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Men and Women Becoming Virtuous: An Examination of Aquinas's Theory of Virtue in
Light of a Contemporary Account of Sexual Difference

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Men and Women Becoming Virtuous: An Examination of Aquinas's Theory of Virtue in Light of a Contemporary Account of Sexual Difference

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Recent years have seen a renewed interest in virtue theory, particularly in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Despite the resurgence of Thomistic virtue ethics, relatively little attention has been paid to the relationship between his philosophy of woman and his theory of virtue. The majority of scholars have simply overlooked or dismissed Aquinas's view of women, because he appears to adopt Aristotle's antiquated androcentric biology, which places him at odds with the modern emphasis on the equal rights and dignity of women and men. However, Aquinas's view of sexual difference seems to give rise to internal inconsistencies within his own account of virtue that cannot be addressed by merely discounting his reliance on Aristotelian biology.

Therefore, this study maintains that in order to resolve some of the internal inconsistencies between his theory of virtue and his philosophy of woman, Aquinas needs an account of sexual difference, such as the one offered by Carol Gilligan, that focuses more on the experience of women and upholds their equality with men even while recognizing the differences between the sexes. It also argues that this new account has implications for the acquisition and exercise of the virtue of chastity.

The first chapter of this study offers a brief overview of Thomistic virtue ethics as well as Aquinas's philosophy of woman, focusing specifically on how sexual difference affects the acquisition of virtue according to his moral theory. The second part summarizes the salient points in the work of Carol Gilligan and situates her account more broadly within the feminist discussion of sexual difference. In addition, this part examines some of the findings from other disciplines that confirm her account. While the third chapter of the study explores places in Aquinas's work that leave room to incorporate Gilligan's insights, the fourth part will suggest some ways in which Aquinas's treatment of chastity and lust might be refined in order to include the experience of women more fully. This study concludes by posing some questions for further exploration, including how sexual difference affects the acquisition and exercise of the cardinal virtues.

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DEDICATION

To Jennifer, my wife

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Introduction

In 1960, Servais Pinckaers, the influential Dominican theologian observed, “The concept of virtue occupies a central place in moral theology. As part of the renewal of this science in our day, an attempt is being made to restore virtue to the full significance it formerly possessed.”¹ Almost forty years later, Pinckaers opened his article “Rediscovering Virtue,” by announcing, “Virtue is back. Especially in the United States, a widespread discussion about its role in moral theology has been initiated, a discussion modeled on Aristotle’s *Ethics*, particularly as Aristotle’s thought was developed in the Middle Ages by Thomas Aquinas.”²

This recovery of Thomistic virtue theory has been one of the ways in which moral theologians have responded to the Second Vatican Council’s general call for a renewal of moral theology.³ From the Council of Trent to the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic moral tradition focused heavily on law and sin. The emphasis was placed on determining whether or not particular moral choices were in conformity with the moral law, making the tradition overly legalistic and act-centered.⁴ With its teleological view of the human person as well as its

¹ Servais Pinckaers, O.P., “La vertu est tout autre chose qu’une habitude,” *Nouvelle Revue Theologique* 82 (1960): 387-403. This article was later translated into English, and the translation used here is taken from that article. See Servais Pinckaers, “Virtue is Not a Habit,” trans. Bernard Gilligan, *Cross Currents* 12, no. 1 (Winter 1962): 65-81.

² Servais Pinckaers, “Rediscovering Virtue,” *The Thomist* 60, no. 3 (1996): 361-378.

³ Second Vatican Council, Decree on Priestly Formation, *Optatum totius*, 16, AAS 58 (1966), 723. The document states that theological subjects, including moral theology, should be “renewed through a more vivid contact with the Mystery of Christ and the history of salvation.” Specifically, it calls for the “perfecting of moral theology” by drawing “more fully on the teaching of holy Scripture” and throwing “light upon the exalted vocation of the faithful in Christ and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world.” The citation is from *Vatican Council II: the Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P., (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1975), 720.

⁴ John Grabowski discusses this trend in moral theology and how it affected the way in which theologians approached the Second Vatican Council’s call for renewal in his book *Sex and Virtue: An Introduction to Sexual Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), ix-xvi. In his analysis, Grabowski

account of moral development, many Catholic theologians felt that virtue theory, particularly as it is presented by Aquinas, was the remedy for this deficient approach to the moral life.⁵

Remarkably, during this resurgence in virtue theory, the scholarship has largely neglected the possible impact that sexual difference makes on the exercise and acquisition of virtue. Even though virtue theory concentrates less on individual acts and more on the human person and how one becomes morally good, relatively little attention has been paid to the human person as male and female. In part, this lacuna seems to be the result of Aquinas's antiquated theory of sexual difference.

Because he relies heavily on Aristotle's androcentric biology, Aquinas insists that women are the weaker sex, physically, emotionally, and intellectually, and thus they have a more difficult time obtaining acquired virtue.⁶ Of course, this position places him firmly at odds with the modern emphasis on the equal rights and dignity of women and men. Therefore, for those interested in reviving his moral theory, the general approach has been to dismiss or ignore his

relies on Pinckaers influential work *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Mary Thomas Noble, O.P. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995). Through a detailed historical analysis, Pinckaers demonstrates how Aquinas's approach to moral theology, which centered on happiness and the virtues, was replaced by casuistry as a result of the influence of nominalism. John Mahoney, S.J. offers a similar but more condensed historical analysis in his work *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition* (Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon Press, 1987), 224-258.

⁵ The resurgence and renewed interest in virtue theory within the Catholic tradition is exemplified by Catholic thinkers such as Josef Pieper, Servais Pinckaers, O.P., Romanus Cessario, O.P., Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sherwin, O.P., Benedict Ashley, O.P., Jean Porter, Paul Wadell, William Mattison, Angela Knobel, and John Grabowski. Perhaps the depth and magnitude of this movement is illustrated by the fact that Ashley, Cessario, Wadell, and more recently Mattison have all published general introductory texts focused on the virtues in an attempt to assist students as well as laypeople, who are reading these texts outside of an academic setting, to return to a more Thomistic understanding of the moral life and to move away from a legalistic conception of morality.

⁶ According to Aquinas, the natural inequalities between the sexes do not affect the acquisition of the infused virtues, because men and women are equal in the life of grace. The implications of his account of sexual difference for his theory of the infused virtues will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1.

view of women as well as and sexual difference in general, while accepting his account of the virtues.

The assumption underlying this approach appears to be that sexual difference has no bearing on virtue. Since men and women are equal, then they must acquire and exercise the virtues in the same way. Unfortunately, Aquinas simply held an antiquated view of women, which lead him to conclude that sexual difference impacts virtue.⁷ Therefore, by setting aside his opinion of women, scholars also seem to disregard any relationship between sexual difference and virtue ethics.

The problem with this approach is twofold. First, it seems to equate equality with sameness. In other words, because men and women possess equal rights and dignity, then they must also function in the same way where the moral life is concerned. However, if men and women are seen as equal but different, then it becomes necessary to consider how sexual difference and the unique experiences of each sex may influence their respective acquisition, understanding, and practice of virtue.

Second, by embracing his virtue theory and dismissing his treatment of sexual difference, scholars seem to overlook one of Aquinas's key insights. He believes that sexual difference has

⁷ For instance, Eleonore Stump in her voluminous work *Aquinas* covers numerous aspects of Aquinas's thought, including his virtue theory. However, regarding Aquinas' philosophy of woman, she merely notes, "I have nothing to say about Aquinas's generally unfavorable view of women, which expresses the spirit of his age." See her work *Aquinas* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003). The citation is from p. 542. In general, most Thomistic virtue theorists seem to have adopted the same position either explicitly or implicitly.

There are some notable exceptions to this general observation. For example, although answering the question is beyond the scope of his project, Grabowski at least asks, "Does moral virtue and its acquisition differ between men and women?" See his work, *Sex and Virtue*, 110. Other scholars dealing with Aquinas' philosophy of woman also address the issue of the relationship between sexual difference and the acquisition of virtue. See Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution 750 BC-AD 1250* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1997); Kristin Popik "The Philosophy of Woman of St. Thomas Aquinas, Part One: The Nature of Woman," *Faith and Reason* 4 (1978): 16-56; and Joseph Francis Hartel, *Femina Ut Imago Dei: In the Integral Feminism of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1993). Nevertheless, their work on this topic is primarily descriptive; they are not concerned with updating Aquinas's theory of sexual difference or coupling his theory of virtue with a more modern account of sexual difference.

an impact on the acquisition of acquired virtue. While his view of women is certainly flawed, what if his basic insight is correct?

This dissertation attempts to take seriously Aquinas's position that there is a relationship between sexual difference and virtue. In other words, sexual difference makes a difference for virtue theory. Therefore, this project seeks to demonstrate that a contemporary theory of sexual difference needs to inform Thomistic virtue ethics. The work of Carol Gilligan provides one such contemporary account.

Gilligan concentrates on the differences between men and women in the area of moral development and reasoning. In her seminal work *In a Different Voice*, which was first published in 1982, she criticizes Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development, because it ignores the distinct moral perspective of women.⁸ Gilligan contends that women resolve moral problems differently than men, because they emphasize care, compassion, and interpersonal relationships rather than competing rights and abstract principles. In order to resolve some of the internal inconsistencies between his theory of virtue and his philosophy of woman, I contend that Aquinas needs an account of sexual difference, such as the one offered by Carol Gilligan, that focuses more on the experience of women and upholds their equality with men even while recognizing the differences between the sexes, and I argue that this new account has implications for the acquisition and exercise of specific virtues such as chastity.

The first chapter in this study will briefly outline the major components of Aquinas's virtue theory and describe his view of sexual difference. The chapter will particularly focus on

⁸ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

how sexual difference affects or does not affect the acquisition of the acquired and infused virtues, according to Aquinas.

In chapter 2, the emphasis shifts to Gilligan's work and her account of sexual difference. I will summarize the salient points of her theory and situate her account more broadly within the feminist discussion of sexual difference. In addition to summarizing some of the criticisms of her theory by feminists and scholars in other fields, this chapter also will examine some of the findings from other disciplines that confirm her account at least in part and demonstrate its relevance for questions of sexual behavior and moral choice.

Returning to Aquinas's thought, chapter 3 will explore points in his work where there is room to incorporate Gilligan's insights, and it will look at how these insights can augment his virtue theory. While this chapter treats moral virtue in general, particular attention will be paid to the moral virtues most obviously impacted by sexual difference.

Following my analysis in chapter 3, the next chapter will take up Aquinas's treatment of chastity and lust. These serve as examples of where his conception of a specific virtue and vice might be refined in order to incorporate the experience of women more fully. After considering the impact of sexual difference on the Catholic moral tradition's understanding of chastity and lust, the final chapter offers a summary of the project and some remaining questions for further investigation.

Before turning to Aquinas's philosophy of woman and theory of virtue, I want to make three important caveats about this project, the first two of which are based on the work of Judith Plaskow. In her book *Sex, Sin and, Grace*, Plaskow is critical of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich's understanding of sin and grace; she maintains that their theologies neglect the

experience of women.⁹ However, in the beginning of her study, Plaskow notes that even though she is using the phrase “women’s experience” in the singular, it is a broad category that includes a variety of female experiences that she is not addressing. Therefore, she instructs her audience to read the phrase “women’s experience” with quotation marks around it whenever it appears in the text. Similarly, while she acknowledges that her view of women’s experience is that of a modern, white, western, middle-class woman, she maintains that it is a significant viewpoint and one which leads to criticisms that are theologically interesting.¹⁰

In a similar way, Carol Gilligan provides one account of “women’s experience.” It is not the only such account; there are others, including accounts offered by gender feminists, post-modern feminists, and “new feminists,” which provide a rather different version of women’s experience. Gilligan’s own conclusions are based on research studies conducted in America, and she specifically denies making universal claims about women worldwide or throughout time (although there is evidence from other fields of study which strongly suggests that Gilligan’s findings are more universal than she is willing to argue.¹¹ Her own research even demonstrates that not every woman approaches moral problems from the same care-centered perspective. Nevertheless, the picture of women’s experience and moral reasoning that Gilligan presents is significant. Furthermore, it makes for a more interesting dialogue partner with Thomistic virtue ethics than other accounts of women’s experience, because it focuses on the significance of sexual difference for moral education and development.

⁹ Judith Plaskow, *Sex, Sin and Grace: Women’s Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1980). Plaskow claims that self-abnegation is women’s original sin, whereas pride is at the root of sin for men.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹ Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 2.

While the phrase “women’s experience” may not capture the experience of all women, it also should not be taken to completely exclude the experiences of men. At the beginning of her work, Plaskow insists, “I do not wish to argue that the experiences I describe as ‘women’s experiences’ are only women’s experiences. The point is, as Valerie Saiving puts it, that ‘feminine experience reveals in a more emphatic fashion certain aspects of the human situation which are present but less obvious in the experience of men.’”¹² Like Plaskow, I do not wish to argue that women’s experiences are only women’s experience. Although Gilligan associates the care perspective with women, she stresses that it is not unique to women. While men tend to concentrate on issues of justice in their moral reasoning, they can and do operate from the care perspective.¹³

Finally, it must be acknowledged that this dissertation attempts to bring together two apparently disparate bodies of literature in care ethics and virtue theory. Each of these has their own internal debates, many of which remain contentious and unresolved. Although these debates are important, the purpose of this dissertation is not to rehash them but to bring feminist discussions of moral development into a deeper conversation with virtue ethics. In particular, it explores how Gilligan’s theory can inform a Thomistic understanding of chastity while also raising questions about how the understanding of other moral virtues could be enriched by a fuller account of sexual difference. Hopefully, this project will enrich both bodies of literature.

¹² Plaskow 5.

¹³ Carol Gilligan, “Reply to Critics,” in *An Ethic of Care*, ed. Mary Jeanne Larrabee (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 209.

Chapter 1

Aquinas on Virtue and Sexual Difference

Introduction

Adopting the definition of virtue set forth by Augustine, Aquinas maintains, “Virtue is a good quality of mind by which we live rightly, which no one misuses, and which God works in us without us.”¹ However, he notes that this definition describes infused virtue, because of the last clause “which God works in us without us.”² Aquinas says, “If we omit this phrase, the remainder of the definition will apply to all virtues in general, whether acquired or infused.”³ This distinction between acquired and infused virtue is critical to Aquinas’s theory of virtue and for understanding the role that sexual difference plays in it.

Therefore, I will begin by examining the nature of acquired virtue, describing what it is and how it is obtained. Then, I will discuss the infused virtues and the role that sexual difference plays in each kind of virtue. Aquinas holds that men and women are unequal in the natural order but equal in the life of grace where the acquisition of virtue is concerned. In other words, women will have a difficult time obtaining acquired virtue, but they are equally capable of growing in infused virtue, due to the equalizing power of grace. By considering some of the primary differences between the acquired and the infused virtues, I will demonstrate why this

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 55, obj. 1 and corpus. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of this text are from *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1948). If I diverge from this translation, it will be noted, and the original Latin text will be provided. Henceforth, the *Summa Theologiae* will be abbreviated *ST* in the notes.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

portion of Aquinas's philosophy of woman is incompatible with his own account of the characteristics of the infused virtues.⁴

Acquired Virtue

Even though he accepts Augustine's definition, St. Thomas does suggest one slight modification. After insisting that this "definition comprises perfectly the whole essential notion of virtue," Aquinas remarks that "the definition would be more suitable if for 'quality' we substitute '*habitus*,' which is the proximate genus."⁵ Aquinas's suggestion is based on Aristotle's ten categories of being, where *habitus* is one of the four divisions of the category of quality.⁶ More specifically, St. Thomas calls virtue an "operative *habitus*" and a "good *habitus*,"

⁴ Throughout this chapter, I am committed to the equality of the sexes. Each sex possesses full human dignity and basic human rights, and I do not defend that position. I take it as a given that men and women are equal and that God did not intend for women to be defective or inferior.

⁵ I have chosen to maintain the Latin form and not to translate the Latin term "*habitus*" as "habit." *Habitus* as it is used here and by ancient and scholastic authors means something very different from how the term "habit" is used currently. In contemporary discourse, habit refers to actions which performed without thought, such as tapping one's foot, fiddling with one's hair, or even putting on one's seatbelt immediately after getting into the car. *Habitus* does not contain this notion of mindless activity or mental indifference.

Servais Pinckaers insists that distinguishing *habitus* from "habit" is one key to understanding Aquinas's conception of virtue. He writes, "If we define virtue by the notion of habit [as currently used], we are bound to meet with paradoxical failure. Virtue then becomes a factor for automatism in human action, and to that extent it lessens its moral character. Far from contributing to the enhancement of the moral and human value of action, it diminishes it to the degree that its own part in the action increases. . . . To define virtue as a habit, however, would seem necessarily to be making man into a pure automaton, and to be depriving his action of its properly human value." See his article, "La vertu est tout autre chose qu'une habitude," *Nouvelle Revue Theologique* 82 (1960): 387-403. This article was later translated into English, and the translation used here is taken from that article. See Servais Pinckaers, "Virtue is Not a Habit," trans. Bernard Gilligan, *Cross Currents* 12, no. 1 (Winter 1962): 65-81. "Virtue is Not a Habit," 65-81. The quotation is from p. 68.

⁶ Aristotle, *Categories*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941). See especially chapter 8 for his discussion of habit as part of quality. For a brief but helpful treatment of quality, see Romanus Cessario, O.P., *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 40. Following Aristotle, Aquinas explicitly argues that habit is a distinct species of quality in *ST*, I-II, q. 49, a. 2, corpus.

While Aquinas alters Augustine's definition with relatively little justification, on the surface, this change seems fairly problematic. As Bonnie Kent notes, Augustine actually came to regret using Cicero's famous definition of virtue as a habit, because he believed that habituation actually bound the will to worldly things and

productive of good works.”⁷ While *habitus*, in general, refers to a constant and firm disposition, Aquinas describes virtue as an operative *habitus*, because it is a constant disposition that is oriented toward action.⁸ As opposed to a vice, which is a bad *habitus* that disposes one to act poorly,⁹ virtue “□makes its possessor good, and renders the latter's work good.”¹⁰

Virtue makes its possessor good, because it changes one's character.¹¹ As William Mattison puts it, virtue creates in the person “a dynamic disposition to act well in the future.”¹² It endows its possessor with a promptness or readiness to act as well as facility and joy in performing morally good actions.¹³ Virtue profoundly alters a person's character to such an extent that Aristotle and Aquinas both liken the *habitus* of virtue to a kind of second nature. Aquinas states, “[A] *habitus* is like a second nature, and yet it falls short of it. And so it is that

restrained it from loving God. The fact that Aquinas offers this change in Augustine's definition without significant argument signifies the extent to which he has expanded Aristotle's understanding of habit to include those habits which are infused in us by God. Kent rightly asks, “Why should Augustine object to defining virtue as a habit when the concept of habit itself has undergone such a significant change?” See her article, “Habits and Virtues,” in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen Pope (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown UP, 2002), 116-130. The citation is from p. 120. For a concise treatment of how Aquinas differs from both Augustine and Aristotle in his understanding of virtue, see Jennifer Herdt's book *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vice* (London and Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 72-97.

⁷ *ST*, I-II, q. 55, a. 3, corpus.

⁸ Pinckaers, “Virtue Is Not a Habit,” 69.

⁹ *ST*, I-II, q. 54, a. 3, corpus.

¹⁰ *ST*, II-II, q. 136, a. 2, corpus. Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 6, 1106a18-19. Henceforth, *Nicomachean Ethics* will be abbreviated *NE* in the notes. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of this text are from *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1999).

¹¹ Here I am specifically talking about the moral virtues. The intellectual virtues do not perfect the whole person. For a concise comparison of the two forms of virtue, see Romanus Cessario, O.P., *Introduction to Moral Theology* (Washington: D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 199. For Aquinas's treatment of the differences between the two types of virtue, see *ST*, I-II, q. 58.

¹² William Mattison, III, *Introducing Moral Theology: True Happiness and the Virtues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), 62.

¹³ Cessario, *Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics*, 47.

while the nature of a thing cannot in any way be taken away from a thing, a *habitus* is removed, though with difficulty.”¹⁴

To better understand the virtuous person, it is helpful to remember the four primary possibilities for human character that Aristotle describes. He maintains that a person may be virtuous, continent, incontinent, or vicious.¹⁵ Aristotle observes, “The continent person seems to be the same as one who abides by his rational calculation; and the incontinent person seems to be the same as the one who abandons it. The incontinent person knows that his actions are base, but does them because of his feelings, whereas the continent person knows that his appetites are base, but because of reason does not follow them.”¹⁶ Unlike the continent and the incontinent, the virtuous and the vicious do not experience a struggle between reason and feelings when acting. One who is vicious simply does what is bad and has no regret,¹⁷ whereas the virtuous individual acts morally and wants to do so. The virtuous person has the right “feelings at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way.”¹⁸

¹⁴ *ST*, I-II, q. 53, a. 1, ad 1. Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII, 10, 1152a30-34. Aquinas is responding to an objection which specifically mentions the *habitus* of virtue, but his response applies equally to virtue and vice.

¹⁵ Robert Sokolowski brought these four possibilities to my attention. He offers an excellent and condensed summary of each in his book *The God of Faith and Reason: Foundations of Christian Theology*, new ed. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 56-58. All are discussed in Aquinas as well. For his discussion of continence and incontinence, see *ST*, II-II, q. 155 and 156, respectively.

¹⁶ *NE*, VII, 1, 1145b11-14.

¹⁷ *NE*, VII, 7, 1150a22-23.

¹⁸ *NE*, II, 6, 1106b22-23. Aristotle and Aquinas’ conception of acquired virtue becomes even clearer when it is compared with a very different idea of virtue, such as the one offered Immanuel Kant. Unlike Aristotle and Aquinas, Kant distrusts the passions and leaves little room for them in his moral philosophy. For Kant, the passions tend to be unruly and only interfere with moral conduct. Therefore, he sees virtue simply as the ability or strength to overcome one’s contrary desires and inclinations in order to do the right thing. In this regard, Kant’s virtuous person actually resembles Aristotle’s continent person. For more on Kant’s conception of virtue, see his work, *The*

How does one acquire this virtuous state? Just as virtue produces morally good actions, it is acquired by performing those same kinds of acts. Aristotle compares the process of acquiring virtue with how one learns to play a musical instrument. He insists that just as one learns to play the harp by actually playing the harp, one becomes just by doing just actions or temperate by acting in a temperate manner.¹⁹

However, it is important to stress that becoming virtuous involves more than merely following a strict set of moral rules. Recall that virtue changes one's very character; therefore, virtue cannot be understood as simply a mathematical like equation where obeying a moral rule equals acquiring a virtue. Here, Aristotle's analogy is extremely instructive, because it helps to reveal the relationship between moral rules and the acquisition of virtue.

Learning to master any musical instrument involves learning basic musical theory, such as how to read music and produce various notes. After learning these basics along with more advanced concepts and spending significant time practicing, one can learn to play a variety of songs, improvise, and even write one's own music. The moral rules are akin to basic musical theory. They are elementary instructions in the moral life that assist one in the acquisition of virtue.

As one passes beyond mere rule-following, virtue begins to emerge. One develops a growing personal initiative and an increasing desire for truth and goodness. One no longer obeys the moral rules out of obligation or fear of punishment but begins to see why they exist and follows them with pleasure. By the time of moral maturity, one has secured an ease and joy in

Metaphysics of Morals, trans. and ed., Mary Gregory (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 145-157, esp. 156.

¹⁹ *NE*, II, 2, 1103a35-1103b2.

performing moral actions in addition to a kind of creative power in the moral life which does not leave the moral rules behind but goes beyond them.²⁰

The virtuous or morally mature person is the one who is able to steer between both excess and deficiency. Because virtue brings one into conformity with the rule of reason, acting virtuously requires one to choose the mean between vices that are in discord with reason.²¹ The virtue of courage, for example, lies between the vices of cowardice and rashness. Similarly, the virtue of generosity is the mean between miserliness and profligacy.

For Aristotle, happiness, which is man's final end, consists in reasoning well and finely over a complete life.²² He states:

Now each function is completed well by being completed in accord with the virtue proper [to that kind of thing]. And so the human good proves to be activity of the soul in accord with virtue, and indeed with the best and most complete virtue, if there are more virtues than one. Moreover, in a complete life. For one

²⁰ This paragraph is a composite of two analogies that Pinckaers utilizes to describe how one grows in freedom and virtue. On the one hand, he uses the example of learning to play the piano well, and on the other hand, he compares an individual's growth in virtue to the stages of human life. The first analogy can be found in his *Sources of Christian Ethics*, 355. For the second analogy, see Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *Morality: The Catholic View*, trans. Michael Sherwin, O.P. (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2001), 70. He discusses the "creative power of virtue," which I am borrowing from him here, in his article, "Virtue is Not a Habit," 70-1.

²¹ *ST*, I-II, q. 64, a. 1. Even though the differences between the acquired and infused virtues will be discussed in the next section, it should be noted that Aquinas is only referring to the acquired moral virtues here. Later in the same question, he makes it clear that the theological virtues do not observe the mean, because there can be no excess associated with the theological virtues. In other words, one cannot possess too much faith, hope, or charity. See article 4.

²² *NE*, I, 7, 1097b21-11098a21. For Aquinas, man's final end is happiness as well, but happiness consists in the vision of the Divine Essence (*ST*, I-II, q. 3, a. 8). Nevertheless, there is an ongoing debate about whether Aquinas posits two final ends, one natural and imperfect and another perfect and supernatural, or only one, supernatural end. For more on this debate, see Denis Bradley, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good: Reason and Human Happiness in Aquinas's Moral Science* (Washington: D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1997).

While this debate lies beyond the scope of this project, for the purposes of this project, it is important to note that Aquinas does acknowledge the value of the acquired virtues and that these virtues help man to reason well in the natural order, even if man's final end lies beyond this life. The relationship between the infused virtues and the attainment of perfect happiness will be discussed later in this chapter.

swallow does not make a spring, nor does one day; nor, similarly does one day or a short time make us blessed or happy.²³

The acquired virtues enable man to achieve happiness by orienting man to this natural end and allowing him to act in accord with reason.

Infused Virtue

For the most part, in his treatment of acquired virtue, Aquinas closely follows Aristotle's theory. His fundamental departure from Aristotle takes place when he posits another kind of virtue, infused virtue, which men and women do not obtain through their own actions. Recall the definition of virtue that Aquinas accepts from Augustine. "Virtue is a good quality of mind by which we live rightly, which no one misuses, and which God works in us without us."²⁴

Aquinas argues that this definition, because of the final clause, describes infused virtue.

According to Aquinas, the infused virtues are the most perfect virtues. In *De virtutibus cardinalibus*, Aquinas distinguishes three levels of virtues.²⁵ First, there are virtues that are wholly imperfect. Explaining wholly imperfect virtue, Aquinas gives the example of an

²³ *NE*, I, 7, 1098a16-21. In addition to virtue, Aristotle insists that external goods are necessary for happiness. See *NE*, VII, 12, 1153b15-21. Julia Annas provides an excellent analysis of why Aristotle argues that both the virtues and external goods are necessary for happiness, and she juxtaposes Aristotle's position on this issue to that of other philosophies in the ancient world, including the Stoics. See her book *The Morality of Happiness* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 364-384, 426-435.

²⁴ *ST*, I-II, q. 55, a. 4, obj. 1 and corpus.

²⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestio disputata De virtutibus cardinalibus*, a. 2, *sed contra*. Unless otherwise noted, the English translation of this text is taken from Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, eds., E.M. Atkins and Thomas Williams, trans. E.M. Atkins (Oxford: Cambridge UP, 2005).

Angela McKay and Thomas Osborne offer rival interpretations of this text. See their respective articles in *The Thomist*. Angela McKay, "Prudence and Acquired Moral Virtue," *The Thomist* 69 (2005): 535-55, and Thomas Osborne, "Perfect and Imperfect Virtues in Aquinas," *The Thomist* 71 (2007): 39-64. Osborne disagrees with McKay's reading of this text, and he contends that there are additional grades of acquired virtue (e.g., imperfect acquired virtues which are underdeveloped and not united to the other virtues) which Aquinas does not mention in this text. This debate has no bearing on this project, because both authors accept the more basic distinction between infused and acquired virtue, which is the distinction that I am attempting to explain here.

individual who is born with an inclination or a predisposition toward a particular virtue, such as temperance. This predisposition is not the complete virtue. Rather, inchoate and disconnected dispositions are not really virtues at all, because they are not unified by prudence. In addition, without discernment, they can be misused, and a virtue is a quality of the mind, which no one can misuse. Second, there are perfect acquired virtues, which are perfect in one way but not completely good. These virtues are perfect, because they are good *habitus* that are united by prudence and orient man toward his human good. However, they are not unqualifiedly perfect, because they do not direct man to his supernatural end, which is the beatific vision.

Consequently, Aquinas declares that only the infused virtues are unqualifiedly perfect “for such virtues make a human action unqualifiedly good, in that it is something that attains our ultimate end.”²⁶

Acquired and infused virtues not only are oriented to different ends, but they also come to and depart from man in different ways. Whereas the acquired virtues are acquired through a person’s efforts and actions, the infused virtues, including the theological virtues as well as the moral virtues, are infused in us by God. According to Aquinas, before the infusion of the theological virtues, grace transforms the soul, which prepares the way for them. Then, through faith, man’s intellect is “enlightened concerning the knowledge of supernatural matters,” and by hope and charity, “the will acquires a certain inclination toward the supernatural good.”²⁷

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestio disputata de virtutibus in communi*, a. 10, *sed contra*. Unless otherwise noted, the English translation of this text is taken from Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, eds., E.M. Atkins and Thomas Williams, trans. E.M. Atkins (Oxford : Cambridge UP, 2005). Aquinas does say that in the order of generation, faith precedes hope and charity, because the object of hope and charity must be apprehended by the intellect before there can be movement of the will. See *ST*, I-II, q. 62, a. 4, corpus.

However, Aquinas argues that these theological virtues are still insufficient. Therefore, God also infuses into man moral virtues to help him act in accord with his ultimate end.²⁸

Even though it appears from Aquinas's description that the transformation of the soul, the infusion of the theological virtues, and the infusion of the moral virtues may occur in stages, this is not the case. Because they all function together and are interrelated, God infuses them all simultaneously. Unlike the acquired virtues, the infused virtues are not obtained over an extended period of time through habitual actions, although the infused virtues can be developed and increased over time.²⁹

Similarly, just as the infused virtues are bestowed on man differently than the acquired virtues, they also depart in a unique way. As previously mentioned, the acquired virtues resemble a kind of second nature in that, like a nature, they are not easily removed. However, the infused virtues can be lost by committing one mortal sin. Aquinas defines mortal sin by saying, "[W]hen the soul is so disordered by sin as to turn away from its last end, viz. God, to Whom it is united by charity, there is mortal sin."³⁰ Since mortal sin involves turning away from God, Aquinas holds that all the infused virtues are lost through mortal sin and are regained through penance. He writes, "Sins are pardoned through penance. . . . But there can be no remission of sins except through the infusion of grace. Wherefore it follows that grace is infused

²⁸ *ST*, I-II, q. 63, a. 3. While he does not mention them in this article because he is discussing virtues, Aquinas also says that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are infused in man by God, and he maintains that they are also necessary for man to act in accord with his supernatural end. See *ST*, I-II, q. 68, a. 2.

The relationship between the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the infused virtues is the subject of substantial debate among Thomistic scholars. For an overview of the issues in the debate and a summary of the various theories which have been offered, see Angela McKay, "The Infused and Acquired Virtues in Aquinas' Moral Philosophy" (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2004), 38-57.

²⁹ Aquinas maintains that the "infused virtues are not increased in their essence, but are said to be increased, either because they become more firmly rooted in their subject, or because they are exercised more fervently and more intensively." See *Quaestio disputata de virtutibus in communi*, a. 11, *sed contra*.

³⁰ *ST*, I-II, q. 72, a. 5, corpus.

into man through Penance. Now all the gratuitous virtues flow from grace, even as all the powers result from the essence of the soul. . . . Therefore all the virtues are restored through Penance.”³¹ Aquinas consistently maintains that all of the infused virtues come and depart together. Through mortal sin one loses *all* the infused virtues, and through penance and the corresponding infusion of grace, *all* the virtues are returned.

Since the infused virtues are obtained through grace and not habitual action, they are not necessarily accompanied by the same facility in action as are the acquired virtues. St. Thomas explains:

It happens sometimes that a man who has a *habitus*, finds it difficult to act in accordance with the *habitus*, and consequently feels no pleasure and complacency in the act, on account of some hindrance coming in from outside: thus a man who has a *habitus* of science, finds it difficult to understand, through being sleepy or unwell. In like manner sometimes the *habitus* of moral virtue experience difficulty in their works, by reason of certain contrary dispositions remaining from previous acts. This difficulty does not occur in respect of acquired moral virtue: because the repeated acts by which they are acquired, remove also the contrary dispositions.³²

Since vices like virtues are acquired through repeated actions, here Aquinas realistically acknowledges that vices, which become ingrained in the individual, are not eradicated easily. Though grace heals the sinner of the vice, some trace of that past behavior still remains in the form of a residual contrary dispositions (*dispositiones*).

³¹ ST, III, q. 89, a. 1, corpus.

³² ST, I-II, q. 65, a. 3, ad. 2 (my translation): “*Ad secundum dicendum quod quandoque contingit quod aliquis habens habitum, patitur difficultatem in operando, et per consequens non sentit delectationem et complacentiam in actu, propter aliquod impedimentum extrinsecus superveniens, sicut ille qui habet habitum scientiae, patitur difficultatem in intelligendo, propter somnolentiam vel aliquam infirmitatem. Et similiter habitus moralium virtutum infusarum patiuntur interdum difficultatem in operando, propter aliquas dispositiones contrarias ex praecedentibus actibus relictas. Quae quidem difficultas non ita accedit in virtutibus moralibus acquisitis, quia per exercitium actuum, quo acquiruntur, tolluntur etiam contrariae dispositiones.*” See also *De virtutibus cardinalibus*, a. 2, ad 2.

Elsewhere Aquinas relies more explicitly on the distinction between *dispositio* and *habitus* to explain what remains of the vice in the person after the infusion of virtue. Unlike a *habitus*, a *dispositio* is less permanent, more unstable, and easily changeable.³³ In responding to an objection that an infused virtue cannot exist in an individual alongside its opposing acquired vice, Aquinas maintains:

It is true that a single, simple, action is not enough to destroy an acquired habit. However, an act of repentance is, by power of grace, able to destroy a vice that has been generated. That is why, if someone has the vice of intemperance, when he repents it no longer remains there alongside the infused virtue of temperateness as a habit, but it is already in the process of being destroyed and has become instead a disposition as it were. However, a disposition is not the contrary of a perfect habit.³⁴

While the full-blown vice no longer remains alongside the virtues, a disposition, which is akin to a tendency, is leftover from the destroyed vice. Furthermore, it can reside in the person for quite some time.³⁵ This disposition may deny the person the kind of facility in action and the pleasure that results from performing good acts, which both accompany the acquired virtues. When these contrary dispositions continue to hinder the individual in the life of grace, s/he more closely resembles Aristotle's continent person than his virtuous one.³⁶

In his article, "Infused Virtue and the Effects of Acquired Vice," Michael Sherwin offers the Venerable Matt Talbot as the embodiment of the kind of person who Aquinas envisions when

³³ ST, q. 49, a. 2, ad 3. Aquinas notes that *dispositio* can also be the genus of habit.

³⁴ *De virtutibus in communi*, a. 10, ad 16 (my translation): *quod licet per actum unum simplicem non corrumpatur habitus acquisitus, tamen actus contritionis habet quod corrumpat habitum vitii generatum ex virtute gratiae; unde in eo qui habuit habitum intemperantiae, cum conteritur, non remanet cum virtute temperantiae infusa habitus intemperantiae in ratione habitus, sed in via corruptionis, quasi dispositio quaedam. Dispositio autem non contrariatur habitui perfecto.*

³⁵ *De virtutibus in communi*, a. 11, ad 16.

³⁶ *De virtutibus in communi*, a. 11, ad 15.

he acknowledges the power and deep-seated nature of vice.³⁷ Talbot, an Irish laborer, was an alcoholic for all of his adult life. Then, at twenty-eight, he had a conversion experience, gave up alcohol, and dedicated his life to God and service of the poor. Despite his conversion, his former lifestyle tugged and beckoned. Particularly in the beginning of his new Christian life, he felt a strong desire to drink and return to his old habits. Nevertheless, with the help of God's grace, he was able to overcome this desire for his former life and persevere.³⁸

Talbot's life raises several issues, including what role, if any, acquired virtue has in the Christian life and how both types of virtue interact and coexist in one individual.³⁹ The exact nature of the relationship between acquired and infused virtue is the subject of substantial debate, and it is a topic that will not be addressed here.⁴⁰ What is relevant to my argument is that Aquinas clearly holds that the infused virtues can exist alongside contrary dispositions. Unlike acquired virtue, the infused virtues are not obtained by consistently performing virtuous actions, and therefore, the infused virtues do not necessarily destroy harmful dispositions, which become

³⁷ Michael Sherwin, "Infused Virtue and the Effects of Acquired Vice: A Test Case for the Thomistic Theory of Infused Cardinal Virtues," *The Thomist* 73 (2009): 29-52. Sherwin is not only investigating how the infused virtues can exist alongside acquired vice but also how the lingering effects of that acquired vice can be eradicated in the life of grace. This inquiry leads him into a discussion of how the infused and acquired moral virtues operate together in the same individual. Sherwin does not attempt to provide a definitive answer to this question but does try to offer concrete material for theological reflection with his recounting of the life of Matt Talbot.

³⁸ Sherwin, "Infused Virtue," 35-37.

³⁹ Ibid. Sherwin rightly identifies that the largest hurdle in determining how these two types of virtues coexist in one individual is that Aquinas clearly says that they have different means in certain instances (*ST* I-II, q. 63, a. 4). If this is the case, then it appears at first glance that either these two forms of virtues cannot coexist in the same person or the acquired virtues occasionally switch-off and default to the infused virtues. Each of these possibilities raises several much larger questions and issues, including whether or not Christians can possess the acquired virtues.

⁴⁰ Even though both types of virtues are discussed and are central to this project, for my purposes, it is not necessary to determine how or even if they operate together in the same person. For an overview of the debate, a summary of what is at stake, and ways in which commentators have attempted to explain how these two kinds of virtues are related, see Angela McKay Knobel, "Two Theories of Christian Virtue," *The American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84.3 (2010): 599-618. For a position that falls outside of theories that McKay covers, see William Mattison, "Can Christians Possess the Acquired Virtue," *Theological Studies* 72 (2011): 558-85.

ingrained in individuals through their own repeated actions. After describing Aquinas's philosophy of woman in the next section, I will argue that this particular aspect of his theory of infused virtue is related to and problematic for the account of sexual difference that he offers.

Aquinas's Philosophy of Woman

In the preceding sections, I explained how an individual obtains acquired and/or infused virtue according to Aquinas. Thus far, there has been no reference to the impact that sexual difference has on the acquisition of either type of virtue. I have treated Aquinas's account of how virtue is acquired as if it is gender neutral; it is not. St. Thomas's philosophy of woman, which is based on a faulty biology that he borrows from Aristotle, leads him to conclude that men are more capable of cultivating acquired virtue.⁴¹ While Aquinas wants to consider men

⁴¹ Before proceeding further in this section, it is important to recognize that there are scholars who disagree with the account of Aquinas's philosophy of woman that I present in this section. In particular, Michael Nolan argues that Aquinas does not hold that "woman is a defective male," and he contends that Aquinas rejects this characterization of women at least six times. Nolan believes that most modern scholars and commentators have misunderstood both Aristotle and Aquinas on this matter. See his article, "The Defective Male: What Aquinas Really Said," *New Blackfriars* 75 (1994): 156-166. For an abbreviated version of his argument, see his essay "What Aquinas Never Said About Women," *First Things* 87 (1998): 11-12, and for a defense of Aristotle on the same topic, see Nolan's article, "The Aristotelian Background to Aquinas's Denial That 'Woman Is A Defective Male,'" *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 21-69.

Nolan presents a compelling case, and my presentation of Aquinas's thought in this section actually corresponds with much of his analysis. In order to support his claim that Aquinas did not see women as defective males, Nolan rightly draws attention to the distinction that Aquinas makes between *natura particularis* and *natura universalis*. Summarizing what he takes to be Aquinas's position, Nolan writes, "The male semen (*natura particularis*) may not intend to produce a female child, but *Natura* (*natura universalis*) intends that female children should be produced. So the female accidentally may be caused vis-a-vis the male semen, but she is no accident so far as Nature is concerned. On the contrary, she is intended by Nature, and because she is intended rather than *occasionatum* there are no grounds for saying she is deficient. Moreover, since God is the author of Nature, she is intended by God. That is why, he [Aquinas] concludes triumphantly, God made woman at the foundation of the world" ("The Defective Male," 159). Nolan correctly observes that for Aquinas, women cannot be seen as mistakes or misbegotten on the level *natura universalis*, because God, who created both male and female, is the author of Nature. See *ST*, I, q. 92, a. 1, ad 1.

