VIRTUE IN ST. BONAVENTURE:
A STUDY IN BONAVENTURIAN ETHICS

A Dissertation
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Bonaventure’s moral philosophy centers around his discussion of the virtues, with the most significant text being found in the third book of his Commentary on Lombard’s Sentences. Using this as the primary source, the dissertation considers Bonaventure’s moral philosophy from the standpoint of intellectual history, and then explores ways in which his ideas might usefully intersect with or contribute to contemporary philosophical discussions.

The dissertation opens with an examination of the role the virtues play in heaven, noting that Bonaventure (unlike Aquinas) understands the cardinal virtues to be focused (in Heaven as on earth) on natural, created goods. Moving on to questions concerning the will, the dissertation considers Bonaventure’s argument that free will is itself a habit or disposition, which arises in some way through the cooperation of will and intellect. In exploring the virtue of faith, Bonaventure naturally broaches questions about the nature of belief, and about the kinds of ethical constraints that should govern the formation of beliefs. The distinctive
features of Bonaventure’s view are illustrated through an extended comparison to the work of Alvin Plantinga. This leads into a discussion of authority and the unity of the virtues, and here I acknowledge that, for all his elegance and subtlety, most contemporary thinkers will find Bonaventure’s views on this subject to be unacceptable.

Hope is a perplexing virtue for several reasons. The faculty to which it corresponds (i.e. the spirited part of the soul) has no obvious corollary within contemporary moral philosophy, but my treatment shows how, for Bonaventure, this virtue is an important tool for explaining human motivation.

Bonaventure’s discussion of charity is mainly focused on the formal role that this virtue plays in regulating the others. Some explanation is offered as to why this might be an issue of such importance for Bonaventure, and finally, in the concluding pages, brief mention is given to some later thinkers whose views seem to be broadly consonant with Bonaventure’s while at the same time offering the kind of nuanced treatment of love that is lacking in Bonaventure’s own work.
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Born Rachel Smith, the author of this work is the second child of Steven and Merina Smith. Owing to her father’s career (first in law and then in academia), Rachel’s childhood was divided among five different American states (and Edinburgh, Scotland), but she comes closest to being a native of Boulder, Colorado. There she learned to love nature and distrust political liberalism at Fairview High School, graduating in 1998.

Rachel first discovered philosophy as a freshman at Notre Dame where her development was particularly influenced by Alasdair MacIntyre, who initiated her study of the history of ethics, and who personally took the trouble to persuade her of the follies of Cartesian skepticism. Her time at Notre Dame included five months in Jerusalem, and also a summer of teaching English in Gaza City, Palestine. Following her graduation in 2002, her love of teaching and travel took her to Andijan, Uzbekistan, where she taught English and organized youth as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

Upon returning to the States, she began graduate school at Cornell, and soon thereafter catechesis at St. Michael’s Catholic Church in Scranton, PA. The latter took eight months to complete; the former eight years. During her three years in Ithaca, she became involved with a
group of Catholic graduate students, the Cornell Society for a Good Time. Here she learned to love Latin liturgy, and met her husband, dreamy fellow Cornell philosopher Mathew Lu.

Following her marriage in 2007, Rachel resumed her childhood life of following an academic career around the country, writing her dissertation along the way. Her sons, Charles and Dominic, were born in St. Paul, MN, in 2009 and 2012. In addition to doing philosophy and parenting, Rachel also cooks, gardens, sings and plays fantasy football. She is a member of St. Agnes Catholic Parish in St. Paul.
To The Cornell Society for a Good Time

Though her institutional life was short, its effects will, God willing, resound through eternity.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Nearly every word of this dissertation was written more than a thousand miles from Cornell, first in Knoxville, Tennessee, and then in St. Paul, Minnesota, where my husband and I are currently raising two boys. Writing a dissertation in absentia, while raising a family, is the sort of project that many begin and few complete. In general, the world seems not to feel much urgency about accommodating the needs of dissertating parents; our scholarly labors are viewed by most as a kind of odd hobby, which we should feel free to pursue only so long as no one else is inconvenienced. Thus I feel immense gratitude towards those who did assist me, beginning with Andrew Chignell, whose critical comments and supportive attitude were equally indispensible. Without Andrew’s help, it is very unlikely that this dissertation could ever have been finished. Of course, the other members of my dissertation committee also made invaluable contributions. Tad Brennan, by offering the perspective of a properly trained classicist, kept me honest and faithful to the texts. Scott MacDonald showed me what it meant to be a Cornell medievalist, and helped me to appreciate how much important work remains to be done in this field. Scott’s talents as a mentor are singular, and I regret that my absence from Cornell made it difficult to take full advantage of these; nonetheless he remains, in so many ways, an instructive example.

Outside of Cornell, I owe thanks to John Kress, who immeasurably broadened my philosophical perspective. Seth and Alex Hiland provided hospitality and
valued companionship during my occasional visits to Ithaca. Fellow philosopher-mothers Gloria Frost, Faith Pawl and Jennifer Rosato supplied encouragement and sympathy that enabled me to push through the exasperating later stages of the dissertation process. My parents, in a supreme act of generosity, allowed me to tell them about my doctoral work for eight long years, and never betrayed any doubt as to whether or not I would finish. And I would be remiss if I did not thank my elder son, Charles, for sharing his babyhood with St. Bonaventure, and my younger son, Dominic, for morally supporting me at my dissertation defense.

Lastly, and most importantly, I wish to thank my husband, Mathew Lu, for sticking with me through a much longer journey than either of us anticipated. In a young family, every project is truly a group project, and without his intellectual, moral and practical support, this dissertation would have been as dead as its primary subject. I only hope that the final product does credit to us both.
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Introduction

The Analytic Bonaventurean

The infusion of ancient thought into the medieval intellectual world sparked one of Western philosophy’s most dynamic and productive eras. No other period in Western history quite rivals this one in terms of the amount of important historical material that became available in such a short period of time. On a smaller scale, however, the re-infusion of old ideas into a new climate has often precipitated intellectual revival. Something of this sort might be said to have taken place in the nineteenth century with the rise of neo-Thomism.

Contemporary Thomism and the revival of medieval thought

In the early nineteenth century, medieval philosophy would have been regarded as quite an obscure area of scholarly expertise. It should be said that important medieval ideas and texts were never really lost in the sense of being completely inaccessible. The intellectual lull of the Dark Ages was not repeated, and the works of Aquinas and Scotus (among others) continued to be read within the Dominican and Franciscan orders. To some extent they were also taught in Italian and French universities, and it might also be argued that, insofar as the early modern philosophers were reacting against the medievals, their own criticisms of medieval thought may have kept it from falling into
complete obscurity. Nevertheless, by the eighteenth century, both Thomism and Scotism had largely stagnated. The real centers of intellectual life were the secular universities, whose anti-Catholic inclinations certainly did not dispose them to explore medieval manuscripts with particular attention.¹

The nineteenth century saw something of a revival of interest in medieval thought, which gathered real momentum with Pope Leo XIII’s release of Aeterni Patris in 1879. This document has understandably been dismissed by some as reactionary and pugnacious, but its impact on Western intellectual life was undeniable. It reads as a kind of “call to arms” to Catholic scholars, in which Pope Leo expounds the importance of responding to the erroneous claims of the modern philosophers, and rekindling Catholic intellectual life. Aquinas is identified as the best and most promising source from which to draw in revitalizing Catholic thought. This encyclical is normally viewed as a kind of seed or charter for Neo-Thomism, and in the decades after its release, medieval philosophy again became the object of considerable attention.

Pope Leo XIII can rest satisfied, insofar as Aquinas’ contribution to Western thought is now well-recognized. But Aeterni Patris, with its intense focus on Aquinas’ work, may also have had some effects which medieval scholars have reason to regret. As Alasdair MacIntyre explains in his discussion of the encyclical,

¹ This characterization of nineteenth century scholarship is largely taken from Alasdair MacIntyre’s God, Philosophy and the Universities. (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 131-164.
What it fails to recognize is the extent to which and the ways in which Aquinas developed his thought through a series of philosophical and theological conflicts and that those conflicts continued, indeed developed further, after Aquinas’s death. So *Aeterni Patris* woefully misrepresents medieval philosophy by failing to take account of the wide range of rival philosophical positions that were in recurrent contention.\(^2\)

These same deficiencies were also mirrored in the scholarship that followed on *Aeterni Patris*, and, looking over the body of neo-Thomist work, scholars a century later found themselves remarking on this noteworthy deficiency. In 1974, for example, Ewert Cousins wrote that,

> From the standpoint of interpreting the thirteenth century, the rise of neo-Thomism as a contemporary philosophical movement was, I believe, problematic. On the one hand, it enormously stimulated historical research, revealing the vitality of Thomas’ thought and bringing to life the drama of the intellectual ferment of the thirteenth century. But at the same time, it tended to provide a single perspective for viewing the thirteenth century and medieval thought as a whole. It is widely acknowledged that Thomas represents a shift of consciousness in the Middle Ages, whether this be interpreted as a significant break with the previous tradition, or a transformation of that tradition into a new mode. If this is the case, then to view medieval thought from the Thomistic shift of consciousness is problematic, since other perspectives may not be adequately explored.\(^3\)

Cousins goes on to express the hope that, by the time of his writing (in the early nineteen-seventies), the influence of neo-Thomism may have waned enough to allow for more exploration of other medieval perspectives. To a certain extent this has taken place, and there is good reason to hope that this process may continue as medieval philosophy becomes an area of interest for an ever-widening circle of scholars. Still, the project poses significant

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\(^2\) MacIntyre, 153.

challenges. It is one thing to decide that non-Thomist medieval perspectives are worth considering, and quite another to actually undertake the task.

The great intellectual historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries invested enormous energy into laying a foundation for the study of medieval thought. Contemporary medieval scholars will naturally draw on those resources in pursuing their own research, but this can make it difficult to escape from a neo-Thomist, Aquinas-centered paradigm. Aquinas looms very large in the contemporary scholar’s understanding of thirteenth-century thought. Clearly his philosophical contribution was enormous, but without doubting the brilliance of his work, we might still reasonably wonder: in responding to the call of *Aeterni Patris*, might contemporary scholars have unjustifiably sidelined other important medieval thinkers?4

These interpretive difficulties must be considered when undertaking the study of any of Aquinas’ thirteenth-century peers. It is always tempting, and in many ways sensible, to gain insight into somewhat-obscure historical figures by using their more-familiar contemporaries as touchstones. This provides a useful stock of foundational concepts, and gives the reader the satisfying feeling of filling in the details of a picture that was already grasped in outline. There are always drawbacks to this approach, however, and in this case the

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4 This is not to deny that Aquinas’ historical influence was considerable. Among the Dominicans Thomism remained the dominant philosophy throughout the early modern period; he is mentioned by such early modern philosophers as Descartes and Leibniz; the first Vatican Council reflects significant Thomist influences. There were, however, other medieval thinkers whose influence was considerable; in Franciscan circles, for example, Duns Scotus was the most-studied medieval figure in the centuries before *Aeterni Patris*. Pope Leo’s decision to crown Aquinas alone as the “prince of Scholastic philosophers” was not *per se* surprising, but neither was it the obvious thing to do.
drawbacks can be considerable. Much of the value of such a study lies precisely in its potential to expand our understanding of medieval thought beyond the traditional Aquinas-centered narrative.

**Bonaventure and Aquinas**

Aquinas’ long shadow has probably, to one degree or another, left quite a number of important thinkers in undeserved obscurity. But the case can be made that no other thinker who has suffered more from this “Thomist neglect” than St. Bonaventure. Bonaventure is in the unfortunate position of having too much in common with the Dominicans’ greatest philosopher. Because he is such an ideal contrast figure for Aquinas, it can be difficult for scholars to remember him in any other way.

It is worth taking a moment to appreciate the amazing parallels between these two men. Born within five years of each other, they became doctors on the precise same day, and died in the same year. They both spent the bulk of their scholarly life (though this was longer for Aquinas than for Bonaventure) in the University of Paris. Perhaps more importantly, however, Bonaventure was one of the leading lights of the Franciscan order in the thirteenth century. This in itself makes him a natural counterpoint to Aquinas, since each stands as the obvious example of an early “prodigy” from one of the two great religious orders of the Middle Ages.

From a historical standpoint, Aquinas and Bonaventure have something of the interest of intellectual “twins separated at birth.” Because they have so
many similarities, their differences are interestingly revealing of the character and development of their respective orders. This may help to explain why, in the golden age of Neo-Thomism, Bonaventure scholarship tended to focus on large-scale questions about the character of Bonaventure’s work. Instead of focusing on in-depth examinations of particular Bonaventurean arguments, scholars sought to determine his major intellectual influences, and to identify his larger philosophical goals.

Considering the circumstances of his life, one can hardly blame them for being perplexed by these questions. As a man, Bonaventure wore many hats. A more critical observer might even say that he was a maze of contradictions. Though committed to a life of simplicity and poverty, he was a powerful administrator who exercised control over considerable property. He was deeply devoted to St. Francis of Assisi, a mystic with pronounced anti-intellectual tendencies, and himself authored several profound mystical works. Nonetheless, he takes his place as one of the great Scholastic doctors, who helped lay a foundation for centuries of Franciscan philosophizing. He hides behind his work, insofar as we have relatively few reliable sources of biographical information. What we do know, however, gives us no reason to think that he had difficulty in reconciling his varied commitments and activities (except insofar as his administrative work left less time for scholarly labors.)

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5 For a more complete account of Bonaventure’s life, see Appendix A.
Add to this his (intellectual) kinship to Aquinas, and it is hardly surprising to find that scholars spent decades debating basic questions about Bonaventure’s influences, commitments and goals. Did he see himself primarily as a protegee of Alexander of Hales? Of Augustine? Could he accurately be characterized as the mouthpiece of “conservative” neo-Platonism in the mid-thirteenth century? Even more importantly, what was his position vis-a-vis Aristotle? How well versed was he in Aristotelian thought? Was he hostile to it? Did he seek to defend an Augustinian perspective over and against an Aristotelian one, or did he think these could be reconciled? Or did he simply view Aristotle as one of many possible sources of insight, to be used if and when his insights appeared applicable?

All of these questions were debated over the course of several decades, culminating in John Francis Quinn’s masterful volume, *The Historical Constitution of St. Bonaventure*, in which the evidence for each position is examined in some detail. It is not the primary purpose of this dissertation either to evaluate, or to supplement, Quinn’s painstaking work. Still, a synopsis of the relevant controversies, and of Quinn’s ultimate findings, may be in order in setting the stage for the present study. For the most part these discussions were not focused on ethical questions, but the controversies merit examination nonetheless. The meticulous textual study they inspired offers the best available platform from which a genuinely Bonaventurean study of ethics might begin.

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Bonaventure among the intellectual historians: Mandonnet and De Wulf

Following the lead of Pierre Mandonnet in the late nineteenth century,⁷ Maurice De Wulf holds that St. Bonaventure was the last great proponent of the Augustinian (or, as he prefers, pre-Thomist) perspective.⁸ De Wulf makes a point of noting Bonaventure’s great respect for tradition, and he and Mandonnet may reasonably be credited with labeling Bonaventure the “conservative” of his day, which reputation he held for many decades following. (Cousins, for example, repeats this claim as part of his grounds for recommending the study of Bonaventure.)⁹ At the same time, De Wulf may have been the first modern scholar to assert that Bonaventure does have his own philosophical system independent of his theology, and also to claim that this system, far from being anti-Aristotelian, has significant Aristotelian components.

In De Wulf’s view, the most important evidence of Bonaventure’s peripatetic tendencies is his acceptance of Aristotle’s distinction between form and matter, and his agreement that this critical metaphysical concept adds something beyond the distinction between essence and existence. Bonaventure’s philosophical system is not, in De Wulf’s view, as successful (or as Aristotelian) as Aquinas’, in large part because of his decision (which is

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⁹ Cousins, p. 6.
echoed in the works of the later Franciscans) to equate form and matter with act and potency. The consequences of this equivalence are significant. In the first place, if matter and potency are one and the same, then in some sense we must stipulate that even non-corporeal substances have matter. (Angels, for example, were a non-corporeal substance that would still, in Bonaventure’s synthesis, need a kind of matter in order to exist.) This also inclined him to accept the doctrine of the plurality of substantial forms (that is, the theory that there can be a multiplicity of forms within a single being) as a means of explaining the variety of changes that can be seen within a particular being over time. Aquinas, because he followed Aristotle in distinguishing form and act, is able to insist more unequivocally on the simple unity of a being with its one defining form. And this, of course, had further ramifications for other metaphysical puzzles, such as the problem of universals.

Since metaphysics is not the primary focus of this dissertation, I will not attempt to adjudicate these debates, but they are worthy of mention because, for De Wulf, they prove Aquinas to be the more consistently Aristotelian thinker. The fundamental principles of Bonaventurean philosophy are Aristotelian in some noteworthy respects, but he fails to follow through on these in a thorough and systematic way. The result, De Wulf thinks, is an imperfect Aristotelian foundation overlaid with traditional Augustinian ideas, with the result being a somewhat eclectic synthesis.10

10 De Wulf, Scholasticism Old and New: An Introduction to Scholastic Philosophy, Medieval and Modern. (New York: Benzinger Bros., 1907), especially pages 276-278.
De Wulf also seems to think that Bonaventure’s views were affected in significant ways by personal connections. Noting that Bonaventure (unlike some of his Franciscan contemporaries) never engaged in any serious critiques of Dominican philosophy, he hypothesizes that his close personal friendship with Aquinas may have dissuaded him from participating in such controversies. This theory seems speculative at best, since no strong evidence has ever been produced that the two were personal friends; moreover, it is far from clear that such a friendship, if it existed, would have dissuaded Bonaventure from critiquing Aquinas’ theories. It seems far more likely that two such brilliant men would be eager to debate philosophy together, if indeed they did enjoy one another’s company with some regularity.

Although it is evident that he has great respect for Bonaventure both as a mystic and a man, De Wulf’s Bonaventure has some fairly serious defects as a philosopher. He escapes the charge of being an anti-Aristotelian reactionary, but his philosophy seems to fall a bit short of the things it most sought to achieve. His Aristotelianism is less perfect than Aquinas’; meanwhile, interpretations of Augustine are colored by his attraction to Aristotle so that ultimately he is not true to either philosophy. Finally, his gentle temperament, together with his reverential attitude towards the Church fathers and his personal friendship with Aquinas, prevent him from fully developing his own ideas to their natural conclusions. If De Wulf’s reading of Bonaventure

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11 He says deferentially at one point that, “Posterity bows reverentially before this great master of contemplative mysticism.” See Scholasticism Old and New, 289.
12 Ibid, 282.
is accurate, then it seems quite reasonable that Bonaventure should be viewed as one of the lesser thinkers of the thirteenth century. However, De Wulf’s study of Bonaventure’s work seems to have been relatively superficial; certainly Bonaventure is never the object of any extended study for him.

**Etienne Gilson**

Etienne Gilson, in his book *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, paints a much more attractive picture of the great Franciscan. In many ways it might be more appropriate to call Gilson’s discussion a “spirited defense” of Bonaventure, especially in the early pages of his book, in which Gilson seems to be responding to the Quaracci editors who, despite their obvious respect for Bonaventure, lamented in their marginal notes that his early departure from the university (after his election as the Minister General of the Friars Minor) prevented him from bringing his intellectual gifts to their full fruition. Their standard of comparison is once again Aquinas, and they suggest that Bonaventure might eventually have achieved an Aristotelian synthesis on a level with Aquinas’ if only the circumstances had been right, “as though the poor man, lacking the resources of Aristotelianism and forced by his duties as a General of the Order to sacrifice his career as a teacher, had never been able

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14 Gilson refers to “the most zealous partisans” of St. Bonaventure before giving an accurate characterization of their view, by which he seems to mean the Quaracci editors.
to do more than draw out a rough sketch of the system and to attain a sort of Thomism *manque*."\[^{15}\]

Against this view, Gilson undertakes to show that Bonaventure does have a robust philosophical synthesis of his own, which is well worthy of study. Gilson further contends that this view can only be appreciated when Bonaventure’s thought is viewed in its totality, and not through a disparate examination of particular fragments. He writes:

> You can either see the general economy of his doctrine in its totality, or see none of it, nor would a historian be led by the understanding of one of the fragments to desire to understand the whole, for the fragments are quite literally meaningless by themselves, since each part reaches out into all the rest of the system and is affected by the ramifications leading to it from the synthesis as a whole.\[^{16}\]

These are strong claims, and in motivating them Gilson offers an equally extreme interpretation of Bonaventure’s attitudes towards Aristotle. According to Gilson, Bonaventure understood and rejected Aristotle from very early on in his studies. His *Commentaries on Lombard’s Sentences* may not reflect the full scale of this rejection simply because, during Bonaventure’s years at the University of Paris, Aristotle’s influence was not so pervasive as to cause him serious alarm.

But right at the beginning it is important to realize that St. Bonaventure did not set out upon a way that would have led to Christian Aristotelianism if he had not stopped too soon. The truth is that from the first he had attached himself to a doctrine which was

\[^{15}\] Gilson, p. 3.
\[^{16}\] Ibid, p. 436/
its radical negation. It was neither through ignorance nor by reason of a mere chronological chance that he did not become an Aristotelian.17

Over the course of his book, it becomes clear that the “radical negation” of which Gilson speaks relates primarily to the question of whether or not there could be a “pure” philosophy independent of Christian theology. Certainly Gilson would agree that Bonaventure was not in every respect the sworn enemy of Aristotle. Still, he is consistent in maintaining that, from the perspective of the modern scholar, Bonaventure’s interest lies precisely in his presentation of a non-Aristotelian synthesis of Christian doctrine. Although he often laments the tendency to cast Bonaventure as a diminutive Aquinas, it is evident that Gilson’s own understanding of Bonaventure’s thought is also filtered through his extensive study of Aquinas. He often explains Bonaventure by reference to Aquinas, with the main difference being that he aims to show, not that Bonaventure was less complete than Aquinas, but rather that he was less Aristotelian. In Gilson’s view, Bonaventurean philosophy has at its heart an Augustinian essentialist metaphysics, and in this sense it is indeed an example of a conservative medieval view.

Fernand Van Steenberghen

Fernand Van Steenberghen, writing shortly after Gilson,18 accuses him of overreacting against the remarks of the Quaracci editors. He offers perhaps the least flattering analysis of Bonaventure to be found in any of the great

17 Ibid, p. 3.
intellectual historians. Van Steenberghen evidently agrees with the Quaracci editors that, perhaps due to the brevity of his university career, Bonaventure’s work was somewhat underdeveloped. More significantly, Van Steenberghen opposes both De Wulf and Gilson in arguing that Bonaventure never develops a philosophical synthesis independent of his theological views. Philosophical reasoning is often employed in his work (particularly in the *Commentary*) but in these cases, the philosophy is strictly in service to the theology.

It should be noted that Van Steenberghen is inclined to view many medieval philosophers in this same light, including Aquinas, whose *Summa Theologica* is in Van Steenberghen’s view a work of theology. Still, Aquinas “had meditated deeply on philosophical problems and had carved out a solid system of philosophy before using it in theology; while St. Bonaventure did not do this to the same extent.”

Van Steenberghen’s Bonaventure is bound by his theological commitments in a way that interrupts his philosophical reasoning and prevents him from generating a coherent synthesis. He is influenced by several of the Church Fathers (especially Augustine), but also by Avicebron, Pseudo-Dionysius and some of the Arabian philosophers; unfortunately, he draws on these various sources somewhat haphazardly, making for an eclectic and inelegant mixture of theories.

Van Steenberghen disagrees with Gilson on another front, however, when he argues that Bonaventure is *not* anti-Aristotelian. On the contrary, he

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19 Van Steenberghen, Fernand. p. 159.
insists, Bonaventure shows the greatest respect for the Philosopher, using him as support whenever possible. When he must acknowledge errors in Aristotle’s work, he even searches for excuses to explain the mistake. Bonaventure’s acquaintance with Aristotle is, in Van Steenberghen’s view, fairly superficial. Nonetheless, there is a real sense in which Aristotle provides the philosophical foundation (such as it is) for his work. He accepts Aristotle’s logic, his core metaphysical theses, and many of his most characteristic theories in physics, biology and moral philosophy. There are no reasonable grounds on which to claim that he viewed Aristotelianism as, in Gilson’s words, “a philosophy condemned.” Instead, van Steenberghen characterizes Aristotle’s philosophy as the “stem” on which Neoplatonic and Augustinian doctrines are grafted in the Bonaventurean synthesis.\(^{21}\)

Van Steenberghen’s criticisms of Bonaventure seem to spring from his dissatisfaction with Bonaventure’s stance in several philosophical controversies of the period. Like De Wulf, he finds fault with Bonaventure’s metaphysics. The equation of form and act, as well as the theory of the plurality of forms, seem less plausible and less elegant than the Dominican theories. In addition, Van Steenberghen is dismissive of Bonaventure’s arguments concerning the eternity of the world, and he finds Bonaventure’s views on the individuation of souls to be insufficiently developed and thus unresponsive to the Aristotelian position. In the end, Van Steenberghen concludes that Bonaventure’s work can best be

\(^{21}\) *Ibid*, p. 171.
described as “an eclectic Aristotelianism with neo-Platonic tendencies, put at the service of an Augustinian theology.”²²

These are serious criticisms, not all of which can be adequately addressed in the present work. Van Steenberghen raises a number of points that deserve serious consideration (as for example when he notes how little of Aristotle’s work had been disseminated in the University of Paris during the most critical period of Bonaventure’s intellectual formation, thus giving us reasonable grounds to worry about the extent of Bonaventure’s exposure to Aristotle’s writings.)²³ However, it should be noted that Van Steenberghen, by his own admission, did not conduct a full and systematic study of Bonaventure’s texts. His methodology (as described in Aristotle in the West) was, “to take a certain number of soundings in the places where one would expect him to come to grips with the main errors of paganism and the characteristic doctrines of the philosophers.”²⁴

Although he claims that the picture that emerged from these “soundings” was “very clear”, it nonetheless seems reasonable to question whether a historian can gain an adequate appreciation of the shape of a philosopher’s thought from a study that was, by his own admission, very incomplete. Van Steenberghen’s selection of passages was presumably guided by his pre-existing ideas about the critical controversies of the thirteenth century, as formed by other thinkers and especially Aquinas. This might well lead to

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²² Ibid, p. 162.
²⁴ p. 150.
misunderstandings. While it is clear that Bonaventure drew insights from multiple historical sources, it seems rather unfair to conclude that these different elements of his thoughts are disjointed or haphazard, when one’s appreciation of that synthesis is itself the product of a somewhat haphazard selection of passages. A more complete study of Bonaventure’s work was clearly needed.

**John Francis Quinn**

Such a study can finally be found in the work of John Francis Quinn. Published in 1973, Quinn’s *Historical Constitution of St. Bonaventure* put something of a capstone on the discussion of how to characterize Bonaventure’s thought. Unlike Van Steenberghen, Quinn researched his book with a complete study of all of Bonaventure’s philosophical texts. Meticulous, detailed and painstakingly thorough, Quinn’s volume traces Bonaventure’s views on the most central questions of metaphysics and epistemology. In the final section, Quinn offers his own contribution to the debate about Bonaventure’s general methods and sources. In particular, he discusses Bonaventure’s general attitude towards Aristotle.

Contra Gilson, Quinn agrees with Van Steenberghen and De Wulf that Bonaventure was not anti-Aristotelian in his approach to philosophy. The Aristotelian influence on his metaphysics especially is obvious, and his attitude

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25 I am particularly indebted to Quinn for his analysis on this subject, which enabled me to trace those studies that were most relevant for the present project. Cf John Francis Quinn, *The Historical Constitution of St. Bonaventure* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1973), 843-892.
towards the Philosopher is respectful, not antagonistic. On the other hand, Quinn agrees with Gilson that Bonaventure’s philosophy offers a comprehensive synthesis independent of his theology, and that there is an underlying coherence to his perspective. Quinn does not seek to excuse Bonaventure’s hastiness or immaturity, because on the whole he does not regard this as necessary.

According to Quinn, Gilson exaggerates Bonaventure’s hostility towards Aristotle. This can be seen both in the tone Bonaventure adopts in speaking of Aristotle (which is consistently respectful) and also in Bonaventure’s liberal use of Aristotle’s texts and ideas in supporting his own theories. At the same time, Quinn also disagrees with Gilson’s characterization of Bonaventure as a devoted Augustinian. Although he agrees that Bonaventure was influenced by Augustine, he carefully traces Bonaventure’s metaphysical influences (particularly pertaining to the question of the knowability of God) in order to show that Anselm, Boethius and Aristotle were also key contributors to the Bonaventurean synthesis. Moreover, in Quinn’s view, Bonaventure is aware that his own metaphysics differs from Augustine’s in several respects. As De Wulf observed, Bonaventure had the kind of amiable temperament that disinclined him to criticize other thinkers; unlike De Wulf, however, Quinn does not think that this proved an intellectual defect. Personal regard did not muddy Bonaventure’s thinking, although Quinn admits that it may have muddied the thinking of some of his interpreters, since Bonaventure’s tendency
is tactfully to de-emphasize areas of disagreement, when it might be more helpful to explain them clearly.

What sort of synthesis, then, does Bonaventure ultimately provide? When all his texts have been considered, Quinn argues, Bonaventure cannot reasonably be cast as an Augustinian, or an Aristotelian, or a neo-Platonist, or a haphazard mixture of all three. The only reasonable thing to call him is Bonaventurean.\textsuperscript{26} This may seem like an unhelpful characterization, but Quinn’s real meaning is that Bonaventure deserves to be studied and understood on his own terms, and not obsessively classified as a hybrid of various other philosophies.

The complaints of van Steenberghen and others that Bonaventure’s synthesis of earlier Christian thinkers is “eclectic and disjointed” may reflect an implicitly patronizing attitude. From the beginning, the historian expects Bonaventure to align himself with one or another pre-existing school of thought. When he draws freely from a wide set of thinkers without clearly identifying his allegiances, he is accused of being scattered and inconsistent. It may be, however, that the real mistake lies in the historian’s expectations. Bonaventure’s goal was not to draw all of philosophy together under the banner of a particular thinker (such as Augustine or Aristotle.) Instead, he drew on those thinkers in developing his own synthesis.\textsuperscript{27}

Quinn explains the project as follows:

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, 858.
\textsuperscript{27} Joseph Ratzinger agrees with Quinn on this point. cf Ratzinger, \textit{The Theology of History in Bonaventure}. (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971).
The texts of St. Bonaventure show that, in treating philosophical questions, he has a twofold point of departure. In some instances, without invoking any philosophical authority, he sets out solely from the evidence provided by human experience, which is based on sense knowledge and is, therefore, the primary foundation of his philosophical knowledge. In other instances, maintaining that primary foundation, he sets out by exploring a question as it has been treated by this or by that authority, or by several authorities, whose doctrines St. Bonaventure has chosen to use in developing his own position on the question. Thus, the facts of human experience, as St. Bonaventure understands it, constitute the stem on to which he has grafted not only Augustinian doctrines, but also Aristotelean doctrines and all the other doctrines that he chooses to transform according to his personal principles of philosophical knowledge. This mode of procedure may seem to produce an eclectic system having no real unity because of a juxtaposing of a variety of doctrines taken from different sources. But this is not the product of St. Bonaventure’s philosophical endeavors. He has produced a really unified synthesis of which the stem and the roots are his own experience and philosophical principles, and they are of such a kind that they can and do give new life to the many doctrines, or branches of philosophical knowledge, that he cares to graft on to the tree of his own knowledge, which is grounded in human experience.\(^{28}\)

Quinn goes on to observe that there is no reason to fault Bonaventure for generating a philosophical synthesis on the basis of personal experience and a selective use of authority; Aristotle, after all, did philosophy in substantially the same way. Aristotle and Augustine enter into Bonaventure’s philosophy in the same sort of way that Plato and the pre-Socratics entered into Aristotle’s.\(^{29}\)

Quinn’s work on this question suggests that it would be better for scholars to stop trying to classify Bonaventure in terms of other thinkers, and instead to redouble their efforts to understand him on his own terms. Apparently this message was received, insofar as Quinn’s volume effectively ended the conversation about Bonaventure’s historical constitution. Later scholars do discuss Bonaventure’s relationship to Aristotle, but this is done primarily with the object of clearing up misconceptions about Bonaventure’s

\(^{28}\) Ibid, p. 859.  
\(^{29}\) Ibid, p. 860.
alleged anti-Aristotelianism. Christopher Cullen remarks mildly that it is important not to let Bonaventure’s animosity towards the Averroists obscure his real intellectual debt to Aristotle.30 Bonnie Kent discusses some inconsistencies between the Quaracci and Delorme editions of Bonaventure’s *Collationes in Hexaemeron* (with the main point being that the Quaracci edition seems to accentuate disagreements with Aristotle that are softened in the Delorme edition), but ultimately concludes that Bonaventure’s suspicion of Aristotle cannot have been all that pronounced.31 It seems an established consensus at this point that Bonaventure’s attitude towards Aristotle was overall benign. Much more remains to be done, however, by way of critically assessing Bonaventure’s own view.

**Bonaventurean ethics**

If Quinn is right, and Bonaventure saw himself more as a philosopher and less as a historian/synthesizer of Christian thought, then it seems particularly important that Bonaventure’s ideas be examined on their own terms. Grafting a brief examination of Bonaventure’s views onto a more-developed body of Thomist literature may prevent us from seeing the internal coherence of Bonaventure’s own thought. This seems to be relevant to Quinn’s criticisms even of his own great teacher, Gilson. Although Gilson insists that Bonaventure’s philosophy *does* have its own unique character, his eagerness to prove this may have led him to impose a somewhat artificial contrast between

31 Kent, p. 46-58.
Bonaventure and Aquinas, thus making Bonaventure out to be more anti-Aristotelian than he actually was. Somewhat ironically, it may have been Gilson’s desire to free Bonaventure from Aquinas’ shadow that most prevented him from appreciating the true character of Bonaventure’s actual work.

Quinn’s painstaking labors lay a good foundation from which to chart a genuinely Bonaventurean philosophy. Still, sustained studies of Bonaventure remain relatively few, particularly as regards his philosophy, and perhaps most of all with respect to his ethics. Such work as has been done on Bonaventure’s moral philosophy deals mostly with meta-ethics or philosophy of action, and in particular with his views on free will. These studies will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Three, when I consider the relationship of habituation and grace with respect to the natural virtues. None of them, however, offer significant analysis of Bonaventure’s normative ethics. For that, what is needed is a careful study of his writings on the virtues. But while Aquinas’ writings on the virtues have been the object of a considerable body of work, very little has been said about Bonaventure’s virtue ethics.

This is regrettable because, for Bonaventure, the virtues are at the heart of normative ethics, which is just to say that they are essential to his understanding of the good human life. Without a detailed study of the virtues, nothing substantial can be said on this subject. An examination of the literature that does exist on Bonaventure’s moral philosophy only underscores the need for more discussion of the virtues. Bonnie Kent examines the Bonaventurean mechanisms by which choices are made, with particular
attention to the interaction between conscience and intellect.\textsuperscript{32} Quinn’s short essay on Bonaventurean moral philosophy deals primarily with the relationship between the moral science and other branches of knowledge.\textsuperscript{33} Only one chapter of Gilson’s book deals with ethics in any significant way, and that is dedicated to showing how Bonaventure’s theory of illumination affects moral truths.\textsuperscript{34} All of these studies are broadly focused on issues in moral epistemology, and all hold some interest in particular for scholars looking to trace the development of thought from Bonaventure through later Franciscans such as Scotus and Occam. None, however, engage in any detailed analysis of normative ethical questions.

If we want to examine Bonaventure’s views on the virtues, the most important source of information is his \textit{Commentary on Lombard’s Sentences}. Written from 1248 through 1251, The \textit{Commentary} represents the major accomplishment of Bonaventure’s university career as such, as well as his main contribution to Scholastic thought. As with all such works, it spans an enormous range of subjects, but the section dedicated to the virtues is still extensive. While some of Bonaventure’s later works do include brief passages on the subject of virtue, only the \textit{Commentary} offers a systematic treatment of this subject.\textsuperscript{35}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{32} Kent, 99-102. \\
\textsuperscript{34} Gilson, 368-391. \\
\textsuperscript{35} Although I will include a few references to some of Bonaventure’s later works, it can be difficult to juxtapose Bonaventure’s early scholarly work against his later writings. In part, this relates to the format of these texts. Following his assumption of the leadership of the Franciscan order, Bonaventure no longer used the traditional Scholastic format even for his
\end{flushright}
Bonaventure and the virtues

Following Lombard’s template, Bonaventure treats the virtues in the second half of the third book of the *Commentary*. Up to this point in the third book he has been addressing Christological questions. Then, rather abruptly, he turns to the virtues, and devotes fourteen distinctions to them. The sections break down as follows: three distinctions are devoted to the virtue of faith, one to hope, six to charity, one to the cardinal virtues, two to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and one to the unity of the virtues in general. After that he moves on to the Ten Commandments and a catalog of sins, and on this subject he ends the third book.

Given this breakdown of material, I will need to give considerable attention to the theological virtues (faith, hope and charity). This is not always the way in which contemporary philosophers have approached medieval ethics. In the first chapter of her *Virtues of the Will*, for example, Bonnie Kent raises this issue explicitly by way of justifying her decision not to address theological virtue to any great extent. After explaining the difference between natural and supernatural virtues, she argues based on textual evidence that, at least for Aquinas, natural virtues can be reasonably regarded as “true” virtues, attainable by pagans or others who have not benefited from an infusion of more philosophical works. Explaining the context of a particular reference can thus be difficult, and this is especially the case given that the later works manifest strong mystical tendencies. Perhaps more importantly, his views, or at the very least his emphases, seem to change somewhat with respect to moral philosophy. Without per se disavowing his earlier work on the virtues, the later Bonaventure is far more focused on the gifts of the Holy Spirit as the primary components of a good life. Exploring this transition could make for a fascinating dissertation in its own right, but it would require a significant detour from the analysis of the virtues.
divine grace. Only the baptized, perhaps, will be able to attain their supernatural end in the Beatific Vision, but others can properly be said to live virtuous, happy lives. Given that there is good reason to suppose that even the non-Christian can be happy and virtuous, she prefers to focus on the naturally acquired virtues rather than those infused by God.

Kent’s reasons for doing this are not difficult to discern. Her book aims to offer an analysis of different historical views on the structure of moral action. This means she must wrestle with an already-complex array of causal factors, each of which may play a role in helping to produce human action. Adding God to the causal picture enormously increases the difficulty, and may increase it in a way that yields few dividends for modern thinkers who are less apt to believe in infused graces. And if, indeed, it is possible to live a virtuous life without such graces, there may be no need to sort out this additional element. Furnishing an adequate explanation of naturally virtuous action is a monumental accomplishment in its own right.

For Kent, then, limiting herself to the study of natural virtue may have been a reasonable scholarly decision. However, a glance at the distribution of material in the Commentary should easily show why it would not be advisable to adopt a similar stance in a study of Bonaventurean ethics. Limiting ourselves to the natural virtues alone would leave us with scarcely thirty pages of text to analyze. The real problem, however, goes beyond the page count. It would be impossible to isolate the natural virtues in a systematic way without

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36 Kent, p. 22-31.
37 Kent, p. 36.
doing violence to Bonaventure’s thought.\textsuperscript{38} His own ethical reflections were primarily focused on the theological virtues, and as we will see, even his discussion of the cardinal virtues leads very naturally into his study of supernatural virtue. Although he was somewhat ambiguous on the question of whether or not habituated virtues could be considered “true”, he has minimal interest in considering the naturally virtuous life as such.

