

INTRODUCTION

Augustine called the Sermon on the Mount the “charter of the Christian life,” complete in all the precepts that constitute the Christian life.¹ Thomas Aquinas regarded the Sermon as the written form of the new law of Christ.² Throughout the Christian tradition, commentaries on the Sermon are central to the moral thought of giants such as Augustine, Luther, and Bonhoeffer. Yet with too few exceptions, the Sermon has surprisingly garnered little attention from contemporary Christian ethicists and moral theologians. One broader goal of this project is an attempt to restore the Sermon on the Mount to a more prominent place in moral theology and in Christian formation more generally.

One of the most important developments in moral theology and Christian ethics has been a return to prominence of the role of virtue. Yet again with few exceptions there has been little sustained attempt to demonstrate how a virtue ethic is thoroughly rooted in Scripture. Indeed, it is even assumed that a virtue-centered approach to morality is actually non-scriptural.³ Another broader goal of this project is to demonstrate not only that a virtue ethic is compatible with Scripture, but also that there is an illuminating convergence between the Sermon on the Mount and a virtue-centered approach to morality. Matthew did not read Aristotle, but it is extraordinary how closely the text of the Sermon matches up with the conceptual resources of virtue ethics.

¹ Augustine, *The Lord’s Sermon on the Mount*, trans. John Jepson, S.S. (New York: Paulist Press, 1948), i.1.1.

² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (New York: Benziger Bros., 1948), I–II 108, 3.

³ For an example of this latter affirmation in recent biblical scholarship, see Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3–7:72 and Luke 6:20–49)* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 97. As further evidence of general neglect, consider that virtue is practically non-existent in what are arguably the two most important late twentieth-century books on Scripture and ethics, namely, Richard Hayes’s *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996) and Frank Matera’s *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996).

The thesis of this book is that the Sermon on the Mount is fruitfully read with the questions and concerns of virtue ethics in mind. In other words, a virtue-centered approach to moral theology helps us to understand better the ethical guidance in the Sermon on the Mount. Yet the moral guidance offered in Matthew 5–7 is not simply Aristotle from the mouth of Jesus Christ. The complementary thesis of this book is that the Sermon on the Mount specifies and illuminates a virtue-centered approach to morality. In short, there is a convergence between the Sermon on the Mount and a virtue-centered approach to morality.

The tasks of this introduction are threefold. I first contextualize this project in relation to other bodies of scholarship in order to both situate it in relation to them and show the need for it given the lacunae in those bodies of scholarship. Second, I explain the rationale for the organization of this book's chapters and provide a brief overview of their content. Third and finally, I attend to some methodological issues that are helpful to have addressed before the ensuing chapters.

I. CONTEXTUALIZING THIS BOOK

In order to contextualize this project in contemporary scholarship and the tradition more broadly, it would help to situate it in relation to three distinct theological literatures. The first is the tradition of commentary on the Sermon on the Mount. Given the claims above by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas about the importance of the Sermon for life in Christ, it should be unsurprising that there is such a vast amount of commentary on the Sermon in the Christian tradition, whether it be focused on the Sermon or address the Sermon in the larger context of commentary on Matthew or the gospels.⁴ Books on the Sermon and/or extended treatments of these three chapters in Matthew are ubiquitous in the writings of important figures throughout the Christian tradition. Books on the Sermon on the Mount continue to be written by biblical scholars today. The tradition of commentary on the Sermon on the Mount is enormous, and it continues today.

The second body of literature is on virtue ethics. In scholarship on moral theology and Christian ethics, one of the more seismic shifts over the past few decades has been the resurgence of virtue ethics. This rise has been well

⁴ To provide some sense of the amount of commentary, Hans Dieter Betz reports Adolf von Harnack's quip that exegesis merely on Mt 5:17 and simply by Patristic authors could easily fill an entire book. See his *The Sermon on the Mount*, 175. Warren Kissinger's *The Sermon on the Mount: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1975) comes closest to providing a comprehensive overview of that tradition, though in his opening lines he reports Jaroslav Pelikan's claim that "the history of the exposition of the Sermon on the Mount has not yet been written," and if it were to be done it would be "a massive historical enterprise" (1).