The problem with Nolan's analysis is that he dismisses the other half of the distinction too quickly. Even though he acknowledges that Aquinas holds that on the level of *natura particularis* the female is defective, Nolan insists that for Aquinas, this is "purely a biological statement that it does not imply that woman is defective in any true sense." However, Nolan fails to address and appears to discount numerous places in Aquinas's writing where he maintains that women have defective reasoning and attributes this flaw to the imperfect nature of their bodies.

and women as equals in the life of grace and Christian virtue, I will argue that his Aristotelian biology makes that claim extremely problematic. However, in order to understand the difference that sexual difference makes in the acquisition of virtue for Aquinas, one must first begin with his philosophy of woman.

Unfortunately, many of Aquinas's critics simply dismiss his view of women as misogynistic and sexist, insisting that it is merely the product or extension of the repressive and patriarchal tradition that he inherits. For example, after discussing some of Augustine's writings on women, Uta Ranke-Heinemann states:

All this is the same old damning of women, for woman is the metaphorical Enemy of all celibate theology, and women themselves all too often accepted the notion of their sex as a divinely chosen plague. With this old Augustinian contempt for woman as a background, in the thirteenth century Scholastic theologians, notably, Albert and Thomas, reinforced by Aristotle, made their contribution.⁴²

Unfortunately, this characterization of Aquinas's work is overly simplistic. The problem with the position taken by Ranke-Heinemann and others who share it is that Aquinas's philosophy of woman is more multifaceted and nuanced than they seem to recognize. Such criticism tends to

Pia Francesca de Solenni in her influential work, *Towards an Understanding of Woman as Imago Dei*, traces Nolan's argument and defends Aquinas. Like Nolan, she concentrates on only one half of the distinction, stressing that the *imago Dei* is found in both women and men for Aquinas. According to de Solenni, Aquinas only agrees with Aristotle's statement that *femina es mas occasionatus* "if considered strictly at a biological level." See her book, *Towards an Understanding of Woman as Imago Dei: A Hermeneutic of Aquinas's Mens Through a Sexually Differentiated Epistemology* (Rome: Università Della Santa Croce, 2003), 101-12. The quotation is from p. 102.

Unfortunately, in following Nolan analysis, de Solenni overlooks the implications of Aquinas's position that woman is *mas occasionatus* on the biological level. In addition, while she correctly observes that Aquinas appreciates the character of individual women, she fails to acknowledge the numerous places in Aquinas's writings where he attributes imperfect reasoning to women in general. De Solenni's analysis will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 3.

⁴² Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven: Women, Sexuality and the Catholic Church*, trans. Peter Heinegg (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 185.

emphasize excessively Aquinas's statements regarding the inequality of women, while disregarding his insistence that men and women are equal in the life of grace.

Even though Ranke-Heinemann mischaracterizes Aquinas's attitude toward women, she is correct in pointing out the influence that Aristotle's thought has on Aquinas in this area. In her article, "The Philosophy of Woman of St. Thomas Aquinas," Kristin Popik notes, "The two most important influences on Thomas' thought about woman were his Faith and his 'Philosopher,' Aristotle."⁴³ Since these two sources—Scripture and Aristotle—are his primary guides, Aquinas's philosophy of woman can be viewed as essentially a synthesis of these two sources. The complexity in his account comes as result of his attempt to bring these two sources together which at times seem to be at odds.

Aquinas accepts Aristotle's position that "the female is as it were a deformed male" but not without qualification.⁴⁴ He poses the question of whether or not woman should have been created in the first production of things, and he answers in the affirmative. However, he raises the objection that she should not have been created in the first production, because "the Philosopher says that the female is a misbegotten male."⁴⁵ In responding to the objection, Aquinas draws a distinction between *natura particularis* and *natura universalis*. With the

⁴³ Kristin Popik, "The Philosophy of Woman of St. Thomas Aquinas, Part One: The Nature of Woman," *Faith and Reason* 4 (1978): 16-56.

⁴⁴ Aristotle, *De Generation Animalium*, trans. A.L. Peck (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1943), II, 3, 737a 27-28. Peck translates the Greek word *πετηνωμένον* as "deformed"; other translations use "misbegotten" or "mutilated." Even though I am using Peck's translation, I believe that Robert Mayhew makes a strong case that the word is best translated as mutilated. Mayhew maintains that Aristotle actually sees women as analogous to eunuchs, males who have been mutilated. See Mayhew's book, *The Female in Aristotle's Biology: Reason or Rationalization* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 54-65.

⁴⁵ *ST*, I, q. 92, a. 1, obj. 1.

distinction, Aquinas is clearly attempting to preserve both Aristotle's definition of woman and the fact that God creates woman from man. He states:

With respect to a particular nature (*natura particularis*), woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from defect in the active force or from some material indisposition, or even from some external influence; such as that of a south wind, which is moist, as the Philosopher observes. However, with comparison to universal nature (*natura universalis*), woman is not misbegotten, but is included in nature's intention as directed to the work of generation. Now the intention of universal nature depends on God, Who is the universal Author of nature. And for that reason, when arranging nature, He made not only the male but also the female.⁴⁶

Following Aristotle, Aquinas holds that male semen contains the active force while passive matter is provided by the female.⁴⁷ Popik explains that according to Aquinas “the male seed as active principle supplies the form, actualizes the matter, and in fact does the generating with the matter supplied by the female. . . . The supplying of the matter is all this is required for motherhood for Thomas and the extent of the female's role in the generation of offspring.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *ST*, I, q. 92, a. 1, ad 1 (my translation): *quod per respectum ad naturam particularem, femina est aliquid deficiens et occasionatum. Quia virtus activa quae est in semine maris, intendit producere sibi simile perfectum, secundum masculinum sexum, sed quod femina generetur, hoc est propter virtutis activae debilitatem, vel propter aliquam materiae indispositionem, vel etiam propter aliquam transmutationem ab extrinseco, puta a ventis Australibus, qui sunt humidi, ut dicitur in libro de Generat Animal. Sed per comparisonem ad naturam universalem, femina non est aliquid occasionatum, sed est de intentione naturae ad opus generationis ordinata. Intentio autem naturae universalis dependet ex Deo, qui est universalis auctor naturae. Et ideo instituendo naturam, non solum marem, sed etiam feminam produxit.*

I have chosen to translate *natura particularis* and *natura universalis* as “particular nature” and “universal nature” rather than “individual nature” and “human nature in general,” which is the translation provided by Benziger edition. My translation brings me closer to the one offered by Michael Nolan. As was previously mentioned, Nolan correctly points out the importance of this distinction for understanding Aquinas' account of sexual difference. Unfortunately, the translation “individual nature” and “human nature in general” only cloud the distinction. When he uses the term “*natura universalis*,” Aquinas is referring to the workings of the whole created natural order not merely human nature, and by “*naturam particularis*,” he is referencing the workings of the male semen not the individual nature of woman. For more on the meaning and significance of these two terms, see Nolan, “The Defective Male,” 159-61.

⁴⁷ *ST*, I, q. 118, a. 1, ad 4.

⁴⁸ Popik, “The Philosophy of Woman,” 11.

Therefore, Aquinas reasons that since the male seed is the active principle in generation and tends toward the production of its own likeness, then the production of the female must come from some defect in the generative process. The female thus produced is defective with respect to the nature of the male semen, which fails to produce its own likeness. Again citing Aristotle, he offers a few possibilities of what might cause this defect in production, including some external influence such as that of a south wind, which is moist.

Although Aquinas accepts that the female is a misbegotten male based on Aristotelian biology, still he must defend God and His creation of male and female. In making the distinction between *natura particularis* and *natura universalis*, St. Thomas clearly has the creation accounts provided in Genesis in mind. He not only references Genesis 2 twice when he argues that woman should have been made in the first production of things,⁴⁹ but questions 92 and 93 in the *prima pars* are essentially an exegesis and defense of the creation stories found in Genesis 1 and 2. Aquinas accepts that God purposely creates both man and woman and recognizes that He cannot create something defective.⁵⁰ Hence, Aquinas insists that concerning nature in general (*natura universalis*), woman is intended and not misbegotten. Explicating the distinction that Aquinas makes, Popik writes:

God as the efficient cause and author of nature intends both that there be females in order to perfect the species, and that in a certain number of individual cases generation results in the production of females. . . .The female then is *occasionata*, accidental or unintended in that her generation is against the natural tendency of generation. She is not accidental or unintended in the sense of a mistake, one who is not intended to exist but does.⁵¹

⁴⁹ *ST*, I, q. 92, *sed contra* and corpus.

⁵⁰ *ST*, I, q. 92, a. 1, obj 1.

⁵¹ Popik, "The Philosophy of Woman," 12-3.

With the distinction, Aquinas aims to be faithful to Scripture and Aristotle.⁵²

After explaining how woman is intended by God in question 92, Aquinas goes on in the following question again to affirm the goodness of creation in general and woman in particular when he argues that both man and woman were created in the image of God. He asks whether the image of God is found in all humanity, and he responds again in the affirmative. Replying to an objection that the image of God is found only in men and not women, he writes:

The image of God, in its principal signification, namely the intellectual nature, is found both in man and in woman. Hence after the words, "To the image of God He created him," it is added, "Male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27). Moreover it is said "them" in the plural, as Augustine (*Gen. ad lit.* iii, 22) remarks, lest it should be thought that both sexes were united in one individual.⁵³

There are two important things to note about Aquinas's response. First, he specifically rejects the idea that perhaps man was androgynous at any point. This position places him in direct opposition to those who claim that sexual differentiation is a consequence of the fall, such as Gregory of Nyssa.⁵⁴ For Aquinas, God created man male and female, and like the rest of creation, this aspect of creation is good. Second, here Aquinas asserts the equality of men and

⁵² Ibid., 13. While this is Aquinas's aim, I argue through the rest of this chapter that his attempt to be faithful to both of these sources inevitably creates internal inconsistencies in his own account of how the infused virtues operate. Other scholars, such as Mary Daly, argue that the tension in Aquinas's account of sexual difference is not between Scripture and Aristotle. Instead, she contends that there is a discord between Aquinas's entire philosophical anthropology, on the one hand, and the androcentric statements he makes about women, on the other hand. Daly attributes the latter to commonly accepted biblical exegesis, bad Aristotelian biology, and the prevailing image and status of women in the Middle Ages. See her work, *The Church and the Second Sex*, rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 90-8.

⁵³ *ST*, I, q. 93, a. 4, ad 1.

⁵⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series*, trans. H.A. Wilson, eds. Henry Wace and Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, Co., 1893), XVI-XVII.

women.⁵⁵ They both possess a rational nature, which makes them both the image of God.⁵⁶

This is hardly “the same old damning of women.” Rather, St. Thomas acknowledges women’s elevated place in God’s creation and their shared qualities, despite the influence of Aristotle’s philosophy of woman on him.

Women and Acquired Virtue

Aquinas’s dual vision of woman as both misbegotten male and *imago Dei* leads him to distinguish what women are capable of where the acquisition of each type of virtue is concerned. In order to understand why women are not equal to men in their ability to cultivate acquired virtue but equal in their capacity for infused virtue, one must examine more carefully what Aquinas inherits on this matter from his two primary sources: Aristotle and Sacred Scripture.

Aquinas not only accepts Aristotle’s understanding of women as misbegotten males, but also the additional conclusions that the philosopher seems to draw from this definition. Like Aristotle, Aquinas maintains that women are inferior to men.⁵⁷ Discussing the incarnation, Aquinas poses a question concerning whether or not the matter of Christ’s body should have been taken from a woman. He raises an objection that it should not, because “the male sex is

⁵⁵ However, while men and women are equal to the extent that they are both created in the *imago Dei*, in other passages, Aquinas implies that men and women were unequal even before the fall. This point will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

⁵⁶ *ST*, I, q. 93, a. 4, ad 1.

⁵⁷ Aquinas admits that there are exceptions. Some women do have the “firm judgment of reason” and excel in virtue; Mary is foremost among them. See *ST*, II-II, q. 156, a. 1, ad 1; Thomas Aquinas, *In salutationem angelicam, scilicet Ave Maria, exposition*, in *Opera omnia* (Parma: Typis Petri Fiaccadori, 1865), II, A, 1. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of this text are from *the Three Greatest Prayers: Commentaries on the Lord’s Prayer, the Hail Mary, and the Apostles’ Creed*, trans. Laurence Shapcote, O.P. (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, Ltd., 1937). Henceforth, this text will be abbreviated *In sal. ang.* in the notes.

more noble than the female.”⁵⁸ In his reply, St. Thomas does not reject this assertion; he plainly accepts it. However, he argues that it was fitting that Christ was born of woman, so that the female sex would not be despised. He states, “The male sex is more noble than the female, and for this reason He took human nature in the male sex. But lest the female sex should be despised, it was fitting that He should take flesh of a woman.”⁵⁹

When he considers the temptation of Adam and Eve, Aquinas again characterizes women as the lesser sex. He argues the devil chooses to tempt Eve directly, because “the woman was weaker than the man, and consequently more liable to be deceived. . . .”⁶⁰ Since out of “ignorance,” she fully believed the serpent’s words and persuaded Adam to sin,⁶¹ he also claims that Eve sinned more grievously than Adam.⁶² Conversely, St. Thomas declares that Adam did not believe what the serpent said but agreed to follow his wife out of a misguided friendly goodwill and inexperience with divine severity.⁶³ Nevertheless, he does grant that one can also consider man’s sin to be more grievous than woman’s due to the fact that “he was more perfect

⁵⁸ *ST*, III, q. 31, a. 4, obj. 1.

⁵⁹ *ST*, III, q. 31, a. 4, ad 1.

⁶⁰ *ST*, II-II, q. 165, a. 2, ad 1. In the same reply, Aquinas also speculates that the devil chose Eve as an instrument of temptation in order to prey on Adam’s loyalty to her.

⁶¹ *ST*, II-II, q. 163, a. 4, corpus; Thomas Aquinas, *Super primam Epistolam ad Timotheum lectura*, in *Expositio et lectura super epistolas pauli apostolic*, vol. 2, ed. R. Cai (Rome: Marietti, 1953), II, lec. 3, vs. 14, no. 83. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of this text are from *Commentaries on St. Paul’s Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. Chrysostom Baer, O. Praem. (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2007). In the remaining notes, this text will be abbreviated *Super I Tim*.

⁶² *ST*, II-II, q. 163, a. 4, corpus.

⁶³ *Ibid*.

than woman.”⁶⁴ Elsewhere Aquinas argues that man was produced first, since he is more perfect than woman.⁶⁵

In these passages, it is unclear exactly what Aquinas means when he refers to woman as “weaker” or man as “more noble” and “more perfect,” particularly when he is talking about the two sexes in the prelapsarian state. He seems to suggest that men in the state of innocence would have been superior to women in almost all things. According to St. Thomas, woman was created to be a helpmate to man specifically in the work of generation, “because another man would have proved a more effective help in anything else.”⁶⁶

At other points, when he discusses woman after the fall, he is more explicit in explaining how women are inferior to men. For example, he likens women to imbeciles and children, claiming that they all possess defective reasoning.⁶⁷ Similarly, he explains that St. Paul admonishes women to learn in silence, “since to learn is proper to those who are deficient in reason.”⁶⁸ In addition, women should not teach publicly, because “as a rule women are not perfected in wisdom.”⁶⁹

⁶⁴ *ST*, II-II, q. 163, a. 4, *sed contra*.

⁶⁵ Aquinas, *Super I Cor.*, 11, lec. 3, vs. 8, no. 611.

⁶⁶ *ST*, I, q. 98, a. 2, *sed contra*. Aquinas here recognizes a certain inequality between men and women that precedes the fall of man. However, it should be noted that Aquinas does not say that women are faulty or defective in the state of innocence. He surmises that if Adam and Eve had not sinned and generation had taken place in paradise, there would have been inequality between men and woman as well as between old and young. In addition, some persons would have been more robust in body or beautiful or more advanced in virtue and knowledge than others. In all these cases, he is careful to insist that these differences should not be taken to imply some defect in creation. He states explicitly that the persons with lesser knowledge, virtue, or bodies would possess no defect in body or soul. On the contrary, those who were surpassed either through the effort of others in the pursuit of virtue or knowledge or by birth would only be less perfect not defective. See *ST*, I, q. 96, a. 3.

⁶⁷ *ST*, II-II, q. 70, a. 3, *sed contra*.

⁶⁸ *Super I Tim.*, II, lec. 3, vs. 11, no. 79.

⁶⁹ *ST*, II-II, q. 177, a. 2, corpus.

As a result of their weaker reasoning, according to Aquinas, women's ability to acquire virtue is inhibited, because their passions frequently overwhelm their reason. In his *Commentary on Aristotle's "Politics,"* Aquinas expounds on Aristotle's contention that moral virtue belongs to men, women, children, and slaves but not in the same way. Unlike the slave, the woman is free and has the power of deliberating, but Aquinas insists that "her deliberation is weak."⁷⁰ He goes on to explain, "[T]he reason for this is that her reason, because of the tenderness of her nature, weakly adheres to decisions and is quickly drawn away from them because of particular emotions (e.g., desire, anger, fear, or such like)."⁷¹

In order to understand Aquinas's characterization of women, one must consider the relationship between the virtues and the passions in his anthropology. The sensitive appetite in St. Thomas's anthropology consists of the concupiscible and irascible powers,⁷² and each of these powers deals with different passions. Aquinas concludes, "Therefore whatever passions regard good or evil absolutely, belong to the concupiscible power; for instance, joy, sorrow, love, hatred, and such like: whereas those passions which regard good or bad as arduous, through being difficult to obtain or avoid, belong to the irascible faculty; such are daring, fear, hope and the like."⁷³

⁷⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia Libri Politicorum*, in *Opera omnia*, vol. 48 (Rome: Leonine Commission, 1971), I, ch. 10, no. 7. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of this text are from *Commentary on Aristotle's "Politics,"* trans. Richard Regan (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 2007). Henceforth, *Sententia Libri Politicorum* will be abbreviated *Pol.* in subsequent footnotes.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² *ST*, I, q. 80, a. 2.

⁷³ *ST*, I-II, q. 23, a. 1, corpus.

As part of the soul, the concupiscible and irascible powers are not inherently evil or bad. Nevertheless, while they do not need to be extirpated, they are lower powers which must be governed by reason. The passions are dangerous, precisely because they can misguide or overthrow reason. St. Thomas explains that inordinate motions of passion “arise because the sensitive appetite, which is the subject of these passions, is not so obedient to reason as not sometimes to move toward an object outside the order of reason, or even, occasionally, against reason; and this is what engenders the sinful impulse.”⁷⁴ When the reason and will are not in control of the lower powers, there is disorder in the soul.⁷⁵

The passions are controlled and brought under the rule of reason by the cardinal virtues fortitude and temperance, which order the irascible and concupiscible powers respectively. Explaining the need for and domain of each virtue, Aquinas writes that “fortitude is chiefly about fear of difficult things which can withdraw the will from following reason,”⁷⁶ while “temperance, which denotes a kind of moderation, is chiefly concerned with those passions that tend towards sensible goods, viz. desire and pleasure and consequently with the sorrows that arise from the absence of those pleasures.”⁷⁷ Since the act of choosing is exclusively the domain of the will, these virtues do not strictly speaking elicit a right choice. However, they facilitate

⁷⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium Theologiae*, trans. Cyril Vollert, S.J. (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1947), Ch. 224. Here St. Thomas is specifically discussing the sanctification of the Blessed Mother, who according to Aquinas, never committed a venial sin, because she did not experience an inordinate motion of passion.

⁷⁵ Joseph Francis Hartel, *Femina Ut Imago Dei: In the Integral Feminism of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università, 1993), 189.

⁷⁶ *ST*, II-II, q. 123, a. 3, corpus.

⁷⁷ *ST*, II-II, q. 141, a. 3, corpus.

moral actions, because by ordering the passions, they remove obstacles in the realization of the virtuous life.⁷⁸

In general, for St. Thomas, women do not appear to be as well-suited for acquiring the virtues of fortitude and temperance.⁷⁹ At times, Aquinas suggests directly that women have a natural disposition that is contrary to these virtues. Since women have a difficult time controlling their passions, he claims that women lack the virtue of perseverance, one of the parts of fortitude. When he discusses the vices opposed to perseverance, Aquinas examines effeminacy and pertinacity. By the former, Aquinas means a kind of “softness” found in man, which causes him to yield easily in the face of minor difficulties or discomfort. He explains “an effeminate man is one who withdraws from good on account of sorrow caused by lack of pleasure, yielding as it were to a weak motion.”⁸⁰ One acquires this vice either through custom or natural disposition, where one’s mind is less persevering as a result of frail temperament.⁸¹ Concerning this second way, Aquinas adds, “This is how women are compared to men, as the Philosopher says (*Ethic.* vii, 7): wherefore those who are womanly are called effeminate, being

⁷⁸ Romanus Cessario, O.P., *The Virtues, Or the Examined Life* (New York and London: Continuum, 2002), 163. For St. Thomas, “the will cannot desire a good that is not previously apprehended by reason” (*ST*, I-II, q. 19, a. 3, ad 1). Therefore, the static of the passions that interferes with the intellect also indirectly affects the will. For more on the interplay between the intellect and the will in St. Thomas’s thought, see Michael Sherwin, O.P., *By Knowledge & By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005).

⁷⁹ Prudence Allen makes this same observation in her work *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution 750 BC – AD 1250* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1985), 402. Since, according to Aquinas, women are deficient in reason, Allen adds to this list the acquired intellectual virtue of wisdom.

⁸⁰ *ST*, II-II, q. 138, a. 1, corpus.

⁸¹ *ST*, II-II, q. 138, a. 1, ad 1.

womanish themselves, as it were.”⁸² Effeminate men are similar to women, because like women, they yield easily to their passions and thus lack perseverance.

In his *Commentary on St. Paul’s First Epistle to Timothy*, Aquinas makes a similar point about women’s lack of temperance. Defending St. Paul’s call for women to adorn themselves with modesty and sobriety, Aquinas maintains that “modesty regards shameful deeds, and so it is laudable in those who are accustomed to fall into shamefulness, such being youth and women.”⁸³ Likewise, when he discusses sobriety in the *Summa theologiae*, he stresses the importance of the virtue for youth and women in particular. He concludes that “sobriety is most requisite in the young and in women, because concupiscence of pleasure thrives in the young on account of the heat of youth, while in women there is not sufficient strength of mind to resist concupiscence.”⁸⁴

In several other places, as we have seen, Aquinas places youth and women in the same category, because he maintains that both groups possess weak and defective reasoning. Because their unruly passions are prone to overtake their weak reason, St. Thomas deduces that women are at greater risk of committing sexual sins. Therefore sobriety, which preserves the power of reason, is especially important for women, because their reason is already weak.⁸⁵ Wine would only further impair their reason and create an even greater risk that they would fall into some kind of sin.

In addition to his remarks on the specific virtues of fortitude and temperance, St. Thomas repeatedly affirms that in general women are less virtuous and have a more challenging time

⁸² Ibid. (my translation): *Et hoc modo comparantur feminae ad masculos, ut philosophus dicit, in VII Ethic. Et ideo illi qui muliebria patiuntur molles dicuntur, quasi muliebres effecti.*

⁸³ *In 1 Tim*, ch. 2, lec. 2, vs. 9, no. 75.

⁸⁴ *ST*, II-II, q. 149, a. 4, corpus.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

acquiring virtue than men. He consistently describes women as incontinent, because their passions oftentimes overcome their reason. Following Aristotle, he insists that women do not “govern their emotions in the majority of cases by reason but rather are governed by their emotions.”⁸⁶ Therefore, he concludes, “Hence wise and brave women are rarely found, and so ‘women cannot be called continent and incontinent without qualification.’”⁸⁷ When he treats incontinence in the *Summa theologiae*, he articulates the same position. Again drawing on the Philosopher, he states that “‘we do not describe women as being continent, because they are vacillating’ through being unstable of reason, and ‘are easily led’ so that they follow their passions readily.”⁸⁸

Because of their unruly passions, it seems that the best women can hope for is a kind of secondary or inferior virtue. After explaining how slaves, women, and children all possess the capacity to reason but to different degrees, Aquinas considers how moral virtues differ in these groups as well. It is necessary to quote Aquinas at length here in order to include all the examples that he provides in support of his contention that various people possess the same virtue but in different ways. These examples are important for understanding the difference between the levels of virtue men and women can acquire. He writes:

And we should likewise consider the matter regarding moral virtues, since all human beings partake of them, but not in the same way. Rather, each one partakes of them as much as necessary for one’s own tasks. And so the one who rules, whether over the political community, slaves, wife or sons, needs to have complete moral virtue, since his task is absolutely the work of a master builder (i.e., a chief craftsman). For, as the chief craftsman directs and commands

⁸⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Sentencia libri Ethicorum*, in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 47, p. 2 (Rome: Leonine Comm., 1969), 8.5.1376. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations from this text are from *Commentary on the “Nicomachean Ethics”*, vol. 1-2, trans. C.I. Litzinger, O.P. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1964).

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ *ST*, II-II, q. 156, a. 1, ad 1.

his assistants who do manual work, so the ruler directs his subjects. And so he has the duty of reason, which is related as the chief craftsman to the inferior parts of the soul. And so the ruler needs to have complete reason, but each of the others who are subjects has as much reason and virtue as the ruler conveys to them (i.e., they need to have as much as suffices to follow the direction of the ruler by fulfilling his commands). And so it is clear that some moral virtue, namely, for example, moderation, courage, and justice, belongs to all of the aforementioned subjects. But the same virtue does not belong to men and women and other subjects, as Socrates thought. Rather, the courage of men is to command, namely, that no fear cause them to fail to order what should be done, but women and any subjects need to have subservient courage, namely, that they do not fail to do their duty out of fear. So also courage in the commander of the army and that of soldiers are different. And we should say the same about all the other virtues that concern ruling in the ruler and serving in the subjects. And this makes clear that these virtues do not differ by more or less but in some respect by reason.⁸⁹

At first glance, Aquinas simply appears to be arguing that it is necessary for both men and women to acquire virtue, even though women possess the virtues to a lesser degree.⁹⁰ While this interpretation is not wholly incorrect, it overlooks some of the complexity in Aquinas's position.

The key to understanding Aquinas's argument is the parallel that he draws between men and women, on one hand, and craftsman/assistants, ruler/subjects, and commanders/soldiers, on the other hand. Good craftsmen, kings, and commanders must have the ability to lead, while assistants, subjects, and soldiers must have the ability to take orders. The commander and soldier, for example, are not equal in virtue or reason. Different duties accompany different stations, and the courage of a commander quiets them to carry out different duties compared with the courage of a soldier. Similarly, men and women have different roles, and those roles require different acts of virtue. One could take Aquinas to mean that the sexes are equal, but that it is the

⁸⁹ Aquinas, *Pol.*, I, ch. 10, no. 7.

⁹⁰ This is the way in which Prudence Allen interprets this passage. See her work, *Philosophy of Woman*, 402-403.

differences in their roles that accounts for the reason why they do not partake of the virtues in the same way.

However, it is clear that Aquinas believes that women are less capable of developing the same degree of virtue not simply because of their roles but also because of their particular deficiencies. He insists that men rule over women, because men possess superior reason and are less influenced by their emotions. In the *Summa contra gentiles*, Aquinas insists, “For the female needs the male, not merely for the sake of generation, as in the case of other animals, but also for the sake of government, since the male is both more perfect in reasoning and stronger in his powers.”⁹¹ Men and women do not partake in the virtues in the same way, because they are unequal. While women possess a form of the virtues that corresponds to their role in life, their roles and lower duties in society are dictated by their inferior reason. Since men have more perfect reason and less unruly passions, men have higher duties, such as ruling, and participate in the virtues more fully. Women are left to cultivate the virtues of a subject, because they possess qualitatively weaker reason that is frequently unable to control their strong emotions.

Women and Infused Virtue

While women, for Aquinas, are inferior to men in their capacity to cultivate acquired virtue, the same is not true where the infused virtues are concerned. Recall that Aquinas argues that women are not only misbegotten males but also created in the image of God, based on the account of creation given in Genesis. Unlike Aristotle, when he reflects on female virtue, Aquinas not only must take into account the teaching of Genesis that women are made in the

⁹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 15 (Rome: Leonine Comm., 1930), III, 123:3. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of this text are from *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Vernon Burke (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975).

imago Dei but also the female moral exemplars found in New Testament, particularly Mary, the Mother of God. With these as starting points for his reflection, Aquinas provides a nuanced account of sexual difference. Rather than simply arguing that men and women are unequal in their reason and capacity to obtain virtue, he claims that men and women are equal in the life of grace. Both are equally able to be perfected by God's grace and to receive the infused virtues.

Just as is the case with his philosophy of woman, Aquinas never concisely articulates his position on how the sexes are equal in the life of grace. The closest that he comes to doing so is in his treatment of the sacrament of Confirmation in the *Summa theologiae*. Unlike the other sacraments, St. Thomas's treatment of the sacrament of Confirmation is comprised of only one question. At various points in the article, he insists that "in this sacrament the fullness of the Holy Ghost is given for the spiritual strength which belongs to the perfect age."⁹² Through Confirmation, the Holy Spirit confers "an increase" of the grace that we receive during Baptism.⁹³ According to Aquinas, this increase strengthens man for spiritual combat, and the sacrament enrolls one, who is already a member of the Church by virtue of Baptism, as a Christian soldier.⁹⁴

Considering the purpose of the sacrament, Aquinas questions whether it should be given to all, including women, children, and those who are near death. He raises the objection that women should not receive the sacrament since they are "incompetent to combat, by reason

⁹² *ST*, III, q. 72, a. 2, corpus. See also the corpus of article 1 of the same question.

⁹³ *ST*, III, q. 72, a. 1, corpus.

⁹⁴ *ST*, III, q. 72, a. 10, corpus.

of the frailty of their sex.”⁹⁵ Drawing on Chrysostom, St. Thomas responds to this objection by pointing out the spiritual courage of women and their equality with men. He writes:

As Chrysostom says ‘in earthly contests fitness of age, physique and rank are required; and consequently slaves, women, old men, and boys are debarred from taking part therein. But in the heavenly combats, the Stadium is open equally to all, to every age, and to either sex.’ Again, he says: ‘In God’s eyes even women fight, for many a woman has waged the spiritual warfare with the courage of a man. For some have rivaled men in the courage with which they have suffered martyrdom; and some indeed have shown themselves stronger than men.’ Therefore this sacrament should be given to women.⁹⁶

Unlike the case of acquired fortitude, Aquinas gives no indication here that women are more deficient than men where the infused virtue of fortitude is concerned. In addition, in the life of grace, women are not relegated to seeking some lesser type of fortitude that befits their station in life. Instead, St. Thomas notes that heavenly combats are open to all and that in some cases, women actually have surpassed men in their displays of spiritual courage.

Aquinas goes on to reaffirm female equality two articles later when he asks whether he who is confirmed needs someone to stand for him. Once again, Aquinas raises an objection concerning women. He states, “Further, this sacrament is given for spiritual strength, which has more vigor in men than in women, according to Proverbs 31:10: ‘Who shall find a valiant woman?’ Therefore at least a woman should not stand for a man in confirmation.”⁹⁷ The objection is interesting, because it does not deal directly with the problem that Aquinas is considering in the article, which is whether or not one needs a sponsor for the sacrament. Aquinas seems to take special care to raise and then dismiss the idea that only men can be

⁹⁵ *ST*, III, q. 72, a. 8, obj. 3.

⁹⁶ *ST*, III, q. 72, a. 8, ad. 3.

⁹⁷ *ST*, III, q. 72, a. 10, obj. 3.

sponsors. Replying to the objection, he asserts, “According to Colossians 3 (Galatians 3:28), ‘in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female.’ Consequently it matters not whether a man or a woman stand for one who is to be confirmed.”⁹⁸

Popik takes Aquinas’ response to be a straightforward declaration that men and women are spiritual equals. Commenting on Aquinas’ pithy reply, she states:

It is clear that Aquinas, by allowing women to sponsor men, is asserting that grace overcomes the natural moral inferiority of women to men and that it is just as easy for a woman to be spiritually stronger than a man as for the reverse. This is not a denial of moral difference between men and women, but it is an assertion that grace overcomes this difference; by nature women are morally inferior to men, but grace erases this inequality. The moral inferiority of women is only in the natural sphere; it is overcome by grace, so that once grace enters the picture one cannot speak any longer of woman’s inferiority to men in spiritual strength.⁹⁹

The relationship between nature and grace in Aquinas’s thought only supports Popik’s analysis. Aquinas holds (along with the rest of the Catholic intellectual tradition) that grace does not destroy nature but perfects it.¹⁰⁰ He also maintains that there is only one human nature, not

⁹⁸ *ST*, III, q. 72, a. 10, ad. 3. Even though Aquinas attributes the passage to Colossians 3, it is actually Galatians 3:28.

⁹⁹ Popik, “Philosophy of Woman,” 33. Prudence Allen echoes Popik’s conclusion. She argues that on the level of nature, St. Thomas embraces “sex polarity.” This theory holds that the sexes are different but unequal. In short, men are superior to women. Conversely, on the level of grace, Allen contends that Aquinas adopts “sex complementarity,” where the sexes are significantly different but also equal. See her work, *The Concept of Woman*, 385-497. Allen summarizes her categories on p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ *ST*, I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2. The specific relationship between nature and grace is obviously a large and complex question, which has occupied and perplexed the whole Western tradition. Therefore, I make no attempt to offer a solution to this question or even to delve into the different positions in the debate. Such an attempt would be beyond the scope of this project. The only part of the nature/grace debate that is relevant to my argument is whether or not grace completely eradicates an individual’s vices and/or vice-like dispositions. Aquinas clearly states that it does not. For a general overview of the debate, particularly as it was carried out in the 20th century, see Stephen Duffy, *The Graced Horizon: Nature and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992). For more on Aquinas’s treatment of the question, A.M. Fairweather has compiled selections from the *Summa* dealing with this topic. See his work, *Nature and Grace: Selections for the “Summa Theologica” of Thomas Aquinas* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954).

two.¹⁰¹ Men and women share the same nature, and since grace perfects this shared human nature, it is only logical for Aquinas to argue that men and women are at least capable of being equals in the life of grace. Of course, certain individuals of both sexes will excel in holiness and thus surpass members of their own sex and the opposite sex.

In his *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, Aquinas further elucidates this position regarding sexual equality. Clarifying St. Paul's statement that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, Aquinas begins by observing that this seems to contradict Romans 3:1, where St. Paul says, "What advantage is has the Jew? Much in every way." In order to reconcile these two passages, Aquinas draws a distinction between the state of the Jewish people before and after Christ. He explains, "I answer that Jews and Greeks can be considered in two ways. First, according to the state in which they were before faith. In this way, the Jew was greater because of the benefits he derived from the Law. In another way, according to the state of grace; and in this way, the Jew is not greater. And this is the sense in which it is taken here."¹⁰² Aquinas goes on to reiterate that neither slavery, nor freedom, nor sex makes a "difference as far as sharing in the effect of baptism is concerned."¹⁰³ He does not deny that there is a difference between Jews and Greeks, slaves and free persons, and men and women.

¹⁰¹ Aquinas follows Aristotle in arguing that men and women are part of the same species and possess the same form (i.e., a rational soul); they differ in matter. See Thomas Aquinas, *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio*, ed. R.M. Spiazzi (Rome: Marietti, 1950), X, 11: 2134. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of this text are from *Commentary on the Metaphysic*, trans. John Rowan (Chicago: Regnery Publishing, 1961).

¹⁰² Thomas Aquinas, *Super Epistolam ad Galatas lectura*, in *Expositio et lectura super epistolas pauli apostolic*, vol. 2, ed. R. Cai (Rome: Marietti, 1953), III, lec. 9. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of this text are from *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians*, trans. F.R. Larcher, O.P. (Albany, NY: Magi Books, Inc., 1966). In the remaining notes, this text will be abbreviated *Super ad gal*.

¹⁰³ Ibid.: "*Tertia differentia est quantum ad naturam, cum dicit non est masculus, neque foemina, quia sexus nullam differentiam facit quantum ad participandum Baptismi effectum.*"

Rather he stresses that in Christ, in the life of grace, those differences are meaningless; all are equal.

Even though Aquinas calls women incontinent and criticizes their lack of perseverance when discussing acquired virtue, he commends many women in the New Testament for excelling in virtue, especially the virtue of perseverance. For example, in the *tertia pars* of the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas considers whether “Christ’s resurrection should have been manifested to all men or only to some special individuals?”¹⁰⁴ Once again, Aquinas goes to great lengths to defend women. He raises a reasonable objection that the resurrection should have been manifested to all, because the witnesses to whom it was revealed were women. As witnesses, they bore the responsibility of proclaiming what they had seen and were forced to preach in public. This public teaching is “unbecoming in women;” they are to keep silent in the churches.¹⁰⁵ “Therefore, it does not seem becoming for Christ's Resurrection to be manifested first of all to the women and afterwards to mankind in general.”¹⁰⁶

Here, as he does elsewhere, Aquinas accepts St. Paul’s prohibition on women teaching publicly. However, while he agrees with this part of the objection, he strongly rejects its conclusion that the Resurrection should not have been manifested to women. First, St. Thomas insists that it is fitting that women were the first to see and proclaim the resurrection since it was through woman that death was brought to man. Then, he goes on to imply that women were allowed to witness the Resurrection first as a reward for their perseverance. Unlike the disciples, they returned to the tomb to care for Christ even in death. He argues:

¹⁰⁴ *ST*, III, q. 55, a. 1.

¹⁰⁵ *ST*, III, q. 55, obj. 3.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Hereby, moreover, it is shown, so far as the state of glory is concerned, that the female sex shall suffer no hurt; but if women burn with greater charity, they shall also attain greater glory from the Divine vision: because the women whose love for our Lord was more persistent--so much so that 'when even the disciples withdrew' from the sepulchre 'they did not depart' [Gregory, *Hom. xxv in Evang.*].--were the first to see Him rising in glory.¹⁰⁷

Notice that Aquinas allows for the possibility that women can burn with greater charity than men, and then he specifically points to Mary Magdalene and the other women who came to the tomb as examples. They deserved to be witnesses to the Resurrection more than the disciples, because their love was more persistent.

Aquinas not only points out the greatness of these women, but he also emphasizes the unequalled virtue of the Blessed Virgin. Of course, for St. Thomas, Mary is the foremost of all the saints, because she "is an example of *all* the virtues."¹⁰⁸ Aquinas emphasizes, "She practiced the works of *all* the virtues, while other saints were conspicuous in certain particular virtues—one for humility, another for chastity, another for mercy—for which reason each one is an example to us of some special virtue."¹⁰⁹ Aquinas even encourages all to seek her "assistance in every virtuous deed."¹¹⁰ In spite of the disparity between men and women in the natural virtues, in the life of grace, a woman, the Virgin Mary, is held up by Aquinas as the example of virtue and holiness for all human persons.

¹⁰⁷ *ST*, III, q. 55, a. 1, obj. 3.

¹⁰⁸ Aquinas, *In sal. ang.*, II, A, 1 (original emphasis).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* (original emphasis).

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, II, A, 3.

Unresolved Issues and Remaining Questions

At first glance, since Aquinas defends sexual equality in the Christian life, it appears that the distinction that he draws between acquired and infused virtue allows him to overcome the deficient and androcentric Aristotelian biology which he relies on so heavily to explain women's natural moral inferiority. Even though it is more difficult for women to cultivate acquired virtue within Aquinas's schema, men and women seem to be equal in their ability to receive and grow in infused virtue. However, a closer examination of St. Thomas's theory of infused virtue reveals a more complicated picture. Men and women may not be as equal in the life of grace as they first appear, because Aquinas cannot escape Aristotle's biology so easily.

