Commentary on Thomas Aquinas's Virtue Ethics

Although St. Thomas Aquinas famously claimed that his *Summa Theologiae* was written for "beginners," contemporary readers find it unusually difficult. Now, amid a surge of interest in virtue ethics, J. Budziszewski clarifies and analyzes the text's challenging arguments about the moral, intellectual, and spiritual virtues, with a spotlight on the virtue of justice. In what might be the first contemporary commentary on Aquinas's virtue ethics, he juxtaposes the original text with paraphrase and detailed discussion, guiding us through its complex arguments and classical rhetorical figures. Keeping an eye on contemporary philosophical issues, he contextualizes one of the greatest virtue theorists in history and brings Aquinas into the interdisciplinary debates of today. His brisk and clear style illuminates the most crucial of Aquinas's writings on moral character and guides us through the labyrinth of this difficult but pivotal work.

J. Budziszewski is Professor of Government and Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin, where he also teaches courses in religious studies and in the law school. His work includes numerous books as well as a blog, *The Underground Thomist*. Budziszewski thinks and writes chiefly about classical natural law, conscience and self-deception, moral character, family and sexuality, religion and public life, authentic versus counterfeit toleration and liberty, and the state of our common culture.

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J. BUDZISZEWSKI
University of Texas at Austin

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St. Thomas investigates whether the traditional understanding of virtue, derived from St. Augustine of Hippo via Peter Lombard, is correct. He considers six possible objections, concerning whether virtue is a good quality, whether it is a quality of the mind, whether it enables us to live rightly, whether it is possible for it to be employed badly, and whether it is brought about in us by God. To solve the problem, he works out the formal, material, final, and efficient causes of virtue.

Commentary on I-II, Question 58, Article 4: Whether There Can Be Moral without Intellectual Virtue? 20

Can a person who lacks intellectual virtue still possess moral virtues such as fortitude, temperance, and justice? For a variety of reasons, at first it seems that this is possible. For example, common observation suggests that some people who do not reason well are morally virtuous. However, Thomas shows that although not all intellectual virtues are necessary for moral virtue, the intellectual virtues of prudence and understanding are necessary for moral virtue.

Commentary on I-II, Question 58, Article 5: Whether There Can Be Intellectual without Moral Virtue? 33

The previous chapter asked whether a person who lacks intellectual virtue can still possess moral virtue; conversely, this chapter asks whether a person who lacks moral virtue can still possess intellectual virtue.

St. Thomas considers a variety of reasons for thinking that this may be possible, having to do with moral development, with the similarity between moral deeds and craftsmanship, and with the common observation that some people who lack moral virtue seem to advise themselves well. He concludes, however, that although other intellectual virtues can exist without moral virtue, the intellectual virtue of prudence does require moral virtue. Taking this chapter together with the previous one, we see that neither complete moral virtue nor complete intellectual virtue is possible without the other.

Commentary on I-II, Question 61, Article 2: Whether There Are Four Cardinal Virtues? 43

According to a widely held view, all moral virtues pivot or depend on four pivotal or paramount virtues – prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude – sometimes called "cardinal" virtues after the Latin word for a hinge. If true, this fact would provide a much more powerful way of understanding the virtues than had been offered by the influential philosopher Aristotle – who, after helpfully suggesting that each moral virtue is a "mean" between opposite extremes, had presented a diffuse list of twelve "means" without explaining why he listed just these twelve and not others. Responding to various objections, St. Thomas presents compelling reasons for thinking that the four virtues called cardinal surpass the other moral virtues and are, in a certain sense, their heads. The first is prudence, or practical wisdom, the bridge between the moral and intellectual virtues, which brings the power of moral reasoning to its full and proper development. The other three are fortitude, or courage; temperance, or restraint; and justice, or fairness. All of the other "acquired" virtues are associated in some way with these four (as we will find later that all of the "infused" virtues are associated in some way with faith, hope, and charity).

Commentary on I-II, Question 61, Article 3: Whether Any Other Virtues Should Be Called Principal Rather Than These? 54

Some have suggested that although it is correct to think that all of the acquired moral virtues depend on a smaller number of cardinal virtues, nevertheless certain other virtues besides prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice should also be called cardinal. Magnanimity has been proposed because it spurs great acts of every virtue; humility, because it gives firmness to every virtue; and patience, because it is through patience that the acts of every other virtue are fully carried out. Without in any way disparaging magnanimity, humility, or patience, St. Thomas argues that the fourfold list of cardinal virtues should be left as it stands. Not only are these four concerned with matters of paramount importance, but every other moral virtue turns out to depend on them. In particular, magnanimity and patience turn out to be aspects of the cardinal virtue of fortitude, and humility turns out to be an aspect of the cardinal virtue of temperance.

Commentary on I-II, Question 62, Article 1: Whether There Are Any Theological Virtues? 64

Besides the four cardinal virtues, the classical tradition had identified three "theological" or spiritual virtues: Faith, hope, and charity or love. The suggestion that we may need spiritual virtues over and above the ordinary qualities of good character is ridiculous to the secular sort of mind. Do such virtues exist? In one sense, it may seem obvious that they exist, but care is needed because the popular culture gives each of these terms different meanings than what the tradition intends. Confidence that my friend will not betray me is not the spiritual virtue of faith; optimism that I will get a raise in salary is not the spiritual virtue of hope; giving money to worthy causes is not the definition of charity; and even though the merely natural loves are good, the love called charity is different from the love of a man and a woman, the love of a mother for her child, or the love of two friends. St. Thomas shows that in their correct meanings, the three theological virtues are genuine, and that they bear the same relation to the virtues infused by Divine grace that the cardinal virtues bear to the virtues acquired by human effort.

