Thomas Aquinas on the Connection of the Virtues

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Does a person need to possess all of the virtues to possess even one of them? Aquinas’s affirmative response to this question is rejected by the majority of contemporary moralists. Two common charges brought to bear on the thesis are: (1) if it is true, then no one is virtuous, and (2) if it is true, then moral progress is impossible. The purpose of this study is to provide an account of Aquinas’s version of the inseparability thesis in a manner that responds to contemporary criticisms by attending to overlooked texts as well as the historical context in which Aquinas’s thesis emerged. The first chapter examines the positions of prominent critics of inseparability. The second and third chapters analyze different versions of inseparability in the periods leading up to Aquinas in philosophy and theology respectively. The fourth chapter presents Aquinas’s thesis, and the fifth chapter revisits the critiques of the first chapter. The dissertation concludes that Aquinas’s thesis is not susceptible to these objections, since he follows Aristotle and Augustine in conceiving of virtue as consisting in degrees. This is contrary to the Stoic view that virtue is an absolute state that does not allow for gradation. Another finding of this dissertation is that disagreement over inseparability stems from the fact that ancient and medieval thinkers define virtue differently than do moderns. It is not as though there is agreement with respect
to the definition of virtue, but disagreement with respect to whether the virtues are inseparable. In fact, the qualities that several modern scholars insist are separable are different from the qualities that Aquinas and his philosophical and theological predecessors insisted were inseparable. Accepting or rejecting inseparability is commonly due to alternative definitions of virtue.
This dissertation by Andrew Kim fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in Moral Theology/Ethics approved by William C. Mattison III, Ph.D., as Director, and by Joseph Capizzi, Ph.D., and Angela McKay-Knobel, Ph.D. as Readers.

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For Caitlin, Theo, Lucy, and Zoë, my parents, and Uwe and SunHee Gertz
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Introduction

If a quality must be in accord with right reason in order to count as a virtue, then the virtues are either wisdom or are directed by wisdom. Scholars generally refer to the first view as the identity thesis, since it identifies all of the virtues with wisdom. It was introduced into philosophical discourse by Plato’s presentation of Socrates’ position in the *Protagoras*. The second view, the unity thesis, is espoused by Aristotle in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. According to this view, the virtues are distinct, but prudence and the moral virtues entail each other. For the sake of clarity, I refer to both theses with the general term “inseparability.” In its most basic form, the inseparability thesis posits that to possess one virtue is to possess them all, either because all of the virtues are wisdom or because they cannot be had apart from wisdom.

The inseparability thesis undergoes significant development in the periods leading up to Aquinas. The Stoics radicalize the identity thesis by defining virtue as an absolute state that does not allow for gradation. Augustine counters this view and in so doing introduces a version of the identity thesis rooted in Christian love rather than philosophical wisdom. Aquinas, in a manner influenced by his more immediate predecessors, synthesizes the views of Aristotle and Augustine in constructing his own version of the unity thesis. At issue in this dissertation is not the historical development of the inseparability thesis but the sweeping rejection of it by contemporary ethicists. The purpose of this dissertation is to assess whether Aquinas’s version of the thesis is susceptible to these objections. I argue it is not.
The opening chapter of this dissertation provides an analysis of contemporary objections to inseparability from different academic disciplines. First, I review criticisms arising from the field of moral psychology. According to situationist psychologists, the data of human behavior made available through experimental research is not supportive of interconnected associations of virtue inhering in the human personality. Next, objections to inseparability from the standpoint of moral philosophy are examined. The inseparability thesis is commonly charged by modern moral philosophers with discounting the virtues of ordinary people by setting an unreachable standard for virtue. The contemporary moral theologian, Jean Porter, puts forward a similar argument employing the life of Martin Luther King Jr. as a test case. Related to this set of criticisms is a further set of criticisms according to which the inseparability thesis does not have a way to account for progress in the moral life. The chapter concludes by considering areas of overlap among the aforementioned objections.

The respective aims of the second and third chapters are to situate Aquinas’s thesis among varying versions of inseparability so as to eventually respond to the objections of the first chapter. In the second chapter, three alternative versions of inseparability from the period of classical philosophy are analyzed. These are: the identity thesis of Socrates, Aristotle’s unity thesis, and the Stoic view, which I refer to as a radicalized identity thesis. The third chapter examines Augustine’s critical response to the Stoic thesis and its implications once the acquired/infused distinction is introduced by Godfrey of Poitiers. This pertains to the concluding arguments of the final chapter, because Aquinas follows Augustine in rejecting the Stoic claim that virtue is an absolute state that does not allow for gradation.
and this impacts his accounts of the inseparability of both acquired and infused virtue. The failure to disassociate Aquinas’s understanding of the inseparability of the virtues from the Stoic view leads to objections to inseparability in general which are not applicable to Aquinas’s thesis, as I shall show.

The fourth chapter of this dissertation analyzes Aquinas’s thesis in the context afforded by the second and third chapters. I argue that Aquinas constructs a unity thesis with regard to both infused and acquired virtues respectively. Thus, Aquinas’s thesis belongs in the Aristotelian branch of versions of inseparability. Since Aquinas’s account synthesizes the insights of Aristotle with those of Augustine, his unity thesis denies the Stoic claim that virtue is only virtue when conceived of in an absolute sense.

The fifth and final chapter contends that Aquinas’s thesis is not susceptible to the objections presented in the first chapter for three reasons. First, since he rejects the totalizing claims of the Stoics, Aquinas’s unity thesis can distinguish true virtue from false virtue without repudiating the good qualities of ordinary people. Second, Aquinas can account for moral progress leading up to the attainment of virtue and beyond. Third, inseparability is frequently rejected merely because it is not applicable to modern definitions of virtue according to which virtue need not be in accord with right reason. Aquinas’s definition, I argue, avoids problems which follow from this modern view.

Having outlined the chapters of the dissertation, I wish to draw attention to some of the limitations of this study. First, this dissertation does not provide an exhaustive account of contemporary objections to inseparability nor does it consider contemporary defenses of the thesis that are not relevant to my project. My presentation of the objections is selective.
have selected objections that are prominent and representative of the kind of critiques of inseparability that emerge in contemporary ethics. I have also not given attention to modern versions of inseparability, such as the limited inseparability thesis posited by N.K. Badhwar, since these are not relevant to Aquinas’s thesis.

Second, this dissertation does not and cannot provide complete accounts of the versions of inseparability espoused respectively by Socrates, Aristotle, the Stoics, and Augustine. Thus, I have only analyzed these theses insofar as they are relevant to Aquinas’s thesis and my project as a whole. Also, Plato’s version of inseparability put forward in the *Republic* and the *Laws* has been omitted. Whether the versions of inseparability put forward by the aforementioned thinkers are susceptible to the objections of the first chapter could each be the subject for a separate dissertation. For the same reason, I do not treat the restructuring of the radicalized identity thesis that takes place in later Stoic thought or Augustine’s apparent repudiation of pagan virtue. In addition to not being directly relevant to my project, these topics deserve separate treatments.

My project is also limited with respect to my treatment of Aquinas’s thought on virtue. For instance, I do not treat the relationship of infused virtue to acquired virtue. Does possessing the infused virtues entail possession of the acquired virtues? Can one possess the acquired virtues apart from the infused virtues? Are the acquired virtues either replaced or transformed by infused virtues? My dissertation leaves these questions which, again, could and have formed the subject of separate dissertations, unanswered.

Given these limitations of scope, the main contribution of this dissertation is explaining why Aquinas’s account of inseparability is not susceptible to contemporary
criticisms. Over the course of making this argument, two other contributions are offered. First, attention is drawn to differences in definitions of virtue. Inseparability is alien to modern thought about virtue, I contend, because of the way modern ethicists define virtue. They do not hold that virtues need to be in accord with right reason. Second, though this dissertation is not a historical analysis, it does help to differentiate versions of inseparability from each other. No one denies that these versions differ from each other in important ways, but my project helps identify those ways. Therefore, this project contributes to contemporary discussions which take place among virtue ethicists regarding the inseparability of the virtues.
The Fragmentation of the Virtues

Thomas Aquinas defines a moral virtue as a habit “directed to a good work done well. And taking the moral virtues in this way,” he continues, “we ought to say that they are connected, as nearly everyone agrees.”¹ Jean Porter, a contemporary moral theologian, has remarked that “few passages in the Summa express the distance between Aquinas’s intellectual world and our own more clearly than does this one. Today, not only is it not the case that ‘nearly everyone agrees’ that the virtues are connected; it is more nearly the case that everyone agrees that they are not.”² The primary objective of the current chapter is to analyze current objections to the inseparability thesis. The term “inseparability thesis” refers to the claim that one must possess all of the virtues to possess even one of them. As the next chapter makes clear, there are multiple versions of inseparability, but for the purposes of consistency and clarity I use “inseparability” as an umbrella term to cover the various versions criticized by the scholars whose work is explored in this chapter.

In what follows, current objections to inseparability are summarized under three headings. The denial of habits objection arises from the field of moral psychology. It draws from the data of human behavior made available through experimental research to argue

¹ ST Ia IIae q. 65 a. 1. Unless otherwise indicated, translations from the Summa are taken from Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger, 1948).

against inseparability. Next, the impossibility of virtue objection, which occurs in moral philosophy and theology, critiques inseparability for discounting the virtues of ordinary people by setting an unreachable standard for virtue. Finally, the impossibility of moral progress objection argues inseparability cannot account for progress in the moral life. A concluding section examines common themes among these objections. Once we understand them, we will be in a position to see, whether Aquinas’s thesis is susceptible to them.

I. The Denial of Habits Objection

Some thinkers deny a connection among good habits of the soul (virtues), because they do not think that empirical analysis supports the existence of such habits in the first place. John M. Doris is a prolific and well respected representative of this view, so this section focuses on his work.  

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According to Doris, “behavioral regularity” may be explained either by “robust dispositional structures or situational regularity.” Virtue ethicists posit that behavioral regularity is predicated upon “robust” qualities of the soul that constitute one’s personality, which in turn, dispose how a given person acts even in a diversity of distinct situations. However, situationist psychologists, such as Doris, argue that empirical observation of human behavior suggests otherwise. According to this view, there is a causal link between situational regularity and behavioral regularity. Human behavior manifests extreme situational sensitivity and appears to be more the product of external situational factors than of internal qualities that inhere in the respective personalities of individuals. This is a denial, then, not just of the inseparability thesis, but of virtues in general.

The method of situationist psychology is empirical. Doris is dismissive of alternative philosophical methods; empirical analysis is the final court of appeal:

Instead of merely reporting how character and behavior seem to them, or how they think such things seem to others, philosophers might try to see how these seemings compare with systematic observation of behavior and interpersonal perception. In undertaking such a project, they will certainly want to consult experimental psychology. Whatever its shortcomings, it’s hard to believe that the psychology experiment is more artificial than the thought experiment or more likely to distort human actualities than literary fictions.

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5 Doris, Lack of Character, 9. In my view, while Doris employs an empirical method, his conclusions take him beyond the scope of both his data and his method. As prior and later footnotes in this section demonstrate, interpretations of the data Doris uses vary widely. Hence, when assessing whether Aquinas’s inseparability thesis is susceptible to Doris’s objection in the concluding chapter of this dissertation, I do not enter into a debate about data interpretation.
Based on his empirical research into experimental psychology, then, Doris distinguishes between situationism and what he refers to as “globalism.”\textsuperscript{6} According to Doris, globalism rests on the following three interrelated claims:

1. **Consistency.** Character and personality traits are reliably manifested in trait-relevant behavior across a diversity of trait-relevant eliciting conditions that may vary widely in their conduciveness to the manifestation of the trait in question.
2. **Stability.** Character and personality traits are reliably manifested in trait-relevant behaviors over iterated trials of similar trait-relevant eliciting conditions.
3. **Evaluative Integration.** In a given character or personality the occurrence of a trait with a particular evaluative valence is probabilistically related to the occurrence of other traits with similar evaluative tendencies.\textsuperscript{7}

Simply put, then, “Globalism construes personality as an evaluatively integrated association of robust traits.”\textsuperscript{8} With regard to the third thesis, Doris comments that “the idea of evaluative integration is rather less prominent in personality psychology than in character ethics,” and further that “even in character ethics, the comprehensive integration required by the inseparability [thesis] has been the object of suspicion.”\textsuperscript{9}

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\textsuperscript{6} This is Doris’s term. The earlier term was “dispositionalism,” which was used by Ross and Nisbett. See Lee Ross and Richard Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

\textsuperscript{7} Doris, *Lack of Character*, 22. As Sabini and Silver note, the claim is essentially that “psychological data show[s] that people do not have characters, in the sense required by virtue ethics, and this undermines virtue ethics.” They clarify in a footnote that by “undermine virtue ethics” they mean that Doris’s interpretation “denies the idea that behavior follows from beliefs, desires, and values.” See Sabini and Silver, “Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued” 2005: 535. Sabini and Silver reject this view. For a similar analysis see Richard Kamtekar, “Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of Our Character,” *Ethics* 114 (2004): 458-91.


\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 21. Doris takes there to be four manifestations of the inseparability thesis, which he ranks in order from strongest (least plausible) to weakest (most plausible). The unity thesis holds that “the apparently discrete virtues turn out to be different manifestations of a ‘single complex sensitivity.’” Doris references J. McDowell, “Virtue and Reason,” *Monist* 62 (1979): 332. McDowell is a contemporary advocate of the unity thesis. Aristotle’s “reciprocity thesis” posits a reciprocal relationship between the intellectual virtue of prudence and the moral virtues, but does not hold that the virtues reduce to “a single complex sensitivity.” Doris’s
However, Doris admits, the inseparability thesis is “an elusive target for empirical attacks,” because “defenders may claim that inseparability holds only for perfect virtue.” Proponents of the inseparability thesis, then, can allow for “the abundant appearances of separability and simply insist that these cases involve something less than the full realization of virtue.” On these grounds, inseparability is removed from “empirical threat,” because “we can expect perfect virtue to be extremely rare.” Hence, “neither a paucity of cases suggesting inseparability nor a plethora of cases suggesting separability need give defenders of inseparability pause.” Doris considers this to be an unhelpful “expedient.” If empirical analysis is to be the preferred path upon which ethical analysis is to proceed, and if the inseparability thesis is impervious to empirical analysis, then it is outside the boundaries of proper ethical analysis. Hence, on Doris’s view, the inseparability thesis is either disproved by empirical analysis or relegated to a sphere of unverifiable speculation. In either case, its relevance for ethics is nil.


11 Sabini and Silver characterize Doris’s critique in the following way: “Ethics is otiose if it prescribes behavior that people cannot perform or, more generally, if it urges people to be the sorts of people they cannot
Doris offers more than a negation of “evaluative integration,” or his term for inseparability, as conceived of in the globalist construct. Recall that the driving question of his study is: what accounts for behavioral regularity? In Doris’s view, the answer is: situational regularity. Situational factors, rather than robust dispositional traits, determine behavior. In this way, Doris summarizes the three-fold thesis of situationism as follows:

(1) Behavioral variation across a population owes more to situational differences than dispositional differences among persons. Individual dispositional differences are not so behaviorally individuating as might have been supposed; to a surprising extent it is safest to predict, for a particular situation, that a person will behave in a fashion similar to the population norm.
(2) Systematic observation problematizes the attribution of robust traits. People will quite typically behave inconsistently with respect to the attributive standards associated with a trait, and whatever behavioral consistency is displayed may be readily disrupted by situational variation. This is not to deny the existence of stability; the situationist acknowledges that individuals may exhibit behavioral regularity over iterated trials of substantially similar situations.
(3) Personality is not often evaluatively integrated. For a given person, the dispositions operative in one situation may have an evaluative status very different from those manifested in another situation; evaluatively inconsistent dispositions may “cohabit” in a single personality. ¹²

According to Doris, then, systematic observation of behavior yields three problematic results for would-be supporters of the inseparability thesis even in its weakest version let alone its stronger ones. First, the data of human behavior contradicts the “weak” limited inseparability thesis, which “allows for separability of virtues across different domains of practical

¹² Doris, Lack of Character, 24-5.
endeavor but asserts that virtues are inseparable within a given practical domain.”

Rather, the data demonstrates that “evaluatively inconsistent dispositions may ‘cohabitate’ in a single personality” even within the same domain. Doris argues this point by referencing SS doctors at Auschwitz. I review this argument in detail below. Second, the data contradicts the exclusionary thesis, the claim that virtue and vice cannot coexist, for the same reason. Third, the data is not supportive even of discrete robust traits inhering within human personalities, let alone an integrated association of such traits. Hence, every version of the inseparability thesis, from the weakest to the strongest, is called into question. In short, if behavior fluctuates with situational variation, then the association of robust traits posited by the inseparability thesis is problematized.

As an alternative to versions of the inseparability thesis, Doris advocates a fragmentation thesis. Doris does not claim that human beings are devoid of personality or that they lack personality traits which influence behavior. Nor does he claim that experimental psychology has disproved the inseparability thesis. Rather, Doris regards experimental psychology as having yielded results suggestive of personality structures comprised of “evaluatively inconsistent dispositions” and subject to extreme situational sensitivity. On the other hand, the data does not support the claim that human behavior is

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14 It is for this reason that critiques of Doris like that of Sabini and Silver may be helpful in defending virtue ethics from situationism but possibly less helpful in defending the inseparability thesis which, as Doris notes, is unpopular even among virtue ethicists. In the next section, I review a virtue ethicist who draws from Doris to redefine virtue in the light of the social influence literature and so also rejects the inseparability thesis. See Robert Merrihew Adams, A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).
determined by robust personality traits (habits, virtues) of the kind endorsed by virtue ethicists. Therefore, Doris endorses a fragmentation thesis as a more likely alternative to the inseparability thesis. The fragmentation thesis maintains that “systematic observation of behavior, rather than suggesting evaluatively integrated personality structures, suggests instead fragmented personality structures – evaluatively disintegrated associations of multiple local traits.”

It is constructive at this point in the argument to review the empirical evidence—the data of human behavior made available through experimental psychology—employed by Doris in order to critique globalism in favor of situationism. In evaluating the empirical literature, Doris considers two primary kinds of behavior which he deems relevant to his study: compassionate or “helping” behavior and destructive behavior. Under the first heading, Doris reviews an experiment conducted by A.M. Isen and P.F. Levin. The experiment ran as follows: subjects making a call from a phone booth were, upon leaving the phone booth, confronted with a confederate (someone in on the experiment) dropping papers in his or her path. He or she, then, could choose to help the confederate pick up the papers or pass by. However, for one group of subjects a dime was planted in the coin return slot of the phone booth, for another it was not. The hypothesis was that those who found the dime would be more likely to help the confederate, while those who did not would be more likely

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15 Doris, Lack of Character, 24-5. His Italics.
17 In a sense this experiment best supports Doris’s claim. Clearly finding a dime has no obvious connection to one’s decision to help or not help a stranger in distress.
not to help. The results were striking. Fourteen of the subjects who found the dime helped, while only two did not. On the other hand, of the twenty-five people that did not find the dime, only one helped. Further, Doris notes that “in numerous instances Isen and Levin’s nonhelping subjects literally trampled the fallen papers.” Is one to conclude, Doris asks, that “those possessing robust compassionate dispositions happened to luck into the dime, while their callous brethren didn’t?” According to Doris, the evidence suggests that even trivial variants in a given situation (finding a dime or not) can have a massive impact on behavior. In other words, behavior is situationally sensitive to degrees that the commonsense view would not expect.

In another situationist experiment subjects at Princeton Theological Seminary were invited to participate in a study on “religious education and vocations.” Subjects were to complete questionnaires in one building and then report to another building for a verbal

18 Doris, Lack of Character, 31.

19 Ibid. Problematic to Doris’s view is the fact that alternative (and more recent) studies have argued that being put in a bad mood can also have positive effects on behavior. See John Sabini, Social Psychology, second edition (New York: Norton, 1995). In addition, Sabini and Silver offer two criticisms of the conclusion Doris draws from the dime experiment. First, they “differ with Doris over whether these mood effects reach the sort of seriousness that would cause us to think much about the character of someone doing them (or not doing them). That is, [they] grant that whether someone will help you with your dropped papers will depend on the kind of mood they are in, and [they] grant that it might only cost a dime (well, nowadays, maybe a quarter) to change their mood. But [they] just do not believe that picking up or not picking up your papers is very important manifestation of a moral trait.” Second, “one of the ways that these mood effects are thought to operate is via attention. Good moods are thought to broaden attention, bad moods to narrow it. Moods, apparently, affect how our attention is engaged by the world around us. Now a person might well argue that the failure to notice the petty trials and tribulations of those around us is an excusable failing of a person in a bad mood. To be sure, being in a bad mood does not excuse the failure to notice screams of agony and the like, but it is the sort of thing that excuses the failure to notice some dropped pencils! And, for these reasons, at least, the fact that people are inconsistent in whether they pick up (or not) depending on their mood is not sufficient inconsistency to warrant abandoning virtue ethics. So [they] will discuss mood effects no further.” Sabini and Silver, “Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued,” 540.

interview. Upon leaving the first building, subjects were either told that they were running late or that they were making good time. The experiment occurred as subjects transitioned from building A to building B. Each subject encountered a confederate manifesting an ambiguous physical distress. Again, each subject had to choose between either stopping to help or continuing to building B without offering help. It was hypothesized that a significantly higher percentage of those who were told they were on time would stop, while those who were told that they were running late would not. Of those that were put into a “high hurry situation” only ten percent stopped to help. Of those that were put into a “low hurry situation” sixty-five percent stopped to help. As Doris explains, “in some cases a hurried seminarian literally stepped over the stricken form of the victim as he hurried on his way!”

Doris views this example as more evidence for the situationist position:

One might expect that most individuals training for a “helping profession” like the ministry would be strongly disposed to assist the unfortunate victim or at the very least inquire as to his condition. Instead, helping varied markedly according to degree of hurry.

In other words, the situation (hurried or not hurried) seemed more determinative of behavior than a robust dispositional trait of compassion. It is rash to infer that the ninety-percent of seminarians in high hurry situations lacked compassion. Furthermore, who is to say that the ten percent who helped despite being in a high hurry situation were not simply disinterested

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21 Doris, *Lack of Character*, 34.

22 Ibid. Sabini and Silver posit that what drove the behavior of the rushed seminarians was the difficulty of “failing an obligation.” They question whether this really calls their character into question, especially when considering that the confederates manifesting “ambiguous” physical distress were told to act such that one could not make out whether they were in need of help, drunk, or even potentially dangerous. Sabini and Silver, “Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued,” 553.
in the study of “religious education and vocations?” The point that Doris is making is “not that helping is rare, but that helping is situationally sensitive.”

In sum, then, empirical research supports situational sensitivity with respect to helping behavior. However, the same research is not supportive of robust dispositional tendencies. Seemingly inconsequential situational variables such as finding a dime or being in a hurry can move a given person to dissimilar manifestations of compassionate or discompassionate behavior.

Doris’s second set of “test cases” for his hypothesis is destructive behavior. His conclusion after consideration of the evidence is that “apparently non-coercive situational factors may induce destructive behavior despite the apparent presence of contrary evaluative and dispositional structures.” Here Doris analyzes Stanley Milgram’s infamous obedience experiments, the equally notorious Stanford Prison Experiment, and studies regarding the behavior of SS doctors in Nazi Germany.

Stanley Milgram’s obedience experiments are well known. The study occurred in different variations from 1960-1963. The premise offered to subjects was that Yale was conducting a study of memory and learning, but that was a deception. In actual fact, the study was on the impact of obedience to external authority figures on behavior. Doris describes the set-up as follows:

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23 Doris, *Lack of Character*, 34.

24 Ibid., 39.

On arrival at the site, the subject is met by a lab-coated “experimenter” who introduces him to another ostensible subject, actually a confederate, and explains that the study concerns the effects of punishment on learning. There is a drawing to determine experimental roles, rigged so that the subject is designated “teacher” and the confederate “learner.” The learner, an affable middle-aged accountant is strapped into a chair “to prevent excessive movement.” An electrode is attached to his wrist with electrode paste “to avoid blisters and burns.” The experimenter assures participants that the shocks used as punishment, although they can be extremely painful, will cause no “permanent tissue damage.” The teacher is administered an uncomfortable sample shock to convince him of the scenario’s authenticity; however, the shocks administered the learner are fake, and he experiences no pain.26

The teacher and the experimenter are then separated from the student. The teacher is placed in front of a “shock generator” that the experimenter explains is “wired to the learner.” Next, the teacher is told to administer a series of questions administering shocks in increasing intensity with each wrong answer.

The learner responds incorrectly on a prearranged schedule, so that shock intensity steadily increases. If the teacher expresses concern about this process, as many subjects did, the experimenter responds with a standardized series of verbal prods: (1) “Please continue,” (2) “The experiment requires that you continue,” (3) “It is absolutely essential that you continue,” (4) “You have no other choice, you must go on.” The sequence begins at (1) each time the subject balks and progresses through (4) if he continues to refuse…If the subject refuses to continue after prod (4) the experiment terminates, and the subject is counted “disobedient”; subjects who comply with all instructions and proceed to the maximum shock are termed “obedient.”

It is important to note that with the increasing intensity of the shocks came increasing protestations from the learner ranging from “Ugh! Hey, this really hurts,” to “(Intense and prolonged agonized scream.) Let me out of here. Let me out of here. My heart is bothering me.” Sixty-five percent of subjects were deemed obedient. Doris concludes from this as follows:

26 All Milgram references are from Doris, Lack of Character, 40-42.
The experiment does not suggest that Milgram had stumbled onto an aberrant pocket of sadists in the New Haven area and still less does it suggest that all of us are a bunch of meanies. Trait-contrary behavior does not necessarily signal the possession of a contrary trait; even active failures of compassion do not necessarily imply sadism. What the experiments do highlight, once more, is the power of the situation; the majority of subjects were willing to torture another individual to what seemed the door of death without any more direct pressure than the polite insistence of the experimenter.27

According to Doris, the facts do not indicate that sixty-five percent of the participants lacked compassion (and even were sadists), but rather, that human behavior is determined by “the power of the situation” interacting with dispositions in a complex manner.28

Another study which yielded results favorable to Doris’s hypothesis is the notorious Stanford prison experiments.29 Doris depicts the set up of the experiment as follows:

Male college students with no history of crime, emotional disability, physical handicap, or intellectual and social disadvantage were selected from a pool of 75 applicants…the 21 participants were randomly assigned the role of “prisoner” or “guard”; prisoners were confined 24 hours a day in a simulated penitentiary complete with barred cells and a small closet for solitary confinement, which became known as the “Hole”.30

27 Doris, Lack of Character, 42.

28 Sabini and Silver note that an alternative interpretation of the Milgram experiments is that people “value obeying authority more than we thought they did. This would leave the formulas that behavior follows from values, desires, and beliefs—in short from their characters—intact by deciding that the subjects’ values, desires, or beliefs were different from what we thought they were.” In addition, they draw from Berger and Luckman in arguing that the experimenter is the “institutional expert” who gives cues regarding how to act to the subjects, because the subjects are “strangers to the world of the laboratory.” In addition, the tests were carried out at Yale which helped the experimenter gain obedience, because “the subjects probably believed that Yale would not allow an experiment that was really dangerous” (which by the way turns out to be true in this case). See Sabini and Silver, “Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued,” 546. Others have also argued that the subjects continued with the shocks because they knew they were not real. See Marin Orne, “On the Social Psychology of the Psychological Experiment: With Particular Reference to Demand Characteristics and Their Implications,” American Psychologist 17 (1962): 776-83.


30 Doris, Lack of Character, 50.
The purpose of the study was to see if “ordinary” people would identify and conform to situational roles rather than maintain distinctive personality traits which varied from behaviors associated with said roles. The participants were told they were participating in an experiment on prisons and would be paid for completing their assigned roles in the experiment. As Doris notes, the results were alarming:

Five prisoners were released prematurely due to “extreme emotional depression, crying, rage and acute anxiety,” symptoms that developed as early as two days into the experiment; one subject developed a psychosomatic rash over portions of his body. Conversely, most of the guards seemed rather to enjoy their roles. Prohibited by experimenters from employing physical punishment, they improvised all manner of creative sadisms such as requiring prisoners to clean out toilets with their bare hands. On the second day there was a prisoner insurrection quashed by guards hosing down prisoners with fire extinguishers. At the end of six days, the alarmed investigators terminated the scheduled two-week experiment.31

Doris does not think those selected to be guards possessed sadistic personality traits while those selected to be prisoners had specific dispositions to manifest extreme emotional distress. In fact, the experimenters performed a series of personality measurements after choosing the subjects and before administering the experiment. These measures indicated “no significant differences between prisoners and guards” in terms of personality.32 Furthermore, while some have criticized the experiment for constructing an artificial environment, which may therefore evoke artificial behavior, Doris thinks the artificiality of the study increases the strength of his argument:

Thus, disproportion between the extremity of situational factors and the extremity of resulting behavior is greater if the experimental environment was not a “functional


32 Doris, Lack of Character, 52.
representation” of a prison, and the situationist message is therefore strengthened. Indeed, the experiment’s unreality is what makes it so shocking. The participants were volunteers in a short-term experiment; unlike individuals in actual correction systems, this was not “their life.” Still, there was a precipitous descent into barbarism.  

Again, Doris’s chief point is that the study once again indicates the extreme situational sensitivity of human behavior as opposed to the influence of robust traits embedded in an “evaluatively integrated” personality structure.

The next step in Doris’s argument is an analysis of the behavior of “SS doctors at the Auschwitz death camp.” Doris does not contend that a cluster of sadistic personality structures all happened to congregate in one particular area, in one particular field, at one particular point in history. Rather, than dismissing the doctors as mere monsters, Doris maintains that “just as with Milgram’s obedients or the Stanford guards…a very substantial percentage of perpetrators in the Holocaust had previously led lives characterized by ordinary levels of compassion.” Doris thinks “there is good evidence that many Nazi war criminals are not straightforwardly understood as possessed of uniformly evil dispositional structures;

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33 Ibid., 53. His italics.

34 Sabini and Silver argue that experiments like the present one as well as research conducted into Nazi behavior, which I review next, reveal that Social psychology does have an important contribution to make to the study of ethics. According to them, “[t]he tradition [of situationism]…has revealed just how weak, morally weak, we are when confronted with a resolute authority or a unanimous group of other seemingly normal people who seem to see the social, moral, and even physical world differently from the way we do. This weakness is partly cognitive—people tend to lose their moral compass—but it is also partly a matter of people’s being unable or unwilling to expose themselves, to disrupt social situations, by exposing their different perceptions of the world.” Sabini and Silver, “Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued,” 557. For more on topic see Solomon Asch, “Studies of Independence and Conformity: A Minority of One against a Unanimous Majority,” 416-25; Also Marie Jahoda, “Conformity and Independence,” Human Relations 12 (1959): 99-120.

35 Doris, Lack of Character, 54.

36 Ibid.
much like Milgram’s obedients, there is evidence that they experienced substantial conflict.”

Doris’s primary aim here is to call attention to personality fragmentation. If the evidence neatly divides the figures under review into moral monsters and moral heroes, then that would lend support to the inseparability thesis. However, if the monsters also possessed streaks of compassion while the heroes also possessed marks of villainy, then the fragmentation hypothesis gains credence.

Drawing from R.J. Lifton’s influential study, Doris highlights the conflicting behaviors of Nazi doctors. While Lifton was “struck by the banality of the Nazi doctors he interviewed years after the war,” Doris contends “it would be a mistake to think that their ‘work’ seemed unremarkable to them,” because “these men had previously dedicated their lives to a humanitarian profession.” Doris reviews the example of Eduard Wirths, the chief medical officer at Auschwitz:

For SS doctors at the Auschwitz death camps, an important “duty” was to meet arriving transports of prisoners and decide who would be condemned to forced labor in the camp and who would be condemned to immediate death. On one occasion, a doctor refused to participate in these “selections”…Wirths…was reputed to have remarked, “Finally a person with character.”

37 Ibid.
39 Doris, Lack of Character, 55.
40 Ibid., 54. The reference is to Lifton, The Nazi Doctors, 193.
More substantively, “Wirths secretly treated Jewish patients after it had become illegal for Aryan doctors to do so.”\(^{41}\) Hence, it is simplistic to describe a figure like Wirths as a mere monster, nor is he a moral hero, since he continued to participate in the Auschwitz protocol albeit in a conflicted manner.

But what about those who did not seem conflicted? Doris attributes the apparent lack of conflict in several of the SS doctors to two factors. First,

the Auschwitz doctors underwent an intensive socialization process in order to effect their ‘adaptation’ to life in the death-world of the camp. Doctors frequently drank heavily together and often expressed dissatisfaction with camp practices, but these protests eventuated in group rationalizations; the alcoholic therapy sessions were a means for the doctors to establish consensual validation for behaviors that were strongly dissonant with precamp values.\(^{42}\)

Second, Doris maintains, “with the passage of time, what was once unthinkable became unremarkable; persons and nations alike are subject to ‘moral drift’—a slide into evil as individuals and groups are gradually acclimated to destructive norms.”\(^{43}\) On this basis, Doris concludes, “many Nazi war criminals exhibited a kind of diachronic fragmentation: Their behavior during the Holocaust was inconsistent with antecedently manifested dispositions.”\(^{44}\)

Further confounding the inseparability thesis in general and the exclusionary thesis (virtue and vice cannot coexist) in particular are cases like that of Josef Mengele. According to prisoner testimonies, Mengele,


\(^{44}\) Doris, *Lack of Character*, 57.
was capable of being so kind to children, to have them become fond of him, to bring them sugar, to think of small details in their daily lives, and to do things we would genuinely admire…and then, next to that,…the crematoria smoke, and these children, tomorrow or in a half hour, he is going to send them there. Well, that is where the anomaly lay.\textsuperscript{45}

In addition to the exclusionary thesis even the modern version of inseparability, the limited-inseparability thesis, is called into question here, for Mengele’s kindness and cruelty were in the same “domain” and even involved the same individuals. On the one hand, Mengele was well known for his kindness to children. On the other hand, he “distinguished himself by the frequency of his direct killing.” For this reason, “a prisoner doctor referred to Mengele as ‘\textit{l’homme double’}.”\textsuperscript{46} From all of the above, Doris concludes by echoing a quote from Levi, “compassion and brutality can coexist in the same individual and in the same moment, despite all logic.”\textsuperscript{47} Hence, “dispositional structures are not evaluatively integrated.”\textsuperscript{48} And this applies to apparent moral heroes as well. Doris notes that “Oskar Schindler saved over a thousand Jews in Poland from deportation and murder, but he was also a manipulative, hard-drinking, and womanizing war profiteer who did not particularly distinguish himself either before or after the war.”\textsuperscript{49}

Having considered Doris’s arguments as well as the evidence upon which his arguments rest, I conclude this section with a summary of the denial of habits objection.

\textsuperscript{45} Doris, \textit{Lack of Character}, 58. Quoted in Lifton, \textit{The Nazi Doctors}, 337.

\textsuperscript{46} Doris, \textit{Lack of Character}, 58. Quoted in Lifton, \textit{The Nazi Doctors}, 375.


\textsuperscript{48} Doris, \textit{Lack of Character}, 58.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 59.
According to situationist psychologists, the data of human behavior made available through experimental research is not supportive of interconnected associations of virtue inhereing in the human personality. If altruistic personalities “with consistent behavioral implications” exist, “they are rare.” Further, if they are rare, they may evade empirical analysis. And if empirical analysis is to be the preferred method of ethical inquiry, then those rare individuals who supposedly possess robust traits, let alone “evaluatively integrated” robust traits, become a subject for those whose mode of enquiry is more in keeping with the “customary armchair speculation” of much moral philosophy. At any rate, the empirical evidence available indicates that such people do not in fact exist. I turn now to the next set of objections to the inseparability thesis.

II. The Impossibility of Virtue Objection

John Doris criticizes the inseparability thesis, because he thinks that systematic observation of behavior does not support either individual virtues or associations of virtue which inhere in the human personality. Behavior is determined by a complex interaction of dispositions and situational stimuli. Normatively, Doris links inseparability to “global condemnations” of individuals, which he regards as “inimical to community, charity, and

50 Ibid., 60.
51 Ibid., 6.
52 Sabini and Silver do not draw the same conclusion. Rather, they argue that the “import of the social influence studies is that the exercise of practical intelligence is, in specific circumstances, harder than the commonsense view expects. This fact might give us reason to believe that the virtuous characters are rarer than we might have imagined, but it does not trouble the notion of character or show that virtue is unattainable.” Sabini and Silver, “Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued,” 557.
forgiveness.” For this reason he also belongs with the thinkers whose ideas constitute what I refer to in this section as “the impossibility of virtue objection.” They regard the inseparability thesis as a threat to virtue ethics, because, in their view, if the inseparability thesis is true, then no one is or ever has been virtuous. In this section, I present the impossibility of virtue objection under two headings which I refer to respectively as the too high a bar for virtue critique and the moral conflict critique. Both critiques belong in this section, because they are agreed in rejecting the inseparability thesis for the reason mentioned above, namely, that if it is true then no one can be virtuous. According to both critiques, to say that one must possess all of the virtues to possess even one of them is to render the possession of virtue impossible. To conclude this section, I employ an essay from Jean Porter that utilizes Martin Luther King Jr. as a test case to champion the impossibility of virtue objection over and against the inseparability thesis.

A. The Too High a Bar for Virtue Critique

Robert Adams maintains that the inseparability thesis sets an impossible standard for virtue thus discounting the good qualities of ordinary people. Like Doris, Adams is conversant with social psychology. However, Adams does not hold that research conducted by experimental psychology requires that one abandon virtue. Instead, these findings make

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apparent the need to redefine virtue and its manifestation in people’s lives. According to Adams, inseparability discounts the virtuous qualities of various individuals, because, in his view, “human moral excellences or virtues are real but typically fragmentary.”\(^{55}\)

Adams believes that discrete virtues can be further divided into discrete “modules” of that virtue. According to Adams, one does not need to possess all of the modules of a discrete virtue comprehensively in order to truly possess a given set of discrete modules of the same virtue. He makes his case with respect to courage, wisdom, and benevolence. For each virtue, Adams contends, one can possess a certain aspect or “module” of it even while lacking other aspects of the same virtue or while lacking other comprehensive virtues.