It is necessary to recall a few of the key differences between the acquired and infused virtues. As was previously mentioned, Aquinas makes it clear that the infused virtues do not carry the same facility in action as the acquired virtues. In *Quaestio disputata de virtutibus in communi*, Aquinas explains this point in a slightly different way. He insists that neither type of virtue completely cures human beings of their sinful desires, but the acquired virtues makes the struggle against these desires easier. He writes:

Those passions that incline us towards evil are not completely removed either through acquired or through infused virtue, except, maybe, by a miracle. For the struggle of the flesh against the spirit always remains, even when we possess moral virtue. St. Paul says about this in Galatians 5:17, 'The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh.' But passions of this sort are modified both by acquired and by infused virtues, so that we are not stirred by them in an unrestrained way. However, (i) acquired virtue achieves this in one way and (ii) infused virtue in another. (i) For acquired virtue is effective to the extent that the struggle is felt less. This comes about from its own particular cause: when someone becomes accustomed to virtue through repeated action, they then become unaccustomed to obey those passions, and accustomed to resist them. The consequence of this is that they feel less troubled by them. (ii) Infused virtue, by contrast, is effective to the extent that even if passions of this sort are felt, they

do not take control. For infused virtue means that we refrain totally from obeying sinful desires, and as long as it remains in us, we do so unfailingly.¹¹¹

Both the infused and acquired virtues enable one to resist sinful desires, but even if one possesses the infused virtues, s/he still may struggle mightily with sinful desires. This is not the case with the acquired virtues. Rather than being infused, these virtues are acquired and the passions are trained by repeatedly performing virtuous acts. By consistently performing virtuous actions, those sinful desires are muted.

Second, Aquinas also maintains that unlike the acquired virtues, we do not obtain the infused virtues through our own actions. However, he does point out that we can dispose ourselves for the reception and increase of the infused virtues through our own actions. He stresses, “Our own actions, too, can prepare us for an increase of charity and the infused virtues, as dispositions, in the same way that we are moved towards charity in the first place; for indeed man should do what is in his own power to prepare himself to receive the charity from God.”¹¹²

How are these differences between the acquired and infused virtues related to Aquinas’s insistence that men and women are equal in the life of grace? Remember Aquinas holds that without grace, women are more prone to incontinence than men. They lack stable reason and tend to be ruled by their passions. While the reception of the infused virtues will begin to heal these natural moral deficiencies, it does not eradicate them completely, at least in the beginning.

¹¹¹ Aquinas, *De virtutibus in communi*, a. 10, ad 14. I am departing slightly from Atkins’s translation. I have chosen to translate *passio* as passion rather than emotion. Even though many scholars use these words interchangeably when translating or interpreting Aquinas, I have chosen the term “passion” rather than “emotion” for two primary reasons. First, I believe that term “emotions,” as it is typically used, fails to include all the passions that Aquinas discusses, specifically daring. Second, Thomas Dixon makes a compelling case that the concept of emotions emerges during the nineteenth century as a secular and scientific replacement for the more theological notion of passions. For more on this transition, see his article, “Theology, Anti-Theology, and Atheology: From Christian Passions to Secular Emotions,” *Modern Theology* 15.3 (1999): 297-330.

¹¹² Aquinas, *De virtutibus in communi*, a. 11, corpus (my translation): “*Actus autem nostril comparantur ad augmentum caritatis et virtutum infusarum, ut disponentes, sicut ad caritatem a principio obtinendam; homo enim faciens quod in se est, praeparat se, ut a Deo recipiat caritatem.*”

In his discussion of charity, Aquinas reiterates his contention that grace elevates nature rather than destroying it. Responding to the question of whether or not we should love everyone equally, Aquinas insists that we naturally love some more than others. He writes:

Now we observe in the physical order that the natural inclination in each thing is proportionate to the act or movement that is becoming to the nature of that thing: thus in earth the inclination of gravity is greater than in water, because it is becoming to earth to be beneath water. Consequently the inclination also of grace which is the effect of charity, must be proportionate to those actions which have to be performed outwardly, so that, to wit, the affection of our charity be more intense towards those to whom we ought to behave with greater kindness.¹¹³

Charity does not obliterate the love that one has for friends, families, and spouse; instead, it continues to respect the natural primacy of these relationships.

If this relationship between grace and nature is applied to the natural defects which inflict women, then it seems problematic to claim that grace completely heals women of their naturally weak reason and unruly passions. Therefore, women, merely because of their sex, seem to resemble Matt Talbot. In the beginning of his Christian life, Talbot struggles against a desire to return to his former life of intemperateness, and similarly, women, in their Christian lives, are forced to struggle with intemperateness due to their weak reason and unruly passions.

Even though Talbot's acquired vice and women's natural defects have different origins according to Aquinas's theory, their impact on the moral life is quite similar. Whereas women are born with weak reason and unruly passions, Talbot acquires the vice of drunkenness through his habitual intemperate consumption of alcohol.¹¹⁴ However, the vice and the natural defect

¹¹³ *ST*, II-II, q. 26, a.

¹¹⁴ Given discoveries in medicine, we now know that one can at least possess a genetic predisposition to alcoholism, and that like other drugs, alcohol can be addictive. I am not overlooking those facts here, but they are not pertinent here, because Aquinas was unaware of them.

both inhibit the acquisition of virtue. For example, if a man possesses the vice of anger, which he has acquired through his own actions, and a woman is unable to control her passion of anger because she naturally has defective reason, then in both cases the passion of anger consistently overwhelms reason and inhibits both sexes from acting virtuously.¹¹⁵

Given Aquinas's acceptance of Aristotle's androcentric biology and his description of how the infused virtues function, it is not completely accurate to say that men and women are equal in the life of grace. Men may or may not enter the Christian life with vices, but women will enter with weak reason and unruly passions. Sanctifying grace does not destroy all traces of vice nor does instantly repair women's weak reason and strong passions. If all other things are equal except gender, women are disadvantaged; they will struggle more than men to control their sinful desires, to avoid mortal sin, and to dispose themselves for an increase in virtue.

Since men and women share one nature, it is fair to say that they possess the same potentiality for holiness. Thus, Allen concludes that for Aquinas, "Female saints could be as perfect as male saints, for both achieved the total perfection or actualization that their natures allow."¹¹⁶ Women, however, are hindered by their deficient reason, which accompanies their gender. In other words, based on Aquinas's account of sexual difference and his theory of the infused virtues, it seems that women would have a more difficult time growing in holiness.

In his *Commentary on St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians*, the tension between Aquinas's two different accounts of sexual difference becomes evident. St. Paul declares, "The women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be

¹¹⁵ I will offer a more detailed comparison between vices and women's natural defects in chapter three. For now, I simply want to acknowledge that they are not exactly the same. However, it is my contention throughout this project that the natural defects which Aquinas's attributes to women function like vices.

¹¹⁶ Allen, *Concept of Woman*, 407

subordinate, as even the law says” (I Cor. 14:35).¹¹⁷ Justifying St. Paul’s instructions, Aquinas writes, “The reason that they [women] are subject and not in the forefront is that they are deficient in reasoning, which is especially necessary for those who preside. Therefore, the Philosopher says in his *Politics* that corruption of rule occurs, when the rule comes to women.”¹¹⁸ Similarly, when he comments on St. Paul’s declaration that women should learn in silence, Aquinas uses identical reasoning and explains that learning and not teaching “is proper to those who are deficient in reason.”¹¹⁹

If men and women are equals in the life of grace for Aquinas, then why does he continue to bring up women’s deficient natural reason when he defends St. Paul’s teachings? The answer seems to be that he cannot escape his reliance on Aristotelian biology. Grace heals and elevates, but women’s natural moral inferiority still lingers in spite of grace. Therefore, Aquinas concludes that women should learn in silence and be subordinate, because they are naturally unequal to men according to Aristotle. Aquinas sees St. Paul’s instructions as the logical consequence of women’s unruly passion and deficient reason, which carry over into the life of grace from natural sexual inequality.

¹¹⁷ I acknowledge that there has been some disagreement among biblical scholars regarding whether this passage was in the original letter or is a later non-Pauline addition. See for example, Calvin Roetzel, *The Letters of Paul: Conversations in Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), where he claims that this passage a non-Pauline interpolation. For my purpose here, this debate is not relevant, because the text is still canonical and Aquinas is not aware of this controversy. It only matters that he wrote and defended this teaching about women.

¹¹⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Super primam Epistolam ad Corinthios lectura*, in *Expositio et lectura super epistolas pauli apostolic*, vol. 1, ed. R. Cai (Rome: Marietti, 1953), 14-7: 880. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of this text are from *Commentary on St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. F.R. Larcher, O.P. (Albany, NY: Magi Books, Inc., 1966). In the remaining notes, this text will be abbreviated *Super I Cor.*

¹¹⁹ Aquinas, *Super I Tim.*, II, lec. 3, vs. 11, no. 79.

Conclusion

In his own virtue theory, Aquinas attempts to reconcile Aristotelian biology with the accounts of creation found in Genesis. From Aristotle's perspective men and women are naturally unequal, and yet, according to Genesis, men and women are both created in the image of God. By drawing a distinction between acquired and infused virtue, Aquinas appears, at least in part, to circumvent the problem. On the one hand, he explains that women are deficient in reason and holds that they are not equal to men in their capacity for acquiring virtue. On the other hand, he claims that grace rectifies this inequality, creating the ability for women to excel and even surpass men in infused virtue.

Unfortunately, despite his valiant effort to overcome Aristotle's account of sexual difference, in the end, St. Thomas never fully escapes it. Based on his theory of the infused virtues, women enter the life of grace not as equals of men but inferior to them. While grace may eventually heal women's unruly passions, based on Aquinas's theory of the infused virtues, it appears that they must retain some residual effect of their lack of reason when they enter the Christian life.

As a result, Aquinas's account of sexual difference in the natural order and the supernatural order is problematic both in light of his own theory of infused virtue as well as our contemporary recognition of sexual equality. Thomistic virtue ethics needs a contemporary account of sexual difference that focuses more on the experience of women and accounts for their equality. Yet that account must not overlook Aquinas's key insight that men and women are different, even in the moral life. The work of Carol Gilligan provides one such account, and it is her work that will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 2

An Ethics of Care

Introduction

In the last chapter, I attempted to explain the deficiencies of Aquinas' account of sexual difference. Even though Aquinas believes that women possess inferior reason and are less capable than men of acquiring virtue, he attempts to maintain that the sexes are equal in the life of grace. Unfortunately, these interrelated but separate accounts of sexual difference are extremely problematic based on St. Thomas' own understanding of how the acquired and infused virtues operate. Therefore, I suggested that he needs an alternative account of sexual difference that takes seriously his contention that men and women are different but which also upholds the equality of the sexes.

The goal of this chapter is to explore one contemporary account of sexual difference which may be able to fill this role. While it may seem strange to turn to the work of Carol Gilligan, a contemporary feminist psychologist, in order to augment St. Thomas' account of sexual difference, her work on an ethics of care shares some interesting parallels with Thomistic virtue theory. Like Aquinas, Gilligan claims that men deliberate differently from women. Specifically, she argues that the sexes tend to privilege different factors in their moral reasoning. However, because she presupposes the equality of the sexes rather than arguing that one sex is more capable of moral development, she is able to maintain that the sexes are equal but not interchangeable.

This chapter attempts to examine Gilligan's theory closely with an eye toward the next chapter, where I will explore how Gilligan's conclusions might inform St. Thomas' theory of virtue and account of sexual difference. It is my contention that Gilligan's account of sexual difference helps to resolve the internal tension in St. Thomas' theory of virtue and sheds light on the distinct moral voice of women, which Aquinas neglects. The chapter proceeds in three parts. The first section summarizes the salient points of Gilligan's research and her conclusions, and the second part considers some of the more recent findings from other disciplines which appear to buttress and to corroborate her theory. The final section situates Gilligan's work more broadly within the feminist discussion of sexual difference and considers some of the criticisms of her theory offered by feminists and scholars in other fields.¹

¹ There was fierce debate among psychologists and feminists over Gilligan's findings and conclusions particularly during the late 1980s and throughout the next decade. Toward the end of the 1990s, the debate over care ethics began to subside. It is difficult to pinpoint one specific reason that interest in care ethics has declined and the intensity of the debate has waned. This phenomenon is probably attributable to several factors.

First, the care tradition lost its founding voice. According to an interview that she did in 2008 with the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Gilligan left Harvard in 2001 to be a university professor at New York University in order to begin the "next phase of her work." That next phase included writing a novel, *Kyra*, which was published in 2008, and co-authoring a book entitled *The Deepening Darkness: Patriarchy, Resistance, and Democracy's Future* with David A.J. Richard, a law professor at NYU. These texts are not a complete break with the themes that Gilligan explored in her earlier work. Patriarchy was her primary interest in her book *The Birth of Pleasure*, which was published in 2002, and *Kyra* takes up many of the themes from her older work on women's experience. According to Gilligan, she chose to explore these themes by writing fiction, because she wanted the freedom that writing fiction provides. She "didn't want to do research on it" or be "bound by tape recorders." For the full text of Gilligan's interview, see Jennifer Howard, "Writing in a Different Voice," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 54.21 (2008): B16-B18.

Second, I think the discussion over the ethics of care was largely sidetracked by the postmodern turn taken by much of feminist philosophy and ethics as well as the gridlock among psychologists over the empirical evidence concerning gender differences in moral reasoning. The latter will be evident over the course of this chapter as I attempt to sort out many of the competing studies involving Gilligan's work. The former can be seen not only in the charges of essentialism that have been brought against Gilligan's theory (these will be discussed later in this chapter) but also in the work of postmodern feminist scholars such as Susan Hekman. She maintains that "the claims made by Gilligan and her commentators are not sufficiently radical," because "they do not recognize that moral voices will be as diverse as subjects that produce them. See her article, "Moral voices, moral selves: About getting it right in moral theory," *Human Studies* 16 (1993): 142-162. The quotation is from pages 143-4.

Despite the fact that discussions of Gilligan's work are less prominent in psychology and feminist literature today, it would be a mistake to conclude that care ethics is no longer relevant. On the one hand, this conclusion overlooks the widespread influence of Gilligan's theory. Stephen Sherblom, in his article, "The legacy of the 'care

Understanding the Theory

In order to understand Gilligan's theory on women's moral development, one must begin with the thought of Lawrence Kohlberg, because the significance of and impetus behind Gilligan's work only becomes intelligible against this backdrop.² The centerpiece of Kohlberg's thought is the six stages of moral development that he devises. Building on the work of Jean Piaget, Kohlberg constructs a theory of moral development that contains three primary moral levels with each level containing two stages.³ According to Kohlberg, these stages trace the trajectory of moral thinking from adolescence through adulthood.

In stage 1, what is right is understood in terms of following the rules, and they are followed out of obedience and in order to avoid punishment. As the individual moves to stage 2,

challenge': re-envisioning the outcome of the justice-care debate," notes that "a wide range of approaches to 'healthy' or 'positive' youth development have either adopted foundational aspects of the care perspective on moral values and relational psychology or have conceptually evolved to a very similar place." Sherblom includes in this list approaches such as character education, social-emotional learning, and positive psychology. See his article, "The legacy of the 'care challenge': re-envisioning the outcome of the justice-care debate," *Journal of Moral Education* 37.1 (2008): 81-98. The quotation is taken from pg. 91.

One the other hand, it is important to recognize that much of the work that currently is being done with care ethics involves applying its central insights to new issues or fields. While this study attempts bring Gilligan's theory into conversation with Thomistic virtue ethics, Virginia Held tries to apply care ethics to a myriad of issues, including military intervention and economic markets. For a sampling of her writings, see "Care and Justice in the Global Context," *Ratio Juris* 17.2 (2004): 141-55; "Military Intervention and Care Ethics," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 46 (2008): 1-20. Unlike Held, Michael Slote attempts to construct a more comprehensive philosophical moral theory from care ethics in his work, *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* (New York: Routledge, 2007). Still other scholars have examined how care ethics can be used to address issues of animal welfare, debated the role of care ethics in healthcare professions, and even compared care ethics with Eastern traditions such as Confucianism. For examples of this type of scholarship, see Daniel Engster, "Care Ethics and Animal Welfare," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 37.4 (Winter 2006): 521-36; Steven Edwards, "Three versions of an ethics of care," *Nursing Philosophy* 10.4 (2009): 231-40; and Chenyang Li, "Does Confucian Ethics Integrate Care Ethics and Justice Ethics?: The Case of Mencius," *Asian Philosophy* 18.1 (2008): 69-82.

² Gilligan was Kohlberg's student and later his colleague during the 1970s and 80s at Harvard University.

³ Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 409-12. For a more detailed description of the stages see pgs. 147-68. Kohlberg would later combine stages 5 and 6. See Lawrence Kohlberg, "Stages and aging in moral development—some speculations," *The Gerontologist* 13 (1973): 497-502.

he or she recognizes that the world is full of competing interests and doing what is right both serves his or her own needs and at the same time becomes a matter of fairness. At stage 3, the person is aware of himself or herself as an individual in relationships with other individuals. He or she is conscious of other's feelings and expectations, and the individual equates what is right with those actions that meet those expectations and show consideration for others and their feelings. People enter stage 4 when they begin to associate right behavior with doing their duty in society and upholding some type of social order. In stage 5, individuals begin to see themselves as part of a social contract, recognizing that others have rights that must be respected. A person who reaches this stage has become "a rational individual aware of values and rights prior to social attachments and [personal] contracts. The person integrates perspectives by formal mechanisms of agreement, contract, objective impartiality, and due process."⁴ In the final stage of moral development, the individual acts based on universal ethical principles rather than merely rights and laws created by society. According to Kohlberg, few people reach these last two stages; the majority of people only develop to stage 3 or 4.

Kohlberg's description of moral development is primarily based upon his research with seventy-five boys, whom he followed from early adolescence into their twenties.⁵ As part of this study and others that Kohlberg conducted to test his theory, participants were given moral dilemmas and then were asked a series of questions about how the predicaments should be resolved. The most famous moral dilemma created by Kohlberg concerns a man named Heinz, whose wife is dying from a rare form of cancer. Her doctor believes that there is one drug that

⁴ Kohlberg, *Philosophy of Moral Development*, 412.

⁵ Ibid., 115.

might save her, but it is very expensive. Even though the drug only costs \$200 to make, the druggist is charging \$2,000 for only a small dose. Unfortunately, Heinz only has half of the money that he needs to purchase the drug, so he goes to the pharmacist to explain his situation. Despite Heinz's pleas and desperate situation, the pharmacist refuses to sell the drug for a cheaper price or allow Heinz to pay him later. Therefore, in order to get the medication that his wife needs, Heinz breaks into the man's store and steals the drug. After being given the hypothetical situation, subjects were asked questions, such as, "Should the husband do that?"⁶ Based on their responses, Kohlberg classified the subjects' moral reasoning according to the stages of his scale.

In her seminal work *In a Different Voice*, which was first published in 1982, Gilligan criticizes Kohlberg's theory, because she argues that it ignores the distinct moral perspective of women. Gilligan traces the problem with Kohlberg's work back to the beginning of his research. She notes that Kohlberg's original samples, which served as the foundation for his schema, completely omitted girls. When girls are later included in his studies, they rarely reach the higher stages of moral development in his theory, because his schema is androcentric.⁷ Since women's moral reasoning is being measured according to a typical male pattern of moral development, it appears stunted and deficient.

⁶ Lawrence Kohlberg, "The Development of Children's Orientations Toward a Moral Order: Sequence in the Development of Moral Thought," *Vita Humana* 6 (1963): 11-33; reprint, *Human Development* 51 (2008): 12.

⁷ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 18.

Conversely, Gilligan identifies “two ways of speaking about moral problems, two modes of describing the relationship between other and self.”⁸ She observes that women speak in their own distinct voice when analyzing moral problems. According to Gilligan, women conceive of moral problems from a more person-centered perspective that focuses on relationships and responsibility to others, whereas men tend to view moral dilemmas as situations of competing rights and rules. Hence, women’s mode of moral thinking tends to be contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract, focusing on connection instead of separation.⁹ Out of these two voices, Gilligan draws a distinction between two different moral perspectives within the moral domain: a justice orientation and a care orientation. While men gravitate to the former, women tend to operate from the latter.¹⁰

Gilligan insists that this difference is the reason why women consistently fail to progress in Kohlberg’s theory. The higher stages of his schema are concerned with rights theory, which is a masculine leaning approach to moral problems. Thus, women get stuck at stage 3, where attention to relationships is more prominent.¹¹

⁸ Ibid., 1.

⁹ Ibid., 19.

¹⁰ Carol Gilligan and Jane Attanucci, “Two moral Orientations,” in *Mapping the Moral Domain: A Contribution of Women’s Thinking to Psychological Theory and Education*, eds. Carol Gilligan, Janie Victoria Ward, Jill McLean Taylor, and Betty Bardige (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 73. See also, Carol Gilligan, “Reply to Critics,” in *An Ethic of Care*, ed. Mary Jeanne Larrabee (New York: Routledge, 1993), 212.

¹¹ Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 19.

In a Different Voice began a revolution.¹² Rosalind Barnett and Caryl Rivers insist, “It’s hard to overestimate Carol Gilligan’s impact on nearly every facet of modern life.”¹³ The authors argue that one can see Gilligan’s influence in everything from Hollywood movies to management texts.¹⁴ In 1996, almost fifteen years after *In a Different Voice* was first published, *Time Magazine* named Gilligan one of its twenty-five most influential people. The article speaks to the pervasive impact of Gilligan’s work. It states:

How likely is it that a single book could change the rules of psychology, change the assumptions of medical research, change the conversation among parents and teachers and developmental professionals about the distinctions between men and women, boys and girls? Yet many who read Carol Gilligan's book *In a Different Voice* (600,000 copies in print, translated into nine other languages) find that their views on gender will never be the same. In her landmark study (first published in 1982) and five subsequent books, Gilligan, a professor at Harvard's Graduate School of Education, has forced scholars across many disciplines to reckon with the differences in the way boys and girls develop their moral faculties and world views.¹⁵

Echoing these sentiments, Margaret Talbot notes that “Gilliganism has enjoyed a remarkable run and a wide and easy influence, from women’s studies departments and education schools to pop

¹² Harvard University Press actually describes it as “the little book that started a revolution.” See its republished edition, Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). The page numbers of the 1982 edition and the republished edition are identical.

¹³ Rosalind Barnett and Caryl Rivers, *Same Difference: How Gender Myths Are Hurting Our Relationships, Our Children, and Our Jobs* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 30.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁵ “Time 25: They Range from 31 to 67,” *Time Magazine*, June 17, 1996, accessed Oct. 18, 2010, www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,984696-9,00.html. Now *In a Different Voice* has sold approximately 750,000 copies and has been translated into sixteen languages according to the Harvard University Press Catalog. See <http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674445444>.

Cynthia Crysdale echoes this point by describing the impact of Gilligan’s work on other fields, including social work, theology, philosophy, and feminist ethics. See her article, “Gilligan and the Ethics of Care: An Update,” *Religious Studies Review* 20.1 (1994): 21-28.

psychology and middle-school girl culture.”¹⁶

While the reasons behind Gilligan’s widespread popularity are multi-faceted, the appeal of her work, at least in part, is rooted in her approach which combines both empirical data and personal stories. She is able to reach a diverse audience, because she not only draws on multiple psychological studies to support her conclusions but she also highlights specific examples from those studies in her writings. This approach makes the data from her studies more personal for her readers and serves to further elucidate her points.

An example from one study involving middle school students illuminates her point well about the two different approaches to moral dilemmas.¹⁷ Two sixth-graders, Jake and Amy, were among a sample of students selected for a study on rights and responsibility. The Heinz dilemma was posed to each student, and then they were asked: Should a husband steal a drug that his wife needs in order to survive, if he cannot afford the medication?¹⁸ On the one hand, Jake argues that the husband should steal the drug, because “a human life is worth more than

¹⁶ Margaret Talbot, “Teen Angels,” *The New Republic*, 22 July 2002, 35.

¹⁷ In addition to the studies referenced below, see D. Kay Johnston, “Adolescents’ Solutions to Dilemmas in Fables: Two Moral Orientations—Two Problem Solving Strategies,” in *Mapping the Moral Domain*, 49-71. Utilizing two of Aesop’s fables, Johnston conducts two studies to determine whether or not boys and girls tend to define and solve moral problems differently. She finds that each sex employs both the care orientation and the justice orientation in their solutions or when asked by the interviewer if there is another way to solve the problem. However, Johnston also found that girls overwhelmingly favored the care perspective when asked to identify the best way to solve the moral dilemma whereas boys most often used the rights orientation when selecting the best solution. (In their responses to one fable, the males were actually evenly split as to whether the care orientation or the justice orientation offered the best solution. Johnston explains this shift by examining the boys’ responses to follow-up questions. She notes that the care orientation provides the best solution for the boys only if certain conditions are met.) It should be noted that Johnston specifically acknowledges that her findings corroborate Gilligan’s original hypothesis that if only males are studied, then the justice orientation will appear to be the only or the dominate mode of moral reasoning. In the same volume, for another study which supports Gilligan’s findings, see Nona Plessner Lyons, “Two Perspectives: On Self, Relationships, and Morality,” 21-45. Drawing on interviews conducted with 36 males and females of various ages, Lyons finds that male s and females consider both issues of care and justice when resolving real-life moral conflicts, but she also discovers that women employ care considerations more frequently than men, who tend to emphasize rights considerations.

¹⁸ Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 26.

money, and if the druggist only makes \$1,000, he is still going to live, but if Heinz [the husband] doesn't steal the drug, his wife is going to die.”¹⁹ Jake does not ignore the responsibility that the husband has to his wife, but his moral analysis is based on logic and begins from a conflict between property and life.²⁰

On the other hand, Amy contends that the husband should not steal the drug, because “if he did, he might have to go to jail, and then his wife might get sicker again. . . So, they should really just talk it out and find some other way to make the money.”²¹ Amy then goes on to offer a different solution to the problem. She hypothesizes that if the druggist saw the wife in her condition then maybe he would lower his price or allow the husband to pay him later. For Amy, the moral dilemma is more complex than it is for Jake, and she focuses not on logically weighing the value of life and property but on human relationships, which is exemplified by the prominent role that she gives to communication and compassion.²²

Gilligan is careful to point out that sweeping generalizations cannot be made about each gender based on her observations. Drawing on the results of three research studies that were conducted over six years, Gilligan and Jane Attanucci note that neither the justice nor the care perspective is the exclusive property of one particular sex. In the studies, eighty men and women were asked to describe a real-life moral dilemma, and then they were asked a series of follow-up questions concerning how they resolved the dilemma and the conflicts that were involved in the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 28.

²² Ibid., 29.

situation. Sixty-nine percent of the participants utilized both moral orientations in their responses.²³

However, while neither perspective can be restricted to a particular gender, the authors maintain that there is a correlation between moral orientation and gender. In the same studies, they found that “Care Focus is much more likely to occur in the moral dilemma of a woman, and Justice Focus more likely in the dilemma of a man.”²⁴ They go on to point out that “if one were to exclude women from a study of moral reasoning, Care Focus could easily be overlooked.”²⁵ So although each sex does not operate exclusively from one orientation, women tend to examine and resolve moral dilemmas from the care perspective, and men tend to do the same from the justice perspective.

Underlying these two moral orientations, according to Gilligan, there are two different concepts of self. While the justice perspective is rooted in an understanding of the self as autonomous, the care perspective is constituted by a relational view of the self, where the self is seen as embedded in a web of relationships.²⁶ When confronted with moral dilemmas, this relational self frames the problem in terms of relationships and conflicting responsibilities rather than as a contest of rights.²⁷

²³ Gilligan and Attanucci, “Two Moral Orientations,” 79-80.

²⁴ Ibid., 81.

²⁵ Ibid. Focus is defined in the study as a dilemma where 75% or more of the considerations are justice or care. See p. 79.

²⁶ Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 48. Underlying Gilligan’s discussion of women’s relational view of the self is the nature/nurture conundrum, and her discussion begs the question about where this view of self originates. Her position on this issue will be discussed later in this chapter once her account of sexual difference and corresponding ethics of care have been examined more fully.

²⁷ Ibid., 59 and 105.

Women tend to possess this relational view of the self, which, in turn, serves as the source of their care orientation in moral reasoning. Drawing on Gilligan's work, Nel Noddings explains how this view of self creates the caring orientation and women's distinct moral perspective. In her work *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, she writes:

Women, in particular, seem to approach moral problems by placing themselves as nearly as possible in concrete situations and assuming personal responsibility for the choice to be made. They define themselves in terms of *caring* and work their way through moral problems from the position of one-caring. This position or attitude of caring activates a complex structure of memories, feelings, and capacities. Further, the process of moral decision making that is founded on caring requires a process of concretization rather than one of abstraction.²⁸

When Gilligan and Noddings discuss "caring" as an approach to moral problems, it is important to understand that caring encompasses more than emotions for them. The care perspective does not exclude rationality. Gilligan remarks, "My critics equate care with feelings, which they oppose to thought, and imagine caring as passive or confined to some separate sphere. I describe care and justice as to moral perspectives that organize both thinking and

²⁸ Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics & Moral Education* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 8 (original emphasis). Unlike Gilligan, Noddings is not concerned with gathering empirical data, which demonstrate different patterns of ethical reasoning between the sexes. Rather, she is attempting to build on Gilligan's observations and construct a robust moral theory with caring at its foundation. While the work of Gilligan and Noddings remains separate and distinct, they are both used in this section as representatives of what is called an ethic of care. Gilligan's work has received more attention and thus will occupy a more prominent place in this chapter. However, both authors were influential in the initiation and development of the care tradition. Although there are marked differences in their approach and aims, both authors are concerned with the role of care in moral reasoning, and each author associates the care perspective with women, while maintaining that it is not exclusive to women. Therefore, both authors are helpful in highlighting the salient parts of the care tradition. Where there are relevant differences in their work, they will be noted.

Oddly, even though both women are pioneers of the care ethics tradition, Gilligan does not engage Noddings' work. While Noddings repeatedly and clearly endorses Gilligan's general project and many of her conclusions, for the most part Gilligan seems to overlook Noddings work. For more on the similarities and differences between their theories, see Margaret McLaren, "Feminist Ethics: Care as a Virtue," in *Feminists Doing Ethics*, eds. Peggy DesAutels and Joanne Waugh (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), 113.

feelings and empower the self to take different kinds of action in public as well as private life.”²⁹

Similarly, Noddings notes that “in caring, my rational powers are not diminished but they are enrolled in the service of my engrossment in the other.”³⁰ For each author, the concept and experience of caring is more robust than merely an emotion. It forms part of a moral outlook that prizes empathy and focuses on persons in relationships rather than emphasizing individual autonomy. As part of that outlook, caring is connected to both moral imagination, which allows the individual to view situations from the standpoint of the other, as well as a moral ideal that one tries to follow when making moral choices.

Noddings and Gilligan’s notion of caring becomes even more clear when it is juxtaposed to Kant and his deontological approach to ethics. At the very least, it is fair to say that Kant is suspicious of allowing one’s emotions and relationships with others to be considered in ethical decisions.³¹ One arrives at the moral decision by following the categorical imperative and its corresponding maxims.³² As opposed this formal and sterile approach to ethical decision-making, Noddings points out that care ethics “recognizes the centrality of meeting others in

²⁹ Gilligan, “Reply to Critics,” 209.

³⁰ Noddings, *Caring*, 36.

³¹ Even though I use the word suspicious here, I do believe that a compelling case can be made that Kant allows sympathy to play a role in his ethical system. In his work, Kant mentions, if only briefly, that one has an indirect duty to cultivate compassionate feelings, and he insists that one should seek out places where people are suffering, such as hospitals and prisons, in order bring about sympathy for others. Nancy Sherman makes a persuasive case for this reading of Kant in her book *Making a Necessity of Virtue: Aristotle and Kant on Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997). See also Kant’s *The Metaphysics of Morals* trans. and ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 205-6. However, even in this more nuanced reading of Kant, emotions certainly do not play a prominent role in his philosophical ethics which is why he is often (mistakenly) compared to the Stoics, who advocate extirpating emotion from the moral life.

³² Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals: On a Supposed Right to Life because of Philanthropic Concerns*,” trans. James Ellington, 3rd ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 1993), 30. Here Kant defines the categorical imperative, stating, “Hence there is only one categorical imperative and it is this: Act only according that that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”

caring relations and the futility of trying to solve moral problems completely and universally in abstract and codified schemes.”³³

While the caring perspective cannot be divorced from reason, it also should not be equated with passivity, self-denial, or submissiveness, as Gilligan points out. These are potential pitfalls of the care perspective--not inherently part of it. On the one hand, women sometimes fail to see that caring for themselves is compatible with their desire to care for others.³⁴ Gilligan insists, “My studies of women locate the problem in female development not in the values of care and connection or in the relationship definition of the self, but in the tendency for women, in the name of virtue, to give care only to others and to consider it ‘selfish’ to care for themselves.”³⁵

On the other hand, the emphasis on relationships and the other that is central to the care perspective may degenerate into an unhealthy desire for companionship, intimacy, and affection, which can lead women not only to ignore their own needs but also to act in ways that are actually detrimental to their own well-being. Through her work on women and abortion, Gilligan came to see this potential flaw in caring perspective very clearly. She explains, “When interviewing pregnant teenagers who were considering abortion, I was struck by the fact that most of them knew about birth control. Their pregnancies seemed in part to have resulted from actions that

³³ Nel Noddings, “Two Concepts of Caring,” *Philosophy of Education Yearbook*, 1999, accessed Sept. 28, 2010, <http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-yearbook/1999/noddings.asp>.

³⁴ Judith Plaskow makes a similar argument about women’s experience against the theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich. Whereas pride is at the root of sin for men, Plaskow claims that self-abnegation is women’s original sin. See her work *Sex, Sin and Grace: Women’s Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1980).

³⁵ Gilligan, “Reply to Critics,” 213.

comprised sometimes desperate, sometimes misguided, and sometimes innocent strategies to care for themselves, to care for others, to get what they wanted, and to avoid being alone.”³⁶ As Gilligan’s experience with these pregnant teenagers demonstrates, if the care perspective becomes skewed, then it has a tendency to cause women to lose themselves in the other who is the object of their care.³⁷ Their caring gets transformed into an excessive desire to be cared for and too much stress is placed on pleasing others.³⁸ For now, it is important to understand how women can avoid these pitfalls according to Gilligan and Noddings.

In order to reach moral maturity, both men and women must learn from each other. Even though Noddings grants that “there is reason to believe women are somewhat better equipped for caring than men are,” she insists that an ethic based on caring does not exclude men.³⁹ Instead, she states, “My contention, then is that men need to learn how to care, and women must learn how to maintain themselves as ones-caring through a general strengthening of self-image.”⁴⁰ Noddings is not suggesting that men become like women or vice versa. Rather, she believes that men can learn from women to be more compassionate and less-rule bound, as parents for example, while women can learn from men to have confidence in themselves and to develop self-esteem that is independent of the approval of others. This process of mutual learning allows

³⁶ Carol Gilligan, “Prologue: Adolescent Development Reconsidered,” in *Mapping the Moral Domain*, xxxvii.

³⁷ Cf., Plaskow, *Sex, Sin and Grace*, 1-50.

³⁸ In chapter 4, I will discuss the implications of this danger for how we conceive of the vice of lust and virtue of chastity.

³⁹ Noddings, *Caring*, 97.

⁴⁰ Noddings, *Caring*, 128.

both sexes to avoid some of the potential hazards of their respective predominant moral orientations.

Gilligan envisions moral maturity in a similar manner. For her, the justice perspective and the care perspective can inform and complement one another. Ideally, as moral development occurs, each sex moves more toward the values of the other. Thus, men develop an awareness of the importance of relationships, care, and context, whereas women come to see the value of rights, rules, and universal principles. Gilligan points out that men and women “come, in the course of becoming adult, to a greater understanding of both points of view and thus to a greater convergence in judgment. Recognizing the dual contexts of justice and care, they realize that judgment depends on the way in which the problem is framed.”⁴¹ Nevertheless, Gilligan notes, even in adulthood, the distinct moral orientation of each sex tends to be the primary way in which each gender initially frames moral problems.⁴² So while the differences in moral reasoning may lessen with moral maturity, the different moral orientations of each gender still persist through adulthood.

If these differences can be seen in childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood, the question becomes: Where do these differences originate? Are they a result of genes or environment, nature or nurture? Even though Gilligan maintains that she makes no claims about the origins of these differences,⁴³ she seems sympathetic to Nancy Chodorow’s account of early

⁴¹ Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 167.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 2.

childhood development, which helps to explain the genesis of these two moral orientations.⁴⁴

Chodorow's work draws on Freudian theory and begins with the observation that in most times and cultures, women are the primary caregivers. Since, in early childhood, young girls experience their primary caregivers as like themselves, identity formation is built upon attachment and takes place within this relationship. This course of development differs sharply from the experience of young boys, whose identity is formed not through attachment but through separation and individuation. Young boys see their mothers as opposites, and thus, their masculine identity is shaped by detaching and differentiating themselves from their mothers.⁴⁵ Chodorow claims that "girls emerge from this period with a basis for 'empathy' built into their primary definition of self in a way that boys do not."⁴⁶ If Chodorow's account of sex differences in early childhood identity formation is correct, then it becomes easy to see why girls are more disposed to the care perspective in moral reasoning. Conversely, boys, whose identities are formed through detachment and individuation, tend to rely on rules and principles in their moral reasoning, because they generally focus more on the individual person and less on persons in relationships.

Even though Gilligan appears to believe that these two moral orientations can be linked exclusively to psychological development, she seems to concede that biology plays a role along with societal conditions in her early work. She writes, "Clearly, these differences arise in a social context where factors of social status and power combine with reproductive biology to

⁴⁴ Carol Gilligan, "Moral Orientation and Moral Development," in *Women and Moral Theory*, eds. Eva Feder Kittay and Diana Meyers (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1987), 28.

⁴⁵ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.

shape the experience of males and females and the relations between the sexes.”⁴⁷ Gilligan does not elaborate on what she means by “reproductive biology” or how it influences women’s moral outlook.

In her later writings, Gilligan appears to reject the influence of biology and seems more adamant that it plays no significant role in giving women a different voice.⁴⁸ She states, “Listening to women’s voices clarified the ethic of care, not because care is essentially associated with women or part of women’s nature, but because women for a combination of psychological and political reasons voiced relational realities that were otherwise unspoken or dismissed as inconsequential.”⁴⁹ Unfortunately, Gilligan’s statement does not completely clarify her position on the nature/nurture question. Earlier in the same article, she remarks:

Theorizing connection as primary and fundamental in human life directs attention to a growing body of supporting evidence which cannot be incorporated within the old paradigm. Studies of the infant as a member of a couple refute the depiction of the infant as locked in egocentrism and provide compelling data showing that the desire for relationship, pleasure in connection, and the ability to make and maintain relationship are present at the onset of development. Research on women and girls provide evidence of psychological capacities and relational knowledge that raises the most fundamental questions about the nature of cognitive and emotional and social development; otherwise, it would seem impossible that women and girls know what they know. These psychological studies of infants and women recast the understanding of the developmental process in relational terms.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 2.

⁴⁸ This apparent shift in Gilligan’s position may be due to the charge of essentialism that other feminist scholars have leveled against her work. This critique of her work will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

⁴⁹ Carol Gilligan, “Hearing the Difference: Theorizing Connection,” *Hypatia* 10.2 (Spring 1995): 123. Here, Gilligan seems to reduce “nature” and equate it simply with biology.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Gilligan's position on the nature/nurture question is at best ambiguous. On the one hand, she suggests that infants are born with the desire to be with others, and she appears to concede that this characteristic of human infants has a biological component, because it precedes development. On the other hand, it is unclear if women possess some special desire or capacity for relationships. While Gilligan agrees that girls and women have a unique "relational knowledge," it is unclear from her writings whether she believes that this relational self or knowledge in females exists in some form prior to personal growth and physical maturing.

Noddings, however, is much more comfortable identifying women's moral orientation as a combination of nature and nurture.⁵¹ Taking up the question of why it is that women in virtually all societies are the caretakers of children, Noddings responds by considering three possible answers. First, one could follow Chodorow and connect women's desire to be caretakers with the way in which their own identities were formed in early childhood. Second, one could argue that women are typically the primary caretaker due to biology, since women alone are given the capacity not only to have children but to nurse them after birth. Finally, one could contend that women have been socialized into motherhood. Rather than selecting one of these possibilities, Noddings suggests that an answer "will have to embrace both biological factors and psychological factors—and, perhaps, even socialization factors" to be adequate and complete.⁵²

⁵¹ Noddings is not alone in this regard. Sara Ruddick, another prominent figure in the care ethics tradition, strongly defends what she refers to as "maternal thinking," which is characterized by humility, cheerfulness, and attentive love. For Ruddick this way of thinking can be expressed by women as well as men, but it exists for all women in a unique way. While she does not readily affirm a biological basis of maternal thinking or simply equate maternal thinking with the ability to bear children, she at least recognizes that biology may foster this way of thinking. See her article, "Maternal Thinking," *Feminist Studies* 6.2 (Summer 1980): 342-67, esp. p. 346.