Commentary on I-II, Question 63, Article 1: Whether Virtue Is in Us by Nature? 80

Is virtue implanted in the constitution of human beings – does it in some sense belong to us just because we possess a human nature? The query sounds very modern: Many secular people believe that we are naturally good, and corrupted only by some disorder of social life which might perhaps be corrected by social engineering. According to Christianity, the human condition is much more complex, for although we were endowed by the Creator with a good nature, this good gift is presently in bad condition. A further complication is that although the term "natural" is sometimes used for things we do without having to learn them, it is also used for things we must learn in order to reach our full and appropriate development. In the former sense, it is "natural" to breathe; in the latter sense, it is "natural" to make friends. St. Thomas responds to the query not just theologically but also philosophically, considering what it means for something to be true of us "by nature," reviewing the history of the problem from the pre-Socratic philosopher Anaxagoras to his own time, and finally disentangling the senses in which virtue can and cannot be called natural to human beings.

Commentary on I-II, Question 63, Article 2: Whether Any Virtue Is Caused in Us by Habituation? 95

According to the tradition, the "acquired" virtues are brought about in us by practicing the acts which correspond to them until they become habitual. Is this true? Up to this point in his discussion, St. Thomas has assumed the habituation hypothesis to be correct; in the present chapter, he scrutinizes it to find out whether it really is. He takes up and discusses various reasons for thinking that it is false, for example the theological argument that

apart from Divine grace humans can do nothing to become virtuous, and the metaphysical argument that a cause (in this case repeated acts) cannot be more perfect than its effect (in this case complete virtue). His solution depends on a distinction between virtues which are directed to the good as measured by the rule of human reason, and virtues which are directed to the good as measured by the Divine law. The former can be brought about by habituation; the latter can be brought about in us only by the work of God Himself.

Commentary on I-II, Question 65, Article 1: Whether the Moral Virtues Are Connected with One Another? 112

Can we pick and choose among the virtues – is it possible to possess some of them without the others? The classical tradition supposes that this is impossible; if you are defective in any virtue, then to some degree you will be defective in each of them, so that if you are serious about cultivating any of them you must cultivate all of them. Yet today, we often view the virtues as disconnected, saying things like "He may be a crooked businessman, but he's good to his mom," "Even a bad man can be a good statesman," and "There is honor among thieves." St. Thomas takes very seriously the reasons for thinking that the classical view is false, for example, the everyday observation that a man may perform the acts of one virtue without performing the acts of another. Ultimately, however, Thomas defeats the objections by distinguishing between fully developed virtues, and merely incipient or incomplete virtues. The former really are mutually dependent and interconnected; the latter are not. He shows that this conclusion can be reached in two different ways, depending on the precise method adopted for distinguishing among the cardinal virtues.

Commentary on I-II, Question 84, Article 4: Whether the Seven Capital Vices Are Suitably Reckoned? 133

Capital vices are those from which other vices arise; they are like leaders and directors of all the other vices. Just as we must practice all of the virtues to be fully developed in any of them, so we cannot let one vice into the house without opening the door wide to its brothers. The question in this chapter, however, is not so much whether certain vices should be considered capital, but which vices they are. The tradition had viewed seven vices as capital: Vainglory, envy, anger, sloth, covetousness, gluttony, and lust. Various reasons can be offered for thinking either that this list is defective, some obvious (for example that since there are four cardinal virtues, there must be four capital vices), some not so obvious (for example that although gluttony and lust concern pleasure, and sloth and envy concern sadness, the list should also include vices pertaining to the other chief passions, hope and fear). By means of a subtle and multifaceted analysis of the psychology of sin as a distortion of the natural desire for happiness, St. Thomas defends the traditional enumeration, comparing the seven capital vices to seven generals with pride as their queen.

PART II: THE VIRTUE OF JUSTICE, ESPECIALLY IN RELATION TO LAW

Commentary on II-II, Question 30, Article 3: Whether Mercy Is a Virtue? 159

Is mercy a virtue? At first it may seem that it is not. In the first place, pity, like anger, can impede deliberation. In the second place, the virtue of justice involves punishment, but mercy involves remission of punishment. Besides, even if the acts of mercy are meritorious, it might be argued that they are merely effects of another virtue, so that mercy is not a virtue in itself. In careful response to these objections, St. Thomas shows that the virtue of mercy is as genuine as the virtue of justice. Although unregulated passion may indeed impede deliberation, the virtue of mercy is neither unregulated nor a passion. Moreover, far from being an impediment to justice, mercy may actually serve the purposes of justice, provided that certain conditions are met. Finally, mercy is not merely an effect of charity, but a distinct virtue subordinate to charity, for it concerns a particular mode in which the acts of charity are carried out.