I. Contextualizing This Book

* 3

documented, with early pioneers such as Elizabeth Anscombe and Josef Pieper paving the way for philosophers such as Alasdair MacIntyre and theologians such as Stanley Hauerwas among Protestants and Servais Pinckaers, O.P. for Catholics.⁵ Philosophical and theological accounts of virtue are ubiquitous today in moral thought, requiring any self-proclaimed virtue ethicist to situate him or herself as to the particular strand of virtue ethic endorsed (a topic addressed below). Nonetheless, despite the prominence of virtue ethics in recent Christian moral thought, there is surprisingly little attention given to its relation to Scripture in general, and to the Sermon in particular. This lacuna sets the stage for this book.

The third body of literature concerns the relationship between Scripture and ethics, both understood more broadly than the Sermon and virtue ethics, respectively. In Catholic moral theology, the degree of disconnect that had developed between Scripture and ethics is evident in the oft-cited Vatican II claim that moral theology should be “nourished more on the teaching of the Bible.”⁶ The late twentieth century saw a surge in scholarship on Scripture and ethics, from both Protestant and Catholic ethicists.⁷ Particularly noteworthy are the two monographs on the topic from scripture scholars Richard Hayes and Frank Matera.⁸ Though the volume of this scholarship has subsided, important works continue to appear on this interrelationship.⁹

Given the existence of these three robust bodies of scholarship, the absence of sustained attention to a virtue-centered approach to morality in

⁵ For one such account of the rise in attention to virtue in moral theology and Christian ethics, see David Cloutier and William C. Mattison III “Review Essay: The Resurgence of Virtue in Recent Moral Theology,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 3.1, *Virtue* (Jan. 2014): 228–59. See also Jonathan Sanford’s *Before Virtue: Assessing Contemporary Virtue Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015).

⁶ See *Optatem Totius*, 707–724 in Austin Flannery, O.P., ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975), 16. For an example of one pre-Vatican II herald of the importance of being more firmly rooted in Scripture, Bernard Haring, see James F. Keenan, S. J. “Bernard Haring’s Influence on American Catholic Moral Theology,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 1.1 (Jan. 2012): 23–22.

⁷ Examples include Bruce C. Birch and Larry L. Rasmussen, *Bible and Ethics in Christian Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1989) and William Spohn, *What Are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics?* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995). For a sampling of positions on this question see Charles Curran and Richard McCormick, eds., *Readings in Moral Theology No. 4: The Use of Scripture in Moral Theology* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1984).

⁸ See the Richard Hayes and Frank Matera volumes cited above.

⁹ Examples include William Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (Bloomsbury, 2000); Allen Verhey, *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture and the Moral Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2005); Richard Burridge, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007); Robert Brawley, ed., *Character Ethics and the New Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007); and, Joel Green and Jacquelyn Lapsley, eds., *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

relation to the Sermon on the Mount is striking. With the very few exceptions noted in the following paragraph, the Sermon on the Mount does not feature prominently in either recent moral theology and Christian ethics, or recent work on Scripture and ethics.¹⁰ As to recent scholarship on morality, despite the fact that the Sermon is universally recognized as the most lengthy and obviously ethical discourse by Jesus, it is largely absent from moral formation, be it in everyday raising of children and ongoing faith formation, or in the halls of academia where scholars of moral theology and Christian ethics are trained.¹¹ As to the literature on Scripture and ethics, attention to virtue is virtually non-existent in that surge of scholarship at the close of the twentieth century. Some more recent work on Scripture and ethics has begun to attend to both virtue and the Sermon. But the literature on Scripture and ethics does not yet reflect the level of depth and sophistication that has been reached in the recent resurgence of research on virtue in moral theology and Christian ethics. A lack of attention to virtue is perhaps less surprising in recent biblical scholars who are not trained moralists (much as this author is no trained biblical scholar). Yet there can even be found in recent biblical scholarship an assumption that a virtue approach to morality is antithetical to a biblical ethic.¹²