There are, for example, modules of courage. Adams defines courage as a “willingness to face fears and risks” with respect to “one’s most important” aims. The importance of the aims is “to be measured…by the commitment one has to them.”\(^{56}\) On this basis, courage, according to Adams, “can be manifested in fighting for an unjust cause, if the decision to fight and face dangers takes account of the fighter’s main aims, unjust as they may be.”\(^{57}\) But he adds that the fighter does not have to wholly approve of the aims so long as “he or she be really committed to them.”\(^{58}\) Courage of this kind, on Adams’s view, “may have an


\(^{56}\) Ibid., 173.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 176.

\(^{58}\) Ibid. The idea of being *wholly* committed to aims of which one *partially* approves strikes me as odd. It seems to me that one would either have to be wholly committed to aims of which one wholly approves or committed with reservation to aims which one only partially endorses.
excellence which, with better motives, could be part of the excellence of comprehensive Virtue. That is a reason for counting their courage as a virtue.”\textsuperscript{59}

Nevertheless, Adams does not regard courage as “compatible with every form of folly,” and he denies the opposite extreme also, the extreme which demands that “the virtue of courage requires practical wisdom of every sort.” According to Adams, playing “Russian roulette” may be deemed “rash (or suicidal) rather than courageous.”\textsuperscript{60} In this way, Adams argues that “the virtue of courage requires at least a minimal motivational integration of the self,” by which he means “a developed ability and willingness to take one’s most important aims into account in dealing with fears and dangers.”\textsuperscript{61} Certain modules of courage may require certain modules of practical reason in some cases, but comprehensive practical reason does not guarantee comprehensive courage.

The next step in Adams’s argument involves dividing courage into the “modules” of “physical courage” and “moral courage.”\textsuperscript{62} The former regards physical dangers, the latter social dangers. According to Adams, it is “quite possible to have one of these without the other.”\textsuperscript{63} His example is “a police officer who is ready to risk his life in the line of duty,” but

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid. Though Adams denies the existence of complete virtue, he does accept comprehensive virtue as a sort of nearer or nearest approximation of the transcendent principle. His capitilization is meant to distinguish comprehensive Virtue from modules of virtue.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 177.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 179.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
who is cowardly when it comes to acting on his beliefs “in the face of likely disapproval from his associates.”  

To divide courage into modules and claim that one can possess one module while lacking others has implications also for the virtue of justice. Does one need courage to be just? In Adams’s view, not every courage, temperance or prudence is needed for justice:

Even [a] very encompassing definition of the virtue of justice, however…hardly seems to require all modules of those virtues. Lack of financial courage, immoderation affecting mainly one’s own health, and poor judgment in some areas of personal life, would not normally be counted against a person’s reputation for justice, nor do I think they should be. 

Although Adams does not view all the virtues to be expressions of practical wisdom (or rationality), for the sake of his argument, he supposes that they are and argues that even on this basis the inseparability thesis fails:

On such a view, for example, courage might be identified with wisdom as shown in not overestimating the importance of dangers that inspire fear, and temperance with wisdom as shown in not overvaluing goods that inspire desire. It certainly seems that one might have so much of one of these types of wisdom and so little of the other as to be rightly said to have one virtue and lack the other. Similarly, justice might be identified with wisdom as shown in recognizing and respecting people’s rights, and kindness with wisdom in recognizing and caring for the needs and feelings of others. Again it seems one could be deficient in one of these without being deficient in the other.

In other words, even if the virtues are defined as manifestations of a singular quality, one can display possession of the quality in some area while lacking it in others.

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64 Ibid.

65 Ibid., 180. His italics. Jean Porter says something similar and uses Martin Luther King Jr. as an example, but of that more will be said below.

66 Ibid., 185.
Adams does not take the virtues to be expressions of a singular practical wisdom, and he thinks that to do so is to deny particular excellences. Good judgment and courage, for instance, need not imply each other. One can be present in the absence of the other. In Adams’s view, “the ability and will to run serious risks in accordance with one’s judgment is an impressive strength that will and should be admired even in those whose judgment is mediocre.”

According to Adams, the same is true of the virtue of benevolence.

Adams understands benevolence as the prime example of a motivational virtue. An action motivated by kindness (an aspect of benevolence) “may be imprudent, unfair, or untruthful in a way that makes it wrong.” However, according to Adams, even if this is the case, “the motive of kindness, in itself, is still an excellence, an excellent way of being for the good.” Whatever this kind person’s flaws, he or she “does not need to unlearn or reacquire the motive of kindness.”

However, Adams wants to avoid a particular confusion. Namely, one could infer from his treatment of “modules” of virtue a thesis which he thinks to be as extreme and wrong as the inseparability thesis. That is, one could think any module of virtue, however discrete and surrounded by folly, is a true virtue. But Adams does not think that. Rather, he holds that “benevolence, as a virtue, cannot be coherently conceived as existing in modules that are too small or too local.” Again, Adams takes this view to be the opposite extreme of the inseparability thesis. To make his point, Adams reviews literature we have already covered with Doris, regarding the lives of Eduard Wirths, Ernst B (an admirer

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67 Ibid., 187.

68 Ibid., 191.

69 Ibid.
of Josef Mengele), and Oskar Schindler. According to Adams, to afford benevolence to the first two would be an error of the first extreme, namely, to affirm the “benevolence” of a person who gives candy to a child shortly before ordering his or her execution seems to undermine the quality of benevolence. On the other hand, to deny the benevolence of Schindler (because he was a womanizer and so forth, recall the argument above from Doris) would be an error of the second extreme, because his womanizing does not cancel the good he did accomplish. On the basis of these examples, Adams concludes that motivational virtue,

depends in part on its relation to other features of the person’s character and life. What is thus required for its standing as a virtue is nothing so grand as complete perfect virtue, or the sum of all virtues. It is simply required that the particular feature’s moral significance not be too deeply undercut by particular motives, beliefs, attitudes, actions, or allegiances that are closely related to it.71

At this point, then, it is possible to summarize Adams’s critique of inseparability. In short, comprehensive virtues can be divided into discrete modules that do not entail other discrete modules or comprehensive virtues. But Adams does not want to take this to an extreme. One would not attribute benevolence to someone who was cruel in every respect of his or her life but held a benevolent disposition toward snails. At the same time, one would not dismiss the benevolence of Mother Theresa if it were later uncovered that she was cruel to snails.

In sum, the too high a bar for virtue critique, as represented in this section by Adams, maintains that the unreachable standard entailed by inseparability denies “the virtues of actual human beings” in favor of an abstraction which is neither possible nor desirable. By

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70 See Ibid., 192-99.

71 Ibid., 199.
discarding this abstraction, one can come to appreciate the fragmentary nature of moral excellences as manifested in the lives of the diverse figures who serve as moral exemplars in a given society at a given time: “Human moral excellences or virtues are real but typically fragmentary.” Inseparability blurs one to this reality and so ought to be discarded as an error of classical philosophy.

B. The Moral Conflict Critique

The key difference between the too high a bar for virtue critique and the moral conflict critique is whereas the former argues that the absence of a given comprehensive virtue or module of virtue does not disqualify some other virtue or module or virtue, the latter argues that to endorse inseparability is to deny the reality of struggle in the moral life. Both critiques, however, are agreed that the inseparability thesis blurs and distorts the reality of moral excellences in actual people. Alasdair MacIntyre is the chief proponent of the moral conflict critique, so this section focuses on his presentation of this critique.73

72 Adams, A Theory of Virtue, 171. In this way, Adams seems to accept the argument of Doris. Recall that Sabini and Silver characterize Doris’s critique in the following way: “Ethics is otiose if it prescribes behavior that people cannot perform or, more generally, if it urges people to be the sorts of people they cannot become. But if empirical research discovers that no one does (or is) what virtue ethics say they should do (or be), then that is, at least, prima facie evidence that people cannot do (or be) what virtue ethics requires. The question, then, is: has social and personality psychology shown that no one does (or is) what virtue ethics says they should do (or be)? Of course, the ‘no one’ in the above is a very strict standard. Diogenes’ finding one honest person really isn’t enough to warrant preaching honesty; virtue ethics will be troubled if the data show that there aren’t many people who do (or are) what virtue ethics says they should (be).” Sabini and Silver, “Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued,” 537. For this reason, Adams is trying to defend virtue ethics by positing a theory of virtue that offers a lower bar for virtue. This is precisely why I refer to his critique as the “too high a bar” critique. For Adams it is the inseparability thesis itself, which threatens to make ethics “otiose.”

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre rejects inseparability, which he thinks follows from a flawed epistemology. His method involves presenting “a confrontation between Aristotle and Sophocles.” The “confrontation” is over the tragic hero. The issue is whether the “tragic” element in narratives which depict a tragic hero is due to a character flaw on the part of the hero or to the situation in which the hero finds himself. MacIntyre presents Aristotle as the advocate of the former and Sophocles as the supporter of the latter.

To bring out the reasons prompting MacIntyre to side with Sophocles requires an examination of MacIntyre’s view regarding the ancestry of the inseparability thesis. According to MacIntyre, it was, in fact, Sophocles who raised a “key and complex set of

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74 For a treatment that both challenges and affirms key parts of MacIntyre’s treatment see Stanley Hauerwas, “Courage Exemplified,” in John Berkman and Michael Cartwright eds., *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 287-306. For a response to the tragic-conflict critique of MacIntyre, see Daniel McInerny, *The Difficult Good: A Thomistic Approach to Moral Conflict and Human Happiness* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006). McInerny’s defense is weakened somewhat by the fact that, as will become clear, one can endorse or deny the possibility of tragic conflict without having his or her view of the inseparability thesis impacted. At any rate, McInerny defends inseparability by positing that “the virtuous life might most realistically be described as the life devoted to achieving perfect unity of the virtues, with the recognition built-in that we are always on the way towards perfect unity” (85). Adams would call an argument like this an “idolatry” of virtue, since it seems to posit “perfect unity” as an ultimate moral destination as opposed to an always transcending goodness.

75 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 163.
questions about the virtues.” The questions he raised were as follows: (1) “Could it...be the case that in certain circumstances at least the possession of one virtue might exclude the possession of some other?” and (2) “Could one virtue be temporarily at least at war with another?” Still following MacIntyre, there were “two systematic sets of answers to such questions.” It is “the ancestor” to one of these “sets” that requires attention here, which MacIntyre depicts as follows:

The ancestor of one of these sets of answers is Plato, for whom...the virtues are not merely compatible with each other, but the presence of each requires the presence of all. This strong thesis concerning the unity of the virtues is reiterated by Aristotle and by Aquinas, even though they differ from Plato—and from each other—in a number of important ways. The presupposition which all three share is that there exists a cosmic order which dictates the place of each virtue in a total harmonious scheme of human life. Truth in the moral sphere consists in the conformity of moral judgment to the order of this scheme.

According to this “scheme,” virtues never conflict. However, MacIntyre thinks this is mistaken, not because there is not a “cosmic order,” but because “our perceptions of it are such that we cannot bring rival moral truths into complete harmony with each other.” The appearance of conflict, then, makes for conflict in fact: “There are indeed crucial conflicts in which different virtues appear as making rival and incompatible claims upon us. But our situation is tragic in that we have to recognize the authority of both claims.”

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76 Ibid., 142.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid., 143.
On this basis, MacIntyre rejects inseparability as a misguided effort to eliminate the reality of conflict and struggle in the moral life.

According to MacIntyre, although the problem begins with Plato, it continues with Aristotle whose “belief in the unity of the virtues is one of the few parts of his moral philosophy which he inherits directly from Plato.” But MacIntyre finds a variance between Aristotle’s defense of the inseparability thesis and the overall shape of his virtue theory:

Aristotle’s portrait is at best an idealization and his tendency is always, so it might be said, to exaggerate moral coherence and unity. So, for example, on the unity of the virtues what he has to argue about the detailed variety in interrelationships between different virtues and vices does not seem to warrant anything like his own strong conclusion about the unity and inseparability of all the virtues in the character of the good man.

Nonetheless, MacIntyre thinks Aristotle’s version of the inseparability thesis, however inconsistent with the rest of his theory, both stems from and contributes to a certain intellectual failure to grasp reality:

Both Plato and Aristotle treat conflict as an evil and Aristotle treats it as an eliminable evil…It follows that conflict is simply the result of flaws of character in individuals or of unintelligent political arrangements. This has consequences…for his…theory of knowledge…[J]ust as conflict is not central to a city’s life, but is reduced to a threat to life, so tragedy as understood by Aristotle cannot come near to the Homeric insight that tragic conflict is the essential human condition—the tragic hero on Aristotle’s view fails because of his own flaw, not because the human situation is sometimes irremediably tragic.

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81 Ibid.
82 Ibid., 157.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
For these reasons, MacIntyre concludes that Aristotle’s failure to grasp “the centrality of opposition and conflict in human life” conceals from him “one important source of human learning about and one important milieu of human practice of the virtues.”\textsuperscript{85} In brief, the inseparability thesis follows from a flawed theory of knowledge that denies the reality of unavoidable moral conflict.

Contrasting with MacIntyre’s criticism is the repudiation of inseparability put forward by P.T. Geach. Though MacIntyre seems to understand Geach to be a defender of the inseparability thesis, this is not the case. Geach’s conclusion regarding the possibility of tragic conflict is the opposite of MacIntyre’s. However, in Geach’s view, the implications for the inseparability thesis remain the same:

Suppose a man, through no fault of his own, finds himself confronted with a dilemma from which there is no honourable issue, or subjected to some pressure under which he cannot but choose evil? This can be envisaged as a possibility only by people who do not believe in God’s Providence or do not think consequentially about what such belief implies. A man who acts dishonourably say in his married life, may indeed find himself in a situation where he cannot help wronging either A or B; but a man cannot get into such a dilemma innocently or by the fault of others. God does not require of a faithful servant the desperate choice between sin and sin.\textsuperscript{86}

MacIntyre has pointed out that “in Sophoclean tragedy…the attempt at resolution unsurprisingly invokes an appeal to and a verdict by some god.”\textsuperscript{87} Geach does not invoke “some god” to resolve tragic conflicts. Rather, he argues that “God’s Providence” does not allow for them in the first place unless of course it is that person’s own fault for being in a

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 163.

\textsuperscript{86} Peter Geach, \textit{The Virtues} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 155.

\textsuperscript{87} MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue}, 143.
given situation of tragic conflict. Thus, whereas Plato and Aristotle impute tragic conflict to a
carer flaw, Geach, seeming to operate more as a moral theologian than a moral
philosopher, views tragic conflict as a “choice between sin and sin” caused by some
preceding sin or sins. Even to consider the possibility that a person could innocently find him
or herself in such a situation, Geach attributes to a failure to believe in and think seriously
about the providence of God.

Although Geach rejects the possibility of culpability-free tragic conflict, he denies the
inseparability thesis. In his words, “it would be a grim fact if it were so: if any vice manifest
in a man showed that all his apparent virtues were mere shams.” Fortunately, he adds, “there
is no reason to believe this.”88 Rather, Geach holds that God’s providence, which necessitates
against culpability-free tragic conflict, also necessitates against the inseparability thesis:

It is thus that Providence uses one human fault to mitigate or prevent a worse one.
Similarly, laziness, incompetence, and venality may save a man from being
thoroughgoing in other evil ways, and save his victims from suffering as they would
if he were industrious, competent, and incorruptible.89

Hence, in Geach’s view, the same providence by which God “will guide his children’s steps
so that they have not to choose between sin and sin”90 also prevents them from gaining all of
the virtues and being cured of all vice, because any one vice or set of vices may be
preventing a worse vice or set of vices.

88 All references from Geach, The Virtues, xxxi.
89 Ibid., xxxii.
90 Ibid., 157.
But Geach does not regard an appeal to providence as the only way to dispute the inseparability thesis. He thinks the falseness of the inseparability thesis is also confirmed by ordinary human experience.

It would need an extremely cogent argument to overthrow the apparent teaching of human experience all the world over that a man may be very laudable in some respects and very faulty in others. And I shall try to show that no such argument is forthcoming, and that therefore the thesis of the unity of the virtues must be rejected as false. We may thank God that it is false; the world would present a very terrible aspect if we had to think that anyone who is morally faulty by reason of one habitual grave defect must be totally devoid of virtue; that any virtues such faulty people seem to have are worthless shams.  

Before proceeding to the next subsection, a word is in order regarding the contrast between MacIntyre and Geach. While the two hold opposite views regarding the possibility of tragic conflict, it is striking to note the manner in which both proceed from opposing premises to similar rejections of the inseparability thesis. For MacIntyre, the view that character flaw accounts for tragic conflict is false, and so, then, is the inseparability thesis which undergirds and supports such a view. For Geach, tragic conflict could never come about innocently. Rather, God’s providence protects “his children” from tragic conflict, but it also utilizes their vices to protect against worse vices, so the inseparability thesis is false. Evidently, then, theories about “the cosmic moral order” or beliefs regarding “God’s

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91 Ibid., 163. It should be clear by this point that MacIntyre’s choice to refute the inseparability thesis by critiquing Geach’s “defense” with regard to courage was an odd one. Also, MacIntyre seems plainly inaccurate when he refers to Geach as “a contemporary follower of Aquinas” with respect to the unity thesis when Geach himself notes that “Aquinas followed the view I am arguing to be wrong when he treated the unity of the virtues.” See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 179; and Geach, *The Virtues*, 165. Perhaps Geach was the closest MacIntyre could find to a contemporary defender of any version of the thesis of inseparability, which, as we have seen, is extremely unpopular.
Providence” or views on the nature of tragic conflict may diverge profoundly without necessarily producing divergent responses to the thesis that the virtues are inseparable.

In sum, the impossibility of virtue objection argues that if inseparability is true, then no one can actually be virtuous. Worse still, the good qualities of ordinary people are not counted as virtues, because they do not reach a standard which is indeed unreachable. The too high a bar for critique emphasizes the fragmentary nature of human moral excellences by affirming that the absence of a given comprehensive virtue or virtues or of a given module or modules of virtue does not nullify the modules of virtue one does possess. The moral conflict critique argues that inseparability leads to the attribution of character flaws to individuals in “irremediably tragic” situations. This fails to recognize “the centrality of opposition and conflict in human life” and conceals from the supporter of inseparability “one important source of human learning about and one important milieu of human practice of the virtues.”

Jean Porter makes similar critiques based on her analysis of the moral struggles of Martin Luther King Jr. It is to Porter’s criticism of inseparability that I now turn.

C. Test Case: Martin Luther King Jr.

If Doris’s method may be referred to as quantitative empirical analysis, then Jean Porter’s rejection of the inseparability thesis based on the life of Martin Luther King Jr. may be defined as a qualitative empirical analysis. That is, rather than drawing conclusions from

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92 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 163.

systematic observation of the behavior of several people, she centers on the behavior of one individual, and draws her conclusions accordingly. At present, Porter’s study of King represents one of the sharpest blows to the inseparability thesis, in particular the version of the thesis held by Thomas Aquinas, which makes her research particularly relevant to this dissertation.

Porter begins by discounting one avenue for defending Aquinas’s thesis. That is, one could point out that, for Aquinas, “there are some virtues which are appropriate only in some circumstances, or in some but not all states of life, and which therefore cannot be possessed by every virtuous individual.” However, she adds, these qualifications “increase the plausibility of Aquinas’s claim, but not by much,” because “it is still the case, on his view, that anyone who possesses any one of the cardinal virtues (i.e., prudence, justice, found in: Craig Steven Titus, “Moral Development and Connecting the Virtues: Aquinas, Porter, and the Flawed Saint,” in Reinhard Hötter and Matthew Levering eds., Ressourcement Thomism: Sacred Doctrine, the Sacraments, and the Moral Life (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010): 330-352. Titus argues that if “Porter had been more attentive to Aquinas’s notion of intermediate states between virtue and vice, the imperfect-perfect distinction concerning the connections between the virtues, and the process of returning to grace and charity after grave sin, she could have accounted better for the type of flaw and the type of virtue exhibited by Martin Luther King. In particular, she would have recognized Aquinas’s account of the possibility of an imperfect connection of charity and the other infused virtues, since one act of charity does not guarantee the next and since the infused virtues are possessed in inchoate states (habituelles formae) before they are put into practice” (350-51). In my view, introducing a category of imperfectly connected infused virtue into Aquinas’s virtue theory, which I do not believe Aquinas actually offers, raises more problems than it solves in general and especially when applied to figures like King. Others have argued that another plausible Thomistic interpretation of King is that he was merely incontinent. See Benedict M. Guevin, O.S.B., “A Case for the Connection of the Virtues in the Flawed Saint,” Angelicum 87/3 (2010): 545-56. In addition to the figures just mentioned, there are also some moral theologians who uphold Aquinas’s thesis without seeming to feel the need to respond directly to the types of critiques surveyed in the current chapter. For example, see Servais Pinckaers, The Source of Christian Ethics (Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 1995); and J.P. Torrell, Saint Thomas Aquinas: Volume II Spiritual Master (Washington D.C.: CUA Press, 2003).

94 Porter, “Virtue and Sin,” 521-22. In my view, Porter is right to discount this way of defending Aquinas’s thesis. Objections to inseparability generally involve the cardinal virtues, as she rightly notes.
temperance, and fortitude) in the full sense (i.e., as a ‘perfect virtue’) necessarily possesses all of them.”

Though Porter thinks that the aforementioned claim is “too strong [when] taken as a substantive claim about the virtues as they are actually experienced and acquired,” she is willing to consider the possibility that Aquinas is “merely offering a criterion by which to distinguish perfect from imperfect virtues.” But if this is the case, then a dilemma is raised which Porter explains by way of the following quotation from Alan Donagan, which I reproduce here in full:

Certainly Thomas’s doctrine of the unity of the virtues follows if every virtue is defined as a disposition that accords with right reason. But why so define them—except to secure that result? I do not dispute that they can be so defined, and that we can understand the concepts that result and employ them correctly. But courage is the stumbling block. Clarendon’s description of Cromwell as “a brave bad man” is not inconsistent according to the concept of courage I picked up as a child, and which I infer from Movie westerns and other evidence is the concept most non-moralists have picked up. Why cannot some morally despicable person have this or that morally admirable specific disposition, even though his having that disposition enables him to commit worse crimes than he would without it?

Porter does not dismiss Aquinas’s version of inseparability as quickly as Donagan. Rather, she contends, most of the examples deployed against the general thesis of inseparability, such as “the brave bad man” can be accounted for by Aquinas’s thesis. However, Porter thinks there is at least one example, Martin Luther King Jr., which problematizes Aquinas’s thesis to such a degree that it must be deemed insufficient and demonstrative of a need to

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95 Ibid., 522. Because an entire chapter of this dissertation is concerned with a proper formulation of Aquinas’s thesis, I refrain throughout this section from analysis of Porter’s understanding of said thesis.

96 Ibid.

97 Quoted in Ibid. Porter’s reference to Donagan is taken from a personal correspondence.
revise not only his thesis, but even his conception of “the relationship between the moral life and the life of grace.”

Much of what Porter offers in the essay under review is an insightful and helpful clarification of Aquinas’s thesis, and even a kind of semi-defense of it. However, none of that belongs in the current chapter which is concerned with cataloguing objections to the inseparability thesis in general. Because Aquinas’s thesis represents one particular version of the inseparability thesis, then, I save Porter’s semi-defenses for later chapters and move to her critique which, after all, is more to the point of her essay.

Porter’s chief objection to Aquinas’s thesis, as well as her primary method of evaluating that thesis, may be surmised from the following statement:

There are counterexamples to the thesis which are...difficult to address, precisely because they call attention to people who apparently combine real and even heroic virtues with equally real and crippling vices in one character and one lifetime. King...offers one such example. Together with his heroic and saintly virtues, he displayed clear weaknesses, particularly through repeated extramarital affairs which he clearly regretted, yet could not forswear.

King, then, is one of the problematic “counterexamples to the thesis” but presumably Porter thinks there are more.

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99 To anticipate what I take to be Aquinas’s response to situationism as helpfully summarized by Porter: “[Prudence] consists in an ability to discern what specific act or course of activity would fulfill the general desire for good and the ideals of good conduct which the virtuous individual brings to a situation of choice.” Porter, “Virtue and Sin,” 526-7. Empirical studies of the kind reviewed by Doris can only speculate as to what “individuals bring to a situation of choice.” Nonetheless, Doris thinks they “bring” very little; it is rather what the “situation of choice” brings to them that is determinative of behavior.

Porter begins her analysis of King by noting that in Aquinas’s view “someone who has a virtue may not always exercise it, or may, on occasion, even act contrary to an acquired virtue without thereby losing it.”\textsuperscript{101} However, this “does not help much,” because “what we see in the case of the flawed saint [King] are not isolated bad acts, but patterns of bad activities, that is to say, vices, which seem to coexist with heroic virtues.”\textsuperscript{102} Moreover, Aquinas’s understanding of acquired virtue, according to Porter, “seems to imply that anyone whose life is marked by a pattern of serious moral struggle, in any respect, is therefore not a person of true virtue.”\textsuperscript{103} Thus, the courage of King would have to be placed in the same category as the brave bank robber, and she thinks “there must be something wrong with that conclusion.”\textsuperscript{104} But one should expect “paragons” of perfect moral virtue to be rare, since Aquinas maintains that “the ideal of perfect virtue is extremely difficult to attain in this fallen world, so long as what is in question are acquired virtues.”\textsuperscript{105} In sum, if the bar for perfect virtue in the acquired sense is so high that even King’s justice or courage falls short, then who could possibly qualify? If no one, then perfect moral virtue is reduced to a level of bare abstraction. If someone, who?

Though examples such as King seem to stump the inseparability thesis with respect to the acquired virtues, as Porter thinks they do, there remains the possibility that the thesis as

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 528-9.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 529.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
held by Aquinas as regards the infused virtues may fare better.\textsuperscript{106} Here Porter notes that for Aquinas “the normal context for the development and exercise of the virtues is the life of grace.”\textsuperscript{107} According to Aquinas, those who partake of this life have all of the virtues infused into them directly by God through charity.\textsuperscript{108} However, such a person may continue to experience moral conflict and struggle due to “the effects of past habits or some other cause.”\textsuperscript{109} Hence, Aquinas’s thesis on the level of infused virtue may have an answer to cases like King who seem to exhibit moral heroism despite moral struggles. In this way, Aquinas’s thesis when understood in the context of the life of grace “can indeed allow for the possibility that someone who is truly virtuous is nonetheless also morally flawed in some ways.”\textsuperscript{110}

Porter does not think the above solution can account for figures such as King for the following reason. It can only account for “moral flaws” that “are not too serious.”\textsuperscript{111} According to Porter,

\begin{quote}
the difficulty lies in the fact that repeated infidelity seems to imply a kind of callousness, or at best a lack of appropriate regard, both toward one’s spouse and also toward one’s other partners. And it is hard to see how this is compatible with King’s
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{106} I support what Angela McKay Knobel refers to as a “unification theory” which she juxtaposes to the “coexistence theory” which posits that a person can have acquired and infused virtues at the same. See Knobel’s “Two Theories of Christian Virtue,” in America Catholic Philosophical Quarterly 84/3 (Summer, 2010): 599-618. For a recent defense of the unification theory see William C. Mattison III, “Can Christians Possess the Acquired Virtues?” Theological Studies 72 (2011): 558-85. A thorough treatment of this topic is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{107} Porter, “Virtue and Sin,” 529.

\textsuperscript{108} ST Ia IIae q. 65 a. 3.

\textsuperscript{109} Porter, “Virtue and Sin,” 530; ST Ia IIae q. 65 a. 3 ad. 2.

\textsuperscript{110} Porter, “Virtue and Sin,” 532.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid. Her italics.
passion for justice and the consistent stance of forbearance and concern toward others which he displayed throughout his life. Yet King’s passion for justice and his forbearance are beyond question. How can this be?112

One potential answer is the thesis of limited inseparability. One could maintain that an “upstanding public servant” may also be a “faithless husband” without any necessary contradiction of character, since the family and the public arena are different “domains” which “engage very different cognitive, motivational, and evaluative structures.”113 While Porter does not address the merits of this thesis, she does note the possibility of a psychological response to the problem. However, in her view this response is bound to be inadequate:

One response might be that King’s extramarital affairs were a manifestation of some psychological difficulty for which he was not finally culpable. That may well be the case. However, as a response to the difficulty raised in the last section, this reply misses the point. What is at issue here is not the culpability of the flawed saint, but the individual’s capacity to develop and use practical wisdom and the other virtues in the presence of some flaw which persistently skews his or her sensibilities and judgments, as well as behavior, in some significant area of life.114

Simply put, Porter regards Aquinas’s thesis, even with respect to the infused virtues, as demanding a level of perfection that King fails to meet. For this reason, she concludes, “Aquinas’s thesis of the connection of the virtues cannot fully take account of a flawed saint, at least not in the case of an individual whose difficulties are very serious and persistent.”115

Needless to say, Porter finds the “expedient” mentioned above by Doris, namely, that of

112 Ibid.


115 Ibid., 533.
Positing whatever virtue King possessed to be in some way imperfect, inadequate. In her view, if King’s “commitment, and the courage to pursue it, are not to count as acts of true virtue in terms of our account of morality, then so much the worse for our account of morality.”

Finally, Porter posits a relationship between inadequacies in Aquinas’s inseparability thesis and flaws in his vision of the life as grace as well as in his 13th century understanding of human psychology:

My own view is that the example of King, and other flawed saints, offers nearly conclusive evidence that Aquinas was wrong to say that the life of charity is inconsistent with serious sin…Aquinas’s accounts of both virtue and sin are developed in terms of a psychology that is inadequate in many respects, particularly when seen in the light of the scientific psychology which has emerged over the last century. If we were to rethink Aquinas’s accounts of both virtue and sin in the light of this psychology, it might appear that sin in particular stands in a more complex relation to the life of grace than Aquinas can recognize.

In this way, Porter’s critiques seem to overlap with the critiques reviewed above. Her essay utilizes the life of Martin Luther King Jr. in order to advance the merits of the impossibility of virtue objection. If the inseparability thesis in general and Aquinas’s version of it in particular is true, then Martin Luther King’s virtue is impugned. Porter puts the would-be defender of inseparability in a difficult position. In order to uphold King’s virtue, (s)he must deny inseparability. In order to defend inseparability, (s)he must disparage King.

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116 Ibid. So his virtue has to be “true” but does it have to be “perfect?” Adams, who also denies the inseparability thesis, would affirm the former while denying the latter. Porter’s imprecision of terms is troubling here.

117 Ibid., 538.
Moreover, if King’s virtue is rejected by the inseparability thesis, “then so much the worse for [that] account of morality.”

In addition to the problem that, according to the impossibility of virtue objection, no one is virtuous, there is also the problem that no one can become virtuous. In other words, moral progress becomes impossible. It is to this objection that I now turn.

III. The Impossibility of Moral Progress Objection

If one must possess all of the virtues in order to possess even one of them, and if at least someone possesses any virtue, then there must be only two kinds of people: those with all of the virtues, and those with none of them. There can be no in between. Two problems emerge. First, if this were true, then those who lack virtue would have no way to advance, because they would have no point of contact with those who possess virtue. Second, those who possess virtue could not progress, because they are already perfect.

According to Alasdair MacIntyre, the inseparability thesis makes moral progress impossible because, even were we to suppose the existence of one group that possess all the virtue and another which lacks them all, if each group existed in those respective states, there could be no point of moral contract between them. MacIntyre makes his point through a thought experiment involving a courageous and temperate Nazi:

Consider what would be involved, what was in fact involved, in the moral re-education of such a Nazi: there were many vices that he had to unlearn, many virtues about which he had to learn. Humility and charity would be in most ways, if not quite in every way, new to him. But it is crucial that he would not have to unlearn or relearn what he knew about both cowardice and intemperate rashness in the face of

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harm and danger. Moreover, it was precisely because such a Nazi was not devoid of the virtues that there was a point of moral contact between him and those who had the task of re-educating him, that there was something on which to build. To deny that that kind of Nazi was courageous or that his courage was a virtue obliterates the distinction between what required moral re-education in such a person and what did not. Thus, I take it that if any version of moral Aristotelianism were necessarily committed to a strong thesis concerning the unity of the virtues (as not only Aquinas, but Aristotle himself were) there would be a serious defect in that position.  

So even if there were a group that possessed all of the virtues, it is imperative, in MacIntyre’s view that those who lack certain virtues not be conceived of as “devoid of the virtues.” If the virtuous group’s view of the non-virtuous group is skewed by the inseparability thesis, then the virtuous cannot properly “reeducate” the non-virtuous. Hence, according to MacIntyre, “a strong thesis concerning the unity of the virtues” precludes those most in need of education in virtue from receiving it thus rendering moral progress impossible for them.  

Another problem is that those who possess virtue cannot advance. Adams holds that “there is no such thing as *complete* human virtue; no such thing as a *fully* good human life if that means a human life that could not be morally improved in any way.” If inseparability is true, according to Adams, then there are perfect individuals in the world for whom moral improvement is impossible, since those who are perfect cannot become more perfect. The general point upon which the above critiques are agreed is that to uphold the inseparability  


thesis is to endanger legitimate theories of moral progress. Because the virtuous/non-virtuous distinction is fictitious, notions of moral advance that presuppose such a division are also flawed. Yet, even were one to postulate the existence of both groups, and then further postulate some means by which one can pass from lacking virtue to possessing it, this seems to imply, as John Langan has observed, “an implausibly sudden and dauntingly difficult” transition from vice to virtue.122

In sum, whereas the impossibility of virtue objection argues that inseparability sets an unreachable standard for virtue which in turn leads to the discounting of virtue as it manifests in the lives of actual people, the impossibility of moral progress objection draws attention to further negative implications which result from this with respect to theories of moral progress. According to this objection, inseparability leads either to implausible descriptions of moral progress or eliminates the possibility of it altogether.

IV. Objections to the Inseparability Thesis

In this chapter I have categorized prominent objections to the thesis of inseparability under three headings. Though it is representative of prominent criticisms, my presentation of the objections is selective and is not intended to form an exhaustive list.123 In addition to not


123 Critiques left out of the current chapter include: George H. Von Wright, The Varieties of Goodness (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963); James D. Wallace, Virtues and Vices (Ithaca: Cornell University
exhausting objections to the inseparability thesis, this chapter is not intended to demonstrate a consensus with respect to this issue among contemporary ethicists.\textsuperscript{124} Moreover, since this chapter is concerned with bringing out the force of the most common objections directed against the thesis, rather than its less common defenses, I have left the latter out.\textsuperscript{125}

Before concluding, two additional observations regarding common themes among the previous objections may be observed. First, it could be argued that the disfavor with which the inseparability thesis is met in contemporary ethics often goes beyond mere objective criticism to personal dislike. Present day defenders of the thesis, such as Susan Wolf, often speak of the “contempt…typically expressed for [the] thesis.”\textsuperscript{126} And this may be expected. Inseparability is often regarded as a judge standing over and condemning the admirable qualities of our heroes, our families, and our friends. Thus, a certain contempt underlies, at least in part, the objections listed above which together comprise the modern day denial of inseparability and fill in “the distance” between Aquinas and the present age observed by Porter at the beginning of this chapter.\textsuperscript{127} Further, it would seem remiss not to mention the impact of the Holocaust on 20\textsuperscript{th} century thought about virtue and personality considering the

\begin{footnotes}

\textsuperscript{124} I think something very near consensus exists.


\textsuperscript{126} Wolf, “Moral Psychology and the Unity of the Virtues,” 164.


\end{footnotes}
frequency with which reference is made to Nazis, fictional or otherwise, in the literature.\footnote{Also relevant is the fact that social psychology emerges largely as a response to WWII. See John Sabini and Michael Siepmann, “The Really Fundamental Attribution Error in Social Psychological Research,” \textit{Psychological Inquiry} 12 (2001): 1.}

At any rate, the purpose of this dissertation is to assess whether Aquinas’s version of inseparability is susceptible to the objections analyzed above whether those objections are driven by dry intellectual analysis, contempt, or a combination thereof.

Second, as Sabini and Silver note, “ethics is otiose if it prescribes behavior that people cannot perform or, more generally, if it urges people to be the sorts of people they cannot become.”\footnote{Sabini and Silver, “Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued,” 537.} Employing similar reasoning, Porter explains that the inseparability of the virtues “is widely dismissed as a prime example of a moral theory that is hopelessly at odds with our experience.” After all, “almost none of us can boast of a wholly consistent character, whether good or bad. We must all admit to at least one or two vices, but most of us can lay claim to one or two good qualities as well. Must we deny that these good qualities are true virtues?” According to Porter, if the answer to this question is affirmative, then the “criterion for virtue becomes so stringent that it could never be met.” The claim that to possess one virtue is to possess them all, then, entails the further claim that “no true virtue is to be found on earth,” which Porter regards as providing “sufficient reason to reject the thesis.”\footnote{Jean Porter, “The Unity of the Virtues and the Ambiguity of Goodness,” 138.} This sums up contemporary objections to the inseparability well. If all the inseparability thesis does is prescribe an unreachable standard which then becomes a
totalizing condemnation of at least the great majority of human beings as morally insufficient, then it may as well be rejected, which the objectors of this chapter do.

Nevertheless, in the final chapter of this dissertation, I argue Aquinas’s thesis is not susceptible to the objections outlined in the current chapter. In the next two chapters prominent versions of inseparability of which Thomas is aware in developing his own account are treated. In addition to making Aquinas’s thesis more intelligible, the analysis of the next two chapters help make clear that while some versions of inseparability may be susceptible to the objections outlined above not all are. Through his version of inseparability, Aquinas gives a compelling description of what it means to become virtuous. Furthermore, his understanding of the unity of the virtues does not lead him to deny virtue to those who are less than absolutely perfect in virtue, nor does he deny the possibility and need for moral progress.
2

Identity and Unity

The aim of this chapter is to help situate Aquinas’s thesis among varying versions of inseparability so as to eventually respond to the objections of the previous chapter. Three versions of inseparability from the period of classical philosophy are analyzed. These are: the identity thesis of Socrates, Aristotle’s unity thesis, and the Stoic view, which I refer to as a radicalized identity thesis. The philosophers of antiquity upheld versions of inseparability, because they linked truth to the possession and use of the virtues. Thus, the correlation between the inseparability thesis and alternative definitions of virtue is examined throughout.