Agreeing with Noddings, Lisa Sowle Cahill also contends that there is no simple answer to the nature or nurture question. She acknowledges that “Gilligan has demonstrated that, *de facto*, gender differences which correlate femininity with relationality rather than with impartial detachment do exist.”⁵³ However, she maintains that it is futile to attempt to pinpoint the origin of these differences, because of “the impossibility of obtaining for observation any pure, unsocialized specimen of either female or male humanity.”⁵⁴ Instead of choosing a side, Cahill argues that we should see the nature/nurture question as an “axis of critical exploration, rather than the alternatives of an answer.”⁵⁵

If one adopts Cahill’s suggestion and views the nature/nurture conundrum as more of an axis than two alternatives, then it becomes easier to embrace Noddings’ viewpoint that multiple factors inevitably shape women’s different voice. Like the factors that typically lead women to be the primary caregivers, their moral voice seems to be created and shaped by psychological, social, and biological factors. While society plays a role, women’s care-oriented perspective is not simply the product of social influences; it is connected to female biology as well, specifically the potential for motherhood. In her writings, Gilligan appears to leave open the possibility that

⁵² Noddings, *Caring*, 128. Even though Noddings is discussing the origins of maternal caring, her insights are applicable to the question about the origin of the distinct moral voice that Gilligan associates with women.

⁵³ Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Women and Sexuality: 1992 Madeleva Lecture in Spirituality* (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992), 61.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid. In her “Letter to Readers,” which was published in the 1993 edition of *In a Different Voice*, Gilligan says something similar. She calls nature and nurture “old categories,” and she seems to resist any attempt to place her work squarely in either one. See pp. xii-xiii.

all three factors may contribute to this voice by highlighting Chodorow's theory while simultaneously making room for "reproductive biology" as well as social context.⁵⁶

Unlike St. Thomas who acknowledges differences between the sexes but sees them largely as negative, Gilligan and Noddings recognize the distinct perspective of women while stressing the equality of the sexes. Women's care orientation, which Gilligan identifies, manifests itself in a multitude of ways which are distinct from but connected to their approach to moral reasoning. The next section explores other ways in which the person-centered perspective of women is evident.

Caring: One Difference Among Many

While studies and scholars in different disciplines disagree over which factor is the most significant in determining sex differences, several findings in various fields, including neuroscience, evolutionary biology, and sociology, are related to and buttress Gilligan's theory.⁵⁷ Conducted independent of Gilligan's work, these studies, many of which span the last thirty-five years, corroborate the conclusion that significant sex differences exist and are the result of some combination of factors. Even though these studies do not present a monolithic picture, their

⁵⁶ In response to those who accuse her of being an essentialist, Gilligan does say explicitly elsewhere that the care perspective is not "biologically determined." It is unclear, however, if that means that she believes that it has no biological basis. See Gilligan, "Reply to Critics," 209.

⁵⁷ For an overview of sex differences and a summary of the findings in these fields, see Anne Moir and David Jessel, *Brain Sex: The Real Difference Between Men and Women* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1989); Leonard Sax, *Why Gender Matters: What Parents and Teachers Need to Know About the Emerging Science of Sex Differences* (New York: Doubleday, 2005); and Stephen Rhoads, *Taking Sex Differences Seriously* (San Francisco, CA: Encounter Books, 2004). In the field of neuroscience, Louann Brizendine offers a comprehensive overview of the difference between the male and female brains at various stages in life. See her books, *The Female Brain* (New York: Broadway Books, 2006); and *The Male Brain* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2010).

varied findings strongly indicate that each factor plays some role in fostering differences between the sexes.

If Gilligan is correct and women tend to emphasize caring and concentrate on their relationships with others when making moral decisions, then one would expect to find evidence that women are typically better at communicating their feelings and more empathic than men. This is precisely what studies have shown. For instance, researchers repeatedly have found that girls and women typically exhibit more verbal skills than boys and men, whereas males tend to excel at mathematical problems and visual-spatial tasks, such as reading maps and solving mazes.⁵⁸ Studies have also found that women tend to be more empathic than men. After surveying the findings of numerous studies, Martin Hoffman concludes, “What is most striking about the empathy findings is the fact that in every case, regardless of the age of the subjects or the measures used, the females obtained higher scores than did the males.”⁵⁹

Drawing on Hoffman’s research, Mia Silver and Klaus Helkama used his semi-projective story completion method to measure feelings of guilt and empathy in Finnish adolescents (ages 13-16). The students were given two partial stories, and they were asked to complete the stories and to describe what the main character was thinking and feeling. In the first story, a child, who

⁵⁸ Helen Fisher, *Anatomy of Love: The Natural History of Monogamy, Adultery, and Divorce* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992), 191-94. See also Moir and Jessel, *Brain Sex*, 53-67.

⁵⁹ Martin Hoffman, “Sex Differences in Empathy and Related Behaviors,” *Psychological Bulletin* 84.4 (1977): 715. Hoffman describes two kinds of empathy. Type 1 he calls “affective perspective,” which is the observer’s cognitive awareness of the other’s emotional state. Type 2 he describes as a “vicarious affective response,” which is the observer’s emotional reaction to the emotional state of the other. In some instances, this type of empathy may entail literally feeling another’s emotional pain or suffering. In other cases, one may empathize with another person but feel a different and distinct emotion, such as the empathic anger that may arise in one individual when they witness another person being bullied or attacked. Hoffman elaborates on the various types of empathy in his later work. See his book, *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1-10.

had just lost several contests at a school picnic, decides to cheat on a quiz in order to receive the highest grade. In the second story, a child is hurrying with a friend to an important sporting event and spots a younger child who appears to be lost. The older child wants to stop and help, but his/her friend insists that they keep going. The next day the protagonist finds out that the young child was killed after being struck by a car.⁶⁰

The researchers found that boys displayed more guilt over cheating, while “guilt over inaction was associated with empathic concern and perspective-taking for girls but not for boys.”⁶¹ Referencing Gilligan, they conclude that this difference may reflect girls’ caring orientation and boys’ tendency toward a justice orientation.⁶² The researchers conclude, “[T]his study highlights the importance of considering possible gender-specific features in moral judgment and emotions. In sum, the expectation derived from the notion of boys’ and girls’ different moral orientations were confirmed.”⁶³

Since women tend to display more caring and empathy for others, one would also anticipate that they are less aggressive and violent than men. When Walter Ong compares the behavior of the sexes where confrontation is concerned, this is in fact what he concludes. Discussing the psychological and biological roots of the male affinity for adversativeness in his

⁶⁰ Mia Silfver and Klaus Helkama, “Empathy, guilt, and gender: A comparison of two measures of guilt,” *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology* 48 (2007): 241.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 245. The researchers are careful not to overstate their case, in part because their sample size (103 students) was relatively small, which they acknowledge.

Perhaps the women’s tendency to be more empathic is related to their “intuition.” Studies reveal that on average women are better than men at reading body language and other non-verbal cues. See Fisher, *Anatomy of Love*, 195.

book *Fighting for Life*, Ong explains, “Like subhuman males, human males tend to fight one another more vigorously than do human females, but at the same time more ceremonially or ritually.”⁶⁴ Ong is careful to note that women can be aggressive. However, their aggression usually takes the form of verbal rather than physical sparring, and when women do become physically violent, it is typically in response to a more immediate and vital concern, such as defense of their young.⁶⁵ Ong contends that this sexual difference can be seen clearly in the disparate number of males and females who commit violent crimes. Unlike men, women’s crimes are typically non-violent and victimless, like shoplifting.⁶⁶

In her own study that tested for a correlation between the use of violent imagery in writing and sexual difference, Gilligan’s findings confirm Ong’s conclusions. For the study, one hundred and thirty-eight Harvard undergraduates, both male and female, were given a series of pictures and asked to write a story explaining each picture. Fifty-one percent of men included violent happenings in at least one of their stories compared to only twenty-two percent of women.⁶⁷

However, Gilligan also discovered that female participants in the study possessed a distinct view of danger. For the study, two pictures were selected, because they depicted people

⁶⁴ Walter Ong, *Fighting for Life: Contest, Sexuality, and Consciousness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 64.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 61.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 69.

⁶⁷ Susan Pollak and Carol Gilligan, “Images of Violence in Thematic Apperception Test Stories,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 42.1 (1982): 162. The authors define violence as the infliction of actual harm and include under this definition homicide, suicide, death by accident, rape or forcible violation, physical assault, kidnapping, and fatal disease.

in close relationships, while two other pictures were images of people at work. For instance, in one picture, a man and woman were sitting together on a bench next to river, and another picture showed two women dressed in white coats working in a laboratory. The former is intended to illustrate an affiliation situation, and the later is supposed to represent an image of achievement.⁶⁸ Gilligan found that women included no mention of danger or dangerous circumstances in their stories about the pictures of affiliation. Women only perceived danger in the images of achievement, and men were almost the exact opposite. She concludes that women see danger in these pictures, because they possess a fear of separation and isolation that may accompany achievement.⁶⁹

Women typically are more comfortable in relationships, because they desire the emotional closeness and exchange which often accompanies them. This female inclination toward affiliation and away from isolation manifests itself in multiple ways, including the way in which women view the relationship between intimacy and sex.⁷⁰ Because of their focus on relationships and persons, women tend to place more value than men on intimacy. Based on her survey of approximately 4,500 American women, Shere Hite found that “98 percent of women in this study say they would like more verbal closeness with the men they love; they want the men

⁶⁸ Pollack and Gilligan, “Images,” 161.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 164. This conclusion along with Pollack and Gilligan’s methodology are challenged by Cynthia Benton, Anthony Hernandez, Adeny Schmitz, Mary Schmitz, Anna Stone, and Bernard Weiner in their article “Is hostility linked with affiliation among males and with achievement among females? A critique of Pollack and Gilligan,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 45.5 (1983): 1167-71. Despite questioning Pollack and Gilligan’s findings on the sexes’ different views of danger, when they replicated the study, Benton *et al.* still found men almost twice as likely to use violence in their stories. For more on this controversy, see the following exchange between these authors: Pollack and Gilligan, “Differing About Differences: The Incidence and Interpretation of Violent Fantasies in Women and Men,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 45.5 (1983): 1172-75; Benton et al, “Compounding the errors: A reply to Pollack and Gilligan, p. 1176-78 in the same volume; Pollack and Gilligan, “Killing the Messenger,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 48.2 (1985): 374-75.

⁷⁰ Moir and Jessel, *Brain Sex*, 59.

in their lives to talk more about their own personal thoughts, feelings, plans, and questions, and to ask them about theirs.”⁷¹ Conversely, Hite discovered that “only 17 percent of women say the communication in their relationship is good, makes them happy, [and] adds to their life.”⁷²

Women also seem to view intimacy as more integral to sex. In a survey of 415 male and female college students, Donald Symons and Bruce Ellis found that men were much more willing to have sex with an anonymous partner than were women. The study highlights the fact that women tend to be aroused emotionally and see sex as an expression of that emotional connection or a way of obtaining it, whereas men tend to be stimulated visually and are more likely to divorce sex and emotional closeness. As Louann Brizendine bluntly points out in her book *The Male Brain*, “Visual stimulation—even in fantasy—is what turns a man on, makes his penis hard, and keeps it up.”⁷³ On the contrary, for women, the intimacy is what arouses them. Anne Moir and David Jessel, in their book *Brain Sex*, note the orgasm rate is actually five times greater for women in the marital bed, because they see intimacy, security, and fidelity as erotic turn-ons.⁷⁴

Even though psychologists and sociologists have long debated whether these gender differences are learned or innate, Helen Fisher concludes that the “data now suggest that these sex differences have an underlying biological component as well.”⁷⁵ Drawing on findings from

⁷¹ Shere Hite, *Women and Love: A Cultural Revolution in Progress* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1987), 5.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷³ Brizendine, *Male Brain*, 72.

⁷⁴ Moir and Jessel, *Brain Sex*, 133-37.

neuroscience, Moir and Jessel affirm Fisher's position concerning a biological basis for the differences between the sexes. They declare, "Men and women *are* different; the society we grow up in does affect us, but essentially in reinforcing our natural differences."⁷⁶ According to Brizendine, these natural differences are, in part, caused by differences in the organization of the male and female brain. She writes:

Under a microscope or an fMRI scan, the differences between male and female brains are revealed to be complex and widespread. In brain centers for language and hearing, for example, women have 11 percent more neurons than men. The principle hub of both emotion and memory formation—the hippocampus—is also larger in the female brain, as is the brain circuitry for language and observing emotions in others. This means that women are, on average, better at expressing emotions and remembering the details of emotional events. Men, by contrast, have two and a half times the brain space devoted to sexual drive as well as larger brain centers for action and aggression. Sexual thoughts float through a man's brain many times each day on average, and through a woman's only once a day. Perhaps three to four times on her hottest day.⁷⁷

Moir and Jessel echo Brizendine's analysis, claiming that women's caring approach and focus on people are attributable to differences in the organization and structure of the female brain. They contend, "Women are more emotional because they are more specifically designed to care about people. They experience other people's distress as their own. Men, with their 'doing' brains, will respond to another's distress by searching for a practical solution to it. . . . The circuitboard of the male brain is programmed for action rather than people."⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Ibid., 192.

⁷⁶ Moir and Jessel, 87 (original emphasis).

⁷⁷ Brizendine, *Female Brain*, 5.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 137.

Working from an anthropological perspective, Fisher does not deny the physical differences that Moir and Jessel as well as Brizendine discuss, but she places them within the larger context of evolution. According to Fisher, many of the differences between the sexes that have been verified by contemporary studies make evolutionary sense. As the primary hunters, males needed the ability to scout and track animals along with the aggression to kill them. Their aggression and enhanced knack for visual-spatial tasks thus developed out of these circumstances. In comparison, women developed traits, such as superior verbal skills and more empathy, because they were the main caretakers for the young.⁷⁹

Fisher, though, strongly emphasizes that human biological predispositions do not mean that human actions are predetermined; culture influences differences between the sexes as well. She maintains:

Is biology destiny? Not at all. No one denies that culture plays an enormous role in molding human action. But it is unscientific to overlook some equally significant facts: the body of data on gender differences in infants, the persistence of male/female differences on tests other than the SATs, the fact that adolescent girls do not fall behind on *other* tasks because of social pressure, the corroborative data from other countries, the literature linking testosterone with spatial skills and estrogen with verbal aptitude all support the view that the sexes do indeed exhibit gender differences in some spatial and verbal abilities---and that these differences stem, at least in part, from male/female variations in biology.⁸⁰

Fisher's insistence that sexual differences are rooted in biology but influenced by other factors is a reminder that any discussion of the differences between the sexes must include at least three caveats. First, one must be careful not to conflate a biological basis for sex

⁷⁹ Fisher, *Anatomy of Love*, 194. See also her work *The First Sex: The Natural Talents of Women and How They Are Changing the World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), 120-27.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, (original emphasis).

differences with biological determinism. If there is a biological component to differences as numerous studies suggest, then that biology only serves as an initial starting point. As N.E. Whitehead points out, “No behavior results exclusively from genes. Genes may produce a tendency but not a tyranny.”⁸¹ Regardless of their genetic makeup, human beings retain the ability to choose to embrace or reject certain traits. Likewise, even though it is possible to identify similarities between men and women across cultures, any biological starting point is always filtered through a particular culture. Societies not only shape how that specific sexual difference is instantiated, but they also possess the power to reinforce or downplay (though not eradicate) that difference.⁸² Second, all men and women do not reflect every difference that can be identified between the sexes. Any statement about a difference between men and women is a description of men and women generally speaking. Specific members of each sex may or may not reflect that difference, and members may possess characteristics typical of each sex to greater or lesser degrees. Third, it must be stressed that recognizing sex differences is not the same as embracing sexual inequality. The sexes can be considered to be different and also equal.⁸³

With these caveats in mind, in this section, I have attempted to show that there are numerous interrelated differences between the sexes. In various disciplines, multiple studies

⁸¹ N. E. Whitehead, “Is Transsexuality Biologically Determined?” in *My Genes Made Me Do It* (1999), updated at www.mygenes.co.nz/transsexuality.htm, accessed October 10, 2010. The article is an extract from “Are Transsexuals Born That Way?” *Triple Helix* (Autumn 2000): 6–8.

⁸² Ong, *Fighting for Life*, 52.

⁸³ The notion of different but equal may strike many as problematic given the history of segregation in the United States, where the misguided policy of “separate but equal” was used to justify the horrific oppression of African-Americans. However, recognition of difference does not necessarily lead to discrimination. There can be both sex differences and equality between men and women. Gilligan clearly recognizes that her work can be distorted and misused to rationalize oppression, and she specifically states that she deplores it being used for this purpose. At the same time, she insists that it is not empowering to encourage women to put aside their own voice and act like men in order to achieve equality with them. See her, “Reply to Critics,” 214.

have found that when compared with men, women are typically more empathic, less violent, more desirous of intimacy, and more fearful of isolation. The findings from these studies accomplish two things. First, they appear to lend substantial support to Gilligan's conclusion that women tend to approach moral problems with a distinct moral perspective rooted in caring. Second, they illustrate some specific ways in which the distinct female voice manifests itself, such as in the way in which women approach relationships, sex, achievement, etc. However, despite the empirical data that Gilligan has collected through her own research as well as the other studies which support her work, the evidence has not insulated her theory from considerable criticism.

The Critics

Over the last 25 years, Gilligan's work, and to a lesser extent Noddings' theory, has generated a flurry of scholarship. While some scholars regard the notion of an ethics of care as a breakthrough for feminist ethics, because it liberates the female experience from masculine standards of moral development, others have been highly critical of Gilligan's work. Critics argue that: (1) care ethics is essentialist, (2) it romanticizes and reinforces stereotypical feminine qualities which were formed under conditions of oppression, and that (3) it undervalues issues of justice.⁸⁴ Each of these criticisms needs to be addressed, because each serves to further illuminate the main aspects of care ethics while also highlighting some of its deficiencies.

⁸⁴ McLaren 103. McLaren actually identifies a fourth criticism that is different from the one that I have articulated here; she argues that Gilligan's work results in a false universalization about women. I will treat this claim within the context of addressing the critique that Gilligan is an essentialist, because unlike McLaren, I do not believe that they can be examined separately.

These charges arise primarily out of three ideological camps: postmodernism, social constructionism, and essentialism. The above criticisms of Gilligan's work are only intelligible if one understands the basic presumptions of each group.⁸⁵ In order to understand postmodernism and social constructionism, it is helpful to understand essentialism. In her book, *Origins of Difference*, Elaine Storkey explains that the term "essentialism" "refers to the idea that a certain 'essence' defines the center of our identity as human beings and men and women."⁸⁶ As it applies to sexual differences, she points out that "this means that men have certain identifiable, fixed characteristics, and women have other identifiable, fixed characteristics, and that these identifiers are rooted in our very nature."⁸⁷ Typically, essentialists have viewed particular characteristics of men and women as fixed, because they are seen as givens, the products of the forces of biology.⁸⁸

Within the essentialist camp, there are a range of positions. Strong essentialists argue that society affects sexual difference very little; differences are inherent, largely determining behavior. While strong essentialism borders on biological determinism, there is a more moderate

⁸⁵ While these categories are helpful in drawing and maintaining distinction, they also can be somewhat misleading. Even though I treat each of these groups as distinct, in reality, they are more fluid. For example, social constructionism and postmodernism at times resemble one another. Chris Beasley points out that the divide between social constructionism (what he calls modernism) and postmodernism is not neat or absolute. Rather, there are stronger and weaker versions of postmodernism with the former showing certain influences of constructionism and the later clearly breaking away from it. See his work, *Gender & Sexuality: Critical Theories, Critical Thinkers* (London: Sage Publications, Ltd., 2005). This point should be kept in mind throughout this section.

⁸⁶ Elaine Storkey, *Origins of Difference: The Gender Debate Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 25-6.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

essentialism which acknowledges that even though sexual differences are biological, society has a significant impact on these differences.

Yves Christen, in his book, *Sex Differences: Modern Biology and the Unisex Fallacy*, is representative of this more moderate essentialist position. He argues that “if boys behave like boys and girls like girls, this is, in the first instance, because of hormonal secretions that set the tone.”⁸⁹ Christen goes on to make it clear that society does not create the differences between the sexes; rather, cultural factors reinforce, ignore, or downplay these differences.⁹⁰

Prior to the growth and influence of postmodernism, the primary opponents of essentialism were social constructionists. Though numerous studies have identified sex differences that are more than skin deep, some feminist scholars insist that the only difference between men and women is their physical makeup. For these scholars, sexual differences are not rooted in biology but culture. They are socially constructed. According to James Nelson, the “social constructionist approach emphasizes our active roles as agents, influenced by culture, in structuring out bodily realities. It recognizes that the concepts and categories we use to describe and define our experience vary considerably in their meanings over time and among different cultures and subcultures.”⁹¹ For social constructionists, there are no *fixed* characteristics of men and women other than their most basic physical differences. The supposedly fixed characteristics are merely the product of socialization.

⁸⁹ Yves Christen, *Sex Differences: Modern Biology and the Unisex Fallacy*, trans. Nicholas Davidson (New Brunswick, NJ: Transactions Books, 1991), 85.

⁹⁰ Ibid. In this regard, Christen’s argument mirrors Moir and Jessel’s position, which was discussed in the previous section.

⁹¹ James Nelson, *Body Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 46.

Social constructionism stresses the importance of drawing a distinction between sex and gender in order to liberate women. Sex is simply biological; it signifies our embodiment as male and female.⁹² Gender, conversely, is how culture shapes and informs the way in which we view and define masculinity and femininity, including which roles and characteristics are appropriate for each sex.⁹³ According to constructionists, other than their physical differences, men and women are the same. Patriarchal cultures, though, have perpetuated the idea that men and women are different to advance the oppression of women.

In her work, *Sexism and God-Talk*, Rosemary Radford Ruether stresses this point with regard to caring. She writes, “Maleness and femaleness exist as reproductive role specialization. There is no necessary (biological) connection between reproductive complementarity and either psychological or social role differentiation. These are the work of culture and socialization, not of ‘nature.’”⁹⁴ Therefore, according to Ruether, “[T]here is no biological connection between female sexual organs and the capacity to be intuitive, caring, or nurturing. Thus the labeling of these capacities as masculine or feminine simply perpetuates gender role stereotypes and imports gender complementarity into each person’s identity in a confusing way.”⁹⁵

⁹² John Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue: An Introduction to Sexual Ethics* (Washington: DC, 2003), 96.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 96-7.

⁹⁴ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 111. See also Cheryl Brown Travis and C.P. Yeager, “Sexual Selection, Parental Investment, and Sexism,” *Journal of Social Issues* 47.3 (1991): 117-29. While granting that there are “biological constraints and predispositions that affect the behavior exhibited by humans,” these authors insist that human behavior patterns are “plastic” and “shaped by ecological and social contexts.” The quotation is from p. 127.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Even though essentialism and social constructionism appear to be diametrically opposed, it took postmodernism to demonstrate that they are not. Essentialism and social constructionism do share a similar feature in that both present a type of metanarrative. While essentialists claim that there are fixed characteristics of each sex across time and cultures, social constructionists maintain that there is a shared women's experience of oppression and inequality.⁹⁶ Even though gender is constructed somewhat differently in each culture, this experience is universal.

With its emphasis on deconstruction, postmodernism rejects these kinds of metanarratives in favor of more localized narratives. Rather than concentrating on male/female equality, postmodernism stresses differences. This includes not only the differences between men and women but also the differences among men and the differences among women.⁹⁷ These differences are "conditioned by the factors of class, region, sexuality, and culture."⁹⁸ Thus, postmodernism focuses its attention on the local rather than the universal, because there is no universal experience. For example, according to postmodernism, one cannot speak of the *experience* of women as social constructionists contend. One can only hear, collect, and reflect upon the *experiences* of women. Describing the postmodern approach, Elaine Storkey writes:

With a focus on narrative rather than analysis, we listen to and absorb the experiences of all women: black and white, rich and poor, powerful and marginalized, immigrant and indigenous, straight and gay, old and young. It is not the job of the theorist to choose between them or to pass judgment on them. We simply hear their stories. So just as there can be no one gender analysis of the

⁹⁶ Storkey, *Origins*, 46.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁹⁸ Elaine Graham, *Making the Difference: Gender, Personhood, and Theology* (London: Mowbray, 1995), 173.

oppression of women, so there is no one sexual analysis of the identity of women.⁹⁹

Unlike essentialism, which also embraces differences, for postmodernism there is no foundation, biological, ontological, or otherwise, for these differences. According to postmodernism, “Our sexuality, like all the rest of life, is in a constant process of construction.”¹⁰⁰ Therefore, sexual differences are completely fluid, because they are perpetually being created and altered by a conglomeration of influences.

As was previously mentioned, Gilligan’s work is criticized by each of these groups. The most common charge brought against Gilligan is that she is an essentialist, and this charge comes in a myriad of forms. On the one hand, some critics actually acknowledge that there are differences between the sexes but maintain that there is no difference in the area of moral reasoning. Critics in this camp insist that Gilligan mistakenly essentializes gender, making it the primary reason that women tend toward the care perspective while ignoring a host of other contributing factors. For instance, in his critique of Gilligan’s work, John Broughton argues that her “separation and sharp contrast of ‘male’ and ‘female’ normative ethics and metaethics seems, in her own terms, extremely ‘masculine’ in its emphasis on difference and boundary, its abstraction of the mind from life, and its tendency to essentialize gender, removing it from the context of relationships, discourse, culture, societal structure, and processes of historical formation.”¹⁰¹ Broughton does not deny that there are sex differences nor does he reject

⁹⁹ Storkey, *Origins*, 57. Even though Storkey uses the pronoun “we” here, she has strong reservations about the postmodern approach to issues of gender and sexuality. See pp. 58-60 in the same work.

¹⁰⁰ Storkey, *Origins*, 57.

¹⁰¹ John Broughton, “Women’s Rationality and Men’s Virtues: A Critique of Gender Dualism in Gilligan’s Theory of Moral Development,” in *An Ethic of Care*, 135.

Gilligan's assertion that there are two different approaches to moral problems. His primary problem with Gilligan's account is that it unnecessarily ties each moral orientation too closely to gender.

Broughton accepts that Gilligan can explain why women occasionally adopt the more masculine justice perspective. In a male-dominated culture, women may believe that the only way to be heard is by imitating male reasoning, or they are conditioned to equate higher forms of moral reasoning with the justice perspective.¹⁰² In other words, women have been conditioned to suppress their own voice and to view justice reasoning as right reasoning. The problem, for Broughton, is that as Gilligan herself discovers, men occasionally employ the care perspective and speak with the female voice. However, men are not oppressed by women, so this finding cannot be explained in the same way as women using the masculine voice. This observation along with his examination of other empirical studies, which reveal no sex differences in the area of morality, leads Broughton to conclude that even though there may be differences between the sexes and although there may be two moral orientations, there appears to be no correlation between gender and moral orientation.¹⁰³

Broughton is not alone in arguing that Gilligan exaggerates the impact of gender on moral reasoning while paying too little attention to other influential factors. For example, after analyzing the results of a series of studies examining sex differences in moral reasoning stretching across age groups, Lawrence Walker argues against Gilligan's conclusions. He

¹⁰² Ibid., 126, 136.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

maintains that “contrary to the prevailing stereotype, very few sex differences in moral development have been found.”¹⁰⁴ Where studies did find sex differences in moral reasoning, particularly among adults, Walker dismisses their findings, arguing that “sex was often confounded with educational and/or occupational differences.”¹⁰⁵ For Walker, these differences at least partially explain the divergent approaches to moral problems.

On the other hand, postmodern feminists condemn Gilligan for supposedly making false generalizations about the “essential” qualities that all women share. Gilligan’s ambiguous answer to the nature/nurture question prevents her from being labeled an essentialist in the traditional sense, because she does not make any specific claims concerning a biological basis for the differences that she discusses. However, according to Naomi Weisstein, Gilligan “puts forth a notion of female difference which, while no longer biologically based, is nevertheless essentialist, or at least highly decontextualized.”¹⁰⁶ Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson note that Gilligan invites the same charge of false generalization that she levels against Kohlberg’s schema, because she describes women’s development in terms of *a* different voice. In this sense, her model is essentialist, because she does not adequately take into account the variety of women’s experiences and the way in which differences in race, class, and sexual orientation

¹⁰⁴ Lawrence Walker, “Sex Differences in the Development of Moral Reasoning: A Critical Review,” in *An Ethics of Care*, 176.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁰⁶ Naomi Weisstein, “Power, Resistance, and Science: A Call for a Revitalized Feminist Psychology,” *Feminism and Psychology* 3 (1993): 239-45, accessed October 14, 2010, <http://ww3.wpunj.edu/~newpol/issue22/weisst22.htm>. Weisstein is actually a proponent of social constructionism and not postmodernism, but the charge that she makes against Gilligan’s work is echoed by many postmodern feminists. Alongside of Gilligan, Weisstein includes Ruddick’s work in her criticism.

create a multitude of unique female voices.¹⁰⁷ One cannot simply make general claims about women's moral perspective, and any attempt to do so serves as a form of oppression by overlooking the unique story of the other and remaking her in one's own cultural image.¹⁰⁸

Based on her research with African-Americans, Carol Stack emphasizes the lack of a female voice among those migrants returning to the rural South. She points out that "these conditions produce a convergence also in women's and men's vocabulary of rights, morality, and the social good."¹⁰⁹ She goes on to note that these "women's and men's voices, in unison with one another, appear to be very different from those on which Gilligan and Kohlberg based their models of relatedness and moral reasoning."¹¹⁰

In the same way, Owen Flanagan, in his book *Varieties of Moral Personality*, claims that Gilligan overlooks the significance and impact of non-universal but morally formative experiences. He insists:

The experience of oneself as a child of the gods or a member of a particular tribe is not universal. But it can be absolutely central for members of particular groups. The project of learning what a self is, and coming to experience oneself as that kind of self, is known to be ethically fundamental but to differ in important ways across human space. Indeed, it is well documented by now that all the virtues

¹⁰⁷ Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy," in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), 32-3. Note that Gilligan is not labeled as an essentialist in the traditional sense of the term, because she does not necessarily see sex differences as biologically given.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender, & Christian Ethics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 25-6.

¹⁰⁹ Carol Stack, "The Culture of Gender: Women and Men of Color," in *An Ethic of Care*, 109. Stack acknowledges that Gilligan does recognize that the impact of cross-cultural differences on her theory remains largely unexplored.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

considered essential to moral personhood are, at some level of analysis, local essences.¹¹¹

For Flanagan, these varied experiences create an incalculable number of moral perspectives, which cannot be reduced to *only* two distinct moral voices as Gilligan contends.

Both charges of essentialism have significant flaws. Postmodern feminists overlook all of the empirical data on the similarities between women within and across cultures.¹¹² In addition, they ignore Gilligan's repeated insistence that women can be associated generally but not exclusively with the care voice, and her acknowledgement that the care orientation arises within a social context, which is bound to impact it. Conversely, Broughton's critique seems to divorce women's experience from their moral reasoning "as if experiences common to women leave no psychological trace."¹¹³ Unfortunately, Gilligan's critics, including Broughton, offer no

¹¹¹ Owen Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality: Ethics and Psychological Realism* (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 211. Flanagan is referring to Alasdair MacIntyre's highly influential work *After Virtue*, when he states that it is well-documented that all the virtues are local essences. Oddly enough, despite its impact and prominence, MacIntyre has retreated considerably from his argument in *After Virtue*. In that work, he maintains that virtues and moral rules are only intelligible within traditions. However, in his later works, he embraces natural law and the universal negative precepts that can be derived from it. For MacIntyre, this law and its precepts are not rooted in traditions but human nature itself. Thus, he moves away from the local to emphasize moral prohibitions and a common nature that unites all human beings. See his article, "How Can We Learn What *Veritatis Splendor* Has To Teach?," *The Thomist* 58 (1994): 171-95.

¹¹² There are only a few cross-cultural studies testing Gilligan's hypothesis, and the samples used in these studies are relatively small. However, their results do reinforce Gilligan's conclusions. For example, based on studies that they conducted with university students in China, Thailand, and Korea, David Stimpson, Larry Jensen, and Wayne Neff conclude that "the findings support the beliefs that women prefer a more caring moral perspective and that the differences exist across cultures." See their article, "Cross-Cultural Gender Differences in Preference for a Caring Morality," *The Journal of Social Psychology* 132.3 (1992): 317-322. The quotation is from p. 320.

While recognizing some validity to their focus on the differences in women's experiences, Cahill also points out that the denial of anything shared or universal by postmodern feminists has disastrous consequences for social ethics. She argues, "Without some essential unity of human moral experience and common recognition of values, virtues, and vices, social criticism in the name of justice would be impossible." See her work *Sex, Gender, & Christian Ethics*, esp. p. 14-35. The quotation is taken from p. 33.

¹¹³ Gilligan, "Reply to Critics," 209.

“psychologically coherent explanation of why the sex differences they mention make no difference to moral development or self-development.”¹¹⁴

Furthermore, like the postmodern feminists, both Broughton and Walker’s arguments are problematic based simply on the empirical evidence. Not only has Walker’s methodology been challenged by Diana Baumrind,¹¹⁵ but his review has been supplanted by a meta-analysis of the data on gender differences in moral orientation conducted by Sara Jaffee and Janet Shibley Hyde.¹¹⁶ Since their work appears almost sixteen years after the publication of Walker’s findings, Jaffee and Hyde have the benefit of including the results of several additional studies in their analysis. On the surface, Jaffee and Hyde’s findings actually seem to echo Walker’s position. Their meta-analysis only revealed “small differences in the care orientation favoring females and small differences in the justice orientation favoring males.”¹¹⁷ This leads the authors to conclude that there is not “strong support for the claim that the care orientation is used predominately by women and that the justice orientation is used predominantly by men.”¹¹⁸ However, a closer examination of their work reveals a more complicated picture.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Diana Baumrind, “Sex Differences in Moral Reasoning: Response to Walker’s (1984) Conclusion that There Are None,” *Child Development* 57.2 (1986): 511-21. Among her criticisms, Baumrind points out that adult data comprises only 16 percent of the studies that Walker uses in his meta-analysis, even though critics of Kohlberg’s theory allege that it is biased at the highest levels of moral development, which are found in adulthood. By using such a small percentage of adult data, Baumrind contends that Walker decreased his probability of finding sex difference.

¹¹⁶ Sara Jaffee and Janet Shibley Hyde, “Gender Differences in Moral Orientation: A Meta-Analysis,” *Psychological Bulletin* 126.5 (2000): 703-726.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 703.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

While they found no significant evidence of gender differences in studies that used hypothetical dilemmas, Jaffee and Hyde found “moderately large gender differences” in studies that did not include any dilemma at all.¹¹⁹ Whereas the content of the hypothetical dilemmas has the potential to guide participants toward one orientation, studies that allow participants to present the moral dilemmas themselves do not possess the same pitfall. In studies that employed participant-generated, real-life dilemmas or only asked participants to identify themselves as justice or care reasoners based on provided definitions, researchers found gender differences in moral orientation.¹²⁰ These findings seem to support Gilligan’s claims that both genders can

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 719.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 719-20. Walker suggests that each sex has the same basic moral orientation. He maintains that it is the type of real-life moral dilemma that causes an individual to favor one moral orientation over the other—not gender. In other words, personal-relationship dilemmas elicit higher levels of care reasoning than impersonal-relationship dilemmas do. (“A ‘personal’ moral conflict was interpreted as one involving a specific person or group of people with whom the subject has a significant relationship, defined generally as one of a continuing nature, whereas an ‘impersonal’ moral conflict was interpreted as one involving a person or group of people whom the subject does not know well or is not specified or is generalized, or as one involving institutions, or involving an issue primarily intrinsic to self.”) Walker contends that “it is impossible to determine from these data, however, whether this relation indicates that the nature of a dilemma influences the moral orientation voiced or that one’s moral orientation influences the construal of the dilemma.” See his article, “A Longitudinal Study of Moral Reasoning,” *Child Development* 60 (1989): 157-166. The first quotation is taken from p. 159, and the second is from p. 164.

However, Stephen Sherblom insists that the type of real-life dilemma typically generated by each sex cannot be overlooked. Since the participant in the study is selecting a situation that he or she considers to be morally problematic and/or significant, it is relevant to the issue of gender differences that women tend to generate dilemmas of a more interpersonal nature. Regarding the position of Walker and others in his camp, he points out that “even if we grant these researchers their point that care language will be more likely to be found whenever someone reflects on a care type dilemma or context, we are left with the question of why women are more likely to relate moral dilemmas of a more personal nature than are men.” According to Sherblom, this question reinforces the care theorists’ claim that there is a gender difference in moral orientation. See his article, “The legacy of the ‘care challenge’: re-envisioning the outcome of the justice-care debate,” *Journal of Moral Education* 37.1 (2008): 81-98. The quotation is taken from pg. 87. For more on this debate, see also the exchange between Sherblom and Walker in the same journal. Lawrence Walker and Jeremy Frimer, “‘The song remains the same’: rebuttal to Sherblom’s re-envisioning of the legacy of the care challenge,” *Journal of Moral Education* 38.1 (2009): 53-68; Sherblom, “If the song sounds the same check for static: a reply to Walker and Frimer,” *Journal of Moral Education* 38.1 (2009): 69-73.

work from either orientation, but women tend to define moral conflicts using care reasoning, while men favor the justice approach.¹²¹

In challenging Gilligan to explain why men occasionally use care reasoning, Broughton likewise overlooks her disclaimer that neither gender operates exclusively from one orientation. He also fails to consider her vision of moral maturity. Recall that Gilligan maintains that men can integrate values from the care perspective, while women are capable of high levels of justice reasoning. Nevertheless, even into adulthood, men continue to spontaneously frame moral problems using the justice perspective, and women do the same through a care perspective.¹²² The fact that men occasionally use care reasoning does not undermine Gilligan's argument; it supports her understanding of moral development.

Even though Gilligan seeks to liberate women's voice from an androcentric framework for moral development, social constructionists insist that her work simply reinforces female "virtues" that were formed under conditions of male oppression. In her article, "Gender and Moral Luck," Claudia Card cautions against seeing caring as a virtue. She argues, "Women's caretaking is often unpaid or underpaid labor performed for a variety of motives. More likely mistaken for a caring virtue is women's misplaced gratitude to men who take less than full advantage of their power to abuse or who offer women the privilege of service in exchange for 'protection.' Women have assumed caretaking responsibilities as a debt of gratitude for such 'benefactions.'"¹²³ Like Card, Bill Puka argues that caring should not be seen as a basic ethical

¹²¹ Gilligan, "Reply to Critics," 210. Gilligan contends that this is the reason her research has focused on first-person accounts of moral conflicts.

¹²² Ibid.

orientation or a general track of moral development. Instead, it should be viewed as a coping strategy for dealing with sexist oppression. It simultaneously serves as a way of trying to win male approval and handle the hurt, domination, and rejection that men inflict on women.¹²⁴

For the most part, social constructionists dismiss empirical data related to Gilligan's theory, asserting that the results only reveal how men and women have been culturally conditioned to think. They reject the argument that these studies reveal any intrinsic differences between the sexes.¹²⁵ For example, Nancy Eisenberg and Randy Lennon found that women were much more likely than men to report experiencing high measures of empathy in simulated emotional situations or to describe themselves as empathetic. Yet the authors attribute this difference not to biology but to sex-role expectations instilled in each gender by society.¹²⁶

To a large extent, the constructionist critique seems to be rooted in an overly simplistic answer to the nature/nurture question. As was previously mentioned, for social constructionists all sex differences, except for basic bodily differences, are the result of socialization not biology. This position not only runs counter to the findings in neuroscience and evolutionary biology, which were discussed in the last section, but it is also impossible to prove. How does one

¹²³ Claudia Card, "Gender and Moral Luck," in *Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology*, eds. Owen Flanagan and Amelie Oksenberg Rorty (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990), 215-6.

¹²⁴ Bill Puka, "The Liberation of Caring: A Different Voice for Gilligan's 'Different Voice,'" in *An Ethic of Care*, 215-7.

¹²⁵ Some social constructionists reject the notion that the facts are immune from cultural conditioning. For example, Travis and Brown argue, "The problems, observations, labels, analyses and conclusions identified as valid by virtue of scientific methodology are historically and culturally bound." Therefore, the authors go on to contend that "values and bias can be transformed by errors of omission and of commission into empirical 'facts.'" See their article, "Sexual Selection," 123.

¹²⁶ Nancy Eisenberg and Randy Lennon, "Sex Differences in Empathy and Related Capacities," *Psychological Bulletin* 94.1 (1983):110-11, 25.

precisely distinguish what results from biology and what results from socialization? As Cahill points out, there is no female subject who is a blank slate to be studied. Everyone has been culturally conditioned, and it is impossible to separate this conditioning from biology.