Though the lack of scholarship described above is real and significant, it is not complete.¹³ There are some excellent recent books that are close kin to this book as to their subject matter. It is worth pausing to mention two of

¹⁰ In addition to the following, note must be made of the Pontifical Biblical Commission document *The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2008). Obviously the general task of that document precludes a focus on either the Sermon or virtue. Indeed, the term “virtue” used in the technical sense appears just sixteen times in this 200-plus page document (4, 40, 43, 44, 47, 65, 104, 106, 109, 129, 133, 137, and 156). Nonetheless, there is an important role for virtue described in this account of the Bible and morality. Though at times (rightly) insisting a biblical morality is not simply a list of laws and virtues (4, 156), the term virtue is also used to describe life in Christ in general (43, 133); in reference to the example Christ offered to us in His life (44); to name the theological virtues (65); to describe the relationship between the “human virtue” of wisdom “potentially discoverable in all cultures” and Christian faith (104); and, in the most frequent and sustained use of the term, in the context of the beatitudes (e.g., “a whole list of fundamental dispositions and virtues is to be found in the beatitudes,” 47).

¹¹ Anecdotally, throughout my seven years of graduate formation in moral theology, never was I required or offered to devote significant attention to the Sermon on the Mount. I myself confess, despite teaching moral theology to college students for over ten years and writing a commonly used textbook on moral theology, that I do not (yet) rely on the Sermon as a foundation in my introductory course on moral theology/Christian ethics.

¹² See, for example, Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 97: “[T] attitudes, actions, and thoughts demanded [in the Sermon on the Mount] are different from what the Greeks would call ‘virtues.’”

¹³ For several important articles on the Sermon on the Mount and ethics, see *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22.1 (2009). This excellent collection features prominent moralists and is the fruit of a 2008 conference at Cambridge on the Sermon on the Mount.

I. Contextualizing This Book

* 5

them not only to recognize their important contributions (as will be done throughout the chapters that follow) but also to contextualize this project in relation to them. By far the closest kin to this project is Servais Pinckaers, O.P.'s *The Sources of Christian Ethics*.¹⁴ The present book can be rightly understood as an attempted expansion of Pinckaers's brief chapter there on the morality of the Sermon.¹⁵ The Thomistic moral theology of virtue articulated by Pinckaers is, as addressed below, the methodology adopted here in terms of virtue ethics.¹⁶ The second book, comparatively impactful in the Protestant world of Christian ethics, is Glen Stassen and David Gushee's *Kingdom Ethics*.¹⁷ This entire book is focused on the Sermon, and virtue features prominently in their approach to morality, so in these senses the book is quite similar to this one. Yet *Kingdom Ethics* differs from this book in terms of its organization, which includes several initial chapters on methodology followed by chapters organized topically, most often by specific ethical issues. Furthermore, Stassen and Gushee's approach to virtue ethics differs significantly from the one here.¹⁸

Despite the very important contributions made by these works, there is clearly a lacuna in recent scholarship as to examining the Sermon on the Mount with a virtue-centered approach to morality. In this book, I attempt to address that gap. More than simply fill a void, I make the further claim that examining the Sermon from the perspective of a virtue-centered approach to

¹⁴ Servais Pinckaers, O.P. *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996).

¹⁵ Given the importance of Pinckaers to post-Vatican II Catholic moral theology, there is a sense in which all post-conciliar moral theology is a continuation of an agenda set by his work. For an analysis of his thought in the context of the post-Vatican II renewal of Catholic moral theology, see Craig Steven Titus, "Servais Pinckaers and the Renewal of Catholic Moral Theology" *Journal of Moral Theology* 1.1 (Jan. 2012): 43–68.

¹⁶ Another excellent book in Catholic moral theology closely related to this one is Daniel Harrington, S. J. and James Keenan, S. J.'s *Jesus and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Sheed and Ward, 2005). Though they include a chapter on the Sermon, their focus is on the gospels more broadly. Also worthy of mention is Yiu Sing Lucas Chan's *The Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes* (Lanham, MD; Sheed and Ward, 2012). This book contains an overview chapter on virtue ethics and Scripture, and its focus on the beatitudes is obviously pertinent to this book. Chan tragically passed away suddenly as this book was completed. R.I.P.

