thomas's argument from perfection as ultimately "theoretical, hellenic, and founded in the general idea of omniperfection"—in sum, it is too philosophical and insufficiently biblical.³⁸

For Margelidon, too, the infused knowledge is to be understood as a stable habit of knowledge that finds a rough analogue in prophetic knowledge:

Saint Thomas seems to appeal not directly to the infused knowledge, but the infused gifts of the Holy Spirit, to explain through them the extent of his range of knowledge, "everything knowable" (*sed contra*): (1) to the gift of wisdom for the knowledge of all divine realities; (2)

³⁶ Margelidon, "La science infuse," 404.

³⁷ See Margelidon, "La science infuse," 412.

³⁸ Margelidon, "La science infuse," 398.

to the gift of understanding for all the immaterial realities, namely separated substances; (3) and to the gift of counsel for everything that is required for moral action. . . . In reality, for Saint Thomas, what specifies these gifts is contained in the proper object of the infused knowledge. It is therefore not false to affirm that, by this knowledge, Christ is prophet. The infused knowledge is certainly not, by nature and by reason of its object, a prophetic knowledge, but it has its perfection of it because, through it, Christ possesses the knowledge of future singulars and of the mysteries of grace to be transmitted. The infused knowledge of Christ *in quantum erat viator* extends to everything that is transmitted by divine revelation, whether it is a question of the gift of wisdom and of other gifts of the Holy Spirit, and of the gift of prophecy.³⁹

In attempting to understand the theological basis for Saint Thomas's teaching, Margelidon finally comes to a view similar to Torrell's. If the exigency of Christ's infused knowledge does not arise from its role in translating the beatific knowledge, it nevertheless exists purely for the sake of its earthly utility. "The infused knowledge," he writes, "empowers Christ for his mission as the perfect revealer of God and as prophet."⁴⁰ Thus, for Margelidon, as for Torrell, "the religious and supernatural end of this mode of knowledge determines its scope."⁴¹ Like Torrell, Margelidon judges Aquinas's account to be based on a principle of perfection that is finally alien to Scripture.⁴²

Margelidon's intuition that Thomas's account of Christ's perfection in infused knowledge is linked to the Adamic knowledge is helpful insofar as through this comparison we see, contrary to Margelidon's reading, that Christ's perfection is grounded in a *ratio* distinct from that of Adam's. This is evident from the account of the *DV* quoted above. There, Aquinas poses the objection that Christ did not need to know the number of stones in a river:

Christ assumed with our nature those defects that do not impede the purpose of the assumption, namely, our redemption. But ignorance [*nescientia*] of many things would not have impeded our redemption, for instance, if Christ had not known how many stones were at the

³⁹ Margelidon, "La science infuse," 391.

⁴⁰ Margelidon, "La science infuse," 395.

⁴¹ Margelidon, "La science infuse," 395.

⁴² See Margelidon, "La science infuse," 398.

bottom of a river. Therefore, it should not be said that Christ knew all things.⁴³

Recall that this is precisely the knowledge that is denied of Adam in the *ST*.⁴⁴ According to the objection in the *DV*, just as such a knowledge was not required for the fulfillment of Adam's earthly function, neither was it necessary for Christ.

Yet, the very knowledge that Aquinas explicitly excludes from Adam on account of its excessive nature is considered to be necessary in Christ:

The Son of God did not assume every defect that could be in him without impediment to the redemption of man. For it is true that he assumed only those [defects] whose assumption would be fitting to the redemption of the human race. Nevertheless, any ignorance [*quaecumque nescientia*] would be a defect impeding the redemption of the human race, since in the Redeemer, through whom grace and truth was to be poured out upon the entire human race, there was required the fullness of grace and truth, to which any defect of knowledge would have been injurious.⁴⁵

Aquinas ties the knowledge of something as inconsequential to his earthly mission such as the number of stones in a river, to his redemptive task. We will return to this argument below. For now, it is sufficient to note that the Adamic parallel highlights not so much the similarity between Adam and Christ, but a key difference. Unlike Adam, Christ is the universal cause of grace. As Aquinas states earlier in the *DV*, "Christ is for us the principle of grace just as Adam was the principle of nature."⁴⁶ Adam's knowledge served an earthly function, of governing and instructing; in contrast, Aquinas sees Christ's knowledge as necessary on account of the fact that his humanity is the very source of all grace and graced truth for all of humanity.

⁴³ *DV*, q. 20, a. 4, obj. 11.

⁴⁴ See *DV*, q. 20, a. 4, obj. and ad 11, for the objection regarding the knowledge of the number of stones in a river. See *ST I*, q. 94, a. 3, corp., for the explicit denial of such a knowledge in Adam.

⁴⁵ *DV*, q. 20, a. 4, ad 11.

⁴⁶ *DV*, q. 18, a. 4, ad sc 3.

Rethinking Saint Thomas's Argument for Christ's Infused Science

What is most striking about the Adamic parallel is not its determinative role in Thomas's account of Christ's knowledge, but its relative absence. Beginning with Hugh of St. Victor, it was commonplace for twelfth- and thirteenth-century Scholastics to frame Christ's human knowledge in terms of the various states of Adam's existence in innocence, sin, and glory.⁴⁷ A similar comparison appears in the accounts of Albert and Bonaventure. In these two thinkers, the Adamic parallel is indeed the determining factor for understanding Christ's infused knowledge.⁴⁸ Christ had to assume the knowledge corresponding to each of Adam's various states. For these thinkers, it is in the Adamic state of innocence (also called the state of integral and perfect human nature) that one finds the reason for Christ's infused knowledge. The *Summa fratris Alexandri*, which is followed by Albert and Bonaventure on this point, states that, besides the knowledge of beatitude and the knowledge of the experience of punishment, it was necessary for Christ to possess the Adamic knowledge of innocence, according to which he knew all that is naturally knowable. In contrast, the Adamic parallel arises only once and in passing in Thomas's treatments of Christ's knowledge, notably in the early *DV* text referenced by Margelidon. Far from conditioning and "over-determining" Aquinas's understanding of Christ's perfection, the Adamic parallel appears more as an exception in Aquinas's various treatments of Christ's knowledge. Given its frequent occurrence in Thomas's contemporaries, it is safe to assume that its relative absence in Thomas's works is not accidental.

But why would Thomas avoid the Adam–Christ parallel in his treatment of Christ's knowledge? Besides the fact that the historical parallel by itself does not get to the fundamental reason for Christ's perfection in knowledge (as Margelidon's article makes clear), I suggest that it is because Thomas sees Christ's humanity as playing a fundamentally different role from Adam's. The first man, the principle of the human race according to nature, possessed the knowledge necessary for his role as the governor and instructor of his progeny; in contrast, Christ is not only the external governor and teacher of the human race (i.e., according to his earthly teaching), more fundamentally he

⁴⁷ The three states of humanity are taken from Boethius. Reference to Adamic knowledge is found in Alexander of Hales, *Glossa III sent.*, d. 13, nos. 10 and 26, and *Summa fratris III*, inq. un., tract. 3, q. 1, tit. 2.

⁴⁸ Albert the Great, *De incarnatione*, tract. 4, q. 1, a. 3; Albert the Great, *In III sent.*, d. 13, a. 10, sol.; Bonaventure, *In III sent.*, d. 14, a. 3, q. 1.

is, in his very humanity, the principle and cause of the interior influx of grace for the entire human race, according to his role as the head of the Church.

In fact, Aquinas explicitly distinguishes Christ's headship from that of every other "head" on this basis.⁴⁹ Others are called "head" on account of external governance (*quantum ad exteriorem gubernationem*), but "the interior influx of grace is from no one except Christ."⁵⁰ Since Christ communicates grace and truth interiorly, in a manner that exceeds any single time and place, his grace and knowledge must also extend beyond the time and place of his earthly teaching and preaching.⁵¹

Returning to the text from the *DV*, we can now consider why Thomas thought it necessary for Christ to know the number of stones in a river.⁵²

⁴⁹ There is a parallel to Christ's mediating work, specifically with respect to the particular participation in this mediating work by others. See Gilles Emery, "Le Christ mediateur," in *Christus—Gottes schöpferisches Wort: Festschrift für Christoph Kardinal Schönborn zum 65. Geburtstag* (Freiberg: Herder GmbH, 2010), 344: "Even though one might participate in mediation, Jesus Christ alone is the true (*verus*), perfect (*perfectus, perfective*) and principal (*principaliter*) mediator of God and men. . . . While Christ acts as the principal, 'sufficient,' and 'perfective' mediator, other mediators who contribute to the union of men with God exercise their mediating activity as 'dispositive or ministerial' in reference to Christ."

⁵⁰ *ST* III, q. 8, a. 6.

⁵¹ See *ST* III, q. 8, a. 6. As Emery notes, this influx is from the very humanity of Christ. This is the basis for a careful distinction and order between the fullness of grace and the hypostatic union: "For Thomas Aquinas, as we have seen, Christ is mediator properly as man. Thomas adds: Christ is the 'Head of the Church' (*Caput Ecclesiae*) according as he is the mediator between God and men. Specifically, however, Christ is the Head of the Church in virtue of his fullness of grace ('capital grace'). By this fullness of grace, Christ is the head *of all men*. 'Christ is the mediator of God and men according to his human nature, as he shares passibility with men, and justice with God, which is found in him through grace. This is why, in order to be the Mediator and Head [*mediator et caput*], it is necessary that, besides the [hypostatic] union, he possess in himself habitual grace.' We find here the relation between the hypostatic union and the fullness of Christ's grace. It is through his fullness of grace that Christ's humanity is formally mediative. This fullness of grace is distinct from the hypostatic union from which it flows" ("Le Christ mediateur," 346). Emery explores the universality of Christ's human action *via* the trinitarian missions (347–49).

⁵² See *DV*, q. 20, a. 4, obj. and ad 11. The question and reply pertain to what Christ knows *in Verbo*. Nevertheless, the objection and reply apply equally to the *ratio* for the infused knowledge. That he speaks in terms of the knowledge *in Verbo* in the *DV* highlights one of the significant developments in Thomas's teaching on Christ's knowledge. Following Bonaventure, Thomas turned from the knowledge of everything *in Verbo* to focus gradually on the beatific aspect of Christ's knowledge of the Word. This is certainly not the case in Alexander of Hales's *Glossa*, nor in the *Summa fratris*, nor Albert's commentary on the *Sentences* or his *De Incarnatione*. What Aquinas applies to the knowledge of things

Here, Margelidon suggests that Thomas considered any nescience whatsoever to be a mark of sin.⁵³ Yet, Thomas nowhere suggests this, and his stated argument explicitly excludes even a morally neutral nescience. To quote the text again: "Any nescience whatsoever [*quaecumque nescientia*] would be a defect impeding the redemption of the human race."⁵⁴ The nescience of which Saint Thomas speaks does not refer to a moral, gnoseological defect arising from sin, as Margelidon argues, but specifically regards Christ's redemptive mission. Thomas's further explanation makes this clear: "For the Redeemer, through whom grace and truth was to be poured out upon all humanity, required the fullness of grace and truth. And *any defect in knowledge* would have been injurious to this."⁵⁵ The key to understanding Saint Thomas's account of the infused knowledge requires us to look not to Christ's earthly teaching, but to the all-encompassing nature of Christ's headship.

*Christ's Humanity as the Universal Principle of Grace
for the Human Race*

Thomas teaches that Christ, in his humanity, is the universal source of grace. This teaching, which appears unremarkable to us now, was a radical claim in the context of thirteenth-century Scholasticism.⁵⁶ Alexander of Hales, and Bonaventure following him, considered Christ's divinity alone to be the source and cause of grace. For the two Franciscans, the humanity of Christ can be only an external and dispositive cause of grace. While Christ's human prayer, obedience, and merit extrinsically (i.e., dispositively) prepare others to receive grace, nevertheless, the interior gift of grace can be given by God alone. The basis for this claim rests in an important Scholastic dictum that God alone is able to give grace.⁵⁷

in Verbo in the *DV* he later attributes to the infused knowledge in the *CT* and finally in the *ST*. The reasons for these shifts internal to Thomas's thought have to do with the underlying *ratio* for beatific knowledge, on the one hand, and the infused knowledge, on the other. The latter is related to the thesis of this paper, namely, the gradual solidification of the close tie between the infused knowledge and the various graces (the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the gratuitous graces).

⁵³ See Margelidon, "La science infuse," 403. Margelidon suggests here that Thomas unwittingly collapsed nescience (a morally inculpable lack of knowledge) with ignorance (culpable not knowing): "If nescience is not in itself an evil, ignorance always has, since Adam, a culpable cause; this is why [Christ] could not assume it without contradiction."

⁵⁴ *DV*, q. 20, a. 4, ad 11.

⁵⁵ *DV*, q. 20, a. 4, ad 11 (emphasis mine).

⁵⁶ See my recent "Principle of Perfection" article.

⁵⁷ See, for instance, Hales, *Glossa III sent.*, d. 13, no. 7. For parallel developments in sacramental causality, which is an extension of Christology, see Bernhard Blankenhorn, "The

One notes a gradual shift away from this teaching in Albert's commentary on the *Sentences*. For Albert, Christ's graced humanity does more than extrinsically dispose others for the reception of grace. As the soul informs the body and is everywhere present within it, so the grace of Christ's humanity informs the Body that is the Church.⁵⁸ While Albert's account is riddled with ambiguities and inconsistencies, the trajectory of the development is clear. Albert is attempting to do justice to the role of Christ's humanity as an efficient cause of grace. Aquinas will spell this out with greater force by speaking of the instrumental causality of Christ's *humanity* with respect to grace. When we arrive at Thomas's own *Scriptum*, we find a more developed account of the role of Christ's humanity in communicating grace; the development of this teaching continues and is finally solidified by the time of the *ST*.⁵⁹

Let us look at this development. Thomas's treatment of Christ's fullness of grace in the *Scriptum* highlights just how radically his early view departs from that of his contemporaries. The account takes its structure from the *Summa fratris*. The parallels between the two accounts serve to highlight their differences. For our purpose, we focus on the most significant aspect of this parallel: the comparison of Christ's grace to various luminary bodies. In the *Summa fratris*, the Halensist examines the fullness of Christ's grace by a comparison to two luminary bodies: to coal and then to the flame. Coal is like the grace of ordinary men: it glows but does not illuminate other bodies. The grace of Christ, however, is like the flame, which not only glows but also illuminates surrounding bodies. Aquinas transforms this analogy by introducing a third luminary body, which is entirely absent in the Halensian account. Christ's grace is not like the flame or candlelight; rather, it is like the sun. Unlike candlelight, which illuminates only particular objects surrounding it, the sun is the very source of all light. "Thus," writes Aquinas, "the matter is similar for Christ's grace: for he has grace through which he is perfect in himself, and from himself he communicates [grace] to others."⁶⁰ In modifying the Halensian account, Thomas intentionally

Instrumental Causality of the Sacraments: Thomas Aquinas and Louis-Marie Chauvet," *Nova et Vetera* (English), 4, no. 2 (2006): 255–94.

⁵⁸ Albert's account is ambivalent but can be seen as opening the door (through the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius) to Aquinas's more robust account of the instrumentality of Christ's humanity.

⁵⁹ On dispositive causality, see H.-F. Dondaine, "A propos d'Avicenne et de Saint Thomas: de la causalité dispositive à la causalité instrumentale," *Revue Thomiste* 51 (1951): 441–53.

⁶⁰ See *In III sent.*, d. 13, q. 1, a. 2, qc. 1, corp.

expands the role of Christ's grace. It is universal in scope—Christ's grace is the source of grace for all others. This analogy appears again in the *ST*, where Thomas contrasts the grace of Christ with that of other men as universal to particular: "Wherefore, just as the power of fire, however much it increases, is not able to equal the power of the sun, so the grace of other men, however much it increases, cannot equal the grace of Christ."⁶¹

In teaching that Christ's humanity is the source of all grace, Thomas does not begin from an a priori philosophical principle, but begins from the scripturally revealed datum that God has predestined all the elect *in Christo*. We see this clearly in Thomas's argument for Christ's grace of headship in the *ST*. The metaphysical priority and preeminence of Christ's grace is apparent from the fact that "all others receive grace with respect to his grace."⁶² For support, Thomas quotes Saint Paul: "Those whom he foreknew, these he also predestined *to be conformed to the image of his Son*, in order that he might be the Firstborn among many brothers."⁶³ Our predestination and the ordering of our grace is to the image of the Son.

Here we find a profoundly theological and biblical argument for Christ's perfection pertaining to the role of Christ's humanity as the universal cause of all grace.⁶⁴ On account of the union to the divinity, as a conjoined and animated instrument, Christ's humanity is the universal source of grace.⁶⁵ From revelation we learn both that the Word became flesh and that it is from Christ's consequent fullness of grace that all receive grace (see John 1:14, 16). The argument's premises are received from the revealed data. "If Christ had not been incarnate," writes Aquinas, "God would have preordained men to be saved through another cause. But since he preordained the

⁶¹ *ST* III, q. 7, a. 11, ad 3.

⁶² *ST* III, q. 8, a. 1, resp.

⁶³ *ST* III, q. 8, a. 1, resp. (emphasis mine).

⁶⁴ See *ST* III, q. 24, a. 4, corp.

⁶⁵ On the universality of Christ's human action as the instrument of the divinity, see Emery, "Le Christ mediateur," 350: "Jesus's human action, by its own power ('according to its proper form'), possesses a determinate, circumscribed, and limited character as with any creaturely action. But insofar as this human action participates in his divine action as its proper, conjoined, and animated organ, it receives the power to obtain these gifts *as extensive and universal as that of his divine action*." Emery later adds: "The procured effect keeps the mark of the instrument which has brought its collaboration to the work thus accomplished: the grace spread by Christ bears the mark of Christ. All sanctifying grace, all communion with God is Christic, whoever the beneficiaries may be; and all sanctifying grace incorporates its beneficiaries to Christ, i.e., to the Church which is the Body of Christ. . . . The scope of this 'instrumental' action is universal: it procures the salvation by participating in the virtue of the divinity 'which attains by its presence *every place and every time*' (351).

Incarnation of Christ, he simultaneously preordained that [Christ] would be the cause of our salvation.”⁶⁶ Again, it is necessary to see that this is not a conclusion deduced a priori from an abstract notion of perfection or even from the bare fact of the hypostatic union. Thomas fundamentally grounds his argument in the priority of Christ’s election and the consequent role of Christ’s humanity in diffusing grace to others.

Propinquity and the Causality of the Maximum

It is from this vantage point that we can make sense of the various arguments from perfection to which Thomas frequently appeals in his accounts of Christ’s fullness of grace and knowledge. One that is often targeted as being alien to Scripture is commonly called the “principle of propinquity.” Stated succinctly, the principle of propinquity holds that the nearer a thing is to the principal cause, the more it partakes of its influence.⁶⁷ Thomas often appeals to the propinquity of Christ’s soul to the overflowing cause of grace (i.e., the Word) in order to account for his fullness of grace and knowledge. Some, such as Torrell and Jean Galot, have considered this to be a variation of the much-abhorred medieval principle of perfection. The argument is frequently understood as a deduction from an abstract consideration of the hypostatic union to the necessary fullness of grace and knowledge in Christ’s human soul. “The nearer a thing is to God, the more perfect it is; this man is united to God to the highest degree (i.e., hypostatically); therefore, this man is maximally perfect.” Naturally, theologians have been uncomfortable with such a mode of reasoning, since the notion that maximal ontological and moral perfection must belong to any creature assumed to a hypostasis of the divine Trinity appears to consider the Incarnation in abstraction from the economy of salvation. Further, the conclusion contradicts the revealed fact that Christ also possessed defects in soul and body for the sake of his mission. It is such an understanding of Aquinas’s argument that Galot rightly accuses of beginning from an a priori, extra-biblical notion of perfection.

Yet, this is not Saint Thomas’s argument. In arguing from the propinquity of Christ’s soul to the Word, Thomas is not concerned about Christ’s perfection for its own sake, but precisely as it has been revealed as ordered to redemption. It is important to notice that the grace given to Christ by virtue of his soul’s proximity to the Word is the same grace that Christ’s humanity

⁶⁶ *ST* III, q. 24, a. 4, ad 3. See also *In III sent.*, d. 13, q. 1, a. 2, qc. 1, corp., *DV*, q. 29, a. 3, ad 6; a. 4, corp. and ad 6.

⁶⁷ See *ST* III, q. 7, a. 1, corp.; see also *DV*, q. 20, a. 5, resp. The principle of propinquity arises from the natural order of things instituted by God himself. See also *ST* III, q. 8, a. 5, corp.

communicates to others as the instrument of the divinity. For it is only what is nearest to the overflowing cause that can exercise a causal influence on others. Thomas writes: "Every first cause operates in what is nearer to itself, and through it operates in things further removed, as fire first heats the air around it, through which it heats distant bodies."⁶⁸ In order to operate on things "further removed," it is necessary that the medium possess *in actu* that which it causes in others. Applied to our present case, if Christ is to be the cause of grace in others, he must himself possess the maximum of grace in the genus of intellectual creatures.

The propinquity argument is situated in a broader argument pertaining to the causal role of Christ's humanity with respect to other men.⁶⁹ Here, philosophy is at the service of revelation. To explain how Christ's humanity can communicate grace and truth to others (received as a datum of faith; see John 1:16), it is necessary that Christ's soul itself possess the maximum of grace and truth.⁷⁰ This maximum or fullness is, in turn, accounted for by his soul's propinquity to God through the hypostatic union (see John 1:14). Thomas ties the hypostatic union to the perfection of Christ's grace through his role as head of the Church.

While the principle of propinquity explains how it is that Christ is perfect in grace, a second principle, the causality of the maximum, explains *why* Christ must possess the perfection of grace. The causality of the maximum states that a cause in any genus must possess maximally that of which it is the cause. For it is only by possessing the greatest grace (*maximam influentiam gratiae*) among rational creatures that Christ can act as its universal principle and cause.⁷¹ Thomas alludes once again to the analogy of the sun:

For the power of a universal principle of a genus universally extends itself to all the effects of that genus, as the sun, which is the universal cause of generation, . . . extends its power to everything that falls

⁶⁸ See *ST* III, q. 56, a. 1, resp.

⁶⁹ In fact, the argument from propinquity presupposes that God bestows grace to intellectual creatures (which is itself not necessary). If God did not give grace to intellectual creatures, then there would be no reason for an assumed human nature to possess the fullness of grace. For the causality of the maximum, see V. de Couesnongle, "La causalité du maximum: l'utilisation par saint Thomas d'un passage d'Aristote," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 38, no. 3 (1954), 433–44; de Couesnongle, "La causalité du maximum: pourquoi Saint Thomas a-t-il mal cité Aristote?" *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 38, no. 4 (1954): 658–80.

⁷⁰ From this, one can state, as Thomas does, that to take away the divine nature from Christ would result in the removal of his unique fullness of grace (*ST* III, q. 26, a. 2, ad 1).

⁷¹ See *ST* III, q. 7, a. 9, resp.

under generation. And thus, [this] fullness of grace was found in Christ inasmuch as his grace extends to all the effects of grace, that is, the virtues, gifts, and other similar things.⁷²

Insofar as Christ is the cause of grace, his own fullness of grace must encompass more than what belongs to his earthly teaching and ministry; in order to be a universal cause of grace, the grace of Christ must extend to *every* effect of grace.

It is important to notice that the arguments proposed by Thomas make use of philosophical premises solely to explicate what is received through revelation. Philosophy here serves only to clarify, not to determine, what is revealed.⁷³ Not only does Thomas argue from the hypostatic union to Christ's fullness of grace (through the propinquity argument); he also argues from Christ's role as the cause of grace back to his fullness (through the causality of the maximum). Note the ambivalence: "Since Christ somehow [*quodammodo*] communicates the effects of the graces to every rational creature, he is indeed, in some manner [*quodammodo*], the principle of every grace according to the humanity."⁷⁴ In this we see Thomas as squarely situated in the office of the theologian, *fides quaerens intellectum*.⁷⁵

In sum, Aquinas's fundamental inspiration is found in the Johannine prologue, which he frequently cites: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. And we have seen his glory, glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . And from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace."⁷⁶ As the universal principle of grace, Christ is less like the

⁷² See *ST* III, q. 7, a. 9, resp.

⁷³ On the structure and procedure of *sacra doctrina*, see John F. Boyle, "The Structural Setting of Thomas Aquinas's Theology of the Grace of Christ as He is Head of the Church in the *Summa theologiae*" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1989), 9–87. See also John I. Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁷⁴ See *DV*, q. 20, a. 5, resp. He speaks in a similar way in the *ST* III, q. 7, a. 9, resp.

⁷⁵ See *ST* I, q. 1, a. 8; *Summa contra gentiles* I, ch. 8.

⁷⁶ The causality of the maximum gives us the final cause (namely, that Christ's humanity be the saving source of grace for all men): The cause in a genus is the maximum in that genus; Christ is the cause of grace in the genus of grace ("from his fullness we have all received"); therefore, Christ must be at the maximum in the genus of grace ("full of grace and truth"). The principle of propinquity gives us the efficient cause (namely, that Christ's humanity derives this power from its union to the Word): The nearer a thing is to its source, the more perfect it is; Christ's soul is nearest to the source of grace ("the Word was made flesh"); therefore, Christ's soul is most perfect in grace ("full of grace and truth"). In both cases, the minor premise and conclusion are taken directly from revelation. Notably, the second syllogism does not give the final cause for Christ's

first man, Adam, and more like the First Cause. "Just as every perfection of *esse* is united in God, so in Christ is found every fullness of grace and power."⁷⁷ It is through his grace and power that Christ not only performs works of grace in his earthly life but also is constituted the cause of grace for others.⁷⁸ This is true not only for those who have attained the state of the *comprehensor* according to which Christ must possess the beatific vision, but also for those who are *in via* according to which Christ must possess every grace that is necessary in order for *viatores* to attain their supernatural end.

The Argument for Christ's Infused Knowledge

We can now see how Thomas's broader Christology and use of metaphysical principles clarify his doctrine of Christ's infused knowledge. In order to be the universal principle of grace, the potency of Christ's possible intellect must be perfect. Christ's humanity is the instrument of the divinity, the source of grace by which the rest of mankind receives grace; to this end, therefore, it must itself be perfected in every graced knowledge. With respect to the possible intellect, this means that it must be reduced to act via intelligible species which are perfective of it.⁷⁹ Yet it is not clear whether or how such

perfection in grace. Taken alone, it might suggest an absolute perfection that contradicts Christ's assumption of defects. It is only when the two are taken together, with a view to Christ's role as head, that one understands the significance of Aquinas's argument. As with his treatment of Christ's mediation, Thomas does not always spell this out, but sometimes speaks in shorthand. See Emery, "Le Christ mediateur," 342: "The approach that looks to the humanity of Christ depends on that which refers to the hypostatic union. The man that Saint Thomas contemplates in Christ the mediator is the man divinized as a result of the union according to hypostasis. This is likely why, in certain shorter texts, Thomas is content to refer the mediation of Christ to his consubstantiality with the Father and with men."

⁷⁷ *DV* q. 29, a. 5, resp. To lead others to beatitude is precisely what it means for Christ to be the author of salvation. See *ST* III, q. 59, a. 2, ad 2.

⁷⁸ Emery speaks of this fullness of grace in terms of the mission of the Holy Spirit: "Founded on the union of the humanity to the divinity in the person of the Word, but formally distinct from this hypostatic union, the anointing of the Holy Spirit flows to the humanity of Jesus in an abundance of divine life such that it makes him not only the most eminent beneficiary of grace but also its giver. Christ received grace, i.e., the principle of life with God, as well as the gifts of the Holy Spirit (the gifts of knowledge and the love of God), not only as an individual [but] also as the First Born of a multitude of brothers, that is, as *archegos* (*auctor, princeps*) who leads to his Father all who are associated with him" ("Le Christ mediateur," 347–48). Additionally, Dominic Legge provides an account of Christ's fullness of grace in terms of the mission of the Holy Spirit in *The Trinitarian Christology of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 182–86.

⁷⁹ Aquinas thinks that the possible intellect is perfected through created intelligible species.

an argument applies to all of Christ's infused knowledge. If Christ has the fullness of grace in order to communicate it to others, does this require that he possess the infused knowledge of all things absolutely (e.g., the number of stones in a river)? The solution to this problem is found by approaching Saint Thomas's account of Christ's infused knowledge against the backdrop of his treatment of Christ's grace.⁸⁰ Since Christ's grace corresponds to every effect of grace, it is necessary that it not only encompass, but surpass the entire scope of natural human knowledge. For the knowledge of all natural things is contained in the effects of grace.

Let us turn to Saint Thomas's argument from the potency of the possible intellect. The argument of the *ST* is worth quoting in full:

It was fitting that the human nature assumed by the Word of God not be imperfect. For everything that is in potency is imperfect unless it is reduced to act. But the human possible intellect is in potency to all intelligibles and is reduced to act through intelligible species, which are forms perfective of it, as is clear from what is said in *De anima* III. And therefore, it is necessary to admit an infused science [*scientiam inditam*] in Christ, inasmuch as the Word of God imprinted on the soul of Christ, personally united to him, intelligible species of all that to which the possible intellect is in potency.⁸¹

Thomas begins with the necessary perfection that is fittingly accorded to the assumed human nature. As we saw above, this perfection can be understood only in light of the Incarnation's ordering to redemption. That is, the human nature of Christ as the universal cause of grace requires the fullness of grace so that it can be the source of grace for others. Without the requisite intelligible species, the human soul of Christ would remain in a state of imperfection—that is, his soul would not be maximally perfect, as is required for a universal cause. Thus, Aquinas concludes, it is necessary that Christ's soul be filled by the Word with the infused knowledge of all things; otherwise, the humanity of Christ would be ontologically defective as a cause, which would further prevent it from acting as the universal source of grace. In theological terms, the presence of any defect in knowledge (again,

Notably, he nowhere states that the possible intellect as such is fully reduced to act by the blessed vision. This makes sense insofar as the possible intellect is naturally proportioned to intelligible species which are necessarily determinate and finite.

⁸⁰ In other words, we must read qq. 9–12 of *ST* III against the backdrop of qq. 7–8.

⁸¹ *ST* III, q. 9, a. 3, resp.: For a parallel account, see *CT* I, ch. 216.

this includes the category of non-morally culpable nescience) would act as an impediment to his role as cause of grace.

Yet, I have so far been making a claim about Christ's humanity as the universal source of *grace*. In this case, the requirement is simply that Christ be perfect in the genus of graced knowledge alone, or in Torrell's words, knowledge belonging to the "religious domain." Otherwise, would we not be forced to claim that Christ is also the universal cause of natural knowledge? The argument for infused knowledge frames the perfection of Christ's infused science not in terms of grace, but explicitly and exclusively in terms of the human intellect. Has Saint Thomas illicitly switched the terms of the argument? Based on the premise that Christ must be perfect in grace, how does he now conclude to Christ's perfection according to what appears to be the natural potency of the possible intellect?

To this a twofold response is sufficient. First, all of the infused knowledge is grounded in Christ's grace. This is clear from Aquinas's explication of the various objects known through the infused knowledge in *ST* III, q. 11, a. 1., where the *sed contra* is most explicit: "It is written in Isaiah 11 that the spirit of wisdom and understanding, of knowledge, and counsel, shall fill him, under which are comprehended all that can be known [*omnia cognoscibilia*]."⁸² Second, "all that can be known" through grace includes the knowledge of all that can be known through nature. This becomes even more apparent in Thomas's further explanation: "For the knowledge of all divine things [*divinorum omnium*] pertains to wisdom; the knowledge of all immaterial things [*omnium immaterialium*] to understanding; the knowledge of all conclusions [*omnium conclusionium*] to science; the knowledge of all practical matters [*omnium agibilium*] to counsel."⁸³ The full possession of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, therefore, encompasses all the knowledge that man can have, both natural and supernatural. In the body of his response, Thomas tells us that by this knowledge Christ knew "everything which is made known to man through divine revelation, whether they pertain to the gift of wisdom or to the gift of prophecy or to any other gift of the Holy Spirit." As noted above, Torrell cites this text to argue for an alternate approach to the perfection argument—restricting Christ's infused knowledge to the "religious domain." In fact, the text suggests that all natural and supernatural knowledge is necessarily tied to the various graces of which Christ is the source. Far from restricting the scope of Christ's knowledge, Saint Thomas argues that all knowledge is linked to Christ's role as head. Thus, it is insofar

⁸² *ST* III, q. 11, a. 1, sc. Thomas appeals to the gifts of the Spirit again in ad 3.

⁸³ *ST* III, q. 11, a. 1, sc.

as he is the universal source of grace that Christ possesses, through the full actualization of his possible intellect, all the knowledge corresponding to the graces, theological virtues, and gifts of the Spirit. In other words, it is because grace perfects and elevates nature that the fullness of grace includes the perfection of natural knowledge. The “religious domain” encompasses the universe of knowledge that Christ must possess in his infused knowledge.

A comparison with Christ’s beatific knowledge helps us to see how the infused knowledge plays a necessary part in his role as the source of grace. Just as Christ must have *in actu* the blessed knowledge to which man is ordered as created *ad imaginem Dei*, so too it is necessary that Christ, as the way to God, also possess the graced knowledge that leads to this end. In other words, since Christ is the cause not only of the *comprehensor’s* beatitude, but also of the various graces and effects of grace (i.e., the theological virtues, the gratuitous graces, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit) that lead the *viator* to his supernatural end, it is necessary that Christ possess all of this in his human soul. Since grace not only elevates but perfects nature, this graced knowledge necessarily includes the entire scope of natural human knowledge.

The argument from the possible intellect also highlights the fact that, even if the infused knowledge is said to be proportioned to the angelic nature, in Christ it is posited as a distinctly human perfection.⁸⁴ Thomas intends to show not only that Christ’s intellect is perfect, but that the perfection of Christ’s intellect is a definitively *human* perfection. While the source of this perfection is found in Christ’s grace, his grace is delimited by the created nature that receives it. In other words, Christ’s perfection in knowledge does not do violence to the human nature, but perfects it. Aquinas shows this based on the fact that the actualized potencies (whether natural or obediential) are potencies which are grounded in the created human nature itself.⁸⁵ Thus, just as the *visio Dei* (knowledge, which Aquinas tells us, is “proportioned to God alone”) does not destroy the integrity of the created human nature, neither does the infused knowledge transform the human soul into an angelic nature, much less an “encyclopedic Pico della Mirandola.”

⁸⁴ See my “Principle of Perfection” for a fuller treatment of the human character of Christ’s perfection in knowledge.

⁸⁵ At no point does Aquinas suggest that Christ’s human nature takes on divine or angelic proportions simply because of its union to the Word. Rather, the natural constitution of human nature as such (which exists between material and intelligible beings) is the basis for this parallel. In other words, it is because of potencies existing in human nature that Christ’s human knowledge can be compared to that of the angels and even of God.

Conclusion

The earthly utility approach is incomplete insofar as it considers Christ's infused knowledge only in terms of the role that it plays in his earthly teaching. As a result, proponents of the earthly utility account have had difficulty making sense not only of the existence of the infused knowledge as distinct from the blessed and acquired knowledge, but also of the extensive scope that Aquinas accords to it. This is true not only of Torrell, but even of more careful attempts such as that of Margelidon. Both the role and extent of Christ's infused knowledge must be understood in light of the role of Christ's humanity as the universal source of grace. The argument from perfection should be understood as an argument pertaining to Christ's role as the mediator of grace. Christ's humanity can communicate only what it itself possesses; according to Scripture, Christ's humanity is the universal principle of all grace (irrespective of time, place, or state); therefore, the humanity of Christ must be full of grace and truth.⁸⁶

This causal power of Christ's human nature is accounted for through its union to the Word. Thomas argues for the necessary fullness of grace and knowledge based on the propinquity of Christ's soul to the absolute source of grace. For the nearer a thing is to the agent cause, the more fully it participates in its effect. These are not *a priori* philosophical arguments. The minor premises are received from revelation and explicated with the aid of philosophical principles. In this regard, Aquinas is simply highlighting the causal relation between the various revealed data concerning the Incarnation. In order to be a universal cause, Christ, in his human nature, must not only possess the infused knowledge that is the source of all the knowledge possessed by the members of his body, but he must also possess it perfectly, such that there is no unactualized potency in his human intellect. When understood correctly, the exigency of the infused knowledge is firmly grounded in the biblical and patristic conviction that Christ's humanity is the

⁸⁶ See Emery, "Le Christ mediateur," 348–49: "For Thomas Aquinas, the grace by which *all men* today live in communion with God, participates in this fullness of grace that was given to the humanity of Christ in order that he communicate it to all men: 'The fullness of grace that is in Christ is the cause of all the graces that are in all intellectual creatures.' The mediative singularity of Jesus Christ appears here in a clear way, at the center of the entire economy. The abundance of salvation is procured for men by one man, Jesus Christ, who, in virtue of the exceptional holiness of his humanity united personally to the divinity, has received the fullness of the divine life in order to communicate this life to all. The communication of this divine life is accomplished by the entire existence of Jesus and, at its summit, by his Passion."

instrument of the divinity and the universal source of all grace—not only for the *comprehensor* but also for the *viator*, independent of time, place, or state.

Torrell and others are certainly right in seeing that Saint Thomas in no way sought to transform Christ into an “encyclopedic Pico della Mirandola.” Yet, by couching the purpose of the infused knowledge purely in terms of its earthly utility, it is difficult if not impossible to avoid such a portrait of Christ without simultaneously necessitating a rejection of Thomas’s own account. By seeking to avoid such a caricature, however, one risks missing the central insight of the Angelic Doctor: the humanity of Christ, as the universal cause of grace for the human race, must possess fully that of which it is the cause. It is crucial not only to see Christ’s perfection not simply in terms of his earthly communication of truth (in which case, the argument from perfection results in a portrait of Christ the expert climate scientist, medical doctor, philosopher), but to see the role of Christ’s perfection in infused knowledge as conditioning the broader and more fundamental role his humanity plays as the universal cause of all grace. To be sure, the infused knowledge plays a role in Christ’s earthly ministry; nevertheless, its *ratio* cannot be reduced to this alone. Christ’s perfection in knowledge is not necessary merely because he must be posited as more perfect than Adam, but because of his role as the author of salvation and the redeemer of the entire human race.⁸⁷ N-V

⁸⁷ I am grateful to Fr. Reginald Lynch, O.P., who read an early draft of this article at the “Crisis of Christology Conference” at Ave Maria University and to Fr. John Emery, O.P., and Fr. Simon Gainé, O.P., who each raised critical questions regarding my thesis. I am especially thankful to the anonymous peer reviewer who offered extremely helpful criticisms that have enabled me to clarify the main argument. Any remaining errors are, of course, my own.

Recovering Aquinas's Common-Good-Oriented Right of Rebellion

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Introduction

As recent events have woefully displayed, armed rebellion is not a topic of merely theoretical interest.¹ While theory seemingly has very little impact on the citizens participating in armed rebellions, theory still remains of paramount importance, providing crucial criteria to evaluate, restrain, apply, and respond to such force. Criteria such as legitimate authority, just cause, right intention, necessity, proportionality, and likelihood of success have been offered by thinkers advocating “just war” theory from across diverse political, philosophical, and religious backgrounds, garnering widespread agreement over the centuries. Contemporary scholars who identify as “historically oriented” just war thinkers have continued to defend that historical tradition as a sufficient and substantial guide for contemporary practice.² Yet some have questioned whether the it can provide useful aid for dealing with contexts of political tyranny. In a 2013 article, Valeria Morkevičius describes

¹ This essay was written shortly after the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, and the 2021 “Spring Revolution” in Myanmar. I understand the term “insurrection” to be synonymous with Aquinas’s term “sedition.” In Thomistic understanding, sedition is inherently immoral and an unjustified attack on a legitimate government. For more on this, see my article which analyzes the unjust nature of the insurrection on January 6, 2021: “A Thomistic Just Rebellion Analysis of the U.S. Capitol Insurrection,” *New Blackfriars* 102, no. 1102 (2021): 873–92.

² Historically oriented scholars are also referred to as “orthodox,” “traditionalists,” or “classicalists.”

Western culture as divided over the moral permissibility of armed rebellion, with advocates basing their views on the Enlightenment ideas found in John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whereas traditional just war theorists have generally denied a right to armed rebellion.³ In Morkevičius's perspective, she argues that there can be justified use of armed force against tyranny and calls upon other scholars to help create a "just rebellion theory" that would "radically reimagine" traditional just war thinking.⁴ She claims that there is a "lack of a systematic and rigorous ethical framework for evaluating the justness of rebellions"⁵ and that "a new theory of just rebellion—a systematic way of evaluating the justness of real world rebellions, of determining appropriate state responses to domestic rebellions, and of weighing the pros and cons of intervention" is needed.⁶

In line with Morkevičius' sentiments, the last ten years has seen the increasing rise of self-proclaimed just war revisionists.⁷ Jeff McMahan, the figurehead for this movement, claims that the classical just war criteria "can no longer stand."⁸ McMahan argues that traditional just war theory has

³ Valeria Morkevičius, "Why We Need a Just Rebellion Theory," *Ethics and International Affairs* 27, no. 4 (2013): 401–11, at 401.

⁴ Morkevičius, "Why We Need a Just Rebellion Theory," 408.

⁵ Morkevičius, "Why We Need a Just Rebellion Theory," 402.

⁶ Morkevičius, "Why We Need a Just Rebellion Theory," 402. For example, Anna Floerke Scheid has created a just rebellion theory using classical sources such as Aquinas, but argues that some revisions are needed. See Anna Floerke Scheid, *Just Revolution: A Christian Ethic of Political Resistance and Social Transformation* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2015).

⁷ Prominent revisionists include: Jeff McMahan, David Rodin, Cécile Fabre, Christopher Finlay, Helen Frowe, and C. A. J. Coady. Within this essay, I generally use the term "revisionists" as a shorthand term for McMahan's and Fabre's particular strain, which is categorized as a "reductionist" approach by others. Other prominent revisionists such as Rodin and Finlay offer their own revisionist variations that would not match McMahan and Fabre. Despite the various revisionist approaches, there are still significant similarities between them. Thus, while my focus is primarily on McMahan's and Fabre's version, many of my critiques would apply to the wider revisionist movement. For a variety of articles from a diversity of revisionists, see *The Morality of Defensive War*, ed. Cécile Fabre and Seth Lazar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁸ McMahan describes the revisionist approach in this way: "Revisionist just war theory is a school of thought, not a body of doctrine. There are many disagreements among revisionists, but they have the benefit of a long tradition of thought about the morality of war on which to build as well as a more recent tradition of rigorous, meticulous analytical thinking about moral issues that has, among other things, given them a richer range of distinctions and other analytical tools than their predecessors had access to. The result of their efforts promises to be an understanding of the just war that is not only quite different from the traditional Theory but substantially more plausible"

depicted war as a morally *sui generis* category of violence in which unique moral principles apply.⁹ The moral asymmetry of war is also reinforced by a “statist” and “collectivist” orientation that overrides the importance of individuals and their rights of life, liberty, property, and other fundamental goods. Instead of seeing war as a distinct category of violence, McMahan argues that war and self-defense are morally symmetrical. Further, he argues that combatants should be depicted as individuals distinct from their political or collective identity.¹⁰ In other words, McMahan offers a theory of war oriented around individuals and their rights based in the concept of justified self-defense.¹¹ Extending McMahan’s theory, Cécile Fabre has particularly targeted the criterion of legitimate authority as morally problematic.¹² Rejecting the exclusive authorization of armed force by political authorities, she argues in favor of an individual’s right to war, and by extension the right to rebellion.¹³ Therefore, given the historical just war tradition’s emphasis on the criterion of legitimate authority (i.e., the restriction of armed force

(“Rethinking the ‘Just War,’ Part 1,” *New York Times*, November 11, 2012, opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/11/rethinking-the-just-war-part-1/; see also part 2, opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/12/rethinking-the-just-war-part-2/).

- ⁹ Jeff McMahan, *Killing in War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009), vii.
- ¹⁰ McMahan is primarily responding to Michael Walzer’s “moral equality of combatants,” in which all combatants regardless of cause have the same rights to use lethal force in wars. McMahan sees Walzer as the main modern representative of traditional just war thinking. While Walzer has played a significant role in the twentieth century’s renewed interest in just war thinking, his place within traditional just war thinking is contested, as he departs from the tradition in significant ways. For Walzer’s impact on the just war tradition and the ways that he departs from traditional just war theory, see Chris Brown, “Michael Walzer,” in *Just War Thinkers: From Cicero to the 21st Century*, ed. Daniel R. Brunstetter and Cian O’Driscoll (London: Routledge, 2018), 205–15.
- ¹¹ McMahan’s main ideas can be summarized as war being morally analogous to self-defense, lethal liability determined by individual culpability, the right of lethal force restricted to just combatants, and a rejection of the absolute prohibition against targeting non-combatants. McMahan’s claims stem from his individualistic orientation (i.e., the elevation of individuals and their rights in contrast to a conception of political community) and reductive methodology (i.e., self-defense as morally symmetrical to war). McMahan’s perspective is also labeled “reductive individualism.” See Helen Frowe, “Collectivism and Reductivism in the Ethics of War,” in *A Companion to Applied Philosophy*, ed. Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen, Kimberley Brownlee, and David Coady (New York: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 342–56, at 346.
- ¹² See Cécile Fabre, *Cosmopolitan War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), and “Cosmopolitanism, Just War Theory and Legitimate Authority,” *International Affairs* 84, no. 5 (2008): 963–76.
- ¹³ Given revisionist views, it could also be termed an “individual right to self-defense,” an “individual right to justified force,” or an “individual right to rebellion.”

to established authorities) and resistance to support armed rebellions due to the lack of recognized political leaders, revisionists conclude that traditional just war thinking is inadequate for providing contemporary guidance in the context of rebellion.¹⁴

To challenge revisionist claims, I analyze Thomas Aquinas's ingenuity and relevance for future "just rebellion" thinking. First, I argue that classical just war thinking is not as antithetical to armed rebellion as suggested.¹⁵ One just rebellion theory has coexisted alongside the classical formation of just war theory, albeit often neglected or ignored by contemporary thinkers.¹⁶ It is well known that Aquinas formalized the Augustinian classical just war theory revolving around the criteria of legitimate authority, just cause, and right intention. Much less known, however, is the fact that Aquinas also crafted criteria for justified armed rebellions. While Aquinas's just war thinking rearticulates Augustine's perspective, Aquinas appropriated his mentor's views to allow for justified armed rebellions. Aquinas's originality was displayed not only in allowing justified armed rebellions, but also by incorporating the criterion of legitimate authority, which he grounded in the concept of the common good, thus displaying that the criterion was still possible to maintain even in extreme circumstances.

Despite the ingenuity of Aquinas's approach and influence on later just war developments, his thinking on just rebellion has largely been underemphasized and undervalued in contemporary discussion.¹⁷ For example, in Gregory Reichberg's 2017 book *Aquinas on War and Peace*, there are only five pages devoted to the issue.¹⁸ Elsewhere, Reichberg acknowledges the "inno-

¹⁴ For pragmatic purposes, however, revisionists encourage people to defer to political authorities' use of armed force in the context of war.

¹⁵ Seth Lazar provides an excellent summary of the division between revisionists and historically oriented scholars in "Just War Theory: Revisionist vs. Traditionalists," *Annual Review of Political Science* 20 (2017): 37–54.

¹⁶ Aquinas is the pioneer of justifying armed rebellions, but he is not the only just war thinker to do so. Subsequent just war thinkers such as Francisco de Vitoria, Francisco Suárez, Alberico Gentili, Hugo Grotius, and John Calvin are other figures whose views should be reinvestigated for future just rebellion theory.

¹⁷ Here are some of the most recent treatments of Aquinas on rebellion: Thomas A. Fay, "Thomas Aquinas on the Justification of Revolution," *History of European Ideas* 16, no. 4–6 (1993): 501–6; N. P. Swartz, "Thomas Aquinas: On Law, Tyranny and Resistance," *Acta Theologica* 30, no. 1 (2010): 145–57; James Turner Johnson, "Ad Fontes: The Question of Rebellion and Moral Tradition on the Use of Force," *Ethics and International Affairs* 27, no. 4 (2013): 371–78; Gregory Reichberg, *Thomas Aquinas on War and Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 122–27. A look at these sources displays the brevity of attention given to Aquinas's views on rebellion.

¹⁸ In Reichberg's approach, he considers three primary Aquinas sources: the commentary

vation” in Aquinas’s just war thinking regarding “the prince’s obligations toward the common good and the attendant acquisition of the relevant virtues,” yet he does not spend significant attention on its connection to Aquinas’s innovative just rebellion thinking.¹⁹ Further, Reichberg devotes significant attention to the ways that Francisco de Vitoria and Francisco Suárez develop and differ from Aquinas’s just war thinking.²⁰ Yet, there is no extended discussion of Aquinas’s just rebellion thinking and how this impacted their expansive views of legitimate authority. Given the insufficient attention on Aquinas’s paradigm shift allowing justified armed rebellions and a common-good understanding of legitimate authority, this essay provides a reinvestigation of Aquinas’s common-good-oriented right of rebellion.²¹ I argue that Aquinas’s communal understanding of the criterion of legitimate authority in justified armed rebellion was a unique contribution to classical just war thinking and is indispensable for contemporary rebellion thinking.

Second, I juxtaposition Aquinas’s perspective with Fabre’s attempt to “jettison” legitimate authority to display the contemporary merit of Aquinas’s just rebellion thinking. Aquinas and Fabre share the same sentiments about political tyranny and the need to protect citizens. They differ,

on Peter Lombard’s *Sentences* [*In I–IV sent.*], the *Summa theologiae* [*ST*], and *De regimine principum*. I, however, consider one additional source, the commentary on Romans [*Super Rom*], which was likely written prior to Aquinas’s articulation found in the *ST*, but which still addresses the issue of tyranny and rebellion. (I have given the source for translations from *Super Rom*, below. All other translations from Aquinas are my own.) Reichberg also devotes significant attention to the ways that Vitoria and Suarez developed and differed from Aquinas’s just war thinking. I argue, however, that Aquinas’s foundational arguments allowing armed rebellion have not been given due attention.

¹⁹ Gregory Reichberg, “Legitimate Authority: Aquinas’s First Requirement of a Just War,” *The Thomist* 76 (2012): 337–69, at 369. Reichberg does discuss self-defense and tyrannicide on 347–52. Much of the material in this article is reused in his chapter on legitimate authority included in *Thomas Aquinas on War and Peace*, 114–41.

²⁰ See Gregory Reichberg, “Suárez on Just War,” in *Interpreting Suárez: Critical Essays*, ed. Daniel Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 185–204, and “Philosophy Meets War: Francisco de Vitoria’s *De Indis* and *De jure belli relectiones* (1557),” in *The Classics of Western Philosophy*, ed. Jorge Gracia, Gregory Reichberg, and Bernard Schumacher (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 197–204.

²¹ It is a paradigm shift in terms of understanding legitimate authority based in the political community rather than in the leaders themselves. Thus, I am arguing that Reichberg and others neither emphasize this unique aspect of Aquinas’s approach nor appreciate its impact on just war tradition. In general, however, Reichberg and Johnson do excellent work on the criterion of legitimate authority. Their works should be consulted for illuminating this aspect of Aquinas’s thinking. See Reichberg, *Thomas Aquinas on War and Peace*, 114–41, and James Turner Johnson, *Sovereignty: Moral and Historical Perspectives* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014).

however, in how they ground the right of rebellion. I argue that Aquinas's incorporation of legitimate authority centered on the notion of the common good and guided through a line of authoritative succession is preferable over Fabre's rejection of legitimate authority based on an individual's right of rebellion. Aquinas's rhetoric allows for the possibility of justified armed rebellion, but significantly restricts its use by incorporating other political authorities and just war criteria. In theory, Fabre's rhetoric allows for a much wider use of armed rebellion. She, however, qualifies her position in such a way that fails to grant individuals the right of rebellion. Despite Fabre's individualistic rhetoric, she unwittingly admits the need for community consent and institutional accountability for armed rebellions. Thus, I argue that the criterion of legitimate authority cannot and should not be rejected even in contexts of political tyranny. Further, a common-good-oriented right of rebellion better depicts individuals' relationships and duties within their communities than does the individualistic one that Fabre defends. Therefore, just rebellion thinkers are better off working within a Thomistic communitarian framework that deals with political tyranny through other political leaders/systems than within Fabre's individualistic cosmopolitan framework, which is hyperbolic in its substance.

Aquinas's Political Theory

In order to understand Aquinas's common-good-oriented right of rebellion, it is vital to first understand his communitarian political theory and the classical just war thinking on which his right of rebellion rests.²² For Aquinas, the purpose of political life is the communal pursuit of the common good built around a virtuous conception of reciprocal rights and duties, which leads to interdependent human flourishing.²³ The common good of the political community is the balancing of order, justice, and peace which

²² See my other articles where I apply Aquinas's political theory to current political issues such as the January 6, 2021 insurrection and COVID-19 government health mandates: "A Thomistic Just Rebellion Analysis of the U.S. Capitol Insurrection"; "Did U.S. Governments Violate Human Rights? A Thomistic Response to COVID-19 Mandates," *New Blackfriars* 103, no. 1107 (2022): 640–61.

²³ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] defines the common good as "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily" (2nd ed. [Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000], §1906; in turn quoting the Second Vatican Council's *Gaudium et Spes*, §26). The common good "presupposes respect for the person as such, . . . requires the social well-being and development of the group itself, . . . [and] requires peace, that is, the stability and security of a just order" (CCC, §§1907–9).

establishes interdependent flourishing of individuals and communities as they holistically live in connection with each other.²⁴ Human flourishing is the quality of holistic well-being attached to individual, communal, relational, physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. Interdependency is the leveraging of individuals' skills in a coordinated effort with other individuals for the cultivation of all in the context of a community.²⁵ In this conception, individuals are recognized as distinct and unique persons who are deeply interconnected and reliant on other individuals who compose their communities. Given this interdependent construction, individuals cultivate and leverage their skills to support other individuals while simultaneously contributing towards a greater whole (i.e., the common good). Within this common good, citizens have a significant role in determining their political construction (leaders, polity, laws, etc.) while also entrusting their leaders to faithfully fulfill their duties.²⁶ Political leaders serve the community by providing, preserving, cultivating, and protecting the common good.²⁷ Leaders also pursue and establish justice through the use of laws and penalties to protect the community and inculcate virtues that lead to relational flourishing on the individual and communal levels. In Aquinas's view, political life has an intrinsic worth in the stable balance

²⁴ See Richard A. Crofts, "The Common Good in the Political Theory of Thomas Aquinas," *The Thomist* 37 (1973): 155–73. For Aquinas, God is the ultimate common good to which political community points: "The common good of the whole is God himself, in whom consists the happiness of all" (*De perfectione vitae spiritualis*, ch.13, pathssoflove.com/aquinas/perfection-of-the-spiritual-life.html). For John Finn's account of the common good, see "Public Good: The Specifically Political Common Good in Aquinas," in *Natural Law and Moral Inquiry: Ethics, Metaphysics, and Politics in the Thought of Germain Grisez*, ed. Robert P. George (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1998), 174–209. For another modern Thomistic account of the common good, see David Hollenbach, S.J., *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Hollenbach, "The Common Good and Issues in U.S. Politics: A Critical Catholic Approach," *Journal of Religion & Society* 4 (2008): 33–46; Hollenbach, "The Common Good Revisited," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 70–94.

²⁵ The CCC states: "Human interdependence is increasing and gradually spreading throughout the world. The unity of the human family, embracing people who enjoy equal natural dignity, implies a *universal common good*. This good calls for an organization of the community of nations able to 'provide for the different needs of men; this will involve the sphere of social life to which belong questions of food, hygiene, education, . . . and certain situations arising here and there, as for example . . . alleviating the miseries of refugees dispersed throughout the world, and assisting migrants and their families'" (§1911; quoting *Gaudium et Spes*, §84).

²⁶ See the section on "Responsibility and Participation" in CCC, §§1913–17.

²⁷ See the section on "Authority" in CCC, §§1897–1904.

between order, justice, and peace in which individuals can interdependently flourish within their community.²⁸

Aquinas's Just War Theory

Aquinas's communitarian political vision influenced his appropriation of Augustine's just war thinking to allow for the possibility of justified armed rebellions. Despite Aquinas's expanded communal notion of legitimate authority, he still follows Augustine's just war thinking in important respects. Augustine is often inaccurately depicted as the first just war thinker.²⁹ Just war thinking, however, can be traced back to Cicero and his political-moral theory found in *De re publica* and *De officiis*.³⁰ Through the influence of Cicero and Ambrose, Augustine famously crafted his own just war perspective.³¹ James Turner Johnson, one leading historically oriented just war theorists, notes that it is more accurate to characterize Augustine's just war thinking as "thinking" rather than a theory, since his views were offered in piecemeal fashion in a variety of sources.³² Nevertheless, one can still detect central elements of just war theory, such as legitimate authority, just cause,

²⁸ Reichberg articulates Aquinas's view of political community in the following way: "An assembled multitude is more than an atomistic collection of individuals who happen to live in proximity to each other; rather it has the form of a community with ipso facto a shared ('common') good. This good is dynamic. It arises when the manifold activities of the community's individual members over time are conducive to the well-being of the whole, a unitary goodness that in turn redounds upon each of the community's many individual members. 'Peace' is another name for this dynamic unity" (*Thomas Aquinas on War and Peace*, 131). For more on Aquinas's political theory, see John Finnis, "Aquinas' Moral, Political, and Legal Philosophy," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/aquinas-moral-political/; Finnis, *Aquinas: Moral, Political, and Legal Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Edgar Scully, "The Place of the State in Society according to Aquinas," *The Thomist* 45 (1981): 407–29.

²⁹ For a summary of the just war tradition from its foundation until the contemporary era, see Gregory Reichberg, "History of Just War Theory," in *International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, ed. Hugh LaFollette (Oxford: Blackwell, 2013), 2863–65; James Turner Johnson, "The Just War Idea in Historical Tradition and Current Debate," in *Ethics and the Use of Force: Just War in Historical Perspective* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2013), 15–35.

³⁰ See John Mark Mattox, "The Historical and Philosophical Landscape," in *Saint Augustine and the Theory of Just War* (London: Continuum, 2006), 14–43. See also Gavin Stewart, "Marcus Tullius Cicero," in Brunstetter and O'Driscoll, *Just War Thinkers*, 9–20.

³¹ See James Turner Johnson, "Augustine," in Brunstetter and O'Driscoll, *Just War Thinkers*, 21–33.

³² For summaries of Johnson's approach, see John Kelsay, "James Turner Johnson, Just War Tradition, and Forms of Practical Reasoning," *Journal of Military Ethics* 8 (2009):

right intention, comparative justice, the aim of peace, proportionality, and discrimination. Augustine's main ideas of just war reflect his larger political theory oriented around order, justice, and peace.³³ Gratian later compiled Augustine's thoughts alongside other Christian thinkers to provide a more coherent account of Christian just war thinking.³⁴ Aquinas then used these canonist sources to formulate a systematized just war theory that would direct and influence the just war tradition for centuries.³⁵

For Aquinas, a just war occurs when, out of necessity, the foremost legitimate political leader authorizes the proportional use of collective armed force on behalf of the common good for a just cause with right moral intention to achieve peace.³⁶ Aquinas's brief just war formulation is not novel, but rather a summation of Augustine's views.³⁷ Aquinas affirms Augustine's notions of order, justice, and peace paralleling (respectively) the primary just war criteria of legitimate authority, just cause, and right intention.³⁸ The aim of peace, necessity, and proportionality are also mentioned, but situated within the three primary criteria. Before venturing into Aquinas's just rebellion thinking, however, one must first understand Aquinas's depiction of the trifold just war criteria.

179–89; Nahed Artoul Zeher, "James Turner Johnson," in Brunstetter and O'Driscoll, *Just War Thinkers*, 227–37.

³³ Johnson, *Ethics and the Use of Force*, 37.

³⁴ Rory Cox argues, "Gratian is arguably the most influential figure in the history of the Western just war tradition": see "Gratian," in Brunstetter and O'Driscoll, *Just War Thinkers*, 35. Cox also notes that Gratian's *Decretum* solidified Augustine's prominent place in the just war tradition as well as becoming "the bedrock of European legal culture" (34). See Reichberg's summary of Aquinas's relevant predecessors such as Raymond of Peñafort, William of Rennes, and Pope Innocent IV: "Legitimate Authority: Aquinas's First Requirement of a Just War," 340–47.

³⁵ Johnson, *Ethics and the Use of Force*, 49.

³⁶ For a summary of Aquinas's just war views, see Gregory Reichberg, "Thomas Aquinas," in Brunstetter and O'Driscoll, *Just War Thinkers*, 50–63. For a more in-depth perspective, see Reichberg's larger work, *Thomas Aquinas on War and Peace*.

³⁷ Aquinas is also incorporating other just war thinkers in his formulation, but Augustine was the primary figure. Johnson argues that Aquinas's formulation goes beyond regurgitating: "When one reads Aquinas's magisterial summary of the three requirements for a just war, it is necessary to recognize, then, that he is not simply systematizing what Augustine had said, though he leans heavily on key Augustinian formulations, providing citations from Augustine on each of the three requirements he identifies; rather, he is adding content to those requirements in accord with the developments in thinking about *ius naturale* and *ius gentium* in the century before him" (*Sovereignty*, 17–18).

³⁸ Johnson, *Sovereignty*, 16–17.

Legitimate Authority

In contrast to Raymond of Peñafort's placement, Aquinas places legitimate authority as the first and primary criterion of just war theory.³⁹ Legitimate authority describes the political and moral authority needed to initiate a war.⁴⁰ Johnson argues that the placement of the criterion of legitimate authority is not about chronological priority, but logical priority.⁴¹ Without a legitimate authority, a just war could not be properly conceived or applied.⁴² Johnson states, "just war was and is about the justified use of force by *temporal sovereign authorities for temporal causes—the common good.*"⁴³ Due to the public nature of war (i.e., communities fighting against other communities), it requires a publicly authorized figure to initiate a war. The right to war is reserved for political leaders, since they are entrusted by a community to care for its citizenry and its commonwealth.⁴⁴ Aquinas also connects the concept of armed force to the political leaders' responsibility to ensure punitive measures against civilian malefactors.⁴⁵ Therefore, political leaders are appointed to protect the community internally (punitive measures) and externally (war).

Regarding the so-called "private right of war," Aquinas denies its validity. Reichberg describes Aquinas's view of war in the following way: "War is a

³⁹ Reichberg notes that Raymond places legitimate authority last ("Legitimate Authority," 339).

⁴⁰ Johnson states: "The just war idea, as it came together in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, centered on a conception of sovereignty as responsibility for the common good of society that is to be exercised to vindicate justice after some injustice has occurred and gone unrectified or unpunished. This responsibility is fundamentally to and for the moral order itself, understood as an order in accord with the natural law, which itself was conceived as a manifestation of the divine will as embedded in the natural order" (*Sovereignty*, 19–20). Johnson also states, "sovereignty thus defined was thus both a political and a moral concept" (21).

⁴¹ Johnson, *Sovereignty*, 28.

⁴² See Reichberg, "Legitimate Authority," 337–69; James Turner Johnson, "Aquinas and Luther on War and Peace: Sovereign Authority and the Use of Armed Force," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 31, no. 1 (2003): 3–20. Reichberg disagrees with Johnson's emphasis on legitimate authority. For Reichberg, without a "just cause," the issue of legitimate authority becomes a moot point (*Thomas Aquinas on War and Peace*, 112). In other words, just cause is logically prior. Reichberg also disagrees with Johnson's interpretation of Aquinas as restricting the use of force to the foremost political leader (115fn8). Additionally, Reichberg prefers the translation of "princeps" rather than Johnson's "sovereign" in reference to the foremost political leader (116fn9).

⁴³ Johnson, *Ethics and the Use of Force*, 51.

⁴⁴ *ST II-II*, q. 40, a. 1.