Ultimately, a study of normative ethics should aim to give an account of the well-lived human life. It would be ridiculous to try to answer that question on Bonaventure’s behalf without discussing supernatural virtue. Discussion of the roles of nature and grace in moral formation will compose a significant part of the dissertation, and will of course be explored from a philosophical standpoint. Nothing detailed will be said about the sacramental theology which is necessary to support the infusion view, and in this case the separation is easy because Bonaventure himself postpones any extended discussion of sacraments until the fourth book of the \textit{Commentary}. Still, I will not attempt to draw artificial lines between Bonaventure’s account of specifically human action and his discussion of those virtues that are more directly the product of divine action. Bonaventure’s work on this subject is philosophical, in the sense that he employs the tools of a formal philosophy in working through moral questions. When he encounters a difficulty, he will not skip past it with a flyby reference to revealed Christian doctrines. It is true that he draws on extra-philosophical material in generating many of the premises on which his

\textsuperscript{38} This is one area in which Gilson’s remarks about the internal harmony of Bonaventure’s thought, though perhaps somewhat extreme, do seem applicable.
arguments ultimately rest. That, however, is by no means a unique feature of Bonaventurean, or even of medieval, philosophy.

The analytic Bonaventurean

As the discussion up to this point has shown, there are a number of obstacles that must be faced in undertaking a study of Bonaventurean ethics. The paucity of available scholarship reinforces the natural tendency to read Bonaventure selectively through the eyes of other thinkers, portraying him either as Aquinas’ Franciscan alter-ego, or else as the underdeveloped forerunner to later Franciscans, whose theories on the will more obviously have an impact on late Scholasticism and the transition to modernity. Bonaventure is in many ways a subtle and nuanced thinker, but his historical placement is not optimal for enabling scholars to appreciate these qualities. These problems further complicate an already-difficult set of choices that the modern scholar must face when investigating an important historical figure.

The study of history’s great thinkers can provide many benefits, but at times we must set priorities as to which we most wish to reap. Gaining significant insight into the brilliance of a particular person can be inspiring in itself, insofar as that person stands as a shining example of the capabilities of the human intellect. More than this, however, historical studies can increase

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39 Analytic philosophers may be nervous about this sort of claim, since they (unlike the medievals) are highly sensitive to the dangers that can arise through excessive deference to authority. While it certainly is possible to make mistakes through excessive reliance on
our appreciation for the ways in which particular ideas have developed. Insofar
as the period in question has contributed to one’s own civilization or culture,
these insights can help us gain perspective on the views that we ourselves, and
our contemporaries, hold.40 This kind of far-reaching intellectual history is the
particular specialty of such philosophers as Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles
Taylor, but even Bonnie Kent, for all her dismissal of “heroes and histories”,
engages in this kind of storytelling to some extent. Intellectual history involves
tracing particular lines of thought through the work of different writers, each of
whom has a somewhat unique set of circumstances and concerns. Selection is
a necessary part of the project, and in order to do it the historian must impose
a narrative of some kind.

Simplifying a philosopher for the sake of a larger narrative is not always
wrong. At times, intellectual historians can offer significant insights into a
particular period. This kind of project can be dissatisfying to the philosopher,
however, insofar as it focuses largely on historical explanation, while neglecting
nuances of the philosophical material that may be significant. In the final
analysis, philosophers should be more than just curators in a museum of
ideas. Historical thinkers are most valuable insofar as they enable us to make

40 This is a complicated matter, because the desire to identify one’s own philosophical
questions with those of a different historical period can be quite strong, and this may lead to
serious errors in our reading of historical texts. Nevertheless, there can be no question that
particular philosophical debates do have their origins in historical works and controversies to
varying extents. For a discussion of this issue, see Gary Hatfield, “The History of Philosophy as
further progress on important philosophical questions.

While there is nothing to prevent us from pursuing both goals (historical understanding and philosophical progress), there can be practical difficulties in pursuing both simultaneously. Different kinds of evidence and analysis can be appropriate for each enterprise; for example, the historian requires a significant grounding in textual evidence, while the philosopher will (quite properly) be less reluctant to deviate from a historical discussion if he sees a more promising way of developing the relevant argument. The historian seeks a broader understanding of the context and influence of a particular body of work, whereas for the philosopher, excessive attention to these details might prove distracting.

For these reasons, philosophy and intellectual history cannot enjoy a perfect marriage. Neither, however, can they be neatly divorced. The historian may attend to context with particular keenness, but without some grasp of the relevant context a historical figure can hardly be understood at all, much less appreciated in all his subtlety. Meanwhile, an intellectual historian needs a fairly strong understanding of philosophical argument if he is to trace the development of ideas through the work of different thinkers. Despite their somewhat diverse goals, philosophy and intellectual history do need one another, and their areas of concern overlap to a considerable extent.

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41 Even here, though, it can be important to appreciate the ways in which one is deviating from the historical text, as Tom Sorrell points out. “On Saying No to History of Philosophy,” Ibid, 43-59.

With respect to Bonaventure studies, there is a need for both. Both Bonaventure’s place in history, and his potential for contributing to contemporary philosophical research, have been insufficiently explored, particularly, as I have argued, with respect to his ethics. If possible, it would be good to make strides on both fronts, but in the case of Bonaventurean ethics, it may actually be necessary to lay a certain amount of historical groundwork before any interesting philosophical exploration will be possible. Bonaventure’s ethical views cannot make a meaningful contribution to contemporary ethical controversies until we have some idea what those views are. Still, there is some need to separate out the two pursuits, lest our scholarly endeavors become hopelessly disorganized.

My strategy, then, is to use a particular text as the organizing principle for my discussion. Focusing on the third book of Bonaventure’s Commentary (and especially on distinctions 23-36), I will mine the text for insights that might be of relevance both to intellectual history and to contemporary philosophy. Earlier chapters will be focused more on Bonaventure’s philosophy as such, and will try to give the reader some reasonable appreciation of the character of Bonaventure’s ethical thought. Later chapters will critique and perhaps extend some of Bonaventure’s ideas, and bring them into the context of relevant contemporary discussions in order to consider what value they might hold for modern philosophers.
General Overview

In my first chapter, I will begin exploring the relationship between natural and supernatural virtue when I take up the question of final ends. Christianity made a significant departure from Aristotelianism by specifying that human beings were destined for a supernatural final end, and this created some significant distortions in the Aristotelian picture. I will show how Bonaventure navigated these challenges by considering the role that he expects the cardinal virtues play in the afterlife. I will illustrate the distinctiveness of Bonaventure’s view through a comparison to Aquinas’ views on the same subject. Although I am committed to understanding Bonaventure in his own right and not exclusively through a Thomist lens, I find in this instance that the comparison is particularly illuminating.

Chapter Two will extend the analysis of the cardinal virtues and their relationship to human fulfillment. Here I will be examining Bonaventure’s views on the will and on the mechanisms by which natural virtues are developed. This is one subject on which there is already a not-insignificant literature, and I will review this, considering especially its significance to a broader study of Bonaventurean ethics.

The third and fourth chapters are concerned with religious epistemology and the virtue of faith. This subject is particularly difficult from the standpoint of the historically-focused philosopher. Faith is a subject of great interest both for medieval and for modern philosophers, but significant differences in context make it difficult to compare their views directly. In Chapter Three, I attempt to
bridge this gap by proposing a set of criteria by which rival views of faith may be assessed. I then apply this model both to Bonaventure’s account of faith, and also to the work of a contemporary philosopher, Alvin Plantinga. The goal here is to show where Bonaventure’s view might reasonably be open to criticism, but also to illustrate ways in which it can garner unique advantages that might also be attractive to modern philosophers. Chapter Four will then extend this analysis by considering how Bonaventure deals with those weaknesses that were highlighted in the previous chapter.

In the fifth chapter, I turn from religious epistemology to action theory, by way of illuminating Bonaventure’s views on the virtue of hope. Here, again, it can be difficult for modern thinkers to understand Bonaventure’s lines of thought in light of the very different assumptions on which modern theories of action generally rest. As in chapter three, I offer some discussion of the differences between these general views, and consider what Bonaventure’s might have to offer. I conclude the chapter with some remarks on the ways in which Bonaventure’s virtue of hope might differ from the related Aristotelian virtue of courage.

The final chapter explores the virtue of charity, which, for Bonaventure, is the central and defining virtue on which his entire moral philosophy rests. In the early part of the chapter, I explain how a charity-based ethics differs from most contemporary alternatives, and consider what resources it might offer for dealing with the apparent tensions between justice and love, which has been the source of so much controversy among moral theorists from the late
twentieth century through the present day. Having said some favorable things about the potential of such a view, I discuss a problem with Bonaventure’s treatment of this view, which is underdeveloped in some important ways. After suggesting some possibilities for why Bonaventure might have left these significant gaps in his ethical view, I briefly remark on some later thinkers who might reasonably be taken to have continued the work that Bonaventure left unfinished.

**A final word on virtue ethics**

Although I will say relatively little about it in the following chapters, there is another possible benefit to a study of this kind with respect to contemporary ethics. The last few decades have seen the rise of a new camp of philosophers seeking to reconstruct ethics on a “virtue-oriented” foundation. This approach has been controversial, with many contending that it is vague and unhelpful, and that the virtue theorists’ claims to be doing normative ethics are vitiated by the impossibility of identifying the relevant moral exemplars. Virtue theorists may provide an interesting angle from which to appreciate the difficulties of rule-following or of goodness-maximizing, but they offer nothing substantial in return.

As many have suggested, part of the problem may be that contemporary virtue theorists like Rosalind Hursthouse try to build their virtue ethics on a very modest foundation which explicitly avoids complex metaphysical claims. As Hursthouse likes to remind us, virtue should be for ordinary people, who
need not be burdened with heavy metaphysical baggage. But while there are clear benefits to this metaphysical modesty in terms of its simplicity and accessibility, it may be that a certain shallowness is also an unavoidable consequence of the “mere virtue” approach. Sometimes people agree about what traits of character an excellent human being should have. Sometimes they don’t. When they don’t, it may be necessary to consider more deeply the origin and purpose of human life, as well as the place of human beings within the greater order of existence. That kind of reflection will almost inevitably introduce the sorts of questions that the modern virtue theorists prefer to avoid. But it might potentially give rise to a more substantial virtue theory of a sort that could, at least theoretically, provide a viable alternative to the ethical theories of our day.

It is not the goal of this dissertation to analyze whether or not this is a serious possibility, much less to argue that Bonaventure’s particular ethical view should be considered as a promising candidate for such a theory. However, it is worth noting at the outset that Bonaventure’s ethics does represent a virtue-based ethics that is utterly unhindered by the sort of metaphysical squeamishness that Hursthouse and others seem to feel. For the contemporary ethicist, this might be an additional source of interest, insofar as it invites us to reflect on what a serious, metaphysically-grounded virtue ethics might potentially have to offer.
Chapter One

The Virtues in Heaven

Ends are very important within a teleological moral view. Presumably this is why Aristotle thinks it worthwhile to devote a large portion of the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to discussing the relationship of means to ends, and to explaining why *tele* (most often translated “final ends”) are so important. This made sense to the Christians, who also sought to explain moral development as a process of becoming, anchored in a final fulfillment that represented the complete perfection of human nature. Their theory diverged from Aristotle’s, however, on one significant point. They were not seeking the same end. Whereas Aristotle envisioned an earthly fulfillment such as might be attained by a wealthy and respected member of the *polis*, the Christians looked to a supernatural end that they hoped would be waiting for them in the afterlife. Obviously, this difference called for some modification of the Aristotelian theory.

How much modification was really required, though? In order to answer that question, it was necessary to consider the relationship between the Christian and Aristotelian final ends. One favorite strategy for doing that was to consider circumstances or places in which the two ends might intersect in a particularly revealing way. So, for example, righteous pagans and unbaptized innocents were believed to congregate in limbo after death, making limbo a
kind of “naturally perfect” society. Thinking about limbo enabled philosophers to speculate on what natural perfection alone could achieve. For seeing human perfection in its entirety, it would be necessary to shoot higher. Heaven was the place where all of the virtues would come to fruition, and so one way of speculating about the relationship of the two ends was to consider how virtue might be manifested in heaven. This is the strategy that will be developed in this chapter. After a brief examination of the historical development of this line of thought, I will offer an extended comparison of Bonaventure’s and Aquinas’ views on the place of virtue in heaven, showing how each has significant advantages.

**The problem of the twofold end**

The very first thing that Aristotle explains in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is that means and ends can be related to one another in chains or webs.\(^1\) One action or object might be a means to a further action or object, which itself is instrumental to reaching yet another thing. Thus, the art of leather-working enables the making of bridles, which supports the craft of horsemanship, which itself is auxiliary to generalship. Then, if we take our analysis one step further, it will become clear that military science as a whole is instrumental to military victory and the goods that can be realized thereby. Thus, instrumental goods can be ordered in a complex web of interrelated subordinate ends.

Something similar holds true for the actions of a particular individual. If I wish to build a pagoda in my back yard, I will need to take a number of

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\(^1\) *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1.1.1094a, 7-17.
intermediate steps: finding the money for supplies, drawing up a schematic, laying an appropriate foundation and then building the structure itself. If we were to describe the process in more detail, even more minor tasks might be mentioned (pulling up the bank records to work out the financial end of the plan, digging the hole for the foundation, rummaging through the garage to find my tool box, etc.) which must be completed in order to enable me to accomplish these larger steps. For most of these, the good attained is merely an instrumental or subordinate good, desirable only because it helps me achieve my final goal of erecting the pagoda. So the overall chain of events will end up being fairly complicated; nonetheless, if someone were to question me about my motives at some particular stage in the process, I would be able to construct for them the chain of subordinate ends that will ultimately lead to the completion of my project.

This in itself tells us much about the importance of ends. They enable us to order our actions around a particular goal or project, thus giving sense and meaning to all the subordinate actions that occupy most of a person’s daily life. A telos, or final end, goes even further than this, however. It is an end that is closely tied to the nature or identity of the thing that seeks it. To understand the telos of a thing is to understand what kind of thing it is. To fulfill one’s telos is to be a successful specimen of whatever sort of thing one is, and thus, to have a meaningful and flourishing existence.²

² For a more nuanced account of this connection, see Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 56-76.
If a single entity or natural kind has *two* ends, that complicates matters for a teleological thinker. A *telos* is, by definition a final and defining end. If there are *two* ends, then the philosopher will have some work to do in explaining how these ends are related to one another, and how they work together to define the identity and purpose of the entity in question. This was the problem that confronted Christian thinkers in their examination of Aristotelian ethics. How did the natural “end” envisioned by Aristotle relate to the Christian “end” of attaining the Beatific Vision?

The easiest way to solve the two-ends problem is by subordinating one of the ends to the other. If one end is merely a particular point along the way to the other, the teleological picture can be preserved without much complication. Of course, that might leave us wondering whether both tele can truly be said to be “ends”. On the one hand, if the *further* end is a necessary part of human fulfillment, then the earlier is not a final end at all, but merely another subordinate end (albeit, perhaps, one with an unusual degree of stability or some other special significance). If, on the other hand, the earlier end is completely fulfilling in itself, then the further end would seem to be superfluous. Either way, one end is selected as the true *telos*, while the other is rejected as less than “final.”

Subordinating the Aristotelian *telos* to the Christian one was the obvious thing to do in this instance; the Beatific Vision was purportedly much more

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3 We might think here of the distinction Kant draws between “final” and “ultimate” ends, although the medievals would want to understand both (and not just the former) in terms of human happiness. Cf Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A800, 801.
glorious than any earthly goods, and it could only be achieved in the post-mortem anyway.\textsuperscript{4} Working out the details of this solution was difficult, however. If the Aristotelian end was \textit{not} an end, it became difficult to explain what purpose natural goods should play in human life, and the cardinal virtues seemed to fade significantly into the background as relatively unimportant features of the moral life. On the other hand, if the Aristotelian end \textit{was} complete in its own right, then the Beatific Vision might appear to be superfluous to human fulfillment, which would have seemed preposterous to a philosopher like Bonaventure.\textsuperscript{5} Augustine’s famous words about the restless heart longing for God could have no place in a moral theory that regarded Aristotelian happiness as fully and satisfactorily complete.\textsuperscript{6}

As a first attempt at solving the problem, we might make something of the Aristotelian discussion of more and less complete ends. In the \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, Aristotle tells us that,

\begin{quote}
We say that an end pursued in its own right is more complete than an end pursued because of something else, and that an end that is never choiceworthy because of something else is more complete than ends that are choiceworthy both in their own right and because of this end. Hence an end that is always choiceworthy in its own right, never because of something else, is complete without qualification.\textsuperscript{7}
\end{quote}

Aristotle seems to be envisioning three categories of ends in this passage. First, there are some ends that are never pursued except as means to

\textsuperscript{4} This was, at any rate, the prevailing view among medieval scholars, although the Eastern Orthodox embrace the possibility of “living saints” who have glimpsed the Beatific Vision even before earthly death.

\textsuperscript{5} This is especially obvious when we consider the orientation of Bonaventure’s later, mystical writings, and particularly \textit{Itinerarium Mentis ad Deum}, which show a deep fascination with the soul’s need for the divine, and with the process by which the soul is completed through its experience of God’s love.

\textsuperscript{6} For a thorough discussion of the problem of the twofold end, see Denis Bradley, \textit{Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good}. (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1997).

\textsuperscript{7} See \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, 1.7.1097a 31-36.
some further good. “Getting to the front of the line at the DMV” might qualify as an end of this sort; it has an obvious instrumental value to the person who needs her license renewed, but no one goes to the DMV for fun or personal fulfillment. Next, there are ends that can be valued in their own right, while also contributing to a further goal. Thus, taking a jog, cooking a meal, or arranging flowers in a vase, are all activities that serve some obvious further goal. A person who hates jogging might still sometimes do it, strictly for the sake of his health. At the same time, many people also enjoy these activities. There is nothing strange about, say, baking cookies for the fun of it, even if the cookies are not needed or could easily be obtained in another way. Finally, there are ends that are complete without qualification. These are valued only for themselves, and never for any other reason. Aristotle goes on to name happiness as the most complete good, since everyone wants it, and nobody wants to be happy for the sake of achieving some further good.\(^8\)

This analysis offers some resources for making sense of the two-ends puzzle. Aristotle’s end of natural happiness was a good with considerable independent value, which is why it could be appreciated even by a person with no knowledge of the Beatific Vision. Still, it might be that the virtuous Aristotelian had the capacity for even greater fulfillment in the post-mortem. The Aristotelian end was complete, but with qualification. As far as it went, this seemed like a promising avenue of development, but it opened a number of

\(^8\) *Ibid*, 1097b, 1-7.
further questions. First of all, how accurate was Aristotle in describing the natural end? And secondly, how complete was the natural end?

In addressing the first question, Christian philosophers did seem eager (as Kent has argued) to endorse a certain amount of Aristotle’s ethical advice. At the same time, it could only be expected that they would want to expand the range of virtuous earthly lifestyles beyond what Aristotle envisioned. Expansion was indicated, in the first place, because so many Christian heroes and heroines obviously failed to conform to Aristotle’s model of virtuous living. Aristotle would likely have taken a dim view of the extreme asceticism of St. Francis or the early desert hermits and stylites, but among Christians these were revered as admirable figures. Leaving aside defensive considerations like these, however, there were good philosophical reasons to suppose that the practical anthropology of a Christian would be complex. In the Christian view, earthly goods are real goods, but their goodness is qualified. Christians and pagans alike can agree that lesser goods should be valued precisely as lesser goods, in a way that is appropriate to their real goodness. Experience shows us, however, that it is often difficult to articulate with precision the appropriate way of valuing of less-important goods.

This point can be illustrated through consideration of the relationship between the pleasures of childhood and the pleasures of adult life. Children are apt to take intense pleasure in simple and trivial goods such as candy, a favorite television show, or falling snowflakes. These pleasures seem appropriate to childhood, such that there is something a bit melancholy about
a child who religiously follows a nutritious diet and never plays outside. In adulthood, by contrast, people discover that life can yield more important goods than jelly beans and snowmen. The person who fails to realize this demonstrates a lamentable immaturity. At the same time, it is difficult to define the precise role that these simpler pleasures should play in a virtuous adult life. Some may outgrow them completely, and that might be perfectly appropriate. There is nothing melancholy about an adult who has a fulfilling career and an active social life, but avoids sugar and prefers the indoors. On the other hand, there can be something fresh and endearing about the person who engages in serious pursuits, and shoulders adult responsibilities, and yet still retains the ability to brighten joyfully at a pile of fresh leaves or a holiday candy display. The simple pleasures of childhood can sometimes be eclipsed by more mature pursuits, but they may also linger as a charming ornament on a life that does nonetheless include more serious goods. Both seem to be acceptable variations on the virtuous life, which is not to say that it is a matter of indifference how one appreciates simple pleasures, but only that different approaches might be appropriate depending on one’s temperament or circumstances.

A similar phenomenon might apply to a Christian reading of Aristotelian ethics. The natural goods that are so centrally important for Aristotle are, in the Christian view, merely qualified goods. They are significant, but less good than the uncreated God, and less important for human well-being than the supernatural fulfillment of the post-mortem. In this light, Aristotle’s ethical
views might seem a bit provincial. This is not to say that a proper valuing of natural goods is dispensable. But the ways in which these goods can be appreciated might be more diverse than what Aristotle recommended.

Describing the natural end, then, might be a complicated matter for a Christian. Even if this could be done, though, a further question would still arise concerning the completeness of the natural end. How happy can a person be without reaching the final, supernatural end?

One place that this debate played out was in discussions of limbo, which, as discussed above, was understood to be a place in which the natural end (but not the supernatural) was achieved. Thus, a philosopher’s portrayal of limbo was a good measure of the degree of completeness he was prepared to attribute to the natural end. For Aquinas, limbo was overall a place of great happiness and content. Although greater fulfillment would theoretically have been possible for the souls in limbo, they themselves had relatively little awareness of the fact, and rested in a peaceful existence that would seem enviable to even the most prosperous in this earthly life.\(^9\) St. Augustine, on the other hand, envisioned a much grimmer fate for the unbaptized, involving torment and deep sorrow; this is what we might have expected from a philosopher who so consistently emphasizes the incompleteness of the natural goods.\(^{10}\) Dante, for his part, portrayed limbo as a place without literal torment, but somber and

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9 Supplement to *Summa Theologica*, q. 70bis and 71, a. 7.
morose in its atmosphere, as the inhabitants eternally contemplated the much
greater heights to which they would never ascend.11

The Commentaries address similar questions from another angle. If
heaven is a place where all human goods find their completion, then what
happens to the cardinal virtues in heaven? By appreciating what these natural
virtues ultimately contribute to the supernatural telos, we might gain a better
appreciation of the relationship of the two ends to one another.

Cicero and Augustine on the Heavenly virtues

In the fourteenth book of De Trinitate, St. Augustine quotes a passage from
Cicero’s Hortensius, in which the great orator reflects on how it might be if, as
legends suggested, the philosopher were permitted in the afterlife to dwell in
the isles of the blessed, where there would be no trials or hardships, and the
wisdom-loving soul would rest contented in the endless savoring of perfect
truth.

What need would there be of eloquence, when there were no trials; or even of the
virtues themselves? For we would not need courage, when we were faced with no toil
or danger; nor justice where there was no one else’s property to desire; nor
temperance, to control lusts that would not exist; nor should we even need prudence
when we were faced with no choices of good or bad. We should be happy, therefore,
by means of just one thing: the understanding of nature and knowledge, which is the
only thing for which even the life of the gods is to be praised.12

11 Dante, The Inferno, canto IV.
12 Si nobis, inquit, cum ex hac uita migrauerimus, in beatorum insulis immortale aeuum, ut
fabulae ferunt, degere liceret, quid opus esset eloquentia, cum iudicia nulla fieren; aut ipsis
etiam uiurtutibus? Nec enim fortitudine egeremus, nullo proposito aut labore aut periculo; nec
iustitia, cum esset nihil quod appeteteretur alieni; nec temperantia, quae reget eas quae nullae
essent libidines; nec prudentia quidem egeremus, nullo delectu proposito bonorum et
malorum. Vna igitur essemus beati cognitione naturae et scientia, qua sola etiam deorum est
uita laudanda. Ex quo intellegi potest, cetera necessitatis esse, unum hoc uoluntatis. (De
Trinitate, 14.3.12, translation mine).
It is perhaps especially telling that Cicero, great statesman and orator that he was, would be eager above all for a life in which *eloquence* was no longer needed. But the philosophical question he raises is more difficult. Are the *virtues*, like political acumen, transitory things of a sort that can become happily obsolete in the afterlife when hardships and sorrows have ceased? Does their value extend beyond their usefulness in helping their possessor to weather the trials of an imperfect existence?

For Cicero, it evidently does not, and this is not surprising given his study of Aristotle. Aristotle presents the cardinal virtues as *political* virtues; their function is to allow the virtuous person to properly manage his affairs, both on a domestic level and within his larger society. For earthly life as most everyone experiences it, the cardinal virtues are indispensable for human thriving. If, however, we could fashion a world in which there was no possibility of threat to the integrity of self, household or society, it isn’t clear that Aristotelian cardinal virtues would be needed at all. They would become superfluous, like weapons in a world without war, or a functioning immune system in a disease-free country. Cicero is envisioning such an existence.

But Augustine, despite his admiration for Cicero’s presentation of the philosophical life, disagrees with the conclusion. He is happy to follow the great Roman orator in his suggestion that in the world to come

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13 *Ita ille tantus orator cum philosophiam praedicaret recolens ea quae a philosophis acceperat et praecclare ac suauiter explicans in hac tantum uta quam uidemus aerumnis et erroribus*
But in Augustine’s conception, the virtues should be understood somewhat more broadly. Justice, for example, is “being subject to that nature (which created and established all others)”; as such, it certainly does not vanish in the next life. Quite the contrary, justice reaches the peak of its perfection in an existence in which nothing hinders the soul from subjecting itself in the fullest and most voluntary way to the greatest of natures, namely God. In a similar way he speculates that:

Perhaps then the other three virtues too will continue in that happy state. Prudence will now be without any danger of mistakes, courage without any annoyance of evils to be tolerated, and moderation without any recalcitrant lusts to control. Prudence will mean not putting any good above or on a level with God; courage will mean cleaving to him with absolute constancy; temperance will mean taking pleasure in no guilty failing. What justice does now in assisting the needy, prudence in taking precautions against pitfalls, courage in enduring trials, temperance in curbing depraved pleasures – there will be none of this where there is simply nothing evil. And so these activities of the virtues which are necessary for this mortal life, like faith to which they should all be related, will be reckoned as things of the past.14

Augustine’s view is offered only briefly, and somewhat tentatively, since it is only one small stepping stone as part of his larger project to find analogies for...
the Holy Trinity. Still, even these brief remarks provide the beginnings of a provocative view of the cardinal virtues. Insofar as the cardinal virtues are definitely connected to the various trials and temptations that are the immediate object of their concern within this lifetime, they do indeed lapse into a state of passivity. The relevant dispositions remain, but without giving rise to actions. Augustine is suggesting that the cardinal virtues may be more than just regulatory powers, and that their scope may reach beyond the temporal cares of this lifetime. The same dispositions that enable mortals to shun lascivious temptations or to stand fast in the face of danger will find a different and more elevated application in the world to come.

Brief as it is, this passage from *De Trinitate* is regularly cited\(^\text{15}\) by later medieval thinkers who offer a more sustained treatment of the issue of virtue in heaven. Let us then consider the views of Aquinas and Bonaventure on this subject, which provide many illuminating points, both of agreement and of contrast. Both locate the final human fulfillment in heaven, where the soul can be united with God. Both are likewise in agreement about *which* virtues will remain in the heavenly realm, and each sustains Augustine’s view that the cardinal virtues are among those that will find application in the hereafter. But there are substantial and interesting differences in their accounts of *why* and *in what way* the cardinal virtues will remain. Aquinas’ view, which I will detail first, extends Augustine’s position in a very natural way, and in so doing offers

\(^{15}\)This is not to imply that Augustine was the first to treat this topic, which had been debated extensively by the Platonists through the preceding centuries. However, Augustine’s text can truly be said to be a “kernel” for medieval thought, since it was the historical text most often referenced by the philosophers of the high Middle Ages in their treatment of heavenly virtue.
a sophisticated and carefully developed explanation of the role of the virtues. But, as I will also show, there are some appealing features of Bonaventure’s position that the Thomist view cannot easily integrate, and in the end Bonaventure opens the path to a thought-provoking counterpoint to Aquinas’ view. For both philosophers, their discussion of the cardinal virtues also opens a window into their thinking about the nature of heaven, and what human life there might be like.

**The Thomist view**

As an entry point into Aquinas’ position, it is useful to begin by considering reasons why the cardinal virtues might not be thought to remain in heaven. One line of argument was already suggested in Cicero, and his position, as a seemingly faithful extension of an Aristotelian conception of virtue, deserves a more complete response. Aquinas’ treatment of the issue hinges on a distinction between *acquired* and *infused* virtues. Acquired virtues are developed through habituation and training, as Aristotle’s account in the *Ethics*\(^{16}\) explains (although even this is only possible because of the special potentialities implanted by God in the human soul.) In rough outline, the virtuous Aristotelian is a person who has learned to identify correctly the place of different goods within a rational life. The temperate person understands that various pleasures have their appropriate place in life, and he indulges in them in just the right ways, and to the right extent, as reason demands. The

\(^{16}\) *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2.1-3.
courageous person is able to perceive when standing firm in the face of a threatening danger would be fine and noble, and when doing so would simply be rash and fruitless. Likewise, the just person sees what is due to different people at different times, and does her part to give each person his due. In each case, virtue involves both recognizing what reason demands, and training oneself to act accordingly. But their objects are necessarily temporal goods, of the kind the Christians would attribute to God’s creative power. It is easy to see how this gives rise to Cicero’s position, such that the cardinal virtues remain active only so long as their earthly objects are at hand.

Aquinas agrees with Cicero in this, and accordingly, holds that the acquired virtues will not remain in the life to come. Because the acquired cardinal virtues are from the beginning ordered to exclusively earthly ends, they cannot survive physical death. In the *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, he explains that:

> the *acquired* civic virtues, which the philosophers discuss, are ordered only to perfecting human beings in civic life, not to perfecting them as ordered towards the winning of heavenly glory. That is why the philosophers held that this type of virtue does not remain after this life, as Augustine tells us was true of Cicero... on the other hand, the cardinal virtues as given by grace and *infused*... perfect us in the present life for being ordered towards heavenly glory.\(^{17}\)

By positing two different sorts of cardinal virtue, Aquinas is able to endorse both Cicero’s point and Augustine’s; acquired virtues fall into disuse in the

\(^{17}\) Manifestum est autem quod virtutes acquisitae, de quibus locuti sunt philosophi, ordinantur tantum ad perficiendum homines in vita civilii, non secundum quod ordinantur ad caelestem gloriam consequendam. Et ideo posuerunt, quod huiusmodi virtutes non manent post hanc vitam, sicut de Tullio Augustinus narrat. Sed virtutes cardinales, secundum quod sunt gratuitae et infusae, prout de eis nunc loquimur, perficiunt hominem in vita praesenti in ordine ad caelestem gloriam. *Disputed Questions on the Virtues (DQV)*, Question 5, Article 4.
absence of earthly objects, but infused virtues have a more exalted object that will be found only in the life to come. Thus, infused and acquired virtues are distinct both in their origin and also, as Aquinas here argues, in their scope. Unlike acquired virtue, which draws on resources already in the soul, infused virtue is poured into the soul from without, through a special act of grace.\textsuperscript{18} But in addition to its supernatural origin, it also has a supernatural end, and the actions which follow from infused virtue are the sort of actions that will lead the agent to her supernatural end.

Despite their ultimate supernatural orientation, infused virtues can still be concerned with earthly goods. Not unsurprisingly, the supernaturally virtuous person is required to respond appropriately to earthly goods as well as heavenly ones, and the infused cardinal virtues enable her to do this throughout her earthly life. Thus, these virtues are \textit{contingently} concerned with natural goods for as long as the virtuous agent’s circumstances require this, although they are ultimately oriented towards the supernatural.

Aquinas explains this process by discussing things that occur in an “ordered series.”\textsuperscript{19} Sometimes a skill or ability can be applied to an activity or endeavor that involves multiple stages. Thus to borrow Aristotle’s example (cited by Aquinas), a master builder will begin a project by laying a foundation, and will then continue through a series of other stages – putting in main supports, adding a roof, and then finishing other details such as cutting

\textsuperscript{18} DQV, Question 1, Art. 10.
\textsuperscript{19} DQV, Question 5, Art. 4.
windows, adding insulation, and so forth. Each stage of construction involves
different procedures and has a different specific end in view. But all contribute
to the final end of the project, namely, the completed building. And,
importantly for our present purposes, all the phases of the project will be under
the supervision of the master builder; all can rightly be classified as part of his
area of professional competence. Thus, one and the same ability – skill in
building – is able to direct and manage each of an ordered series of changes, all
directed at one final end.

Aquinas thinks that something similar is possible in the case of a virtue.
He explains:

But where the upper limit (ultimum) of the virtue differs in kind, but is still contained
under the same series of changes, so that it reaches from one to another, then there
will be a different kind of activity, but the virtue is the same throughout. For
example, courageous activities are ordered to one upper limit before the battle, to
another during it, and to yet another when victory is secured. Hence, the actions of
approaching the battle, standing one’s ground courageously during it, and rejoicing
at winning a victory are different; the courage, though, is the same.20

The guiding thought here seems to be that the level and type of activity that
can be expected of the virtuous agent will vary depending on the conditions.
So, for example, a prudent parent may reasonably demand obedience from a
young child, even in situations in which the child fails to understand the
reasoning behind his mother’s instructions. As the child matures, however, the
virtuous parent will gradually modify her expectations in order to allow him

20 Ubi vero ultimum virtutis differt specie (si tamen sub eadem serie motus continetur, ut
scilicet ab uno perveniatur in alium), est quidem actus differens specie, sed virtus est eadem;
sicut fortitudinis actus ad alium ultimum derivatur ante praelium, et ad alium in ipso praelio, et
ad alium in triumpho: unde alius specie actus est accedere ad bellum, et alius in praelio fortiter
stare, et alius iterum de aede victoria gaudere; et eadem fortitudo est; sicut etiam eiusdem
potentiae actus est amare, desiderare et gaudere. Ibid.
more responsibility and freedom. Her character may remain equally virtuous throughout the process, but precisely because she does possess prudence, she is able to adjust her behavior appropriately in order to facilitate her offspring’s moral development.

The upper limit of a virtue can also change more rapidly with changing external circumstances, as in Thomas’ example of the brave soldier, whose courage will lead him to demonstrate different sorts of behavior before, during, and after a battle. In each of these cases, the appropriate activity changes as the upper limit of the virtue changes, but the regulating virtue itself remains the same.

As human beings progress through earthly life, death, and the post-mortem, their virtues will manifest themselves differently according to the objects that are presented to them, and this, as Aquinas understands it, represents another ordered series of changes. In form it is very much like the soldier’s progression through the battle, though presumably the series of changes included in an entire life span will be more comprehensive. The same principle, however, will hold in each case. A virtue that regulates certain familiar types of action in mortal life might find a very different upper limit in the next life. In each case the infused virtue is ultimately ordered, not to the intermediate earthly goal, but to the final goal of fulfillment in heaven. Like the master builder, the virtuous person directs his attention towards the immediate task at hand, which in earthly life may be avoiding erroneous decisions, regulating pleasures, facing pain and hardship, and so forth. In
heaven, the same virtues will be redirected towards seeing God, desiring God, holding fast to God and submitting ourselves entirely to his guardianship.

Aquinas summarizes his position as follows:

The cardinal virtues concern things that contribute to the end, but not in the sense that their ultimate end is found in them, in the way that the ultimate end of a ship is sailing. Rather, it is through the things that contribute to the end that the cardinal virtues are ordered to the ultimate end. For example, grace-given temperateness does not have as its final end moderating the sensual desires for things we touch, but it does this for the sake of the blessedness of heaven.21

So, the infused cardinal virtues do regulate the agent’s dispositions with respect to created goods, but only as an intermediate step along the road to the final end of blessedness in heaven. This is a neat way of explaining the relationship of earthly acts of virtue to the saintly dispositions that will ultimately be exhibited by the blessed.

The above explanation may be misleading, however, in one important respect. By suggesting that infused temperance regulates sensual desires for the sake of heavenly blessedness, Aquinas may seem to imply a high level of conscious calculation on the part of the virtuous agent, which would enable the agent to draw a strict separation between infused and acquired virtue. So, for example, a person with the acquired virtue of temperance might moderate his intake of alcohol because he realizes that this will be beneficial to his health, or that social propriety demands it. A person with the infused virtue, on the other hand, will moderate his intake because of a conscious realization that this is in

21 Ad secundum dicendum, quod virtutes cardinales sunt circa ea quae sunt ad finem, non quasi in his sit ultimus eorum terminus, sicut ultimus terminus navis est navigatio; sed in quantum, per ea quae sunt ad finem, habent ordinem ad finem ultimum; sicut temperantia gratuita non habet pro finali ultimo moderari concupiscentias tactus, sed hoc facit propter similitudinem caelestem. Ibid, ad. 2
accord with God’s commands and conducive to his eventual salvation. There would be a pleasing simplicity to this sort of distinction, since it would make the two varieties of virtue clearly different even from a human perspective. It seems unlikely, however, that Aquinas envisioned such a phenomenologically clear division between the two. Consider, for example, the following passage:

It is clear, then, from what has been said that since the condition of our homeland is higher than that of our journey, the virtues in our homeland must attain a more elevated upper limit. If, then, the upper limit attained by virtue on our journey is ordered to the upper limit of virtue attained in our homeland, there will have to be one type of virtue, but different types of action.\textsuperscript{22}

Here Aquinas seems to be suggesting that a person with infused virtue will have only “one type of virtue” that will regulate her various actions. That seems to imply a fairly close relationship between acquired and infused virtue, in which acquired and infused dispositions complement one another, or in some way overlap. Other passages in the \textit{Disputed Questions} give a similar impression, as for example when Aquinas states that:

\begin{quote}
The activities of infused virtues do not bring about any disposition, but strengthen a pre-existing disposition.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

Although he never says so explicitly, it seems highly probably that the pre-existing natural disposition must be the same one that is developed through

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Manifestum est igitur ex praedictis, in istomet artic., quod cum status patriae sit altior quam status viae, peritingat ad perfectius ultimum. Si igitur ultimum illud ad quod pertingit virtus viae, ordinetur ad ultimum illud ad quod pertingit virtus patriae, necesse est quod sit eadem virtus secundum speciem; sed actus erunt differentes. \textit{Ibid}
\item Ad decimumnonum dicendum, quod actus virtutis infusae non causant aliquem habitum, sed per eos augetur habitus praeexistens: quia nec ex actibus virtutis acquisitae aliquis habitus generatur; alias multiplicarentur habitus in infinitum. \textit{Disputed Questions on the Virtues}, Question 1, art. 10, ad. 19.
\end{enumerate}
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acquired virtue. This impression is strengthened by a somewhat longer passage in which Aquinas explains that:

Since we can merit nothing without charity, the actions of an acquired virtue cannot have merit without charity. However, the other virtues are infused in us together with charity; that is how the actions of an acquired virtue can be meritorious only by means of an infused virtue. For a virtue that is ordered towards a lower end can only bring about actions that are ordered to a higher end if this is done by means of a higher virtue. For example, the courage that is a virtue of a human being *qua* human being does not order its actions to the civic good except by means of that courage that is the virtue of a human being *qua* citizen.24

The last sentence in this quotation is a reference to a passage from Aristotle’s *Politics*25 that Aquinas used in article 9 of the *Disputed Questions* to illustrate the relationship of the divine and natural human ends. The example is intended to show that human beings can be considered under multiple aspects, and that natural dispositions can remain natural, even while they are being redirected towards some higher end. The courageous person’s desire for glory is not quelled by his induction into the military, but it is incorporated into a larger (and hopefully better) endeavor, and is thereby made more noble.