¹⁷ The complete title is *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press Academic, 2003)

¹⁸ Two other recent books warrant mention here. Dale Allison's *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1999) also focuses on the Sermon and ethics, and like the present book is organized by the textual order of the Sermon. Yet virtue ethics does not feature prominently. Finally, Charles Talbert, who edits the series where Allison's book appears, wrote *Reading the Sermon on the Mount: Character Formation and Decision-Making in Matthew 5–7* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006). This excellent book is also organized by the Sermon's textual order and does feature character and virtue prominently, though its approach to virtue ethics differs from that offered here.

morality reveals a noteworthy convergence. In other words, a virtue perspective enables one to ascertain more fully the moral guidance offered in the Sermon. Conversely, the Sermon on the Mount specifies and perfects a virtue-centered approach to morality. It is hoped that by making this case I can: contribute to theological scholarship; do moral theology that is robustly “nourished more on the teachings of the Bible” as called for by the Second Vatican Council; and perhaps most importantly, contribute to the restoration of the Sermon on the Mount to a prominent role in Christian moral formation.¹⁹

II. ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

How is this book organized, and why was that organization chosen? One friend who reviewed this manuscript suggested a possible tension in the structure of the book. Is this book a sort of “ethics commentary” that follows the text in order and identifies the moral relevance of passages sequentially? Or is it a more constructive argument about what a virtue-centered approach to morality looks like that is rooted in the Sermon on the Mount?²⁰ This book is in some ways both, but clearly more the latter than the former. The problem is that these two endeavors suggest different organizations, the first driven by textual order of the Sermon and the second a topical order based on central features of virtue ethics. Despite my claim that this book is more the latter, the organization I have chosen is the former. Why so?

First, the “downsides” of the order I have chosen. I have always been concerned that a monograph organized in the order of the sections of the Sermon could be misperceived as a work of biblical scholarship. As noted above, I am not a biblical scholar, and this is not a work of contemporary biblical scholarship. I hope biblical scholars benefit from the arguments offered here as I most certainly have from biblical scholarship, but this book is not a work of that genre. Furthermore, treating the Sermon in basic textual order can lead to a tendency to “run through” what classical commentators and contemporary biblical scholars say about this text rather than marshaling that thought toward the constructive argument that this book makes. I have been attentive to avoiding that temptation, but I likely have been less successful on some passages than others.

So why nevertheless organize this book by chapters that follow the order of the Sermon and organize chapters to *generally* follow the text of the Sermon? Moral theologians have long been accused of proof texting Scripture to

¹⁹ The term “restoration” invites question as to whether or how the Sermon played such a role in the past. That primarily historical question is worthy of study but cannot be undertaken here.

²⁰ My thanks to David Cloutier for raising this question.

II. Organization of This Book

* 7

support arguments that are in actuality generated by other (non-scriptural) commitments. That charge could of course be leveled here as well. The decision to follow the order of the text of the Sermon reflects a commitment to have the constructive argument offered here be as accountable as possible to the Scripture, not only to more sporadically chosen verses, but to the very organization and structure of the Sermon itself. That is one reason why the book is organized as it is, and also why I take so seriously the organization of the Sermon and the constitution of its various components as having significance (e.g., the beatitudes, antitheses, and petitions of the Lord's Prayer). The very organization of the Sermon on the Mount is offered in support of this book's thesis that there is noteworthy convergence between the Sermon on the Mount and a virtue-centered approach to morality, and therefore I have chosen to respect that organization by the structure of the book.

This claim of course rests on some account of what the structure of the Sermon on the Mount actually is. There are many explanations of the organization of the Sermon throughout the tradition of commentary. To name just two noteworthy examples: Augustine famously organized the Sermon into seven sections that align with the beatitudes.²¹ Thomas Aquinas divides the Sermon into three sections: first, Jesus promises reward (5:3–16); second, Jesus sets down precepts (5:17–7:6); and third, Jesus teaches how someone can attain the observance of these precepts (7:7–29).²² Yet there is actually remarkable commonality in contemporary biblical scholarship as to the overall structure of Matthew 5–7.²³ The Sermon begins with a section on the beatitudes that concludes with the salt and light metaphors. It then contains what might be called the “main part,” beginning with 5:17 and concluding with 7:12. Contemporary scholars virtually unanimously recognize the *inclusio* formed by these two verses based on the repeated phrase “law and the prophets.” There is then a final part of the Sermon which follows 7:12, namely, 7:13–29.