In addition, the constructionist theory seems extremely problematic in light of the changes in sex roles and the empowerment of women during the 20th century. According to constructionists, patriarchal social structures, institutions, and expectations condition men and women to assume particular roles and qualities, such as assertiveness and caring respectively. Therefore, if women are liberated and break out of their traditional roles, such as housewives, then one should see evidence that women are redefining themselves and stereotypical femininity.¹²⁷ However, even though more women are participating in the labor in force, holding executive positions and political office, participating in higher education, marrying later, and choosing to divorce and become single parents, according to Lloyd Lueptow, Lori Garovich-Szabo, and Margaret Lueptow, relatively little has changed in the way in which men and women choose to describe themselves and their sexes in general.¹²⁸ Based on their review of several studies and their own research, the authors conclude:

[T]he main body of research shows stability or even increase in sex typing over the past several decades, in personality and stereotypes. The result of the present study are very consistent with the cumulating evidence and taken in conjunction with the increasing recognition that the perceptions embodied in the stereotypes reflect real personality differences, lead to the conclusion that differences in sex related personality traits have not declined over the last twenty three years, in spite of the sociocultural factors presumed to create these differences. Thus, the

¹²⁷ Lloyd Lueptow, Lori Garovich-Szabo, and Margaret Lueptow set out to test whether or not women are redefining femininity in their article, "Social Change and The Persistence of Sex Typing: 1974-1997," *Social Forces* 80.1 (2001): 1-36.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

findings of this and other research cited above are not consistent with the sociocultural explanation of gender differences. They are consistent with the evolutionary model.¹²⁹

The findings of these authors seem even more valid in light of Stack's work. Recall that Stack claims that women of color under oppressive conditions do not reflect the caring orientation but opt for the language of rights. Based on the analysis of Card and Puka, who claim that caring is not a virtue but a reaction to oppression, it is unclear why these women do not embrace some form of caring as a coping strategy.¹³⁰ If, however, women's moral voice is rooted in some combination of nature and nurture, then it becomes easier to see how the experience of racial oppression affects their moral orientation and language.

The argument that oppression produces women's caring tendency also fails to consider the diverse population of females that Gilligan studies. Gilligan's conclusions are based on her research with young girls, adolescents, teenagers, and adult women. In the latter group, research participants were included from a wide range of career paths. Across these groups, Gilligan

¹²⁹ Ibid., 24. The authors do grant that it is conceivable that two generations may not be a long enough to see changes in sex differences, if they are the result of socialization. However, since the authors document an increase the intensity of gender stereotypes, they argue that this is highly unlikely. See p. 30.

See also Alice Eagly, "The Science and Politics of Comparing Women and Men," *American Psychologist* 50.3 (1995): 145-58; and Alan Feingold, "Gender Differences in Personality: A Meta Analysis," *Psychological Bulletin* 116.3 (1994): 429-56. Taking into account several research studies, Eagly and Feingold reach the same conclusion as Lueptow, Garovich-Szabo, and Lueptow. They argue that studies have demonstrated that men and women have different personality characteristics, which conform to stereotypes. Women tend to be more communal, nurturing, and empathic than men, while men tend to display behavior that is more independent and assertive.

Eagly claims that many feminists have ignored findings demonstrating sex differences, because these facts are contrary to their ideology. Social constructionism gained traction in the 1970s when there was a scientific consensus that sex-related differences were nonexistent or small. Consequently, according to Eagly, despite a flood of evidence showing many consequential sex differences in the 1980s and early 1990s, many feminists still have sought to protect this consensus in their theories and research (150).

¹³⁰ If the primary difference is that these women of color are experiencing racial oppression and not sexist oppression, then it appears that Card and Puka must provide an explanation of why certain forms of oppression affect women's caring differently.

finds that females favor the care perspective. Furthermore, many of them appear to be independent, powerful women, who are conscious of the pitfalls of caring and who are reconsidering what it means to care in light of their experiences.¹³¹ If caring is caused or shaped primarily by oppression, then it remains unclear how oppression informs or produces the caring perspective of young girls and why older women, many of whom are aware of the dangers of caring, fail to abandon this perspective. The charge that Card, Puka, and others make against female caring risks perpetuating the notion that women are helpless victims of oppression who are compelled or conditioned to care in order to survive. Unfortunately, this is the same view of women that they are criticizing, and rather than liberating women, this argument continues to subvert their voice.

The final criticism made against Gilligan's work falls outside of the debate between essentialists, social constructionists, and postmodernists. It concerns the place of justice in her work and in care ethics in general. As noted earlier, the impact of Gilligan's theory was not limited to her own field; it was deeply influential in several other disciplines as well, including moral and political philosophy. Some scholars working in these fields insist that care ethics draws too sharp a distinction between justice and care thereby unnecessarily placing the two in opposition and elevating care over justice.

For instance, Susan Moller Okin, in her book *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, claims that Gilligan's work creates a false dichotomy between justice and care.¹³² Instead, she argues

¹³¹ Gilligan, "Reply to Critics," 209.

¹³² Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1991), 15. Okin also questions the conclusiveness of the evidence supporting Gilligan's theory, and she insists any evidence related to different moralities is skewed and tainted by our gender-structured society, which forces women and men into particular gender roles that are alterable.

that the best account of justice “has integral to it the notions of care and empathy, of thinking of the interests and well-being of others who may be very different from ourselves.”¹³³ Therefore, Okin declares, “that the best theorizing about justice is not good enough if it does not, or cannot be readily adapted to, include women and their points of view fully as men as their points of view.”¹³⁴

Care is or at least should be part of justice, and in this regard, Okin is correct. Care and justice certainly are not in opposition or mutually exclusive. However, Gilligan does not make this mistake. Gilligan speaks of “seasoning mercy with justice,” and she certainly concedes that one person can consider both issues of justice and care in their moral decision-making.¹³⁵ In addition, it is important to remember Gilligan’s vision of moral maturity, where men and women, in the course of becoming adults, achieve a greater convergence in their moral perspectives.¹³⁶ Gilligan does not divorce care from justice; instead, she discusses what it means to emphasize care rather than (not apart from) justice in a moral perspective.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate that men and women are equal but not interchangeable. By summarizing essential components of Gilligan’s theory, I have tried to establish how men and women differ in their moral reasoning, and I have attempted to describe

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 149.

¹³⁶ Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 167.

the characteristics of women's different moral voice. Despite the criticism of her work, Gilligan makes a compelling case that women tend to adopt a care perspective in their moral decision-making, and men typically operate from a justice perspective. Aside from her own research studies, her conclusions are supported by findings in several other fields that identify and explain pertinent differences between the sexes, which seem to be instances of women's person/relationship-centered perspective, including their tendency to be more empathic.

The last section concluded by discussing the dispute between Gilligan and Okin. As an end to this chapter and a prelude to the next, it is helpful to return to this debate. Okin argues that justice must include care, and Thomistic scholars, such as Eleonore Stump, make the case that St. Thomas's treatment of justice already incorporates many of the concerns of care ethics.¹³⁷ However, even if Stump is correct, care ethics in general and Gilligan's work more specifically still pose substantial challenges to Aquinas's moral theory.

One of Gilligan's central claims is that there is a distinct female voice that has been overlooked because of patriarchal prejudice in psychology, philosophy, and theology. Care is at the heart of that voice, and it occupies a central place in women's ethical perspectives. If Aquinas's theory is androcentric, then he too has ignored this distinctive voice. In order to fully account for this voice, he needs more than a robust conception of justice. He needs Gilligan's

¹³⁷ Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 338. It should be noted that Stump is responding to Annette Baier, who accuses Aquinas of constructing a very legalistic moral theory. Stump rejects this characterization of Aquinas's moral theory, and she defends Aquinas by noting that care and justice are inseparable in his moral theory.

As part of her criticism of care ethics, Stump also contends that it has no room for moral principles. Therefore, she maintains that Aquinas theory is superior to an ethics of care, "because these concerns are met in the context of justice, because justice, not care is the fundamental ethical value governing relationships with others, Aquinas's account can give a principled explanation, difficult to come by on the ethics of care, of the moral unacceptability of letting oneself be exploited by others." As far as Gilligan's work is concerned, I think that Stump is largely correct. Gilligan was attempting to identify and describe a different voice; she was not a moral philosopher who was concerned with developing a comprehensive moral theory.

description of sexual difference or something like it, which presents a more equitable account of sexual differences and which has implications for his moral theory as a whole, including how sexual difference impacts the acquisition and exercise of virtues other than justice.

For example, in chapter 4, this project will consider how attention to this distinct female voice and women's particular motivations in moral decision-making might impact their acquisition and exercise of chastity. Since women tend to focus more relationships and seem to possess a greater desire for emotional intimacy, then that which tempts them into lustful acts, such a premarital sex, may be different from men. If that is the case, then Thomistic virtue ethics needs to be more attentive to how sexual difference might alter the traditional understanding of lust and in turn change how the Church approaches chastity education.

More specifically, beyond just incorporating the distinct female voice and considering its impact on particular virtues, Aquinas needs a contemporary theory of sexual difference and equality, such as that within Gilligan's account, in order to resolve the tension in his schema between his theory of infused virtue and his philosophy of woman. The problem, which I identified in the last chapter, is that Aquinas claims that women have weak reason and unruly passions, which make them inferior to men in the natural order and make it very difficult for them to acquire virtue. However, in the life of grace, Aquinas holds that the sexes are equal. Unfortunately, he fails to explain what happens to women's natural defects in the life of grace. If these defects inhibit the acquisition of virtue in the natural virtue, then it seems problematic for Aquinas to maintain that sexes begin as equals in the Christian life, considering how he describes the persistence of acquired vicious dispositions despite the infusion of grace. The next chapter

considers how Aquinas' theory of virtue can be modified in light of the differences and equality between men and women that are at the heart of care ethics.

Chapter 3

A New Account of Sexual Difference for Thomistic Virtue Ethics

Introduction

Throughout the first two chapters, I have suggested that there are internal contradictions in St. Thomas's theory of virtue, which can only be resolved with a new and more adequate account of sexual difference. This new account not only should uphold the equality of the sexes, but in addition, it must respect Aquinas's fundamental insight that men and women are different. Therefore, this new account should focus more on the experience of women, including how they assess moral problems and what factors they prioritize in their moral-decision making.¹ At the end of the last chapter, I contended that Gilligan offers one such account of sexual difference, which can be used to reform significant parts of Aquinas's philosophy of woman. The primary concern of this chapter is to demonstrate more specifically how Gilligan's work can inform Thomistic virtue theory by providing it with a new account of sexual difference.

It should be noted at the beginning of this chapter that some scholars already have expressed serious reservations about bringing St. Thomas into conversation with Gilligan.² They appear to be extremely skeptical about whether or not Gilligan's theory has anything valuable to add to Aquinas's work. This skepticism takes two forms. On the one hand, Thomists, such as

¹ Obviously, women have many experiences that men do not have, such as childbirth. However, when I use the phrase "experience of women," I'm specifically referring to the unique way that women assess and resolve moral problems, which Gilligan identifies as the care orientation.

² There are exceptions to this statement, most notably Paul Philibert. He discusses the parallels between Aquinas's moral anthropology and Gilligan's critique of ethical formalism in his article, demonstrating that they are both concerned with relationality, compassion, and continuity. Unfortunately, his treatment is very brief, and he dismisses St. Thomas's teachings on the inferiority of women as a picayune issue. See his article, "Addressing the crisis in moral theory: Clues from Aquinas and Gilligan," *Theology Digest* 34.2 (Summer 1987): 103-13.

Craig Steven Titus, insist that “Aquinas’s developmental approach differs significantly from both Kohlberg’s theory of ‘moral development’ and Gilligan’s theory of the dichotomy between male justice and female care.”³ Titus notes that Aquinas’s approach to moral development includes an account of human nature, a theory of both the acquired and the infused virtues, and an explanation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit as well as natural and divine law; these, however, are all foreign to Kohlberg and Gilligan’s account of moral development.⁴ For Titus, the chasm between St. Thomas and Gilligan’s work seems insurmountable. Due to the limitations and inadequacies found in Gilligan’s work and the comprehensiveness of Aquinas’s theory, it seems as if Gilligan can add nothing to Aquinas’s theory of moral development or philosophical anthropology.⁵

On the other hand, other scholars, such as Eleonore Stump, argue that Aquinas already anticipates many of the concerns of care ethics in his treatment of justice. Stump insists, “[M]any of the provisions that proponents of an ethics of care are most concerned to bring into ethics, such as care for those at the bottom of the social hierarchy, are in fact in Aquinas’s ethics, and in a place where philosophers advocating an ethics of care would not expect to find them: subsumed under justice.”⁶ Stump goes on to contend that “Aquinas supposes that caring of

³ Craig Steven Titus, “Moral Development and Making All Things New in Christ,” *The Thomist* 72 (2008): 233-58.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁵ Since the main focus of Titus’ essay is Aquinas’s understanding of moral development, he offers only a cursory glance at Gilligan’s work, suggesting that her work has not proven to be philosophically adequate or empirically established. In addition, he notes that Gilligan has been criticized for “an overly rigid conceptual division of feminine and male anthropology and developmental tasks” (235). Because I dealt extensively with criticisms of Gilligan’s work in the last chapter, I will not recount those arguments here. Moreover, Titus does not defend or explain these claims, which make them difficult to refute.

⁶ Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 311. To provide some context to this passage, Stump is refuting some of the claims that Annette Baier makes in her writings concerning the similarity between Aquinas’s thought and the focus on individualism in the modern Western philosophical tradition.

certain sorts is integral to justice itself.”⁷ Unlike Titus, Stump sees similarities between Aquinas and care ethics. Unfortunately, Stump draws the same conclusion as Titus. For her, care ethics can add nothing to Aquinas. Rather, his work already subsumes the concerns of care ethics.

In examining how Gilligan’s account of sexual difference can enrich Thomistic virtue theory, this chapter seeks to chart a middle way between these two camps. I recognize that Gilligan’s work in particular and care ethics in general differ significantly from Thomistic virtue ethics, including the account of moral development which it offers.

However, Gilligan and Aquinas are not so different that they cannot be brought into conversation with one other, and yet they are not so similar that a conversation would be fruitless. This chapter seeks to further demonstrate that Aquinas would benefit from a new account of sexual difference that includes the experiences of women, recognizes their equality with men, and resolves the internal tensions within his own theory of virtue.

In order to show that Gilligan provides one such account which fulfills these criteria, this chapter proceeds in three sections. The first section reviews the tension between Aquinas’s theory of virtue and his account of sexual difference, and it analyzes three primary responses that various authors offer to this tension. The second section considers the same foundational concerns with integrating psychology and theology before comparing and contrasting Gilligan and Aquinas’s account of sexual difference. The final part of the chapter examines how men *and* women become virtuous by considering some points in Aquinas’s thought where there is

However, even though Stump selects Annette Baier rather than Gilligan to represent the care ethics tradition and to be her dialogue partner, the point here still stands. Stump does not believe that care ethics, whether it is represented by Baier or Gilligan, has anything to add to Aquinas’s theory of virtue, particularly his account of the virtue of justice.

⁷ Ibid.

room to incorporate Gilligan's insights, while also considering how these insights will enhance his theory of virtue.

The Problem and Three Possible Solutions

In chapter 1, I described some of the internal inconsistencies in Aquinas's thought that arise between his theory of virtue and his view of women. Holding that women are both misbegotten males and created in the *imago Dei*, Aquinas carefully attempts to navigate a course between Aristotelian biology and the creation accounts in Genesis. Without rejecting either the Philosopher or Scripture, St. Thomas concludes that men and women are unequal in the natural order and yet equal in the supernatural order. Without grace, women are deficient in reason when compared with men. Along with weak reason, they possess unruly passions, which typically overwhelm their reason and make it difficult for them to be courageous or temperate. Moreover, the combination of their deficient reason and unwieldy passions seemingly cause them to be perpetually incontinent and pose almost insurmountable obstacles to them acquiring moral virtue.

Conversely, in the life of grace, according to Aquinas, women's potential for growth in virtue is not bound by the same fetters. Like men, women are infused by God with the theological virtues along with the infused moral virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit at baptism. While God graciously increases the infused virtues in the person, both men and women have the ability to cultivate these virtues by preparing themselves for an increase through their own actions. Created in the *imago Dei* and possessing the same potential for holiness and even sainthood, men and women are made equal through the power of grace according to Aquinas.

Is Aquinas's position coherent? Can he hold simultaneously that men and women are not equal in the natural order where the acquisition of acquired virtue is concerned, but they are equal in their potential to obtain and grow in the infused virtues? A fundamental tension between these two positions begins to emerge when one considers Aquinas's discussion of whether or not an acquired vice can exist alongside the infused virtues. Even though he clearly argues that the two cannot coexist, he also follows the axiom that grace does not destroy but perfects nature. Therefore, while he contends that the vice is destroyed with the infusion of grace, he acknowledges that a residue from the vice may still remain in the person. Rather than existing as a full-blown vice, the vice is reduced to a disposition. This contrary disposition can still affect the person by making it difficult for him or her to perform virtuous acts and calling the individual back to an old life of sin.⁸ However, with perseverance and grace, hopefully, the disposition will be fully eradicated as the person cultivates the infused virtues.

⁸ In *De virtutibus in communi*, a. 10, ad 14, Aquinas writes, "It should be said that passions inclining to evil are not completely taken away by either acquired or infused virtue, except maybe miraculously. There always remains the struggle between the flesh and the spirit, even with moral virtue. The Apostle speaks of this in Galatians 5, 17: 'For the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh.' But these passions are modified by both acquired and infused virtue, such that a man is not moved by them in an unbridled way, but acquired virtue in some degree prevails and so too infused virtue. Acquired virtue prevails in this, that the struggle is felt less, and this is due to its cause, since it is by frequent acts that a man is accustomed to virtue, and a man becomes unaccustomed to obey such passions when he has learned to resist them and that is why he feels their troubling less. But the infused virtue prevails in this, that while such passions are felt they in no way dominate, for infused virtue brings about that the concupiscence of sin is in no way obeyed, and while it remains, it does this infallibly. Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on Virtue*, trans. Ralph McInerny (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 1999), 71-2. "*Passiones ad malum inclinantes non totaliter tolluntur neque per virtutem acquisitam neque per virtutem infusam, nisi forte miraculose; quia semper remanet colluctatio carnis contra spiritum, etiam post moralem virtutem; de qua dicit apostolus, Gal., V, 17, quod caro concupiscit adversus spiritum, spiritus autem adversus carnem. Sed tam per virtutem acquisitam quam infusam huiusmodi passiones modificantur, ut ab his homo non effrenate moveatur. Sed quantum ad aliquid praevallet in hoc virtus acquisita, et quantum ad aliquid virtus infusa. Virtus enim acquisita praevallet quantum ad hoc quod talis impugnatio minus sentitur. Et hoc habet ex causa sua: quia per frequentes actus quibus homo est assuefactus ad virtutem, homo iam dissuevit talibus passionibus obedire, cum consuevit eis resistere; ex quo sequitur quod minus earum molestias sentiat. Sed praevallet virtus infusa quantum ad hoc quod facit quod huiusmodi passiones etsi sentiantur, nullo tamen modo dominantur, Virtus enim infusa facit quod nullo modo obediatur concupiscentiis peccati; et facit hoc infallibiliter ipsa manente.*"

In *De virtutibus in communi*, a. 10, ad 16, Aquinas also states, "It should be said that an acquired habit is not corrupted by one simple act; still the act of contrition corrupts the habit of vice through the power of grace.

Given that women suffer from deficient reason and unruly passions in the natural order and men do not and given that grace does not destroy nature, including contrary dispositions, then it appears to be inconsistent for Aquinas to claim that men and women are equals in the life of grace. While they both may grow in virtue enough to become saints, it certainly does not seem as if they begin at the same point. Women appear to be hampered and burdened in a way that men are not. If, as I will argue later in this chapter, grace has the same impact on their unruly passions and weak reason as it does on an acquired vice, then it seems as if women enter the life of grace at a disadvantage. Despite the degree to which grace heals women of these poor qualities, within Aquinas's schema, something of these qualities would still remain in women and impact their ability to act virtuously.

Among modern commentators, one can identify roughly three primary positions regarding the importance of Aquinas's account of sexual difference for his theory of virtue.⁹ The first of these positions simply dismisses Aquinas's account of sexual difference as antiquated and rejects, at least implicitly, that there is any tension at all between his philosophy of woman and this theory of virtue. In other words, this position largely neglects to consider the possible impact of sexual difference on the exercise and acquisition of virtue. For instance, Eleonore Stump in her voluminous work *Aquinas* covers numerous aspects of Aquinas's thought,

Thus in one who has the habit of intemperance and is contrite there does not remain with the virtue of infused temperance the habit of intemperance in the sense of a habit, but it is on the way to corruption, as a certain disposition. But a disposition is not the contrary of a perfect habit." This translation is also taken from McNerny. "*Quod licet per actum unum simplicem non corrumpatur habitus acquisitus, tamen actus contritionis habet quod corrumpat habitum vitii generatum ex virtute gratiae; unde in eo qui habuit habitum intemperantiae, cum conteritur, non remanet cum virtute temperantiae infusa habitus intemperantiae in ratione habitus, sed in via corruptionis, quasi dispositio quaedam. Dispositio autem non contrariatur habitui perfecto.*"

⁹ I use the qualifier "modern" here, because prior to the modern period, where women gained more rights and more equality, Aquinas's disparaging comments regarding women were generally not viewed as problematic. Therefore, his account of sexual difference was not challenged.

including his virtue theory. However, concerning Aquinas's philosophy of woman, she merely notes, "I have nothing to say about Aquinas's generally unfavorable view of women, which expresses the spirit of his age."¹⁰ Similarly, Jean Porter, in her book *The Recovery of Virtue: The Relevance of Aquinas for Christian Ethics*, simply insists that Aquinas is "wrong about the relative mental inferiority of women." Beyond this basic declaration, Porter pays virtually no attention to St. Thomas's philosophy of woman as she attempts to recover his theory of virtue.¹¹

Stump and Porter are not alone in overlooking or dismissing the relationship between St. Thomas's treatment of sexual difference and his understanding of virtue. Their work exemplifies the approach of many contemporary Thomists, who write about virtue ethics but fail even to mention St. Thomas's philosophy of woman or his account of sexual difference.¹²

This position is unacceptable for multiple reasons. Besides overlooking the tension between Aquinas's philosophy of woman and his theory of virtue, it ignores his fundamental insight that sexual difference has a bearing on virtue theory, which focuses less on individual acts and more on the whole human person. Commenting on the importance of sexual difference

¹⁰ Stump, 542.

¹¹ Jean Porter, *The Recovery of Virtue: The Relevance of Aquinas for Christian Ethics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 140.

¹² The published collection of essays titled *The Ethics of Aquinas*, which is edited by Stephen Pope, exemplifies this point. While almost thirty authors make contributions to the volume, only one, Diana Fritz Cates, remarks on "Thomas's problematic attitude toward women's rational capacities." See her article "The Virtue of Temperance," in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 321-329. The quotation is from p. 337, note 53. Cates also remarks on Aquinas's problematic statements regarding women in her article, "Taking Women's Experience Seriously," in *Aquinas and Empowerment: Classical Ethics for Ordinary Lives*, ed. Simon Harak, S.J. (Washington: D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1996), 47-88.

Along with Cates, there are some notable exceptions to this general observation. For example, although his primary focus is not Thomistic virtue ethics, John Grabowski at least asks, "Does moral virtue and its acquisition differ between men and women?" See his work, *Sex and Virtue: An Introduction to Sexual Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 110. Along with Prudence Allen, Kristin Popik, and Pia de Solenni, all of whom will be discussed later in this section, Joseph Hartel also offers an excellent treatment of St. Thomas's philosophy of woman in his book *Femina Ut Imago Dei: In the Integral Feminism of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1993).

for virtue ethics, Grabowski points out that “human persons who acquire and exercise the virtues are necessarily embodied and therefore sexual beings. How one understands this embodiment and the place of sexuality in it is therefore an important question for an account of virtue--whether ancient or modern.”¹³ Yet, for the most part, the question has not only gone unanswered but also unasked.¹⁴

Unlike the first position which considers St. Thomas’s account of sexual difference to be irrelevant, the second position recognizes the importance of Aquinas’s philosophy of woman within his thought but denies that it is problematic or in need of alteration. In her book *Towards an Understanding of Woman as Imago Dei*, Pia de Solenni exemplifies this position.¹⁵ She contends:

Aquinas did not fully develop a philosophy of woman and more often than not he is attributed with a pejorative view of women. Critics base their accusations on his biology which he drew from Aristotle. ‘Woman is a misbegotten man’ is

¹³ Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue*, 96.

¹⁴ The reason that modern Thomistic commentators in general have failed to discuss the relationship between sexual difference and the acquisition virtue is unclear. This omission may be attributable to the fact that the resurgence of interest in Thomistic virtue theory, particularly in America, substantially overlapped with second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. As Kristin Goss notes, scholars and activists, who were involved in this wave of feminism, stressed the equality and sameness of the sexes. See her book, *The Paradox of Gender Equality: How American Women’s Groups Gained and Lost Their Public Voice* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 108.

This way of understanding sexual difference left an indelible mark on contemporary American society and may have consciously or unconsciously influenced those who were involved in the recovery of virtue ethics, leading them to conclude that sexual difference was irrelevant to questions concerning the acquisition and exercise of virtue. For more on tenets of the second wave of feminism and its impact on American culture, see Jennifer Scanlon, “Sexy from the Start: Anticipatory Elements of Second Wave Feminism,” *Women’s Studies* 38, no. 2 (2006): 127-50.

¹⁵ Pia Francesca de Solenni, *Towards an Understanding of Woman as Imago Dei: A Hermeneutic of Aquinas’s Mens Through a Sexually Differentiated Epistemology* (Rome: Edizioni Universita Della Santa Croce, 2003). As the title indicates, de Solenni is concerned primarily with epistemology and not virtue in Aquinas’s thought. Nevertheless, one of her main tasks is to defend Aquinas’s philosophy of woman from those critics who claim that it is androcentric. If she is correct and Aquinas’s philosophy of woman does not present women as inferior to men, then the tension that I have attempted to identify between Aquinas’s account of sexual difference and his theory of virtue does not exist, because men and women would be equal in their ability to obtain and develop both acquired and infused virtue.

generally cited as Aquinas's view. In fact, although he is a solid Aristotelian, Aquinas does not hold with Aristotle on this point.¹⁶

To support her claim, De Solenni draws heavily on the work of Michael Nolan and examines several passages in Aquinas's writings where she believes that he has been misunderstood.¹⁷

She also cites numerous passages in Aquinas's work, where the Angelic Doctor emphasizes that both men and woman are created in the *imago Dei*. Therefore, de Solenni concludes that he does not hold that women are inferior to men.¹⁸ On the contrary, she claims that Aquinas recognizes that women are equal to but different from men. However, according to de Solenni, these differences should be seen as qualities and not defects.¹⁹

While de Solenni presents a well-reasoned and coherent defense of Aquinas's philosophy of woman, her presentation suffers from a few fatal flaws. On the one hand, she relies heavily on the *Summa contra gentiles* and the *Summa theologiae* to construct her case, and therefore, she fails to address or even acknowledge the negative statements that Aquinas's makes concerning women in other writings, particularly in some of his biblical commentaries as well as his commentaries on Aristotle's works.²⁰ This latter omission is even more problematic, because Solenni claims that Aquinas does not follow Aristotle's philosophy of woman.

¹⁶ Ibid., 101.

¹⁷ I dealt extensively with Nolan's argument in chapter 1, so I will not repeat my critique of his argument here.

¹⁸ de Solenni, 108-109.

¹⁹ Ibid., 108.

²⁰ de Solenni does not deal with what Aquinas says about women in his commentary on Aristotle's *Politics* or his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*. De Solenni's failure to consider these texts also adversely affects the way in which she translates and interprets passages for other texts. For more on this deficiency in her work, see note 23.

On the other hand, because she believes that Aquinas's philosophy of woman is rooted almost solely in Scripture, de Solenni focuses heavily on his view that women are created in the *imago Dei*. This leads her to assert that for Aquinas, the sexes are equal, because "there is no difference in the souls of man and woman."²¹ In addition, both men and women possess the same potentiality for holiness. She writes, "In Aquinas's thought, every human being has the same beginning: a potentiality that is a *tabula rasa*."²² While there are differences between the sexes, the most significant and obvious of which is their different bodies, according to de Solenni, this fundamental difference leads to other differences in the ways in which men and women experience the world and perfect their capacity for knowledge.²³

Unfortunately, by concentrating so much on Aquinas's argument that women are created in the *imago Dei*, de Solenni overlooks his dependence on Aristotelian biology. Her esteem for Aquinas's philosophy of woman causes her to explain away the derogatory statements she makes regarding women in the text that she does consider.²⁴ She appears to examine and

²¹ de Solenni, 108.

²² Ibid., 147.

²³ Ibid., 148-69. She is concerned primarily with the relationship between St. Thomas's philosophy of woman and his epistemology.

²⁴ For example, she examines ST I, q. 92, a. 1, ad 2, which reads: *Ad secundum dicendum quod duplex est subiectio. Una servilis, secundum quam praesidens utitur subiecto ad sui ipsius utilitatem et talis subiectio introducta est post peccatum. Est autem alia subiectio oeconomica vel civilis, secundum quam praesidens utitur subiectis ad eorum utilitatem et bonum. Et ista subiectio fuisset etiam ante peccatum, defuisset enim bonum ordinis in humana multitudine, si quidam per alios sapientiores gubernati non fuissent. Et sic ex tali subiectione naturaliter femina subiecta est viro, quia naturaliter in homine magis abundat discretio rationis. Nec inaequalitas hominum excluditur per innocentiae statum, ut infra dicitur.*

According to de Solenni, the typical translation of this passage is inaccurate. The Benziger Brothers edition translates "*in homine magis abundat discretio rationis*" as "in man the discretion of reason predominates." De Solenni, however, contends that this translation is misleading, since Aquinas uses *homine*, which typically refers to humanity or mankind in general, and not *viro*, which exclusively refers to the male sex. Therefore, she maintains that Aquinas is not claiming that reason is more abundant in men than women; he is arguing that reason abounds to a greater extent in mankind. See her complete argument on pp. 92-93.

interpret all of Aquinas's remarks about women through the lens that women are created in the *imago Dei*. Ultimately, this approach blinds her to the problematic aspects of Aquinas's philosophy of woman.²⁵

Furthermore, she omits any discussion of the role that moral virtue plays in enabling the human person to actualize his/her potentiality for Aquinas. If women are naturally more likely than men to be swayed and ruled by their passions, then women begin the moral life with a handicap. Although it is true that each sex possesses the potential for acquiring and growing in

While she correctly points out that *homine* usually (though not always) refers to mankind and not a male human being, her translation remains less plausible than the Benziger translation. The translation that she proposes appears to ignore the first part of the sentence where Aquinas is explaining how women are subject to men. It seems more reasonable to read the second part of the sentence as a continuation of this theme. In the second half of the sentence, Aquinas is merely continuing to explain why men are superior to women. He is not commenting on the superiority of mankind to other creatures.

Furthermore, even though she briefly considers this phrase in light of its context, she overlooks the specific objection to which Aquinas is responding. The objection contends, "Further, subjection and limitation were a result of sin, for to the woman was it said after sin (Genesis 3:16): 'Thou shalt be under the man's power'; and Gregory says that, 'Where there is no sin, there is no inequality.' But woman is naturally of less strength and dignity than man; 'for the agent is always more honorable than the patient,' as Augustine says (Gen. ad lit. xii, 16). Therefore woman should not have been made in the first production of things before sin" (*ST I*, q. 92, a. 1, obj. 2). In his reply, Aquinas draws a distinction between servile subjugation, which accompanied sin, and economic or civil subjugation, which existed even before sin. Before the fall, women were subject to men in the later sense and not the former.

However, he never explicitly rejects the notion that women possess less strength and dignity than men. Given the close connection between dignity and reason in Aquinas's thought and the fact that Aquinas believes that there was inequality even before the fall, it makes sense to translate the phrase "*in homine magis abundat discretio*" as comparing men to women. This translation also seems to be more in line with the statements that Aquinas makes elsewhere concerning women's deficient reason.

²⁵ Curiously, Hartel's work, which also centers on the meaning and importance of women as created in the *imago Dei* in St. Thomas's thought, suffers from this same flaw. Hartel's main objective is to demonstrate that Aquinas's feminism is the "right feminism", and he seems to dismiss outright any critics of Aquinas's philosophy of woman. While he acknowledges that Aquinas's philosophy of woman is not perfect, he contends that feminists who criticize Aquinas "have built a fire on the wrong kind of wood. Such a fire will not burn. The only prejudice lies in their own eyes. They have not understood Thomas, his culture, or his historical period. Thomas has left his critics far behind. And his idea of woman is something very elevated and very beautiful" (3-4). Even though Hartel deals with Aquinas's view that women possess more unruly passions than men, his emphasis on women as the *imago Dei* and his admiration of Aquinas's philosophy of woman prevent him from examining the implications of these unruly passions for women trying to acquire virtue.

virtue, women are not *tabulae rasae*, as de Solenni suggests. When juxtaposed to men, women begin life with weaker reason and stronger passions.²⁶

A third position acknowledges that there is a tension between Aquinas's view of women in the natural order and the supernatural order, and recognizes that this tension is related to his theory of virtue. However, according to proponents of this position, Aquinas resolves this tension by stressing the equalizing power of grace. Both Prudence Allen and Kristin Popik discuss the paradox in Aquinas's philosophy of woman. Popik notes, "[W]hile it is one unified theory, Thomas' philosophy of woman is two-sided, and in such a way that it might appear at first contradictory: somehow (and the determination of exactly how is the aim of this study) woman is both equal to man in nature and inferior; in their relationship she is subject to man but as his equal."²⁷ Popik recognizes that on the surface, there appears to be a conflict between Aquinas's contention that women possess weaker reason and more unruly passions than men, and yet at the same time, like men, women are created in the *imago Dei* with the same capacity to excel in virtue. At first glance, for St. Thomas, women appear to be both equal to and unequal to men.

However, according to Popik, Aquinas can hold these two views of women simultaneously because of the perfecting role of grace. Apart from grace, men and women are unequal, and women will struggle to cultivate the acquired virtues due to their deficient reason and unruly passions. With the help of grace, women are made equal to men. Because it heals

²⁶ Later in this chapter, I contend that based on Aquinas's schema, women not only begin human life with weaker reason and stronger passions, but they enter the life of grace with these same deficiencies.

²⁷ Kristin Popik, "The Philosophy of Woman of St. Thomas Aquinas, Part One: The Nature of Woman," *Faith and Reason* 4 (1978): 1.

them of their natural deficiencies, women are just as capable as men of cultivating the infused virtues and growing in holiness. Discussing the role of grace in St. Thomas's philosophy of women, Popik writes, "The moral inferiority of women is only in the natural sphere; it is overcome by grace, so that once grace enters the picture one cannot speak any longer of woman's inferiority to men in spiritual strength."²⁸

Even though she uses slightly different terminology, Allen concurs with Popik. Allen argues that Aquinas's philosophy of woman includes both "sex polarity" and "sex complementarity." Allen uses sex polarity to refer to accounts of sexual difference that see women as significantly different from and inferior to men, while sex complementarity, in her schema, denotes theories that view the sexes as different but equal.²⁹ Like Popik, she maintains that Aquinas's account of sexual difference moves from sex polarity on the level of nature to sex complementarity on the level of grace.³⁰

Within Aquinas's account of sexual differences, which contains both sex polarity and sex complementarity, one can identify two positions on women's capacity for virtue. On the one hand, St. Thomas follows Aristotle, who sees women as inferior to men with regard to virtue. Allen remarks, "For Thomas, women appear not to be prone to acquiring the cardinal virtues of continence, wisdom or courage because they are incapable of ordering their emotions. Aquinas concludes that women participate in the cardinal virtues, but in a lesser way than do men."³¹

²⁸ Ibid., 33.

²⁹ Prudence Allen makes this same observation in her work *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution 750 BC – AD 1250* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1985), 3.

³⁰ Ibid., 407.

³¹ Ibid., 402. Here Allen uses the terms "continence" and "temperance" interchangeably, and she does the same for "wisdom" and "prudence".

However, as Allen points out, this is not the case where the theological virtues are concerned. She explains:

After a consideration of woman's relation to the natural virtues, there is also the question of her relation to the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. In the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas defines a theological virtue as one that is said 'to be theological from having God as the object to which it adheres.' Since these virtues are in part due to the direct infusion of grace, it would follow that woman's nature would in no way be limited in relation to their practice. Therefore, in a similar way to that in which woman in the category of wisdom was able to receive infused wisdom, woman in the category of virtue was able to live out the theological virtues.³²

Because men and women share the same nature and since grace perfects nature, Allen insists that "female saints could be as perfect as male saints."³³ Then she goes on to conclude that "even though sex polarity may be the framework in which the potential for actualization of the two sexes was explained, the final result of this actualization opened to a sex complementarity."³⁴

It is not completely clear what Allen means when she identifies sex polarity as the framework in which the potential for actualization was explained. While she could mean that there is some sex polarity within the life of grace, it seems more likely that she is referring St. Thomas's comments about men and women on the level of nature. In other words, without

³² Ibid., 407. It should be noted that Allen does not mention the infused moral virtues, when she discusses the virtues infused in men and women by God. Instead, she focuses on the theological virtues. This omission can be traced to her general description of St. Thomas's theory of virtue. According to Allen, St. Thomas only discusses two types of virtue: cardinal and theological. By cardinal, Allen means the acquired cardinal virtues of temperance, courage, justice, and prudence. Allen overlooks the fact that the theological virtues do not exhaust the category of infused virtues for Aquinas. In his theory, the acquired moral virtues have infused counterparts. See *ST*, I-II, q. 63, a. 3.

Presumably, even if she acknowledged these additional infused virtues, Allen's analysis would remain unchanged. Like the theological virtues, the infused moral virtues come to men and women through a "direct infusion of grace." Therefore, Allen could still contend that "woman's nature would in no way be limited in relation to their practice."

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

grace, there is sex polarity, because men and women do not possess the same potentiality for actualization. With the help of grace, within Aquinas's schema, there is sex complementarity, because both sexes have the potential for holiness and even sainthood.

For both Allen and Popik, Aquinas appears to correct his androcentric account of sexual difference as he moves from the natural to the supernatural. With the transition, he seems to leave behind his misogyny and Aristotle's biology. Even though Aquinas appears to offer two different accounts of sexual difference, he does not. According to Allen and Popik, he has one philosophy of woman, which is coherent given the distinction that he draws between the natural order and the supernatural order. Considering Aquinas's theory of virtue, Allen and Popik grant that it is logical for Aquinas to hold simultaneously that women are unequal to men in their capacity to acquire virtue without grace, but the sexes are equal in their ability to obtain and grow in infused virtue due to the power of grace. While the authors do not condone Aquinas's derogatory statements about women, they applaud where he ends up--defending the equality of the sexes and recognizing women's potential to excel in virtue.

While these three positions evaluate the importance of the relationship between Aquinas's philosophy of woman and his theory of virtue differently, they each share a common flaw. Each claims that the way in which Aquinas perceives women's reason and passions apart from grace becomes irrelevant in his theory of virtue once women enter the life of grace. In the first two positions, this claim is more implied than expressed. For authors such as Stump, who can be aligned with the first position, Aquinas's account of sexual difference has no bearing on this theory of virtue. Therefore, how Aquinas understands women's capacity for virtue on the natural level has no impact on their ability to cultivate the infused virtues. The second position

leads to the same conclusion. While scholars in this group pay much more attention to Aquinas's account of sexual difference, they tend to ignore the negative ways in which he characterizes women on the natural level, because they are more concerned with his conviction that women are also created in the *imago Dei*. These authors emphasize the equality of the sexes in Aquinas's writing and downplay his assertions that women cannot control their passions and have weak reason. Since they whitewash these aspects of Aquinas's philosophy of woman, they fail to consider how these deficiencies could impact women in the life of grace.

The third position, which is reflected in the work of Allen and Popik, provides the most comprehensive examination of Aquinas's philosophy of woman. These authors acknowledge that there is a tension in Aquinas's thought between how he views women on the level of nature and how he views them on the supernatural level, particularly when it comes to their capacity for virtue. Unfortunately, they believe that Aquinas resolves this tension. Popik and Allen maintain that it is coherent for Aquinas, on his own terms, to hold that women's weak reason and unruly passions do not affect their ability to cultivate the infused virtues. Given the distinction that he makes between the acquired and infused virtues, they see it as logical for Aquinas to argue that the sexes are unequal without grace but equal with it.

I strongly disagree. I am arguing that Aquinas's view of sexual difference gives rise to internal inconsistencies within his own account of virtue that cannot be resolved without altering his account of sexual difference. The crux of the problem lies in the nature/grace issue. More specifically, regardless of how one understands the impact of grace on nature from a Thomistic perspective, with respect to infused virtue, Aquinas clearly states that grace does not completely

eradicate the influence or pull of an acquired vice within the person.³⁵ After one receives the infused virtues, the full-blown vice no longer remains. However, a vice-like disposition may still reside in the individual, which s/he will struggle to resist and overcome. In his assessment of vice, Aquinas is a realist. Grace destroys the vice, but after an individual has spent an extended period of time building a vice, then some residue of that vice will remain, at least in the beginning of the Christian life.