In addition to helping situate Aquinas’s thesis, this chapter anticipates an avenue for responding to the objections of the previous chapter by demonstrating an intrinsic connection between definitions of virtue and inseparability. Criticisms of inseparability are often rooted in competing definitions of virtue. Though versions of inseparability differ in important ways, it could be reasonably maintained that the one thing every version of inseparability shares is a debt to Socrates, so I begin with his proposal.

I. Socrates

According to Socrates, virtue is a fine and noble thing. This means it is perfective of the person or, in Socrates’ terms, beneficial to the soul. The attainment of wisdom differentiates virtue so defined from morally neutral skill sets capable of being ordered to destructive ends. In this section, I show how Socrates derives criteria for virtue which
informs his thesis that virtue is wisdom.¹ Next, I examine both Socrates’ formulation of the thesis as well as his defense of it in response to Protagoras. The conclusion demonstrates the link between Socrates’ criteria for virtue as a “fine and noble thing” and his definition of virtue as wisdom. I show how this contrasts with certain modern definitions of virtue which deny inseparability.

A. Virtue as a Fine and Noble Thing

In order to arrive at a precise understanding of Socrates’ definition of virtue, it is helpful to begin by analyzing that which does not qualify as virtue.² Any skill that can be used indifferently with respect to good or evil is not, in Socrates’ view, a virtue, even if by this skill its possessor may attain power, wealth, and fame. Hence, when Gorgias claims to be able to teach oratory in a way that may be used either justly or unjustly, Socrates replies, far from deserving the name of virtue, oratory, of the kind Gorgias is speaking, does not even merit the name of skill: “Well then, Gorgias, I think there’s a practice that is not craftlike, but one that a mind given to making hunches takes to, a mind that’s bold and naturally clever at dealing with people. I call it flattery, basically.”³

¹ “Socrates sometimes uses σοφία rather than ἐπιστήμη, but he generally uses both terms to refer to knowledge of good and evil; and the conclusions that Lyons reaches regarding the relations between the two terms further confirms that no great significance can be attached to this difference.” John Lyons, Structural Semantics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 227-28.

² It is notoriously difficult to separate the views of “the Historical Socrates” from those of Plato himself. In what follows, I accept the standard view that an authentic portrait of Socrates emerges in the early dialogues, though I am aware that this “interpretive thesis” is far from conclusive. For more on this topic see Daniel W. Graham, “Socrates and Plato,” Phronesis 37 (1992): 141-65. For a critique of the “early dialogue thesis” see Robert B. Talisse, “Misunderstanding Socrates,” Arion 9.3 (2002), 46-56.
When Gorgias presses Socrates to explain his position, Socrates provides a fuller account:

These [gymnastics, medicine, legislation, justice], then, are the four parts, and they always provide care, in the one case for the body, in the other for the soul, with a view to what’s best. Now flattery takes notice of them, and—I won’t say by knowing, but only by guessing—divides itself into four, masks itself with each of the parts, and then pretends to be the characters of the masks. It takes no thought at all of whatever is best; with the lure of what’s most pleasant at the moment, it sniffs out folly and hoodwinks it, so that it gives the impression of being most deserving...I call this flattery, and I say that such a thing is shameful.  

Socrates does not deny that through mastering the techniques of flattery an individual may seem to gain power and happiness in the perceptions of others, but he thinks these perceptions are wrong. Polus is exasperated when Socrates says he does not know whether Archelaus, ruler of Macedonia, or the “Great King” of Persia are happy or miserable, because he does not know whether they are just or unjust:

Polus: Really? Is happiness determined entirely by that?
Socrates: Yes, Polus, so I say anyway. I say that the admirable and good person, man or woman, is happy, but that the one who’s unjust and wicked is miserable.
Polus: So on your reasoning this man Archelaus is miserable?
Socrates: Yes, my friend, if he is in fact unjust.

For Socrates, then, virtue is not the mere knack for persuasion the Sophists teach, but the qualities descriptive of the “good person, man or woman.” And being good is associated with being happy, whereas being evil is associated with being miserable.

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4 Gorgias 464 b-465.

5 Gorgias 470 d-471.
Indeed, the contrast between Socrates and the Sophists, in Plato’s view, extends to the qualities possessed by each. According to Plato, the defining characteristic of a Sophist, from which the name derives, is that he “imitates the wise man,” while he himself does not “know anything.” Plato depicts the Sophists, in contrast to Socrates, as contrary-speech-producing, insincere, unknowing, appearance-making, copy-making, word-jugglers. The primary aim of the Sophist is to attain power great enough to have people put to death, exile them, and in general do to them whatever he “sees fit.” His goal is to learn the rhetorical skill to “induce in his audience whatever opinion he wants.” Furthermore, whatever opinion an audience comes to hold, according to the Sophist, is as true as any other opinion, because, for the Sophists, man is the measure of truth:

Socrates: But look here, this is no ordinary account of knowledge you’ve come out with: it’s what Protagoras used to maintain. He said the very same thing, only he put it in a rather different way. For he says, you know, that ‘Man is the measure of all things: of the things which are, that they are, and of the things which are not, that they are not.’ You have read this, of course?

Theaetetus: Yes, often.

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6 The version of inseparability espoused by Plato in the Republic and the Laws, which I regard as a sort of hybrid thesis that incorporates elements of both the Socratic identity thesis and the later Aristotelian unity thesis, is left out due to issues of scope and since Plato’s influence on Aquinas with respect to this topic is mediated by Aristotle.

7 Sophist 268c.

8 Sophist 268d

9 Gorgias 469 c-d. “Polus: I mean just what I said a while ago. to be in a position to do whatever you see fit in the city, whether it’s putting people to death or exiling them, or doing any and everything just as you see fit.” Indeed, it has been convincingly argued that the Sophists were responsible for the trial and death of Socrates himself. See Kenneth C. Blanchard Jr., “The Enemies of Socrates: Piety and Sophism in the Socratic Drama,” The Review of Politics 62 (2000): 421-49.

Socrates: Then you know that he puts it something like this, that as each thing appears to me, so it is for me, and as it appears to you, so it is for you—you and I each being a man?

Theaetetus: Yes, that is what he says.\textsuperscript{11}

The “man is the measure” doctrine has further implications for politics and the construction of the laws which order the city:

Then consider political questions. Some of these are questions of what may or may not fittingly be done, of just and unjust, of pious and impious; and here the theory may be prepared to maintain that whatever view a city takes on these matters and establishes as its law or convention, is truth and fact for that city. In such matters neither any individual nor any city can claim superior wisdom.\textsuperscript{12}

Truth is all in the perception, the Sophist asserts, and one person’s truth has no claim to superiority over any other person’s truth. According to Steve Johnson, the sophistic emphasis on “skill, technique and process” enabled them to become influential after the “seeming failure and contradictions of the pre-Socratic philosophers,” which had “engendered skepticism about the existence of objective knowledge and truth.”\textsuperscript{13}

Ironically, if the Sophist claim that knowledge and truth are “merely that of which a man can be persuaded,” is a true claim, then nothing is certain, and indeed, all truth is relative.\textsuperscript{14} Thus, the Sophists justified charging fees for teaching on the basis that people

\textsuperscript{11} Theaetetus 152 a-b.

\textsuperscript{12} Theaetetus 172 a-b.


skilled in rhetoric can alter perceptions in useful ways. As Gorgias says, “words bear the same relationship to the mind as drugs do to the body.”

According to Socrates, in contrast, the mere fact that a particular “skill” is useful or effective does not qualify it as a virtue. In order for an ability to be counted as a virtue it must also be linked to truth. Johnson notes in this respect “Socrates’ originality lay in using ‘arete’ as a moral quality—rather than merely as a skill that is a prerequisite of success.” For Socrates, then, whatever virtue is, it is not a mere effective skill indifferently ordered to a variety of potential ends. Also, it is a real moral quality, not a mere matter of perception. By “real” moral quality, I mean a quality that is objectively good in the sense that it cannot be used for evil or to bring harm to the soul.

Socrates’ criteria for virtue is also on display in the Laches. Socrates is investigating the common element in cases of courage involving pleasure, pain, desire, and fear. In response, Laches suggests that “a sort of endurance of the soul” is the essential quality manifest “in all these cases.” Socrates asks him whether “endurance accompanied by wisdom is a fine and noble thing.” Laches agrees it is, and he goes on to affirm Socrates’ further claim that when endurance is accompanied by folly, it is “just the opposite, harmful and injurious.” Neither Socrates nor Laches approve of calling “a thing fine which is of the injurious and harmful sort.” On this basis, Socrates asks Laches

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17 Laches 191d-192.

18 Laches 192 b-c.
whether he agrees that endurance accompanied by folly is not courage, “since it is not fine, whereas courage is fine.” Laches agrees, and Socrates sums up the implications: “Then, according to your view, it would be wise endurance which would be courage.”19 Laches agrees.

Virtue is “a fine and noble thing” by which Socrates means that it is beneficial to the soul. It is not of the “injurious and harmful sort.” Whatever qualities a person may possess, if not involving wisdom, they fail to reach this standard as Socrates’ shows with respect to endurance. The essence of courage cannot be endurance since endurance without wisdom is not a fine and noble thing. The essence of virtue, according to Socrates, is wisdom.

B. The Identity Thesis

Those familiar with the Parmenides know the complexity involved in defining any complex whole with the terms “one” or “many.” Indeed, Socrates scholars disagree not with respect to whether Socrates’ thesis is persuasive or not but, more basically, over that which his thesis entails. Exactly where Socrates stands on the issue of whether virtue is one or many is unclear. This has been a rigorously contested issue in Socratic scholarship since at least the middle of the twentieth century. Consequently, two positions have emerged.

In the first position, commentators argue that Socrates accepts Protagoras’ claim that each of the individual virtues is a part of the whole of virtue but rejects Protagoras’

19 Laches 192 c-e.
contention that one can possess one virtue without all of the others, a view that
Protagoras, like contemporary thinkers, takes to be a matter of common sense.\textsuperscript{20} In
contrast, another set of commentators contend that Socrates believes the individual
virtues form a unity in the sense of being one and the same thing.\textsuperscript{21} Although this view
does not posit distinct but inseparable virtues, it is still a version of inseparability in the
sense that if there is only one real virtue, then, for obvious reasons, one cannot possess
one virtue in isolation from others, since there is only one. This view is commonly
referred to as “the identity thesis.” The view that the virtues are distinct but inseparable is
sometimes referred to as “the equivalency thesis” or “the unity thesis.” I refer to this view
as the unity thesis, since it maintains that the virtues are distinct but form a unity. Indeed,
the distinctness of the virtues is essential to a unity thesis since a unity can only occur
between distincts. At any rate, the multiplicity of terms in the secondary literature is

\textsuperscript{20} For defenses of this view see: R. Kraut, \textit{Socrates and the State} (Princeton: Princeton University

\textsuperscript{21} For defenses of this view see: T. Penner, “The Unity of Virtue,” \textit{The Philosophical Review 82}
(1973): 35-68; “What Laches and Nicias Miss—And Whether Socrates Thinks Courage is Merely a Part of
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 86-90; M. Ferejohn, “The Unity of Virtue and the Objects of
occasioned by the fact that Socratic scholarship is not in agreement with respect to the view Socrates actually held.\textsuperscript{22}

In my view, Socrates holds an identity thesis, since he understands virtue as a whole composed of similar, rather than dissimilar, parts. To borrow a distinction from Aquinas, a whole may be made up of dissimilar parts, for example, “no part of a man is a man, nor any of the parts of the foot, a foot,” but a whole may also be made up of similar parts such that whatever is predicated of the whole, except for size, may be predicated of a part, for example, “part of the air is air, and a part of water, water.”\textsuperscript{23} Though it may at first seem anachronistic to interpret Socrates through a distinction made by Aquinas, consider the distinction Socrates himself offers to differentiate his view from Protagoras. After asking Protagoras whether virtue is “a single thing, with justice and temperance and piety its parts,” or whether, on the other hand, justice, temperance, and piety are “all names for a single entity,” Protagoras replies: “Virtue is a single entity, and the things you are asking about are its parts.” In response, Socrates asks: “Parts as in the parts of a face: mouth, nose, eyes and, and ears? Or parts as in the parts of gold, where there is no difference, except for size, between parts or between the parts and the whole?”\textsuperscript{24} While Aquinas uses the examples of “man,” “foot,” vs. “water,” and “air,” and Socrates uses the examples of “face” vs. “gold,” I think they are making the same distinction.


\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Summa Theologiae} Ia q.3 a. 7.

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Protagoras} 329 d-e.
In the *Protagoras*, Socrates speaks as if knowledge were the whole of virtue and the other virtues its parts, which suggests that there is more than one virtue: “And do you also speak of the same parts that I do? In addition to courage, I call temperance and justice and everything else of this kind parts of virtue. Don’t you?”\(^{25}\) Socrates is referring to virtue as a whole composed of similar parts in the sense described above. His disagreement with his interlocutor in the *Protagoras* is not with respect to whether virtue is a whole composed of parts. Rather, Socrates takes issue with Protagoras’ claim that virtue is a whole composed of dissimilar parts remaining themselves even when separated from the whole. Socrates, in other words, disagrees with this position: “You will find, Socrates, many people who are extremely impious, unjust, intemperate, and ignorant, and yet exceptionally courageous; by this you will recognize that courage differs very much from all the other parts of virtue.”\(^{26}\)

In order to understand the reasons why Socrates rejects Protagoras’ account of courage as a separable part of virtue, dissimilar from the other parts of virtue and from the whole of virtue, let us begin by considering Socrates’ account of courage in the *Laches*. Initially, Socrates warns Laches it “would perhaps be too great a task” to move straightaway into “an investigation of the whole of virtue.” Instead, Socrates elects to start the investigation with a part of virtue, in this case, courage: “but let us first see if we

\(^{25}\) *Laches* 198 a-b.

\(^{26}\) *Protagoras* 359 b-c.
have sufficient knowledge of a part. Then it is likely that the investigation will be easier for us."  

After Laches has agreed that endurance without wisdom is not a fine and noble thing, as observed above, Nicias enters the dialogue. All are agreed that courage involves some kind of knowledge, but Socrates seeks more precision. What kind of knowledge does courage involve? Nicias suggests it is correct knowledge with respect to "future goods and evils," which enables one to fear what ought to be feared and to not fear what ought not to be feared. In this sense, courage is predicated on "knowledge of the fearful and hopeful." But how does one arrive at such knowledge? Socrates thinks this process must involve learning from the past so as to act in the present with an eye toward the future. Further, since it is one knowledge that accomplishes this, courage turns out to be "not knowledge of the fearful and the hopeful only, because it understands not simply future goods and evils, but those of the present and the past and all times, just as is the case with other kinds of knowledge." Since Nicias agrees, Socrates concludes that the kind of knowledge which informs courage is actually "the knowledge of practically all goods and evils put together." On the basis of this, Socrates asks Nicias a series of further questions:

Then does a man with this kind of knowledge seem to depart from virtue in any respect if he really knows, in the case of all goods whatsoever, what they are and will be and have been, and similarly in the case of evils? And do you regard that man as lacking in temperance or justice and holiness to whom alone belongs the ability to deal circumspectly with both gods and men with respect to both the

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27 *Laches* 190d.

28 For example, death is not to be feared, and fearing it may induce a person to act poorly.
fearful and its opposite, and to provide himself with good things through his knowledge of how to associate with them correctly?

Nicias sees Socrates’ point. Though Nicias was trying to describe a part of virtue, he has arrived not at “a part of virtue but rather virtue entire.”

There are at least two arguments to be made here in favor of the identity thesis. First, Socrates holds that the reason why Nicias’ attempt to define courage has failed is because courage is indistinguishable from knowledge. Second, Socrates maintains that correct knowledge of good and evil is a sufficient condition for the possession of virtue. This latter point has prompted Gerasimos Santas to ask why it could not be the case “that a man has all the knowledge that Socrates is talking about, and yet fails in virtue because he cannot endure the pain? Or, he is near paralyzed with fear? Or, because he is unable to control his desires or resist pleasures?”

Perhaps, Socrates’ response to Santas would be the same as it was to Protagoras:

Come now, Protagoras, and reveal this about your mind: What do you think about knowledge? Do you go along with the majority or not? Most people think this way about it, that it is not a powerful thing, neither a leader nor a ruler. They do not think of it in that way at all; but rather in this way: while knowledge is often present in a man, what rules him is not knowledge but rather anything else—sometimes anger, sometimes pleasure, sometimes pain, at other times love, often fear; they think this of knowledge as being utterly dragged around by all these other things as if it were a slave. Now, does it seem like that to you, or does it seem to you that knowledge is a fine thing capable of ruling a person, and if someone were to know what is good and bad, then he would not be forced by

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29 Laches 199 b-e.

30 Socrates follows a similar procedure and makes a similar claim with respect to temperance at Charmides 171 d-172. He does the same with piety at Euthyphro 6d -8.

anything to act otherwise than knowledge dictates, and intelligence would be sufficient to save a person.\footnote{32} Socrates understands virtue as correct knowledge of good and evil; this knowledge precludes the possibility of incontinence. He recognizes both claims differ from the commonsense point of view. Returning to the \textit{Protagoras}, then, Socrates takes issue not with Protagoras’s description of virtue as a whole which consists of parts, but rather, with his claim that the whole of virtue consists of dissimilar and separable parts.

After leading Protagoras to the conclusion that “cowardice is ignorance of what is and is not to be feared,” and that, “courage is the opposite of cowardice,” while “wisdom about what is and is not to be feared is the opposite of this ignorance,” Socrates asks Protagoras whether this ignorance is cowardice. Protagoras reluctantly agrees in anticipation of Socrates’ conclusion: “the wisdom about what is and is not to be feared is courage,” while the opposite of this “is ignorance.” On this basis, Socrates asks Protagoras whether he still believes that “some men are extremely ignorant and yet still very courageous?”\footnote{33} It is important here to recall how Socrates had framed the original question:

Then I want to proceed together to take a good hard look at some other questions. I believe the first question was this: Wisdom, temperance, courage, justice, and piety—are these five names for the same thing, or is there underlying each of these names a unique thing, a thing with its own power or function, each one unlike any of the others? You said that they are not names for the same thing, that each of these names refers to a unique thing, and that all these are parts of virtue, not like parts of gold, which are similar to each other and to the whole of which

\footnote{32} \textit{Protagoras} 352 b-d.

\footnote{33} \textit{Protagoras} 360 d-e.
they are parts, but like parts of a face, dissimilar to the whole of which they are parts and to each other, and each one having its own unique power or function. If this is still your view, say so.\textsuperscript{34}

As this passage anticipates, Socrates takes issue with Protagoras’ view that virtue is a whole comprising parts “dissimilar to the whole of which they are parts and to each other.” Protagoras nonetheless tries to use courage to make his point: “You will find, Socrates, many people who are extremely impious, unjust, intemperate, and ignorant, and yet exceptionally courageous; by this you will recognize that courage differs very much from all the other parts of virtue.”\textsuperscript{35} In other words, since courage is a virtue dissimilar from the other parts of virtue, Protagoras claims, virtue is a whole composed of dissimilar parts, “like parts of a face.”

Socrates argues against Protagoras’ claim, by showing apparent good qualities accompanied by folly to not reach the standard of virtue, since virtue is a fine and noble thing. Endurance and confidence cannot be the essence of courage since when surrounded by folly endurance and confidence are insanity. People who are confident without wisdom, “turn out to be not courageous but mad,” and further, “the wisest are the most confident and the most confident are the most courageous.” Hence, Socrates concludes, “wisdom is courage.”\textsuperscript{36} The whole of virtue is wisdom, and courage is a similar part of it.

\textsuperscript{34} Protagoras 349 b-d.
\textsuperscript{35} Protagoras 359 b-c.
\textsuperscript{36} Protagoras 350 c-d.
Socrates’ understanding of virtue as a whole composed of similar parts leads him to posit an identity thesis: all virtue is wisdom. If the only way we can refer to “parts” of gold, water, or air is through the predication of size (the only distinguishing factor in a similar part to part, part to whole relationship), then how is it possible to refer to “parts” of virtue, which do not exist in terms of “size” in this material sense? If size is not a proper predication of virtue, then we have lost the only distinguishing factor by which “part” can be said to exist at all with respect to wholes composed of similar parts. Though different manifestations of virtue appear dissimilar, they are not; similar parts comprise the whole.\footnote{See Julia Annas’s interpretation of Socrates on this point in \textit{Platonic Ethics: Old and New} (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1999), 117-20. Annas notes that “in dialogues such as the \textit{Laches} and the \textit{Meno} we find Socrates rejecting the idea that a virtue should be identified by a characteristic pattern of behavior; what he is looking for is the inner state of the person, which explains why all these different ways of acting are united as exemplifications of the virtue in question. The inner state is identified with knowledge, the state ideally achieved by the person’s reasoning part. More surprisingly, the non-rational aspects of virtue appear to drop out.” (117)}

Consider another example from the \textit{Meno}. Here Socrates leads Meno to the conclusion that virtue is knowledge only to further define knowledge as either the whole of virtue or one of its parts. Socrates begins by asking Meno whether he agrees that health, strength, beauty, wealth “and others of the same kind” are beneficial. Meno agrees with this and also with Socrates’ further claim that these attributes, though beneficial, can sometimes also be harmful. Socrates continues by asking, “what directing factor determines in each case whether these things benefit or harm us?” And he provides the answer as well: “it is the right use of them that benefits us, and the wrong use that harms us,” a point with which Meno agrees. Socrates then moves the discussion to the soul:
“Let us now look at the qualities of the soul. There is something you call moderation, and justice, courage, intelligence, memory, munificence, and all such things?” Meno agrees, and Socrates underscores the point by asking Meno to do the following:

Consider whichever of these you believe not to be knowledge but different from it; do they not at times harm us, at other times benefit us? Courage, for example, when it is not wisdom but like a kind of recklessness: when a man is reckless without understanding, he is harmed; when with understanding, he is benefitted.

Socrates argues, “the same is true of moderation and mental quickness; when they are learned and disciplined with understanding they are beneficial, but without understanding they are harmful.” Here Socrates arrives at his conclusion: “Therefore, in a word, all that the soul undertakes and endures, if directed by wisdom, ends in happiness, but if directed by ignorance, it ends in the opposite?” Meno agrees, which leads to a further conclusion:

If then virtue is something in the soul and it must be beneficial, it must be knowledge, since all the qualities of the soul are in themselves neither beneficial nor harmful, but accompanied by wisdom or folly they become harmful or beneficial. This argument shows that virtue, being beneficial, must be a kind of wisdom.

In order for parts of virtue to be virtuous they must be a “kind of wisdom,” since, according to Socrates, “virtue is wisdom, either the whole or a part of it.”38 Socrates criteria for virtue as a fine and noble thing and his definition of virtue as wisdom entail each other.

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38 *Meno* 88a - 89b.
C. The Inseparability Thesis and Definitions of Virtue

At the beginning of this section it was noted that Socrates’ definition of virtue as wisdom is predicated upon his understanding of virtue as a fine and noble thing. In a sense, this relationship is tautological. Virtue “must be beneficial” to the soul. Wisdom is beneficial to the soul. Therefore, virtue “must be a kind of wisdom.” 39 Thus, Socrates’ definition of virtue and his affirmation of inseparability entail each other, which is of fundamental importance to this dissertation for a reason I will now explain.

Socrates understands virtue as “a fine and noble thing.” But a thing which is “of the injurious and harmful sort” is neither fine nor noble. 40 Some modern theories of virtue depart from this view. For example, as noted in the previous chapter, Adams argues that in order for courage to be virtuous it merely needs to be ordered to an aim to which one is committed, regardless of whether the aim is just or not. This defines virtue by a standard of effectiveness alone, and it is on this basis that he rejects inseparability.

Again, in After Virtue, MacIntyre defines virtue as “an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.” 41 As he further states, “there may be some practices—in the sense in which I understand the concept—which simply are evil.” MacIntyre goes on to clarify the link between his own criticism of inseparability and his definition of virtue:

39 Meno 88a - 89b.

40 Laches 192 c-e.

41 MacIntyre, After Virtue, 191.
I do have to allow that courage sometimes sustains injustice... To deny this would be to fly in the face of just those empirical facts which I invoked in criticizing Aquinas’s account of the unity of the virtues. That the virtues need initially to be defined and explained with reference to the notion of a practice thus in no way entails approval of all practices in all circumstances. That the virtues... are defined not in terms of good and right practices, but of practices, does not entail or imply that practices as actually carried through at particular times and places do not stand in need of moral criticism.\(^{42}\)

Thus, to deny or affirm inseparability either leads to or follows from alternative definitions of virtue. To redefine the “virtues” as not necessarily linked to anything true or good has consequences. As Christopher Steven Lutz contends, “the definition of virtue in After Virtue falls prey to charges of relativism because of MacIntyre’s rejection of the unity of the virtues. The unity of virtue is crucial to the possibility of truth in virtue.”\(^{43}\) It is of the utmost importance, then, that Aquinas does not deny the Socratic insight linking virtue to truth. Aquinas does, however, accept Aristotle’s critique of this view, to which I now turn.

II. Aristotle

Aristotle’s unity thesis preserves the link between virtue and truth, but does not define all virtue as wisdom, as this section shows. According to Aristotle, virtue is a quality that enables a thing to perform its function well.\(^{44}\) The virtue of a human being,

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\(^{44}\) Christine M. Korsgaard, “Aristotle on Function and Virtue,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 3.3 (1986): 259. See the second endnote on 278. W. F. R. Hardie, in *Aristotle’s Ethical Theory* (Oxford, Oxford University Press: 1968), contends that a human being does not have a function, because a human
then, whose distinct function involves “activity of the soul in accord with reason or requiring reason,” 45 consists in the perfection of the rational part of the soul. In this way Aristotle is in agreement with Socrates. Yet, as Terence Irwin has remarked, for Aristotle, “virtue is distinguished by the receptivity of the non-rational (but indirectly rational, and potentially obedient) part to the rational (i.e., inherently rational) part of the soul.” 46 This understanding leads Aristotle to depart from Socrates by positing more virtues than one. However, virtue, in the Aristotelian account, remains a fine and noble thing which cannot be used for evil or in a manner “destructive rather than perfective of the person.” 47

A. Virtue as Good Activity in Accord with Reason

Contemporary ethicists often criticize Aristotle’s contention that becoming good involves reason. They argue instead that reason is a power that “can be used either for good or for evil; and a rational activity, excellently performed, might for all that be an evil one.” 48 This resembles Donagan’s argument about the brave bad man. However, this objection fails to consider that Aristotle follows Socrates in linking virtue to the


perfection of the rational soul in a normative sense. As Christine Korsgaard explains, for Aristotle “an arete is not merely one of a thing’s good points; it is specifically a quality that makes a thing good at performing its function.”

With respect to the virtues of character, then, virtue is not a mere appetite, like anger or fear, nor is it a capacity for appetites. Rather, the genus of virtue is a state, which Aristotle defines as “what we have when we are well or badly off in relation to feelings.” Whether one is “well or badly off” is determined by the mean: “If, for instance, our feeling is too intense or slack, we are badly off in relation to anger, but if it is intermediate, we are well off; the same is true in other cases.” Merely to have a feeling of anger or fear, for instance, is not, in and of itself, virtuous (or vicious), because “we are angry and afraid without decision; but the virtues are decisions of some kind, or [rather] require decision.”

That feelings with decision can be virtuous means, of course, that feelings can also fail to be virtuous, and in order to make the distinction between the two Aristotle again returns to the doctrine of the mean:

By virtue I mean virtue of character; for this is about feelings and actions, and these admit of excess and deficiency, and an intermediate condition. We can be


50 NE II 5. §1-6 (1105b20-1106a). The degree of detail and precision which Aristotle thinks the doctrine of the mean can lend to a proper definition of virtue is a much disputed topic in the secondary literature as are the interrelated questions of the importance of the doctrine to Aristotle’s comprehensive theory of virtue and the usefulness of the mean in ascertaining distinctions between virtue and vice. More fundamentally, critics and commentators are not agreed on what the doctrine of the mean actually entails. Much of the argument here has to do with whether mesotēs is arithmetical or refers to a proportion of opposites on a single scale. For more on this topic see W.F.R. Hardie, “Aristotle’s Doctrine that Virtue is a Mean,” Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 65 (1965): 183-204.

51 NE II 5. §3 (1106a).
afraid, for instance, or be confident, or have appetites, or get angry, or feel pity, and in general have pleasure or pain, both too much and too little, and in both ways not well. But having these feelings at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way, is the intermediate and best condition, and this is proper to virtue. Similarly, actions also admit of excess, deficiency, and an intermediate condition.\(^{52}\)

Aristotle regards that which is distinctively human as in accord with reason or requiring reason. Hence, feelings can be virtuous when they contribute to the healthy functioning of rational activity. This account is consistent with Plato’s claim that justice makes a person happy because it perfects the deliberative function.\(^{53}\) Thus, we are reminded at the outset of Book VI that “a thing’s virtue is relative to its proper function.”\(^{54}\) On this basis, Aristotle defines the virtues of the understanding parts as those “states that best direct it toward the truth.”\(^{55}\) As with Plato, the particularizing of the virtues in Aristotle’s theory follows largely from his moral psychology. This is of relevance for the next subsection as well, but the point I aim to draw out here is that in each and every case the specification of a given virtue is contingent on its role in the preservation of and contribution to practical rationality. If a “virtue” cannot be said to do this, then it is not a virtue. However, for Aristotle the health of the rational part of the soul entails the proper functioning of the lower part. Korsgaard has described the senses in which this is possible based on her analysis of the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

\(^{52}\) *NE* II 6. §10 (1106b).

\(^{53}\) *Republic* 352e.

\(^{54}\) *NE* VI 1. §7 (1139a).

\(^{55}\) *NE* VI 2. §6 (1139b).
(1) The Obedience Theory. The appetitive part of the soul is in a good condition for rational activity when the passions give way to reason.

(2) The Harmony Theory. The appetitive part of the soul is in a good condition for rational activity when the desires and emotions are in harmony with the dictates of reason.

(3) The Susceptibility to Argument Theory. The appetitive part of the soul is in a good condition for rational activity when the desires and emotions are caused by rational considerations.

(4) The Health Analogy. Moral virtues are qualities that in a general way make one good at the formulation and execution of rational plans and projects; their relation to rational activity is analogous to the relation of the physical virtues to physical activity.

(5) The Perception Theory. The appetitive part of the soul is in a good condition for rational activity when what we perceive to be good (because it is pleasant to us) really is good: because we perceive evaluative qualities correctly we are able to make correct judgments about evaluative issues.\(^{56}\)

It is not difficult to find evidence for the obedience theory in the writings of Aristotle. The problem with this interpretation of the relation between reason and the appetitive part of the soul is that it seems to suggest that the good person is marked by weak and slavish passions. The role of the passions in the life of virtue is minimized:

If, then, [the child or the appetitive part] is not obedient and subordinate to its rulers, it will go far astray. For when someone lacks understanding, his desire for the pleasant is insatiable and seeks indiscriminate satisfaction. The [repeated] active exercise of appetite increases the appetite he already had from birth, and if the appetites are large and intense, they actually expel rational calculation. That is why the appetites must be moderate and few, and never contrary to reason. This is the condition we call obedient and temperate.\(^{57}\)

It is important to emphasize that by “moderate and few,” Aristotle does not mean weak and slavish. Indeed, Aristotle criticizes the “insensible” person for not enjoying bodily pleasure to the degree it ought to be enjoyed. Moreover, it is those who are not angry

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\(^{57}\) NE III 12. §7 (1119b).
enough that Aristotle critiques along similar lines: “For people who are not angered by the right things, or in the right way, or at the right times, or toward the right people, all seem to be foolish. For such a person seems to be insensible and feel no pain, and since he is not angered, he does not seem to be the sort to defend himself.”\(^{58}\) Aristotle does not regard the proper interrelationship between reason and the appetites as involving the removal or atrophy of the appetites in order to afford reason control over the levers of decision. Simply put, “moderate and few” is not mutually exclusive with strong and robust. The obedience theory as understood by Korsgaard, then, does not adequately depict Aristotle’s understanding of the role of the appetites in the moral life.

The harmony theory is consistent with Aristotle’s understanding of the relation of the appetites to reason but only in a qualified sense. Whereas if the obedience theory were an adequate description of the right relationship among reason and appetite, then mere continence would suffice for virtue, if the harmony theory alone sufficed, then it would become difficult to explain in what sense intemperance is not a virtue. The harmony theory alone could regard both temperance and intemperance as virtue and continence and incontinence as vice or, at least, less than virtue.

Aristotle parses out the distinctions between intemperance, incontinence, continence, and temperance by appealing to the degree to which desires struggle and clash with reason. But, again, the intemperate person is marked by no such struggle: “The intemperate person, as we said, is not prone to regret, since he abides by his decision

\(^{58}\) _NE IV 5. §5 (1126a)._
"when he acts."⁵⁹ Again, “the incontinent person is the sort to pursue excessive bodily pleasure against correct reason, but not because he is persuaded [it is best]. The intemperate person, however, is persuaded, because he is the sort of person to pursue them.”⁶⁰ On the other hand, we praise the reason of the incontinent and continent man, since “it exhorts them correctly and toward what is best; but they evidently have in them some other [part] that is by nature something apart from reason, clashing and struggling with reason.”⁶¹ The continent man is different from but similar to the temperate man: “At any rate, in the continent person [the non-rational part] obeys reason; and in the temperate and the brave person it presumably listens still better to reason, since there it agrees with reason in everything.”⁶²

Temperance, then, involves good desires in accord with right reason. Incontinence and continence are lesser degrees of this, and intemperance is bad desires in accord with corrupted reason. The possibility of corrupted reason raises problems for both the obedience theory and the harmony theory. It is, perhaps, for this reason that Aristotle has to ask whether a person is continent “if he abides by just any sort of reason and any sort or decision,” or rather, whether he must “abide by the correct decision.”⁶³ At this point

⁵⁹ NE VII 8. §1 (1150b).
⁶⁰ NE VII 8. §4 (1151a).
⁶¹ NE I 13. §15 (1102b).
⁶² NE I 13. §17 (1102b).
⁶³ NE VII 9. §1 (1151a). It would take us beyond the scope of this discussion to go into the controversial points in Aristotle’s account of akrasia. Scholars disagree with respect to whether Aristotle really parts ways with the Socratic claim that to know the good is to do it. For more on this topic see the following: David L. Schaefer, “Wisdom and Morality: Aristotle’s Account of Akrasia,” Polity 21.2 (1988):
we are in position to reply to the objection that reason is a power that “can be used either for good or for evil; and a rational activity, excellently performed, might for all that be an evil one.” Aristotle can agree with Williams and Donagan that there is such a thing as corrupted reason that does not entail moral goodness. However, this is not virtuous and through the stages leading up to temperance Aristotle describes progress to a virtuous state.

It is for this reason that the obedience and harmony theories, in and of themselves, are insufficient to the task of explaining the relationship between the rational and non-rational parts of the soul. Aristotle departs from Socrates insofar as he recognizes that ethical knowledge alone does not guarantee right action. It is not sufficient for the rational part to correctly grasp ethical truths, because the human soul also has an appetitive component, which can fight and struggle against reason. In a virtuous person, the appetitive parts of the soul participate in the rational part and so gain a share in reason. An individual, then, may possess ethical knowledge but remain weak-willed due to misshapen appetites. Aristotle compares the appetitive soul of the weak-willed to limbs which “when we decide to move them to the right, do the contrary and move off to the left, the same is true of the soul; for incontinent people have impulses in contrary directions.” This is why ethical knowledge requires the moral virtues.


65 NE I 15. §15 (1102b).
Aristotle does not deny Socrates’ view that correct knowledge pertaining to intrinsic goods and evils as well as right and wrong action is a criterion for virtue. Rather, Aristotle confirms and expands this view. Erik Wielenberg refers to Aristotle’s understanding of wisdom with respect moral goodness as prudence, or the virtue by which one recognizes “the morally relevant aspects of the situations in which one finds oneself” in order to “understand the morality of those situations correctly.”

Although they can be analyzed separately, Aristotelian practical wisdom (prudence) includes both ethical knowledge and moral perceptiveness. As Wielenberg points out, it is not difficult to conceive of a person “who recognizes that it is never permissible to inflict suffering on the innocent but isn’t very good at identifying the innocent in actual situations (or isn’t very good at detecting suffering).”

This explains Aristotle’s contention that virtue “is not merely the state in accord with correct reason, but the state involving the correct reason.” Actions are motivated by appetites shaped by rational processes. The appetitive soul becomes receptive to the formation of desires “produced by the dictates of reason.” Since the moral virtues are integral both to the emergence and maintenance of this condition, to possess and act upon.

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67 Aquinas understands himself to be following Aristotle when argues that a person can rightly recognize a universal but fail in applying it to a particular. This is also common sense. Wielenberg, “Saving Character,” 465.

68 Wielenberg, “Saving Character,” 465.

69 NE VI 13. §5 (1144b).
the moral virtues is likened to a healthy (bodily) state.\textsuperscript{70} Hence, as with Socrates, a crucial criterion for virtue is its betterment of the soul inasmuch as it enables it to fully realize its potential for rational activity. However, for Aristotle prudence and appetite share in a reciprocal relationship. One cannot be perfected independently of the other; for this reason natural dispositions to virtue are not virtue. They may be in accord with right reason but are not shaped by a rational principle. This is also the reason why they, unlike “full” virtue are separable.\textsuperscript{71}

Virtues, then, for Aristotle, are intellectual and moral qualities that together comprise the perfected state of the human soul. It is in this state that one engages in rational activity by rightly perceiving and being motivated by the truly good and noble. When the appetitive soul is able to be motivated by these considerations it is in what Korsgaard refers to as “the argument-susceptible state” where the dictates of reason inform desires and emotions which in turn involves reason pursuing precisely that which maintains this condition: “it chooses what is best for itself.”

Returning, then, to the objection that the function argument draws unnecessary and arbitrary links between achieving the distinctive human good, being morally good, and rational activity, this objection does not take adequate account of the connection Aristotle makes between rational activity and the achievement of moral goodness. This is, in fact, the manner by which Aristotle addresses the claim that, because reason can be used either for good or for evil, it cannot define the morally best life. As Korsgaard

\textsuperscript{70} NE II 2. §1-8 (1104 a-b).