Taken together with the other passages, this reference serves to underscore the point that the relationship between infused and acquired virtues will need to be somewhat complicated. Infused virtues do not simply supplant acquired dispositions; rather, they appropriate or transform them in such a way that they can serve a higher purpose. The temperate man does not

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24 Ad quartum dicendum, quod cum nullum meritum sit sine caritate, actus virtutis acquisitae, non potest esse meritorius sine caritate. Cum caritate autem simul infunduntur aliae virtutes; unde actus virtutis acquisitae non potest esse meritorius nisi mediante virtute infusa. Nam virtus ordinata in finem inferiorem non facit actus ordinatum ad finem superiorem, nisi mediante virtute superiori; sicut fortitudo, quae est virtus hominis qua homo, non ordinat actum suum ad bonum politicum, nisi mediante fortitudine quae est virtus hominis in quantum est civis. *Ibid*, ad. 4.

25 *Politics*, 3.2, 1276b34.
cease to desire health or propriety, but his desire for these natural goods can somehow be incorporated into a more elevated motivational framework with the help of infused virtue. The nature of this intricate relationship will be explored more fully in chapter five, but for now it is sufficient to note that infused and acquired virtues may manifest themselves in very similar ways from the perspective of a human agent or observer.

Aquinas has made it clear that the cardinal virtues will remain active in heaven, but unfortunately, he never explains in much detail what the “characteristic activities” of the cardinal virtues will be in that sphere. He does, however, quote Augustine with approval, which would seem to imply that, for the blessed in heaven, the characteristic activities of the virtues will be directed immediately towards God. Insofar as this is Aquinas’ view, it might seem to raise certain problems with other aspects of his thought. First of all, how is it possible for the virtues of temperance or courage to be directed immediately towards God when, as Aquinas has explained elsewhere, these are located in the sensory powers? And secondly, if the cardinal virtues find their proper end in God directly, how are they ultimately different from the theological virtues?

The question of sensory powers is important in light of Aquinas’ view that the sensory powers are inherently suited only to the comprehension of created goods, and thus not capable of perceiving the Divine. “These effects,” he explains, “are not equal to the power of their causes.”26 But if two of the cardinal virtues are located in the sensory powers, and the sensory powers

26 Summa Contra Gentiles, 1.3.
cannot perceive God, then how is it possible for the cardinal virtues to be
directed immediately towards God? Aquinas addresses this in reply to an
objection, explaining that,

The virtues in question (that is, courage and temperance) exist in aggression and
sensual desire in that they flow through them, but their origins and predispositions
are in the reason and will; this is because the principal action of moral virtue is
choice, which is an action of the rational desire. But the choice in question is applied
by means of temperateness and courage so that it finally reaches the emotions of the
aggression and sensual desire.27

So, while Aquinas supports Aristotle’s point that courage and temperance can,
in this life, be found in the sensory powers, he distinguishes between the
origins and predispositions of these virtues, and the medium through which
they manifest themselves in this earthly life. Perhaps surprisingly, he ends up
claiming that, like the created goods that are their primary area of concern
here below, the sensory powers are not necessary to the existence of these
virtues. In heaven, the same virtues can manifest themselves in a different,
non-sensory form.

At points, this solution does feel like a bit of a fudge. Looking back to his
discussion of temperance and courage in the Summa Theologiae, Aquinas
seems to have rather different ideas about these virtues. At the very least, his
discussion in the Summa is rather misleading if the above passage is correct.
For example, his statements that courage “is primarily about the fear of
difficult things”28 and that “temperance is about pleasures of touch”29 seem to

27 Ibid, ad 13.
28 ST II-II, q. 123, a. 3.
29 See ST II-II, q. 143, a. 1.
imply a view more like Cicero’s, wherein the virtues must have material objects
in order to be actively exercised. When we come to consider the distinction
between the cardinal and theological virtues, Aquinas’ difficulties only seem to
intensify.

The puzzle that arises here can perhaps best be illustrated using a
particular pair of virtues, such as courage and hope. Augustine has declared
(with Aquinas’ approval) that courage in heaven will mean “cleaving to God
with absolute constancy.” But earlier in the same work, Aquinas has already
told us that hope will find its object (and thus cease to be needed) when the
saints in heaven “hold fast to God’s help.”30 These sound like remarkably
similar goals. And yet, how could two different virtues aim at the same final
end? Wouldn’t this make them, in some sense, the same virtue?

To understand what’s going on here, it is useful to look briefly to the
Summa Contra Gentiles. Here Aquinas raises the question of human knowledge
of God in this earthly lifetime, and his remarks about the limitations of human
reason may throw some light on his treatment of the cardinal virtues. Aquinas
suggests that there are two senses in which human beings can believe in God.
Through observation of the natural world, they can come to know conclusively
that God exists (though this is a god of the philosophers, or First Mover.) Then,
through the virtue of faith, they can come to believe other truths about God
that are beyond what the human senses could ever perceive.

30 Ibid.
Aquinas holds, however, that it is not possible for human beings to know God directly in this lifetime, and the reason relates to the fact that human knowledge, in his view, originates in sensory perception. As explained above, the sensory powers are inherently unable to grasp the divine nature, and for this reason, any understanding mortal human beings have of God must proceed along two imperfect lines. One is through the proofs of sensory perception, which do qualify as real knowledge, but fall well short of grasping God’s true nature. The other is through faith. The person of faith will potentially be able to say quite a lot more about God’s nature, but on the other hand, he will not have real knowledge of the truth of what he says. (The question of what he does have will be explored at greater length in the fourth chapter.)

Turning back to our pairings of cardinal and theological virtues, we can see a similar sort of bifurcation. A person’s approach to God is mediated, on the one hand through created goods that reflect the divine image even while falling far short of its greatness, and on the other hand, through virtues specifically intended to direct the soul towards God without yet being able to see or experience God’s presence. The first of these methods of approach gives rise to the cardinal virtues. The second gives rise to the theological.

In a way, we might think of these as the “positive” and “negative” paths to God. One occupies itself in the here and now with the created goods that present themselves in earthly life, with the ultimate goal of turning that same capacity towards God in the world to come, where the soul will not be subject
to earthly limitations. Thus, courage trains the soul to cling fast to what is good, even in the face of the trials and temptations that present themselves in this lifetime. The tenacity that is developed through this “conditioning” will prepare the soul to cling fast to God, the greatest good, in the hereafter. Here the soul clings to God, not because there are further hardships to be endured, but rather because this secure attachment to its creator is most conducive to the person’s thriving. Meanwhile, the theological virtues take God as their direct object even in this lifetime. But this means they must “work blind” in a sense, accepting that for the course of the present lifetime, their object is inherently out of reach. Accordingly, the hopeful person learns to trust in God and in the possibility of salvation, even despite the uncertainties that come with a fallen world and a fallible existence. Coping with God’s absence is, in a sense, the primary function of a theological virtue like hope, and this is why Aquinas holds that the saints cannot hope in God, since their end is already attained.31

Aquinas makes clear that it is possible for multiple virtues or skills to have the same endpoint. He makes an analogy to the good of a city, which can be the object of both legislation and military science, each in different ways. Similarly, the different heavenly virtues all find their end in God, but this need not imply that they are the same virtue. As he explains, “each one rejoices in that end in accordance with the end of its own particular activities.”32

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31 ST II-II, q.18, a.2.
32 Ibid, ad. 4.
This explanation adequately distinguishes, say, justice from charity, but it doesn't clearly distinguish between two virtues like courage and hope, which resemble one another not only in their ends, but even in the way in which they enjoy the final end. Both find their fulfillment in clinging steadfastly to God. But need this really be a problem for Aquinas? Depending on one's definition of virtue, there might be a sense in which the two virtues are finally the same; both represent an excellence of the spirited part of the soul, and both come to the same final resting place. But they create two different arcs that mirror one another, ultimately coming together at the same point. Hope as a “virtue of absence” dissipates in heaven when its “coping mechanisms” are no longer needed. Courage, as the positive virtue, comes to its perfect end when its ability to cling fast to the good is turned towards the most perfect possible object – God.

All virtues are ultimately ordered by charity, and in this sense the cardinal virtues are certainly subordinate, lesser virtues, even in their perfected state. Still, Aquinas’ view does seem clear. In heaven the cardinal virtues will enjoy God, not only in a mediated way through the help of the higher virtues, but directly. Even those virtues that originally concerned themselves with created goods eventually come to a supernatural fulfillment, and presumably the blessed in heaven find their attention wholly occupied with praising God and enjoying the greatness of His love.
The Bonaventurean View

For Bonaventure, as for Aquinas, the Beatific Vision is the most complete final end for all human beings. There is significant disagreement between them, however, on the nature of the cardinal virtues. Aquinas, as we've just seen, argues that the infused cardinal virtues are ultimately directed towards God as their final end. Bonaventure, by contrast, holds that the cardinal virtues must always and only be directed towards created goods. This, for him, is simply what a cardinal virtue is.

Like Aquinas, Bonaventure draws a distinction between a person’s incomplete, natural end, and the complete, supernatural end that is finally found in God. Like Aquinas, he thinks that a person does need to be properly disposed with respect to the created world, most especially because this is a prerequisite for being properly disposed towards God. In the third book of his Commentaries on Lombard’s Sentences, Bonaventure offers the following explanation:

But the powers of the soul are divided into two parts, with two areas of concern. These are directed towards the lower and the higher ends, towards the created good and uncreated good, and towards an end and that which is ordered towards an end. Therefore, when it is said that the soul is adequately formed and reformed through the (theological) virtues, this is true with respect to the higher good. But it doesn’t follow from this that the cardinal virtues are superfluous, because they shape and restore the soul with respect to a created good, and to that which is ordered to the final end.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{33} Ad illud quod obiicitur, quod virtutes sunt ad reformandum potentias; dicendum, quod verum est; sed facies potentiarum animae duplex est secundum duplicem portionem et duplicem eius conversionem, videlicet ad inferius et ad superius, ad bonum creatum et ad bonum increatum, et ad finem et ad id quod est finem. Ideo, cum dicit, quod anima sufficienter formatur et reformatur per virtutes; dicendum, quod verum est per comparisonem ad superius; sed ex hoc non sequitur, quod cardinales virtutes superfluant, quia ipsam animam
So, for both these thinkers, the soul shares in both a natural and a supernatural order, and must be rightly disposed with respect to each. The supernatural is the final end, and the natural is only “that which is ordered to the final end.” Complete goodness is found in God alone.

Examining the premises Bonaventure has given us so far, we can see that 1) the natural order contains only lesser goods, which are ultimately ordered to a more final end, and 2) the cardinal virtues are necessarily ordered towards this lesser, subsidiary order. Thinking back to the logic of Cicero, then, would it be right to conclude that on this view, the cardinal virtues are needed only in this lifetime, and are not to be found among the saints?

In his discussion of the cardinal virtues in heaven, Bonaventure divides the infused virtues into three different kinds. The first type of virtue carries over from the earthly realm into the heavenly, but is supplemented, so that whatever of the virtue was possessed on earth will be perfected in heaven. Although Aquinas does not classify the virtues in precisely this same way, it seems reasonable to suppose that he would put the cardinal virtues in this first category. For Bonaventure, however, charity alone falls into this category.

The second type of virtue is not found in heaven, but only because the relevant earthly disposition is incompatible with its perfect fulfillment. Faith and hope are the two virtues that fit into this category, because, as discussed

informant et reformant per comparisonem ad creatum et ad id quod est ad finem ordinatum. (From Commentary on Lombard’s Sentences, Quaracci edition, 3.33.1.1 ad.3, translation mine).
above, their earthly dispositions depend on the *inability* to see or know God. The soul that is able to see and hold fast to God will not need faith or hope, and so these virtues will vanish upon reaching their fulfillment, in much the same way that medicine loses its potency when health is achieved.\(^3^4\)

The third type of virtue does remain in heaven, but it remains, as on earth, not a fulfilled final end in itself, but rather a *disposition* towards its end. The cardinal virtues fit into this third category. In Bonaventure’s view, they will continue through eternity to order the saints rightly towards created beings (or “self and neighbor” as he prefers to say) while these, in turn, will continue to point ultimately towards God, the final end.

For the ultimate end of those highest virtues is the highest good, which is the God that is seen, loved and held [by the virtuous soul.] And just as there are these three acts, so the soul is endowed with three powers. However, none of these acts is an act of cardinal virtue, because the cardinal virtues were never elevated to have God as their object; otherwise they would change into theological virtues and cease to be cardinal virtues. However, with respect to these glorious acts the cardinal virtues will be just like dispositions. Just as on earth it is possible to do things, not through the virtues themselves, but because we are disposed through the virtues to do them, so it will be in heaven. And from this all of our good activities will be strong and just, prudent and chaste, just as justice precludes wickedness, prudence excludes all error, courage all pain and temperance all repugnant lusts, according to what Augustine said and the Master mentioned in the Sentences. And so it is clear that the cardinal virtues will remain in heaven, in a more excellent mode than on earth.\(^3^5\)

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\(^3^4\) It seems strange that achieving a perfected state could involve *losing* two virtues, and in a sense it does not since faith and hope cease to be virtues for the person who has attained their proper object. It would be wrong to conclude, however, that faith and hope are merely instrumental and that the attendant dispositions simply lose all relevance once beatitude is attained, in something like the way that skill at marksmanship loses its relevance once the war is won. The belief of faith gives way to the certitude of seeing, and the perseverance of hope finds its completion in the successful attainment of its goal, but the meritorious dispositions that are attendant on these virtues contribute to the completeness of the virtue of charity. Aquinas discusses this in *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, Article 4, and Bonaventure addresses the question in *Commentary*, 3.33.1.1.

\(^3^5\) *Nam praemium essentiale ipsarum virtutum est ipsum bonum summum, quod Deus est, secundum quod videtur, diligitur et tenetur, ita quod penes istos tres actus tres dotes animae accipientur. Nullus autem istorum actuum est actus virtutum cardinalem, quia cardinales virtutes nunquam tantum elevantur, quod Deum habeant pro objecto, alioquin transirent in theologicas virtutes et desinerent esse cardinales. Respectu tamen horum actuum gloriosorum virtutes cardinales erunt sicut dispositiones; ut, sicut in via, licet per virtutes cardinales non*
Bonaventure’s account enjoys the advantage of being, in many respects, conceptually neater than Aquinas’. (This is also one respect in which Bonaventure’s account seems to differ from Augustine’s, despite his implication in the passage that he is in agreement with Augustine.) The distinction between the cardinal and theological virtues is clear, and this same distinction continues throughout this life and into the heavenly realm. Each sort of virtue has its own distinct subject matter, which is particularly advantageous given that both Aquinas and Bonaventure discuss the cardinal virtues, in most contexts, as virtues that are ordered towards earthly goods.

On the other hand, this view has some curious features of its own. Why, if a person has reached her final end, should she still need dispositions that lead to that end? Wouldn’t these become superfluous for someone already resting securely in the enjoyment of God’s truth, beauty and love? Going back to Aquinas’ analogy, it almost seems that Bonaventure has agreed that the cardinal virtues are like the ship that transports the virtuous to the heavenly kingdom. On his account, though, the blessed must drag their ships with them throughout eternity, even though the destination has been reached.

One solution that might initially look promising here is the “inclusivist” approach to the final end. This sort of solution, perhaps most commonly

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fruamur, tamen per eas disponimur, ut fruamur; sic et in patria. Unde omnes actus nostri gloriosi erunt fortes et iusti, prudentes et casti, ita quod iustitia excludit omnem obliquitatem, prudentia excludit omnem errorem, fortitudo omnem molestiam, temperantia omnem libidinum repugnatiam, secundum quod dicit Augustinus, et Magister tangit in littera. Et sic patet, quod virtutes cardinales excellentiori modo manebunt in patria, quam sunt in via. (3.33.1.6).
discussed in an Aristotelian context, designates a final end, but allows that smaller amounts of goodness might still be added to that end even when the highest good has already been achieved. So, for example, even granted that union with God is the single best thing a person could enjoy, might not there still be some further goods that could be accumulated in addition to this good? Would the Beatific Vision be made even better if it were supplemented by a delicious Pinot Noir or a relaxing walk on the beach?

If Bonaventure could answer this question in the affirmative, his position would become readily understandable, because the goods attained through the perfected heavenly cardinal virtues could then be understood as an unnecessary, but still genuinely good, addition to the bliss attained in the Beatific Vision. If being in a right relationship with God were worth one thousand units of happiness, being rightly ordered towards other people might count for considerably less (a few dozen, say.) Still, the cardinal virtues might be worth having even if their overall contribution to heavenly bliss is comparatively meager.

However, it seems unlikely that Bonaventure would consider this sort of solution. The inclusivist view would give created goods a kind of independent status apart from the final end, whereas Bonaventure, throughout his discussion of the cardinal virtues, repeats again and again that they are directed at “the things that point towards the end.” He further specifies that the

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36 For a more detailed discussion of inclusivism in Aristotle as considered in the context of Medieval philosophy, see Bradley, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good.* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1997), 377-390.
cardinal virtues are unable, in themselves, to make us happy or fulfilled; their value is in leading the soul back to its final end in God, not in making the Beatific Vision just a tiny bit sweeter.

Bonaventure views the cardinal virtues as fixed, stable dispositions that never reach a point of complete fulfillment, but that continue to form a non-eliminable part of the saints’ heavenly life. In order to be rightly ordered towards God, the saints must remain consistently ordered towards created goods too, just as they do on earth.

Why is this a necessary part of a saintly character? For Aquinas, as we have seen, the cardinal virtues are equipped to regulate the agent’s responses to earthly goods, but they do this only insofar as circumstances require it; in heavenly existence they will direct themselves towards their true and proper object, God. Bonaventure, by contrast, wants the cardinal virtues to remain ordered towards created goods even if there are no created goods at hand, and he regards this orientation as an important part of the perfected human state.

Bonaventure’s view is initially puzzling, but it might make sense if a right ordering towards created goods were simply constitutive of what it is to be rightly ordered towards God. Consider, as an analogy, the musical training of a great composer. In his early years, such a person will probably receive instruction in the fundamentals of musical theory. He will write simple four-part chorales, work through exercises in counterpoint, and learn to identify different chord progressions. As his skills develop, the “rules” that he learned in his early days will eventually become internalized to the point where he no
longer needs to think about them; he will even come to understand where it is appropriate to break them. Although the counterpoint exercises are left behind, their effect on the composer’s sensibilities is more lasting.

Something similar may apply to the dispositions of the saints with respect to created goods. In particular, the developmental theme seems appropriate for expressing what Bonaventure probably has in mind here. Throughout his mystical writings, Bonaventure returns again and again to a model wherein the human soul progresses from the appreciation of natural beauties, to the contemplation of his own soul, to a final exalted state in which the soul’s gaze comes to rest directly on divine things. Each stage contributes something significant to the person’s development and prepares it for the next stage. Early in the *Itinerarium Mentis ad Deum*, Bonaventure writes,

> In relation to our position in creation, the universe itself is a ladder by which we can ascend into God. Some created things are vestiges, others images; some are material, others spiritual; some are temporal, others everlasting; some are outside us, others within us. In order to contemplate the First Principle, who is spiritual, eternal and above us, we must pass through his vestiges, which are material, temporal and outside us.  

The ladder analogy, while clearly establishing the developmental character of the ascent to God, may also be problematic in some respects. A ladder, after all, is an instrumental good. Provided one has no intention of coming back down, there is no harm in kicking the ladder away once it has served its purpose. In other places, however, Bonaventure makes it clear that there are different parts of the human soul that require development, and that the various stages each leave their mark on the soul by facilitating that

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development. Just a few paragraphs down from the passage quoted above, he explains that,

Our mind has three principal perceptual orientations. The first is toward exterior material objects and is the basis for its being designated as animal or sensual. The second orientation is within itself and into itself and is the basis for its being designated as spirit. The third is above itself and is the basis for its being designated as mind. By all of these we should dispose ourselves to ascend into God so as to love him with our whole mind, with our whole heart and with our whole soul. 38

Now the composer analogy seems more apt. There are different parts of the human soul that require development and training in order for the person to be capable of appreciating the divine goodness in its fullness. At the summit of the ascent, these dispositions will all be relevant to the appreciation of the ultimate good, even if they are not all simultaneously being exercised with respect to discrete objects.39

Thus, the saints’ appreciation of the divine goodness extends beyond God himself to a full valuing of everything that is. This means that they retain their disposition to value other goods appropriately, whether or not that disposition is actively exercised. Regardless of whether Pinot Noir is drunk in heaven, saints should still be the sort of people who, under appropriate circumstances, would savor it to its fullest extent.

As discussed above, the differences between these two views mirror differences in the level of completeness that each philosopher wishes to attach to the natural human telos. Aquinas envisions a more definite separation

38 Ibid, part 4.
39 Fleshing out the details of this gradual progression is a significant project in its own right, for which Bonaventure’s later, mystical writings prove more useful in many respects than his work in the Commentary. Zachary Hayes provides a good overview of the subject in his Bonaventure: Mystical Writings. (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999).
between the natural and supernatural ends, and accordingly, the cardinal virtues in Aquinas’ heaven have more definitely discontinued their earthly function for the sake of their ultimate goal. Augustine, though his discussion of the issue was quite brief, seems to have had something similar in mind; his description of the heavenly cardinal virtues seems to presume that they will take God as their direct and immediate object. For Bonaventure, the line between earthly and heavenly fulfillment is less sharp. He is far less inclined to see earthly happiness as an end in itself, but, by the same token, he is more eager to integrate earthly goods into the final fulfilled state, at least in a passive if not in an active sense.

One of the most-discussed differences between Bonaventure and Aquinas is in their conception of natural reason. Aquinas consistently shows more confidence than his Franciscan counterpart in the potential of unaided human capabilities. He is prepared to grant that natural reason can accomplish much even without revelation or the Sacraments, that the senses have considerable purchase on reality (and indeed are our primary means for coming to know it), and that the natural virtues, even in their acquired form, can be developed to a significant degree. Bonaventure, by contrast, is much less sanguine about the potential of any human endeavor that is not assisted by grace. True wisdom comes only from God. Absent an act of submission

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40 This point is discussed extensively by Gilson in *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 200-250.
41 This is one of the main themes of his *Reductio Artium in Theologiam*, and indeed, this conviction permeates many of his works, both mystical and philosophical. For a particularly
to faith, intellectual endeavors decay into vanity and confusion, and efforts
towards virtue tend to be swallowed up in pride and lust. True understanding
comes through the light of grace, and can be received by the soul that is
ordered towards God.43

Given his deep mistrust of natural reason and natural goodness, it might
seem surprising that it is Bonaventure, not Aquinas, who gives human
relationships and created goods a more prominent and robust place in heaven.
In fact, though, this is perhaps not so strange. For Aquinas, the dividing line
between the heavenly and earthly spheres is fairly distinct; for Bonaventure,
the contrast is less sharp, as we can see in his desire to keep natural goods in
the picture, even if only in a passive way. Thus it turns out that, for Aquinas,
creation-ordered virtues must undergo a significant transformation in moving
from this life to the next. They can serve as a kind of “training virtue” for the
superior dispositions that will be attained in the life to come, but in themselves
they are unsuited for the heavenly kingdom. For Bonaventure, no such radical
transformation is necessary. The heavenly and earthly goods run together to a

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42 For a more detailed discussion of Bonaventure’s conception of wisdom and its radical
dependence on God, see Christopher Cullen, Bonaventure. (New York: Oxford University Press,
Thomas” (from Shahan and Kovach, Bonaventure and Aquinas: Enduring Philosophers.
(Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), p. 117-132) touches on some ways in which
Aquinas’ thought might have been relevantly different from Bonaventure’s with respect to these
issues.

43 Although this theory is not much developed in the Commentary, it later matures into a theory
of illumination which is presented in full in De Scientia Christi, probably written around 1256.
Ignatius Brady discusses the importance and influence of this theory in “St. Bonaventure’s
Doctrine of Illumination: Reactions Medieval and Modern” (Shahan and Kovach, 57-68).
much greater degree, and so the cardinal virtues can themselves be early-developing components of the perfected human nature.

Heavenly Virtues in the Christian Tradition

Naturally, I can produce no definitive evidence in favor of either of these two views, and while we can, to some degree, evaluate them through philosophical analysis, it may be that both retain a certain plausibility. This seems especially likely when we observe that both of these views find certain echoes in other parts of the Christian tradition. In Aquinas and Bonaventure we can find the philosophical underpinnings for a contrast that might equally be highlighted through a look at literature or mysticism.

Throughout the Christian tradition, many have been attracted to an image of heaven as a place in which significant social interaction takes place among the saints and angels. This idea might be said to originate in the Gospels themselves. In the parable of the wedding feast, Christ gives an analogy to heaven that suggests a social atmosphere in which people mingle freely and interact with one another.\(^4^4\) Julian of Norwich drops a similar image into the sixth section of her *Revelations of Divine Love*, portraying the blessed in heaven as guests at a feast in a house over which God reigns, “fulfilling it with joy and mirth.”\(^4^5\) CS Lewis seems to have a similar idea in his depictions

of heaven. Both *The Great Divorce* and *The Last Battle* contain depictions of heaven in which the occupants converse and enjoy one another’s fellowship. Although it is true that neither Bonaventure nor Aquinas explicitly discusses the atmosphere of heaven, it seems that Bonaventure’s model is more conducive to this sort of understanding of heaven. By including elevated natural virtues in the perfected human state, he leaves room for the appreciation of natural goods (such as human relationships) as a component of heavenly bliss.

The Christian tradition is not unanimous, however, in portraying heaven as a social place. Other images are more directly focused on God’s own splendor. In the Book of Revelation, the white-robed saints are found standing around the throne of God singing praises. This image finds echoes in Dante, whose *Paradiso* portrays the most blessed of the saints gathered in the divine presence, apparently wholly absorbed in singing praises and basking in the light of grace. Dante does, of course, depict paradise as involving a kind of heavenly society, whose members do interact to some degree. Even so, the Thomist vision of *Sanctus*-singing saints takes pride of place for Dante.

Given the limitations to which ordinary mortals are subject, it may be best to draw on both images in our speculation about heaven. The Thomist view emphasizes the unfathomable beauty and goodness of the divine, and the extent to which the good of the Beatific Vision far surpasses any joy that mere

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47 Revelation 7:9-17.
mortals could know. Bonaventure’s view, on the other hand, highlights another important idea, namely that earthly loves, insofar as they are true and inspired by grace, can find a place in heaven. Underneath Bonaventure’s view is a confidence that nothing wonderful need ultimately be lost or sacrificed, because all will be restored to its proper order in the blessed country beyond the grave.
Chapter Two

Conscience and the Will

In the last chapter we saw that, for Bonaventure, cardinal virtues are those by which natural, created goods are appropriately valued (though they do also play a role in the love for God.) In his view, the proper valuing of these goods is a constitutive part of the final end that is fully achieved only in the postmortem in the Beatific Vision. Our next task is to examine the cardinal virtues from the opposite end. If these virtues are an essential component of the supernatural human end, is it also the case that a person can only exemplify them when in possession of the supernatural end? Further, is it necessary to be directed towards that end in order to properly develop the cardinal virtues?

These questions are important because they help to define the relationship between human nature and grace. If human beings can fully attain the cardinal virtues on their own, in this lifetime and without any special gift of grace, that will give them a kind of autonomy from Christian revelation and sacraments. In the intellectual sphere the virtues could then be understood without the aid of Christian theology; in the practical one, they could be attained without sacraments. This would certainly be good news for Aristotelians, but all moral philosophers would have reason to be pleased, insofar as this would open interesting possibilities for understanding moral virtue as such, and for delineating the precise role of supernatural grace in a
Bonaventurean Christian ethics. The cardinal virtues might function like “control” virtues, providing a blueprint for what virtue looks like when it is not supplemented or perfected by supernatural grace.

**Virtuous Pagans?**

To what extent, though, do the cardinal virtues have this kind of autonomy? This question has been the source of some controversy at various periods of Christian history. Augustine famously claimed that the natural virtues (by which he presumably meant those observable phenomena that the philosophers had traditionally classified as virtues) are in fact vices. While some pagans might display qualities that are externally similar to genuine virtues, these were secretly vitiated by a smoldering pride.1 In the high Middle Ages, however, philosophers were inclined to make more of the natural virtues as such, in keeping with the high esteem that they had for Aristotle and his Greek and Islamic successors. Bonnie Kent argues strenuously that the natural virtues were widely regarded by the medievals as “true virtues”, despite their acknowledged imperfections with respect to the supernatural human end.2

Kent could be more thorough in explaining what she means by this, but her remarks do make it clear that she thinks a virtue might be considered “true but imperfect” if it is directed towards a human being’s natural, but not his

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1 See Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XIX, c. 25, and *Contra Julianum*, IV, c. 3.
supernatural, end. She explains this through a quotation from Aquinas, in which he differentiates between an apparent virtue that is directed towards a genuine good, and one that is directed towards a false good. As an example of the latter, he gives the case of a person whose apparent prudence is really just auxiliary to his own greed. In most cases, prudent living is the surest route to earthly prosperity, and that in itself might provide a compelling motivation to live like the prudent person even if one is ultimately focused on an unworthy end.

Kent suggests that Aquinas diverges from Augustine primarily in holding a more optimistic view of the moral state of human beings. Both philosophers agree that human nature is fallen and can only be fully perfected with the help of infused grace. More than Augustine, however, Aquinas thinks that this nature “has not been totally corrupted by original sin.” This might be a reasonable way of distinguishing Augustine’s view from Aquinas’. Bonaventure, however, would be less inclined to consider the matter in terms of the totality of human corruption. Instead, he might look at things from the other end. What does natural human happiness look like? To what extent is the natural human end indivisibly bound up with the supernatural? Or, to put the question another way: to what extent is there an autonomous natural human end?

In the last chapter we saw that for Bonaventure, the love of created things is a constitutive part of the completely charitable disposition. That is why, for Bonaventure, created goods are actively loved even in heaven, where

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3 ST II-IIae, q.23, a.7.
4 VW, 30.
we might have expected God’s magnificent presence to overwhelm all other attitudes or dispositions. But if natural loves are a constitutive or organic part of the supernatural end, it would not be surprising to find as well that supernatural fulfillment is necessary for completing even a natural love.

In evaluating the good of organic wholes or unities, we often find that the good of the whole can be more than the combined good of the individual components; thus we saw at the end of the last chapter that the technique of the musician or the athlete becomes a constitutive part of a much greater good when it is incorporated into a stellar performance. We cannot say that the violinist outgrows her accurate fingerings or the quarterback his perfect spiral release. Rather, these technical accomplishments become an assumed part of a complimentary set of skills that all come together to enable a virtuoso performance. But once we understand these goods as part of an organic whole, we can also understand that they are not autonomous goods in their own right, or, at the very least, that their goodness is far from complete if they are taken in isolation.

It seems, then, that Bonaventure will be much less able than Aquinas to regard the natural virtues as true and autonomous. The language he uses in referring to the natural virtues is not dissimilar to that cited by Kent; like Aquinas, he speaks of the natural virtues as virtues, but sometimes mentions that it is the infused virtues that are virtuous simpliciter. Bonaventure does

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5 See, for example, Commentary 3.23.2.1. Bonaventure holds that the term “virtue” can be used in three different ways: commonly, properly, and simply or most properly. In a common sense the term may be used to refer to any trait that leads a specific thing towards its proper end;
not follow Augustine in declaring the natural virtues to be vices in disguise. It is clear, however, that the natural virtues occupy a very subordinate place in his ethical view, and even when he does write about cardinal virtue he continually emphasizes how much it is in need of perfection through grace.

The Bonaventurean moral philosopher cannot count on the natural virtues to provide a stable “control group” for ethical study, and this perhaps puts her at a disadvantage in the company of Thomists. Her attention must quickly be drawn to the infused virtues that were clearly the focus of Bonaventure’s concern. Still, even for a Bonaventurean, the natural virtues provide a good starting point for an exploration of the mechanisms by which virtues are acquired. Natural virtues may not be particularly stable or autonomous, but it does still seem possible even for pagans to acquire the cardinal virtues to some degree. Some account must be given for the methods and mechanisms by which these (admittedly imperfect) virtues are acquired. Further, though, we may be able to learn something through an examination of the imperfections of the natural virtues. We will see Bonaventure’s view more clearly if we understand why he regards infused grace as necessary for perfecting the cardinal virtues. Then, at the end of the chapter, some

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thus, animals or plants might be “virtuous” in the common sense. Properly speaking, virtue is possible only for human beings, and refers to those moral dispositions that are salutary for human beings, which may include Aristotelian virtues. In a simple or most proper sense, however, virtue refers to those infused habits that lead a person to his ultimate fulfillment in the Beatific Vision. Bonaventure references these distinctions at several points in the Commentaries, but distinguishes most clearly between them in his Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity, q.1, a.1.

6 It should be noted, after all, that the concept of cardinal virtue predated Christianity.
consideration will be given to the way in which grace can supervene on naturally habituated traits to create a more perfectly virtuous disposition.

What is really wanted in this chapter is an account of morally good action as such, which does not rely on mysterious references to supernatural forces that are beyond our ken. And although Bonaventure’s writings on the natural virtues are fairly brief and sometimes unsatisfying, there is another useful resource that might help to shed further light on this topic. Bonaventure discusses morally good action in the second book of the Commentaries when he deals with questions about free will and conscience. Next to the discussion of the virtues in the third book, the section on free will and conscience is comparatively short. But here the Bonaventure scholar can avail herself of a rare benefit: a not-insignificant body of secondary literature.

Insofar as contemporary medievalists have delved into Bonaventurean ethics at all, their work has primarily focused on those sections of the Commentaries (found in the middle of the second book) that discuss free will and conscience. This probably is not a reflection of any perceived emphases in Bonaventure’s own work. Free will and conscience were not per se overwhelmingly important themes for him. However, an emphasis on the freedom of the will did become enormously important for the Franciscan order generally, and Franciscan ideas about the will were certainly significant to the development of Western philosophy more generally. Bonaventure never participated in the debates over the will to any significant degree, and his university career was too early for him to be extensively involved when these
issues became truly explosive among philosophers. Still, he remains one of the great founding intellectuals of the Franciscan order, and so it is not surprising that contemporary scholars would be interested in examining the extent to which later Franciscans were following in a pre-existing Bonaventurean tradition when they developed their influential theories on the will.

Given my primary goal of contributing to the lamentably small body of Bonaventure scholarship, I prefer to focus my attention on the larger and less-appreciated material in the third book of the Commentaries. Bonaventure's work on free will is neither extensive nor historically influential to any great degree; even more importantly, scholars are largely in agreement about his general views, so that there is less work to be done on this subject. Nevertheless, in this chapter, it will be useful to draw on this literature in considering natural virtue and establishing the conditions for moral action as such. By pairing this with an examination of the remarks on the natural virtues as found in the third book of the Commentaries, we will be able to identify the natural components of virtue, and describe the way in which their imperfections can be corrected through supervening grace.

**Innate human capacities for virtue**

Following Aristotle, virtually every medieval ethical thinker agreed that there were two natural components which were important for acquiring virtue. The first was some sort of innate characteristics or capacities that make human
beings particularly suited to acquire virtue. The second is habituation, which can shape and form these characteristics to allow that potential to be realized. Both of these points merit further consideration.

Bonaventure agrees that the cardinal virtues are in some way innate. But by contrast to, for example, Aquinas, he is more inclined to see this as a common tie to the animals and to the lower order of creation. He discusses innate virtues through comparison to natural qualities that can be found in various animal species.

For we see, the irrational creatures inherit the same virtues in the same way, as though naturally. For a certain animal is strong in nobleness; a certain one in prudence; a certain one in gentleness; a certain one in strenuous activity; a certain one in purity, which is clear through example. Therefore, if the nature of man is worthier than the nature of the beasts, it seems much more likely that man should have these cardinal virtues through that which is innate simpliciter, or through that which, in virtue of what is innate, the industry of reason enables us to acquire.⁷

Strictly speaking, Bonaventure’s reasoning on this point is not deeply in tension with a typical Dominican view (except possibly in its implication that animals actually have virtues, which might require more clarification.) Certain species of animal do seem to demonstrate virtue-like tendencies, for which we love and admire them. Thus, for example, a German Shepherd shows great loyalty to its human masters, along with something resembling courage when the ones it loves are threatened, while elephants and dolphins are noteworthy

⁷ Videmus enim, quasdam creaturas irrationales huiusmodi virtutes quasi naturaliter possidere. Quoddam enim animal est, quod viget in liberalitate; quoddam, quod in prudentia; quoddam, quod in mansuetudine; quoddam, quod in virtutis strenuitate; quoddam quod in castitate, sicut per exempla patet: ergo si natura hominis dignior est quam natura bestiarum, multo fortius videtur, quod homo istas virtutes cardinales aut habeat simpliciter sibi innatas, aut per illud quod est innatum, cum rationis industria possit acquirere. *Commentary*, 3.33.1.5 fund. 5.
both for their intelligence and for their ability to form community bonds. Surely most Christian scholars would agree that these traits are a manifestation of special innate goods with which the Creator has endowed each particular species. By the same token, Bonaventure concedes that human beings have a higher nature than beasts, such that we should expect their innate gifts to be finer and nobler than those of their animal cousins. He even mentions the possible role of reason in developing human gifts into full-blown virtues.

Still, the emphases seen in this passage are striking. Although human beings are higher than beasts, Bonaventure portrays this less as a difference in kind, and more as a difference in degree. All created beings have been blessed with particular gifts; human beings were granted the largest share, but insofar as their virtues are innate, they are effectively the same sort of good that we see in elephants or cats. Although he doesn’t explicitly say so in this passage, we can conclude that if human beings are to be distinguished from animals in some more absolute way, it will not be primarily through their innate qualities. In fact he does think that human beings are greater than the beasts, but their exalted nature will best be seen through their receptivity to grace.