What are the implications of this position for Aquinas's account of sexual difference? For Aquinas, sexual difference makes a difference when it comes to the acquisition of acquired virtue, but it has no impact on the infused virtues. By maintaining that the sexes are equal in the life of grace, he is contending that women's deficient reason and unruly passions do not matter for their reception of and growth in infused virtues. This position appears to be untenable.

If a vicious disposition can remain and affect the person after the infusion of grace, then it would seem that women's weak reason and their recalcitrant passions are not abruptly wiped away by grace. Like the vice, part of these traits must remain in the life of grace based on Aquinas's own description of how grace affects vices. Aquinas even acknowledges that "passions inclining to evil are not completely taken away by either acquired or infused virtue."³⁶ Furthermore, while these disabilities will not impact women's reception of the infused virtues, they may continue to hinder them in a manner similar to the way in which what is left of the vice continues to disturb the individual even after s/he receives the infused virtues. Just as the

³⁵ Aquinas's contention that grace does not completely eradicate an acquired vice seems to align with his broader principle that "grace does not destroy nature but perfects it." See *ST I*, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2.

³⁶ *De virtutibus in communi*, a. 10, ad 14: *passiones ad malum inclinantes non totaliter tolluntur neque per virtutem acquisitam neque per virtutem infusam, nisi forte in iraculose*. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of this text are from *Disputed Questions on Virtue*, trans. Ralph McInerney (Sound Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 1999).

Venerable Matt Talbot struggled against what remained of his vice of drunkenness after his conversion, women will struggle to control their passions.³⁷

This analysis obviously is predicated on establishing a parallel between a vice and the disabilities that Aquinas attributes to women. Remember that for St. Thomas, a vice is a bad habit, which inhibits the practice of virtue. The habit is formed in the person through repeated actions over a long period of time, and like a virtue, the vice becomes a kind of second nature that disposes one to act a particular way.

My contention is that the characteristics that Aquinas ascribes to women closely resemble a vice. However, before considering the similarities between women's natural defects and acquired contrary dispositions, it is important to note that there are significant discontinuities between the two as well. First, they have different origins. While vicious dispositions are acquired through repeated actions and completely contrary to human nature, the defects which Aquinas attributes to women are innate. Women do not acquire them; rather, they are born with them.³⁸ Second and relatedly, there seems to be a different amount of personal responsibility and culpability involved. Women do not choose to have defective reason and unruly passions. However, vices, whether they are found in a man or a woman, are the result of the individual's own choices.

Despite these dissimilarities, acquired vice and feminine natural defects still seem to impact the moral life in a similar way. Like a vice, these traits inhibit the cultivation and

³⁷ See the story and discussion of Matt Talbot from chapter 1.

³⁸ It is important to recall hear the distinction between *natura particularis* and *natura universalis* from chapter 1. On the level of *natura universalis*, women are intended by God. However, on the level of *natura particularis*, they are misbegotten, defective males and therefore inferior to men in several ways, including the strength of their reason. See note 41 in chapter 1.

exercise of virtue. For example, Aquinas contends that a moderate amount of the passion of fear is good, because it indicates that one understands the magnitude of a situation and can push a person to seek suitable counsel in order to make a virtuous decision.³⁹ However, if the passion of fear is excessive in the individual, it prevents one from seeking counsel and hinders action.⁴⁰

According to Aquinas, fear is not only a passion, but it is sometimes also a vice. Fear is contrary to the virtue of fortitude, which enables one to stand firm for the good even in the face of grave danger.⁴¹ Therefore, one who possesses the vice of fear would repeatedly turn away from the good in the face of grave danger. Unlike the passion of fear, the vice of fear includes the will. Distinguishing the two fears, Aquinas writes:

Now sometimes this inordinateness of fear is confined to the sensitive appetites, without the accession of the rational appetite's consent: and then it cannot be a mortal, but only a venial sin. But sometimes this inordinateness of fear reaches to the rational appetite which is called the will, which deliberately shuns something against the dictate of reason: and this inordinateness of fear is sometimes a mortal, sometimes a venial sin. For if a man through fear of the danger of death or of any other temporal evil is so disposed as to do what is forbidden, or to omit what is commanded by the Divine law, such fear is a mortal sin: otherwise it is a venial sin.⁴²

In any given situation considered in isolation, it would be impossible to determine whether an individual possessed the vice of fear or merely was overcome with the passion of fear. However, in either case, it is essential to note that fear, whether it is the vice of fear or

³⁹ *ST*, I-II, q. 44, a. 2, ad 1. It is beyond the scope of this example to examine all the different types of fear and to evaluate how they inhibit or help us. For more a more comprehensive treatment of this subject, see Rebecca Konyndyk DeYong, "Holy Fear," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 86 (2012): 1-22.

⁴⁰ *ST*, I-II, q. 44, a. 2, ad 1; *ST*, I-II, q. 44, a. 4, corpus.

⁴¹ *ST*, II-II, q. 123, a. 2, corpus.

⁴² *ST*, II-II, q. 123, a. 3, corpus.

passion of fear, prevents one from acting courageously. Each causes the person to turn away from the virtuous action.

What do these observations about fear have to do with sexual difference? On the one hand, if women suffer from unruly passions and weak reason, which Aquinas maintains, then they will have a difficult time bringing their passions under the control of reason, and therefore, they will consistently fall prey to immoderate passion. Hence, their passions, such as fear, will cause them to turn away from the good. Remember that from Aquinas's perspective, women are born this way; they begin life with this moral handicap.

Men, on the other hand, do not begin life with this moral handicap.⁴³ Like women, individual men may fall prey to their passions, or individual men may acquire a vice, like the vice of fear. These vices also cause them to turn away from the good. However, on the whole, as a gender, they do not suffer from weak reason and unruly passions. Through their actions, they acquire moral deficiencies; they are not born with moral defects.⁴⁴

St. Paul likens the Christian life to a race. In that race, everyone stumbles. Of course, different people struggle with different vices and temptations, but everyone struggles with and against sin. Then, the question is: Does everyone start the race at the same point? According to St. Thomas, the answer is no. Someone, for example, who has acquired the vice of drunkenness, such a Matthew Talbot, will struggle more, at least in the beginning, than someone who possesses no vices. In a similar way, women's moral defects will inhibit their cultivation and exercise of virtue. In fact, based on Aquinas's description, these qualities appear to be even more

⁴⁴ I recognize that all human beings, male and female, are born with original sin. However, I am referring to the moral defects or vices that one acquires through habitually bad actions.

ensconced in women than a vice. Whereas habits become like a second nature, these deficiencies are innate in women. By making them incontinent and placing them under the control of their emotions, these disabilities dispose women to act in ways which are often governed by their passions and irrational.⁴⁵

In addition to arguing that some residue of a vice may exist after the infusion of grace, Aquinas also insists that grace does not heal all natural deficiencies, even those which may not be the result of vice. In Aquinas's discussion of prudence, he asks "whether prudence is in all who have grace?"⁴⁶ The first objection reads, "It would seem that prudence is not in all who have grace. Prudence requires diligence, that one may foresee aright what has to be done. But many who have grace have not this diligence."⁴⁷ In his response, rather than refuting the objection, Aquinas draws a distinction between two kinds of diligence in order to permit the objection and to allow for the kind of diligence that the graced do not possess. He writes:

Diligence is twofold: one is merely sufficient with regard to things necessary for salvation; and such diligence is given to all who have grace, whom 'His unction teacheth of all things' (1 John 2:27). There is also another diligence which is more than sufficient, whereby a man is able to make provision both for himself and for others, not only in matters necessary for salvation, but also in all things relating to human life; and such diligence as this is not in all who have grace.⁴⁸

While Aquinas does not clarify why those in the life of grace may lack the kind of natural diligence which does not pertain to matters of salvation, he is clear that grace does not

⁴⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia Libri Politicorum*, in *Opera omnia*, vol. 48 (Rome: Leonine Commission, 1971), I, ch. 10, no. 7. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of this text are from *Commentary on Aristotle's "Politics"*, trans. Richard Regan (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 2007).

⁴⁶ *ST*, II-II, q. 47, a. 14.

⁴⁷ *ST*, II-II, q. 47, a. 14, obj. 1. Aquinas uses the Latin word *industria*, which is translated here as diligence.

⁴⁸ *ST*, II-II, q. 47, a. 14, ad 1.

necessarily heal the Christian of this deficiency.⁴⁹ Whether the absence of this diligence is due to vice or some form of natural defect, it is not overcome by grace.⁵⁰

Thus, there are two clear places in Aquinas's thought where he argues that grace does not completely rectify moral deficiencies. On the one hand, Aquinas recognizes that the infusion of grace and the virtues destroys vice. However, since the individual acquires a vice by habitually performing bad actions, the infusion of grace does not magically rid the individual of any trace of the vice. Rather, grace explodes the vice, but fragments of it still remain in the individual. Hopefully, as in the case of Matthew Talbot, these fragments are removed over time as the person grows in holiness and more fully participates in the infused virtues. On the other hand, Aquinas acknowledges that a person may lack diligence, which is part of prudence, in temporal matters. Again, Aquinas is clear that the infusion of grace, specifically prudence, does not heal this deficiency. Regardless of whether or not this deficiency is a result of a natural defect or vice, Aquinas suggests that some form of diligence can remain absent after one receives the theological and moral virtues.

Since grace does not necessarily eradicate or completely heal all of one's moral deficiencies, then it seems that women's defective reasoning and unruly passions would also continue to exist to some extent, at least when they first enter the life of grace. Recall that

⁴⁹ This does not eliminate the possibility that the Christian, through the grace of God, could grow in prudence and thus obtain the diligence in civic matters which s/he previously lacked. See William Mattison, "Can Christians Possess the Acquired Moral Virtues?", *Theological Studies* 72 (2011): 582.

⁵⁰ As I mentioned in chapter 1, there is an ongoing debate concerning the relationship between acquired and infused virtue. While this controversy is beyond the scope of this project, it is important to note that in part, this debate centers on how the question of how human beings rid themselves of the deficiencies which may still exist after the infusion of the moral and theological virtues. If some of man's natural or acquired deficiencies remain, then several questions arise about the importance of cultivating the acquired moral virtues in the Christian life, the completeness of the infused virtues, and how these two kinds of virtue are related. For more on this debate and these questions, see Mattison, "Can Christians Possess the Acquired Cardinal Virtues?", 558-85.

Aquinas associates women with children and persons with mental disabilities, because he maintains that they all have defects in their reason.⁵¹ However, in most cases, the grace of baptism does not suddenly make a child mentally mature or remove the disability of one who has a mental handicap. Even after they enter the Christian life, these defects usually remain. Likewise, grace would not heal women's weak and deficient reason or unruly passions; it seems that these typically would persist after the infusion of grace, unless they are miraculously removed.

Based on Aquinas's framework, one must conclude that while women may become holy as Talbot did, men and women do not start out as equals in the life of grace.⁵² If all other things are equal, on St. Thomas' terms, women enter the Christian life with a disability that men do not have. They still possess what remains of their natural deficiencies, which grace has healed partially but not completely. Like men, women still can achieve sainthood, but it will be more difficult for them to grow in holiness.

Therefore, it seems impossible for Aquinas to hold that without grace women are less capable than men of living virtuously, but with the help of grace, they are just as capable. The deficient reason and unruly passions that he attributes to women will affect their ability to cultivate the infused virtues. Thus, there is an unresolved tension in Aquinas's work between his account of sexual difference and his theory of virtue, and this conflict is rooted in his reliance on Aristotelian biology. In order to resolve this internal incoherence, Aquinas needs a new account

⁵¹ *ST*, II-II, q. 70, a. 3, corpus.

⁵² Those scholars, such as Allen and Popik who imply that women's natural defects do not carry over into the life of grace in Aquinas's schema will have to reconcile this position with Aquinas's stance that grace does not rectify all moral deficiencies. In doing so, it seems incumbent upon them to draw a meaningful distinction between the natural defects that Aquinas assigns to women and the kind of moral imperfections which he maintains carry over into the Christian life.

of sexual difference, which focuses more on the experience of women and recognizes their equality with men. At the same time, this new account should respect Aquinas's most basic insight, which is that women and men are different.⁵³ Gilligan provides an account of sexual difference that achieves both of these ends.

Theology and Psychology

Before examining how Gilligan's account of sexual difference can supplement Thomistic virtue theory, it is important to recognize the challenges posed by bringing a 13th century Roman Catholic philosopher and theologian into conversation with a 20th century feminist developmental psychologist. While they are operating in vastly divergent cultures replete with social, political, and religious differences, some of the relevant differences between these two thinkers epitomize the issues found in the tense and fragile relationship between theology and psychology in general. In 1996, Paul Vitz remarked, "For some twenty-five years, many Christian psychologists have been seriously wrestling with the issue of integrating Christianity and psychology. Some of these psychologists think, of course, that these two disciplines cannot be integrated and that any such attempt will subvert the orthodoxy of Christianity."⁵⁴ The past fifteen years have done little to erase the concerns which Vitz describes.

⁵³ It is important to respect this fundamental insight of Aquinas for two reasons. First, as I attempted to show in the last chapter, it is objectively true. Men and women are different. Not only is this Gilligan's position, but her conclusion is supported by studies in several different fields. Second, Aquinas clearly believes that sexual difference is intended by God, and he affirms the goodness of the body throughout his work, insisting that man is a combination of body and soul and arguing for the resurrection of the body. See *ST I*, q. 74, a. 4 and *ST Suppl.*, q. 75, respectively. Claiming that men and women are not different betrays these aspects of Thomas's thought and inevitably creates a virtue theory that ignores the body and the significance of sexual difference.

⁵⁴ Paul Vitz, "Catholic Presuppositions for a Christian Psychology: Preliminary Remarks," *The Catholic Social Science Review* 1 (1996): 241. Martian and Diedre Bobgan are among those critics who see Christianity and

In part, this hesitation to integrate psychological insights into theology seems to be rooted in the recognition that the discipline of psychology contains assumptions and presuppositions that in some instances are at odds with the Christian worldview.⁵⁵ Terry Cooper and Don Browning classify modern psychologies as “quasi-religions.”⁵⁶ According to Cooper and Browning, “While full-blown religions contain narratives, worldviews, rituals, ethics, and a community of celebration, quasi-religions also contain a meta-narrative and worldview.”⁵⁷ Psychology is no different. In its worldview, secular psychology focuses on the individual; traditionally, God is either omitted, or He is openly attacked.⁵⁸ Typically, there is little discussion of sin, moral norms, or the meaning of human freedom.⁵⁹ The emphasis tends to be on what will make the individual feel happy, and therefore, therapists tend to allow patients to determine for themselves what behavior is moral and what is not. Thus, for example, in the area

psychology as completely incompatible. While they have published numerous works on the subject, their earliest and most foundational is *The Psychological Way, The Spiritual Way* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1978).

⁵⁵ I recognize that the term Christian worldview is extremely broad, and I acknowledge that it encompasses several different Christian churches who hold similar as well as divergent beliefs. I am not attempting to lump all of these together. However, I do believe that there some basic, common tenets of faith that all of these groups share, including the belief in God, grace, and sin.

⁵⁶ Terry Cooper and Don Browning, “Psychology, Religion, and Critical Hermeneutics: Comments on Reber, Slife and Whoolery, Nelson, and Richardson,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 34. 3 (2006): 250.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁵⁸ It should be remembered that Sigmund Freud, who is considered by many to be the father of psychology, was hostile toward religion. He argues that God is an illusion created by man in order to alleviate his fears of nature and the unknown future. See his books, *The Future of an Illusion*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1975); and *Civilization and its Discontents*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961).

⁵⁹ Solomon Schimmel’s book on the seven deadly sins is an exception to this generalization. While I disagree with some of Schimmel’s conclusions, he, nevertheless, attempts to incorporate Jewish and Christian insights on sin into the practice and study of psychology. See his book, *The Seven Deadly Sins: Jewish, Christian, and Classical Reflections on Human Psychology* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1997).

of sexual ethics, most secular psychologists tend to accept and even support pre-marital sex, abortion, and homosexual behavior.⁶⁰

In light of their clashing worldviews, how can one make connections between psychology and theology while recognizing differences between the two disciplines? First, it is important to recognize that even though psychology contains a worldview and meta-narrative, both are rather constricted. In other words, as Cooper and Browning point out, “There are aspects of reality beyond its [psychology] investigatory scope.”⁶¹ Since Christianity offers a more comprehensive worldview, it is possible to incorporate some of the findings from psychology into theological truths, approaches, and arguments while avoiding clashes between the two worldviews. Specific findings or approaches in psychology either do not touch upon theological truths or may enhance our understanding of them.⁶² Second, when the two disciplines do conflict, it is necessary to keep in mind that, in this project, psychology is being

⁶⁰ Vitz, 243. There are numerous examples that support Vitz’s claim. For example, even though Schimmel spends an entire chapter in his book discussing the emotional and psychological dangers of lust, he also recounts how he encourages one woman to masturbate and engage in premarital sex as part of her therapy. He writes, “I was convinced that my client was comfortable with engaging in premarital sex, and I had no qualms about helping her prepare emotionally for it.” See pp. 126-28. The quotation is from p. 127.

Like Schimmel, Gilligan also adopts a permissive sexual ethic. She writes, “Released from the passivity and reticence of a sexuality that binds them in dependence, women can question with Freud what it is that they want and can assert their own answers to that question” (*In a Different Voice*, 70). In her famous “abortion study”, Gilligan follows twenty-nine women from the ages of 15-33, who are considering having an abortion. While Gilligan acknowledges that abortion is a complex and difficult moral decision for women, she never condemns the act and seems supportive of whatever decision the women in her study make. She is not concerned with the morality of abortion *per se* but with understanding the factors that women consider when they are deciding whether or not to have an abortion. See *In a Different Voice*, 71-97.

⁶¹ Cooper and Browning, 250.

⁶² Fr. Benedict Groeschel’s work exemplifies how psychology and spirituality can be brought together to enhance one another as well as pastoral care. See, for example, his books *Spiritual Passages: The Psychology of Spiritual Development “For Those Who Seek”* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1984); *The Courage to Be Chaste* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988); and *In the Presence of Our Lord: the History, Theology, and Psychology of Eucharistic Devotion* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1997). William Kraft, a Catholic psychologist, provides another example of how psychology and spirituality can be integrated. See, for example, his article, “A Psycho-Spiritual View of Masturbation,” *Human Development* 3.2 (Summer 1982), 39-45.

incorporated into Christian theology and not vice versa. From the Christian perspective, “psychological methods of inquiry, however valuable they may be, must not be allowed to be the final arbiter of all truth.”⁶³ Empirical data and human experience does not carry the same weight as Scripture and Tradition.⁶⁴

How do these two principles guide this project? On the one hand, even though this project brings Christian theology and developmental psychology into conversation, it privileges the former over the later. Thus, the primary aim of this project is to integrate Gilligan’s account of sexual difference into Thomistic virtue theory. To this end, it extracts, examines, and attempts to integrate only specific portions of Gilligan’s thought which are related to but independent of other aspects of her work. For example, her account of sexual difference is not inextricably linked to her permissive sexual ethic. The question of whether or not men and women should engage in premarital sex is a separate question from whether or not they approach moral reasoning differently. Each of these questions can be answered separately, and one can defend Gilligan’s conclusions concerning the later while disagreeing with her about the former. On the other hand, there are points where relevant parts of Gilligan’s work do conflict with St. Thomas’s thought. However, these conflicts are due mainly to St. Thomas’s dependence on Aristotelian biology, which influences his philosophy of woman. Modifying Aquinas’s account

⁶³ Cooper and Browning, 250.

⁶⁴ By placing Scripture and Tradition above empirical data and human experience, my approach in this project differs substantially from other Catholic theologians, such as Margaret Farley, Charles Curran, Michael Lawler, and Todd Salzman, and Lisa Sowle Cahill, whose approaches to Christian ethics utilize versions of the Wesleyan quadrilateral and prioritize experience. Cahill, for example, argues that there are four complementary sources that should inform Christian ethics: foundational texts, tradition, philosophy, and human experience/empirical data. While Cahill suggests that all of these should have influence on Christian ethics, of these four sources, human experience takes precedence over the other three sources, which carry relatively equal weight in her work. See her article, “Sexuality and Christian Ethics: How to Proceed,” in *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection*, eds. James Nelson and Sandra Longfellow (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 19-27, esp. p. 22.

of sexual difference with Gilligan's insights does not elevate psychology over Scripture, Tradition, or dogma. These remain authoritative. It modifies an archaic view of women, which is rooted in an antiquated biology, with a contemporary account of sexual difference that is rooted in empirical data.⁶⁵

Men and Women Becoming Virtuous

At first glance, Aquinas and Gilligan appear to offer radically different and incompatible accounts of sexual difference. Following Aristotle, Aquinas holds men to be superior to women on the natural order, and apart from grace, he insists that women will struggle to acquire virtue. Even though he holds that men and women are both created in the *imago Dei*, his philosophy of woman condemns women to a life of incontinence in the natural order. Conversely, Gilligan, whose contemporary account of sexual difference relies on human experience and empirical data, emphasizes the equality of the sexes, where men and women are equal but not the same.⁶⁶ She stresses that the sexes approach moral decisions from two different but equally valuable moral ideologies. While women tend to adopt an ethic of care, men typically rely on an ethic of rights.

⁶⁵ I acknowledge here, as I did in the last chapter, that Gilligan's theory is based on empirical data, but her reading of the data is not beyond dispute.

⁶⁶ Gilligan is accused by some of arguing that women are superior (rather than equal) to men. De Solenni, for example, characterizes her work as "reverse polarity feminism of difference," where the sexes are seen as different but men are viewed as inferior. De Solenni argues, "Gilligan does not explicitly claim that women are superior to men; but such a conclusion is implicit in the differences she attributes to each." See her work, *Towards an Understanding of Woman*, 40-2. The quotations are from p. 40.

De Solenni rightly observes that Gilligan never explicitly elevates women over men in her book *In a Different Voice*. In fact, Gilligan never explicitly makes this claim in any book or article, because this is not her position. Unfortunately, in her brief treatment of Gilligan's work, de Solenni overlooks Gilligan's vision of moral maturity, which stresses that the sexes can learn from one another. Gilligan argues that "male and female voices typically speak of the importance of different truths, the former of the role of separation as it defines and empowers the self, the latter of the ongoing process of attachment that creates and sustains the human community" (*In a Different Voice*, 156).

At this point, it would be easy to conclude that Gilligan's account of sexual difference is correct, and Aquinas's account is wrong. Given this conclusion, one approach would be to merely substitute Gilligan's theory of sexual difference into Thomistic virtue ethics. Like changing a light bulb, one could simply take out Aquinas's philosophy of woman and insert Gilligan's account, which insists upon the equality of the sexes, into Aquinas's theory of virtue.

Unfortunately, this approach is unsatisfactory and deficient for two reasons. First, it presumes that Aquinas and Gilligan have nothing in common. It overlooks the fact that their accounts of sexual difference have some striking similarities. These similarities provide points of contact where Gilligan's theory can be used to modify Aquinas's philosophy of woman, while respecting some of his basic insights about sexual difference.

For example, it is important to recognize that each author argues that the sexes are not the same; men and women are different both physically and mentally. Aquinas and Gilligan both conclude that men and women think differently, even though they draw that conclusion based on very different premises. For Aquinas, this conclusion is tied to women's weak reason. According to Aquinas, men and women possess the same human nature and reason, but women's reason is impaired and overwhelmed by their unruly passions.⁶⁷ For Gilligan, this conclusion is connected to the way in the female identity is formed. Women, who define their identity through relationships of intimacy and care, tend to be guided by empathy and compassion in their moral decision-making rather than abstract principles, which often inform men's moral judgments.⁶⁸

Second, this simplistic approach presumes that the theory of a 20th century feminist psychologist can merely be inserted into Aquinas' thought and replace his account of sexual

⁶⁷ *ST*, II-II, q. 156, a. 1, ad 1.

⁶⁸ Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 164-65.

difference. However, Gilligan's conclusions and the language that she uses to express them do not fit so easily into Aquinas's broader conception of the moral life. Most notably, there is nothing comparable in St. Thomas's thought to Gilligan's concept of an ethic of care and an ethic of justice. Certainly, his vision of the moral life includes justice, which is both an acquired and infused virtue, as well as charity, which is at the center of the Christian life, but these virtues are not different moral voices or modes of moral reasoning in his thought. Furthermore, these virtues are not isolated. While they make-up an essential part of the moral life, they are intimately connected to other virtues, such as prudence and temperance.

With these differences in mind, how can Gilligan's insights be incorporated into Aquinas's thought? One point of intersection between Aquinas's work and Gilligan's account of sexual difference is the role that the passions play in the moral life. Even though the passions are discussed far less than the virtues among modern Thomistic commentators, for Aquinas, the passions have a significant impact on the moral life and cultivation of virtue.⁶⁹ His treatise on the passions occupies a prominent place in the *Summa*, which speaks to their importance in his thought and the role that they play in the moral life.⁷⁰ Situated in the *prima secundae* immediately after his discussion of the will and human action and prior to his lengthy discussion

⁶⁹ This lacuna in Thomistic scholarship is being filled by some recent works. For more detailed treatments on the role of the passions in Aquinas's thought, see Robert Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions: A Study of Summa Theologiae Ia2ae 22-48* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Diana Fritz-Cates, *Aquinas on the Emotions: A Religious-Ethical Inquiry* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009); Nicholas E. Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010).

⁷⁰ Elisabeth Uffenheimer-Lippens draws attention to the location of the treatise within the broader framework of the *prima secundae*. See her article, "Rationalized Passion and Passionate Rationality: Thomas Aquinas on the Relation Between Reason and the Passions," *The Review of Metaphysics* 56 (March 2003): 529-31.

of virtue, the treatise contains twenty-seven questions, in which St. Thomas discusses eleven passions.⁷¹

In order to explain the general relationship between the passions and reason, Aquinas juxtaposes their relationship to the one between the soul and the body. Following Aristotle, he insists that “the body obeys the soul blindly without any contradiction.”⁷² However, this is not the case with the irascible and concupiscible powers, the source of the passions. Unlike the body, they do not follow reason blindly. Whereas reason lords over the body like a slave, it rules these powers in a political manner; they are like free men “who in some respect have a will of their own.”⁷³

As “free men,” the passions can participate in and thus be governed by reason, or they can defy and overwhelm it. Writing on Aquinas’ view of the passions, Paul Gondreau remarks that “Aquinas’s position falls between the two extremes we see frequently proposed in the history of philosophical thought, the one excluding emotion from moral action and the other identifying emotion with moral duty as such.”⁷⁴ Navigating between the Stoicism and Epicureanism, Aquinas states, “The passions of the soul, in so far as they are contrary to the

⁷¹ *ST*, I-II, q. 23, a. 4, corpus. Aquinas specifically names only eleven passions: love, hatred, desire, delight (pleasure), joy, sorrow, hope, despair, fear, daring, and anger. Peter King points out that at least some of the passions on the list should be viewed more as categories. For example, rage, annoyance, and irritation are all subsumed under anger for St. Thomas. St. Thomas, therefore, recognizes that there are different kinds of anger with respect to intensity but not essence. For more on the adequacy of Aquinas’s taxonomy, see Peter King, “Aquinas on the Passions,” in *Thomas Aquinas: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Brian Davies (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 361-2.

⁷² *ST*, I-II, q. 56, a. 4, ad 3.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Paul Gondreau, “The Passions and the Moral Life: Appreciating the Originality of Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 71 (2007): 429-50. For more how Aquinas understands the relationship between the passions and reason, see Uffenheimer-Lippens, 525-58.

order of reason, incline us to sin: but in so far as they are controlled by reason, they pertain to virtue.”⁷⁵

On the one hand, passions can negatively influence reason and prevent one from acting virtuously. Aquinas describes various ways that the passions can contravene reason. First, the passions can blind reason and completely overwhelm it.⁷⁶ In this case, the person could be described as “blinded by rage” or “being out of his mind” with anger (or some other passion).⁷⁷ St. Thomas compares the person in this state to irrational animals, who follow their passions out of necessity and without reflection.

It is rare that the passions engulf reason to this extent, but there is a second and more common way in which the passions can negatively affect reason. Aquinas writes:

Sometimes, however, the reason is not entirely engrossed by the passion, so that the judgment of reason retains, to a certain extent, its freedom: and thus the movement of the will remains in a certain degree. Accordingly in so far as the reason remains free, and not subject to the passion, the will's movement, which also remains, does not tend of necessity to that whereto the passion inclines it.⁷⁸

In this instance, since the person remains free, s/he maintains the ability to choose to follow the passion or not. For example, if one feels the desire to consume an excessive amount delicious food, then reason can control and moderate this urge or follow it.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ *ST*, I-II, q. 24, a. 2, ad 3.

⁷⁶ *ST*, I-II, q. 10, a. 3, corpus.

⁷⁷ King, 370.

⁷⁸ *ST*, I-II, q. 10, a. 3, corpus.

⁷⁹ Uffenheimer-Lippens, 549. Uffenheimer-Lippens bases this example on *ST*, II-II, q. 141, a. 3, where St. Thomas is discussing the virtue of temperance. See also *ST*, I-II, q. 33, a. 3, corpus.

Finally, Aquinas explains other ways that the passions, particularly pleasure, may hinder the use of reason, even if the passion is not contrary to reason. He argues that passion may distract reason by fixating its attention on a particular good to the exclusion of others.⁸⁰ Similarly, the bodily changes that accompany passions, specifically the passion of pleasure, can fetter reason. Aquinas gives the example of drunkard, whose use of reason is fettered by bodily disturbances.⁸¹

On the other hand, the passions do not always interfere with or hinder reason. They can also participate in it and even increase the moral goodness of an act.⁸² St. Thomas maintains that it belongs “to the perfection of moral good, that man should be moved unto good, not only in respect of his will, but also in respect of his sensitive appetite; according to Psalm 83:3: “My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God”: where by “heart” we are to understand the intellectual appetite, and by “flesh” the sensitive appetite.”⁸³ While Aquinas makes it clear that it is better for one to perform a moral action out of a judgment of reason than out of passion, he insists that it is best if a moral action includes both reason and the appropriate passion.⁸⁴ For example, if one acts justly, it is more morally praiseworthy that one takes pleasure in doing so rather than feeling reluctant or even sorrowful. According to Aquinas, the presence of the

⁸⁰ *ST*, I-II, q. 33, a. 3, corpus.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* Elsewhere Aquinas also notes that pleasure and bodily changes which can accompany it may interrupt reason with no moral malice as in the case of conjugal intercourse. See *ST*, I-II, a. 34, a. 1, ad 1.

⁸² *ST*, I-II, q. 24, a. 3, ad 1.

⁸³ *ST*, I-II, q. 24, a. 3, corpus.

⁸⁴ *ST*, I-II, q. 24, a. 3, ad 1. Aquinas’s contention that the passions should be incorporated into the moral life stands in stark contrast to Immanuel Kant, for example, who insists one’s moral duty should be completely purified of and divorced from any emotion. See his work *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. and ed., Mary Gregor (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 141.

passion is a reflection of the intensity of the will, because when the higher part of the soul is intensely moved by anything, the lower part of the soul follows that movement.⁸⁵

Furthermore, Aquinas notes that one can “choose to be affected by the passion in order to work more promptly with the cooperation of the sensitive appetite.”⁸⁶ He describes how the passions “may heighten the attention, engender motivation, urge one to act more quickly, and stimulate moral judgment and insight,” and he gives the examples of pity, fear, and sorrow.⁸⁷ While pity can cause one to act with a greater sense of urgency on behalf of the poor and oppressed,⁸⁸ fear, as was previously mentioned, if it is moderate and does not overtake reason, has the potential to enable man to work with greater care and attention.⁸⁹ Similarly, moderate sorrow, which does not cause the mind to wander or lead to despair, can prompt man to learn more about those things which can relieve his sorrow.⁹⁰ In addition, he insists that sorrow for actions which thwart virtue helps the virtuous man to shun evil more readily.⁹¹

Unlike Aquinas, Gilligan offers no detailed description of the relationship between the passions and reason. Gilligan admits that she is not a moral philosopher or a theologian; she is a psychologist.⁹² Nevertheless, for the justice orientation as well as the care orientation, Gilligan

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Elisabeth Uffenheimer-Lippens, 556.

⁸⁸ *ST*, I-II, q. 24, a. 3, *sed contra*.

⁸⁹ *ST*, I-II, q. 44, a. 4, corpus.

⁹⁰ *ST*, I-II, q. 37, a. 1, ad 1.

⁹¹ *ST*, I-II, q. 59, a. 3, corpus.

⁹² Jennifer Howard, “Writing in a Different Voice,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 54.21 (2008): B18.

contends that emotions and thought are not divorced. Like Aquinas, she recognizes that each have a role in the moral life.⁹³ Responding to what she views as a misinterpretation of her work, she writes, “My critics equate care with feelings, which they oppose to thought, and imagine caring as passive or confined to some separate sphere. I describe care and justice as two moral perspectives that organize both thinking and feelings and empower the self to take different kinds of action in public as well as private life.”⁹⁴ The justice perspective is not comprised of reason alone nor is the care orientation only about feelings. They basically describe the way in which relationships, emotions, and moral principles factor into moral decisions for men and women. Each moral perspective refers to how thought and feeling come together to influence men and women differently when they are making moral judgments.

While Gilligan points out the role and value of emotions in the moral life, she, like Aquinas, is aware that emotions can overpower reason to the detriment of the moral actor. Recall that Gilligan argues that women in particular are susceptible to this pitfall due to their unique caring perspective. Based on her work with women who were considering abortions,

⁹³ I am using the words “emotion” and “passions” interchangeably here, but it should be noted that the relationship between these two concepts is historically and philosophically complex. Thomas Dixon traces the origins of the word emotions to the nineteenth-century, and he argues that it both connected to and disconnected from the Christian notions of passions and affections. In general, emotions became a broad category, which overlooked traditional distinctions (such as the one between passions and affections). In addition, while passions were connected to the soul, emotions were associated with the mind and/or body. See his article, “Theology, Anti-Theology and Atheology: From Christian Passions to Secular Emotions,” *Modern Theology* 15.3 (1999): 297-330.

Gilligan and Aquinas reflect this history. According to Aquinas, passions are “in the soul” (*ST* I-II, q. 22, a. 1, corpus). As a secular psychologist, Gilligan does not discuss the human soul. Rather, she focuses on the mind, and she offers no systematic treatment of emotion, which resembles Aquinas’s *Treatise on the Passions*. However, unlike psychologists, such as William James, who fail to see any cognitive element in emotion, for Gilligan, beliefs are important factors in emotions (Dixon 308-11). This is a position which brings her closer to Aquinas’s understanding of passion, even though there are still differences between the two thinkers. For my purposes, it is not necessary to sort out all those differences. I am simply arguing that for both of them, the moral life is not just about pure reason. The passions or emotions also have an important role in moral maturity and decision-making.

⁹⁴ Gilligan, “Reply to Critics,” 209.

Gilligan discovers that many of the women knew about birth control yet chose not to use it. In many instances, their decision to engage in premarital sex without birth control was based on their twofold desire to please another and to avoid being alone.⁹⁵ However, their misguided care for the other absorbed their reason and any concern for their own well-being.

Thus, there are parallels between Gilligan's vision of moral maturity and Aquinas's conception of the virtuous man or woman. For Aquinas, the virtuous person lives according to the moral law, such as the Ten Commandments, but s/he has in some sense moved beyond it. The person possesses the virtues, which are accompanied by a kind of creative, dynamic power in moral action.⁹⁶ The virtuous person does the right thing, at the right time, in the right way, with the right emotion. In the virtuous person, there is a harmonization of the passions and reason, so that the former does not override the latter in moral decision-making.⁹⁷

As I noted in chapter 2, for Gilligan, moral maturity requires some integration of the justice and caring orientations. The individual will be guided by and obey some universal moral principles, but the person will also be compassionate and empathic, paying particular attention to other persons and relationships which are relevant to any particular moral decision. Even though

⁹⁵ Carol Gilligan, "Prologue: Adolescent Development Reconsidered," in *Mapping the Moral Domain: A Contribution of Women's Thinking to Psychological Theory and Education*, eds. Carol Gilligan, Janie Victoria Ward, Jill McLean Taylor, and Betty Bardige (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), xxxvii. I am in no way condoning the use of birth control here. I am merely pointing out that these women chose to engage in premarital sex and chose not to use birth control, despite seemingly having no moral objection to contraception. The question then becomes: Why did they opt not to use contraception? It is my contention that the answer to this question is pertinent to how the care perspective can go awry and more broadly why feelings must be governed by reason.

⁹⁶ Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *Morality: The Catholic View*, trans. Michael Sherwin, O.P. (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2001), 70-71.

⁹⁷ While this is certainly true of the individual who has developed the acquired virtues, it may not be the case with the person who possesses the infused virtues. Recall that Aquinas acknowledges that one may have the infused virtues yet still experience contrary dispositions, because the infused virtues are not accompanied by the same facility in action as the acquired virtues. However, as the individual grows in infused virtue through God's grace, then that facility in action comes in the Christian life. See *ST*, I-II, q. 65, a. 3, ad. 2.

Gilligan's understanding of moral maturity is much more underdeveloped than Aquinas's vision and lacks any discussion of virtue *per se*, she does offer a view of moral maturity that contains some similarities to Aquinas's virtuous person, particularly the importance of emotion and reason and the harmonization of these two elements in the moral life.

In light of these similarities in Gilligan and Aquinas's work, how can Gilligan's account of sexual difference modify Aquinas's philosophy of woman? Remember that Aquinas insists that women's passions frequently overwhelm their reason, which makes it difficult for them to acquire virtue. To a certain extent, Gilligan agrees; she maintains that emotions, such as care and empathy, tend to play a larger role in moral decision-making for women as compared to men. However, unlike Aquinas, this does not make the sexes unequal in Gilligan's account. It simply means that the sexes often privilege different factors in their moral reasoning. Thus, when compared with Aquinas, Gilligan offers an account of sexual difference that attempts to focus more on the experience of women and insists upon their equality with men even while recognizing and accounting for their differences.

On Aquinas's own terms, the passions can cooperate with reason and can positively influence moral decision-making, and Gilligan agrees in her account of sexual difference. In highlighting the value of the care perspectives, she is also advocating for the positive role of emotions. However, these emotions, which Gilligan associates with women, do not overwhelm female reason but distinguish it from men's.

To return to the example of Amy and Jake from last chapter, Gilligan observes that, "Amy's judgments contain the insights central to an ethic of care, just as Jake's judgments reflect

the logic of the justice approach.”⁹⁸ These insights are found not only in the solutions that the children offer but also in the way in which they frame the moral problem. While Jake sees a conflict between life and property that can be resolved through logical deduction, Amy focuses on the relationships between the wife and husband and the wife and druggist involved in the dilemma.⁹⁹ “Consequently her solution to the dilemma lies in activating the network by communication, securing the inclusion of the wife by strengthening rather than severing connections.”¹⁰⁰ Amy’s response exemplifies how women tend to focus less on the individual and more on the person in relationship when framing and resolving moral conflicts. This approach often leads to empathy, pity, and compassion playing larger roles in their moral decision-making. Nevertheless, these emotions are not divorced from reason but cooperate with it to form their distinct moral “voice.”

Even if one accepts Gilligan’s theory, how does her account sexual difference remedy the internal inconsistencies in Aquinas’s theory of virtue? While Aquinas argues that men and women are equally capable of obtaining and growing in the infused virtues because of the power of grace, I have argued that this position is untenable based on his own theory of virtue. On the one hand, due to Aristotle’s influence, Aquinas holds that women have unruly passions, which inhibit their reason and hinder the acquisition of acquired virtue. On the other hand, Aquinas clearly states that the infusion of grace does not completely destroy the individual’s vices. Rather, a residual contrary disposition, which is leftover from the vice, may still remain in the individual even after God infuses the moral and theological virtues.

⁹⁸ Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 30.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 30-1.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

While Aquinas wants to claim that the sexes are equal in the life of grace, this conclusion does not follow from the two aforementioned premises. Since women naturally have unruly passions, this deficiency will carry over into the life of grace. Grace does not completely eliminate this weakness just as it does not completely eliminate an acquired vice. Therefore, all other things being equal, women and men do not begin with the same capacity to cultivate and grow in virtue in the Christian life.