⁴⁵ *ST II-II*, q. 40, a. 1.

collective enterprise of the highest political community, the polity [*res publica*].⁴⁶ In other words, war cannot be an individual right, given that war is a communal and political reality. It is not a right held by all individuals (i.e., citizens); it is a right restricted to certain individuals (i.e., the appropriate political leaders). Aquinas follows Pope Innocent IV's distinction: "It is permissible for anyone to wage war in self-defense or to protect property. Nor is this properly called 'war' [*bellum*], but rather 'defense' [*defensio*]."⁴⁷ The terminological distinction between "war" and "self-defense" grants individuals a right of self-defense without implying an individual right to war.⁴⁸ Aquinas states: "For it does not pertain to a private person to declare war, because he can prosecute his rights at the tribunal of his superior; similarly, it does not pertain to a private person to summon the people together, which must be done in time of war."⁴⁹ Even in situations of internal malfeasance, individuals cannot act singly or cooperatively to execute judgment without proper authorization:

It is lawful to kill a malefactor insofar as doing so is directed to the health of the whole community; but so to do pertains only to him to whom the task of preserving the community's health has been entrusted, just as it pertains to the physician to cut off a decayed member when he has been entrusted with the care of the health of the whole body. Now the care of the common good is entrusted to princes having public authority; and so they alone, and not private individuals, can lawfully kill malefactors.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Reichberg, "Legitimate Authority," 359.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Johnson, *Sovereignty*, 46.

⁴⁸ For Aquinas on self-defense, see *ST II-II*, q. 64. See also Reichberg, "Self-Defense," in *Thomas Aquinas on War and Peace*, 173–200. Johnson states, "force may be used by people who have no right to do so, for purposes having to do with private gain rather than the common good" (*Ethics and the Use of Force*, 37). Martin Rhonheimer argues: "Nevertheless, the formulation that intending death for the sake of self-defense is allowed for public authority as distinct from the private person remains somewhat open to misunderstanding, insofar it 'relates [this] to the public welfare.' That is, such killing is only permissible in the context of punishment (the preservation of justice) or of a just war. It is not dealing with mere actions in self-defense, as Thomas's formulation somewhat misleadingly suggests" ("Sins against Justice [IIa IIae, qq. 59–78]," in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen J. Pope [Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002], 287–303, at 296).

⁴⁹ *ST II-II*, q. 40, a. 1.

⁵⁰ *ST II-II*, q. 64, a. 3, corp. See also ad 3: "It is not lawful to slay a malefactor except by the judgment of a public authority."

Therefore, individual citizens lack proper authority because they are neither representatives of their communities nor entrusted with tasks expected of public authorities (i.e., internal and external maintenance of the common good).⁵¹ Political authorities, however, can use armed force, since they are recognized, entrusted, and empowered to represent and protect their communities.⁵² Even when a malefactor acts in a “bestly” manner or commits a gross public violation, it still requires a public authority to use lethal force except in cases of immediate self-defense without other recourse.⁵³ Therefore, citizens are called to actively participate in bringing about the common good of the community, but defer to political authorities when it comes to issues of internal and external malfeasance.⁵⁴

While political authorities have the *exclusive* right to war, they do not have the *unconditional* right to war.⁵⁵ There is a moral component within the concept of political legitimacy derived from classical understandings of sovereignty.⁵⁶ Johnson describes this classical conception as “the moral responsibility of the ruler for the common good of the people governed.”⁵⁷ This contrasts with the modern conception of sovereignty based on “territorial inviolability” and “defense.”⁵⁸ The classical concept emphasizes the moral and political responsibility of rulers to the common good, whereas the modern concept emphasizes the defensive responsibility of rulers grounded in the individual’s right of self-defense.⁵⁹ The classical conception of sovereignty is based on morally and politically competent authorized leaders within a political community, whereas the modern conception is based on politically recognized territories within the modern nation-state

⁵¹ Reichberg states, “[Aquinas’] conceptualization of war as a violation of peace between independent polities borrows from Pope Innocent’s notion that war is qualitatively different from either private self-defense or internal policing” (“Legitimate Authority,” 347).

⁵² Johnson states, “the person or persons in sovereign authority have the responsibility of securing a just and peaceful order within society” (*Ethics and the Use of Force*, 51).

⁵³ *ST II-II*, q. 64, a. 3, corp.

⁵⁴ *ST II-II*, q. 64, a. 3, ad 3.

⁵⁵ Reichberg, “Legitimate Authority,” 348.

⁵⁶ Johnson states: “Sovereignty is government of a political community by a person or persons with final responsibility for the well-ordered justice and peace of that community, which Aquinas often rendered as its *bonum commune*, or ‘common good’” (*Sovereignty*, 29). Johnson also states, “it remained unchallenged, as to both substance and priority, until Grotius’s recasting of the terms of the tradition” (*Ethics and the Use of Force*, 8).

⁵⁷ Johnson, *Sovereignty*, 1–2.

⁵⁸ Johnson, *Sovereignty*, 1.

⁵⁹ Johnson, *Sovereignty*, 1.

framework.⁶⁰ The central underlying moral component of legitimate authority concerns the role and the responsibilities of political authorities to preserve, provide, protect, and cultivate the community. In other words, political leaders are other-regarding and their moral authority derives from fulfilling their central duties to the common good. Political authorities can utilize the right of armed force only if they meet the prerequisite moral criteria of proper political leadership described above. Therefore, Aquinas orients all just war thinking around legitimate authority as the foundational criterion. Deemphasizing or rejecting this criterion ultimately brings about a distortion of the other criteria.⁶¹

Just Cause

Assuming that a political community's leader is legitimate in the moral and political sense, leaders are also tasked with *assessing* the justness of the resort to armed force. Political authorities are required to determine if a just cause "of some wrongdoing" requires the use of armed force to restore the peace of the community.⁶² Aquinas cites Augustine's just cause definition: "A just war is customarily defined as one which avenges injuries, as when a nation or state deserves to be punished because it has neglected either to put right the wrongs done by its people or to restore what it has unjustly seized."⁶³ It is important to note that this depiction of just cause contains moral and political aspects, in contrast to some revisionist approaches which focus on moral justice irrespective of political life.⁶⁴ The political and communal element is why Aquinas restricts armed force to authorized political leaders.

For Aquinas, just cause includes punitive, restitutive, remedial, and defensive measures. As displayed in other classical just war thinking, this definition of a just cause entails the moral permissibility of offensive and defensive

⁶⁰ See Gregory Reichberg, "The Nation-State as Locus of War-Making Authority," in *Nation, State, Nation-State*, ed. Vittorio Hösle and Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020), 169–82.

⁶¹ For example, McMahan and Fabre elevate "just cause" as the preeminent just war criterion. Fabre does so in such a way that even allows just insurgents to use asymmetrical unjust tactics in order to turn the tide in their favor (*Cosmopolitan War*, 271).

⁶² *ST* II-II, q. 40, a. 1. Johnson states: "But the sovereign may use armed force only for a just cause and only with right intention—not to bully or dominate, but to serve the common good by achieving a just and peaceful order" (*Ethics and the Use of Force*, 51).

⁶³ *ST* II-II, q. 40, a. 1.

⁶⁴ McMahan and Fabre both endorse an individual right to war and elevate just cause as the preeminent just war criterion (McMahan, *Killing in War*, 108–9; Fabre, *Cosmopolitan War*, 141).

wars. This is in stark contrast to the predominant view in contemporary just war theory, which depicts defensive warfare as the sole justification for a just cause. In the last fifteen years, however, there has been a growing number of scholars who have returned to the permissibility of offensive war to promote the use of armed humanitarian intervention (AHI).⁶⁵ For those who support AHI, the following justification is offered: if political leaders are abusing their citizens, then other authorized political authorities from other nations, ideally through a multilateral effort, can intervene to protect another communities' citizens.⁶⁶ Despite AHI having a clear offensive component to it, it is still often depicted in defensive terms. The defensive framing is as follows: the intervening army is not attacking the abusive leaders, but rather defending the vulnerable citizens. This, however, seems to be more of an issue of semantics rather than a difference in the acts of armed force that occur.

The reason for the current emphasis on defensive wars is twofold. First, offensive wars seem to draw one back to a bygone era of political authorities initiating wars with impunity or for self-oriented aims. The assumption is that, if you remove offensive wars as a just cause, then you will limit armed force in general. Second, the emphasis on defensive wars corresponds with the just war tradition's historical shift towards emphasizing self-defense. While the shift has its roots in Hugo Grotius's impact on international law, the defensive trend gained traction in the revitalization of just war theory in the twentieth century. The elevation of self-defense-based argumentation has been drawn to even the more extreme conclusions by just war revisionists in the twenty-first century.⁶⁷ Twentieth-century just war thinkers, however, attempted to convince pacifists of the moral permissibility of war while seeking to limit the use of armed force, thus resulting in a restriction of violence to its most uncontroversial cases (i.e., defensive). The unintended consequence of this has been overemphasizing defense as the sole justification for war. Defensive war is certainly a central component to classical thinking, but it is not the only just cause. This overemphasis on defensive wars, however, has led some contemporary scholars to return the permissibility of

⁶⁵ See the collection of essays in *The Ethics of Armed Humanitarian Intervention*, ed. Don E. Scheid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁶⁶ See International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty*, ed. Gareth J. Evans and Mohamed Sahnoun (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001).

⁶⁷ See Johnson's "The Just War Idea in Historical Tradition and Current Debate," in *Ethics and the Use of Force*, 15–35.

offensive wars in cases of tyranny, thus giving rise to contemporary efforts for a just rebellion theory. Despite being currently out of vogue, I affirm alongside Aquinas that offensive wars can be morally justified in certain circumstances, such as political tyranny.⁶⁸ Offensive wars, however, must be attached to legitimate political authorities who are seeking the common good (order, justice, peace) and who meet the other just war criteria of just cause, right intention, necessity, proportionality, and likelihood of success. This is precisely where many modern advocates of offensive wars go wrong. They endorse offensive permissibility but seek to remove the criterion of legitimate authority.⁶⁹ Yet it is precisely the criterion of legitimate authority that ties notions of just cause and right intention together in the context of political community.

Right Intention

In addition to just cause, the criterion of right intention adds an extra standard of accountability to restrict the use of armed force.⁷⁰ Aquinas cites Augustine's understanding of right intention as "those wars which are waged not out of greed or cruelty, but with the object of securing peace by coercing the wicked and helping the good."⁷¹ Right intention intertwined with legitimate authority and just cause creates the proper conditions (means and ends) for a moral act. If one's means (authority, proportionality) or ends (cause, necessity, intention, likelihood of success) were immoral, then it would render the act impermissible. Aquinas also states, "even those who are waging a just war may sin in taking spoils through greed arising from an evil intention: if, that is, they fight principally not for justice but for spoils."⁷² If political authorities engage in war with ill intent (e.g., greed), then restitution is morally required for any acts of "theft."⁷³ Wrong intention also includes "the desire to do harm, the cruelty of vengeance, an unpeaceable and implacable spirit, the fever of rebellion, the lust to dominate, and

⁶⁸ This can be categorized as "offensive" in the sense of initiating restitution or regime change through armed force.

⁶⁹ See Fabre, *Cosmopolitan War*, 142–48.

⁷⁰ Johnson states: "As he develops each it becomes clear that his three would be four in many present-day listings, because his right intention has two aspects: avoidance of wrong intentions ('motives of aggrandizement or cruelty') and pursuit of right intentions, which may be grouped together as the goal of achieving peace" (*Ethics and the Use of Force*, 50).

⁷¹ *ST II-II*, q. 40, a. 1.

⁷² *ST II-II*, q. 66, a. 8, ad 1.

⁷³ *ST II-II*, q. 66, a. 8, corp.

similar things.⁷⁴ Therefore, right intent aims “to promote a good cause or avert an evil.”⁷⁵ This clarification again displays the moral justification for offensive and defensive wars. Right intention is also connected with the aim of peace. Aquinas states, “those who wage just wars intend to secure peace.”⁷⁶ Further, he cites Augustine’s often quoted phrase: “We do not seek peace in order to wage war; rather, we wage war in order to achieve peace.”⁷⁷ Therefore, the aim of war is not aggrandizement or revenge, but the establishment or restoration of a fundamental aspect of communal life (e.g., order, justice, or peace).

As contemporary theorists have deemphasized legitimate authority, right intention has also been deemphasized on the grounds of being too amorphous, subjective, or idealistic. The fear seems to be that any political leader can offer a carefully worded justification of intention or cause, thus nullifying the relevance of these criteria. The potential for abuse, however, does not sufficiently warrant deemphasizing these critical criteria. A proper understanding of these ideas situated within a Thomistic communitarian framework (the common good, the role and responsibilities of political leaders, moral means and ends, etc.) protects these concepts from abuse.⁷⁸ Further, these criteria provide a clear standard of accountability to which leaders can be held. Contemporary just war thinking that deemphasizes or eliminates the criteria of legitimate authority or right intention ends up transforming modern just war theory into something that it is distinctly

⁷⁴ Quoted in *ST II-II*, q. 40, a. 1, corp.

⁷⁵ *ST II-II*, q. 40, a. 1, corp.

⁷⁶ *ST II-II*, q. 40, a. 1, ad 3.

⁷⁷ Quoted in *ST II-II*, q. 40, a. 1, ad 3.

⁷⁸ See Nico Vorster, “Just War and Virtue: Revisiting Augustine and Thomas Aquinas,” *South African Journal of Philosophy* 31 (2015): 55–68; Ryan R. Gorman, “War and the Virtues in Aquinas’s Ethical Thought,” *Journal of Military Ethics* 9 (2010): 245–61. With regard to military strategy, Aquinas justifies the use of ambushes if the war was just. Concealment is considered different from lying. Lying is “being told something false or by not having a promise kept; and this is always unlawful. No one ought to deceive an enemy in this way, for there are certain rights of war and covenants which should be observed even among enemies” (*ST II-II*, q. 40, a. 3). Concealment here differs in that “someone may be deceived by what we say or do because we do not reveal our thoughts or intentions to him.” Aquinas believes further here that this sort of concealment should be used by leaders during war, since there is not moral obligation to reveal plans: “And the planning of ambushes, which may lawfully be used in a just war, belongs to this art of concealment; nor can such ambushes properly be called deceptions; nor are they repugnant to justice or to a rightly-ordered will, for a man would have a disordered will if he were unwilling that anything should be hidden from him by others.”

different from its classical foundation.⁷⁹ As shown further in this essay, however, I argue that there are good grounds to recover classical understandings of just war thinking. For example, Aquinas's understanding and utilization of legitimate authority in the context of armed rebellion provides a guide and standard of accountability to restrict the use of armed force to other political leaders. This perspective provides a better alternative than contemporary approaches which seek to replace legitimate authority with an individual right of rebellion.

Just War Thinking as Political and Moral Theory

As displayed thus far, Aquinas's just war thinking is deeply connected to a political theory oriented around the common good of order, justice, and peace in which legitimate authority is the primary just war criterion.⁸⁰ In contrast to contemporary approaches, legitimate authority is not a secondary component of just war thinking, but the primary one which safeguards the good of citizens and communities. Without this criterion in place, the criteria of just cause and right intention are warped. It must be reiterated that the classical understanding of war does not rest on political authorities' unconditional license for armed force, but restricts its use to those who are truly representative of their community's common good with the aim of peace. Therefore, the moral responsibility of armed force lies primarily with recognized political authorities. This is not to deemphasize the importance of individual citizens or personal moral responsibility, but to restrict the use of violence that impacts the community. In contrast to revisionist theories, classical just war theory is not aimed at how individuals should use armed force, but rather provides moral guidance and standards of accountability for political authorities' use of armed force.⁸¹ Thus, the three primary just war criteria have political and moral aspects involving the community which should not be ignored in favor of an individualistic moral theory of war.⁸² Ultimately, divorcing just war criteria from their political context will lead

⁷⁹ Revisionists depict just war theory as an extension of self-defense (i.e., focused on individuals). Classical just war theory, however, argues that just war thinking is a moral-political theory which guides and holds those who represent their political communities accountable (i.e., leaders).

⁸⁰ Johnson states, "just war thinking first took shape as a coherent, systematic way of thinking about the use of armed force in relation to politics conceived in terms of the good of human communities" (*Ethics and the Use of Force*, 134).

⁸¹ McMahan and Fabre both treat just war theory from an individualistic perspective.

⁸² McMahan and Fabre claim to depict just war theory in terms of "deep morality" (Jeff McMahan, "The Ethics of Killing in War," *Philosophia* 34 [2006]: 23–41, at 38; Fabre,

to misapprehension, deemphasis, or rejection of central components of just war thinking.

Augustine on Political Tyranny

Aquinas's just war legacy is best known for his just war summary of legitimate authority, just cause, and right intention, as well as the influence it had on future just war thinkers. Aquinas's ingenuity within just war thinking, however, is rarely acknowledged. Aquinas's most inventive contributions to just war thinking are his allowance of armed rebellion and expanding the criterion of legitimate authority to include the wider common good. Aquinas's allowance of armed rebellion was not an attempt to significantly depart from Augustinian just war thinking, but to develop it further based on Aquinas's own common-good-oriented political theory. To better understand how Aquinas departs from Augustine's position on armed rebellion, I juxtapose Aquinas's and Augustine's views on tyrannical political leaders.⁸³ I also discuss how citizens were expected to respond to such tyranny. Historically, Rom 13:1–7 is the most influential Christian scriptural reference concerning political authority.⁸⁴ Interpreting this passage, Augustine argues

Cosmopolitan War, 142, 145). In other words, they elevate a moral approach grounded in moral principles.

⁸³ See Paul Weithman, "Augustine and Aquinas on Original Sin and the Function of Political Authority," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 30, no. 3 (1992): 353–76, and "Augustine's Political Philosophy" in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 234–52. For the most up-to-date research on Augustine's views, influence, and reception, see *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, 3 vols., ed. Karla Pollmann and Willemien Otten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). See also *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009); *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. David Vincent Meconi, S.J., and Eleonore Stump, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁸⁴ Rom 13:1–7: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. ²Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; ⁴for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. ⁶For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. ⁷Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due" (NRSV, adapted).

that God providentially appoints *every* political ruler, including those who are wicked. Therefore, if citizens resist authorized political leaders (whether good or evil), they are in effect attempting to resist God. God is described as the true sovereign of the world who appoints political rulers for his purposes. Augustine reasons that God appointed Constantine, who Christianized Rome, but also Nero and Julian, who had relentlessly killed Christians.⁸⁵ Augustine believes that God providentially orchestrates all human events in such a way to guide history towards fulfilling his divine purposes.⁸⁶ Thus, God providentially selects just and unjust rulers as part of his providential working. Divine providence ensures that God appoints *every* ruler with a *divine purpose*.⁸⁷ Augustine also presents a theodicy in which all evil is ultimately allowed by God to bring about a greater good.⁸⁸ Even when evil appears incomprehensible and utterly destructive, God mysteriously directs it towards a redemptive end perfectly fulfilling his divine purposes.⁸⁹

Augustine's Theodicy of Tyranny and War

While Augustine does not justify the wickedness of abusive leaders, he did attempt to justify God's providential purposes in granting them the right to rule. Augustine offers three potential justifications for why God's appoints

⁸⁵ Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 5.19–21.

⁸⁶ Herbert Deane states, "God was the focus of Augustine's life and thought to such a degree that he saw the hand of God in every event in the natural world and in every human action" (*The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1963], 13).

⁸⁷ In response to unjust rulers, Augustine states, "Nevertheless power and domination are not given even to such men save by the providence of the most high God, when He judges that the state of human affairs is worthy of such lords" (*De civitate Dei* 5.19, trans. Marcus Dods [New York: Modern Library, 1993]). Augustine states, "God can never be believed to have left the kingdoms of men, their dominations and servitudes, outside of the laws of His providence" (5.22). Deane states: "Even the most wicked, cruel, and tyrannical rulers receive their power from God alone. . . Their tyranny and cruelty are a scourge to the evildoers and to the wicked, and a trial and a proof of the patience of the good" (*Political and Social Ideas*, 69).

⁸⁸ Deane, *Political and Social Ideas*, 67.

⁸⁹ See Deane, *Political and Social Ideas*, 67–68: "No human action, no matter how cruel or wicked or lustful it may be, falls outside the control of God's Providence. God does not force men to sin or to commit evil deeds, but even the sinner is not permitted to do anything that runs counter to God's immutable will for the universe that He has created. . . The realm of human affairs is completely governed by His Providence, no matter how disordered and unjust events may seem to us as we observe them with our feeble, myopic vision."

wicked rulers: First, God can use an unjust leader as a means of punishing a wicked community. Second, God can use a wicked leader to sanctify the faithful by deepening their faith and furthering their Christian witness to others. Third, God can appoint wicked leaders to incite wars with other wicked nations, thereby bringing judgment on multiple wicked nations simultaneously.

Related to the last point, Augustine argues that God utilizes wars to accomplish his greater purposes.⁹⁰ Similar to the function of unjust leaders, God can use wars to call sinners to repentance, bring judgment on the unrepentant, sanctify Christians' faith in God, and serve as a means of Christian testimony. War can also be the means to usher Christians to heaven (i.e., via death). For Christians, war is not divine judgment, but God's means of bringing about a greater good temporally (faith, eradication of evil, etc.) or eternally (heaven). War is also the mechanism for the rise and fall of nations. Therefore, God uses evil leaders as his instruments of judgment and sanctification.⁹¹ Even if Christians cannot grasp God's providential reasons, they should submit to their political authorities knowing that God has placed their leaders there.⁹²

In Augustine's perspective, there was no communal or civilian right of rebellion against political leaders. Christians do not ultimately know how God is providentially using their leaders, and thus Christians should remain obedient citizens.⁹³ Christians are, however, expected to disobey immoral commands (renunciation of faith, sinful acts, etc.). This resistance, however, is a form of non-violent non-compliance.⁹⁴ In refusing to perform immoral commands, Christians are still expected to submit to the authority of the government and to whatever judicial punishments may ensue, even if they are unjust. In this way, Christians resist immoral commands without resisting the leaders established by God. Therefore, Christians uphold the integrity

⁹⁰ See Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 1.1. See *The Political Writings of St. Augustine*, ed. Henry Paolucci (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1996), 44–117, for an extended treatment of this topic.

⁹¹ Augustine states, “when He exposes us to adversities, it is either to prove our perfections or correct our imperfections; and in return for our patient endurance of the sufferings of time, He reserves for us an everlasting reward” (*De Civitate Dei* I.XXIX).

⁹² Deane, *Political and Social Ideas*, 157.

⁹³ See Deane, *Political and Social Ideas*, 134: “Moreover, we must not forget that the wicked or unjust man who exercises rule is in every way as legitimate and as much entitled to absolute obedience as the most pious or just ruler. The goodness or badness, piety or impiety, justice or injustice of the ruler has nothing at all to do with his title to rule and to be obeyed.”

⁹⁴ Deane, *Political and Social Ideas*, 149.

of the Christian faith, God's appointment of political leaders, and his divine purposes. In the end, God alone judges the leaders' (mis)actions.

Aquinas's Departure from Augustine

Before describing Aquinas's position in more detail, I provide a brief summary of how Aquinas appropriates Augustine's theo-political theory while avoiding his predecessor's political quietism in five ways. First, Aquinas depicts the institution of government as God's means to restrain sin, provide order, protect the common good, and help citizens cultivate virtue. Political leaders are held accountable to standards of preserving, protecting, and cultivating the common good in an other-regarding orientation. Christians need not fear political leaders, nor feel that their fidelity to God was violated. God creates the temporal political realm as the good means for humanity's communal life, benefit, growth, and preparation for the Beatific Vision. Thus, the temporal and spiritual spheres are intertwined. Second, Aquinas allows citizens to rebel against tyrannical leaders if the leaders consistently abuse their power and oppress the people in ways that fundamentally violate the common good. Tyrannical leaders forfeit their right to rule and are no longer considered legitimate authorities. Therefore, citizens are not obligated to obey or submit to illegitimate leaders. Further, citizens could justly participate in an armed rebellion (via legitimate authority, just cause, right intention, necessity, proportionality, and/or likelihood of success). A just rebellion is neither a form of sedition nor an act of political disloyalty, but is grounded in a communal right to protect the common good.⁹⁵ Third, citizens have a *duty* to resist and remove tyrannical leaders. If sustained and intolerable abuse occurs, tyrannical leaders threaten the entire community's common good, and thus the very establishment of order, justice, and peace. Therefore, there is an active obligation on the part of the community to put tyranny to an end. Some tyrannical abuse, however, should be tolerated if the risk to thwart it harms the community more than if it were to refrain. Fourth, Aquinas holds political leaders morally and politically accountable to their citizens. At times, God may allow a tyrant as a form of punishment, but this does not mean that citizens are to accept it as the indefinite will of

⁹⁵ A communal (or collective) right is held by all citizens by virtue of their connection to the political community. It requires a coalition of citizens to enact this right (likely a major share). This is different from an individual right in which political community or communal consent is not required. An individual right is held within the individual and can in theory be enacted unilaterally without communal consent (assuming it does not harm others' rights).

God. Rather, citizens are encouraged to remove tyrants through other public authorities or official policies of removal. If the community is incapable of armed force or action is not prudential, it is encouraged to put its faith in God and to remember God's ability to dispose of tyrants as is evidenced in multiple biblical narratives. Fifth, Aquinas upholds the Christian tradition's emphasis on submission to political authorities found in Rom 13, but in a way that focuses on God's establishment of the institution of government, rather than the providential establishment of all political leaders.⁹⁶ This interpretation sets the stage for Aquinas's expanded understanding of legitimate authority which is grounded in the community's common good rather than in individual rulers. In other words, individual leaders serve as representatives of this common good rather than holding legitimacy in themselves. Therefore, Aquinas's interpretation of Rom 13 encourages Christian submissiveness in general while also discouraging the community from a quietism that enables political tyranny.

Aquinas's five distinctions provide a more active form of civilian political engagement and resistance than Augustine's thinking allowed. Therefore, Aquinas's inventive contribution to just war thinking is his allowance for armed rebellion against political tyranny based in the expanded communal understanding of legitimate authority. In light of this comparison, I am sympathetic to concerns that traditional just war thinking is too statist, static, or inadequate for addressing authoritarianism. Yet, as I have briefly displayed, the fear of authoritarianism is not a modern concern, but one that is deeply entrenched in Aquinas's political theory. This brief comparison also displays that the classical just war tradition is not as monolithic or static as some suggest. Thus, while Aquinas's just war theory is thoroughly Augustinian, his just rebellion theory uniquely stands apart. Aquinas's views are deeply entrenched in classical just war thinking, to be sure, but in a way that allows for a wider application than Augustine envisioned. Therefore, one should be cautious of contemporary calls to radically reimagine, revise, or jettison classical just war theory, since diversity and alternative understandings are evident within the just war tradition. As I will continue to display, we are better off reinvestigating more historical sources for developing just rebellion theory than assuming the just war tradition's deficiency and inadvertently missing out on its wisdom. In what follows, I display the ancient wisdom and

⁹⁶ Aquinas, *Super Rom* 13, lec. 1, Marietti no.1022 (sites.google.com/site/aquinasstudy-bible/home/romans/st-thomas-aquinas-on-romans). In his commentary on Rom 13, Aquinas also discusses tyranny, divine providence, political accountability, and a cautious acceptance of political resistance.

contemporary relevance found in Aquinas's views on tyranny and justified armed rebellion.

Aquinas on Political Tyranny

Similar to contemporary times, Aquinas was deeply conscious of and concerned over political tyranny. Tyranny is one of the most prominent political issues discussed by Aquinas and is the fundamental concern in his just rebellion thinking. Aquinas argues that tyranny stunts communities' growth through limiting material resources and stifling the cultivation of virtue. Tyranny also creates chaos, distrust, and vulnerability by thwarting the community's sense of unity, peace, and stability. Intolerable conditions occur when there is a sustained and significantly pervasive attack on the order, justice, and peace of the community. Aquinas argues that tyrants attempt to protect their power through three means. First, tyrants thwart solidarity and friendship among citizens to prevent unified efforts to challenge their power. Second, tyrants hoard power and wealth from citizens to keep them from having adequate resources to oppose them. Lastly, tyrants stunt the growth of virtues as a way to maintain power and control.⁹⁷ Aquinas believed that virtuous people will eventually challenge tyrants, and thus tyrants find it necessary to stunt the cultivation of virtue. By suggesting that virtuous citizens will challenge tyranny, Aquinas implicitly endorses the resistance of tyranny as a virtuous act. The government's investment in the cultivation of virtue serves as an additional check and balance for political polity. Without virtue, people are more susceptible to political tyranny.

Aquinas further describes tyranny as the worst political polity for a community: "What renders government unjust is the fact that the private good of the ruler is sought at the expense of the good of the community. The further it departs from the common good, therefore, the more unjust will the government be."⁹⁸ Coming from the Greek term *τυραννος* and tied to the related term *τυραννίς*, translated as "force," tyrants are described as those who rule by unjust force and who "oppress with power."⁹⁹ A tyrant "oppresses his subjects in a variety of ways, according to the different passions

⁹⁷ *De reg. princ.* I, ch. 4. Regarding thwarting solidarity and friendship, Aquinas states: "Indeed it is the tyrant who is guilty of sedition, since he nourishes discord and sedition among his subjects in order to be able to dominate them more securely" (*ST* II-II, q. 42, a. 2, ad 3).

⁹⁸ *De reg. princ.* I, ch. 4. Aquinas notes here that "tyrannical government more often arises from the rule of many than from that of one."

⁹⁹ *De reg. princ.* I, ch. 2.

to which he is subject as he tries to secure whatever goods he desires.”¹⁰⁰ Tyrants govern “unjustly” by pursuing personal gain and neglecting the “good of the community.”¹⁰¹ Tyranny is a violation of the leader’s role because it neglects and injures the common good through prioritizing the leader’s private good.¹⁰² Proper political leaders are other-regarding in providing, protecting, and cultivating the community for interdependent flourishing, while tyrants are self-regarding in hoarding resources, limiting virtues, and thwarting solidarity for personal gain. Aquinas provides several analogies to describe the horrible nature of tyranny. Tyrannical rule is analogous to being “mauled by a ferocious animal.”¹⁰³ Tyrants are also compared to thieves who use their power to steal from others for private gain.¹⁰⁴ In reference to tyranny as a type of theft, Aquinas states: “But to use public authority to take other people’s property violently and against justice, is to act unlawfully and to commit robbery; and anyone who does this is bound to make restitution.”¹⁰⁵ Therefore, Aquinas argues that political leaders are to be held accountable to their citizens for their actions. Political leaders do not have unconditional or unaccountable authority. With all this in mind, Aquinas defines tyrants as *illegitimate political leaders who inhumanely oppress the community through a self-regarding orientation, which leads to the illegitimate use of authority* (force, theft, unjust policies, etc.).

Aquinas argues that tyrants typically employ oppressive means to hoard and maintain power. He argues, however, that this is ironically counterproductive to maintaining power. It is oppressive means, which most pragmatically threaten authority.¹⁰⁶ There is no love for abusive leaders because “they do not exhibit towards [the community] the kind of behavior for which anyone deserves to be loved.”¹⁰⁷ Loyalty is also absent in an oppressive environment. Yet, it is the “virtue of loyalty” which dissuades people from attempting to “throw off the yoke of undeserved servitude.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁰ *De reg. princ.* I, ch. 4.

¹⁰¹ *De reg. princ.* I, ch. 2.

¹⁰² *ST II-II*, q. 42, a. 2, ad 3.

¹⁰³ *De reg. princ.* I, ch. 5.

¹⁰⁴ Concerning theft, Aquinas states, “if princes extort by violence something which is not due to them, they commit robbery just as much as the bandit does”; they “are bound to make restitution, just as robbers are; and by so much do they sin more grievously than robbers, as their actions bring into a greater and more general peril the public justice whose custodians they are appointed to be” (*ST II-II*, q. 66, a. 8, ad 3).

¹⁰⁵ *ST II-II*, q. 66, a. 8, ad 3.

¹⁰⁶ *De reg. princ.* I, ch. 8.

¹⁰⁷ *De reg. princ.* I, ch. 8.

¹⁰⁸ *De reg. princ.* I, ch. 9.

Tyrants also often attempt to paralyze a community through “fear,” yet this is also a counterproductive tactic:

But fear is a weak foundation. For those who are subdued by fear will, if an occasion arises when they may do so with hope of impunity, rise up against their rulers in a manner which will be all the more ardent the more they have been constrained against their will and through fear alone, just as water, when forcibly compressed, will burst forth all the more vigorously when it finds an outlet.¹⁰⁹

Therefore, proper political service, rather than tyranny, leads to sustaining political power. This shows that even leaders who want to ensure their authority for selfish reasons are better off doing so through other-regarding service rather than oppression.

Aquinas on Individually Initiated Tyrannicide

While it is true that the majority of classical just war thinkers were hesitant about or even resistant to the idea of justified rebellion, Aquinas was able to create the possibility of such action without disregarding the criterion of legitimate authority.¹¹⁰ Reichberg recounts how Aquinas held a more “open” perspective of tyrannicide at first that was later qualified.¹¹¹ In his writings on the subject, Aquinas oscillates on the issue of tyrannicide in a way that both expands and restricts permissibility.¹¹² In Aquinas’s first account of tyrannicide found in his commentary on Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*, he allows for

¹⁰⁹ *De reg. princ.* I, ch. 6.

¹¹⁰ In the context of rebellion, the criterion of legitimate authority is usually the most difficulty or problematic element to maintain for the simple reason that rebellion is occurring in response to violations committed by the authority deemed “legitimate.” Therefore, modern just war revisionists like Fabre have argued for “jettisoning” the criterion of legitimate authority in contexts of justified rebellion.

¹¹¹ Reichberg discusses this shift in *Thomas Aquinas on War and Peace*, 122–27. R. W. Dyson also notes that, in his early writings, Aquinas seems to favor tyrannicide in extreme cases in which no other viable option existed, invoking Julius Caesar as a historical example where tyrannicide was approved: see Dyson, “Introduction,” in *Aquinas Political Writings*, trans. R. W. Dyson, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), xxix.

¹¹² Again, to Reichberg’s three primary sources (*In I–IV sent.*, *ST*, and *De reg. princ.*), I add the commentary on Romans, which addresses the issue of tyranny, obedience, and rebellion in commenting on chapter 13.

any civilian to resist usurpers provided there be no higher authority.¹¹³ In contrast, political authorities that are legitimately empowered but err are protected from civilian rebellion.¹¹⁴ Aquinas's depiction of tyrannicide in this source seems to create room for a proto-individual right of rebellion against any usurper. In his second (*ST*) and third (*De regimine principum*) accounts, however, Aquinas more explicitly restricts the right of rebellion to other public authorities, preventing private citizens from unilaterally acting.¹¹⁵ Yet, even as Aquinas restricts his allowance for civilians to unilaterally act, he simultaneously expands the permissibility of tyrannicide to include political leaders who are legitimately empowered but have become unjust in their rule. In other words, Aquinas's first conception of justified rebellion displaces the criterion of legitimate authority, while the second and third renditions incorporate the criterion of legitimate authority via a line of authoritative succession in which other recognized political leaders gain the authority to resist their superior(s) if they become tyrannical.¹¹⁶ While this right is typically reserved for the foremost authorized leader, there is a line of authoritative succession based on a threefold layer of authority if the foremost leader were to falter.¹¹⁷ This threefold layer of political authority is as follows: the foremost authorized leader, other national and local political leaders, and a united coalition of citizens. On the second level, if the foremost leader is abusive or grossly negligent, other national leaders gain authority presumably according to a previously established hierarchical pattern.¹¹⁸ The third level allows the right to pass to citizens vis-à-vis a united coalition in extreme cases, provided that they can meet other criteria such as necessity, proportionality, and likelihood of success. In such a perspective, there is a communal right of rebellion oriented around the common good, rather than a right grounded in individuals. Aquinas appropriates

¹¹³ Reichberg notes that the Latin *aliquis* ("anyone") is used ("Legitimate Authority," 349).

¹¹⁴ Reichberg, *Thomas Aquinas on War and Peace*, 122–23.

¹¹⁵ Reichberg, *Thomas Aquinas on War and Peace*, 123–27.

¹¹⁶ See Reichberg, "Legitimate Authority," 350: "Aquinas avers that tyrannicide can be justified when it is undertaken at the initiative of 'public authority' (*auctoritate publica*)."
See also 351: "This authority accordingly passes to the defenders of the common good. Far from contravening the first requirement of *bellum iustum*, by their just resort to force they affirm the principle's validity."

¹¹⁷ Later Thomistic thinkers such as Francisco de Vitoria added an additional layer by including the legitimacy of other international leaders to address foreign tyranny. See 3.5 in his "On the American Indians," in *Vitoria: Political Writings*, ed. Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrence (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹¹⁸ For example, the United States has an established line of succession: president, vice-president, speaker of the House, etc.

the criterion of legitimate authority to include the common good, thus allowing armed rebellion to be used in justified cases by the community (i.e., lesser public authorities first and citizens as a last resort). Reichberg states: "The discourse thereby shifts from the person of the prince to the underlying subject of this competence—the political community—which acts through its leadership to protect the common good."¹¹⁹ Therefore, legitimate authority is now defined by the common good rather than by the rulers themselves.¹²⁰

To clarify, political leaders are the representatives of the common good, and therefore the rightful legitimate authorities. Legitimate authority typically rests in the foremost political leader.¹²¹ However, in contexts of the foremost political leader turning tyrannical, other political leaders (ideally through a pre-established hierarchal system) are able to hold him accountable. If other political leaders are negligent, incapable, or complicit, then civilian-led armed rebellion is still permissible as a last resort. Even in this extreme scenario of civilian armed rebellion, the right of rebellion is not based on an individualistic notion as we find in Enlightenment thinkers or in current revisionist accounts. Rather, the right of rebellion is grounded in a communal right of collective citizens working together towards restoring the common good. In other words, it is the citizens' right vis-à-vis the common good rather than vis-à-vis an individual right. All citizens hold the right together by virtue of being in the community itself, rather than independently. This communal right requires a unified coalition of citizens to remove a tyrant, rather than individual citizens acting unilaterally. Presumably, when citizens form a unified coalition, temporary leaders will be appointed, since "coordinated action" is required for likelihood of success.¹²² In such a scenario, the criterion of legitimate authority is still being implemented through the community itself. If armed rebellion is not

¹¹⁹ Reichberg, "Legitimate Authority," 339.

¹²⁰ See Reichberg, "Legitimate Authority," 351: "In later discussions, there appears a growing emphasis on the underlying function of authority, which is to promote the well-being of society by facilitating collective action toward beneficial ends. Having come to a more explicit recognition that authority is for the sake of society, not vice versa, Aquinas could think of it as a competence embodied in society itself (hence the notion of 'public authority') rather than as standing over society (as in the fealty due to a feudal lord)."

¹²¹ Johnson argues that Aquinas believes that this legitimacy is reserved exclusively for the foremost leader, but Reichberg argues that Aquinas uses the plural *principes*, applying it to other princes outside the emperor. ("Legitimate Authority," 339, addressing Johnson at 340n10). I concur with Reichberg's translation on this point.

¹²² Reichberg, "Legitimate Authority," 353.

possible or prudential, then citizens should bear the weight of the tyranny as much as possible.

If the society has dissolved in such a way that individuals have returned to what Thomas Hobbes calls a natural “state of war,” then we are no longer looking at a war or rebellion, but rather individual self-defense.¹²³ As previously mentioned, Aquinas has no qualms with individuals unilaterally defending themselves, but if a situation pertains to the community, then the communal context changes the nature of the act (i.e., war rather than self-defense). War and rebellion are political and communal realities that cannot be unilaterally initiated. Therefore, Aquinas does not envision an individually based or unilaterally implemented right of rebellion as promoted in Fabre’s recent proposal. In summary, R. W. Dyson argues that Aquinas’s view may be best described as an “intelligible position of cautious conservatism which recognizes that extreme measures may be justified sometimes but should be avoided if at all possible.”¹²⁴ In my view, Aquinas’s position avoids the two extremes of unaccountable tyranny (found in Augustine) and individually initiated rebellion (found in Fabre).

Delineating a Justified Armed Rebellion

Having established that legitimate authority is upheld even in contexts of armed rebellion, other criteria must still be met for an armed rebellion to be justified. To clarify the criterion of just cause, Aquinas differentiates between legitimate and illegitimate political leaders by terminologically distinguishing “unworthy” leaders from “unjust” leaders.¹²⁵ Unworthy leaders are those who have manifest character flaws or habits of vice. They may commit infrequent or insubstantial political infractions. Aquinas’s seeming acceptance of infrequent abuse is not suggesting that a leader can get away with abuse if they simply conveniently time their infractions. The caution is against creating implausible expectations of political leaders’ conduct in which mounting an armed rebellion becomes too widely permissible for too many causes. Yet, even when armed rebellion is not permissible or prudential, this does not preclude holding leaders accountable for the abuse of power. If leaders abuse their power, a community is free to “depose or restrain a king.”¹²⁶ The political abuse of authority requires significant punishment due to the gravity and the far-reaching effects of the crime:

¹²³ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 190.

¹²⁴ Dyson, “Introduction,” xxx.

¹²⁵ He also classifies unworthy as “wicked.”

¹²⁶ *De reg. princ.* I, ch. 7.

For if someone who robs one man, or delivers him into slavery, or slays him, deserves the greatest punishment, whether, indeed, it be death by the judgment of men or eternal damnation by the judgment of God, how much more is the tyrant to be deemed worthy to suffer worse penalties, who has robbed all men everywhere, worked against the liberty of all, and slain all and sundry to please his own will?¹²⁷

Therefore, the violation of leaders' authority and responsibilities is still considered immoral, albeit not necessitating armed resistance. If citizens are merely put off by the leader's personal wickedness or responding to minor infractions, then armed rebellion is not justified.¹²⁸ In cases of tolerable abuse, citizens should seek accountability, reparations, or reconciliatory measures through other authorized political authorities.

Aquinas advises political communities to create systems of accountability prior to their leaders holding office. He recommends three preventative measures for protecting a community from tyrannical rule.¹²⁹ First, political communities should seek leaders with virtuous character who are not likely to abuse authority. Second, legal measures should be put in place to remove leaders if abuses of power occurs. Third, leaders' power should be limited. In other words, political authorities should not be given unconditional or unaccountable authority. A structure of accountability helps to limit leaders' illegitimate use of authority. This type of legal accountability is also preferable because it keeps order, justice, and peace without the need of armed force to remove tyrannical leaders. If citizens cannot successfully appeal to other political leaders, then they can utilize non-violent resistance. In any case, there are several avenues to take before citizens resign themselves to endure. Additionally, Aquinas notes that the community can remove tyrants without feeling as if they unjustly betrayed their leader, breached an agreement, or committed an act of injustice.¹³⁰ Aquinas even argues that tyrants forfeit agreements of perpetual leadership. Therefore, Aquinas argues that political authority is continually contingent upon the actions of the political leader.

Despite the wicked character of unworthy leaders, however, it is still possible for an unworthy leader to serve the common good: "The first defect is not an impediment to the acquisition of rightful authority; and because

¹²⁷ *De reg. princ.* I, ch. 12.

¹²⁸ Aquinas gives an example as when "some of the goods of individual men" are taken (*De reg. princ.* I, ch. 6).

¹²⁹ All three elements can be found in *De reg. princ.* I, ch. 6.

¹³⁰ See *De reg. princ.* I, ch. 7: "For the tyrant who has failed to govern the community faithfully, as the office of king requires, has deserved to be treated in this way."

authority is always of God according to its form, which is the cause of our duty to obey it, their subjects are always bound to obey such rulers, however unworthy.¹³¹ Therefore, the legitimacy of political authority is not based on moral or political perfection, but on their overall care of the common good. If, on the whole, unworthy leaders uphold their central duties to the common good, then their legitimacy is maintained. Leaders' personal and professional failures are worthy of lament and open for accountability, but are not a just cause for armed rebellion. Citizens' moral obligation to be compliant to unworthy leaders is about supporting the common good of order, justice, and peace.

The moral and political obligations of civilians are conditioned, however, upon the political authorities' use of power:

Man is bound to obey secular princes in so far as this is required by order of justice. Wherefore if the prince's authority is not just but usurped, or if he commands what is unjust, his subjects are not bound to obey him, except perhaps accidentally, in order to avoid scandal or danger.¹³²

If civilian compliance requires enacting a manifestly immoral command or endangering the common good, then compliance is not permitted. Yet, even in dire tyrannical circumstances, Aquinas believes prudence should guide a community's application of resistance (e.g., the use of non-compliance, legal measures, or armed force).¹³³ Aquinas's political theory revolves around the preservation of order, justice, and peace. Thus, anarchy and civilian armed force have the potential to be more harmful than some forms of tyranny. Again, not utilizing armed force does not equate to capitulating to tyranny. Other forms of resistance and appeals for accountability can and should be made. Aquinas, however, does not offer an optimistic perspective of tyrants yielding to accountability peacefully. Typically, tyrants are impenitent, incorrigible, and unresponsive to accountability. Unaccountable tyranny, however, should not be ignored, since there is the additional danger of creating political precedent. The danger of tyranny is not just for those in the present, but the possibility of perpetuating an endless cycle for future

¹³¹ Aquinas, *In II sent.*, d. 44, q. 2, a. 2.

¹³² *ST II-II*, q. 104, a. 6, ad 3. For Aquinas's meaning of "accident," see Gaven Kerr's section on "Substance and Accident" (section 4) in "Aquinas: Metaphysics," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, iep.utm.edu/aq-meta.

¹³³ For more on prudence in Aquinas's just war thinking, see Gregory Reichberg, "Thomas Aquinas on Military Prudence," *Journal of Military Ethics* 9, no. 3 (2010): 261–74.

generations.¹³⁴ Therefore, there is an urgency for the community to stop present tyranny for the sake of future generations. Future political oppression or political flourishing is a multigenerational concern which requires leaders to be held accountable.

Aquinas categorizes the second type of political leaders as “unjust” (alternatively tyrannical), and thus illegitimate. Unjust leaders serve personal rather than communal ends and subvert the common good. In Aquinas’s political theory, political leaders are directly accountable to citizens and risk invalidation if they abuse their authority. Since compliance is required only when leaders properly fulfill their role, Aquinas allows for and even demands civilian non-compliance in certain cases.¹³⁵ In extreme cases of tyranny this even allows for the use of armed rebellion. Given how past commentators understood the term, “sedition” was seen to be immoral in its very essence. Therefore, Aquinas had to supply a way to legitimize armed rebellion in a way that avoids the connotations of sedition. Incorporating his definition of tyranny, Aquinas shows that “there is no sedition in disturbing a government of this kind” and flips the charge of sedition onto the tyrants, as those who are truly seditious, sowing “discord” and harming the people by focusing exclusively on their “private good.”¹³⁶ In such cases, Aquinas argues that armed rebellion may be morally permissible: “It is lawful to fight, provided it be for the common good.”¹³⁷ This is his first explicit reference to the use of armed force in response to political oppression. Even with this allowance, however, Aquinas carefully argues that other just war criteria must be upheld.

Justified armed rebellion requires *sustained or substantial abuse* by the political leader (a *just cause* for a *proportional* rebellion *aimed at* peace). Aquinas describes conditions as intolerable when “the tyranny is so excessive that it ravages the whole community.”¹³⁸ In other words, tyranny is that which subverts the very purpose and role of the government (i.e., order, justice, and peace). In today’s terms, mass atrocities, crimes against humanity,

¹³⁴ See *De reg. princ.* I, ch. 12: “Not only do [tyrants] make no attempt to repair the evil that they have done, but by the authority of their actions they make shameless sinning into a custom which they then transmit to their posterity, and so they are held guilty in the sight of God not only of their own misdeeds, but also of those of the others to whom they have left behind the example of sinning before God.”

¹³⁵ In reference to when authorities command a sinful act, Aquinas states, “not only is one not bound to obey the ruler, but one is bound not to obey him” (*In II sent.*, d. 44, q. 2, a. 2). See also Sally Schols, “Civil Disobedience in the Social Theory of Thomas Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 60 (1996): 449–62.

¹³⁶ *ST II-II*, q. 42, a. 2, ad 3.

¹³⁷ *ST II-II*, q. 42, a. 2, ad 1.

¹³⁸ See *De reg. princ.* I, ch. 5.

and certain human rights violations would qualify as substantially subverting the common good. The telos of armed rebellion is restorative rather than retributive. It aims not to get revenge on tyrants, but to restore the common good. Therefore, even in dire situations, a community must consider whether the armed rebellion will harm the common good more than the tyrant's abuse, taking into account the criteria of necessity, proportionality, the likelihood of success, and the aim of peace. Prudentially, a community may be required to allow the abuse to remain if armed rebellion would further disturb the community or worsen conditions. Interestingly, the criteria of necessity, proportionality, likelihood of success, and so on seem to play a more pronounced role in Aquinas's evaluation of whether a rebellion is justified than in his just war thinking.¹³⁹

Summarizing Aquinas's Just Rebellion Theory

In summary, a justified armed rebellion requires a legitimate authority grounded in the common good (i.e., held through an authoritative line of succession) who has a just cause (tyranny, the severe negation of the common good, culpable negligence, refusal of accountability, etc.) and a right intention (i.e., the restoration of the common good) to use armed force when it is necessary (i.e., under intolerable conditions) and proportionate, and stands a reasonable chance of success (i.e., will not cause worse harm than the current conditions). Aquinas's just rebellion theory is based on his communitarian political theory centered on the common good of order, justice, and peace and the just war criteria of legitimate authority, just cause, and right intention. Therefore, it is best to view Aquinas's just rebellion theory as derivative of classical just war thinking rather than as a distinctive theory departing from the just war tradition. In this respect, Aquinas foreshadows contemporary efforts to utilize just war criteria to craft a just rebellion theory. In contrast to contemporary efforts, however, Aquinas utilizes the criterion of legitimate authority in his approach to armed rebellion.

¹³⁹ Johnson argues that legitimate authority, just cause, and right intention are the primary just war criteria dominating classical thinking, whereas necessity, proportionality, discrimination, and the likelihood of success are "prudential criteria" that are not required to act (*Ethics and the Use of Force*, 19). Instead of following Johnson's language of "prudential criteria," however, I prefer Kelsay's understanding of these criteria as related to measures of right intention. In other words, these criteria should be met as part of a trifold criteria. In a classroom conversation, Kelsay has argued that Johnson's language was likely a reaction to the U.S. Catholic Council of Bishops argument for the primacy of necessity, proportionality, discrimination, and the likelihood of success in evaluating the permissibility of contemporary just war.

Fabre's Jettisoning of Legitimate Authority

Contrasting Aquinas's communal right of rebellion is Fabre's contemporary proposal of an individual right of rebellion. While Aquinas's views are based on his communitarian political theory, Fabre bases her views on a political cosmopolitanism in which individualism, equalitarianism, and universalism are foundational principles.¹⁴⁰ As a part of her cosmopolitanism, she deemphasizes the importance of "special relationships."¹⁴¹ In other words, her strong individualism does not tie individuals to their particular political communities in any significant way. Therefore, she advocates for an individual right of war to counter the historical precedent of political authorities' "exclusive" right of war.¹⁴² Fabre argues that governments fiducially hold rights which are derivative of the rights of individuals. For example, the state's right to war is merely a derivative of an individual's right to war. If political leaders violate people's rights (citizens or non-citizens), then leaders forfeit their right to fiducially manage their citizens' rights and are deemed illegitimate authorities, thus reverting the right of war to individuals.¹⁴³ Fabre argues that "a war need not be waged by a legitimate authority in order to

¹⁴⁰ Cosmopolitanism is built around three main claims. First, individuals are equal to all other individuals and are the moral focus of ethical inquiry. Second, states' rights are derivative of individuals' rights. Any right utilized by a state must provide and protect individuals. Third, citizens and states do not have a special relationship with each other. In other words, states should not prefer their citizens' rights to the rights of other individuals and vice versa. Therefore, all individuals have innate human rights irrespective of race, religion, gender, geography, or political affiliation, etc. See Fabre, "Cosmopolitanism," 964–65.

¹⁴¹ Fabre, *Cosmopolitan War*, 137.

¹⁴² See Fabre, *Cosmopolitan War*, 142: "According to the deep morality of war, I argue, it is not necessary for a war to be just that it should be waged by the kinds of entity on which the right to go to war has traditionally been conferred: namely, state or quasi-state actors. Rather, an entity can hold the right to wage war if it is the best placed to put a stop to the wrongdoings which provide agents with a just cause for war." She continues: "The right to wage a war in defence of one's human rights should also be conceived of as a human right. If that is so, the right cannot be denied to some groups of individuals on the grounds that they lack some characteristic or other, when lacking or possessing those characteristics is irrelevant to their fundamental interest in being able to protect their rights" (145).

¹⁴³ Fabre, *Cosmopolitan War*, 45–47. While Fabre does not expect moral perfection, she states: "Some kinds of wrongdoings are so egregious that state officials lack the morally justified power to commit them. More strongly still, state officials who commit such wrongdoings in a systematic way and over a significant period of time, or who negligently or willfully fail to stop the commission of those wrongdoings by private actors, forfeit their protected (and not only their naked) power to govern" (*Cosmopolitan War*, 47).

count as a just war.”¹⁴⁴ Further, she claims, “non-political groups, as well as individuals themselves, can have the right to go to war.”¹⁴⁵ Thus, cosmopolitans “must renounce” the legitimate authority requirement.¹⁴⁶ While Fabre acknowledges the pragmatic rationale for restricting war to political authorities, she denies the moral basis for such a restriction. Fabre argues that the important point is not whether an individual can go to war, but whether they are justified in doing so (i.e., whether other *ad bellum* criteria are fulfilled).¹⁴⁷ Whether war is conducted by an individual or a group is morally irrelevant. Every individual maintains a right to protect their “fundamental interest(s)” regardless of political recognition.¹⁴⁸ In summary, Fabre endorses an individual right to wage war, the fiduciary management of this right by the government, the forfeiture of such a right if political authorities are grossly negligent or abusive, and the reversion of the right of armed force to individuals in oppressive circumstances.

Consent and Institutional Accountability

Despite Fabre’s individualistic rhetoric, she attempts to create two standards for individuals who wish to initiate a war on behalf of their community.¹⁴⁹ Individuals must “have good reasons to believe that their fellow community members would consent if they could, and they put in place institutional mechanisms whereby those for whose sake they fight can hold them into account once the war is over.”¹⁵⁰ What is immediately striking about her standards of consent and institutional accountability is the way that this undercuts the very condition of individuality. In other words, the language

¹⁴⁴ Fabre, “Cosmopolitanism,” 964–65.

¹⁴⁵ Fabre, “Cosmopolitanism,” 968.

¹⁴⁶ Fabre, “Cosmopolitanism,” 968. To clarify, the rejection of legitimate authority is conditioned on its pragmatic merit to protect individuals.

¹⁴⁷ Fabre, “Cosmopolitanism,” 970. See also 76: “To reject it is, in effect, to deny that individuals are one another’s moral equals irrespective of political borders, and that they have the right to defend, by force if necessary, their fundamental human rights.”

¹⁴⁸ Fabre, “Cosmopolitanism,” 969. See also *Cosmopolitan War*, 131: “The geographical location of a conflict (as within, or across, borders) and the political status of its actors are irrelevant to the determination of the latter’s rights, duties, and liabilities.”

¹⁴⁹ In addition to the two standards of consent and institutional accountability, Fabre attempts to restrict an individual’s right to war by introducing other just war criteria of just cause, likelihood of success, and proportionality.

¹⁵⁰ Fabre, *Cosmopolitan War*, 155. Concerning acting without explicit consent, see 156: “But they do at least lend support to the view that it is not absolutely necessary that an individual acting alone, or a group, be able to secure a mandate from those on whose behalf they go to war, in order for their war to be just.”

of an individual's right to war is unhelpful, misleading, and disingenuous. Later, she acknowledges, "overthrowing and replacing a regime, by contrast, is a clearly political act which cannot be committed by just anyone."¹⁵¹ There are significant inconsistencies in Fabre's account. Fabre argues that individuals have a right to war and can utilize this right in defense of the self or on behalf of others. Yet Fabre argues that, despite having a right to war, a single individual cannot in practice lead a war without some representative element (a following, communal consent, accountability, etc.). This leads Fabre to distinguish terrorism from rebellion (e.g., Timothy McVeigh is described as a terrorist). Aquinas's argument that wars/rebellions are fundamentally communal and political phenomena in which individuals cannot unilaterally act is strengthened. Fabre also acknowledges that civil wars are distinct from "mere self-defensive killing," yet she is not consistent or careful in distinguishing self-defense from war elsewhere in her work.¹⁵² By virtue of having some type of following or communal consent, we are moving beyond an individual's unilateral right to war. Therefore, we are better off with Aquinas's distinction of an individual's right of self-defense from the right of war.

The very issue of representativeness and consent detracts from Fabre's individualistic construction. Further, the call for an institutional (dare I say communal) form of accountability post-rebellion again displays that war and rebellion are intricately tied with political communities, rather than atomistic individual right bearers. Fabre's rhetoric is far more about shock value than anything substantive, as she constantly vacillates between a strong individualism and an acknowledgment that an individual cannot act without communal representation/consent.¹⁵³ Therefore, Fabre's construction does not provide an individual right of rebellion in theory or practice. Further, in addition to the two standards of consent and institutional accountability, Fabre attempts to restrict an individual's right of war by introducing other just war criteria such as just cause, likelihood of success, and proportionality. She notes that the last two criteria are what likely prevent individuals from acting unilaterally. At the end of Fabre's individualistic argument, it seems we have come full circle to the acknowledgment of the benefits of classical

¹⁵¹ Fabre, *Cosmopolitan War*, 156.

¹⁵² Fabre, *Cosmopolitan War*, 136–37.

¹⁵³ Another example of Fabre's vacillating rhetoric: "More precisely, it is not a necessary condition for a war to be just that it be waged by such an authority. In fact, in some cases individuals alone can have the right to go to war, even though in other cases the latter should be prosecuted by actors with some degree of representativeness of, and authority over, the people and territory which they claim to govern" (*Cosmopolitan War*, 165).

just war criteria. Fabre wrongly laments the fact that just war theory denies the moral permissibility of armed rebellion by on the basis of lacking one criterion, which she argues is unnecessary.¹⁵⁴ As I have shown in this essay, however, Aquinas does present the possibility of a justified armed rebellion grounded in the criterion of legitimate authority rather than in spite of it. Therefore, we are better off reinvestigating the historical just war tradition rather than exasperatingly and ignorantly setting it aside in favor of ideas that are currently in vogue.

Comparing Aquinas's Communal Right with Fabre's Individual Right

It may seem surprising, but Aquinas does agree with Fabre on a few issues. Despite significant differences on their political vision and concerning rights, means, and the ends of armed force, there is a common revulsion for political tyranny and a common affirmation that political authority can be forfeited through such abuse. There is also a common affirmation that armed force can be justified in removing such tyranny when other just war criteria are met. It has been my contention, however, that Aquinas's formulation offers a better and more adequate approach to armed rebellion by preserving the criterion of legitimate authority, as opposed to Fabre's rejection of it.¹⁵⁵

In the end, Fabre's argument of abandoning the criterion of legitimate authority is overdrawn, misleading, and inadequate for dealing with political oppression. Fabre's claims are overdrawn in the following manner. First, her approach is built around a monolithic understanding of the just war tradition largely rooted in Michael Walzer's approach.¹⁵⁶ This leads her to overemphasize the problem of the tradition's rejection of armed rebellion. I have shown throughout that, even in the tradition's early formulations (i.e., Aquinas), it allows for the possibility of armed rebellion. Further, the permissibility of such an allowance comes through the criterion of legitimate authority, rather than around it. Thus, legitimate authority is not the problematic criterion disqualifying armed rebellion, as she claims. Further,

¹⁵⁴ Fabre, *Cosmopolitan War*, 141–42. See also “Cosmopolitanism,” 969: “It is not necessary, for an entity to have the right to wage a war, that it be a legitimate authority.”

¹⁵⁵ Not all revisionists reject legitimate authority in armed rebellion. For example, Finlay wishes to revise legitimate authority but does not endorse the language used by Fabre. Yet, Finlay's approach still has flaws, as it is based on an individualistic construction of political life. See Christopher J. Finlay, “The Perspective of the Rebel: A Gap in the Global Normative Architecture,” *Ethics and International Affairs* 31, no. 2 (2017): 213–34.

¹⁵⁶ On why Walzer is not the representative of traditional just war thinking, see note 10 above.

even Fabre acknowledges that a rebellion must meet several other just war criteria to be morally permissible. In the end, the other criteria restrict individuals from unilaterally acting, thus subverting any sense in which an individual has a right of rebellion. Fabre's conflation of self-defense and war is also misleading. By depicting the just war tradition as disallowing individuals from the right to defend themselves, she creates a non-existent problem (i.e., that the just war tradition is unable to deal with political tyranny). Rather, Aquinas's distinction of self-defense from war allows all individuals to defend themselves in cases of immediate danger without recourse to other authorities.

Fabre's rhetoric of rejecting legitimate authority (jettisoning, dropping, dispensing, unnecessary, etc.) is also misleading, as she unwittingly affirms a type of legitimate authority in her approach. While she uses significant individualistic rhetoric, she always walks back on an individual's ability to use this right. Individuals must have some form of representativeness, consent, or institutional accountability to act on behalf of the community. In this sense, no individual can unilaterally act without some communal recognition. In Aquinas and other classical just war sources, the right to war is restricted to political authorities for this very reason. Only representative political leaders can use force, given the fact that they work on behalf of their communities. Further, Fabre expects individuals to follow other just war criteria such as last resort, necessity, and proportionality. Fabre herself admits that a sole individual would likely never be able to fulfill these other criteria. If this is the case, what is gained in the rhetoric of an individual's right to war? Further, Fabre acknowledges that she can provide no actual historical examples of an individualistically initiated war. All these concerns lead me to argue that an individual's right to war is not viable even in Fabre's own account. Rather, she unwittingly and ironically reaffirms a conception of legitimate authority, albeit grounded in individuals' right of self-defense vis-à-vis atomistic individual rights-bearers. In contrast, Aquinas grounds legitimate authority in the common good, which emphasizes the special nature of citizens to their communities.

In the end, Aquinas and Fabre both wish to stop political tyranny and to protect individuals. They agree that the act of rebellion can be morally justified only if other just war criteria is followed. They both endorse legitimate authority in practice (Aquinas explicitly and Fabre inadvertently). Despite their pragmatic agreement, however, their grounding and rhetoric differ dramatically, with significant implications for understanding individuals' relationships to their communities and the purpose of armed rebellion. Aquinas's perspective on armed rebellion is

to be preferred for the following reasons. First, Aquinas's view of armed rebellion against political tyranny is tied to a communitarian political framework that better describes the reality of human interdependence and a communal context for rights/duties. Second, Aquinas argues for a special relationship between citizens and their political community that can enhance rather than hinder human flourishing. Special relationships can also provide avenues for the cultivation of virtue, interdependent aid, and a unified response to tyranny. Third, political life is not worthy solely for its instrumental value (i.e. provision and protection), but intrinsically worthy. Human flourishing comes through the political context of order, justice, and peace in which true community can occur. In other words, political life provides a stable context for humans to flourish together in a holistic sense. Fourth, Aquinas's communitarian political theory also builds substantial responsibility and accountability for political leaders and citizens. This theory can endorse contemporary ideas like universal human rights and conditional sovereignty, but in a way that does not lose sight of either individuals or community life. Further, Aquinas's political theory concerning the common good provides a strong rationale for why armed force is restricted to political leaders rather than open to individuals.

Conclusion

In stark contrast to revisionists' dual claim of the just war tradition's apathy and inadequacy to deal with political tyranny, I have argued that Aquinas's just rebellion thinking displays a significant concern for authoritarianism and provides a helpful foundation for further contemporary just rebellion theory. While Fabre calls for a jettisoning of legitimate authority, I have argued that the concept of legitimate authority in armed rebellion is an indispensable criterion. As I have shown, Fabre's theory ultimately adopts a legitimate-authority criterion in practice. Therefore, it is not a question of whether legitimate authority should remain, but of whose theory has the better foundation for developing contemporary just rebellion thinking.