As for the subdivision of the “main part,” again we find virtual unanimity. The four verses in 5:17–20 on fulfillment of the old law are regarded as introducing the ensuing six antitheses in 5:21–48, with which they form one

²¹ Augustine, *The Lord's Sermon on the Mount*. For a helpful summary of Augustine's organizational schema, see Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 46.

²² Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew 1–12* (Rochester, NY: The Aquinas Institute, 2013), 403.

²³ For examples of the organization of the Sermon on the Mount along the lines offered in the ensuing sentences, see Robert Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 39; Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 50–66; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1989), 212; and W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew, Vol. I: Matthew 1–7*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark 1988), 63.

unified section. Next, the readily evident structured parallelism of 6:1–18 leads scholars to regard these verses as another unified section. Finally, the remaining verses in the main part 6:19–7:12 can be grouped together. There is far less agreement on how these verses fit together, and frequently it is assumed that they fit together only by default, that is, as the verses left over in the main part until 7:12. Against this assumption Chapter 4 offers a case for how these verses are indeed coherently structured. However, it is still the case that 6:19–7:12 are commonly treated together in contemporary biblical scholarship.

Therefore, in contemporary biblical scholarship there are evidently five sections of the Sermon on the Mount. These sections correspond to the first five chapters of this book. This book concludes with a sixth chapter on the Lord's Prayer, which is of course found at the center (6:7–15) of the middle section of the Sermon (6:1–18). There are several reasons to "pull out" the Lord's Prayer and treat it separately in its own chapter. First, contemporary biblical scholarship indicates in various ways the unique function of these verses in the organization of the Sermon.²⁴ Most noteworthy is Ulrich Luz's chiastic view of the structure of the Sermon, with the Lord's Prayer as the centerpiece and very heart of the Sermon.²⁵ Second, the crucial importance of the Lord's Prayer in the life of Christian discipleship, along with the enormous tradition of commentary on the prayer, warrants distinct treatment of these verses. Finally and more substantively, Chapter 6 offers a constructive argument about the Lord's Prayer and its relationship to virtue that is in some ways a climactic conclusion to the thesis of this book.

In summary, the division of the Sermon into sections that correspond with the six chapters in this book is well supported in the tradition of commentary on the Sermon on the Mount. And as indicated above, we will find that this commonly recognized organization of the Sermon provides further support for this book's thesis for illuminating convergence between the Sermon and a virtue-centered approach to morality. How do these chapters unfold?

Chapter 1 (Mt 5:1–16) focuses mainly on the beatitudes. It makes a case that the classic virtue ethics' claims that morality is about happiness, and that happiness is an activity, can help us better understand the beatitudes. To make this claim in the terms of contemporary biblical scholarship, the beatitudes are best understood both ethically and eschatologically. Equipped with the questions and concerns of virtue ethics as to the role of happiness in morality and the connection between moral activity and happiness, this chapter mines the tradition of commentary on the beatitudes in order to

²⁴ See, for example, Guelich on how the petitions of the Lord's Prayer govern the ensuing verses 6:19–7:12 (*Sermon on the Mount*, 363–81). This argument (and its origins) is addressed in Chapter 4.

²⁵ Luz, *Matthew* 1–7, 212.

II. Organization of This Book

* 9

elucidate the moral guidance offered in the beatitudes. The scriptural text in turn informs common claims of classical virtue ethics, so in this chapter we see the method of the book perfectly exemplified. The chapter also concludes with an examinations of the role of suffering in the life of discipleship, the centrality of Christ, and the inextricable link between Christology and ecclesiology, particularly evident in 5:13–16.