Habituation

If the innate component of virtue is relatively unproblematic for Bonaventure, the same cannot be said for the habituated component. He accepts that
habituation must play some role in moral development, as is clear in the following passage:

For we see, that the evil man, while he is trained in good and grows used to it, always comes more and more to be disposed and made suitable to the good, and more easily to be restored to it. But this could not be, unless it was through habituation in having acquired that habit which might suit any person to the good. Therefore, insofar as such things are cardinal virtues, it seems, that they have their origin in doing good constantly.⁸

Since we have already seen that human beings have some innate characteristics that are relevant to virtuous action, it is interesting that Bonaventure describes the cardinal virtues as having their “origin” in habitual behavior. This might be read as an indication that, as Kent would have it, habituated traits can be real virtues in a way that innate dispositions cannot. In discussing habituation, however, Bonaventure seems conflicted at points. He has difficulty harmonizing this account of Aristotelian habituation with some other aspects of his theory. Two significant problems arise. I will first give brief consideration to the problem of gradualness, and then will consider at greater length the problem of passivity in habituated virtue.

For the truly virtuous person, a variety of habituated tendencies will work in conjunction to enable him to live a balanced and flourishing life. Balancing these different characteristics in just the right way is challenging, and any weakness or vice has the potential to undermine the entire virtuous

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⁸ Videmus enim, quod malus homo, dum in bono exercetur et assuescit, semper plus et plus ad bonum habet disponi et habilitari et facilior reddi; sed hoc non esset, nisi per assuefactionem in bono acquireretur habitus, qui ad bonum habilitaret: cum igitur tales sint virtutes cardinales, videtur, quod originem trahant ex frequenti bene agere. (3.33.1.5 fun.3)
disposition, as Aristotle also agreed. All of this helps to explain why Bonaventure is inclined to see virtue as the sort of thing that one either has or doesn’t. These themes will be developed more in the next chapter when we discuss the theological virtues, whose all-or-nothing character is much more obvious and pronounced. But even when he is considering the natural virtues, Bonaventure is still somewhat uncomfortable with the idea that virtue should be acquired through a gradual process. This discomfort becomes clear through the following objection:

Likewise, if virtue is acquired through operations, then it is either through one operation or through many. But it is agreed that it is not acquired through one, and therefore must be acquired through many. But on the other hand, when one of those activities begins to be, another ceases; therefore, if activities are never simultaneous, one cannot do it, therefore neither can many be do it, since new operations are coming on, while others may move into the past.

The way Bonaventure presents this objection is a bit reminiscent of sorites paradoxes within contemporary philosophy. Habituated traits of character can be developed only after an extended series of actions; a person must engage in many sorts of good actions, and must repeat them numerous times, in order to habituate good states of character. But what is the specific point at which a vicious person crosses the line from vice into virtue, or from virtue into vice? The fact is that there doesn’t seem to be one; there is simply a continuous

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9 Nicomachean Ethics, 6.13.1144b, 5-12.
10 Item, si virtus acquiritur per operationes, aut per unicam operationem, aut per plures; constat, quod per unicam non: ergo per plures. Sed contra: quando una illarum operationum incipit esse, alia desinit: ergo si nunquam operationes sunt simul; si una non potest facere, ergo nec plures, cum novis operationibus supervenientibus, aliae transeant in praeteritum. (3.33.1.5 ob.4).
series of actions, with different individuals falling at different places along the spectrum between virtue and vice. And yet, Bonaventure wishes to talk about virtue and vice as two distinctly separate states.

One possible (if unappealing) solution to the sorites paradox is to simply declare by fiat an arbitrary point that marks the line between two categories. Thus, the person who is five-foot-four is deemed short and the five-foot-six person is called tall; the man with thirty hairs is bald but the man with thirty-five is not-bald, and so forth. Bonaventure could attempt to make use of a similar solution. But even if, somehow, we were able to pinpoint a semi-arbitrary point along the line of good actions at which vice is supposedly changed to virtue, there would still be a problem. The suddenly-virtuous person would be gaining that status, not only because of the act he had just done, but also because of a long list of other actions that had been done in the past. But how can that be, when the other actions are already over and done? If those actions were able to confer virtue, he would have become virtuous long ago. If they are not, then why are they necessary at all?

It is interestingly revealing of the direction of Bonaventure’s thoughts that he has this worry at all, and it will arise again with greater force when he comes to the infused virtues. Still, at this point he offers a solid Aristotelian reply to this concern, insofar as he defends the importance of habitual action for instilling virtue.

Concerning the question of whether one activity or many may lead to the completion of virtue, it must be said that it must be many, because a habit is not generated out of one
operation, but from many. And if someone should object that when one supervenes, the other perishes, and that at no time were there many together, it will be said that although the first activity ends as far as the act is concerned, yet it will remain as concerns the effect. The effect in itself is not so much that it should deserve to be called a disposition or habit; but just as it is helped and moved forward to the following acts, it grows into a disposition, and from a disposition grows into a habit. This is similar to the way that one drop is not enough to pierce, yet numerous falling drops make a hole, as in that poem: “A drop carves a stone not through strength, but by repeatedly falling.”

Two things about this reply are worth noting. First, Bonaventure is interested in the fact that no bright line can be drawn between habituated virtue and vice. Even after an action is long since completed, the effect of that action may remain in the soul. Thus, when many actions have been done, the effects of all of them together can accumulate within the soul to form a fixed habit or disposition, and this is in effect what a habituated virtue must be. But this is not sufficient to mark a definite point at which virtue emerges. Rather, there will be a sliding scale of more-virtuous and less-virtuous dispositions.

Further, though, it is worth noting that this account of habituation emphasizes the passive aspect of virtue. The analogy to the drop of water and the stone makes this particularly clear. When water erodes stone, the water moves while the stone sits still. Virtue in this case is compared to the indentation in the rock, a mere after-effect of something else’s motion. In comparison to Aristotle, who likes to emphasize virtue as an active disposition, Bonaventure here gives a very non-participatory account of habituated virtue.

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11 Ad illud quaeritur, utrum una operatio, an plures perducant ad virtutis completionem; dicendum, quod plures, quia non ex una operatione generatur habitus, sed ex multis. - - Et si obiiciat, quod una superveniente, reliqua transit, et nunquam erunt simul plures; dicendum, quod etsi prima operatio transeat quantum ad actum, manet tamen quantum ad effectum, qui quidem effectus per se ipsum non est tantus, ut mereatur dici dispositio vel habitus; sed prout ab actibus sequentibus adiuvatur et promovetur, crescit in dispositionem, et de dispositione crescit in habitum; sicut videmus, quod una gutta non sufficit ad cavandum, frequens tamen stillatio guttae facit foveam, secundum illud poeticum: Gutta cavat lapidem non vi, sed saepe cadendo. (3.33.1.5 ad.4)
As we will see, he ultimately wants to entertain a theory of habituation that gives a more active role to the individual agent, and it may be that he wishes at this point to distinguish different senses in which habituation might be understood. In any case, though, the description of habituation offered here seems to be fully adequate to describe the training of an animal. A dog or a parrot can be taught to do tricks through repeated reinforcement of particular cues, and this seems to be exactly the sort of process that Bonaventure is describing.

At this point it seems that the Aristotelian account of habituation, in Bonaventure’s view, only underscores the similarities between human beings and the lower order of creation. This is problematic for Bonaventure because, as we will see, he wishes to describe the virtues as meritorious, and to understand merit in turn as a result of a free and active decision. This ability to freely choose the good is what truly distinguishes human beings from beasts. Bonaventure must find a way to emphasize the freedom of the human will if he is to preserve this important distinction.

**Free will**

The characteristic Franciscan concern with defending the freedom of the will is not nearly so pronounced in Bonaventure as it is in later Franciscans such as Scotus or Occam. Nonetheless, in comparison with Aristotle or even his

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12 *Commentary* 2.25.1.1.
Dominican contemporaries, Bonaventure clearly is worried about establishing a connection between merit and the freedom of the will. True virtue should be meritorious, and meritorious action must proceed from free choice. Consequently, Bonaventure treads carefully when adopting Aristotelian ideas about habituation and its effect on the soul. Without denying that a good upbringing and education might be desirable prerequisites to virtue, he is anxious to establish that true virtue will manifest itself in free choices which are very different in kind from any behavior that could be manifested by a dog or a chimpanzee, no matter how expertly that animal was trained. In order to protect that connection between virtue and free will, he makes certain modifications to the Aristotelian account of the soul, and ultimately finds a somewhat unique solution to the problem of free will that does enable him to incorporate habituation into his account in a robust way.

Although he never introduces the view in an explicit and systematic way, Bonaventure clearly works under the assumption that the soul can be divided into three fundamental parts. The intellect is the part of the soul that is rational to the fullest and most complete extent. But there are also two other parts of the soul, which Aristotle highlights in the last chapter of the first book of the Ethics as those that “obey reason as a father.” These are the irascible and concupiscent (sometimes more naturally referred to as the spirited and appetitive) parts of the soul, which enable a person to withstand hardships, and to foster appetites. Although Aristotle never directly says so, the Greek and later Christian traditions identified four primary virtues as “cardinal” and
matched particular cardinal virtues to particular parts of the soul. Each virtue corresponds to its attendant part of the soul, and directs its operation appropriately. In the case of the spirited part of the soul, courage is the attendant regulating virtue (more will be said about this in the next section.) For the concupiscent part, temperance is the relevant virtue. The intellect is directed by prudence, leaving justice as a kind of leftover oddity. For our purposes, however, the important thing is that the cardinal virtues will be found in all three parts of the soul, and indeed, two of the four will explicitly regulate parts of the soul other than the intellect.

According to Aristotle, the appetitive and spirited parts of the soul are not rational in the same way as the intellect is, but they are still able to “obey reason as a father,” thus giving them some share in reason.13 Bonaventure explicitly considers Aristotle’s view on this matter in one of the objections from section three, stating it thus:

Courage is in the irascible, and temperance in the concupiscent; but these are not rational, unless because they obey reason, according to what the Philosopher says in the end of the New Ethics. Therefore, it seems that the cardinal virtues should not be in the rational part, but more suitably in the sensible part.14

Here we encounter a problem. Courage and temperance are widely agreed to be virtues, and yet, according to this account, they are not rational, but are only shaped by reason. In order to maintain his desired connections between virtue,

13 Nicomachean Ethics, 1.13. 1102b, 30-35.
14 Fortitudo est in irascibili, et temperantia in concupiscibili; sed istae non sunt rationales, nisi quia obtemperantes rationi, secundum quod dicit Philosophus in fine Novae Ethicæ; ergo videtur, quod cardinales virtutes non habeant esse in parte rationali, sed potius in parte sensibili. (3.33.1.3.1)
freedom and merit, Bonaventure seeks to bring these virtues more immediately under the control of the will. Accordingly, he makes a modification to the Aristotelian system, replying that:

But if the “rational” is said strictly, as the work of what participates in reason, just so some wanted to say that certain cardinal virtues are in the rational part, for example prudence and justice, while others are in the inferior power which is fruitfully spoken of in connection to reason, because it obeys reason. Examples of this are courage and temperance, which belong to the spirited and appetitive.

Although this way of speaking seems probable for the moral philosopher, for the theologian it seems unreasonable that some cardinal virtues should be put in the superior part and some in the inferior. This is because, while all cardinal virtues are equal with respect to their deserved dignity, all are the beginning of deserving. And therefore, because merit centers radically around free will, the virtues, whether cardinal or theological, have to be in these powers alone in which the free choice of the will is found. Because of this, while the freedom of the will cannot be anywhere except in the rational part of the soul, insofar as that is called “rational” that participates in reason, it is necessary that the other cardinal virtues be put in that part.  

Bonaventure’s concern is obvious here; he insists that “merit centers radically around free will” indicating that he regards the relationship between merit and freedom as strong and important. But further nuance is required because, as Bonaventure must acknowledge, some of the virtues have an obvious intellectual component, while others are more concerned with acting correctly

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15 Si vero rationale dicitur proprie, secundum quod participat rationem, sic voluerunt aliqui dicere, quod quaedam virtutes cardinales sunt in parte rationali, utpote prudentia in iustitia; quaedam vero non, sed in potentia inferiori, quae est rationalis largo modo dicta, quia obtemperat rationali, ut fortitudo et temperantia, quae sunt irascibili et concupiscibili. Licet autem hic modus dicendi aliquo modo probabilis videatur secundum Morales philosophos; tamen secundum theologum non videtur rationabiliter dici, quasdam virtutes cardinales reponi in parte superiori et quasdam in inferiori; cum omnes virtutes cardinales aequales sint quantum ad meriti dignitatem; omnes etiam sunt principium merendi. Et propter ea, cum meritum consistat radicaliter circa liberum arbitrium, in solis illis potentiis habent esse virtutes, sive cardinales sive theologiae, in quibus reperitur libertas arbitrii. -- Propter quod, cum libertas arbitrii non sit nisi in parte animae rationali, secundum quod rationale dicitur quod participat rationem; necesse est, ceteras virtutes cardinales in parte illa reponi. (3.33.1.3)
in response to that judgment. Prudence, for example, is directly involved in
determining what is good, while temperance and courage must rely on those
judgments in deciding how to value the goods previously identified. Common
experience shows us that habituation is a major component of courage or
temperance, whereas prudence and justice are more complex. For example,
people who are raised in cultures with a healthy cuisine tend to eat healthy
diets, whereas people raised on hot dogs and fried chicken find this much more
difficult. Likewise, trained soldiers or veteran policemen are generally more able
to stand firm in the face of danger than, say, lifelong academics who have
rarely or never been in life-threatening situations. The role of habituation here
is obvious. Prudence and justice, on the other hand, require a more nuanced
understanding of a given situation, such that the influence of habituation
seems to be less direct. It’s easy to understand why Aristotle would have
classified courage and temperance as the less directly rational virtues.

In order to preserve the relevant distinction, Bonaventure begins by
introducing a new term of classification. He distinguishes between the affective
and the sensitive parts of the soul.

But... according to the theologian, there is another way of dividing that should be
observed. For in one way the rational is distinguished from the sensitive part; in
another way it is distinguished from the affective potency. Insofar as it is distinguished
from the sensitive power, the rational virtues are all in that part. But insofar as it is
distinguished against the affective power, not all of the virtues are in that part, but only
some of them, which direct in discerning, namely faith and prudence. Others are placed
in the affective power, which is indeed part of free will and is called “will”, inasmuch as
it is joined to reason; it is called “appetitive” and “spirited” inasmuch as it in many ways
has to be affected and moved. For will is nothing other than a rational disposition or
appetite. However, every disposition or appetite is of the spirited or appetitive power,
which two powers, insofar as they are parts of the free will, are rational. In these there
are virtues that are both cardinal and theological: the theological are immediately lifted
It seems, then, that the term “rational” can be used in two ways. In one sense it distinguishes the rational from the sensitive, and taken this way, all virtues are rational. Presumably Bonaventure would regard the sensitive part of the soul as being entirely a product of habituation working on innate capabilities. This is the sort of capacity that human beings share with the beasts. On the other hand, there is another use of the term “rational” which distinguishes it from the affective parts of the soul. In this sense, the rational virtues are those whose primary function is discernment and direction. The affective virtues, on the other hand, are responsible for enabling the person to be guided appropriately by the dictates of reason. Roughly speaking, we might say that the rational virtues determine what the person should do, while the affective virtues are more directly responsible for getting her to do it.

Both the affective and the sensitive parts of the soul have spirited and appetitive components. Bonaventure explains this in the following passage:

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16 Ad evidentiam vero obiectorum, quae in contrarium opponuntur, notandus est alius modus distinguendi secundum theologum. Uno enim modo distinguuntur rationale contra partem sensitivam; alio modo distinguitur contra potentiam affectivam. Secundum quod distinguitur contra potentiam sensitivam, sic sunt in parte ista rationali omnes virtutes. Secundum vero quod distinguitur contra potentiam affectivam, sic non sunt in ea omnes virtutes, sed illae solum, quae dirigunt in discernendo, sicut fides et prudentia; alia vero reponuntur in potentia affectiva, quae quidem pars est liberi arbitrii et dicitur voluntas, secundum quod est coniuncta rationi; dicitur etiam concupiscibilis et irascibilis, secundum quod diversimode habet affici et moveri. Nihil enim alius est voluntas quam affectus sive appetitus ratiocinatus. Omnis autem affectus sive appetitus vel est vis irascibilis, vel concupiscibilis, quae duae vires, secundum quod sunt liberi arbitrii partes, rationales sunt; et in ipsis possunt esse virtutes theologicae et cardinales: theologicae in quantum immediate elevantur in Deum, ipsum diligendo et ipsi innitendo; cardinales vero, in quantum versantur circa bonum creatum (3.33.1.3).
For the spirited and the appetitive are in us in two ways, namely rational and sensible: rational, according to which we were born to be received into God, and in which we communicate with Angels, and into which in different respects have been put the theological and cardinal virtues. But there is also the spirited and appetitive sensible part, which is called rational only because it obeys reason. And the freedom of the will is not in this, nor is cardinal virtue a subject of this part, although through frequent training in some way those powers can not unsuitably be called 'habituated'; yet that habituation is not the essence of virtue, but rather connected to it.\footnote{In nobis enim est duplex irascibilis et concupiscibilis, videlicet rationalis et sensibilis: rationalis, secundum quam immediate nati sumus in Deum ferri, et in qua communicamus cum Angelis, et in qua secundum diversas comparationes habet reponi theologica virtus et cardinalis. Alia vero est irascibilis et concupiscibilis sensibilis, quae solummodo dicitur rationalis, quia obtemperat rationi. Et in his non consistit libertas arbitrii, nec in his sicut in subieicto ponitur virtus cardinalis, licet per frequentem assuecationem aliquo modo illae potentiae non incongrue dicantur habili\textit{t}ari; illa tamen habilitatio non est de virtutis essentia, sed potius sibi ann\textit{e}x (3.33.1.3.ad.1).}

Habituation shapes the sensitive soul in a way that can either undermine or reinforce our efforts to be virtuous, and in a loose sense we might refer to merely habituated dispositions as “courageous” or “temperate”, but properly speaking the only virtuous dispositions will be the ones located in the affective or rational parts of the soul. To illustrate this point, consider a child who has been consistently raised on a healthy diet for the first ten years of her life. Because she has always been fed nourishing food, she naturally craves vegetables and whole grains and dislikes fried or heavily processed foods. However, she does not understand the principles of good nutrition, and she has not herself exercised much choice about the way she wants to eat. So, while we might immediately be inclined to call this child “temperate”, she is not, properly speaking, virtuous. Her appetites are habituated in such a way as to put real temperance easily within her grasp, but first she will need to mature
to the point where she can choose to adopt these same principles of healthy living in a conscious and reflective way.\footnote{For another discussion of this point, see Christopher Cullen, *Bonaventure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 98-100.}

Obviously, Bonaventure envisions a fairly close and fluid relationship between the various parts of the soul. The rational appetites help determine the way in which the sensitive part of the soul is shaped, and thus, the sensitive aspect of each part of the soul should mirror the state of the rational part. On the other side, the rational aspects of the spirited or appetitive parts will be affected by the appetites of the sensible part. Thus, a person who realized that his inclinations were well habituated could properly allow himself to be influenced by his desires and passions; meanwhile, the person whose habits are improperly formed ought to resist many of his immediate inclinations. This kind of study could give rise to an Aristotelian-type classification of people as virtuous, vicious, continent and incontinent. But ultimately, for both the virtuous and the vicious person, the rational and sensitive aspects of the soul are intimately interrelated, with both affecting the other significantly. This being the case, there is a genuine sense in which all the virtues could be said to be subject to habituation.

However, this does not change the fact that there are two very different forces working together to shape the human soul, one of which is basically animal and unmeritorious, and the other of which is more exalted. The rational, free aspect of human nature can accumulate merit and communicate with angels and is the thing in light of which human beings “were born to be
received into God.” The other is basically slavish, and good primarily to the degree that it reflects goodness in the more elevated parts of the soul.

**Virtue as habitus**

From what has been presented so far, it is clear that habituation has an indirect influence on virtue through the sensitive part of the soul, but it looks as though virtue properly speaking is not the product of habituation. Real virtue cannot be instilled in us by external forces; rather, it must involve the action of a free will in conjunction with an exercise of human reason. Would it be right then to say that virtue, properly speaking, is *not* habituated? Is habituation merely auxiliary to the process of moral development?

This would be an unfortunate conclusion, and not merely because it would represent such a radical break with the Aristotelian tradition. Innateness and habituation are the two main avenues by which natural virtue can be developed. If neither of these are capable of elevating a person even beyond the level of one of the nobler beasts, nor of instilling true virtue in the soul, then it begins to look as though natural virtue may not be possible at all. Bonaventure would finally have to conclude with Augustine that even the noblest pagans were completely devoid of virtue, and ultimately not so different in kind from a well-trained German Shepherd.
Fortunately, he finds a way to avoid such extreme conclusions. He simultaneously protects the freedom of the will and brings habituation into his moral theory by declaring that free will is itself a habitus.

As mentioned above, Bonaventure’s discussion of free will has received more scholarly attention than his other ethical writings, in large part because of the historical significance of later Franciscan views on the freedom of the will. Bonaventure’s writings on the matter are relatively brief, but his view is intriguing nonetheless, both for its similarities with later Franciscan theories, and also for its differences.\(^\text{19}\) As we have seen, Bonaventure is characteristically Franciscan in his eagerness to insist that the will must be free in order for us to maintain a satisfying account of moral responsibility. Aristotelian habituation is worrisome because it threatens to explain human action primarily in terms of external causal powers, and this might not leave the will sufficient freedom to develop true virtue. As we have seen, Bonaventure tries to adjust the Aristotelian picture to alleviate this concern. Unlike later Franciscans, however, he seems not to be concerned about preserving the will’s freedom over and against the activity of the intellect. Instead, he envisions a harmonious relationship between will and intellect that can, in his opinion, leave sufficient freedom for both to operate without being made subordinate to the other.

Bonaventure proposes a theory wherein free will is found in the joint action of two different faculties. The first is conscience, which is definitely

\(^{19}\) For a discussion situating Bonaventure’s views on the will in relation to his contemporaries and to other important Franciscans, see Kent, VW, 94-149.
located in the rational part of the soul. Conscience can effectively be broken
down into two components.20 One, which Douglas Langston calls “the potential
conscience”, perceives foundational principles and moral truths which should
shape our lives in a very general way. Thus, the potential conscience might tell
us that we should worship God, serve our community, care for our children
and so forth. This part of the conscience is inerrant, in something like the way
that theoretical reason is (Bonaventure thinks) infallible in recognizing
fundamental truths of logic.21 But, of course, the truths perceived by the
potential conscience do not dictate action directly.22

The other component of conscience is more targeted. Dubbed by
Langston “the applied conscience”, it is responsible for determining more
specific applications of the principles perceived by the potential conscience.
Thus, the applied conscience, in acting on the general principle to care for
one’s children, might direct a parent to schedule her child’s pediatric
appointment. The applied conscience is supplied by the potential conscience
with a certain number of infallible principles, but it can still be confused by
ignorance or erroneous beliefs with respect to other relevant information. For

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20 According to Douglas Langston, this division was traditionally attributed to Jerome (c.347-
419), although it is unclear whether Jerome actually intended to draw such a distinction. The
seminal medieval work on conscience came from Philip the Chancellor (d. 1236). Langston,
*Conscience and Other Virtues: From Bonaventure to MacIntyre*. (University Park: The


22 John Quinn gives a detailed description of how, for Bonaventure, this “moral science” works,
particularly in relation to the other sciences. The most significant thing to note is that the
potential conscience (to use Langdon’s terminology) is always focused on “the optimum good,
which is the final cause or end of all moral goodness.” “The Moral Philosophy of St.
Bonaventure”, from *Bonaventure and Aquinas: Enduring Philosophers*, ed. Shahan and Kovach
example, I might be correct in believing that I should care for my child, but if I
don’t realize that his pediatrician is so incompetent as to do more harm to him
than good, I might not make the correct decisions concerning his medical
care.\textsuperscript{23}

Obviously, Bonaventure’s conscience reasons in syllogisms, with the
potential conscience supplying infallible major premises and the applied
struggling to find the right minor premises and thus to determine the
appropriate action. This account raises all the usual questions about syllogistic
reasoning, beginning with concerns about how the major premises are to be
systematically distinguished from the minor. For the present purposes,
however, the important point is that Bonaventure intends for the well-
functioning conscience to supply information about \textit{what is to be done} in order
to reach certain desirable goals.\textsuperscript{24}

Epistemic questions abound, but even presuming that these can be
answered, conscience still will not be enough to enable virtuous action. Even if
the conscience manages to reach the right conclusions about what should be
done, it cannot in itself supply the \textit{motivation} for acting well. For that, we need
a second component, which Bonaventure calls \textit{synderesis}.

Sometimes called “the spark of conscience”, synderesis is the soul’s
appetite for the good. Bonaventure locates synderesis entirely in the affective
part of the soul. It provides drive and motivation for the soul to pursue good

\textsuperscript{23} Langston, 28-29.
\textsuperscript{24} On Quinn’s reading, a person can be culpable for bad moral judgments insofar as she has
allowed herself to apply this part of the conscience to lesser, unworthy goals, and not to that
ultimate end which is always the target of the potential conscience. Quinn, 32-33.
things, and is also the source of regret and frustration when a person fails to do this; for that reason, synderesis is found even in the damned in hell. Synderesis is infallible in that it can only be attracted to the good; it is also unquenchable in that it will never cease to feel such an attraction. As an appetite, however, it has no capacity to formulate strategies for attaining the good. Even more significant, it lacks the discernment necessary to perceive the way in which a particular thing is good. As Langston explains,

Because synderesis is directed to the general good in objects, it can never be mistaken. Whatever it causes us to pursue contains good in general. Yet, because every being is good, synderesis as the general drive to the good appears to provide little practical advice about which objects to pursue and which to avoid. Providing this practical guidance, however, is the role of conscience.

Very often in life, we encounter things that we can identify as good as such even while recognizing that they will not be good when all the relevant circumstances are taken into account. For example, it is good to spend an evening in intimate conversation with a friend. If, however, one has committed to hosting a birthday party for a daughter or son on that same evening, it would not be good overall to run away to a coffee shop for a friendly chat. The penalty paid for such negligence (both in terms of the child’s disappointment and also in terms of the social opprobrium that would surely be imposed by other parents) would almost certainly outweigh the attendant benefits. None of this, however, takes away from the intrinsic good of the intimate conversation,

25 For a discussion of this passage see Langston, 32-34.
26 Langston, 30.
to which syndersis is naturally attracted. By itself, then, synderesis cannot be trusted to consistently direct a person to right action.

By this point it should be fairly clear that conscience and synderesis are naturally complementary to one another. Synderesis infallibly recognizes the good and yearns after the things that are good. Conscience perceives general moral truths, and makes use of those truths to determine how particular goods ought to be pursued. Between them they provide a person with both the motive and the means to act well. Quinn sums the point up as follows:

The goodness of the will is grounded in the natural instinct or appetite of synderesis but is completed in its deliberative appetite, which follows free choice. The will is both good and right only in moving toward the same object both naturally and deliberatively. To be completely good and right, a man must first proceed from his natural will and, perfecting his action virtuously, then will the object rightly and deliberatively.27

In order for the process to work, however, it is important that both faculties should function properly, and also that the relationship between them should be harmonious. Bonaventure does not (like Philip the Chancellor and Hugh of St. Cher) try to combine these together into one faculty, nor does he (like St. Albert the Great) try to postulate an “overseer” faculty that coordinates the reason and the will. Rather, he suggests that true freedom results from the healthy cooperation of the two. Gilson explains the point as follows:

Thus just as the union of their efforts gives two men the strength to carry a block of stone which either of them by himself would be incapable of lifting; just as the agreement of a father and mother to organize the life of a family brings into being a kind of common faculty capable of introducing order, whereas the effort of either of them

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singly would be unable to do so; just as from the collaboration of hand and eye results the faculty of writing though neither hand nor eye could write: so from the collaboration of will and reason is born a sort of faculty which is precisely liberty itself – that is the mastery and free disposition of the acts possible to man. Here therefore by the term faculty is understood not only, nor even principally, a power to act considered in itself, but a sort of perfection of the rational soul, a domination which it exercises over itself to set itself in action, refrain from action or decide the direction which it will take in the exercise of its operations or the choice of its objects.28

This solution to the problem of free will is very characteristically Bonaventurean in that it tries to settle a puzzle concerning a particular faculty or capability by referring to a larger organic whole. Freedom is not the function of some particular human faculty; rather, it supervenes on multiple other faculties, and thus can be seen and understood only in light of a more holistic examination of the moral agent. Such explanations can be frustrating insofar as they make it difficult to offer a precise, targeted analysis of a specific moral action. Also, the relative brevity of Bonaventure’s remarks on the subject leave many things unexplained. Nevertheless, it may be that Bonaventure’s remarks on free will as a habitus lay the foundation for a pleasingly Aristotelian account of natural virtue, while still allowing the will to be free in a robust sense.29

Let us recall once again the problem that was being addressed with this discussion of free will and merit. A moral theory will be more plausible, and have more explanatory power, if it can offer some explanation of how virtue might arise within a non-Christian context. Following Aristotle, the medievals largely agreed that innateness and habituation were the two primary natural

29 Seeing how eager he is to preserve the freedom of the will, Kent actually hypothesizes that Bonaventure may be the origin of the later Franciscan claim that it is the will that commands the intellect (VW, 101), although he avoids making this claim explicitly.
mechanisms by which virtue might be acquired. As a Christian, however, Bonaventure wishes to associate virtue with merit, and merit with the free choice of the will. Innate qualities clearly are not chosen, and even habituation seemed distressingly passive, at least when the focus was on the way in which one’s external environment can be instrumental in instilling or reinforcing particular traits of character.

The effect of his “free will as habitus” theory is to draw attention away from the specific causal story of how particular components of a person’s overall moral character are acquired, and to focus it instead on the way in which these different pieces are fitted together. By proposing that free will is itself a habitus, Bonaventure seems to be suggesting that a human being has both the capability and the responsibility for bringing her different passions and faculties into balance with one another, ultimately creating an excellent human being who can be trusted to act well under wide variety of circumstances. Bonaventure never suggests that a special gift of supernatural grace is a necessary prerequisite for engaging in this sort of self-regulation. And if this freedom is the primary precondition for merit, and merit the root of virtue, then something like virtue must be available to all free agents. It seems likely then that he would be able to endorse, at least in a

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30 This, in part, is why Kent sees Bonaventure as a strong defender of the idea that the will is free in some strong sense. Although the various parts of the soul must be fitted together in order to attain moral goodness, Bonaventure seems to feel that it is a person’s responsibility to ensure that this happens, which, in Kent’s understanding, seems to imply a robust role for free will. As she puts it, “The will leads the act of another power to its own act” (VW, 103).
limited way, Kent’s suggestion that pagans are capable of attaining “true” virtues, even if their virtue is not complete.

The fact remains, however, that pagan virtue will not be complete on Bonaventure’s view. Understanding why that must be the case will set the stage for the next chapter, in which I will examine the infused virtues and the relationship between natural virtue and supernatural grace.

**Natural virtue as perfected by grace**

In Chapter Three, we saw how, for Bonaventure, the cardinal virtues are necessarily directed at created goods. Here we have seen that, in order to be virtues at all, cardinal virtues must be both rational (as opposed to sensitive) and free. By bringing the various components of their character into harmony with one another, it might be possible even for pagans to attain some level of virtue. Still, they will not be able to direct these virtues towards the supernatural end, and, as we have seen, rightly-directed cardinal virtues are a necessary component of the supernatural final end. How, then, can grace perfect what nature has started by elevating these virtues beyond the earthly sphere?

Bonaventure discusses this question in the fifth question, wherein he addresses the question: are the cardinal virtues gifts from God, or the product of habituation? He begins by reiterating the real and significant role played by
Aristotelian habituation as a force by which the lower powers of the soul can be trained to respond to reason.

It is said of the cardinal virtues, insofar as they enable moral actions, that they are in kind political virtues, and are also at their root from nature. But, they are completed by frequent works and persistence, or from the influence of grace presiding over other virtues, or from both causes combined. I say that they are at their root from nature because we have them planted in our natural uprightness, through which we are suited, albeit imperfectly, to works of virtue and integrity. But while we become accustomed to good works, gradually what was at first difficult to us becomes easy, according to what Bernardus and Eugenium said, that nothing is so difficult that habit does not make it easy.31

In part, this is just a good, Aristotelian summary of how habituation is meant to work. The capacity for virtue, presumably through the habitus of free will as discussed above, is innate to all human beings. Meanwhile, habituation trains the sensitive powers. While this cannot produce virtuous action all by itself, it nonetheless makes virtuous actions easy. This is at least in part because the relevant sensitive appetites have been trained such that they help to incline the virtuous person towards right action. They contribute positively, whereas in the vicious person they are an obstacle to be overcome.

In this passage, however, Bonaventure suggests that grace and habituation are both available sources of moral rectitude, and continues on to explain how the two might work together, saying that,

31 Alio modo est loqui de cardinalibus virtutibus, secundum quod habilitant ad opera moralia; et sic huiusmodi virtutes cardinales sunt virtutes politicae et radicaliter sunt a natura, sed completeve sunt vel ab operum frequentia et perseverantia, vel a gratiae influentia et praesidentia, vel ex utraque causa. A natura, inquam, sunt radicaliter, quia plantatam habemus in nostra natura rectitudinem, per quam apti sumus, licet imperfectede, ad opera virtutis et honestatis; sed dum assuescimus, paulatim efficitur nobis facile quod prius erat difficile, secundum quod dicit Bernardus ad Eugenium, quod nihil est adeo difficile, quod consuetudo non reddat facile. (3.33.1.5)
These half-finished habits are led to their completion, not only from habituation but also the help of grace. For while grace rectifies the soul, the supervening rectitude amplifies whatever rectitude of nature previously exists, and in amplifying strengthens it.\[32\]

Here Bonaventure identifies the second available source of rectitude: divine grace. The free, rational and genuinely virtuous parts of the soul are able to receive and respond to these divine gifts. For Bonaventure, the choice to accept these graces, or not, is one of the primary marks that distinguishes human beings from all other created (and embodied) beings. Grace can redirect natural dispositions towards the supernatural end of the Beatific Vision. And, through the self-conscious decision to be ordered by grace, natural human dispositions can transcend their innate limitations, and move beyond whatever rectitude would potentially be instilled by habituation alone.

Having already seen several references to the complementary relationship of habituation and grace, we might now wish for more explanation of the interaction between them. Obviously, Bonaventure envisions a dual account of cardinal virtue, wherein grace orders the virtues from above while habituation supports them from below. In showing how this might work, he makes an analogy to horsemanship.

For we see, that a horse has from the order of his nature aptitude for carrying and walking well; but that aptitude can be brought to its completion through habituation of the horse itself, or through the diligence of the rider, by one who knows how to lead the horse around with the reins, or through both. And that is how in the case at hand it should be understood too that according to Augustine the free choice of the will is

\[32\] Nec solum ex assuefactione ducitur illa habilitas semiplena ad complementum, sed etiam per gratiae adiutorium. Nam cum ipsa gratia sit animae rectificativa, rectitudo superveniens naturae rectitudinem qualemcumque prius existentem amplificat et amplificando confirmat. (3.33.1.5)
compared to the horse, and grace is compared to the rider, and the good activity is compared to walking rightly.\textsuperscript{33}

Unless there is something wrong with it, a horse will naturally be able to walk around and to carry things on its back. Horses are quite good at moving with speed and dexterity, even when carrying fairly considerable burdens. No special luck or training is needed in order for them to have this ability.

The natural ability, however, can be improved and sharpened through habituation. One way to do this is by finding an experienced trainer. With the trainer’s help, the horse can be taught to carry human riders, to respond to commands (both verbal or tactile), and other useful skills. The horse’s natural ability to walk and carry will find a complement in such training; the habits instilled by the trainer will enhance its natural abilities and make them more reliably useful.\textsuperscript{34}

There is, however, another way in which a horse might be made to be useful to human beings. If a particularly skilled rider mounts the horse, he might be able to guide it into doing his will, even if the horse has not received much special training. For one who understands horses with particular keenness, even bad training and unruly habits might not absolutely prevent

\textsuperscript{33} Videmus enim, quod aliquis equus ex sua naturali compositione aptitudinem habet ad bene portandum et ambulandum; sed illa aptitudo ad complementum potest reduci per ipsius equi assuefactionem, vel per ipsius sessoris industrias, qui scit freno equum circumducere, vel per utramque. Sic et in propositione intelligendum est quia secundum Augustinum liberum arbitrium assimilatur equo, et gratia assimilatur sessori, et bona operatio rectae ambulationi (3.33.1.5).

\textsuperscript{34} Gilson points out that this is a characteristically Bonaventurean way of describing the interaction of nature and grace, with grace actually \textit{drawing out} those natural abilities that are already inherent in the creature, and bringing them to their proper completion. The horse analogy is reminiscent of another analogy favored by Bonaventure, wherein grace is compared to rain falling on seeds. The rain does not impose an external form on the seeds; rather, it unlocks the potential already contained within the matter itself. This, Gilson thinks, is a noteworthy way in which Bonaventure tends to differ from Aquinas. Gilson, 385-387.
him from bending the horse to his will, at least in some respects. Thus, through the guidance of someone ontologically higher than himself, the horse’s usefulness can be enhanced.

The best thing, of course, is to have a trained horse and an experienced rider. A properly habituated horse might, in certain circumstances, be taught to accomplish some useful things on its own, but for some purposes the intelligence of a human rider will be indispensable. So, for example, a horse can be taught to find its water trough, but it takes a human being to find the most vulnerable holes in the enemy line during a cavalry charge. The horse that has a good rider and good training will be the most excellent horse, able to accomplish more than all other equine creatures.

Something similar, Bonaventure thinks, holds true for the souls of human beings. The analogy is slightly confusing insofar as it compares the rational human agent to a non-rational beast. In light of Bonaventure’s larger views, however, it seems reasonable to suggest that the effects of the human horse trainer can be compared to natural human reason, such that we all have, unlike the horse, some capacity to “train ourselves” in virtue. Habituation can thus enable us to acquire the virtues to a certain degree. Like the well-trained horse, the well-habituated person avoid being enslaved by her disordered lower-order desires or passions. Her well-regulated wishes and emotions will accord with reason, thus enabling her to live well.

Like the well-trained horse, though, the well-habituated human being is still capable of more. Infusions of grace would enable her to amplify this
natural rectitude such that it can be redirected towards higher goods. Although he doesn’t give examples, it seems reasonable to suppose that Bonaventure would turn to the saints to illustrate this principle. The desert hermits who practiced extreme asceticism, or the martyrs who endured terrible torments leading finally to death, showed courage and temperance in an extreme form that cannot be explained by innate abilities alone, nor even by habituation. Only with the help of a higher ordering principle, such as that given by grace, can people rise to such extraordinary displays of virtue. Thus, the most excellent human beings will be those whose virtuous behavior is supported both by habituation and a gift of grace.

For Bonaventure, there is a sense in which pagans can attain the cardinal virtues, and another in which they cannot. Certainly, the “seeds” of virtue are innate to all human beings alike, and likewise, those innate capacities can be habituated to some extent. Only grace, however, can direct all dispositions towards their proper final end in God, and without its influence the natural dispositions are liable to go awry at some point or another.

