

Introduction

Virtue in the writings of Thomas Aquinas is inseparable from his understanding of sin, grace, and God's presence in human life and action. The logic inherent to his account of virtue, virtue both with and without grace, requires us to speak of grace and sin. Because it pertains to the very logic of virtue to address these theological topics, it becomes impossible to treat them as mere addenda or to bracket them in favor of a supposedly complete philosophical account. This last point comes into greater relief when we acknowledge, with centuries of other readers of Aquinas, that his theology of grace underwent development throughout his writings. Yet little attention has been given to the effects this development exercises on both his understanding of virtue and the role it can take up in our moral lives. This is largely because readers of Aquinas, friends and adversaries alike, have become satisfied addressing the intersection of grace and virtue in terms of the infused and acquired virtues alone. While such a vector is certainly an interesting and demanding study, it fails to acknowledge the effects his developments in topics like operative grace, God's influence in human action, and sin have for his account of virtue.

The aim of this book, therefore, is to address the rationale Aquinas employs in his account of virtue in general and to demonstrate that account's inner reliance on the theological categories of grace, sin, and divine providence. This means tracing the developments in his theology of grace and demonstrating the impact those developments necessarily exercise on his account of virtue and the role virtue plays in the moral life. In other places, it means underscoring that according to Thomas's inner principles of virtue, even in the one without grace, the source of one's

moral goodness remains inescapably under the influence of a theological category, namely, sin. As such, sin and God's sapiential plan and governance are theological topics just under the surface of a full account of Aquinas's understanding of virtue. Moreover, precisely because of the nature and causes of the developments in Aquinas's theology of grace, it becomes *radically unthomistic* to re-present his full account of virtue without these categories. Treating those theological topics as addenda or bracketing them off from his account of virtue leads to an idea of virtue and the moral life that Aquinas not only would fail to recognize as his own, but one which he would regard as wrongheaded and heretical. Accounts that match such a description not only are unfaithful to Aquinas's thought but are, in fact, opposed to it.

I have made what for some are bold statements. I wish to make myself clear. I am not arguing the above claims regarding the entirety of Aquinas's moral science, but only his account of virtue. We might perhaps agree that some terms of reference in his moral science, for example, natural law, are more philosophical, and others are less so. I am specifically making these claims regarding his account of virtue. Of course, one might hold the same regarding other aspects of Aquinas's moral science, but that question I leave to the side. Nor do I think that a Thomistic-inspired, philosophical account of virtue is impossible to fashion. Many ethicists today read Aquinas for their own insights. Philippa Foot and Terence Irwin are among those who laud Aquinas for being a better ethicist and Aristotelian than even Aristotle.¹ Furthermore, some scholars today take whole parts of Aquinas's logic as their own. Peter Geach's

¹ In one of her best-known essays, Philippa Foot writes, "In spite of this modern work, it is perhaps best when considering the virtues and vices to go back to Aristotle and Aquinas... However, there are different emphases and new elements in Aquinas's ethics: often he works things out in far more detail than Aristotle did, and it is possible to learn a great deal from Aquinas that one could not have got from Aristotle." Philippa Foot, "Virtues and Vices," in *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 1–18, esp. 1–2. Similarly, in the introduction to his three-volume review of all of moral philosophy, *The Development of Ethics*, Terence Irwin writes, "Aquinas offers the best statement of the Aristotelian approach to moral philosophy and of Aristotelian naturalism. The best way to examine this approach and this naturalist position is to reflect on Aquinas' version of them... Even if Aquinas' position were not a reasonable version of an Aristotelian position, it would deserve attention in its own right. The criticisms that have sometimes been taken to rule it out as a defensible account of morality are ill founded." Terence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study, vol. 1: From Socrates to the Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4.

lecture on the virtues is such an example.² In addition, of course, Aquinas's account of virtue in general and various virtues in particular are *deeply and profoundly philosophical in nature*. Josef Pieper has shown how fruitful even a philosophical reading of the theological virtues can be.³ All of these I gladly admit as possible. What I reject, however, is that Aquinas's account of virtue could be *fully explained*, including his own rationale, without recourse to topics blatantly theological in nature such as grace, sin, and divine providence.⁴ On the issue that some philosophers wish to take up such theological topics in the name of Christian philosophy, I do not pass judgment. My focus is on the trouble caused by philosophers who attempt to provide a full account of Aquinas's understanding of virtue without mention of its theological backdrop. Moreover, there are larger issues also at play here regarding whose understanding of philosophy one is employing. Often, it is not Aquinas's.⁵

This study is important because, perhaps through a legitimate endeavor to dialogue in the recent revival of virtue ethics in Anglophone philosophical work, authors tend to present Aquinas's account of virtue as more philosophical than it can bear on its own principles. That such is the case is especially brought out by understanding Aquinas's developments in his theology of grace and the impact it has on his account of virtue. Thus, our study demands a diachronic reading of Thomas. A diachronic study offers, moreover, a second point of interest for our investigation. The shift in Aquinas's theology of grace concerns how he understood God's "operative grace," or that grace by which God does something in us without us. Because virtue in its fullest sense depends on God's grace, studying this intersection allows us to study the relationship between grace and virtue outside the typical infused/acquired virtue debate. The *causes* of Aquinas's developments on grace have more to say about that relationship than is at first obvious. Thus, the investigation has various reasons to make it worthy of our pursuit.