Commentary on II-II, Question 58, Article 1: Whether Justice Is Fittingly Defined as Being the Perpetual and Constant Will to Render to Each One His Right? 175

According to a long tradition, justice is "a constant and perpetual will to give to each person his right." In our day the expression "right" is most often used to signify a liberty to do something, for example the right to bear arms, to speak freely, or to worship according to conscience. In the classical definition of justice, however, the term is used in a much broader sense: A person's "right" is whatever is his, whatever he deserves, whatever is properly due to him. The present chapter's query is whether this time-honored definition suitably expresses the essence of justice. St. Thomas considers six objections, each of which targets some element in the definition. Objections 1 and 2 deny that justice "a will"; Objection 3 denies that it is "perpetual"; Objection 4, that it is both "perpetual" and "constant," as though these words signified different qualities; and Objections 5 and 6, that it "renders to each one his right."

Commentary on II-II, Question 60, Article 1: Whether Judgment Is an Act of Justice? 189

Before I can render someone what is due to him, I have to know what is due to him. So the act of giving him his right seems to presuppose a prior act of judging what his right is. Then is judgment itself the characteristic act of justice? So it would seem, yet this answer lays us open to difficulties. For example, if judging is an act of the intellect, wouldn't it be the characteristic act of an intellectual rather than a moral virtue? And isn't some kind of judgment required by every virtue, not only by judgment? On the other hand, judgment seems to be what judges do. Where then does this leave the rest of us – is no one just but the judge? To complicate matters still further,

it might even be said that judgment belongs neither to the ordinary person nor to the judge, for St. Paul says that judgment, in some sense, is the act of "the spiritual man." We see then that what might at first appear to be a fatuous question – "Is judgment the characteristic act of justice?" – turns out to be a stumper. St. Thomas unravels the difficulties.

Commentary on II-II, Question 60, Article 2: Whether It Is Lawful to Judge? 202

Human law appoints certain persons judges, but is it really right for any mere human to stand in judgment? The Objectors think that the answer should be "No"; in their view, human judgment is condemned both by natural and Divine law. In the relativistic ambiance of our own times as well, "judgmentalism" has been judged and found wanting. Yet there is a certain difficulty with antijudgmentalism, for if no one may judge others, then how is it that we may deliver an unfavorable judgment upon those who do judge others? Could it be that we have passed judgment upon judgment too quickly – or perhaps that only certain kinds of judgment are illicit? If so, which kinds? St. Thomas investigates the various senses in which human beings may and may not "judge."

Commentary on II-II, Question 60, Article 5: Whether We Should Always Judge According to the Written Law? 214

The act of judgment is the means by which justice is actualized, and justice is in turn connected with all the rest of the virtues. Normally, we should do as the written law directs, but earlier in the *Summa* St. Thomas has considered exceptions: (1) Under certain conditions custom can abolish written law. (2) Under certain conditions one may disobey so-called unjust laws, and may even be obligated to disobey them. (3) When cases arise which the written law was not intended to cover, those who have the authority to make the law may also suspend it. (4) In emergencies, when such cases arise but there is no time to consult authority, the citizens themselves may set aside the words of the law and follow its intention instead. Here, though, St. Thomas is not thinking of either lawmakers or ordinary citizens. Must judges follow the written law? And must they do as its very words direct, or may they sometimes set aside the words and follow its intention instead? This inquiry is not just about constitutional rules or judicial role definitions. Taken in its broadest sense it concerns how such matters are related to human moral character.

Commentary on II-II, Question 60, Article 6: Whether Judgment Is Rendered Perverse by Being Usurped? 228

Is justice destroyed when judgment is usurped – when a person is judged by someone who has no public authority to do so? Usurpation of judgment is judging a case without jurisdiction, seizing the power of judgment from the person to whom it belongs. However, in the present chapter St. Thomas is not asking whether it is unjust for a judge to make the sorts of judgments which properly belong to, say, the legislature; he has already established that this is wrong, because the judge must render judgment according to the law.

Rather he is asking whether it is unjust for someone else to make the sorts of judgments which properly belong to the judge himself. The usurper, the "someone else," might be another judge who has no jurisdiction in the case, or it might be someone who is not a judge at all. St. Thomas defends the traditional view that the usurpation of judgment is a violation of justice – that judging without proper jurisdiction always destroys justice – even if the usurper renders the correct judgment.

Commentary on II-II, Question 80, Article 1: Whether the Virtues Annexed to Justice Are Suitably Enumerated? 242

Although the many aspects of justice may be called "parts" of justice, they are not all "parts" in the same sense. The present chapter is about the "potential" parts of justice, meaning the secondary virtues which in some way resemble justice or are associated with it. Before St. Thomas, the thinkers who had investigated the potential parts of justice had enumerated them in a bewildering variety of ways. In the present Article, he defends the sixfold classification of Marcus Tullius Cicero against the sevenfold classification of Macrobius, the ninefold classification of Pseudo-Andronicus, the fivefold classification of "certain others" whom he does not name, and a single suggestion drawn from Aristotle. Characteristically, he does not simply discard the thoughts of all these others; whenever he comes upon a worthy insight, he works out what the writer was getting at and finds room for it in a subtler scheme to which the present chapter is merely an introduction.