In order to understand this more clearly, however, we must consider those virtues that properly concern themselves with the supernatural, uncreated goods. We turn, then, to the theological virtues.
Chapter Three

Two Rival Accounts of Faith

For all their thorny difficulties, natural theories of virtue tend to share one obvious advantage: they wear their justification on their sleeve. Virtue theorists may struggle to explain how the virtuous agent can be recognized, and even if they can answer that question satisfactorily, they must then face a host of questions about how the virtues should be acquired and maintained. These are formidable challenges. Nevertheless, moral philosophers keep coming back to the virtues, because they offer such a satisfying way of connecting good moral choices to a deeper account of human thriving. A virtue-based ethical theory is rarely straightforward in its explanations of what moral goodness should look like, but it does explain why moral goodness matters. Most people can readily understand why it’s worthwhile to be an excellent, flourishing human being.¹

In moving from the natural to the supernatural virtues, it may seem that Bonaventure is stuck in the worst of all ethical worlds. His account of moral goodness is extremely complicated, and also dependent on a large set of controversial metaphysical premises. At the same time, the desirability of the final end that he hopes to attain is less than self-evident. Why is it good to orient one’s life around a supernatural being? How can we make philosophical

¹ It should be noted that this general characterization of virtue-based ethical theories only clearly applies to *eudaimonistic* forms of virtue theory.
sense of a set of virtues when it is stipulated from the outset that they are beyond what our natural abilities could ever achieve?

It would be absurd to try to explicate a Bonaventurean moral philosophy without considering the theological virtues (faith, hope and charity). They are obviously of great importance to Bonaventure, such that his discussion of each one individually is lengthier than his discussion of all the cardinal virtues combined. For historical reasons, then, the theological virtues must be addressed, but on the philosophical front the obstacles seem formidable. Bonaventure holds that the theological virtues are necessarily infused by divine grace, and so, in order to understand them, we will have to consider the role of supernatural grace in human salvation. He thinks as well that the theological virtues must come together as a unity, such that each one can only be had in company with the other two. A view that can accommodate both these claims will necessarily be complex, and will require a nuanced account of the relationship between divine and human agency. These issues will be discussed in the next chapter.

Before getting into the specifics of the view, however, it seems important to motivate the concept of infused virtue in a more general way. To put the matter bluntly: what is the point of the infusion view? Why should anyone take it seriously? It seems important to provide honest answers to these questions before embarking on a lengthy discussion of the details of the infusion theory, but from a historical standpoint, it can be difficult to know where to begin. As regards the general motivation of his view, Bonaventure doesn't address most
of the questions that contemporary philosophers would want to ask, for the simple reason that, in his time, nobody was asking them. In order to make sense of Bonaventure’s theory, we will need to find some interpretive mechanism that will bridge this historical gap by highlighting those aspects of the view that are the most interesting and relevant for a contemporary thinker.

Ideally, we should look for an interpretive mechanism that doesn’t require us to engage in an extended exploration of Bonaventure’s metaphysics. Obviously, Bonaventure shared a large body of beliefs and assumptions with his (mostly Christian) contemporaries, and contemporary philosophers would be inclined to reject many of those views. To deal with all of those questions would be beyond the scope of the present work. Reflecting on this point, however, might suggest a promising avenue of approach. There are some contemporary Christian philosophers who share Bonaventure’s core assumptions about God, creation, and the human soul. Faith, hope and charity are still a source of interest for many philosophers today, and some have been reasonably successful at defending the relevance of these concepts against contemporary criticisms. But when the contemporary philosopher of religion seeks to explain the theological virtues, divine infusions of grace generally do not play a prominent role, nor is there much emphasis on the unity of the virtues. Not coincidentally, contemporary philosophy of religion is much more accessible to the modern reader than Bonaventure’s texts, and seems to respond more effectively to the criticisms of those who are skeptical about the existence of God or the truth of central Christian beliefs.
Have religious philosophers become more sophisticated and nuanced in the centuries since Bonaventure penned his *Sentences*? Or do they simply have different concerns and priorities, leading them to develop views with different strengths, and, corresponding to these, different problems? In this chapter I will attempt to answer those questions by isolating a particular virtue, namely faith, and comparing Bonaventure’s views on this subject with those of a more contemporary thinker, Alvin Plantinga. As one of the twentieth century's most recognizable and successful philosophical defenders of faith, Plantinga stands as a reasonable representative of what contemporary philosophy of religion has to offer.² Like Bonaventure, he wants to explain faith in a way that is rational and philosophically cogent, while at the same time remaining true to the Christian tradition, and ensuring that the faith he describes has the power to transform a person’s life and direct him towards his eventual salvation. With so much commonality of purpose, it should be possible to draw fruitful comparisons between his view and Bonaventure’s, and to show where each has been successful in its aims, and where each might be vulnerable to criticism.

Although Plantinga’s account of faith is remarkably successful in certain ways, I will finally conclude that Bonaventure’s view stands up well against its contemporary rival. Ultimately, though, the primary purpose of the comparison is not to identify which account is the most attractive; after all, it may well be

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² There are, of course, many contemporary philosophers who could also stand as worthy representatives for modern religious epistemology. Nicholas Wolterstorff and William Alston stand out as philosophers who have articulated particularly thorough and complete accounts of faith, and many others have made worthwhile contributions. Although it would not be feasible to discuss all of these in detail, I hope I can at least indicate at points where their views might be interestingly different from Plantinga’s.
that neither of these philosophers has articulated the strongest possible defense of Christian faith. The comparison will be successful if it can help to illuminate the reasons why an infusion-based virtue theory like Bonaventure’s might be attractive and worth developing. Plantinga and Bonaventure developed their theories in very different circumstances, and consequently, their concerns and points of emphasis are quite different. Nonetheless, I think it would be fair to say that each philosopher manages to attain certain goods through his account of faith that the other would recognize as such.

The chapter will be divided into three major sections. In the first, I will offer some general desiderata which I believe most Christian thinkers would wish to achieve when offering a philosophical account of faith. This will enable me to develop an evaluative model by which a given account of faith can be measured. In the second section, I will describe the central features of Plantinga’s account of faith, and use the evaluative model to rate its success. Bonaventure’s account of faith will receive a similar treatment in the third section, and this will enable me to offer some concluding remarks about the relative strengths of the two rival views.

**An evaluative model of faith**

What is faith? In this context, I take this term to denote a special kind of relationship between an individual and a particular religion or creed. Faith is

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3 I suspect that an examination of other world religious, and their attitudes towards faith, would reveal significant similarities. This, however, will not be the object of the present study.
understood to be a means through which adherents come to accept the important tenets of that religion or creed. In general, faith is expected to do two sorts of things: first, to supply epistemic content for the adherents of a particular religion, and second, to have some kind of transformative effect on those who have it, bringing them into a significant relationship with God and possibly also with a religious community.

How exactly faith can accomplish both of these goals at the same time is a bit of a puzzle, and it is hard to say very much about this without raising objections from one or another interested party. Both theists and atheists argue extensively about the nature of faith beliefs, and the means by which they may be acquired. Philosophers with an interest in defending faith will sometimes try to show that faith beliefs are substantially similar to beliefs of other kinds, such that they can be subject to equivalent standards of justification. In other contexts, religious figures sometimes seem to exult in the groundlessness of their beliefs, almost as if they regard this as a moral accomplishment or a cause for celebration. Philosophers who speak up in

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4 One particularly famous example can be found in William James' “The Will to Believe.” Originally given as address to Yale and Brown Philosophical Clubs. Reprinted in Readings in the Philosophy of Religion (second edition) ed. Brody, Baruch. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall Inc., 1992). James is responding to very strict evidentialist constraints that are particularly developed and exemplified in the work of William Kingdon Clifford and John Locke, both of whom suggested that a person who believes a thing (whether or not the belief turns out to be true) on insufficient evidence is morally remiss. Nicholas Wolterstorff has explored this position extensively in his book, John Locke and the Ethics of Belief (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

5 It is presumably this sort of person who Mark Twain means to ridicule when he writes that, “Faith is believing what you know ain’t so.” Twain, Following the Equator: A Journey Around the World (New York: American Publishing Company, 1897), 64.
defense of religion are generally more measured, but still often willing to contend that religious beliefs need not be grounded in indisputable evidence.6

What kind of thing must faith be, if it is to have a simultaneous effect on a person’s epistemic and moral states? Many answers have been offered to this question, and given the eclectic combination of goods that faith is expected to secure, it can be difficult to evaluate a particular account of it, and even more difficult to compare contrasting accounts. One account may succeed brilliantly with respect to one faith-related good, while failing utterly to supply another; a second account may deliver some share of all the relevant goods, but in a mediocre or unsatisfactory way. In order to make sense of this diverse landscape, it will be necessary to marshal together the important desiderata that many or most people have for faith, organizing them into a schema that can help us to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of any given faith account.

In this first section, then, I will propose three general goods that faith should strive to realize. These goods, I will suggest, can be broken down into three subsidiary points, each representing a degree of realization of the relevant good. To illustrate this, I will construct a spectrum along which the three points will be organized. Moving up the scale, each successive point will represent a higher degree of realization of the relevant good. (See Appendix C.)

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6 As Robert Audi points out, developments within religious epistemology have tended to mirror developments in epistemology more broadly, and one result of this is that many thinkers have rejected the stricter evidentialist constraints imposed by an earlier era, while still contending that religious beliefs can be justified to the same degree as other sorts of belief. “The Dimensions of Faith and the Demands of Reason,” in Reasoned Faith, ed. Eleonore Stump (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 70-75.
Two of the goods included in the schema might broadly be classified as epistemic goods. The first draws its inspiration from Aristotle’s assertion that “all men desire to know”. Knowledge of the truth is certainly a good and one the faithful person will rightly desire. However, there may be forms of epistemic contact with truth that fall short of knowledge while still having value of a related kind. Accordingly, these lesser forms of epistemic contact will also be included on the schema.

My second scale will isolate another epistemic quality that is of particular value when it comes to integrating faith beliefs into (on the one hand) a religious community or (on the other) a religious philosophy. I label this good “transparency”, but the motivating idea is that it is good to be able to clearly articulate one’s beliefs for others and better still to be able to explain and justify them.

My third scale looks to the attitudinal component of faith. It holds that faith is more than just a set of propositions. We can get some hint of this through an examination of the word itself, and its etymological cousins. The word ‘faith’ shares its root with such English words as ‘fidelity’ and ‘confide,’ each of which suggests an attitude of commitment or trust. A person is called “faithful” if she is known to be loyal or reliable. In religious contexts, too, faith is consistently regarded as something that should effect a change in the believer’s life. It should alter her attitudes or dispositions in some noteworthy way.

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7 *Metaphysics*, 1.1.980a, 21.
Faith establishes a relationship between the believer and God. The exact nature of that relationship is disputed among noteworthy theologians, particularly as regards the relationship between faith and justification. Nonetheless, all parties are eager to establish that religious faith must somehow improve or correct the believer’s way of relating to God. This is part of the thought behind the common claim that faith must be a divinely given “gift.” Through faith the infinitely great God establishes contact with the individual person, and this connection is greatly to her benefit.

Thus, faith has an intellectual component, but also what we might call an attitudinal component. The former supplies at least some part of the epistemic content for religious belief. The latter is what the demons lack when, as the apostle tells us, they “believe and tremble” (James 2:19). An account of faith will be strongest, and have the most explanatory power, if it can neatly and convincingly link together the epistemic and attitudinal components of faith. Ideally, it will show how beliefs can be formed in such a way as to establish a trusting relationship between the believer and God.

For the sake of easy reference I will refer to the three scales simply as the “Epistemic Strength-Scale,” “Transparency-Scale,” and “Affection-Scale” but readers may refer to the diagram included in Appendix C, or to the following section for more detailed analyses of each scale.

An exercise of this kind will always run some risk of appearing ad hoc, insofar as I am simply asserting that people of faith will be interested in my three primary goods. I will try, as I go along, to give examples to show that in
fact many people *have* recognized the importance of the goods in question, but it remains open to the philosopher of religion to simply dismiss one or more of my goods as irrelevant. Alternatively, there is always the possibility that someone might wish to add a further good to the schema, thus changing the calculations. Identifying the relevant “goods” for faith could be the basis of a healthy and illuminating conversation, but conversations must begin somewhere. Thus, I offer my own best analysis of the goods to be achieved by faith in the hope that they will be compelling, but also that those who disagree will simply continue the conversation.

**Epistemic Strength Scale**

Most fundamentally, faith should put the believer in epistemic contact with truth. Truth is a good with which the philosopher is quite properly concerned, and philosophers should be the first to agree that, as a rule, it is better to have more truth than less.⁸ There are a couple of different ways in which this might be measured. In the first place, it is good to increase the number of truths with which one is familiar. All else being equal, it is better to understand biology and physics than to know physics alone, and better still to know biology, physics and Sanskrit. Beyond this, though, it is good to increase the degree of epistemic contact that one has with the truth. Firm knowledge is better than

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⁸ While conceding that it would be difficult to *prove* such a basic truth, William Alston reflects on this point at some length, and offers evidence of widespread acceptance of the desirability of having greater acquaintance with the truth. Alston, *Beyond Justification: Dimensions of Epistemic Evaluation* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2005), 29-38.
probable conjecture, while probable conjecture is better than ungrounded opinion or simple ignorance. As rational beings, humans can better fulfill their nature if they understand more of the world and their place within it. As creatures of God, they will be uplifted by a greater acquaintance with God and his creative work.

Few will disagree with these general claims. But how, with respect to religious faith, can epistemic contact be measured? The obvious place to start is with the observation that the faithful person should not be explicitly irrational. At the very least, there should be no internal contradictions among the claims of a religion or creed, nor should religious beliefs contradict other truths that can be known through natural reason. If they do, then the believer must embrace contradiction, and thereby sacrifice any credible claim to having a coherent world view. Committed atheists sometimes make a project of trying to show that the central claims of Christianity fall short of even this most lowly standard of rationality. The quarry often proves more elusive than its pursuers expect. Still, the requirement is not a trivial one, and so it occupies a

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9 Alston refers to these weaker (but still valuable) epistemic states as “directly truth-conducive”. He goes on to list desiderata that he takes to increase the truth-conduciveness of particular beliefs. Ibid, 39-49.

10 Recent years have seen a number of popular works on the irrationality of religion: Christopher Hitchens, God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything (USA: Twelve Books Hachette Book Group, 2007); Richard Dawkins, The God Delusion (Boston: Mariner Books, 2008). More serious academic works tend to focus on a specific issue, such as the problem of evil. But it is worth noting that the past few centuries have seen many efforts to discredit religion as irrational by the standards of modern science or natural reason. Writing in 1953, C.D. Broad could say that, “Nowadays the so-called ‘conflict between Religion and Science’, which was once appetizingly hot from the oven, has acquired something of the repulsiveness of half-cold mutton in half-congealed gravy.” Broad, “The Present Relations of Science and Religion”, from Religion, Philosophy and Psychical Research (Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1953).
place on the “degree of epistemic contact” scale. A believer should confidently be able to assert that her faith account contains no contradictions.

Moving up the scale, it seems fitting to propose some more positive requirements for an account of faith. There might, after all, be a multiplicity of strange and unappealing views that nevertheless contain no obvious contradictions. Ideally, a faith account should distinguish itself from these by displaying some significant markers of truth.

Here again, we might wish to draw further distinctions between levels of epistemic acquaintance. Even without knowing which world view is the right one, a person might still be able to distinguish stronger candidates from weaker ones. Stronger views will have a discernible internal cohesiveness, and will offer satisfying explanations for the wide range of phenomena that are seen and experienced in the world. Weaker views will offer only a disparate collection of claims which, even taken as a whole, provide little insight into the human experience. Thus, a person who acknowledges great uncertainty about the nature of the universe might still give more credence to an Aristotelian or Hegelian view than to the view that she is an isolated brain in a vat.\textsuperscript{11} The former have an impressive cohesiveness and explanatory power, while the most that can be said for the latter is that it is not obviously incoherent. Even if she is not in the business of weighing the merits of different views, the religious

\textsuperscript{11} Bertrand Russell gives tribute to this kind of coherence when he remarks of Hegel that, “Even if (as I myself believe) almost all of Hegel’s doctrines are false, he still retains an importance which is not merely historical, as the best representative of a certain kind of philosophy which, in others, is less coherent and less comprehensive.”\textit{The History of Western Philosophy}, p. 730. What Russell’s comment illustrates is that it is possible to recognize some of the marks of plausibility even in views which one has definitely rejected.
believer should be able to recognize this quality, which we might call “plausibility,” in her own view. She can see an internal cohesion in her religious beliefs and can explain how they have succeeded in explaining a wide variety of experienced phenomena.

Finally, at the top of the scale, there is knowledge. Knowledge is something of a gold standard for epistemic contact, and while there is wide disagreement about what constitutes knowledge, it will be enough for present purposes to suggest that faith will be on very firm footing indeed (epistemically speaking) if it can offer a form of epistemic contact that is commensurate with what would be regarded as knowledge in other contexts such as, for example, a scientific or historical context.\(^\text{12}\)

Looking back on this scale, we can identify three levels of epistemic contact that a faith account should seek to attain. At the lowest level, it will demand that the believer not embrace contradiction. Moving up a level, it will offer a view of the world that is plausible, in the sense of providing satisfying explanations for experienced phenomena. Finally, at the highest level, it will yield knowledge in the fullest sense of the word.

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\(^{12}\) Comparing religious beliefs to beliefs concerning science or history is illuminating and helpful for several reasons. One is that this provides a standard that does not per se depend on reaching an agreement about the requirements for knowledge, which is itself an almost Herculean task. Also, though, attempts to demonstrate parity of religious beliefs with other kinds of belief have become common within religious epistemology, reflecting the move away from strictly evidentialist forms of justification, and also the oft-repeated claim that religious beliefs have often been held to a much higher epistemic standard than other sorts of belief.
Transparency Scale

To know a thing for oneself is good. Transmitting one’s knowledge to others, however, opens the possibility of much greater good. One reason is that, as knowledge is transmitted, the goodness is cumulative. If one person’s knowledge of a general truth is good, then most likely it will be even better for two people to know it and still better for ten. Moving beyond arithmetic, however, there can be benefits to a collective embrace of truth that would not be available to a single, isolated knower. Groups of people can make use of the truths they know to engage in cooperative projects. Also, the collective embrace of a significant set of truths can form the foundation on which harmonious families, communities, or societies are built. Sharing a world view with one’s intimate associates can promote closeness and trust, since members of the group understand one another easily and are likely to be in agreement about important questions.

Even when a knower fails to convince others of the truths she holds, there can still be a benefit to explaining clearly the content and grounds of her belief. This may open the door to fruitful discussion, enabling others to benefit from her insights and vice-versa. In a pluralistic society people will often have disagreements about fundamental truths, some of which may create serious challenges for a tolerant society. The odds of finding acceptable compromises
will be greatly increased, however, when believers are able to articulate what they believe and why.\textsuperscript{13}

Transparency is not a necessary component of knowledge. An “exclusive” insight may still be genuine. Still, there are disadvantages to relying on privileged knowledge. Whenever a faith account appeals to mystery or privileged insight, it becomes less easily transmittable, less persuasive to non-believers, and less open to the benefits of philosophical discourse. A faith account will be stronger if it can easily open its arguments and insights to non-believers.\textsuperscript{14}

Historically, there have been some cults or religious movements that have kept a significant portion of their beliefs and practices secret, revealing them only gradually to willing initiates.\textsuperscript{15} On the transparency scale, a movement of this kind would rate very poorly indeed. Moving up from that point, however, there might be faith accounts that openly reveal the content of the religion while maintaining that the primary grounds for belief are inaccessible to non-believers. In this category we might place those faith accounts that justify belief through appeal to “saving experiences” or some similar form of personal revelation. And, although this type of account has

\textsuperscript{13} A similar insight is operative in many works of political theory, as seen, for example, in Rawls’ notion of “public reason”. Rawls prefers that political actions be motivated by reasons that can be, not just understood, but \textit{shared}, by all citizens of a society, and he is famously pessimistic about the extent to which religious beliefs can be included among public reasons. Still, he would share in the insight that common understanding is at least a desirable first step towards just political action. Cf. John Rawls, \textit{Political Liberalism}. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 212-247.

\textsuperscript{14} Alston notes that, in cases where a person’s faith beliefs are under attack, the ability to articulate reasons for those beliefs will be particularly valuable. BJ, 172-174.

\textsuperscript{15} Scientology and Mormonism are two contemporary religious that engage in this sort of practice to varying extents.
limitations, it is worth noting that it does enjoy at least some of the benefits of transparency. Even without offering positive arguments for his faith, a person at this level might still be able to describe his beliefs and to respond to objections. If a skeptic seeks to show that this person’s beliefs are irrational, he can search for flaws in the argument. So, for example, this believer might be able to respond to the logical problem of evil (showing that God’s existence is not logically incompatible with the existence of evil in the world), or to speculate about ways in which God’s sovereignty could still leave room for human freedom. Only when the discussion turns to his positive reasons for religious belief will this believer be forced to give up on certain conversations. These grounds are privileged in a way that is not accessible to the uninitiated.

In order to achieve greater transparency, a faith account will need to free itself from reliance on “privileged” sources of knowledge. Here again though, we might wish to distinguish two different levels of transparency, which will correspond to the different levels of epistemic contact discussed in the previous section. The most transparent faith of all would be one that was fully known in a way that was entirely transmittable to others. Those who fall short of full knowledge will presumably fall short on the transparency scale as well, since it is unlikely that one can truly teach something he doesn’t know himself. At the third and highest level of transparency, the believer will be able to demonstrate conclusively that his faith beliefs are true. Below that, there is a second level of transparency, wherein the believer can discuss and explain all the grounds for his beliefs to others, while still acknowledging that these fall short of conclusive
proof. Clearly, this is less impressive than furnishing proofs. Still, believers on both the second and third level of the transparency scale can boast significant advantages for their faith accounts. Both can reasonably claim that all of their beliefs are open to discussion. They need not shun philosophical analysis as threatening or impious. All the benefits of open communication are theirs to reap.

On the first point of the transparency scale will be faith accounts that make significant use of privileged knowledge while still articulating freely the content of their creeds. On the second point will be those accounts that can freely articulate both the content and the grounds for belief, while acknowledging that their reasons fall short of rational proof. The third point is for accounts that can, in fact, demonstrably show that their faith beliefs are true.

**Affection Scale**

In turning to our third scale, we will need to begin thinking seriously about the ways in which faith differs from other epistemic states. Up to this point, the proposed desiderata could appropriately be applied to any branch of learning or study. So, for example, the mathematician or logician would presumably score very well on the first two scales with respect to their fields of expertise. The truths that they pursue can be both known and conclusively demonstrated to others. Some other disciplines, such as cosmology or psychology, might
reasonably expect to be held to less rigorous standards, since they face more serious obstacles in investigating their subject matter. Still, cosmologists and psychologists can unproblematically agree that it would be desirable to confirm their theories in as conclusive and transparent a way as the subject matter allows.¹⁶

Faith is different, not only from mathematics or logic, but even from cosmology or psychology. It deals in claims that cannot be conclusively demonstrated, but unlike (for example) psychologists, people of faith are sometimes seen to exult in this fact. However much they incline towards tendentious exaggeration, there can be no doubt that popular atheists like Dawkins or Hitchens are correct in perceiving that faith beliefs are often taken to be in some sense “special”, and may be subjected to a specialized set of standards or criteria. What they may not fully grasp is that the standards applied to faith are in many respects more exacting or complex than those used in other contexts. The mathematician or logician (or cosmologist or psychologist) has done his job satisfactorily if he has added to the pool of human knowledge by illuminating some aspect of the universe. Faith is expected to illuminate the mind but also to transform the faithful person’s life by establishing a special sort of relationship between the believer and God.¹⁷

¹⁶ We might think here of Aristotle’s suggestion in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1.3) that we should demand of any given discipline only the level of specificity, and the type of proof, that is appropriate to it.

¹⁷ In answer to the question, “What is true faith?”, the Heidelberg Catechism declares that, “true faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in his word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits.”
How could a set of beliefs be the foundation for a trusting relationship? Two possibilities present themselves. One relates to the content of the beliefs. Extensive familiarity with a person’s character might (particularly if it is a good or admirable character) enable me to form an intimate, trusting relationship with that person. This could certainly be the case with faith beliefs, since many of them do discuss God’s admirable qualities. Insofar as faith acquaints the believer with facts about God’s (presumably good) nature, it might put her in a better position to make God an important part of her life.

There is, however, a second way (which is not mutually exclusive from the first) that beliefs can ground a trusting relationship. When a person is willing to believe the words of another, not incidentally (as when a figure on television voices a view that I am already inclined to accept, or, at the very least, that I have no reason to doubt) but on that person’s say-so, this establishes a personal bond between them. “We believe because we love,” declared John Henry Newman in one of his famous sermons to Oxford University. Although this may look like an overstatement, it is more than just a grandiose expression. To believe, and to be believed, are among the most essential components of intimate personal relationships. Faith, then, might

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(Question 21, CCEL translation.) See also Luther’s “Introduction to Paul’s Letter to the Romans,” Luther’s German Bible, 1522. “Faith is God’s work in us, that changes us and gives us new birth from God.” From “Dr. Martin Luther’s Vermischte Deutsche Schriften”, Johann K. Irmischer, ed. Vol. 63.

play a critical role in a person’s spiritual life insofar as it involves believing what God has said.¹⁹

Thinking about faith in this way, it becomes easier to understand why some would actually want their faith beliefs to be epistemically special. When religious believers rejoice in the epistemic uniqueness of their faith, this need not reflect any elitism or willful embrace of irrationality. Rather, it may be a reflection of some of the goods that can follow from believing God’s word without demonstrable proof. Believing without proof is an act of love for God, through which a trusting relationship is established.

Our third scale measures the potential of a faith account to establish a trusting relationship between the believer and God. As with the previous two, it can be broken down into three stages, with the higher levels offering greater rewards. On the lowest level, God might be seen as a merely efficient cause of beliefs which can be substantiated through some external process. Here God’s role would be similar to that of, say, the teacher who originally taught me my multiplication table. My second grade teacher certainly played a significant part in my early intellectual development, and because of that service I now remember her with gratitude and affection. I also have some reason to trust her, insofar as she has proven herself to be a reliable source of information in the past. Still, my present confidence that $5 \times 5 = 25$ does not rest on her

¹⁹ Josef Pieper makes this point by contrasting the sense of mistrust and fear that is created within politically repressive societies with the loving openness that becomes possible in free societies wherein people may speak uninhibitedly about their beliefs. Considering this contrast, he writes, “we suddenly become aware of the degree of human closeness, mutual affirmation, communion that resides in the simple fact that people listen to each other and are disposed from the start to trust and ‘believe’ each other.” From Faith, Hope, Love. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 41.
authority. No matter how thoroughly her character was discredited, I would still hold fast to that mathematical truth because I can see clearly that it must be so. This gives me a high degree of epistemic contact with the truths that she taught me, but, on the other hand, the personal bond between us is fairly slight. Her role in my education was significant but not essential, and a continued relationship with her was not necessary for maintaining a grip on the relevant truths. Similarly, if God is merely one of many possible sources of faith beliefs, that will give the believer some reason to love and trust him, but God’s role in the acquisition of the relevant beliefs will be inessential. The personal connection need not be maintained after the knowledge is acquired. While the service God performs qua teacher might reasonably inspire gratitude, believing will not itself be an act of love insofar as faith beliefs can be independently corroborated. Even scoundrels and miscreants are believed when the evidence for their claims is sufficient.

The personal bond might be strengthened somewhat if God were to play a more essential role in the acquisition of faith. Perhaps God could furnish the faithful with evidence or arguments that they would not otherwise have discovered. Here again a teacher-and-student analogy seems the most apt, but now the teacher is considerably more specialized. Multiplication could be taught by any number of people, but perhaps faith beliefs are not like this. We might compare God in this case to a top expert in a particular field, who is uniquely equipped to impart certain insights to his students. His relationship to the faithful might be something like a mentor’s relationship to a talented
protegee. God is both significant and irreplaceable in the life of the religious person. This model provides a stronger foundation for a transformative relationship between the believer and God. If God is an essential and exclusive source of vital instruction, gratitude and trust will arise very naturally. Even so, God is still merely an efficient cause of the relevant knowledge. Belief is ultimately grounded, not in the authority of the teacher, but rather in the fact that the student sees the truth for himself. There is no act of intellectual submission in this case, and a continued loving relationship is not per se necessary for maintaining epistemic contact with the relevant truths.

The most dramatic way to establish a bond of trust would be for the believer to make an unreserved act of intellectual submission. This is the third and highest level of the scale. On this model, the believer would never herself have knowledge of the things believed through faith. But, by accepting absolutely God’s authority, she would have access to whatever truths he chose to reveal. Obviously, this would create opportunities for faith to have a transformative effect in the believer’s life.²⁰

Thus, at the first point of this scale, the believer will rely on God as a teacher of important truths. At the second point, God’s role will be strengthened to that of an exclusive teacher, able to reveal truths that others

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²⁰ The First Vatican Council, in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, declared that “The obedience of faith” (Rom. 13:26; see 1:5; 2 Cor 10:5-6) "is to be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man commits his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals." cF. Heinrich Denzinger, Sources of Catholic Dogma. (Fitzwilliam: Loreto Publications, 2002), 3008.
could not. Finally, at the highest point, God’s word will be accepted on his authority alone, without other evidence or confirmation.  

**The Faith Schema Applied**

The purpose of the previous section was to offer a meta-discussion of the characteristics that should ideally be included in an account of religious faith. Faith, as discussed above, is a curious thing. Although it functions partly as a means by which religious believers are familiarized with the tenets of their creed, it is also expected to have an effect on the believer’s lifestyle and general attitude towards the world. Atheists sometimes complain that religious believers become foolish or lax when they turn their minds to matters of faith. Looked at from another angle, though, it would seem that faith carries a much heavier burden than a standard academic discipline or a typical line of enquiry.

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21 Recent philosophical articles have explored the non-doxastic elements of faith. In “Christian Faith” (from *Reasoned Faith*, ed. Stump) Scott MacDonald describes faith as “a compound state, the primary constituents of which are a cognitive state, namely, belief that certain propositions are true, and a particular sort of volitional response to the things and states of affairs represented in those propositions (44).” MacDonald sees these two components as being connected in a fairly straightforward sense; the belief that X (for example, that God created me) prompts feelings of love and gratitude concerning X, and thus the two are closely associated and can reasonably be classified as a single thing. If the belief fails to produce the volitional response, then there is no compound, and so there is no faith.

Robert Audi also delves into the non-doxastic elements of faith (*Ibid*, 75-91), considering various ways in which belief and volition might be combined, and even suggesting that it might actually be possible to be “a person of faith” without positively holding the relevant beliefs that, according to MacDonald, should provoke the volitional response. (Even Audi places a negative cognitive restraint in faith; I cannot be grateful to God for creating me if I am stalwartly convinced that there is no God. Still, the relationship between the cognitive and volitional components of faith is quite flexible on Audi’s account.)

Both of these articles are helpful insofar as they discuss those non-doxastic elements of faith that have been less fully explored in the recent literature. What I am suggesting with my third criterion, however, is that a faith account will be stronger (both in terms of its conceptual simplicity and in terms of its ability to accommodate recurrent claims within the Christian tradition) if it can show a deeper and more intrinsic connection between the cognitive and volitional components of faith than either MacDonald or Audi describe.
It must function as a conduit to truth while at the same time effecting some sort of moral transformation in the believer. What sort of thing would faith have to be, in order to accomplish so much?

Given this multiplicity of goals, it can be difficult to evaluate the merits of a particular account of faith, let alone to compare different philosophers’ accounts. The evaluative schema described above is intended to measure how effectively a given faith account incorporates each desirable feature. (See Appendix C.) Hopefully this can show us where each faith account is successful, and where each one might be open to criticism.

**Alvin Plantinga and Warranted Christian Belief**

Alvin Plantinga’s work on Christian belief spans decades, over the course of which his own views have undergone some development. In *God and Other Minds* (1967) he considers the most significant arguments of natural theology and concludes that none are successful, although religious belief might still be justified to the same extent as other widespread beliefs such as, for example, our belief in the reality of other minds. “*Reason and Belief in God*” (1983) continues the attack on natural theology and introduces the idea (inspired by John Calvin and other Reformed theologians) that belief in God is “properly basic.” Following on this project, Plantinga became intensely interested in developing a more systematic account of belief generally, in part by way of demonstrating that religious beliefs were being held to an unreasonably
stringent standard of justification. Although he remained committed to showing that knowledge of religious truths could be “on all fours” with other kinds of knowledge, Plantinga came to see that this could best be done by working from two directions. On the one hand, he developed a sophisticated model of Christian faith and belief in God. On the other, his general work on epistemology sought to articulate realistic standards by which all knowledge, including theistic and Christian knowledge, could be measured. His work on these subjects produced numerous articles and books, but the greatest and most influential of these was *Warranted Christian Belief* (2000), in which Plantinga unveiled his complete theory concerning faith and the formation of Christian beliefs. Although I will reference some of Plantinga’s other works, my main focus will be on Plantinga’s argument as found in *Warranted Christian Belief*.

On the epistemology front, his key theoretical contribution was in drawing a distinction between justification and warrant. Justification was a familiar concept well before Plantinga’s time, with the main idea being that a person ought to have satisfactory reasons for believing a thing before he could be said to know it. In the post-Gettier world, however, it was widely acknowledged that justification was not enough. Justified beliefs need not count as knowledge; indeed, as Gettier famously observed, they might not even be true.22 Some additional component seemed to be necessary in order to

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convert belief into knowledge. Plantinga suggested that what was wanted was *warrant*.

Although he himself avoids the terms, Plantinga’s description of warrant might be described as broadly teleological. He begins by discussing human faculties and their requisite functions. Plantinga’s remarks on this subject are basically Aristotelian, although he understands functionality in a more explicitly theistic way, with the function of each organ or faculty being written into God’s creative design. A faculty is working properly if it is doing what God intended for it to do, and it can yield knowledge only if it was designed for that purpose.\(^{23}\)

This last condition is particularly important for Plantinga given his long-standing goal of showing, not just that religious belief might be true, but, more importantly, that religious belief can be epistemically responsible. Plantinga’s book *Warrant and Proper Function* is largely dedicated to a thorough discussion of what this should entail, and the first two segments of *Warranted Christian Belief* consider why, in the views of such thinkers as Freud and Marx, Christian belief comes up short. Plantinga concludes that Christian beliefs will be epistemically irresponsible insofar as they are accepted, not because they are confirmed through some specifically truth-seeking method, but for some other reason.\(^{24}\) Given this concern, it is of great importance to him that warranted beliefs be confirmed by a specifically truth-seeking faculty. We must

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\(^{24}\) WCB, 135-152
avoid situations in which, “noncognitive or nonintellectual features of a cognitive situation can influence belief formation, thus impeding cognitive function.”25 This is the internal component of warrant.

In addition to this, features of a person’s external environment are also relevant. Perfect eyesight will not mean perfect vision for the person who is locked away in a completely dark room. The conditions of a person’s environment must be such as to enable his faculties to do their assigned job. Moreover, even if the general conditions are optimal, more particular features of an environment might come into play. If I am at the zoo, and someone has very expertly painted a mule with zebra-like stripes and turned it loose in the zebra pen, this will incline me to form false beliefs. Warrant requires that no such conditions be present.

The roles of justification and warrant can be illustrated through a simple example in which my husband, upon arriving home from work, asks me what I did that particular day. Reaching back into my memory, I reply that I went shopping for groceries. My justification for the belief is that I remember going shopping. My warrant will come through the fact that I have a capacity to remember, given to me by God for the purpose of enabling me to grasp truths about my past experiences. Moreover, this capacity is functioning properly insofar as I am not affected by mental disease, emotionally upset to the point of extreme distraction, or anything of that kind. On an external level, my memories must be accurate, and not the product of an elaborate set-up.

25 WCB, 306
involving a simulated car trip and grocery store. Given that the belief is both justified and warranted, I can claim full knowledge of my grocery-shopping activities.

Which of our faculties would come into play when it comes to belief in God? Plantinga is open to the possibility that multiple faculties might be capable of perceiving the divine. One in particular, though, is specially suited to the task, and this Plantinga dubs (following Calvin) the *sensus divinitatis*.\(^{26}\) The *sensus divinitatis*, while important, is evidently not a very versatile faculty. Its function is simply to perceive God. The circumstances that might stimulate such a realization are various; Plantinga’s favorite examples involve scenes of natural beauty, but it is certainly possible that other circumstances (say, sitting in front of the fire on a snowy evening) might have a similar effect. It is important to specify, however, that the *sensus divinitatis* does not *deduce* God’s existence from a set of initial data. Rather, it senses God’s presence directly so that our knowledge of God can be “properly basic,” just as, for example, a belief based on personal memory is basic to me, not based on preliminary inferences. Just as I might, on a warm, autumn afternoon in my favorite apple orchard, stop and say to myself with profound conviction: “this is a beautiful world!” so I can, under the same circumstances find myself realizing with conviction that: “There is a God!” In each case, Plantinga thinks the truth in question can be

\(^{26}\) WCB, 170-175
known, and known in a direct way that has nothing to do with logical deduction.  

Belief in God, on this model, is warranted because the *sensus divinitatis* is itself a special (but natural) faculty which is functioning properly when God’s presence is felt. So long as the faculty is not being blocked, impeded, or deceived by external or internal obstacles, there is no reason why this cannot qualify as knowledge on Plantinga’s epistemology.

Knowledge of God’s existence, however, is not the same as faith. Plantinga acknowledges this forthrightly, and extends his model to include an account of faith, the virtue through which other Christian truths (concerning creation, sin and especially the availability of salvation) are made known to human beings. Faith, according to Plantinga, has three primary components. First, it depends on Scripture, that divinely inspired testament to the truth of the Christian faith. Next, it involves the activity of the Holy Spirit, who provides what Plantinga calls an “inward instigation” to accept the truths contained in Scripture. Through the help of this supernatural agent, the faithful person is suddenly illumined with the realization that the thing he is reading or hearing (which is in some way linked to Scripture, whether directly or through the mediation of a teacher) is both true and divinely inspired. Finally, the believer freely accepts the relevant truth. This triad of elements (Scripture, the inward

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27 It should be noted briefly that, in positing the *sensus divinitatis* and man’s natural ability to sense God’s presence, Plantinga takes himself to be faithfully following in the tradition of a multitude of other Christian thinkers who have held that this is possible. John Calvin is the obvious progenitor of the idea, but Plantinga also claims St. Thomas Aquinas as a supporter, and, in this ecumenical spirit, dubs his model the “Aquinas/Calvin Model.” See WCB, 249, for further discussion of the historical roots of this theory.
instigation of the Holy Spirit, and the free decision to believe) come together to constitute faith.\textsuperscript{28}

Thus, in Plantinga’s quintessential case a person might be reading the Bible or listening to a sermon when the instigation of the Holy Spirit causes him to realize in a profound and fundamental way that what he is reading or hearing is a divinely revealed truth. He gladly embraces this truth and is now in possession of new knowledge. Plantinga goes on to specify that faith should be understood as a “belief-producing process or activity, like perception or memory. It is a cognitive device, a means by which belief, and belief on a certain specific set of topics, is regularly produced in regular ways.”\textsuperscript{29}

**Plantinga’s Model Evaluated**

In applying our evaluative schema to this account, the easiest scale will be the first. Plantinga is very clear that faith yields knowledge in the fullest sense. Quoting from both Calvin and the Heidelberg Catechism, he specifies that the faith offers “a deep-rooted assurance” of the truth of the gospel and the availability of salvation.\textsuperscript{30} He seems to regard this as adequate to supply knowledge. Further, his extensive writings on warrant are explicitly designed to show that the truths grasped through faith can be “on all fours” with other kinds of knowledge. In faith, there is a properly functioning faculty which is designed to sense and respond to the instigation of the Holy Spirit. This

\textsuperscript{28} WCB, 249-252  
\textsuperscript{29} WCB, 256  
\textsuperscript{30} WCB, 247
process is part of God’s plan to reveal his salvific actions to human beings, so it is clear that the faculty is working exactly as intended when it yields the relevant knowledge. Provided that no features of the person’s epistemic environment are causing the faculty to malfunction (and indeed, it is hard to imagine what could do this), the truths grasped by faith will qualify as knowledge, and Plantinga’s account can be placed at the third point of the Epistemic Strength-Scale.