\textsuperscript{71} NE VI 13 (1144b – 1145a). More is said about this topic below.
helpfully points out, “this objection is based on a more or less empiricist view of practical reason: its use is the determination of means to ends, and ends can be good or bad.”\textsuperscript{72} But such an “empiricist view” parts ways entirely with Aristotle’s definition of perfected practical reason which is only virtuous when ordered by the moral virtues to a correct judgment pertaining to the soul’s well being. Virtues only emerge when the non-rational part of the soul follows the rational part itself informed by the moral virtues. It is also true that emotion and desire can be correct or incorrect inasmuch as they do or do not contribute to the actualization of the soul’s potential for rational activity. Therefore, in each and every case the specification of a given virtue is contingent on its role in the preservation of and contribution to practical rationality. If a “virtue” cannot be said to do this, then it is not a virtue.

In sum, whereas Socrates defines the virtues as wisdom, Aristotle defines the virtues as perfected practical reason working in harmony with appetites well shaped by the moral virtues: “We cannot be fully good without prudence, or prudent without the virtue of character.”\textsuperscript{73} These dual criteria lead to a unity thesis, which is the subject to which I now turn.

\textbf{B. The Unity Thesis}

It has already been observed that for Aristotle the virtuous person possesses both the intellectual virtue of prudence, by which she deliberates well, and the moral virtues

\textsuperscript{72} Korsgaard, “Aristotle on Function and Virtue,” 277.

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{NE} VI 13. §5-6 (1144b).
which draw the non-rational part of the soul into a harmonious alignment with the rational part. Hence, Aristotle holds a unity thesis (to possess one virtue is to possess them all).\textsuperscript{74}

Aristotle understands the identity thesis of Socrates as “in one way correct, and in another way in error. For insofar as he thought all the virtues are [instances of] prudence, he was in error; but insofar as he thought they all require prudence, what he used to say was right.”\textsuperscript{75} Aristotle maintains instead that a unity between the virtues of character and the intellectual virtues comprises a fully virtuous state.

In Book I of the \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, Aristotle maintains that happiness is the ultimate end of human activity. He argues this on the basis that “an end pursued in its own right is more complete than an end pursued because of something else.”\textsuperscript{76} The ultimate end is achieved by humans when they live in accord with the distinctively human function, which “is some sort of action of the [part of the soul] that has reason. One [part] of it has reason as obeying reason; the other part has it as itself having reason


\textsuperscript{75} \textit{NE} VI 13. §3 (1144b).

\textsuperscript{76} \textit{NE} I 7. §4 (1097a).
and thinking." Hence, “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.” The catalogue of virtues and analysis of their interdependence which follows is meant to be descriptive of the state of the soul in possession of this happiness. Temperance and courage, for example, are the virtues by which the non-rational part of the soul is brought into harmony “with reason in everything.” It is for this reason that “the division between virtues accords with” the rational and quasi-rational components of the soul. Here Aristotle reveals his debt to Plato.

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77 NE I 7. §13 (1098a). Aristotle does not think that plants and animals are capable of rational thought. Some contemporary moral theologians still assign a predominant status to reason’s capacity to discern the good. Mark Miller, for example, argues that “discernment of the good is where we distinguish ourselves as human beings” (413) in “Experience as a Source of Moral Theology,” Studia Moralia 48.2 (December, 2010): 394-413.

78 NE I 7. §15 (1098a). Clearly Aristotle does think there are “more virtues than one”. However, he maintains that “the best and most complete virtue” (prudence) is inclusive of the other virtues. See Irwin’s editorial comments on 181 regarding the exclusive and inclusive interpretations of the complete end: “What is ‘the most complete end of these?’…Two possible answers: (a) Exclusive: We look for the single most complete end, excluding other ends that are less complete. (b) Inclusive: The most complete end is the one that includes the other ends; we are not to pursue an unordered collection of ends, but the complete single end that is the whole formed by them. If we accept the exclusive answer, it is difficult to see how this conclusion that we must seek the complete end follows from what Aristotle has said; if we accept the inclusive answer, we do not face this difficulty. For more on this topic see Peter Simons, “Real wholes, Real Parts: Mereology without Algebra,” The Journal of Philosophy 103.12 (December, 2006): 597-613. Also see Kathrin Koslicki’s “Aristotle’s Mereology and the Status of Form” in the same edition.

79 NE I 13. §17 (1102b). The irrational part of the soul participates in reason by “listening to reason as to a father.” NE I 13. §19 (1103a). Aristotle seems fond of this analogy. See also NE III 3. §12 (1119b). If, then, [the child or appetitive part] is not obedient and subordinate to its rulers, it will go far astray…And just as the child’s life must follow the instructions of its guide, so too the appetitive part must follow reason.

80 NE I 13. §19 (1103a). One will have reason fully, by having it within itself; the other will have reason by listening to reason as to a father. The division between virtues accords with this difference. For some virtues are called virtues of thought, others virtues of character; wisdom, comprehension, and prudence are called virtues of thought, generosity and temperance virtues of character…and the states that are praiseworthy are the ones we call virtues. Also see NE VI 12. §3 (1144a). Each [prudence and wisdom] is the virtue of the two [rational] parts of [the soul].
Aristotle arrives at distinctions among the virtues so as to posit a unity among them. A unity, after all, can only occur between distincts. Hence, an analysis of the two primary kinds of distinction within the virtues made by Aristotle is in order. The first distinction is between the intellectual virtues and the moral virtues, and the second is between the moral virtues themselves.81 As demonstrated above, Aristotle’s commitment to the unity thesis is driven in large part by his decision to amend the position that he attributes to Socrates. Aristotle objects to Socrates’ claim that the perfection of distinct capacities for desire and action are not needed in order to secure the proper functioning of the rational part. He laments, for example, that for Socrates a moral capacity is indistinguishable from a rational capacity: “Socrates, then, used to think the virtues are [instances of] reason because he thought they are all [instances] of knowledge, whereas we think they involve reason.”82 Aristotle, then, is constructing his view regarding the interrelationship between the virtues as a corrective of the identity thesis. Aristotle does not accept two Socratic claims: (1) wisdom and the moral virtues are identical, because the moral virtues are all instances of wisdom and (2) for the same reason, no distinction is to be made among the moral virtues since they too are all really “instances” of wisdom. In contrast, Aristotle maintains both that (1) prudence and the moral virtues are distinct though inseparable and (2) that the moral virtues are also distinct although, again, inseparable. In my view, Aristotle is accepting Protagoras’ claim that the virtues are a


82 *NE* VI 13. §5-6 (1144b).
whole composed of dissimilar parts though siding with Socrates regarding the inseparability of the parts. The proper functioning of a nose is not exactly possible if it is separated from the face, after all, though the nose and eyes and mouth are certainly dissimilar parts that make up a face.\textsuperscript{83}

Again, the chief question is: how does Aristotle distinguish the virtues? For we have seen that Socrates is not particularly interested in distinguishing them save as parts of wisdom. This question I take in two parts: (1) How does Aristotle distinguish the intellectual virtue of prudence from the moral virtues? And (2) How does Aristotle distinguish the moral virtues from each other? I turn now to the first question, which is also the easier of the two.

In addition to having a capacity to know truth, human beings have a capacity to desire what is good. Aristotle differentiates intellectual virtue from moral virtue on this basis: “Decision is either understanding combined with desire or desire combined with thought; and this is the sort of principle that a human being is.”\textsuperscript{84} Moral virtues, then, involve a state wherein good desires are actualized through decision and action:

\textsuperscript{83} As may be expected, scholars have not arrived at a consensus regarding how convincing Aristotle’s understanding of the interrelationship among the virtues is. All agree that Aristotle tries to support two claims: (1) Moral virtues require practical wisdom and (2) Practical wisdom also requires the moral virtues. However, critics contend that Aristotle fails to substantiate both claims. See Elizabeth Telfer, “The Unity of the Moral Virtues in Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics,” \textit{Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society} 90 (1989/90): 35-48. Telfer claims that although Aristotle fails he may have succeeded if he would have admitted that his concepts of the moral virtues represent unattainable ideals. However, John Lemos argues that even that argument fails in “The Unity of the Virtues and Its Defenses,” \textit{The Southern Journal of Philosophy} 32 (1994): 85-105. Because this dissertation is about Aquinas’s thesis, I do not respond to these claims here. For defenses of Aristotle’s thesis see Paula Gottlieb, “Aristotle on Dividing the Soul and Uniting the Virtues,” \textit{Phronesis} 39.3 (1994): 275-290; and Edward Halper, “The Unity of the Virtues in Aristotle,” \textit{Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy} 17(1999): 115-43. Deslauriers, “How to Distinguish Aristotle’s Virtues,” 111.
By virtue I mean virtue of character, for this is about feelings and actions, and these admit of excess, deficiency, and an intermediate condition. We can be afraid, for instance, or be confident, or have appetites, or get angry, or feel pity, and in general have pleasure or pain, both too much and too little, and in both ways not well. But having these feelings at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way, is the intermediate and best condition, and this is proper to virtue. Similarly, actions also admit of excess, deficiency, and an intermediate condition.\(^{85}\)

It was observed in the previous subsection that Aristotle places desire in the sensitive faculty as distinct from the intellectual. Hence, desire and deliberation both contribute to decision. Because desire and deliberation belong to distinct faculties, different virtues are required to perfect them. Aristotle’s definition of the virtues and his unity thesis entail each other.

Aristotle’s division of the soul, then, is one of the manners in which he establishes his unity thesis in contrast to the identity thesis of Socrates. The desiderative and deliberative elements which combine in choice are truly distinct. In this sense, Aristotle’s unity thesis follows from his moral psychology in general and specifically from the distinction he makes between the sensitive and rational part of the soul. If rational desires were generated by reason, then desire and deliberation would not form a unity producing choice leading to action. Rather, desire with respect to one’s aims, and deliberation with respect to how to attain them, would turn out to be the same thing. As Marguerite Deslauriers remarks, “If there are different faculties involved in choice, then there must

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\(^{84}\) NE VI 1. §5 (1139b).

\(^{85}\) NE II 6. §10 (1106b).
be different virtues involved, so phronesis [prudence] and the moral virtues must be
genuinely different.”

In the virtuous person, desire makes a distinct contribution to decision and action; this is through its relationship to practical reason. The object of desire also determines the mode of deliberation. Consequently, prudence needs good desire to establish for it proper objects of deliberation. Good desire also requires prudence, because good desires are ordered properly to their ends by prudence:

And it is clear that, even if prudence were useless in action, we would need it because it is the virtue of this part of the soul, and because the decision will not be correct without prudence or without [moral] virtue—for [moral] virtue makes us achieve the end, whereas [prudence] makes us achieve the things that promote the end.

Desire contributes to decision and action and is a faculty distinct from the faculty of deliberation, and yet virtuous action requires deliberation and desire to mutually inform one another which in turn requires distinct virtues ordered to the perfection of each distinct faculty. Aristotle clearly maintains that intellectual and moral virtue entail one another though they remain distinct virtues since they belong to distinct faculties of the soul. But why, then, posit more than one moral virtue as the perfection of the appetitive part? In other words, how does Aristotle specify moral virtues?

86 Deslauriers, “How to Distinguish Aristotle’s Virtues,” 111.

87 NE VI 13. §7 (1145a).

88 See Gottlieb, “Aristotle on Dividing the Soul and Uniting the Virtues,” 288. She argues that Aristotle posits not only reciprocity between phronesis and the moral virtues but also among the moral virtues themselves: “It is precisely because of the connection between rational and non-rational parts of the soul that a vice in any one area may undermine an Aristotelian virtue in any other.” In her view, this is why one must have all of the moral virtues to have even one of them, because a weakness in any sphere of
Aristotle distinguishes moral virtues according to distinct kinds of actions and feelings proper to that virtue:

First, then, in feelings of fear and confidence the mean is bravery…In pleasures and pains—though not in all types, and in pains less than in pleasures—the mean is temperance…In giving and taking money the mean is generosity…Another mean is magnificence; for the magnificent person differs from the generous by being concerned with large matters…In honor and dishonor the mean is magnanimity…Anger also admits of an excess, deficiency, and mean. These are all practically nameless; but since we call the intermediate person mild, let us call the mean mildness…In truth-telling, then, let us call the intermediate person truthful…In sources of pleasure in amusements let us call the intermediate person witty…In the other sources of pleasure, those in daily life, let us call the person who is pleasant in the right way friendly…There are also means in feelings and about feelings.

A unity requires a relationship among distincts, and Aristotle furnishes us with distinct virtues. These are virtues distinguished not merely by the circumstances or situations in which they are activated but by the distinct contributions they make to decision and action, the functions they perform, and the part of the soul they perfect. At the same time, Aristotle does, in a sense, recognize external conditions or circumstances as a factor in the specification of certain virtues. For example, the amount of wealth one has appears to be the only distinguishing factor between generosity and magnificence. In addition,


Richard Kraut, in differentiating large-scale from small-scale virtues, argues that Aristotle does not furnish us with much guidance regarding how to individuate virtues. See Kraut, “Comments on ‘Disunity in the Aristotelian Virtues’ by T. H. Irwin,” 1. As this section demonstrates, I think Kraut is incorrect on this point, though I agree with Deslauriers that “the means of individuation Aristotle offers us suggest that he himself was not committed to making the distinctions on every occasion.” Deslauriers, “How to Distinguish Aristotle’s Virtues,” 113.

NE II 7 (1107b – 1108b). Aristotle also singles out proneness to shame and proper indignation as virtuous feelings.
“political science and prudence are the same state, but their being is not the same.”\textsuperscript{91}

Expertise in political science is determined by one’s activity with respect to the political system. Political prudence is a manifestation of prudence in a particular arena and so it takes on a different name. The same is true with respect to household management. For these reasons, determining how many virtues there are for Aristotle requires several judgments: for instance, are generosity and magnificence separate virtues?\textsuperscript{92} What do we do with the virtues that are the same state but distinct in being? Nevertheless, the distinction among the intellectual virtue of prudence and the moral virtues differentiated from each other according to the objects, feelings, and actions proper to them make up Aristotle’s unity thesis.\textsuperscript{93}

In sum, Aristotle posits a unity thesis according to which to possess one virtue is to possess them all insofar as to possess prudence is to possess the moral virtues and to possess the moral virtues is to possess prudence. This corresponds to Aristotle’s criteria for virtue since, “we fulfill our function insofar as we have prudence and virtue of character; for virtue makes the goal correct, and prudence makes the things promoting the

\textsuperscript{91} NE VI 8. §1 (1141b).

\textsuperscript{92} And I have said nothing of the crowning virtue of magnanimity. NE IV 3. §35 (1125a).

\textsuperscript{93} R.E. Houser provides the following description: “Aristotle multiplied Platonic wisdom into five different virtues: the theoretical virtues of wisdom (sophia), understanding (nous), and knowledge (episteme), productive craftsmanship (techne), and finally prudence (phronesis), which is different from the others because it guides practical life. He then adopted Plato’s three moral virtues—courage, temperance, and justice—but he transformed them into specific virtues by limiting the scope of each. Finally, he added nine other specific virtues, in areas where Plato had only seen vice.” See R.E. Houser, The Cardinal Virtues: Aquinas, Albert, and Philip the Chancellor (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2004), 14. I have focused here on phronesis and the moral virtues which are the virtues that Aquinas considers in his inseparability thesis.
Furthermore, it is in this way that Aristotle argues against the possibility of a person possessing one virtue without another:

For [it is argued], since the same person is not naturally best suited for all the virtues, someone will already have one virtue before he gets another. This is indeed possible in the case of [natural dispositions to virtue]. It is not possible, however, in the case of the [full] virtues that someone must have to be called good without qualification; for one has all the virtues if and only if one has prudence, which is a single state.\(^95\)

The question remains of how one is to move from whatever natural dispositions to virtue he may have (or whatever vices) to full virtue. It is to this question that I now turn. This is relevant since Aquinas draws from Aristotle with respect to this question, and because the objectors of the previous chapter equate the upholding of inseparability with denials of moral progress. Aristotle, like Aquinas, affirms both inseparability and the reality of moral progress.

\textit{C. How is Virtue Attained?}

In Book II of the \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, Aristotle remarks that “our present discussion does not aim, as others do, at study; for the purpose of our examination is not to know what virtue is, but to become good, since otherwise the inquiry would be of no benefit to us. And so we must examine the right ways of acting; for, as we have said, the actions also control the sorts of states we acquire.”\(^96\) In the \textit{Eudemian Ethics} Aristotle

\(^{94}\) \textit{NE} VI 12. §6 (1144a).

\(^{95}\) \textit{NE} VI 13. §6 (1145a).

\(^{96}\) \textit{NE} II 2. §1 (1103b).
contends that Socrates did not inquire much into the process by which virtue is attained, because he presumed that all of the virtues are knowledge and so gained solely by moving from ignorance to knowledge of virtue. One becomes virtuous in the same way that one becomes a geometer, by learning the principles of that subject. But Aristotle explores further the source of the attainment of virtue:

Of the productive sciences, however, the end is distinct from the science [itself] and from understanding: health is the end of medicine, good social order or something of the sort distinct [from the science itself] the end of political science. If something is fine, understanding it is fine also; but still, in the case of virtue, the most valuable thing is not to have knowledge of it, but to know from what source it arises.

Nevertheless, to know the end of a particular science remains valuable since, as Aristotle maintains in the Magna Moralia, “it is not easy to know the source and manner of its production, if one does not know what it is, anymore than in the sciences.” Aristotle is investigating the attainment of the end. With respect to virtue, from what source does Aristotle think virtue arises? Returning to the health analogy, in the Metaphysics, Aristotle makes a distinction between two ways that one might understand the source of health:

With a view to action, experience seems in no way inferior to art, and we even see men of experience having more success than those who have theory but lack experience; the reason is that experience is knowledge of particulars while art is


98 EE 1.5 (1216 bl7-23).

of universals, and actions and productions are all concerned with the particular; for the doctor does not cure man, except incidentally, but rather Callias or Socrates or some other individual referred to in this way who happens to be a man. If, then, a man has the theory but lacks experience, and knows the universal but not the particular contained in this, he will often fail to cure: for it is the particular that is to be cured.\footnote{\textit{Metaphysics} 1.1 (981 a12-24). I use W.D. Ross’ translation in Barnes (1984).}

The best case scenario is that a person has knowledge of both the universals and the particulars. This person correctly transitions from theoretical knowledge to its practical application in a given situation. Not only can he tell us exercise is healthy, but he can prescribe the right degree of exercise to Callias and Socrates based on their individual states.\footnote{See Daniel T. Devereux, “Particular and Universal in Aristotle's Conception of Practical Knowledge,” \textit{The Review of Metaphysics} 39.3 (1986): 483-504.} In order to do this, more than theoretical knowledge is necessary. One must also apply this knowledge. With respect to virtue, then, it is not enough to possess virtue in the sense of understanding the sort of harmony it entails or the sorts of acts it informs. One must also use and exercise virtue in order to attain a truly virtuous state:

But perhaps one might raise the following sort of question also, “If I really know these things, shall I then be happy?” For they think they must be; whereas it is not so. For none of the other sciences transmits to the learner the use and exercise, but only the faculty. So in this case also the knowing of these things does not transmit the use (for happiness is an activity, as we maintain), but the faculty, nor does happiness consist in the knowledge of what produces it, but comes from the use of these means.\footnote{\textit{MM} 2.10 (1208 a31-b2).}

As Alex London has pointed out, the idea here is a simple one. Returning to the health analogy, a “medical intern’s experience in the hospital, for instance, enables him to put
into practice a form of scientific knowledge he has already acquired in the classroom.” The intern may possess scientific knowledge as a result of his classroom education, but this still has to “be exercised in clinical practice in order to acquire medical skill.”

Similarly, an athlete may receive the proper instruction from a coach, but still must execute this properly in the myriad situations that may arise in the game.

The problem which arises is Aristotle’s contention in the *Eudemian Ethics* that the soul achieves the best state through exercise of moral virtue. Indeed, it is through this kind of exercise that moral virtue is acquired. This makes it seem as though one must already possess virtue in order to acquire virtue. This is not a problem caused by the unity thesis. The same problem would exist even if Aristotle believed that the virtues could be acquired piecemeal.

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104 See EE 1.4 (1215 b3-4); compare 1.5 (1216 a21). This is a commonly recognized and critiqued problem. For example, Andrew Dell’Olio describes Aristotle’s theory regarding the attainment of virtue as a “hopeless circularity” that renders moral progress impossible: Andrew J. Dell’Olio, *Foundations of Moral Selfhood: Aquinas on Divine Goodness and the Connection of the Virtues* (New York: Peter Lang inc, 2003), 91. Dell’Olio goes on to argue that “in order to break free from this vicious cycle of virtues, the moral agent would need at least one supreme virtue which, when possessed, could itself orient the self to its ultimate end and thereby unify the various desires, actions and virtues of the agent. But Aquinas could not find the solution to this problem in Aristotle, who, as Hauerwas has maintained, does not adequately provide a way to account for ‘how the self acquires an orientation that gives a unity to our various actions.’ There is no one virtue in Aristotle that is sufficiently up to this task…It is here in his account that Aquinas turns to the resources of the Augustinian tradition. For Aquinas’s solution to this problem lays in the way in which love or charity directs the other virtues, and prudence in particular, to the divine good” (110-11). See Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1981); John M. Cooper, *Reason and the Human Good in Aristotle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975); Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 373-77. As my later discussion of Aquinas makes clear, I disagree with Dell’Olio. In my view, Aquinas (or Aristotle for that matter) does not need Augustine’s charity to solve a problem which Aristotle’s prudence could not. Rather, Aquinas addresses this problem by positing a theory of proportional moral growth.
Although Aristotle does not address this problem in the *Eudemian Ethics*, he does take it up in Book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Here, after recognizing the dilemma Aristotle replies by appealing to the distinction between natural dispositions to virtue and virtue without qualification. A person may act virtuously even if she is not a virtuous person. Aristotle provides us with three additional criteria by which one may distinguish between the virtuous actions of a person who possesses only natural dispositions to virtue and the person who possesses virtue without qualification:

But for actions in accord with the virtues to be done temperately or justly it does not suffice that [the actions] themselves have the right qualities. Rather, the agent must also be in the right state when he does them. First, he must know [that he is doing virtuous actions]; second, he must decide on them, and decide on them for themselves; and, third, he must also do them from a firm and unchanging state.\footnote{NE II 4. §3 (1105a).}

Simply put, one acquires virtue by acting virtuously: “It is right, then, to say that a person comes to be just from doing just actions and temperate from doing temperate actions; for no one has the least prospect of becoming good from failing to do them.”\footnote{NE II 4. §5 (1105b).} According to Aristotle, the manner that one acquires the right state through repeated right action may be likened to the manner in which an athlete habituates her skills through practice: “This is clear from those who train for any contest or action, since they continually practice the appropriate activities. Only a totally insensible person would not know that a given type of activity is the source of the corresponding state.”\footnote{NE III 5. §10 (1114a).} Situations contribute to the
“sources and means” by which one may “develop each virtue”, but situations also contribute to the “sources and means” by which one may “ruin” virtue:

For what we do in our dealings with other people makes some of us just, some unjust; what we do in terrifying situations, and the habits of fear or confidence that we acquire, make some of us brave and others cowardly. The same is true of situations involving appetites and anger; for one or another sort of conduct in these situations makes some temperate and mild, others intemperate and irascible.\(^{108}\)

The corresponding situations and actions will vary greatly with respect to each discrete virtue, but the one thing that every action which helps us to develop a virtue have in common is that they are in “accord with the correct reason.”\(^{109}\) The virtues are acquired through attaining both the theoretical and experiential knowledge which comes from practicing the virtues. A person with natural dispositions to virtue can act virtuously so as to attain virtue even if he does not perform the virtuous deeds in the same manner that the virtuous person does (with knowledge, ease, and constancy). These things grow through repeated action so as to form a \textit{secunda natura} that involves their fully developed state.

The issue remains, however, of the vicious person who presumably will have great difficulty performing virtuous deeds so as to undo his vicious state. Can this person too act virtuously so as to become virtuous despite having developed a state of vice through acting poorly?

\(^{108}\) \textit{NE} II 1. §7 (1103b).

\(^{109}\) \textit{NE} II 2. §2 (1103b). Indeed, the relation between temperance and prudence is so strong that “temperance (\textit{sôphrosunê})” is so named because it “preserves prudence (\textit{sôzousan tên phronêsin}). VI 5. §4 (1140b).
People can, according to Aristotle, act contrary to character. The fact that character provides a strong inclination to act in a certain way does not mean character necessitates certain actions. Otherwise, people with natural dispositions to virtue would be more virtuous than people with full virtue since the latter act involuntarily. This is important, because if having an established character does not deprive a person of the ability to act contrary to it, then moral reform is possible for those who have developed a bad character. In order to bring this out two seemingly contradictory texts need to be reconciled. First, in Book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says the following:

Further, it is unreasonable for someone doing injustice not to wish to be unjust, or for someone doing intemperate action not to wish to be intemperate. This does not mean, however, that if he is unjust and wishes to stop, he will thereby stop and be just. For neither does a sick person recover his health [simply by wishing]; nonetheless, he is sick willingly, by living incontinently and disobeying the doctors, if that was how it happened. At that time, then, he was free not to be sick, though no longer free once he has let himself go, just as it was up to someone to throw a stone, since the principle was up to him, thought he can no longer take it back once he has thrown it. Similarly, then, the person who is [now] unjust or intemperate was originally free not to acquire this character, so that he has it willingly, though once he has acquired the character, he is no longer free to have it [now].

This implies that there cannot be progress from vice to virtue. However, the following text seems to contradict this:

For the bad man, if led into better ways of living and talking, would progress, if only a little, towards being better. And if he once made even a little progress it is clear that he might either change completely or make really great progress. For however slight the progress he made to begin with, he becomes ever more easily changed towards virtue, so that he is likely to make still more progress; and when this keeps happening it brings him over completely into the contrary state, provided time permits.

\[110\] *NE* III 5. §13-15 (1114a).
Here Aristotle does envision a state of progress between vice and virtue. The way to resolve this seeming incompatibility is again by underscoring Aristotle’s emphasis on the role of right actions in the formation of virtue. The sick man cannot merely wish to become better, nor does he become better by acquiring theoretical knowledge as to what the better state entails. Rather, he must stop “disobeying the doctors” and start acting so as to procure his health. Nevertheless, the path to virtue is more arduous for the vicious person than for the person who has not yet developed a vicious character. 

How, then, does the unjust person become just? Keeping with Aristotle’s likening of injustice to disease, one can point to what Gianluca Di Muzio has referred to as “the transformational power of repeated and consistent action.” Just as it is possible to recover health by therapy, diet, and exercise, a person can also improve a state of character by acting contrary to the bad habits one has. Since, “a given type of activity is the source of the corresponding state,” moral improvement is indeed possible. As the famous bent stick remedy reminds us, the process of character improvement is not easy, especially for one has developed strongly towards bad actions. A smoker can unlearn

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113 Di Muzio, “Aristotle on Improving One’s Character,” 211.

114 *NE* III 5. §12 (1114a).
smoking, though there is always the possibility of relapse, since habits, good or bad, do not override voluntariness. And, of course, the person who has never acquired the habit is freer not to start than the person who has acquired it and is trying to quit. But Aristotle does not regard this as an impossible process to complete. Rather, he recognizes the possibility and difficulty of moral reform though these aspects are stressed differently in the two seemingly contradictory passages reviewed above.

In sum, according to Aristotle, actions are key to the attainment of virtue. Voluntariness makes virtuous action possible for those already in a virtuous state, those with natural dispositions to virtue, and even those weakened by vice. To become virtuous, one must act virtuously. The acquisition of virtue occurs by degrees over time. One gains the practical experience necessary for correctly applying universals in myriad situations and so develops prudence which in turn contributes to the ends set forth by the moral virtues. Aristotle maintains that prudence “is a state grasping the truth, involving reason, concerned with action about things that are good or bad for a human being.”

D. Conclusion

The difference between Socrates and Aristotle is that between the identity thesis and the unity thesis. Both agree that virtue is a state that actualizes the potential of the rational soul. Both are epistemological realists who sharply delineate the real from the apparent and are unimpressed by sophist understandings of wisdom as perception.

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115 NE VI 5. §4 (1140b).
However, Aristotle’s understanding of the role of the appetites in the virtuous life leads him to part ways with Socrates identity thesis but affirming nonetheless that virtue must be in accord with right reason to count as virtue (“Socrates is partly right and partly wrong”).

The purpose of this dissertation is not to ascertain whether Socrates’ or Aristotle’s respective theses are susceptible to the objections of the previous chapter. Rather, this dissertation is concerned with Aquinas’s thesis. Aristotle’s version of inseparability greatly informs Aquinas’s own account, but Socrates is not entirely left behind. When there is disagreement Aquinas sides with Aristotle, the Philosopher. Hence, Aquinas’s is a unity thesis emphasizing the necessary (but not sufficient) condition of knowledge for virtuous living.

Whereas Aquinas’s commitment to Aristotle’s unity thesis, which affirms the link between virtue and truth offered by Socrates, provides one avenue for responding to the objections of the previous chapter, Aquinas’s rejection of the Stoic version of inseparability provides another. It is to this thesis that I now turn. The Stoic version of inseparability entails totalizing claims which prompted concerns similar to those enumerated in the previous chapter among Aquinas’s theological predecessors.

\[116 \text{ Aristotle regards the Sophists as a group who employ erroneous arguments that appear convincing but, in fact, are not. He discredits their capacity to provide moral and political guidance. See } \textit{NE} \ (1164a; 1180b; 1181a). \]
III. The Radicalized Identity Thesis of the Early Stoics

In this section, I maintain that the Stoic definition of virtue involves problematic totalizing claims.\(^\text{117}\) Diogenes Laertius (ca. 250 A.D.) understands the Stoics to reject the Peripatetic claim that there exists a middle position wherein one is progressing towards virtue without yet possessing it: “while the Peripatetics say that progress lies between virtue and vice,” the Stoics “believed there is nothing between virtue and vice.”\(^\text{118}\) The moral rigorism of the Stoics is expressed in a salient metaphor:

For just as those who are submerged in the ocean cannot breathe, whether they are so close to the surface that they are just about to emerge or they are down deep…so too whoever is making little progress toward the habit of virtue is no less in misery than one who has not progressed at all.\(^\text{119}\)

The one who has emerged from the ocean of misery is the Stoic sage, and he has done so through single minded devotion to the \textit{logos}.\(^\text{120}\) As Laertius understands it, the point of this metaphor is to deny the reality of moral progress. Though the passage distinguishes between those “making little progress” and those who have “not progressed at all,” the

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\(^{118}\) \textit{Vitae} 7.127, tr. Inwood and Gerson 144; quoted in Houser, \textit{The Cardinal Virtues}, 17.

\(^{119}\) Cicero, \textit{De finibus} 3.14.48. Augustine references this in Letter 167 to Jerome, which I treat in the next chapter.

\(^{120}\) The \textit{logos} refers to the cosmic force of universal reason. Diogenes Laertius, \textit{Vitae} 7.87-8, tr. Inwood and Gerson 136.
whole point is that these groups are, in any important sense, in the same position.

Drowning is drowning.

Another analogy the Stoics employed was that of “a puppy which is just about to open its eyes.” The Stoics argued that “a puppy which is just about to open its eyes is no less blind than one which has just been born. Either it sees or it does not. Either one can breathe or one cannot; either one is guilty or one is not.” Again, there is no significant difference between the sight of the newborn puppy and the one “about to open its eyes.” It either can see or it cannot. J.M. Rist has analyzed the import of Stoic analogies regarding their view of the moral life:

A piece of wood is either straight or it is not; there are no degrees of straightness any more than degrees of justice. The wise man differs from everybody else not in degree but in kind. Just as a proposition is either true or not-true, so men are either moral or not moral. One thing cannot be “more” true or “more” false than another; and morality is similar. 122

The early Stoics were unwilling to concede to the commonsense point of view that some wood is less bent than other wood and some men are less moral than others and so forth. According to Rist, this is because the Stoics were “afraid” of polluting the very concept of moral goodness:

If the concept of moral goodness admits of degrees, who can say that it could reach a term? If Smith is better than Jones, who is better than Thomas, how can any man be said to be perfect. Could not some moral improvement be imagined? In other words, how could there be a sage or wise man? The Stoics in fact reject a

121 Cicero, De Fin. 3.48 (SVF III 530), 4.75 (SFV III 531); Plut., CN 1063A (SFV III 539). Quoted in J.M. Rist, Stoic Philosophy (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1969), 83.

form of the ontological argument in advance. For them, if there are degrees of
moral goodness, there cannot be a good, only a relative good.\footnote{Rist, \textit{Stoic Philosophy}, 84.}

Thus, in qualifying virtue as an absolute state the Stoics eliminate the possibility of
degrees of moral progress. As Rist has observed, the Stoic dilemma “is a Platonic one.”
The Stoic “wants to say that the perfectly good man is of a different kind from people
trying to be good.” However, whereas the Platonist can “remove the perfect example to
another world,” the Stoic, since he is a monist, has “no other world in which to put him.”
For this reason, according to their view, “only wholly imperfect examples must exist
alongside him in the only world that there is.”\footnote{Ibid.} For this reason, as the next chapter
demonstrates, Augustine challenges the Stoic view. The point for the moment is that the
Stoic definition of virtue entails problematic totalizing claims which I enumerate as
follows:

- **Totalizing Claim 1:** Virtue is an absolute state that does not allow for gradation.
- **Totalizing Claim 2:** Virtue is either totally lacking in a person or totally present.
  There are no degrees of possession.
- **Totalizing Claim 3:** To attain virtue is to suddenly and instantaneously transition
  from one total state to another total state (e.g. from drowning to not drowning).\footnote{In referring to these as “totalizing” claims, I am following John Langan, who has criticized the
  “totalizing effect” of the Stoic understanding of virtue. Langan, “Augustine on the Unity and the
  Interconnection of the Virtues,” 89.}

The early Stoics hold an identity thesis that is radicalized by these claims. Zeno
made sense of the multiplications of virtue found in Plato by reducing these to activities
of prudence. This is not a unity of distinct virtues, but a single virtue expressing itself in
different contexts. Plutarch explains as follows:
Zeno admits several differentiated virtues, as Plato does, for example, [prudence], courage, temperance and justice, on the grounds that although inseparable they are distinct and different from one another. But when defining each of them he says that courage is [prudence] in things to be endured, moderation is [prudence] in things to be chosen, [prudence] in the specific sense is [prudence] in what is to be done, and justice is [prudence] in things to be distributed—on the grounds that it is one single virtue which only seems to differ in accordance with the activities by virtue of its relation to things.126

Virtue is a singularity that appears as a plurality due to the different spheres of action in which it is practiced. The courageous person does not merely endure difficulties for difficulty’s sake; he endures the right difficulties at the right times, to the right degree, for the right reason. Hence, his courage is reduced to an expression of his prudence. The temperate (translated “moderate” in the quote above) person does not merely choose this and deny that, he chooses this at the right time, in the right way, and to the right degree, and he denies that at the right time, in the right way, and to the right degree. Hence, his temperance is reduced to an expression of his prudence and so on.127

As has been shown, for the Stoics there are no degrees of virtue. One cannot acquire the virtues by degrees over time. One either acquires virtue all at once or not at all. Consequently, the Stoics did not hesitate to categorize the majority as simply non-virtuous, because even if they seem prudent in some areas of life they still fail to act appropriately in every area, which speaks to a deficit of prudence, which is virtue. There

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are intermediate acts that are neither perfectly virtuous nor vicious, but perfect acts must be performed in the right way and in every area of life to reflect a perfect disposition.\textsuperscript{128}

Inextricable from the Stoic identity thesis, then, are three interrelated totalizing claims which radicalize this same thesis. The “violently paradoxical terms,” to borrow Irwin’s phrase, in which the Stoics reformulate the identity thesis of Socrates leads to a substantively distinct version of inseparability.\textsuperscript{129} Resolving whether Aquinas’s thesis is susceptible to the objections of the previous chapter involves ascertaining whether he is committed to the totalizing claims enumerated above.

IV. Conclusion

The identity thesis and the unity thesis are the two primary versions of inseparability espoused by the philosophers of antiquity. Socrates thesis is the exemplar of the former, while Aristotle is the exemplar of the latter. The radicalized identity thesis of the Stoics is a version of inseparability radicalized by three totalizing claims. These claims happen to be linked to the identity thesis in the thought of the Stoics, but there is no reason why they could not be linked to a unity thesis as well.

All thinkers analyzed in this chapter define virtue as in accord with right reason. Virtue is a moral quality that cannot be used to bring harm to the soul or marshaled for destructive ends. It is ordered to the true good of the person and the society and covers the entire range of the moral life. The chasm between ancient affirmations of


\textsuperscript{129} T.H. Irwin, “Virtue, Praise and Success: Stoic Responses to Aristotle,” 1.
inseparability and modern denials of it may be due to the different ways in which the former and the latter define virtue. Some contemporary moralists conceive of virtue as an effective quality which may be used indifferently for good or evil. It is easy to see why those “virtues” are not inseparable. In fact, the thinkers of the current chapter can agree. However, they do not regard these qualities as virtues.

This chapter also demonstrates that problematic claims may accompany a given version of inseparability. If, for example, the totalizing claims of the Stoics are inextricable from the inseparability thesis, then the objections of the previous chapter appear accurate. More importantly for the purposes of this dissertation, if Aquinas’s version of inseparability entails these claims, then his thesis is susceptible to the same objections. This is because the radicalized identity of the Stoics does seem to render the possession of virtue impossible, or at least so rare that it may as well be impossible, and it explicitly denies the significance of moral progress. However, Aquinas follows Augustine and his immediate scholastic predecessors in explicitly denying these claims, as subsequent chapters demonstrate.
Theological Versions of Inseparability

The previous chapter analyzed the link between definitions of virtue and versions of inseparability in ancient philosophy. Specifically, I emphasized the crucial connection between inseparability and true virtue. The current chapter further situates Aquinas’s thesis by examining versions of inseparability which follow from Augustine’s definition of virtue as love. Though Augustine, as well as Aquinas’s immediate predecessors, are critical of the version of inseparability which follows from the totalizing claims of the Stoics, this does not lead them to reject inseparability altogether, which they affirm with respect to infused virtue. This chapter contributes to the aims of this dissertation by demonstrating the manner in which rejections of acquired inseparability and affirmations of infused inseparability in the period before Aquinas inform his thesis in a manner pertinent to responding to the objections of the first chapter.