Commentary on II-II, Question 122, Article 1: Whether the Precepts of the Decalogue Are Precepts of Justice? 267

The notion of some people that virtue ethics is a way of doing ethics without rules would strike St. Thomas as very strange, for the acts to which the virtues predispose us are things which we ought to do; he always connects virtues with precepts, dispositions of character with authoritative rules. In the present chapter he is concerned with the famous set of authoritative rules known as the Ten Commandments. Although they are part of Divine law, Thomas thinks they are also precepts of natural law, upheld by reason. The great question of the chapter – whether they are precepts of justice – should be taken not in the sense "Do they have anything to do with justice?" but in the sense "Is justice is their main concern?" For according to the classical tradition, the Divine law addresses all of the virtues, not only justice – yet in some sense the Ten Commandments specialize in the virtue of justice. What Thomas investigates is whether this view of their special concern is correct.

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I would like to thank D. H. Williams, with whom I corresponded about a sentence in his translation of St. Hilary of Poitiers's *Commentary on Matthew*, and my friend Arlen Nydam, for chatting with me about other Latin matters. External reviewers generously gave time and insight to the manuscript, and the University of Texas granted me the boon of a semester free of teaching for its completion. I am grateful to students for questions, to friends for solidarity, and to students who became friends for double blessing. To God, I owe life in the two greatest senses; to my parents, in two more; to my wife, Sandra, in two more still. For whatever is wrong in these pages, the fault is mine alone.

Ante Studium
(Before Study)

Ineffable Creator, Who out of the treasures of Your wisdom appointed treble hierarchies of Angels and set them in admirable order high above the heavens; Who disposed the diverse portions of the universe in such elegant array; Who are the true Fountain of Light and Wisdom, and the all-exceeding Source: Be pleased to cast a beam of Your radiance upon the darkness of my mind, and dispel from me the double darkness of sin and ignorance in which I have been born.

You Who make eloquent the tongues of little children, instruct my tongue and pour upon my lips the grace of Your benediction. Grant me penetration to understand, capacity to retain, method and ease in learning, subtlety in interpretation, and copious grace of expression.

Order the beginning, direct the progress, and perfect the conclusion of my work, You Who are true God and Man, Who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

– Thomas Aquinas

Introduction

ABOUT READING BOOKS

The wise say that the best thing is not to read many books but to read a few great books truly well. This is a bit overstated, for a number of books are worth reading. But the best reason for reading them is to develop the discernment by which we can recognize the few great ones when at last we come upon them.

One of these few is the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas, and one of the great themes of that work is virtue, or character – moral, intellectual, and spiritual. This volume is a commentary on selected texts from the theory of virtue therein presented. Although the commentary is entirely self-contained, it also complements and extends my previous *Commentary on Thomas Aquinas's Treatise on Law*, along with its online partner volume, the *Companion to the Commentary*,[1] for one of the great questions in virtue ethics is how moral virtues are related to laws, moral rules, and the activity of judging.

THE BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TOPIC

The topic of virtue has always been central to the aspiration of the humane studies to investigate what it means to live well. During the last generation, however, questions about character have taken fire. Spurred by a variety of thinkers, including G. E. M. Anscombe,[2] Peter Geach,[3] and Alasdair

[1] Both books published by Cambridge University Press in 2014. Elsewhere in this book, I refer to them by their titles alone. The *Companion* is available online at no cost, both at the Resources link of the Cambridge catalog page for the *Commentary* and at my website, www.undergroundthomist.org/sites/default/files/related-documents/Companion-to-the-Commentary-FINAL.pdf.

[2] G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 1–16. This work is widely credited with having originated the renaissance of virtue ethics.

[3] Peter Geach, *The Virtues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

MacIntyre,[4] inquiry into the virtues has surged in a variety of fields – at first primarily in philosophy and theology but more recently in law, social science, and across the disciplines. To mention but a single example, one of the new approaches in jurisprudence focuses on the qualities of moral and intellectual character necessary to be a good judge.[5] I call this approach new because it is new for us, but it actually revives a very old approach, taken, for example, by the authors of the US Constitution.

Although some writers turn to the topic of moral character as though no one had ever done so before, the rise of interest in the virtues has naturally generated an increase of interest in Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest – I would say the greatest – theorists of virtue in history. However, no contemporary commentary on Aquinas's virtue ethics exists, a problem which is acute because Aquinas is an exceptionally difficult thinker. Even in his *Summa Theologiae*, which he famously said was for "beginners," the style, terminology, philosophical and theological background, and mode of argument are opaque to most persons today. This is true not only for students and general readers but even for most scholars trained in the modern fashion. Without the assistance of a commentary that illuminates the text not only in the context of Aquinas's own theoretical milieu but with a sensitivity to contemporary philosophy and social science, many of the most interesting of the themes and questions of this great body of work are overlooked or else grossly misunderstood.

WHY NOT JUST BE VIRTUE PLURALISTS?

Unless we hope eventually to find the true answers to our questions, there is no point in asking about virtue or anything else. I expect this claim to meet criticism.[6] We are told that it is illiberal to seek the "true" answers to fundamental questions because an infinity of reasonable views can be held about them, all of them conflicting. There are too many philosophies, too many religions, too many sacred texts. Often this Babel of discordant voices is presented as something new. It isn't. After all, the Tower of Babel is a very ancient tale, and just as many voices, sects, and doctrines quarreled in premodern times as today. Nor were the thinkers of those times deaf to all the racket. St. Augustine of Hippo contended with Gnostics, Platonists, Jews, Stoics, and Epicureans, among others; Maimonides wrote a *Guide for the Perplexed*; Thomas Aquinas cast his *Summa Theologiae* in the form of disputed questions. Babel is not a modern revolution but the enduring condition of the fallen human race.