In order to correct this inconsistency, Thomistic virtue ethics must be supplemented by an account of sexual difference that defends the equality of the sexes in the natural order. While still preserving St. Thomas's basic insight that men and women are different, Gilligan's theory fulfills this need and helps to resolve the internal inconsistencies in Aquinas's virtue theory. By modifying Aquinas's philosophy of woman with Gilligan's account of sexual difference, one is able to preserve a place for the passions in the moral life and to fix the problematic aspects of St. Thomas's theory of virtue, which are created by his reliance on Aristotelian biology.

In Gilligan's account, women are not inferior to men. The sexes are equal. However, they are also not the same. In general, they approach moral decisions in different ways. Gilligan's description of the two different moral voices provides Aquinas's virtue theory a different starting point where sexual difference is concerned. Gilligan's theory argues that men and women are equal, but it preserves Aquinas's fundamental insight that the sexes are different. If women do not possess defective reason and unruly passions and if the sexes are equal in the natural order, then men and women begin at the same point in the life of grace. By relying on Gilligan's account of sexual difference instead of Aristotle's metaphysical biology, one can

argue that men and women possess the same potential to acquire virtue in natural order and the supernatural order, even though they may privilege different factors in their moral reasoning.

Therefore, women can strive to be virtuous and not merely continent, and since women are no longer plagued by unruly passions and weak reason in the natural order based on Gilligan's account, they do not carry any vice-like deficiencies into the life of grace. From the perspective of Thomistic virtue theory, one can now claim that men and women enter the Christian life as equals, because they are equals in the natural order. As equals, men and women are both capable of acquiring virtue as well as cooperating with God's grace in order to grow in infused virtue. Of course, grace, the great equalizer, is necessary to help both men and women overcome their vices, but those vices are not inherently tied to their sex. However, if men and women approach moral decision-making with two different voices, then the question remains: How do these voices impact the acquisition and exercise of particular virtues? This is the subject of the next chapter.

Conclusion

To this point, I have argued that Gilligan's account of sexual difference corrects some of the deficiencies in St. Thomas's philosophy of woman and offers a way to resolve some of the internal contradictions in Thomistic virtue ethics. Without disregarding St. Thomas's basic observation that the sexes are different, Gilligan defends the equality of the sexes in the natural order, while also clarifying how women's moral voice typically differs from men's. Nevertheless, if Gilligan's account of sexual difference helps to clear up some internal inconsistencies in St. Thomas's thought, her work also raises a fundamental question for

Thomistic virtue theory. If men and women possess the same capacity for moral development but reason differently, how does sexual difference affect the exercise of virtue?

Even if one replaces parts of St. Thomas's philosophy of woman with Gilligan's account of sexual difference, it seems clear that on a very basic and general level, there would be no difference in the way in which men and women acquire virtue. Each sex acquires virtue by repeatedly performing virtuous actions, or the virtues are infused in them by God. What is less clear, however, is whether or not the virtues look different in men and women. If men and women both frame and resolve moral situations differently as Gilligan contends, then what impact do these sexual differences have on how men and women practice justice, courage, prudence, etc.? Moreover, does the way in which St. Thomas envisions these virtues and their corresponding vices need to be reexamined and reconceived to more fully incorporate the experiences of women?

While it goes beyond the scope of this project to consider the impact of sexual difference on every moral virtue, the next chapter attempts to begin to answer these questions by examining the virtue of chastity and the opposing vice of lust. I intend this to be test case of how Gilligan's insights might inform St. Thomas's conception of a particular virtue and vice. Hopefully, this case study will serve to highlight a specific point in Aquinas's virtue theory where the experience of women could be integrated more fully, while also raising questions about how St. Thomas's understanding of other moral virtues could be enriched by a more egalitarian account of sexual difference.

Chapter 4

The Implications of Sexual Difference for the Virtue of Chastity

Introduction

At the conclusion of the last chapter, I suggested that if one takes into account sexual difference, then the way in which men and women acquire and manifest the virtues might be different. The purpose of this chapter is to explore this hypothesis and to consider what difference sexual difference makes for the virtue of chastity. Even if Gilligan's account of sexual difference is incorporated into Thomistic virtue theory and is used to resolve some of the internal inconsistencies in Aquinas's schema, does sexual difference have any broader or more practical impact? In other words, if men and women are different, as I have argued, how do those differences affect the exercise of virtue in men and women, and how do they affect the way in which Aquinas defines individual virtues? This chapter attempts to begin to answer these questions by focusing on the virtue of chastity and lust, its opposing vice.

To begin to explore the difference that sexual difference makes in the acquisition of virtue, two auto-biographical examples of personal transformation from popular literature will provide helpful starting points. One story is from a female perspective, and the other is from a male point of view. Together they illustrate how men and women approach decisions concerning sex and intimacy very differently.

It is difficult to imagine two more different stories. On the one hand, Elizabeth Gilbert is a woman in her mid-thirties, who is battling serious depression and who is attempting to find herself after a series of failed relationships, including a bitter divorce. In order to find happiness

and the purpose of life, Gilbert decides to explore various exotic places for a year. At the beginning of her journey, Gilbert notes how even in a beautiful place like Italy, depression and loneliness silently sneak-up on her like Pinkerton detectives.¹ She writes, “They don’t need to show me their badges. I know these guys very well. We’ve been playing a cat and mouse game for years now.”² By the end of her book, *Eat, Pray, Love*, Gilbert recounts how she escapes these demons by discovering joy in food, spiritual practices, and romance.

On the other hand, Andy Raskin offers a radically different account of transformation in his memoir *The Ramen King and I*. Raskin is a chronic womanizer, who describes his sexual escapades and struggles with fidelity. At numerous points, Raskin presents himself as more than just a bad boyfriend who is unwilling to make a commitment; his strong desire for casual sex resembles an addiction. Reflecting on cheating on his girlfriend, Raskin writes: “Occasionally, I would think about what I was doing—the most intense moments came after sex with someone who wasn’t [my girlfriend] Harue—and it was as if I had awoken from a dream in which I had been possessed by someone else, someone utterly indifferent to betraying someone that he cared about. I would feel dirty and ashamed.”³ He goes on to say:

Like with Maureen, I would promise myself over and over again that I would never cheat again as long as I lived, and I would remain faithful for several weeks or even months. I would convince myself that I was a good boyfriend, as if these loyal periods wiped away what I had done. But without fail, and with increasing frequency, I found myself back in the dream, calling women from the dating service and typing keywords into the ‘American Online’ member directory.”⁴

¹ Elizabeth Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman’s Search for Everything Across Italy, India and Indonesia* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 41.

² *Ibid.*, 41.

³ Andy Raskin, *The Ramen King and I: How the Inventor of Instant Noodles Fixed My Love Life* (New York: Gotham Books, 2010), 66.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

Eventually, after seeking help for sexual addiction and after studying the wisdom of Momofuku Ando, the creator of Ramen Noodles, Raskin begins to transform his life. By writing letters to Ando, Raskin reflects on his behavior, and he starts to restrain his sexual desire.

Even though their problems and transformations appear to be very different, Raskin and Gilbert were both searching for healthier and more fulfilling lives and relationships. However, each of them had their own obstacles to overcome. Comparing these memoirs, Steven Greydanus observes the differences between them. He notes that whereas Raskin's romantic woes involve too much sex with too many partners, Gilbert's struggle involves a lack of romance and intimacy with one partner, which is a significant reason for her divorce.⁵ Therefore, Raskin has to conquer his all-consuming sexual addiction, and Gilbert has to battle against loneliness and depression.

It is my contention that these two rather different memoirs point to one of the primary differences between men and women. For many women, the desire for physical sex is secondary to or an extension of their desire for emotional closeness and emotional intimacy. For most men, this order is reversed; they typically place a greater emphasis on physical sex than on intimacy. The purpose of this chapter is to consider how this sexual difference impacts the traditional Christian conception of lust and conversely to examine how it affects the exercise and acquisition of chastity.

To accomplish this end, this chapter proceeds in four parts. Relying primarily on St. Thomas as a guide and an example, the first section examines the chief way that the Catholic

⁵ Steven D. Greydanus, "The Oprahfication of Religion," *National Catholic Register* 13 August 2010 [Accessed 10 October 2012, from <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/the-oprahfication-of-religion/18>].

moral tradition has defined the vice of lust and the opposing virtue of the chastity. The second part considers some of the ways in which this traditional view may need to be modified in light of Gilligan's more contemporary account of sexual difference. The third section surveys some current approaches to chastity education for young people found within the Church, noting how they fail to take into account sexual difference. The final section explores how these current approaches might be revised to reflect sexual differences and a new understanding of lust and chastity.

The Christian Tradition on Lust and Chastity

To begin understand how traditional conceptions of lust and chastity could be altered in light of sexual differences, it is important to consider how the Church has commonly defined this particular vice and virtue. Throughout the history of the Catholic Church, the sin of lust generally has been defined as excessive desire for physical sexual pleasure. As John Grabowski notes in his book *Sex and Virtue*, "[T]he Church's theological tradition has understood lust to be disordered desire for sexual pleasure or a fixation on sexual pleasure to the exclusion of other purposes of human sexuality (i.e., procreation and interpersonal union)."⁶

This way of describing and defining lust is clearly evident in the writings of the Doctors of the Church. For example, in *City of God*, Augustine likens lust to a physical craving, such as hunger and thirst, and while he acknowledges numerous types of lust, such as the lust for revenge, the lust for money, or the lust for conquering, he maintains that lust is primarily

⁶ John Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue: An Introduction to Sexual Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 112.

“concerned with the sexual organs.”⁷ Augustine states that lust “excites the indecent parts of the body” and thus “assumes power over the whole body.”⁸

In his discussion of the seven capital vices in his *Book of Morals on Job*, St. Gregory the Great describes lust in a similar manner to Augustine. While five of the capital vices are spiritual vices, such as pride and envy, St. Gregory labels gluttony and lust as carnal vices, and he associates the latter with genital excitement. He writes, “But after these [spiritual vices], there remain behind two carnal vices, gluttony and lust. But it is plain to all that lust springs from gluttony, when in the very distribution of the members, the genitals appear placed beneath the belly. And hence when the one is inordinately pampered, the other is doubtless excited to wantonness.”⁹ He goes on to add that from lust comes “blindness of mind, inconsiderateness, inconstancy, precipitation, self-love, hatred of God, affection for this present world, but dread or despair of that which is to come.”¹⁰ These are traditionally referred to as the daughters of lust.¹¹

When Aquinas considers the matter of lust in the *Secunda secundae* of the *Summa theologiae*, he insists that lust “applies chiefly to venereal pleasures, which work the greatest havoc in a man’s mind,” but secondarily it refers to “any matters pertaining to excess.”¹² St. Thomas defends this position, when he responds to an objection concerning wine. Because

⁷ St. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. John O’Meara (New York: Penguin, 1972) XIV, 15, 576.

⁸ Augustine, *City of God*, XIV, 16, 578.

⁹ St. Gregory the Great, *Book of Morals on Job*, trans. J. Bliss (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1950), 31, 89 (<http://www.lectionarycentral.com/GregoryMoralia/Book31.html>).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ St. Thomas agrees with St. Gregory and argues that this list fittingly describes the daughters of lust. See *ST*, II-II q. 153, a. 5.

¹² *ST*, II-II, q. 153, a. 1, ad 1.

Proverbs 20:1 refers to wine as a “lustful thing,” Aquinas considers whether or not lust concerns venereal pleasure specifically or excess carnal pleasure more generally.¹³ He concludes, “Wine is said to be a lustful thing, either in the sense in which surfeit in any matter is ascribed to lust, or because the use of too much wine affords an incentive to venereal pleasure.”¹⁴

In his treatment of lust, St. Thomas echoes Gregory’s claim that lust leads to other vices. Recall that for Aquinas, the image of God resides in all human beings. However, he also maintains, as Torrell puts it, that the image, in each person, is “a reality in the process in of becoming.”¹⁵ In other words, the image is found to different degrees in different people.¹⁶ The image is more perfect in those who possess virtue and thus have tamed their passions and brought them under the control of reason. The virtue of chastity, for example, which is part of the cardinal virtue of temperance, chastises sexual desire and brings it under the control of reason.¹⁷ Aquinas writes, “For it belongs to chastity that a man makes moderate use of bodily members in accordance with the judgment of his reason and the choice of his will.”¹⁸

Conversely, the vice of lust short-circuits this process of becoming and integration, because it causes the lower powers to revolt against reason. Describing this process, Aquinas states:

¹³ *ST*, II-II, q. 153, a. 1, obj. 2.

¹⁴ *ST*, II-II, q. 153, a. 1, ad 2.

¹⁵ Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master*, vol 2, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 2: 88. Torrell here is drawing on *ST*, I, q. 93, a. 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *ST*, II-II, q. 151, a. 1 *sed contra* and a. 2 *sed contra*.

¹⁸ *ST*, II-II, q. 151, a. 1, ad 1.

When the lower powers are strongly moved towards their objects, the result is that the higher powers are hindered and disordered in their acts. Now the effect of the vice of lust is that the lower appetite, namely the concupiscible, is most vehemently intent on its object, to wit, the object of pleasure, on account of the vehemence of the pleasure. Consequently the higher powers, namely the reason and the will, are most grievously disordered by lust.¹⁹

Since lust overwhelms reason and will, it hinders their proper functioning and gives birth to its daughters, such as blindness of mind and affection for the present world.²⁰

Historically, the vice of lust has been associated not only with venereal pleasure but also with men. While women have been seen as the objects and causes of lust, in the tradition, there has been much more concern that men (rather than women) will fall prey to the vice. For example, writing about modesty in dress, Aquinas asks: “Do women sin mortally by excessive adornment?”²¹ He responds in the affirmative, pointing out women’s ability to lead men into lust through their appearance. He warns, ““As regards the adornment of women, we must bear in mind the general statements made above concerning outward apparel, and also something special, namely that a woman's apparel may incite men to lust, according to Proverbs 7:10, ‘Behold a woman meeteth him in harlot's attire, prepared to deceive souls.’”²² Even though he lacks the empirical evidence to support his claim, Aquinas seems to be aware that men are much more likely than women to be aroused through visual stimulation.²³

¹⁹ *ST*, II-II, q. 153, a. 5, *sed contra*.

²⁰ *Ibid*.

²¹ *ST*, II-II, q. 169, a. 2. The way in which Aquinas frames this question is revealing. Note that he specifically asks if “women sin,” which suggests that the conventional thinking of period and the tradition was that women can tempt men into lust through their appearance and not vice-versa.

²² *ST*, II-II, q. 169, a. 2, *sed contra*. Aquinas goes on to point out that men should not be provocative or ostentatious in their dress. However, his primary focus is on women and their ability to lead men into lust with their appearance. He not only deals with women first in his response and at greater length, but it is also clear from the way in which he frames the question by specifically referencing women.

²³ Aquinas’s claim probably originates from practical observation as well as personal experience. After all, his family tried to use a prostitute to tempt him away from joining the Dominican order. See Jean-Pierre Torrell, *St.*

Here, St. Thomas echoes other Doctors of the Church, such as St. Ambrose, on the potential for women to lead men into lust. Speaking of the female dancers at the celebration of John the Baptist's death, Ambrose writes:

Is anything so conducive to lust as with unseemly movements thus to expose in nakedness those parts of the body which either nature has hidden or custom has veiled, to sport with the looks, to turn the neck, to loosen the hair? Fitly was the next step an offense against God. For what modesty can there be where there is dancing and noise and clapping of hands?²⁴

Aquinas and Ambrose each imply that men are enticed into the vice through their sense of sight. It is visual stimulation that leads them into lust.²⁵

Elsewhere, Aquinas draws an explicit connection between lust, pleasure, and men. He writes, "The opposite of lust is not found in many, since men are more inclined to pleasure. Yet the contrary vice is comprised under insensibility, and occurs in a man who has such a dislike for the use of women as not to pay the marriage debt."²⁶

Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work, vol. 1, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1996), 10.

²⁴ Ambrose, *Concerning Virginit*y, in *From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, vol. 10, trans. H. de Romestin, E. de Romestin, and H.T.F. Duckworth, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1896), bk. 3, ch. 6, 27.

²⁵ This connection between sight and the vice of lust recalls Christ's teaching on adultery in Matthew 5, where he tells the crowd, "You have heard it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Matthew 5:27-28 (NAB). Cf. Job 31:1. Clearly, this admonition is specifically directed to men.

²⁶ *ST*, II-II q. 153, a. 3, ad 3. The translation here is my own. *Ad tertium dicendum quod oppositum luxuriae non contingit in multis, eo quod homines magis sint proni ad delectationes. Et tamen oppositum vitium continetur sub insensibilitate. Et accidit hoc vitium in eo qui in tantum detestatur mulierum usum quod etiam uxori debitum non reddit.* (Leonine, Rome: 1899). My translation differs from the Benziger translation in one important respect. That editions translate this passage, "The opposite of lust is not found in many, since men are more inclined to pleasure. Yet the contrary vice is comprised under insensibility, and occurs in one who has such a dislike for sexual intercourse as not to pay the marriage debt." See *Summa theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1948). I have chosen to translate the phrase *mulierum usum* literally as "use of women" rather than sexual intercourse. I opted for this translation, because I believe that it sheds light on how "*homine*" should be translated. The Benziger translation seems to believe that Aquinas is not specifically talking about men suffering from the vice of lust or insensibility. Rather, he is making a more general point about human beings male and female. Based on the phrase "*mulierum usum*" as well as Aquinas's focus on male acts of

Furthermore, when Aquinas addresses the six species of lust, which he identifies as simple fornication, adultery, incest, seduction, rape, and the unnatural vice, he focuses heavily on men. When he discusses fornication, for instance, he refers to Deuteronomy 23:27 and stresses the prohibition against men “going with whores.”²⁷ He goes on to add that fornication is contrary to the natural law, because children need both the nourishment of their mother and the guidance and protection of a father.²⁸

In his treatment of the other five species of lust, Aquinas maintains his focus on men. Rape and seduction are specifically acts of males. According to Aquinas, in the act of seduction, a man violates a virgin, and in the act of rape, a man unlawfully forces himself upon a woman.²⁹ Likewise, his description of incest is androcentric, because he stresses how it is a man having a “liking for a woman of his kindred.”³⁰

While his treatment of adultery and unnatural vices is slightly more balanced, in these articles, he still focuses heavily on men. All three of his objections deal with men committing adultery. For instance, objection 3 reads, “Further, where there is the same kind of deformity, there would seem to be the same species of sin. Now, apparently, there is the same kind of deformity in seduction and adultery: since in either case a woman is violated who is under

lust in q. 154, I contend that Aquinas holds that it is much more likely that men will be affected by the vice rather than women.

²⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 154, a. 2, corpus.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *ST*, II-II, q. 154, a. 6 and a. 7 respectively. In his treatment of seduction here, Aquinas does not consider the possibility that a woman can seduce a man. His definition of seduction is very narrow and focuses on men as the seducers.

³⁰ *ST*, II-II, q. 154, a. 9 corpus.

another person's authority.”³¹ Even though adultery obviously involves a man and women, in his response, Aquinas maintains this emphasis on the man as the adulterer.³² Similarly, when he considers unnatural vices, he deals with masturbation, bestiality, and homosexual acts. It is only under the last category that he specifically mentions unnatural vices among women.³³

Since lust and its species traditionally have been associated with men's disordered desire for physical sexual pleasure and visual stimulation, contemporary theologians working on Thomistic virtue ethics have paid almost no attention to how women lust or even if they lust differently from men. In other words, the impact of sexual difference on how each sex experiences the vice of lust largely has gone untreated. It is my contention that the traditional understanding of lust is too narrow, because it focuses too heavily on men and how they experience of lust, while largely ignoring women and why they lust. In light of Gilligan's account of sexual difference as well as contemporary social scientific data, the vice of lust must be re-envisioned and redefined in order to include the experience of women and prevent them from falling prey to it.

³¹ *ST*, II-II, q. 154, a. 8, obj. 3.

³² *ST*, II-II, q. 154, a. 8. I am not suggesting here Aquinas evaluates the sin of adultery any different for men than he does for women. I am merely pointing out that he rarely places women in the position of the adulterer in his objection or responses. In the article, he closely associates the sin with men.

³³ *ST*, II-II, q. 154, a. 11. It should be noted that in article 12, Aquinas argues that these unnatural vices are the greatest among the species of lust. According to Aquinas, they are more grievous than even adultery and rape. Aquinas is heavily criticized for this position. See, for example, Jean Porter, “Chastity as a virtue,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58 (2005): 285, and Louis Crompton's *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 188. However, Aquinas is arguing that masturbation, bestiality, and homosexual acts are more grievous in relation to nature but not in relation to justice. Rape and adultery are more unjust than these unnatural vices. See Ronald Lawler, Joseph Boyle, and William May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics: A Summary Explanation and Defense*, 2nd ed. (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1998), 58.

Sex and the Sexes

Before talking about how the sexes lust differently, it is important to examine how each sex views sex, because men and women do not view sex in the same way. While this is true for couples inside of marriage, it is especially true for men and women outside of marriage.³⁴ Of course, both men and women fornicate. However, do they sin for the same reasons? In their book *Premartial Sex in America*, Mark Regnerus and Jeremy Uecker offer some statistical insight into this truism. Relying on various surveys of over 15,000 young adults as well as hundreds of interviews, these sociologists focus on the sexual behavior of American 18-23 year-olds, who have never been married. They consider not only the number of sexual partners during the last year but also the total number of sexual partners that the respondent had during his or her lifetime.

Summarizing their findings, Regnerus and Uecker conclude that only 16 percent of young adults reported no sexual partners. Among the 84 percent of this demographic that had already had sex, about 17 percent reported having only one partner, and 28 percent acknowledged having 2-4 partners. While approximately 25 percent had between 5 and 10 partners, about 15 percent reported having more than 10 sexual partners.³⁵

These numbers reflect the prominent practice and acceptance of casual sex among young adults in American culture, and over the last 20 years, relatively little has changed in the sexual behavior of this population. When Regnerus and Uecker examine the number of sexual partners

³⁴ Mark Regnerus and Jeremy Uecker, *Premarital Sex in America: How Young Americans Meet, Mate, and Think about Marrying* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

of 18-23 year olds only over the last year, their findings closely resemble the findings of a major study done in the early 1990s. Regnerus and Uecker explain:

When compared with the benchmark University of Chicago sex study, the ‘recent sex partner’ figures do not appear to have changed much since the early 1990s. Sociologists reported then that—among 18-29-year-old never married men—41 percent had had one sex partner in the last year, 31 percent reported 2-4 partners, and 14 percent reported 5 or more. Among never-married women of the same age, 57 percent had had one partner, 24 percent had reported 2-4, and 6 percent reported five or more.³⁶

Even though the majority of both men and women in the U.S. have had sex outside of marriage, a close examination of their responses reveals significant differences between the sexes. These differences are found both in the number of partners that men and women have as well as why they choose to have sex outside of marriage. For instance, almost 8 percent more men than women reported having 5 or more sexual partners, and approximately 4.5 percent more men than women claimed 11 or more sexual partners.³⁷ These numbers highlight one of the most prominent and reoccurring findings in studies on sexual activity. As Regnerus and Uecker note, “Men report more sexual partners than women do. Period. Everywhere.”³⁸ Multiple studies throughout the world and over an extended period of time have reached the same conclusion.³⁹

This conclusion is odd, because mathematically it is impossible. Hypothetically, if one man has sex with five different women, he will be in the category of 5 or more partners. If each

³⁶ Ibid., 25. The authors are drawing on a 1992 National Health and Social Life Survey. For the NHSLS data, see Edward O. Laumann, John H. Gagnon, Robert T. Michael, and Stuart Michaels, *The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

³⁷ Ibid., 25.

³⁸ Ibid., 27.

³⁹ Gina Kolata, “The Myth, the Math, the Sex,” *New York Times*, 12 August 2007 [Accessed 12 February 2013, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/12/weekinreview/12kolata.html>].

of those women is having sex for the first time, then they will be in the one partner category. However, even though a scenario like this is certainly plausible, on average, heterosexual men and women must have about the same number of partners, because each new partner for a man is also a new sexual partner for a woman.⁴⁰ As mathematician David Gale notes, “Surveys and studies to the contrary notwithstanding, the conclusion that men have substantially more sex partners than women is not and cannot be true for purely logical reasons.”⁴¹ Offering a proof, he states:

By way of dramatization, we change the context slightly and will prove what will be called the High School Prom Theorem. We suppose that on the day after the prom, each girl is asked to give the number of boys she danced with. These numbers are then added up giving a number G. The same information is then obtained from the boys, giving a number B. Theorem: $G=B$ Proof: Both G and B are equal to C, the number of couples who danced together at the prom. Q.E.D.’⁴²

If Gale’s math is correct, then why do women consistently report having fewer sexual partners than men? Regnerus and Uecker offer several possible explanations, including the fact men and women use different estimation strategies.⁴³ One might assume that men intentionally exaggerate the number of sexual partners that they have had. Conversely, women intentionally underestimate the number due to a presumed cultural double-standard, which holds that it is an achievement for a man to have several partners, while it is a disgrace for a woman to have sex with several men. However, Norman Brown and Robert Sinclair discovered a different reason for this discrepancy between the sexes in reporting the number of partners. After examining

⁴⁰ N.R. Brown and R.C. Sinclair, “Estimating number of lifetime sexual partners: Men and women do it differently,” *Journal of Sex Research* 36 (1999): 292.

⁴¹ David Gale qtd. in Kolata, “The Myth, the Math, the Sex.”

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Regnerus and Uecker 27.

approximately 2,000 responses, the researchers found that typically men and women use different estimation strategies to figure out the number of sexual partners that they have had in their lives. When reporting their total number of partners, women reached that number through enumeration, but men tended simply to estimate.⁴⁴ Brown and Sinclair reject the notion that this difference is due in part to lying by either sex, because in other surveys, which deal with sensitive questions such as the frequency and duration of sexual activities, the sexes provide responses that closely resemble one another.⁴⁵ Thus, they ask: “Why is it that women tend to enumerate and men are prone to respond with rough estimates?”⁴⁶

The authors suggest a few possibilities, including the profound mark that each sexual experience seems to make on women. They point out:

Another line of research suggests that women are more likely than men to think about sex in the context of relationships, suggesting that women may be more likely to deeply encode or rehearse their experiences. Assuming women have better memories for their partners than do men, and given that enumeration-based estimates should be common when partners can be readily recalled and rough approximations should be common when they cannot, it follows that women should enumerate more than men, and that men should produce rough approximations more than women.⁴⁷

This possibility appears to be supported by related findings from several other studies, which consider the differences between the sexes regarding sexual behaviors and attitudes. For example, in their meta-analysis, Mary Beth Oliver and Janet Hyde examined the data from 177 different studies and discovered two significant differences between the sexes.⁴⁸ On the one

⁴⁴ Brown and Sinclair 296.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 292-293.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 296.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 296.

hand, while women generally possess the same permissive attitude toward masturbation as men, they do it much less frequently.⁴⁹ On the other hand, women are much less comfortable than men with causal, premarital sex as well as extramarital sex.⁵⁰

How does one explain these divergent views and practices? Why do women enumerate when calculating their lifetime sexual partners, masturbate less, and feel more uneasy about premarital and extramarital sex? While the ethics of care tradition does not specifically address the impact of sexual difference on sexual desire and decision-making, nevertheless, the framework that Gilligan provides is useful for examining the emotional and psychological differences between men and women in the area of sexuality. Recall that at the heart of Gilligan's theory lies her contention that men and women emphasize different things in their moral reasoning. As her analysis of the moral decision-making of women demonstrates, women tend to place a higher value on relationships rather than rules, autonomy, and justice, which men emphasize. Therefore, women oftentimes are more caring and empathetic, and this caring orientation affects the way in which women view sex.

The female focus on relationships and caring leads women to stress the importance of emotional closeness in sexual relationships. Unlike men, women tend to see an inseparable connection between sex and intimacy. As Kaye Payne argues in her book *Different but Equal*, even though many feminists have encouraged women to be as cavalier about sex as men, "males still see sexual intercourse as a way to achieve pleasure and please their partner, while females

⁴⁸ M.B. Oliver and J.S. Hyde, "Gender Differences in Sexuality: A meta-analysis," *Psychological Bulletin* 114 (1993): 29. Oliver and Hyde's meta-analysis is confirmed by Jennifer Petersen and Janet Hyde's meta-analysis of studies conduct between 1993-2007. See their review, "A Meta-Analytic Review of Research on Gender Differences in Sexuality, 1993-2007," *Psychological Bulletin* 136 (2010): 21-38.

⁴⁹ Oliver and Hyde 42.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 33 and 42.

still view it as a way to achieve emotional closeness.”⁵¹ Regnerus and Uecker echo this point. Based on their findings, they contend that unlike men, “women, on average, don’t want to *have sex with*. They want to be made love to.”⁵² They go on to add, “Being made love to implies a secure relationship and puts the focus on the benefits of the act.”⁵³ In other words, for women, there is a much stronger connection between sexual intimacy and emotional intimacy.

Elaine Storkey, in her book, *Origins of Difference*, agrees with Payne. Storkey contends, “[M]any women need emotional warmth and affection before they can commit themselves sexually. Many men, on the other hand, feel they need sex before they can let go of their inhibitions and draw close.”⁵⁴ In her article, “The Sexes See Sex Differently: Why 70 Percent of Women Would Rather Have Chocolate,” Sherry Van Zante writes about her own experience, which exemplifies Storkey’s point. Van Zante notes:

In my marriage I’ve found that ‘intimacy’ means different things to Loyd [my husband] and me. I like to cuddle; he wants to make love. I like to talk; he wants to make love. I like to share time together; he wants to make love. Early in our marriage, I was hurt to think he had one thing on his mind; he was hurt to know I didn’t have the same thing on mine. After 34 years of marriage, we’ve forgiven each other for being different, but we *are still different*.⁵⁵

Payne and Storkey’s insight coupled with Van Zante’s experience help not only to explain why women enumerate but also why they feel uneasy about engaging in casual sex. For

⁵¹ Kaye Payne, *Different but Equal: Communication Between the Sexes* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2001), 100-101. Payne is not talking about every man and woman but men and women in general.

⁵² Regnerus and Uecker 152 (original emphasis).

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Elaine Storkey, *Origins of Difference: The Gender Debate Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 81.

⁵⁵ Sherry Van Zante, “The Sexes See Sex Differently: Why 70 Percent of Women Would Rather Have Chocolate,” October 2010 [Accessed 12 February 2013, from <http://www.kyria.com/topics/marriagefamily/marriage/romancesex/sexessee.html?start=1>] (original emphasis).

women, sex is not primarily about physical pleasure; sex is primarily about relationships. It is a physical expression of their desire for emotional intimacy and oftentimes is predicated upon it.

This connection between sex and relationships reflects the characteristics of women's caring orientation which Gilligan highlights. According to Gilligan, with their caring orientation, women stress the importance of relationships in their moral decision-making. This same emphasis on relationships is also visible in the way in which women approach sex.

Since the female desire for sex is closely linked to a desire for intimacy, it follows that sexual pleasure for women is directly tied to the communication and emotional connection found in a relationship. Thus, Anne Moir and David Jessel, in their book *Brain Sex*, point out that the orgasm rate for women is five times higher in the marital bed, because the sexual act is an expression of the couple's marital vows and commitment to one another.⁵⁶ For women, the sexual act and the enjoyment that they derive from it is fundamentally rooted in the connection and bond that they have with their partner.⁵⁷

While various studies have shown that women's sexual desire has a strong emotional component, other studies have demonstrated that men's sexual desire tends to be more physically driven and that visual stimulation plays a greater role in arousal than intimacy.⁵⁸ This distinction is evident in the disproportionate male interest in pornography. Currently, the pornography industry in the United States is over a \$13 billion dollar industry, and there are approximately 240 million pornographic webpages registered in the United States. Almost 75% of the people

⁵⁶ Anne Moir and David Jessel, *Brain Sex: The Real Difference Between Men and Women* (New York: Dell Publishing, 2003), 134.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 135-6.

⁵⁸ Jill Wood, Patricia Koch, and Phyllis Mansfield, "Women's Sexual Desire: A Feminist Critique," *Journal of Sex Research* 43.3 (2006): 236-44.

who visit pornographic websites are men.⁵⁹ In addition, strip clubs, prostitution, and lingerie manufacturing are all industries that cater predominately to the male desire for visual stimulation.

Certainly, one cannot deny that there are women who are consumers of pornography, but the number of women who engage in this behavior is much lower. Furthermore, women's interest in pornography is not simply tied to visual stimulation; it is closely connected to their desire for intimacy. Therefore, women are twice as likely as men to use cybersex chat rooms, and 40% of the most extreme cybersex participants are women.⁶⁰

Unlike simply downloading pornographic pictures, cybersex involves much more interaction; it faintly resembles an encounter or even a relationship, despite being disordered and virtual.⁶¹ For many women seeking intimacy, these cybersex relationships go offline. Patrick Carnes gives one such example in his book, *Out of the Shadows*, which is on sexual addiction. Carnes retells the story of Dorie, a professional woman and romance junkie, who was married with children. Feeling that she did not get enough attention at home, Dorie turned to the internet. Shortly thereafter, she met someone online, began a relationship, and decided to surprise him by flying to his home in Canada. Within minutes of showing up at his door, the two were having sex. After sex, he abruptly asked her to leave, and Dorie was left confused, devastated, and

⁵⁹ Jerry Ropelato, Ropelato, "ToptenREVIEWS: Pornography Statistics," [Accessed 6 October 2007, from <http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics.html>].

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Patrick Carnes, *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction*, 3rd ed. (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 2001), 83. It is important to note that cybersex might occur one time between two people, or it might involve more of a cyber-relationship, where the focus is almost exclusively on sexual arousal. As Sr. Maria Weber notes, "Cybersex may also involve reading and writing sexually explicit letters and stories, visiting sexually oriented chat rooms, placing ads to meet sexual partners, e-mailing to arrange sexual encounters, and engaging in interactive online sexual behaviors." See her article, "Pornography, Electronic Media and Priestly Formation," *Homiletic & Pastoral Review* 1 April 2008 [Accessed 9 August 2013, from <http://www.hprweb.com/2008/04/pornography-electronic-media-and-priestly-formation>].

alone.⁶² Even though Dorie turned to cybersex, she was not seeking sexual stimulation; she wanted a romantic relationship.

In our contemporary “hook-up” culture of casual sex, it would be easy to argue that there is really no difference in the way in which the sexes view sex. Almost 8,000 young men and women become sexually active each day in the United States.⁶³ In general, it seems as if sex has been reduced simply to a physical activity, which both sexes participate in casually in order to derive pleasure. Women’s magazines, such as *Cosmopolitan*, consistently publish columns on how women can please their partners and increase their own sexual pleasure by experimenting with new sexual positions.⁶⁴ Similarly, men’s magazines, such as *Men’s Health*, regularly offer sex advice on how men can keep sex interesting for themselves and their partners.⁶⁵

However, even though the pill and other forms of contraception have made premarital and extramarital sex more prevalent, they have not erased the innate female desire for intimacy.⁶⁶ As noted above, women receive more enjoyment from sex when it takes place within a marriage, and even in a marriage, many women still want more emotional exchange than they

⁶² Carnes 82-3.

⁶³ Marva Dawn, *Sexual Character: Beyond Technique to Intimacy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), 3.

⁶⁴ See for example Mina Azodi, *Cosmopolitan*, “Athletic Kama Sutra Sex Positions,” [Accessed 19 September 2012, from http://www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/tips-moves/kama-sutra-sex-positions?click=cos_latest#slide-1].

⁶⁵ See for example, *Men’s Health*, “Sex in the USA,” [Accessed 19 September 2012, from http://www.menshealth.com/video/relationships/white-hot-sex-forever#/video/sex_women/created/d/1&auto=1]. The pieces from *Cosmopolitan* and *Men’s Health* both focus on how to make sex more pleasurable and entertaining, and they each fit squarely into what David Matzo McCarthy calls the contemporary economy of desire, “where passionate relationships are sustained by reproducing and extending this passion indefinitely” (53). In the end, Matzo McCarthy argues that this kind of desire is not only unsustainable but also undermines life in the home. For more of Matzo’s McCarthy’s critique of the economy of desire as well as how it compares to a Christian account of love and marriage, see his book *Sex and Love in the Home: A Theology of Household*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2004).

⁶⁶ Moir and Jessel 134.

typically receive. In her study of women with low sexual desire, Rosemary Basson discovered that 50% of the women in the study attributed their low desire to insufficient emotional intimacy.⁶⁷ Based on her own findings as well as the findings of other studies, Basson concludes:

When a woman senses a potential opportunity to be sexual with her partner, although she may not ‘need’ to experience arousal and resolution for her own sexual well-being, she is nevertheless motivated to deliberately do whatever is necessary to facilitate a sexual interaction as she expects potential benefits that, though not strictly sexual, are very important. The increased emotional closeness, bonding, commitment, tolerance of each other’s imperfections, and expectation of increase well-being of the partner all serve as highly valid motivational factors that activate the [female sex response] cycle.⁶⁸

In short the sexual act is not an end for women; it is a means through which they can discover and achieve intimacy with the opposite sex.

Using a clinical case from his practice, Solomon Schimmel, a psychotherapist, unknowingly illustrates this point in his book *The Seven Deadly Sins*. Schimmel retells the story of an adult female patient, who wanted to have premarital sex but was uncomfortable with her body. The middle-aged woman was a virgin and desperately wanted to get married. However, she was worried that “any man with whom she might establish a relationship would consider her psychologically unbalanced and reject her when he discovered this ‘secret’ of hers.”⁶⁹

Therefore, in order to help her overcome this fear, Schimmel attempted to prepare her for sex. First, he had her create and memorize a list of positive statements about sex. Then, he

⁶⁷ Rosemary Basson, “Using a Different Model for Female Sexual Response to Address Women’s Problematic Low Sexual Desire,” *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 27 (2001): 400. It must be acknowledged that Basson was working with a small sample size of only 47 women.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 396-7.

⁶⁹ Solomon Schimmel, *The Seven Deadly Sins: Jewish, Christian, and Classical Reflections on Human Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), 126.

assigned her some readings on how to explore her body, and he encouraged her to give herself sensual pleasure by masturbating. If while exploring her body and masturbating the woman experienced feelings of shame or guilt, she was to review the list of positive statements about sex that she previously created.⁷⁰ These exercises were intended to prepare her for sex and make her more comfortable with her body. Not long after these sessions, Schimmel notes that his client “overcame unpleasant feelings about premarital sex with an affectionate companion who was also a marriage prospect.”⁷¹

Unfortunately, Schimmel and the woman both missed the underlying reason that she felt the need to have premarital sex. She thought that she needed to have sex in order to prepare her for a relationship, and she was concerned that her virginity actually would jeopardize her chance of having a sustained and successful relationship. Referring to his client’s newfound relationship, Schimmel himself even points out that “the sexual dimension of her relationship with him [her boyfriend] was much less important to her than the mutual love that evolved.”⁷² His patient does not engage in an act of lust out of carnal desire but out of a desire for intimacy and emotional fulfillment.

In Gilligan’s work with women, who were considering having abortions, it is important to recall that she identifies similar pitfalls in women’s caring orientation. She says:

When interviewing pregnant teenagers who were considering abortion, I was struck by the fact that most of them knew about birth control. Their pregnancies seemed in part to have resulted from actions that comprised sometimes desperate, sometimes misguided, and sometimes innocent strategies to care for themselves, to care for others, to get what they wanted, and to avoid being alone.⁷³

⁷⁰ Ibid., 127.

⁷¹ Ibid., 128.

⁷² Ibid.

In those cases, their caring voice led these women to disregard their own well-being. Their desire for intimacy and for a relationship overwhelmed their reason. Gilligan's comments and the experiences of these women give us a starting point to reexamine the traditional definition of lust and to delve into the unique character of female lust.

Redefining Lust

If men are moved to have sex by visual stimulation and the desire for physical pleasure and women seek emotional closeness and intimacy in sex, what are the implications of these different approaches to sex for the traditional description of lust? It is my contention that lust must be reexamined in light of differences between the sexes. In short, the vice must be redefined in order to include female lust.

First, it is important to recall how the Church currently describes lust. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, "Lust is disordered desire for or inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure."⁷⁴ Then it goes on to add, "Sexual pleasure is morally disordered when sought for itself, isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes."⁷⁵ Among the offenses against chastity (and therefore acts of lusts), it lists masturbation, pornography, prostitution, and rape.⁷⁶

⁷³ Carol Gilligan, "Prologue: Adolescent Development Reconsidered," in *Mapping the Moral Domain*, xxxvii.

⁷⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C: United States Catholic Conference, 1997), 2351.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 2352-2356.

Notice that these lustful acts are related to the pursuit of physical gratification, and also, note that they are predominately sins which males commit. As I pointed out in the last section, the use of pornography is more prevalent among men. In addition, masturbation is much more common among men,⁷⁷ and almost one-hundred percent of rapists are men.⁷⁸ By focusing on male lust, this understanding of lust and description of lustful acts largely seems to overlook the impact of sexual difference on lust. It seems to ignore how and why women lust.