The first section of this chapter analyzes Augustine’s version of inseparability, which identifies all of the virtues with love. He understands virtue as consisting in degrees and is critical of the Stoics. Next, the scholastic division of virtue into acquired and infused and the implications this has relative to their respective understandings of inseparability are assessed. Both sections confirm the fundamental importance of assessing inseparability in the context of the definition of virtue a given thinker holds. Though the Stoic version of inseparability may be susceptible to the kinds of objections considered in the first chapter of this dissertation, this does not mean that any version of inseparability is also susceptible to these objections.
I. Augustine

Augustine’s insights into the classical philosophical query of whether the person who possesses one virtue possesses them all may be gauged effectively, if not exhaustively, from two principal works. Though the question was likely transmitted to Augustine through the writings of Cicero while Augustine was a student at Carthage in 370AD, it is only eighteen years later that he composes the first of the two works upon which I, following John Langan, center my analysis.¹ It is in the year 388 that Augustine, thirty-four years of age, mourning the death of Monica, and having returned to Thagaste, presents in De moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae a Christian version of the identity thesis. The thesis is reaffirmed and elaborated upon in a letter to Jerome in the Spring of 415AD.² In this letter, Augustine is critical of the Stoics. He thinks they set an unrealistic standard for virtue, and he rejects the three totalizing claims by which they radicalize the identity thesis of Socrates. This is important, because the objections of the first chapter all seem to equate any version of inseparability with these three claims. I begin by juxtaposing Augustine’s understanding of virtue with the Stoic view. Next, Augustine’s identity thesis is examined. Finally, Augustine’s understanding of the attainment of virtue is considered.


A. Degrees of Virtue

In the previous chapter, it was demonstrated that bound up with the Stoic identity thesis are three interrelated claims which radicalize that same thesis. These totalizing claims were enumerated as follows:

Totalizing Claim 1: Virtue is an absolute state that does not allow for gradation.
Totalizing Claim 2: Virtue is either totally lacking in a person or totally present. There are no degrees of possession.
Totalizing Claim 3: To attain virtue is to suddenly and instantaneously transition from one total state to another total state (e.g. from drowning to not drowning).

In this subsection, I demonstrate that Augustine’s definition of virtue rejects these claims. Beginning with the claim that virtue is an absolute state, in *De libero arbitrio*, Augustine defines virtue as a “quality of mind thanks to which we live rightly, which can never be used badly.”³ So far, this is in keeping with the definition of virtue put forth by the philosophers. However, in Letter 167 to Jerome Augustine makes a key distinction between possessing virtue by degrees as is proper to this life, and possessing it in an “absolutely perfect” state as is possible in the next life. In this manner, Augustine denies that virtue is only virtue when conceived of as an absolute state not allowing for gradation, and he accounts for the possibility of further moral progress on the part of the virtuous person through the gradual curing of vice:⁴

To sum up briefly the general view I have about virtue so far as relates to right living: Virtue is the charity by which what ought to be loved is loved. This charity exists more in some, less in others, and in some not at all; but the greatest charity, ³⁴

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³ *De lib. arb.* 2.18.50 ed. W.M. Green. CCSL 29 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1970), 271. Aquinas synthesizes this definition with Aristotle’s definition of virtue as a voluntary habit that lies in the mean as specified by reason (*NE* 1106b-1107a). See *ST* Ia IIae q.55 a. 4 *sed contra*.

⁴ Aquinas follows Augustine in this but refines the language so as to properly distinguish between vice per se and contrary inclinations to sin.
which admits no increase, exists in no human living on earth. So long as it admits of increase, what makes it less than it ought is due surely to vice.\textsuperscript{5}

In a way, everything that needs to be said in this section is summarized in this passage.

Virtue is love. It is possessed by degrees. It is not absolute in this life. And possession of it does not uproot all of the bad effects of our past sins in one triumphant blow, as it were. Rather, it grows in the person by degrees.

With respect to the second and third totalizing claims of the Stoics, Augustine, again, responds directly to these in Letter 167. The driving question of Augustine’s exchange with Jerome involves the meaning and implications of the Scriptural passage which states that “whosoever shall keep the whole law but offend in one point has become guilty of all.”\textsuperscript{6} Augustine approaches this question by means of what he deems to be the related question of whether the person who has one virtue has them all.\textsuperscript{7} Here Augustine directly responds to the totalizing claims of the Stoics:

It seems to me that the Stoics are wrong in refusing to admit that the man who is increasing in wisdom has any wisdom at all, and insisting that he has it only when he is absolutely perfect in it; not that they refuse to admit the increase, but for them he is not wise in any degree unless he suddenly springs forth into the free air of wisdom after coming up and, as it were, emerging from the depths of the sea.\textsuperscript{8}

\textsuperscript{5} Augustine, \textit{Ep. 167}. CSEL 44: 586-609: tr. Houser 214. As far as I know Letter 167 is the only place where Augustine comments directly on the topic of inseparability in the sense of differentiating his own view from earlier versions.

\textsuperscript{6} James 2:10. NRSV.


\textsuperscript{8} \textit{Epist.} 167 2.4.
An alternative metaphor, which Augustine adopts, likens the attainment of virtue to coming out of a dark cave and gradually adjusting to the light.\(^9\) According to Augustine, the acquisition of virtue occurs by degrees (\textit{progrediendo}); the Stoic conception of virtue is flawed. Augustine regards virtue in this life as allowing for gradation. One can possess virtue without possessing it absolutely, and virtue grows by degrees. In this way Augustine denies the totalizing claims of the Stoics. Augustine maintains that there is such a thing as the absolutely perfect possession of virtue. However, possessing virtue in this way is not possible in this life. Hence, perfect love of God does not exist in the present life.\(^{10}\) Augustine’s is an early example of a thinker responding to the kind of totalizing claims that can be associated with inseparability. It is noteworthy that at no point does Augustine seem to notice even a tension between upholding inseparability (even a very strong version of it as the next subsection shows) and denying the totalizing claims of the Stoics.\(^{11}\)

Although Augustine transforms\(^{12}\) the understanding of virtue he receives from the philosophers, he also incorporates much of their thought into his own account. For instance in the \textit{Soliloquia}, he defines virtue as the “proper and perfected act of looking, or

\(^9\) \textit{Epist.} 167 2.4.

\(^{10}\) \textit{Civ. Dei} XIX. 27.


\(^{12}\) I say “transform,” because I deny the sacralization thesis held by many modern philosophers. According to this view, any theologian who appropriates a philosophical view must somehow greatly disfigure it. Augustine is very often accused of this. See Brian Harding, \textit{Augustine and Roman Virtue} (Continuum International Publishing Group, London: 2008). I agree with Harding in rejecting the sacralization thesis.
looking which leads to vision.”¹³ James Wetzel has observed that “the sort of vision Augustine has in mind transforms human desires to align them with the object of vision, the good.”¹⁴ In this way, Augustine’s definition of virtue entails both a cognitive and volitional element. It is not enough to know the good, the agent must also have his or her desires conformed to that knowledge. Knowledge is important, but also important for Augustine is the manner in which one appropriates it.¹⁵

Virtue, then, must direct both one’s mind and one’s will to the good, and this understanding is linked to Augustine’s view of happiness. In De Trinitate Augustine explains that “all who are happy have what they want.” However, he continues, “not all who have what they want are for that reason happy.”¹⁶ A person becomes miserable either by failing to attain that which he rightly wanted or by attaining something that he should not have wanted. As Wetzel explains, in Augustine’s view, there are “objective conditions for happiness,” and so virtue may best be understood as an “objective feature” of the blessed life.¹⁷

Virtue directs the agent to the supreme good, which Augustine does not think is fully attainable in the mortal life. Indeed, Augustine contends, the present life is to be

¹³ *Sol.* I. 6. 13 (CSEL 89, 21, 11-12).


¹⁵ The narrative of the *Confessions* may be seen as Augustine’s recollection of his moving from false knowledge to true knowledge and then to volitional appropriation of that knowledge in the Milanese Garden. See John G. Prendiville’s essay, “The Development of the Idea of Habit in the Thought of St. Augustine,” *Traditio* 28 (1972): 29-99.

¹⁶ *De Trin.* 13.5.8 (CCSL 50, 392-93, 33-37) tr. Wetzel (1992), 45.

¹⁷ Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue*, 47.
used so as to secure enjoyment of the next: “We see, then, that the Supreme Good of the City of God is everlasting and perfect peace, which is not the peace through which men pass in their mortality, in their journey from birth to death, but that peace in which they remain in their immortal state, experiencing no adversity at all.” Augustine continues to spell out the implications of this relative to defining what is and is not true virtue: “For the present does not bring into play the true goods of the mind; since no wisdom is true wisdom if it does not direct its attention, in all its prudent decisions, its resolute actions, its self-control and its just dealings with others, towards that ultimate state in which God will be all in all, in the assurance of eternity and the perfection of peace.”18

The virtues of this life, then, direct a person to perfection in the next. However, in the mortal life, these virtues are intermingled with vice: “What is [virtue’s] activity in this world but unceasing warfare with vices, and those not external vices but internal, not other people’s vices but quite clearly our own, our very own?” Regarding temperance, Augustine contends, we strive for a state in which “the desires of the flesh do not oppose the spirit, and where there is in us no vice for the spirit to oppose with its desires.” However, Augustine continues, “we cannot achieve this in our present life, for all our wishing.” Augustine asks, “who has reached such a height of wisdom as to have no struggle to maintain against his lusts?” Continuing with his point, Augustine asks: “Does not [prudence] herself thus testify that we are in the midst of evils, or rather that evils are in us? For she teaches us that it is an evil to consent in sinning, and a good to refuse to

consent. But although prudence teaches us not to consent to that evil, and self-control causes us not to consent, neither prudence nor self-control removes that evil from this life.” The same is true for justice, which demonstrates by her very function that she “is still laboring at her task rather than resting after reaching its completion.” Here Augustine is referring to the “task” of bringing about a harmonious soul. Finally, fortitude “bears most unmistakable witness to the fact of human ills; for it is just those ills that she is compelled to bear with patient endurance.”

In order for a person with grace to qualify as virtuous, in this life, she does not need to be purged of all vice. In fact, if this were true, then no one in this life could ever be virtuous, in Augustine’s view. Rather, virtue gradually uproots the past effects of sin as it directs a person to the ultimate end of true happiness available only in the next life. Virtue does entail the cognitive and volitional elements of the harmonious soul, but in an imperfect sense intermingled with irremovable evils in the present life. For this reason, Augustine defines the increase of charity and the decrease of vice as one and the same thing: “So long as it admits of increase, what makes it less than it ought is due surely to vice.” Virtue is possessed by degrees, but for Augustine this virtue is love, as the next section shows.

**B. Virtue is Love**

Augustine draws from Ambrose who rooted all virtue in the person of Jesus Christ, the wisdom which generates virtue in all virtuous people. Ambrose likens the four

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19 *Civ. Dei* XIX. 4.
Platonic virtues to the four rivers of Eden, which have God as their source. He refers to these as the “cardinal” virtues. These virtues orient one towards God. Accordingly, in Ambrose’s view, “the virtues are so connected and chained together, that whoever has one seems to have them all; and there accrues to the saints one virtue.” As Houser notes, Ambrose has “crossed the line separating Platonic virtues which are essentially multiple while operationally unified, to a more Socratic view where Christian virtue is essentially one while operationally many.” This account is confirmed and expanded by Augustine.

In De moribus ecclesiae catholicae, Augustine’s expressed aims are to put forward a Christian understanding of virtue and happiness while showing the continuity between the moral teachings of the Old and New Testaments. In De moribus Augustine defines virtue in the following manner:

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20 Ambrose, De par. 3.18, CSEL 32.1:277. Referenced in Houser, The Cardinal Virtues, 36.

21 Cardinal comes from the Latin caro which refers primarily to the hinge of a door. A caro then is what allows us to transition from one state to another, just as the hinge of a door allows us to transition from one room to another. The cardinal virtues, then, as Ambrose understands them, are what enable us to transition to the state of living well even in the face of death. Ambrose develops this idea in De excessu fratris Satyri 1.57, CSEL 73L239. See P. Courcelle, “Aspects variés du platonisme ambrosien,” in Recherches sur les Confessions de S. Augustin (Paris: Boccard, 1968). To my knowledge, Ambrose is the first to employ this term. See Houser, The Cardinal Virtues, 36.


Temperance, we say, is love preserving itself in integrity and without corruption for God, fortitude is love enduring all things for the sake of God, justice is love serving only God and, therefore, ruling rightly those things subject to man, and prudence is love discerning well between those things that aid it in reaching God and those things which can impede it.\footnote{26}

Here Augustine has formulated an identity thesis with love serving as the one true virtue; the other virtues are only names for different activities of love. Again, in the 	extit{Enchiridion}, Augustine emphasizes the primacy of love with respect to virtue: “And now regarding love, which the Apostle says is greater than the other two—that is faith and hope—for the more richly it dwells in a man, the better the man in whom it dwells. For when we ask whether someone is a good man, we are not asking what he believes, or hopes, but what he loves.”\footnote{27} And Augustine affirms his identity thesis again in Letter 167 as observed above: “Virtue is the charity by which what ought to be loved is loved.”\footnote{28} For Augustine, this virtue cannot be acquired by human effort. Rather, it is a gift from God.

\footnote{25} It has been argued that 	extit{De moribus} is a polemical revision of 	extit{De beata vita}, which was Augustine’s introduction to moral theology two years prior. See Chad Gerber, 	extit{The Spirit of Augustine’s Early Theology} (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012). Although 	extit{De moribus} is Augustine’s first polemic against the Manichaeans, the approach of the treatise is constructive.

\footnote{26} Augustine. 	extit{De Moribus} 2.25; 	extit{De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum}. CSEL 90. Ed. J.B. Bauer. Vienna, 1992. My translation. Quare definire etiam sic licet, ut temperantiam dicamus esse amorem Deo est integrum incorruptumque servantem; fortitudinem, amorem omnia propter Deum facile perferentem; justitiam, amorem Deo tantum servientem, et ob hoc bene imperantem caeteris quae homini subjecta sunt; prudentiam, amorem bene discernentem ea quibus adjuvetur in Deum, ab iis quibus impediri potest.

\footnote{27} 	extit{Ench.} XXXI (CCEL 78).

C. How is Virtue Attained?

Augustine believes the process whereby virtue grows as vice is gradually uprooted only comes about by the grace of God. However, this does not mean that we are passive: “The one who made you without you will not justify you without you.”

Nevertheless, according to Augustine, virtue is not something we can earn or acquire through effort. It is a gift. Christ is the way to the *summum bonum*. Through Christ, a new reality enters the soul from above. Attaining virtue, then, involves three processes:

It is to [Christ] we adhere by sanctification for, when sanctified, we are inflamed with that full and sound love which prevents us from turning away from Him and causes us to be conformed to him rather than to the world. “He has predestined us,” as the Apostle says, “to be conformed to the image of his Son” [Rom. 8:29].

To become virtuous is to become holy, conformed to God the Son, through union with God. In Augustine’s view, it is the Holy Spirit who animates this process:

It is through love, then, that we are conformed to God, and being so conformed and made like to Him and set apart from the world, we are no longer confounded with those things which should be subject to us. But this is the work of the Holy Spirit. “Hope,” he says, “does not confound us, because the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” [Rom. 5:5]. We could not possibly be restored to perfection by the Holy Spirit, however, unless He Himself remained forever perfect and immutable and this, of course, could not be unless He were of the very nature and substance of God, who alone is eternally immutable and, so to speak, irreversible. It is not I, but St. Paul who exclaims: “For creation was made subject to vanity” [Rom. 8:19]. Now, what is subject to vanity cannot separate us from vanity and unite us to Truth. But this the


Holy Spirit does. He is therefore, not a creature, for everything that exists must be either God or creature.\textsuperscript{32}

It may be impossible to parse out with perfect clarity the role that God plays and the role that we play in the attainment of virtue according to Augustine’s account. If it is not impossible, it is, at least, well beyond the scope of this project. Perhaps, the most that can be said is that, for Augustine, virtue is attained through a complex process involving God’s grace lifting up human agency without annihilating or replacing it. Virtue is an unmerited gift from God that one either receives and appropriates or denies. Relating back to the previous two subsections, any account of the attainment of virtue that did not prioritize the activity of God in the reception of virtue would be inadequate for Augustine. It is for this very reason that a sharp distinction emerges in later periods between the kind of virtue Augustine is speaking of here and the kind presented by the philosophers which can be attained through one’s repeated good acts. The next section analyzes this antimony and its implications for inseparability.

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Mor.} I.13.23. (tr. Gerber, 2012). So this is what God does, but what do we do? Although God is active in our attainment of virtue, it does not mean that we are passive, if passive is taken to mean uninvolved. Rather, “the one who made you without you will not justify you without you” (Augustine, \textit{Sermo} 169, 13). The complex movements of the soul’s ascent—sanctification through union—are enacted by the volitional provocation of love. The Spirit does not replace the will, but rather, transforms and restores it. It is we who “strive after God by loving him” (\textit{Mor.} I.12.20). Nevertheless, Augustine’s insistence on the role of choice in the forming of habits does not lead him to an Aristotelian theory regarding the acquisition of virtue. We are, in fact, so mired by sin that we cannot work out of it through our own labors. Rather, a supernatural infusion of the divine life is needed to cure us. But still, this infusion occurs in steps, as it were, over time, and by degrees. Conversion to the divine life is more of a process than a moment.
II. The Acquired/Infused Distinction in Early Scholastic Thought and the Inseparability of the Virtues

According to Odon Lottin, “roughly two periods in the evolution of doctrine before St. Thomas Aquinas can be distinguished” with the first occurring between 1150 to 1215 during which time “the connection of the virtues is allowed without distinction by almost the entirety of theologians.”\(^{33}\) The second period begins with Godfrey of Poitiers’ distinction between acquired and infused virtue between 1213 and 1215. After this distinction, the inseparability of infused virtue continues to be upheld, but the inseparability of acquired virtue is rejected:

Thus, as of the moment when, with Godfrey of Poitiers, one had distinguished between infused and acquired virtues, the theologians unanimously supported the connection of the infused virtues, but (and no less unanimously), denied the connection of the acquired virtues: if the acts which engender these acquired moral virtues are not themselves connected, then how could the virtues which proceed from these acts be? One thus rejected unanimously the verdict of the Stoics, which, however, had been admitted by certain Church Fathers, who had preached on the inseparability of the moral virtues.\(^{34}\)

The goal of this section is to further situate Aquinas’s thesis by analyzing thought about inseparability immediately prior to him. Therefore, my focus is on the second period described by Lottin above. In this period, objections to the inseparability of acquired

\(^{33}\) Odon Lottin. *Psychologie et morale aux XII et XIII siècles: Problèmes de morale, la connexion des vertus chez Saint Thomas d’Aquin et ses prédécesseurs*, vol. 3, section 2.1. (Louvain: Editions du Mont César, 1949.), 198. On discerne sans peine deux périodes dans l’évolution doctrinale avant saint Thomas d’Aquin. De 1150 à 1215, la connexion des vertus est admise sans distinction par la presque totalité des théologiens. For the remainder of this chapter I will follow this work very closely. All translations of the French and Latin are mine.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 231. Ainsi donc, dès le moment où, avec Godefroid de Poitiers, on avait distingué entre vertus infuses et vertus acquises, les théologiens unanimement soutinrent la connexion des vertus infuses, mais, et non moins unanimément, nièrent la connexion des vertus acquises: si les acts qui engendrent ces vertus morales acquises ne sont pas connexes entre eux, comment les vertus qui procèdent de ces actes seraient-elles connexes entre elles? On rejetait ainsi unanimement la sentence des stoïciens, admise cependant par certains Pères de l’Église, qui avaient prôné l’inséparabilité des vertus morales.
virtue arise which are similar to the objections analyzed in the first chapter of this dissertation. Therefore, Aquinas’s response to these objections, which are examined in the next chapter, are of particular importance. It is also significant that Aquinas “breaks with the tradition” in order to uphold the inseparability of acquired virtues. Second, Aquinas’s immediate predecessors make claims regarding the inseparability of infused virtue as well as the relationship of infused virtue to vice which also inform Aquinas’s thesis in a manner pertinent to responding to the objections of the first chapter.

A. The Rejection of Acquired Inseparable Virtue

Godfrey of Poitiers introduces the distinction between acquired and infused virtues that later becomes commonplace. The scholastics before Godfrey, following the example of Peter Lombard, treated only those virtues given by God, ordered to salvation, and unified in charity. In a key text, Godfrey denies the inseparability of acquired virtue while upholding the inseparability of infused virtue:


36 Of course, mapping out the distinctions between scholastic categorizations of virtue is a complex task. For an analysis of how the theological virtues emerge as a distinct “categorization” of virtue in the period of high scholasticism see William C. Mattison III, “Thomas’s Categorizations of Virtue: Historical Background and Contemporary Significance,” The Thomist 74 (2010): 189-235. Mattison maintains that William of Auxerre is the first to identify “the category ‘theological virtue’ (which includes faith, hope, and charity) and to attempt to explain the basis of that category” (203). Mattison references William of Auxerre, Summa aurea III, tracts 11-29 (ed. Jean Ribailler [Paris: Editions du centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1980-87], 170-584).

37 In III, Sent. d. 36 c.1.1, Lombard concludes his treatment of virtue by assessing the connection and equality of the virtues. Here he draws on the prominent patristic metaphors of charity as the “mother” of the virtues (Ambrose) and of charity as the “root” of the virtues (Augustine) in order to affirm that wherever charity is found the other virtues are also found. Now the first set of virtues to which Lombard is referring are the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. The second set of virtues are the cardinal
The political virtues can be possessed one without the others, just as vice also can. They are not theological virtues if not possessed simultaneously as evidenced by that which is put forth by the saints. Nor would these extraordinary ones have possessed the virtues all at once if they [the virtues] did not come from [God] who simultaneously created all of them and infused them all at the same time. But this is not the case with vice, for the vices are not infused, but rather, they are acquired by acts. But the doing of one act excludes the doing of another. Wherefore, because every act cannot be done in one act, the vices are not all acquired at once. Therefore, it clearly is not the case that he who has one habit has them all.38

Here Godfrey links the inseparability of the virtues with the source of virtue. God infuses virtue “all at the same time.” However, acquired virtues (and vices) are attained “by acts,” and “the doing of one act excludes the doing of another.” Hence, “it is clearly not the case that he who has one habit has them all.” Inseparability, then, does not pertain to virtues “acquired by acts,” but it does pertain to those “infused” by God.

In the first chapter of this dissertation I noted Langan’s criticism of inseparability as involving an “implausibly sudden and dauntingly difficult” transition from lacking virtue to possessing it. Bonnie Kent has referred to this as the “acquiring virtue all at once virtues of prudence, justice, courage, and temperance. According to Lombard, the seven great virtues are unified on the basis that they lead to God as ultimate end. Hence, whereas the philosophers had located the efficient cause of virtue exclusively in human agency, Lombard, following Ambrose and Augustine, appears to maintain that virtue is caused efficiently by divine grace rather than by human effort. Peter Lombard, Sententiae in iv libris distinctae, 2 vols. 3rd ed. (Rome: Grottaferatta, 1981). For a thorough treatment of Lombard’s influence see Marcia Colish, Peter Lombard (Leiden: Brill, 1994). Also see R.E. Houser, The Cardinal Virtues, 41. On the “identification of virtue and grace,” see J. Müller, Natürliche Moral und philosophische Ethik bei Albertus Magnus (Müster: Aschendorff, 2001), 136.

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38 Godfrey of Poitiers. Summa. Avranches Ville 2995 (ancien i21) f. 120r in Lottin 209. My translation. Virtutes politice possunt haberi altera sina reliqua, sicut et vitia; sed theologice non possunt nisi simul haberi, sicut testantur sancti expositoris. Nec mirum si simul habeantur, cum ab illo qui simul creavit omnia simul infundantur. Sed de vitiis non est ita, non enim infunduntur, sed ex actibus acquiruntur, vel respectu actu, ut nullum excludam; unde cum omnes actus simul non possunt haberi, nec omnia vitia simul acquireret. Unde patet quod non debet sequi quod qui habet unum habet omnia.
problem.” With respect to acquired virtues, Godfrey seems to share this concern. The acquired virtues are not obtained “all at once,” since “every act cannot be done in one act.” Aquinas responds to this by positing a theory of proportional moral growth, as the next chapter shows.

Aquinas’s immediate predecessors are also critical of the inseparability of acquired virtue as understood by the Stoics. For example, Odon Rigaud examines the Stoic definition of virtue and rejects it in favor of Augustine’s view:

[The Stoics] said that virtue always consists in the highest state. But no one can have any virtue in the highest state unless by the highest state he has all the conditions which are generally attributed to virtue. Now these virtues cannot be had in the highest state unless one has all of the virtues; and therefore, the Stoics maintained that one cannot have one virtue unless he has them all. But this position was exceedingly too strict, because according to it no one can be in the state of salvation unless he is in the highest state of perfection; and he is even not freed from condemnation whether his sins are many or few, great or small…On account of this, Augustine responds to Jerome and the Stoics by saying “to me it seems the Stoics are deceived when they say that the man proficient in wisdom can only have this by being perfect in it.” For the Stoics say that just as nothing is different about a man drowning whether many stades [a Greek measurement of distance equivalent to 607 ft.] of water are above him or only water as shallow as the palm of his hand, it is the same with the raging abyss of error as opposed to wisdom. Therefore, I say that the Stoic position was deficient, as has been shown; for indeed, just as Augustine pointed out in the aforementioned passage, in the Stoic view one cannot take hold of any virtue, since one may not speak of having any one habit of virtue unless he is in the highest state, for aside from the highest state there are no degrees so as to make progress.

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40 Odon Rigaud, Bruges Ville 208 ff. 471\textsuperscript{rb}-472\textsuperscript{rb}; Bibl. Roy. 11614 (154\textsuperscript{r})f. 173\textsuperscript{v}. In Lottin 223-25. My translation. Opinio tamen stoicorum contraria fuit…Et sic dicebant virtutem semper consistere in summo. Sed nullus potest habere aliquam virtutem in summo nisi summe habeat omnes conditiones que generaliter exiguntur ad virtutem. Has autem non potest summe habere nisi habeat omnes virtutes; et ideo ponebant quod non potest habere unam virtutem nisi habeat omnes. Sed hec positio nimis stricta fuit; quia secundum eam non essent in statu salutis nisi illi qui essent in summo gradu perfectionis; et etiam non referret ad damnationem utrum multum vel parum peccaret aliquis. …Propter hoc reprehendit Augustinus
Like Porter, Rigaud rejects a “criterion for virtue...so stringent that it could never be met.”\textsuperscript{41} But Rigaud links this problem to the totalizing claims of the Stoics, not to the inseparability of the virtues which he goes on to uphold with respect to the infused virtues.\textsuperscript{42} In Rigaud’s view, the problem with the Stoics is not their claim that “one cannot have one virtue unless he has them all.” It is rather that they base this on a flawed definition of virtue:

(1) “Virtue always consists in the highest state.” (Totalizing Claim 1: Virtue is an absolute state that does not allow for gradation).
(2) Therefore, “one cannot take hold of any virtue” since “there are no degrees so as to make progress.” (Totalizing Claim 2: Virtue is either totally lacking in a person or totally present. There are no degrees of possession).
(3) “For the Stoics say that just as nothing is different about a man drowning whether many stades of water are above him or only water as shallow as the palm of his hand, it is the same with the raging abyss of error as opposed to wisdom.” (Totalizing Claim 3: To attain virtue is to suddenly and instantaneously transition from one total state to another total state, e.g. from drowning to not drowning).

Rigaud’s criticism is of the version of inseparability that follows from the Stoic definition of virtue: “virtues cannot be had in the highest state \textit{unless} one has all of the virtues; and \textit{therefore}, the Stoics maintained that one cannot have one virtue unless he has them all.”

In the next chapter, I show that Aquinas offers a version of inseparability with respect to


\textsuperscript{42} Lottin, \textit{Psychologie et morale aux XII et XIII siècles}, 215.
both acquired and infused virtue which is neither based on nor entails the totalizing claims of the Stoics. In the final chapter of this dissertation it is maintained that failure to appreciate this point can lead to objections to inseparability in general which do not apply to Aquinas’s thesis.

Before moving on to the infused virtues, it is worth considering a fissure in the “unanimous” rejection of inseparable acquired virtue as described by Lottin. Philip the Chancellor argues that the acquired virtues may be thought of in two senses. First, a given virtue is understood, specifically, in accord with “the act of its proper power and concerning the proper matter of that power.” According to the Chancellor, then, “it does not follow that whoever has one virtue has all, for there are many powers and each one has its own ultimate end and optimum end, which can exist without the ultimate end or optimum end of another.”43 In another sense, however, virtue may be conceived of analogically, and in this way virtues may be thought of as connected (even though in actuality they are not):

By nature the pleasant pertains to the power of desire, but it extends analogically to the matter of other powers, so that each power has its own pleasurable object and what appears proper to it, yet this is determined by its proper nature. For example, the true is said to pertain to the power of reason, while the arduous or difficult is what pertains to the emotions.44

On the basis of these distinctions, Philip contends, “if one takes temperance about any kind of desiring and any kind of pleasant object, and courage about any kind of

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43 III Summa de bono de virtutes generalis q. 1. a.1 (Wicki, ed., 1069-84): tr. Houser 103.

44 III Summa de bono de virtutes generalis q. 1. a.1 (Wicki, ed., 1069-84): tr. Houser 104.
confronting and any kind of difficult object, in this respect it is true that whoever has one virtue has all."⁴⁵

In his often neglected second commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Ethica*, Albert the Great goes out of his way to criticize this view.⁴⁶ Courage, for instance, does not pertain to "any kind of confronting and any kind of difficult object. Rather, "courage deals with passions violently inflicted from the outside."⁴⁷ Again, temperance does not pertain to temperance about "any kind of desiring and any kind of pleasant object" but to natural passions such as the desire for food. The virtues are distinguished by their objects. The view that every cardinal virtue must be a basic component of each cardinal virtue Albert links to theological accretions into Aristotle’s philosophy and rejects. Historians have argued that Albert is responding directly to Philip the Chancellor.⁴⁸ At any rate, Philip’s was not really a defense of the inseparability of acquired virtue since he rejected

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⁴⁵ III *Summa de bono de virtutes generalis* q. 1. a.1 (Wicki, ed., 1069-84): tr. Houser 104.


⁴⁷ Albert the Great, *Ethica* 3.2.1, 234-36. For parallel treatments see *Super Ethica* 3.8 (200), 181-82; *De bono* 1.6.2, (121), Heinrich Kühle et al., *Opera omnia* (Münster) 28: 80-81.

this thesis “in the strict sense” that one must actually possess each cardinal virtue to possess any cardinal virtue.\textsuperscript{49}

\textbf{B. The Inseparability of Infused Virtues and the Elimination of Vice}

According to Lottin, after the acquired/infused distinction is introduced by Godfrey “theologians unanimously supported the connection of the infused virtues.”\textsuperscript{50} All agree that the virtues are unified in charity.\textsuperscript{51} However, these thinkers tend to equate the infusion of charity with the elimination of vice in a manner that seems contrary to Augustine’s view, as I shall show. In the next chapter, I demonstrate the manner in which Aquinas resolves this inconsistency. This is significant to this dissertation since contemporary moralists, like Porter and MacIntyre, criticize inseparability for disallowing the possibility of moral struggle in the life of the virtuous person.

I begin with Alan of Lille who draws from Roland Bandinelli’s \textit{Commentary on the Sentences} of Peter Lombard (between 1145 and 1150). Bandinelli introduces the

\textsuperscript{49} Lottin, \textit{Psychologie et morale aux XII et XIII siècles}, 222-23. For this reason I pass over one potential response to critics of inseparability. That is, it could be argued that the connection of the virtues only applies to the general conditions of virtue and so does not actually entail the claim that to possess one virtue is to possess them all. In my view this response is adequate, and Albert and Aquinas are among the first to recognize this as has been shown. They are not interested in a theory of virtue that collapses the virtues into a general construct of conditions. For this reason I do not think that Houser’s response to criticisms of inseparability is successful. See Houser, \textit{The Cardinal Virtues}, 1-149.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 231.

\textsuperscript{51} Except perhaps for William of Auxerre who posits that virtues are actually unified by faith. William of Auxerre. \textit{Summa aurea III}. Ed. Jean Ribailer (Paris: Editions du centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1980-87, 170-584.): 204\textsuperscript{a} in Lottin 209. For William, The infused virtues are connected between themselves, because he who possesses faith at the same time has charity: in effect, when one is esteemed by one the other is attached; thus when, by faith, a man is drawn into God by God’s just sovereignty, the will adheres by charity. But he who has charity has all the other virtues; because he who loves God, loves his neighbor; therefore he exercises justice towards him, mercy and the other virtues. And therefore he who has faith has all the virtues.
argument which, according to Lottin, will “either in full or in part, will be adopted by all
of the theologians of the next half-century.”52 The argument is as follows: “no one is
without vice unless through virtue itself, and therefore when virtue enters all vice is
excluded.”53 Alan of Lille makes explicit what was implicit in the Bandinellian thesis. To
lack a virtue is to possess the corresponding vice. Hence, with respect to infused virtue,
Alan claims that one is either virtuous or vicious. There is no gradation. One either has
charity (and so all the virtues) or lacks it and so possesses all of the corresponding vices
that the virtues expel:

Charity is the mother of all the virtues. And wherever the mother is, namely
charity, the children will be joined, it is the same for virtues, this is rightly
believed. Wherefore Augustine says “where love is, what can be lacking?”
Therefore, can we not say that he who has this virtue has the plenitude of all since
this is the rule of love? Also, virtue and vice are directly opposed. Therefore, if
one does not have a certain virtue, then he has the vice which opposes it.
Therefore, if he has one virtue and does not have the other, he has the opposite
vice; therefore he simultaneously has virtues and vices, which is impossible.54

52 See Lottin, Psychologie et morale aux XII et XIII siècles, 199. “Roland Bandinelli propose
l’argument qui, en tout ou en partie, sera repris par tous les théologiens du demi-siècle suivant.”

Queque virtus habet vitium sibi prima fronte contrarium. Sed ad unius virtutis ingressum omnia vitia
excluduntur, quod inde apparel quia caritas intronizatur. Cum ergo nullum vitium excludatur nisi per
virtutem sibi prima fronte contrarium, et ad ingressum unius virtutis omnia vitia excluduntur, luce clarior
constat quod ad ingressum unius virtutis omnes introducuntur. Relinquitur quod qui habet unam virtutem
habet omnes.

54 Alan of Lille, Londres British Roy. 9. E. XII f. 162v°-162vb in Lottin 201. My translation. Caritas
mater est omnium virtutum. In quocumque mater est, scilicet caritas, et cuncte filie eius, id est virtutes,
recte fore creduntur. Unde Augustinus: “ubi est caritas, quid est quod positis deesse?” cur ergo non dicimus:
qui habet hanc virtutem habere omnes, cum plenitudo legis sit caritas? Item indirecte sic. Virtus et vitium
sunt immediate opposite; si ergo quis non habet virtutem habet vitium sibi oppositum. Si quis ergo non
habet unam virtutem habet vitium sibi oppositum; si quis habet unam virtutem et non habet aliam, habet
vitia illi opposite; ergo simul habet virtutes et vitia, quod est impossible.
In this passage, Alan links the inseparability thesis to the exclusionary thesis. It is impossible to have virtues and vices at the same time. Furthermore, to lack a virtue is to possess the corresponding vice which that virtue expels. Therefore, one must either have “the plenitude of all” virtue or the vices which virtue excludes. Thus, whereas Augustine had argued that “so long as [virtue] admits of increase, what makes it less than it ought is due surely to vice,” Alan claims that to possess a vice is not to possess virtue which “admits of increase” but not to possess it at all.55

Alan is careful to point out that his conclusion applies only for “the habitus of the virtues; since the exercise of all the virtues does not necessarily result from having the habitus of all the virtues.”56 This does allow for one to conceive of further growth in the infused virtues. For instance, a baptized infant possesses the virtues only in habit and so his virtue in usu may develop, grow, and intensify as physical impediments are removed. But these physical impediments are not vices. Hence, this is still a departure from the Augustinian position where virtue and vice can coexist in the same person at the same moment as he progresses toward perfection. Resolving the conflict between Augustine’s thesis and interpretations of that same thesis forms a major part of Aquinas’s project.

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56 Alan of Lille, Londres British Roy. 9. E. XII f. I62va-I62vb. Habet omens in habitu non in usu. Simon of Tours, Peter of Capoue, and Peter of Poitiers all make a similar argument. See Lottin, Psychologie et morale aux XII et XIII siècles, 204-8. Similarly, the Summa de virtutibus attributed to Étienne Langton further emphasizes the opposition between charity and all vice by arguing that “if one has charity, he is worthy of heaven; if one has vice, he deserves hell.” For this reason, virtue and vice must be mutually exclusive and absolute states. For more on this topic see Michael Sherwin O.P., “Infused Virtue and the Effects of Acquired Vice: A Test Case for the Thomistic Theory of Infused Cardinal Virtues,” Thomist 73 (2009): 29-52.
In sum, the division between the acquired and infused virtues raises three problems for Aquinas. First, with respect to the acquired virtues, his predecessors regarded these virtues as separable based on the “acquiring virtue all at once problem.” Second, relatedly and again with respect to the acquired virtues, Aquinas’s predecessors tended to link inseparability with the totalizing claims of the Stoics and reject the version of inseparability which follows from these claims. Third, theologians in the period leading up to Aquinas linked the possession of infused virtue with a total elimination of vice in a manner which departs from the Augustinian view. Though I have focused on prominent examples of the kinds of virtue theories I have been describing, these patterns are widespread in the period of scholastic thought leading up to Aquinas. Aquinas’s responses to these problems are useful in responding to the objections of the first chapter of this dissertation, as I shall show.