[4] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

[5] See, e.g., Timothy Cantu, "Virtue Jurisprudence and the American Constitution," *Notre Dame Law Review* 88, no. 3 (2013): 1521–1542.

[6] The next few paragraphs are adapted from J. Budziszewski, *The Revenge of Conscience: Politics and the Fall of Man*, rev. ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010).

What is really new is the *manner* in which some of us respond to Babel. The classical way, which is St. Thomas's way, is both *apologetical* and *noetic*. I mean by calling it apologetical, after the Greek word for a speech in defense, that he stakes a claim and defends it; he makes some one voice in the Babel his own, then takes on his opponents by arguing the issues on their merits. And I mean by calling his way noetic, after the Greek word for knowledge or understanding, that his arguments appeal to shared knowledge rather than shared ignorance. For a classical reasoner does not take the Babel around him quite at face value. If I seem completely ignorant of a basic moral precept, he will say that the reason is less likely to be that I really do not know it than that I am trying not to think about it. Moreover, he will regard an age like ours as exceptional even for this broken world. Before too long, any culture in deep denial must come to its senses or collapse, for the consequences of denying first principles are cumulative and inescapable.

By contrast, a fashionable contemporary way of responding to Babel is both *anti-noetic* and *anti-apologetical*. The virtue pluralists – so we may call them – are anti-noetic because they do take the Babel around them at face value, or at least they claim to. Their arguments appeal to shared ignorance rather than shared knowledge. So far as we know, they say, an enormous variety of religions and philosophies are equally in the dark and equally in the light. Although they may well agree that our age is exceptional rather than typical, they see this fact not as an omen of corruption but as a portent of an impending forward leap – a sign that our old philosophies have exhausted themselves and we need to try something new.

What is the something new? This is where being anti-apologetical comes in. The virtue pluralist denies the need to make one voice in the Babel his own and denies that he is doing so; he refuses to stake out a position, then argue its claims on their merits. By adopting a posture of neutrality among competing goals and aspirations, of equal concern and respect for every view of virtue, he tries to escape the futility of interminable arguments and carve out a new moral sphere in which people of every point of view can get along: sodomists with socialists, pickpockets with Platonists, hedonists with Hasidim. Thus, for example, he does not object to St. Thomas's doctrine of the virtues as a *mistaken* point of view; disputing its claims would be too crude. Rather, he objects to it as a *point of view* – just one more of the pullulating things down there among the Platonists and pickpockets. Virtue pluralism floats chastely above them, out-topping knowledge by the sheer determination not to need to know.[7]

Alas for the virtue pluralist, this doesn't work. Virtue pluralism does not really float above all of the contrasting views of the virtues. It only seems to. For

[7] The most influential example of this sort of thinking is John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, 2005).

example, is there a way to have equal concern and respect for the opinions of the virtues held by both the terrorist and the persons he aims to blow up? Either he gets his way, or they get away. Is there a way to have equal concern and respect for both monogamous and polygamous marriages? Legal arrangements that allow both monogamy and polygamy are in fact polygamous. Rather than floating above the contrasting views about virtue and tolerating them all, virtue pluralism smuggles a particular view of the virtues into law and popular culture without having to argue for it – *just by pretending that it is not a point of view*. This clever authoritarianism rules with a rod of iron, enforcing its judgments by complaining about judgmentalism.

I have embarked on this book in the conviction that virtue pluralism is a sham and that the classical way of investigating the virtues is correct. The riot of unreasonable views about the virtues does not require us to suspend judgment; rather, the pretense of suspending judgment makes the riot of unreasonable views seem reasonable. The reasonable response to the riot is not to suspend judgment but to learn to judge more reasonably. We must not be ashamed of seeking the truth of things, and we should seek it with all our minds and hearts.

We will tolerate those who disagree with us – I do not of course mean terrorists or rapists – but we will do so not because of what we don't know but because of what we do know. For it is with good reason that we believe that God, by His nature, does not desire an unwilling obedience and that faith, by its nature, cannot be coerced.

THE PRINCIPLE OF SELECTION

To include *all* of St. Thomas's writings about virtue in the commentary would be impossible, because even without commentary, they take up hundreds of pages; with commentary, they would take up thousands. However, there is no need to include everything, for with proper commentary on the most essential texts, the reader is able to navigate the deep waters of the omitted writings by himself. For this reason, I am focusing on the celebrated *Summa Theologiae* and have selected just eighteen of its "Articles"[8] or chapters about virtue for inclusion and discussion in this book.

Some of these eighteen I have chosen because they lay the theoretical groundwork for understanding moral character. These are considered in Part I. With the exception of the Article on the capital vices, which is taken from the *Treatise on Vice and Sin*, all of these are from the section of the *Summa* called the *Treatise on Habits*. Others I have chosen because they apply and extend the analysis of virtue in general to the specific virtue of justice, especially in relation to law. These are considered in Part II. With the exception of the Article

[8] From Latin *articulus*, meaning "part," originally the part of a limb between the joints.

on mercy, which is taken from the *Treatise on Charity*, all of these are from the *Treatise on Justice*.