With respect to his goal of showing that religious belief can be epistemically responsible, Plantinga has succeeded admirably. By supplying standards for knowledge that can be applied equally to religious and non-religious beliefs, he makes a strong case that there is nothing suspicious or epistemically lax about religious beliefs per se. Unsurprisingly, though, this benefit must be purchased at the expense of some other, less-than-ideal features of the model. This becomes most obvious when we turn to the Transparency Scale. Plantinga’s account of faith relies heavily on both supernatural help and private experience. Clearly, the believer will not simply be able to offer her knowledge to another person through discursive communication. And while it certainly might be possible for her to articulate her beliefs, and even to offer arguments for them, the primary grounds of her own faith-based beliefs will be inaccessible to anyone who has not likewise received this supernatural gift. It would seem, then, that Plantinga’s account
falls to the first level of the Transparency Scale. This reliance on privileged knowledge has been the basis of much criticism of Plantinga’s model.\textsuperscript{31}

Turning to the Affection Scale, matters become slightly more complicated. What is most clear is that for Plantinga faith-based beliefs are not exclusively dependent on the testimony of another. A little clarification is in order here, because Plantinga does state at one point that faith is an example of testimony-based knowledge.\textsuperscript{32} However, close examination reveals that testimony functions in the model as the source of knowledge, but not as its primary ground. Certainly beliefs grasped through faith will be received through the testimony of God, Scripture, and the Holy Spirit. Further, the belief that the witness contained in Scripture is divinely inspired testimony will be a necessary component of faith. Nevertheless, the believer need not rely exclusively on that testimony because, even as it reveals the divine origin of Scriptural testimony, the Holy Spirit will simultaneously stimulate a realization that the claims in question are true. The believer sees the truth of these claims for herself and need not make any inference from the realization that “God has said X” to the belief that “X is true.”

\textsuperscript{31} Deane-Peter Baker summarizes the concerns of many Plantinga critics, arguing that, “the Christian has a duty to at least attempt to offer a positive apologetic for her beliefs. From a Christian perspective, this duty arises because of the importance of evangelism -- to be human agents in God’s quest to seek and save the lost. From an epistemological perspective, this duty arises out of the overarching goal of discovering truth. From an ethical perspective, this duty arises because of the historically contingent, but all too real, moral wrongs that have been carried out in the name of religious exclusivism -- this point is, as I have argued, the basis of the ethical objection that seems to be implicit in the writing of so many of the critics of Plantinga and his fellow Reformed epistemologists” (Baker, “Plantinga’s Reformed Epistemology: What’s the Question?” in \textit{International Journal for Philosophy of Religion}, Vol. 57:77-103, 2005, p. 100).
\textsuperscript{32} WCB, 252
Plantinga even goes so far as to say that the truths contained in Scripture are “self-authenticating.” He hastens to clarify that he does not mean that they are logical or tautological truths, nor does Scripture have within it any arguments or proofs demonstrating its reliability. Illumination from the Holy Spirit is a critical component of faith, which cannot be attained by reason alone. Still, Scriptural teachings are like self-evident truths in that:

they have their evidence immediately – that is – not by way of propositional evidence. They do not get their evidence or warrant by way of being believed on the evidential basis of other propositions. So from that point of view, these truths too could be said to be self-evident – in a different and analogically extended sense of that term. They are evident, but don’t get their evidence from other propositions; they have their evidence in themselves (and not by way of inference from other propositions.) 33

What we see is that, as a consequence of Plantinga’s claim that faith beliefs are both known and properly basic, believers on his model are not exclusively reliant on God’s testimony as a ground for their belief. They believe that the testimony found in Scripture comes from God, and they believe that it is true, but these two beliefs are not inferentially connected. And, while Plantinga does not explicitly discuss this, there seems to be no reason why a believer could not (without danger of irrationality) abandon the belief that Scripture is divinely inspired while retaining at least some of her knowledge regarding the truth of its claims.

Thus, Plantinga’s faith account will fall at the first or second point of the Affection Scale. Through faith, God (perhaps in the Holy Spirit) will serve as a kind of teacher of important truths. In Plantinga’s case, God will be a very

33 WCB, 262
unique kind of teacher, because the knowledge will be communicated, not
discursively, but directly through a special faculty designed for that purpose.
Nonetheless, God’s role will be as the provider of knowledge, not as the witness
on whose word certain truths are accepted.

How exclusive is God’s role in supplying this particular knowledge? We
have seen that the means by which truth is communicated are extraordinary
indeed, but this does not settle the question of exclusivity with respect to the
beliefs themselves. Could the relevant knowledge be attained in any other way?
This is a complex question for Plantinga. He does not insist with respect to any
particular truth that it could not be known (or grasped in a way that falls short
of knowledge) through a process other than faith. On the other hand, he does
argue at some length that the Gospel could not be accepted in its totality
without a supernatural process of the sort he proposes. One reason for this is
that the human mind has been clouded by sin and cannot be cleansed without
supernatural aid. Another is that the truths communicated through faith are of
a particularly strange (though wonderful) kind. Our everyday experience does
not lead us to expect that people will rise from the dead or that God will
become human in order to redeem us from our sins. Such extraordinary claims
call for a special form of confirmation. After a long and involved examination of
the historical argument for the truth of the Gospels, Plantinga concludes that
ordinary, natural faculties will at best be able to convince us that their claims
are “not terribly unlikely.” And this, of course, does not seem satisfactory for his purposes.34

It seems, then, that Plantinga’s model should properly be placed at the second point of the Affection Scale. The epistemic content that God provides through faith is unique, in that no other source could supply it. On the other hand, God’s testimony is still only the source, and not the ground, of faith beliefs.35

A defender of Plantinga might argue at this point that the “Aquinas/Calvin model” is itself a good example of how the Affection-Scale has been improperly constructed. After all, Plantinga clearly does regard faith as having an affective component, declaring that, “the believer, the person with faith, has the right beliefs, but also the right affections. Conversion and regeneration alters affection as well as belief.”36

Of course, having achieved the second point of the scale, the evaluative schema does indicate that Plantinga’s faith account has significant potential for explaining the transformation of affections. It is natural that God’s revelation of important and salutary truths would inspire gratitude and affection, especially when those truths include the wonderful news that God himself has redeemed

34 WCB, 268-280
35 Keith DeRose has proposed an epistemic model wherein beliefs get some of their justification through direct apprehension (as on Plantinga’s model) but require further support in order to qualify as knowledge. On DeRose’s Direct Warrant Realism, direct apprehension is supported by a positive coherence of a particular belief with the other beliefs one holds. A faith account based on DeRose’s Direct Warrant Realism might be able to capture most of the strengths of Plantinga’s model while better realizing the goods of transparency. cf DeRose, “Direct Warrant Realism” from God and the Ethics of Belief, ed. Dole and Chignell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 150-174.
36 WCB, 292
us from our sins and opened for us the gates to eternal life. Still, human beings do not always respond to generosity in the way that they should, and the fact remains that the regeneration of affections is, for Plantinga, one step removed from the act of belief that seemed most constitutive of faith. In a lengthy chapter on “The Testimonial Model,” Plantinga tries to extend his model so as to make the transformation of affections a more vital part of the process. He does this by using the appreciation of God’s beauty and/or greatness as the bridge between belief and affection, but he admits freely that the relationship between these dispositions is complex, and that he is uncertain how exactly the causal sequence goes.\textsuperscript{37} Again, there is nothing impossible or even necessarily implausible about this account, but it does not enjoy the benefit of conceptual simplicity. The relationship between beliefs and affections is both indirect and unclear. Moreover, even on a generous reading, Plantinga’s faith merely \textit{inspires} a love for God; it is not itself a demonstration of that love. This, as we will see, is one area in which the next model will improve on Plantinga’s account.

Plantinga’s primary interest in constructing his “Aquinas/Calvin model” was to show that faith could be warranted, justified, and epistemically responsible. Put another way, he was from the beginning most concerned about those aspects of faith that I have classified on the Strength Scale. Unsurprisingly then, this is the area in which his account is strongest. It is somewhat less successful at explaining faith’s role in ordering the affections.

\textsuperscript{37} WCB, 309
Possibly its greatest weakness, however, is its requirement that faith beliefs be privileged, in a way that threatens to hinder both apologetics and philosophical discourse.

**St. Bonaventure and infused faith**

Although he is not engaged in historical exegesis per se, Plantinga clearly sees his work as continuing in a tradition that extends back through the early Reformers, and even has roots in the Middle Ages and beyond. He mentions especially St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure as medieval thinkers whose ideas might, in his view, usefully be seen as precursors to the Reformers’ work and ultimately his own.\(^{38}\) Not claiming to be a historian, Plantinga never attempts an in-depth historical analysis of the subject, but by referring to his completed faith account as the “Aquinas/Calvin model”, he strongly implies that the medieval and early modern thinkers that he references are substantially in agreement about the nature of faith. This, as we will see, is something of a stretch. Aquinas does indicate, in a passage frequently quoted by Plantinga,\(^{39}\) that human beings have some natural capacity to realize God’s existence, not just inferentially but through the internal activity of the Holy Spirit. However, it would be very misleading to understand Aquinas and Bonaventure’s views on faith as less-developed precursors to Calvin’s.\(^{40}\)

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\(^{38}\) WCB, 241-242

\(^{39}\) *Summa Theologiae* I, q.2. a.1, ad. 1

\(^{40}\) Plantinga often implies this; see, for example, *WCB*, p. 249-250.
From earliest Christian times, faith has been numbered among the three theological virtues. This, as we have seen, enables us to say several things about it. In the first place, following Aristotle, Bonaventure understood virtue to be a state inclining a person to act well with respect to a particular capacity. Again following Aristotle, the excellence of a thing is measured with respect to its final end. So, as for Plantinga, this view is teleological, but whereas Plantinga expressed this in terms of the creative intention of the designer, the medievals tend to focus more on the ultimate fulfillment towards which the individual creature is naturally directed. The virtues advance a being’s progress towards its final end, and as a theological virtue, faith directs a person towards his supernatural end, the Beatific Vision.

Faith, as an intellectual virtue, must order the cognitive faculties in such a way as to lead the virtuous person to God. Naturally, then, it will be important for faith to grasp whatever truths are needed to sustain an upright Christian life. Nonetheless, what defines faith as a virtue is not adherence to any particular truth, but rather an inclination towards a method for attaining truth which is both reliable and also itself salutary for the Christian soul. In Thomist terms, we might distinguish between the material and formal aspects of faith, since, as Aquinas says in addressing this subject:

The object of every cognitive habit includes two things: first, that which is known materially, and secondly, that whereby it is known, which is the formal aspect of the object. Thus, in the science of geometry, the conclusions are what is known materially,

41 cf, 1 Corinthians 13:13
while the formal aspect of the science consists in the means of demonstration, through which the conclusions are known.\textsuperscript{42}

The importance of the formal aspect should not be underestimated. Often there may be multiple ways in which a person can come into contact with particular truths, but unless they are uncovered through the method that is proper to the virtue, this will not be a manifestation of real faith.

Bonaventure, thinking along the same lines, tells us that:

Without an understanding of the highest Good, it is not possible for an intention to be right. A thing is only made with right intention when it is made for the glory and honor of God. But without right intention, no act of virtue can proceed rightly. Therefore, because the habit of faith is that by means of which the highest Good is recognized by our minds, so it is that ‘faith directs our intention’, and for this reason it is the standard of every good work and every meritorious virtue. Therefore (faith) should not only be called a gratuitous virtue; it is the ruler and director of the virtues.”\textsuperscript{43}

He shows how serious he is about this point when he goes on to explain:

Some people assent to the truth that they’ve heard because they are moved by human persuasion, through a love and awe of speech, or through miracles, or through reasons and argument. This kind of faith is simply acquired and is not truly a virtue at all, because it is a product of human reason, without vitality or strength.\textsuperscript{44}

The point, then is not simply to hold the appropriate beliefs, or even to hold them with sufficient strength. In order to qualify as faithful, a person must acquire the relevant beliefs through the appropriate process.

\textsuperscript{42} *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 1, a.1

\textsuperscript{43} Rursus, sine cognitione summi Boni non potest esse recta intentio -- hoc solum fit recta intentione, quod fit ad gloriam et honorem Dei -- sine vero recta intentione nullus actus virtutis recte incedit. Quoniam igitur habitus fidei est, quo mediante summum Bonum a mentibus nostris agnoscitur; hinc est, quod ‘fides dirigat nostram intentionem’, et per hoc regula est omnis operationis bonae et omnis virtutis meritoriae. Et ideo non tantum debet dici virtus gratuita, sed etiam virtutum gratuitarum regula et auriga. (3.23.1.1)\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{44} Bonaventure, *Commentaries on Lombard’s Sentences*, 2.32.2.2
Upon reading a quote like the above, Plantinga might in fact be inclined to approve. Bonaventure’s account of faith seems to exclude most of the ordinary means by which a person could conceivably come into contact with the truth, up to and including rational proof; something more singular will evidently be required. In Plantinga’s model, this might appear to be a good opening for discussing the *sensus divinitatis*. The next stage of the account, however, takes a sharp turn away from the “Aquinas/Calvin model.”

For it is just that our intellect should be taken captive by, and should be subject to, the highest Good. The soul cannot be right unless it assents to the highest truth for its own sake and above all things, and unless the affective part of the soul clings to the highest Good. However, no one has this uprightness who doesn’t want it; it is only had by those who want it. For no one believes God above his own self, unless it is thanks to this, that he wants to make his intellect captive in obedience to Christ. 

So says Bonaventure early in his discussion of faith, highlighting the significance of submitting to truth voluntarily and “for its own sake.” He further goes on to describe faith as a process of believing God above one’s own self, or, in other words, accepting certain truths on God’s authority, as an act of obedience. The stress Bonaventure places on the *voluntary* nature of belief seems appropriate in this context, since a person cannot be compelled to accept a claim on another’s say-so in the same way that one may be compelled to accept a truth of logic or an empirical truth that is demonstrated before one’s own eyes.

Contra Plantinga, Bonaventure seems to think that faith must include an inference from the understanding that “God has revealed X” to the belief that

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45 3.23.1.1
“X is true.” The realization that God exists may be properly basic in something like Plantinga’s sense, but beliefs grasped through faith are not. The method proper to faith is to investigate what God has revealed, and then to believe it simply because God is the source of the claim.

Bonaventure’s phrase about making “the intellect captive in obedience to Christ” is particularly revealing. The primary marker of faith, for him, is the relationship that is established between the believer and God. Through the believer’s voluntary submission, God becomes absolutely authoritative in every exercise of the faithful person’s cognitive faculties, and it is for this reason that faith beliefs are accepted.

Aquinas makes a similar point in his (name work), when he argues that,

Faith signifies the assent of the intellect to that which is believed. Now the intellect assents to a thing in two ways. First, through being moved to assent to its very object, which is known either by itself (as in the case of first principles, which are held by the habit of understanding), or through something else already known (as in the case of conclusions which are held by the habit of science). Secondly, the intellect assents to something, not through being sufficiently moved to this assent by its proper object, but through an act of choice, whereby it turns voluntarily to one side rather than to the other. Now if this be accompanied by doubt and fear of the opposite side, there will be opinion; while, if there be certainty and no fear of the other side, there will be faith.46

Here the contrast is made particularly clear. The intellect can assent to two different sorts of things. On the one hand, there are truths of logic and science which are seen, understood, and known. On the other there are tentative opinions, and, most importantly, faith beliefs, which are firm, confident, and not known.

46 ST II-II, q. 1, a. 4.
Two burning questions are likely to occur to the reader at this point. Firstly, how is the faithful person to know what God has revealed? And secondly, why, lacking knowledge, should he assent to these revealed truths? On the first point, Bonaventure is less communicative than modern readers would surely like. It was obviously their assumption that revealed truths would be sifted and proclaimed through the mediating body of the Church, and some suggestions are made as to how the correct institution might be recognized.47 In general, though, this was not a point of intense concern for the medieval Schoolmen. For thirteenth century scholars in the Latin West, the number of plausible candidates for authoritative religious institutions was effectively limited to one. Certainly, this is a point on which contemporary philosophers of religion might regard the medieval analysis as inadequate, and today’s would-be Christian believer could conceivably find herself in a quandary if she wishes to submit her intellect to Christ, but is uncertain which authority accurately proclaims God’s word.

Without downplaying this question, we should still allow ourselves to appreciate the degree to which Bonaventure’s model has altered the terms on which the believer pursues truth. Though she is still capable of attaining knowledge through the exercise of her natural faculties, the faithful person will also seek to increase her access to the truth by believing those things that God has revealed. As part of this pursuit she will need to confront questions about the ways in which human authors or institutions might serve as tools for

47 In general, arguments on this point mainly refer back to the Nicene Creed’s declaration that the Church should be “one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic.”
transmitting divinely revealed things. For our purposes, however, it is enough to observe that someone might be able to ascertain that God has revealed a certain claim, without being able to see for herself how or why that thing should be true. Accepting the claim without independent argument or confirmation is, on this model, the quintessential act of faith.

Why should anyone do this? Is it not the essence of irrationality to accept (firmly and with confidence) things that we admittedly do not know? Here we find more points of similarity between the Medievals and Plantinga. All agree that faith cannot be attained through a person’s natural capacities alone. Supernatural help is essential, in Plantinga’s case for enabling us to know the truth, and in the medieval case for instilling virtuous dispositions in the soul that incline us to believe it without knowledge. As Bonaventure affirms, faith is “infused in us through God’s gift”\footnote{3.23.1.1} together with all of the other virtues. The inclination to believe rightly will thus be implanted in us by God, and inseparably bound up with other virtues which enable us to trust in God’s providence and to love what is genuinely good.

Nothing I have said here diminishes the intrinsic strangeness of a virtue theory that depends on God’s infusing particular dispositions into the human soul. Since this chapter is focused on the motivation behind the theory, I will leave this consideration aside for the present, with the intention of taking it up again in the next chapter. It still remains, however, to see how Bonaventure’s theory fares on the evaluative schema.
Bonaventure’s Model Evaluated

In Bonaventure’s case, the evaluative schema immediately reveals the weakest point in his faith account. This relates to the Epistemic Strength Scale since, as we have seen, faith-beliefs (necessarily) fall short of knowledge for him. Although Bonaventure is entirely forthright about this fact, we still should not downplay its significance. For a philosopher like Plantinga, the inability of a faithful person to attain true knowledge (at least with respect to certain central Christian teachings) would represent a catastrophic failure. At best, Bonaventure’s faithful believer will be able to articulate compelling reasons why her perspective is appealing, personally satisfying, and very possibly true. But this will not be enough, on Plantinga’s view, to supply warrant for religious beliefs. And without warrant, religious beliefs may turn out to be epistemically irresponsible, which is the thing Plantinga fears most.

It should be noted here that it cannot always be epistemically irresponsible to accept claims on the basis of others’ testimony, since belief in the word of others is a regular and necessary feature of human life. On a perfectly ordinary morning, I might read a news story, check a weather report to see how warm the day is likely to get, and read the instructions on a pill bottle to determine how many vitamins I should take; here in this perfectly ordinary morning routine we can see three discrete instances of adopting a belief on the testimony of others. There are in fact noteworthy similarities between this kind of belief and the sort recommended by Bonaventure through
religion. In none of the above cases do I have the kind of personal
association with the knower (that is, the journalist, weather man or pharmacist
in charge of the pill labeling) that would reassure me of their reliability. When I
accept the advice on the vitamin bottle, I probably do not have a sufficient
understanding of anatomy to do an independent evaluation of the relevant
claims. In fact, I most likely will not even take the relatively simple step of
calling my doctor or consulting an online medical reference for a second
opinion. I simply swallow the pills and go about my day without a second
thought. But if this kind of behavior is irrational or epistemically irresponsible,
it may turn out that living rationally is all but impossible. Life is too short to
spend endlessly fact-checking the advice of experts.

Having said all of this, it remains true that the attitude recommended by
Bonaventure is somewhat different from ordinary cases in which we accept
claims on another’s authority. I may not personally understand anatomy well
enough to assess the information on the vitamin label, but I do at least realize
that there is a complex network of laws and institutions that works to ensure
the accuracy of information distributed through this kind of medium. If the
pill’s manufacturers were to recommend a dangerously high dosage, this might
help them to sell more pills in the very short term, but they would then attract
scrutiny from the FDA, and likely be subject to legal sanctions. Even if my
understanding of this system is relatively vague, I can also get some
reassurance from general principles of induction; most everyone I know has
followed instructions on pill boxes at one time or another, and it usually seems
to work out. Finally, I might tell myself (if I stop to think about it at all) that even without personally researching such information, I do at least have some idea how I might go about researching it. Particularly today, in the information age, there are innumerable sources of health information that I might consult if I were truly concerned. That makes the expert in question at least potentially accountable for the advice he gives, even if I don’t in every instance take the relevant steps to examine his information. In taking the manufacturer’s advice, I certainly do not regard myself as submitting intellectually to his authority.

This, however, is precisely what Bonaventure thinks is required for faith. Many of the claims embraced though faith will not be verifiable through alternative means, and even those that are will (in Bonaventure’s view) remain faith beliefs only insofar as the faithful person doesn’t understand them for himself. The pill-taker might trust the manufacturer’s advice with a kind of tacit provision that he is free to re-evaluate at any time in the light of new information. The faithful person, on Bonaventure’s understanding, adopts the

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49 Hypotheticals of this kind can become rather important in normal cases of accepting truths based on another’s authority. In presenting his analysis of authority-based beliefs (“The Epistemic Authority of Testimony”, from God and the Ethics of Belief, ed. Dole and Chignell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 175-201), Robert Audi (presenting what he takes to be a reasonable interpretation of the views of Thomas Reid) suggests that authority-based beliefs are (or at least can be) non-inferential, in that sense that it is not necessarily morally irresponsible to accept a claim on someone else’s say-so, even without subjecting the claim to independent rational scrutiny. However, for mature persons (which is to say, those who are capable of having real justification for their beliefs), a certain level of discernment should be exercised such that they would be able to give some reasons for accepting the claim (for example, that the claim was verbalized by a person known to be reliable, that he sounded sincere at the time, or possibly that the claim seems plausible in light of other known facts), even if no one demands that they do. Accepting the testimony of others is both natural and indispensable, but Audi makes clear that the mature believer will place certain limits on what testimony she will accept, even if those limits are often implicit and not an active subject of reflection for her.
opposite strategy by accepting God’s word unconditionally and with a ready willingness to believe anything else that God might wish to say. Such complete credulity would almost certainly appear naïve or irrational in most other contexts in life. It seems reasonable to demand that Bonaventure supply an explanation for why this case should be different.

This issue will be one of the major concerns of the next chapter, when I will discuss the unity of the virtues and other related issues that might help to justify giving faith such an “epistemically special” status. For the present it will be sufficient to observe that, while Bonaventure’s faith certainly will not supply knowledge of the relevant truths, it may very well meet the second point of the Strength Scale by offering a view that is recognizably coherent. This point might get a bit tricky, because, given the unconditional nature of Bonaventure’s intellectual submission, it isn’t clear whether the faithful person could demand that the view provided will be internally coherent. On the other hand, it does seem very likely that the view offered will, in fact, have a high level of internal cohesion and explanatory power. This may seem obvious to anyone familiar with Bonaventure’s work and with Scholastic thought more generally; the medieval Schoolmen were second to none in their zeal for synthesis and internal cohesion. It is also worth noting, however, that the act of intellectual submission that Bonaventure recommends accepts on authority whatever God has said. The belief that God has spoken may be acquired in more ordinary ways, and given Bonaventure’s enthusiasm for explicating Christian philosophy in a cohesive and compelling way, it seems reasonable to
suppose that he would want would-be believers to be impressed by the intrinsic plausibility of the view. Even prescinding from the question of how faith begins, Bonaventure’s believer will presumably need some significant level of epistemic contact with the relevant claims even to distinguish those that are authoritatively promulgated from those that are not. She does not, as in Plantinga’s model, receive these truths piecemeal in moments of epiphany that are yielded to her by a special God-sensing faculty. Thus, it seems reasonable to expect that Bonaventure’s faith will yield a fairly coherent view. Placing Bonaventure’s view at the second level of the Strength Scale may require some measure of optimism, but it seems a justified optimism.

None of this analysis should distract us from the ultimate conclusion that, on the Strength Scale, Plantinga’s view has more to offer. Turning to the Transparency Scale, however, we begin to see that Bonaventure’s view offers some other attractive advantages. Far more than on Plantinga’s account, Bonaventure’s model calls for a high degree of cognitive engagement on the part of the religious believer. The religious person believes, most fundamentally, because she sees that the relevant truths have been revealed by God. However, as discussed above, she will probably need a fairly coherent understanding of God’s revelatory words before she can even make real faith-based claims. Better still, given the interconnected nature of the virtues (which will be discussed in the next section), it seems likely that the decision to believe will be influenced by the general realization that the Christian life is good, meaningful, and worth embracing. While it obviously would not be reasonable
to expect the believer to communicate knowledge that he himself lacks, there
seems no reason to doubt that Bonaventure’s believer should at least be able to
articulate all the reasons she does have for her faith beliefs.

This is an area in which Bonaventure’s account offers considerably more
flexibility than Plantinga’s. Although both accounts involve some level of divine
involvement, in Plantinga’s this comes in the form of experiences that are, by
their very nature, private. By contrast, infusions of grace on Bonaventure’s
model need not be accompanied by any particular experience; indeed, in the
case of the newly baptized infant, there is no reason to think that the virtuous
person is even aware of what has transpired. Accordingly, there is no necessity
for “privileged” insight on this model, which can rise to the second point of the
Transparency Scale. Any insights or arguments the religious believer has can
potentially be shared with others, and there is no need to bracket out certain
portions of the faith as beyond the realm of discussion. Philosophy may find its
limit when it tries to explore certain propositions that are beyond the reach of
natural reason. Indeed, Bonaventure is confident that it will. Still, there is
nothing to discourage the philosopher from pushing natural reason to its
furthest boundary, nor should he fear to enter into serious philosophical
exchange with non-believers. Even if the discussion ultimately turns to a
debate about religious authority, the believer on Bonaventure’s model will
never be compelled (as Plantinga sometimes may be) to resort to the maddening
claim that “I just know something you don’t.” With respect to philosophical
exploration, the soil seems more fertile on Bonaventure’s model.
Turning finally to the Affection Scale, we see at last the greatest strength of the Bonaventure’s model. Since faith is explicitly based on authority, the act of belief can in and of itself be an expression of love and trust for God. There is no need to posit other, associated effects or dispositions to explain why faith has the potential to transform the will. Josef Pieper explains the point as follows:

Once more then: Toward what does the believer direct his will when he believes? Answer: toward the warrantor and witness whom he affirms, loves, “wills” – insofar as he accepts the truthfulness of what that witness says, accepts it on his mere word. This wholly free, entirely uncoercible act of affirmation, which is enforced neither by the power of self-evident truth nor by the weight of argumentation; this confiding, acknowledging, communion-seeking submission of the believer to the witness whom he believes – this, precisely, is the “element of volition” in belief itself.50

The moving simplicity of this connection might certainly be taken as an advantage of Bonaventure’s account, which attains the third point of the Affection Scale. Bonaventure can show in a very neat way how belief can in fact be the starting point for a changed life.

Conclusion

In Reason and Belief in God and again in Warranted Christian Belief, Plantinga offers a historical narrative in which the immature ideas of Aquinas and Bonaventure are gradually refined and developed through later thinkers, finally leading to a synthesis in Plantinga’s own work. At the very least, I hope I have shown that this story does not do justice to Bonaventure, who offers a mature and highly-nuanced view that conflicts with Plantinga’s at several points. A far

more revealing historical narrative would be one in which each view was understood to reflect the circumstances and priorities of the time in which it was produced. Each faith account, as we have seen, is more successful in some respects and less so in others. This means that each author must make choices of which goods he most wants his account to realize, and here the philosophers in question have revealed different priorities through their varying accounts of faith.

Plantinga lives in a time in which religious belief is continually under attack. He has worked among colleagues for whom any kind of religious belief seems fantastic and strange. Thus, his project looks to narrow the gap between believers and non-believers in such a way as to persuade the non-Christian to take faith seriously, while reassuring his fellow Christians that they have no cause to feel ashamed of their belief. It is easy to feel sympathy with these motives and easy too to understand why, given his goals, epistemic strength is of such vital importance to Plantinga. His model is well defended against those atheists and agnostics who wish to portray religious belief as foolish and ridiculous.

As we have seen, however, this strength comes at serious cost. Plantinga’s model may make religious belief appear less outlandish to modern eyes, but by the same token, it is less easy for him to explain how faith has the potential to open the believer to fulfilling relationships with her fellow creatures and, most importantly, with God. Plantinga’s account seems most proper to a society in which religious belief is a fundamentally private concern, which
should be respected but not necessarily admired or emulated by society at large.

Working in a much more faith-supportive environment, Bonaventure envisions a faith that can be shared freely with others, and that is itself an expression of love and trust for God. As we have seen, these philosophers integrate authority into their account with an ease and comfort that may strike some modern readers as indecent. Certainly, their view is less insulated against charges of irrationality. By the same token, however, their view is more open for engagement with other views, as well as being more naturally suited to integration into a larger Christian philosophy. Perhaps most importantly, they can explain in a simple and immediate way the power of faith to draw the believer back towards God.

Knowledge is a great good. Enjoying the respect of one’s friends and colleagues is also a real good, which contemporary Christians quite reasonably value. Consideration of the Bonaventure model might lead us to reflect, however, whether there are other goods that are worth even more.
If my analysis in the last chapter has been successful, the reader should now understand that the Bonaventurean view of faith has several advantages. It provides an elegant account of faith as a virtue that directs a person’s intellectual development in such a way as to forge a significant bond between the person and God. It paves the way for intellectual debate and meaningful philosophical exploration. Properly understood, Bonaventure’s account has an elegance and simplicity that a modern theory like Plantinga’s cannot easily match. Still, these benefits come at significant cost. However accessible and life-transforming Bonaventure’s faith may be, a serious philosopher will not accept it if it demands that the believer begin with an irrational or unjustified commitment. Considering the view in the light of modern epistemological insights, that cannot but be a serious concern.

Irrational Faith?

Certainly, Bonaventure’s faith account is not irrational in any direct or obvious way. He embraces no contradictions, and he does not anticipate that the person of faith should encounter any grave tensions between her faith beliefs and those things that she comes to understand through
natural reason and empirical observation. Ideally, faith should work harmoniously with natural reason to broaden and deepen the believer’s overall grasp of the truth. Even so, there are reasons to worry that the ideal may not always (or ever) be attained. One source of concern is the very strong role given to authority in Bonaventure’s view. How can a person responsibly make such an unconditional submission to another’s testimony, particularly when the one towards whom this trust is directed is somewhat uniquely inaccessible? Josef Pieper puts this objection well, observing that, while we often accept truths that we are unable to directly examine on the basis of others’ testimony, even so, Belief in religious revelation is peculiar in that the reason for this nonexaminability lies both in the nature of the message and in the nature of the recipient. This nonexaminability is fundamental to the entire concept and cannot be done away with. No man, no matter how brilliant or how saintly, can undertake to evaluate the tidings that God has become man in order to enable us to participate in the life of God. He cannot test this message against reality. That is manifestly impossible. And yet, that is only one element in the “outrageous” summons to believe in such things as the Incarnation of God. We are not only summoned to accept as real and true a set of facts that we can in no way examine; we are also referred to a witness who never meets us directly, as do our human interlocutors, but who, nevertheless, demands of us the kind of absolute and unconditional assent that we are prepared to offer in no other case.\(^1\)

If this assessment of faith applies to Bonaventure’s account, the situation looks fairly grim. Unfortunately, it seems likely that Pieper’s characterization of faith does really apply. Bonaventure shares Pieper’s view that certain faith claims will be even in principle unavailable to human understanding\(^2\); even more importantly, however, he takes it that faith by its very nature concerns truths that are not understood, such

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\(^2\) These aspects of the faith are discussed in the *Commentary*, 3.25.1.5.
that a person cannot understand the same truth simultaneously through faith and through natural reason. In this sense, the nonexaminability of faith beliefs is certainly “fundamental to the concept” such that it cannot be done away with. To believe in the sense intended here actually entails a failure to understand the relevant claims.³

Bonaventure’s believer resembles Pieper’s as well in that she accepts religious truths on the basis of God’s authority, which must in most cases be accessed through intermediaries whose authenticity might itself be open to question. Despite all these uncertainties, Bonaventure recommends an intellectual submission of a particularly complete and dramatic kind, which imposes no external epistemic standards on the beliefs held through faith.

Why should anyone make this submission? Is there any way to escape the apparent irrationality of such a choice? It is at this point that Bonaventure employs supernatural aid as a means of filling the gap between human faculties and the requirements of the Christian life. This, however, is much more than just a blind appeal for God to paper over the cracks in an underdeveloped theory. There is an intricate logic to Bonaventure’s account of divine and human agency in the development of virtue. In order to make sense of the view, it will first be necessary to present a theory that might initially seem to make the problem even more unworkable. This is the theory of the unity of the virtues, which, despite

³ Knowledge and belief are explicitly contrasted in Commentary 3.23.2.4.
a long list of distinguished proponents, has appeared to most modern ethicists to be one of the less plausible ancient ideas about virtue. The first section of this chapter will explain how Bonaventure makes use of the theory, and will consider briefly whether it might be less ridiculous than some contemporary thinkers have supposed. In the second section of the paper, I will acknowledge some ways in which the theory I have outlined seems highly implausible from the standpoint of moral psychology. Having done that, however, I will then present Bonaventure’s detailed and sophisticated strategy for dealing with these problems.

**Unity Theory: A First Look**

The basic tenets of the unity theory are easy enough to grasp. It claims that the virtues, in their truest and most complete form, must necessarily be integrated into a single, unified state such that any person who had one true virtue would necessarily have them all.⁴ True justice can only be found in company with true courage, true temperance, and so forth.

What qualifies a virtue as “true”? To answer this question, it will be helpful to look to one of the more famous articulations of the unity theory, which can be found in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle broaches the subject in his discussion of the virtue of prudence. Acknowledging that individual

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⁴ Although current convention among ethicists follows my usage of the term “unity of the virtues”, scholars of ancient philosophy will sometimes use the term to refer to the much stronger claim that all of the virtues are in fact the same. (See T.H. Irwin. “Disunity in the Aristotelian Virtues,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* (1988):61-78). This is not the thesis that I mean to discuss.
people do seem to exemplify some virtues more than others, he suggests that this reflects, at least in part, the natural endowments that individuals have from birth. In and of themselves, though, these natural endowments will not reliably direct people towards their real good. Without the support of prudence, they are not sufficiently responsive to the wide variety of circumstances that may arise.

For each of us seems to possess his type of character to some extent by nature; for in fact we are just, brave, prone to temperance, or have another feature, immediately from birth. But still we look for some further condition to be full goodness, and we expect to possess these features in another way. For these natural states belong to children and to beasts as well {as to adults}, but without understanding they are evidently harmful. At any rate this much would seem to be clear: just as a heavy body moving around unable to see suffers a heavy fall because it has no sight, so it is with virtue.\(^5\)

A person who is naturally blessed with great strength or speed is likely to harm himself if he does not have a corresponding understanding of how these abilities are appropriately used. Modern techniques for physical conditioning provide us with an even clearer example of the principle: a person who engages in regular weight training must take care not to foster dramatic imbalances in the strength of different muscle groups. If he strengthens one muscle significantly while neglecting a closely connected one, the stronger muscle may actually cause injury to the weaker. If, on the other hand, he coordinates his exercises so as to preserve the body’s natural balance, his strength will be increased in a genuinely useful way. Aristotle suggests that a similar principle holds for virtue. So, for example, a person may be born with a natural tendency

\(^5\) *Nicomachean Ethics*, 6.13.1144b.
to be good-natured and trusting towards other human beings. In general this would probably be viewed as a positive trait, and certainly it has many positive tendencies. Without proper regulation, however, this natural disposition could develop into an irksome obsequiousness, or, even worse, could enable the good-natured person to be victimized by those who are unworthy of trust.

True virtues, unlike the natural dispositions, are not susceptible to this kind of misapplication. That is because they are regulated and directed by reason, and especially by practical wisdom or prudence. Thomas Aquinas makes this distinction particularly well in the contrast that he draws between imperfect and perfect virtues. Imperfect virtues are merely an inclination (acquired either by nature or through habituation) towards a particular sort of good. Perfect moral virtue, by contrast, “is a habit that inclines us to do a good deed well.” Doing something well involves acting for appropriate reasons, with a nuanced, all-things-considered understanding of the morally relevant circumstances. This is the kind of virtue, Aquinas thinks, that must necessarily be integrated into a unified state that includes all the moral virtues.

It is easy to see why Aristotle’s discussion of the unity theory arises in the context of a discussion of prudence. Prudence is the key to achieving the right balance among the virtues. Animals and children have natural inclinations towards particular sorts of goods, but insofar as they lack an appreciation for all the relevant features of a situation, these tendencies can be

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6 Whether such traits are born or habituated is of no great importance for the present purpose; habituated tendencies towards friendliness or trust would presumably be susceptible to the same vulnerabilities.

7 See ST I-II, Q. 65 a.1.
misapplied. A German Shepherd’s natural desire to protect his family may lead to grief if he ends up attacking the mailman. A child’s wish to help her parents will prove unhelpful if she dumps the whole canister of salt into the cake batter.

Clearly, virtuous behavior requires measured judgment and good information. This, Aristotle tells us, is why Socrates was inclined to attribute all moral defects to ignorance. Aristotle diverges from the Socratic view, however, by insisting that prudence alone is not adequate to ensure a virtuous life. The virtues of character are also necessary, so that, “we cannot be virtuous without prudence, or prudent without virtue of character.”

The mutual entailment suggested by this sentence leads naturally to the conclusion that no virtue can truly be embodied in the absence of the others. The virtues must be held together, or not at all.

That prudence is essential to the formation of other well-regulated virtues is fairly easily grasped. Why, though, must prudence be supported by the other virtues? Why would it not be possible, for example, to have a person who was both prudent and just, but not temperate? Aristotle’s own position on this matter is somewhat obscure, but the main idea seems to be that any moral failure has the potential to corrupt a person’s judgment, which in turn may precipitate errors. To see how this might be, let us imagine the case of a judge whose discerning mind and passion for justice enable him to settle difficult disputes in an admirably fair and even-handed way. Hearing of his good

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8 *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1144b 31-32.
reputation, a high-ranking official assigns him to a controversial, high-profile case. Now a problem arises: despite his thirst for justice, the judge is a coward. When forced to endure a barrage of hate mail and scathing criticism in the press, the judge eventually yields to pressure, and delivers a judgment he knows to be unjust. Initially, he may feel ashamed about his willingness to compromise himself. Should he continue to work under similar circumstances, he may begin to rationalize his behavior to the point where his judgment is affected as well. His one weakness proves the “Achilles heel” which undermines all of his multiple strengths.