III. Conclusion

In the previous chapter, the link between definitions of virtue and versions of inseparability was examined. Specifically, I emphasized the crucial connection between

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57 Lottin. *Psychologie et morale aux XII et XIII siècles*, 196-249. Again, the purpose of this chapter is not to trace the historical development of thought on inseparability leading up to Aquinas. If this dissertation was primarily a historical project, then much more would need to be said on the thought of Alexander of Hales, William of Auxerre, Philip the Chancellor, and Albert the Great to name a few. But the purpose of this chapter (and the previous chapter) is to situate Aquinas’s thesis relative to key claims which are made regarding inseparability in the periods before him in order to show how by endorsing or departing from these claims Aquinas’s thesis can respond to the objections of the first chapter. Consequently, much thought on inseparability which is noteworthy from a historical standpoint has been omitted. It is for the same reason that Plato’s thesis was omitted from the previous chapter. Though historically important, Aquinas’s thought on the inseparability can be effectively gauged without directly attending to these views.
inseparability and “truth in virtue.”

The current chapter has explored versions of inseparability which follow from Augustine’s definition of virtue as “the charity by which what ought to be loved is loved.” Contrary to the Stoic view, for Augustine, virtue is possessed by degrees. One does not need to be absolutely perfect in virtue to be virtuous in any respect.

In a sense, Augustine is among the first critics of inseparability. However, his criticism is of the specific version of inseparability which follows from the totalizing claims of the Stoics. Augustine affirms inseparability with respect to his own definition of virtue, and we saw this same tendency on display in the analysis of Rigaud. We have also observed how thinkers leading up to Aquinas depart from Augustine’s claim that a person can possess virtue and vice at the same time. Hence, this chapter again reveals the fundamental importance of assessing inseparability in the context of the definition of virtue a given thinker holds. One’s definition of virtue may indeed preclude the possibility of inseparability altogether. Another’s may lead to a version of inseparability susceptible to the kinds of objections considered in the first chapter of this dissertation. Aquinas’s understanding of virtue leads to neither of these.

In the next chapter, I examine the manner in which Aquinas’s unity thesis with respect to both infused and acquired virtue, while rejecting the totalizing claims of the Stoics, synthesizes the Aristotelian linking of virtue with truth and the Augustinian understanding of virtue as love which grows by degrees. Since Aquinas does this, his


thesis is not susceptible to the objections of the first chapter, as the final chapter of this dissertation demonstrates.
Aquinas on the Connection of the Virtues

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the central features of Aquinas’s formulation of the inseparability of the virtues as well as the nuances of that theory in a manner which draws from the previous two chapters with an eye toward subjecting Aquinas’s unity thesis to the objections of the first chapter, which is the aim of the final chapter of this dissertation. Indeed, because of the treatment of the figures and themes of the previous two chapters, Aquinas’s thesis may be treated in a more concise and intelligible manner than would have been possible otherwise. The two sections of this chapter treat Aquinas’s unity thesis relative to acquired and infused virtues respectively. Aquinas incorporates key Aristotelian and Augustinian insights into his own account, as I shall show. The final part of both sections analyzes Aquinas’s response to the totalizing claims of the Stoics, which he follows Augustine and his immediate predecessors in rejecting. Aquinas’s is a unity thesis with respect to both infused and acquired virtue.

I. Aquinas on the Unity of Acquired Virtue

The key task of this section is to trace the contours of Aquinas’s unity thesis with respect to acquired virtue. The distinction between true but imperfect virtues and natural dispositions to virtue is essential. Aquinas does not regard the latter as true virtue, because they are not connected through prudence. This section also demonstrates that Aquinas champions a unity thesis as opposed to the identity thesis of Socrates. Also,
Aquinas’s theory of proportional moral growth is analyzed. Finally, I show how Aquinas’s thesis allows for degrees of virtue in a manner responsive to the totalizing claims of the Stoics.

A. Three Steps of Virtue

In *De virtutibus cardinalibus* Aquinas explains that there are three steps of virtue (*triplex gradus virtutum*).¹ The first step consists of virtues which are wholly imperfect (*virtutes omnino imperfectae*), because they exist without prudence and so do not achieve right reason.² The second step of virtue achieves right reason but does not reach God.

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² It could be reasonably maintained that a “virtue” which is wholly imperfect is not a virtue at all. I think it is important that Aquinas chooses to include step 1 virtue in the *triplex gradus virtutes*. Doing so is consistent with Aquinas’s understanding of virtue which is authentic even if imperfect or (wholly imperfect). At the same time, scholars are right to recognize that step 1 “virtues” are not really virtues since Aquinas explicitly points out that natural dispositions to virtue “do not have the character of virtue, because no one can use virtue badly, according to Augustine; but one can use these inclinations badly and
because they are not combined with charity. These virtues are complete in relation to the human good (\textit{perfectae per comparationem ad bonum humanum})\textsuperscript{3} but not perfect simply. They are true but imperfect virtues. The third step of virtue entails virtues which are simply perfect (\textit{virtutum simpliciter perfectarum}), because they are combined with charity (\textit{simul cum caritate}).\textsuperscript{4} The purpose of this subsection is to demonstrate why step 2 virtue meets Aquinas’s definition of virtue while step 1 virtue does not.

According to David Burrell, Aquinas maintains that “the human self becomes itself by acting the way it does, and these ways come to stamp an individual with his or her particular character.”\textsuperscript{5} Andrew J. Dell’Olio has referred to this process of habituation as a “feedback loop, wherein one’s actions modify the self only to be influenced by the self they modify.”\textsuperscript{6} Natural dispositions to virtue, then, are the stuff that every moral


\textsuperscript{4} \textit{De virtut. card.}, a. 2. My translation. Also see \textit{ST} Ia IIae q. 65 a. 2. “It is therefore clear from what has been said that only the infused virtues are perfect, and deserve to be called virtues simply: since they direct man well to the ultimate end. But the other virtues, those namely, that are acquired, are virtues in a restricted sense, but not simply, for they direct man well in respect of the last end in some particular genus of action, but not in respect to the last end simply.”

\textsuperscript{5} David Burrell, \textit{Aquinas: God and Action} (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 128.

\textsuperscript{6} Dell’Olio, \textit{Foundations of Moral Selfhood}, 91. Dell’Olio notes that the inseparability thesis “has not been widely accepted by contemporary moral thinkers” but informs the reader that his concern is “not to enter the debate about the viability of [the general] thesis [but] to understand its role in Aquinas’s overall ethical perspective” (104).
agent begins with. Habits (good, less good, or bad) are what every moral agent ends with. Actions are the road from dispositions (the start) to habits (the finish).

Natural dispositions to virtue (step 1 virtues) are fragmented. As Aristotle maintained that “the virtues are in us neither by nature or against nature,” Aquinas understands innate qualities as mixed dispositions by which we tend to some kind of virtuous activities more than others. In fact, Aquinas does not think anyone has a natural disposition to be virtuous in every respect:

There can be a natural disposition to do what is characteristic of one virtue. However, there cannot be a disposition to do what is characteristic of all the virtues. The reason is that a natural disposition that inclines toward one virtue will also incline to conflict with [the disposition of some other virtue]. For example, someone who is naturally disposed to be courageous, which is shown in pursuing difficult things, will be less disposed toward gentleness, which consists in restraining the emotions of the aggressive faculty. That is why we see animals which naturally incline to do what one virtue does also incline towards the vice that is opposite of a different virtue; for example, a lion, which is naturally daring, is also naturally cruel. The natural disposition to this or that virtue is enough for other animals, which cannot achieve complete goodness in respect of virtue, but follow a determinate good. Human beings, however, are apt by nature to reach goodness that is complete with respect to virtue...This could not happen by nature. Therefore it needs to happen in accordance with reason; the seeds of all virtues exist in that.

In addition to being fragmented, natural dispositions to virtue are also unstable.

Aquinas confirms Aristotle’s account when he explains that “the name habit [habitus]

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7 NE II 1. §2 (1103a).
8 De virtut. comm. a. 8. ad. 10. Prudence provides a holistic framework for acting well.
implies a certain lastingness that the name disposition does not.‖\(^\text{10}\) Step 1 virtue, then, consists of dispositions which are fragmented and unstable.

The rational powers (intellect and will) of the soul may be actualized in any number of ways. The sensory apprehension, in contrast, may only be actualized in one way, and “dispositions and habits have no place in something which…can be actualized in only one way.”\(^\text{11}\) For this reason, dispositions and habits pertain to the soul’s rational potential. According to Aquinas, “if a form is capable of diverse activities, such as is the case with the soul, then it needs habits to dispose it to its proper actions.”\(^\text{12}\) Hence, step 1 virtue consists of fragmented and unstable dispositions which reflect the rational powers of the soul in a wholly imperfect way.

Aquinas does not depict step 1 virtue in an entirely negative light. Step 1 virtue is “nothing more than a disposition to do a good act, whether the disposition is in us by nature or by custom.”\(^\text{13}\) Aquinas describes step 1 virtue as “aptitudes and beginnings [rather than] perfections.”\(^\text{14}\) Hence, while step 1 virtue consists of fragmented and unstable dispositions capable of actualizing the rational soul only in a wholly imperfect way, they are also that which mark our beginning in the life of virtue and in a sense even make us receptive to that life.

\(^{10}\) ST Ia Iae q. 49 a. 2.

\(^{11}\) ST Ia Iae q. 49 a. 4.

\(^{12}\) ST Ia Iae q. 49 a. 4.

\(^{13}\) ST Ia Iae q. 65 a. 1.

\(^{14}\) ST Ia Iae q. 63 a. 2; q. 63 a. 1.
Aquinas follows Aristotle in positing a distinction between step 1 virtue (natural dispositions to virtue) and step 2 virtue.\textsuperscript{15} The issue here arises of the different types of perfection Aquinas employs in describing virtue. In the *Prima Secundae* q. 65 a. 2, Aquinas defines perfect virtue as that which directs the agent to his or her supernatural end: “It is therefore clear from what has been said that only the infused virtues are perfect, and deserve to be called virtues simply: since they direct man well to the ultimate [i.e. supernatural] end.”\textsuperscript{16} Again in *De virtutibus cardinalibus* a. 2, Aquinas explains that the third step of virtue “consists of virtues that are unqualifiedly perfect. For such virtues make a human action unqualifiedly good, in that it is something that attains our ultimate end.”\textsuperscript{17} But in the first article of *Prima Secundae* q. 65, Aquinas defines perfect virtue on the basis of inseparability:

Moral virtue may be considered either as perfect or as imperfect. An imperfect moral virtue, temperance for instance, or fortitude, is nothing but an inclination in us to do some kind of good deed, whether such inclination be in us by nature or habituation. If we take the moral virtues in this way, they are not connected: since we find men who, by natural temperament or by being accustomed, are prompt in doing deeds of liberality, but are not prompt in doing deeds of chastity. But perfect moral virtue is a habit that inclines us to do a good deed well; and if we take moral virtues in this way, we must say that they are connected, as nearly all are agreed in saying.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{15} But he also is following Gregory the Great. Aquinas employs Gregory’s statement that “one virtue without the others is either nothing at all or imperfect” (*Moralia* 22.1) to establish the division between step 1 and step 2 virtues. Immediately after Aquinas notes that Augustine gives the same reason [for the division] in *De Trin.* vi. 4. See *ST* Ia Iae q. 65 a. 1.

\textsuperscript{16} *ST* Ia Iae q. 65 a. 2.

\textsuperscript{17} *De virtut. card.* a. 2.

\textsuperscript{18} *ST* Ia Iae q. 65 a.1.
Perfect virtue is distinguished from imperfect virtue, then, on the basis of attainment of the supernatural end, but also on the basis of inseparability. This may seem like a contradiction, but the distinction Aquinas makes here maps on to the *triplex gradus*. Therefore, there is no such thing as disconnected virtues ordered to separated ends. In the first set of texts, Aquinas is distinguishing supernatural, infused virtue from acquired and connected, step 2 virtue. In the q. 65 a. 1 text, Aquinas is distinguishing connected acquired virtue from natural dispositions to virtue. The criterion for step 2 virtue is inseparability, and Aquinas explains why this is the case in the following passage:

Some moral virtues perfect man as regards his general state, in other words, with regard to those things which have to be done in every kind of human life. Hence man needs to exercise himself at the same time in the matters of all moral virtues. And if he exercise himself, by good deeds, in all such matters, he will acquire the habits of all the moral virtues. But if he exercise himself in good deeds in regard to one matter, but not in regard to another, for instance, by behaving well in matters of anger, but not in matters of concupiscence; he will indeed acquire a certain habit of restraining his anger; but this habit will lack the nature of virtue, through the absence of prudence, which is wanting in matters of concupiscence. In the same way, natural inclinations fail to have the complete character of virtue if prudence be lacking.

Not just any habit is a virtue, as Aquinas makes clear. In order for a habit to qualify as a virtue it must perfect man with respect to “those things which have to be done in every

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19 This is an important point because some Thomists have failed to recognize this point and so wrongly maintained that “true and perfect” virtue can be fragmented. Osborne holds that true acquired virtue can be disconnected. See Thomas Osborne Jr., “Perfect and Imperfect Virtues in Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 71 (2007): 39-64. Titus holds that infused virtue can be disconnected. See Craig Steven Titus, “Moral Development and Connecting the Virtues: Aquinas, Porter, and the Flawed Saint,” in Reinhard Hütter and Matthew Levering eds., *Ressourcement Thomism: Sacred Doctrine, the Sacraments, and the Moral Life* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010): 330-352.

20 ST Ia Hae q. 65 a.1 ad. 1. There is an issue here of how a good habit can be a good habit without being a virtue. Clearly, for Aquinas, a good habit is not a virtue if “prudence be lacking.” This distinguishes Aquinas’s view from some modern accounts of virtue which do not hold to this standard.
kind of human life.” This is why step 2 virtue is “perfect,” in the sense of connected, relative to dispositions or habits that “fail to have the complete character of virtue.” On the other hand, relative to step 3 virtue, step 2 virtue is imperfect because by it one does not attain the ultimate end. This does not mean step 2 virtues are separable. Aquinas expressly denies this by using inseparability as the criteria by which to differentiate step 2 virtue from step 1 virtue. In this way, the tripex gradus provides a consistent criterion by which to define different grades of virtue. Step 2 virtues are true virtues relative to step 1 but imperfect relative to step 3.

Aquinas follows Aristotle in affirming a pivotal role for prudence in the transition from step 1 to step 2 virtue. Aristotle described the man who possessed natural virtue but lacked prudence as “a heavy body moving around unable to see,” which therefore “suffers a heavy fall.” Aquinas fills in the metaphor by making the “heavy body” into a blind horse:

A natural disposition to the good of virtue is a certain beginning of virtue, but it is not perfect virtue. For the stronger this disposition is, the more dangerous it may be, unless it be joined by right reason which makes the right choice of the fitting means to the due end; just as a running horse, if it were blind, would fall more heavily the faster it runs, and the more grievously would it be hurt.  

21 NE VI 13. §1 (1144b).

22 ST Ia IIae q. 58 a. 4. The main point is that stage 1 virtue can detract from the flourishing of an overall life and even lead to self-destructive tendencies. This is similar to the idea of “semblances of virtue.” See Jean Porter, The Recovery of Virtue: The Relevance of Aquinas for Christian Ethics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990); Lee H. Yearley, Mencius and Aquinas: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of Courage (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).
The influence of Aristotle is evident in Aquinas’s treatment of the special role prudence plays in the acquisition of virtue. According to Aquinas, prudence unifies the moral virtues. This is because “it is proper to moral virtue to make a right choice.” However, “a right choice requires not only the inclination to the due end, by which it is directed by the habit of moral virtue, but also to be directed to choose that which is for the sake of the end.” Accomplishing the latter task is the special function of prudence, because prudence is the virtue which contributes to right choices insofar as it “counsels, judges, and commands those things that are for the sake of the end.” To anticipate a point that will become clear as this chapter progresses, Aquinas does not think prudence and the moral virtues can develop independently of each other. Rather, prudence and the moral virtues develop together at a proportional rate. It is clear then that prudence is a necessary condition for step 2 virtue. But it is not a sufficient condition. If so, then it may

\[^{23}\text{ST Ia IIae q. 65 aa. 1-4; q. 58 a. 4; q. 58 a. 5; DV 12. 23. Appreciation of this point enables Angela McKay-Knobel to respond to the view of Osborne. See her “Prudence and Acquired Virtue,” Thomist 69.4 (2005): 535-55.}\]

\[^{24}\text{ST Ia IIae q. 65 a. 1. The end itself is not a matter of choice though except in a special way. Aquinas explains that “just as in speculative knowledge nothing hinders the principle of one demonstration or of one science from being the conclusion of another demonstration or science; while the first indemonstrable principle cannot be the conclusion of any demonstration or science; so too that which is the end in one operation, may be ordained to something as an end. And in this way it is a matter of choice.” See Ia IIae q. 13 a. 3. This represents an interesting area of future growth for my project.}\]

be said that Aquinas holds an identity thesis, but, in fact, Aquinas holds a unity thesis, as the next subsection demonstrates.

**B. Aquinas's Unity Thesis (Acquired Virtue)**

Prudence “counsels, judges, and commands” “with a view to the final good of the whole of human life.”26 Because prudence “pertains to the whole life of a person and to the ultimate end of a person’s life,” it is the key to becoming good and leading a good life.27 Thus, prudence is pivotal to the moral life to such an extent that Aquinas refers to prudence as “the generator of the virtues” with respect to the cardinal virtues.28

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27 *ST* Ia Iae q. 57 a. 4; see also q. 57 a. 5.

28 *Sent* d.33 q. 3 a. 5; Charity, of course, is the mother of perfect virtue: *ST* Ia Iae q. 65 a. 1: Again, the term “mother of the virtues” was meant to convey that which produces all of the virtues (as a
Although Aquinas affirms the indispensability of prudence in the transition from step 1 virtue to step 2 virtue, he also follows Aristotle in recognizing that prudence needs the moral virtues in order for prudence to be perfect. This is because prudence itself does not incline one to the right ends. Hence, in order for prudence to apply right reasoning “with a view towards the end” one’s character must be conformed to the ultimate end.\(^\text{29}\) This is where the identity thesis is mistaken. Aquinas sides with Socrates in recognizing the fundamental importance of deliberating well with respect to things ordered to the end but sides with Aristotle’s view that prudence does not select the end since the appearance of the end is determined by one’s character.

Aquinas differentiates his thesis from the identity thesis. As has been made clear in previous chapters, the identity thesis is interrelated to a certain kind of moral psychology. Jean Porter describes this interrelationship well:

> Perfected [acquired] virtue, according to Aquinas, can thus be understood as a disposition by which the individual translates her general knowledge of that in which her good consists into specific actions. How is this transition supposed to take place? Is it sufficient for the individual to know what her true good is in order for her to do it? If this were the case, the virtues would consist in nothing other than a settled, rationally informed tendency to act in accordance with one’s true happiness as a human being. It is easy to see why, on this supposition, the perfected moral virtues would be regarded as necessarily connected. In effect, there would only be one true moral virtue, namely, correct knowledge of the good. We would have to speak of unitary virtue, rather than arguing for the unity of diverse virtues.\(^\text{30}\)

\(^{29}\) Ia IIae q. 65 a. 1. Aquinas likens character to a healthy or unhealthy sense of taste. _De virtut. card._ q. 5 a. 2.

In other words, to affirm that virtue consists in the best possible state of the rational soul seems to imply an identity thesis and a corresponding elimination of the other virtues.

But this presumes that the non-rational powers of the soul must obey reason whereas Thomas follows Aristotle in maintaining that they are naturally inclined to obey reason but also able to dissent:

Reason is the first principle of all human acts; and whatever other principles of human acts may be found, they obey reason somewhat, but in various ways. For some obey reason blindly and without any contradiction whatever: such are the limbs of the body, provided they are in a healthy condition, for as soon as reason commands, the hand or the foot proceeds to action. Hence the Philosopher says (Polit. i, 3) that “the soul rules the body like a despot,” i.e. as a master rules his slave, who has no right to rebel. Accordingly some held that all the active principles in man are subordinate to reason in this way. If this were true, for man to act well it would suffice that his reason be perfect. Consequently, since virtue is a habit perfecting man in view of his doing good actions, it would follow that it is only in the reason, so that there would be none but intellectual virtues. This was the opinion of Socrates, who said “every virtue is a kind of prudence,” as stated in Ethic. vi, 13. Hence he maintained that as long as man is in possession of knowledge, he cannot sin; and that everyone who sins, does so through ignorance.

Here Aquinas has related the identity thesis to moral psychology. Aquinas even goes on to contend that there is “some truth” in this theory of Socrates. Nevertheless, Aquinas revises the thesis on the basis of Aristotelian moral psychology:

Now [the identity thesis] is based on a false supposition. Because the appetitive faculty obeys the reason, not blindly, but with a certain power of opposition; wherefore the Philosopher says (Polit. i, 3) that “reason commands the appetitive faculty by a political power,” whereby a man rules over subjects that are free, having a certain right of opposition. Hence Augustine says on Psalm 118 (Serm. 8) that “sometimes we understand [what is right] while desire is slow, or follows not at all,” insofar as the habits or passions of the appetitive faculty cause the use of reason to be impeded in some particular action. And in this way, there is some truth in the dictum of Socrates that so long as a man is in possession of knowledge he does not sin: provided, however, that this knowledge is made to include the use of reason in this individual act of choice. Accordingly for a man to do a good deed, it is requisite not only that his reason be well disposed by means of a habit
of intellectual virtue; but also that his appetite be well disposed by means of a habit of moral virtue. And so moral differs from intellectual virtue, even as the appetite differs from the reason. Hence just as the appetite is the principle of human acts, in so far as it partakes of reason, so are moral habits to be considered virtues in so far as they are in conformity with reason.\textsuperscript{31}

Like Aristotle, Aquinas does not identify the virtues with perfected reason. However, he does define the virtues as “in conformity with reason.” And virtues so understood are inseparable.\textsuperscript{32} This is not because the appetites are perpetual rebels against reason. Rather, in Aquinas’s view, they are directed to a plurality of sensible goods but unable to direct the human person to the comprehensive good as discerned by reason. However, the sensitive appetite is capable of obeying reason and thus becoming well shaped.\textsuperscript{33}

According to Aquinas, then, we internalize desires and fears on the basis of judgments which follow from our rational discernment of the good. Therefore, the virtuous person is

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{31} ST Ia IIae q. 58 a. 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{32} Porter uses the term “unified moral self.” See her discussion in Jean Porter, “The Unity of the Virtues and the Ambiguity of Goodness,” 145-54. Indeed, the relationship between the metaphysics of the soul and versions of inseparability is so linked that some moral theologians have wrongly posited that the only purpose for the inseparability thesis is to secure the idea of a unified moral self. I do not agree with Stanley Hauerwas that Aquinas invents his inseparability thesis to secure his moral psychology. Rather, Aquinas’s vision of inseparability follows from his moral psychology. Further, Hauerwas thinks that the virtues cannot provide unity for the self because the self pursues goods, and thus requires virtues, that at any given moment might be incommensurable and even in conflict. This is essentially MacIntyre’s moral conflict critique, which will be responded to below. See Stanley Hauerwas, “Toward an Ethics of Character,” in \textit{Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection} [1974] (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); “The Self as Story: A Reconsideration of the Relation of Religion and Morality from the Agent’s Perspective,” in \textit{Vision and Virtue}, 69; and “Character, Narrative and Growth in the Christian Life,” in \textit{Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics} [1975] (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 141-143; For a sympathetic but critical treatment of Hauerwas’s view see Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, “Thomas Aquinas: The Unity of the Virtues and the Journeying Self,” in \textit{Unsettling Arguments: A Festschrift on the Occasion of Stanley Hauerwas’s 70th Birthday}, Charles R. Pinches, Kelly S. Johnson, and Charles M. Collier, eds., (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010): 25-41.
  \item \textsuperscript{33} ST Ia q. 81 a. 3.
\end{itemize}
ordered well to the end by the moral virtues and pursues the end rightly by prudence.

Since, one cannot be done without the other, Thomas affirms Aristotle’s unity thesis:

No moral virtue can be without prudence; since it is proper to moral virtue to make a right choice, for it is an elective habit. Now right choice requires not only the inclination to a due end, which inclination is the direct outcome of moral virtue, but also correct choice of things conducive to the end, which choice is made by prudence, that counsels, judges, and commands in those things that are directed to the end. In like manner one cannot have prudence unless one has the moral virtues: since prudence is right reason about things to be done, and the starting point of reason is the end of the thing to be done, to which end man is rightly disposed by moral virtue. Hence, just as we cannot have speculative science unless we have the understanding of the principles, so neither can we have prudence without the moral virtues: and from this it follows clearly that the moral virtues are connected with one another.  

In order for a person to be virtuous, the lower parts of the soul must be aligned with the rational part. The perfection of the rational will consists in its being able to achieve its capacity fully and with ease. In order for a person to fully achieve the capacity of his or her powers, therefore, the higher part must not be impeded by the lower part, and the lower part must be guided by the higher part. Any disposition that impedes reason’s discernment of the good, the will’s natural tendency to incline to the good discerned, or the capability of the lower powers to obey the rational will, prevents one from attaining the upper limit of his or her powers. When such dispositions are habituated to the point of becoming second nature, they are called vices. Ignorance in choice caused by the inclinations of one’s desires blocking reason’s capacity for sound judgment, for example, is such a vice.  

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34 *ST* Ia IIae q. 65 a.1.  
35 *De virtut. comm.* a. 6. ad. 3.
Thus, for Aquinas, if a person engages in extramarital affairs, presuming that (s)he knows what (s)he is doing, it is not accurate to say that his or her rational judgment errs by discerning that betraying those to whom one has made irrevocable commitments is morally praiseworthy. Rather, his or her appetitive desires have resisted and overcome his or her rational will. Thus, the agent does not achieve the fullest reach of his or her powers to discern the good and act upon it if those powers are impeded by either the presence of bad dispositions in the lower powers or the lack of good ones. In that sense, to say that (s)he lacks prudence and justice because (s)he lacks temperance is to say that whatever prudence and justice (s)he does have is being blocked from carrying out its function of fulfilling his or her powers to reason and will the good due to a defect in the lower parts of his or her soul without which his or her prudence and justice would not be so impeded. In brief, Aquinas posits a unity thesis with respect to acquired virtue. Prudence requires the moral virtues and they it. I turn now to the manner in which Aquinas thinks the acquired virtues are attained.

36 “The morally incontinent man seized by the fervor of sin considers rightly some universal, for example that all fornication is to be fled, nevertheless when he descends to this particular good by the force of sin, the habit of right reason is bound, so that he cannot carry through an act of right consideration about the particular.” III Sent. d. 31 q.1 a.1.

37 Dell’Olio, Foundations of Moral Selfhood, 108. The person with step 1 virtue “is more likely to experience the inner conflict between desire and reason that characterizes a divided, rather than unified self.” See ST IIa IIae q. 155 a. 2.
C. How is Acquired Virtue Attained?

Dell’Olio has criticized Aristotle’s unity thesis for resulting in a “hopeless circularity” with respect to the possibility of moral progress. Dell’Olio explains as follows:

For, while the perfection of prudence presupposes the proper ordination of the appetites toward the good brought about by the moral virtues, in order for the appetites to be well-ordered toward the good, they must conform to their rational mean in light of one’s overall good. As we have seen, this is only possible through the judgments of prudence. So the moral virtues require prudence for their perfection as virtues, just as prudence requires the moral virtues for its own perfection as a virtue. But then how is anyone ever to become perfectly virtuous without already possessing all the virtues in their perfect state?38

This pertains to the impossibility of moral progress objection analyzed in the first chapter of this dissertation. Aquinas responds to this problem by positing a theory of proportional moral growth, as I shall show.

If one cannot acquire prudence without the moral virtues, and if one cannot acquire the moral virtues without prudence, then how is one to acquire any virtue at all? Aquinas’s answer echoes that of Aristotle: act virtuously. Even though it is not possible

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38 Dell’Olio, Foundations of Moral Selfhood, 109-10. Dell’Olio goes on to argue that “in order to break free from this vicious cycle of virtues, the moral agent would need at least one supreme virtue which, when possessed, could itself orient the self to its ultimate end and thereby unify the various desires, actions and virtues of the agent. But Aquinas could not find the solution to this problem in Aristotle, who, as Hauerwas has maintained, does not adequately provide a way to account for ‘how the self acquires an orientation that gives a unity to our various actions.’ There is no one virtue in Aristotle that is sufficiently up to this task…It is here in his account that Aquinas turns to the resources of the Augustinian tradition. For Aquinas’s solution to this problem lays in the way in which love or charity directs the other virtues, and prudence in particular, to the divine good” (110-11). See Stanley Hauerwas, A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1981); John M. Cooper, Reason and the Human Good in Aristotle (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975); Martha Nussbaum, The Fragility of Goodness (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 373-77. As will become apparent below, I disagree with Dell’Olio. On my view, Aquinas (or Aristotle for that matter) does not need Augustine’s charity to solve a problem which Aristotle’s prudence could not. Rather, Aquinas addresses this problem by positing a theory of proportional moral growth.
to have the moral virtues without prudence or to have prudence without the moral virtues, it is possible to act virtuously without yet having acquired virtuous habits. Otherwise, the acquisition of any virtue (separable or otherwise) would indeed be impossible. Hence, Aquinas recognizes the need to explain the acquisition of virtue, which he does by drawing from Aristotle’s unity thesis.

Envision a person with step 1 virtue and even some vice. According to Aquinas, this person is still capable of acting rightly, and “through such activity the opposing tendencies are removed at the same time as the virtues come into existence.”

Aquinas explains this in the following way:

Virtue is generated by actions which are virtuous in one sense and not in another. The actions that occur before virtue exists are virtuous from the point of view of what is done. The person is doing just or brave things. They are not virtuous from the point of view of how they are done; for before someone has acquired a virtue, he does not do the things that virtue does in the way that a virtuous person does them, that is, readily, without any hesitation, with pleasure, and without difficulty.

Hence, in Aquinas’s view, a person’s moral powers, even if vitiated, can still generate virtuous acts. This person does so with varying levels of difficulty, hesitation, and pain. The fact that this person through repeated acts removes “opposing tendencies…at the same time as the dispositions of the virtues come into existence” does mean they progress from step 1 virtue to step 2 virtue in an instant in a qualified sense, which I now explain.

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39 *De virtut. card.* a. 2 ad 2.

According to Aquinas, the act by which a virtue is formed “is attained out of many good acts, insofar as a subsequent act always occurs in virtue of all the preceding ones—as is evident in drops of water hollowing a stone, where it is not each and every drop that takes away something from the stone, but rather, all the preceding ones are disposing the stone to be hollowed out.”\(^{41}\) Hence, to say that one has gone from lacking virtue to possessing it in an instant is inaccurate if it precludes the acquisition of virtue from the “many good acts” which precede it. But it is accurate when considered as the last act in a series of acts ordered to the same end. To say that an engineer has built a bridge through one stroke of a hammer is false, but to say that he has completed a bridge through one stroke of a hammer may be true. Hence, Aquinas has a response for the impossibility of moral progress objection as the next chapter further demonstrates.

Even if a person can act virtuously while lacking virtuous habits, the question remains of the order in which the virtuous habits must be acquired. Does the person first need to perfect her ability to discern the moral good and then cultivate the ability of the lower capacities to obey the judgments which follow from these discernments in various contexts? Or does one first need to acquire well ordered appetites in order to make sound practical judgments? If judgment is “blocked” by tendencies within the lower powers, then it seems the latter is the case. But how can the lower powers become perfected while judgment is impeded?

Aquinas does not think the acquired virtues are obtained one by one. It does not make sense to maintain that one cannot possess one virtue without possessing them all.

\(^{41}\) I Sent. D. 17 q. 2 a. 3.
and then assert that the virtues are acquired one by one. Rather, Aquinas equates the growing of virtuous habits to the manner in which a hand grows. As the whole hand grows, the fingers grow “at a proportional rate.” Thus, with respect to acquired virtue, as prudence (the hand) grows so to the fingers (the moral virtues) at a proportional rate. Therefore, in order for any given virtuous action to count towards the acquisition of a virtue it must be in accord with right reason. This is because the other virtues “are possessed along with” practical wisdom. Aquinas explains as follows:

Certain virtues, for example, temperance, justice, and gentleness, order us in ordinary areas of human life. In this area, while one is engaged in one type of virtuous activity one must either also be engaged in exercising the other virtues; thus one will acquire the all the virtues at the same time; or else do well in respect of one and badly in respect of others. In the latter case, one will acquire a disposition that is contrary to some one of the virtues, and therefore destructive of practical wisdom [prudence]. But without practical wisdom the tendency acquired through acting in accordance with the other virtues will not have the distinctive character of virtue.

According to Aquinas, any disposition contrary to a virtue is “destructive of practical wisdom.” It will either make it more difficult for it to operate or block it altogether. In either case the ability to act well is impeded. Therefore, the agent’s moral powers are

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42 De virtut. card. a. 3 ad. 1. My translation; cf. a. 2 ad. 13. Ad primum ergo dicendum, quod ratio illa procedit de inaequalitate quae est et attenditur secundum ipsas virtutes, non de inaequalitate quae est secundum inesse ipsarum, de qua nunc loquimur. Caritas enim, ut ditum est, secundum se est major omnibus aliis virtutibus; sed tamen, ea crescente, etiam proportionaliter crescent omnes aliae virtutes in uno et eodem homine; sicut digitii manus secundum se sunt inaequales, tamen proportionaliter crescent. This is why I refer to Aquinas’s theory of “proportional moral growth.”

43 De virtut. card. a. 2.

44 De virtut. card. a. 2. ad. 10.

45 De virtut. card. a. 2. ad. 9.

46 One may observe here the impact of Aquinas’s exclusionary thesis on his theory of moral progress.
impaired. Further, one must act in some kind of way with regard to the “ordinary areas of life” with which the virtues are concerned. There is no way to avoid this. Hence, because one is always acting in the “ordinary areas of human life,” one is always either acquiring virtuous dispositions connected through practical wisdom or some other tendency without “the distinctive character of virtue.” But Aquinas does not think this means that the latter kind of people are necessarily devoid of virtue, though they may be. The opinion that they must be devoid of virtue he equates with the Stoics who erred when they said “that no one possesses a virtue without possessing it supremely.” According to Aquinas, the Stoic position “does not seem to follow from the character of a virtue, because there is such a variety of ways in which people share in a virtue.” On this note, I turn to Aquinas’s rejection of the totalizing claims of the Stoics.

D. Aquinas on Degrees of Acquired Virtue

The purpose of this section is to show how Aquinas departs from the totalizing claims of the Stoics. It has already been demonstrated that Aquinas rejects the third of these claims, the claim, that is, that there is not progress leading up to virtue (totalizing claim 3). He also rejects the first and second of these claims. He does not conceive of virtue as an absolute state not allowing for degrees (totalizing claim 1), nor does he say virtue must be totally lacking in a person or totally present (totalizing claim 2). In De virtutibus communis, the objector argues that virtue cannot increase: “Something that is in its character the best of its kind cannot be increased: for nothing can be better than the

47 De virtut. card. a. 3.
best, nor whiter than pure whiteness. However, the character of virtue is that it is the best of its kind, for virtue is the upper limit of a capacity. Therefore virtue cannot be increased.”48 Here, the objector has defined virtue as an absolute state (“upper limit”) not allowing for gradation, but Aquinas responds to the objector by redefining virtue as consisting in degrees:

The character of virtue does not consist in being the best of its kind in itself, but with reference to its object. For it is through virtue that someone is ordered towards the upper limit of his capacity, that is towards doing things well. That is why Aristotle says that virtue is the tendency of something complete towards what is best. However, someone can be more disposed or less disposed towards what is best; accordingly, he has virtue to a greater or lesser degree.49

Later, an objector argues that virtue cannot increase, because it is an absolute state, and nothing can advance “beyond its own completeness because that is a thing’s finishing point.” The objector regards this definition as consistent with Aristotle’s understanding of virtue, since Aristotle describes virtue as a “tendency of something complete towards what is best.”50 Here again, Aquinas responds by positing degrees of completeness with respect to the possession of virtue. One does not need to have reached his or her “finishing point” to be said to possess virtue: “Not everything that is complete in some sense is as complete as possible, but only what is actualized to its upper limit. Therefore nothing prevents something from being complete with respect to virtue, and then being completed still further.”51 From this it is clear that Aquinas does not view the

48 De virtut. comm. a. 11 obj. 15.

49 De virtut. comm. a. 11 ad. 15.

50 De virtut. comm. a. 11 obj. 18.
unity of the virtues as a line of demarcation between those devoid of virtue and those absolutely perfect in it. Rather, a person can possess virtue to a greater or lesser degree. And since a virtue must be connected to the others to be a step 2 or step 3 virtue, it follows that affirming the connection of the virtues does not deny room for further growth in virtue. Daniel McInerny has expressed this point well:

> While admitting that no one said the virtuous life was going to be easy, we should add that no one ever said (except the Stoics) that the virtuous life had to be capped off in order to be fully virtuous. There are, in other words, degrees of perfection and of unity in attainment of the virtues, and it is reasonable to suppose that we can achieve a certain level of perfection and unity in the life of virtue without having yet achieved absolutely perfect unity of the virtues. Accordingly, the virtuous life might most realistically be described as the life devoted to achieving perfect unity of the virtues, with the recognition built-in that we are always on the way towards that perfect unity.\(^{52}\)

Therefore, to point to the respective imperfections of revered moral figures like C.S. Lewis, Oscar Schindler, Martin Luther King Jr., or whoever else, is not “to recognize a performative refutation of the [inseparability] thesis, but rather to recognize what is necessary if one is to achieve ultimate consistency in action.”\(^{53}\) It is to point out that even those who truly possess virtue have room to morally advance (a claim with which Aquinas and they presumably would all agree). Aquinas does not need to posit separable virtues to account for the good qualities of those who are less than perfect (i.e., everyone). Indeed, the only good qualities that are separable are natural dispositions to virtue which are virtues in a wholly imperfect sense.

\(^{51}\) De virtut. comm. a. 11 ad. 18.

\(^{52}\) Daniel McInerny, *The Difficult Good*, 85.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 84.
In sum, then, Aquinas’s unity thesis avoids the totalizing claims of the Stoics. This makes Aquinas’s thesis impervious to criticisms that virtue is impossible or that greater unity in virtue is impossible. The gradations of goodness in Aquinas’s account become even more clear in his treatment of the infused virtues, so it is to that treatment that I now turn.