Where helpful and appropriate, I have also referred to other parts of the *Summa*, to other works of St. Thomas, to works mentioned by St. Thomas, to various other works, and to my two previous books on the *Treatise on Law*.

HOW THIS COMMENTARY IS COMPOSED

One cannot carefully read Thomas Aquinas without being changed, and one must be in very sorry shape for this change to be for anything but the better. Although he is a difficult writer, I do not think one must be an expert to study him. In fact, sometimes the experts make him still harder. As one scholar remarks, "his commentators will readily obscure his meaning, in explaining some point of their own; for true illumination, we must go to the master. Fortunately, we still have his works to explain what his commentators are driving at! It is quite a relief to return to him after cutting our way through their entanglements."[9]

I do not want to be that obscuring kind of expert, and that is one of the reasons I have written this commentary as I have – in readily the classical, line-by-line format in which one can *always* go back to the master, indeed, in which his words cannot be avoided. All of his text is there. Even when lengthy, my remarks are strictly subordinate, for each of my own words is chained to his.

At the opening of each Article, I begin with an English version of the text itself, using the celebrated Blackfriars translation, which is in the public domain and is considered the gold standard. In a parallel column, I provide a paraphrase of the text, which renders the argument more readable but is composed with careful attention to the meaning of the Latin original. After the paraphrase, I offer line-by-line (in a few cases, even phrase-by-phrase) analysis, which takes up difficulties as they arise and goes far beyond the paraphrase. My intention is to make the arguments accessible and cogent to scholars, to students, and even to serious general readers.

In a few conspicuous cases, when I think the Blackfriars translation is misleading, I call attention to the fact. In most cases, though, my small emendations are silent. For example, the Blackfriars translation renders the words of 1 Corinthians 2:15 in the Vulgate, *diffunditur in cordibus nostris*, as "poured forth in our hearts," which follows the Douay-Rheims version (DRA), but I have preferred "diffused in our hearts," which is more literal. On the other hand, sometimes my paraphrase is very free; I may even add to the text or rearrange it. This sort of thing is unacceptable in a translation but welcome in a paraphrase, and since the book provides both paraphrase and translation, the

[9] A. G. Sertillanges, *Thomas Aquinas* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1910, 2011), Chapter 7.

reader may enjoy the benefits of both. A reviewer of my previous commentary suggested adding yet another parallel column, showing the original Latin. I would love to. However, this would add significantly to the length and cost of the book without a sufficient benefit, since the Latin text is readily available online.[10]

This may be a suitable place to insert my standard disclaimer. Where pronouns are concerned, I generally follow the traditional English convention – the one everyone followed, before politically motivated linguistic bullying became fashionable – according to which such terms as "he" and "him" are already "inclusive." Unless the context clearly indicates the masculine, they have always been used to refer to a person of either sex. Readers who choose differently may write differently; I ask only that they extend the same courtesy to me. In the meantime, since my language includes masculine, feminine, neuter, and inclusive pronouns, any rational being who feels excluded has only him-, her-, or itself to blame.

Some may think I do not spend enough time quarreling with critics of St. Thomas. My conviction is that before we enter these quarrels, we had better make sure we understand him. If we do understand him, many of the criticisms fall away like dead leaves. It is not that an intelligent person cannot disagree with the Angelic Doctor. Not even those who work in his tradition agree with him about everything. But the first step in identifying a real disagreement is to take a thinker seriously enough to be persuaded if he is, in fact, correct.

HOW ST. THOMAS WRITES

Readers encountering St. Thomas for the first time – sometimes the second and the third times – are likely to meet obstacles of three kinds. First is the genre in which the *Summa* is written; second is its rhetorical figures; and finally is its attitude and style.

The literary genre in which the *Summa* is composed is the formal disputation, which resembles a debate with a built-in review of the literature. Disputation is an extremely concise way of presenting and analyzing the state of a question that is under consideration. It puts all of the competing views in the clearest possible confrontation, so that one can pull up one's sleeves and solve the problem. The same format is always followed: first is the *utrum*, the "whether," always in the form of a yes-or-no question, usually one to which the traditional answer is yes. In second place are the principal objections to a "Yes" answer, set forth in a list. These might also be called the difficulties. Third comes the *sed contra*, the "on the contrary" or "on the other hand," a restatement of the traditional view. Fourth is the *respondeo*, or "I answer that," also called the *solutio*, or solution, expressing the author's own view. Finally,

[10] For example, at www.corpusthomisticum.org/iopera.html.

the author makes use of the solution to reply to the objections, resolving each difficulty in turn.