Revisionists' political foundation is based on a social-contract political theory that emphasizes individuals' rights as the supreme moral principle. In other words, individuals are atomized from the notion of political community as isolated rights-bearers.¹⁵⁷ In such a notion, the government

¹⁵⁷ I argue in favor of the depiction of human rights as outlined in article 29 of the United Nations 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. The first two subarticles state: "(1) Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible. (2) In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone

is merely a mechanism to protect human rights and provide material necessities (food, shelter, medicine, etc.). By placing the right of war/rebellion in individuals, revisionists are implying a very loose connection of citizens to their political communities. In other words, when tyranny is occurring, the sense of community seems to dissolve. In contrast, Aquinas's communitarianism is based on the notion of civilians interdependently living within a common good. In such a theory, the government is an intrinsic good by which civilians best flourish together in connection to the community's cultivation of order, justice, and peace. In cases of tyranny, other political authorities are obligated to respond. If they are unable or unwilling to aid their community, then civilians can unite to act for the sake of restoring their common good.

Revisionists also base their theory fundamentally in the individual right of self-defense. Revisionists conflate self-defense with war, whereas Aquinas treats self-defense and war as distinct concepts. Given the communal connotations of war, it seems very difficult to defend the revisionist notion. Many contemporary thinkers assume or take for granted that self-defense is the primary just war foundation. For Aquinas, however, the grounding is in the common good of order, justice, and peace, which in turn shifts the emphasis in armed rebellion to communal defense and restoration. Revisionists envision rebellion as a means to thwart or halt rights violations, whereas Aquinas sees the proper restoration of an interdependent and other-regarding political order as the best means to protect a community's citizens. Therefore, Aquinas distinguishes his view from the revisionists' in two distinct ways. First, Aquinas's allowance for justified armed rebellion is based on a communal notion of the common good, in contrast to an emphasis on individuals' rights. Second, Aquinas's allowance for civilian-led armed rebellion is a last resort which aims at restoring the common good, whereas revisionist rhetoric starts with notion of the self and the aim to thwart rights' violations, without much reference to their communal order.

Revisionist rhetoric is also deficient and unhelpful in developing just rebellion theory. What Fabre's rhetoric gives with one hand (an individual right of rebellion) is ultimately taken away with the other (the necessity of communal consent, accountability, likelihood of success,

shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society" (un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/). In this article, individual rights are connected with our communal duties.

proportionality, etc.). With Aquinas's rhetoric, however, we see the possibility of civilian-led armed rebellion, but as a last resort when other politically authorized leaders and/or structures have failed. Pragmatically, revisionists recognize this, but ignore the political foundation on which Aquinas's thinking is powerful. Aquinas's political foundation creates a standard of other-regarding political authority, interdependency, human flourishing, communal representation, and responsibility. Thus, revisionists' individualistic rhetoric is disingenuous, hyperbolic, dangerous, and negligent of the insights of the classical just war tradition. Therefore, I argue that we should *reinvestigate* and *recover* the just war tradition rather than *revise* it for further work in just rebellion theory. We do not need a just rebellion theory which *departs from the just war tradition*, but one that *develops it*. In order to carefully do further work, I have highlighted Aquinas's important contributions to display the merit of further *reinvestigating* and *recovering* other just war thinkers' insights.¹⁵⁸ The historic just war tradition has substantial wisdom and adaptability to meet contemporary contexts. Alongside other historically oriented just war thinkers, I call for other just war thinkers to be *investigated* rather than *ignored*.¹⁵⁹ The adequacy and flexibility of the historical just war tradition has also been displayed in Aquinas's own ability to uphold the criterion of legitimate authority in armed rebellion—a feat neither previously envisioned by his predecessors nor fully appreciated in contemporary times. Yet, as further historical investigation will bear, his notion was deeply influential on later rebellion theories.¹⁶⁰ Therefore, the criterion of legitimate authority

¹⁵⁸ See Johnson, "The Use of History for Thinking about Morality and War," in *Ethics and the Use of Force*, 1–12.

¹⁵⁹ Revisionists tend to approach just war thinking primarily through philosophical analysis rather than historical inquiry. Historically oriented scholars argue that historical inquiry and philosophical analysis are needed. See Brunstetter and O'Driscoll, *Just War Thinkers*, for a collection of essays devoted to this reconstruction and recovery. See also *The Ethics of War: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Gregory M. Reichberg, Henrik Syse, and Endre Begby (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), for a collection of primary sources.

¹⁶⁰ For an excellent tracing of the history of the right to rebellion see Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978). Specifically in regards to the development of Aquinas, see: Johnson, "Sovereign Authority and the Justified Use of Force in Thomas Aquinas and His Early Modern Successors," in *Sovereignty*, 28–60; Reichberg, "Suárez on Just War"; D. J. B. Trim, "If a Prince Use Tyrannie towards His People': Interventions on Behalf of Foreign Populations in Early Modern Europe," in *Humanitarian Intervention: A History*, ed. Brendan Simms and D. J. B. Trim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 29–66; Alex Bellamy, "Francisco De Vitoria," in Brunstetter and O'Driscoll, *Just War Thinkers*, 77–91; Scott G. Davis, "Francisco Suárez," in Brunstetter and O'Driscoll, *Just War Thinkers*, 105–27.

oriented around the common good operated via an authoritative line of succession should be incorporated within future rebellion thinking.¹⁶¹

N.V

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“Divine Person” as Analogous Name

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The position of St. Thomas Aquinas and the Thomistic school that human beings cannot name God and creatures univocally is well-known.¹ This includes the term “person,” which is predicated of the Trinity, of angels, and of human beings truly but analogically. In contrast, it might seem that, when speaking of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in respect of *one another*, “divine person” must be univocal.²

¹ There are numerous (conflicting) studies of Aquinas on analogy, including Hampus Lyttkens, *The Analogy Between God and the World: An Investigation of its Background and Interpretation of its Use by Thomas of Aquino* (Uppsala, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1952); Cornelio Fabro, *Partecipazione e causalità secondo S. Tommaso d'Aquino* (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1960); George P. Klubertanz, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Analogy: A Textual Analysis and Systematic Synthesis* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1960); Ralph McInerny, *The Logic of Analogy: An Interpretation of St. Thomas* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961); Bernard Montagnes, *La doctrine de l'analogie de l'être d'après Saint Thomas D'Aquin*, *Philosophes médiévaux* 6 (Louvain: Publications universitaires, 1963); McInerny, *Aquinas and Analogy* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996); John Mortenson, *Understanding St. Thomas on Analogy* (Irvine, CA: Universal Publishers, 2007). For an overview of important developments within the Thomistic commentatorial tradition, see Domenic D'Ettore, *Analogy after Aquinas: Logical Problems, Thomistic Answers*, *Thomistic Ressourcement* 11 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019). I am grateful to Joseph L. Shetler, Ulrich Lehner, and Joshua P. Hochschild for their feedback on an earlier draft of this article.

² See, e.g., Dominic Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 124–25: “They are not persons in different ways, nor is there an analogical notion of personhood between the three; the notion of person is absolutely identical for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. . . . Indeed, if the persons did not have the same *ratio* of personhood, there would be no basis for saying that there are three ‘persons’ in God.”

The seventeenth-century Discalced Carmelites of Salamanca (the Salmanticenses) thought otherwise. They argued that the *ratio*³ of “divine person” is common to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit not univocally, but analogically, and that this follows from established Thomistic principles.⁴ Their position makes for an interesting case study in religious language, as the Salmanticenses apply a highly developed material logic to the central mystery of Christian faith.

Words, Concepts, and Things

In *On Interpretation* (*Peri hermeneias*), Aristotle explains that words immediately signify concepts and, by means of concepts, things.⁵ This so-called “semantic triangle” makes it easy to misunderstand univocity and analogy if we do not first determine how a particular thinker conceives of the relationship among words, concepts, and things. To discern how the Salmanticenses understood this relationship, it is most helpful to look to their counterparts, the Discalced Carmelites at neighboring Alcalá de Henares outside Madrid, commonly called the Complutenses.⁶ The Complutenses’ *Artium cursus*

³ *Ratio*, of course, has many meanings. Throughout this discussion, it usually refers to an intelligible account or concept.

⁴ The principal source for this argument is Salmanticenses, *Cursus theologicus*, tract. 6, disp. 10, dub. 5, in *Collegii Salmanticensis fr. Discalceatorum b. Mariae de Monte Carmelo parenti suo Eliae consecrati, cursus theologicus, Summam theologicam Angeli Doctoris d. Thomae complectens*, vol. 3, editio nova correcta (Paris: Victor Palmé, 1877), 434–44. The Salmanticenses’ enormous *Cursus theologicus* was summarized by Pablo de la Concepción, OCD (1666–1734), in four volumes. The relevant section of Pablo’s work is *Tractatus theologici*, tract. 6, disp. 3, dub. 2, §6, nos. 44–46, in *Tractatus theologici iuxta miram D. Thomae et Cursus Salmanticensis Ff. Discalceatorum b. Mariae de Monte Carmeli primitivae observantiae doctrinam*, vol. 2 (Parma: Haeredes Pauli Monti, 1725), 46–47. Although I summarize and explain the Salmanticenses’ teaching, I also use arguments, examples, and observations of my own. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁵ Aristotle, *De interpretatione* 16a4–9.

⁶ The Salmanticenses frequently refer to the Complutenses. In fact, some of the same people worked on both the *Artium cursus* (*Artium cursus sive disputationes in Aristotelis dialecticam, et philosophiam naturalem* [Alcalá de Henares, Spain: Ioannes de Orduña, 1624]) and the *Cursus theologicus*, such as Antonio de la Madre de Dios, OCD (1583–1637), and Juan de la Anunciación, OCD (1633–1701). Antonio de la Madre de Dios not only contributed a large part of the *Artium cursus*, he also authored the first volumes of the *Cursus theologicus*, including the disputations on the Trinity. For an overview of the history, see Enrique Llamas Martínez, “El colegio de San Elías y los Salmanticenses,” in *Historia de la Universidad de Salamanca*, vol. 1 (Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2002), 687–704.

serves as philosophical handmaid to the Salmanticenses' *Cursus theologicus*, and is therefore essential for correctly interpreting the latter's claims about grammar, logic, and metaphysics.⁷

To begin with the verbal element, this is how the Complutenses, following a fairly typical account, explain the difference between a vocal sound, a name, and a term: A vocal sound (*vox*) is speech considered simply as an audible phenomenon, the pure sound wave. A name (*nomen*) is a vocal sound that signifies something. A term (*terminus*) is a name insofar as it serves as one end of a proposition.⁸ Terms may be purely mental (as when a proposition is conceived of in the mind alone), or they may be spoken or written.

Names and terms are useful precisely because they signify. The Complutenses define "signifying" (*significare*) as "representing to the knowing power something other than [the signifier] itself."⁹ A name or term points beyond itself so that something else can become known to the mind through that name or term.

When it comes to spoken (or written) terms, a term is "common" (*communis*) if it signifies more than one thing. Common terms may be "non-transcendent" (*non transcendens*) or "transcendent" (*transcendens*). Common terms are non-transcendent if they are predicated of certain things (such as "man" or "animal"). They are transcendent if they are predicated of all things. Six terms are usually acknowledged to be transcendent: "being" (*ens*); "thing" (*res*); "true" (*verum*); "good" (*bonum*); "something" (*aliquid*); and "one" (*unum*).¹⁰

⁷ While the Salmanticenses strive to be strict followers of Aquinas, we cannot expect their understanding of univocity and analogy to be a clone of the Angelic Doctor's. The surveys of Aquinas on analogy cited above show just how hard it is to resolve questions about what Aquinas himself thought, whether he was faithful to Aristotle, whether he changed his mind, whether commentators (e.g., Cajetan) distorted his doctrine beyond recognition, and so forth. Add to this that the Salmanticenses are writing after four hundred years of further developments, changes in terminology, and challenges from competing schools of thought requiring a response from Thomists. In short, to understand the Salmanticenses' theological claim, we must afford them the courtesy of exploring univocal and analogical predication on their own terms.

⁸ Complutenses, *Artium cursus*, bk. 1, ch. 2 (p. 18).

⁹ Complutenses, *Artium cursus*, bk. 1, ch. 1: "Potentiae cognoscitivae aliud a se repraesentare" (p. 15). The general form of this definition is fairly common among seventeenth-century philosophers; see Stephan Meier-Oeser, *Die Spur des Zeichens: das Zeichen und seine Funktion in der Philosophie des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997), 178n18.

¹⁰ Complutenses, *Artium cursus*, bk. 1, ch. 4 (p. 22).

Here it is necessary to distinguish first and second “intention” (*intentio*).¹¹ The Carmelites take “first intention” properly to be the act whereby the intellect knows things in accord with what is in them as realities.¹² This act of the intellect is the “formal first intention,” while the thing known is the “objective first intention.” A name signifying a thing in this way is a “name of first intention.”

But the intellect can also attend to those things not in accord with what is in them from their own perspective as realities, but instead with reference to their character *as acted upon by the intellect itself*. This act is called “second intention.”¹³ An example of first intention is the intellect’s knowing that “man is an animal,” whereas an example of second intention is its knowing that “‘animal’ is a genus.”

The Complutenses stress that first and second intention are, properly speaking, *acts* of the intellect—distinct ways of attending to what it knows—even though logicians often use “first intention” and “second intention” as shorthand to refer to the objects of these acts.¹⁴ In fact, because objective second intentions (the objects of the intellect’s second-intentional acts) are beings of reason (*entia rationis*), logicians sometimes refer to *all* beings of reason under the umbrella of “second intention.” Although common, the Carmelites judge this practice to be “quite improper.”¹⁵

It is second intentions that constitute the proper object of logic.¹⁶ More precisely, insofar as second intentions lead to knowledge of the truth, they form the adequate *formal* object of logic. This includes primarily and principally those second intentions founded on things, and secondarily those founded on vocal sounds.¹⁷ Now, while objective second intentions are

¹¹ Different thinkers have understood first and second intention differently and have used the terminology in a variety of ways.

¹² Complutenses, *Artium cursus*, disp. 2, q. 5, no. 40: “secundum id, quod habent a parte rei” (p. 180).

¹³ Complutenses, *Artium cursus*, disp. 2, q. 5, no. 40: “not according to what applies to them on the part of the thing but according to what they have from the operation of the intellect [non secundum ea, quae conveniunt illis a parte rei, sed secundum ea, quae habent ab operatione eiusdem intellectus]” (p.180). This act is formal second intention; the thing known with this kind of (mental) existence is the objective second intention; the names signifying things with respect to this kind of (mental) existence are names of second intention (e.g., “genus”).

¹⁴ They take the grammatical form of the Latin word *intentio* quite literally as the *act* of forming a concept.

¹⁵ Complutenses, *Artium cursus*, disp. 2, q. 5, no. 44: “Haec acceptio secundae intentionis valde impropria est” (p. 183).

¹⁶ Medieval and early-modern “logic” encompasses what today is called “semantics.”

¹⁷ Complutenses, *Artium cursus*, disp. 1, q. 3, no. 31: “A logical being of reason or second

beings of reason, formal first and second intentions, being the very acts of the intellect, are real. Because of the correspondence between formal and objective concepts within those acts, formal first and second intentions based on real beings *do* reflect how those beings really are. Thus, the *material* object of logic consists of "things and vocal sounds in respect of their real being," though by way of second intentions.¹⁸ Hence, although logic deals directly with second intentions, it can reach back through second intentions to first intentions and to the real world. We must distinguish the grammatical, logical, and metaphysical orders without divorcing them.¹⁹

Univocal Predication

When a term is predicated of two subjects, those predications can be compared.²⁰ The term that appears in both predications can apply to them univocally, purely equivocally, or analogically. In the case of pure equivocation, the two instances of the term are not the same or related in any meaningful sense, and so pure equivocation really involves no commonality of terms, even if the same sounds and the same string of letters occurs in

intention, either indicative of the truth or else a way of knowing taken in the broad sense as inclusive of all logical second intentions even those founded on vocal sounds, is the adequate object or *ratio formalis quae* of the object of Logic, granted that intentions founded on things are so primarily and principally, while those founded on vocal sounds are so secondarily and less principally. Still, they all pertain *per se* and not *per accidens* to the adequate object of Logic [Ens rationis logicum, sive secunda intentio, quae est veritatis ostensiva, vel modus sciendi late sumptus, prout comprehendit omnes secundas intentiones logicales, etiam eas quae fundantur in vocibus, est obiectum adaequatum, seu ratio formalis quae obiecti Logicae, licet intentiones, quae fundantur in rebus, primario, et principaliter; illae vero, quae fundantur in vocibus, secundario, et minus principaliter; omnes tamen per se, et non per accidens pertinent ad obiectum adaequatum Logicae]" (pp. 117–18).

¹⁸ Complutenses, *Artium cursus*, disp. 1, q. 3, no. 33: "res et voces secundum suum esse reale" (p. 119).

¹⁹ Alan P. Darley, "Predication or Participation? What is the Nature of Aquinas' Doctrine of Analogy?," *The Heythrop Journal* 57, no. 2 (2016): 312–24; Gyula Klima, "Nominalist Semantics," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, revised ed., vol. 1 (Cambridge: University Press, 2014), 159–63.

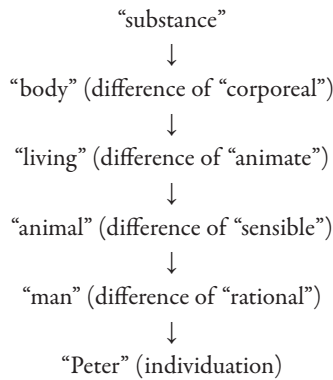
²⁰ Bl. John Duns Scotus forced subsequent discussions of univocity and analogy to give further attention to the role of concepts. Comparing two predications means comparing two *judgments* (the second act of the intellect), but judgment depends on *apprehension* (the first act of the intellect). It is necessary to consider both a concept and the propositional context in which a name or term corresponding to that concept occurs. See Joshua P. Hochschild, *The Semantics of Analogy: Rereading Cajetan's De Nominum Analogia* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 47–64.

two predications. For example, in the sentences “the dog has a loud bark” and “the tree has rough bark,” the word “bark” is used purely equivocally. Its significance in one instance is unrelated to its significance in the other.

Conversely, univocal predication occurs when the repeated term has the exact same significance in both instances. For example, in the sentences “the dog Spot has a loud bark” and “the dog Stripe has a soft bark,” the word “bark” has the exact same significance in both instances. It is used univocally. So far, so good.

According to the Complutenses, univocal predication is possible because of the mind’s ability to grasp things in various ways and to consider these facets *hierarchically*. The hierarchical perspective means arranging the predicates that apply to a given individual on a scale. The classic way to do this is “the tree” of Porphyry.

The Porphyrian tree—often depicted in medieval and early-modern books of logic as a literal tree—organizes the scale of predicates along distinct lines from general to specific. For example, the individual man “Peter” can be schematized hierarchically as:



From top to bottom, each level of narrowing specificity arises because of a “difference” that divides the level above it.²¹ Thus, “substance” branches into “body” and “non-body” through the difference “corporeal” and its negation, “body” branches via the difference “animate” and its negation, and so forth. Everything above Peter in a straight line and the differences that define that

²¹ It is customary to refer to the level immediately above the individual as a “species” and each higher level as a “genus.” “Subaltern” genera are those that have a genus above as well as below them.

particular line can be predicated of him. And so, we can say that "Peter is a man," "Peter is an animal," "Peter is rational," and so on.

Univocal predication occurs when a given predicate is applied to more than one individual *and* those individuals fall beneath that predicate on the hierarchical scale. For example, "animal" is said univocally of Peter and of Brownie the donkey. Similarly, "body" is said univocally of Peter, Brownie, and a block of marble. Conversely, "animal" cannot be said univocally of Peter and of a tree.

From the hierarchical perspective, *univocals taken in themselves do not include what falls beneath them*. "Animal" applies univocally to both Peter and Brownie because, at its own level, "animal" includes *neither* "rational" *nor* "irrational." Only once "animal" has been narrowed by a difference ("rational" or its negation) do distinct lines branch off.

Universals and the Real Basis for Univocal Predication

Here we cannot escape mentioning the classic problem of universals. Of course it is impossible to rehearse the whole history of the issue or its nuances. To summarize the Carmelites' own view, there are two opposite positions to be rejected. One is denying real universal natures, a position they attribute to Heraclitus and Cratylus among ancient philosophers and to the nominalists among their contemporaries. The other is positing universal natures that really exist as separate from individuals, a view they attribute to Plato.²²

As expected, the Carmelites themselves are moderate realists. They hold that only individuals really exist in the world but that there is a real basis in individuals grounding the mind's universal concepts. Thus, the commonality of human nature in two individual men, such as Peter and Paul, allows "man" to be predicated of both univocally, and the commonality of animality in Peter and Brownie allows "animal" to be predicated of both univocally. In other words, in terms of the Porphyrian tree, whatever is at a level higher than the individual exists *as universal* only in the mind while being based in real individuals.

Individuals are the starting point. When the mind, through the senses, encounters real, concrete beings, it recognizes in them a complex of determinations. These determinations really exist only in combination. For example, wherever the mind encounters "animal" in the world, it is partnered with either rationality or irrationality. Every actual animal must be one or

²² Complutenses, *Artium cursus*, disp. 3, q. 1, nos. 5–9 (pp. 189–94).

the other. And yet, the mind spontaneously grasps the universal concept “animal” and applies it univocally to all animals. On the moderate-realist view, the mind’s ability to do this must begin with something really in the individuals themselves.²³

Now, in individuals there is no real distinction of levels such as “body,” “animal,” and “man.” If there were, every individual would have many substantial forms. Instead, an individual’s single substantial form contains in a unified way all the degrees of perfection reflected by the hierarchy of predicates that apply to it. These degrees of perfection or metaphysical grades, as they exist concretely in the individual, are not *really* distinct, though, according to the usual Thomistic opinion, they are *virtually* distinct. As Aquinas puts it:

The more perfect form virtually contains whatever belongs to the lower forms. And thus, being one and the same, it perfects matter according to different grades of perfection. For it is one and the same form essentially whereby a man is actually a being, a body, living, animal, and man.²⁴

The mind can consider a single metaphysical grade in an individual without considering others.²⁵ For example, it can consider Peter’s corporeality without attending to his animality, even though *in Peter* there are not really distinct forms of “being a body” and “being an animal.” And, when the mind distinguishes between Peter’s being a body and his being an animal, this is not a merely conceptual distinction; it is a virtual distinction, a conceptual distinction *based in reality*.²⁶

Virtual distinction allows for univocal predication that says something about reality. Peter contains virtually distinct metaphysical grades of

²³ See Bernard M. Flynn, “The Notion of Formal Logic,” *Laval théologique et philosophique* 2, no. 1 (1946): 181–83.

²⁴ *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 76, a. 6, ad 1 (Leonine ed., 5:229).

²⁵ ST I, q. 76, a. 3, ad 4: “Because . . . the intellective soul virtually contains what the sensitive soul possesses and still more, reason can consider what pertains to the power of the sensitive soul on its own as something imperfect and material. And because it finds this to be common to man and other animals, it thereby forms the *ratio* of the genus” (Leonine ed., 5:221).

²⁶ Merely conceptual distinctions are also called distinctions *rationis ratiocinantis*, while conceptual distinctions *cum fundamento in re* are called distinctions *rationis ratiocinatae*. An example of a merely conceptual distinction is when the mind considers that “Peter is Peter,” where there is no real basis for distinguishing Peter as subject from Peter as predicate.

ascending generality. So does Paul. Just as the mind has a real basis for abstracting the universal notion of "man" from Peter, so it does for Paul. When the mind then compares these two predications ("Peter is a man" and "Paul is a man"), it finds that "man" applies univocally, and we rightly conclude that this says something about the real individuals, Peter and Paul, not just about words or mental concepts.

This is where the distinction between the *formal* and the *objective* concept comes in. The formal concept is the concept of some object as it is in the mind itself in the particular way it is conceived of. The objective concept is that which is really in the object whereby the mind is able to form such a formal concept of the object. As noted, the mind can conceive of a single object under various formalities (e.g., conceiving of Peter as animal without attending to his rationality). Hence, multiple formal concepts may refer to the same real object.²⁷ This is how the univocity of "animal" in respect of Peter and Brownie can be a claim *about Peter and Brownie*. The mind's formal concept of "animal" corresponds to the objective concept of animality that really exists in both Peter and Brownie.

Analogical Predication

This brings us to analogy. Following in the tradition of Tomasso de Vio Cajetan, the Carmelites define analogs as "what have a common name, while the *ratio* of the substance that goes with that name is partly the same and partly different."²⁸ This can happen in different ways, and so some distinctions are needed. The most important distinction is between "physical analogy" and "logical analogy."

Physical analogy (what Cajetan calls "analogy of inequality") is when analogs have a common name and *ratio* but participate in that *ratio* to greater or lesser extent in their real being. Crucially, cases of physical analogy may well count as univocity from a logical perspective.²⁹ For example, on the Aristotelian view, heavenly bodies are incorruptible. Hence they are bodies

²⁷ Complutenses, *Artium cursus*, disp. 3, q. 1, no. 4 (p. 189).

²⁸ Complutenses, *Artium cursus*, disp. 10, q. 1, no. 4: "Analogia sunt, quorum nomen est commune, ratio vero substantiae secundum illud nomen partim est eadem, et partim diversa" (p. 405). Cf. Cajetan, *De nominum analogia*, ch. 1, no. 4; ch. 2, no. 8; ch. 3, no. 23. The Carmelites' treatment of analogy is indebted to Cajetan throughout.

²⁹ Complutenses, *Artium cursus*, disp. 10, q. 1, nos. 1–5 (pp. 404–7); Aquinas, *In I sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 2, ad 1 (*Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, ed. nova, vol. 1, ed. R. P. Mandonnet [Paris: Sumpribus P. Lethielleux, 1929], 492); *In Boetium De Trinitate* II, q. 4, a. 2, corp.; III, q. 6, a. 3, corp.; *In X metaphys.*, lec. 12, no. 8; *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 7, ad sc 1; Cajetan, *De nominum analogia*, ch. 1, nos. 4–5.

in a more perfect way than animals, while animals are bodies more perfectly than plants, and plants more than minerals. From this perspective, “body” is said analogically of heavenly bodies, animals, plants, and minerals, since all have the same *ratio* of “body” but do not participate in it equally.

The present discussion is not concerned with physical analogy, only with logical analogy. Here, too, the *ratio* of the substance signified by the common name must be partly the same and partly different. There are three ways this could occur: equally the same and different; more same than different; more different than same.³⁰ The third view, they argue, is correct. Thus, logical analogy is properly that in which the analogs “have a common name, while the *ratio* of the substance that goes with that name is different *simpliciter* and the same *secundum quid*.”³¹

This is how analogy is a middle way between univocation and pure equivocation. The former means a common name with a totally identical *ratio*, while the latter means a common name with totally different *rationes*. The two major classes of logical analogy are analogy of attribution and analogy of proportionality.³²

Analogy of attribution can occur in two ways. The first way is when the analogous name is compared to the prime analog (that in which the *ratio* signified by the name essentially exists), on the one hand, and to the derivative analog, on the other, as when “healthy” is compared to an animal (in which health essentially exists) and to medicine and urine (which are a cause and an indication of health). The second way is when the analogous name is compared to only the derivative analogs, as when “healthy” is compared first to medicine and then to urine.

Analogy of proportionality occurs when analogous names “have a common name, while the *ratio* of the substance that goes with that name is similar by proportion.”³³ An example is “seeing” when said of bodily vision and of intellectual vision. The common name “seeing” applies to both cases by proportion, since just as bodily vision shows something to the senses,

³⁰ Complutenses, *Artium cursus*, disp. 10, q. 1, nos. 5–6 (pp. 405–6).

³¹ Complutenses, *Artium cursus*, disp. 10, q. 1, no. 6: “Analoga sunt, quorum nomen est commune, ratio vero substantiae secundum illud nomen simpliciter est diversa, et secundum quid eadem” (p. 406).

³² Complutenses, *Artium cursus*, disp. 10, q. 2, nos. 8–13 (pp. 406–9). Aquinas also acknowledged both analogy of attribution and analogy of proportionality as legitimate forms of analogy, as Joshua P. Hochschild shows in “Proportionality and Divine Naming: Did St. Thomas Change His Mind about Analogy?,” *The Thomist* 77, no. 4 (2013): 531–58.

³³ Complutenses, *Artium cursus*, disp. 10, q. 2, no. 12: “quorum nomen est commune, ratio vero substantiae secundum illud nomen, est similis secundum proportionem” (p. 408).

understanding shows it to the mind. Analogy of proportionality thus involves four terms: $A : B :: C : D$.

Analogy of attribution and analogy of proportionality differ in how the *ratio* signified is found in the analogs. In analogy of attribution, the *ratio* signified by the common name is found intrinsically and formally only in the prime analog, whereas in analogy of proportionality, the *ratio* is found in each analog intrinsically.³⁴ This makes analogy of proportionality "much nobler" (*multo nobilior*) than analogy of attribution, though both count as true instances of logical analogy.³⁵

Once again, it is crucial to grasp that, by using words like "intrinsically," neither the Carmelites nor Cajetan, whom they are following, mean to shift the discussion out of the domain of logic. The point being made is still about concepts.³⁶ The *concept* of "healthy" in medicine (or urine) depends upon the *concept* of "healthy" in the animal body. In contrast, the *concept* of mental understanding in "seeing" does not depend upon the *concept* of physical sight. A person born blind, for instance, may well use colloquial expressions like "I see" to mean "I understand" without confusion.

A *Ratio* of "Divine Person"?

Although human beings in the wayfaring state typically have no direct experience of God, the human mind can still form a concept of "divine person," drawing on both faith and reason. As Aquinas argues, the mind can attain a *ratio* even of things without definition and even of things beyond human experience, such as divine attributes.³⁷ In fact, if the mind cannot do this, then it is impossible to say anything true about God, since words signify realities only by means of concepts. If the mind's *ratio* of "divine person" does not correspond to anything real in God whatsoever, then affirmative propositions about the divine persons are always false. This cannot be the case, since it would negate even the most basic dogmas of faith.

The Salmanticenses' claim about "divine person" is directly a *logical* claim.

³⁴ Speaking of analogy of *proper* proportionality, that is. Analogy of proportionality can also be *improper* (metaphorical), in which case the *ratio* is found in the metaphorical analog only extrinsically. Thus, to use a classic example of Latin metaphor, a burgeoning meadow is said to "smile," since, as a smile brightens the face in a pleasant way, the flourishing of a meadow brightens it in a pleasant way. This is metaphorical because it is the idea of the human being that includes the idea of smiling intrinsically, whereas the idea of a meadow does not.

³⁵ Complutenses, *Artium cursus*, disp. 10, q. 2, no. 12 (p. Orduña, 409).

³⁶ Hochschild, *Semantics of Analogy*, 110–21.

³⁷ *ST I*, q. 13, a. 4 (Leonine ed., 4:144–45); *In I sent.*, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3 (p. 63–72).

It is a claim about what sort of *ratio* the theologizing mind properly forms. However, the basis for this claim is partly metaphysical, since the concept of “divine person,” if it is to be accurate—even though it can never be perfectly clear and adequate to the reality—has to answer to certain things that are known to be true of God, such as his simplicity and unity.

According to Aquinas, “person” is common to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.³⁸ This is not a real commonality (*communitas rei*), but a conceptual commonality (*communitas rationis*). “Person” is not a thing that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit mutually possess, like the divine essence. In fact, for Aquinas, even to two human beings “person” is common not by real commonality but by conceptual commonality. Peter and Paul do not share a single real personhood, though each, being an individual of a rational nature, is a person. “Person” is not a genus, nor is it a specific difference. Instead, it signifies after the manner of *individuum vagum* (“nondescript individual”), meaning that “person” indicates the fact of concrete, individual existence. All the more, then, is it the case in God that “person” is not a genus or any kind of universal. Nor does “person” signify only something negative, such as incommunicability.³⁹ It signifies a positive perfection: the fact of individual subsistence in a rational nature.

Why “Divine Person” Is Predicated Analogically, Not Univocally

Having summarized the Carmelites’ view of logical analogy, it is at last possible to present their arguments for why “divine person” is said analogically in respect of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Now, the Father, Son, and Spirit are really identical with the singular divinity, whereas they are distinct in their personhoods. Thus, what is at issue in the name “divine person” is not the *ratio* of “divine,” but instead that of “person” as qualified by “divine.” Granted that they are all divine, how does the *ratio* of “person” apply to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in comparison to one another?⁴⁰

³⁸ *In I sent.*, d. 25 q. 1 a. 3 (pp. 608–10); *ST I*, q. 30, a. 4 (Leonine ed., 4:341).

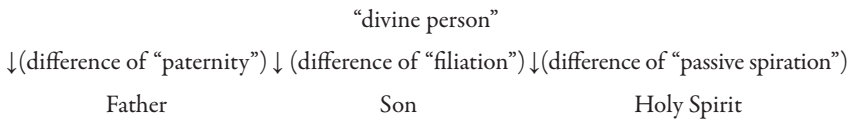
³⁹ As Richard of St. Victor had suggested.

⁴⁰ Salmanticenses, *Cursus theologicus*, tract. 6, disp. 10, dub. 5, no. 107: “As for the name ‘divine person,’ we do not understand it from the perspective of the divinity it adds on the basis of the divine nature, but instead from the perspective of its differentiating or subaltern *ratio* directly contained under the *ratio* of ‘person’ as such, abstracting from ‘created’ and ‘uncreated,’ which, together with the *ratio* of ‘person’ as such, immediately descends to the three relative persons found in God [Nomine autem personae divinae non intelligimus eam secundum id divinitatis, quod ex parte naturae divinae affert, sed secundum illam suam rationem differentialem veluti subalternam directe contentam sub ratione personae ut sic, abstrahentis a creata et increata, quae una cum ratione personae

In a nutshell, the Salmanticenses' reply is that, "since the three divine persons considered in their particular *rationes* do not exist through really distinct existences, but instead, through one and the same *esse* of the divine essence, . . . the *ratio* of 'divine person' is not common univocally in respect of the aforementioned persons."⁴¹ This argument includes both metaphysical and logical elements. It is because of the real existential constitution of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that "divine person" cannot be even conceptually univocal.⁴²

The common *ratio* of "divine person" cannot be totally abstracted from the particularities of each person, which would be necessary for univocity.⁴³ Abstraction to the point of allowing for univocity would make "divine person" into a genus or some kind of universal. This, in turn, would require the divine persons to have distinct acts of existence, since, as Aquinas says, "genus and species, as well as every universal, is predicated of more than one in respect of different *esse*."⁴⁴ To be more precise, at least when a common, univocal *ratio* is complete at its own level but narrowed at a lower level by more specific, differentiating *rationes* to yield complete, concrete beings, those beings must exist through distinct acts of existence.

In other words, if the *ratio* of "divine person" were univocal, it could be schematized like this:



This would make the *rationes* of "paternity," "filiation," and "passive spiration" into differences further specifying the universal "divine person." Thus,

ut sic immediate descendit ad tres personas relativas in divinis repertas]” (p. 435).

⁴¹ Salmanticenses, *Cursus theologicus*, tract. 6, disp. 10, dub. 5, §2, no. 110: “Quoniam tres personae divinae secundum suas particulares rationes consideratae non existunt per existentias realiter distinctas, sed per unicum et idem *esse* divinae essentiae, . . . ergo ratio personae divinae non est communis univoce respectu praedictarum personarum” (p. 436).

⁴² Salmanticenses, *Cursus theologicus*, tract. 6, disp. 10, dub. 5, §1, no. 109: “Haec autem ratio etiam probat, non dari in divinis rationem univocam communem communitate rationis respectu divinarum personarum” (p. 435).

⁴³ Salmanticenses, *Cursus theologicus*, tract. 6, disp. 10, dub. 5, §1, no. 109 (p. 435).

⁴⁴ ST I, q. 30, a. 4, ad 3 (Leonine ed., 4:341). Aquinas had made the same remark earlier in his career in *In I sent.*, d. 25, q. 1, a. 3, corp.: “Every universal is in accord with distinct *esse* in the things that fall under it” (p. 610).

just as “animal” can be predicated univocally as a universal, since the *ratio* of “animal” can be abstracted from any further determinations, so could “divine person.”

The problem is that “animal” is a universal precisely because its conceptual commonality comes from the metaphysical composition that exists in particular animals. As explained above, it is the virtual distinction between metaphysical grades (such as “animal” and “man”) within individuals that allows the mind to abstract the universal “animal” and predicate it univocally of both Peter and Brownie. Composition of genus and species, in turn, presupposes composition of essence and *esse*.⁴⁵ This is a principal reason why Aquinas argues that God cannot be in a genus.⁴⁶

Now, without threat to the divine simplicity, it is true that each divine person is virtually distinct from the divine essence.⁴⁷ While the Father, for example, does not differ from the divine essence *really*, there *is* a real basis for distinguishing the Father from the divine essence in our consideration. That basis is precisely that the Father, though he is the divine essence, is *not* the Son and *not* the Holy Spirit. Each divine person is really identical with the divine essence, which is really identical with the divine *esse*. Yet, the divine persons are really distinct from one another. Hence, with an eye toward their real distinction from one another, each divine person can be distinguished from the divine essence/*esse* virtually. The real distinction among the persons is the basis for the virtual distinction between a given divine person and the divine essence.

However, from the perspective of a given divine person, there is not even a virtual distinction between “being a divine person” and “being *this* divine person.” On the Thomistic view, which the Salmanticenses embrace, the divine persons are *relations as subsisting*, and so the constitution of a given person includes his unique relationality.⁴⁸ The human mind cannot prescind from the personal properties of a given divine person and still consider him as a person. As Aquinas says, “by paternity the Father is not only the Father but is a person and a *someone* or hypostasis.”⁴⁹ Thus, in the Father, the distinction between the *ratio* of “divine person” and the *ratio* of “Father” has no real foundation, and thus can be at most merely conceptual

⁴⁵ Complutenses, *Artium cursus*, disp. 5, q. 6, no. 71 (p. 311). Essence-*esse* composition and matter-form composition are examples of what is sometimes called “physical” composition, whereas genus-species composition is “metaphysical” composition.

⁴⁶ *ST I*, q. 3, a. 5 (Leonine ed., 4:43–44).

⁴⁷ Salmanticenses, *Cursus theologicus*, tract. 6, disp. 5, dub. 2, §2, no. 18 (p. 198–99).

⁴⁸ *ST I*, q. 29, a. 4 (Leonine ed., 4:333–34); *I*, q. 40, a. 1, ad 1 (4:411–12).

⁴⁹ *ST I*, q. 40, a. 3, ad 2 (Leonine ed., 4:417).

(*rationis ratiocinantis*).⁵⁰ The same is true, in the Son, of the *ratio* of "divine person" and the *ratio* of "Son." But, this means that, for the *ratio* of "divine person" to be univocal in respect of Father and Son, the *rationes* of "Father" and "Son" could themselves be only conceptually distinct, which would amount to Sabellianism.

The reason why univocity requires a distinction that is at least virtual is that a univocal *ratio* considered in itself does not actually contain—and in fact excludes—the narrower determinations that it has the potential to receive in individuals. A *ratio* that did not exclude the various further determinations to which it is susceptible could not be perfectly one, since it would then actually include contradictories, in which case it could not be univocal. For example, "animal" can be a univocal *ratio* in respect of Peter and Brownie only because, taken in itself, it excludes the specific differences of rationality and irrationality, and thus has the potential to be specified by either difference.⁵¹

In contrast, consider the example of "being" (*ens*). *Ens* is predicated of many kinds of individuals, such as God and creatures, substances and accidents, and so on. However, *ens* is not a genus, and so cannot be said univocally of all beings. Still, it is possible to form a formal concept of *ens*. This concept cannot perfectly prescind from all the particular modes of being covered by it. It includes these further determinations in a confused way. Hence, the formal concept of *ens* is analogical: It is formally one in an imperfect way, which is to say that it includes one *ratio secundum quid* but distinct *rationes simpliciter*.⁵² Thus, the formal concept of *ens* includes the narrower and more distinct ways of being that fall under it actually, though confusedly, not only potentially.

Therefore, a univocal name does not relate to its univocals in the way an analogous name relates to its analogs.⁵³ "Animal" requires the addition of differences that fall outside it in order to occur in Peter or Brownie. *Ens* does not, since whatever differentiates *ens* must exist, and so must fall under *ens* to begin with. "Animal" has to be narrowed by extrinsic addition in order to arrive at a final, concrete individual, whereas *ens* is narrowed by the explication of determinate modes that are already contained implicitly within it.

Wherever extrinsic addition is required for the common to extend to individuals, there is metaphysical composition and the underlying real

⁵⁰ *ST* I, q. 40, a. 3 (Leonine ed., 4:416–17); Salmanticenses, *Cursus theologicus*, tract. 6, disp. 10, dub. 5, §3, nos. 119–22 (p. 439–40).

⁵¹ See Aquinas, *In I sent.*, d. 22, q. 1, a. 3, ad 2 (pp. 538–39).

⁵² Complutenses, *Artium cursus*, disp. 11, q. 5, no. 44 (p. 457).

⁵³ Salmanticenses, *Cursus theologicus*, tract. 6, disp. 10, dub. 5, §2, nos. 113–14 (p. 437).

composition of essence and *esse*. This cannot be the case in God. Hence, “divine person” considered as common cannot actually exclude the three persons’ unique personal properties, but instead must include them implicitly. This makes it a *ratio* that is diverse *simpliciter* but one *secundum quid*, which is another way of saying that it is analogous.

Another way to get at this is to suppose that the mind could form a concept of “divine person” so abstract as to exclude the personal properties of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If the mind does this, then the resulting *ratio* of “divine person” would not be limited to those three, and would, in fact, admit of an arbitrary number of divine persons. In this case, it is not a *ratio* derived from reason elevated by *faith*, but instead a creation of the mind alone. “Divine person” taken in this way is no longer a properly theological concept. It could apply univocally to any number of non-existent gods or subsisting relations in the way that “animal” applies univocally to Brownie the donkey and Sparkles the unicorn. The only way for the *ratio* of “divine person” to apply to the Father, Son, and Spirit and *only* to those three is for it to include their personal properties implicitly.

Does Analogy Always Mean Unequal Participation in the *Ratio*?

The preeminent Thomist and contemporary of the Salmanticenses, John of St. Thomas, agrees that the predication of “person” in respect of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit cannot be strictly univocal. But he also denies that it can apply strictly analogically. His reason for rejecting the analogical predication of “person” is that he thinks analogical predication always involves unequal participation in the *ratio*.⁵⁴ He admits that the common concept of “person” *does* possess an analogical mode in the sense that it is not a genus, but is instead like a transcendent concept in respect of what falls under it.⁵⁵

John addresses only analogy of attribution, where the predicate is found essentially only in the prime analog but is attributed to the other analogs in a derivative sense. This clearly has no place in the Trinity. It is true that, ontologically speaking, the Son originates from the Father. However, the

⁵⁴ John of St. Thomas, *Cursus theologicus in I Thomae*, q. 32, disp. 14, a. 1, no. 26, in *Admodum Reverendi et eximii Patris Joannis a S. Thoma . . . Cursus theologicus in Summam theologicam D. Thomae*, nova editio, vol. 4 (Paris: Ludovicus Vivès, 1884), 250.

⁵⁵ John of St. Thomas, *Cursus theologicus in I Thomae*, q. 32, disp. 14, a. 1, no. 26: “Still, it has the mode of an analog inasmuch as it is included in what falls under it and relates in a transcendent way to all lower modes [Habet tamen modum analogi, quantum ad hoc quod est includi in inferioribus et per modum transcendentis se habere ad omnes modos inferiores]” (p. 250).

concept of "divine person" applied to the Son is not derived from the concept of "divine person" applied to the Father in the way that the concept of "healthy" applied to urine *is* derived from the concept of "healthy" applied to the animal body. "Divine person" applies to Father and Son equally and non-derivatively, meaning that it cannot apply by analogy of attribution.

What about analogy of proportionality? Even in this nobler kind of analogy, there seems to be a dilemma: either there is inequality, or else there is no proportionality at all.⁵⁶ For example, consider "'accident' is to *ens*, as 'substance' is to *ens*." There is proportionality between the two relations, but the *ratio* of *ens* in "substance" and the *ratio* of *ens* in "accident" are not equal. Alternatively, consider "'donkey' is to 'animal,' as 'man' is to 'animal.'" In this latter case, there is no inequality, but neither is there proportionality. Instead, there is univocity, since the *ratio* of "animal" is absolutely identical in "man" and "donkey."

The Salmanticenses overcome this apparent dilemma by noting that the inequality of the first example arises not from analogy of proportionality *per se*, but from the concepts of substance and accident. There is nothing about analogy of proportionality that necessarily entails inequality. It all depends on the terms under consideration. Moreover, the dilemma's second horn falsely presupposes that equality can only be based on total agreement in mode, which is actually begging the question. In short, there is no reason to suppose that "the Father is to 'divine person' as the Son is to 'divine person'" implies inequality in their being divine persons or in the application of the concept of "divine person" to them. All it means is that each is a divine person in a way that is partly the same (subsisting in the divine nature) and partly different (being this particular relation that subsists in the divine nature).⁵⁷

Do the Salmanticenses Contradict Aquinas?

Now, there is a difficulty for the Salmanticenses. They pride themselves on being faithful Thomists, and yet Aquinas states: "Others say that there is a commonality by reason of proportion, as when we say that a captain is in the ship as a ruler is in a city. So they say that 'person' is something common to Father and Son, since as the Father is to 'subsisting with respect to the divine

⁵⁶ Salmanticenses, *Cursus theologicus*, tract. 6, disp. 10, dub. 5, §6, nos. 130–31 (p.443).

⁵⁷ Salmanticenses, *Cursus theologicus*, tract. 6, disp. 10, dub. 5, §6, nos. 132–33 (p. 444).

nature,' so also is the Son."⁵⁸ It seems as if Aquinas has already considered and rejected analogy of proportionality in the case of "divine person."

Is it really so? By careful analysis of the opinion Aquinas relates and rejects, the Salmanticenses show that what Aquinas disagrees with is not the affirmation that "divine person" is analogous *as such*, but rather the opinion that the analogous *ratio* is only a relation of reason or a second intention.⁵⁹ This clarifies the Salmanticenses' own position: "divine person" is a name that truly signifies and refers to the Father, Son, and Spirit concretely.⁶⁰ It is not just a derivative label.⁶¹ Nor is it merely a conceptual classifier like "genus." The predication of "divine person" is more like the predication of *ens*, which applies to concrete beings commonly but analogically.⁶² This is also why, even if a more abstract and conceptual term like *individuum vagum*

⁵⁸ Aquinas, *Super I Sent.*, d. 25, q. 1, a. 3, corp. (p. 609).

⁵⁹ Salmanticenses, *Cursus theologicus*, tract. 6, disp. 10, dub. 5, §5, nos. 126–28 (pp. 441–42). Their reading of Aquinas is plausible, given that he goes on to explain in *In I sent.*, d. 25, q. 1, a. 3, corp.: "Others say that there is an intentional commonality, like when it is said that 'color' and 'animal' agree in the intention of genus. But these two stated opinions refer to the same thing, since commonality of intentions is only in accord with the proportion of common to proper or vice versa. And this, too, seems insufficient. For 'person' does not name only an intention or the habitude of a subsistent to a common nature, like the names 'suppositum,' 'particular,' and other such names. Rather, it names that thing to which such an intention applies. Hence the commonality of 'person' in God cannot be in accord with the commonality of this sort of habitude or intention, but this is the commonality whereby the name 'suppositum' is common to the three persons" (p. 609).

⁶⁰ Salmanticenses, *Cursus theologicus*, tract. 6, disp. 10, dub. 5, §5, no. 128: "The commonality that 'divine person' indicates is a commonality of reason founded in reality, but it is not a commonality of such a kind that the *ratio* said to be common is only a relation of reason or a second intention [Communitas, quam dicit persona divina, est communitas rationis fundata in re; non vero est communitas talis conditionis, ut ratio, quae communis dicitur, solum sit aliqua relatio rationis, aut aliqua secunda intentio]" (p. 442).

⁶¹ Salmanticenses, *Cursus theologicus*, tract. 6, disp. 10, dub. 5, §4, no. 123: "The *ratio* of 'divine person,' though common in respect of the three divine persons only by analogy, is nevertheless said of them in a quidditative way (so to speak), that is, it pertains to the formal concept of them and is not something that applies to them in a denominative or quasi-denominative way [Rationem personae divinae, licet analogice tantum communem respectu trium personarum divinarum, nihilominus dici (ut sic loquamur) quidditative de illis, seu esse de conceptu formali earum; non vero aliquid denominative, aut veluti denominative eis conveniens]" (p. 440).

⁶² Confusingly, the example that Aquinas uses in this specific context is "animal." However, his point is not to affirm the univocity of "divine person," but only to give an example of conceptual commonality grounded in reality. See *In I sent.*, d. 25, q. 1, a. 3, corp. (p. 609–10).

("nondescript individual") can be predicated of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit univocally, "divine person," a concrete term, cannot be.⁶³

Similarly, Aquinas's affirmation in the *tertia pars* of the *Summa theologiae* that "there is also the same common *ratio* of personhood in the three persons" does not contradict the Salmanticenses.⁶⁴ In that passage, Aquinas is speaking to the common ability of the Father, Son, and Spirit to assume a human nature, even though only the Son actually has. His point is simply that they are equal in the fact of being divine persons. And thus the *ratio* of "personhood" (*personalitas*) is the same in them. He does not state that the *ratio* of "person" is absolutely identical in them or that it is predicated univocally.

As the Salmanticenses have argued, the *ratio* of "person" is truly common and is the same *secundum quid*, though not *simpliciter*, in the Father, Son, and Spirit. This analogical commonality is enough to avoid the fallacy of equivocation and to verify propositions like "there are three divine persons."

Application to a Rahnerian Concern about the Incarnation

Karl Rahner argues that "person" must be considered an analogous name in the Trinity. His claim is that "the ways in which each person is a person are so different that they allow of only a *very loosely* analogical concept of person, as *equally* applicable to the three persons."⁶⁵ This goes hand in hand with Rahner's *Grundaxiom*, that "the 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity, and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity."⁶⁶

Rahner's concern is that the presence and action of the divine persons in the history of salvation be revelatory of their real personal distinction *per se*. This requires that they not be fungible in their acts *ad extra*, since that would destroy the self-communication and revelation of each person in his distinction. A prime example is Rahner's view that *only* the Son could become incarnate and that there is something about the Son that makes assuming human nature uniquely possible to him. In fact, Rahner highlights the Son's Incarnation precisely because it is a clear example of something in the economy of salvation that is unique to him and not merely

⁶³ Complutenses, *Artium cursus*, disp. 4, q. 6, no. 51 (p. 259–60); Salmanticenses, *Cursus theologicus*, tract. 6, disp. 10, dub. 5, §4, no. 125 (p. 441).

⁶⁴ *ST* III, q. 3, a. 5, corp. (Leonine ed., 11:63).

⁶⁵ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 29. See also 104–6 and Rahner, "Divine Trinity," in *Sacramentum mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner et al., 6 vols. (New York: Herder, 1970), 6:298.

⁶⁶ Rahner, *The Trinity*, 22.

an appropriation. Rahner fears that the traditional presumption that any of the divine persons could have been incarnate entails a univocity that renders the three persons generic and interchangeable.

The Salmanticenses show that one can hold the traditionally Thomistic view that any of the divine persons could have become incarnate without thereby being committed to the view that “divine person” applies to them univocally. The commonality of the analogous *ratio* safeguards both the unity of the divine nature and the radical distinction of personal properties. As the Salmanticenses explain,

it is clear that the grace of union God intended, that which actually exists, was as such meant to be terminated in the person of the Word not in terms of the general concept of subsistence or divine personhood, but in the determinate way that that person in particular is the natural Son of God.⁶⁷

Thus, the Salmanticenses affirm the distinctly filial character of the Son’s Incarnation. God did not just will that a divine person would become flesh, but that *the Word* would become flesh. Still, holding this does not require denying God’s power to have realized incarnations of the Father or Spirit. Such incarnations and their resulting hypostatic unions would be radically different from the actual Incarnation because of the distinction of personal properties.⁶⁸

The Son’s Incarnation is filial and revelatory of him as the Son because he is a divine person precisely by being subsisting natural divine filiation. In him there is not even a virtual distinction between being a divine person and being the *Son*. But the Father and Spirit are equally divine persons, and so their power to assume human nature must equally be affirmed.

The inference that because a divine person has become incarnate any divine person could become incarnate need not rely on a univocal application of “divine person.” The analogous *ratio* of “divine person” avoids the

⁶⁷ Salmanticenses, *Cursus theologicus*, tract. 21, disp. 33, dub. 3, §1, no. 70: “Liquet gratiam unionis a Deo intentam, et de facto existentem petivisse per se terminationem ad personam Verbi non secundum conceptum communem, aut subsistentiae, vel personalitatis divinae, sed determinate ut talis persona est Filius Dei naturalis” (vol. 16, p. 472). Cf. Salmanticenses, *Cursus theologicus*, tract. 21, disp. 8, dub. 2, §2, no. 42 (vol. 14, p. 31).

⁶⁸ See *ST* III, q. 3, a. 5 (Leonine ed., 11:62–63). For further comparison of Rahner and the Salmanticenses on this point, see Dylan Schrader, *A Thomistic Christocentrism: Recovering the Carmelites of Salamanca on the Logic of the Incarnation*, Thomistic Ressourcement 17 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 180–89.

fallacy of equivocation. Father, Son, and Spirit are equal in the relevant respect, namely, being one who subsists in the divine nature. Thus, it is valid to infer that any of them is capable of being the terminus of a relation of hypostatic union. At the same time, the common *ratio* of "divine person" always implicitly includes the distinction of persons.

Conclusion

As the Salmanticenses show, the divine simplicity ultimately rules out the univocal application of "divine person" to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But the true commonality of "divine person" (a dogma of faith) rules out pure equivocation. It remains that "divine person" applies to the three persons in respect of one another analogically. There is something common to them, allowing for a common name and *ratio*: each is a relation subsisting in the divine nature. But there is also irreducible distinction: each is *this* relation. There is nothing generic about God. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not just three instances of the same thing. Each is equal to the others in divinity but radically unique in personal identity. N.V

Scientism, Certitude, and the Recovery of Politics

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In *Natural Law and Human Rights*, Pierre Manent begins his analysis of the contemporary political situation by discussing the intractable tension between the relativism surrounding moral action and the absolutism surrounding “human rights.” Later, drawing heavily from Aristotle’s *Politics*, Manent discusses the necessity of a command–obey structure to resolve the tension such that human beings can fruitfully engage in political life. These two claims, one about the tension between relativism and absolutism and the other about the command–obey structure, are closely linked. If it is true that human beings have an innate need for authority, then it is also the case that the extreme abuses of that need, as they manifest themselves in the political realm, will be either wholesale embrace of such authority (absolutism) or wholesale rejection (relativism). We should be clear that the authority Manent discusses is not arbitrary or autocratic exercise of power, but a legitimate authority towards which citizens can offer rational assent. But any human need or desire can be abused and knowledge of the abuses is necessary to understand the proper object.

It is the contention of this piece that Manent, in his explication of command–obey, wrote better than he knew. Manent authored his text before the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, his analysis provides some of the best explanatory power for understanding the politics surrounding COVID. This politics has significance that transcends the particular crisis of the pandemic and merits serious attention. Specifically, Manent’s analysis of the human need for a command–obey structure both offers an explanation for the concurrent tension between relativism and absolutism, at least as it pertains to the relationship between science and politics, and gives explanatory

power for the rise of scientism in contemporary society. The widespread conception that the natural sciences have the potential to answer questions that reside out of their proper purviews leads to abuses of authority in both directions, by both sides—the political left and political right. I will flesh out my argument first by showing the usefulness of Manent’s analysis for explaining how easily so many in the United States fall prey to a false conception of “science” that undermines a healthy politics and reveals, at root, a dangerous aversion to ambiguity. I will then explain the implications of the elevation of scientism for the relationship between politics and Christianity. I will conclude with some reflections on the common good and the future of politics in the United States given Manent’s important observations. I anticipate that a common criticism of Manent’s book will be that it lacks clear prescriptions for the political problems that ail us. I will argue that clear prescriptions cannot follow from the logic of Manent’s argument, and ultimately that the lack of prescription is one of the strengths of the book.

Before I begin, I wish to make two qualifications. First, Manent’s argument ultimately is about the (un)tenability of liberalism without some common conception of the good. He treats several moral and political problems in his book that fall outside of the scope of this short paper. I am not attempting in the analysis that follows to reduce the moral scope of Manent’s claims or even to take up the mantle of his argument. I simply wish to show how his analysis is helpful in explaining a contemporary political problem and how the implications of this analysis should affect the way Christians think about political practice in the United States. Second, I want to make clear at the outset that I positively wish to avoid a discussion about the various policies enacted as responses to COVID-19. I also want to avoid any cavalier political discussion of COVID that does not sufficiently respect the over one million persons (given the latest CDC tally) who have lost their lives in this country and the hardships that many more have endured due to the pandemic. It is essential for our purposes here though to treat the political significance of the pandemic. I will attempt to do that now.

The Appeal of Scientism

Numerous thinkers have chronicled the rise of scientism. Charles Taylor, following Max Weber, writes about the “disenchantment” of the modern world and how the ability of science to offer causal explanations led to a decline of an older viewpoint.¹ Augusto del Noce neatly summarizes how the

¹ See, e.g., Charles Taylor, “Disenchantment-Reenchantment,” in *Dilemmas and*

modern predilection for scientific knowledge is linked to its apparent certitude: “Every other type of knowledge—metaphysical or religious—expresses only ‘subjective reactions,’ which we are able, or will be able, to explain by extending science to the human sphere through psychological and sociological research.”² These articulations are helpful, but Manent’s contribution to this previously trodden ground is a compelling historical and psychological account of modern political thought that indirectly explains the rise of scientism in such a way that directly bears on concerns of political practice.

Manent identifies Niccolò Machiavelli as the figure who ushers in modern political philosophy through his attempt to use speculative principle, rather than practical reason, to direct human political affairs.³ This bucks against a common narrative that one of the touchstones of modernity is the elevation of the practical and the demise of the speculative. Manent claims that the reduction of the four Aristotelian causes to the efficient cause and the reduction of the human person to an individual-*conatus* belongs to a hypertrophy of the theoretical over the practical: “In any case, whether one prefers to speak of physics or of metaphysics to designate the field to which the notion of individual-*conatus* belongs, what is constant is that it belongs to a theoretical discipline, that it derives from theoretical science.”⁴ Manent turns a common narrative about ancient versus modern thought on its head not only by suggesting that modern thought elevates the speculative rather than the practical, but also by arguing that the proper dichotomy by which we consider the divide is not “idealism” (ancient) versus “realism” (modern). He argues, employing Machiavelli for evidence, that the modern political project proceeds not by looking at things “as they are” (realism), but by removing from our picture of the world the element of human action—that is, the political element. The apparent benefit of such a maneuver is to remove ambiguity from the political equation.

We can already see how Manent’s account of Machiavelli and the elevation of the speculative sheds light on the manner in which we utilize natural science in our practice of politics. The foregoing analysis shows that there are two reasons, rather than one, why people turn to science for answers in the

Connections: Selected Essays (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2014), 287–302.

² Augusto del Noce, “Toward a New Totalitarianism,” in *The Crisis of Modernity*, trans. Carlo Lancellotti (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014), 89.

³ Here, Manent follows the lead of Leo Strauss; see Strauss, “What is Political Philosophy?,” in *What is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies* (1959; repr. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 9–55.

⁴ Pierre Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, trans. Ralph C. Hancock (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), 20.

midst of pandemic: first, they turn to science because certain of its branches, for example, biology and epidemiology, are the fields that most competent to learn about the virus, stem its spread, and develop a vaccine. Second, people turn to science because they want to have faith in something that is sure. Using natural science as a stand-in for the practice of politics elevates the speculative so as to avoid the messiness of the practical. Machiavelli's political strategy seems to have become engrained in the modern psyche. This should come as no surprise since contract theory, as Manent points out, is premised on the promise of security.

The authority of scientific methodology is strong and for good reason. The advances in technology and medicine that we enjoy are testaments to its ability to improve our lives. It clearly offers us a most appealing option for a sense of security. But there is a problem: politics does not offer the same kind of certainty as mathematical science, but mathematical science is simply not equipped to solve political problems. No matter how much knowledge we accumulate about any virus, the successful scientific methodologies that lead to such knowledge are not able to make the value judgments or prudential decisions that politics demands. To be sure, scientific expertise should guide political decision making, but very rarely are there clear-cut answers in political decision making. A recent case study on "policymaker ignorance" points out the inherent difficulties of non-expert lawmakers legislating for the common good.⁵ The study argues that a whole host of considerations need to be considered in policymaking: physical health, psychological health, economic impact, and so on. The study is certainly a balanced attempt to evaluate COVID policy. However, the essential point to keep in mind is that, even if a policymaker possesses all of the data points for every possible area of concern, he or she will still have to make a prudential decision about the common good that will necessitate compromise and an imperfect solution. Scientific methodology simply cannot change the nature of political decision making. It may be the case that policymakers are non-experts in many areas, but the true statesman is the person who is a master of political prudence and possesses the necessary courage to make political decisions. Thus, the public-health official can never replace the statesman. The former must advise and use expertise to ensure that the statesman is informed, but it is the latter who is deputed to make prudential decisions for the common good taking the particular contributions of experts as elements for consideration. As Manent further explains the developments

⁵ Scott Scheall and Parker Crutchfield, "A Case Study in the Problem of Policymaker Ignorance: Political Responses to COVID-19," *Cosmos + Taxis* 9, no. 5 + 6 (2021): 18–28.

in political thinking from Machiavelli, the appeal of scientism in our current political climate becomes even more clear.

In Thomas Hobbes, Manent argues, the elevation of the speculative over the practical develops into a science of command whereby the sovereign concerns himself with the maintenance of political order. Since the human being is understood as an individual-*conatus* rather than a political animal, it must be assumed that all obedience is repugnant and the sovereign must find a way to coerce people to obey who have no reason to obey.⁶ If we are born in freedom removed from obligations, any obligation is seen as an imposition. Conversely, Manent's conception of command-obey draws from Aristotle's treatment of the citizen in *Politics*. Aristotle begins developing the language of command-obey as it pertains to the citizen in book 1, but his clearest articulation of the principle comes in book 3:

There is a rule of another kind, which is exercised over freemen and equals by birth—a constitutional rule, which the ruler must learn by obeying, as he would learn the duties of a general of cavalry by being under the orders of a general of cavalry, or the duties of a general of infantry by being under the orders of a general of infantry, and by having had the command of a regiment and of a company. It has been well said that “he who has never learned to obey cannot be a good commander.” The two are not the same, but the good citizen ought to be capable of both; he should know how to govern like a freeman, and how to obey like a freeman—these are the virtues of a citizen.⁷

Whereas for Hobbes obedience has been rent from any robust concept of civic participation or rational exercise—the commander coerces and the coerced obey—for Manent the elements of rational obedience and shared governance are essential for the command-obey structure. In the act of ruling and being ruled, the citizen learns the art of self-rule which equips him or her to participate well in civic society.

What concerns us most here are the suggestions about human nature. If human beings are rational animals and political animals, then the desire to share in ruling and being ruled qua rational animal is innate.⁸ We have already seen how one abuse of this natural desire can lead to a kind of

⁶ Manent, *Natural Law*, 60.

⁷ Aristotle, *Politics* 3.4.1277b., trans. Benjamin Jowett, classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.3.three.html.

⁸ We should note that Manent extends this political nature more widely than Aristotle, who posits the existence of natural slaves in the first book of the *Politics*.

absolutism: when one embraces wholesale the authority of the apparent certitude of natural science which promises to remove the uncertain from political life. But the tendency to the other extreme of relativism comes into view when we consider the task of the human person in being ruled.