Critics of the unity theory have raised several concerns about examples of this kind. In the first place, we might wonder whether it is reasonable to say that the judge lacks the virtue of justice based merely on the hypothetical possibility that his genuinely admirable traits will be undermined. Suppose that the judge spends a lifetime in committed service to the bench, and never encounters circumstances of the kind that would tempt him to betray his calling. Would it be fair, even still, to say that he lacked the virtue of justice?

Following on this criticism is another, related one. The judge in the hypothetical example was described as a coward, and cowardice is by common consent a vice. It seems possible, however, that a person may be somewhat deficient in a certain virtue without per se being vicious. Suppose that the judge is not actually courageous, but merely continent with respect to the virtue of courage. Might that not be good enough to enable him to just in the
full, virtuous sense? Quite often, ordinary decency and common sense are sufficient to enable a person to act well in morally difficult situations.

The answer to both of these criticisms must lie in Aristotle’s declaration that the virtues are states. Moreover, they are the kind of states that leave the virtuous person prepared to act in the right way, at the right time, for the right reasons and so forth. In other words, they are broadly responsive to the range of circumstances that may arise. Even if the cowardly judge never encounters a case that demands particular fortitude, the fact remains that his somewhat-virtuous dispositions will not be fully reliable. The justice of his judgments will depend, not only on his own good character, but also on a certain measure of good luck. This is why the judge cannot be regarded as just in the full, Aristotelian sense. The response to the second criticism follows closely on the first. Decency and common sense may be sufficient to enable good action in many or most circumstances, but sometimes more is required, and the truly virtuous person should be able to rise to the challenge. Even the “merely continent” judge may not be able to withstand the pressures of, say, an organized crime syndicate that is making serious threats on his life. In happier conditions his moderate defect with respect to courage might seem insignificant, but in this more extreme case it could lead him to behave in an egregiously unjust way.

The unity theory is attractive insofar as it enables the moral philosopher to develop this Aristotelian concept of virtue in a robust way. On the unity theory, virtues can be understood as stable states that are fully regulated by
reason and responsive to the wide range of circumstances that may be encountered over the course of a lifetime. Thus, the unity theory presents a pleasing and dignified picture of what the excellent human life might look like.

By the same token, the unity theory enables ethicists to explore the relationship between the different virtues in subtle and nuanced ways. Often in life, situations arise in which multiple goods are at stake and not all can be attained. Some are inclined to view these circumstances as “tragic”, since it may seem that all possible courses of action are morally reprehensible in some way. Although the unity theory obviously cannot remove the reality of painful choices and ethically difficult situations, it suggests that, even in painful circumstances, the virtuous agent can give due consideration to all morally relevant circumstances. Insofar as the virtuous person foregoes some genuine moral good, it is because she has recognized that this is what reason requires, and not because of an arbitrary or “tragic” decision.9 Thus, even in administering justice, an official may retain a keen understanding of the value of mercy; even when breaking a commitment to a friend for the sake of, say, a sick child, a parent may be mindful of the inconvenience caused and endeavor

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9 To suggest that such decisions are utterly arbitrary would probably be unfair, since they certainly may represent non-arbitrary commitments on the part of the agent. Christine Korsgaard, for example, has developed the idea of “practical identities”, which may articulate a particular self-understanding that renders a person’s life meaningful and expresses that person’s values and priorities. (See Korsgaard, The Sources of Normativity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 101.) Acting on such a reason would not be arbitrary in a subjective sense, but it would fail to do full credit to the various goods involved, and this might, on some level, seem to reflect a kind of arbitrariness.
to make amends. The unity theory holds out the possibility that conflicting goods can be balanced, and not simply pitted against one another.

The unity theory also presents a number of daunting challenges, however. If the virtues must be unified, then becoming virtuous will be very difficult indeed. Realistically, it seems that nearly everyone has at least one or two characteristic vices, and according to the unity theory, this is enough to prevent a person from having any virtues at all, at least in a full and complete sense. But this seems not to fit with ordinary experience. The fact that Sheila tends to overindulge a little on holidays or feasts doesn’t seem to prevent her from being a kind and loyal friend. Seth’s fear of unfamiliar social situations seems not to prevent him from being honest and generally trustworthy. Examples of this kind are legion.

The stringency of the requirements may reasonably lead some to wonder whether the Aristotelian theory is idealized to the point of uselessness. For all the nuance and subtlety of its psychology, the unity theory comes to seem almost ludicrously simplistic when we look to its final moral analysis. After all, if the virtues come together in an all-or-nothing package, then every individual will be virtuous either completely or not at all. Considerations such as these have led most contemporary ethicists to conclude that the unity theory is simply implausible. Human characters are too complex to be streamlined into this one neat little theory.

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Daniel Russell and the “Model Unity Theory”

Despite these difficult problems, some contemporary ethicists have shown themselves to be moderately sympathetic to a unity theory of some type.\textsuperscript{11} Most recently, however, Daniel Russell has offered an extended defense of a modified unity theory.\textsuperscript{12} Russell bases his defense on a distinction drawn between “attributive” and “model” interpretations of the unity theory. Attributive theories, according to Russell, consider what actual criteria might be used in attributing a virtue to a particular person. On this level, Russell agrees that the unity theory is too demanding. On the other hand, he thinks it may be desirable at times to step back from attributive theories of virtue in order to “construct a model of virtue so as to understand the ‘natural makeup’ of that virtue.”\textsuperscript{13} This is what he refers to as a “model theory” of the virtues.

The problem with the unity theory on the attributive level is that, as discussed above, it seems to make virtue effectively unattainable. This seems particularly true given the realities of moral development. The moral progress of actual human beings tends to be uneven, not only among the virtues but even in the application of a particular virtue to different aspects of the same

\textsuperscript{12} Daniel Russell, \textit{Practical Intelligence and the Virtues} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)
\textsuperscript{13} Russell, p. 367
person’s life. Referencing Neera Badhwar’s article on this subject\(^{14}\), Russell points out that this uneven application of a single virtue is not unusual in human beings. The same person may be, for example, courageous in political debate but lacking in physical courage. Or a person might be kind to friends, family and neighbors, but ruthless and uncharitable in sabotaging the careers of professional rivals. Given the difficulty of manifesting even one virtue consistently across the different spheres of one’s life, it seems far too much to expect that anyone could develop them all in a consistent, unified way.

Nonetheless, Russell does believe that the virtues are unified on a theoretical level. He points out\(^{15}\) that although we can all recognize the unevenly courageous or unevenly generous person as a familiar type, we are not for that reason inclined to break courage or generosity into smaller sub-virtues. Indeed, if the virtues were broken down according to the different spheres of human life (friend-generosity, workplace-generosity, and so forth), the division could go on *ad infinitum*, and virtue theory might well become fragmented to the point of uselessness. Fortunately, this is not necessary. Even our ordinary intuitions incline us to accuse the unevenly generous person of inconsistency rather than subdivide the virtue itself. If, however, we can draw a line between the *theoretical* integrity of a particular virtue, and its characteristically uneven manifestation as part of an individual person’s character, why can we not draw a similar distinction with respect to the virtues as a whole?


\(^{15}\) Russell, p. 364-368
Russell thinks that we can, and explains his position as follows:

One, it is part of the natural makeup of a virtue to unfold so as to have a broader and more intelligent grasp of what practical reasons there are for virtuous choice, action, and feeling; that is, it is part of the nature of every virtue to entail phronesis. And two, since it is in virtue of phronesis that one is responsive to practical reasons for virtue in an excellent, balanced and integrated way, it is part of the natural makeup of phronesis to unfold so as to be fully responsive to all such reasons; that is, it is part of the nature of phronesis to entail every virtue.16

This is a straightforwardly Aristotelian argument. Russell derives the unity theory from an Aristotelian understanding of phronesis (prudence), and from a basically Aristotelian understanding of virtue as a state that is regulated by reason and responsive to all morally relevant circumstances. Despite his sympathy with contemporary critics of the unity theory, Russell realizes that this theory must be embraced on some level if virtue is to be understood in this robust Aristotelian sense.

Beyond this, though, he thinks that the model theory of unity might provide a psychologically satisfying foundation for attributive theories as well. He draws attention to several ways in which the unity theory does seem to make sense of our intuitions about virtue. He points out that on many occasions, we find ourselves working to determine whether an individual’s apparently virtuous behavior (a significant increase in generous acts, for example) represents genuine moral improvement or not. In such instances, we tend to evaluate whether this change seems harmonious with a more general responsiveness to the practical and moral requirements that are placed on that person. If not, we may conclude that the apparently virtuous behavior is actually a manifestation of personal insecurity, or perhaps an attempt to curry

16 Ibid, 372.
favor in pursuit of some further goal. Russell also observes that, when a person shows inconsistency in their manifestation of a particular virtue, we generally regard this as blameworthy. We are shocked to see that the same man who was famously kind to his friends is at the same time brutally callous towards his employees. The unity theory makes sense of these intuitions.

Russell’s theory enjoys significant advantages insofar as it allows us to embrace an Aristotelian model of virtue without ignoring many of the empirically implausible features of the unity theory. His language may be misleading, however, insofar as he presents the attributive and model theories as being categorically different, when in fact his reasons for distinguishing them seem to be more pragmatic. Russell agrees with Aristotle, Aquinas and Bonaventure that an individual virtue will be complete (which is to say, fully regulated by reason) only when it is incorporated into the unity. He simply seeks to infuse some realism into his account by conceding that less-than-perfect manifestations of virtue might reasonably be labeled as such. And while it is hard to fault him for bowing to reality in such an obviously practical way, it is also worth noting that on Russell’s account there is no reason in principle why an individual could not have the complete, unified virtues. The obstacles to moral perfection are practical, not theoretical.

For medieval thinkers, practical obstacles like this were more surmountable, for a simple reason: they were not averse to invoking supernatural aid. As we will see, though, their reliance on divine grace did not precipitate philosophical laziness. Looking to the work of St. Bonaventure, we
find an attributive version of the unity theory, which still provides the necessary tools for an empirically plausible moral analysis.

**Unity Theory in a Medieval Context**

The medievals were generally favorable to the unity theory, for a number of reasons. Of course, they had great respect for the authority of the ancient philosophers in general and Aristotle in particular, and this inclined them to take the unity theory seriously as an organic part of their philosophical heritage. More than this, though, the unity theory fit well into the Christianized Aristotelianism that was forged through the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Medieval thinkers wished to integrate Aristotle’s ethical insights into the sacramental theology that they had inherited from Augustine and the early Church Fathers. This latter theory relied on sacramentally infused graces to perfect the soul, erasing the deformities of Original Sin that marked each person from birth. According to the traditional sacramental view, the virtues were all infused by grace through baptism, and would remain in the soul until a mortal sin was committed, at which time the person would lose all of the virtues and become the enemy of God. Through the sacrament of reconciliation, the virtues could be regained, and ultimately each individual would be saved or damned depending on the state of his soul at the time of death. Those who died in a state of grace would eventually be saved and enjoy the Beatific Vision. Those who died with mortal sins on their souls would be eternally lost.
To see how the unity theory fit into this larger view, we might look to Bonaventure’s analysis of it, which we find in his *Commentary on Lombard’s Sentences*. In this passage, Bonaventure uses the four Aristotelian causes (material, efficient, formal and final) to show why the virtues should be unified.

The reason for the connection between these can be taken to be fourfold, according to the four kinds of cause: first from the material cause, which is our need; secondly from the efficient cause, which is the generosity of God; third from the formal cause, which is the conformity of the virtues, and fourth from the final cause, which is our highest honor.\(^{17}\)

In the text that follows he goes on to explain each of the causes in more detail. The first, the material, is the most opaque; what would it mean to say that the unity of virtues is materially made of human need? Since a unity is not a material thing at all, but rather a relationship, it seems odd even to ascribe a material cause to it, and possibly he is stretching here in order to make use of this Aristotelian device. However, insofar as there is a philosophical point to be gleaned from this passage, it might be that the interconnectedness of the virtues is intimately related to the needs of the people whom they are designed to perfect. The “virtue package” that God bestows on a person is fitted exactly to her (as yet unfulfilled) potentialities.

This is admittedly somewhat obscure. Fortunately the other three causes are more comprehensible. In his discussion of the efficient cause, God’s generosity, Bonaventure offers an insight that would become quite important to

\(^{17}\) *Ratio autem connexionis sumi potest quadrupliciter secundum quadruplex genus causae: primum quidem ex parte causae materialis, quae scilicet est nostra necessitas; secundo ex parte causae efficientis, quae est Dei lergitas; tertio ex parte causae formalis, quae est virtutum conformitas; quarto ex parte causae finalis quae est primi dignitas.* (from St. Bonaventure, *Commentary on Lombard’s Sentences*, 3.36.1.1)
many Protestant thinkers in later centuries: God is so supremely good that, given the opportunity, he would not deny his children anything that was needed to prepare them for salvation. Some, presumably, are unable to receive the virtues due to their unwillingness to let go of their own vices and, ultimately, their own pride. But if, as Bonaventure thinks, a person prepared to receive one of the infused virtues would be able to receive all, then we should expect that all will be infused together. There does seem to be a presumption here that an openness to the virtues is in some sense unconditional; a person who is prepared to receive faith, say, will necessarily also be prepared to receive charity. Once again, this harmonizes well with Luther’s claim, four centuries later, that human beings are radically dependent on God for salvation, and that thing the most essential to an individual’s redemption is simply a willingness to accept grace. Once a person is truly prepared to receive grace, God can do the rest.

Bonaventure’s explanation of the formal cause, however, makes it clear that he was not prepared to abandon Aristotle (as was Luther’s wont). Here he discusses the relationship that the virtues bear to one another, and his remarks on this subject are reminiscent of the Aristotelian argument for unity theory, as offered in the first segment of this paper. Each virtue, he tells us, is naturally conformed to the others. They must go together because, like pieces of a puzzle, or tiles in a mosaic, they form a kind of organic whole. So, faith in

its most formed state should give rise to hope and be undergirded by charity, hope in its best state should be inspired and directed by faith, and so forth.

For a better sense of how this “mosaic” comes together, we should look to the final cause, which reminds us once again that ultimately, the virtues prepare the soul to attain heaven. The different pieces of this interconnected package are simply the essential ingredients of sainthood, and the lack of any one of them would render the soul unfit for the Kingdom of God. Here we are reminded that, no matter how many subtleties are built into one’s moral theory, there remains a pass-fail element to the Christian life. Any person might unexpectedly be killed more or less at any time, and the fate of that person’s soul would then be sealed. Perhaps ironically, the feature that makes the unity theory so counterintuitive for the moderns (namely, its all-or-nothing character) is in many ways an asset from the medieval perspective. It offers some reasonable explanation for how God can, without arbitrariness or injustice, divide his sheep from his goats, giving the former an eternity of bliss and the latter eternal punishment.

**Rational faith, revisited**

As we have seen, the unity theory fits well with Bonaventure’s ideas about divine infusion, and the view that results from the combination of these two has significant potential for explaining many complex human behaviors, and also for mapping these explanations onto a Christian metaphysical picture involving salvation and damnation. How much,
though, can this theory do to satisfy the concerns raised in the last chapter about the rationality of Bonaventure’s understanding of faith?

The answer seems to be that Bonaventure’s faith cannot meet the epistemic standards of a philosopher like Plantinga. Nonetheless, it can offer a non-trivial explanation of religious belief, which connects faith to a rich and complex account of human good.

In the early sections of Warranted Christian Belief\textsuperscript{19}, Plantinga sketches what he terms the “Classical Package” of Western epistemology. The central tenets of the Classical Package are, first, a demand that people be prepared to examine and evaluate their beliefs, and second, a foundationalist picture in which epistemically responsible beliefs are either known or else derived from things that are known. In short, the epistemically responsible person should be able to trace her all of her beliefs back to some kind of foundational knowledge. Plantinga spent much of his life arguing that religious beliefs can stand up to this test. Bonaventure, however, would disagree. Faith beliefs, for him, do not qualify as knowledge in any sense.

Looking at faith through the lens of Bonaventure’s unity/infusion view, we should nevertheless be able to see that his reasons for believing are not trivial or obviously foolish. The faithful person’s belief is properly bolstered by external signs that convince her that God is speaking; in this vein, the study of theology, philosophy and history may be helpful,\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{19} Chapters 3 and 4.
or she may be inspired by miracles, the lives of saints, and so forth. All of these things give her reason to believe that God has spoken to human beings, which should naturally inspire a desire to know what God has said. The actual encounter with God’s word does not per se deliver knowledge (as on Plantinga’s account), but it does offer a glimpse of the bright future that could lie ahead of her if these words were true, coupled with a loving desire to trust God and draw closer to him. It is the organic, interlocking combination of these things that explains religious belief. In Bonaventure’s model, we should believe because we thirst for the truth, but also (and equally) because we hope for fulfillment, and love the Creator who offers it to us.

In the fifth chapter of *Warranted Christian Belief*, Plantinga describes what he terms the “F/M Complaint”, an attack on Christianity which he derives from the works of Freud and Marx, two of the great cultural critics of Western religion. The central claim in this argument (as outlined by Plantinga) is that Christian beliefs are formed in improper ways. Obviously, enormous numbers of people have held tenaciously to the Christian religion over the centuries, but according to Freud and Marx, the faculties that led them to accept Christianity were not truth-seeking faculties. Instead, people have adopted Christian beliefs as part of a quest for comfort or security, or as an escape from the bleakness of the world.
Plantinga can answer this charge easily; according to him, Christian beliefs are warranted, which is to say, they are formed explicitly through truth-seeking faculties. Naturally, Bonaventure offers no answer to thinkers who had not as yet been born, but we can see that his treatment of this argument would need to be more complex than Plantinga’s. He would have to agree with Freud and Marx that the decision to believe is influenced by a desire for fulfillment, and a yearning for an intimate relationship with God. But, by bringing forward his unity/infusion view, he could argue that the relationship between belief and desire is in fact a natural one, and that there is nothing improper in the blending of belief and desire. From that point, the discussion would need to proceed to a more general examination of the plausibility of each thinker’s larger view. Which can offer a more complete or satisfying explanation of the world? Which has more penetrating insight into the human condition?

**Moral Psychology and Infusion**

The question at the end of the last section throws us immediately into another difficulty. Bonaventure’s unity/infusion view may boast certain benefits when it comes to moral psychology. How satisfying, though, are the results? We seem to be left with a theory in which people are regularly popping in and out of virtue as a result of sin or supernatural infusion; at any given moment a person must either be morally perfect or else lacking entirely in real virtue.
Such a theory would seem to have many strange and counterintuitive implications.

Consider, for example, an adult convert to Christianity. When she is baptized (let us say, at the age of twenty-five), she receives sanctifying grace for the first time. Now, all in a moment, she is transformed from an entirely unvirtuous person, to one possessing every virtue in its most complete form. If she then commits a mortal sin, her newfound virtues will be entirely lost. This is no cause for despair, however, because a few minutes in the confessional can return her to a pristine state of moral perfection.

Clearly, this is problematic. Given the dramatic changes in this person’s moral state, we would expect to see dramatic changes in her behavior as well, but empirical facts seem not to gratify this expectation. While a religious conversion may provide new opportunities for moral development, most people will manifest this only gradually over time as they integrate into a new community and absorb the ethos of their new faith. Moral improvement or degeneration are gradual processes, and the infusion theory not well equipped to explain this observable phenomenon.

Aristotle’s theory of habituation, by contrast, is. As Aristotle explains in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the formation of certain habits or dispositions requires the right sort of education and upbringing, and once a character is established as virtuous or vicious, it can be changed only gradually. Thus, a person of good character will find it a pleasure to do the right thing in most

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20 *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 2.
cases, but even if temptation does get the better of her once in awhile, her generally virtuous character will inspire her to make amends and go on living virtuously. The vicious person, by contrast, has habituated himself to vice in such a way that moral improvement will be quite difficult.

Aristotle’s ethics offers a descriptively plausible account of moral development. The infusion view makes it possible to analyze human behavior within the context of a Christian metaphysics and a Christian account of the relationship between God and human beings. Bonaventure needed them both. The only reasonable course of action, therefore, was to find a way to integrate both theories into one unified account.

In order to accomplish this, Bonaventure postulates a kind of hybrid virtue, which captures some of the elements both of habituated and of infused virtue. He calls this “unformed virtue”. In effect, unformed virtue is what remains when the unity of the virtues is broken through sin. Examining Bonaventure’s analysis of unformed virtue, the reader is first struck by the similarity between unformed and formed virtue, such that the difference between them seems little more than a technicality. Moving further into the text, it becomes clear that this concept is just distinctive enough to enable Bonaventure to bridge the gap between the two views.
“When I say ‘unformed faith,’” Bonaventure explains in the *Commentary*,

“I mean three things, namely a habit, the use of the habit, and the defect
associated with the habit.”

The first two things on this list would also be a part of infused faith.

Assuming the “habit” in question is the same, unformed faith would be
exactly like formed faith in everything except the defect. Bonaventure
confirms this interpretation when he explains that:

> through that habit (of unformed faith), the human intellect is in some way rectified, while it is taken captive in obedience to Christ for assenting to the highest Truth for its own sake and beyond all things. Also, he is strengthened who believes truths, not specious things, and shuns errors and fantasies, just as can be seen in many Christians lacking charity, who freely and humbly hear the considered words of the doctrine of the faith, and powerfully reject depraved heresies.

Thus far, unformed faith seems to have all the significant components of
faith. By specifying that the intellect “is taken captive in obedience to
Christ” and that it assents to the highest Truth “for its own sake and
beyond all things,” Bonaventure seems to be indicating that unformed
faith makes precisely that intellectual submission that was most
characteristic of his virtue of faith, as we saw in the last chapter. He does
also specify that the unformed version is “lacking charity.” It is hard to

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21 Cum dico fidem informem, dico tria, videlicet habitum et ipsius habitus usum et defectum annexum (3.23.2.4).

22 Per illum enim habitum quodam modo rectificatur intellectus hominis, dum captivatur in obsequium Christi ad assentendum praeae Veritati propter se et super omnia; vigoratur etiam, ut credat vera non apparentia et vitet erronea et phantastica; sicut multis Christianis carentibus caritate, qui libenter et humiliter audiunt verba spectantia ad doctrinam fidei et constanter et viriliter abhorrent haereticam pravitatem (3.23.2.1).
see how this can be significant, however, when the relevant intellectual habits look to be precisely the same. Bonaventure goes on to further underline the similarities between the formed and unformed virtue when he emphasizes that, like formed faith, unformed faith is necessarily attained through divine gift.

For some people assent to the truth that they've heard, moved by human persuasion, on account of a love and awe of the speaker, or on account of miracles, or on account of reasons and argument; and such faith is simply acquired and is not said to have the nature of a virtue, because of there being no liveliness or strength, it being a product of human reason. However some people assent to the truths of the faith on account of divine illustration, depending on the first Truth beyond all things and for its own sake, as in the case of many Christians who don't have charity. This kind of faith is through infusion. For they voluntarily assent, with the help of divine illumination, which must be elevated to those things that are beyond reason. 23

Unformed faith is just like formed faith in its outward manifestations, but it cannot be a true, gratuitous virtue because it is not part of the unity. It is possessed by Christians lacking charity; most probably, Bonaventure is thinking here about baptized Christians who have unabsolved mortal sins on their consciences. Like the fully virtuous person, the person with unformed faith accepts everything God has said for its own sake and above all things. But for him, this disposition is not part of a generally well-ordered soul. His character may be in an excellent state thanks to Aristotelian-type habituation, but grace is

23 Nam quidam assentiunt veritati auditae, moti humana persuasione, utpote propter amorem et reverentiam dicentis, vel propter miracula, vel propter rationes et argumenta; et talis fides est simpliciter acquisita nec dicenda est habere rationem virtutis, quia nullius est vigoris nec roboris, sublata de medio ipsa humana ratione. Quidam autem assentiunt veritati fidei propter divinam illustrationem, sicut illi qui innituntur primae Veritati super omnia et propter se, sicut multi Christani, qui caritatem non habent; et in talibus fides est per infusionem. Voluntarie enim assentiunt, concomitante divina illuminatione, illuminatione, inquam quae rationem elevat in his quae sunt supra ipsam (3.23.2.2).
needed to restore the full Christian virtues. Thus, an unformed virtue is somewhat like Aristotle’s natural virtue, in that it is good in itself but lacking in discipline and regulation. Unlike natural virtue, however, it is not innate from birth; rather, it is the leftover remnant of the unified virtues that were once in the soul.

Unformed faith, because it is separated from the unity of the virtues, allows Bonaventure to retain many Aristotelian insights about habituation and fixity of character. Habituated excellences need not disappear with the first mortal sin; they can remain as a part of unformed faith. This is why a person who commits a single mortal sin will not immediately collapse into moral monsterhood. Those salutary habits that were developed in her virtuous state will remain in the soul, and this will protect her to some degree from moral collapse, and may even inspire her to seek out another infusion of grace.

**Complementary Perfections**

Unformed virtue enables Bonaventure to add some empirical plausibility to his moral theory, but oddities do remain. An example might help bring these to light.

Let us suppose that we wished to offer a moral comparison of two very different sorts of people. One, a newly baptized infant, has just received an infusion of supernatural grace, and thus has all the virtues in their perfection. The other, a lifelong Christian whose virtuous lifestyle is admired by all, has
recently committed a mortal sin. As we have seen, the adult sinner will retain her virtuous habits as unformed virtues, and these habituated traits may allow her to correct her mistake and make amends. Still the fact remains that the newborn, who understands nothing and has done nothing admirable, retains the virtues in their most perfect form. Must we decree that the infant is the morally superior of the two?

The key to the puzzle lies in the realization that perfection, like being, is said in many ways. Outside of God himself, nothing that exists manifests all possible perfections. A created thing can only be perfect with respect to some particular potentiality or power. So, for example, the UglyRipe tomato\textsuperscript{24} may be the superlative breed of tomato with respect to its taste. In appearance, though, it is decidedly less than perfect, and it wouldn’t make a good addition to a table centerpiece. A small, efficient car may be excellent with respect to its gas mileage, while lacking the perfections of size and style that can be found in an SUV. Thus, a thing may be an excellent exemplar of one perfection without simultaneously manifesting all perfections that are relevant to its kind.

Infused and habituated virtues each represent a different sort of virtue-appropriate perfection. Infused virtue is perfect in the sense that it draws the virtues together, incorporating every essential component of the perfected soul. However, it is not essential to the nature of an infused virtue that it be \textit{durable}. Because it is part of the unity, it will never lead a person to act wrongly, but

\textsuperscript{24} This is not merely a descriptive term; it is a recognized variety of heirloom tomato. Food critics declare that the UglyRipe has a superlative flavor, but because of its misshapen appearance, its sale has been restricted in most states.
the inclinations associated with it may be too weak to overcome serious
temptation. For the Aristotelian virtues, by contrast, durability is significant.
The very process of acquiring them is intended to instill them as a deep and
lasting part of the person’s character.

An analogy might be made here to durability in physical objects. Suppose
a king commissions two artisans to create a bust of his royal visage. Having a
high opinion of his own personal appearance, he wants the statue to look as
much like him as possible. However, he also wants to put the statue in his
courtyard, where he hopes it might stand for generations to come. One artist
accepts the assignment, and creates an extremely accurate representation of
the king using a very delicate variety of crystal. The royal features are mirrored
exactly, but, given the fragility of the material, the statue is liable to shatter
under even moderate stress. The other artist, by contrast, carves a moderately
accurate likeness out of marble. Its appearance is less pleasing than that of the
crystal statue, but, if placed in the courtyard, it is much more likely to stand
the test of time.

Which of the statues is more perfect? Given the goal of capturing the
king’s likeness, the first is almost exquisitely perfect. However, given the
practical realities of the king’s goals, the crystal statue has a grave deficiency –
one that, it must be emphasized, has nothing to do with its perfection qua
representation of the king. Similarly, the infused virtues are superlatively
perfect when it comes to the (eminently worthwhile) goal of rendering the soul
fit for heaven. For the purposes of persevering through the trials of earthly life, however, habituation may also prove to be an essential ingredient.

As has already been discussed, a theological virtue cannot be obtained through natural faculties alone. That doesn't mean, however, that the habits associated with the theological virtues, once infused, couldn't be strengthened over time through habituation. What God initially pours into the soul through supernatural means can then be reinforced by natural forces just as any other habit or disposition might be. As with any other Aristotelian virtue, habituation produces a fixed state of character. The agent then has the unified theological virtues, as supported by acquired habits that were only made possible by the original infusion of grace.

This explanation seems to provide a satisfactory explanation of the problematic cases described above. A newly baptized infant has a “perfect faith” in the sense that he has all the unified theological virtues. In his case, though, the unity is presumably quite fragile. Without the support of a particular sort of upbringing, instruction from parents and teachers, rules reinforcing right behavior and so forth, he will be drawn towards other beliefs and other lifestyles. Like the crystal statue, his fragile perfection will easily shatter.

For the lifelong committed Christian, it is a different story. If he succumbs to temptation, he will lose the unified theological virtues, but because he still has a substantial body of acquired virtues, his behavior
is likely to remain relatively consistent. If he persists in his error, even the acquired virtues will eventually wither. But the habits themselves will militate against that, as in an Aristotelian virtue, which inclines the agent to rectify those mistakes that are damaging to his fixed state of character. If the taint of sin is removed (again through infusion), all the habits of the unformed faith will remain in his soul, but the defect will be removed, putting the agent once again in a truly virtuous state.

And to those that object that there is no unformed faith except in sinners and with sin, it must be answered, that this is true on that account in which the term ‘unformed faith’ names a defect of form, but not according to that in which it names a habit. And therefore from this it can not be concluded, that through the coming of grace the habit of unformed faith is destroyed, but only that the defect of its not being formed in destroyed. 

We should see now the sense in which unformed faith can be called a “hybrid” virtue. It is not, properly speaking, an acquired virtue, because it is dependent on infusion. It might seem more accurate to call it an infused virtue that has become in some respects deformed or defective.

However, it bears a close relationship to acquired virtue, because it is the acquisition of the habits of virtue that allow this defective cousin of faith to remain in the souls even of those who do not love God. Unformed faith has its origins in grace, but it is sustained through the effects of natural habituation.

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^{25} Ad illud quod obiicitur, quod fides informis non est nisi in peccatoribus et cum peccato; dicendum, quod hoc verum est ea ratione, qua fides informis nominat defectum formae, non secundum quod nominat habitum. Et ideo ex hoc non potest concludi, quod per gratiam advenientem tollatur fidei informis habitus, sed solum quod tollatur informitatis defectus (3.23.2.4).
More helpful analogies

The pragmatic implications of this view are exactly what Bonaventure would have wished. Sacraments and grace are indeed vital to the Christian life; at the same time, sacraments do not eliminate the need for natural efforts to integrate the faith into one’s ordinary activities. The person who neglects his prayers or his study, or who drifts away from his Christian community, will be vulnerable to vices of a sort that might shatter the properly ordered state that was infused by grace.

Bonaventure uses a number of analogies to help illustrate his point. One of the more interesting is the analogy to colors in a dark room. He explains as follows:

"Just as many colors in a dark cathedral are made bright through the coming of one light, and from that are formed and embellished and made beautiful, so the unformed habits of the virtues existing in the soul are made beautiful and embellished from the coming of one grace. And according to this way of understanding the infusion of grace and virtue, it is easy to understand how the unformed habit of faith is formed through the coming of grace. For it is said to be formed just as dark color is formed by a flooding of light." 26

This example illustrates Bonaventure’s wish to juxtapose two types of goods on top of one another; one is constant and the other is readily changeable. The combination of the two makes the room beautiful in a way that one alone cannot. Thus, a dark room will not be beautiful to look at no matter how rich

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26 ...sicut multi colores in una domo tenebrosa existentes efficiuntur luminosi per unam luminositatem supervenientem et ab illa informatur et decorantur et venustantur; sic habitus virtutum informes, existentes in anima venustantur et decorantur ab una gratia superveniente. Et secundum hanc modum intelligendi infusionem gratiae et virtutum facile est intelligere, qualiter habitus fidei informis formetur per ipsius gratiae adventum : dicitur enim formari, sicut color tenebrosus formatur ad luminis ingressum (3.33.2.5).
its furnishings; meanwhile, a brightly lit room will not contain much beauty unless it is furnished and decorated.

It may be helpful to think of this analogy as suggesting how souls might look from God’s perspective. Without the unified virtues, the soul is dark, because it is not properly ordered towards God. On the other hand, even “dark” souls can have a number of admirable qualities, which may be illuminated quite brilliantly with a single infusion of grace. For the soul that is lacking in moral development, the case is quite different; here the infusion of grace will be just as bright, but considerably less beautiful. The soul of the newly baptized infant might be compared to a room that is brightly lit, but bare. The otherwise-worthy sinner, by contrast, has many admirable qualities. Unfortunately, when viewed from a God’s-eye perspective, her soul is darkened such that none of these beauties can be seen.

The darkened-room analogy is somewhat helpful for showing how, in Bonaventure’s view, the virtues fit together with respect to our final end. It may raise more questions than it answers, however, when we consider the effects of the virtues on daily life. When examining the lives of our fellow human beings, habituated excellences are readily observable, whereas infused graces seem not to be. What is lacking at this point is an explanation of how these virtues work together to regulate human behavior. None of Bonaventure’s analogies address this question directly, but I will suggest one of my own that may prove helpful.

Imagine a group of scientists conducting tests in the desert using sensitive scientific instruments. The instruments, we may suppose, need to be
left out in the open for long periods of time in order to take readings (say, concerning the weather or the night sky). If the instruments are calibrated correctly, they will function as needed in collecting data. But if they somehow become misaligned, they will no longer be able to collect data. Unfortunately, the environment in which the scientists must leave them is rather hostile, and many things can happen to destroy the correct calibration of the machines. Blazing heat might melt certain components, or sand might blow into the gears. An animal could knock them over so that they are no longer pointed in the proper direction. These interferences would prevent the machines from functioning correctly.

The instruments cannot be calibrated by degrees. Either they are taking their readings correctly, or else they are not. Furthermore, they do not fix themselves. If they develop a defect, they will remain broken until the team comes back and recalibrates them. However, the scientists might make certain other improvements to the machines, which could then be measured on a more comparative scale. Protective casings might mitigate the effects of sun and wind. An electric fence could discourage animals from interfering with the collection of data. These improvements will increase the likelihood of gathering the data without interruption. And even if, say, an unusually monstrous sandstorm does still cause problems, the protective measures may prevent further damage from occurring in the interim period before the scientific team returns.
Like these instruments, Bonaventure believes that human beings need to be “calibrated” before they can attain the virtues in all their perfection. Even after the calibration, however, the world remains a rather hostile environment in which to operate. Good habits (the unformed virtues) strengthen them against the dangers and temptations of the world, but even if they prove insufficient to protect the soul’s fragile unity, they can continue to provide protection and support until repairs can be made.

Although much more could still be said about divine grace, Bonaventure shows great deftness in working out a practical account of the moral life of a sort that can successfully account for empirical facts about human behavior. Divine grace, though mysterious in many respects, can still play a regular and to some degree explicable role within the human soul.
Chapter Five

The Spirited Virtues: Courage and Hope

Up until now we have been considering the juxtaposition of the Aristotelian and Augustinian moral philosophies from what might be regarded as a “third person” perspective. Chapter two focused on final ends as such, and thus offered a kind of road map showing where the virtues would lead. Chapters three and five explored the relationship of habituation to divine grace, showing how these could work together to instill and reinforce the virtues. This chapter will shift to more of a first-person perspective, considering how the virtuous person’s goals and sources of motivation will be different in the Aristotelian and Bonaventurean contexts.

Beliefs and desires

As a rule, contemporary action theory breaks the necessary components for action into two primary categories: beliefs and desires. The interplay between these two can be simply illustrated through the example of taking aspirin for a headache. Suppose I have a headache and I want it to go away. I know that there is a bottle of aspirin in my medicine cabinet, and that a pill from this bottle will relieve my pain. So, I get up and take the pill. In a belief/desire action model, only two mental states or dispositions are necessary in order to motivate my action. First, I need relevant beliefs. I must know where the
aspirin is and what it can do for my headache; otherwise I would in no way connect the pills to the pain. But also, I must have a desire to end the pain. If for some reason I wanted my head to keep aching, I would not have taken the medicine.

A simple belief/desire model seems adequate for explaining a simple action like taking aspirin. Not all actions are so simple, however. Are these two building blocks adequate to explain much more complicated sorts of behavior? As discussed in the second chapter, human beings will often pursue goods that can only be attained through multiple steps, which requires them to organize complex plans of action involving subordinate goals. In itself this need not pose a problem for a belief/desire model of action. The desire for the final end (say, a weekend at Cedar Point) can, when combined with appropriate beliefs, motivate a person to take the necessary preparatory steps (saving the money, getting the car repaired, reserving lodging, and so forth.) It may be, however, that there are some sorts of behavior that cannot be explained so easily, even if we grant the human capacity for complex calculation about the relationship of means and ends. To understand how this might be, it will first be beneficial to take a brief look at the historical origins of belief/desire theories of action.

Contemporary belief/desire models of action are traditionally taken to have their roots in the work of David Hume, whose *Treatise on Human Nature* explicitly endorses the complete separation of these two sorts of mental states from one another. Hume did, of course, have antecedents. Many of the pre-Humean works that have traditionally been classified as political philosophy
are equally interesting for what they reveal about changing views on human nature. So, for example, in Machiavelli we can see human nature regarded, not as something to be trained and shaped by the political order, but instead as a fixed backdrop against which to realize one’s personal ambitions.\footnote{For a discussion of this point, see Alasdair MacIntyre’s \textit{A Short History of Ethics} (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 126-130.} Hobbes makes this still more explicit, taking human desire simply as a given, neither subject to reason nor responsive to it. Because he views human desires as a fixed and uncontrollable factor, the goal of Hobbes’ political order is simply to control the terms on which those desires can be realized. Even this is done through appeals to individual self-interest, or, in other words, by arranging society such that obedience to the law is the most effective means for satisfying a person’s desires.\footnote{This may be a controversial claim, since some passages in Leviathan do indicate that men may be required to follow the law against their own self-interest simply because they have already committed to doing so. But, as critics have noted, it is unclear how Hobbes can produce such an obligation given the mechanisms by which his social contract is established.} Through these works we see the foundations of a conception of human nature wherein the passions are juxtaposed against reason as a pre-set attribute of human nature.\footnote{\textit{Ibid}, 131-140.}

It is Hume, however, who argues clearly and explicitly for the divorce of reason and passion. In the \textit{Treatise}\footnote{Book II, Part III, Section III.} he contends that desires are \textit{in no way} influenced by reason, except insofar as the cognitive faculties present to the will the potential objects of desire, and calculate the means by which those objects can be attained. Abstract and demonstrative reasoning, he tells us, “never influences any of our actions, but only as it directs our judgment

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concerning causes and effects.”⁵ A passion, meanwhile, “is an original existence, or, if you will, modification of existence, and contains not any representative quality, which renders it a copy of any other existence or modification.”⁶

Hume presents desire as the primary focus of human attention, while reason functions merely as an instrument for attaining those things that we desire. Thus, Hume tells us that, “Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.”⁷

In Kant we find a similar bifurcation being used to support a different view of the appropriate relationship between reason and passion. Kant disagrees with Hume’s prioritizing of passion over reason, insisting instead that reason should be a human being’s highest concern. Kant’s characterization of reason as a “practical faculty”⁸ is obviously in tension with Hume’s claim that reason has no power to motivate. This creates one of the primary openings for Kant’s critics, who are unsatisfied with his contention that a human being can act for reason alone.⁹ Nevertheless, the fact remains that Kant fundamentally accepts Hume’s characterization of the passions as divorced from reason and

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⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid.
⁷ Ibid.
⁸ See The Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals, 396.
⁹ Kant himself does recognize at points that there may be something problematic about this. One of his most interesting, but also cryptic, remarks on this subject is in fact buried in a footnote (cF Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals, tr. Ellington, 402, footnote 14), in which he suggests that respect can be a “rational feeling” which can be motivational without being reducible to inclination. Contemporary readers of Kant might certainly wish that he had said more on this particular point.
independently motivational. His escape from the appetite-driven moralities of Hobbes and Hume requires, not that the passions be trained, but that they be ignored and allowed to play as little role as possible (ideally no role at all) in dictating the moral agent’s actions. Thus Kant actually helps to solidify the Humean psychology, even while reacting against Humean morality.