At first it seems that St. Thomas's style is plain and unornamented. Actually this impression is mistaken, for he uses quite a few figures of speech. However, he does not always use the *same ones* we do – his rhetorical profile is more classical than modern. For example, he makes less use of metaphor, which is one of our own favorite figures. On the other hand, he makes far greater use of metonymy, the figure in which a part of something stands for the whole thing, a figure we use so seldom that we often fail to recognize it when we meet it. This sort of failure can be deadly to understanding, not only concerning his own works but concerning a great deal of ancient, medieval, and biblical literature, for if we take a metonymical statement literally, we will view it as having a much narrower meaning than it really does. For example, when St. Thomas characterizes temperance in terms of withstanding the temptation of sexual pleasure, we will mistakenly think that it has nothing to do with other pleasures, although his real meaning is that this particular pleasure is its greatest and most characteristic challenge. Similarly, when the Decalogue prohibits bearing false witness, we will erroneously suppose that other kinds of lying are permitted, although actually the commandment refers to the most dreadful kind of lying to signify the evil of all lying. We might complain, "Why don't the authors of these texts *tell* when they are using metonymy?" That would be like expecting a contemporary writer to tell us when he is using a simile: we are expected to know. Eventually some enterprising scholar will provide a comprehensive study of St. Thomas's rhetorical figures. In this book I content myself with calling attention to a few of them as we go along.

As to St. Thomas's attitude and style: I venture to say that if other books hamper readers because of their faults, the *Summa* detains them in large part because of its virtues. Perhaps the most common hindrances are St. Thomas's supposed dryness and lack of warmth, his view of intellectual authority, his view of faith and reason, his view of how to study reality, and his apparent failure to consider the objections that some people of our day find most cogent. In the introduction to my previous *Commentary on St. Thomas's Treatise on Law*, I discussed these obstacles at some length, but here, adapting those remarks, I will say only a few words about each.

St. Thomas's prose is like climbing to the top of a great height, which is wonderful and exhilarating if you survive it. Some love the heights; others don't. It may seem dry at the top of the mountain. Thomistic prose is clean, terse, minimalist. It epitomizes Mark Twain's rule "eschew surplusage." It is like the Platonic ideal of concision come to earth. This makes it essential that we read as precisely as St. Thomas writes and take the time to unpack his succinct definitions.

Most people also find his style cold, as we find mathematics cold. But mathematicians don't find their field cold; although they certainly find it austere, they also find it heady, exhilarating, and, above all, beautiful. It sets their

pulses pounding, or, if not their pulses, something in the intellect that feels much the same. Why don't the rest of us see what they see, feel what they feel, pound as they pound? Sometimes, perhaps, we do. Many of us can remember moments in our mathematical training when our minds leaped and our hearts caught, because suddenly it all came together and *had to be just that way*. The better we understood the math, the more often we experienced those moments; the more often we experienced them, the greater was our desire to understand. As it is when mathematicians are doing math, so it is when St. Thomas is doing philosophy and theology. If we find his writing cold, we find it so in large part because it is difficult and demanding. There is a warming cure for that: study.

A different sort of obstacle lies in St. Thomas's view of intellectual authority – or at least what we take his view of it to be. Often my students are annoyed by the mere fact that he quotes so much from other thinkers. So little does our style of intellectual training cherish humility – and so thoroughly has it been drummed it into us that the so-called argument from authority is a fallacy – that we tend to confuse humility with fallacy. A popular bumper sticker commands, "Question authority!" There ought to be one that counsels, "Choose among authorities wisely." There is nothing wrong with asking a geologist about the chemical composition of limestone, since I can't possibly have firsthand knowledge of everything, and he knows more about limestone than I do. Careful use of authority serves the ends of reason, provided that one has reasonable assurance of the supposed authority's honesty, reliability, and qualifications; the question asked concerns his own field of expertise; one considers not just his answers but the reasons he gives for them; and, if authorities differ, one consults the other ones too. This is exactly how St. Thomas does consult authority. Notice too that not all *reference* to authority is *deference* to authority. Although humility requires that we consider what other respected thinkers have thought, it does not require that we accept their reasoning if we find something wrong with it. One must separate the wheat from the chaff, and this is exactly what St. Thomas tries to do. It is just that before discarding the chaff, we had better make sure it is really chaff.

If anything about an author annoys modern readers more than quoting from thinkers of antiquity, it is quoting from the Bible. The notion that faith and reason are opposites has become a reflex with many of us. As one of my undergraduates protested recently, "But isn't all this just a religious argument?" At least she recognized that there was an argument! My graduate students are often even more thoroughly indoctrinated in the nostrums of the academy than my undergraduates; only with the greatest difficulty am I able to get some of them to recognize that St. Thomas offers arguments at all. Like the citizens of Oceana, George Orwell's fictional dystopia, they have been conditioned in such a way as to find certain lines of reasoning impossible to recognize as lines of reasoning. Confronted with them, they can only say "fallacy of argument from religious authority," which is their way of saying "crimethink."

This conditioned response has a history. Early in the modern era, many thinkers began to mistrust faith, viewing it as "blind" and an enemy of reason. Their watchword was "reason alone." One of the difficulties of this stance is that reason cannot test its own reliability, any more than soapstone can test its own hardness. Any conclusion *accomplished by reasoning* that the conclusions of reasoning can be trusted would be circular, because it would take for granted the very thing that it was trying to prove. Perhaps it is not surprising that the descendants of these thinkers began to mistrust reason itself, holding that the mind is locked in its own mazes, unable to penetrate external reality. "How can we know anything?" we complain. When it turns to someone like St. Thomas, the complaint becomes especially bitter: "Who is *he* to think he can know anything?"