As we pointed out earlier, obeying “like a freeman” does not mean submission to autocratic authority, but rather a rational submission to legitimate authority. With the advent of the digital age and the widespread dissemination of news, the failures of institutions and those who run them are much more publicized. If one is to be called “elite,” or placed in a position of authority, one has to be able to live up to the title.⁹ When citizens witness those in positions of authority overstepping the bounds of their competency, inconsistently enforcing policy that has been laid down with a certain air of moral certitude, or repeatedly changing policy that was supposedly based on objective knowledge, many will revolt against the authority. In our present age of social media, the failure of authority on these counts is much more visible to the public eye.¹⁰ Ironically, the substitution of the apparently certain scientific methodology for the messier prudential decision making of the political art actually undermines authority in the long run because of its necessary failure to deliver on its own terms.

Concerning the extreme factions, we have, on the one hand, a group of people who either know or intuit the limitations of science and so react against those who conflate the certitude of mathematical science with political practice. The problem is that often this group will use this realization to deny science any and all authority in political decision making. We have, on the other hand, a group of people who demonize and dismiss out of hand those who would raise true political questions as being “anti-science” because of a desire for safety and security in political decision making that is simply not possible. At its roots, this tension between a form of relativism and a form of absolutism is closely connected to the contemporary lack of a true command—obey structure as described by Manent.

Science, Christianity, and the Recovery of Politics

The appeal of scientism is real, but it does not limit itself to the natural sciences. In the pluralistic cultural landscape that is ours, it can be tempting to trot out various “systems,” philosophical or theological, that offer complete

⁹ See José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York: Norton, 1994).

¹⁰ The effect of the digital age on authority and its political ramifications is treated by Martin Gurri, *The Revolt of the Public and the Crisis of Authority in the New Millennium* (San Francisco: Stripe, 2018).

and apparently compelling interpretations of reality in the midst of cultural confusion. This is to fall unwittingly into the Machiavellian mentality of elevating the speculative so as to avoid the messiness of politics, of replacing practical reason with the application of formulas.¹¹ If the political pitfall of our time is to fall into patterns of ideological thinking, rather than to engage in the practice of politics, Christians have to offer something other than a baptized ideology as leaven for society. After at least three centuries of decline, the fall of Christendom is complete. Christians must do better than merely assert a type of authority, either political or theological, that is no longer adequate for our contemporary challenges.¹²

Thomas Smith has written about this very problem: “Religious believers have to think about politics in much wider horizons. We have to wrestle with our political pathologies not simply by figuring out the right policy or which party or candidate is ‘the most Christian.’ We have to ask much more fundamental questions.”¹³ Smith goes on to argue that the neoliberal regime perpetually defers the essential question of politics: “What is the good?” Since the deferral is no longer politically expedient, Christian political actors have to make explicit claims about the good life: what it is and how we should pursue it.¹⁴ And, as I will argue below, we are required not only to articulate conceptions of the good life on an intellectual level, but also to show what the good life looks like through our actions.

The corollary of this injunction to raise questions about the good, given the pluralistic nature of our regime in which Christianity is no longer given a preferred seat at the proverbial table, is that we have to be willing both to walk into a room recognizing the existence of a complex array of competing

¹¹ Benedict XVI is very careful to make the distinctions that so many who adopt scientism fail to make: religion’s role in politics is “to help purify and shed light upon the application of reason to the discovery of objective moral principles” rather than to supply the objective norms governing right action, or “still less to propose concrete political solutions, which would lie altogether outside the competence of religion” (“The Ethical Foundations of Political Choices: The Speech in Westminster Hall (September 17, 2010),” in *Faith and Politics: Selected Writings*, trans. Michael J. Miller and others [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2018], 152–58).

¹² For an excellent sociological account of the breakdown of the mainline Protestant consensus in the United States and the subsequent failure of Catholics and evangelicals to fill the void with natural law reasoning, see Joseph Bottum, *An Anxious Age: The Post-Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of America* (New York: Crown, 2014).

¹³ Thomas Smith, “Politics Without the Fall?,” *Church Life Journal*, June 9, 2021, churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/politics-without-the-fall/.

¹⁴ See V. Bradley Lewis, “Is the Common Good Obsolete?,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 92 (2018): 261–70.

goods and to make compromises, recognizing the trade-offs that come with true political practice. The fundamental Christian political insight, best explicated by Augustine in *City of God*, is that politics has inherent limitations and that, therefore, Christians should moderate their expectations of what politics can deliver. Moderating expectations does not in any way weaken our mandate to show our fellow citizens the good, but it should prevent us from falling prey to any ideology that promotes oversimplified and clean-cut political solutions. This insight may be a boring one, but it is nonetheless one that, when ignored, always leads to bad consequences.

If the first way a mentality of scientism can insert itself into the Christian practice of politics is through an intellectual over-reliance on speculative reason to the detriment of practical reason, a second danger manifests itself in allowing our actual practice of politics to become abstracted. This seemingly paradoxical practice is made possible through network news and social media. I contend that the practice of politics should take focus in our local communities and with our neighbors. Yet, since so much of our political engagement takes place through the internet, it becomes easy to privilege the national over the local. More importantly, political engagement over social media does not lend itself to citizens thoughtfully engaging other flesh-and-blood individuals.¹⁵ Rather, social media makes it all too easy for the user to identify himself or herself as well as the opposition with an abstract public. Such “engagement” usually leads to feelings of anger, or even, in certain cases, feelings of acceptance and community. But these emotions are completely detached from any real human engagement. They are no substitute for the arguments that once took place in the town hall or the community building, at the bowling alley and in the church. They cannot count as authentic political practice because they do nothing to promote or strengthen the neighborly bonds that are essential to political community. Christians now, more than ever, should take as their first political principle the building up of their local communities.

Of course, this is more easily said than done. Both Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis, while expressing approval for a pluralistic political society, have also pointed out the necessity of common principles for political discourse. Benedict, on multiple occasions, signaled his belief that the two main dialogue partners in contemporary society are Christian faith and

¹⁵ Augustine’s critique of the theatre in book 3 of the *Confessions* is very instructive here. I have made this argument in a popular piece: “On Some Problems with Political Discourse,” *McGrath Institute for Church Life* (blog), October 8, 2020, mcgrathblog.nd.edu/on-some-problems-with-political-discourse.

Western secular rationality.¹⁶ But he voices his serious concern that religion, in the name of reason, is often marginalized in political dialogue.¹⁷ Francis has suggested that human dignity offers the best hope for a shared political premise.¹⁸ While dignity originated as a distinctly Christian concept, and does represent a common value between many, believers and non, it is also now used to justify euthanasia. I am not completely confident that our post-Christian values, stripped of their Christian roots, will be able to sustain themselves.¹⁹ But the prospect of political success is not the primary motivation of the Christian. Rather, it falls to us to strive for union with the living God and to model for our fellow citizens that communion which is most properly the object of our desire, not by trying to exercise authority that no longer holds sway, by proposing abstract moral systems as solutions to political problems, or by engaging in political debates removed from real human contact, but by living the truth. N.V.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Benedict XVI, “Reason and Faith for a Common Ethics: A Dialogue with Jürgen Habermas (January 19, 2004),” in *Faith and Politics*, 182–95, esp. 195.

¹⁷ Benedict XVI, “Reason and Faith,” 194–95, and “Ethical Foundations,” 156.

¹⁸ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), §211.

¹⁹ Perhaps the best arguments supporting such skepticism can be found in David Bentley Hart, “Reaction and Retreat: Modernity and the Eclipse of the Human,” part 4 in *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019).

The Declaration of Independence: Inalienable Rights, the Creator, and the Political Order

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Pierre Manent puts his finger on numerous problems that arise from an emphasis on human rights that is detached from any consideration of human nature, the Creator, or the traditions that inform human practice. In his book *Natural Law and Human Rights: Towards a Recovery of Practical Wisdom*, Manent writes: “Let us dwell a moment on the proposition in which so much passion is invested today: man is the being who possesses rights. It resonates as our self-definition and our perspective on humanity, one that we take to have fortunately replaced other definitions and perspectives, such as that man is God’s creature or that man is a political animal.”¹ Contemporary political discourse has arrived, so he thinks, at an impasse of contradiction, incoherence, and self-defeating beliefs.

Manent finds a vital help for thinking through these issues in Thomas Aquinas,² but perhaps also a useful resource is the work of Thomas Jefferson. In *Natural Law and Human Rights*, Manent cites the first article of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen: “Human beings are born and remain free and equal in rights.”³ But Manent does not cite the Declaration of Independence drafted by Jefferson. The 1776 Declaration provides a way of addressing many of Manent’s concerns about human rights, human nature, and equality because it combines an appeal to the Creator

¹ Pierre Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights: Toward a Recovery of Practical Reason*, trans. Ralph C. Hancock (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), 50.

² Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 119.

³ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 74.

with the establishment of rights grounded in human nature and defended by limited government. In order to approach some of the important political, religious, and philosophical questions raised in *Natural Law and Human Rights*, we can reconsider the famous “American proposition”: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” What exactly does this famous American proposition mean? Can it help us to address some of the concerns about incoherent political discourse that Manent highlights?

We Hold These Truths to Be Self-Evident

What does “we hold these truths to be self-evident” mean? The interpretation of this phrase has generated no small amount of speculation.⁴ As Manent notes, appeals to self-evidence arise also today in disputes about same-sex marriage.⁵ Even if we cannot perfectly trace the remote or proximate historical origins of the phrase in 1776, we might still examine some possible meanings.

For John Locke, a self-evident truth is akin to what later philosophers called an analytically true proposition.⁶ Such propositions are true in virtue of the agreement of the ideas that make up the proposition. “A bachelor is an unmarried man of marriageable age” is self-evidently true, since the idea of “bachelor” agrees with the idea “an unmarried man of marriageable age.” It does not seem plausible that the self-evident truths of the Declaration of Independence were meant in this sense. The assertions of the Declaration are not true simply by agreement of ideas or by definition in a way that is obvious to anyone who is a native speaker.

Thomas Reid suggests a different sense of self-evidence. On his view,

⁴ For an example of a scholar tracing this phrase to Locke, see Michael Zuckert, *The Natural Rights Republic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996). Daniel Robinson favors an origin from Thomas Reid in “On the Evident, the Self-evident and the (Merely) Observed,” *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 47 (2002): 197–210. On the importance of Francis Hutcheson, see Gary Wills, *Inventing America: Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence* (New York: First Mariner, 2002). Defending the view that the phrase comes from Aristotelian-Scholastic logic text books common at the time of the founding, see Danielle Allen, *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality* (New York: Liveright, 2014). See also Wilbur Samuel Howell, “The Declaration of Independence and Eighteenth-Century Logic,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (1961): 463–84.

⁵ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 17.

⁶ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, bk. 4, ch. 7, no. 2.

self-evidence does not mean obviousness to everyone, but rather clear to those with the requisite education and maturity: “Moral truths . . . are self-evident to every man whose understanding and moral faculty are ripe.”⁷ If a person is conscious of no moral obligation whatsoever, then reasoning with such a person will not bring the person to understand his or her obligations. Just as mathematical calculations cannot begin without acceptance of basic axioms of mathematics, so too ethical reflection presupposes but does not establish its first principles. As Reid says, “the man who does not by the light of his own mind, perceive some things in conduct to be right, and others to be wrong, is as incapable of reasoning about morals as a blind man is about colours.”⁸ Just as there are people who cannot see colors, so too there are people lacking the requisite moral faculty to perceive the demands of ethics. In order to assent to such truths, the terms must be set out distinctly so that the moral faculty of “all well-disposed men” may perceive them.⁹

Thomas Aquinas recognizes a similar sense of self-evidence.¹⁰ Thomas distinguishes two kinds of self-evident (*per se nota*—known through themselves) propositions.¹¹ Some self-evident propositions are self-evident to all (*per se nota omnibus*); other self-evident propositions are self-evident only to some (*per se nota quoad nos*).

It is implausible to read the American proposition as claiming to be self-evident to all. Some people denied it in 1776, and some people deny it now. Yet, if we interpret self-evidence not with respect to all but with respect to us, then we render the founders’ claim more plausible.¹² Indeed, “we hold” in English might be understood as making a similar qualification to the claim of self-evidence as *quoad nos* does in Latin.

Aristotle noted that various domains of inquiry have different levels of certitude.¹³ Human affairs cannot be ordered simply by positing the axioms and deriving the proofs. Politics is not geometry with men rather than lines. More than two thousand years later, echoing Aristotle, Alexander Hamilton wrote: “Though it cannot be pretended that the principles of moral

⁷ Thomas Reid, *Philosophical Works* (Hildesheim, NY: Georg Olms, 1980), 480.

⁸ Reid, *Philosophical Works*, 480.

⁹ Wills, *Inventing America*, 190.

¹⁰ Harry V. Jaffa, “What is Equality?,” in *The Conditions of Freedom: Essays in Political Philosophy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 149–60, at 153.

¹¹ A thorough exploration of this topic can be found in Luca F. Tuninetti, *Per Se Notum: Die logische Beschaffenheit des Selbstverständlichen im Denken des Thomas von Aquin* (Cologne: Brill, 1996).

¹² For a similar interpretation, see Michael P. Zuckert, “Self-Evident Truth and the Declaration of Independence,” *The Review of Politics* 49, no. 3 (1987): 319–39.

¹³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1104a1–6.

and political knowledge have, in general, the same degree of certainty with those of the mathematics, yet they have much better claims in this respect than, to judge from the conduct of men in particular situations, we should be disposed to allow them."¹⁴ More than mathematics, politics generates controversy and partisan spirit. Hamilton continues: "The obscurity is much oftener in the passions and prejudices of the reasoner than in the subject. Men, upon too many occasions, do not give their own understandings fair play; but, yielding to some untoward bias, they entangle themselves in words and confound themselves in subtleties."¹⁵ Since political or ethical investigation has a lower level of certitude than geometry, both its principles and its conclusions will be more under the sway of human self-interest, bias, and prejudice than will those of a mathematical investigation. Only the most fundamental principles of evaluation of human action, such as that good is to be done and evil avoided, have an almost indubitable certitude akin to the certitude of the principle of non-contradiction. As Michael Zuckert puts it, the truths of the Declaration of Independence are self-evident "within the political community dedicated to making them effective. The truths must serve as the bedrock or first principles of all political reasoning in that regime. While they stand as the conclusion of some (unspecified) chain of philosophical or scientific reasoning, they must stand that the beginning of all chains of political reasoning."¹⁶ The claims of the Declaration, in other words, are self-evident within a particular realm of discourse, in this case political practice, but they may very well be conclusions in prior and more fundamental realms of discourse such as political theory or moral philosophy.

All Men

Arguably the most important claim of the entire Declaration of Independence is that "all men are created equal." The expression "all men" may be understood in an exclusive sense or in an inclusive sense. The exclusive reading is illustrated by Jon Meacham in *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power*. According to Meacham, Jefferson "basically meant all white men, especially propertied ones," when claiming that all men are created equal.¹⁷ By contrast,

¹⁴ Alexander Hamilton, "Federalist No. 31: Concerning the General Power of Taxation," *New York Packet*, January 1, 1788, guides.loc.gov/federalist-papers/text-31-40.

¹⁵ Alexander Hamilton, "Federalist No. 31."

¹⁶ Zuckert, "Self-Evident Truth," 329.

¹⁷ Jon Meacham, *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power* (New York: Random House, 2012), 107.

in a speech at Lewistown, Illinois, Abraham Lincoln proclaimed that the signatories of the Declaration meant it as including “the whole great family of man. In their enlightened belief, nothing stamped with the Divine image and likeness was sent into the world to be trodden on, and degraded, and imbruted by its fellows. They grasped not only the whole race of man then living, but they reached forward and seized upon the farthest posterity.”¹⁸ Lincoln’s inclusive reading understands “all men” to include each and every human being—full stop—including all and excluding none. This inclusive reading of “all men are created equal” means that all human beings regardless of race, sex, birth, ability, ownership of property, or any other characteristic are created equal. Manent has in mind this inclusive sense when he writes, “we hold that human rights are a rigorously universal principle, valid for all human beings without exception.”¹⁹ In contrast, the exclusive reading holds that some human beings, because of their race, religion, sex, age, disability, or some other characteristic, are not equal in basic status to other human beings who have the desired quality. Is the inclusive or the exclusive interpretation of the “all men are created equal” most historically defensible?

In his book *America Declares Independence*, Alan Dershowitz endorses the exclusive interpretation:

If the equality of “all Men” had any relevance to their rights, as Jefferson suggested they did, then these words could only have included white, Protestant, landowning males—since blacks, non-Protestants, nonlandowners, and women were denied some of the most basic rights we take for granted today. Some or all could not vote, serve on juries, hold public office, appear as witnesses, make contracts, or live freely.²⁰

On this view, the Declaration’s claims do not cover all human beings; indeed, they cover only a small fraction of human beings. Of course, Dershowitz is right about the lack of fundamental legal rights for Blacks, non-Protestants, nonlandowners, and women in 1776. But is he also right about the meaning of the Declaration?

By contrast, reading the Declaration of Independence as inclusive would reflect the understanding of rights expressed less ambiguously in other documents of the revolutionary era. As Thomas G. West points out,

¹⁸ Abraham Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, vol. 2 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Digital Library, 2001), 546–47.

¹⁹ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 4.

²⁰ Alan Dershowitz, *America Declares Independence* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2003), 159.

“Men,” in this document as in all leading statements of principle in the founding era, refers to all human beings, not just to males. One can see this in other pronouncements of Congress from the same period, in which parallel phrases were used, such as “humanity,” “mankind,” “inhabitants.” For example, Congress’s 1774 Declarations and Resolves states that “the inhabitants [i.e., not only the males] of the English colonies in North-America, by the immutable laws of nature, . . . have the following RIGHTS: . . . life, liberty, and property.”²¹

If West is correct, the Declaration expresses an inclusive view of who has basic rights—anyone with human nature—and this view was not radical or unique, but rather also found in other documents of the era.

In *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality*, Danielle Allen likewise argues that “men” does not refer simply to white, male Protestant property owners. She notes that the original draft written by Jefferson contains a paragraph about the violation of the natural rights of slaves: “Jefferson talks about markets where ‘MEN;’ which he capitalizes, are bought and sold. In other words, he is calling the slaves ‘men.’ And when he does this, he can’t mean males only, because those markets were for men, women, and children. So when, in the second sentence, he writes that all men are created equal, he must mean all people—whatever their color, sex, age, or status.”²² The Declaration, in other words, is inclusive rather than exclusive in its scope.

The state constitutions of six Southern states written after the Declaration provide more evidence for the inclusive interpretation. Aware of the contradiction between the American proposition and slavery, Carl Becker notes, “in the constitutions of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky (1799), Mississippi, and Texas (1845), the phrase ‘All men, when they form a social compact, are equal’ was changed to read ‘All *freemen*, when they form a social compact, are equal.’”²³ If early readers of the Declaration understood that the phrase “all men” did not include slaves, why did the slave states bother adding the prefix “free”?

Indeed, Allen points out that many defenders of slavery understood that

²¹ Thomas G. West, “The Universal Principles of the American Founding,” in *The American Founding: Its Intellectual and Moral Framework*, ed. Daniel N. Robinson and Richard N. Williams (New York: Continuum, 2012), 53–75, at 57.

²² Danielle Allen, *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality* (New York: Liveright, 2014), 154.

²³ Carl Becker, *The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Political Ideas* (New York: Harcourt, and Brace, 1922), 239–40 (emphasis original).

the Declaration's proclamation that "all men are created equal" applied also to Blacks, and so therefore many of these slave owners rejected the Declaration.²⁴ In 1826, for example, Jefferson's cousin and a spokesman in the House of Representatives, Virginian slave-owner John Randolph, defended slavery by calling human equality "a falsehood, a most pernicious falsehood, even though I find it in the Declaration of Independence."²⁵ In 1837, South Carolina senator John C. Calhoun asserted that slavery was a positive good and explicitly rejected the "false and dangerous notion" that all men are created equal.²⁶

Some of the founders, including Jefferson, owned slaves. This fact does not, I think, undermine the historical validity of interpreting the American proposition as including Black human beings within the scope of "all men." Many of the slave-owning founders, including Jefferson, recognized the contradiction between signing the Declaration of Independence and owning slaves, but could not bring themselves (for a variety of rationalizations) to free their slaves. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson reflected on the fate of white slave owners: "Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep for ever: that considering numbers, nature and natural means only, a revolution of the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation, is among possible events: that it may become probable by supernatural interference! The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest."²⁷ Then as today, innumerable people sincerely believe in moral principles and yet also fail to live up to them. The constitutional question, as Lincoln also believed, involved a political compromise necessary at the time to establish the union. In the prevailing opinion of time, outlawing slavery in all the states was simply not politically feasible in 1776.

If Blacks were included within the ambit of the Declaration, what about Native Americans? Jefferson's thoughts on this matter were expressed in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Jefferson argued that "Aborigines" exhibit

²⁴ Allen, *Our Declaration*, 241.

²⁵ John Randolph in congressional debate, cited in Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 199.

²⁶ Maier, *American Scripture*, 200. See also Lacy K. Ford Jr., "Republican Ideology in a Slave Society: The Political Economy of John C. Calhoun," *Journal of Southern History* 54, no. 3 (1988): 405–24.

²⁷ Thomas Jefferson, "Query 18: The Particular Customs and Manners That May Happen to Be Received in That State?" (1781), in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (London: John Stockdale, 1787), 270–73, at 272. For more on Jefferson and Slavery, see Joseph Ellis, *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Knopf, 1996), 144–52; Dershowitz, *America Declares Independence*, 123–50.

eloquence in political deliberation, courage in battle, heart-break at familial loss, and strong and faithful friendships. Given similar cultivation as white people, we shall probably find, thinks Jefferson, that Native Americans “are formed in mind as well as in body, on the same module with the *Homo sapiens Europaeus*.”²⁸ Later, in his second inaugural address, President Jefferson explicitly affirmed that Native Americans are “endowed with the faculties and rights of men,” and so are within the ambit of the American proposition. He recognized Native Americans as persons. True, his actions both as a private person and in public office did not always reflect this view. He wrote letters at various times suggesting the “extermination” of the American Indians should they not comply with the demands of whites.²⁹ We have, again, an all-too-common contradiction between noble principle and selfish practice brought about by the weakness of human nature. Despite these assertions, Jefferson held the view that Native Americans, Black Americans, and white Americans all are created equal.

If men of all races and colors are included, what about women? Is the word “men” as used in the Declaration of Independence meant to indicate that women are not created equal or that women do not have inalienable rights such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? In other words, does “men” mean adult males (*vires*) or does “men” mean all human beings (*homines*)?³⁰ Of course, in some contexts, the terms “men” and “man” are used to refer to adult, male human beings only, such as “men should have their prostates checked yearly after they turn fifty.” In other contexts, “men” or “man” properly refers not just to adult males, but to all human beings, as for example in the title of a 2015 *New York Times* article, “Did Earth’s ‘Anthropocene’ Age of Man Begin With the Globalization of Disease in 1610?”³¹ No one supposes that a woman cannot be a hit-man or that a man-eating tiger will not eat her.³²

Does the Declaration use the inclusive sense of “men” (*homines*) or the exclusive sense of men (*vires*)? Casey Miller and Kate Swift hold that “men”

²⁸ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1984), 185–86.

²⁹ Thomas Jefferson, letter to Alexander von Humboldt, December 6, 1813.

³⁰ See Paul Mankowski, “The Necessary Failure of Inclusive-Language Translations: A Linguistic Elucidation,” *The Thomist* 62, no. 3 (1998): 445–68.

³¹ Andrew C. Revkin, “Did Earth’s ‘Anthropocene’ Age of Man Begin With the Globalization of Disease in 1610?,” *New York Times*, March 11, 2015.

³² A similar linguistic phenomenon exists today with the term “guys,” which can refer to male human beings as opposed to female but is also regularly used by women in addressing other women. A female student may ask her sorority sisters, “do you guys want to leave right now?” Like “guys,” the term “men” can be used inclusively or exclusively.

is properly understood in the exclusive sense, including all adult males but excluding to women:

Thomas Jefferson did not make the same distinction [as Burke] in declaring that “all men are created equal” and “governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.” In a time when women, having no vote, could neither give nor withhold consent, Jefferson had to be using the word men in its principal sense of “males,” and it probably never occurred to him that anyone would think otherwise.³³

Perhaps for this reason, although she followed the original document closely in most respects, Elizabeth Cady Stanton in the 1848 *The Declaration of Sentiments* revised the language of the Declaration of Independence to read, “all men and women are created equal.”³⁴

In composing the Declaration, did Jefferson intend to exclude women from basic equality? In his consideration of Native American culture in Virginia, Jefferson wrote about his view of the role of women: “The women are submitted to unjust drudgery. This I believe is the case with every barbarous people. With such, force is law. The stronger sex therefore imposes on the weaker. It is civilization alone which replaces women in the enjoyment of their natural equality.”³⁵ On Jefferson’s view, if women have the natural equality of all who are created equal, then women also have inalienable rights of the Declaration whether or not these rights are reflected in law.

Insofar as the founders drew their inspiration from Locke,³⁶ we find yet more support for the inclusive view. Like the founders, Locke knew the text of Genesis: “God said, ‘Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame animals, all the wild animals, and all the creatures that crawl on the earth.’ God created mankind in his image; in the image of God

³³ Casey Miller and Kate Swift, *The Handbook of Non-Sexist Writing: For Writers, Editors, and Speakers*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 12. See also Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988), 52.

³⁴ See Wolfgang Mieder, *“All Men and Women Are Created Equal”: Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s and Susan B. Anthony’s Proverbial Rhetoric Promoting Women’s Rights* (New York: Peter Lang, 2014), 65.

³⁵ Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. Peterson, 185–86.

³⁶ See West, “Universal Principle,” 56: “The colonists quoted Locke more often than any other political writer during the fertile period from 1760 to 1775, when they were explaining to each other the principles of government. But that does not mean they agreed with everything Locke said.”

he created them; male and female he created them.”³⁷ In his *First Treatise on Government*, Locke interprets this text as supporting the idea that all members of the human species “them”—male and female alike—are made in God’s image and given jurisdiction over the earth. Both Scripture and reason, says Locke, point to the same conclusion: all individuals of the human species are made in God’s image and have rational nature.³⁸ Their rational nature enables them to have dominion over other creatures on earth. If the Declaration is understood in this matter as reflecting Locke’s views, the Declaration should be understood as including women.³⁹

In 1776, women obviously did not enjoy equality of legal rights as codified in law with adult males. Among innumerable injustices, women could not vote or hold governmental office in most states. New Jersey, a happy exception to the general rule, did allow women to vote from 1776 to 1807.⁴⁰ Many other states did not allow them to vote until the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. However, the American proposition is not a claim about the legal rights created by the positive law of the government. The American proposition is about natural rights that exist whether or not a particular government legally codifies them. What is relevant in terms of inalienable rights is not whether someone can vote but whether someone can be wronged.

In 1776, it was widely recognized that women, children, and men of all colors could be morally wronged in that their inalienable rights could be violated. For example, the moral obligation not to intentionally kill human beings—not to murder—was understood to apply equally to killing men, to killing women, and to killing children. An individual’s (moral or legal) right to life is the (moral or legal) duty of all others not to intentionally kill the individual. Given this understanding of the correlation of inalienable rights and duties, the Declaration must mean that not just adult males, but also women and children are also endowed with inalienable rights. It does not always follow practically that these human rights are protected also by legal rights. Manent notes: “In particular, nongovernmental organizations and international institutions lead very active campaigns throughout the

³⁷ Gen 1:26–27.

³⁸ John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, treatise I, no. 30. See also Jeremy Waldron, *Basic Equality*, New York University School of Law, Public Law Research Paper No. 08–61, December 5, 2008, ssrn.com/abstract=1311816.

³⁹ Jeremy Waldron, “*The Mother Too Hath Her Title*”—*John Locke on Motherhood and Equality*, New York University School of Law, Public Law Research Paper No. 10–74, ssrn.com/abstract=1687776.

⁴⁰ West, “Universal Principles,” 54.

world for the rights of women or the rights of children, campaigns that very explicitly and even emphatically address all human beings wherever they may live.⁴¹ Fair and equitable provisions about voting rights and qualifications for holding public office are absolutely essential for bringing into existence a just republican political order.⁴² At the time of the founding, not just women and non-whites, but also white men without property, Jews, and Catholics could not vote in many states.⁴³ Even today, both felons and minors may not vote or hold public office. The inalienable rights of the Declaration focus on different and more fundamental concerns about what positive law does not give and may not justly take away.

Created Equal

In *Natural Law and Human Rights*, Manent devotes much attention to the question of equality.⁴⁴ What does it mean to say human beings are created equal? In his book *All Men are Created Equal: Some Reflections on the Character of the American Revolution*, Jack P. Green argues that “what the phrase [created equal] clearly could not mean [was] that all men were equal by nature.”⁴⁵ In support, Green appeals to a letter in which John Adams remarks that individual human beings differ from one another by nature, “almost as much as man from beast.”⁴⁶ Green cites a few other lesser-known contemporaries of Adams to the same effect.

However, Green’s interpretation of Adams rests on an equivocal use of the term “nature,” which is immediately resolved when considering Adams’s remark in its original context. In a letter to his wife Abigail on February 4, 1794, the second president wrote:

I hope my old friend will never meet the fate of another preacher of égalité, who was, I fear, almost as sincere as himself. By the law of nature, all men are men, and not angels—men, and not lions—men, and not whales—men, and not eagles—that is, they are all of the same species; and this is the most that the equality of nature amounts to. But man differs by nature from man, almost as much as man from

⁴¹ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 3–4.

⁴² See Ellis, *American Sphinx*, 262.

⁴³ Jack P. Green, *All Men are Created Equal: Some Reflections on the Character of the American Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 14–17.

⁴⁴ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 4–5, 1–12, 84–85, 115–16.

⁴⁵ Green, *All Men are Created Equal*, 5.

⁴⁶ Green, *All Men are Created Equal*, 5.

beast. The equality of nature is moral and political only, and means that all men are independent. But a physical inequality, an intellectual inequality, of the most serious kind, is established unchangeably by the Author of nature; and society has a right to establish any other inequalities it may judge necessary for its good.⁴⁷

Adams uses the term “nature” in equivocal senses in this passage. The equivocal use of the term continues, as Manent points, throughout contemporary discourse.⁴⁸ “Nature” can mean an innate personality trait. An extroverted person has one kind of nature, and an introverted person has a different nature. Nature can also refer to an ingrained habit disposing someone to act, as when we say, “this criminal has a depraved nature.” It is in the sense of an innate disposition of personality or an acquired habit that Adams denies that all human beings share the same nature. But as the fuller context makes clear, Adams also accepts the moral and political equality of all human beings because they share the same nature. All human beings have the same nature in that they all belong to the same species, the same kind of rational creature. The French Revolution, Adams suggests in mentioning *égalité*, was rooted in a misunderstanding about the true implications of the equality of all human beings. In any case, this letter from Adams supports, rather than undermines, the view that equality of nature is what is meant by the Declaration of Independence. A similar disambiguation of the term “nature” may resolve the apparent contradiction found in the lesser-known authorities cited to support Green’s claim.

This equality of nature leads to another sense of equality: namely, that we are equal subjects of the law. Adams states: “All are subject by nature to equal laws of morality, and in society have a right to equal laws for their government, yet no two men are perfectly equal in person, property, understanding, activity, and virtue, or ever can be made so by any power less than that which created them. . . . All are subject by nature to equal laws of morality, and in society have a right to equal laws for their government.”⁴⁹ But without an equality of nature, we would not—as beasts are not—be

⁴⁷ John Adams, letter of February 4, 1794, in *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States: with a Life of the Author, Notes and Illustrations, by His Grandson Charles Francis Adams*, vol. 1, *Life of the Author* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1856), oll. libertyfund.org/titles/2099#Adams_1431-01_945.

⁴⁸ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 6. See too, Edward Feser, “Whose Nature? Which Law?,” *Edward Feser* (blog), October 12, 2012, edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2012/10/whose-nature-which-law.html.

⁴⁹ John Adams, *Works*, vol. 6 (Boston: Little and Brown, 1851), 285–86.

subject to the moral law nor enjoy equal protection of the civil law. In this, Adams in drawing out an implication of our fundamental equality, the equality of nature. The reason we are equally subject to the laws of morality and to the laws of government is because we equally share in the same nature. Among these moral and legal obligations is to respect the inalienable rights of other people.

In considering the inalienable rights of the Declaration, the word “created” is significant, as is the later word “endowed.” These words imply that human equality is not an achievement that is accomplished, but an inheritance that is granted. In most senses, human beings are not equal. As James Wilson said in 1791: “When we say, that all men are equal; we mean not to apply this equality to their virtues, their talents, their dispositions, or the acquirements.”⁵⁰ The fact of human inequality in innumerable respects was as well known in 1776 as it is today. Human beings are radically unequal in talents, in accomplishments, in strengths, in intelligence, and in effective agency. But these inequalities result, at least in part, from human choice. Human beings cultivate their talents, seek accomplishment, enhance strengths, develop intelligence, and cultivate agency. By our choices, we make ourselves better or worse than others in various respects. By contrast, to be “created” equal involves nothing that depends upon human choice, but rather is an innate possession, an endowment of the human being from his or her beginning. The youngest human being, the most disabled human being, and the most vigorous and healthy president of the United States are unequal in most senses, but the Declaration claims they are equal in some basic respect.

“Equal” and “equality” are terms used in radically different senses. Harry Jaffa noted a generation ago: “Clearly, we have reached a state of affairs where, as the demand for equality becomes ever more intense, its meaning becomes ever more indistinct, if not absolutely incoherent.”⁵¹

In *Speaking of Equality*, Peter Westen defines the term: “Equality” signifies the comparative relationship that obtains between two or more distinct persons or things by virtue of their having been jointly measured by a relevant standard of comparison and found indistinguishable [in both possession and degree] by that standard.”⁵² This definition can be refined slightly by deleting

⁵⁰ James Wilson, “Of Man, as a Member of Society, Lectures on Law” (1791), in *The Works of James Wilson*, ed. Robert Green McCloskey, vol. 1 of 2, ch. 15 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1967), doc. 48, press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch15s48.html.

⁵¹ Jaffa, “What is Equality?,” 150.

⁵² Peter Westen, *Speaking of Equality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 39.

“jointly measured” and “found indistinguishable.” Two things are in fact equal to each other before they are measured or found indistinguishable by anyone. Equality does not come into existence when measurements are made or when their equality is found by human observers. Rather, equality exists prior to human investigation. The measurements and human judgments do not constitute equality; they only *reveal* the equality to us.

Equality is better understood as a comparative relationship that obtains between two or more distinct persons or things by virtue of their being indistinguishable in both possession and degree by some standard whether recognized or unrecognized. Two cars are equal in weight if relative to the standard of mass they are indistinguishable. Equilateral, scalene, and isosceles triangles all possess sides and possess them in the same number (three). They are equally triangles. Human beings are created equal if they are indistinguishable in both possession and degree of some characteristic(s).

Following Jeremy Waldron, we can distinguish aspirational equality as an economic or social aim from basic equality as a premise or conclusion of moral and political thought.⁵³ Aspirational equality raises questions about how to ease income inequality, how to remedy disparate outcomes of various human groups, or how to distribute political power. Equality of opportunity, equality of outcome, and equality under the law are all matters of aspirational equality in that we may more or less adequately approach the standard. Basic equality (which might be called foundational equality or descriptive equality) obtains when human beings by virtue of a relevant standard of comparison are found indistinguishable in both possession and degree by that standard. Basic equality answers questions about who is included as part of the moral or political community, whose interests count, and why these beings are included and not others. Aspirational equality presupposes basic equality because, if two beings do not enjoy basic equality, we have no reason to seek aspirational equality, such as equal pay for equal work.

Are human beings created equal because they all possess inalienable rights? Or does the justification of equal rights arise from human equality? In other words, does the premise of human equality lead to the conclusion of inalienable rights, or are inalienable rights the premise that leads to the conclusion of human equality?

Dennis J. Mahoney provides one answer: “The equality that men possess by nature is equality of right. There is, among human beings, none with a right to rule the others; God may claim to rule human beings by right, human beings may rule the brutes by right, but no human being has a claim

⁵³ Waldron, *Basic Equality*.

to rule another.”⁵⁴ That human beings are “created equal” means that human beings are the same in their endowment with basic rights, including the right not to be ruled by others. This understanding of the relationship between rights and equality is found still earlier in Locke:

That all men by nature are equal, I cannot be supposed to understand all sorts of equality: age or virtue may give men a just precedency: excellency of parts and merit may place others above the common level: birth may subject some, and alliance or benefits others, to pay an observance to those to whom nature, gratitude, or other respects, may have made it due: and yet all this consists with the equality, which all men are in, in respect of jurisdiction or dominion one over another; which was the equality I there spoke of, as proper to the business in hand, being that equal right, that every man hath, to his natural freedom, without being subjected to the will or authority of any other man.⁵⁵

All human beings are equal because all human beings are indistinguishable both in having rights and in having them to the same degree. On this view, the first three phrases of the Declaration of Independence explicate what it is to be “created equal.”

Does “created equal” in the American proposition just mean “the same in having rights”? This understanding of the relationship of rights and equality renders the Declaration redundant. If “all men are created equal” just means that all men have the same basic rights, there is no need for a next clause claiming that all men are “endowed with certain unalienable rights.” The claims of the Declaration were not entirely novel, and therefore not in need of immediate explication in different terms. Jefferson’s claims echo virtually identical claims made in the Virginia Bill of Rights adopted on June 29, 1776: “Section 1. That all men are by nature equally free and independent and have certain inherent rights, of which, when they enter into a state of society, they cannot, by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity; namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.” In the Virginia Bill of Rights, it is even more clear than in the Declaration that the assertion of equality is a distinct assertion from the claim about rights.

⁵⁴ Dennis J. Mahoney, “Declaration of Independence,” *Society* 24, no. 1 (1986): 46–48, at 47.

⁵⁵ John Locke, *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, ch. 6, no. 54, gutenberg.org/files/7370/7370-h/7370-h.htm.

The interpretation that “created equal” just means having the same rights also fails to recognize the logical structure of the Declaration. When connections are made between the self-evident truths of the Declaration, Matthew Franck points out that the entire sentence makes a logical argument:

1. All men are created equal (*therefore:*)
2. They are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness (*therefore:*)
3. Governments are instituted to secure these rights, and rest on the consent of the governed (*therefore:*)
4. Governments destructive of these rights may be overthrown and replaced by better ones that protect them.⁵⁶

It is not that equal human rights grounds human equality, but rather that human equality grounds equal human rights.

The logical connection between equality and rights is more explicit in Jefferson’s first draft of the Declaration: “All men are created equal & independent, that from that equal creation they derive rights inherent & inalienable.” In other words, people have inherent and inalienable rights because they are created equal. Equality in nature gives rise to equal rights. In a letter dated June 11, 1790, Adams explicated in a similar way the relationship between human nature shared equally by all human beings and what we today call “human rights”: “That all men have one common nature, is a principle which will now universally prevail, and equal rights and equal duties will in a just sense, I hope, be inferred from it. But equal ranks and equal property never can be inferred from it, any more than equal understanding, agility, vigor, or beauty. Equal laws are all that ever can be derived from human equality.”⁵⁷ In other words, all human beings have rights because all human beings are equal. The same argument is made by the antifederalist Brutus:

If we may collect the sentiments of the people of America, from their own most solemn declarations, they hold this truth as self-evident,

⁵⁶ Matthew Franck, “Declaring Equality without Supplying Its Ground: Danielle Allen’s *Our Declaration*,” *Public Discourse: Journal of the Witherspoon Institute*, November 4, 2016, thepublicdiscourse.com/2016/11/18037/. For a plausible alternative account of the logical structure of this section of the Declaration of Independence, see Allen, *Our Declaration*, 166.

⁵⁷ John Adams, letter of June 11, 1790, in *Works*, vol. 9, *Letters and State Papers 1799–1811* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1856).

that all men are by nature free. No one man, therefore, or any class of men, have a right, by the law of nature, or of God, to assume or exercise authority over their fellows. The origin of society then is to be sought, not in any natural right which one man has to exercise authority over another, but in the united consent of those who associate.⁵⁸

We see then in the logic of the Declaration of Independence as understood by Franck, in Jefferson's first draft, in Adams, and in Brutus the same mode of argument. The Declaration does imply that to be created equal means having the same basic rights to life, liberty, and property. But these inalienable rights follow from equality and are not simply an explication of what is meant by being created equal in nature. Obviously, an appeal to human nature, as Manent points out, has become problematized in contemporary discourse.⁵⁹ But it may be that these problems are not insuperable.

Endowed by Their Creator

What role, if any, should God have in our political order? Does invocation of the Creator add anything to the Declaration of Independence? Or would a "distilled Declaration" lacking all references to the Transcendent be, in all important respects, equivalent? Are references to God in the Declaration merely ceremonial, without ethical, theological, or political import? Are references to God in the Declaration like the motto "In God We Trust," words which (at least as this motto is interpreted in *Aronow v. United States*) are empty of any theological impact?

Arguably, God does add something to the Declaration. The puzzles and problems Manent points to arise, in part, from the void left by the evacuation of the Creator in public life. If the *Creator* endows us with our inalienable rights, then our rights rest on the highest possible authority, indeed a transcendent unchangeable authority. These rights are not government-given, but God-given. The community does not endow us; the Creator endows us. No human authority, not even our own, gives us these rights, so no human authority, not even our own, can strip us of these rights. If these rights are not ultimately God-given, then the source of these rights is something less than divine. Obviously, inalienable human rights are not bestowed by the inanimate objects, by the plant kingdom, or by brute animals like dogs. So, they

⁵⁸ Brutus II, "To the Citizens of the State of New York," *New York Journal*, November 1, 1787, archive.csac.history.wisc.edu/Brutus_II.pdf.

⁵⁹ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 6.

must arise from some human authority, such as a king, an aristocracy, or a democracy. But any human authority can be trumped. A democracy can vote to overturn its prior decisions. A constitutional convention or supreme court can overturn decisions of an earlier constitutional convention or supreme court. Even the authority of an absolute monarch can be trumped. Not only can a monarch change his mind, but the death of an absolute monarch may be followed by a radically different new leader. A Creator roots our rights in a transcendent, unchangeable, and untrumpable authority.

For the Declaration of Independence, the Creator makes a difference in a second way. Recall that natural rights impose a moral obligation upon other agents minimally not to intentionally murder us, enslave us, or do anything else that undermines our ability to pursue happiness. These natural rights may or may not also have corresponding legal rights enforced by law. If there is no enforcement of the law, the law can be put into disrepute. So if natural rights are not enforced by positive law, then they are in practical effect weakened.

However, if you believe that a supreme judge of the world exists, then you believe that God not only sees human activity but responds with justice to it. If such a God does exist, the murderer, the slave trader, and the thief will not ultimately evade punishment. Whoever violates human dignity cannot escape justice. If a supreme judge exists, wrongdoers are *always* caught and *always* punished, sooner or later, with perfect justice. Such considerations obviously did not prevent theistic believers from heinous wrongdoing such as witch burning, the Wars of Religion, and anti-Semitic pogroms, among many other atrocities. But, of course, the atheism of its agents did not stop the Reign of Terror, the Gulags of Stalin, the Khmer Rouge of Pol Pot, or the Great Leap Forward through forty-five million corpses of Mao.⁶⁰ Human beings do evil, sometimes massive evil, whether they are atheists, theists, or agnostics. However, if an agent has theistic beliefs, these beliefs introduce a new consideration of deterrence that an atheist lacks, namely that violations of natural rights are flawlessly detected, infallibly judged, and perfectly punished in this life or the next. From the perspective of someone who believes in God, human choice has eternal and cosmic significance because the effects of these choices can endure forever, even after death. These beliefs do not, of course, guarantee right behavior, but these beliefs add another consideration to the deliberations of agents who have such beliefs. Perhaps for this reason, Jefferson asked: "Can the liberties of a nation be thought

⁶⁰ See Frank Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958–1962* (New York: Walker, 2010).

secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with his wrath?"⁶¹ It is noteworthy that Jefferson says, "in the minds of the people," implicitly suggesting that, perhaps in other minds, basic liberties might be secured by other means than the invocation of God's justice.

Thirdly, the invocation of God serves as an implicit reminder of what a human person is not.⁶² No human individual can create himself or the conditions that make possible human existence (air, water, gravity, atmospheric pressure). We can refashion created things, but we do not create *ex nihilo*. We do not share in divine nature. But we also do not share in the nature of an irrational animal. We are all greater, in terms of our nature, than a dog, cat, or squirrel. In Jefferson's words, "man [is] a rational animal, endowed by nature with rights and with an innate sense of justice."⁶³ We have powers of reflection that enable political deliberation, orchestral composition, and philosophical refutation that (as far as we know) other animals do not enjoy. But this recognition leads to further insight into our basic moral status vis-à-vis one another. Jaffa writes: "In short, as men are neither beasts nor gods, they ought not to play God to other men, nor ought they to treat other men as beasts. Here is the elementary ground, not only of political but of moral obligation."⁶⁴ Someone who places himself in absolute power over other human beings usurps God's place and implicitly denies his own humanity. No one may justly consider herself a god in relation to other human beings, and when this happens, the greatest tyranny can result.

The basic equality of nature among all human beings, an equality of rational nature, makes it fitting that consent of the governed is relevant for government. "Consent becomes necessary to the just powers of government because men are equal," writes Jaffa. "Because men are not unequal, as are man and God, or man and beast, nature by itself does not decide the question of who is to rule. Consent comes to light in the Declaration as an alternative to nature, as a source of the just powers of government."⁶⁵ It is important to note that the scope of consent is narrower than the extension of inalienable rights. Not all human beings are capable of giving informed

⁶¹ Thomas Jefferson, "Query 18," 272.

⁶² I am indebted in these three paragraphs to the insights of Jaffa, "What is Equality?," 153.

⁶³ Thomas Jefferson, letter to William Johnson, June 12, 1823, founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-3562.

⁶⁴ Jaffa, "What is Equality?," 153.

⁶⁵ Jaffa, "What is Equality?," 154.

consent. So, although young children have the same inalienable rights as adults not to be intentionally killed or enslaved, young children are justly denied the right to vote, since they cannot give legal and (when they are very young) moral consent to anything.

Fourth, the contrast between human nature and divine nature is significant as a reminder of the contrast between divine perfection and human imperfection, and the political implications of this contrast. The divine appears not just in the American proposition, but also in the first sentence, last paragraph, and concluding sentence of the Declaration of Independence. This repetition, in a document of only 1,337 words, suggests that God plays an important role. The Declaration's opening sentence invokes God as legislator: "When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation." The Declaration invokes God as judge: "We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions . . ." The final sentence of the Declaration invokes God as executive, providentially ordering and overseeing human affairs: "And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor." The Declaration invokes the legislative, judicial, and executive power of the Divinity.⁶⁶

Only in God could perfect justice, wisdom, power, and goodness exist. Since we do not share the divine nature, we lack the divine attributes. Jaffa draws out the political implications of this insight: "It is an absolutely necessary condition of the rule of law that the three powers of government never be united in the same *human* hands. For them to be so united, whether in a singular or a collective body, is the very definition of tyranny, as the Founding Fathers never ceased to repeat. For the equality of mankind is an equality of defect, as well as an equality of rights."⁶⁷ A perfect tyranny would be absolute power without absolute wisdom, justice, and love. Since no human being has absolute wisdom, justice and love, no human being rightfully exercises absolute power over any other. For this reason, Aquinas argues that, even those who have taken vows of obedience, as a priest or

⁶⁶ Jaffa, "What is Equality?," 153.

⁶⁷ Jaffa, "What is Equality?," 153.

solider might, are not obligated to obey every order issued by the bishop or general in command.⁶⁸ Orders from legitimate authorities not only may but *must* be disobeyed in certain circumstances.

A fifth and final reason the Creator makes a difference for the Declaration of Independence is that the Creator plays a crucial role in the two most common justifications for inalienable rights given at the time of the founding, the Scottish Enlightenment and Lockean natural rights. If the Declaration is read as reflecting the Scottish Enlightenment justification of rights,⁶⁹ then the basic truths of ethical conduct arise from an innate sense implanted within us. When Jefferson spoke of “my own creed on the foundation of morality in man,” he described it as a divinely implanted moral sense. Jefferson recognized that some people lack this sense, but they are similar to someone born without eyes or someone born without hands, the exception that does not disprove the rule.⁷⁰ For this reason, Jefferson thought both the ploughman and the professor are on an equal footing in terms of basic ethical responsibilities:

He who made us would have been a pitiful bungler, if he had made the rules of our moral conduct a matter of science. For one man of science, there are thousands who are not. What would have become of them? Man was destined for society. His morality, therefore, was to be formed to this object.⁷¹

For Jefferson, God made man for a social state, so God gave to human beings a moral sense so that they would be able to pursue happiness together.⁷² But if God is taken out of the picture, then Jefferson’s justification for trusting the moral sense vanishes. If our moral sense arises not from the design of a Creator, but from chance survival and random mutations in the primordial evolution of humankind, why should we trust our moral sense as reliable? If our moral sense is not reliable, then the Scottish Enlightenment justification of the Declaration’s claim vanishes.

On the other hand, if the Declaration is read as reflecting a Lockean justification of rights,⁷³ then the question arises about the role of the divine

⁶⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 104, a. 5.

⁶⁹ A case for this view is made in Wills, *Inventing America*.

⁷⁰ Thomas Jefferson, letter to Thomas Law, June 13, 1814.

⁷¹ Thomas Jefferson, letter to Peter Carr, August 10, 1787, founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-12-02-0021.

⁷² Wills, *Inventing America*, 186–91.

⁷³ A case for this view is made most famously in Becker, *Declaration of Independence*.

in Locke's account of rights. Arguably, the Creator also plays a central role in Locke's understanding of basic rights.⁷⁴ Locke wrote that, without God, each person "could have no law but his own will, no end but himself. He would be a god to himself, and the satisfaction of his own will the sole measure and end of all his actions."⁷⁵ For Locke, the respect of one person for another is founded on the view that each person serves a Sovereign Master and is sent into the world by his order and for his business. If Locke's theism is central to his justification of rights, then the Declaration falls flat without a Creator. Perhaps another justification for basic human equality can be found, but it will not be the justification that animated the founders of the United States of America.

Inalienable Rights

By "inalienable rights," the Declaration of Independence means rights that cannot be taken away by private parties or given away by the possessors themselves.⁷⁶ Such rights cannot be abdicated or waived by individual human choice. Citing the Virginia Bill of Rights, which is more explicit on this matter, Zuckert defines inalienable rights as rights we cannot give up or relinquish for ourselves or on behalf of our posterity.⁷⁷ Our legal code recognizes such rights. For example, we may not waive our right to equal protection of the law, our right against arbitrary arrest, or our right to be presumed innocent.⁷⁸ In the context of the Declaration, the inalienable rights asserted are rights that the law does not bestow and the law cannot take away. As inalienable, these rights are ours even if we consciously reject them. So, although someone may wish to sell himself into slavery, he has no right to do so. Thus, these rights cannot rest on our desires or conscious beliefs, since we have them regardless of and even in contradiction to our desires, beliefs, and so on. This understanding of rights conforms with the idea of a basic endowment of all human beings from their creation, for even

⁷⁴ See Jeremy Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality: The Christian Foundations of Locke's Political Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁷⁵ John Locke, Bodleian MS Locke c. 28, fol. 141. 1693.

⁷⁶ In drafting the Declaration, Thomas Jefferson wrote in his own hand of "inalienable" rights, but the text approved by Congress for publication, seemingly influenced it would seem by John Adams, speaks of "unalienable" rights. These terms, then as now, are synonymous.

⁷⁷ Zuckert, *Natural Rights Republic*, 24.

⁷⁸ See S. Matthew Liao, "Human Rights as Fundamental Conditions for a Good Life," in *The Philosophical Foundations of Human Rights*, ed. Rowan Cruft, S. Matthew Liao, and Massimo Renzo (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 79–100.

very young human beings or severely handicapped human beings share with us the same basic endowment as human beings, though they may have very different (or even no) desires and beliefs.

The rights in question are pre-political in the sense that they do not depend upon a government that may or may not provide legal recognition and enforcement of these rights. Yet, as Manent rightly points out, rights cannot exist in a pre-social world: "The declaration and promotion of human rights in effect presupposes the prior existence of a human world already ordered according to rules and purposes that cannot be derived simply from human rights."⁷⁹ If man is a rational animal, then he is for that same reason a political animal, minimally one raised in community with others. The Declaration of 1776 endorses natural rights, entitlements, or immunities possessed by human beings in virtue of their nature, endowment, or creation, regardless of political arrangement or positive law. The Declaration claims that governments are to be judged and even abolished under certain conditions when they violate these rights. Indeed, the founders cast aside the rule of King George III on these grounds.

Today we call these rights "human rights." One of the central concerns of Manent's book is how we should understand these human rights and how they relate to the social world. On one view, these rights are to be distinguished from duties. Jaffa claims: "In this state, however, in which all men have equal and unalienable rights they have no real duties."⁸⁰ Jaffa may have in mind here the teaching of Locke, who held that natural law "ought to be distinguished from natural right: for right is grounded in the fact that we have the free use of a thing, whereas law is what enjoins or forbids the doing of a thing."⁸¹ Rights are liberating; laws are confining.

It is hard to see, on this understanding, what force natural right has. Since natural right is distinguished from positive right established by law, natural right has no legal force. But if natural right has nothing to do with ethical duty, it has no moral force either. If this is so, then Jeremy Bentham was correct that talk of a claimed, natural right is useless nonsense on stilts.⁸² It is better to understand natural rights as facilitating the free use of a thing

⁷⁹ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 48.

⁸⁰ Henry V. Jaffa, "Abraham Lincoln and the Universal Meaning of the Declaration of Independence," in *The Declaration of Independence: Origin and Impact*, ed. Scott Douglas Gerber (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2002), 39.

⁸¹ John Locke, *Essays on the Laws of Nature*, ed. W. von Leyden (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 111.

⁸² Hugo Adam Bedau, "Anarchical Fallacies': Bentham's Attack on Human Rights," *Human Rights Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (2000): 261–79, at 261.

precisely by imposing moral duties on other agents. Although it might also imply other duties, the right to life minimally includes the *prima facie* duty of others not to intentionally kill us. Although it also might imply other duties, the right to liberty minimally includes the *prima facie* duty of others not to enslave us.

In August of 1776, the statement of a right to the “pursuit of happiness” in the Declaration of Independence drew criticism as confused and vague:

Did ever any mortal alive hear of taking a pursuit of happiness from a man? What they possibly can mean by these words, I own is beyond my comprehension. A man may take from me a horse or a cow, or I may alienate either of them from myself, as I may likewise anything that I have; but how that can be taken from me, or alienated, which I have not, must be left for the solution of some unborn Oedipus.⁸³

Undoubtedly, the right to pursue happiness is more difficult to define in terms of the duties of other people. Yet its meaning is not entirely obscure. The Declaration speaks not of a right to happiness but a right to *pursue* happiness. A limited government does not seek to secure the perfect happiness for its citizens through securing eternal salvation or by attempting to construct an earthly utopia.⁸⁴ To secure such lofty ends requires both an authority and a power beyond what is possible for a limited government. Some scholars hold that the pursuit of happiness is a right to property,⁸⁵ others that it pertains to seeking happiness in a more robust sense.⁸⁶ Although it may mean more, the right to pursue happiness arguably includes the right to make use of (if not necessarily to legally own) property, which entails the *prima facie* duty of others not to steal from us. If we cannot make personal use of water, food, shelter, and clothing, we cannot survive to pursue happiness. So, if we have a right to pursue happiness, we necessarily have the right to make personal use of created things as a necessary supposition of any pursuit.

This correlation between rights and duties helps ease, though not

⁸³ Citation from Wills, *Inventing America*, 246.

⁸⁴ I draw here on Jaffa, “What is Equality?,” 156.

⁸⁵ Ellis suggests that Jefferson wrote “the pursuit of happiness” rather than speaking of property because “Jefferson was probably aware of the contradiction between his own version of the natural rights philosophy and the institution of slavery. By dropping any reference to ‘property’ he blurred the contradiction” (*American Sphinx*, 56).

⁸⁶ See Arthur M. Schlesinger, “The Pursuit of Happiness,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (1964): 325–27. Perhaps the best treatment of what the pursuit of happiness means for Jefferson is found in ch. 16 of Wills, *Inventing America*.

eliminate, the tensions between reading the American proposition as a form of liberalism focused on defense of individual rights and interpreting the Declaration as an expression of republicanism focused on formation of a virtuous community. In practice, liberalism cannot be separated from republicanism. Without a virtuous community, individual rights will be frequently violated. People without the virtues of courage and temperance are apt to violate the rights of others whenever dangers or pleasures incite such violations. If Aristotle is right, then virtuous people cannot be formed outside of communities aiding in the formation of character. On the other hand, without individual rights, a virtuous community may degenerate into a totalitarian state bent on eradicating all vice and threats to communal well-being, even at the expense of respect for the individual. This connection between individual rights and a virtuous community is strengthened by an understanding that the pursuit of happiness requires habituation in doing good actions. "The order of nature," writes Jefferson in a letter to M. Correa de Serra, is "that individual happiness shall be inseparable from the practice of virtue."⁸⁷ For Jefferson, as for the other founders, "without virtue, happiness cannot be."⁸⁸ In an echo of Aristotle, the third president held: "Happiness is the aim of life. Virtue is the foundation of happiness."⁸⁹ The union of personal happiness and virtuous activity does not answer every question about reconciling a liberalism focusing on individual rights and a republicanism focused on communal virtue, but it does set a context in which these questions can be more fruitfully posed and intelligently answered.

Nevertheless, the ambiguity of the "pursuit of happiness" lends itself to the unlimited expansion of new rights which are viewed by agents as necessary for their subjectively defined "happiness," the unlimited expansion of government in order to enforce these new rights, and the inherent contradictions that thereby arise as emphasized by Manent in *Natural Law and Human Rights*.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Thomas Jefferson, letter to José Corrêa de Serra, April 19, 1814, founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-07-02-0216.

⁸⁸ Thomas Jefferson, letter to Amos J. Cook, January 21, 1816, founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-09-02-0243.

⁸⁹ Thomas Jefferson, Letter to William Short, October 31, 1819, csun.edu/~hcfl004/jefflet.html.

⁹⁰ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 11 and throughout.

Conclusion

We can, at this point, express the American proposition in different words so as to resolve some possible ambiguities. We hold that it is true that all human beings are created equal in rational nature. As rational and free creatures, God endows all human beings with inherent rights that other people should not violate, whether these rights are recognized legally or not. These universal human rights include the right to not to be intentionally killed, the right not to be enslaved, and the right not to have their property stolen. If the American proposition is accepted, it offers us a coherent way forward in answering some of the conundrums and questions raised by Manent in *Natural Law and Human Rights*. But that raises a question that I cannot begin to answer in this essay: Is the “American proposition” of the Declaration of Independence still credible today? N.V.

Human Rights and Women's Rights

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Mainstream feminists insist, with a degree of unanimity that is sometimes surprising, that access to abortion is an essential precondition of female equality. That feminism, which is in other respects so flexible, inclusive, and uncategorizable, should be so unyielding with respect to this particular issue seems surprising to many. It is especially surprising to those who, while sympathetic to other feminist goals, also oppose abortion.¹ Why is access to abortion so important? Why must one's views about the equality of women stand or fall on one's views about the value of unborn human life? If feminism has to have a flagship issue, why must that issue be *abortion*? In this paper, I will propose that Pierre Manent's *Natural Law and Human Rights* offers a possible answer to this question. I will argue that, to the extent that mainstream feminism assumes the truth of what Manent calls the "philosophy of human rights," it cannot *not* advocate abortion access. Similarly, I will argue that pro-life feminist attempts to defend the contrary position—namely, that abortion is antithetical to feminism—invariably assume the natural law that the philosophy of human rights rejects. My argument, if correct, suggests the pivot point in discussions of abortion and feminism occurs much further back than many acknowledge: in our very understanding of ourselves and our place in the world.

In what follows I will first briefly summarize Manent's account of what he calls the "philosophy of human rights." With this background in place,

¹ This was initially my own view. See Angela Knobel, "Why Can't One Be Pro-life and Pro-Woman?," *Washington Examiner*, January 26, 2017, [washingtonexaminer.com/why-cant-one-be-pro-life-and-pro-woman](https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/why-cant-one-be-pro-life-and-pro-woman).

I will consider the mainstream feminist claim that access to abortion is a necessary precondition of female equality. When “equality” is understood through the lens of the philosophy of human rights, I argue, the mainstream feminist insistence on access to abortion becomes coherent: a feminism that assumes the truth of the philosophy of human rights cannot *not* insist on access to abortion. The pro-life feminist reply that abortion harms and oppresses women, by contrast, is coherent only to the extent one assumes the framework of natural law.²

Natural Law or Human Rights?

To believe in natural law is to believe that nature itself sets the standard for human life. What the “law” commands is simply action necessary for the realization of the potential implicit in our nature. Under such a framework, Manent notes, “natural inclinations and natural differences, if they exist, constitute a kind of language of nature.”³ The fact that human beings are naturally rational or naturally social, or that biological males are (typically) attracted to biological women, helps provide insight into nature’s “law”: “Natural law issued commands in the name of a teaching implicit in human nature, in a *tendency* of human nature to society and to knowledge, or in a natural *difference* among ages, sexes, and capacities, a tendency or difference that reason once made explicit and on the basis of which it founded its commandments and recommendations.”⁴ Nature’s laws can be and frequently are violated: cultures or individuals can choose to live up to nature’s laws or not. For this reason, Manent says that, under the traditional framework of natural law, human beings are “free under the law.”⁵ Natural law is something we freely choose to follow or freely choose to reject, but because it stems from our human nature, it does not cease to bind even those who reject it.

The philosophy of human rights, by contrast, accepts the notion of freedom but rejects the notion of any overarching “law” against which our free choices are to be measured. While the philosophy of natural law is rooted in the language of nature, and thus sees human beings as free “under the law” of nature, the philosophy of human rights puts freedom prior to

² It is not my intent, however, to argue that a belief in natural law forces opposition to abortion. It is one thing to believe in natural law and another to reach a consensus about what natural law does or does not require.

³ Pierre Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights: Toward a Recovery of Practical Reason*, trans. Ralph C. Hancock (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press 2020), 11.

⁴ Manent, *Natural Law*, 10.

⁵ Manent, *Natural Law*, 7.

law and recognizes law only as a means of preserving freedom.⁶ While the philosophy of natural law understands individual human beings in terms of their human nature, and thus in terms of their natural inclinations and natural differences, the philosophy of human rights rejects the language of “nature” in favor of an “impoverished common denominator,” namely equality: “Modern natural right begins with a proposition concerning nature that reduces it to identity and separation: the bearers or bases of rights are sufficiently or even exhaustively defined by the fact that they are identical, or similar, and separate.”⁷

When human beings are understood simply as “free,” rather than free “under the law,” nature can no longer provide a standard of judgment. Nature—albeit an anemic version of it—is still there, because only an appeal to what is shared by all can ground the affirmation of equality that is at the heart of the philosophy of human rights. At the same time, however, to focus only on what all share is by definition to exclude any assertion of natural inclination or natural difference.

When our shared human nature is reduced to the “impoverished common denominator” of equality, any individual “nature” beyond our fundamental equality becomes a construct. When common nature does no more than establish basic identity and equality among each individual, when it is reduced to what each equally shares, then we can no longer be male or female, let alone “rational” or “social,” thanks to our common nature.⁸ When the common nature shared by all human beings no longer points us to a standard of behavior, then standards of behavior become ours to invent: what Manent refers to as “particular nature” takes precedence over common nature.

Although Manent does not define it, “particular nature” seems to refer to a nature constructed on the basis of the desires and inclinations a particular individual happens to have. For Manent, the rejection of common nature and the embrace of particular nature is exemplified in contemporary attitudes toward homosexuality. Under natural law, homosexuality was a disorder, and involved the willful choice “contrary to the rule inscribed in the physical and moral nature of humanity.”⁹ Contemporary culture, however, both denies that gender is determined by nature *and* insists that homosexuality is natural.¹⁰ The key to understanding the pair of assertions is this: under

⁶ Manent, *Natural Law*, 9.