II. Aquinas on the Unity of Infused Virtue

In this section, my aim is to bring out the nuances of Aquinas’s unity thesis relative to infused virtue. He rejects the identity thesis, as I shall show. Furthermore, I depict how Aquinas follows Augustine in affirming the lasting effects of sin even in the life of those who possess the infused virtues. Finally, I demonstrate that Aquinas’s theory of proportional moral growth is still operative in his unity thesis of infused virtue, and that this same thesis once again rejects the totalizing claims of the Stoics.

A. What is an Infused Virtue?

In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas argues that the moral virtues cannot be without charity and charity cannot be without the moral virtues. As was observed above, Aquinas contends that the moral virtues cannot be without charity, because in order for virtues to be true and perfect (step 3) they must be able to produce works “in proportion
to a supernatural last end.\textsuperscript{54} Charity cannot be without the moral virtues either, because it is through the moral virtues “that man performs each different kind of good work.”\textsuperscript{55}

Infused virtue, then, makes a person able to act well in every area of life so as to reach the supernatural end. This aspect of infused virtue is related to two other components of infused virtue as the following passage evidences:

Effects must needs be proportionate to their cause and principles. Now all virtues, intellectual and moral, that are acquired by our actions, arise from certain natural principles pre-existing in us, as above stated (A. 1; Q. 51, A. 1): instead of which natural principles, God bestows on us the theological virtues, whereby we are directed to a supernatural end, as stated (Q. 62, A. 1). Wherefore we need to receive from God other habits corresponding, in due proportion, to the theological virtues, which habits are to the theological virtues, what the moral and intellectual virtues are to the natural principles of virtue.\textsuperscript{56}

For Aquinas, then, infused virtue, has these aspects: (1) God is its source, (2) it makes the agent able to perform acts well in every area of life in a manner proportionate to its “cause and principles,” and (3) it directs the agent to his or her supernatural end. Hence, in Aquinas’s view charity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for step 3 virtue.\textsuperscript{57} This brings us to Aquinas’s unity thesis as it pertains to infused virtue.

\textsuperscript{54} ST Ia IIae q. 65 a. 2

\textsuperscript{55} ST Ia IIae q. 65 a. 3.

\textsuperscript{56} ST Ia IIae q. 63 a. 3.

\textsuperscript{57} With respect to charity Aquinas does to Augustine what Aristotle did to Socrates with respect to prudence. Charity is transitioned from the essence of virtue to a requirement for virtue. This is an Aristotelian move designed to protect the distinctiveness of the other virtues. See Ia IIae q. 62 a. 2 ad. 3
B. Aquinas’s Unity Thesis (Infused Virtue)

Because of the central role Aquinas designates to charity as the commander of the activities of all of the virtues, and because, as was observed in the previous chapter, there was a tendency amongst his predecessors to identify virtue with charity, the central task of the current subsection is to demonstrate the manner in which Aquinas is able to posit a unity thesis with respect to charity and the other virtues while not compromising the importance afforded to charity by his predecessors.

According to Aquinas, charity “commands the activities of all the other virtues.” He explains this with a reference to Aristotle:

Now charity inclines us towards all sort of virtuous activity, because it commands the activities of all the other virtues, since it is concerned with the ultimate end: for a skill or virtue that includes a certain end, also governs whatever concerns the end, just as a military skill commands horsemanship and a horseman’s skill that of the saddler, as Aristotle says [NE I 1. §4 (1094a10)]. That is why all the other virtues are infused into us along with charity, because God’s wisdom and goodness does whatever is fitting.  

The infused cardinal virtues are “determined by their special matters, each to its own matter, in which the general condition from which the name of virtue is taken is specifically praised.” Commenting on the distinctiveness of charity, Aquinas explains, “virtue derives its species from its object according to the ratio under which the virtue chiefly tends to the object.” Further, “since charity chiefly loves God, and does not love anything else except insofar as it is of God, it is apparent that charity receives unity and is

\[58 \text{De virtut. card. a. 2.}\]

\[59 \text{ST Ia Hae q. 61 a. 4. Aquinas is following Aristotle. See NE II 7 (1107a33). As Dell'Olio rightly notes, Aquinas does not want to blur “any genuine distinction among the moral virtues.” Dell'Olio, Foundations of Moral Selfhood, 104.}\]
a single virtue from the unity of divine goodness to which it first has reference.\textsuperscript{60} This does not mean charity subsumes all of the other virtues into itself. Rather charity “perfection of the virtues.” Hence, charity is a “special power” as opposed to “something diffused in all the other powers.”\textsuperscript{61} Aquinas is championing the centrality of charity while securing the specificity of the other virtues.

Charity needs the other virtues to be perfect in act. Hence, actions ordered by charity are much more than mere expressions of charity. Recall that charity cannot be without the moral virtues, because it is through the moral virtues “that man performs each different kind of good work.”\textsuperscript{62} So charity would be unable to achieve its end of loving God without the other virtues, yet the other virtues also require charity in order to be true and perfect. Hence, Aquinas’s unity thesis manifests a unity between charity (and the other theological virtues as will become clear) and infused prudence and the infused moral virtues.

In Aquinas’s view, charity perfects the will with respect to the supernatural last end.\textsuperscript{63} However, this ordering in and of itself is insufficient to the task of leading one to the beatific vision. In addition to being positioned well with respect to his or her

\textsuperscript{60} II Sent. d. 27 q.2 a.4; see also ST Ia IIae q. 23 a. 5.

\textsuperscript{61} II Sent. d. 27 q.2 a.4 qa. 3. See also John F. Harvey, “The Nature of Infused Moral Virtues” Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America (1955): 172-217. See also Servais Pinckaers “Virtue is not a Habit” Cross Currents 12 (1962).

\textsuperscript{62} ST Ia IIae q. 65 a. 3.

\textsuperscript{63} ST Ia IIae q. 5 a. 7; Ia IIae q. 65 a. 4.
supernatural last end, human beings also achieve their ends through good works or merits.\textsuperscript{64} As Michael Sherwin remarks, a proper understanding of both the aforementioned aspects is “crucial for understanding charity’s relationship to the other virtues.” This is because “although the theological virtues order us sufficiently in relation to our supernatural end, on their own they do not sufficiently order us in relation to the good works that are the means to the end.”\textsuperscript{65} For this reason, Aquinas understands charity, which concerns the end, to be inseparable from the infused cardinal virtues, which are referred to the end.\textsuperscript{66}

The theological virtues perfect the soul’s natural capacities of intellect and will. Even when the intellect and will are ordered to the supernatural last end, they still, by means of virtues other than the theological virtues, need to be ordered to the intermediate ends that serve as the means to the supernatural last end.\textsuperscript{67} Because of this, with charity is infused the virtue of prudence, which is the virtue that discerns with respect to particular (intermediate) ends.\textsuperscript{68} Prudence “is the ability to reason well from universals to particulars.”\textsuperscript{69} Infused prudence, then, is the ability to make choices regarding things

\textsuperscript{64} ST Ia IIae q. 5 a. 7; see also Joseph Wawrykow, \textit{God’s Grace and Human Action: “Merit” in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas} (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995): 177-233.


\textsuperscript{67} ST Ia IIae q. 58 a. 4; Ia IIae q. 56 a. 6; Ia IIae q. 94 a. 2; Ia q. 79 a. 12.

\textsuperscript{68} ST IIa IIae q. 49 a. 2 ad 1.
ordered to one’s supernatural end by charity. By infused prudence a divine regulam is instilled within the practical intellect which makes reason capable of discerning acts consistent with charity.\textsuperscript{70}

Charity could not operate without infused prudence, because the possession of charity in and of itself does not mollify the myriad situations which require diverse judgments as to the proper way to act. For instance, in some cases it may be better to “assist a stranger more than one’s own father if, for example, the stranger is in extreme need, while one’s father suffers a lesser need.” At the same time, however, “in the case of two people, one whom is more closely united to us, while the other is in greater need, it is not possible by a general rule to determine whom we should assist more, for there are various degrees of need as well as of union; this requires the judgment of the prudent person.”\textsuperscript{71} In this way, Aquinas argues that infused prudence enables charity to achieve its end of loving God. As Sherwin puts it,

Aquinas is here affirming the necessary priority—even on the level of grace—of the practical intellect in human action on the level of specification. Even though the intellect requires a higher measure infused by God in order for it to act according to the exigencies of the heavenly kingdom, if our graced actions are going to be human acts, this infused measure must function as a principle elevating an essentially human process of practical reasoning. Infused prudence is truly infused: it is a gift of God’s grace. Yet, infused prudence is also truly prudence: it is a virtue that disposes the practical intellect of the human person to judge and command rightly about the proper means to attain our ultimate end.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{69} Sherwin, By Knowledge & By Love, 176. His italics.

\textsuperscript{70} ST Ia IIae q. 63 a. 4

\textsuperscript{71} ST IIa IIae q. 31 a. 3.

\textsuperscript{72} Sherwin, By Knowledge & By Love, 179.
Charity depends on the other infused virtues and on infused prudence, but the infused virtues also depend on charity:

The other [acquired] moral virtues cannot be without prudence, and prudence cannot be without the moral virtues, because the moral virtues order us well toward the ends, from which the reasoning of prudence proceeds. Now, for the right reasoning of prudence, it is much more necessary that we be well ordered toward the ultimate end, which is the effect of charity, than that we be well ordered toward other ends, which is the effect of the moral virtues: just as in theoretical matters right reasoning most of all needs the first indemonstrable principle, that contradictories cannot simultaneously be true. It is therefore clear that neither can infused prudence be without charity, nor, consequently, can the other moral virtues, since they cannot be without prudence.\textsuperscript{73}

The moral virtues require prudential judgments and prudence requires the ordering to the supernatural last end accomplished by charity. So whereas with Aristotle’s unity thesis the moral virtues require prudence to deliberate about means to attain the ends, Aquinas’s unity thesis links the moral virtues to the supernatural last end to which they are commanded by charity. The basic structure is the same.\textsuperscript{74} Charity (and the other theological virtues) require infused prudence in order to measure acts in accord with charity’s goal and the infused moral virtues in order to elicit the variety of acts which may be directed to that goal in various circumstances and situations. Also, all of the other virtues require charity in order to be well ordered to the supernatural last end.\textsuperscript{75} Charity unifies the virtues by directing them to its own end of loving God. I turn now to the process by which Aquinas thinks infused virtue is attained and grows.

\textsuperscript{73} ST Ia IIae q. 65 a. 2.

\textsuperscript{74} It is the same as Aquinas’s unity thesis with respect to the acquired virtues, that is.

\textsuperscript{75} For a very helpful treatment of charity’s role in commanding the other acts of virtue see Sherwin, By Knowledge & By Love, 180-81.
C. How is Infused Virtue Attained?

Aquinas maintains that even though God infuses the virtues at the same time, there is still a process of proportional moral growth by which one continues to grow in virtue. Proportional moral growth is a description of moral development even with respect to infused virtue. Again, this view differs from the third totalizing claim of the Stoics, namely that there is not progress beyond virtue. To possess infused virtue is not to be perfect in the sense of not needing to improve in any way. As Jean Porter has observed,

unlike the acquired virtues, [the infused virtues] are compatible with the presence of persistent contrary inclination, which would have been removed by habituation in the case of the acquired virtues, but which can remain in someone who has the infused virtues to such a degree as to render their operation difficult and unpleasant (I-II.65.3 ad 2). In other words, Aquinas allows for a great deal more actual imperfection on the part of those who are virtuous through grace, than those who are virtuous through their own labors!76

The question arises here of charity’s relation to vice. As observed in the previous chapter, Aquinas’s immediate predecessors maintained that charity expels all of the vices: “When one has virtue the contrary vice is directly opposed. But by one virtue entering [into a person] all vice is excluded, which is evidenced by charity being enthroned [in the person]. Therefore...all vice is excluded.”77 This view contrasts with Augustine’s view: The greatest charity, which admits no increase, exists in no human living on earth. So

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long as it admits of increase, what makes it less than it ought is due surely to vice.\textsuperscript{78}

Aquinas resolves this discrepancy by defining vice as the direct contrary to virtue and sin as the direct contrary to virtuous acts.\textsuperscript{79} Infused virtue cannot coexist with serious acts of sin. However, infused virtue can coexist with contrary dispositions to sin.

Because Aquinas maintains that serious active sinning and infused virtue are incompatible, among his first tasks is that of showing that the person who possesses charity is capable of sinning in the first place (thereby losing her charity). Here Aquinas compares “the opinion of those who held that charity, on account of its firmness, cannot be lost” to the similar “opinion of Socrates who held that one who has knowledge, on account of its nobility and certainty, cannot go astray.” Aquinas maintains that “each position is most powerfully disproved through experience.” Aquinas refutes the invincibility of charity claim by drawing from Aristotle’s refutation of the invincibility of wisdom. Aristotle argued that “knowledge chiefly consists in the universal, whereas actions are concerned with singulars.” But it is “concupiscence, which tends to the particular good unless it is restrained,” and when it is not restrained it “impedes the application of universal knowledge to the particular, absorbing the consideration of knowledge in a particular of action.” Therefore, even if “a morally incontinent man seized by the fervor of concupiscence considers rightly some universal, for example that all fornication is to be fled, nevertheless when he descends to this particular good by the


\textsuperscript{79} \textit{ST} Ia IIae q. 71 a. 4 ad. 2.
force of concupiscence, the habit of right reason is bound, so that he cannot carry through
an act of right consideration about the particular.” Aquinas says it is similar with charity:

In a similar way, too, charity is chiefly concerned with the eternal good, so that it
makes one have the universal conception that nothing is to be done against God;
but when a man descends to the particular, some temptation absorbs the aforesaid
inclination of charity, as was said about knowledge...Thus, the man who has
fallen into sin loses charity, since by sin he is divided from God, and this is
because he sets for himself another end and there cannot be two ultimate ends.
Hence, since charity has for its cause conjunction with God, it is immediately lost
by one act. And this immediate loss may be found in all accidents that have a
cause outside of the subject in which they exist, because nothing can remain in
being once it has been separated from its essential cause, as is evident with light.
However, it is otherwise with habits that have their cause in the subject itself,
because they are not totally destroyed through one act of sin.\(^{80}\)

Aquinas is preserving the key role of charity without making it into a quality that offers a
sort of invincibility in the moral life. In a sense, charity is the most fragile of the virtues,
since it can be lost through even one isolated act. Nevertheless, Aquinas’s claim is not
that the person who possesses step 3 virtue is free from contrary dispositions to sin. He
considers an objection based on Augustine’s claim that perfect charity is not compatible
with cupidity, which is the root of all evil. To this, Aquinas replies, “although cupidity is
not actually present in him who has charity, still the root of it remains in the soul, and
through charity it can be blocked so that it does not rush forward into act. But when
cupidity is not blocked, it starts germinating and expels charity.” Aquinas replies to the
next objection by arguing that “charity is expelled in the very instant in which sin comes
to be; and just as that instant is the first in which sin begins to be, so it is the first in

\(^{80}\) II Sent. d. 31 q.1 a.1; see also ST Ia IIae q. 63 ad. 2.
which charity begins not to be.” Vice, then, is an operative habit of sin, and it cannot coexist with step 3 virtue. In this way, the person with step 3 virtue still has room to morally advance as the intensification of her charity lessens the force of contrary dispositions to sin.

The infused virtues advance towards perfection through repeated correct moral action; charity is always received from an external cause (God). Properly speaking, then, no one can actually cause charity within themselves through correct action. They can participate in the process through correct action. According to Aquinas, charity is a created habit given according to the agent’s natural capacity. The capacity of the soul to receive charity, then, comes both from natural endowments and efforts of the soul which impact its disposition to receive charity:

\[\text{It should be said, therefore, that the measure according to which charity is given is the capacity of the soul itself, which is at once from nature and from the disposition that comes through the effort of works. And because a better nature is more disposed for one and the same effort than an inferior nature, it follows that the one who has better natural endowments, when there is an equal effort of works, will receive a greater share of infused perfections than the one who has inferior natural endowments, and the one who has inferior natural endowments, if there be a greater effort in the work, will sometimes receive more than the one who has better natural endowments.} \]

Hence, the natural dispositions which one possesses does not impact the infusion of charity and its accompanying virtues but the “share” which he or she receives of these perfections insofar as he or she is more or less “apt and prepared” for virtue. The sun


\[\text{\textsuperscript{82} III Sent., d. 17 q.1 a. 4; see also ST IIa IIae q. 24 a.1 ad. 1.} \]
shines less brilliantly in L.A. smog than in the Rockies, but that is not due to a defect in
the light of the sun. It is due to the diversity of aptness between the former and the latter
as caused by the activities of the peoples who have lived there. The infusion of charity is
impacted by “preceding powers and habits.”

Aquinas does not understand the infusion of charity to be a once and for all
moment. Rather, charity when infused into an agent according to his or her disposition
can increase in intensification as the agent’s disposition to receive charity continues to
expand through subsequent acts of charity:

I say that when charity is increased, nothing is added there; for just as the
Philosopher explains in Physics IV, something is made whiter or hotter not by the
addition of some other whiteness or hotness, but rather because the same quality
which was in it before is intensified according to nearness to a term…Hence, just
as what is non-hot is made hot through the power of what is actually hot, not
because some hotness is placed there, but rather because the hotness that is in
potency in the non-hot is brought into actuality, so also the less hot comes to be
hotter through the action of what is hot, insofar as the hotness which was already
in the former in the manner of an imperfect act is brought into a greater perfection
and a greater likening to the agent.

Aquinas’s understanding of charity’s intensification through nearness to its term also
informs his unity thesis:

Now an intensification of charity does not occur because the power of the agent is
strengthened, but only because the nature receiving—which, in regard to what is
in it, has a certain disposition according to which it is in potency to many things—
is more and more prepared for the reception of grace, insofar as it is gathered
from the aforesaid multitude of potentiality into one, through those operations by

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83 It is fitting that for Aquinas the virtues would need to be connected both on the level of grace
and the level of nature, since grace perfects the person in a manner that is in keeping with her nature. In this
way, Aquinas’s departure from his predecessor’s unanimous rejection of connected acquired virtue is made
clear.

84 III Sent., d. 17 q.2 a.2; see also ST IIa IIae q. 24 aa. 6-8.
which someone is prepared for charity, as was said before. And therefore Dionysius always describes the perfection of holiness as characterized by a rising up from a divided life into a unified one.\textsuperscript{85}

The intensity of charity has an infinite capacity for increase on the part of the soul itself, since “to the extent that it receives more of the divine goodness and the very light of grace,” the more it is made is apt for receiving these; and therefore the more it receives, the more it is able to receive.\textsuperscript{86} In this way, just as Aquinas’s vision of the virtuous life with respect to acquired virtue “might most realistically be described as the life devoted to achieving perfect unity of the virtues, with the recognition built-in that we are always on the way towards that perfect unity,” the same may be said with respect to infused virtues.\textsuperscript{87} Growth in virtue, even infused virtue, is proportional moral growth. I turn now to Aquinas’s repudiation of the totalizing claims of the Stoics, which he follows Augustine in rejecting.

\textit{D. Complete Charity}

Aquinas employs different terminology than Augustine to explain the distinction between perfect virtue in this life and absolutely perfect virtue in the next life. Aquinas explains that the term “complete” can be taken in three senses: “complete simply speaking; complete in relation to a thing’s nature, and complete in relation to a stage of time.” Aquinas continues by defining “complete simply speaking” as something which is

\textsuperscript{85} III Sent., d. 17 q.2 a.2; see also ST IIa Ilae q. 24 aa. 6-8.

\textsuperscript{86} III. Sent., d. 17 q.2 a.4; see also ST IIa Ilae q. 24 aa. 6-8.

\textsuperscript{87} Daniel McInerny, \textit{The Difficult Good}, 85.
complete “in all respects and lacks no type of completeness.” He defines something as complete in relation to its nature if it “lacks nothing that is naturally possessed by that nature. For example, to say that a person’s intelligence is complete does not mean that he understands everything intelligible, but that he understands everything human beings naturally understand.” Finally, something is “complete in relation to a stage of time” if it “possesses everything that is naturally possessed at that stage: we can call a child complete if he possesses whatever a human being needs to possess at its age.” Having established his terms, Aquinas argues that “only God possesses complete charity simply speaking. Human beings may possess charity complete in relation to their nature, but not in this life. Even in this life we can possess charity complete in relation to the stage of time.”

Human beings “may possess charity complete in relation to their nature, but not in this life.” Aquinas is following the Augustinian move of transferring absolutely perfect (simply complete) virtue into the next life. Virtue unfolds in “stages of time” and our charity can be complete relative to that. In other words, charity advances by degrees. Like

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88 De frat. a. 10. He concludes by noting that the one exception is Christ, since it was distinctive of him that he was both travelling and in possession of his destination at the same time. See also III Sent. d. 17 q. 2 a.4. “I say that charity’s increase comes to some limit in each man beyond which it is not in fact increased, but nevertheless it does not come to some term beyond which it cannot in principle be increased. The reason for this is from both that which is moved according to the increase and that to which it is moved. Now that to which the soul is moved in an increase of charity is the likeness of divine charity, to which the soul is likened; and this, being infinite, can be approached infinitely more and more, and will never be perfectly equaled. On the other hand, the reason for the possibility of infinite increase on the part of the soul itself, to the extent that it receives more of the divine goodness and the very light of grace, is made all the more apt for receiving these; and therefore the more it receives, the more it is able to receive.” For the treatment in the *Summa* see Ila Ilae q. 24 a. 8.
Augustine, Aquinas maintains that step 3 virtue is impossible without charity and charity cannot be absolutely perfect in this life and grows by degrees.

Aquinas equates the unfolding of charity with a journey toward a destination. Step 3 virtues are part of that journey. Vice impedes it. The theological virtues concern the destination directly. Charity is understood as a “virtue of man on the way,” because charity has “by its very nature an inability to remain at rest as long as it has not reached its term, and that is why charity is normally in perpetual growth.”89 This is the very reason why charity is said to increase:

Here below, charity can increase. For we are called wayfarers by reason of our being on the way to God, Who is the last end of our beatitude. In this way we advance to the extent that we draw closer to God. And it is not the steps of the body that bring us closer, but the affections of the soul. Now this approach is the result of charity, since it unites our soul to God. Consequently, it is essential to the nature of charity here below that it can increase, for if it could not, the progressive path that characterizes our earthly life would not exist. Hence the Apostle calls charity the way, when he says: “I am going to show you a yet more excellent way.”90

From what has been said, it is clear that Aquinas posits gradations of goodness between the possession of charity in this life and the absolute perfection of charity in the next one. Hence, like Augustine, Aquinas does not envision a life “here below” that has no room for moral improvement.

As observed above, Aquinas arrives at his theory of moral development by means of a comparison with biological development. As the hand and fingers grow at a

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90 *ST* IIa IIae q. 24 a. 4.
proportional rate, so too do the virtues. Aquinas also uses the comparison with biological
develop to posit distinct stages which occur in the spiritual life. Just as growth in the
natural life is characterized by distinct stages, the same can be said with respect to
spiritual development:

The spiritual increase of charity may be compared with man’s bodily growth. We
can, doubtless, distinguish many degrees, yet it has certain fixed divisions
characterized by actions or pursuits corresponding to that growth. Thus infancy
precedes the age of reason; another stage begins with the use of reason and
speech; then comes puberty and the possibility of reproduction, and so on until
full development. In like manner, the diverse degrees of charity are distinguished
according to the different pursuits inspired by development itself. For at first
keeping away from sin and resisting concupiscence, which lead in a direction
opposed to charity, is the main concern. This concerns beginners, in whom charity
has to be nourished or strengthened lest it be destroyed: in the next phase, the
main concern is the intention of progress in the good. This is the pursuit of the
proficient, whose aim is mainly at strengthening their charity by adding to it.
Finally, there is a third pursuit whose chief aim is union with and enjoyment of
God. This belongs to the perfect who “depart to be with Christ.” This is the very
law of motion: we see the body distance itself from its point of departure, then
progressively approach, and finally, at the end, find repose. 91

Commenting on this passage, J. P. Torrell has noted that “Thomas knows quite well that
in life things are never so simple as in this tripartite scheme. He thus concedes that we
could envision many other gradations; but if we look at the matter closely, he says, we
always come upon a scheme of this kind.” 92 The person who possesses step 3 virtue, then,
is somewhere along a spectrum of gradations which fill in the space between the various
kinds of spiritual perfection possible in this life and the absolute perfection possible only
in the next. Aquinas’s theory may be understood by the metaphor of a ladder reaching

91 ST IIa IIae q. 24 a. 9.

92 Torrell, Saint Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master, 360. These stages are not original to Thomas.
from earth to heaven. There are several rungs along the way and greater height amounts to greater unity of the virtues even if absolutely perfect unity is not possible until the next life. Also, in this life we can go up as well as down the ladder. The life of virtue is a struggle and not an entirely upward movement. The only one who never had to struggle with virtue was Christ who possessed the virtues of the purified soul.\textsuperscript{93}

Having completed my account of Aquinas's unity thesis, I return now to the objections of the first chapter in order to ascertain whether Aquinas's thesis is susceptible to them.

\textsuperscript{93} \textit{ST} IIIa q. 7 a. 2.
Good Qualities or Virtues?

If inseparability is the criterion for virtue, then no one is virtuous. This is the impossibility of virtue objection. Inseparability divides the population into those devoid of virtue and those absolutely perfect in virtue. The former cannot progress since they have no point of contact with the latter, and the latter cannot advance since they are already perfect. There are no states of progress leading up to the possession of virtue and no further progress once virtue is attained. This is the impossibility of moral progress objection. Lastly, the denial of habits objection contends, the data does not support the claim that behavior is determined by robust traits (virtues) or associations of said traits. Aquinas’s unity thesis, I argue, affirms inseparability in a manner that is not susceptible to these criticisms.

This chapter unfolds in three sections corresponding to the objections enumerated in the first chapter of this dissertation. With respect to the denial of habits objection, a Thomistic analysis highlights the significance of prudence for the moral life. Without prudence, there can be no virtue. Upholders of the impossibility of virtue objection are unsuccessful in their attempts to redefine virtue without prudence, and their critiques of inseparability follow from their definition of virtue. Finally, Aquinas, since he does not affirm the Stoic totalizing claims, can account for moral progress leading to virtue as well as further progress for those who possess virtue.
I. The Denial of Habits Objection

Aquinas and Doris agree that there is such a thing as good dispositions. These do not rise to the level of habit. They are unstable, and they can be mixed with bad dispositions. However, Aquinas and Doris disagree over the issue of whether anything more than this can take root in an individual. Aquinas believes that people develop habits or second natures that emerge from repeated action and make one more or less virtuous.\(^1\) As the previous chapter shows, for Aquinas the key to becoming virtuous is the attainment of prudence, which enables one to determine the right way of acting in specific situations. For example, one may need to “assist a stranger more than one’s own father if, for example, the stranger is in extreme need, while one’s father suffers a lesser need.” At the same time, however, “in the case of two people, one whom is more closely united to us, while the other is in greater need, it is not possible by a general rule to determine whom we should assist more, for there are various degrees of need as well as of union; this requires the judgment of the prudent person.”\(^2\) But, Doris argues on the basis of his review of experimental research, human behavior is determined more by situational factors than prudential judgments following from a robust trait which inheres in the practical reason. In this section, I argue that a Thomistic analysis of the data reviewed by Doris demonstrates the indispensability of prudence to acting well and indicates how prudence is the dividing line between true and false virtue.

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\(^1\) Or vicious if they choose poorly.

\(^2\) ST IIa IIae q. 31 a. 3.
Starting with Milgram’s obedience experiments, all agree it is wrong to torture a person only because someone in a white lab coat has insisted to do so. This is why it is alarming that sixty-five percent of the participants in the study did precisely that.\(^3\) But why did they? According to Doris, they were not merely “sadists;” rather, the situation in which they found themselves influenced their behavior to a high degree.\(^4\) A Thomistic analysis does not require one to deny either of these claims. However, the study shows that general rules, such as “obey authority,” are not enough to live well. Helping one’s father over a stranger may be the wrong thing to do “if, for example, the stranger is in extreme need, while one’s father suffers a lesser need.”\(^5\) Disobeying authority may be the right thing to do if the authority in question is prescribing unjust actions. There is not “a general rule” by which to differentiate all the cases where authority is to be followed from all the cases where dissent is in order, which is why “the judgment of the prudent person” is required.\(^6\)

A Thomistic response to the Milgram experiments, then, is that the sixty-five percent of participants deemed obedient did not act prudently in that particular instance. Their actions underscore the significance of prudence for acting well. Imagine if the experiments had been real! But the fact that they did not act prudently in this situation does not mean that they are devoid of virtue (though it may), or can never attain it. At the

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\(^3\) Doris, *Lack of Character*, 42. At least, they thought they were doing so.

\(^4\) Ibid. In my view some of them could have been sadists or otherwise vicious, but I agree with Doris that the data provided is insufficient to make this judgment.

\(^5\) *ST* IIa IIae q. 31 a. 3.

\(^6\) *ST* IIa IIae q. 31 a. 3.
least, their failure to act well illuminates an area where they are in need of further moral growth. In fact, Milgram himself acknowledged his hope that the study would accomplish precisely that. He wanted the sixty-five percent of participants deemed obedient to learn from their mistakes in order to improve their moral characters.⁷

Isen and Levin’s dime experiment and the Princeton Theological Seminary experiment, on the one hand, and the Stanford prison experiment, on the other, are alarming for opposite reasons. The former is disconcerting, since the majority of subjects behaved poorly on the basis of such seemingly insignificant variables (not finding a dime, being in a hurry to complete a survey). In contrast, the latter study is disturbing because the situational factors (institutional prison dynamics) seem so dominant and complex that it is difficult to blame the subjects for not acting well in spite of them. I turn to the Stanford prison experiment first.

With respect to the guards, Doris remarks, they “seemed rather to enjoy their roles. Prohibited by experimenters from employing physical punishment, they improvised all manner of creative sadisms such as requiring prisoners to clean out toilets with their bare hands…[and] hosing down prisoners with fire extinguishers.”⁸ Interestingly, this

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⁷ See S. Milgram, Obedience to Authority, postscript. Also, see Joel Kupperman’s analysis of Milgram’s study in “Virtue in Virtue Ethics,” Journal of Ethics 13 (2009): 243-55. In addition, Sabini and Silver argue that “the import of the social influence studies is that the exercise of practical intelligence is, in specific circumstances, harder than the commonsense view expects. This fact might give us reason to believe that the virtuous characters are rarer than we might have imagined, but it does not trouble the notion of character or show that virtue is unattainable.” Sabini and Silver, “Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued,” 557.” Finally, Doris himself recognizes that situationism could actually help people improve their behavior: “Presumably, many people are ignorant of the details of situationism, and before the development of the tradition everyone was. Now you or I, familiar as we are with the phenomena, might be responsible for paying insufficient attention to determinative situational stimuli. (My apologies: By reading this book, you’ve taken on a whole new set of responsibilities!)” Doris, Lack of Character, 153.
study again involves the subject of authority. Whereas the Milgram study bids one to analyze prudent responses to authority (on the part of the subjects), the Stanford prison experiment invites an analysis of the prudential exercise of authority. The point to be made here is that prudence must discern not only effective means to an end, but also just means to an end. Doris notes that the “creative sadisms” employed by the guards were in response to the threat of “prisoner insurrection.” The guards may have succeeded in squashing the insurrection, but this does not mean that they acted justly. Indeed, one can envision any number of ways that authority figures may effectively coerce behaviors in an unjust and therefore imprudent manner. The guards failed to discern just means to the good end of maintaining order, which is the role of prudence. The poor choices of the guards again point to the significance of prudence for acting well. Whereas Milgram’s obedient relied on a general rule rather than a prudential judgment, the Stanford Prison guards failed to distinguish between just means to an end and effective means to an end.

The dime and Princeton Seminary experiments both involve subjects acting poorly by not helping someone in need of help. From a Thomistic standpoint, these studies show that developing the habit of prudence requires attentiveness to the manner in which different situations predispose one to certain kinds of behavior. Avoiding poor behavior involves recognition of the situations that may occasion this behavior, and these occasions may involve factors the commonsense point of view would not expect. The

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helping behavior experiments raise basic questions: am I less likely to act justly toward others if I am in a hurry? Am I less likely to help others if I am in a bad mood? In brief, is my good behavior linked to qualities I have acquired through repeated right action that are firm and constant, or is my good behavior merely tied to situational regularity and my mood on a given day? One can see why Aquinas and the classical thinkers differentiated between the good actions that follow from the firm and unchanging state of the virtuous person and the occasional good actions which follow from less stable factors.

The question that all of the preceding arguments pose is whether the kind of prudence Aquinas champions can ever be had. Based on experimental research, Doris does not think so. Surely, Doris’s study highlights the difficulty of prudence. There are so many ways that one can fail to act prudently. But it is for this very reason that Aquinas makes prudence the dividing line between true and false virtue:

Certain virtues, for example, temperance, justice, and gentleness, order us in ordinary areas of human life. In this area, while one is engaged in one type of virtuous activity one must either also be engaged in exercising the other virtues; thus one will acquire the all the virtues at the same time; or else do well in respect of one and badly in respect of others. In the latter case, one will acquire a disposition that is contrary to some one of the virtues, and therefore destructive of practical wisdom [prudence]. But without practical wisdom the tendency acquired through acting in accordance with the other virtues will not have the distinctive character of virtue.10

The studies reviewed by Doris show that prudence is indispensable to acting well in the “ordinary areas of human life.” My conclusion, then, is that Aquinas’s unity thesis is not susceptible to the denial of habits objection not because Aquinas proves that there is such a thing as virtue in a way that is responsive to the empirical literature but because that

10 De virtut. card. a. 2. ad. 9.
literature itself supports a key Thomistic claim relative to the definition of virtue. I turn now to an analysis regarding the possibility of such virtue.

II. The Impossibility of Virtue Objection

Common to both the denial of habits objection and the impossibility of virtue objection is the claim that inseparability discounts the good qualities of ordinary people. Whereas Adams refers to these good qualities as virtues or modules of virtue, Doris defines them as “dispositions.”11 Virtues differ from dispositions in two ways. First, behavior following from dispositions can be “readily disrupted by situational variation.” Second, “evaluatively inconsistent dispositions may ‘cohabitite’ in a single personality.”12 The virtues of “the evaluatively integrated self [i.e. the inseparable virtues],” on the other hand, “are reliably manifested in trait-relevant behavior across a diversity of trait-relevant eliciting conditions that may vary widely in their conduciveness to the manifestation of the trait in question.”13 And the exclusionary thesis maintains that “virtues and vices cannot coexist in a single personality.”14 According to Doris, while the psychological literature supports the existence of dispositions that interact with

11 Doris, *Lack of Character*, 24-5. Dispositions may also be bad qualities. Doris maintains that “evaluatively inconsistent dispositions may “cohabitite” in a single personality.”

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., 22.

situational factors to determine behavior, it does not support the existence of robust traits (virtues) and certainly not the connected virtues of the “evaluatively integrated self.”

In addition to being a more accurate assessment of the relationship between personality traits and behavior, Doris contends, recognizing the validity of situationist psychology has a normative advantage. Doris links inseparability to “global condemnations” of individuals, which he regards as “inimical to community, charity, and forgiveness.” In this section, I contend that Aquinas’s unity thesis can accommodate this concern by accounting for the “good qualities” of those not absolutely perfect in virtue. The same is true with respect to the good qualities affirmed by Adams, MacIntyre, and Porter. However, affirming a person’s good qualities need not mean conflating those qualities with virtue.

A) Natural Dispositions to Virtue and Other Good Qualities

Aquinas’s account of the virtues recognizes the kind of good “dispositions” analyzed by Doris and redefined as virtues by Adams. Not only can natural dispositions to virtue exist alongside natural dispositions away from virtue, this is in fact the only state in which we find natural dispositions to virtue. Natural dispositions to virtue are also unstable. This is a point of agreement. At issue is whether these natural dispositions to

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15 Doris, Lack of Character, 168.

16 De virtut. comm. a. 8. ad. 10.

17 ST Ia IIae q. 49 a. 2.
virtue, or any other non-fully virtuous qualities can nonetheless count as “good qualities” in the Thomistic account.

Doris’s emphasis is on individuals who have behaved poorly, either in minor ways, like failing to help someone pick up some dropped papers, or in more significant ways, such as participating in the Nazi death camps. In each case, Doris rejects a global condemnation of the figures under review. They are not merely “callous,”18 or “an aberrant pocket of sadists,” or a “bunch of meanies,”19 or “possessed of uniformly evil dispositional structures”20 Nor do people possess uniformly good dispositional structures: “Oskar Schindler saved over a thousand Jews in Poland from deportation and murder, but he was also a manipulative, hard-drinking, and womanizing war profiteer who did not particularly distinguish himself either before or after the war.”21

A Thomistic account of virtue can account for the good qualities that Doris explains and thus need not involve having to make the kind of “global condemnations” of character Doris links to affirmations of inseparability. From a Thomistic standpoint, the figures Doris reviews may lack prudence in one of two ways. Some of them they may have natural dispositions to virtue mixed with natural dispositions away from virtue. Others, Wirths and Mengele perhaps, might have a vice or vices, which are dispositions shaped by practical reason, but poorly, and thus also lack prudence. Others may have step

18 Doris, Lack of Character, 31. Here he is referring to those deemed “non-helpful” in Isen and Levin’s dime experiment.

19 Doris, Lack of Character, 42. He is referencing Milgram’s obedience experiments.

20 Doris, Lack of Character, 54. He is referring to SS doctors.

21 Ibid., 58.
3 virtues along with contrary dispositions. Still other may have some degree of step 2 virtue. Though all of the figures who populate the various categories may theoretically possess good qualities in Aquinas’s account, not all necessarily possess virtue. If Aquinas accepted the Stoic definition of virtue, then he would not have a way to affirm the good qualities of those not absolutely perfect in virtue. However, since Aquinas follows Aristotle in distinguishing between natural dispositions to virtue and step 2 virtue, and since he follows Augustine in maintaining that virtue can be possessed by degrees, he has multiple ways to affirm the good qualities of people those not absolutely perfect in virtue.