Chapter 2 (Mt 5:17–48) examines in detail Christ’s teaching in the antitheses about how the new law fulfils the old law. Granting that that the *telos* of old law and new law alike is happiness, this chapter makes an implicit argument about the compatibility of law and virtue. More explicitly, it adopts a virtue-centered approach to morality to argue that Christ’s moral teaching in these verses “fulfills” the law (5:17) by depicting activity that is in greater conformity to the *telos* of the law, and thus called more “perfect” or complete (5:48).

Chapter 3 (Mt 6:1–6, 16–18) examines a crucial topic in any virtue ethic, namely, intentionality. A first-person perspective is central to the teleological view of human action endemic to classical virtue ethics, but it raises questions about the intelligibility of immediate actions and long-term goals, as well as the relationship between the two. This chapter argues that a virtue-centered approach to morality not only converges with the moral guidance offered in these verses, but such an approach is also illuminated by the scriptural text, mainly through the notions of “hypocrisy” and “reward” as well as the practical guidance offered there on the development of virtue.

Chapter 4 (Mt 6:19–7:12) analyzes a set of verses commonly grouped together by default due to the clear transitions in 6:19 and 7:12. It argues that a virtue-centered perspective reveals a clear order to these verses, centered around the (spatially centered) verse “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (6:33). These verses address classic virtue ethics themes, such as the singularity of the final end and its impact on everyday activities with particular attention to relations with others. Once again I argue that the Sermon, far from merely relating insights of classical ethics, presents an ethic convergent with classical virtue yet thoroughly transformed by faith in our heavenly Father. This faith in a God of provident gratuity shapes our engagement with temporal goods and our relations with others.

Chapter 5 (Mt 7:13–29), which forms an *inclusio* with 5:1–16, similarly addresses the relationship between activities in this life and our ultimate destiny in the next. While the opening of the Sermon presents an account of such activity as continuous in the life and the next, these warning verses employ different metaphors to depict how such activity may fail to be continuous with eternal reward.

Chapter 6 (Mt 6:7–15) is a concluding chapter focusing on the Lord’s Prayer, the spatial and thematic heart of the Sermon and a perfect microcosm of the central thesis of this book. The chapter mines the tradition of

commentary for how the Lord's Prayer has been understood, structurally and substantively. It then offers a constructive proposal about the alignment of the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer with the three theological and four cardinal virtues, an interpretation in some ways readily continuous with the tradition (e.g., Augustine) and yet in other ways novel.

III. METHODOLOGY OF THIS BOOK

The thesis of this book is that there is ready convergence between the Sermon on the Mount and a virtue-centered approach to morality, and that the former further illuminates the latter. This introduction is an appropriate place to pause to address two methodological questions. What "virtue-centered approach to morality" is employed here? And how is the meaning of the Sermon on the Mount ascertained? This section then concludes with a methodological reflection on this book's strategy of positing alignments between portions of the text and other groupings from the Christian tradition.

A. WHICH VIRTUE ETHICS?

Turning first to virtue ethics, it was noted above how virtue ethics is burgeoning today, to the extent that it is necessary to state what sort of virtue ethics approach one adopts. Approaches to virtue ethics vary significantly. Not only can they be philosophical or theological, but even within these commitments different authors employ the language of virtue in various ways influenced by figures such as Aristotle, Cicero, Hume, and Kant among others. "Virtue ethics" is not a monolithic approach, and so one must ask, "Which virtue ethic?" This project offers no attempt to delineate the significant differences in these approaches, much less make a case for the superiority of one approach over others. Nonetheless since the approach to virtue employed here is as "positioned" as any other, it is necessary to acknowledge that position. In this book, I rely on a Thomistic (and therefore quite Aristotelian) *ressourcement* (meaning in continuity with the Patristics) virtue approach to morality.²⁶ That means there are commitments on certain topics reflected in this book that may not be shared by other "virtue ethicists." These topics include, for instance, the singularity and function of the last end, the role of intentionality in human activity, and the distinctive role of prudence in relation to the other virtues. The virtue-centered approach to morality here also rests on certain theological claims

²⁶ Thank you to David Elliot for this description of the approach to virtue employed here.