⁷ Manent, *Natural Law*, 11.

⁸ Manent, *Natural Law*, 11.

⁹ Manent, *Natural Law*, 14.

¹⁰ Manent, *Natural Law*, 15.

the philosophy of human rights, gender is not a fact of the common nature shared by all human beings, but a construct, something peculiar to the particular nature of the individual: “Sexual desire . . . is determined in a random or unpredictable way according to the particular nature of each subject. It is still nature that commands or prevails, but now the nature proper to each individual and no longer human nature understood as representing an order that is valid for all members of the species.” Sexual desire, or even what it means to be male or female, that is to say, are not deliverances of common nature, but constructs of particular nature.

As a direct consequence of the rejection of a common nature, we are no longer able to assert with any authority that any action, culture, or way of life is superior to any other. For Manent, this is especially reflected in contemporary attitudes toward cultural difference.¹¹ Cultural difference is evidence of human freedom insofar as it “demonstrates the almost unlimited capacity of humanity to produce itself—to produce itself *according to no rule or criterion*, whether such a rule or criterion derives its power from human nature or from human reason.”¹² To condemn cultural practices, even those we consider barbaric, would be to admit that we are free “under the law,” that there are good and bad uses of freedom, and that there is a human nature that can be either lived up to or violated. But having rejected the law of nature, there is only freedom. When rights are based in a freedom unconstrained by law, all cultures are necessarily equal.

Women’s Rights and Human Rights

If the philosophy of human rights is at the heart of contemporary attitudes toward gender and cultural difference, then it likely also motivates other aspects of contemporary culture. In this section I will consider the implications of the philosophy of human rights for feminism, and more specifically for feminist attitudes toward abortion. A feminism based on the philosophy of human rights, I will argue, would indeed have to include access to abortion as a foundational component.

As we saw above, Manent argues that the philosophy of human rights eschews nature in favor of equality. Since the philosophy of human rights rejects the “language of nature,” it rejects any claims about natural inclination or natural difference. What would it mean to pursue female equality

¹¹ As Manent makes clear, he is referring to the attitudes of “the citizens of modern democracies insofar as they adhere to the idea of justice that the progress of the Enlightenment seems to have validated” (*Natural Law*, 2).

¹² Manent, *Natural Law*, 6

in such a context? If our common nature delivers only the fact of human equality, if everything else is a construct, a deliverance of particular nature, then we should anticipate that a feminism constructed on the philosophy of human rights will be more or less silent on the question of what women “are” or of what it “means” to be a woman. To prioritize the contributions of particular nature is to anticipate that different women will have different and possibly even incompatible understandings of what femininity is. For some, femininity will be tied to motherhood and marriage or to a given tradition, culture, or religious belief; for others, it will not. For a feminism founded on the philosophy of human rights, this will be as it should be. Since such a feminism cannot look to nature or to an account of what women “are” or “want,” it can insist only that individual women be free to achieve their own version of femininity, whatever that happens to be.

If the preceding account is correct, then self-determination will be the primary vehicle of female equality. Women will be “equal” to the extent that they have the freedom to construct their femininity in accord with the inclinations and preferences of their particular natures. Such freedom will be secured partly, but only partly, through supportive social structures. Access to education, equal pay, equal opportunity, and the absence of social pressures to conform to a certain preconceived ideal of femininity will certainly all help to provide space for the construction of a particular nature. But it is equally important to notice that, if female equality is understood to consist in a woman’s freedom to construct and live her own version of femininity, then the obstacles to it are not merely social. For, when female equality is understood in this way, an important—perhaps *the* important—obstacle to female equality will be biology itself.

Even if we avoid making any assertions about the common nature all females share, it will continue to be true that only those with a certain biological constitution can become pregnant, that when they do it will take a considerable amount of time to gestate the child, and that that space of time will be inconvenient, uncomfortable, and sometimes dangerous. It will also continue to be true that (most) of those with said biological constitution will feel an inclination to bear children, that they will feel attached to the children they gestate, and so on. The philosophy of natural law holds that these biological facts provide helpful insight into the “language of nature”: they tell us something about the law that governs human beings in general and women in particular. Those facts will also tell us something about human rights and duties, and importantly about what kinds of actions will lead to or detract from human fulfillment. The philosophy of human rights as described by Manent, however, rejects what the philosophy of natural

law affirms: it rejects the notion of a language of nature and of a robust common nature. But rejecting the language of nature does not eliminate the problem of biology.

Suppose that I have constructed my own version of femininity for myself, according to the inclinations and preferences of my own particular nature, and that I have constructed it in such a way that pregnancy and motherhood have no role to play, or—as is more likely the case—have no role to play until some appointed time. If (having included in my construct the behaviors that biologically culminate in pregnancy) I nonetheless become pregnant, what then? Unless I have a way of resisting it, biology will run roughshod over the vision of femininity I have constructed, over the inclinations and preferences of my own particular nature. This, in turn, seems to imply that—at least according to the philosophy of human rights—women cannot really be equal unless and until they have the ability to refuse the burdens placed upon them by biology itself.

An excellent illustration of the intuition that female liberation requires liberation from biology itself can be found in Judith Jarvis Thompson's famous "A Defense of Abortion."¹³ Thompson argues that a woman who finds herself pregnant has no more obligations to the child she carries than she would to a passerby in need of help. Since we do not expect other members of society to offer assistance whenever they see someone in need, Thompson argues that it is unfair and unjust that society expects women to not merely offer aid to the fetus but to put their entire lives on hold to care for it.¹⁴ Although Thompson initially imagines a situation where pregnancy is forced upon a woman by circumstances outside her control, she ultimately argues that such expectations are unjust even when the pregnancy is the result of the woman's own deliberately chosen actions. If a burglar were to injure himself while invading a home, the homeowner would not be held responsible, let alone expected to assist him, even if he had neglected to lock his doors.¹⁵ Similarly, Thompson argues, a woman should not be expected to care for a developing fetus merely because she knew a pregnancy might result from her actions.

Thompson's critics charge that her examples distort and denaturalize pregnancy, depicting pregnancy as an invasion altogether distinct from the sexual act, and that she ignores the fact that the female body is meant to bear children and that the developing child—whatever its origins—is exactly

¹³ Judith Jarvis Thompson, "A Defense of Abortion," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, no. 1 (1971): 44–66.

¹⁴ Thompson, "Defense of Abortion," 62.

¹⁵ Thompson, "Defense of Abortion," 58.

where it ought to be.¹⁶ But from the perspective of the philosophy of human rights, this is precisely the point. From the perspective of the philosophy of human rights, the “naturalness” of conception implies nothing whatsoever about a woman’s obligation to carry a child. If one rejects the idea of a common nature that gives a law, then it will be nonsensical to speak of obligations whose existence points back to that shared, common nature. It will be more nonsensical still to claim that one’s biological makeup brings special obligations along with it. Any attempt to make such claims will necessarily be seen as unfair and unjust.

Viewed in this light, access to abortion becomes not just one demand among others, but foundational to female equality as such. On the basis of our preceding discussion, it is clear that the philosophy of human rights has two consequences for the pursuit of female equality. First, since equality means having the freedom to construct femininity according to the inclinations and preferences of particular nature, feminism cannot advocate for a specific ideal of femininity or uphold some “ideal” of what women are. Since feminism cannot put forward any robust account what women are or want or need, the sole coherent goal of feminism will consist in ensuring that women have the freedom to construct femininity for themselves in accord with the deliverances of their particular nature. The second consequence, which is a result of the first, is that, when female equality is understood in these terms, the success of feminism will hinge on the elimination of the obstacles that get in the way of the construction of a particular nature: not just the more easily remedied social obstacles, but biological ones as well. Since there are few obstacles to the construction of a particular nature that are as dramatic, pervasive, and life-altering as pregnancy, it follows that any feminist who accepts the philosophy of human rights would have to insist on access to abortion.

Women’s Rights and Natural Rights

So far I have argued that, to the extent that feminism presupposes the truth of the philosophy of human rights, it must also advocate access to abortion.¹⁷ But if Manent is correct, allegiance to the philosophy of human rights is so widespread, as to be the de facto assumption of citizens of modern

¹⁶ See, e.g., Gilbert Meilander, “The Fetus as Parasite and Mushroom,” *Linacre Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (1979): 126–35.

¹⁷ I have not argued that mainstream feminism does in fact ascribe to the philosophy of human rights. Given the complexity and variety of feminism, such a claim would be difficult to establish.

democracy.¹⁸ If both Manent and I are correct, then the gap between mainstream feminists and pro-life feminists is wider and deeper than it at first appears: it is not a disagreement about how to achieve mutually agreed upon goals, but a disagreement about ourselves and our place in the world. If the roots of the disagreement reach all the way to human nature itself, then it will be impossible to both assume the truth of the philosophy of human rights and oppose abortion. In what follows, I will argue that—even if they themselves are unaware of it—the truth of this consequence is reflected in the very rhetoric of pro-life feminism: their claims are coherent only to the extent one assumes the truth of natural law.¹⁹

Pro-life feminists commonly respond to the claim that access to abortion is a necessary precondition of female equality by insisting that abortion is not a “choice” but an act of desperation. Women *want* the child, they argue, but are they forced into seeking abortion because society fails to sufficiently support them. Frederica Matthews Green, former vice president of Feminists for Life, has famously argued that abortion is always an act of desperation on the woman’s part: “Like an animal caught in a trap, trying to gnaw off its own leg,” says Matthews Green, “a woman who seeks abortion is trying to escape a desperate situation by an act of violence and self-loss.”²⁰ Abortion, she claims, “is not a sign that women are free, but a sign that they are desperate.”²¹ And the New Wave Feminists website, declaring “no woman ever wants to have an abortion,” states that its aim is to make abortion unthinkable by making abortion unnecessary.²²

The problem with claims like those above is that—at least if they are taken at face value—they are clearly false. This becomes clear when we consider the ambiguity inherent in the word “want.” Let us take it as a given that no woman “wants” to have an abortion. But “want” can mean different things. Consider the difference between “not wanting” to have a cavity filled, on the one hand, and “not wanting” to give a valuable heirloom to the thug demanding it a gunpoint, on the other. Cavities arise in the normal course of things, and having them filled is unpleasant, but we freely and willingly

¹⁸ Manent, *Natural Law*, 2.

¹⁹ Some pro-life feminists explicitly couch their arguments in nature. See for instance Erika Bachiochi’s *The Rights of Women: Reclaiming a Lost Vision* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press 2021).

²⁰ Frederica Matthews Green, “When Abortion Stopped Making Sense,” *National Review*, January 22, 2016, nationalreview.com/2016/01/abortion-roe-v-wade-unborn-children-women-feminism-march-life/.

²¹ Green, “When Abortion Stopped Making Sense.”

²² newwavefeminists.com.

seek to have them filled because we know our lives will be very much better with the unpleasantness removed. Considered narrowly, we “don’t want” the cavity filled (we do not want the pain, temporary inconvenience, etc.), but considered broadly, we very much *do* want the cavity filled. The loss of the heirloom, on the other hand, is something we “want” in neither the broad or the narrow sense: it is taken from us under great duress and we grieve the loss of it. Our sacrifice of the heirloom is also “chosen,” but the choice is thrust upon us in a way the other choice is not. So, when pro-life feminists insist that no woman “wants” an abortion, what sense of “want” are they using?

If the pro-life feminist claim is to be taken seriously—if it is really true that abortion is an act of desperation, if it is really an act of self-harm and self-loss—then the claim that no woman “wants” an abortion has to be taken in the second sense. But when “want” is understood in the second sense, the claim is unsustainable. It is at least unsustainable as an assertion about the *conscious* attitudes and feelings every woman has toward her choice to have an abortion. For, while many women do experience anguish, regret, and feelings of loss, and while many women do choose abortion unwillingly and in despair, still others do not.²³ One could always acknowledge that there are women for whom the choice for abortion is like the choice to have a cavity filled, of course, and simply insist that those women are outliers: statistical anomalies that occur too rarely to be noteworthy. But a rebuttal like this is unlikely to withstand scrutiny. A 2016 report which reviewed official state statistics across America, as well as several other collected statistics, found that women report economic hardship as their primary motivation in only 20–40 percent of abortions.²⁴ A whopping 48 percent said that they chose abortion because they felt unready for motherhood or else did not want the lifestyle changes it would require. That study also found that the numbers of so-called “hardship” abortions reported by places like the Guttmacher Institute are inflated by as much as four times the actual amount.²⁵

Taken as an empirically verifiable assertion about the conscious desires and motives of any and all women who seek abortion, then, the pro-life feminist claim that no woman wants an abortion is clearly false. But if we take “want” not as a claim about the conscious wishes of women choosing abortion, but as a claim about nature, as a claim about “wants” we ourselves might be unaware of, then the pro-life feminist claim that no woman “wants” an abortion suddenly becomes coherent.

²³ See, e.g., shoutyourabortion.com.

²⁴ See Wm. Robert Johnston, “Reasons Given for Having Abortions in the United States,” last updated, January 18, 2016, johnstonsarchive.net/policy/abortion/abreasons.html.

²⁵ Johnston, “Reasons Given.”

So far, in speaking of our “wants,” I have contrasted different kinds of conscious desires: the sense in which one does or does not “want” to have a cavity filled or does or does not “want” to hand over a valued possession to a thief. But there is no need to think we are conscious of everything we want. Or, more precisely, it is conceivable that one could consciously desire something general, like “happiness,” and yet be mistaken about how to achieve it. And the more mistaken one is, the more self-defeating one’s attempts to obtain what one “wants” will be. Consider, for instance, the familiar claim that money does not buy happiness. This claim, at least as it is commonly used, assumes the third sense of want: people *want* to be happy, they *think* the acquisition of money will enable them to become happy, and they are wrong—there is something that happiness consists in, and money is not it.

This third meaning of “want” is, of course, tied in a deep way to a recognition of the language of nature. Does money buy happiness? If there is no nature shared by all human beings and no truth about what fulfills it, then it is impossible for “money does not buy happiness” to be true across the board. If nature is mine to construct according to the inclinations and preferences I happen to have, then money *might* buy happiness. To put the point differently, we cannot be mistaken about what we want unless it is possible to get things wrong. If nature is mine to construct according to the inclinations and preferences I happen to have, then it is hard to see how I could be mistaken about what fulfills me. If the only nature I have is my particular nature and my nature is my own construction, then it is not clear that I can really make a mistake. Can I really be mistaken about the inclinations and preferences I currently have? But, if the inclinations and preferences I currently have can conflict with or come apart from something more substantial, can come from something other than what I *am* most fundamentally or different from whatever it is that truly fulfills me, then mistakes are possible: I might, by pursuing what I think I want, do real damage to my ability to achieve what I “really” want.

The pro-life feminist claim that no woman “wants” an abortion makes a great deal of sense if we understand “want” in this third way, in a way that presupposes the language of nature. Then, the claim is no longer empirically false, and it no longer sounds silly and idealistic. If “want” refers to what fulfills one’s nature, then it might well be true that many or indeed most women who seek abortion *consciously* “want” the abortion in the way they want a cavity filled. But the empirically verifiable fact of their conscious motives will have nothing to do with the truth or falsity of the assertion. To the contrary, the claim will be that, whether knowingly or not, women harm themselves when they choose abortion, because it is contrary to the

fulfillment of what they are most fundamentally. One can ascertain the truth of the claim only by examining nature itself.

“Want” used in this third way is not empirically false, but it is also not empirically verifiable: one will find such ways of speaking plausible only to the extent that one is sympathetic to the language of nature. But perhaps this is the lesson of Manent’s book: our culture wars cannot be fought and won within the confines of contemporary culture. To the contrary, any significant opposition must seek to question our culture’s very self-understanding.

N.V

Self-Knowledge, Friendship, and the Promulgation of the Natural Law

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Know Thyself.

—Inscription on the pronaos of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi

Christian, remember your dignity, and now that you share in God's own nature, do not return by sin to your former base condition. Know who is your head and of whose body you are a member. Do not forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the light of the kingdom of God.

—Pope St. Leo the Great

In this essay, I wish to discuss the relationships between self-knowledge, ethics and political life, and our knowledge of the natural law. I hope to show that our knowledge of natural law depends to a large extent on what we take ourselves to be, simply as human beings, and that our knowledge of what it is to be human is foundational for and textured by our social and political life. It is through the lens of these interconnected issues that I will engage Pierre Manent's thoughtful and provocative book, *Natural Law and Human Rights: Toward a Recovery of Practical Reason*. I will not simply provide an exegesis of Manent's work, which is rich and repays careful reading, nor will I argue directly for or against his fundamental points; rather, I take his work as a springboard to discuss the connection between our knowledge of ourselves, our ethical and political lives, and our knowledge of the natural law. In so doing, I will perhaps confirm and strengthen what I take to be Manent's central thesis.

Manent claims that the project of human rights, with the modern “state” understood as the guarantor of such rights, is inextricably tied to an erroneous understanding of human beings as naturally isolated and apolitical individuals. He shows that this impoverished modern understanding of human nature, and of human rights protected by the state as its offspring, distorts our self-understanding and saps the intelligibility of law, natural or otherwise, as well as the fecundity of human action. According to Manent, and contra Jacques Maritain, modern human rights must be understood as a feeble replacement for, not founded upon, the classical understanding of natural law.¹ Further, Manent argues that it is modern political philosophy that generates the modern state as the “sovereign instrument” wielded to protect human rights, with the result that civic and political friendship becomes more difficult as the state becomes more powerful. Modern political philosophy is therefore at the basis of our distorted understanding of ourselves and our inability to engage in the friendships that hold polities together.

Before discussing these issues in detail, it will be helpful to say a word about the way in which Manent approaches them and about how my own approach relates to his. Manent says that he is “inside a triangle: politics, philosophy, religion.” He claims that he has never been able to devote himself entirely to any one of those three poles and that he finds “a fragile equilibrium, or rather a productive disequilibrium, in this questioning . . . concerning the very manner in which these three dimensions are articulated throughout Western history.”² Manent’s book on natural law and human rights evidences this fecund triangulation of politics, philosophy, and religion. Manent also says that, through his studies, he has come to adopt a “‘classic’ view of political life, which gives . . . a better view of the eternal play between the few and the many, beyond the democratic enthusiasm characteristic of modern societies.”³ Aristotle, as the political scientist and philosopher par excellence, occupies a prominent place in Manent’s classical

¹ See Jacques Maritain, *The Rights of Man and Natural Law*, trans. Doris C. Anson (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1943). In *Man and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), Maritain says: “With regard to Human Rights, what matters most to a philosopher is the question of their rational foundations. The philosophical foundation of the Rights of man is Natural Law. Sorry that we cannot find another word!” (80). See also Heinrich Rommen, *The Natural Law: A Study in Legal and Social History and Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1998), 261.

² Pierre Manent, *Seeing Things Politically: Interviews with Bénédicte Delorme-Montini*, trans. Ralph C. Hancock (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2015), 59–60.

³ Manent, *Seeing Things Politically*, 105 (see also 3 for the role of Aristotle in Manent’s thinking).

view of political life, and the central role of Aristotle's ethics and political philosophy is also on display in Manent's work on natural law, especially in the book's final chapter. Manent's knowledge of modern political philosophy and his Aristotelian view of political life give him a sharp awareness of the differences between ancient and modern approaches to philosophical, ethical, and political questions, an awareness that permeates his previous work on political form and his recent book on natural law.

I will concentrate on the philosophical point of Manent's triangle, and I will present my philosophical reflections as a recapitulation, a "creative retrieval," of Aristotelian and Thomistic thinking within a modern context, a recapitulation that extends and complements Manent's. After discussing distinct kinds of self-knowledge and their connection to ethical and political life, I will use Manent's work on natural law and human rights to show how the Aristotelian and Thomistic foundations for natural-law thinking have been rejected in modern thought. I will describe how this rejection has distorted our understanding of ourselves, thereby occluding our knowledge of the natural law and corrupting our ability to achieve civic and virtuous friendship. In the final section, I will discuss how this philosophical point can be connected to a Catholic theological reflection on Jesus Christ's revelation of God to man and of man to himself.

Four Forms of Self-Knowledge, and a Fifth

In an essay discussing Allan Bloom's *Love and Friendship*, Manent provides something of a key that we may use to open our topic:

We are not condemned to remain disillusioned or sober romantics, sterilely oscillating in politics, as well as in love and friendship, between a deliberately constructed illusion and an ironically anticipated deception. A mysterious but luminous energy circulates among the different levels of human life and the variety of human connections, and it does not circulate in vain. In the end, eros, because there really is an "end," is one with the desire for understanding and self-knowledge, and this desire, too, is not in vain. I would summarize the humanity and the severity—and hence, the gravity—of [Bloom's] book as follows: life is worthy of being loved because it is capable of being understood.⁴

⁴ Pierre Manent, "Recovering Human Attachments: An Introduction to Allan Bloom's *Love and Friendship*," in *Modern Liberty and Its Discontents*, ed. and trans. Daniel J.

Because eros is natural and teleological, because we are erotic beings with the natural end of attaining the truth of things—including of ourselves as the ones who achieve truth—we are capable of friendship with others. The human soul is unified by its eros, and the natural end of eros is friendship in truth. Manent therefore asks us to “keep in mind the relationship between understanding and friendship,” and he shows that the rejection of the classical view of human beings as naturally erotic for truth and self-knowledge as the basis of friendship leads to an inability to understand ourselves and an incapacity to be friends with others.⁵

Manent is correct to insist upon the link between self-knowledge and friendship and to highlight the differences between ancients and moderns on this point. However, before we discuss Manent’s argument concerning the differences between classical and modern approaches to this issue, we must ask: (1) What exactly do we mean by “self-knowledge”? (2) Why is such knowledge important, and indeed necessary, for the moral life? We will discuss the second question in the following section, but let us now specify and extend Manent’s work by noting that “self-knowledge” is said in many ways, and let us distinguish five ways it is said. Articulating this array will enable us to understand more fully the relationship between self-knowledge, knowledge of the natural law, and friendship, and thus it will allow us to appreciate the results of the rejection of classical thinking that Manent claims has shaped the modern world.

Self-Awareness

First, we have what we may call self-awareness, a natural and immediate perception of ourselves as engaged in various actions. As Aristotle says, “The being of living things is life,” and for human beings, living is “in the authoritative sense, perceiving or thinking.”⁶ To be human is to live a life of perceiving and thinking, and when we perceive and think about things, we are aware that we perceive (those things) and think (those things). “The result is that if we are perceiving something, we also perceive that we are

Mahoney and Paul Seaton (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 165.

⁵ Manent, *Seeing Things Politically*, 5.

⁶ The first quote comes from Aristotle, *On the Soul* 2.4.415b13, trans. Joe Sachs (Santa Fe, NM: Green Lion, 2004); the second is from *Nicomachean Ethics* [NE] 9.9.1170a18–19, trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). Paraphrasing Aristotle, St. Thomas says, “Vivere viventibus est esse” (*Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 18, a. 2). Unless otherwise attributed (as here), translations are my own; for ST, I consult and sometimes modify the Alfred Fredosso’s translation at www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/summa-translation/TOC.htm).

perceiving; and if we are thinking, that we are thinking. And to perceive that we are perceiving or thinking is to perceive that we exist—for to exist is to perceive or to think.⁷ As human beings, our life is active and self-aware not only in perception and thought, but also in desire for and action toward those goods recognized in the activities of perception and thought, for when a living thing has perception, it also has appetite. We live not only by perceiving and thinking speculatively, but also by desiring and acting practically, and we are aware of ourselves as desiring and acting, just as we are aware of ourselves as perceiving and thinking. As St. Thomas says, to live for living things is to be, and to live as a human being is to exist in a nature that enables one to engage in perception, thinking, and deliberate actions, all of which are accompanied by self-awareness, by knowledge of myself as acting thus and thus as living.⁸

Our self-awareness has important ethical consequences because it provides the cognitive foundation for voluntary actions, which originate with us (they are not necessitated by external forces) and are performed knowingly (they are not done in ignorance of the relevant concrete features of the action). At the basis of the knowledge of voluntary actions is the awareness of myself as the one doing this action, this way, at this time, toward this person, within these circumstances, with this instrument, and for this end. “Now, no one could be ignorant of all these things, unless he were mad; and it is clear that he would not be ignorant of the man who is acting either, for how could he be ignorant of himself?”⁹ Self-awareness enables voluntary actions, which require that I know what I am doing and that I am the one doing it. We could not engage in voluntary actions, including the choices that consolidate and express our moral character, if we did not have a natural awareness of ourselves as perceiving, as thinking, and as acting in specific ways within concrete situations and in relation to particular persons or groups. We perceive, think, and act, and there is a halo of self-awareness surrounding our perceptions, thoughts, and actions that allows us to perform those actions knowingly, that is, voluntarily. If we did

⁷ *NE* 9.9.1170a32–35. For a discussion of Aristotle on self-awareness, see Joseph Owens, *Aristotle: The Collected Papers of Joseph Owens*, ed. John R. Catan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 74–98. For a discussion of St. Thomas on self-awareness, see Therese Scarpelli Cory, *Aquinas on Human Self-Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁸ Such self-awareness clearly has a biological, neurological foundation. It is not yet infused with logic, reasoning, or syntax. Higher animals have some level of this self-awareness, even though in their form of life it is not enrolled into the higher activities of reason and choice.

⁹ *NE* 3.1.1111a6–8.

not have this natural self-awareness, we would not be able to act voluntarily, and therefore we would not be able to deliberate and to choose freely, and thus the moral and political life, including the friendships that are its *telos*, would not be possible for us.

Consciousness is therefore intentional, in the sense that it is always consciousness of something, and it exhibits a kind of duality, as its name indicates. It is a “knowing with” because consciousness is consciousness of something and of itself as conscious of that thing. As Robert Sokolowski says, “To be conscious is not just to know something, but to be aware that I am knowing it, to have some distance to myself as I know it.”¹⁰ For human persons, to live is to subsist in a nature that enables us to perceive, to understand, to act freely, and to have the distance from our activities that allows us to be aware of ourselves. Thus, Robert Spaemann claims that the capacity for reflection, for achieving “the inner distance on its own states, . . . is the hallmark of the person.”¹¹ The phenomenon of distance from oneself deserves our attention, as it is crucial for distinguishing the five kinds of self-knowledge.

A visual image can help us understand this intellectual distance. If we wish to see an object with our eyes, for example, then we must not remain too close to it; if we linger in close proximity to the object, then we cannot take it in visually, and we remain in perceptual darkness about it. However, if we take a distance from the object, if we move into the proper space in relation to it, and if we find the appropriate light within which it can show itself, we can take it in and perceive it as a whole, a one. To see it properly, we must establish the optimal distance between ourselves and the object, and this distance depends not on us, not on our desires or psychological neuroses, but on the object itself. The appropriate distance from which to see an ant is different from the appropriate distance from which to see Giovanni Baglione’s *Sacred Love and Profane Love*. In each case, we have to find the distance that clarifies, the distance that allows us to see properly, and this clarifying distance is called for by the nature of the thing we wish to see. To be human is to be active in thoughtful perception, in perceptive thinking, and in deliberate action, and it is to have a natural distance from my actions that enables me to be aware of myself. We have a natural distance

¹⁰ Robert Sokolowski, “Parallelism in Conscious Experience,” *Daedalus* 121, no. 1 (1992): 87–103, at 99.

¹¹ Robert Spaemann, *Persons: The Difference between ‘Someone’ and ‘Something,’* trans. Oliver O’Donovan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 182.

from ourselves that comes from our being rational animals, and that allows us to be aware of ourselves as rational animals.¹²

Psychological and Moral Self-Knowledge

The phenomenon of clarifying-distance-from-self as a precondition for self-awareness provides a bridge to the second form of self-knowledge, which we may call psychological and moral self-knowledge. Our natural self-awareness enables us to act voluntarily, but to act well we must know ourselves in a more detailed, personal way. We must take stock of our temperament, our emotional tendencies, our strengths and weaknesses, neuroses and settled preferences, and our moral character. As Aristotle says, we “must examine what we ourselves readily incline toward, for some of us naturally incline to some things, others to other things.” He says that our inclinations can be known from what it is that we tend to enjoy or to shun, and based upon this self-understanding, “we must drag ourselves away from it towards its contrary; for by leading ourselves far from error, we will arrive at the middle term.”¹³ We therefore need this psychological and moral self-knowledge in order to develop virtue and to live well, but we can obtain it only by “increasing” the natural distance to ourselves that allows us to be self-aware. We must take “another step back” from our desires, and our actions and relationships if we are to understand and evaluate our individual psyche and moral characteristics in the hope of improving them.

Carl Jung’s work can be understood as an attempt to deepen this form of moral, psychological self-knowledge. He describes self-knowledge as the activity of “exploring our own souls”; it is a “self-searching,” an “occupation

¹² We should add that free choice demands that we be able to “step back” from multiple options so that we may select one possibility from among others. To choose freely, we must have a distance from the possible, alternative ways of achieving an end so as to compare them and then to prefer one to the other(s), and to choose well we must also be able to distance ourselves from the objects of our immediate desires. Incontinent action includes a failure to achieve the proper distance between myself and the object of my sensual desire. On choice, see *ST* I-II, q. 13, especially a. 6, and Aristotle, *NE* 3.2–3 and *On the Soul* 3.9–12. One should not overlook the kind of distance needed for the activities of the virtue of justice. Sokolowski says, “Justice involves another kind of objectivity than do the virtues of courage, temperance, and the like. *It requires that I take a distance to my situation* and judge with a kind of neutrality about it, not giving too much of the benefits and too little of the burdens to myself” (“Phenomenology of Friendship,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 55, no. 3 [2002]: 451–70, at 457 [emphasis added]).

¹³ See *NE* 2.9.1109b1–8.

with and meditation on one's own being."¹⁴ He says that it is something of a virtuous mean between sterile, narcissistic "brooding" over oneself and "thoughtless superficiality," and he stresses the individual and practical nature of this kind of self-understanding. Anyone who "feels in need of improvement, anyone who in brief wishes to 'grow,' must take counsel with himself" so as to understand himself and his situation in society in the hopes of unifying his life and "growing" in responsibility and virtue.¹⁵ Jung says that, in psychological self-knowledge, "whether it is a question of understanding a fellow human being or of self-knowledge, I must in both cases leave all theoretical assumptions behind me." As distinct from self-awareness, psychological self-knowledge is more purely intellectual and reflective, but it is not theoretic insight into human nature and its essential properties done for the sake of knowing the truth of what it is to be human. Rather, it is intimate knowledge of the self, considered as an individual with all its particularities, both its conscious activities and unconscious processes, and it is pursued for the sake of the individual's psychological wholeness and growth in moral virtue.¹⁶ It is therefore important for the development and maintenance of friendship, for anyone who cannot see his own flaws and the source of those flaws will be incapable of the common life characteristic of friendship with others. In an Aristotelian echo, Jung says: "When a man lacks self-knowledge he can do the most astonishing or terrible things without calling himself to account and without ever suspecting what he is doing."¹⁷ As Aristotle himself says, a mark of the vicious man is to be unaware of himself in this way, to lack this form of psychological and moral self-knowledge, "for vice escapes the notice of one who has it."¹⁸

One need not agree with Jung's theory of the unconscious in whole or in part to recognize the existence and importance of this kind of self-knowledge and to see that we can achieve it only because we are able, as rational animals, to take a distance from ourselves and our immediate situation. This clarifying distance allows the space for reflection, which, if done well, can improve our understanding of ourselves, and thus enhance our capacity for noble action and friendship. Thus, in order to live well in friendship with others, we must

¹⁴ Carl G. Jung, "Depth Psychology and Self-Knowledge," in *The Symbolic Life*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, vol. 18 of *Collected Works*, ed. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, and Gerhard Adler (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 817.

¹⁵ Jung, "Depth Psychology," 815.

¹⁶ See Carl G. Jung, *The Undiscovered Self: With Symbols and the Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 58.

¹⁷ Jung, "Depth Psychology," 811.

¹⁸ *NE* 7.8.1150b35–36.

not only be aware of ourselves as agents; we must also develop a personal and practical self-understanding so as to improve our moral and social lives.

Pre-Philosophical Knowledge of Human Nature

Let us move to the third form of self-knowledge, which has for its object human nature itself. In the course of their lives, human beings naturally develop an inchoate sense of what it is to be human; by living with others, by perceiving, thinking, acting, and interacting, we tend naturally to attain some vague understanding of human nature, just as such. As the condition for the possibility of its existence, such self-knowledge requires that I am able to take yet another step back, not only from my particular desires, habits, neuroses, or actions, but from myself as an individual. It requires that I take a distance to my life as a whole so that I may think, not about *how* I am constituted in my particular psychological or moral qualities, but rather *what* I am simply as a human person. It requires that I transcend thoughts about what individuates me as a unique personality with a unique history in to order to think about what is common to human nature, to reflect upon what is shared between myself and all human beings.

Such self-knowledge is more reflective because its object is more general than psychological self-understanding, but it is not less personal; it is rather more personal, but in a different way. With Stephen Brock, we may say that it is quite natural and somewhat spontaneous “to understand oneself to be a human being” and to grasp “that human nature is our own nature.” That is, we grasp human nature as our own *nature*, “not just as a feature that we happen to have, but as what we are, constitutive of our very being.” Included in this self-knowledge of what we are by nature is a recognition of “the things that befit human nature as befitting ourselves.”¹⁹ Our inchoate and nebulous self-knowledge of human nature is therefore not merely universal and un-erotic, as if it were a vision of mathematical certainties, but a grasp of what we are, and thus of what is fitting for us because of what we are. As Sokolowski says, “Our understanding of ourselves as human beings is related to our understanding of the good and virtuous human life.”²⁰ To grasp human nature is to have a sense of human excellence, and to see human excellence displayed is to grasp human nature.

It is important to note that this incomplete and often somewhat incoherent grasp of human nature is not the result of disciplined philosophical

¹⁹ These three quotations are taken from Stephen Brock, *The Light That Binds: A Study in Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysics of Natural Law* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2020), 163.

²⁰ Robert Sokolowski, “What Is Natural Law? Human Purposes and Natural Ends,” *The Thomist* 68, no. 4 (2004): 507–29, at 507. See Aristotle, *Politics* 1.2.1252b31–1253a2.

thinking. It does not come to us for the first time when we enter into the philosophical life, and we do not achieve it based upon philosophical description and argument. It is likely more spontaneous than psychological self-knowledge, as we achieve some sense of human nature even before engaging in the psychological and moral self-searching described above. This understanding of ourselves, of our human nature, “is achieved in light of our understanding of the human world around us and of our belonging to that world.”²¹ Our inchoate knowledge of human nature is necessarily mediated by our social setting. It comes to us, or rather we develop it, as entangled with the folk wisdom that we encounter in our family and social groups, and it is textured by our political, artistic, and intellectual culture. Such self-knowledge of human nature thus forms an important dimension of our “world view,” which is inevitably shaped by the world in which we live.

This quasi-reflective but pre-philosophical self-knowledge of human nature, especially insofar as it includes a sense of the good for human beings, should be connected to Charles Taylor’s discussion of “social imaginaries.” Taylor defines a social imaginary as “the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.”²² He sharply distinguishes a “social imaginary” from a “disengaged” theory characteristic of the philosophical and theoretic life. As distinct from a theory, which is had by only a few intellectual elites and is expressed in precise terms, a social imaginary is the possession of “ordinary people” and is “carried in images, stories, and legends.” It is therefore much wider and more influential than pure theory, shared as it is by whole groups and societies, and it constitutes the “common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.”²³

Taylor says that a social imaginary is complex; it is both descriptive and normative because it gives us “a sense of how things usually go, but this in interwoven with an idea of how they ought to go, of what missteps would invalidate [our collective practices].”²⁴ Behind this descriptive and normative sense of things “stands some notion of a moral or metaphysical order, in the context of which the norms and ideals make sense.”²⁵ The social imagi-

²¹ Brock, *Light that Binds*, 163.

²² Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 23.

²³ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 23.

²⁴ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 24.

²⁵ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 25.

nary of a given society is therefore quite extensive as a background for our individual actions and collective practices; it has “no clear limits” because it represents “our largely unstructured and inarticulate understanding of our whole situation, within which particular features of our world show up for us in the sense they have.”²⁶ Included in the extensive background of any social imaginary, and mediated by its characteristic images, is a pre-theoretic “sense of moral order” through which we come to understand “human life and history.”²⁷ Human beings come to know themselves insofar as they know and are immersed in the world around them; they develop a sense of what they are, of what it is to be human and to identify and achieve goods, by engaging with their familial, social, political, and intellectual setting. The distinction between *physis* and *nomos* is critical for self-knowledge and decent moral action, but our “original,” pre-philosophical knowledge of the human *physis* is mediated by our engagement with the *nomoi* of our society, including what Taylor describes as our social imaginary.

Philosophical Self-Knowledge and Its Completion

Because we are *rational* animals, human beings develop a sense of themselves and of what is naturally good for them, and our knowledge of ourselves both forms and is shaped by our sense of how we are situated in the whole of things. Because we are *familial and political* animals, this knowledge of our nature, of our natural goods, and of how we fit in the whole of things is sculpted by our familial life and our social and political culture, by what Taylor calls our social imaginary. When this vague, background knowledge of ourselves and of the whole is brought to the foreground, when we move from thinking prompted by practical necessities and shaped by (more or less) unexamined opinions about ourselves and about the whole to thinking done for the sake of truth itself, in which we take ourselves and the whole of things as the explicit target of contemplative activity, we may be said to move toward the fourth kind of self-knowledge: philosophical understanding of ourselves. In order to achieve this philosophical self-understanding, we must once again take another step back and extend the distance from ourselves and our practical lives. We must find the philosophical distance that clarifies, that enables us to see clearly the nature of the human person as the one who is capable of knowing the whole and the principle of the whole and of acting responsibly toward others.

Each in his own way, Plato and Edmund Husserl describe this

²⁶ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 25.

²⁷ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 28.

philosophical distance and thus display the distinction between philosophical contemplation and the more narrow, practical view of human things obtained in pre-philosophical thinking. In the *Theaetetus*, Plato's Socrates claims that the philosopher does not concern himself with the practicalities of "the serious business of clubs for gaining office, and meetings, banquets, and revelries with flute girls." As distinct from practical men whose "small, sharp" minds are constantly occupied with such machinations, the philosopher "doesn't even know that he does not know all these things."²⁸ The philosopher has "truly become unaware of his neighbor next-door, not only as to what he's doing but almost to the point of not knowing whether he is a human being of some different nursling. But what [a] human being is and in what respect it's suitable for a nature of that sort to act or be acted on that's different from all the rest—[the philosopher] seeks that, and all his trouble [*pragmata*] is in exploring it."²⁹ Plato uses the image of the philosopher as being "hung up on high" and "dragging others up" with him so that they can transcend questions concerning "how I am wronging you, or you me?" and debates about whether "a king who has much gold is happy." Rather, the proper intellectual distance enables the philosopher to examine the nature of man along with the nature of "justice itself and injustice, what each of the pair is and in what respect they are distinct from everything else and from each other." By becoming a "disinterested spectator," the philosopher is able to discuss human nature itself, the nature of kingship itself, and especially the nature of happiness itself and misery itself, "of what sort the pair [happiness and misery] is and in what way it's suitable for the nature of [a] human being to acquire one and avoid one of the pair." It is the philosopher who asks and attempts to answer such questions by taking a steady look to the whole, and thus it is the philosopher who knows "how to tune the strings of common speech to fitting praise of the life of gods and happy men."³⁰

Yet, we can achieve this philosophical knowledge of human nature and its *telos* only if we are able, as Husserl says, to achieve a perspective that enables us to inquire back into those intellectual activities that allow us to achieve truth. We must reorient our intellectual focus in order to reflect theoretically upon the correlation between our subjective activities and their objective correlates. Husserl shows that philosophy is occupied with "the knower's reflecting upon himself and his knowing life," and he says that the

²⁸ Plato, *Theaetetus* 173d–e, in *The Being of the Beautiful: Plato's Theaetetus, Sophist, and Statesman*, trans. Seth Benardete (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

²⁹ Plato, *Theaetetus* 174b.

³⁰ These texts may be found at Plato, *Theaetetus* 175c–e. I modify the translation of the final quotation.

philosophical perspective lies “here, situated above” our default, practical orientation toward the objects with which we must deal in our quotidian activities.³¹ From this philosophical perspective, we contemplate beings and the subjective activities through which they manifest themselves to us, and in so doing the philosopher “loses nothing of their being and their objective truths and likewise nothing at all of the spiritual acquisitions of his world-life of those of the whole historical communal life; he simply forbids himself—as a philosopher, in the uniqueness of the direction of his interest—to continue the whole natural performance of his world-life.”³² Thus, for the philosopher, all practical, unreflective interests are “put out of play” so that he may achieve the distance from which philosophy “helps us think about the first and final issues and helps us to know ourselves.”³³

Because the philosopher must take a contemplative look at the whole of things and at the principle of the whole, he must look especially at the nature of the one who knows the whole, the human being, and at how the human being ought to live within the whole. That is, he must know himself and the ways in which he displays being to himself and to others, and he must contemplate his distinctive place in the whole of things and reflect upon how he ought to act, given what he is and “where” he lives. As Plato and Husserl help us to see, the turn to philosophy requires a radical kind of distance, yet one that is prepared for and completes the various kinds of distancing we have discussed. The philosopher requires this special distance from individual practical concerns and activities, not so that he may escape from human life into some unknown mystical realm, but rather for the sake of contemplating the natures of things, especially human nature, so that he may glimpse their relation to the whole and to the ultimate source of the whole. This philosophical distance from particular beings and from every practical concern is the most reflective, the most illuminating and clarifying form of distance; it is the “view from nowhere” that allows us to see into the depths of things, to look at what makes them to be what they are.

Before we enter into philosophical thinking, we are concerned with who and what we are, with human goods, with political authority and friendship, and with truth. We speak to others and to ourselves about these things and we take the various kinds of distance from ourselves that enable us to

³¹ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 97, 152.

³² Husserl, *Crisis*, 152.

³³ Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 209 (the phrase “put out of play” is from Husserl, *Crisis*, 152).

achieve them. When we shift up into philosophical thinking, we begin to look at the things that we normally live through. We seek to understand human nature, the nature of the good, and the essence of political life and friendship, not just to have or to live them, and we try to come to the truth about truth itself; as Aristotle says, “Rightly then is philosophy called the science of truth.”³⁴ While engaged in philosophy, we speak about speech, about how it manifests being and about how being shows itself to use through language, and we contemplate how thinking in the medium of words displays the goods that naturally perfect us. We contemplate how language provides a doorway into social and political life and how it punctuates the life of friendship with others, and we identify, name, and describe a social imaginary just as such. Further, in the pre-philosophical life, we recognize and live according to the natural law to a greater or lesser extent, but from the philosophical perspective we contemplate the “nature” of the natural law, its origin, “content,” mode of being known, and connection to human nature. The natural law is not originally promulgated with the turn to philosophical thinking.

For his part, Manent says that “the most interesting questions of human life play out in the realm of motives: what are the motives of human beings?” Manent concludes that “philosophy is finally self-knowledge since, obviously, one cannot really know human motives without being capable of knowing one’s own motives. Self-knowledge, in effect, is not the knowledge of the *self*, of the ‘I,’ the knowledge of one’s individual, incommunicable or incomparable particularity; this self-knowledge consists in discerning how human motives, the motives *common* to all human beings, are configured in one’s own soul.”³⁵ According to Manent, the issue of human nature insofar as it expresses itself in the motives common to all human beings provides the lever to move up into philosophy, and philosophy “culminates in, or at least results in, self-knowledge. This is what the Greeks call ‘putting one’s soul in order.’”³⁶

Throughout this paper, we have been speaking from the philosophical perspective. We have contemplated what it is to be human precisely by distinguishing and comparing self-awareness, psychological and moral self-knowledge, and the vague knowledge of human nature achieved by human beings in conjunction with their social imaginary, but we have not engaged directly in any one of these forms of self-knowledge (except for

³⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 2.1.993b20.

³⁵ Manent, *Seeing Things Politically*, 57–58.

³⁶ Manent, *Seeing Things Politically*, 58.

self-awareness). Yet, there is a fifth kind of self-knowledge that must be identified. At this point, we only mention this form of knowing ourselves, as we will return to it in the final section of this essay. The fifth form of self-knowledge comes through the Incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth. The life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ shows us what it is to be human, and this knowledge gained through faith in God as revealing the truth to us in Christ completes and extends the natural forms of self-knowledge that we have discussed. At the close of this paper, we will show that Jesus's revelation of man to himself has important consequences for our knowledge of the natural law.

Two Conclusions Concerning Self-Knowledge and the Moral Life

We may draw two important conclusions from our reflections on the various kinds of self-knowledge. First, these forms of self-understanding are interlaced; they are built upon each other and influence each other. Self-awareness provides the foundation for all the other kinds of self-knowledge, and psychological, moral self-knowledge is structured by what we take ourselves to be, simply as human beings. As Jung points out, our psychological self-searching is to a large extent shaped, both in form and content, by what our cultural, social, and political setting explicitly or implicitly claims human nature to be. We might say that the pre-philosophical grasp of human nature gleaned in part from our social imaginary shapes our ability to look truly at ourselves as individuals. For its part, our social imaginary is an expression of the dominant sense of human things and of the whole of things, an expression that textures the thinking of those who enter into it.

We have discussed the ways that philosophical understanding of human nature must transcend the more practically oriented forms of thinking and action, but it is crucial to note that there can be, and often is, an overflow of philosophical ideas back down onto the realm of social imaginaries. Philosophy can infiltrate individuals' psychological and moral sense of themselves, both directly through serious study and indirectly by being filtered through a cultural sieve. Just as there is a "reflux" of art and poetry back on life, a reflux of artful imitation back on imitated action, so too there is often a reflux of philosophical thinking back on the social imaginaries and *nomoi* that both express and serve to shape our understanding of ourselves.³⁷ It is within this interplay of different forms of knowledge of the self and of the

³⁷ On the "reflux" of art back onto life, see Thomas Pruffer, *Recapitulations: Essays in Philosophy* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 12–21, esp. 18–19.

whole of things that the natural law is made known or occluded to human beings, who must act in accordance with what they take themselves to be.

The second conclusion concerns not the connection between the forms of self-knowledge themselves, but that of each form of self-knowledge, and all together, with ethics. While each is fundamental in its own way, the questions concerning what it is to be human and how it is that we ought to live do not merely run parallel to each other; they are interwoven, with the answer to one texturing the approach to the other. For, how we ought to live depends upon what we are, and the truth of what, or rather who, we are shapes how we ought to conduct ourselves. To grasp what we are in any form of self-knowledge is to have some sense of what is good for us, of what is perfective of us as human beings. Therefore, “the working out of a description and definition of human nature is at the same time the formulation of what we ought to be as human beings, because the good or perfected state of man, which is the issue for ethics, is what defines human being. The normative is also the definitional. We cannot describe what man is without specifying the human good, without showing what it is to be a good (and consequently ‘happy’) man.”³⁸ Knowledge of human nature, even in pre-philosophical thinking, is always a hendiadys—a one through two—of being and the good, of anthropology and ethics. Part of knowing ourselves truly is grasping that our nature is just that, an active source of life and a potency to become more fully what we are by nature. As Remi Brague says, “Man’s humanity is not simply an immutable given; man must achieve his excellence by developing what he begins with. He achieves this through an activity that is entrusted to him: for man, to be a man is a task; his humanity must, literally, be brought to perfection. The impact of cosmology on anthropology will thus also, and inseparably, be an ethical impact.”³⁹ Because we are naturally open to development yet directed, because we are laden with potential but teleological, we must realize or complete ourselves, and we must do so according to the rule of our natural perfection.

Even when articulated vaguely and confusedly as it so often is, the answer

³⁸ Sokolowski, “What is Natural Law?,” 527. Remi Brague makes much the same point: “An anthropology is not just a collection of considerations that might be made about certain dimensions of human existence—the social, economic, or anatomical dimensions. . . . Nor is it limited to a theory that seeks to isolate the essence of the human being; it also encompasses a reflection on the way in which man can fully realize what he is—an ethics” (*The Wisdom of the World: The Human Experience of the Universe in Western Thought*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003], 5).

³⁹ Brague, *Wisdom of the World*, 217.

that we give to the question of human nature contains the seed of a certain way of life. There is a moral weight that comes along with any and every conception of human nature and human life, a kind of teleology that runs from our conception of human things to our action in relation to them. We tend to live in accordance with what we take ourselves to be. If we are convinced that human beings are nothing more than so many materially determined bags of molecules resulting from pure chance through the blind mechanism of evolutionary biology, or if we are persuaded that being human is nothing more than being a blank slate awaiting self-creation through technology and artifice, then simply holding such views puts us on the road to a certain kind of moral life.⁴⁰ Our incipient understanding of human nature provides the contours of our view of what is base or noble, if there be such, in the realm of human action. As we have seen, our choices, along with the moral character they consolidate and the relationships they facilitate or vitiate, are made within an intellectual horizon containing questions and answers about human nature and the nature of reality; our actions are surrounded by a halo of self-understanding, a halo that sheds light on a path to take in one's conduct with others, even as it leaves other paths in darkness. It is not accidental that the Delphic maxim to know oneself is immediately tied to an injunction at the heart of moral virtue: nothing to excess.⁴¹

The Cause of the Necessity of the Link between Self-Knowledge and the Moral Life

We are now in a position to answer the second question raised at the beginning of the previous section: Why is self-knowledge important, and indeed inevitable, for human beings? Why must we know ourselves truly in order to live well? St. Thomas's subtle ontology of personhood can help us to answer this question. Aquinas argues that the word "person" . . . is not used to refer to an individual in the aspect of its nature, but to a reality subsisting in that nature [ad significandum rem subsistentem in tali natura].⁴² As individual

⁴⁰ Cormac McCarthy's novel *Child of God* may be understood as a vivid illustration of what human moral life looks like if we take ourselves to be merely material beings seeking bodily pleasure, and if we follow this understanding of ourselves to its logical practical conclusion.

⁴¹ According to Pausanias (ca. 110–180): "In the fore-temple at Delphi are written maxims useful for the life of men, inscribed by those whom the Greeks say were sages. . . . These sages, then, came to Delphi and dedicated to Apollo the celebrated maxims, 'Know thyself' and 'Nothing in excess'" (*Description of Greece*, trans. W. H. S. Jones [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918], 507). See also Plato, *Protagoras* 343b.

⁴² *ST* I, q. 30, a. 4.

substances of a rational nature, human persons are indeed substances, but the presence of intellect “in” us means that our mode of being an individual substance is unique.

As distinct from “accidents” like “how much a thing is” or “where it is,” (primary) substances or entities exist in their own right. While an accident exists and is individuated by inhering in and modifying an entity, substances are the most fundamental subjects of being. Substances are individuated through themselves, unified in themselves and distinct from other things. Accidents are present in and predicated of substances, but substances are not present in or said of anything else. St. Thomas argues that free choice, the characteristic mode of action of persons, manifests that we hold a unique place even among substances. He says that “there is an even more special and perfect mode in which particulars and individuals are found among rational substances, which have dominion over their acts and which are not just acted upon like other substances, but act on their own. Now, actions belong to singular things. And so, among the other substances, singular substances with a rational nature likewise have a special name. And this name is ‘person.’”⁴³ A human person is unified and specified by his rational soul, which shapes the human body toward the intellectual pursuit of truth and toward freely chosen expressions of love. It is the intellect and its eros for truth that make us more radically individualized than other animals. Reason gives us the ability to choose freely to love others through bodily actions, to have intellectual “dominion over our acts,” and it is reason that grants us the inner “distance” from those actions that allows us to reflect upon who we are and how we ought to live.

Because we are human persons whose intellect and will give us dominion over our choices, but not over our nature, knowing our nature truly is necessary if we are to live in accordance with who we are as rational animals. Because our nature is intellectual and free, we must understand who we are, as human persons, in order to be perfected through free choice and friendship. The ontology of human personhood, the unique way that intellect and will enable human persons to exist and act, is the deepest reason why self-knowledge of our unified being is necessary and important for our moral lives.

The recognition of this unique mode of existing of human persons enables us to avoid two extremes that plague our contemporary culture. The first is the scientific extreme that claims that human beings are nothing more than materially determined bodies held together by DNA formed by chance

⁴³ *ST I*, q. 29, a. 1.

events, and the second is the existentialist extreme that claims that we are radically free to create ourselves according to our whims. The first submerges human beings into “nature” understood in a deterministic way, and therefore denies the individuality and dignity proper to reason and freedom, while the second exalts “freedom” and individuality to the point of denying the existence of human nature itself. The first plunges us into a deterministic, materialistic “nature,” while the second cuts all ties to nature and drifts into flights of mythical self-creation *ex nihilo*.

Aquinas’s subtle ontology of personhood enables us to avoid both extremes, and therefore helps us to understand adequately the unique being of human persons and why that being requires various forms of self-knowledge. The scientific extreme claims there is no reason and freedom with which to direct ourselves well or poorly, only a materially determined nature to which we are utterly subject, and the existentialist extreme claims that there is no human nature, only reason and freedom to create ourselves according to no rule other than our subjective whims. Contra the scientific extreme, we note that to be a person means to have an intellectual distance from our actions and to be open to the whole of things through knowledge, free choice, and love; contra the existentialist extreme, we note that human persons subsist in a rational nature with an inner structure that provides a rule and measure for our free choices. To be a person is, as Spaemann says, to be someone, not something, and thus to be a person is to have the task of understanding the truth about ourselves in order to live according to who we are.⁴⁴

St. Augustine provides an excellent description of this relationship between true self-knowledge and freely chosen action in accordance with human nature. Augustine says that “the mind” is commanded to know itself because it “should think about itself and live according to its nature, that is it should want to be placed according to its nature, under him it should be subject to and over all that it should be in control of; under him it should be ruled by, over all that it ought to rule. In fact many of the things it does show that it has twisted its desires the wrong way round as though it had forgotten itself.”⁴⁵ It is interesting to note that Augustine says that the mind ought to think about itself, that the thinking itself is essential and must be done, both for the sake of the knowing and so that we may be able to live according to our human nature as thought about and understood. Further,

⁴⁴ Spaemann, *Persons*, 5–40.

⁴⁵ St. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 10.2.7, trans. William Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1991), 292.

Augustine suggests that our vicious and sinful actions include a failure to see the truth about ourselves. In vicious action, it is as if the mind has “twisted its desires the wrong way round as though it had forgotten itself,” and therefore needs to be reminded to know itself properly.

Thus, self-knowledge is inextricably linked to a human nature that must be understood in order to be perfected through free choice, and St. Thomas Aquinas says that these three aspects—self-knowledge of human nature setting the stage for free choice that perfects the human person—are linked from the “first instant” of the moral life. According to St. Thomas, the ability to choose freely and the moral pressure that comes with free choice prompts us to think (1) about ourselves as the agent of our actions, (2) about the end that is fitting for us, and (3) about how we ought to relate ourselves to our due end. Discussing the first free action of an unbaptized child, Aquinas says that, when we begin to think actively and to engage in properly moral deliberation, “The first thing that occurs to a man to think about at that time is *to deliberate about himself*.” Aquinas says that if he thinks about himself properly and orders himself to his due end (*debitum finem*), “He will receive the remission of original sin through grace. On the other hand, if he does not order himself to his fitting end, then to the extent that he is capable of discretion at that age, he will commit a mortal sin because he fails to do what he is capable of doing.”⁴⁶ For our purposes, let us bracket the theological implications of Aquinas’s argument and concentrate on the philosophical claim that undergirds it. Aquinas says that “the first thing that occurs to a man who has discretion is that he think, *with respect to himself*, what end he should order other things toward.”⁴⁷ Moved by the natural desire of the will for happiness, the human person must begin to consider the truth about himself as he considers the end for which he should act. The end is the first in intention for the human person, and this desire for the end inclines the human person to think about himself in relation to that end.

St. Thomas is obviously not attributing a “scientific” or philosophical knowledge of human nature to young children on the precipice of the moral life, nor is he referring to an intimate psychological grasp of the self, and even less to the more basic self-awareness attendant upon each human action. It seems clear he is discussing something akin to what we have identified as the third form of self-knowledge, a kind of primitive intellectual sense of what it is to be human through which “we know man by a certain confused cognition before we know how to distinguish all the things that belong to

⁴⁶ *ST* I-II, q. 89, a. 6, corp.

⁴⁷ *ST* I-II, q. 89, a. 6, ad 3.

the definition of man.”⁴⁸ From the genesis of our active intellectual life, we are a question for ourselves, and because we are human persons, we must understand ourselves truly in order to move ourselves to our natural end by free choice. At the very least, we must see that we are not the end of all things, that we are not, as Aristotle would say, the best thing in the cosmos, but that we are toward the end that is above us, and thus perfective of us. Yet, this means that we can also misunderstand ourselves to varying degrees, with deleterious consequences for our moral lives. We can attempt to make ourselves the end of all things instead of seeing our life as being toward the end that is God.

Self-Knowledge and Friendship

Because of who we are as human persons, there is a necessary link between self-knowledge and the moral life, and this link can be specified by examining three texts on friendship from Aristotle and St. Thomas. Aristotle shows that self-love is of two kinds, one noble and one base, and he argues that proper self-love is the source of (virtuous) friendship with others. Aquinas incorporates this point into his discussion of the theological virtue of charity and claims that “the love by which one loves himself is the form and root of friendship [*forma et radix amicitiae*], since we have friendship with respect to others by the fact that we relate to them as we relate to ourselves.”⁴⁹ According to Aristotle, to have noble self-love is to love oneself well by wishing for and doing what is truly good for oneself, and to do those good things to ourselves for our own sake, without the inner tension and struggle that plagues the continent and incontinent agents due to their unruly appetites. The decent man loves himself for his own sake in a unified, intelligent way, and this self-love flows into friendship with others because the decent man “stands in relation to a friend as he does to himself—for the friend is another self.”⁵⁰

The decent man animated by noble self-love is capable of friendship because he loves his friend as he loves himself, and he wants the noble goods of virtue for himself, for his own sake. “For if someone should always take seriously that he himself do what is just, or moderate, or whatever else accords with the virtues, and, in general, if he should secure what is noble for himself, . . . this sort of human being would seem to be more a self-lover.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ *ST I*, 85, a. 3, ad 3. See also q. 87, a. 1.

⁴⁹ *ST II-II*, q. 25, a. 4.

⁵⁰ *NE* 9.4.1166a31–32.

⁵¹ *NE* 9.8.1168b25–28.

Yet, what does it mean for the decent man to want these noble goods of virtue for himself, *for his own sake*? What does “for his own sake” mean in the context of self-love? Aristotle says that the noble self-lover wants and does what accords with the virtues “for his own sake, since he acts for the sake of the thinking part of himself, which is in fact what each man seems to be.”⁵² The good moral agent, whose noble self-love provides the foundation for friendship with others, “allots to himself the noblest things and the greatest goods, [and] he gratifies the most authoritative part of himself, and in all things he obeys this part. Just as a city and every other whole composed of parts seem to be their most authoritative part above all, so too does a human being.”⁵³ Aristotle concludes that the man with noble self-love “is fond of and gratifies this authoritative part [the intellect]; and he is said to be either self-restrained or lacking in self-restraint depending on whether or not his intellect is in control, on the grounds that this part is the man himself. . . . It is not unclear, then, that each human being is this [rational] part, or is this above all, and that the decent man is fond of this especially.”⁵⁴ The intellect makes us to be who we are; it enables us to be free agents who can achieve the good for ourselves and others by thoughtful choice, and therefore the intellect is “most what we are.” Having some sense of this truth of human nature is necessary for proper self-love, which is the foundation for friendship with others.

Friendship is therefore founded upon noble self-love, and noble self-love is itself based upon true self-knowledge. We are capable of friendship only if we are “most of all fond of the intellect,” and thus able to will the goods of truth and virtue for ourselves, and we can do this only if we take ourselves to be rational, and thus familial and political, animals who are what we are due to the presence of intellect, with its natural eros for truth. We must take ourselves to be “agents of truth,” to be formed by our ability to achieve and to live the truth, if we are to be capable of the self-love and friendship that are the *telos* of the moral life. To extend Aquinas’s metaphor, if noble self-love is the root of friendship, then true self-knowledge is its seed. It is important to add that true self-knowledge is the necessary, but not sufficient, condition for decent moral action at the heart of friendship. Such knowledge opens the intellectual space within which the desires can be formed properly, but it does not guarantee the inculcation of moral virtue, which comes from consistently doing the right actions in the right ways. It was perhaps Plato’s

⁵² NE 9.4.1166a17–19.

⁵³ NE 9.8.1168b30–33.

⁵⁴ NE 9.8.1168b34–69a3.

mistake to imply that true self-knowledge is achievable only in philosophy and that it is both necessary and sufficient for moral virtue and friendship. If we may continue with our Thomistic metaphor, the presence of the seed of true self-knowledge does not guarantee the root of proper self-love or the flower of friendship, but the absence of the seed does ensure that neither the root nor the flower will develop.

Aristotle concludes his argument by showing that, when each person takes himself to be what he truly is by nature—when each knows himself to be a rational, familial, and political animal by nature—then he is in an intellectual position to desire what is fitting for him as so understood, and thus the common good of all is achieved. “All approve of and praise those who are preeminently serious about noble actions. And if all compete with a view to what is noble and exert themselves to the utmost to do what is noblest, then in common there would be all the necessities and for each individually the greatest goods, if in fact virtue is of such a character. As a result, the good person ought to be a self-lover—he will both profit himself and benefit others by doing noble things.”⁵⁵ In both its acquisition and consequences, self-knowledge is far from a private affair. The common goods of friendship in social and political union depend upon individuals knowing, even in a general and vague way, what it is to be human.

Alas, we can also fail to grasp adequately what we are by nature. Aristotle says that those who exhibit a base self-love, those human beings we may call selfish, “gratify their desires and, in general, their passions and the non-rational part of their soul.”⁵⁶ Aristotle suggests that base people take themselves to be their appetites most of all. Instead of identifying themselves primarily with the intellect and seeing the bodily desires as non-rational but open to reason’s direction, they identify themselves primarily with their desires for bodily gratifications, and thus they love themselves poorly by wanting for themselves the goods of money, power, and pleasure. Because they do not understand themselves and their nature, they fail to identify those goods that are truly perfective of human beings, for the end “does not appear to someone if he is not good. For corruption distorts and causes one to be mistaken about the principles bound up with action.”⁵⁷ Based upon a distorted self-knowledge, such people instrumentalize the mind to pursue the means to achieve bodily satisfactions, and these pursuits lead to competition and faction with others. They are therefore incapable of friendship. Aristotle

⁵⁵ *NE* 9.8.1169a7–13.

⁵⁶ *NE* 9.8.1168b20–21. For our purposes in this essay, I bracket the question of the moral culpability of this ignorance of human nature.

⁵⁷ *NE* 6.12.1144a34–36.

concludes that “the corrupt person ought not to be [a self-lover]—he will harm both himself and his neighbors, since he follows his base passions.”⁵⁸ In a remark similar to Augustine’s on the self-forgetfulness of the sinner, Aristotle says that base people seek the company of others with whom they are not capable of friendship in order to distract themselves from knowledge of their actions and moral character. “Corrupt people seek to pass their days with others, but they flee themselves because, when by themselves, they are reminded of many odious things and anticipate still others. When they are with others, however, they forget. And since they possess nothing lovable, they feel in no way friendly toward themselves.”⁵⁹ True self-knowledge opens the door to friendship and social union, while distorted self-knowledge leads to the shallow, superficial company of those who assemble together in order to use one another other to flee from themselves.

In these texts, we can identify four forms of self-knowledge enumerated in the previous section. We hear Aristotle speaking from a “philosophical distance” and reflecting upon human nature and experience. With philosophical precision, he describes the kind of pre-philosophical self-knowledge of human nature that decent human beings achieve and that makes them capable of friendship with others. He also alludes to the base man’s failure to achieve this knowledge of human nature and discusses his subsequent inability to achieve adequate moral self-knowledge, for such a man flees from himself by spending time with others with whom he is incapable of community and friendship. A distorted knowledge of human nature leads to base actions, and those actions in turn make psychological, moral self-knowledge difficult to achieve.