St. Thomas certainly thinks it is *possible* for the mind to become locked in its own mazes. This is a permanent liability of our fallen state. Yet he takes an extraordinarily high view of the power of both reason and Christian faith to illuminate reality, and he views them not as enemies but as friends. To be sure, he does not think they are the same thing. Although there may be rational grounds for trust in God, and rational grounds for believing that biblical revelation about God is authentic (and he thinks that there are), one must still take that step of believing. Obviously, my reasons are not the same as trust; faith surpasses reason. Even so, they are reasons *for* trust; though faith surpasses reason, it is not irrational. In fact, not only does reason come to the cleansing aid of faith but also faith enables reason to reach further, to ask better questions, to become in every way more fully what it is meant to be.

The final obstacle is that moderns tend to view St. Thomas's approach to the study of reality as naive, unsophisticated, and obsolete, because it sets *things* before *knowledge*. He approaches all kinds of *things* this way – material objects, volitions, qualities, whatever they may be – for no matter what we are studying, we have to know something before we can investigate how we know it. But in the modern era, we reverse this procedure. Before studying what there is to know, we insist on a critique of our ability to know anything at all.

This shift, called the *epistemological turn*, has had a variety of bad results. First comes extreme skepticism, along with contempt for tradition and common sense. Of course even the skeptic has to assume that *something* is true; otherwise, he has no way to decide what to do and how to live – the rational springs of action lose their springiness, and he is left with nothing but his prejudices. In practice, then, extreme skepticism turns into its opposite, extreme conventionalism. For the supposed skeptic doesn't really reject prejudice; he unquestioningly accepts every prejudice that has learned to put on skeptical airs. Another way to say this is that someone who has made the epistemological turn has not really turned aside from the study of *things*. He continues to practice it, but he does so ineptly, because he does not pay attention to what he is doing.

At first it seems modest and reasonable to proceed "critically," to scrutinize the instrument of knowledge before relying on the things that we supposedly know. For how often we have been misled by things that seem obvious but turn out not to be true! A straight stick inserted halfway into water may look bent, but this is a mere trick of the light, produced by the diffraction of light. Shouldn't we guard against such errors? Certainly, but there is something fishy about the illusion of the bent stick. Yes, it is really an illusion. But how did we find that out? How did we discover this weakness in our powers of knowing things? *By knowing something*: By finding out that the stick was straight after all.

How could we have thought that the instrument of knowledge could test itself before it had any actual knowledge to test itself against? "Test before you buy" is a good rule for reason to apply to things other than reason but not a good rule for reason to apply to itself; it isn't as though there were another sort of product on the shelf. First try to know something, *then* go ahead and criticize the power of knowing. You will find out the weaknesses of the reasoning power only in the act of using it. That is how St. Thomas proceeds.

A NOTE ON CITATIONS

Because I also supply many cross-references, it may be helpful to explain how the sections of the *Summa Theologiae* are cited. In the body of the text, I spell out the citations, but in the footnotes, I use abbreviations. First, the part is indicated: "I" for the First Part of the *Summa*, "I-II" for the First Part of the Second Part, "II-II" for the Second Part of the Second Part, "III" for the Third Part, and "Supp." for the Supplement. "Q." followed by a numeral identifies the Question; the numbering of questions begins anew in each part. "Art." followed by a numeral identifies the Article. Citations are further specified by the abbreviation "Obj.," with a numeral, for an objection or the Latin preposition "ad," with a numeral, for a reply to an objection. If a citation specifies neither an objection, a reply to an objection, nor the *sed contra*, then it refers either to the whole Article or, if one is quoting from it, to the *respondeo*. For example, "S.T., II-II, Q. 60, Art. 1, ad 2" means "*Summa Theologiae*, Second Part of the Second Part, Question 60, Article 1, Reply to Objection 2," but "S.T., I-II, Q. 58, Art. 5" refers either to Article 5 in its entirety or to the "I answer that" part of Article 5.

Several other systems of citation are also widely used. The First Part, or *Prima Pars*, is sometimes designated 1, 1a, or Ia; the First Part of the Second Part, or *Prima Secundae Partis*, is sometimes designated 1-2, 1a-2ae, or Ia-IIae; the Second Part of the Second Part, or *Secunda Secundae Partis*, is sometimes designated 2-2, 2a-2ae, or IIa-IIae; and the Third Part, or *Tertia Pars*, is sometimes designated 3, 3a, or IIIa. In an abbreviation like "1a-2ae," the "a" and "ae" are endings of the words *Prima* and *Secundae*. I should also mention that the body of an Article is also sometimes called the *corpus*, abbreviated *cor*.

I am writing for scholars too, but for the convenience of beginners, in quoting from works other than the *Summa*, such as the writings of Aristotle, I try to use reliable editions that are in the public domain and are available on the internet. Sometimes this is impossible or inconvenient. The specialists, of course, will have their own favorite translations. When I provide quotations from the Bible, I most often use either the Douay-Rheims American version (DRA), which is an American English translation of the Latin Vulgate that St. Thomas used, and which is also employed by the Dominican Fathers, or the Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition (RSV-CE), which is sometimes more clear and often more beautiful. Which translation I am using is always indicated in footnotes. When the chapter and verse divisions of the Douay-Rheims differ from those of more recent translations, I indicate this fact in the notes as well.