² Peter Geach, *The Virtues: The Stanton Lectures 1973–1974* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

³ Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope and Love* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997).

⁴ This we also perceive in Pieper's treatments, precisely because he has "the sober reflective will not to shirk 'embarrassing' conclusions and to carry the question through to its ultimate meaning." Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 52.

⁵ Mark Jordan, "Theology and Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleanore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 232–251.

To direct these various paths fruitfully, our study will need to have a particular mode. First, it will need to balance both a historical and a systematic reading. This historical approach will include not only a diachronic reading of Aquinas's own writings, but also those that preceded him. An analytic and systematic reading of Aquinas is critical to distill those principles and conditions on which his account of virtue rests. Second, our study must be text based.⁶ By this I mean not only staying close to the text (though I will do that too), but especially being faithful to the explanation that he gives, aware of terms of reference that appear there. This mode of our investigation is directly related to the next mode of proceeding. Third, our study must be committed to following the logic inherent in Aquinas's reasoning. While this may seem straightforward enough, this commits us to pursue that line of reasoning even when passing into theological quarters, without self-limiting our ability to follow. Indeed, our own limits are not those of Aquinas himself, but born of our own concerns, legitimate or not, about contemporary understandings of the confines of philosophy.⁷

The investigation is broken down into four parts. Part I consists of the first three chapters. These chapters find their unity in introducing the elements that will interact in Parts II and III. Chapter 1 lays out a general introduction to Aquinas's account of virtue. This account is built up as it were as the chapter progresses. In so doing, it introduces the various general contours of Aquinas's account of virtue in itself. Moving beyond this propaedeutic, Chapter 2 looks more deeply into how Aquinas used the idea of virtue and some of the various, but analogous senses it takes on. The chapter introduces the distinction of virtue *simpliciter* and virtue

⁶ Because our investigation will be text based, I have endeavored to use critical editions wherever possible. Also, where possible I have largely taken the English translation from others as indicated in the notes. However, I have taken some liberty in adjusting those translations where I deem necessary. For the sake of space, the notes contain the original language of a quoted passage in only two instances. The first is when the passage serves a particularly important point for our investigation. The second is when I could find no English translation. Because in these latter cases, the reader would rely on my translation, I have made the original language accessible in the notes. One final point on language: where quoted passages refer to Latin's *homo*, I have generally kept the traditional translation of "man." This, of course, is a reference to both male and female. However, I have sought, hopefully not too confusingly, to alternate my own English personal pronouns from chapter to chapter. Moreover, any mention of "person" should be assumed to mean "human person," not divine or angelic unless explicitly qualified as such.

⁷ See Pasquale Porro, *Thomas Aquinas: A Historical and Philosophical Profile* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 47–48.

secundum quid that will dominate much of the rest of the study. Where Chapters 1 and 2 are largely devoted to Aquinas's account of virtue in general, Chapter 3 is historical in nature. First, it addresses the hundred years prior to Aquinas and the shifts in understandings of nature and the supernatural. The second part of the chapter focuses on the historical data pertaining to Aquinas's own developments in his theology of grace and the causes of those shifts.

Chapters 4–9 comprise the second and third parts of the book. Taken together, they explore the conditions under which virtue finds its source, continuance, and culmination. I will say more on this method at the beginning of Chapter 4. Part II (Chapters 4–6) inquires into those necessary, “graced” conditions from which virtue *simpliciter* springs (Chapter 4), perseveres (Chapter 5), and participates in its end (Chapter 6). Chapters 7–9 constitute Part III and investigate the highest form of virtue *secundum quid* attainable without God's grace (or, more popularly, “pagan virtue”). As such, these chapters study those necessary conditions under which pagan virtue can again spring (Chapter 7), persevere (Chapter 8), and partake in its end (Chapter 9).

Finally, Chapter 10 confirms what has gone before by offering a brief exposé on the history and explanation of Thomas Aquinas's explicitly chosen, but oft-ignored, definition of virtue. A brief Conclusion indicates the book's individual conclusions and offers some closing thoughts on what its findings mean for accounts of virtue according to the mind of Thomas Aquinas.

Thomas Aquinas is a perennial figure in our Western intellectual tradition. His thought has molded our own often in ways unlooked for and sometimes unnoticed. By our own investigation's completion, I hope it will be abundantly clear that another constituent of his thought entails acknowledging that our own journey is never something walked wholly alone.