Nor is self-awareness unrelated to friendship. To perceive that we perceive and that we think is to perceive that we exist, and because life is by nature a good thing, to perceive that we exist is also good and pleasant, especially to those who are good. As a friend is another self, “one ought to share in the friend’s perception that he exists, and this would come to pass by living together and sharing in a community of speeches and thought—for this is what living together would seem to mean in the case of human beings, and not as with cattle, merely feeding in the same place.”⁶⁰ Thus, one’s friend’s perception, both of things and of himself in perceiving those things, is in a sense one’s own perception. Self-awareness is expanded in friendship to become a shared consciousness of goods, especially the good of life itself, and

⁵⁸ *NE* 9.8.1169a13–14.

⁵⁹ *NE* 9.4.1166b14–18.

⁶⁰ *NE* 9.9.1170b11–14.

of ourselves as knowing and desiring those goods together in a community of speech, thought, and life.

Aquinas develops many of these philosophical points in a theological question concerning whether or not sinners may be said to love themselves. He claims that self-love is predicated in three ways. In one way, it is common to all human beings, in a second way it is unique to the good, and in a third way it is held by the bad. Like Aristotle, he bases each form of self-love on the understanding that human beings have of themselves, “for it is common to everyone that he loves what he thinks himself to be.”⁶¹ Now, human persons may be said to be in two ways. First, we may be said to be in terms of our “substance and nature, and this way all think themselves to be what they are, that is, composed of soul and body. In this way too, all men, both good and wicked, love themselves, in so far as they love their own preservation.” Second, we may be said to be something in terms of what has preeminence “in” us; we may be said to be our principal part or our highest, most noble ability. In this more specific way of being and being known, “all do not think themselves to be what they are.” Aquinas says that the “reasoning mind” is the principle of man and that our “sensitive and corporeal nature” is secondary to what we are. “Now the good think their rational nature as being principal in them, . . . and therefore in this way they think themselves to be what they are.” However, the morally bad “think their sensitive and corporeal nature as being principal in them Therefore, since they know not themselves aright, they do not love themselves aright, but love what they think themselves to be. But the good know themselves truly, and therefore truly love themselves.” Within a theological context, St. Thomas specifies Aristotle’s philosophical thinking and provides excellent detail concerning true self-knowledge as the foundation for noble self-love and friendship.

Self-Knowledge, Political Life, and Our Knowledge of the Natural Law

I wish to claim that Manent gives us a contemporary, sophisticated, and explicitly political version of Aristotle’s argument concerning self-knowledge as the foundation for the self-love that opens to friendship. His book on natural law and human rights displays the fact that the modern state and its social imaginary distort our self-understanding in profound ways and mutilate our ability to love ourselves well and to form friendships. However, we can appreciate the strength of his argument only if we understand that

⁶¹ This and the following quotations from St. Thomas are taken from *ST* II-II, q. 25, a. 7.

the interconnected questions we have discussed—of what man is and of how he ought to live, of self-knowledge as a foundation for the moral life and friendship—culminate in a third question, critical both for the philosopher and for the one operating in the quotidian world of practical concerns. This third, culminating question concerns the nature of politics, and more specifically the best political form for human beings.

The question of what it is to be human is prompted by a situation that invites our thoughtful response, and our conception of human nature flows back into the question of how we ought to live, which in turn cannot be answered fully without raising the question of the nature and perfection of society generally and of polity specifically. Thinking about how we ought to live demands that we think about how we ought to live *together*, which requires that we raise the classical political question concerning the best regime, the regime for which one ought to pray. One's understanding of human nature affects one's understanding of political life because societies and political regimes are formed by human beings in view of governing themselves and others toward the common good. Human beings must be understood to be a certain way if they are to be capable of acting (or being acted upon) as citizens (or subjects) of a specific political form. Therefore, one's ethical life and one's political form are founded upon a conception of the nature of human beings, for one's anthropology includes an ethics that must harmonize with one's political teaching, and one's political teaching must be fitting for one's ethical anthropology.

*Manent on the Modern State and
Its Foundational Conception of Human Nature*

The various renditions of the state of nature given by modern philosophers are therefore not accidental to their political thought, and the epistemological developments in modern philosophy are not unrelated to its political upheavals. Despite their differences, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant must present an understanding of human nature, especially the human mind, as the foundation for their arguments concerning political things. As Manent says, modern philosophers “justified their [political] theses, founded them on a certain interpretation of the state of nature, that is, ultimately of human nature.”⁶² The recognition of this necessary connection between human nature and

⁶² Pierre Manent, *Metamorphoses of the City: On the Western Dynamic*, trans. Marc LePain (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 26. See also Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 205–6.

politics, between soul and city, is also foundational for classical thinking. Aristotle claims that, if the politician is to know how to rule, he must “know in some way about the soul.”⁶³ Moderns do not usher in “new modes and orders” by breaking this link itself between soul and city, but rather by redefining human nature in order to initiate a new political form fitting for their “new man”; they attempt to remake men so as to fit them for subjection to the sovereign of the modern state, the terrible and immortal Leviathan.⁶⁴

Politics both arises from and gives form to human life, and as such it is the arena in which our understanding of human nature reaches its maturity and most fully reveals itself. Manent therefore turns to “political things” in order to understand “human things.” Further, he argues that a science of political form is central to understanding the nature and activities of politics, and therefore his work on political form is central to his understanding of human things as they are displayed in political life. He understands political forms to be those widest modes of human association for the common good. Political form is that which shapes human life and activity, that which gives structure and stability to our associations aimed at the common good. Political form is the source of our common life and manifests the understanding of human nature upon which it is built. According to Manent, political form is distinct from and wider than the classical understanding of the six political regimes discussed by Plato and Aristotle. He discusses the political forms of the ancient Greek city (*polis*), the empire, the Church, the nations of Western Europe (especially after the Protestant Reformation), and finally the modern “state.” The modern state is distinct from the nation, but is in many ways built upon it, with aspects of the nation continuing to survive in modern “nation-states.”⁶⁵

⁶³ *NE* 1.13.1102a18. A few lines later, Aristotle says that “the politician too ought to contemplate the soul; but he ought to contemplate it for the sake of [promoting virtue and happiness] and up to the point that is adequate for what is being sought.” See also *Politics* 7.13–14.1332b24–34a10.

⁶⁴ Compare this approach with that of Aristotle, who observes that political life is natural to human beings and that legislators must receive men from nature and make them into citizens by cultivating in them virtues fitting for the regime through decent laws in keeping with natural justice (see *Politics* 1 and 7–8).

⁶⁵ See Manent, *Metamorphoses of the City*, 18–28, and *Seeing Things Politically*, 106–129; and Joe Wood, “Political Form in the Work of Pierre Manent” (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 2019). Manent’s work on political form is rich, and I suggest that Russell Hittinger’s discussions of social forms as providing a natural foundation for political life and activity fill a crucial gap in Manent’s argument. One could use Hittinger’s important work to show that Manent passes too quickly from conceptions of human nature to the role of political form; see Hittinger, “The Coherence of the Four

The modern state is not a natural political form as were the city and the empire, nor is it a temporal polity shaped by its subservience to the eternal City of God, as were the nations of Western Europe. The modern state is a philosophical construct cogitated into being by rejecting classical political forms and by refusing to acknowledge the truth and political transcendence of Christian Revelation. As Francis Slade says, “Modern political philosophy created a unique new political form, the state, one unassimilable to any of the well-known regimes because the state is intended to replace them all. It is a form that supplanted, one might say dissolved, all previous political forms in the West and which has been exported throughout the world.”⁶⁶ Georg Hegel and Hobbes are no doubt correct when each says, respectively, that “the state is universal in form, a form whose essential principle is thought” and that the modern state is “a creation out of nothing by human wit.”⁶⁷ Manent claims that the modern state is *cosa mentale*, a mental thing that originates with modern political philosophy and gradually comes to dominate human life.⁶⁸ It showed its true face during the French Revolution and came into its own during the National Socialist and Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century.⁶⁹

The state, according to Manent, is a “mental thing” marked by paradoxes, if not outright contradictions. It is nebulous but all-powerful, neutral but

Basic Principles of Catholic Social Doctrine: An Interpretation,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 7, no. 4 (2009): 791–838, and “Social Roles and Ruling Virtues in Catholic Social Doctrine,” *Annales theologici* 16 (2002): 385–408. See also his essay “Three Necessary Societies,” in *On the Dignity of Society: Essays in Catholic Social Teaching and Natural Law*, forthcoming from Catholic University of America Press (originally published in June 2017 in *First Things*, firstthings.com/article/2017/06/the-three-necessary-societies). All the essays from Hittinger referenced in this article will be included in this collection.

⁶⁶ Francis Slade, “Two Versions of Political Philosophy: Teleology and the Conceptual Genesis of the Modern State,” in *Natural Moral Law in Contemporary Society*, ed. Holger Zaborowski (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 235–63, at 242.

⁶⁷ Slade quotes both of these passages. For Hegel’s statement, see *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon, 1953), 172. See also Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 299–300. For Hobbes’s text, see *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, ed. Ferdinand Tönnies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), 84.

⁶⁸ Pierre Manent, *The City of Man*, trans. Marc A. LePain (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 177.

⁶⁹ See Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 198–206, and “The Human Person and Political Life,” in *Christian Faith and Human Understanding: Studies on the Eucharist, Trinity, and the Human Person* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 179–98.

tyrannical, artificial but governing nature. It subsists as the un-knowing and anti-philosophical creation of philosophers. The state is a tyrannical power erected to enforce the democratic will of the people that it represents, a “sovereign instrument” that stands outside the society it was brought into being to represent and to protect, a sovereign instrument that lurches ever closer to tyranny and censorship under the guise of protecting democracy and free speech.⁷⁰ It is the nameless, faceless impersonator of human persons, the all-powerful enforcer of the human rights proclaimed by the members of a society above which it is exalted yet upon which it is attendant. It is an impersonal arbiter of personal rights and liberties, and the understanding of human nature upon which it is founded is no less contradictory.

Manent argues that human rights, the protection and promotion of which are the *raison d'être* of the modern state, are rooted in the mental constructs of the state of nature that animate modern political philosophy. These modern discussions of the state of nature have two main targets: (1) Aristotle's philosophy such as we have discussed it, especially his “doctrine of ‘substance’ concerning nature in general or human nature in particular,” and (2) Catholic readings of the Book of Genesis.⁷¹ In these modern, anti-Aristotelian re-writings of Genesis exemplified above all by Hobbes, we find a human nature “that keeps human beings separate and available for equal freedom.” This is an understanding of nature that is “void of any quality that might indicate a bond and exempt from any difference of age, sex, or capacity.” This nature, strictly identical for all members, is “stripped of all complexity or inner fullness” and therefore “has nothing to teach us concerning the *human* being that we are—indeed it has little to tell us regarding ourselves as animals. This nature may *leave* us all equally free, but only for the negative reason that it bears no properly human characteristic, no *binding* characteristic.” This understanding of human nature is at the basis of “human rights,” and thus of the modern state, and it reduces us to the “most impoverished common denominator,” thereby offering itself “as a basis indifferently available for all imaginable human possibilities in their infinite variety.”⁷² We might say that, according to Manent's view, the modern state begins with philosophy muting human nature, rejecting natural

⁷⁰ See Pierre Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights: Toward a Recovery of Practical Reason*, trans. Ralph C. Hancock (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), 61. Discussing Manent's work, Brad Lewis called the modern state a “sovereign instrument,” which captures well Manent's accurate portrayal of the contradictory character of the state. I thank Lewis for his insight.

⁷¹ Manent, *City of Man*, 113. This chapter is aptly titled “The Hidden Man.”

⁷² These texts are taken from Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 9.

political forms, and refusing Christian Revelation; modernity is born when nature and grace are silenced by philosophy.

Manent shows that the modern understanding of human nature that provides the foundation for human rights reduces human beings to “the fact of the separation of separate individuals,” and therefore we are left with the claims that human beings are nothing more than separate-living individuals who are simple, indeterminate, isolated, and asocial.⁷³ All that remains to this “nature” is the desire for power after power. Manent claims that Hobbes, so pivotal for modern political thinking, “both postulates the homogeneity of human motives—all human beings obey the same motives—and reduces all these to the desire for power.”⁷⁴ Manent concludes that in modernity we have in effect “contemptuously dismissed the very idea of a human nature” and “dismembered” the human world even as we continue to appeal clandestinely to the authority of nature.⁷⁵ We are therefore left with a mere vestige of the human that we call the individual with the power to claim his rights.

Yet, this modern reductionism that so profoundly and so artificially impoverishes human nature is but a first step, a preparatory move. Manent argues that nature is leveled so that the road may be clear to the myth of self-creation through human rights. If nature is mute because we silenced it, then we are free to speak for it by claiming a right to whatever we wish. The modern claim that by itself nature “tends toward nothing that is properly human” opens the door to the activities of *mentally adding* to nature “everything that reason, imagination, or human experience can observe or produce.”⁷⁶ This conception of human nature, this “unit of life—sexless and ageless, with no distinct capacities—has been isolated as the basis of human rights.”⁷⁷ Modernity is thus a project of “denaturalizing” the human phenomenon and isolating the remnant of human nature as the foundation for human rights that allow their claimants to construct themselves. The result is that, “Once the validity or the authority of nature has been limited to the brute fact of radical separation, what is properly human can be constructed and deconstructed as we wish, since it is devoid of the natural basis whose determining or inspiring force we should recognize. Regarding any human characteristic we can now say that it is ‘constructed’ and that it is therefore possible or even urgent to ‘deconstruct’ it.” The modern approach to human things is founded upon “the mute compactness of a nature that is enclosed

⁷³ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 10.

⁷⁴ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 21.

⁷⁵ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 53.

⁷⁶ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 9.

⁷⁷ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 10.

in the individuality of the not-even-animal-living-being” and “transforms the human world into a Transformers toy.” Manent says that this sense of human nature is presented as “equality,” for “nature understood as without inclination or difference is equality, an equality that tends toward confusion with identity or similarity, since it neither recognizes nor nourishes any differences.” Human rights are therefore rooted in “nature without qualities” and “promote an equality that ignores differences,” with the result that “such rights are the moving force of an indefinite social, moral, and political movement that ceaselessly sets an undefinable and ever-deferred equality at odds with the inclinations and differences that human beings experience.”⁷⁸

The leveling of human nature to the rubble of separate packets of power armed with technology and human rights, all in service of “an equality that ignores natural differences,” raises a critical question: What does a life “according to nature” look like when nature “bears no properly human traits?” This is the modern specification of the classical question that Augustine answered so beautifully. According to Manent, a life in accordance with the modern understanding of human nature understands itself “as the seat of an unceasing effort to authorize and encourage the individual-living-being to recombine all the significant elements of the human world in order to make them conform to the idea that he has of himself. And this presupposes that these elements or determining factors of our being human are treated as so many artifacts that are held together by nothing but their connection with the individual-living-being. The power of nature so understood issues into the open-ended process of rendering the human world artificial.”⁷⁹ The modern conception of human nature demands a constant and ever incomplete “recomposition of the human world,” a recomposition “presented as the concretization of human rights in their full consequences, and of course as the ultimate fulfillment of freedom, since each individual is henceforth authorized and encouraged freely to compose the bouquet of characteristics constituting the humanity he has chosen.”⁸⁰ Because we have nothing “to give human form” to this desiring machine, “this un-known, this x” that is but the remains of human nature, rights become the tools of self-construction wielded by unknowable centers of desire for power, and living according to nature comes to mean no more, and no less, than creating oneself through state-sponsored rights. Manent highlights the inevitable consequence of this understanding of human life

⁷⁸ The previous quotes are taken from Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 10–11.

⁷⁹ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 12.

⁸⁰ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 12–13.

and activity: “Under the exclusive legitimacy of the principle of human rights, all aspects of the human world are delivered up to a *ius omnium in omnia*. Let us be clear here that this ‘right’ is understood in a more and more extensive way, indeed in a way that is properly unlimited: not only as the right to ‘have it all’ but, more troubling still, as *the right to be everything that we are or want to be*.”⁸¹ Modern man not only demands that his rights be respected, but cogitates them into being in order to employ them in the task of self-creation.

The modern state is therefore based on the definition of man as “the being who possesses rights. It resonates as our self-definition and our perspective on humanity, one that we take to have fortunately replaced other definitions and perspectives, such as that man is God’s creature or that man is a political animal.”⁸² By detailing the modern repudiation of Genesis (man as God’s creature) and Aristotle (man as political animal), Manent displays the contradiction inherent in the modern conception of human nature: there is a constant, clandestine appeal to human nature as separate-individual living being so as to authorize the triumph of artificiality and self-creation through the mechanism of human rights enforced by the law of the state. Modern man appeals implicitly to the authority of nature in order to remove any and all natural boundaries to his will to power and self-assertion, for we understand ourselves to be nothing more than “desiring machines” seeking to create ourselves and to assert ourselves as self-created through claims to rights that must be protected by law, which is not an expression of political prudence but of impersonal domination. *Physis* is presented so as to be swallowed up by *techne* and the *nomoi* of human rights. Manent concludes that “the doctrines of modern natural right are based on mental constructions—the state of nature, human rights—that, far from being especially pertinent for guiding action and ordering the political body, tend rather to throw the rule of action into indeterminacy and to obscure more and more the sources of common life.”⁸³

We can now understand Manent’s position that the state and its laws exist to protect human rights and that the philosophy of human rights is “constituted in opposition to the idea of natural law,” especially as natural law thinking has developed within Christianity.⁸⁴ If human rights are inherently opposed to natural law, it is because these rights are understood to replace natural ends. The rejection of Aristotle and Christianity is motivated by,

⁸¹ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 76.

⁸² Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 50.

⁸³ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 57–58.

⁸⁴ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 8.

or at least includes, the move from human nature understood as teleology and end—as eros for truth, beauty, and friendship with God and others in familial and political society—to nature understood as *carte blanche* for self-creation through the will to power asserted through the medium of human rights. For eros is not mere desire for power, but rather the love that seeks the eternal joy of union with the divine Beauty itself by itself. When eros is silenced and ends replaced by rights, then self-mastery in virtue is replaced by autonomy expressed in the idiom of authenticity, and reasoned speech in search of the truth about justice is replaced by ideological activism backed by violence.⁸⁵ It is this mutilated conception of human nature marked by the deletion of natural ends that provides the foundation for human rights and the modern state that must protect them, and conversely, it is this conception of human nature that the state sanctions and produces. As Manent says, “The modern state produces a social state that asymptotically approaches the state of nature as presupposed in its construction. The human being . . . called ‘modern’ or ‘democratic’ posits and produces himself according to a norm that has the authority of nature—human beings are born and remain free and equal in rights—but a nature posited and produced by the most powerful artifice [i.e., the state] ever conceived and constructed by human beings.”⁸⁶ In such an understanding of human nature and political life, the natural law has no fundamental role to play because the political form of the modern state will continue to “presuppose and thus produce this lawless humanity who founds himself on his self-relation.”⁸⁷ Instead of freedom under the natural law specified and extended by prudent positive law, we have a lawless humanity that creates itself according to human rights backed by force masquerading as law.

We see therefore something of a vicious circle: the state is founded upon a false conception of human nature and works to exacerbate and to extend this distorted conception through the production of an unhealthy social imaginary. While the Greek *polis* displayed human things themselves as political things and facilitated the formation of friendship, the modern state conceals us from ourselves and from our fellows while denigrating the public expression of Christianity. Manent says that the state “is the great instrument of modern politics because it orders individuals—because it institutes the political order founded on individuals,” but the state is also “the great obstacle to our understanding of ourselves because it masks or

⁸⁵ See Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 67.

⁸⁶ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 62.

⁸⁷ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 126.

deforms the collective bodies—the ‘cities’—of which the individuals are members.” The state therefore “interposes itself between us and ourselves; it hampers at the same time that it mediates our relation with the cities we are part of—the Church and the nation.”⁸⁸ Because the modern state claims superiority to revealed religion and operates through the deracinating mechanism of representation, “each of the soul’s two commitments [is] hampered in its manifestation and soon drained of its vitality.” The human soul “is hardly recognizable,” for the modern state “represses almost equally the two divergent movements of the soul: not only does it severely circumscribe the public expression of religious convictions and affects—religion is henceforth essentially a private thing—but it makes and is organized to make the ‘ancient freedom,’ that is, the direct expression of civic commitments, impossible: citizens can act only through their representatives.”⁸⁹ Manent shows that the modern state “thus rests on the repression, in any case the frustration, of the two most powerful human affects: on the one hand the passionate interest in this world as expressed in active participation in the common thing, and on the other the passionate interest in the eternal and the infinite as expressed in the postulation of another world and participation in a community of faith.”⁹⁰ The state comes between us and ourselves by repressing these two fundamental activities of the human person and offering in their place the protection of rights, with the result that “the soul no longer recognizes itself.”⁹¹ Because the state is a contradiction built upon a contradiction, it occludes and mutilates that which it is meant to manifest and perfect. It sanctions, and perhaps demands, the rejection and ignorance of human nature inherent in the existentialist extreme of self-creation. Friedrich Nietzsche is the modern state’s patron saint.⁹²

We may conclude that human rights are modernity’s fig leaves. Rooted in a false conception of human nature and sponsored by the state, human rights are the natural tools of our self-concealment from ourselves and others, and the state, existing to protect human rights, is the sovereign instrument of the occlusion of human nature and the natural law that governs us. Let us recall the Aristotelian argument that man loves what he thinks himself to be and that true self-knowledge is the seed of a noble self-love which

⁸⁸ Manent, *Metamorphoses of the City*, 222.

⁸⁹ Manent, *Metamorphoses of the City*, 217.

⁹⁰ Manent, *Metamorphoses of the City*, 217.

⁹¹ Manent, *Metamorphoses of the City*, 217.

⁹² See the remarkable, and remarkably fitting for our argument, text from Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1980), §3.

provides the root of friendship with others, while false conceptions of the self lead to selfishness and enmity. It matters not upon which kind of soil the modern seed of self-knowledge falls, for the seed itself is corrupt and corrupting. Those tutored by the political form of the modern state and its social imaginary are no longer capable of knowing themselves truly, and thus they can neither love themselves well nor achieve the friendships at the heart of a happy human life. Manent says that the modern definition of man as the being who possesses rights leads to a conception of human life in which to live humanely is to assert one's rights. However, this new definition, along with its attendant mode of life, is insufficient because it retains something negative or polemical, for to assert one's rights is merely "to 'defend' them against those who deprive you of your rights, who harm or violate them, or against a society that is always curtailing them."⁹³ Thus, in order to govern or organize collective life sufficiently, "another, positive principle is needed, that of self-interest. The person who asserts his or her rights is also one who seeks his or her self-interests. Rights and self-interest are the two principles that allow for the ordering of the human world without recourse to law as the rule and measure of human action."⁹⁴ Manent acknowledges that we do, of course, continue to craft laws, but their goal "is no longer directly to regulate our actions but rather to guarantee our rights and equip us to seek our interests."⁹⁵ As a result, the modern person "who asserts his rights and seeks his self-interest is no longer the agent for whom law provides the rule and measure of action. As the being who has rights and pursues his interests, he defines himself first of all in relation to himself, a relation that is subjective or subjectifying and by which he guarantees his independence with regard to any objective rule, that is, any law of God or nature."⁹⁶ Modern conceptions of human nature and human rights backed by state laws lead agents to seek their own self-interest—which is distinct from loving themselves truly—as they attempt to escape from the direction of the natural law. Claims to rights replace recognition of natural ends, self-interest grows in place of noble self-love, and faction reigns over friendship.

The result is that modern men and women are hidden from themselves, and thus incapable of the noble self-love that flows into friendship. Manent says that, in modernity:

⁹³ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 120.

⁹⁴ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 120.

⁹⁵ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 120.

⁹⁶ Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 121.

We have no confidence in the capacity of human reason to grasp the human world. This conviction that reason gives no access to human things has now become the most widespread opinion under the name of relativism. Call it nihilism lite. We contemporaries, therefore, do not believe that we can understand human things, and consequently, we do not love human things; this is the other aspect of nihilism. We do not love them because we cannot understand them. It seems to us that we cannot understand them and thus, because of this distance between human things and ourselves, there cannot be this friendship for human life that we cannot, after all, help but desire.⁹⁷

The problem with human rights is therefore much more profound than their constant proliferation or the issue of adjudicating between competing rights claims. The very notion of human rights distorts our understanding of ourselves because it is based upon a false conception of human nature and promulgated by an artificial political form. To the extent that he is taught by the state and its social imaginary, modern man is incapable of true self-knowledge and the proper self-love that opens to friendship; “statesmen” are no longer friends in truth, but comrades in self-interested activism. Nature is neither contemplated by philosophy nor healed by grace, but rather occluded and mutilated by the artificial creation of modern political philosophers.

Let us connect these reflections on Manent’s work to our discussion of the four kinds of self-knowledge: (1) philosophical self-knowledge, (2) pre-theoretic knowledge of human nature, (3) psychological and moral self-knowledge, and (4) self-awareness. In each of these four, we see that modernity is marked by the inversion of the classical approach and by a distortion of human and political phenomena. Regarding (1), in modern political thought, philosophy no longer contemplates nature as it manifests itself for the sake of the joy of loving truth, but rather posits a state of nature that is unobservable in principle for the sake of creating the artificial political form of the state constructed upon man’s consent to representative government. As for (2), the bipartite philosophical construct of human nature ruled by the state engenders a social imaginary that is but a philosophically produced, state-sponsored form of the existentialist extreme of self-creation through the will to power. It is not accidental that this dominant conception of human nature that animates our social imaginary so often leads

⁹⁷ Manent, *Seeing Things Politically*, 4. As Pruffer and Slade say, “for Hobbes, friendship is terrible” (Pruffer, *Recapitulations*, 25).

individuals to a distortion of (3), an impoverished personal understanding of their psychological states and moral characters. Finally, self-awareness (4) remains, since it is too immediate and natural to be mutilated by this grasp of human nature, but it cannot be expanded and perfected in the shared consciousness of virtuous friendship.

We ought to recall that we must find the appropriate intellectual distance in order to know ourselves properly in each of the four ways enumerated. Each demands the right amount of distance from ourselves, the distance that allows us to see the truth of who and what we are. Modern political philosophers have to a great extent failed to achieve the proper philosophical distance. They do indeed speak about nature, the mind, truth, and God, but they do so for the sake of practical results. The mastery and possession of nature is often the ultimate end pursued, even in political thinking. Niccolò Machiavelli desires to dominate the mind of the prince, and thereby to rule Florence, and Hobbes wants his doctrine to be taught in the universities so that future statesman may be guided by his principles.⁹⁸ Their political success is in part the result of this failure to be fully philosophical; they did not follow Plato and Aristotle to the schools of philosophical contemplation on the outskirts of the city, but attempted to reign in the state by dominating the mind of its rulers. Their failure to achieve the appropriate philosophical distance is correlated with, indeed foundational for, their subsequent political influence and “success.”

Philosophy itself becomes paradoxical in modernity; to the extent that it is productive and not fully contemplative, it has not the distance that would allow it to see the truth about the whole of things. Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and René Descartes no longer display natural ends at work, but rather attempt to delete those natural ends to make room for the triumph of contract and artifice, and the dominant sense of human nature possessed by modern man is marked by this philosophical failure.

⁹⁸ In an excellent article discussing Francis Slade’s work in political philosophy, Sokolowski comments upon chapters 9–11 of Machiavelli’s *The Prince*: “For Machiavelli the real rulers in such governance are not the religious and historical figures themselves, such as Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus, but the writers who construct them, such as Xenophon and the biblical writers. Machiavelli implicitly proclaims himself as such a ruler over minds, and he presents his philosophy as a form of ruling” (“Recovering Classical Philosophy in the Modern Context: The Work of Francis Slade,” *Perspectives on Political Science* 45, no. 1 [2016]: 4–8, at 7). See also Sokolowski, “Hobbes and Husserl,” in *Phenomenology in a New Key: Between Analysis and History. Essays in Honor of Richard Cobb-Stevens*, ed. Nicolas de Warren and Jeffrey Bloechl (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015), 51–62. Compare my approach to this issue with that of Manent at *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 20–34.

In a remarkable passage, Manent says, “The man who pursues ends that are . . . constitutive of his nature fulfills his definition, seizes upon his identity in this very pursuit. It is the *distance* between his empirical, real being, and the end he pursues—justice, wisdom, truth—a *distance* that is recognized so as to be eliminated, and yet always invincibly maintained by reason of the ‘sinful’ or simply ‘intermediary’ character of man, that *opens a space where he can reflect on himself and recognize himself as man.*”⁹⁹ The recognition of natural ends as perfective of human beings and the resultant pursuit of those ends—for we never fully arrive at our perfection in this life—provide us with the necessary distance from ourselves that allows us to see ourselves truly. The distance between who we currently are and who we ought to be by nature opens a space for reflection.

However, if philosophy claims to delete these natural ends, and if a political form and social imaginary shaped by such a philosophy comes to dominate the thinking of the man and woman on the street, then we are simply incapable of obtaining the proper view of ourselves, of our human nature and our moral character. Such is our current predicament, and it is the source of our inability to love ourselves well and to achieve the friendships that tie communities together. Manent continues: “But for the one who no longer has ends but rights, how shall this indispensable distance be opened, this interior space that allows man to think and speak of himself?” For the man armed with rights but not inclined to natural ends, “there is no longer any differential tension between empirical and completed being, between potency and act, between what is fulfilled and desired. Whether rights are guaranteed or scoffed at, it is in any case the empirical being himself who owns and holds them.”¹⁰⁰ The man who recognizes and pursues natural

⁹⁹ Manent, *The City of Man*, 136 (emphasis added).

¹⁰⁰ Manent, *The City of Man*, 136. The replacement of natural ends by “rights” manifests the distinction between classical discussions of *ius*, exemplified by St. Thomas, and modern doctrines of natural or human rights, exemplified by Hobbes. As we have shown, the deep divide between classical and modern approaches is therefore the role of nature and teleology, with the differing emphases on the objective *ius* (classical) or subjective right (modern) playing an important but secondary role. Clearly, our criticisms apply to the modern approach, which dominates our political form and social imaginary; see Dominic Legge, O.P., “Do Thomists Have Rights?,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 17, no. 1 (2019): 127–47. For an excellent discussion of Pope St. John XXIII’s attempt to place the modern language of human rights within the classical framework of teleological order, see Russell Hittinger, “*Quinquagesimo Ante*: Reflections on *Pacem in Terris* Fifty Years Later,” in *The Global Quest for Tranquillitas Ordinis: Pacem in Terris, Fifty Years Later*, ed. Mary Ann Glendon, Russell Hittinger, Marcelo Sánchez-Sorondo, Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences Acta 18 (Vatican City: Pontifical Academy of Social

ends, the man “who seeks justice, wisdom, or truth knows that he does not possess them, but the one who declares his rights and demands that they be respected knows that he possesses them and that nothing he or anyone else does can change anything about this possession. Respected or scoffed at, human rights, whether a man be a scoundrel or a hero, are equally what they are.”¹⁰¹ Obsessed with our rights, which must be claimed as actual but cannot be achieved as potential, we no longer have the distance to see who we are. A fixation on inalienable human rights, as distinct from and in place of realizable natural ends, prevents us from achieving the clarifying distance that makes true self-knowledge possible. Unfortunately, one need not search far and wide for empirical confirmation of Manent’s arguments.

Manent’s Reflections and the Promulgation of the Natural Law

With these points in view, I wish to argue that Manent’s discussions of human nature, human rights, and the modern state should be understood as falling under the theme of the promulgation of natural law. His subtle arguments display how the natural law itself can be disclosed or occluded, and he traces the way that modern philosophy and politics have made it increasingly difficult to know and to live by the natural law. He helps us to see anew what St. Thomas saw so well: all law, especially the natural law, is a rule and measure for human action with the end, the *telos*, of forming friendships, either between men themselves or between man and God, and living according to the natural law demands that we know the truth about ourselves. Living by the natural law is therefore something of a middle term between friendship, the *telos* of the law, and a proper self-knowledge, the foundation of our ability to live under law.

St. Thomas says that the natural law is nothing other than the rational creature’s participation in the eternal law of God’s wisdom, by which he moves all things to their proper acts and ends in a manner proportionate to their natures. God promulgates this law to us in the creation of a world of natures culminating in the human person, but we can and must complete or extend this promulgation. God is the sole author of the natural law and its primary promulgator, but we are by nature called to be secondary,

Sciences, 2013), 38–60.

¹⁰¹ Manent, *The City of Man*, 136. Perhaps we may say that, if man is the being with rights, and if rights are always perfectly possessed and inalienable, our incessant claims to our rights constitutes something of a perverted imitation of God, who is the greatest good (*summum bonum simpliciter*), who is his goodness by his essence, and who communicates a participation in his goodness to creatures out of sheer love and generosity (see *ST I*, q. 6).

co-promulgators of a law that we disclose but do not create. If our social imaginary is shaped by a philosophy that denies the very existence of human ends and rebels against the supposed tyranny of nature and God, then we witness a massive human failure to co-promulgate, to make known to ourselves and others, the natural law that directs us to friendship.¹⁰²

Self-knowledge, especially of human nature, is at the core of ethics and political life, and as such it is foundational for our knowledge of the natural law as that which provides a foundation for both. In St. Thomas's discussion of the unified multiplicity of the precepts of the natural law, he describes the order of natural goods, and thus the order of the natural inclinations to these goods. It is clear that the goods at the heart of the natural law are human goods, things in accordance with and proportioned to human nature, for "all the things to be done or avoided that practical reason naturally apprehends as human goods are such that they belong to the precepts of the law of nature."¹⁰³ Naturally apprehended human goods are naturally understood to be fitting for and perfective of what we are as human beings, but the recognition of goods that perfect us presupposes some inchoate knowledge of the one they perfect. As we saw in St. Thomas's text concerning the first free moral act, knowledge of an end as an end—that is, as good—is founded upon knowledge of myself as the one desiring that good for me; a good is only recognized as good in some way for me, which means that I must have some sense of what I am in order to see something as fitting for the kind of thing that I am. As Brock says, "What we naturally apprehend as a human good is what we can all immediately see to be proportioned to human nature, as a perfection of it."¹⁰⁴ Such goods as the conservation of human life, the marital union of man and woman and the education of their children, the knowledge of the truth about God, and the goods of human life in society could not be seen as fitting for us if we did not have some grasp, however basic and vague, of ourselves as the ones for whom such goods are good—namely, of ourselves and of our nature as substantial, animal beings specified by our use of reason in pursuit of truth and friendship in familial and political society. Our natural grasp of human goods, which gives birth to our natural inclinations to those goods, is therefore based upon "a natural—non-scientific but nonetheless truly intellectual—understanding of human nature."¹⁰⁵ To the extent that we see the truth of what it is to be

¹⁰² See *ST I-II*, q. 91, a. 2; q. 93. Taylor also recognizes the impact modern political philosophy has had on our current social imaginary (*Modern Social Imaginaries*, 24).

¹⁰³ *ST I-II*, q. 94, a. 2.

¹⁰⁴ Brock, *Light That Binds*, 158–59.

¹⁰⁵ Brock, *Light That Binds*, 161.

human, and only to that extent, are we capable of living a life of familial, social, and political friendship based upon the natural law.

Because we are rational animals achieving the knowledge of our human nature foundational for our recognition of the natural law is a complex affair. Although Manent clearly disagrees with Maritain concerning the relationship between natural law and human rights, since Maritain argued that we ought to understand natural rights as founded upon and not in opposition to natural law, both Manent and Maritain understand well that gaining a proper understanding of human things is not automatic. Such understanding takes time and experience to develop, and Manent shows us the impediments to self-knowledge erected by much of modern philosophy and politics.

For his part, Maritain distinguishes between the ontological aspect of the natural law (the “normality of functioning of human nature”) and its “gnoseological,” or epistemological, aspect (the natural law as known). Regarding the epistemological aspect, he says that human agents know the natural law “with more or less difficulty, and in different degrees, running the risk of error here as elsewhere.”¹⁰⁶ With this distinction, Maritain points to the fact that, while the ontological aspect of natural law remains the same, the knowledge of the natural law increases and decreases throughout history, both the personal history of individual men and women and the history of cultures and civilizations. In agreement with Maritain’s claim that the knowledge of natural law can rise and fall, both for an individual human agent and for a culture, Russell Hittinger says, “Appropriation of the ‘evidences’ of natural law, either by the individual or by a culture, is a slow process requiring action and reflection.”¹⁰⁷ Manent’s work enables us to see that the truth about human nature is a central piece of the evidence that must be appropriated for the natural law to be more fully promulgated and more efficaciously directive of human action toward friendship.

St. Thomas also argues that the most general precepts of the natural law, including the primary precept that good is to be done and pursued and evil avoided, cannot be “erased entirely from the hearts of men,” even if men and women fail to apply them in a concrete action due to disorderly passions that cloud the intellect. However, he says that the secondary precepts of the natural law, which are as conclusions based upon the primary precepts and which include prohibitions against theft and vices

¹⁰⁶ Maritain, *Man and the State*, 90.

¹⁰⁷ Russell Hittinger, “Natural Law and Public Discourse: The Legacies of Joseph Ratzinger,” *Loyola Law Review* 60 (2014): 241–71, at 266.

against nature, can be erased from the hearts of men, “either because of bad arguments, in the same way that errors occur in speculative matters with respect to necessary conclusions, or because of depraved customs and corrupt habits.”¹⁰⁸ Manent has done us the great service of showing that much of modern political philosophy and politics constitute bad arguments concerning human nature, which have led to a political life marked by depraved customs promoting corrupt habits that erase the secondary precepts of the natural law from the heart of man and the state, thereby impeding the promulgation of the natural law and vitiating the possibility of proper self-love and friendship.

Jesus Christ’s Revelation of Man to Himself

“We do not know what man is. We only know that the moral notions that govern the life in common of men are artifacts and thus that society is not natural to man.”¹⁰⁹ According to Manent, we are ignorant not only of man, but even of how to pose the question itself of what he is. “What do we really mean when we use the word man today? Whom are we speaking of when we defend human rights or engage in the human sciences? Not only do we lack a clear answer to this question, we do not even know how to go about asking it.”¹¹⁰ Hidden as we are from ourselves, how might we regain the knowledge of our nature that will open to us the natural law and its direction to happiness in friendship? Who is able to keep alive the question of man’s nature and thus respond to the Delphic maxim to know ourselves?

Manent proposes that, contra the Hobbesian reduction of all human motives to that of power expressed through rights, we must recover the diversity and heterogeneity of the three natural human motives for the pleasant, the useful, and the noble. He argues that a proper integration of these three motives and the goods that activate them will ameliorate our self-knowledge and serve as a sign that a given person, community, or institution is acting in accordance with human nature and the natural law. It is not accidental that the natural motives to these three kinds of goods provide the foundations of Aristotle’s three forms of friendship.¹¹¹ Yet, Manent claims that it is primarily the Church that continues to pose the question of man. He says that the Church has submitted herself politically

¹⁰⁸ *ST I-II*, q. 94, a. 6.

¹⁰⁹ Manent, *The City of Man*, 124.

¹¹⁰ Manent, *The City of Man*, 5.

¹¹¹ See Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, 99–117.

to democracy, but this submission is perhaps fortunate, at least in one way. “The church willy-nilly conformed itself to all of democracy’s demands. Democracy no longer, in good faith, has any essential reproach to make against the church. From now on it can hear the question the church poses, the question that it alone poses, the question *Quid sit homo*—What is man?”¹¹² As we have shown, the democratic modern state cannot pose or respond to this question in any significant way, nor does it desire to do so. We therefore find ourselves in a situation in which “on democracy’s side of the scale, we are left with political sovereignty and dialectical impotence. On the Church’s side, we are left with political submission and dialectical advantage. The relation unleashed by the Enlightenment is today reversed. No one knows what will happen when democracy and the church become aware of this reversal.”¹¹³ In our modern context, the lives of decent men and women and the recapitulations of classical philosophy can and do heal the human mind by disclosing our human nature to ourselves, but it is the Catholic Church, her teaching, and the philosophy that lives within her institutions that primarily keeps alive the question of man.

By continuing to ask and to answer the question of man, the Church elevates the discussion of political things. As Hittinger has shown, in her teaching on social issues since the French Revolution, the magisterium has largely bracketed the question of the best political regime.¹¹⁴ Yet, even though she has bypassed the classical political question of the best regime, the Church keeps the political question alive by raising and answering the question of man. Because politics is always based upon a conception of human nature, to ask and to answer the question of the human person is to influence in indirect but profound ways one’s political situation.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Pierre Manent, “Christianity and Democracy: Some Remarks on the Political History of Religion, or, on the Religious History of Modern Politics,” in *Modern Liberty and Its Discontents*, 97–116, at 115.

¹¹³ Manent, “Christianity and Democracy,” 115.

¹¹⁴ See Russell Hittinger, “Pope Leo XIII (1810–1903),” in *The Teachings of Modern Roman Catholicism: On Law, Politics, & Human Nature*, ed. John Witte and Frank Alexander (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 63–66.

¹¹⁵ Hittinger made this point to me in a conversation about Manent’s work in relation to the thought of John Paul II. I am grateful for his insight. The Church’s teaching on the nature of the human person necessary includes the truth that human persons are social animals by nature and that the social dimension of human nature both provides the foundation for political life and is taken up into the social reality of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. See Russell Hittinger, “Toward an Adequate Anthropology: Social Aspects of *Imago Dei* in Catholic Theology,” in *Imago Dei: Human Dignity in Ecumenical Perspective*, ed. Thomas Albert Howard (Washington, DC: Catholic

I wish to suggest that Pope St. John Paul II embodied in an extraordinary manner this service of integrating faith and reason in articulating the nature of man and his relation to God and the world. By his life and teaching, by his deeds and words, John Paul II disclosed the dignity of men and women created to the image and likeness of God. He says that God has entrusted the visible world to us as a gift and a task, and he adds that God “has assigned us a particular mission: to accomplish the truth about ourselves and about the world. We must be guided by the truth about ourselves, so as to be able to structure the visible world according to truth, correctly using it to serve our purposes, without abusing it. In other words, this twofold truth about the world and about ourselves provides the basis for every intervention by us upon creation.”¹¹⁶

Further, John Paul II shows that God does not assign us this task of achieving the truth about ourselves and then leave us wandering in darkness concerning who we are as men and women. He says that the Church enables us to fulfill our mission of accomplishing the truth about ourselves and the world by contemplating the human face of God in Jesus Christ:

In its penetrating analysis of “the modern world,” the Second Vatican Council reached that most important point of the visible world that is man, by penetrating like Christ the depth of human consciousness and by making contact with the inward mystery of man, which in Biblical and non-Biblical language is expressed by the word “heart.” Christ, the Redeemer of the world, is the one who penetrated in a unique unrepeatable way into the mystery of man and entered his “heart.” Rightly therefore does the Second Vatican Council teach: “The truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a type of him who was to come (Rom 5:14), Christ the Lord. Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, *fully reveals man to himself* and brings to light his most high calling.” And the Council continues: “He who is the ‘image of the invisible God’ (Col 1:15), is himself the perfect man who has

University of America Press, 2012), 39–78. See also Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Sister Elizabeth Englund, OCD (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).

¹¹⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Memory and Identity: Conversations at the Dawn of a Millennium* (New York: Rizzoli International, 2005), 81; see also his discussion of the distinction between the nation and the state on 59–114, esp. 69–71. See also Pope Saint John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (1991), §§ 13, 53–55.

restored in the children of Adam that likeness to God which had been disfigured ever since the first sin. Human nature, by the very fact that it was assumed, not absorbed, in him, has been raised in us also to a dignity beyond compare. For, by his Incarnation, he, the son of God, *in a certain way united himself with each man*. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin." He, the Redeemer of man!¹¹⁷

Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, reveals the mystery of God to man and the mystery of man to himself. Faith in Christ grants us the "divine distance" from ourselves that enables us to see, and to hear, the truth about the human heart. It is therefore primarily in the preaching of Jesus Christ—of his life, mission, deeds, and teaching, of his crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ascension—that the Church manifests the nature of man to himself and fecundates the human, political world. By transcending politics but caring for the practical lives of her sons and daughters on their pilgrimage to the Father, by surpassing philosophy but incorporating it into her supernatural life and thinking, by exercising faithfully the supernatural *munera* of teaching, governing, and sanctifying, the Church contributes to our knowledge of man and woman created to the image of God and called to eternal life in Christ. The preaching of Christ as God incarnate, the Redeemer of man, and the teaching of the truth he reveals about human nature are the principal contributions the Church can make to our modern political situation.¹¹⁸

The Church is the supernatural society of truth and graced friendship with God and with each other, and as such it proclaims the natural law when it preaches Christ and him crucified. Because the natural law is nothing other than the eternal law as participated by the rational creature, and

¹¹⁷ Pope Saint John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), §9, quoting *Gaudium et Spes*, §22. See also Russell Hittinger, "Human Nature and States of Nature in John Paul II's Theological Anthropology," in *Human Nature in Its Wholeness: A Roman Catholic Perspective*, ed. Daniel Robinson (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 9–33. Spaemann's discusses the human heart as brought to light only by Christ and his Church in *Persons*, 16–21, 151–52, 216–35.

¹¹⁸ As John Paul II says, "The Church respects the legitimate autonomy of the democratic order and is not entitled to express preferences for this or that institutional or constitutional solution. Her contribution to the political order is precisely her vision of the dignity of the person revealed in all its fullness in the mystery of the Incarnate Word." *Centesimus Annus*, §47.

because the New Law of grace is a fuller disclosure of and participation in this same eternal law, the revelation of Jesus Christ includes a promulgation of the natural law. When Jesus reveals the depths of the human heart to man himself, he discloses the law written naturally upon it. We catch a glimpse of “part” of the eternal law when we display the natural law through the light of reason, and God reveals both this naturally knowable part and much more when Christ tells us everything he has heard from the Father.¹¹⁹ When Jesus reveals the Father to us through the grace of the Holy Spirit, he reveals us to ourselves, and this revelation of man to himself achieved by Christ refines and deepens our understanding of ourselves, enables us to grasp the profound truth of who we are, and thereby displays to us the natural law that directs us and that is taken up into the law of the Gospel. Grace heals, elevates, and perfects nature, and therefore it manifests the natural law and its place in the life of men and women created in the image and likeness of God and called to eternal beatific friendship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The truth that Christ reveals about God and about the heart of man opens to us the possibility of friendship, not only between men and women in familial and political society, but also between us and God himself in the supernatural society of the Church. “I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father” (John 15:15). God became flesh in Christ, disclosing the Father to us and us to ourselves and calling us to friendship with God and each other through the grace of the Holy Spirit. The graced knowledge of God and of ourselves as made in his image and redeemed by his Passion enables us to love ourselves with the same divine love by which we love God, and to love others as we love ourselves. As St. Thomas says, God makes us his lovers by loving us and revealing to us the truth in Christ.¹²⁰ The Aristotelian insight that self-knowledge provides the foundation for self-love, political life, and friendship is elevated into the Christian teaching of God’s creation of the world, of man and woman *ad imaginem Dei*, and of his offer of friendship in the revelation of Christ.

¹¹⁹ On the relationship between the eternal law, the natural law, the New Law of grace, and friendship with God, see Scott Roniger, “Natural Law and Friendship with God,” *The Thomist* 83 (2019): 237–76.

¹²⁰ See Aquinas, *Super Ioan* 15, lec. 3.

Concluding Question

Let us end with a question. If Manent is correct in his claim that human rights are rooted in a distorted conception of human nature and inevitably serve to hide us from ourselves, to hinder self-love and friendship, and to occlude the natural law, does the modern magisterium's continued insistence upon the language of human rights in her teaching on social issues amount to a failure of pastoral prudence? Can the Church transform the fig leaves of human rights into threads fitting for the garment of Christ that must be put on in the house of the Father? It is one thing to baptize Plato and Aristotle, but quite another to baptize Hobbes and Nietzsche.¹²¹ N·V

¹²¹ I wish to thank Russell Hittinger for philosophical and theological conversations on many of the points discussed in this essay and for his very helpful comments on an earlier draft of it. I would not have come upon many of the insights discussed here apart from our conversations. I also wish to thank Stephen Brock, Brian Carl, Joe Wood, and Brad Lewis for philosophical discussions of Manent's work, and I am grateful to The Lumen Christi Institute for hosting a master class on Manent's book on natural law in the Spring of 2021. All errors are my own.

Saving Honor: The Ideology of Equal Esteem and the Good of Honor, Friendship, and Glory according to St. Thomas

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In his book *Natural Law and Human Rights*, Pierre Manent assesses and critiques a practical ideology that he finds pervasive within the European academy and sees increasingly informing the practical sensibilities of much of the Western world. “Our governing doctrine,” as Manent calls it, is chiefly characterized by the primacy of right over law and the rejection of any objective principle by which actions and persons might be judged.¹ It is “the plasticity of the human form” itself which demands respect.² The only non-constructed and thus normative characteristic of equal human nature is the power of being an “individual-*conatus*,” the power to be one’s own rule and reason for acting.³ And the only generally recognized purpose of this “individual-*conatus*” is to satisfy the desire for power, which is the sole universal motive of human action.⁴ Such an individual can be legitimately ruled and governed only by himself, a claim reflected in the ideal of the autonomous subject and representative government.⁵ In sum, Manent characterizes this ideology in terms of a thoroughgoing

¹ Pierre Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, trans. Ralph C. Hancock (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), 6.

² Manent, *Natural Law*, 6.

³ See Manent, *Natural Law*, 11–12.

⁴ Manent, *Natural Law*, 20–21.

⁵ See Manent, *Natural Law*, 93–95

rejection of any objective rule, “any law of God or of nature,” according to which man is defined and judged.⁶

Manent warns that this ideology is opposed to the very wellsprings of action, since an operation is rightly called an action only when it is performed according to some deliberate choice, which requires some rule and reason. If all rules and reasons are entirely self-generated, then there is no principle according to which deliberation might occur. Such a so-called autonomous subject purports to command himself, but in fact he is more patient than agent: the subject is moved by desires and preferences which cannot be weighed according to any discriminatory rule or principle, since the desires and preferences themselves are the only rule the subject acknowledges. Aside from submitting to the movement of the inexplicably strongest preference, the only positive reason for acting that remains is to destroy any vestiges of objective rules or reasons for acting—that is, the law—that might hinder the realization of individual preference: “The acting animal is now the prisoner of the very audacious and ingenious arrangement that he once devised to escape the urgency and to avoid the difficulty of the practical question. Caught in the realm of inaction, he seeks out, in a kind of terminal fever, the last corners of social existence that still escape the *laissez-faire* idea and where the very idea of the law might suffer its final defeat.”⁷

What is a Christian to make of this practical ideology? What natural inclinations does it privilege and how might the goods it seeks be sought rightly? Manent argues that the sole universal motive for action explicitly recognized by this practical ideology is a certain kind of power: the power of self-determination. According to the governing doctrine, this power is the only universal human motive that can be relied upon to construct common life and political order. Manent’s response to this ideology is therefore to propose a recovery of a natural law account of the heterogeneity of universal human motivations to include useful, pleasing, and honorable goods. In this article, I will argue that Manent’s own account of the ideology he critiques suggests a more fundamental motive driving the ideology, namely, a desire for an unassailable esteem. And since it is a desire for esteem that best explains the attractiveness of the ideology of modern freedom, an alternative vision of practical life will need to address the desire for esteem and articulate its proper bases. In advancing this argument, I will first show that Manent’s own analysis highlights the importance of the desire for esteem in motivating the ideology of modern freedom. I will then turn to the anthropology of Thomas

⁶ Manent, *Natural Law*, 121.

⁷ Manent, *Natural Law*, 117.

Aquinas to show that the desire for esteem is manifested in the desire for honor and for friendship and is rooted in a fundamental inclination to have certain knowledge of one's own goodness. Finally, in light of this analysis, I will suggest how Christians might best secure the true goods of honor, friendship, and the glory of a good conscience in the face of the ideology of esteem critiqued by Manent.

An Ideology of Equal Esteem: The Good Sought in the Flight from Law

*“Laissez-faire, laissez-passer—this is the simple but prodigiously seductive formula of modern freedom.”*⁸ Thus Manent summarizes the freedom from law sought in the dominant ideology of the West today, the “governing doctrine.” But I maintain that Manent’s simple formula does not do justice to the depth of his analysis. Manent’s own assessment of the right claims made according to the governing doctrine go beyond this formula of modern freedom. Manent begins his work advertent to “the Great Contradiction” of Western thought today by which human equality and human rights are affirmed as universal criteria of justice and yet regarding other cultures which violate human equality and human rights, judgment is withheld: “On the one hand, all human beings are equal; on the other hand, all ‘cultures’ have a right to equal respect, even those that violate human equality—for example, as happens in many cases, by keeping women in a subordinate position.”⁹ Manent observes that there is a certain logic underpinning this contradiction: if one takes human equality to entail equality of esteem, then to afford less esteem to one culture is to afford less esteem to its members, and therefore to violate the universal criterion of human equality with respect to merited esteem: “All cultures are equal because they are made up of human beings and it is human beings who give them life; if I belittle a given culture because that culture belittles women, then I belittle all the human beings that are members of that culture, and thus by my judgment I exhibit the very inequality that I had reproved and proposed to fight.”¹⁰ Notice that the claim at issue here is not a claim to non-interference, meaning a claim to *laissez-faire, laissez-passer*. The logic of the great contradiction is founded on a claim regarding the just distribution of a social good, namely, the good of esteem and recognition.

⁸ Manent, *Natural Law*, 87.

⁹ Manent, *Natural Law*, 4.

¹⁰ Manent, *Natural Law*, 4.

Making the proper distinction between positive and negative claim rights is essential to understanding the account of distributive justice those claim rights reflect. A negative claim right to some action is a claim that non-interference in the act is owed by certain third parties to the claimant—a claim to *laissez-faire, laissez-passer*. This is what the canonical tradition would call a *ius exigendi omissionem*, a right to claim the omission of any interfering action on the part of others.¹¹ Importantly, in some circumstances this right can be claimed against a political community for a shameful act, if for instance some sin is tolerated by human law due to some exigency of the common good.¹² A positive claim right to action is a claim that some positive assistance in the act is owed by certain third parties to the claimant. This positive claim right, in claiming that assistance is due, is at the same time a claim for positive authorization, since the debtors owe it to the claimant to make the act their own in some way by virtue of their assistance, becoming “coauthors” of the act. This assistance could take the form of positive endorsement, encouragement, or affirmation—important forms of social assistance that should not be discounted as principles of action and signs of authorization. The positive claim right is a *ius exigendi activam*, a right that claims more than *laissez-faire, laissez-passer*, and which is only properly claimed with respect to good acts. A positive claim right to action is a normative claim—it demands social recognition of the goodness, the honorability, of the action.

Manent acknowledges that the claims made according to the governing doctrine are positive claims of authorization rather than negative claims of toleration. Human rights are affirmed without any positive determination to specific goods, and “to declare human rights in a way that is perfectly indeterminate and actively resistant to determination is to grant to just anyone *the formal authorization to claim* whatever thing in the human world he judges or feels he has a right to.”¹³ Manent relates that it is aversion to exposure to judgment concerning one’s worthiness of esteem and honor that explains why the governing doctrine is not satisfied with mere toleration.

¹¹ See Basile Valuet’s analysis of subjective right in the canonical and manualist tradition in Basile Valuet, *Le droit à la liberté religieuse dans la tradition de l’Eglise* (Le Barroux: Sainte-Madeleine, 2005), 23–40.

¹² In analyzing claim rights, it is essential to identify the debtor and the creditor of what is claimed as due. Even though a negative claim right of non-interference in some sin might be made against the human political community, the same claim cannot be made against God.

¹³ Manent, *Natural Law*, 48 (emphasis mine).

This aversion further explains why even the mere authorization of particular actions falls short of the kind of esteem that is sought:

As a matter of fact, if we are doing or wish to do something, that presupposes that we could do or want to do something else. We cannot give an account of the choice we make, even in our own eyes, without reference to a rule, or rather in general to certain rules of diverse kinds and belonging to diverse registers. Every action and every plan of action confronts us with the question of the rule of the action and exposes us to the judgment of those close to us, of fellow citizens, or of our conscience. . . . To find ourselves under the law and exposed to judgment is what we refuse above all when we intend not only to have our rights respected but to define ourselves by our rights, rights *whose whole meaning resides in the authorization that they demand and promise*. The authorization of action does not include the rule of action, but it does not dispense us from seeking this rule. The authorization to do something, as extensive as it may be, does not deliver us from the law. In our frantic flight from law, in our principled refusal of law, *we covet an authorization that would suffice unto itself*, that would not require the complement of a personal search for the rule, however lazy or random our search might be. This is the point at which *the right to be all that we are or want to be* intervenes.¹⁴

Manent writes that the claim for authorization “to be all that we are or want to be” is motivated by a refusal to be exposed to judgment, but I maintain that this doesn’t capture the most important dynamic of what Manent is describing. The aversion he describes is not an aversion to being exposed to judgment per se. In fact, by claiming authorization, the subject is *demanding* judgment—a *positive* judgment. The exposure to judgment that the subject refuses is an exposure to the possibility of *negative* judgment—the possibility of being dishonored or shamed even in his own eyes. For this reason, the claim for authorization does not terminate in the authorization of particular actions, the authorization of which implies that the claimant has a reason to act rather than not to act, a reason which, when acknowledged, implies that the claimant could be susceptible to a negative judgment of esteem according to that reason.

The absolute freedom from negative judgments of esteem, the absolute freedom from shame, requires an authorization, a right, that suffices unto

¹⁴ Manent, *Natural Law*, 77 (emphasis mine).

itself and does not render the person vulnerable to judgment or evaluation according to some rule. This absolute freedom from shame is sought by rooting the positive claim right to authorization of agency in a more fundamental authorization of the passivity of the subject—it is the suffering or enjoyment of the individual that demands to be recognized and authorized and given a value that resists any negative evaluation by some law or rule:

The human being also ceases to be a rational animal confronted with the challenge of acting well, since reason is the commanding and legislating authority par excellence and the point of the law of rights is to strip all legitimacy from reason as commanding. Henceforth the human being, if he is still susceptible to definition, is a sentient or sensitive animal, an “I” qualified by the way he “feels” his life, or is “affected” by it, a closed circle of self-adhesion, a tautology of self-feeling from which no question proceeds and which can hear no question: the living-individual without either city or reason, ceaselessly busy reducing its being to what it feels of it and at the same time to gaining recognition for his being as he feels it.¹⁵

Since the individual seeks an unassailable recognition, authorization, esteem, and honor, what Manent characterizes as a flight from law should be understood as first and foremost a seeking-after. The flight from law is a search for a new, unassailable basis for honor and esteem, an esteem that is secure and can be unconditionally demanded. Theologically, we could see in this endeavor a certain rejection of the *status viatoris*, as the time for conversion and growth in moral dignity. The governing doctrine immanentizes the last judgment according to the most favorable terms imaginable, a judgment as secure as a tautology: if you do you, you can do no better; if you are you, then you can be no better.

Here we touch upon a contradiction even greater than “the Great Contradiction” Manent observes in the West today. On the one hand, the modern subject Manent describes claims to be the measure of his own dignity and worth, the standard of the esteem which he is owed. On the other hand, the modern subject claims a right to an esteem he cannot produce himself, manifesting a persistent dependence upon others to give him the esteem he craves. The modern subject denies any measure of judgment and yet craves and demands positive judgment. And herein lies the contradiction, because one cannot be both the measure and the object of judgment. To

¹⁵ Manent, *Natural Law*, 78.

hold someone in esteem is to testify that that person's existence is good and desirable. But as the rationale for that esteem is rendered more and more formless and inscrutable because entirely particular to the experience of the living-individual-right-bearer, the *ratio* of desirability is rendered more and more inscrutable. The statements "you are you" and "you are good" begin to converge. Once the dissolution is complete, esteem can no longer be given or received. All affirmation becomes indication. Absent any *ratio* or rule of desirability, there is no way to apprehend being *qua* good. And yet the hunger to have my goodness affirmed remains. I do not need someone to tell me that I exist. That is not in question. I need someone to tell me that I am good. The question of my goodness is an existential question that my contingency and my free agency do not allow me to avoid.

In sum, Manent's description of the governing doctrine suggests that it is fundamentally motivated by a desire for unassailable esteem even more than it is motivated by a desire for power. This observation suggests the need for a supplement to Manent's positive proposal regarding the recovery of practical reason and common action. In his account of the anthropological foundations of the governing doctrine, Manent highlights the importance of the Hobbesian reduction of universal human motives to the desire for power. Since this doctrine recognizes only one common motive, a motive that is purely formal and contentless, fulfilled in the pursuit of an indeterminate number of concrete goods, law loses its intelligibility and the bases for common action and common life are disrupted. For this reason, Manent's positive proposal for reclaiming the intelligibility of law and common action involves recovering the heterogeneity of human motives along Aristotelian-Thomistic lines: the practical motives of the useful, the pleasant, and the honorable. But if the desire for an unassailable esteem is the motivating impulse for this practical ideology, as I have argued, then Manent's proposal will need to be supplemented with the recovery of the true bases for that esteem. Having identified the good to which this practical ideology is inclined, I will now turn to the thought of Thomas Aquinas to understand the natural inclination for honor, friendship, and glory, and how the unassailable esteem sought by modern freedom might be properly attained.

Honor, Friendship, and Glory: Thomas Aquinas on the Desire for Esteem

It is common in contemporary social psychology to distinguish the desire for esteem into two related but fundamentally distinct desires: the desire for

status and the desire for social belongingness.¹⁶ “Status,” also called regard or prestige, is defined as a recognition of one’s instrumental social value which elicits respect, admiration, and voluntary deference.¹⁷ Social belongingness, also called acceptance, relational value, affiliation, or inclusion, denotes the value that others place on being in relationship with an individual.¹⁸ If status tracks relative position and differentiation within a vertical hierarchy, social belongingness tracks the degree of social union and identification. Employing Thomistic mereology, we might say that belonging is a recognition of how essential the end of a part is to the end of a whole (i.e., how integral the part is to the whole), and status is a recognition of how essential the activity of the part is to achieving the end of the whole (i.e., how beneficial the influence of the part is to other parts within the whole). Esteem can be understood then as signaling status and belonging, and within this literature, self-esteem typically involves the ability to recognize these signals and to track one’s status and belonging within a social context.¹⁹

¹⁶ For an exemplary literature review, see Cameron Anderson, John Angus D. Hildreth, and Laura Howland, “Is the Desire for Status a Fundamental Human Motive? A Review of the Empirical Literature,” *Psychological Bulletin* 41, no. 3 (2015): 574–601.

¹⁷ See Anderson, Hildreth, and Howland, “Is the Desire for Status a Fundamental Human Motive?,” 575. When used in its strictest sense, “status” refers to social rank within a prestige hierarchy, rather than rank within a dominance hierarchy, the former being stratified by voluntary deference to socially beneficial qualities and the latter being stratified by fear of coercive power. Evolutionary biologists and psychologists have theorized that each route to social rank benefits social animals in different ways: prestige fosters cultural transmission of socially advantageous habits by drawing attention to exemplars and motivating imitation, whereas dominance aids in conflict resolution and in coordinating responses against external threats. See: Joseph Henrich and Francisco J. Gil-White, “The Evolution of Prestige: Freely Conferred Deference as a Mechanism for Enhancing the Benefits of Cultural Transmission,” *Evolution and Human Behavior* 22, no. 3 (2001):165–96; Joey T. Cheng, Jessica L. Tracy, Tom Foulsham, Alan Kingstone, and Joseph Henrich, “Two Ways to the Top: Evidence That Dominance and Prestige are Distinct Yet Viable Avenues to Social Rank and Influence,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 104, no. 1 (2013): 103–25; Mark Van Vugt and Jennifer E. Smith, “A Dual Model of Leadership and Hierarchy: Evolutionary Synthesis,” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 23, no. 11 (2019): 952–67.

¹⁸ See Anderson, Hildreth, and Howland, “Is the Desire for Status a Fundamental Human Motive?,” 576; See also Roy F. Baumeister and Mark R. Leary, “The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation,” *Psychological Bulletin* 117, no. 3 (1995): 497–29.