Even though women engage in lustful acts, such as fornication, they do so oftentimes seeking intimacy and not primarily sexual pleasure. Women view sex as a means to emotional closeness, and therefore the reasons why they lust if different from men. This difference in motivation must be addressed in the way in which the Church describes lust, and the tradition's description of lust must be altered in order to take into account female lust.

How can the tradition's account of lust be broadened to include female lust? In his work *Love and Responsibility*, Karol Wojtyla provides a foundation on which a new and more comprehensive account of lust can be structured.⁷⁹ Like Immanuel Kant, Wojtyla is concerned about the implications of utilitarianism.⁸⁰ According to Wojtyla, the real danger of utilitarianism

⁷⁷ A. Das, "Masturbation in the United States," *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy* 33 (2007): 301.

⁷⁸ Lawrence Greenfield, *Sex Offenses and Offenders: An Analysis of Data on Rape and Sexual Assault* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Justice Programs, 1997) [Accessed 19 September 2012, from <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/SOO.PDF>]. While it is beyond the scope of this project, there is an ongoing controversy over whether rape is about power or sexual pleasure. There is good evidence to suggest that it is a combination of both, and in specific cases, it may be about one much more than the other. For more on this debate, see David Buss and Neil Malamuth, eds., *Sex, Power, Conflict: Evolutionary and Feminist Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁷⁹ Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H.T. Willetts (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1981).

⁸⁰ For more on the influence of Kant on Wojtyla's thought, see Michael Waldstein, "Introduction," *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, by John Paul II, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 34-55.

is that it prevents authentic love, which is rooted in self-sacrifice. If the point of human existence is to maximize one's pleasure as utilitarianism holds, then other persons must be viewed simply as means through which one can achieve that end.⁸¹ The other is important only in so far as he or she is capable of contributing to one's personal pursuit of maximum pleasure.⁸²

In order to demonstrate the inherent problem with utilitarianism, Wojtyla draws a sharp distinction between persons and things, and at the heart of this distinction is his analysis of the verb 'to use.' Man uses things to achieve a particular end. For example, man uses a pencil in order to write or a hoe to till the ground. Wojtyla notes, "Man in his various activities makes use of the whole created universe, takes advantage of all its resources for ends which he sets himself, for he alone understands them."⁸³ According to Wojtyla, this is the first definition of 'to use': "*To use means to employ some object of action as a means to an end—the specific end which the subject has in view.*"⁸⁴

The second definition of 'to use' is related to the first but deals specifically with sexual activity. Wojtyla notes that man's reason gives him the power to isolate pleasure as a distinct end in and of itself.⁸⁵ He goes on to note, "If actions involving a person of the opposite sex are shaped exclusively or primarily with this [pleasure] in view, then that person will become only

⁸¹ I recognize that there are different forms of utilitarianism, and here Wojtyla is referring to a version of utilitarianism that closely resembles hedonism. His analysis here does not encapsulate other forms of utilitarianism, such as rule utilitarianism.

⁸² Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, 37.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 25 (emphasis in the original).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

the means to an end—and ‘use’ in its second meaning (=enjoy) represents, as we see, a particular variant of ‘use’ in its first meaning.”⁸⁶

Echoing Kant’s notion of a kingdom of ends, Wojtyla develops what he calls the “personalistic norm.”⁸⁷ He argues that another person can never be reduced to a mere object, because all human persons are acting subjects who possess inherent dignity and free will, which gives them the power of self-determination.⁸⁸ A person recognizes the dignity of other persons, because s/he sees another person as distinct from other objects. The other person is another ‘I’, who deserves equal treatment.⁸⁹ Therefore, referring to Christ’s commandment to love one’s neighbor, Wojtyla concludes:

[I]t becomes obvious that if the commandment to love, and the love which is the object of this commandment, are to have any meaning, we must find a basis for them other than the utilitarian premise and the utilitarian system of values. This can only be the personalistic principle and the personalistic norm. The norm, in its negative aspect, states that the person is the kind of good which does not admit of use and cannot be treated as an object of use and as such the means to an end. In its positive form the personalistic norm confirms this: the person is a good towards which the only proper and adequate attitude is love.⁹⁰

Given this juxtaposition of using and authentic loving, it is easy to see how male lust is wrong. If sex is undertaken merely for sexual pleasure, then the person uses the other. The other person becomes akin to a tool or other inanimate object that one would use to complete a particular task. Clearly, male lust, which is rooted in visual stimulation and the desire for sexual

⁸⁶ Ibid., 33.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 40-41.

⁸⁸ For more on how Wojtyla’s notion of self-determination fits into his philosophical anthropology, see Gerard Beigel, *Faith and Social Justice in the Teaching of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 9-33.

⁸⁹ Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, 23-24.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 41.

enjoyment, objectifies the other and turns the other into a mere location for sexual gratification. Male lust is obviously contrary to the personalistic norm, because it involves using the other person as a means to an end and thereby ignores the equality and inherent dignity of the other.

Unlike male lust, female lust is rooted in the desire for intimacy and not visual stimulation, but it also treats the other as a mere means. With female lust, the male is objectified not as a source of sexual pleasure but as a source of emotional and romantic intimacy. The sexual act simply becomes the way through which this intimacy is pursued and even garnered. Like male lust, female lust involves using the opposite sex, but in the case of female lust, the man is used to fulfill the woman's desire for intimacy.

Thus, the difference between male and female lust resides in the intention of the agent. A man and a woman may choose the same immoral object, such as fornication, but the intention of the agent choosing that object is different. The man, in many cases, will fornicate in order to fulfill his sexual desire, while the woman, oftentimes, will fornicate in order to satisfy her desire for emotional intimacy, to begin a relationship, or to sustain struggling relationship.

However, the traditional definition of lust seems to exclude this more feminine intention. Remember in the tradition, lust is defined as a "disordered desire for inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure."⁹¹ Female lust seems to fall outside of this male conception of lust. Female lust is disordered desire, but it is disordered desire for intimacy and not just sexual pleasure.

In both male and female lust, the opposite sex is exploited in the sexual act but in distinct ways. To account for female lust, the sin of lust must be understood more in terms of the analysis of 'to use' offered by Wojtyla. Drawing on that analysis, one can describe lust as using

⁹¹ CCC, 2351.

another in the sexual act as a means to achieve any selfish end, such as intimacy or pleasure. This expanded notion of lust enables the Christian tradition to take into account the different ways in which men and women lust and to address why both types of lust are disordered.

Some will object that if men and women are created for love and communion, which John Paul II emphasizes repeatedly, then it is mistaken to associate lust with an excessive and disordered desire for intimacy.⁹² After all, the desire for intimacy appears to be one manifestation of mankind's call to and desire for communion. Furthermore, the desire for emotional intimacy seems to involve a more holistic engagement with the personhood of the other in a way that traditional lust does not, since it focuses solely on the body. However, notice the parallel between the desire for intimacy and the desire for sex.

The Church does not condemn sexual desire. Rather, it views sexuality, which includes one's desire for sex, as a something good. The *Catechism* contends, "Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual *identity*. Physical, moral, and spiritual *difference* and *complementarity* are oriented toward the goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life. The harmony of the couple and of society depends in part on the way in which the complementarity, needs, and mutual support between the sexes are lived out."⁹³ Sexual desire becomes immoral when it becomes an excessive desire for sexual pleasure to the exclusion of the dignity of the other and the other goods of the conjugal act, such as procreation. When a man becomes consumed by that desire for sexual pleasure and uses the other as a means to achieve it, then he falls into the sin of lust.

⁹² For a concise summary of why John Paul II maintains that human persons are created for and called to communion, see John Grabowski, "Forward," *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*, by John Paul II, trans. L'Osservatore Romano, English ed. (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997), 15-21.

⁹³ CCC, 2333 (original emphasis).

Similarly, the desire for intimacy is good. The problem occurs when that desire becomes excessive, and the other goods of the conjugal act, such as procreation or even pleasure, are ignored. The other is not a co-creator of life or a potential father; instead, he is used simply to fulfill a woman's craving for affection. The other person is not used for sex but for intimacy. With both male and female lust, something that is good, whether it is sexual desire or the desire for intimacy, becomes twisted and disordered by sin. Now the question is: How does the Church help men and women avoid falling prey to that sin?

The Current Approach to Chastity Education

To this point, I have argued that lust manifests itself differently in men and women, and I have contended that the traditional definition of lust must be expanded to include female lust. If my contention is correct and men and women commit acts of lust, such as fornication and participating in pornography, for different reasons, then it seems important to consider how this insight might inform and alter current models of moral education. Since one of the most fundamental responsibilities of the Church is to teach, it is imperative to examine the practical implications of redefining lust for how the Church approaches sex education.

Without pretending to offer a comprehensive analysis of Catholic chastity programs, this section surveys, at a macro level, the current approach to chastity education within the Church, particularly as it is presented in the documents *Educational Guidance in Human Love* and the *Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*. The former is written by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, and the latter is promulgated by the Pontifical Council for the Family. Together they offer a lens through which to see the Church's vision for chastity education both inside and

outside of the home. By identifying some of the deficiencies in the Church's approach to chastity education, this section foreshadows the final section of this chapter, which offers a constructive account of sexual education that adequately takes into account sexual difference, including the unique character of female lust.

To inhibit lust in both men and women, the Church could simply continue to emphasize rules that prohibit sex outside of marriage and condemn other lustful behavior. However, given our contemporary culture's commodification of the human body and distorted notions of love, it does not appear that this approach has been or will be effective. While rules have their place in the moral life, more is needed than simply stressing rules. In addition to rules, John Grabowski notes:

One must also attend to the larger vision of human sexuality and its place in the person's call to beatitude realized through the communion of love. Equally important is the identification of concrete practices that can foster this transformation of the person's character as well as the concrete social and cultural obstacles to human sexual flourishing (e.g., the widespread trivialization of sex in contemporary Western culture.)⁹⁴

If Grabowski is correct, then moral education must present a robust vision and understanding of sex and love. The Church must offer moral education and practices which help young people to avoid lust, so that young people can fend off, with the assistance of God's grace, the warped vision of sexuality and the body that Western culture offers.

Throughout the history of the Church, the virtue of chastity has occupied a central place in the way in which the Church approaches human sexuality. In its document, *Educational Guidance in Human Love: Outlines for Sex Education*, the Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE) notes that "in order for the value of sexuality to reach its full realisation, *education for*

⁹⁴ Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue*, 155.

chastity is absolutely essential” (n. 17).⁹⁵ The document goes on to explain that chastity “consists in self-control, in the capacity of guiding the sexual instinct to the service of love and of integrating it in the development of the person” (n. 17).

How does one cultivate chastity? Like the other virtues in the Christian life, chastity is infused into the person by God at baptism. Unlike the acquired virtue of chastity, the infused virtue of chastity is not obtained through one’s own efforts but by the grace of God.⁹⁶ Similarly, it is not increased through one’s own efforts; God increases the virtue in the person. However, recall that Aquinas stresses that Christians can dispose themselves for an increase of the infused virtues through their own actions.

The CCE makes a similar point by referring to chastity as the “fruit of the grace of God and of our cooperation” (n. 17). In this regard, Christians can prepare themselves for an increase in chastity by acting and thinking in a chaste manner. Over time and through the grace of God, chastity becomes like second nature to the person who possess it, providing the person with self-mastery over his or her sexual desire and integrating that desire within the good of the whole person.⁹⁷

Even though the person obtains the virtue through the grace of God and individual decisions, the community is not irrelevant. Parents and educators help to cultivate the virtues,

⁹⁵ Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educational Guidance in Human Love*, (November 1, 1983), original emphasis. The document is quoting from Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris consortio*, no. 37.

⁹⁶ In Aquinas’ schema, each acquired virtue has an infused counterpart with the exception of the theological virtues. For more on the relationship between acquired and infused virtues, see footnotes 37, 39 and 40 in chapter 1 of this project. Since this chapter deals with chastity education within the Church, I am assuming that the audience of both Church documents as well as chastity programs is baptized Christians. Therefore, the remainder of this chapter deals primarily with how to cultivate the infused virtue of chastity, which according to Aquinas, Christians receive, along with the other moral virtues at baptism. See *ST*, I-II, q. 63, a. 3.

⁹⁷ CCC, 2395.

including chastity, by disciplining their children, by modeling virtuous behavior for them, and by giving them the resources to help them understand what constitutes virtue and vice. In short, parents, educators, and the broader Christian community guide children on the path of virtue, so that young people are disposed to make virtuous choices.

While the Christian community, including priests, parishes, and Catholic schools, have an important role to play in moral formation in general and chastity education in particular, the Congregation stresses that parents have the primary role in sex education (n. 54). The document encourages parents to collaborate with others in the community, who assist with moral education, but it makes it clear that parents are the leaders and directors of their children's moral formation. To assist parents with this formation, the Pontifical Council for the Family published *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education within the Family*.

Once again, these guidelines stress the importance of chastity, and they offer parents practical suggestions for how to think about and approach chastity education. To that end, the document proposes three objectives for chastity education in the home. It states:

Educating children for chastity strives to achieve three objectives: (a) to maintain in the family *positive atmosphere of love, virtue and respect for the gifts of God*, in particular the gift of life; (b) to help children to understand the value of sexuality and chastity in stages, sustaining their growth through enlightening word, example and prayer; (c) to help them understand and discover *their own vocation to marriage or to consecrated virginity for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven* in harmony with and respecting their attitudes and inclinations and the gifts of the Spirit (n. 22).⁹⁸

Regarding the second objective, the guidelines outline children's principal stages of development, pointing out what comprises helpful and appropriate chastity education at each stage, given what is happening physically, emotionally, and mentally. To the credit of the

⁹⁸ Emphasis in the original.

authors, the document does not overlook the importance of sexual difference. For example, when it addresses puberty, it notes that “‘*the psychological and emotional development of boys*’ can make them vulnerable to erotic fantasies, and they may be tempted to try sexual experiences. Parents should be close to their sons and correct the tendency to use sexuality in a hedonistic and materialistic way (n. 93).”⁹⁹ While the document never explicitly mentions lust, this is a clear warning against the vice of lust as it traditionally has been understood. The focus here is on young men misusing and abusing their sexuality in pursuit of sexual pleasure. In addition to this warning, the document goes on to discuss some of the usual offenses against chastity, including masturbation, where the aim is sexual gratification (n. 103).

In order to prevent young men from falling into lust, the document encourages parents to:

[R]emind boys about God’s gift, received in order to cooperate with him ‘to actualize in history the original blessing of the Creator—that of transmitting by procreation the divine image from person to person...’; and this will strengthen their awareness that ‘Fecundity is the fruit and sign of conjugal love, the living testimony of the full reciprocal self-giving of the spouses.’ In this way sons will also learn the respect due to women (n. 93).

If the temptation for boys is to objectify women and to misuse their sexuality by seeking sexual pleasure outside of marriage, then the solution, as the document suggests, is to stress the dignity of women and the significance of God’s gift of fertility. The young man is much less likely to use a young lady if he possesses true respect for her.

In the paragraph immediately preceding its discussion of young men, the document addresses young ladies and the challenges of puberty. It states, “Through *a trusting and open dialogue*, parents can guide *their daughters* in facing any emotional perplexity, and support the

⁹⁹ Emphasis in the original.

value of Christian chastity out of consideration for the other sex (n. 92).”¹⁰⁰ Then, it goes onto to say:

Instruction for both girls and boys should aim at pointing out the beauty of motherhood and the wonderful reality of procreation, as well as the deep meaning of virginity. In this way they will be helped to go against the hedonistic mentality which is very widespread today and particularly, at such a decisive stage, in preventing the ‘contraceptive mentality’, which unfortunately is very common and which girls will have to face later in marriage (n. 92).¹⁰¹

There are a few things to note about this passage. First, while promoting chastity for both sexes, the document is unclear about what threatens chastity for women. In other words, what drives women to be unchaste? For young men, the document is clear; young men are led to unchaste behavior because of a desire for sexual pleasure (n. 93). For young women, it simply mentions emotional perplexity, but it offers no description of what is involved in this emotional confusion or the relationship between this perplexity and unchaste actions.

After mentioning this emotional perplexity, the authors immediately move, in the same paragraph, from discussing how parents can guide their daughters to offering instructions for parents of boys and/or girls. The authors then mention the hedonistic and contraceptive mentality that pervades our contemporary culture. This discussion flows into their treatment of hedonism and young men in the next paragraph. In total, the authors devote one sentence exclusively to the challenges that young women face, and everything else in this section pertains to young men or both sexes.¹⁰² For both boys and girls, the threat to the virtue of chastity seems solely to be the hedonistic view of sexuality promoted by contemporary culture.

¹⁰⁰ Emphasis in the original.

¹⁰¹ Emphasis in the original.

¹⁰² It is unclear in no. 92 whether the document is referring specifically to young women or to both sexes.

Second, whether parents' are rearing boys or girls, the advice that the document offers concerning how parents should promote chastity is the same. In order to combat Western culture's hedonism and contraceptive mentality, the document suggests that parents stress what a great privilege men and women have been given by God in the gift of their fertility. They have been allowed by God to be co-creators, cooperating with Him in bringing forth new life. Therefore, the document encourages parents to point out the reverence that young people should have for this gift. Also, it instructs parents to teach their children that the proper place to use their gift of fertility is in the context of marriage, where "fecundity is the fruit and sign of conjugal love" (n. 93). However, it fails to include any discussion concerning the potentially different reasons why girls and boys engage in pre-marital sex. In addition, it does not point out the fundamental differences between male and female fertility or how the hedonistic culture aims to turn young women into men by encouraging them to engage casual sex and to suppress their ability to become pregnant.

Re-envisioning Chastity Education: A Way Forward

If the Church's approach to chastity education largely has neglected the different ways in which men and women lust, as I have contended, then any new vision for chastity education must begin by redressing this omission. This section attempts to begin that process. While it is beyond the scope of this project to provide a comprehensive chastity education program that adequately takes into account sexual difference, this section attempts to offer some basic guidelines and components, which should accompany any re-envisioning of chastity education.

Before offering some suggestions on how Christian chastity education can incorporate sexual difference, it is important to understand the scope of the problem. In her book *Your Kids at Risk: How Teen Sex Threatens Our Sons and Daughters*, Meg Meeker provides some disturbing statistics concerning sexual activity among teens. Prior to their graduation from high school, 46 percent students are sexually active.¹⁰³ Approximately 8 to 10 million teenagers contract at least one STD annually, and teenagers acquire 20-25 percent of all STDs, even though they comprise only 10 percent of the population.¹⁰⁴ The rate of non-marital births reached its historical peak 2007, and the highest rate of non-marital births was among 18- to 19-year-olds.¹⁰⁵ Despite the millions of dollars which have been spent at the federal and state level on abstinence-only and comprehensive sex education programs, sexual activity among teens continues to be a pervasive problem. While some of these numbers have trended downward at points over the last twenty-years, the number of sexually active teens as well as the number of non-marital births and STDs among teens have not been substantially reduced.¹⁰⁶

Why have these statistics remained relatively high and some years even increased over the last few decades? Undoubtedly, one could point to a myriad of factors, and these might include the influence of the media and culture, the sexualization of youth at younger ages, more widespread access to contraception, and the substantial number of children from disrupted or

¹⁰³ Meg Meeker, *Your Kids at Risk: How Teen Sex Threatens Our Sons and Daughters* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2007), xiv. This number is actually down from 54 percent in 1991.

¹⁰⁴ Meeker 13.

¹⁰⁵ Helen Alvaré, "Beyond the Sex-Ed Wars: Addressing Disadvantaged Single Mothers' Search for Community," *Akron Law Review* 44 (2011): 170.

¹⁰⁶ As was previously mentioned in note 101, the number of sexually active high school students only dropped from 54 to 48 percent between 1991 and 2006. See Rob Stein, "Rise in teenage pregnancy rate spurs new debate on arresting it," *Washington Post* 26 January 2010 [Accessed on 12 February 2013, from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/25/AR2010012503957.html>].

never married families.¹⁰⁷ However, Helen Alvaré, in her article “Beyond the Sex-Ed Wars,” identifies another factor, which has largely been overlooked by all current approaches to sex education (both outside and inside the Church). She writes:

In brief, I suggest that revealing data show how young women frame their choices about sex, pregnancy and childbearing as part of a larger strategy both to ‘construct community’ where one is lacking, and then to take their place in the larger community which they understand to expect and to value giving or self-donation from its good citizens. Sexual connection and the following motherhood are understood to be important parts of realizing these goals.¹⁰⁸

In other words, women’s rationale for engaging in pre-marital sex differs from men, and Alvaré maintains that this sexual difference has been almost completely ignored by both abstinence-only and comprehensive sex education program.

Instead, current sex education efforts assume that “women make sexual and reproductive choices based upon materialistic, individualistic, and self-maximizing grounds.”¹⁰⁹ The “learn this and take care of number one” approach adopted by most sex education programs fails to reach women. Unfortunately, this strategy ignores the reasons, such as low self-esteem and the desire for emotional intimacy, why women engage in pre-marital sex.¹¹⁰ Consequently, Alvaré

¹⁰⁷ Alvaré, 175. There is a substantial amount of literature and data concerning the significance of these factors in sexual activity among youth. It is beyond the scope of this project to engage in these debates, which have been raging for several years now. Like Alvaré, I am merely acknowledging that there are several direct and more remote factors which contribute to a young man or young woman’s decision to engage in pre-marital sex. For a summary of the available empirical data on the decline of two-parent, heterosexual households, see Child Trends DataBank, “The proportion of children living with both parents,” Child Trends DataBank, [<http://www.childtrendsdatabank.org/?q=node/23>], Accessed 12 February 2013.

¹⁰⁸ Alvare 176.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 173. Alvare is specifically referring to disadvantaged women here, but I think that her critique applies to sex education programs in general.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 201.

proposes that “future efforts by the state and cooperating entities take single women’s thinking more into account.”¹¹¹

Even though the focus of Alvaré’s work is disadvantaged women and how to reduce the non-marital birthrate among these women, much of her analysis applies to women in general.¹¹² In particular, she notes that “single women’s choices for sexual intimacy and motherhood are likely one logical manifestation of human beings’ inbuilt orientation toward seeking permanent, reciprocal connections, which allow for both giving and taking.”¹¹³ While the desire for intimacy and relationships is good, the problem for teenagers is that their brains may not be developed enough to figure out how to pursue their desire for connection and self-donation in positive, healthy, and moral ways.¹¹⁴ As child and adolescent psychiatrist Jay Giedd points out, “Teenagers are capable of enormous intellectual and artistic accomplishments, but the basic part of the brain that gives us strategies and organizing and perhaps warns us of potential consequences is not fully on board yet.”¹¹⁵ Therefore, chastity education must not only help teenage girls understand the potential consequences of pre-marital sex, such as acquiring an STD, but it must also provide them with healthy outlets, which speak to their desire for intimacy, relationships, and self-giving.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² I am not ignoring differences in race, class, and education, and community dynamics between advantaged and disadvantaged women. As Alvaré points out throughout her article, these differences impact how disadvantaged women think about relationships and sex outside of marriage. However, at various places in her work, Alvaré makes claims about women in general without confining her analysis to disadvantaged women, and I have noted where she specifically is addressing the latter.

¹¹³ Ibid., 189.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 192.

¹¹⁵ Jay Giedd qtd. in *Frontline: Inside the Teenage Brain*, prod. By Sarah Spinks, PBS 31 January 2002 [Accessed on 12 February 2013, from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/teenbrain/#>].

The empirical data supports this conclusion. In his comprehensive study and evaluation of existing public sex education programs, Douglas Kirby notes that girls who are involved in sports are more likely to delay sex and have pre-marital sex less frequently. (The same is not true of teenage boys who participate in athletics).¹¹⁶ Not surprisingly, Kirby also finds that for young men and young women, one of the most significant “protective factors” involves quality, positive, healthy relationships with adults, particularly parents.¹¹⁷ These relationships are especially important for young women, who are more likely to engage in early sexual activity and experience adolescent pregnancy whenever they are exposed to father absence.¹¹⁸

While no chastity program can force young women to be involved in sports or mandate that parents stay active in their children’s lives, one program, Best Friends, connects chastity education to relationship-building as well as community service for young women.¹¹⁹ The program is focused not just reducing sexual activity but also reducing other risk behaviors, such as smoking, drug use, and underage drinking. Girls begin the program in 6th grade and continue through high school. Each year, they receive at least 110 hours of guidance and activities.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Douglas Kirby, “Emerging Answers 2007: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases,” *The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy* (November 2007): 65-66 [Accessed 12 February 2013, from http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/pubs/EA2007_FINAL.pdf].

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 68.

¹¹⁸ Bruce J. Ellis, John E. Bates, Kenneth A. Dodge, David M. Fergusson, L. John Horwood, Gregory S. Pettit, and Lianne Woodward, “Does Father Absence Place Daughters at Special Risk for Early Sexual Activity and Teenage Pregnancy?,” *Child Development* 74 (2003): 801.

¹¹⁹ Best Friends began as a program specifically for girls. The success of the program has led to the development of a similar program for boys called Best Men. Since the Best Men program has existed for a shorter period of time, there is less empirical data available on its effectiveness. For more information on the Best Men program, see Best Friends Foundation, “What is Best Men?,” [<http://www.bestfriendsfoundation.org/BMWhatIsBM2.html>], Accessed 12 February 2013.

¹²⁰ Best Friends Foundation, “Start a New Program,” [<http://www.bestfriendsfoundation.org/FoundStartProgram.html>], Accessed 12 February 2013.

Best Friends is unique, because it acknowledges the importance of quality relationships and provides opportunities for self-giving in the lives of young ladies. It does not simply tell young women how to use birth control nor does it focus on the dangers associated with risk behaviors, although it does cover these. Instead, it builds relationships among the participants themselves and between the girls and female mentors. On the one hand, Best Friends requires that only female members of the school's faculty be used as teacher-mentors, and these mentors are chosen by the students. The mentors meet with each student between 30 and 45 minutes each week.¹²¹

On the other hand, the Best Friends curriculum begins with a unit on friendship, and this focus on friendship and the support that it offers continues throughout the program. When the girls enter high school, they transition to the Diamond Girls program. The community of girls that was formed in middle school continues, and the girls meet monthly and on weekends in order to provide one another with peer support and to reaffirm their commitment to abstain from high risk behavior.¹²²

In addition to the unique focus on community, Best Friends also works to increase young girls' self-esteem and to provide them opportunities to give of themselves in healthy and productive ways. For example, the middle school program offers lessons on love and dating, self-respect, decision-making, physical fitness, and nutrition. For high-school girls, these lessons take on a more practical component, as mentors provide leadership activities for the young ladies and discuss career goals and how to achieve them. At every level, girls in the Best Friends

¹²¹ Robert Lerner, "Can Abstinence Work?: An Analysis of the Best Friends Program," *Adolescent & Family Health* 3.4 (2004): 186.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 186.

program are recognized in school-wide ceremonies for their accomplishments and dedication to the program.

By any measure, Best Friends has been highly successful and has made a tremendous impact in the lives of hundreds of young girls. According Robert Lerner, who conducted an analysis of the program using quantitative techniques, girls in the program in high school were almost 3 times less likely to drink alcohol, 26 times less likely to use illegal drugs, 120 times less likely to engage in sex in high school! For both middle school and high school girls, Lerner concludes that “the BF program substantially reduces the likelihood of girls engaging in risk behavior.”¹²³ This conclusion is supported by D.R. Rowberry’s study, which was conducted almost 10 years before Lerner’s review.¹²⁴

Best Friends’ holistic and comprehensive approach to abstinence education, in particular, and risky behavior, more generally, stands in stark contrast to some approaches to chastity education in the Church. For example, the popular program, *Theology of the Body for Teens*, which is designed to be used in a variety of settings, such as youth ministry, parish religious education programs, and schools, includes one paragraph in almost 200 pages on the importance of service.¹²⁵ In addition, the bulk of the curriculum is written for both sexes, so it pays little attention to the particular and unique temptations that each sex faces. In addition, while the program recognizes the importance of good friendships, it does not attempt to cultivate community in any deliberate way.

¹²³ Ibid., 190.

¹²⁴ D.R. Rowberry, “An evaluation of the Washington, D.C. Best Friends program” (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado, 1995).

¹²⁵ Jason Evert, Crystalina Evert, and Brian Butler, *Theology of the Body: Leader’s Guide* (Necedah, WI: Ascension Press, 2006), 189.

Endow, another popular, Catholic chastity program, more closely resembles the Best Friends model.¹²⁶ Endow is for middle school and high school girls as well as young adult women, and the program contains age appropriate components for the younger girls. The program heavily emphasizes community and peer support, so the curriculum is designed for small study groups of less than 30 people, which are led by a facilitator. Through community-building and by focusing on women's unique gifts, Endow educates young women, provides character formation, and empowers them to be chaste.

Unfortunately, despite its unique approach to chastity education for young women, Endow still lacks service, leadership, and strong mentoring components, and it is not structured in order to provide young women with more knowledge, experience, and opportunities as they mature. As the success of Best Friends demonstrates, the Church must begin to think about chastity education more broadly, where traditional elements of chastity education are combined with service to others, leadership training, community-building, and mentoring. Each of these elements has a role to play in empowering young women and helping them to avoid poor moral decisions. While Endow is a good start, Catholic chastity educators, including parents, program designers, youth ministers, and directors of religious education, must continue to re-envision the way in which we help young men and women cultivate chastity. Chastity education must be more than instruction, particularly for young women; it must include opportunities for action.

Conclusion

For the most part, the Church's teaching on lust fails to acknowledge that sexual difference should influence chastity education. *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality* is one example

¹²⁶ Endow Online, "About us," [<http://endowgroups.org/about-us-2/>], Accessed 12 February 2013.

of this omission. The document fails to adequately take into account how sexual difference impacts the cultivation of the virtue. While it correctly points out that boys are led to lust by their desire for sexual pleasure, it pays almost no attention to the temptations that young women face. In other words, it sufficiently treats male lust and describes how parents can help their sons avoid it, but it completely overlooks female lust.

Even though young women also need to cultivate chastity, the obstacles that they face are different from those faced by young men. As was previously argued, in many instances, women are not primarily seeking pleasure in lustful acts; they are chasing emotional closeness with another. Unchaste behavior, whether it be premarital sex or participation in cybersex or sexting, is rooted in their desire for relationships. Believing that sex will lead to relationship, they use sex and the opposite sex in their pursuit of that intimacy. Unlike men, many young women are not primarily seeking sexual pleasure. They are seeking emotional intimacy, and pleasure is only a secondary good for them.

Chastity education must reflect this difference. One must understand the problem before one can address it. If young men and women are engaging in lustful acts for different reasons, then it seems imperative not only to help them understand what might lead them to abuse their sexuality but also to alert parents to the same thing. Once chastity educators acknowledge the differences in why and how men and women lust, then moral formation and tips for how to avoid lust can be tailored toward each gender.

Since women value intimacy and will participate in the sexual act to obtain it, they must be shown that sex outside of marriage is not an authentic expression of love and that intimacy takes a variety of forms. While *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality* deals with the

former throughout, it barely touches on the later. It simply mentions, “*Friendships* are very important in this period [of adolescence] (n. 107).”¹²⁷ This is certainly true, but the document never explains why.¹²⁸ For boys, who are tempted to objectify women, friendships, particularly with girls, are an essential part of their moral formation. With the help of God grace, they cultivate chastity by moving beyond the mere physical appearance of a young woman to recognize a person, who, like them, is created in the image and likeness of God. These friendships are an opportunity for young men to recognize the dignity of women outside of the home and to participate in the infused virtue of chastity by acting in a chaste manner.

For young women, friendships with the same sex and opposite sex are ways in which they can practice other forms of intimacy. They can learn the value of self-giving and experience emotional closeness with others, without participating in unchaste behavior.¹²⁹ Again, by participating in the grace of God, they can grow in the infused virtue of chastity by practicing chastity. At the same time, young women must be empowered by parents, educators, and the Church, so that they understand that being in a romantic relationship is not essential for happiness or self-worth.

Unfortunately, existing programs are primarily written for young men (even if not intentionally). They educate young men about the dangers of pornography and STDs, and they encourage young men to treat women with respect and dignity. However, as Gilligan points out, women weigh different factors in their moral decision-making. When it comes to choosing

¹²⁷ Emphasis in the original.

¹²⁸ In fact, it is unclear whether the authors are claiming that friendships are important to the adolescences themselves or whether they are important for the cultivation of chastity or both.

¹²⁹ Benedict Groeschel uses similar language and conveys a similar message to homosexual persons. See his book, *The Courage to Be Chaste* (Boston: Paulist Press, 1998).

whether or not to have pre-marital sex, young girls are focused on relationships, their desire to please another, and their own need for emotional intimacy. Therefore, chastity education for young women needs to do more than appeal to their individual self-interest. It must be tailored to their unique temptations to lust in order to be compelling, while also providing them with opportunities to make a healthy gift of self and build positive relationships.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

While the second half of the 20th century was a time of upheaval in Catholic moral theology, two prominent trends emerged by the end of the century. First, as Servais Pinckaers pointed out in 1996, “Virtue is back.”¹ This renewed interest in virtue ethics among Catholic theologians has largely focused on Aquinas’s writings and his interpretation and reappropriation of Aristotle. Second, because of the writings of John Paul II, questions about the significance and meaning of sexual difference have begun to occupy a central place in Catholic moral theology. For the most part, these questions have been closely tied John Paul II’s catecheses known as the Theology of the Body and to a lesser extent his philosophical writings.² While these two trends dealing with virtue and sexual difference have remained fairly separate and distinct, this project has attempted to bring them together by exploring the impact of sexual difference on the acquisition and exercise of virtue.

In the preceding chapters, I argued that in order to resolve some of the internal inconsistencies between his theory of virtue and his philosophy of woman, Aquinas needs an account of sexual difference, such as the one offered by Carol Gilligan, that focuses more on the experience of women and upholds their equality with men even while recognizing the differences between the sexes, and I maintained that this new account has implications for the acquisition and exercise of specific virtues such as chastity. On the one hand, these

¹ Servais Pinckaers, “Rediscovering Virtue,” *The Thomist* 60, no. 3 (1996): 361.

² For more on how John Paul II has influenced Catholic moral theology in America, see John Grabowski, “The Luminous Excess of the Acting Person: Assessing the Impact of Pope John Paul II on American Catholic Moral Theology,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 1, no. 1 (2012): 116-147.

inconsistencies arise, because Aquinas is heavily influenced by Aristotle's androcentric metaphysical biology, which leads him to conclude that on the natural level, men are superior to women. The former possess superior reason and thus are more suited for the acquisition of virtue, while the latter suffer from weak reason and unruly passions. On the other hand, influenced by Scripture, Aquinas maintains that men and women are equal in the life of grace. Both sexes are created in the image of God, and both sexes are capable of receiving and cultivating the infused virtues. For Aquinas, grace is the great equalizer, which heals women of their natural deficiencies and places them on the same level as men.

However, Aquinas's philosophy of women is problematic. According to St. Thomas, grace heals and elevates nature, but it does not destroy it. Therefore, he maintains that if one enters the Christian life with a vice, then the grace that comes from baptism destroys the vice. Unfortunately, contrary dispositions, which are remainders of the vice, will still plague the individual except miraculously cases. I have argued that the natural defects which Aquinas attributes to women are akin to a vice, because they interfere with women's ability to make good moral decisions and thus inhibit their acquisition of virtue. Therefore, if women are defective and inferior to men in the natural order, which Aquinas claims, then based on his own terms, they cannot be equal to men in the supernatural order. Instead, they begin the Christian life with moral defects, such as weak reason and unruly emotions, which grace does not completely overcome. It seems extremely tenuous for Aquinas to hold that the sexes are unequal in the natural order but equal in the Christian life.

My position concerning Aquinas's philosophy of woman puts me at odds with two popular interpretations of his work. On the one hand, it runs counter to scholars, such as

Prudence Allen, who argue that Aquinas's philosophy of woman is logically consistent. According to Allen, it only appears to be contradictory for Aquinas to claim that women are inferior in the natural order and equal to men in the supernatural order. In fact, Allen maintains that Aquinas resolves this apparent tension in his account through the equalizing power that he attributes to grace.³

On the other hand, my read of Aquinas's philosophy of woman also stands in stark contrast to scholars, such as Eleonore Stump, who ignore or dismiss Aquinas's philosophy of woman as having no bearing on his theory of virtue.⁴ I have contended that Aquinas's fundamental insight, which is that sexual difference impacts the acquisition and exercise of virtue, is correct. His insight is substantiated not only by the research of Carol Gilligan but also by findings in the fields of neuroscience, sociobiology, anthropology, and psychology.

While Gilligan does not engage Aquinas's thought directly, her work not only supports Aquinas's basic insight regarding the importance of sexual difference, but she also offers a new account of sexual difference for Thomistic virtue ethics. Like Aquinas, Gilligan argues that men and women deliberate differently about moral issues. However, because she presupposes the equality of the sexes rather than arguing that one sex is more capable of moral development, she maintains that the sexes simply tend to privilege different factors in their moral reasoning.

Therefore, I have argued that her account of sexual difference is capable of resolving the tension between Aquinas's philosophy of woman and his theory of virtue. If her account of sexual difference or one like it is incorporated into Aquinas's moral framework, then it allows

³ Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution 750 BC – AD 1250* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1985), 407.

⁴ Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 542.

Thomistic scholars to explain how the sexes are different but also equal in both the natural order and the supernatural order.

While Gilligan's account of sexual difference may help to resolve some of the internal inconsistencies in Aquinas's philosophy of woman, her account also raises several questions for Thomistic virtue ethics. For example, if men and women possess the same capacity for moral development but reason differently, then how does sexual difference affect the acquisition and exercise of virtue?

I have attempted to begin to answer this question with a detailed examination of the virtue of chastity and its opposing vice of lust. Based in part on Gilligan's account of sexual difference as well as findings from other disciplines, I concluded that men and women lust for different reasons. While men engaged in lustful acts for primarily pleasure, women tend to commit the same acts seeking mainly emotional intimacy. Consequently, in order to help men and women cultivate the virtue of chastity, Thomistic virtue ethics must redefine lust from a less androcentric perspective. Lust cannot be defined simply as a disordered desire; it must be thought of more broadly in order to capture the reasons why women tend engage in lustful acts, such as premarital and extramarital sex. In addition, the Church must re-envision its current approach to chastity education by focusing on the unique temptations for each sex. In particular, if young women are seeking affirmation and emotional fulfillment, then they need chastity education that is more holistic and provides them peer support and with opportunities to give of themselves through service.

If sexual difference affects how men and women cultivate chastity and conversely avoid lust, then this project raises several questions about how sexual difference impacts other virtues.

While I have argued that sexual difference is extremely important for how Thomistic virtue ethics understands chastity, does sexual difference also affect courage, prudence, justice, temperance, etc.? In other words, do men and women exercise these virtues differently? Furthermore, are men and women tempted into vicious behavior opposed to this virtue for the same reasons, or does sexual difference influence the ways in which each sex is tempted, as in the case of lust?

In addition to these questions dealing with Thomistic virtue ethics, this study has implications and resources for further explicating the thought of John Paul II. More specifically, in *Mulieris dignitatem*, John Paul II discusses the “feminine ‘genius’” and “the fruits of feminine holiness.”⁵ These lie at the heart of the new feminism, which John Paul II calls for in *Evangelium vitae*. He writes:

In transforming culture so that it supports life, women occupy a place, in thought and action, which is unique and decisive. It depends on them to promote a "new feminism" which rejects the temptation of imitating models of "male domination," in order to acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of the life of society, and overcome all discrimination, violence and exploitation.⁶

Hopefully, by stressing the importance of sexual difference in the moral life and by starting to articulate what is unique about many women’s moral perspective, this project provides resources for exploring this feminine genius and furthering the new feminism.

⁵ John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Mulieris Dignitatem*, 31, AAS 80 (1988), 1729. The translation here is taken from John Paul II, *On the Dignity and Vocation of Women*, in *The Theology of the Body* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1997), 487 (original emphasis).

⁶ John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter Evangelium Vitae*, 99, AAS 87 (1995), 515. The translation here is taken from John Paul II, *The Gospel of Life*, in *The Theology of the Body* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1997), 487.

It has been over fifteen years, since Pinckaers announced the return of virtue.⁷ As the study of virtue ethics continues to gain popularity and prominence in Catholic moral theology along with the ideas of Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II, the significance of sexual difference cannot be overlooked. Our bodies matter, because it is in and through them that human beings grow in holiness. Thus, our maleness and femaleness must be an integral part of the future conservation in virtue ethics, so that the Church can preach and teach virtue more effectively. After all, it is *men* and *women* who become vicious and virtuous not asexual creatures.

⁷ Pinckaers, "Rediscovering Virtue," 361.

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