It could be objected that I have introduced a category “non-virtuous good qualities” in order to merely deflect Doris’s objection without responding to it. In fact, Doris seems to preempt this kind of an argument when he remarks that “defenders may claim that inseparability holds only for perfect virtue “allowing them to acknowledge “the abundant appearances of separability and simply insist that these cases involve something less than the full realization of virtue.” In one sense, Aquinas does maintain that “inseparability holds only for perfect virtue.” In fact, as the previous chapter demonstrates, Aquinas qualifies perfect virtue as perfect on the grounds that it is connected through prudence. On the other hand, Aquinas does not contend that the virtues only begin to form a unity once they reach their “full realization.” Instead, Aquinas posits a theory of proportional moral growth. The virtues grow together at a proportional rate. As McInerny explains, there are degrees of unity:

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22 Ibid., 21.
While admitting that no one said the virtuous life was going to be easy, we should add that no one ever said (except the Stoics) that the virtuous life had to be capped off in order to be fully virtuous. There are, in other words, degrees of perfection and of unity in the attainment of the virtues, and it is reasonable to suppose that we can achieve a certain level of perfection and unity in the life of virtue without having yet achieved absolutely perfect unity of the virtues. Accordingly, the virtuous life might most realistically be described as the life devoted to achieving perfect unity of the virtues, with the recognition built-in that we are always on the way towards that perfect unity.\textsuperscript{23}

As this dissertation makes clear, one does not need to endorse the Stoic totalizing claims in order to defend inseparability nor does one commit oneself to these claims by upholding inseparability. In fact, Augustine and Aquinas expressly deny these claims while upholding different versions of inseparability.

Doris criticizes inseparability for discounting the good qualities (by which he means good dispositions) of moral agents by judging them in relation to the impossible standard of “globalism.” Since people’s good qualities cannot meet this standard, global condemnations of character tend to follow. But Aquinas’s unity thesis can affirm the good qualities of people not absolutely perfect in virtue in multiple ways. Therefore, Aquinas’s thesis is not susceptible to this portion of Doris’s objection. I turn now to Adams.

\textit{B. The Too High a Bar for Virtue Critique}

According to Adams, inseparability discounts the good (which for Adams, unlike Doris, means virtuous) qualities of individuals, since “human moral excellences or

\textsuperscript{23} Daniel McInerny, \textit{The Difficult Good}, 85.
virtues are real but typically *fragmentary.*”24 Discrete virtues, he contends, are separable from each other and can be further divided into discrete “modules” of that virtue. According to Adams, one does not need to possess all of the modules of a discrete virtue comprehensively in order to truly possess a given set of discrete modules of the same virtue. Adams does not argue that every module of virtue is a true virtue. Rather, he contends, “modules that are too small or too local,” may in some circumstances not count as virtue.25

Adams does not offer a clear criteria by which one may distinguish non-virtuous “modules that are too small and local” from true modules of virtue. This can be observed in Adams’ treatment of courage. He defines courage as a “willingness to face fears and risks” with respect to “one’s most important” aims. The importance of the aims is “to be measured…by the commitment one has to them.”26 Therefore, Adams argues, courage “can be manifested in fighting for an unjust cause, if the decision to fight and face dangers takes account of the fighter’s main aims, unjust as they may be.”27 Here Adams seems to acknowledge that courage necessarily involves practical reason. His claim is that courage is still courage even if the practical reason of the agent is poorly shaped. If the agent were prudent, in Adams’s view, then her courage could become “part of the excellence of comprehensive Virtue. That is a reason for counting their courage as a

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25 Ibid. If Aquinas endorsed the totalizing claims of the Stoics, then this objection may apply to him, but he does not as I have explained at length.


27 Ibid., 176.
virtue.” In Adams’ view, “the ability and will to run serious risks in accordance with one’s judgment is an impressive strength that will and should be admired even in those whose judgment is mediocre.” But he excludes playing Russian roulette as indicative of such an “impressive strength,” since here the agent has failed to accurately assess his or her most important aims, a function of prudence. Preserving one’s life is and should be a more important aim than impressing others by taking unnecessary risks. Teenagers playing chicken in a car is another example. Adams uses prudence to distinguish false modules of courage from true modules in some instances, but in other cases he does not. Adams does not explain why the “courage” of the rash Russian roulette player or the teenager playing chicken could not become part of the excellence of comprehensive virtue if the agent acquired prudence.

In order to have a consistent standard, Adams needs to affirm either that virtue requires prudence or it does not. If it does, then either an identity or unity thesis follows. If it does not, then neither thesis is necessary, but he has no standard by which to distinguish the “courage” involved in playing Russian roulette from a true module of virtue. For how is one to determine one’s most important aims? On the one hand, Adams submits, they are “to be measured…by the commitment one has to them.” Thus,

28 Ibid. Though Adams denies the existence of complete virtue, he does accept comprehensive virtue as a sort of nearer or nearest approximation of the transcendent principle.

29 Ibid., 187.

30 Ibid., 187.

31 Ibid. 26. Adams acknowledges that he does not have a “tightly defined criterion of virtue.”
regardless of the aims, the willingness to face fears and risks for the sake of them is virtuous, which could include Russian roulette. So prudence is not essential to virtue. On the other hand, if one has inaccurately accounted for her most important aims, then her modules of virtue are “too small and local” to count as virtue. So prudence is necessary for virtue.

Despite the inconsistency of Adams’ criteria for virtue, there are good qualities he affirms, such as “courage” ordered to an unjust cause. At issue, then, is whether Aquinas’s unity thesis can account for this. Aquinas and Adams can agree that the “courage” in question (the ability to face fears and risks for the sake of an unjust cause to which one is committed) would be improved were it ordered to a just cause through prudence.\(^3\) However, for Aquinas the superior state or states in which this courage would emerge are indeed those states described in detail by his unity thesis. A virtue must accurately account for the agent’s overall good.\(^4\) This is why courage needs the other virtues: “perfect moral virtue is a habit that inclines us to do a good deed well; and if we take moral virtues in this way, we must say that they are connected, as nearly all are agreed in saying.”\(^5\)

At issue, then, between Adams (and really all the objectors of the first chapter) and Aquinas is a basic but complex question: “when is one virtuous enough to be said to

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\(^{32}\) Ibid., 173.

\(^{33}\) This is what I take Adams to mean by “better motives.” Adams, A Theory of Virtue, 176.

\(^{34}\) I take (1) to concern prudence, (3) the moral virtues, and (2) both.

\(^{35}\) ST Ia I1ae q. 65 a.1.
possess a virtue?” In one sense, Adams acknowledges, the “courage” of the soldier committed to an unjust cause is a potential excellence, which seems to suggest there is something lacking. Yet, it is due to its potential that he defines it as a virtue. It has the potential to become “part of the excellence of comprehensive Virtue. That is a reason for counting [it] as a virtue.” But, for Aquinas, the “courage” under review here is at best a natural disposition to virtue. It is not a virtue until it is “joined by right reason.” Like semblances of virtue, step 1 virtue can detract from the flourishing of an overall life and even lead to self-destructive tendencies, which is why it is not a virtue:37

A natural disposition to the good of virtue is a certain beginning of virtue, but it is not perfect virtue. For the stronger this disposition is, the more dangerous it may be, unless it be joined by right reason which makes the right choice of the fitting means to the due end; just as a running horse, if it were blind, would fall more heavily the faster it runs, and the more grievously would it be hurt.38

Nevertheless, that Aquinas refers to this as “a certain beginning of virtue” is significant. Adams and Aquinas seem to agree that there are qualities that are potentially excellent and may be conceived of as preceding greater excellence. However, Adams argues that a potential virtue is a virtue nonetheless. Aquinas says that it is not a virtue until joined with right reason.

This is a key finding of this dissertation. Disagreement over inseparability stems from discrepancy between definitions of virtue. It is not as though there is agreement as

36 Adkins, A Theory of Virtue, 173.


38 ST Ia IIae q. 58 a. 4.
to the definition of virtue, but disagreement as to whether the virtues are inseparable. In fact, the qualities thinkers such as Adams insist are separable are importantly different from the qualities Aquinas and his philosophical and theological predecessors insisted were inseparable. The separable virtues affirmed by scholars like Adams are what Thomas would label dispositions. They can be used for either good or evil, they may bring harm to the soul, and the variety of ends to which they may lead has no intrinsic connection with human flourishing.

Those who define virtue in a way such as Adams and then deny inseparability may be critiqued for three reasons. First, they deny inseparability by their definition of virtue. Donagan recognizes and admits that the “doctrine of the unity of the virtues follows if every virtue is defined as a disposition that accords with right reason.” Defining the virtues as not having to be in accord with right reason and then objecting to the inseparability thesis as applied to these “virtues” is to apply the thesis to dispositions that all agree are separable. Second, to define the virtues apart from right reason is to fail to recognize the crucial role of prudence in distinguishing true virtue from false virtue. Doris’s review of empirical research inadvertently speaks to this importance as does Adams’s inconsistent utilizations of prudence in order to disqualify certain modules of virtue as too small or local to count as virtue. Finally, there seems to be a common but unargued assumption that unless virtue is defined in this way there can be no recourse to affirming the good qualities of ordinary people. But Aquinas’s unity thesis shows that

one can affirm degrees in the possession of virtue. Aquinas does not say that those who are yet to attain virtue are devoid of virtue. The opinion that they must be devoid of virtue he equates with the Stoics who erred when they said “that no one possesses a virtue without possessing it supremely.” According to Aquinas the Stoic position “does not seem to follow from the character of a virtue, because there is such a variety of ways in which people share in a virtue.”

In sum, Aquinas can affirm the good dispositions of those not absolutely perfect in virtue without redefining virtue as a disposition that may occasionally lead to good actions should the person luck into the right situation or have aims which happen to be just. Prudence is the dividing line between true and false virtue but not between those absolutely perfect in virtue and those utterly devoid of it. I turn now to MacIntyre’s objection to inseparability.

C. The Moral Conflict Critique

The key difference between the too high a bar for virtue critique and the moral conflict critique is that whereas the former argues that the absence of a given comprehensive virtue or module of virtue does not disqualify some other virtue or module of virtue, the latter argues that the presence of a character flaw or flaws does not disqualify it. In After Virtue, Alasdair MacIntyre presents the inseparability thesis in the context of “a confrontation between Aristotle and Sophocles” over the tragic hero. The

\[40 \text{ De virtut. card. a. 3.}\]
issue is whether the “tragic” element in narratives which depict a tragic hero is due to a character flaw on the part of the hero or to the situation in which the hero finds himself.

MacIntyre presents Aristotle as the advocate of the former and Sophocles as the supporter of the latter. Since MacIntyre sides with Sophocles regarding the centrality of opposition and conflict in human life, he rejects the inseparability thesis:

Both Plato and Aristotle treat conflict as an evil and Aristotle treats it as an eliminable evil...It follows that conflict is simply the result of flaws of character in individuals or of unintelligent political arrangements. This has consequences...for his...theory of knowledge...[J]ust as conflict is not central to a city’s life, but is reduced to a threat to life, so tragedy as understood by Aristotle cannot come near to the Homeric insight that tragic conflict is the essential human condition—the tragic hero on Aristotle’s view fails because of his own flaw, not because the human situation is sometimes irremediably tragic.42

The issue, then, is whether to uphold inseparability, in and of itself, involves denying the claim that “the human situation is sometimes irremediably tragic.” Aquinas supports the unity thesis but does not have any difficulty noting that Job, “a man perfect in every virtue” found himself in such a situation.43 I find Aquinas’s thesis allows for more “flaws of character” in people progressing towards virtue than MacIntyre recognizes. But the crux of MacIntyre’s critique is directed toward linking the virtues with prudence. If prudence is either a necessary or sufficient condition for virtue, in

41 MacIntyre, After Virtue, 163.
42 Ibid.
MacIntyre’s view, then those in “irremediably tragic” situations will be faulted for something beyond their control. This is because our perceptions of the “cosmic order [are] such that we cannot bring rival moral truths into complete harmony with each other.” Hence, MacIntyre critiques inseparability on the basis of the definition of virtue it entails.

Making prudence a necessary condition for virtue, as Aquinas does, responds to the same problem today that it responded to in Socrates’ day, namely, that of moral relativism. As observed prior, Donagan admits that the “doctrine of the [inseparability] of the virtues follows if every virtue is defined as a disposition that accords with right reason,” but asks, “why so define them—except to secure that result?” An answer to this question can be found in a recent work by Christopher Lutz, who has argued that to deny the inseparability of the virtues “absolutely entails moral relativism.” The problem with “virtues” that do not accord with right reason, according to Lutz, is that they “have no moral content” and may be “destructive rather than perfective of the person.” “If virtue is divorced from right reason, then it loses its moral content:

Justice may be reduced to fairness. Prudence may be reduced to effective cleverness; perhaps the strongest definition possible would be effective cleverness

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44 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 143.


47 Lutz, “Is MacIntyre’s Theory of Tradition Relativistic?” 95.

in the pursuit of the perceived good of a whole human life. Fortitude can be reduced to “avoiding cowardice and intemperate rashness in the face of harm and danger.” Temperance can be reduced to self-control before pleasure.

As Lutz further contends, “any of these reductive shells of the virtues may be possessed to an admirable degree in isolation from all the others.” However to maintain that virtues do not need to be in accord with right reason “is to empty [them] of any falsifiable content.” If fortitude is not directed by prudence, then it reduces to an effective skill to carry through with any kind of action in the face of danger and harm. If temperance is not linked to prudence, then it reduces to an efficient knack to deny certain pleasures. Consequently, because these separable and content-less “virtues” operate independently of a right apprehension of the good, they may be equally present in a “Missionary of Charity or a Nazi torturer.”

According to Lutz, to maintain that a quality does not need to be in accord with right reason in order to be virtuous does enable one to refer to more things as virtuous, but this is only because the virtues have been rendered “content-less” and “unfalsifiable.” Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle were responding to an issue that had emerged in the preceding philosophy, but this was not the possibility of tragic conflict as understood by Sophocles. Rather, it was the sophist demotion of virtue to an effective skill. For the thinkers MacIntyre critiques, the mere fact that a particular skill is useful or effective does not qualify it as a virtue. In order for a skill to qualify as a virtue, it must also be a moral quality: “Socrates’ originality lay in using ‘aretē’ as a moral quality—rather than

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49 Ibid., 100.

50 Ibid.
merely as a skill that is a prerequisite of success.” In order for a quality to be virtuous it must either be wisdom or be accompanied by wisdom since wisdom makes it “a fine and noble thing,” but folly makes it “just the opposite, harmful and injurious.” Virtue is fine and noble, but Socrates refuses to call “a thing fine which is of the injurious and harmful sort.” For this reason, “virtue” without wisdom is not virtue. Therefore, Aristotle defines virtue as an “activity of the soul in accord with reason or requiring reason.” And Aquinas affirms this. As the following passage makes clear, for Aquinas, defining virtue as in accord with right reason and affirming inseparability go hand in hand:

Accordingly for a man to do a good deed, it is requisite not only that his reason be well disposed by means of a habit of intellectual virtue; but also that his appetite be well disposed by means of a habit of moral virtue. And so moral differs from intellectual virtue, even as the appetite differs from the reason. Hence just as the appetite is the principle of human acts, in so far as it partakes of reason, so are moral habits to be considered virtues in so far as they are in conformity with reason.

A person cannot be said to be virtuous until her practical reason is well shaped by prudence and her appetite well shaped by the moral virtues so as to partake in reason. These two things do not happen apart from each other, since if an individual exercises himself “in good deeds in regard to one matter, but not in regard to another, for instance, by behaving well in matters of anger, but not in matters of concupiscence; he will indeed acquire a certain habit of restraining his anger; but this habit will lack the nature of virtue,


52 Laches 192 c-e.


54 ST Ia IIae q. 58 a. 2.
through the absence of prudence, which is wanting in matters of concupiscence.” In the same way, natural dispositions to virtue “fail to have the complete character of virtue if prudence be lacking.”

In sum, contemporary thinkers such as Doris, Adams, and MacIntyre are critical of inseparability, because they reject the classical criteria for virtue introduced by Socrates and affirmed by Aristotle and Aquinas. The good qualities affirmed by these thinkers differ in everything but name from virtue as understood by Thomas. For Doris these good qualities are dispositions that interact with situational factors in a complex way sometimes leading to good actions. Adams calls these qualities true virtues but inconsistently introduces prudence to sometimes divide between true and false modules of virtue and sometimes not. Finally, MacIntyre’s definition of virtue seems to demote virtue to an “effective cleverness in the pursuit of the perceived good of a whole human life.” These thinkers succeed in showing that inseparability does not follow from the definitions of virtue (or dispositions for Doris) they endorse, but they have not shown that inseparability does not apply to virtue that conforms with right reason.

In order to overturn the classical criteria for virtue, contemporary thinkers insist that the standard of virtue introduced by ancient philosophy cannot be attained. For Doris this is because “evaluatively inconsistent dispositions may ‘cohabitate’ in a single

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55 ST Ia IIae q. 65 a.1 ad. 1.

56 At least Doris acknowledges that these are not virtues, but that is only because he thinks that there are no such things as virtues.

57 Lutz, “Is MacIntyre’s Theory of Tradition Relativistic?” 100.
personality.\textsuperscript{58} For Adams it is because “human moral excellences or virtues are real but typically fragmentary.”\textsuperscript{59} And for MacIntyre it is because our perceptions of the “cosmic order [are] such that we cannot bring rival moral truths into complete harmony with each other.”\textsuperscript{60} Jean Porter agrees that the inseparability thesis sets an impossible standard for virtue, and so it is to her analysis that I now turn.

\textit{D. Reply to Porter}

I have argued that Aquinas’s unity thesis is not susceptible to the impossibility of virtue objection since this objection argues for the separability of qualities which Aquinas can agree are separable. The key difference is that Aquinas thinks there are qualities beyond these, virtues, which are inseparable. However, the question arises of whether it is possible for anyone to attain the virtues that meet the standard set by Aquinas’s definition of virtue, a definition that renders virtue inseparable. As Porter remarks, the inseparability thesis “is widely dismissed as a prime example of a moral theory that is hopelessly at odds with our experience.” Inseparability introduces a “criterion for virtue…so stringent that it could never be met,” which provides a “sufficient reason to reject the thesis.”\textsuperscript{61} A key example of this is Martin Luther King Jr. If his virtue is disqualified, then whose virtue can qualify? Porter puts the would be defender of

\textsuperscript{58} Doris, \textit{Lack of Character}, 24-5.

\textsuperscript{59} Adams, \textit{A Theory of Virtue}, 171.

\textsuperscript{60} MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue}, 143.

inseparability in the unfavorable position of either having to deny the virtue of King or finally part ways with the thesis. In this subsection, I argue that Aquinas’s unity thesis does not require one to deny the virtue of King in the manner Porter supposes.

Porter argues that King’s virtue may be tested under both the criterion for acquired and infused virtue, so for the sake of clarity I follow her procedure. With respect to the acquired virtues, Porter notes, in Aquinas’s view “someone who has a virtue may not always exercise it, or may, on occasion, even act contrary to an acquired virtue without thereby losing it.”62 However, in Porter’s view, this “does not help much,” because “what we see in the case of the flawed saint [King] are not isolated bad acts, but patterns of bad activities, that is to say, vices, which seem to coexist with heroic virtues.”63 Moreover, Aquinas’s understanding of acquired virtue, according to Porter, “seems to imply that anyone whose life is marked by a pattern of serious moral struggle, in any respect, is therefore not a person of true virtue.”64 Thus, the courage of King would have to be placed in the same category as the brave bank robber, and she thinks that “there must be something wrong with that conclusion.”65

Porter is right that Aquinas’s thesis places them in the same category, if that category is “those who have not yet achieved absolutely perfect unity of the virtues.”66

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62 Ibid., 528-9.
63 Ibid., 529.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
However, this does not mean that normative judgments cannot be made within the
category. Again, this is because Aquinas maintains that virtue consists in degrees.

The character of virtue does not consist in being the best of its kind in itself, but
with reference to its object. For it is through virtue that someone is ordered
towards the upper limit of his capacity, that is towards doing things well. That is
why Aristotle says that virtue is the tendency of something complete towards
what is best. However, someone can be more disposed or less disposed towards
what is best; accordingly, he has virtue to a greater or lesser degree. 67

Unless Porter is arguing that King’s virtue is perfect in the sense of being “capped off”
with no room to progress, there is not a problem with placing King and the bad brave
bank robber in the same category. One is “more disposed” toward what is best and
another “less disposed.” Hence, one has “virtue to a greater degree” and one to a lesser.
Virtue can exist more in some and less in others. Or perhaps we could simply say that the
brave bank robber is not really brave, since he lacks prudence.

Porter’s point is similar to MacIntyre’s. Aquinas’s unity thesis “seems to imply
that anyone whose life is marked by a pattern of serious moral struggle, in any respect, is
therefore not a person of true virtue.” 68 Porter acknowledges that those in possession
of the infused virtues may, in Aquinas’s view, continue to experience moral conflict and
struggle due to “the effects of past habits or some other cause.” 69 Thus, Aquinas “can
indeed allow for the possibility that someone who is truly virtuous is nonetheless also
morally flawed in some ways.” 70 But Porter does not think this can account for figures

67 De virt. comm. a. 11 ad 15.
69 Ibid., 530; ST Ia IIae q. 65 a. 3 ad. 2.
such as King since it pertains to “moral flaws” that “are not too serious.”\textsuperscript{71} According to Porter,

the difficulty lies in the fact that repeated infidelity seems to imply a kind of callousness, or at best a lack of appropriate regard, both toward one’s spouse and also toward one’s other partners. And it is hard to see how this is compatible with King’s passion for justice and the consistent stance of forbearance and concern toward others which he displayed throughout his life. Yet King’s passion for justice and his forbearance are beyond question. How can this be?\textsuperscript{72}

Porter has understood Aquinas correctly here. To add precision to her claim, the distinction between moral flaws that can coexist with virtue and moral flaws that are “too serious” is as follows. Moral flaws exist in the virtuous person as contrary dispositions to sin. These become “too serious” once one acts on them which expels charity. As Aquinas says, “although cupidity is not actually present in him who has charity, still the root of it remains in the soul, and through charity it can be blocked so that it does not rush forward into act. But when cupidity is not blocked, it starts germinating and expels charity.”\textsuperscript{73}

For Aquinas our actions always impact our character, and there is no virtue, not even charity, that makes us finally immune to acting poorly. The virtues are inseparable, but they are not invincible. As observed in the previous chapter, Aquinas compares “the opinion of those who held that charity, on account of its firmness, cannot be lost” to the similar “opinion of Socrates who held that one who has knowledge, on account of its

\textsuperscript{70} Porter, “Virtue and Sin,” 532.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid. Her italics.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
nobility and certainty, cannot go astray.” Aquinas contends that “each position is most powerfully disproved through experience.” He responds to the invincibility of charity claim by drawing from Aristotle’s refutation of the invincibility of wisdom. Aristotle argued that “knowledge chiefly consists in the universal, whereas actions are concerned with singulars.” But it is “concupiscence, which tends to the particular good unless it is restrained,” and when it is not restrained it “impedes the application of universal knowledge to the particular, absorbing the consideration of knowledge in a particular of action.” Hence, even if “a morally incontinent man seized by the fervor of concupiscence considers rightly some universal, for example that all fornication is to be fled, nevertheless when he descends to this particular good by the force of concupiscence, the habit of right reason is bound, so that he cannot carry through an act of right consideration about the particular.” In a similar way, Aquinas contends, charity gives one a “universal conception that nothing is to be done against God; but when a man descends to the particular, some temptation absorbs the aforesaid inclination of charity, as was said about knowledge.”

Here Aquinas is affirming, not denying, the possibility of ongoing struggle in the moral life. But, according to Porter, Aquinas does not allow for enough struggle: “My own view is that the example of King, and other flawed saints, offers nearly conclusive evidence that Aquinas was wrong to say that the life of charity is inconsistent with serious sin.”

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74 II Sent. d. 31 q.1 a.1; see also ST Ia Iae q. 63 ad. 2.

If Aquinas claimed that the person with charity lacks contrary dispositions to sin, then Porter would be right in her contention. If Aquinas said that the person with charity never does sin or is incapable of sinning then Porter’s argument would stand. But Aquinas explicitly denies both of these claims. Moreover, Aquinas’s belief that charity is “immediately lost by one act of sin” does not mean that “the life of charity is inconsistent with serious sin,” since, according to Aquinas, although charity can be lost through a single act, it can also be restored through a single act of repentance:

An act of repentance is, by virtue of grace, able to destroy a vicious habit that has been generated. That is why if someone has the vice of intemperateness, when he repents it no longer remains there alongside the infused virtue of temperance in the character of a vice. Rather, it is already in the process of being destroyed, and has become instead a sort of tendency. However, a tendency is not the contrary of a perfected habit.77

To sin is to turn away from the source of infused virtue, God. To repent is literally to “turn back” to God. To summarize Aquinas’s view as an assertion that “the life of charity is inconsistent with serious sin” does not adequately attend to Aquinas’s understanding of ongoing struggle in the moral life.78 In Aquinas’s view, the virtuous person has contrary dispositions to sin and may even act on them thus expelling charity. This person then needs to repent so as to regain charity. This is not a denial of serious moral struggle but Aquinas’s description of it.

76 II Sent. d. 31 q.1 a.1; see also ST Ia IIae q. 63 ad. 2.

77 De virt. comm. a.10 ad. 16.

In sum, the serious struggles of Martin Luther King Jr. are not evidence that Aquinas’s unity thesis introduces a “criterion for virtue…so stringent that it could never be met,” thus providing a “sufficient reason to reject the thesis.” With respect to the acquired virtues, if Aquinas maintained that one either had to be absolutely perfect in virtue or lack virtue entirely, then that would be the case, but Aquinas’s view is that one can possess “virtue to a greater or lesser degree.” With respect to the infused virtues, if Aquinas understood the person with infused virtue as having no propensity or capacity to sin, or recourse to virtue once they had sinned, then Porter’s critique would be correct. But Aquinas explicitly denies all of these claims. If Aquinas were a Stoic, then he would define virtue as an absolute state that does not allow for gradation. But he follows Augustine in rejecting this view. The Stoic version of inseparability cannot account for figures like King, but Aquinas’s can. His unity thesis does not entail the further claim that “no true virtue is to be found on earth.” Thus, it is not susceptible to the impossibility of virtue objection. Nor is it susceptible to the impossibility of moral progress objection to which I now turn.

III. The Impossibility of Moral Progress Objection

Those who uphold the impossibility of moral progress objection argue that inseparability entails the further claim that all people either possess all of the virtues or


80 De virt. comm. a. 11 ad 15.

are devoid of virtue. This raises three problems with respect to theories of moral progress. First, it denies a “point of moral contact” between both groups since it gives attributes to those who lack virtue nothing “on which to build” so as to progress from the lack of virtue to the possession of it. Second, it suggests that those who possess virtue “could not be morally improved in any way.” Thus, those devoid of virtue cannot progress since its members have no point of contact with those who possess virtue. Nor can those who possess virtue progress, because they have nowhere to go but down. Their virtue is “capped off.” Finally, the idea, in and of itself, that everyone in the world must be placed into one of these two groups seems erroneous. Even if one were to accept that there are some people in the world who lack all the virtues and some who possess them all can there not be a great number of people somewhere in between who cannot properly be said to reside in either group? In this section, I argue that Aquinas’s unity thesis is not susceptible to this objection, because Aquinas accounts for moral development through his theory of proportional moral growth and holds that one can progress in virtue by degrees.

A. Moral Progress for Those Lacking Virtue

According to MacIntyre, the inseparability thesis makes moral progress impossible because it eliminates the possibility of “moral contact” between those who

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possess virtue and those who lack virtue. MacIntyre envisions a courageous and temperate Nazi:

Consider what would be involved, what was in fact involved, in the moral re-education of such a Nazi: there were many vices that he had to unlearn, many virtues about which he had to learn. Humility and charity would be in most ways, if not quite in every way, new to him. But it is crucial that he would not have to unlearn or relearn what he knew about both cowardice and intemperate rashness in the face of harm and danger. Moreover, it was precisely because such a Nazi was not devoid of the virtues that there was a point of moral contact between him and those who had the task of re-educating him, that there was something on which to build. To deny that that kind of Nazi was courageous or that his courage was a virtue obliterates the distinction between what required moral re-education in such a person and what did not. Thus, I take it that if any version of moral Aristotelianism were necessarily committed to a strong thesis concerning the unity of the virtues (as not only Aquinas, but Aristotle himself were) there would be a serious defect in that position.  

In MacIntyre’s view, then, “a strong thesis” of inseparability threatens to make moral progress impossible by “[obliterating] the distinction” between what requires moral reeducation and what does not.

Yet Aquinas does not conceive of the attainment of virtue as a sudden transition from vice to virtue. According to Aquinas, the act by which a virtue is formed “is attained out of many good acts, insofar as a subsequent act always occurs in virtue of all the preceding ones—as is evident in drops of water hollowing a stone. The act by which one attains virtue is the last act in a series of acts ordered to the same end. To say that an engineer has built a bridge through one stroke of a hammer is false, but to say that he has completed a bridge through one stroke of a hammer may be true. In addition, it is

84 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 180.
85 I Sent. d. 17 q. 2 a. 3.
important to differentiate between the radicalized identity thesis of the Stoics and Aquinas’s unity thesis. Drowning and not drowning are not the only possible moral states in Aquinas’s account, because he affirms that virtue is possessed by degrees. Aquinas does not deny virtuous and non-virtuous states, but he affirms many gradations in between: “while the Peripatetics say that progress lies between virtue and vice,” the Stoics “believed there is nothing between virtue and vice.” Aquinas follows Aristotle:

The character of virtue does not consist in being the best of its kind in itself, but with reference to its object. For it is through virtue that someone is ordered towards the upper limit of his capacity, that is towards doing things well. That is why Aristotle says that virtue is the tendency of something complete towards what is best. However, someone can be more disposed or less disposed towards what is best; accordingly, he has virtue to a greater or lesser degree.

But MacIntyre’s key argument is that those who lack virtue cannot begin to progress if they lack all of the virtues. Unless one has “something on which to build” one cannot progress in virtue. But must the “something” be a virtue? If so, then this leads to an infinite regress. One could not have some virtue unless they previously had some other virtue, and they could not have had that virtue unless they previously had some other virtue and so on. It makes more sense for these “somethings” to be natural dispositions to virtue mixed with natural dispositions away from virtue. According to Aquinas, a person in this state is capable of acting rightly, and “through such activity the opposing

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86 Vitae 7.127, tr. Inwood and Gerson 144; quoted in Houser (1994).

87 De virt. comm. a. 11 ad 15.
tendencies are removed at the same time as the virtues come into existence.\footnote{De virtut. card. a. 2 ad 2.} Aquinas explains this in the following way:

Virtue is generated by actions which are virtuous in one sense and not in another. The actions that occur before virtue exists are virtuous from the point of view of what is done. The person is doing just or brave things. They are not virtuous from the point of view of how they are done; for before someone has acquired a virtue, he does not do the things that virtue does in the way that a virtuous person does them, that is, readily, without any hesitation, with pleasure, and without difficulty.\footnote{De virtut. comm. a. 9 ad 13. Aristotle employs a similar mechanism. See Daniel McInerny, The Difficult Good, 76-80.}

If it were impossible to act virtuously without possessing the habit of virtue, then it would be impossible to attain virtue regardless of whether the virtues are inseparable or separable. But, according to Aquinas, when the person who lacks virtue acts virtuously he or she advances by degrees towards the possession of virtue since virtue “is attained out of many good acts.”\footnote{I Sent. d. 17 q. 2 a. 3.} Aquinas does not think that the virtues are obtained one by one. Rather, he equates the growing of virtuous habits to the manner in which a hand grows. As the whole hand grows, the fingers grow “at a proportional rate.” Thus, with respect to acquired virtue, as prudence (the hand) grows so to the fingers (the moral virtues) at a proportional rate.\footnote{De virtut. card. a. 3 ad. 1. My translation; cf. a. 2 ad. 13. Ad primum ergo dicendum, quod ratio illa procedit de inaequalitate quae est et attenditur secundum ipsas virtutes, non de inaequalitate quae est secundum inesse ipsarum, de qua nunc loquimur. Caritas enim, ut ditum est, secundum se est major omnibus aliis virtutibus; sed tamen, ea crescente, etiam proportionaliter crescent omnes aliae virtutes in uno et eodem homine; sicut digiti manus secundum se sunt inaequales, tamen proportionaliter crescent. This is why I refer to Aquinas’s theory of “proportional moral growth.”}
In sum, Aquinas’s unity thesis does not disallow the possibility of moral progress. MacIntyre is right that Aquinas’s is a “version of moral Aristotelianism…committed to a strong thesis concerning the unity of the virtues,” but this does not entail the “serious defect” which MacIntyre argues follows from “that position.”92 Aquinas’s theory of moral development provides those lacking virtue with “something on which to build.” It is true that these are not isolated full virtues, but to assert that they must be raises more problems than it solves for the reasons I have already explained. In order for MacIntyre's critique to be effective he would need to explain why the theory that virtues are acquired one by one makes more sense than Aquinas’s theory of proportional moral growth, but MacIntyre offers no such explanation. I turn now to Adams critique of the possibility of progress for those in who possess virtue.

B. Moral Progress for Those Possessing Virtue

Adams argues that “there is no such thing as complete human virtue; no such thing as a fully good human life if that means a human life that could not be morally improved in any way.”93 He thinks inseparability entails that there are such lives, so he rejects inseparability. But Aquinas agrees that, in this life, there is no such thing as “a human life that could not be morally improved in any way.”

92 MacIntyre, After Virtue, 180.

93 Adams, A Theory of Virtue, 173.
That some, even in this life, possess all of the virtues simply does not, for Aquinas, entail the further claim that they have no room to improve morally. In *De virtutibus communis*, the objector argues that those who possess virtue cannot increase in virtue, since “nothing advances beyond its own completeness because that is a thing’s finishing point. However, virtue is what completes whatever has it; for Aristotle says that virtue is the tendency of something complete towards what is best. Therefore virtue does not increase.” Aquinas responds that “not everything that is complete in some sense is as complete as possible, but only what is actualized to its upper limit. Therefore nothing prevents something from being complete with respect to virtue, and then being completed still further.”\(^{94}\) As observed in the previous chapter, the term “complete,” for Aquinas does not have a single referent.

Though something is either incomplete or complete, Aquinas’s view is more complex. As observed in the previous chapter, he holds that the term “complete” can be taken in three senses: “complete simply speaking; complete in relation to a thing’s nature, and complete in relation to a stage of time.” He defines “complete simply speaking” as something which is complete “in all respects and lacks no type of completeness.” Also, a thing can be complete in relation to its nature if it “lacks nothing that is naturally possessed by that nature. For example, to say that a person’s intelligence is complete does not mean that he understands everything intelligible, but that he understands everything human beings naturally understand.” Finally, something is “complete in relation to a stage of time” if it “possesses everything that is naturally possessed at that stage: we can

\(^{94}\) *De virt. comm.* a. 11 ad 18.
call a child complete if he possesses whatever a human being needs to possess at its age.”

With these clarifications in mind, Aquinas argues, “only God possesses complete charity simply speaking. Human beings may possess charity complete in relation to their nature, but not in this life. Even in this life we can possess charity complete in relation to the stage of time.”95 Clearly, for Aquinas, to possess virtue in this life does not entail being as “complete as possible,” though it does entail being “complete in some sense.”

The chief disagreement between Aquinas and Adams, therefore, is not over whether anyone can be absolutely perfect in this life; both agree that one cannot. It is rather over whether greater “degrees of perfection” in virtue corresponds to greater “unity in the attainment of the virtues.”96 Adams argues it does not, because he believes “the quest for virtue cannot yield more than an always and necessarily incomplete and fragmentary approximation to a transcendent goodness.”97 Aquinas, in contrast, holds that “the perfection of holiness [is] characterized by a rising up from a divided life into a unified one.”98 Whereas Adams asserts that virtue is “always and necessarily incomplete,” Aquinas differentiates between differing degrees of completion. At any rate, Aquinas’s unity thesis simply does not entail the further claim that those who are virtuous in this life have no room left for moral improvement, so he is not susceptible to this objection.

95 De frat. a. 10.

96 McInerny, The Difficult Good, 85.


98 III Sent., d. 17 q.2 a.2; see also ST IIa IIae q. 24 aa. 6-8.
IV. Conclusion

Does a person need to possess all of the virtues to possess even one of them? The contemporary moralists surveyed here agree that inseparability sets an unattainable standard for virtue. These thinkers rightly affirm the good qualities of ordinary people, whether these be mere dispositions that interact with situational stimuli in a complex manner (Doris), or modules of virtue that fall short of comprehensive virtue in important respects (Adams), or even the heroic virtues of Martin Luther King Jr. (Porter). They think that to affirm inseparability leads to “global condemnations of character” (Doris) or “obliterates the distinction” between a person’s good and bad qualities (MacIntyre), or discounts the virtue of anyone “whose life is marked by a pattern of serious moral struggle” (Porter). Some contemporary moralists also deny inseparability, because they think it leads to inaccurate accounts regarding the possibility and significance of moral progress. In brief, they think that the standard of inseparability means that no one ever has been virtuous or ever could be.

However, Aquinas can affirm inseparability while avoiding these problematic claims, as this dissertation has shown. But Aquinas provides more than a way to affirm inseparability in a manner that avoids the totalizing claims of the Stoics. Aquinas’s unity thesis is an important source for reflection on what it means to be virtuous. For Aquinas, the virtuous person is capable of discerning the right ways to act across the various domains relevant to the moral life with ease and consistency. Her emotions and appetites are not mere slaves or obstacles that interfere with her ability to live well but active participants readily following her wise judgments. And these judgments are not ordered
to aims that are unjust but to that which is true, good, and beneficial to the soul. Her actions and the character from which they follow are praiseworthy and lead to flourishing as she achieves and indeed surpasses the natural end for which she was made. In my view, Aquinas’s unity thesis is not best understood as a judge standing over and condemning the good qualities of ordinary people even when those good qualities do not rise to the level of virtue. Rather, Aquinas’s understanding of the unity of the virtues provides a valuable and worthwhile account of virtue as a fine and noble thing.
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