¹⁹ Some theorists distinguish self-esteem into two component parts as they relate to the fundamental desire for status and for social belongingness: sociometer theory describes the ability to track one’s social inclusion and belongingness; hierometer theory describes the ability to track one’s position within a social hierarchy and the “fit” within that

Thomas Aquinas has his own way of conceptualizing this fundamental human desire for esteem that bears some remarkable similarities with the literature of social psychology, especially in consideration of the goods of friendship and honor. In his taxonomy of human goods, Thomas distinguishes three different genera of goods: external goods, goods of the body, and goods of the soul.²⁰ Among external goods, honor and friendship are the greatest that can be desired.²¹ Honor is defined as a testimony to excellence, where excellence denotes some relative superiority of goodness.²² The testimony of honor signals both the excellence of the one honored and the reverence of the one who honors, where reverence denotes a kind of disposition of voluntary submission caused by a filial fear, a fear not of the revered person's coercive power, but rather a fear of offending or being separated from the revered person.²³ This reverence motivates the testimony of honor which signals a desire for communion with the honored person and benefits the honored person by inciting him to greater excellence, giving him greater certitude about his own goodness, and by inducing others to think well of him, to desire communion with him through reverence, and to imitate his excellence.²⁴

Honor also has an important social effect of ordering the affections of

position, so as not to overreach and fail a status contest (Nikhila Mahadevan, Aiden P. Gregg, and Constantine Sedikides, "Is Self-Regard a Sociometer or a Hierometer? Self-Esteem Tracks Status and Inclusion, Narcissism Tracks Status," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 116, no. 3 [2019]: 444–66).

- ²⁰ See, for example, *Summa theologiae* [ST] II-II, q. 104, a. 3, corp.; *In IV sent.* d. 15, q. 1, a. 4, ad qa. 3.
- ²¹ In some places Thomas reckons honor to be the highest external good and in other places friendship has first place. This is likely due to the ambivalence of friendship, which can be reckoned as either an external or spiritual good depending upon if one considers the good on the part of the friend or on the part of the habit of friendship. See *In II sent.*, d. 42, q. 2, a. 4, corp.; *ST* II-II, q. 131, a. 1, obj. 1 (although it is stated here in an objection, Thomas's reply does not dispute the premise that honor is the greatest among external goods); q. 74, a. 2, corp.; *In IX eth.*, lec. 10, no. 1888.
- ²² See *ST* I-II, q. 2, a. 2, corp. See also II-II, q. 103, a. 1, corp.; q. 131, a. 1, corp.; q. 144, a. 3, corp.; *In II sent.* d. 42, q. 2, a. 4, corp.; *Summa contra gentiles* [SCG] III, ch. 28.
- ²³ See *ST* II-II, q. 131, a. 1, corp.; q. 81, a. 2, ad 1. Thomas's account of the reverence given to God applies more generally to reverence held towards parents or to any excellent person. To revere God is an act of the Holy Spirit's gift of fear, a filial fear of offending or being separated from him. A similar fear of offending or being separated from excellent persons motivates the disposition of submission characteristic of reverence in general.
- ²⁴ See *ST* II-II, q. 91, a. 1, corp. Here Thomas speaks of the ends of praise, but in this context he is considering praise as honor given by way of words. The ends of praise enumerated here are also ends of honor given by means of different signs. For reverence as motive and end of honor, see also q. 103, a. 1, ad 1.

others to the honored person such that their affective disposition is also one of benevolence and devotion, a readiness to serve and to aid in the diffusion of the honorable good. This affective ordering caused by honor gives rise to a social cohesion facilitating common action, a practical and social end mediated through a more immediate cognitive end, namely, that others might know the witness's good opinion of the one honored. This promulgation of good opinion increases the *fama*—the renown and reputation—of the honored person. Depending on the strength of the credibility of the witness (a credibility strengthened by the witness's own good *fama*), this testimony of honor can cause others to adopt the same opinion. In this way, honor builds on honor and itself facilitates the giving of honor. And this good opinion now widespread gives the honored person a resplendent reputation joined with praise and approbation, what Thomas, following Cicero and Augustine, calls glory.²⁵

For Thomas, honor is an external good of the honored that properly exists in those who honor.²⁶ One's honor endures after an actual act of honorific testimony is given, since the reverent dispositions remain in those who give honor and in those who assent to the testimony. Thomas refers to this habitual honor sometimes as reverence (denoting the affective habitual disposition to fear to give offense and to be separated from the revered) and sometimes as *fama* (denoting the cognitive habit of good opinion which gives rise to reverence).²⁷ Suffice it to say that one's honor can persist even when actual testimony isn't being given, such that honor denotes a kind of prestige status.

While Thomas's account of the good of honor tracks with the status aspect of esteem, his account of friendship sheds light on the belonging aspect of esteem. The identification and union effected through friendship is best illuminated by considering how the will, the rational appetite, is changed by a friend. The first change that any good causes in the appetite is a certain adaptation to and aptitude for the good, an adaptation which Thomas calls love (*amor*).²⁸ The good imparts a certain form to the appetite, an appetitive form or complacency (*complacencia*). Whereas apprehensive

²⁵ Following Cicero, Thomas defines glory as *fama cum laude*, renown with praise, and following Augustine (misattributed to Ambrose), as *clara cum laude notitia*, clear knowledge with praise. See *SCG* III, ch. 29. For a detailed treatment of Thomas's conception of glory, see Francisco J. Romero Carrasquillo, "The Role of *Gloria* in Aquinas' Philosophy of Religion," *Acta Philosophica*, 23, no. 2 (2014): 311–30, esp. 315. For Aquinas sources, see Cicero, *De inventione rhetorica* 2.55, and Augustine, *Contra Maximinum* 2.13.

²⁶ See Aquinas *ST* I-II, q. 2, a. 2, sc.

²⁷ For example, see *ST* II-II, q. 74, a. 2; q. 131, a. 1, corp.

²⁸ See *ST* I-II, q. 26, a. 2, corp.

form, which informs the apprehensive powers, is a form of representational presence, the form the good initially imparts to the appetite is the form of appetitive absence—a lack or a wanting. As an appetitive form, the form initially imparted by the beloved is an appetitive void that yearns to be filled by that which causes and fits the void. Already this change wrought in the appetite causes a certain kind of union between the appetite and the appetible, between the lover and that which is loved, because the formal void is a void discovered in the lover himself: “Union pertains to love inasmuch as, through the complacency of the appetite, the lover relates to that which he loves just as he relates to himself or to something belonging to him.”²⁹

The lover relates to the appetitive void of love either as to himself (e.g., as a missing part of himself) or as something belonging to the perfection of himself (e.g., as something perfecting some part of himself). These two ways in which the lover relates to what he loves correlate with two tendencies of love, one which is primary, namely the love of friendship (*amor amicitiae*), and another which is secondary, namely the love of concupiscence (*amor concupiscentiae*). Primarily, the lover relates to the beloved as he relates to himself, as another self. This is the love of friendship, which we might call absolute love (or *amor simpliciter*). Secondarily, the lover relates to what he loves as something belonging to him as ordered to his perfection. This is the love of concupiscence, which we might call relative love (or *amor secundum quid*).³⁰ That which is loved secondarily and *secundum quid* is loved for the sake of something else, namely, for the sake of what is loved primarily and *simpliciter*.³¹ Secondary love depends on primary love. The appetitive forms of primary love stand as matter for the appetitive forms of secondary love.

These two tendencies of love permit a distinction between two kinds of honorable goods. For Thomas, that which is desirable for its own sake is said to have the *honestum* formality of goodness—it is an honorable good, worthy of testimony to its excellence among goods as good *per se* and not on account of something else. But in light of the distinction between the love of friendship and the love of concupiscence (what I have called primary and secondary love), we can distinguish between two kinds of honorable goods: one kind which is desirable for its own sake qua perfective accident (e.g., virtue and virtuous operation) and one kind which is desirable for its own sake qua substance (e.g., my friend and my self). Although Thomas

²⁹ ST I-II, q. 26, a. 2, ad 2. All translations from the Latin are my own.

³⁰ Thomas does not employ this terminology of love *simpliciter* and love *secundum quid*, but I find it helpful to denote how *amor concupiscentiae* always presupposes and is relative to some *amor amicitiae*.

³¹ ST I-II, q. 26, a. 4, corp.

does not use the terms, we might even call the former *honestum accidentalis* and the latter *honestum substantialis*.

The love of friendship causes an affective union with my friend, such that my friend is truly loved as another self for his own sake as an *honestum substantialis*. When perfected, the love of friendship habituates the will such that the center of affectivity is neither myself nor my friend's self, but rather *our-self*. Friendship admits of degrees, of course, and those loved in a civic friendship, a familial friendship, or a conjugal friendship may have different degrees and different kinds of affective union, but some identification and union is essential to every friendship. All friendship is constituted by a sharing in common, a *communicatio*, and this sharing is caused in the first place by the identification effected by the love of friendship.³²

The belonging proper to friendship is further evidenced by the three characteristic works of friendship which Thomas adopts from Aristotle: *concordia*, *benevolentia*, and *beneficentia*. *Concordia* refers to a congruence of estimation and affection that makes *benevolentia* and *beneficentia* possible. This congruence of affections especially regards important things to be done such that friends can will the same goods and delight in a common life together. For the truest form of friendship (and the only form truly worthy of the name), the friendship of honor, this concord must include a common estimation of what is truly honorable and excellent. This concord facilitates benevolence, since knowing what is good, I can will the good of my friend, who in turn can recognize my good-willing, since we share a common vision of the good. Benevolent good-willing then leads to actual well-doing and benefaction.³³

For Thomas, honor is ordered to friendship, but the desire for both bears upon a more fundamental desire to have certain knowledge of my goodness, a desire that bears remarkable similarities to the desire motivating the governing doctrine critiqued by Manent. Honor is ordered to friendship, since a good reputation disposes to friendship while a bad reputation disposes to enmity.³⁴ Recall that reverence denotes a fear of giving offense or a fear of separation. Positively, this reverence reflects a certain devotion, a readiness to facilitate the operation of the honored person, and a kind

³² See *In VIII eth.*, lec. 9, no. 1657.

³³ Here we can observe that honor and friendship both involve a recognition of excellence and facilitate common action, but in two distinct ways. Honor unites an inferior to the action of a superior through reverential deference, uniting agents in common action as an instrumental cause participates the action of a principal cause. Friendship unites the action of friends by ordering multiple principal causes to a common end.

³⁴ See *ST II-II*, q. 74, a. 2, ad 2.

of initial affective union with the honored party in esteeming a common excellence. In this way, the reverence caused by your honor and reputation manifests and reflects an initial *concordia*, an agreement concerning the most important things to be done and the measure of the excellence of action. Reverence likewise motivates a form of *benevolentia*, namely, a will that the honored person exist and that his excellent operation may be unhindered. And the giving of honor is itself also a form of *beneficientia*, insofar as the testimony of honor benefits me by allowing me to delight in my goodness, to be incited to even greater excellence, and to benefit from a diffusion of reverence. This establishes a communication of goods, a sharing in common, which constitutes the basis of friendship.

While honor is desirable for the sake of friendship as dispositive thereto, it is also desirable for another fundamental reason. Thomas teaches that, in seeking honor from the wise and the virtuous, people seek a spiritual good thereby, namely, “to confirm their own opinion about their own goodness, and therefore they rejoice in themselves on account of the fact that they are good, as it were, believing the judgment of good men who, by the very act in which they honor them, seem to say that they are good.”³⁵ Honor is desirable for friendship, but also because it is natural for human beings to desire to have a firm opinion of their own goodness.

This fundamental desire is also implicitly and more perfectly affirmed in the love of friendship. The desire to be good and to know that I am good is at once a desire to be honorable, to be an *honestum substantialis*, to be worthy of being another self, which is to say, to be worthy of existing as an end, not just of my own willing, but of the will of another. To be honorable in such a way opens up the possibility for an our-self to be the end of a common will, making it possible for me to delight in my friend delighting in me for *our* sake, multiplying the good in which I delight. But certain knowledge of this kind of worthiness cannot be self-generated. It belongs to the very structure of my will to will my own good for its own sake, and so it is more excellent and a greater sign of my goodness for me to be the chosen end of the will of another that might choose otherwise. To know my excellence as an end for another depends upon the testimony of others, the testimony of potential friends and the testimony of actual friends given most convincingly through the acts of *benevolentia*, *concordia*, and *beneficientia*, which manifest the love of friendship and my goodness as an honorable good.

The good of having a certain opinion about one’s own goodness is what Thomas calls the *gloria bonae conscientiae*, the closest conceptual counterpart

³⁵ *In VIII eth.*, lec. 8, no. 1643.

to the psychologist's self-esteem. But for Thomas, this certain opinion is not merely self-estimation; it is a form of glory, a *clara cum laude notitia*, a clear knowledge with praise. And as glory, this good involves a manifestation and a testimony of my goodness. As Thomas explains, it is testimony similar to and yet distinct from one's *fama*: "These two, conscience and *fama*, in this way are constituted towards each other, in that conscience is to be preferred to *fama*; because the testimony of conscience is in the sight of God, but the testimony of *fama* pertains to human favor."³⁶ The *gloria bonae conscientiae* is a testimony in the sight of God, or we might say, it is an estimation of God's estimation of my good. It testifies to the judgment of God, and the desire for this *gloria bonae conscientiae* manifests a fundamental desire for a positive universal judgment regarding my good, to be measured by goodness itself and not to be found wanting, to receive approbation from the most perfect witness that the contingency of my being and agency is in some sense necessary for the delight of perfect being and pure act.

To know that I am good is to know that I am desirable, and not just desirable as an instrumental good, but desirable as another self, desirable for union with the love of friendship, such that the good of another and my good might become our good. By virtue of sanctifying grace and the supernatural virtue of charity, this love of friendship has been made possible even with God. And when the sanctified soul enters into glory, we might speculate that the beatific vision of God is beatifying in part because the intellectual operation by which God himself is apprehended is itself a co-operation, a *convivere* of friends, a theandric act, by which the beatified soul knows God's glory and is in turn glorified, seeing the approbation of the Father in seeing the Father.³⁷ Understood in this way, we might even dare to say that the divine judgment is not just a means to beatitude, a threshold crossed and left behind once the vision is given; but rather that the divine judgment is essential to beatitude itself, constituting how the beatified soul now sees itself through the *clara cum laude notitia* of God, the *gloria bonae conscientiae* now illuminated by the perfect knowledge of God's own testimony.

³⁶ *De virtutibus*, q. 3, a. 2, corp.

³⁷ I am not aware of Thomas making such a claim. I think such an eschatological vision is consonant with his principles, but I do not claim to rely on his authority in this speculation.

A Christian Response to the Ideology of Equal Esteem: Courageous Testimony to the Love and Noble Commands of Christ

The desire for certain esteem which motivates the modern flight from law is a fundamental human desire recognized by Thomas and contributes to the desirability of honor and friendship. Seeing the governing doctrine critiqued by Manent as an ideology of equal esteem clarifies both what it threatens and how it might be surpassed by a Christian alternative. In some sense, the governing doctrine harbors the seeds of its own destruction, since in seeking to render esteem unassailable, the governing doctrine destroys the interpersonal and communal basis of esteem itself. The individual futilely aspires to be both the measure and the object of the testimony of excellence.

For a time, this self-destruction might be delayed as mutual recognition lingers under the guise of the old order of honor, as is sometimes in evidence when the demand for identity authorization is hailed as courageous. But as objective measures of excellence and honor are torn down as so many obstacles to esteem and inclusion, the demand for recognition may gradually lose its semblance of courage. It seems likely to me that the ideology of equal esteem remains in a kind of parasitic dependence upon the old order of honor in this way. If so, there may be strong incentives to seek novel threats to esteem, since it is in the face of such threats that courage may be manifest. This dynamic could also explain why the commitment to objective measures of dishonor remain remarkably salient. As the social consensus of esteem is undermined, a consensus of resentment and reproach might be expected to take its place. A *concordia* of resentment takes the place of a *concordia* of honor as opposition to a common enemy provides the last redoubt of friendship and belonging once mutual esteem in the pursuit of a common good has been abandoned.

I concur with Manent in the need to reclaim the heterogeneity of human motivation—the useful, the pleasant, and the honorable—in order to base our common life in mutual recognition of the kinds of goods that actually motivate people’s actions, but I would propose that Thomas points us to a yet more pressing need. The governing doctrine—what I have called the ideology of equal esteem—is motivated by a fundamental human desire for unassailable esteem and borrows its appeal in part from the virtue of courage. Efforts to restore *concordia* regarding the honorable must respond to these two hallmarks of the ideology. Christians have been given to know the true basis for unassailable esteem: that the Son of God died for all, though we were yet sinners, and all are potential members of his body as his love of friendship is extended to all. As Thomas teaches, this gift of grace makes it

possible for any Christian to esteem any other person as better than himself: "There is something found in every man on account of which he may be reputed superior to ourselves, according to which Philippians 2 states: 'In humility judge each other superior. And in this way also, all should be ready to honor each other.'"³⁸ In humility, we truthfully acknowledge our own defects and recognize God's gifts in every other person, including the particular and incommunicable love of friendship with which Christ died for that person.³⁹ The love of Christ provides an unassailable basis for my own self-estimation in his sight, an unassailable core to the *gloria bonae conscientiae*, which provides at the same time a basis for me to give unconditional esteem to others.

Of course, in affirming the universal esteem of Christ, the Christian affirms at the same time his commands which communicate an order of honorable goods that must be received in reverent submission to sustain the love of friendship with Christ and establish true *concordia*, *benevolentia*, and *beneficentia* with God. This is the order of honorable goods so often the object of reproach according to the ideology of equal esteem. But herein lies an opportunity for the Christian to manifest the courage implicitly recognized by the ideological opponent. In giving testimony to the nobility of God's law, to the excellence of virtue, to the dignity of asceticism and self-sacrifice, the Christian may be reproached as upholding obstacles to universal esteem, but the very act of courage lays claim to an important source of the opposing ideology's appeal. While debate, dialogue, and consensus-building certainly have their place, there is no substitute for the act of testimony: to stake your credibility on the honorable by bearing it witness with reverence and devotion and grateful approbation.

The privatization of honor is the greatest threat to honor itself, because the recognition of the honorable is largely dependent upon public testimony. The recognition of what is good, excellent, and honorable suffers when its true witnesses lack the courage to bear it witness in the face of false human opinion and the risk of public shame. If the governing doctrine is as dominant as Manent fears, the price paid to give this honor will likely come at the cost of worldly honor, status, and esteem. But in contests of honor like we face today, honor must die to be reborn. It is in losing honor that we will find it. And since the desire for honor, friendship, and esteem is so fundamental, it is Christian friendship based on a true *concordia* of estimation and affection for what is truly honorable that will sustain our collective witness

³⁸ *ST* II-II, q. 103, a. 2, ad 3.

³⁹ See *ST* II-II, q. 161, a. 3, corp.

and give us the courage to pay that price. The necessary Christian response to the errors of this age is arguably the same as it has been in every age: to proclaim the love of Christ crucified and the nobility of his commands, and to be willing to suffer in fidelity to our proclamation. N.V

Patricia Kelly, *Ressourcement Theology*: A Review Essay

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Introduction

Although now over seventy years in the past, the theological and ecclesiastical events of the 1940s, most often styled under some banner akin to “the crisis over the *nouvelle théologie*,” leading up to the promulgation of the encyclical *Humani Generis*, retain a currency and interest to this very day. No doubt, the later influence of many of the so-called *nouveaux théologiens* leading up to, during, and following the Second Vatican Council has contributed to the continued currency of their thought and the debates connected to it. Numerous monographs continue to be written concerning themes of “ressourcement,” theological reform, and engagement with the world, all of which were dear to many of those who were embroiled in the philosophical and theological controversies of the 1930s and 1940s. Moreover, increased interest in certain long-buried conservative Thomist thinkers from this same era has led to renewed consideration regarding the concerns that they expressed at the time. In fact, it would seem that today, in 2022, the evaluation expressed in *Nineteenth Century Scholasticism: The Search for a Unitary Method* by Fr. Gerald McCool (from a perspective rather different from my own) remains true, as the Church continues to live in the midst of an ongoing crisis of modernity that places us in tight continuity with so much of the past several centuries of European Christian intellectual history:

In contemporary Catholic theology, the relationship between apologetics, or fundamental theology, and speculative theology is as much

an issue as it was in the nineteenth century. . . . And in contemporary Catholic theology, the relation between positive theology and speculative theology still remains a problem whose solution demands the use of a coherent system of epistemology and metaphysics. . . . The contemporary debate over theological method is simply another phase in the dialectical movement of Catholic theology's response to post-Enlightenment thought from the beginning of the nineteenth century through Vatican I, *Aeterni Patris*, the modernist crisis, between-the-wars Thomism, the New Theology controversy, and Vatican II up to the present.¹

The great crisis of the 1940s—whether we name it *nouvelle théologie*, after the reform-advocates of the era, or *dialogue théologique*, in honor of the Toulouse Dominicans' attempt to present a Scholastic position between, on the one hand, Fr. Chenu's and Congar's view of what the Saulchoir should be, and, on the other hand, the more-conservative Thomism of Frs. Garrigou-Lagrange, Gagnebet, and Gillon in Rome²—was and remains, in the words of Étienne Fouilloux, “the only theological debate of real [*quelque*] importance, at least in France, from the condemnation of Modernism to the time of the Second Vatican Council.”³ And like any truly great event or crisis in intellectual-spiritual culture, it remains with us today in its fruits, both resolved and unresolved.

Thus, when a new work is published dedicated to these events and the figures involved therein, the Catholic intellectual world should take heed, for our own self-understanding—whatever *sui iuris* Church in which we are ascribed—is at stake. Hence, the arrival of the collection of translations by Dr. Patricia Kelly of the University of St. Andrews is an event to be welcomed, even if elements of its publication also give rise to concern. This volume, *Ressourcement Theology: A Sourcebook*,⁴ gathering together essays by various parties involved on both sides of the specifically Francophone debates over theological method and truth that came to a head in the 1940s, provides the reading public with a dual “service”: it presents in English a

¹ Gerald A. McCool, *Nineteenth Century Scholasticism: The Search for a Unitary Method*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), 15.

² See Étienne Fouilloux, *Un Église en quête de liberté* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2006), 116.

³ Étienne Fouilloux, “Dialogue théologique? (1946–1948),” in *Saint Thomas au XXe siècle: actes du colloque centenaire de la Revue thomiste; Toulouse, 25–28 Mars 1993*, ed. Serge-Thomas Bonino (Paris: Éditions Saint-Paul, 1994), 153–95, at 153. Unless otherwise stated, all translations in this review are my own.

⁴ Patricia Kelly, *Ressourcement Theology: A Source Book* (London: T&T Clark, 2020).

number of texts not heretofore available, while also, unfortunately, bearing witness to the academic prejudices lingering against the authors writing from Rome and Toulouse concerning certain veins of thought in theological methodology during the inter-war and immediate post-war era. Although my review will be somewhat negative on certain points—both for technical textual reasons and because of the slanted narrative presented by Dr. Kelly—I wish only the best to her and her work, hoping that the concerns that I voice can serve as a springboard to dialogue, not retrenchment within respective philosophico-theological bunkers.

Before beginning my review in earnest, one final cautionary statement should be registered. Together with Dr. Jon Kirwan, I am the author of a forthcoming collection of translations of texts related to this debate, in particular the various pieces written by Frs. Garrigou-Lagrange, Labourdette, Marie-Joseph Nicolas, and Raymond-Léopold Bruckberger, O.P. Our work, along with the historical-speculative introduction that accompanies it, takes a very different approach to these events, particularly seeking to emphasize the peaceful overtures made by Fr. Labourdette in seeking to have open dialogue with his Jesuit interlocutors in particular. No doubt, our own research and conclusions will give my own review its own slant, for there is no reviewer who writes from an anonymous scholarly “nowhere” position. Nonetheless, sharing in the crooked timber of humanity, I sincerely look for fruitful discussion to be the outcome of this review, above all so that Dr. Kelly’s own work might bear positive fruit. In that spirit, I will now turn to the details of her work.

In the following two sections, I will voice concerns that can be organized into four main registers: (1) an open anti-Scholastic bias that marks the very organization of the work; (2) the way that this polemical orientation also disorients the logical structure of the volume; (3) the fact that the volume reproduces several articles that were already available from other translators; (4) translation issues.

Structural-Historical Evaluations

Dr. Kelly’s collection is divided into three sections, each accompanied by an introduction providing brief biographical and historical details about each piece’s author and the article in question. The sections are entitled “The Sources of Theology,” “Attacks on the ‘New Theology,’” and “Further Thoughts on *Ressourcement*.” Structurally, this breakout is likely a bit confusing for the reader who is not familiar with the history of the exchanges undertaken in the articles included in the volume. This is most readily seen

if one considers the chronology and historical situation of the works in the first two sections in particular:

Part 1: The Sources of Theology

Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P., “Theology” (1937): This text is drawn from Chenu’s address as regent of studies, published privately as *Une école de théologie: le Saulchoir* and placed on the index in 1942.

Henri Bouillard, S.J., “Conversion and Grace in Aquinas” (1944): The conclusion to Bouillard’s published dissertation, *Conversion et grâce chez S. Thomas d’Aquin. Étude historique*.

Jean-Marie Le Blond, S.J., “The Analogy of Truth: A Philosopher’s Reflection on a Theological Controversy” (1947): A text written as a philosophical defense of Bouillard, articulating a metaphysical-epistemological view of the transcendentals owing much to transcendental Thomism (or something epistemologically very similar, whether inspired by Joseph Maréchal, Pierre Rousselot, or even Maurice Blondel)

Henri de Lubac, S.J., “Supernatural and Superadded” (1946): A selection from De Lubac’s work *Surnaturel*, arguing that the notion of being “superadded to nature,” as introduced into the theology of grace, influenced and changed the notion of supernaturality as it was traditionally understood by most pre-Scholastic thinkers.

Jean Daniélou, S.J., “Current Trends in Religious Thought” (1946): An article devoted to themes in ressourcement and engagement with contemporary thought.

Anonymous (Henri de Lubac⁵), “Response to ‘The Sources of Theology’”⁶ (1946): A response authored in response to

⁵ For the attribution of this infamous article to de Lubac, see: Fouilloux, “Dialogue,” 174; Antonio Russo, *Henri de Lubac: teologia e dogma nella storia, l’influsso di Blondel* (Rome: Studium, 1990), 379; Aidan Nichols, “Thomism and the *Nouvelle Théologie*,” *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 1–19, at 10.

⁶ The title to this article also should have been synchronized with the title of the

Fr. Michel Labourdette's "Theology and its Sources"; the response defends Frs. De Lubac, Daniélou, Bouillard, Hans Urs von Balthasar, S.J., and Gaston Fessard, S.J.

Part 2: Attacks on the "New Theology"

Pietro Parente, "New Tendencies in Theology" (1942): A very brief Roman response (perhaps the first using the expression "new theology"), though directly in the context of the 1930s texts by Frs. Chenu and Louis Charlier, O.P.

Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., "Where Is the 'New Theology' Going?" (1946): The infamous article warning of a purported reviviscence of modernism witnessed in certain contemporary works.

Marie-Michel Labourdette, O.P., "Theology and its Sources" (1946): A review article commenting on the first ten volumes of the collections *Théologie* and *Sources chrétiennes*.

Marie-Michel Labourdette, O.P., and Marie-Joseph Nicolas, O.P., "The Analogy of Truth and the Unity of the Theological Method" (1947): A lengthy critical response to the article by Le Blond, outlining what the authors present as the true Thomist approach to historical relativity.

I will revisit the third section at the end of this portion of my review, for it is of less concern for our purposes than is the content of these first two parts.

Before considering the content of these sections, it is useful to note the polemical posturing of the work's outline. Whereas the first section is devoted to "The Sources of Theology," the second section receives the

Labourdette article in section 2, there translated as "Theology and its Sources." The current reviewer has done much work translating and is well aware that this kind of discrepancy can happen all too readily in the course of working. Although I personally think that the original French should not be translated as "the Sources of Theology," given that Fr. Labourdette is concerned with *the nature* of theology *itself* as well as *the sources* used in theological reflection, I personally allow the translator a fringe for such interpretation for the sake of euphony, even where I would disagree. But, as for the discrepancy, it seems that Dr. Kelly would have benefitted from copy editors who might have helped her to catch something that understandably seems to have escaped her eye while heeding other translational concerns.

polemically inclined title, “Attacks on ‘the New Theology.’” This polemical slant, which is variously echoed in Kelly’s introductory sections, implicitly (and, the present reviewer would argue, explicitly at times) presents the figures gathered herein as reformist “white hats” and retrenched conservative “black hats,” reacting Vichy-style to the secularism of turn-of-the-century France.⁷ This oppositional narrative is the generally received interpretation of these events. In the face of the historical facts, it remains only partially fair, for while it is true that Frs. Garrigou-Lagrange, Labourdette, and Nicolas expressed various concerns in response to volumes being published in the *Théologie* series, as well as the introductions and notes to texts in the first ten volumes of *Sources chrétiennes*, there was no united flank looking to brazenly attack the authors in question.⁸

Although Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange did not flinch from noting the risk of “modernism” in Fr. Bouillard’s notion of dogmatic development, he explicitly did so as a theologian, not an ecclesiastical judge.⁹ His repeated insistence, across the course of many articles (themselves not given sufficient recognition by Kelly in her introductory observations), is almost wholly devoted to the theory of speculative truth and the question of dogmatic development. Although repetitive, his “attack” is solely looking for Bouillard to respond to a rather direct question: If notions (which are the necessary components of our judgments, furnishing the latter with their subjects and predicates) used in dogmatic statements can intrinsically change, how is it that dogmatic statements (which are expressed in propositional form¹⁰) do not ultimately change when their notions change in the way that Bouillard proposes? Perhaps one could critique the “Old Dominican” for not going

⁷ See Kelly, *Ressourcement Theology*, 7. Although Kelly somewhat charitably presents the conservative Francophone temptation toward Vichy-style *intégrisme* in light of the experience of turn-of-century anti-clericalism, the connection (along with all the political connotations of the collaborationist regime) should be handled with *great* care, given the nuance needed for understanding the various positions held by people during this lamentable period of Catholic history.

⁸ Some discussion of this history can be found in Matthew K. Miner, “*Humani Generis* and the Nature of Theology: A Stereoscopic View from Rome and Toulouse,” *Saint Anselm Journal* 16, no. 2 (2021): 1–35. A fuller discussion will be presented in the forthcoming volume by Kirwan and Miner.

⁹ Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, “Vérité et immutabilité du dogme,” *Angelicum* 24, no. 2/3 (1947): 124–39, at 136: “A theologian is not forbidden to say that, to his eyes, a given new position leads to heresy and even that it seems to him to be heretical. He only says this from the perspective of theological science and its deductions, without *authoritatively* speaking like a judge in an ecclesiastical tribunal.”

¹⁰ Obviously, this is not the place to take up all the various methodological issues in need of consideration for a full theology of revelation.

deeper to the root of the significant epistemological difference separating himself from Bouillard (and Fr. Le Blond), but, what one cannot do is say that Garrigou-Lagrange launched a kind of wholesale attack, whatever might have been the title and rhetorical excesses of his first article in a lengthy series of texts ultimately devoted to the question of speculative truth and dogmatic development.

But we might go further still. This section title becomes an *utter* fabrication when it is applied to Fr. Labourdette's "Theology and its Sources," especially when this text is read in its definitive form as published in the volume *Dialogue théologique*, which I will discuss below.¹¹ To any unbiased eyes, Fr. Labourdette bends over backwards¹² to laud the work being done in the two series mentioned above. Although he notes his concerns regarding a perceived depreciation of Scholasticism and an overly zealous attempt to present new texts (in *Sources chrétiennes*) with a ready inflection toward contemporary relevance,¹³ he takes immense pains to retain an irenic tone in the exchange.

As I have already hinted, a further remark might be registered concerning the historical-thematic organization of Dr. Kelly's volume. Although all the articles gathered here are part of the long historical arc from the 1930s to the time of *Humani Generis*, technically there are three different strands presented here, and even then, only in part. First, the Chenu and Parente articles ultimately are connected to a series of publications and Roman-magisterial interventions from the middle of the 1930s through the 1942 indexing of Chenu's *Une école* and Charlier's *Essai sur le problème théologique*. This context, which would also engage other authors (e.g., Frs. Marie-Rosaire Gagnebet, O.P., and Charles Boyer, S.J.), is not sufficiently established in Kelly's volume. Although she cites Jürgen Mettepenning's study, which contains details concerning these events,¹⁴ her own comments

¹¹ Moreover, the reader should consult the recently published review article by Dr. Jon Kirwan (*New Blackfriars* 103 [2022]: 700–703), where he points out certain translational issues that unfortunately (and, we argue, incorrectly) render Fr. Labourdette's tone to be that of a judge in a tribunal—something he explicitly denies, both in the original French article and in his follow-up comments.

¹² See Fouilloux, "Dialogue théologique," 155: "'Theology and its Sources' is anything but polemical: the tone is meant to be modest, serene, and even explicitly benevolent."

¹³ Thus, here too, it is unfortunate that Dr. Kelly did not thematically consider the missiological debates ongoing during the time period as well. See the critical review study by Frs. Labourdette and Marie Joseph Nicolas, "Théologie de l'apostolat missionnaire," *Revue thomiste* 46 (1946): 575–603. I owe to Dr. Kirwan my awareness of this important theme.

¹⁴ See Jürgen Mettepenning, *Nouvelle Théologie, New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism*,

do not make it adequately clear to the readers that what we have here in the Chenu and Parente articles is really only one strand of the unfolding controversy during this period.

The second and third strands are a bit more intertwined. On the one hand, there is the concern raised by Bouillard's comments concerning dogmatic development, registered at the end of his *Conversion et grâce*. These concerns would be shared by the Dominicans writing in the *Revue thomiste*, as well as by Garrigou-Lagrange. However, there is also a broader concern about theological methodology that only partly comes to the discussion in Garrigou-Lagrange, whereas it is quite clear in the interventions written by Labourdette in particular.

Thus, if one were to label the Chenu-Parente strand (1), the Bouillard-related strand (2), and the theological-methodology strand (3), the clearest way to understand the dependencies of the articles gathered in the first two sections would be as follows:

- (1) Chenu, "Theology"
- (1) Parente, "New Tendencies"
- (2) Bouillard, "Conversion and Grace"
- (3) Daniélou, "Current Trends"
- (2, with rushed treatment of 3) Garrigou-Lagrange, "Where is the 'New Theology' Going?"
- (2 + 3) Labourdette, "Theology and its Sources"
- (2 + 3) Anonymous Jesuits, response to "Theology and its Sources"
- (2) Le Blond, "Analogy of Truth"
- (2) Labourdette and Nicolas, response to "Analogy of Truth"

Now, it is somewhat troubling that Kelly seems to have chosen to use the original edition of Fr. Labourdette's "La théologie et ses sources," published in *Revue thomiste* in 1946, whereas the definitive version of his text, accompanied with extensive notes in response to the anonymously published article by the Jesuit Fathers, was published in the volume *Dialogue théologique*.¹⁵ This latter publication contained his original article (with annotations), the Jesuit response, Labourdette's own further response devoted to the nature of theological criticism, a closing article by Fr. Nicolas

Precursor of Vatican II (London: T & T Clark, 2010).

¹⁵ Marie-Michel Labourdette, Marie-Joseph Nicolas, Raymond-Léopold Bruckberger, *Dialogue théologique: pièces du débat entre la Revue thomiste d'une part et les R.R. P.P. de Lubac, Daniélou, Bouillard, Fessard, von Balthasar, S.J., d'autre part* (Saint-Maximin: Les Arcades, 1947).

(then provincial of the Toulouse province of Dominicans), and a stentorian introduction by Fr. Bruckberger. Quite unfortunately, Dr. Kelly does not mention this volume in her own thematic treatment of this debate, despite the fact that it represents the full and definitive articulation of the position of the Toulouse Dominicans, who wished to retain an open dialogue between the parties. Alas, the lines of communication broke down before any substantive resolution could be reached.

In all of his texts, one gets a full sense for Fr. Labourdette's positive desire for rapprochement, registered alongside his concerns that theological relativism would end in the rejection of the later Scholastic inheritance of the various *scholae*. In fact, given the near wholesale abandonment of post-Baroque Scholasticism in the immediate wake of the Second Vatican Council, the estimation expressed by him and Fr. Nicolas cannot fail to echo prophetically today: "How can we fail to see that Thomism finds itself at a critical moment—and along with it, all the traditional theological schools, for none of them would survive its ruin unscathed, existing thereafter only in the form of scattered themes taken up and transformed into brand new intellectual constructions?"¹⁶ To present the Toulouse Dominicans' interventions as being solely an attack does not truthfully contextualize their own express intention to engage in dialogue, lest discontinuity replace what was positive in the Western inheritance of later Scholasticism. Perhaps they were overly defensive of the prerogatives of Scholasticism; however, only the most partisan of readings could interpret Fr. Labourdette's repeated overtures in such a systematically negative sense.

Moreover, the reader will note that Kelly's translation of Fr. de Lubac's chapter, "Supernatural and Superadded," is not included in my reordered list above. Truth be told, it is not clear whether this text is very helpful for understanding the central concerns of the debates reflected in the other texts.¹⁷ In the popular consciousness today, there is an understanding of

¹⁶ Michel Labourdette and Marie Joseph Nicolas, "L'analogie de la vérité et l'unité de la science théologique," *Revue Thomiste* 47 (1947): 417–66, at 466.

¹⁷ In point of fact, if one considers the articles by Frs. Labourdette and Nicolas, the more important texts in this debate would be de Lubac's *Corpus mysticum* and his notes in the translation of *Homélies sur la Genèse*. Although, Fr. Labourdette voices his frustration with *Surnaturel* by noting the affinities between the interpretation offered by de Lubac and the thought of Blondel ("De la critique en théologie," in *Dialogue théologique*, 117: "We will also say that *Surnaturel*, alongside solid historical studies, presents summary and hasty generalizations, wishing, out of an allegedly 'historical' concern, to lead us back to a St. Thomas, whom he interprets through the lenses of a very contemporary school of thought which has drawn significant inspiration from the ideas of Maurice Blondel.").

these events that places de Lubac's *Surnaturel* close to its center. However, as is clear upon reading the whole sequence of articles by Garrigou-Lagrange in *Angelicum* and by Fr. Labourdette and others in the *Revue thomiste* (and in the *Dialogue théologique* volume), this matter is quite secondary, textually speaking.¹⁸ Far more pages in his lengthy sequence of articles are devoted to Bouillard, his defenders, Maurice Blondel,¹⁹ and epistemological issues related to conceptual knowledge, speculative truth, and doctrinal development.²⁰ These themes are far more important than the topic of the distinction between the natural and supernatural orders.²¹

In fact, upon reading Kelly's volume, one will not come away with sufficient awareness of how central the anti-Blondel theme was for the somewhat aggressive series of articles penned by Garrigou-Lagrange. Whether or not one shares in the Dominican's interpretation and critique of Blondel's theory of truth, as well as the former's implicit attribution of similarities to Frs. Bouillard and Le Blond, this point of intellectual history is very important, for it bears witness to the fact that, in the final analysis, Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange's concerns remained steeped in the context of his youth and the philosophical/theological excesses that gave rise to Pius's 1907 *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*. The issues of truth, dogmatic development, and the nature of theological reflection were central for him (and, in a different key,

¹⁸ Obviously, however, the Blondellian implications in apologetics and theological anthropology involved in *Surnaturel* are conceptually connected to the debate over theology, dogma, and truth. My point here, however, is to orient the reader to the latter debate, which is the true *locus* for the joint concerns of the Dominicans writing from Toulouse and Rome. This latter perspective represents the proper hermeneutic context for understanding the essence of all the many articles penned between 1946 and 1949. A full, systematic presentation would need to take into account the conceptual ties between the questions of the orders of nature and of grace, alongside the other topics. However, the particular arguments in *Surnaturel* are not of great import for understanding the main concerns raised by Frs. Garrigou-Lagrange, Labourdette, Nicolas, and Bruckberger.

¹⁹ The older Dominican quite correctly senses the influence of the latter's own thought on the debate unfolding in the late 1940s.

²⁰ On Blondel's influence on various Jesuits of this era, see: Henri Bouillard, S.J., *Blondel et le christianisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1961); Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté*, 149–91; and the lengthy introduction in Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, ed. and trans. Alexander Dru and Iltyd Trethowan (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964). So pervasive is Blondel in the narrative presented in Jon Kirwan, *An Avant-garde Theological Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), that the author merely indexes the entry "Blondel, Maurice" as *passim*.

²¹ This claim will be substantiated at greater length in the forthcoming volume by Dr. Kirwan and myself. It is important, in any case, that the researcher not be distracted by de Lubac's *Surnaturel* here, for this work was not at the center this particular debate.

for Frs. Labourdette and Nicolas). The problem of nature and grace remained quite secondary, and in the final analysis one has the sense that the Old Dominican wishes that de Lubac would merely read his lengthy treatment of the question in the former's *De Revelatione*.²² Ultimately, an overview of the sequence of articles shows that his main concern is the epistemological issue of the development of doctrine tied up in Bouillard's claims.

What is more, in Dr. Kelly's volume, one does not get a sense for the fact that, among all the parties involved, the only substantive dialogue that happened was between Bouillard and Garrigou-Lagrange.²³ Labourdette's review article was met with a somewhat contemptuous dismissal of his concerns.²⁴ However, for several articles, Bouillard and Garrigou-Lagrange at least had a real intellectual exchange, though it did not end in mutual agreement. From reading Kelly's presentation, one gets no idea that this exchange took place, even though knowledge of it would do much in helping to draw attention to one of the main points of contention for Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange in his many, quite repetitive articles.²⁵

The third section of Dr. Kelly's volume contains three essays that are more loosely connected to each other, though they all are concerned with themes of importance to the thinkers engaged in what might be broadly styled "ressourcement" (though the introduction of Congar adds yet another fold to the concerns addressed):

- Jules Lebreton, S.J., "The [series] *Sources chrétiennes*" (1943): A brief summary of the first four volumes of the series *Sources chrétiennes*.
- Henri de Lubac, S.J., "Memories of 1940–1945" (1987): A very brief recollection by de Lubac concerning some of the intellectual labors of his fellow workers during World War II.
- Yves Congar, O.P., "Appendix 1 [to *True and False Reform in the Church*]: Collective Responsibility" (1950): A reflection on the problem of collective responsibility in the context of ecclesiastical self-awareness and reform.

²² See Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, "L'immutabilité des vérités définies et le surnaturel," *Angelicum* 25, no. 4 (1948): 285–98, at 297.

²³ This will be discussed in some detail in the introduction to the volume by Dr. Kirwan and myself. In the article by Fouilloux cited on several occasions above, one will also find that an honest and genial interpersonal dialogue took place between Frs. Labourdette and Daniélou. Something of a dialogue with Msgr. Bruno de Solages took place as well.

²⁴ I would hesitate to make this claim if it were not for the balanced observations of Fouilloux in "Dialogue Théologique," 171–75.

²⁵ In our forthcoming volume, Dr. Kirwan and I summarize this exchange and present the articles by Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange.

Although perhaps interesting, the first two articles, given their brevity, do not add much to either the speculative or the historical content of the volume. The article from Congar is devoted to a completely new vein of discussion, and although it is not unrelated to the concerns addressed in the articles included in the first two sections, it is not clear what it adds, especially since this appendix can be found in a currently existing translation of Congar's *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'Église*.²⁶ In this regard, I should here note the fact that both the Daniélou article in the first section and the Garrigou-Lagrange article in the second also pre-existed Kelly's volume in translation.²⁷ Although she is to be recognized for her work in re-translating these texts, it is disappointing that 33 pages out of a total 176 (including the introductions and index) are devoted to such pre-existing content.

Translation Concerns

In his forthcoming review in *New Blackfriars*, Dr. Kirwan notes a number of translational concerns in Kelly's volume, most frequently in the context of technical Scholastic philosophical terminology, though also in relation to certain stock expressions of transcendental Thomism. I do not here wish to revisit these particular concerns, so ably and carefully considered by Dr. Kirwan. Moreover, having put my own hand to the plow of translation for many years, I have become immensely sensitive to the difficulties of the translator's task, especially when dealing with technical texts. I am loath to add to a potential chorus of "second guesses" regarding the work of a fellow translator. Thus, to this end, I will register translation-specific concerns only as they immediately touch on technical points in one article in particular, "L'analogie de la vérité et l'unité de la science théologique" by Frs. Labourdette and Nicolas. However, I wholly agree with Dr. Kirwan's own critiques, which are real and merit further consideration.

As my collaborator has already noted, Dr. Kelly's volume is marred on occasion by excisions, particularly in footnotes. As she comments in her own introductory remarks, she chose to retain the shortened mid-century French style of citation. I think that nobody should make a negative judgment concerning that choice. We do not know the time constraints under which Dr. Kelly was operating, and for this reason, let us not second-guess

²⁶ See Yves Congar, *True and False Reform in the Church*, trans. Paul Philibert (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical and Michael Glazier, 2011), 349–64.

²⁷ See Jean Daniélou, "The Present Orientations of Religious Thought," *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 18, no. 1 (2011): 51–62; Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, "Where is the New Theology Leading Us?," *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 18, no. 1 (2011): 63–78.

this quite-understandable choice in the face of the miserably abbreviated notes so often found in authors of this period.

What are not acceptable, however, are some significant *content* excisions from certain notes. At a first glance, when I was using this text for a course, I thought that she had only removed the Latin original from some notes, or at the very worst the text of certain citations from Aquinas which could be easily found in contemporary translation. “Perhaps,” I mused, “T&T Clark pressured her to watch her word count.” Too busy at the time to check in detail, I worked on this assumption, giving her the benefit of the doubt. However, as I began to closely review the text of her translation of “The Analogy of Truth” by Frs. Labordette and Nicolas, I began to note the lack of several lengthy footnotes.

On page 119 of her translation (422–423 of the original), she excises a lengthy (five hundred words) footnote with no indication of this fact. It contains an important technical discussion and disagreement registered by the authors. We likewise find, on 120 (425 of the original) the excision of two notes, for a total length of over two hundred words, both containing important technical asides. On 123 (430 of the original), she truncates a footnote that contains a reference to *Dialogue théologique* concerning the solely theological (not *De fide*) nature of the Dominican friars’ disagreement with the Jesuit Fathers. Then, again, over the course of 124–25 (431–433 in the original), approximately three hundred words of footnotes are omitted as well, once again with no warning thereof. On 126, a one-hundred-word citation from the Council of Vienne is truncated.

Finally, near the end of the article, she excises an entire paragraph in which the Dominican fathers defend themselves against the accusation of being insensitive to the missionary needs of the Church. While one might quibble with details concerning their view of the unity of theological science or with their obvious biases toward Latin theology,²⁸ it is not clear why this passage was not included in the published translation:

Finally, in what way would our position be *anti-missionary*? Certainly, “incarnating” Christian thought in cultures that are entirely different from Latin culture involves great difficulties. However, a great problem is already involved in freeing these cultures from what in them is opposed to Christianity. Even then, even under the pure

²⁸ The present reviewer, who is dedicated to much in the Dominican fathers’ thought, is nonetheless also a Ruthenian Catholic, forever ready to note that Latin hegemony is not the sole coin of the whole Catholic realm.

dominion of faith, reason that has been shaped by Hindu thought would doubtlessly be ill-adapted, in its current state, to assimilate Scholastic theology. Doubtlessly, it would think out its new faith in its own manner, and surely it would introduce fundamental Christian philosophical conceptions into mental structures which are uniquely its own, into a vocabulary charged with references to a mentality that is quite different from our own. But, we must think that not everything would be true, nor complete, nor precise in this theology (even though nothing would prevent faith in the dogmas) until the day when, by dint of its own progress and perhaps of coming into confrontation with Latin theology, and by dint of the latter being obliged to deepen itself and perhaps refashion itself on certain points, indeed, to enrich itself upon everything found in this new contribution, this theology would itself reach a more perfect age, the scientific age.²⁹

Thus, over a thousand words are removed from this article without any justification offered for this “editorial” activity. I have not taken time to document all the footnotes, but something similar can be detected in Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange’s “Where is the ‘New Theology’ Going?,” in which approximately five hundred words are excised from two footnotes.³⁰

Moreover, I would be remiss if I did not remark on several translational issues I noted in the course of my review of the same Garrigou-Lagrange essay. In the opening of the essay, she translates “la controverse qui vient de s’ouvrir” as “a shrill controversy.”³¹ In point of fact, this is tied to a translational issue in her rendering of Fr. Le Blond, who is being quoted here. Le Blond, writes, “le problème des rapports entre théologie historique et théologie scolastique, que pose avec acuité un controverse qui vient de s’ouvrir . . .,” which she renders, “the question of the relationship between historical theology and scholastic theology, which has suddenly become a shrill controversy . . .” However, the subordinate clause in question should, in fact be rendered (in a somewhat literalistic form) along the lines of “which a recently opened controversy acutely poses [for us today].” This translational distortion at once (1) implicitly accuses the Dominican fathers of shrillness in their tone and (2) even makes Fr. Le Blond’s own contribution seem more negative than it truly was. (In point of fact, he believes he is serenely proposing a set of shared theses). Also, here too (on 117), as in her rendering of Fr. Le Blond’s

²⁹ See Labourdette and Nicolas, “L’analogie,” 464.

³⁰ See Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, “La nouvelle théologie—ou va-t-elle?” *Angelicum* 23 (1946): 126–45, at 138n1 and 140n1 (95n15 and 97n17 in Kelly’s volume).

³¹ Labourdette and Nicolas, “L’analogie,” 418 (“Analogy of Truth,” 115 in Kelly).

article, she translates *asymptotique* as “asymptomatic,” distorting a technical point regarding Fr. Le Blond’s presentation of the human mind’s asymptotic attempt to reach the full truth. This error was obvious in the English, with no need to refer to the French.

On 117, where Dr. Kelly renders the words “du fait que” from Le Blond as “if it is a ‘unified multiplicity,’” what is in fact required is something closer to “because” or “on account of the fact that,” precisely for a technical point that Le Blond is making (from within his own outlook): precisely because intellectual constructions are “unified multiplicities,” they thus are *systems* (which would be marked with the deficiencies befalling all such unified multiplicities). Also, where she here renders *l’affirmation* as “statement,” this choice seems confusing to Dr. Kirwan and myself, for the term is technical for Le Blond (and Bouillard): concepts change, but the affirmation expressed through those concepts are the same. It does not seem that *l’affirmation* is being used by Bouillard with the same sense as *énoncé*, often used by French Scholastics to refer to the “enunciabilia” fashioned by the intellect’s second operation.

On 119 her rendering of *adéquation* as “matching” is contestable, given that the former is a technical Scholastic term, whereas the latter represents one (but by far not the only) possible interpretation of the Scholastic notion of speculative truth. Then, on 124, she renders, “qui font son adéquation au réel” as “which make it appropriate to the real.” Admittedly, the term *adéquation* is difficult to render in English without using the awkward cognate “adequation”; however, I believe that one is justified in worrying that the Scholastic meaning will be lost by translating it loosely as “matching” or “appropriate” for the sake of euphony.³² Equally problematic is, on the same page, a rendering that will stand out to any Scholastic reader and will seem quite odd to any non-Scholastic: “l’act n’est limité que par la puissance” is rendered as “the act is limited only by power,” but *puissance* here in French is obviously standing in for the Latin *potentia*, “potency.” Perhaps it was an honest error in editing, due to the use of the various translational tools that we all blessedly have at our disposal today. However, it does not accurately convey the meaning, which clearly echoes the words of the second of the twenty-four Thomistic theses: “*Actus, utpote perfectio, non limitatur nisi per potentiam, quae est capacitas perfectionis.*” A similar rendering of *puissance*

³² The purpose of seeking linguistic euphony (something to be lauded in translations) is precisely to make the text clearer. In philosophical and theological works, technical terminology is, however, often the only means for clear communication, even when it is also eminently clunky, as I too judge “adequation” to be. Clunkiness and opaqueness are not quite the same things.

can be found on 125 as well.³³ Also, on 146, one will find “doctrine of action and potentiality” for “doctrine de l’acte et de puissance.”

In a similar vein, on 130, Frs. Labourdette and Nicolas make the technical point that, while concepts are not subject to formal truth or falsity (which pertains, strictly speaking, to judgments), truth does indeed flow from our concepts’ relationship to reality. The two Dominicans open this section stating: “Quoique les concepts ne soient, en rigueur de termes, ni vrais ni faux . . .” The clear sense here is “even though, strictly speaking, concepts are neither true nor false . . .” However, the technical Scholastic point is lost in the Dr. Kelly’s rendering: “Whether concepts are strictly speaking true or not . . .”

On 132, the technical notion of “imperfect abstraction” (which is very important for understanding the theory of analogy proposed by Cajetan and developed by John of St. Thomas) is described by the original authors by stating, “nous formons un concept analogue *incomplètement* abstrait de ses inférieurs” (443). In the translation presented, however, one reads, “we form an analogous concept which is *completely* abstract from those inferior to it.” The error might have been a wholly understandable typographical error at some point of the translation process, but like several of the errors noted in this review, it too bears witness to a seeming insensitivity to the technical requirements of Scholastic terminology. Without consulting the French, this error will stand out immediately to any Thomist who recalls the doctrine of the later *schola Thomae* regarding the nature of properly proportional analogical “concept”³⁴ formation.

On 135, speaking of Jacques Maritain’s discussions of the noetic distinction between ontological and *empiriological* analysis (a neologism he proposes in relation to the epistemological diversity of the sciences), the translation presented renders *empiriologique* as “empirical.” The term is, however, technical for Maritain, and in fact, Labourdette and Nicolas cite this word in quotes in their own French, thereby drawing attention to the neologistic sense in which Maritain himself uses it. Then, when they

³³ Let it be noted: I am not looking to quibble over words. It is my preference to allow a wide range for translational freedom. However, these technical points, in light of Dr. Kirwan’s own findings reported in *New Blackfriars*, merit being noted at least so that these issues might be addressed in a future edition of the volume.

³⁴ Since it is not a question of generic concept formation, one is not dealing merely with abstraction in such analogical “conceptualization.” Concerning this point, as well as the aforementioned texts from Cajetan and John of St. Thomas, see Yves R. Simon, “On Order in Analogical Sets,” in *Philosopher at Work: Essays*, ed. Anthony O. Simon (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 135–71.

compare this distinction to that proposed by Maritain in the *Degrees of Knowledge*, between ontological analysis, on the one hand, and moral and mystical analysis, on the other, a note in Dr. Kelly's translation reads, "again, Maritain gives too sketchy principles for the solution of both Augustine and St. John of the Cross." In point of fact, however, the note reads, "là encore, Jacques Maritain dans *Les Degrés du Savoir* à propos de saint Augustin et de saint Jean de la Croix a donne des principes de solution trop négligés," which one would be much more justified in rendering: "Here too, in the *Degrees of Knowledge*, in relation to Saint Augustine and St. John of the Cross, Maritain has provided principles for solving this issue, and what he says there deserves wider recognition." The sense of *trop négligés* is clearly "all too neglected." One would only expect such a comment from men whom Fouilloux numbered, in a slightly different but connected context, as being part of a group deserving the appellation "maritainiens de stricte observance."³⁵ The general context also supports this rendering, such that it was actually the English alone that alerted me to a translational issue here.³⁶

At the top of 137, *scientifique* is rendered "academic." The technical term "scientific" is important here, given the Scholastic meaning of the term and the connected issues related to the scientific status of theology. Due to the technical necessities attached to the term in this context, such a broad rendering is not justified.

On 138, in the midst of all this technical discussion of various sources of noetic differentiation, the authors only then take up the issue of formal objects. Here, they express, in rather difficult French, an important point. The translation presented by Dr. Kelly, however, is insufficiently clear in its rendering. My concern is not so much with her different translational approach to an admittedly indirect French construction, but rather with a subordination structure that obscures more than it illuminates. For the sake of clarity here, I will provide the texts in parallel, with the phrases italicized that make the significant difference:

³⁵ See Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté*, 116–18.

³⁶ Also, in this same paragraph, bearing witness to similar issues regarding Maritain's notion of "empirical analysis," one reads in the translation, "pseudo-mathematical" for "physico-mathématique," a term used by Maritain to describe the noetic character of mathematical physics.

French

Qu'à ces multiples causes de différenciation viennent s'ajouter des différences d'éclairage, c'est-à-dire d'objet formel, nous serons en face de "positions," devant le réel, dont l'erreur principale serait de s'exclure mutuellement, de comporter la négation de vérités mal comprises parce que vues sous un jour étranger.

Kelly translation

When we add differences of emphasis to these multiple causes of differentiation, in other words the formal object, we find ourselves faced with "positions" about the real, whose principle error is their mutual exclusion and of being the denial of poorly understood truths because they are seen under a strange light.

Proposed translation

Let differences in illumination—that is, differences in formal objects—come to be added to these manifold causes of differentiation, and we will find ourselves faced with "positions" before reality whose principal error would be to mutually exclude each other, including the denial of truths that are poorly understood because they are viewed under an unfamiliar³⁷ intellectual light.

Finally, on 140, in one (among many) important passages where the Dominican fathers openly analyze the many ways that our knowledge is

³⁷ The sense of *étranger* allows for some latitude here, even perhaps requiring more re-rendering than my still-rather-strict wording. However, "strange" is not the point being made. Rather, the sense of *étranger* is "foreign": the truths being denied are misunderstood because they are being judged in light of the wrong formal perspective, like the scientist misunderstanding a philosophical datum. (This observation is connected, no doubt, to Maritain's own treatment of the nature of facts, a theme deployed elsewhere by Fr. Labourdette.) This is clear in the next sentence: "A so-called 'scientific' outlook (in the modern sense of the word 'science') concerning the world is often simply a worldview lacking in philosophical illumination, where the only portion of error that is discernable comes from what is rejected." For more on this theme of "facts" in Maritain and Yves Simon, see Michael D. Torre, "Yves R. Simon, Disciple of Maritain: the Idea of Fact and the Difference between Science and Philosophy," in *Facts are Stubborn Things: Thomistic Perspectives in the Philosophies of Nature and Science*, ed. Matthew K. Miner (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press and the American Maritain Association, 2021), 19–39. For Fr. Labourdette's own use of it, see the essay to be included in the forthcoming volume by Dr. Kirwan and myself, "Théologie, intelligence de la foi," *Revue thomiste* vol. 46, no. 1 (1946): 5–44.

made imperfect by the vicissitudes of our cultural situation, the translation obscures an important point. Here, it is best to present the texts in parallel, again with the phrasings in question italicized:

French

Et d'ailleurs beaucoup des idées dans lesquelles on pourrait essayer (chose si difficile!) de formuler une mentalité, sont acceptées toutes faites, introduites sans critique, parce qu'admises par tous, *dans un système par ailleurs fort appliqué à rendre raison de ses principes propres.*

Kelly translation

And yet many of the ideas in which one might try (with some difficulty!) to formulate a mind-set are accepted ready-made, uncritically accepted because everyone accepts them, *into a system which is strongly applied to give its own principles reason.*

Proposed translation

And, moreover, many of the ideas one might try to use—though, with what difficulty!—to formulate a mentality are themselves accepted ready-made, and are introduced uncritically (because they are admitted by all) *into a system that otherwise diligently strives to render account of its principles.*

The French of this passage is admittedly vexing and difficult. However, the final clause is quite confusing in the translation presented by Dr. Kelly. A fair reading of this comment, especially when interpreted alongside remarks made by Frs. Labourdette and Nicolas in the course of this controversy,³⁸ reveals the fact that the Dominican fathers are more than willing to say that the state of affairs being described has also befallen Thomistic thought.

Conclusion

To be fair, there are many points when, reviewing or reading Dr. Kelly's translation, I thought, "that's an excellent turn of phrase" (the mark of a good translation). It should be clear that my primary focus in the critiques registered here has been technical in nature. However, given that similar issues were discovered by Dr. Kirwan while reading her rendering of Fr. Le Blond's article, I thought it best to present some of the Thomistic-Scholastic translational issues that stood out to my eye, focusing primarily on the single

³⁸ Texts which will be included in the forthcoming volume by Dr. Kirwan and myself.

article by Frs. Labourdette and Nicolas. I suspect that having a Scholastically trained philosopher or theologian review the translations would have enabled almost all of these errors to be avoided.

Dr. Kelly correctly senses that a full understanding of our contemporary ecclesiastical situation calls for keen self-awareness of the history of the great conflict that generated a host of Francophone articles over the course of merely four years' time. She is to be commended for undertaking the difficult work of translation, making available original sources to readers who do not have ready facility in French. Given the heated nature of these exchanges, as well as their continued reverberations up to our own day, direct textual contact is utterly vital for forming a fair estimation of the parties involved, all of whom were deeply concerned priests seeking the correct way to be faithful to the revealed Truth so desperately needed by a world that had just been devastated by the horrors of two world wars. However, it is precisely because of the urgency of such *fair assessment* that Dr. Kelly's volume raises such concerns for me. More than the translation issues noted earlier, the structural-historical issues discussed in the second section of this review essay remain my primary concerns with this volume. A well-apprised reader will draw some benefit from this volume, but it is unfortunate that it is marked by the aforementioned problems.

I warmly approve of an interlocutor who interprets the history and import of the infamous exchange from the 1940s differently than do I. However, I feel that Dr. Kelly's volume represents a missed opportunity concerning a matter of significant importance. Nonetheless, it is also my sincere desire that my comments be read in a spirit of fraternal charity, inflected with hope for true dialogue in the midst of a Church all too sadly marked by divisions. N:V

Book Reviews

Human Perfection in Byzantine Theology: Attaining the Fullness of Christ by Alexis Torrance, *Changing Paradigms in Historical and Systematic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), ix + 239 pp.

AS A PART OF THE SERIES *Changing Paradigms in Historical and Systematic Theology*, Alexis Torrance's *Human Perfection in Byzantine Theology* examines the role of Christ's human perfection within key figures in the Byzantine tradition against the backdrop of trends in contemporary Orthodox theology. Torrance seeks to uncover a common "Christocentrism" within the Byzantine tradition that challenges the contemporary tendency among contemporary Orthodox theologians to "unmoor" theological anthropology from the doctrine of the humanity of Christ. Indeed, according to Torrance, some of these approaches go so far as to risk the danger of "theological shipwreck" (1). As general representatives of the tendency Torrance has in mind, we can name such figures as John Zizioulas and Vladimir Lossky, whose personalist anthropologies depart from the tradition by "bypassing or deferring Christology" (10). In the case of Zizioulas, for instance, Torrance sees the disintegration of theological anthropology into "a sentimental application or projection of worldly and hazy concepts of personality and 'community' to both the Godhead and the people of God" (10). If, for Torrance, the above thinkers appear to represent a wayward *tendency* (even if he takes issue with certain of their "starting points," Torrance nevertheless seems to agree with most of their conclusions), it is Fr. John Behr whose theology Torrance likely has in mind as risking "theological shipwreck."

As we shall see, the overall intelligibility of Torrance's work appears only in the final chapter, against the backdrop of Behr's "unmistakably Christocentric" (206) anthropology. While Torrance joins Behr in bemoaning the non-Christocentric character of much of modern theological anthropology, nevertheless, he sees Behr's project as positing a Christocentrism that flies in the face of the Byzantine tradition. In light of Behr's Christocentrism (and in a way that is reminiscent of *Gaudium et Spes* §22), Torrance wishes to

show that, for any genuinely Byzantine doctrine, Christ, *in his particular and enduring humanity*, must be the starting point of the human ideal: "Human perfection and human destiny are only revealed, known, and bequeathed in the person of Jesus Christ, the God-man" (11). To this end, Torrance proposes a "fresh Christocentric paradigm" (3).

Torrance's study provides insight into important texts which both implicitly and explicitly reflect the priorities of the Fathers. Taking the historical and systematic approach of Georges Florovsky's "neo-patristic synthesis" as his cue, Torrance highlights the centrality of Christ's humanity in four key figures. He examines the immovability of the human will in the *eschaton* in Maximus the Confessor (ch. 2), the particular ("depictable") and enduring humanity of Christ in Theodore the Studite (ch. 3), the attainability of human perfection in Symeon the New Theologian (ch. 4), and the possibility of deification through uncreated grace in Gregory Palamas (ch. 5). In each of these thinkers Torrance discovers a "thoroughly Christocentric gaze" (37), which begins from the concrete and particular human nature of Christ, and thereby provides a contrast with the abstract tendency of certain contemporary Orthodox thinkers. However, as we shall see, on account of the ambiguity surrounding the term "Christocentric," it is not always clear whether or how Christ's humanity and human perfection figure into the themes discussed. More problematically, it is not always clear whether Christ's perfect humanity provides an insight into human *perfection* or human nature, as such.

For the purposes of this review, we will focus on Torrance's chapter on Theodore the Studite. Torrance's treatment of Theodore is distinct from his treatment of other Byzantine figures inasmuch as Theodore's teaching on Christ's depictability is historically situated in an explicitly Christological debate. While the studies on Maximus, Symeon, and Palamas certainly have themes that, in one way or another, advert to Christ's humanity, nevertheless none of particular issues treated can be said to have Christ's humanity as their essential starting point. This is to say that Christ's human perfection is not so much a principle of the teaching in question, but one (perhaps *the*) particular example introduced as confirming a distinct theological doctrine. For instance, in the chapter on Maximus, which focuses primarily on showing that the immovability of the human will is not contrary to eschatological *human* existence, the humanity of Christ appears significant only as it is evidence of this fact. Likewise, in the chapter on Symeon, Christ's humanity is proof that human perfection is attainable in this life; and in Palamas, the deification of Christ's humanity is introduced as proof of the possibility of human deification through the uncreated divine energy. In each

of these cases, we see the import of Christ's human perfection as exemplar, but it is not always clear whether and how exactly each of the anthropologies represented in the thought of the above figures can be understood as distinctively "Christocentric" (that is, it is not clear whether or how their respective "starting points" [10] is explicitly Christ).

To return to the example of Maximus, Torrance's argument about the eschaton turns on the application of the divine attribute of immovability to the believer through deification. Christ's own human deification arises in this broader context as a case in point. Here the claim to Christocentrism appears somewhat mitigated inasmuch as the account of Christ's deification is not so much the starting point but evidence that the nature of deification cannot simply be characterized in terms of perpetual change (pace popular readings of Gregory of Nyssa). While a similar problem ultimately arises in Torrance's study of Theodore (for here too the debate seems to be first and foremost grounded more in the depictability of human nature as such rather than in Christ's own depictability), it nevertheless has the strongest *prima facie* claim to providing a glimpse into a more traditionally Byzantine "Christocentrism."

We turn, therefore, to Theodore and his anti-iconoclastic position. The iconoclast controversy, at least as it pertains to images of Christ, centers on the iconoclasts' "Christological dilemma": Christ cannot and must not be depicted in icons, since what is depicted in the icon is either the divine nature or the human nature; it cannot be the divine nature, for the divine nature is uncircumscribable and undepictable; neither can it be the human nature, for to depict the human nature would be to fall into Nestorianism by separating it from the divine nature. Therefore, Christ cannot be depicted. Theodore rejects this dilemma on the ground that "every image is the image not of a nature [φύσις] but of a hypostasis" (86). It is not the nature, but the person who is depicted in the icon. As Torrance notes, such a view implies the broader notion that "a nature in abstraction . . . is undepictable." Since "human nature only has subsistence in individual human beings" (88), it follows that Christ in his humanity *can* be depicted in icons—for what is depicted is not the human nature in abstraction but the divine Person subsisting in a human nature.

Filling in some gaps, we might summarize Theodore's position as follows: The universal "humanity" has existence only in individual human beings. The particular human, having its own matter (on account of which we can speak of the particular properties of an individual human, the *ιδιώματα*, i.e., this flesh, these bones), is depictable on this account. Possessing a concrete material or corporeal nature, therefore, appears to be the main principle

for depictability. The abstract notion of humanity does not have particular matter; it has “flesh and bones” only in an indeterminate or abstract sense. Thus, Christ did not and could not assume universal humanity in the abstract, for, as Theodore argues, this would amount to a fiction. In order for the Incarnation to have truly taken place, therefore, it is necessary that the Word assume a particular (i.e., materially individuated) human nature—one that has its own (determinate) matter and is, consequently, depictable.

As is clear from Torrance’s presentation, the philosophical character of Theodore’s doctrine is unmistakable. Torrance tells us that Theodore’s teaching on the assumption of an individual rather than an abstract human is grounded in an Aristotelian doctrine of universals. It is “an exact formulation of the Aristotelian version of realism about universals: universals are real entities, but they exist only in individuals” (89, quoting Christophe Erismann). The difference of Theodore’s position from that of the iconoclasts thus appears to be fundamentally rooted in a difference in philosophical assumptions.

But if this is true, how ought we understand Torrance’s thesis that wishes to posit Theodore’s “grounded, rugged ‘earthiness’ of the human ideal” (85) as founded foremost upon Christ’s human perfection? Is Theodore’s “overriding concern to emphasize, in the person of Christ, the irrevocably *incarnate* nature of human perfection” (85) based on his philosophical assumptions or upon a Byzantine Christocentrism? Notably, Theodore’s argument does not begin with Christ’s particularity or his depictability to conclude to characteristics of human nature; rather, the reverse is true. To be a true human being is to be depictable; Christ is a true human being; therefore, Christ is depictable. While the revelation of the Incarnation is a datum of faith, the fundamental premise (i.e., what it means to be human) here logically *precedes* what is received by faith. If Theodore did not know anything about human nature, he would not be able to argue to Christ’s human depictability. In other words, Theodore’s focus on the “incarnate” nature of human perfection is first grounded in the fact that human beings are corporeal beings.

Such a reading would compromise Torrance’s broader attempt to uncover a Byzantine “Christocentrism” according to which the entry point be *explicitly* Christ (see 8). And though Torrance recognizes Theodore’s philosophical inheritance (see 85, 89), his language at times suggests that Theodore’s “strongly material or ‘earthy’ theology devoted to the incarnate Christ” (104) in some way acts as the foundation for something as philosophical as Theodore’s doctrine of universals. Elsewhere, Torrance attempts to answer reservations about Theodore’s use of the term “individual,” distancing it from the Boethian definition of “person” (see 15) by an appeal

to Theodore's Christocentric bent. Thus, we are told that Theodore's use of the language of "individuality" (which points to the subsistent nature) "has to do with his emphasis on the *specificity* of Christ's humanity, in particular its circumscribability (and thus depictability in icons)" (90; emphasis original). We are often given the impression that Theodore's refusal "to reify human nature in the abstract" (88) is due to his "deep and vivid devotion to the enduring particularity of Christ as a human being" (90). A similar confusion regarding the role of philosophy appears when Torrance speaks as if the predication of humanity to all men (a question of logical predication) is illuminated by Christ's assumption of "the whole of human nature" (109). From this, Torrance claims that one aim of Theodore's iconophilism is to cause his audience to reflect on "the whole of human nature possessed individually by each of his listeners and readers."¹ It is as if the predication of humanity to individual human beings holds a special significance in light of Christ's assumption of human nature. But this is surely something that can be known just as well without a consideration of the Incarnation.

In sum, for Torrance, Theodore's Christological/theological "creativity" (see 85, 90) is too frequently depicted as if it were the ground not only for his understanding of human perfection, but for his conception of human nature as such. Yet, this is to reverse the very logic of Theodore's argument. The particularity and depictability of Christ's human nature does not belong to him on account of a characteristic unique to the Word incarnate, but instead is a consequence of his sharing in our common human nature. The result of such a confusion is a tendency to conflate philosophical principles with theological ones. What ought to be seen as arising from a properly philosophical consideration of human nature is treated as arising from Theodore's Christocentrism.

This points to a deeper ambiguity within the work as a whole regarding the meaning of "Christocentrism." Beyond seeing human *perfection* in Christ, Torrance in places speaks as though human nature as such can be known only in Christ. For, Christocentrism requires that the "entry point"

¹ There is a confusion about what Torrance understands by "universal humanity." In speaking of two functions of Theodore's approach, he writes: "The first is to direct Theodore's audience to the circumscribed Word incarnate, in whom the whole of human nature has found its resting place and exaltation. The second is to direct the audience self-reflexively, to the whole of human nature possessed individually by each of his listeners and readers, a humanity that is currently not at rest and not exalted" (109). While denying the possibility of the assumption of an abstract, universal human nature, Torrance nevertheless speaks puzzlingly of the "continuity and permanence of *the particular and universal humanity* of the resurrected Son of God" (92; emphasis added). This reflects a broader confusion on Torrance's part regarding Theodore's view on universals.

be “explicitly Christ” (8). Yet, if we are to take Theodore as our guide, it seems that to be Christocentric (if the moniker can rightly be applied to Theodore’s theological anthropology) does not exclude the possibility of making claims about Christ beginning from what is known (and therefore knowable) about human nature considered in itself. In fact, if Theodore’s account is to be trusted, it seems that we must begin from what is known about human nature through natural philosophical reason. Whether this is the “certainly hazardous” (10) attempt which Torrance seeks to avoid, meaning “to *begin* Christian theology with metaphysics,” it is nevertheless clear that natural human reason must have some kind of real priority with respect to Christology. Thus, Theodore’s impatience with “any idea of humanity that is not abidingly concrete, particular, and thus specific” (97) should not be understood as grounded in his Christocentric theological anthropology, but should instead be seen as a conclusion drawn from his understanding of human nature, from his *philosophical* anthropology. It is only because we first know something about human nature that we can affirm and wonder that the Word became flesh—and further, it is only on this basis that we can intelligibly reason about Christ’s concrete, particular, and depictable human nature.

The confusion regarding the philosophical principles at play in Theodore’s work leads Torrance to emphasize aspects of Theodore’s thought which are not essential to the historical debate. For instance, Torrance spends an unusual amount of time on Theodore’s discussion of Christ’s distinct human properties (*idiomata*). When Theodore lists the various properties of Christ in Epistle 359, he mentions, in passing, Christ’s eyelids: “If [Christ’s] depictability disappears, how is it that not all his corresponding [human] properties disappear with it?” (90). Theodore’s main point is that the perduring human properties of Christ depend on his depictability. The argument is a *reductio*. If one denies depictability, one must also deny Christ’s human properties that depend on it. But Christ’s human properties remain forever (a position that the iconoclasts presumably also held). Therefore, Christ must be depictable. By denying depictability, the iconoclasts risk denying Christ’s human properties, and thus Christ’s true humanity altogether.

Torrance, however, uses this text as an occasion to push home the point that Christ’s *idiomata* remain in perpetuity. While it is undoubtedly true that, for both Theodore and his opponents, Christ’s human nature remains in perpetuity (and thus his human properties), nevertheless, Torrance’s decision to focus on this aspect is at first puzzling. Torrance summarizes the argument thus: “Theodore’s logic is that if we are to deny one of Christ’s human properties (in this case ‘depictability’) we must deny them all, and

vice versa: if Christ is depictable, as the iconophiles claim, then he possesses all his human properties intact, only now, in the resurrected state, no longer subject to corruption" (90).² Torrance tells us here that, in this text, "[Theodore] insists on the permanence of all the distinguishing properties of Christ's specific humanity." It is as though Theodore's argument concludes to the perdurance of Christ's humanity. Notwithstanding the question of the coherence of Torrance's paraphrase of the argument (for instance, how do we get from Christ's possession of all his human properties to the perdurance of said properties?), it is nevertheless clear that Torrance is keen here on highlighting "[Theodore's] deep and vivid devotion to the enduring particularity of Christ as a human being." But if the historical context of the iconoclast controversy does not account for Torrance's emphasis on Christ's perduring human properties, what does? Why is Theodore's "radical affirmation" of Christ's human identity, "down to the continuity of all natural human properties no longer subject to corruption" (214) so important for Torrance? We discover the answer only in the concluding chapter, which has Behr in its crosshairs. Incidentally, it is here that one recognizes the vital contribution of Torrance's study.

According to Torrance, Behr's Christocentrism is contrary not only to Theodore but to the Byzantine tradition as a whole. The former's emphasis on the paradoxical centrality of the Passion *event* (which includes the death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ) results in an "apparent dissolution and collapse of the historical life and even fleshly properties of the man Christ Jesus" (209). For Behr, "the 'historical man' Jesus 'vanishes' and must vanish because . . . we no longer know Christ 'after the flesh' (cf. 2 Cor. 5:16), flesh here connoting for Behr Jesus's historical existence as man" (207). While not directly essential to Theodore's argument, Torrance uncovers what is nevertheless an important assumption of Theodore's theology: "Any threat to the natural, even physical, continuity of Christ's humanity with its constitutive properties before and after the discrete yet interconnected events of the Crucifixion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension would threaten the whole Gospel" (209). This is true not only for Theodore but also for each of the figures Torrance treats. In saving mankind, Christ also preserves the integrity of his humanity—by consequence, he preserves the integrity of our own humanity as well. And it is just this that Torrance seeks to establish: "The preservation and salvation of our whole humanity in the state

² Theodore's own argument, rather than counting depictability as on the same level as other properties, seems instead to premise the rest of Christ's human properties on his depictability.

of deification is constitutive, in fact, of the Byzantine doctrine of human perfection" (203). So long as Behr abstracts from Christ's "historical human properties," his definition of Christ's humanity "remains, at best, opaque" (210). As Torrance states, this raises "the most serious question . . . of the rending of Christ's historical human properties from his status as a full or true 'human being' as this is enacted in his death on the Cross" (210). Here we see how Torrance's study attempts a *neo*-patristic synthesis. He aims to show that the Byzantine doctrine of human perfection unambiguously excludes a Christology that departs, as Behr's clearly does, from the particular and concrete humanity of Christ.

If there was any question of the possibility of a rapprochement between the Byzantine tradition and Behr's radical "Christocentrism," Torrance has definitively shown that the answer is no. In this respect, we can appreciate and commend his contribution to contemporary historical and systematic theology. Still, among friends, it is possible to raise questions about the way in which Torrance arrives at this grave impasse. If Florovsky's neo-Patristic synthesis requires a "creative reassessment of those insights which were granted to the Holy Men of old" (3; quoting Florovsky), then it is necessary first to properly grasp not only the stated positions (which Torrance has done), but also, and perhaps more crucially for our times, the mode of reasoning behind the teaching of the Fathers. Any undue haste in applying the conclusions of the Fathers to modern theological questions without a grasp of the principles at work runs the risk of misunderstanding ways in which our own way of approaching theology might be subject to criticism. In the case of Theodore, the importance of philosophical reasoning, which is so "inextricably interrelated" (85) to his theological conclusions, demands that we not only acknowledge but also adopt the sort of role that he implicitly accords to philosophy within theology.³ In fact, doing this

³ There is at least an apparent tension here between thinkers such as, on the one hand, Maximus and Theodore, whose theology more evidently makes use of philosophical terms and categories, and on the other, Gregory Palamas, whose reaction to the arguably naturalistic theology of Barlaam (who is described as beholden to "Aristotelian logic," 155) gives his theology an apparently anti-philosophical hue. Nevertheless, if Palamas's "rich and varied but little studied" epistemology (174) can be understood as a reaction to the undue elevation of natural reason, which appears to be the case in certain instances (though not in all; e.g., Torrance's insistence on Palamas's rejection of the "unicity of truth" [156], i.e., the idea that "all truth is one" [172], appears to contradict any philosophical and theological vision of the unity of Truth in God), then even his teaching can be contextualized within the broader harmony between faith and reason discussed above. For instance, the following quotation of Palamas clearly implies a distinction between natural and supernatural knowledge: "It is not by removing this [scientific]

strengthens Torrance's own arguments against Behr. The perdurance of Christ's concrete and particular humanity is and must be the perdurance of that very human nature that we know apart from the Incarnation. To be sure, human nature undergoes a supernatural elevation through grace, but as Torrance shows in his account of Maximus the Confessor, this is an elevation that is revealed in Christ's humanity to be profoundly consonant with our very own human nature.

In order to challenge Fr. Behr's Christocentrism, then, it seems necessary first to question what it means to be "Christocentric." In what way must Christ be "first"? Is Christ first absolutely so that the very order of our coming to know what is essential to human nature as such can ever only be through Christ's humanity? In this case, Behr's project, which transforms Christ's humanity into one that can no longer be recognized as our own, has the stronger claim to Christocentrism. But if Christ is "first" in the sense that it is in the Incarnation that we see the *full and final* perfection of human nature, then it appears that we can and must also speak about what is essential to human nature in a way that is prior to the revelation of Christ's perfect humanity. It is clear that it is the latter approach that Torrance wishes to affirm. Yet an eagerness to affirm "Christocentrism" in the Fathers without clearly indicating what is meant by it often leads Torrance to statements that can easily be confused with the former. For Theodore, at least, the answer is obvious. We must know certain things to be true about human nature independently of the Incarnation, for only thus can we make intelligible claims about what is true of Christ's humanity. Nevertheless, to consider human nature at its last end, in Christ, is to speak of this *same* human nature, but in a way that cannot be known except in and through the humanity of the Word made flesh. N-V

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ignorance, but by removing ignorance with regard to God and the divine dogmas, an ignorance forbidden to us by the theologians, and by improving all your conduct according to their precepts, that you will be filled with the wisdom of God, becoming a true image and likeness of God, being made perfect through keeping of the Gospel commandments alone" (170). Thus, in the case of the controversy between Palamas and Barlaam, the question should not be construed as being about philosophical knowledge as such, but the limitations of philosophical knowledge with respect to what is supernaturally revealed in Christ. Contrary to some of Palamas's more reactionary statements, his theology can be interpreted as implying a real though limited role for philosophical knowledge in service of theology.

The Trinitarian Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar: An Introduction
 by Brendan McInerny (*Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020*), 250 pp.

THOMAS AQUINAS AFFIRMS that knowledge of the doctrine of the Trinity is useful to think about creation and about the salvation of humanity (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 32, a. 1, ad 3). Brendan McInerny addresses this challenge by introducing, in a captivating and suggestive way, the Trinitarian theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar. This book responds in great detail to the question posed by Balthasar in *Razing up the Bastions*: What place does the doctrine of the Trinity have in Christian existence? In order to answer this question, the author divides the book into four chapters, preceded by an introduction and followed by a conclusion. The first two chapters are about the immanent Trinity, the third about deification, and the last one about apophaticism.

In the introduction, McInerny comments on Balthasar's distinct theological method. This method has been praised by some scholars, such as Lucy Gardner or David Moss, for presenting old mysteries in new configurations; but it has also been criticized by other scholars such as Karl Rahner or Karen Kilby for alleged Gnosticism or presuming a "God's eye view . . . above Tradition, Scripture or history . . . against his [Balthasar's] desire to remain epistemologically humble" (6). McInerny reaffirms that Balthasar never belittles the abysmal difference between creatures and God; but rather, he recognizes that alterity is founded on a principle of similarity. Thus, the Thomistic real distinction does not stop the possibility of creatures becoming "sons and daughters of the Father, in the Son, by the Holy Spirit." Instead, difference is the principle of similarity, since it is founded on the "movement of the divine essence . . . the kenotic outpouring, self-sacrifice, self-gift of the intra-trinitarian difference" (13).

Chapter 1, "God is Love: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theology of the Immanent Trinity," deals with the generation of the Son, the procession of the Holy Spirit, and thus the divine relations. The author explains that Balthasar seeks to affirm a strong unity in the person of the Father as the foundation of divinity or as the core of the mystery of selflessness and pure love. This unity, however, appears in the very difference between the persons in an "intra-mental act of producing distinct persons capable of reciprocal acts—a reciprocity required if God is love" (16). The Father is Father insofar as he eternally gives the entirety of divinity to the Son; and the Son is Son insofar as the groundless "love of the Father finds its expression in the mirror of the Son's own groundless consent to, and thanksgiving for, being

begotten” (26). The Spirit is in-between the Father and the Son as their bond of love so that it seals and maintains “the infinite difference between them”; the Spirit is the “identity of the gift-as-given and the gift-as-received in thanksgiving” (28). In the order of processions, the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son in a miracle of eternal fruitfulness. The author argues in this chapter that there is both an active and passive function in each person of the Trinity due to a real I–Thou relationship that occurs in the divine life. Despite the provisional nature of any concept applied to God, this dialogue can be considered “of reciprocal wonder and worship, of infinite reciprocal gratitude, . . . the reciprocity of divine love as therefore the reciprocity of divine worship, adoration and prayer” (41).

In chapter 2, “A Confluence of Diverse Tendencies: The Sources of Balthasar’s Immanent Trinitarian Theology,” the author seeks to put Balthasar into context. McNerny highlights the influence of Richard of Saint Victor and Bonaventure in the context of the Franciscan and Thomistic dispute over whether the Father is Father by generating the Son, or if he generates insofar as he is Father. Balthasar says that “the Father cannot be thought to exist “prior” to his self-surrender. He is the movement of self-giving that holds nothing back” (54). In order to look for an effective model that explains the infinite difference between the divine persons, McNerny considers the influence of Augustine and Sergei Bulgakov ineffective because they “fail to maintain the unity of the divine substance” (68). The human family is a good image of the Trinity because the love of man and woman in a living exchange of love results in a fruitful third. More importantly, Balthasar sees in Martin Buber’s dialogical ontology “a unique imago Trinitatis; the Spirit reigns between I and Thou, who are pure relation to each other, but each one, incommunicable in his core (as Other), nonetheless (and precisely for this reason) communicates all he has” (73). Only after the unity-in-difference of reciprocal love is established does Balthasar connect the immanent with the economic Trinity. McNerny mentions Karl Barth’s influence on the doctrine of antecedence through which Balthasar unites the mission of Christ for the salvation of the world with the divine life of the Son, to the extent that the Son is his mission. This becomes clear with the input of Adrienne von Speyer. She argued that the way Jesus, via his human nature, relates to the Father in worship and reverence (by means of the doctrine of antecedence) permits us to understand the dynamic of love and self-giving in the Trinitarian life (82).

In chapter 3, “Unless You Become like this Child: Deification as Trinitarian Adoption,” McNerny explores Balthasar’s claim that “the doctrine of the Trinity has a profound soteriological significance” (86). The economic

Trinity cannot collapse the immanent because the latter has priority over the former ontologically. Nonetheless, by Christ's crucifixion and the wider horizon of deification, we are granted in grace "participation in the eternal inner dynamic of the triune God in the eternal procession of the Persons" (93). The Father's will is carried out by Christ and the Holy Spirit. First, Christ is not only the expression of the Father, but also the *principium* and final cause of creation. The two realities never vanish. In the Incarnation, the inner-Trinitarian difference is manifested when he becomes flesh and when he adopts a difference to show its Trinitarian horizon. Preeminently, the same happens in the Cross. It reveals the innermost being of God in the distinction between the persons, and the unity in the plan of redemption (mission). Thanks to this distinction-in-relation with the Father, the God-man "can expedite and banish that alienation from God that characterizes the world's sin" (107). In the resurrection, the distance marked by estrangement finally becomes a distance of positive love, of reciprocity. We are incorporated into this mission of the Son through the Spirit in the Church. In particular, McNerny highlights the importance of the Eucharist for Balthasar: "To receive the Eucharist, to receive the divine life, is to be implicated in this active stance of thanksgiving. One must, be receiving, given in and with Christ in return" (122).

The innovations described above have created much suspicion among scholars who consider that Balthasar oversteps the limits of apophatic trinitarianism. Chapter 4, "A Blessed Wilderness: The Trinity and Divine Incomprehensibility," provides some counter-arguments. McNerny explains that Balthasar is in full agreement with Augustine in that "a God who could be expressed to the end in finite words and deeds would no longer be God but an idol" (138). However, Balthasar also believes that God is infinitely knowable, even if "we cannot exhaustively know him by the created intellect, even in the beatific vision" (139). In agreement with Jennifer N. Martin and Anne M. Carpenter, McNerny affirms that "God's incomprehensibility is no longer a mere deficiency in knowledge, but the positive manner in which God determines the knowledge of faith" (141). Everything we say about God is said analogously: that God is Trinity, that the Son proceeds from the Father and so on. Yet this analogy shows the similarity between our knowledge of God and what God is in himself, within a far greater dissimilarity that grounds our theology "in a relationship of total dependency" (151). The overflow of intra-worldly knowledge demands of us not fatalism, but "to bend the knee in order to receive the gift of truth" (147). As von Speyer says: "Worship is the expression of God's encounter with God in love." Through von Speyer we definitely comprehend that

“negative theology finally becomes the locus of perfect encounter, not in a dialogical equality of dignity, but in the transformation of the whole creature into an *ecce ancilla* for the all-filling mystery of the ungraspable love of the self-emptying love” (155–56).

In the conclusion, McNerny argues against Balthasar’s study of the differences between the sexes as a trace of the Trinity because it runs the risk of falling “into an idolatrous series of hierarchical analogies” (161). Similarly, he disagrees with Balthasar’s resistance to the social and political dimensions of the Christian confession. The author thinks that political questions should stem from the theology of deification, or from the philosophical plane, rather than proceeding directly from immanent terminology (165). On the contrary, McNerny sides with Balthasar on the anti-apophatic critique. The author argues that Trinitarian apophaticism is not about “theology reaching its limits, in terms, to put it very bluntly, of the dead-end of theology” (167), but rather as Cyril O’Regan explains: an “excess of the infinite divine” (170). The end result is prayer: it offers a new life for “Christian theory . . . praying in a world reeling from the perceived absence of God” (171). McNerny finishes the book by doing justice to Balthasar’s Ignatian spirituality: “Perhaps theology is nothing but the intellectual playing of the children of God, to his ever-greater glory” (174).

This book is a notable contribution to the scholarship on Balthasar and Trinitarian theology. It is a fierce and convincing defense of Balthasar. The book is recommended for critics of Balthasar, as well as for graduate students of theology researching about the doctrine of the Trinity. Nonetheless, there are some areas where further clarification is needed. First, Balthasar never totally discards Augustine’s *imago Trinitatis in anima*, because he interprets it (in an Ignatian way) as a threefold way in which a creature is open, praises, and attains to God. Second, a distinction between the philosophical and theological analogy is necessary. The intra-Trinitarian alterity is not quite the same “kind” of alterity as that of creatures and God. Third, the doctrine of deification is profoundly ecclesial for Balthasar, to the extent that Christian existence is truly an ecclesial existence. Lastly, more evidence could have been provided to support the claim of a lack of dynamism in some Thomistic interpretations of the beatific vision. N.V

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Deep Mysteries: God, Christ, and Ourselves by Aidan Nichols, O.P. (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2020), vii + 133 pp.

BASIC CATHOLIC TEACHING DECLARES that God's will must be trusted and that perfect knowledge of all that is resides in the Creator. An implication of this claim is that all of God's work within time and history—in man's linearly conception of time and history—is meaningful. For, as perfect order himself, God's work is neither random nor coincidental. God's perfect understanding means that he is able, colloquially speaking, "to connect the dots" perfectly. Thus, the historical particulars of the New Testament events are not random and coincidental, but they connect perfectly within God's plan.

In terms of biblical events, then, what are the significances of the time periods during which, and places at which, they occurred? Why was Jesus born on a particular date, at a particular time, and in a particular manger in Bethlehem? Why was the womb of Mary, *Mater Dei*, chosen at that exact time, and at that exact place? Why did Jesus stand on that particular mountain and not upon another? There are perfect answers to all of those questions and more, for, as Proverbs declares in this vein: "The LORD has made everything for a purpose" (16:4).

In *Deep Mysteries: God, Christ, and Ourselves*, Father Aidan Nichols, O.P., meditates on questions related to the potential reasons for some of the historical particulars of "the principal Christological mysteries." Fr. Nichols defines the mysteries as these: "the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Baptism, the Transfiguration, the Passion and Death, the Descent into Hell, the Resurrection, the Ascension, Pentecost, and the Second Coming." (41).

Attempting to understand how all of the parts of the New Testament fit together perfectly in an historical sense—as God's mind would see it—is a fascinating intellectual endeavor. The primary difference between the innocent inquirer and the vain one, however, is that the former understands that God's reason is infinite and that only the First Mover has the ability to see and to put together all particulars. Thomas Aquinas elucidates the essence of the endeavor to connect the particulars when, in reference to man's ability to understand "the truth of faith," he argues: "Yet it is useful for the human reason to exercise itself in such arguments, however weak they may be, provided only that there be present no presumption to comprehend or to demonstrate. For to be able to see something of the loftiest realities, however thin and weak the sight may be, is . . . a cause of the greatest joy" (*Summa contra gentiles* I, ch. 8).

Posing the question of what the particulars of history might mean brings immediately another question. As Fr. Nichols asks: "How can the Eternal

and time be conjoined in a phrase, and the truth of such conjoining made credible?" (29). Indeed, if God transcends the man-conceived conception of time, how can man even understand God's movements if man can see time only in linear fashion? Fr. Nichols contends that Christ's "mystery-events are not just historical occurrences that, like all such events, belong to the human past" (31). Rather, argues Fr. Nichols, the mysteries "are permanently able to affect the intended beneficiary of the mysteries: namely, the human race" (31). In other words, contends Fr. Nichols, the mysteries are past, present, and future, in the human conception of time.

Attempting "to connect the dots" in Christological historical particulars is a subjective endeavor that requires a great deal of individual deciphering, with reliance especially on the interpretation of perceived symbolism. Fr. Nichols's broad theme-based meditations can provide starting points for further study on more concentrated topics.

The most exceptional part of the book is Fr. Nichols's discussion on how Jesus's mysteries exist, simultaneously, in the past, in the present, and in the future. This point is of great significance for both theology and philosophy. For, until the Second Coming, God, not being tied to man's limited experience of time, simultaneously, and always, would be experiencing the joys and trials and tribulations of Jesus's life, death, and Resurrection. Simultaneously, he experiences all of the mysteries: He experiences the Last Supper and his crucifixion as priests around the world consecrate Holy Communion; he feels the nativity as men pass images or icons of the manger; he is pained when men turn away from him in sin, but rejoices when they accept their faults in the sacrament of Reconciliation; he celebrates when men heed his call to make disciples of all nations by way of the sacrament of Holy Orders; he welcomes his newly baptized; he sees the Holy Spirit repeatedly descend during Confirmation; and he prepares the worthy for eventual homecoming in the sacrament of Extreme Unction. He is the Alpha and the Omega.

Fr. Nichols explains that the Church allows for man's active participation in all of the mysteries but one: the Parousia, or Second Coming. The Second Coming, however, writes Fr. Nichols, "can certainly be anticipated. This is the point of Christian hope" (120). Indeed, one may only anticipate participation in the Parousia, when the end of "the end" (Matt 24:14) is finally upon man. "For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay everyone according to his conduct" (Matt 17:27). N.V

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Free Will and the Rebel Angels in Medieval Philosophy by Tobias Hoffmann (*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021*), xiv + 292 pp.

MODERN READERS are often perplexed by the frequency and rigor with which angels are discussed in medieval philosophical texts. To the untrained eye, it may seem as if debates concerning the various properties and abilities of purely spiritual beings are the epitome of Scholastic extravagance, which can be safely disregarded—if not outright ridiculed—as a fanciful diversion from more essential philosophical concerns. The truth, of course, is that angelological reflection gave rise to some of the most original philosophical ideas of the Middle Ages, from Anselm's two *affectiones* of the will to Aquinas's "real distinction" between essence and existence. Far from being an idiosyncratic theological addendum to an already complete philosophical system, consideration of the angelic nature was in fact a central component of medieval philosophy, without which certain crucial metaphysical and psychological insights might not have occurred. This often-neglected truth is given detailed expression in Tobias Hoffmann's *Free Will and the Rebel Angels in Medieval Philosophy*, which explores how philosophical investigation into the fall of the angels—that is, the hypothesis of an evil choice made by rational beings under optimal psychological conditions—helped bring about significant advances in medieval debates about free will. Focusing on the century immediately following the reception of Aristotle's action theory in the Latin West (from roughly the 1220s to the 1320s), Hoffmann examines how theological claims regarding angelic sin influenced medieval thinkers as they sought to reconcile the intellectualism of Aristotelian moral psychology with their understanding of free will as the power to choose between alternatives.

This period is particularly deserving of study, Hoffmann argues, because it was then that the existence of free will first began to be "investigated within a philosophical account of action," rather than merely asserted on theological grounds as a necessary corollary of the doctrines of grace and sin (1). Consequently, theological anthropology took what Hoffmann calls a "psychological turn," with theologians newly determined to explain rational agency in terms of the interaction between different powers of the soul. In Hoffmann's estimation, the subsequent debates over the respective roles of intellect and will in the process of decision-making, as well as the relation between faulty cognition and voluntary wrongdoing, gave rise to some of the most innovative theories of free will in the later Middle Ages—including not only those of celebrated thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus, but also those of lesser-known luminaries such as

John of Pouilly and Peter Auriol. Although the concerns that motivated these debates were primarily anthropological, having to do with specifically human psychological processes, Hoffmann's study foregrounds the role that the angels played in the unfolding of various controversies. Comparing medieval angelological discussion to the thought experiments commonly employed by contemporary philosophers, Hoffmann argues that angels proved significant because they provided a subject matter in which rational freedom could be considered in a pure and ideal form, abstracted from any material constraints (3). While the angelic nature was certainly regarded as worthy of study in its own right, it was also often viewed as an opportunity to explore the nature of cognition and volition *simpliciter*, in relation to which the distinctiveness of human psychology could be better understood.

The book is divided into three parts, each of which traces the historical development of a distinct topic related to the free will debate. In the first part, Hoffmann presents a lucid account of the various ways that medieval thinkers employed Aristotelian ideas—including not only the essentials of his action theory, but also metaphysical doctrines such as the distinction between active and passive powers—as they sought to explain the psychological origins of free will. Comprising over half the text, these chapters provide a comprehensive overview of the free will debate from its origins in the writings of Anselm of Canterbury to its culmination in the proto-modern theorizing of William of Ockham, including a thorough discussion of the controversies surrounding the condemnations of 1270 and 1277.

Having introduced the reader to the key thinkers and philosophical issues at stake in the debate, Hoffmann then turns in the second part of the book to examine medieval discussion of the first cause of evil. As Hoffmann notes, this topic was closely connected to that of angelic sin, even though medieval thinkers normally treated the two independently from one another. Whereas the former has to do with how a good person can make an evil choice for the first time, the latter more specifically addresses how someone can do so under ideal psychological conditions (199). Discussion of evil's origin therefore provides a helpful introduction to the philosophical issues that arise from reflection on the fall of the angels, which are the focus of part three. In these final chapters, Hoffmann adds further depth to his account of the debate by detailing how medieval thinkers refined and clarified their theories of free will through sustained reflection on angelic sin. Concluding with an insightful chapter on the obstinacy of the rebel angels, this part of the book more than any other demonstrates the unique contribution that theological speculation made to medieval philosophy, prompting scholars to employ Aristotelian insights in manifestly un-Aristotelian ways.

Throughout the book, Hoffmann frames his analysis in terms of the disagreement between intellectualists and voluntarists—designations that he finds helpful to distinguish, in the most general way, between those who considered freedom to be rooted primarily in reason and those who instead prioritized the role of the will (5). Thus, whereas the intellectualists tended to tie volitions very closely to practical knowledge, such that evil willing was assumed to presuppose some sort of intellectual deficiency, voluntarists instead held that evil willing was possible even in the absence of any deficient cognition, since one always has the power to choose contrary to one's practical judgment. Hoffmann is careful to note, however, that there was no small amount of variation among thinkers within each camp, with some adopting stricter, and others more moderate positions. Indeed, a number of thinkers developed what he calls "intermediary" theories, which incorporate certain elements from each. While these theorists sided with the intellectualists in rejecting the notion that the will can choose directly against one's practical judgment, they nevertheless maintained, in a voluntarist vein, that the will has some sort of direct control over what causes this judgment (264). Although Hoffmann takes pains throughout the book not to color his analysis with any sweeping evaluative judgments, his sympathies seem to lie primarily with this third group of thinkers, who, even if they failed to provide a fully satisfactory solution to the problem of free will, nevertheless recognized the twin dangers posed by intellectualist determinism and voluntarist irrationalism.

As Hoffmann presents it, the fundamental problem that each of these theories sought to address was how to reconcile the necessary conditions of rational deliberation with the control that we must have over our choices to be morally responsible for them. Prior to the reception of Aristotle's action theory, medieval thinkers tended to assume that this control is secured by the fact that we can act in alternative ways by choosing either in accordance with or against reason's dictates (19). On the Aristotelian view, however, whether we decide to perform an action is determined solely by our rational judgment of what option is most choice-worthy. The adoption of such a view therefore seemed to entail a kind of intellectual determinism, since "a perfectly rational agent . . . would only act on the best reasons, and thus would not truly have alternative possibilities" (264). Consequently, intellectualists who sought to integrate Aristotelian insights into their theories of free will were faced with the task of explaining how their views did not compromise moral responsibility. On the other hand, voluntarists who wished to retain the standard control requirement had to find a way to account for the rational intelligibility of the decision to act against one's

practical judgment. As Hoffmann notes, medieval thinkers generally did not admit the possibility of clear-eyed wrongdoing (4). It was therefore incumbent upon voluntarists to elucidate the motivational structure of evil willing without compromising their commitment to the Aristotelian dictum that “every evildoer is ignorant.” Of course, in each case, the primary concern was with determining whether and to what extent the traditional understanding of free will as the ability to do otherwise needed to be revised in order to accommodate Aristotelian moral psychology. Whereas intellectualists were generally favorable to such revision, voluntarists tended to resist it.

How did angels factor in? According to Hoffmann, they did so by placing constraints on what could be considered an acceptable theory of free will. That is to say, for the medievals, such a theory not only had to reconcile the intelligibility of an evil choice with the agent’s control over it, but also had to explain how such a choice is possible for an agent who possesses perfect knowledge and is free from all disordered passions and dispositions. Moreover, it must account for the fact that, among those agents in such an ideal epistemic condition, only some sinned and not others. Thus, as Hoffmann notes, even the strictest intellectualists were forced to admit, if only implicitly, that free choices are determined not by cognition alone, but by the use that rational agents make of their cognition (265). Although explanations of what such use consists of—and whether it, too, must be preceded by a cognitive process of some kind—varied widely, Hoffmann’s subtle analysis reveals an underlying consensus among medieval thinkers that the control an agent has over his free choices must be “primitive,” meaning that it cannot be fully explained by its antecedent causes: “Freely made choices have an explanation—there is a story behind them—but at some point, the explanation stops at a bare fact, at a person willing something rather than not willing it” (265). Thus, in Hoffmann’s estimation, the primary upshot of the medieval free will debate, to which reflection on angelic sin directly contributed, was the emergence of the following view: although every free choice may be intelligible, insofar as it is based on a reason, there can be no contrastive explanation of why a person makes one choice instead of another, or why two persons who are in identical situations make different choices (266). In other words, while we may be able to explain how an agent *could* have acted in one way or another, we cannot ultimately account for why the agent *did* act in the way he or she did (214).

Hoffmann arrives at this conclusion by way of a rigorous philosophical analysis of the writings of over twenty medieval thinkers, including some whose contributions to the free will debate have until now received scant

scholarly attention. Although his goal is ultimately to cast these disparate writings into a coherent philosophical narrative, he is careful throughout to address each thinker on his own terms, sometimes even wading into interpretive disputes on matters of particular significance. Thus, in addition to advancing Hoffmann's overarching thesis, the book also contains much that will be of interest to scholars whose focus is somewhat narrower, extending only to certain figures in the debate. Thomistic scholars, for example, will benefit from Hoffmann's careful rendering of Aquinas's treatment of the first cause of evil, which has in recent years been the subject of much controversy. In his discussion of it, Hoffmann argues persuasively for the internal coherence of Aquinas's solution, which famously depends on the contested notion of "blameless nonconsideration" as the condition for the possibility of evil willing. Moreover, by situating this account within the context of the medieval free will debate, Hoffmann demonstrates Aquinas's exemplarity with respect to his integration of Aristotelian moral psychology into a theological account of free will, thus substantiating Jacques Maritain's claim that his explanation of the origin of moral evil was "one of the most original of his philosophical discoveries."¹

In all of these respects and more, Hoffmann's study succeeds in bringing to greater systematic clarity a wide-ranging debate that was central to medieval philosophy. Even if some contemporary scholars might wish for a more thorough interrogation of its philosophical presuppositions, Hoffmann clearly accomplishes his goal of "presenting the medieval free will debate according to the breadth of the thinkers' own interests" (3). Of course, even a strictly historical study such as Hoffmann's is not entirely free from the influence of contemporary philosophical concerns, which inevitably frame the way in which the various texts are analyzed. Thus, it is perhaps not inappropriate to consider whether the book might have benefited from an examination of not only the control condition of moral responsibility, which admittedly was the preeminent concern of medieval thinkers, but also what contemporary philosophers call the epistemic condition, by which they simply mean the knowledge or awareness an agent must have of his behavior in order to be morally responsible for it. Although a wrongdoer must be ignorant enough of his evil behavior to make his choice of it intelligible, he must also be cognizant enough of what he is doing in order for such a choice to be truly free. Unfortunately, Hoffmann raises this issue only in passing, as part of his discussion of Aquinas's account of angelic

¹ Jacques Maritain, *St. Thomas and the Problem of Evil* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1942), 23.

sin (210). While this is understandable, given its relative insignificance for most medieval thinkers, a more thorough consideration of how the relationship between knowledge and moral responsibility was understood might have further enriched Hoffmann's fascinating study, while perhaps also helping to convince contemporary moral philosophers of the ongoing relevance of the medieval free will debate. N.V

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Cur Deus Verba: Why the Word Became Words by Jeremy Holmes (*San Francisco: Ignatius, 2021*), 284 pp.

THIS BOOK'S TITLE plays on the incarnational analogy, and its argument begins and ends with God's purposes to draw humanity into communion with himself through revelation. In both aspects, Holmes echoes *Dei Verbum* (*DV*, §§2, 13). However, rather than pursuing a revelation-historical organization or beginning with Scripture's texts to derive conclusions about its nature and purpose, the book takes a "top-down" (13) approach to bibliology. In this way, its strength is the theological framing or reframing it gives to common questions.

The first three chapters culminate, he claims, in a "definition of Scripture" (11). Beginning with the Trinity and creation, Holmes argues that all things have their being by participating in the inner life (the Word) of the Father, thus reflecting him, and that the Spirit drives creatures "toward the pattern of the Son" (33). God desires creatures to be good and causes of goodness in others, patterned after and in the Son through the Spirit's impulse to return them to God. In the Incarnation, God "reconciles nature with grace" (39) and in Christ perfects these desires. In Christ, man is now "included in the life of the Trinity" (37) and an agent of revelation, reflects God perfectly, and in love sends the Spirit to return humans to God through himself. This leads to reflections on Scripture directly. "Scripture is meant to impress the interior life of the Church on each generation; put another way, it is meant to impress Christ the Head on the members of his Mystical Body" (69). This brings Holmes to the topics of inspiration and canon. In order for human texts to impress Christ on his members, to communicate the divine through human means, "God himself" must be "addressing the

heart of the believer" (72). He makes a case for canon by pointing to the communal nature of humans. Tradition and canon, by which truth as a common good is formulated for a society, order and inform the society regarding its purpose, history, and character. "Tradition," then, "is good for man as man" (57) even in natural society, and all the more so in the supernatural society, the Church. The "texts that embody and transmit the tradition" (63) give continuity and life to the organism that is the Church, while within that tradition these texts can function as a sort of "guide rail" and a "mirror" of its identity (67).

This overall view of Scripture lends perspective to particular topics (chs. 4–12). Turning to Scripture's authorship and inspiration, Holmes emphasizes again that God means humans to be real causes of revelation as God "attaches his voice" to their writing (82, 91, and throughout). This may, in differing circumstances, involve endowing them with particular and even unusual graces, many of which God grants to others who hand on revelation (such as Augustine), but in the case of the biblical authors the ("only") difference is that God "intended" biblical texts like Luke "to sound not only Luke's voice but God's voice as well" (91). His "general account of the fact of biblical difficulties" (202), then, depicts the human "author's soul" as "like the body of an instrument, determining the overtones of everything he writes" (208). God writes the notes to be played and selects the instruments, and God "asserts what the human author asserts" (210). But the particularities of an author's soul (and upbringing, assumptions, etc.) can be seen in anything from grammatical infelicities in Paul to the author's assumptions about a geocentric solar system, the goodness of killing the Canaanites, or Qoheleth's unawareness of an afterlife. God attaches his voice to their writing, and these instruments play "only God's note" (219), but God "does not affirm or deny" the assumptions or unasserted views of the author when writing (209). Scripture's purpose is not merely to impart doctrine but to conform one to Christ, and difficult passages are inspired in part for us to wrestle with and grow in virtue as we do (222, cf. 203).

Inspiration's criterion then is not focused merely on inerrancy or prophetic elevation of a single author's intellect. Inspiration is framed here by its final cause. This carries over into Holmes's discussion of Israel and the Old Testament. Israel participates in Christ as its final cause, and its "history and institutions received Christ's form as their own," such that "statements about Israel were already in a way statements about Christ" (111). This is helped by his argument that the Old Testament texts were written or at least standardized in the exilic and postexilic periods, when the authors and editors were in a better position to see the significance of Israel's story for

all of humanity under God and for its redemption in the coming messiah (see 95, 135, 137). This in a way anchors the spiritual sense not merely in the words that happened to be written down, but in “the human author’s own depth of understanding” (137). Though Holmes does not see the Old Testament authors as necessarily having a clear mental picture of the details of Christ’s future life (110), he is quick to show that an author who knows that what he recounts has greater prospective significance for the redemption of Israel will shape his text accordingly (137, 139). Readers of the literal sense in this case are helped by modern attention to literary genre, if they retain an ancient appreciation for the role of tradition and its literary tradents as the necessary “matchmaker” between our minds and divine realities by the way they shape their narratives (178, 184–85). Reading the spiritual senses likewise requires attention to the divine author. For, just as God inspired the authors and editors to creatively and faithfully construct Israel’s and the Church’s memory and identity through narrative, God can lead us to make connections and creatively “fill the gaps” (237) in Scripture ourselves as receivers and tradents of revelation. Indeed, the eternity of God and God’s intent for these texts to nurture the Church of all generations means that “our creative contribution to the meaning of the text can be a meaning the author [i.e., God] both intended and brought about” (241). Modernity perhaps makes a helpful contribution to call us to be aware of our subjectivity, and our interpretations must submit to the rule of faith and the common good, but we may take “as intended by God any interpretation that expresses a truth and is consistent with the meaning of the words and the context” (243). The spiritual senses ask us to consider the texts in light of Christ’s threefold coming—in humility (allegory), in glory (anagogical), and in the pilgrim Church (moral; 142–43)—and are thus part of our encounter with and conformation to Christ. The Scriptures live in the heart of the Church and, indeed, in the heart of Christ incarnate, who himself read and took to heart the inspired word, and in whose heart we are restored in love to the Father.

There is much to appreciate here. Holmes’s top-down and somewhat teleological approach offers a theological reframing to issues of inerrancy, the relation between the Old and New Testaments, and the relation of the literal and spiritual senses. He helpfully emphasizes the goodness of narrative (against one who might think the divine book *should* be an abstract catechism or philosophy primer) by emphasizing that narrative uniquely presents Jesus, the Word himself, “in his own mode” as one who lived and acted to save within linear-historical time (170). I also appreciated Holmes’s insight to press beyond or nuance the mere “signs and things” hermeneutic, noting

that, “while a human author cannot cause real things to signify [because he has not created them], he can do something remarkably like it” in creating parabolic stories and characters or even in the way he adjusts his presentation of events or characters for the good of the Church (138).

However, this approach—and its execution—bear weaknesses. Formally, I was uncertain of the ideal audience. Some arguments begin with illustrations or assumptions that seem to befit the introductory level (clarifying that “inspiration” does not mean the same thing as an artist being inspired by a sunset [81–82]), while at other points a Latin sentence (not merely a stock phrase) is given first and English only secondarily (97) or a question is framed anticipating an audience more familiar with Aquinas than with Scripture. One is surprised—from either audience—in a book about Scripture to see the accurate claim that John 1:1 echoes Gen 1:1, and yet to see the citation of Gen 1:1 (“In the beginning God created . . .”) defended thus: “So the Septuagint renders it, and I think it probable that John was interacting with this Greek text” (27n12). It is universally acknowledged and demonstrated in several studies from the whole of John that John is using the Septuagint. And the Septuagint is merely giving a straightforward rendering of the Hebrew (the occasional rendering “when God created” is an interpretation of the relation of 1:1 to the discourse it introduces, not a rendering of a “when” word that most English versions have left off). If the citation needs defending, why not explain what needs defending for the uninitiated or defend it for scholars with scholarship? The signposting is also often unhelpful. As an example: the last sentences of chapter 7 state that the literal sense of the Old Testament “is also inherently valuable to Christians, as we will see in the next chapter” (146). Chapter 8 opens by asking why God would inspire so much narrative rather than clear doctrinal pronouncements, and states that its goal is to explain why narrative is fitting (147–48). The chapter achieves this goal and, in the process, illustrates the literal-sense value of Old Testament narrative. But chapter 9 opens: “In the previous chapter, I offered a basic answer to the question, ‘How do texts mean?’” (173), and builds from that. Chapter 8’s discussion of the role of narrative is my favorite part of the book, and there are elements of it that would be part of an account of meaning, but it is hardly an adequate or explicit account of textual meaning. Several such mismatches in signposting might either lead a sympathetic reader not to shore up all the connections that add cogency to the argument or lead an unsympathetic reader to think that the argument is a mere succession of topically related animadversions.

Materially, the benefits of any top-down approach should be buttressed from below. Holmes helpfully accounts for the creative role of the human

under God. Yet even the nuanced articulation of signs and things here leaves the weight of spiritual meaning in the “natures” of things (124). But human communication—which God has inspired—encodes meaning within a preexisting network of symbols that have value beyond their “natures” (relations, stereotyped attributes, the emotive or patriotic value of a symbol or pattern of events, etc.). One need not deny essentialism to consider the modes of human communication in which Scripture’s text participates. Holmes has not rejected this—his account of narrative and event mirrors in some ways Paul’s perspective in 1 Cor 10:11 (“these things *happened* to them [Israel] as types, but they were *written* for our instruction”)—and his argument that one’s own interpretation may be divinely inspired opens a space for readings that are less controlled by the human authors’ historically conditioned communicative options and intentions. But his statement that we can take our own reading as divinely intended when it “expresses a truth and is consistent with the meaning of the words and the context” (243) requires more consideration of words within their ancient communicative contexts. Indeed, investigating the human author’s communicative intent in this way is part of trying to hear “clearly what God wanted to communicate to us,” even if such analysis does not exhaust divine meaning (*DV*, §12). Presumably this is all the more important in Scripture’s public role as a “guide rail” when one considers interpretation not merely devotionally but magisterially.

More “from below” analysis would also supplement this bibliology’s reframing with a historically prospective dimension. Holmes’s quotation of a ritual passage in Lev 14:4–7 invites subjectivity and eisegesis by saying the details and “bizarreness of the ritual . . . throws down a hermeneutical gauntlet: Interpret *this!*” (236; emphasis original). From a modern devotional vantage, this may be the impression of many, but why begin by inviting readers (students?) to retain that impression by problematizing the text, rather than reminding them that this is a Persian-period (see above) codification or perhaps modification of what priests had been doing for centuries, and evaluating it at least initially within that context? Such set-ups not only encourage less sympathy for the text than they could; they can also create an unhelpful hermeneutical asymmetry. The treatment of biblical “difficulties,” again from a modern vantage point, emphasizes that the inspired authors play God’s note and symphony but that their culturally based assumptions or blind spots that shape and are implied in their texts are *not* assertions divinely intended in the meaning of the text. Yet we *are* told to see our own (orthodox) interpretations as divinely intended meanings of the text, and that to decry eisegesis “offends pious ears” (235). Our culturally based

assumptions and beliefs are constituents of our reading just as much as of the authors' writing, and this account might encourage readers to trust their own biases without first trying to attune their ears to God's symphony and his chosen instruments, so that pious ears can listen more clearly. N·V

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1 & 2 Thessalonians by Douglas Farrow (*Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2020*), xx + 336 pp.

1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS are probably the very first written testimonies of early Christianity. When Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians in AD 50, Our Lord Jesus Christ had “accomplished his exodus in Jerusalem” (see Luke 9:31) not twenty years before. Here we find the *paradosis* of the Mystery of Christ among the Gentiles, the first articulations of Trinitarian faith (see 1 Thess 1:2–5), expressions of longing for the coming Parousia of Christ, warnings of a strange lawlessness already at work ripening towards a great apostasy and the coming of the “man of lawlessness.”

Douglas Farrow has pondered 1 and 2 Thessalonians for many years, attested by his numerous expositions and essays over three decades. He brings to his task a ready command of Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, and a vast reading of historical commentary and controversy, an intense personal and ecclesial faith, and a sense of historical, prophetic, and pastoral urgency.

Throughout the book are excursions on themes opened up by the words and phrases of St Paul's text: Satan (82–86); the sexual body and virtue in sex, divorce, and remarriage (95–114); the remedial pains of purgatory (beginning in this life); the reality of final retribution, the finality of hell; the untenability of so-called “universalism” (131–41, 178–84, 192–96); the imminency and the delay of the Parousia (199–204); the apostasy / man of lawlessness / Antichrist; the temple in which the Antichrist seats himself (205–42); the mystery of lawlessness at work, especially in undermining the Church (245–61).

In studying Paul's eschatological themes, Farrow necessarily ponders other scriptural texts leading in the same direction: Dani 7–12; Jesus's Olivet Discourse in its most extensive form at Matt 24:1–25:46 (though it really begins at 23:23); 2 Pet 2:1–5, 3:3–15; much of the Rev 6:1 through 19:21;

Deut 32:1–43 (Farrow says the Song of Moses encapsulates the whole of human history); Psalms 97 (LXX 96); 110 (LXX 109); Wis 4–5, 10–19; Sirach 50; Joel; Zech 8–14; Mal 3–4; 2 Macc 5–9; Isa 66:5,14–16; and so on. Farrow holds that Paul worked from knowledge of Jesus’s apocalyptic teachings in a version closest to Matthew’s (138, 142, 184, 189, 205).

Farrow takes companions in his exegesis: Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Augustine, Haimo, Anselm, Aquinas, and others. He knows Luther’s hermeneutics and Calvinist disputes about supra- and infra-sessionism and double predestinationism. He consults more recent prophets, quoting at length from Newman’s amazingly prescient 1838 discourses on the last times, Solovyov in 1899, and Fulton Sheen in 1948 and 1958. Another exegete is an artist: Luca Signorelli, whose *Disputation of the Antichrist* in Orvieto Cathedral Farrow refers to several times.

Farrow shows his affinity with Irenaeus. That means cleaving to the visible and invisible truths of the Incarnation of God the Word, respecting concrete and embodied realities, keeping in view the transcendent goal (“The glory of God is a living man—and the life of man is in the vision of God”), instinctively flinching at gnosticizing tendencies—sophisticated re-interpretations of Scripture that elide the rule of faith and dissolve truth. It means a ruling sense of the Kingdom of God as an intervention from heaven rather than generating from man or from the earth. It means a spirit of obedience to the commandments, to the *paradosis* that descends to us from above in Christ, effected by the Spirit in the *ecclesia*, the company of brethren destined to “gather to Christ” at his coming (1 Thess 2:1), who practice that final *gathering to Christ* by participating in the Eucharist on the “Eighth Day,” the Lord’s Day.

Farrow deplores the patchy reading of 1 and 2 Thessalonians in the lectionaries: “While 1 Thessalonians fares a little better, barely half of 2 Thessalonians is read in the Churches” (11). Missing is the eschatologically pivotal 2 Thess 2:3–15, where Paul, distinguishing the imminency and immediacy of the *Parousia*, speaks of the “mystery of lawlessness at work.” Farrow wonders drily with Jaroslav Pelikan whether the Church prefers among the faithful “their more customary torpor” to any risk of stirring up eschatological fervor (12). 1 and 2 Thessalonians are read in their entirety in the fourth week of Ordinary Time in the Office of Readings. Nevertheless, the eschatological urgent passages of 1 Thess 4:13–18 and 2 Thess 2:3–15 would be fittingly read in the last couple of weeks of Ordinary Time and the first two weeks of Advent, when the mood of the liturgy does turn to the coming Day of the Lord.

Farrow studies three possibilities for that “temple of God in which the man of lawlessness, the son of perdition . . . will seat himself, giving himself out to be God” (2 Thess 2:3, 5). Relegating the idea of a restored Jewish Temple in Jerusalem (the first option), he favors a combination of the second and third options: the adhering of many to the man of lawlessness, in the world at large and within the Church. The conclusion, in Farrow’s view, is painful and inescapable. If the Antichrist is a simulacrum of Christ, so he will attempt to suborn the Church into a counter-Church, another simulacrum.

For the new and eternal Temple of God is the Incarnate Son himself (Jn 2:21), and by extension his ecclesial body (1 Cor 3:26–17, Eph 2:21). To violate God’s place then, and to occupy his temple, it is necessary to violate and occupy in some fashion his Church, which must be suborned and brought to heel, defiled and then destroyed, like Jerusalem itself. (222)

Jesus himself foretold an end time of “false messiahs and false prophets, who will deceive even the elect if possible” (Matt 24:24). He asked his disciples: “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith upon the earth?” (Luke 18:8). Farrow answers, schooled by St. Paul: “Yes, he will, though it will not be common” (238).

From time to time, he ponders what is even now befalling the earthly Church and wider society. The referents are clear enough to watchful readers. Towards the end, Farrow names names (267). Our forebodings are merited:

Do we no longer believe in the mission? Do we no longer consider it our business, or indeed God’s business, to exalt the name of Christ? Have we lost all confidence in the power of his word? If so, then we ourselves have been hindered *by perverse and evil men* (2 Thess 3:2), who have taught us not to be too quickly shaken or disturbed by God himself, and have led us away into somniferous myths about peace and progress. (169)

The preacher who either does not believe these things or is afraid to preach them perforce preaches *another gospel* (Gal 1:6). Does he prefer “mercy”? What he calls “mercy” is a very cruel mercy that causes others to stumble and fall, suffering the penalties that accrue to the disobedient in this life and (where repentance is lacking) in the next; for when the ἐκδικος (1 Thess 4:6) comes, with his holy ones and for his holy ones, those who thought their disobedience a small thing, who forgot that the virtue of obedience is in its way “the mother and

guard of all the virtues" (Augustine, *Civ.* 14:9), will not be ready, and will not be able to stand. (114)

Farrow firmly upholds the reality of the retributive justice of God:

It may be open to some Marcionites to say that the true God is a God without retributive justice, but they will have to dispense with Paul in order to do so, leaving them with no canon at all. The biblical God is a refining fire; for those who will not be refined, he *is a consuming fire* (Heb 12:29 et al). (177)

Further to the suggestions of some Alexandrians, from the beginning of the third century, that hell is transient, Farrow quotes St. Basil on the reality of an everlasting hell from which there is no return:

"Since these and many such sayings are found everywhere in the God-inspired Scripture," he says, "this is surely one of the devil's stratagems: that many human beings, by overlooking such important and serious words and declarations of the Lord, award to themselves an end of punishment in order that they may sin with greater bravado." And he adds, showing his grasp both of the dominical words and the deeper issue, "if there ever were an end of eternal punishment, then surely eternal life would also have an end, . . . since the same adjective [αἰώνιος] is attached equally to both." (184)

Towards the end, Farrow allows poetry to his spirit of faith as he brings 1 and 2 Thessalians to bear on contemporary events. He ends by sounding like one of those prophets of the early Church:

If two millennia on, we cannot recognize around us, inside the Church as well as outside, the advance of the mystery of lawlessness, and the appearance of the signs of the end, then there *is* no advancing mystery nor any approach of the end. If we cannot see, in the theoretical and practical atheism with which we have been experimenting for several centuries, and in today's sudden repudiation of the body and of any God-given moral order, a preparation for the appearance of the *man of lawlessness*, then no doubt we can say that such a man is always with us and will never be with us. In which case, neither will the Son of Man come. . . . Which means that the long arc of justice, to employ that popular phrase, will never terminate in an actual judgment. . . .

We have been given these letters and these texts to teach us to stand firm, how to be stable in our manner of life, how not to be easily shaken, how to wait for what, in the justice and mercy of God, we have been told to expect—in a word, *to serve the God who is living and true, and to wait for His Son to appear from the heavens, whom He raised from the dead—Jesus, the one rescuing us from the coming wrath* (1 Thess 1:10). (292–94)

Farrow holds together the tension of two truths: human responsibility on the one hand, and divine retribution on the other:

The line between the literal and the metaphorical is hard to draw here, but we do not have to draw it. What we have to do is to face squarely the fact of retribution. . . . Universalism is a grave departure from tradition, and the notion that hell, like sin, is merely an effect of free will is wrong. Hell is *the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels* (Mt 25:41), not a temporary fire prepared *by* the devil and his angels, of which they later repent. . . . Hell is the last destination of those who prefer love of self to love of God and love of neighbor. . . . Hell is the place of banishment from the presence of God *who is love* (1 Jn 4:16), and from the creaturely face of love which is the face of Jesus Christ. All who go to this place go willingly in one sense, and unwillingly in another. They go there because they themselves have determined thus; they go there because God has sent them where they belong. (179–80)

Farrow frequently returns to the themes of thanksgiving, the Eucharist, and the “economy of the gift.” The “time between the times”—between the Beginning and the Eschaton—is “a Eucharistic time, a pause in which the Church has its own anaphoric work to do” (123). He responds to Paul’s exhortation, “Rejoice at all times. Pray unceasingly. Give thanks in every circumstance, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thess 5:17–18):

God’s design for us, the very ground of our humanity, is that we should be Eucharistic creatures who know how to give thanks and gladly do so, who are thus able to participate in an exchange of gift and gratitude and joy. Therefore, the apostles urge prayer, thanksgiving, and rejoicing at all times, even and especially when things look bleak. (163)

In praying for others, we participate in Christ, who “lives forever to make intercession for those who draw near to God through him” (Heb 7:25). So Farrow elucidates Paul on what it is to offer intercessory prayer in Christ:

The Spirit, who through the apostles proposes the Son as object of faith and obedience, also enables the apostles to join with the Son in presenting the Thessalonians to the Father as the object of the Father’s blessing. The Ascension of Jesus into heaven, alluded to at 1:10, is a license to recall *before our God and Father* (cf. Jn 20:17) the merits of the brethren, past and present. (33)

What Farrow says of the exigencies of persevering in a life of prayer surely catches fire from lived experience, and we very much recognize the truth of what he says:

For our safe conduct to the kingdom is a process of learning the love of God and the constancy of Christ, which cannot be done without prayer. That we stumble in our lessons; that neither our words nor our intentions are properly conformed as yet; that we do not as yet see God like the saints in glory, with God’s own eyes, or hear him with his own ears; that we do not know fully even what is in our own mind, never mind about the mind of God; . . . that we desperately need those *sighs of the Spirit* (Rom 8:26), especially when they are most inaudible and inaudible to us—is no reason not to pray, but rather a reason to pray. For only what is in motion towards God can be directed. (273)

Finally, Farrow cedes the long view of Paul’s urgent eschatological doctrine:

We may after all agree with McGinn, then, that the chief use of the doctrine of the Antichrist is to warn us against ourselves, meaning this the way that Gregory the Great meant it—that we should fight the antichrist within, lest we find ourselves allied with the antichrist without. (239)

Yes, one can take this lesson to heart from the disturbing, dramatic doctrine of the “man of lawlessness” who is to anticipate and simulate Christ’s Second Coming: “Pay heed to yourselves, and keep your soul diligently” (Deut 4:9), especially in days of worsening polarizations, lest we wake on that Day—for “it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the earth”

(Luke 21:35)—and find that we have sided with a plausible, “safe” counterfeit, that is, the *lie*, and we hardly knew it—it took us so smoothly, so incrementally—and behold, our Lord is come “to judge the world by fire.”

N:V

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