The influence of Humean psychology has been enormous, especially in the social sciences. Modern economics, for example, is largely premised on the (at least provisional) assumption that human beings’ behavior can be reasonably analyzed as a manifestation of some combination of beliefs and desires. Within philosophy itself, belief/desire theory has come in for some criticism, especially by those in the Wittgensteinian tradition who are dissatisfied with the Humean conception of reason. Questions about the mutual exclusivity of beliefs and desires gave rise to discussions of “direction of fit” and other possible models for demonstrating the exclusivity. Although the “direction of fit” debate was never fully resolved one way or another, it certainly indicated some level of dissatisfaction with the simple belief/desire model, and persuasively showed that beliefs and desires are not so obviously distinct as a committed Humean might wish.\(^{10}\) Still, Hume’s model remains very widely influential in philosophy as well as the social sciences.

\(^{10}\) Defenders of a Humean psychology sometimes try to use the concept of “direction of fit” to elucidate the distinction between beliefs and desires. The idea, in brief, is that beliefs are responsive to the world, whereas desires try to impose themselves on the world; to put the point another way, the world changes our beliefs, but our beliefs make us try to change the world. Whether or not this strategy is successful has been the subject of much debate. Michael Smith has been one stalwart proponent of the view (cf. *The Moral Problem* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 104-130), while critics have included HUW Price (“Defending Desire as Belief” from *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 98, No.389 (Jan. 1989), 119-127) and John
Alternatives to Hume

The “direction of fit” strategy was intended to show how beliefs and desires can be clearly distinguished, as Hume believed they ought to be. If indeed we are unable to distinguish clearly between beliefs and desires, that might indicate a need for a broader, more nuanced theory of action than that offered by Hume.

In order to judge whether or not this is the case, I must first say more about the phenomenology of human action, and the ways in which a belief/desire theory can be dissatisfying. We might ask: do most human actions seem to be readily explainable in terms of beliefs and desires? Or are there strong candidates for mental states that fall somewhere outside this picture? In what follows, I wish to explore a category of mental states that seem not to be easily explicable on a belief/desire model. These are offered, not as a clear or incontrovertible disproof of belief/desire theories of action, but rather as a suggestive beginning to an alternative theory that might offer certain attractions and also (even for one who does not ultimately wish to adopt it) provide a useful standpoint from which to critique the Humean model. Belief/desire theories probably cannot be proven to be false; they are extremely flexible, in no small part because of the broadness and vagueness of their primary categories. By all accounts, human beings are complex creatures, and very often we fail to understand even our own mental states. That being the case, there is always a real possibility that a person may have latent,

Milliken (“In a Fitter Direction: Moving Beyond the Direction of Fit Picture of Belief and Desire” from *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* (2008), 11:563-571).
subconscious, or irrational beliefs or desires, and the Humean can always appeal to these in order to explain difficult cases.

When presented with an unfalsifiable theory, however, it is sometimes possible to evaluate it in terms of its *explanatory power*. If indeed belief/desire theories find it awkward to explain certain phenomena, this would strengthen the case for seeking an alternative theory. As a part of my discussion, I will consider whether a Christian Aristotelianism such as Bonaventure's might offer an account of certain situations that is, in many respects, more helpful and satisfying. Even for the committed belief/desire theorist, I believe the contrast may be illuminating, insofar as it can throw light on these cases from a new angle. It may be possible to account for the relevant phenomena with a careful combination of beliefs and desires (indeed, it almost certainly *is* possible, whether or not the explanation is ultimately satisfying), but a contrast theory might help to clarify which kinds of behavior need the most attentive consideration.

For the sake of illustrating the benefits of this alternate theory (which I will call the “tripartite model”), I will concentrate on what I take to be core areas of agreement between Aristotle and Bonaventure. At the end of the chapter, however, I will offer a brief reflection on the primary points of difference between the Aristotelian and Bonaventurean models.
Spirited virtue: A first look

As a first attempt at understanding the differences between a Christian-Aristotelian action theory and a belief/desire model of motivation, we might consider an analogy to the history of art. Before a certain point in history, painting was primarily a 2-dimensional art. This necessitated serious distortions of the subject being painted. Around the time of Giotto, artists began to develop a more sophisticated understanding of perspective, which enabled them to portray depth and shape in more realistic ways. The result was better, more lifelike portrayals of the subjects. Similarly here, a Christian Aristotelian might argue that the belief/desire model suffers because it is using two dimensions to capture a thing that in fact has three. In order to create a more realistic account of human motivation, we must bring the third dimension into play.

The theory of the tripartite soul is common to many of the great thinkers of the ancient and medieval period. Plato famously “derives” his account of the soul from his account of the city in the Republic\textsuperscript{11}; Aristotle, more plainly and less ostentatiously, presents a similar idea early in the Ethics.\textsuperscript{12} Augustine makes innumerable uses of the theory, drawing parallels from the tripartite soul to the political order on one hand, and on the other, to the divine Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{13} By Bonaventure’s time, the tripartite soul is sufficiently taken for granted that it requires no special explanation or defense.

\textsuperscript{11} Republic, 419d-445c.
\textsuperscript{12} Nicomachean Ethics 1.13.102a-103a.
\textsuperscript{13} This is particularly evident in De Trinitate, which is filled with references to threes.
Bonaventure makes casual reference to the various parts of the soul in a way that obviously presumes the reader’s familiarity.

Contemporary readers quickly find their attention arrested by the term “soul”, and by the corollary claim that it can be divided into parts. Although there are many fascinating questions that might be explored in connection with this subject, it should be sufficient for present purposes to say that Bonaventure views a “part of the soul” as the locus point for a particular “power”, which seems to roughly correspond to what a modern thinker might refer to as a type of mental state. Whether, for example, cognitive judgments come from the physical brain, or from the intellectual part of the soul, or whether one is reducible to the other or not, are not questions that require an answer at this point. The different parts of the soul are in some way the origin of different sorts of dispositions, and this is the critical point for our purposes.

Two of the three parts of the soul can easily find parallels to the Humean model of action. The intellectual part of the soul corresponds naturally with beliefs, and the concupiscent or longing part of the soul is obviously related to desires. What, then is the third part? Bonaventure tells us that:

> in heaven there will be three gifts corresponding to the three powers of the soul. One gift will reform and perfect the rational power, which is for seeing clearly; another will perfect the desiring power, which is for taking delight; and a third will perfect the spirited power, which is that holding on perfectly. On earth, then, it is necessary to posit the theological virtues, to which the gifts must correspond.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{14}\) Unde quam in patria tres erunt dotes secundum tres animae vires, quarum una reformabit et consummabit rationalem, videlicet ipsa visio, alia concupiscibilem, videlicet dilectio, tertia irascibilem, videlicet ipsa perfecta tentio; sic et in via necesse est ponere circa virtutes theologicas, quibus dotes habent correspondere. (3.36.1.3)
The third part of the soul, then, is the spirited power, which enables us to “hold on” in a perfect way. To what, though, should we hold? And why should “holding on” be a distinct power in its own right, as opposed to simply another sort of action that might be explained in terms of beliefs and desires?

To understand the function of the spirit, we might consider the example of a person playing a carnival game. Carnival booth operators, as we know, are expert at converting the passing whims of bystanders into zealous projects. They surround their booths with garish prizes that will catch the eye of passers-by. People realize, of course, that carnival games are difficult to win, so most will be content to glance and continue on their way. To lure customers in, the operator will offer a cheap “entry-point” into the game, making it seem easy to try once and walk away. In theory it is perfectly possible to do this, but the games are carefully constructed to tease the player by making it appear that she is very close to winning. This experience of (apparent) near-victory is so wrenching that the customer finds herself reluctant to leave empty-handed. She is invested in the game now. A person who had no intention of playing any games at all might suddenly find herself spending far more than she can afford trying to win a prize that an hour before she would have dismissed as cheap and ugly.

On its face, this kind of behavior seems to be something of a curiosity. We can, to be sure, list a variety of reasons why the game-player might become invested in her activity. She has already spent money on the effort. Her friends may have stood watching her attempts. Most importantly, though, she is
aggravated by the thought that it almost went in. A prize that would have meant little an hour before suddenly seems very important. So potent is the power of carnival workers to activate this must-win instinct (and, in the process, to clean out the pockets of the hapless customer), the losing-everything-at-the-bottle-toss scene has become a familiar trope in film and television.

To be sure, a belief-desire theorist can certainly say things by way of explaining this scenario. Very obviously, the player has an intense desire to win the game, coupled with the belief that the prize is within reach. The booth worker lures the customer by offering an easy entry-point and draws her in further by making it appear that the prize is obtainable. All of this can be expressed in terms of beliefs and desires. Still, the account will have to be a complicated one if it is to explain why the goal (either the prize or just the pleasure of winning it) appreciates in value so suddenly. A goal that meant next to nothing a few minutes ago suddenly becomes all-important. Although we might contemplate multiple goods to be gained from winning the game (social status, bragging rights, the rebellious thrill of having beaten the system, etc.), the sudden increase in interest is still something of a curiosity from a belief-desire perspective. And yet, it must be a regular and predictable feature of human nature if carnival workers (and con artists of other varieties) can exploit it so effectively.

Hume himself, no doubt realizing that situations like this were precisely the weak point of his belief/desire psychology, offers some explanation of what
he calls the “strong passions.” On this account, all passions tend to mold themselves to whatever is the strongest or prevailing passion at a particular time or in a particular situation. The strongest passion exercises something like a gravitational pull on other existing passions, and these, when they are united to the prevailing passion, intensify its force. Thus, if I am seriously angry at my sister for borrowing my car without permission, but also, to a lesser degree, worried about a check I recently wrote that may bounce, my worry about the check will unite with my anger towards my sister. The result will be an even more intense feeling of anger (and, very possibly, an explosion of rage when she finally brings my car home.)

In the above example, the theory sounds fairly plausible. People are more easily angered when they are simultaneously worried or agitated by unrelated matters. In those cases, however, the emotions in question are fairly similar, at least insofar as both stir up negative feelings and apply stress. The “prevailing passion” theory adapts itself much less easily to some other situations.

Positive emotions, for example, tend to ease worry and anger. Let us suppose that, as I am stewing about my sister’s inconsiderate behavior, I happen to note with satisfaction that there are enough blueberries left in the refrigerator to supplement my breakfast cereal. This is a minor pleasure, not sufficient to outweigh my irritation over a missing car. Still, I may find myself a little mollified, and in any case the tasty breakfast certainly will not augment my anger. Moreover, there are many situations in which people find themselves

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15 See Treatise on Human Nature, Book II, Part III, Section IV.
experiencing mixed emotions. The very term “bittersweet” denotes a familiar sensation of happiness blended with regret, such as might be felt at times of transition from one period or state of life to another. Even while experiencing the thrill of, say, winning a board game, a person might simultaneously feel a pang of empathy at the visible disappointment of the vanquished opponent. None of this is easily accounted for on the model that Hume has described.

It might be possible to modify the account by constructing a sort of “emotion axis” on which positive emotions pulled one direction, while negative emotions pulled the other way. Multiple positive emotions might have an intensifying effect, such that the cumulative effect of, say, a beautiful morning and a good cup of coffee would be better than the value of each combined. With negative emotions a similar effect would come into play, but if negative and a positive emotions arose at the same time, they would balance one another. The fresh berries diminish my anger at my sister; a warm bath softens my disappointment after a long-anticipated sporting match goes badly.

This modified Humean view has a certain intuitive appeal, but is precisely not equipped to deal with those situations that Aristotle would explain with reference to the spirited virtues. In the case of the carnival game, Hume would presumably say that the prospect of winning, when it is presented so forcefully and suddenly to the game-player, becomes the prevailing desire. The irritation that the player feels at each loss is then molded to the dominant emotion (desire to win), and this can explain the intoxicating effect that such games have on some people’s minds. Hume seems to feel that this sort of case
is in need of special justification, and we can see why; anticipation of winning would seem to be a *positive* emotion, but the interim losses would be negative.

So, here we do appear to have a case in which “bad” emotions actually intensify a person’s resolve and commitment. But Hume’s account, while it may be better than no explanation at all, leaves much to be desired. Why is it that some sorts of opposition intensify a person’s resolve, while others deflate it? Why do some emotions serve to intensify while others are enervating? For Hume, at least, this certainly seems to be a weak point in his belief/desire psychology.

**The Tripartite Model applied**

On the tripartite model, the carnival game would be easily explicable, and indeed could serve as a classic illustration of the powerful influence of the spirited part of the soul. The spirit is the part of the soul that pushes back against adversity, exults in victory, and remains constant in defeat. The carnival game is intoxicating because it presents the player with a dramatic, clear-cut case in which both victory and defeat lie immediately before her; in such instances, the spirit naturally thirsts for victory. More development is clearly needed, however, in order to establish these points.

The spirited part might helpfully be described as the “wayfarer’s” part of the soul. It is that part of the human being that appreciates the journey towards the good more even than good itself. The spirited part of the soul is excited by challenges that arise *en route* to the desired end. When a person’s
resolve is actually hardened by the realization that a valued goal (the keeping of a promise, the attainment of a position, the exacting of revenge) will be more difficult to reach than originally anticipated, this can be credited to the spirited part of the soul.

It is not in the nature of the spirited part to select desirable end points or goals. This is the function of the desiring or loving part of the soul, which will be discussed in the next chapter. The spirit, by contrast, is responsible for holding fast to those goals that have already been selected, and for coping with whatever hardships and challenges the journey may bring. In some cases this may lead to a high level of investment in a goal that is really of little value in itself. The carnival game illustrates this very well. In themselves, neither the game nor the prize is of great importance, but when the player becomes myopically focused on the game, winning can come to seem very important indeed.

The tripartite model is particularly suited for explaining displays of excitement or support. A good example can be found in the excitement of fans at an athletic event. Detractors will sometimes marvel at the inanity of “rooting” for a team of professional athletes who are not personal acquaintances, and whose success (or failure) will have no noteworthy effect on the fan’s personal, professional or financial affairs. Assuming that he hasn’t bet money on the game, why should it matter to Joe Smith of Long Neck, Delaware whether Miami’s professional athletes can score more points than Dallas’ in the MBA finals? To the tripartite theorist this is readily explicable. It is part of human
nature to become invested in stories, and especially in struggles for honor or success. Here we see the real effects of spirit. By giving their loyalty to particular teams, fans become vicariously invested in their battle to achieve victory against long odds. A similar phenomenon can be seen when people become engrossed in a well-plotted movie or book, or enthused about a political campaign. The spirited part of the soul becomes excited by struggle, and rejoices in victory, regardless of whether that victory is ultimately fruitful or valuable.

On the more “passive” side, the spirited part can also manifest itself in displays of patience, loyalty and trust. An excellent example of this aspect of the spirit can be seen in the character of Catherine Sloper in Henry James’ *Washington Square.*¹⁶ Because she is a quiet, placid and compliant girl, Catherine is judged to be weak and easily manipulable, even by those who know her best. When her father opposes her attachment to the impressive but unsteady Morris Townsend, Catherine proves iron-willed beyond anyone’s expectations, willingly allowing her father to disinherit her rather than break her engagement. But the strength of her spirit is most fully revealed when Morris finally abandons her in search of a more lucrative match. Although her hopes have been disappointed, and she has no expectation of any redress for her woes, she nonetheless refuses to give her father the satisfaction of gloating over her, and allows him to go to his grave uncertain of whether or not the connection between her and her former suitor has truly been broken.

¹⁶ Originally published in 1880 through *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine.*
For Catherine, personal dignity is the goal for which she acts. Her original goal of marrying Morris has been disappointed, and she realizes in retrospect that he was false to her from the beginning; just to make the point clear, James shows at the end of the book that Catherine no longer has any desire for the renewal of Morris Townsend’s addresses. Nonetheless, she perceives that all of the important figures in her life (her father, her aunt, and Morris) have treated her as a subsidiary object in their own plans, not believing her capable of forming any serious projects of her own. In response, she preserves her self-respect by refusing to bring any of these people into her confidence, and by ceasing to rely on them either emotionally or materially. Regardless of whether this course of action is a good one, her patience and unshakeable resolve can only be seen as a display of extraordinary spirit. This is ironic, of course, because it was precisely in spirit that all her acquaintances believed her to be lacking.

The virtues connected to the spirited part of the soul are courage and hope. Enumerating these virtues can be difficult in that exercises of spirit often look very much like beliefs, while at other times they seem to closely resemble desires. In the next two sections, I will explain how the spirited part of the soul differs from either the intellectual part on the one hand, or the desiring part on the other. In order to bring Bonaventure into this explanation, I will look specifically at the Christian virtue of hope, which is the spirited virtue that focuses on the journey towards the Christian’s final end in heaven. In these next two sections, however, my main focus will be on hope qua exercise of
spirited virtue. The final part of the paper will consider hope in relation to Aristotelian courage.

**Hope and “affective belief”**

Hope looks to the future, and in particular, it looks to a future that is anticipated in a positive way. For the Christian, of course, the happiest and most important event is his own salvation. Thus Bonaventure, like many Christian thinkers before him, begins with the idea that hope in its most elemental form is a kind of confident expectation of one’s own salvation. The hopeful person strongly feels that she will ultimately attain life in Heaven.

Any theological discussion of the Christian virtue of hope is likely to mention an important New Testament passage that appears to link hope with faith, declaring that faith, “is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

The faith described here seems here to be a kind of rational optimism, looking ahead to a future that it both believes in and wants. The interesting thing, though, is that this description of faith brings hope into the picture as well, apparently marking it as a kind of *belief*, or at least as a close associate to belief. Since belief is normally the province of faith, it isn’t clear why hope would then require its own virtue.

Bonaventure anticipates this objection, and indeed articulates it himself as a problem to which an answer must be offered. In the fifth article of

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17 *Hebrews* 11:1, KJV.
distinction twenty-six of the Commentaries, he gives a description of this false view.

For indeed some want to say that the certitude of hope is neither proper to itself nor different from the certitude of faith, but on the contrary that hope draws all its certitude from faith, just as a knowledge of particulars draws its certitude from a knowledge of universals. In such a way someone knows that this mule is sterile, because he knows about all mules in the universal. And that, they say, is how hope is related to faith, as knowledge had in a particular is related to knowledge in the universal. For just as Augustine says, and the Teacher relates in letters, through faith man believes all good people finally to be saved, and concerning this has a kind of certitude. From this, and through hope, he has a kind of certitude, but through hope he trusts that he himself should be saved. It is from this general believing that he believes, hoping through hope to apply it to himself.18

Through the example of mules and sterility, Bonaventure is obviously making reference to the syllogism. All mules are sterile; this animal is a mule; therefore this animal is sterile. In the mistaken view that Bonaventure is opposing here, the same logic is applied to questions of salvation. We can know through faith that all good people will be saved. Thus (so the reasoning goes) a person who rightly regards himself as good can expect confidently that he himself will be saved. The transition from faith to hope seems to require nothing more than a practical syllogism, which surely is within the purview of the intellectual part of the soul. In this view hope would be, in essence, a particular application of faith.

18 Quidam namque dicere voluerunt, quod certitido spei non est sibi ipsi propria neque diversa a certitudine fidei, immo spes omnem certitudinem suam trahit a fide, sicut scientia in particulari trahit certitudinem a scientia in universali. Ideo enim quis novit, quod haec mula est sterilis, quia novit de omni mula in universali. Et sic dicunt se habere spem ad fidem, sicut se habet scientia in particulari ad scientiam in universali. Sicut enim dicit Augustinus, et Magister recitat in littera, per fidem credit homo, omnes finaliter bonos esse salvandos, et de hoc habet quandam certitudinem; per spem et de hoc habet quandam certitudinem; per spem autem confidit, se esse salvandum; unde quod credens generaliter credebat, sperans per spem sibi appropriate (3.26.1.5).
Even if it were possible to make these kinds of predictions about the state of one’s own soul, this is not what Bonaventure understands hope to be. The kind of certainty that arises through hope is not, per se, intellectual. It is another sort of confidence, which may dovetail with intellectual certainty, but which itself has a different character.

“Hope,” says Bonaventure, “has its proper certitude; and in one way man is brought to obtaining salvation through faith, and in another way through hope.”

To understand what he has in mind here, we might begin by considering circumstances in which a person’s intellectual beliefs (or at least, beliefs towards which the available evidence inclines her) are at odds with another assessment (colloquially we might call this a “gut feeling”), derived from general life experience or from a set of more abstract principles through which this person typically understands the world.

So, for example, when a person commits a terrible crime, the people who knew him well often find it difficult to make themselves fully believe that he is guilty. Even when absolutely incontrovertible evidence is shown to her, we might imagine the criminal’s mother saying, “I see that he must have done it, but somehow I just can’t quite believe it.” Although her intellect may have assented to the proposition that her son is guilty, her longstanding belief in his underlying decency and worth make it difficult for her to fully accept this.

19 Spes, ut ibi innuit Glossa, habet propriam certitudinem; et aliter certificatur homo de salute obtinenda per ipsam fidem, aliter certificatur per ipsam spem (3.26.1.5).
We see the same trend with regards to future events, when a person’s present surroundings or attitudes make it difficult to fully internalize a belief that one actually holds about them. Such a circumstance once obtained for me, in my last days as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Uzbekistan. I remember having a conversation, on my last night at my site, with a woman in the bazaar. I was buying grapes, and the vendor, having heard that I was leaving town, asked me about my plans. I told her that, two weeks from that very day, I would be starting classes as a graduate student at Cornell University in New York. It was true, and I knew it, and my listener accepted my claim with no apparent incredulity. To my own ears, however, it seemed an utterly incredible thing. The bazaar, the dusty streets of Andijan, plugging rat holes in my apartment, riding to work in vans filled with sweaty men, and so forth, were all realities to me. Discussing philosophy in clean classrooms with Starbucks-drinking graduate students seemed completely unreal. There was a tension between what I knew intellectually, and what I could bring myself to feel intuitively to be true.

When such dissonance arises between people’s intellectual beliefs and their “gut feelings”, it is not unusual to express the latter using the language of belief. “I’ve read all the statistics,” a person might say, “but I still feel sure that the plane will crash.” Another helpful and revealing case can be found in the common saying that adolescents “think they’ll live forever.” This is normally said to explain a proclivity towards rash, profligate or generally unhealthy activities. Young people often display poor judgment in deciding when the
benefits of a particular action outweigh the risks, and this poor judgment seems to stem from a failure to take seriously the possibility that the worst would ever really happen. They *behave* like people who think that they are immortal.

The fact remains, though, that adolescents are old enough to know with a high level of certainty that they are going to die someday. And, importantly, this is not a subject about which many people are foggy or confused; quite the contrary, they are quite clear on the subject. If a con artist tried to peddle an “elixir of life” that supposedly yielded immortality, most people (adolescents included) would easily dismiss this as a fantastic and utterly implausible promise. So, although it might be possible to argue that young people simply have conflicting beliefs, it does seem that the cognitive dissonance would need to be quite obvious and extreme, given the absolute clarity with which they would acknowledge their mortality. That this mistake should be *common* among the young only makes the case more puzzling, if indeed the inconsistency is properly attributed to contradictory beliefs.

It seems more reasonable to suggest that, here again, we see a bifurcation between those facts that are accepted intellectually, and those that form an active part of the person’s lived experience. Affective states are shaped by a person’s experiences and the circumstances of his life; in some important way, the world as we have known it *is* the world to us. It is possible to convince a person intellectually that her experiences are atypical in certain ways. Affectively, though, her attitudes and expectations will inevitably reflect her
own experience. So, the young may have weighty evidence persuading them that human beings in general are mortal (there seem to have been people on this planet for quite a long time, but most of them aren’t alive today), but most have had little firsthand experience with death. Thus, their firmly-held intellectual belief in human mortality conflicts with their own experiences of remaining alive and (in most cases) basically healthy. The tension manifests itself in seemingly irrational behavior.

In classifying these two different sorts of “confident expectation” we might call one “intellectual belief” and the other “affective belief.” Affective belief takes account of the fact that human beings are not probability calculators; we understand the world through interpretive devices in light of habituated tendencies and experience. This fact gives rise to the second category of “beliefs”, which are the province of the spirited part of the soul.

Bonaventure shows his interest in “affective belief” in a passage explaining the difficulty of hope in the theological sense (which is to say, directed towards personal salvation.)

To those that object that it is not difficult to expect the good, it must be said that just as it isn’t difficult to believe what is seen, and yet to firmly believe what is not seen is very difficult, similarly it should be understood that although it isn’t very difficult to hope for good for the present time, which in some way is seen in oneself, or in someone like oneself, yet to expect with certain fidelity those invisible and eternal goods that the eye cannot see, and to disregard those temporal goods for the sake of the eternal, is very difficult and has great worth. And therefore it is undoubtedly true that hope falls into the category of gratuituous virtue.20

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20 Ad illud quod obiiciture, quod exspectare bonum non est difficile; dicendum, quod sicut credere quod videtur non habet difficultatem, credere tamen firmissime quod non videtur habet magnam difficultatem; sic intelligendum est, quod quamvis sperare bona praesentia, quae aliquo modo videntur in se, vel in suo simili, non est multum difficile; bona tamen invisibilia et aeterna, quae oculus non videt, exspectare certa fiducia et pro illis temporalia bona
In light of everything that has been said, this position is eminently understandable. With respect to their own salvation, earth-dwellers might be in a situation somewhat similar to that of the adolescents. Even if they believe on authority that there is another life to come, they obviously have no firsthand experience to confirm this. Nothing on earth is like the Beatific Vision, and so it is hard to get much imaginative grip on the suggestion that they may someday enjoy it. And, importantly, the honest person will likely be conscious of a number of personal flaws or imperfections that he might reasonably suppose would render him unfit for enjoying a harmonious life in God’s presence. Ordinary life, with all of its sweet or tawdry details, seems ludicrously remote from the imagined throne room filled with white-robed saints chanting Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus. And so, even one who is intellectually convinced that eternal life exists may find it difficult to feel confident that this is in fact the case, much less that he himself may one day qualify for admittance.

**Hope and desire**

In colloquial English, the word “hope” is sometimes used to express a favorable attitude towards events that the speaker believes have very little likelihood of occurring. “Do you think you’ll win the election?” a reporter might ask a
political candidate. If he replies, “Well, I hope so,” readers will quickly conclude
that the candidate knows that the election is a lost cause.

The English word “hope” encapsulates rather nicely the ambiguities
contained within the Latin *spes*. At times it can be used to express confidence;
a person who describes herself as “hopeful” of a desirable event will in most
contexts be understood to believe that there is a non-negligible chance of the
desirable outcome obtaining. At the same time, “hope” may sometimes be used
in a way that is interchangeable with “want” or “wish”, and in some cases may
even be *contrasted* with the kind of desire that anticipates fulfillment. It is
perfectly intelligible to say that, “I hope I’m wrong, but I really think I failed
that test.”

Differentiating between spirit and desire can be difficult, especially
because spirit is *dependent* on the existence of desires. As explained above, the
spirited part of the soul appreciates *journeys* and in particular journeys
involving struggle and sacrifice. A proper journey, however, requires a
destination; without this there can be no triumph, and what would otherwise
be a “journey” is really little more than aimless wandering. The spirited part of
the soul is thus bound up with the desiring part in the same way that the plot
of a good story is naturally and organically linked to its conclusion. To explore
this further, we will employ a similar technique to that used in the preceding
section, examining circumstances in which a person’s felt desires fail to match
up to those that they can (intelligibly and with good reason) describe
themselves as wanting.
Harry Frankfurt, in his writings on love and on human motivation, famously distinguished between “first-order” and “second-order” desires.\textsuperscript{21} First-order desires are felt at a particular time and generally aim at something immediately available; second-order desires are longer-term, considered goals that help a person to organize her activities and control her first-order inclinations. In order to differentiate between spirit and appetites or desires, I wish to draw another distinction that, while not unrelated to the above, is nonetheless somewhat different. We might describe this as a distinction between \textit{desire} and \textit{ardor}. Desire merely entails wanting something or wishing that a state of affairs should obtain. Ardor encompasses such things as zeal and enthusiasm, and implies an \textit{investment} in the goals in question.

At first glance, it might seem that this distinction maps fairly closely onto the divide between first- and second-order desires. First-order desires are immediate but not necessarily deeply reflective of a person’s volitional structure; second-order desires can be more detached or reflective, and thus reveal more about the person’s broader commitments or enthusiasms. Further reflection shows, however, that first-order desires can be accompanied by zeal, but may not. Sitting languidly in my living room on a summer afternoon, trying to edit a chapter of my dissertation, it might occur to me to wish for air conditioning or a breeze. This desire, while sincere and possibly even intense, could not properly be called an enthusiasm. I perceive that I would be more

comfortable in a cooler environment, but I don’t feel excitement in the way that I might before opening an interesting book or digging into a delicious meal.

In the case of first-order desires, the difference between desire and ardor may be subtle, but we can perhaps get some grip on it by reflecting on the state of a severely depressed person who says that he has felt no enthusiasm for anything for weeks or months. Probably that person is not claiming that he has had no desires of any kind for that whole period. At the very least, he desires release from his depressed state; he has a desire for ardor precisely because he lacks it. It is also true that even his first-order desires may be stunted; severely depressed people often report a diminishment even of their bodily desires (for favorite foods, exercise, sex etc.), and of their enjoyment of sensual pleasures. This does seem to indicate once again that ardor and desire are closely related to one another. But even if a lack of ardor diminishes desire, it is still possible to feel desire in a non-ardent way.

With respect to second-order desires, the contrast with ardor is more easily seen. Long-term goals can be difficult to achieve in large part because our enthusiasm for them tends to vacillate over time. The most committed professional will have days in which she would rather skip work and crawl back into bed. The most loving parent will occasionally with that her unruly child would spontaneously disappear for a few hours. Inspirational speakers and life coaches make their living by keeping others motivated. In part, this is a matter of finding ways to increase one’s level of ardor for a particular goal. Even more importantly, though, the successful person needs the ability to
sustain commitments over long periods of time, despite the inevitable changing circumstances and fluctuations in mood that are a part of every human life.

To attain even a basic level of functionality, a person must learn to recognize intellectually when an unappealing activity is necessary for the sake of larger goals. Few people enjoy washing the dishes or visiting the dentist, but most can recognize that these activities are sometimes necessary to maintain even a minimally healthy lifestyle. People vary more widely in their capacity for disciplined pursuit of higher goals, and one of life’s perpetual puzzles involves balancing this demand for discipline and commitment against the natural and healthy desire to follow more immediate interests and enthusiasms.

Sometimes, a person may find that her life has become so completely defined by a goal that she continues pursuing it even when it has ceased to yield any significant rewards or promise of future rewards. (We might think, for example, of committed “social climbers” who continue to seek greater status even at the expense of all the more intimate connections that might make a person’s social life genuinely enjoyable or worthwhile.) On the other hand, the inability to commit to a project can prove a crippling vice which makes almost any worthwhile goal unattainable. Success in this sphere requires an ability to identify worthwhile goals, but also to find ways of embracing each project its entirety, so as to make even the more onerous aspects seem meaningful.
Commitment and motivation

One of the most basic strategies for increasing motivation is to identify the intermediate stages of the project with the end, and to identify oneself with the project as a whole. Interestingly, this difference in perception can have dramatic effects on performance. Thus, a person prepping for a job interview may be told to visualize himself getting the job. Thinking of himself as a competent employee, rather than a desperate job-seeker, will actually affect his demeanor throughout the application process, improving his odds of actually fulfilling the goal. A similar argument has often been made against pre-nuptial agreements for engaged couples. While some would offer the pre-nuptial contract as a prudent precautionary measure, a counter-argument would contend that a marriage is much more likely to fail if the spouses begin their shared life with a negotiation concerning its (at that point hypothetical) end. In making the legal arrangement, the couple is anticipating the failure of the very enterprise into which they are entering, and this cannot but affect their perception of the character of the relationship.

In light of all these observations, it is possible to draw certain conclusions about the relationship of ardor to desire. Desires can be enormously diverse and wide-ranging precisely because they require nothing more than the recognition that the object is good. Ardor is dependent on desire, but goes beyond. In order to infuse desire with ardor, a person must also be able to identify himself with the project, and must be capable of some level of commitment. (Note that the required level of commitment might vary greatly
depending on the good in question, but also that the strength of one’s commitment need not necessarily be *sufficient* for attainment of the goal in order for the person to feel ardor. We need not doubt the ardor of Romeo’s love for Juliet in order to question whether, had circumstances been different, he would have been able to forge with her a happy and lasting marriage.)

Ardor requires a sense of narrative. If human beings were purely rational decision-makers (in something like the economist’s sense) they would have no need of ardor in order to pursue worthwhile goals. Mere recognition of the end’s goodness would be enough to motivate. In fact, though, human beings understand themselves and their lives in terms of a self-constructed narrative that helps them to infuse their daily activity with meaning. In motivating a person to pursue a particular goal, it is not enough to persuade him that the goal is both worthwhile and attainable in the abstract. In addition to these, he must find a way to “write it into” the narrative of his life.

Now we can look to Bonaventure’s account of the virtue of hope with some comprehension of what role he expects it to play within the good Christian life. Bonaventure says of theological hope that it, makes the soul to anticipate those things which are beyond all human estimation and those which the divine bounty promises, and it causes us entirely to have confidence in and to depend on that highest and infinitely great bounty, just as faith causes us to assent to the highest truth, and charity to cling to that highest Good. While the soul depends on that infinitely great bounty for its own sake and beyond all things, it is thereby rectified, and elevated beyond itself and is made acceptable to God. It is therefore necessary that the habit by means of which this is done has the nature of a gratuitous virtue. And thus, when the soul depends on the one who cannot fail, although on its own it may be faltering or staggering, yet through hope it is established
Bonaventure is careful to stress the *protective* nature of the virtue of hope. It is compared to an anchor or a firm rock, both things that might steady a person in danger of falling or going down the wrong path. This shows clearly that hope is concerned with *motivation*, and particularly with the motivation that a person needs in order to persevere through the struggles of mortal life.

Hope interacts with the desire for God (provided by charity, as will be discussed in the next chapter) and infuses the soul with the ardor that allows him to stay the course. It does this by anticipating “those things which the divine bounty promises.” Just as the job candidate changes his attitude and demeanor by visualizing himself in the desired position, so the Christian, by turning her mind towards the divine bounty to come, changes her attitude and demeanor for her earthly life. She places herself mentally in a “salvation-bound” narrative, and ideally conforms her life to the narrative even in its more mundane details. As Bonaventure says, hope, “invigorates (the person) in that it elevates (his)

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22 Virtus quidem gratuita est, quoniam in hoc, quod facit, animam exspectare ea quae sunt supra omnem aestimationem humanam et ea quae promisit largitas divina, facit omnino confidere et inniti summae et immensae largitati, sicut fides facit assentire primae Veritati, et caritas facit adhaerere summae Bonitati; et dum anima ipsi immensae largitati innititur propter se et super omnia, rectificatur et super se elevatur et Deo accepta efficitur. Necesse est ergo, quod habitus quo mediante fit illud, rationem habeat virtutis gratuitae. Et quia, cum anima innititur ei qui non potest deficere, quamvis ipsa in se sit deficiens et vacillans, fundatur tamen per spem quasi super firmam petram; et proptera dixi, quod spes non tantummodo est in genere virtutum gratuitarum, sed etiam est earum ancora et sustentamentum (3.26.1.1).
potential to the eternal good that is to be anticipated, and gives him a certain stability, so that he may not succumb to despair."^{23}

Coming back around to our characterization of hope as affective belief, we can see now why the spirit occupies a middle ground between belief and desire. As a “narrative” virtue, it helps to shape both belief and desire, and yet, as Bonaventure understands it, it is subtly different from either one. He explains:

What removes hesitation or faltering gives certitude, but hesitation, which causes a person to falter, is removed through the confidence of hope. So, hope gives certitude to those who hope, and therefore in its act there is certitude.\textsuperscript{24}

The ardor of hope connects our beliefs and our desires, enabling us to believe that we will get what we most long for, and, at the same time, increasing the likelihood that we will realize our heart’s desire.

**Assessment of the tripartite model**

Earlier in this chapter I noted that, while it would be impossible to *disprove* a belief/desire model of action, I hoped to be able to show that, at least in this one respect, the theory of the tripartite soul has more explanatory power. In closing this section, it might be worthwhile to consider the extent to which this project has succeeded.

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\textsuperscript{23} Vigorat etiam in hoc, quod elevat potentiam ad aeterna bona exspectanda et quandam stabilitatem ei tribuit, ne per desperationem succumbat. (36.1.4).

\textsuperscript{24} Item, quod removet haesitationem sive vacillationem tribuit certitudinem; sed hesitatio, quae facit hominem vacillare, removetur per confidentiam spei: igitur spes dat certitudinem ipsi speranti; ergo in actu suo est certitudinalis. (36.1.5 fund. 3).
As noted above, a belief/desire theory has a great amount of flexibility. All action theorists must acknowledge that human beings are creatures of considerable complexity, and must accordingly account for wide variation among different characters. Belief/desire theorists can make much of the fact that, by all accounts, people are liable to hold irrational or conflicting beliefs. Often a person may not realize that his beliefs conflict, or, even if he does, he may prefer to act on the provisional assumption that two conflicting beliefs are true until such a time as he determines which is false. Thus, the mere existence of conflicting beliefs is not enough reason *per se* to reject a belief/desire model of action.

The fact that people have overlapping or inconsistent desires tells us even less. Humeans insisted from the beginning that desires were not subject to reason, and were inclined to be whimsical, fickle and often not in the agent’s best interests so far as an outside observer could see. All this being the case, it is quite easy for the belief/desire theorist to dismiss oddities among human desires as normal, attributing them to desires that were previously subconscious or that simply arose unexpectedly for reasons unknown.

Still, insofar as philosophers must resort to explanations like these, it may at least be said that their model has failed to offer much perspective on the relevant behavior. Some actions or emotions may, in the final analysis, have to be written off to the mysterious complexity of the human creature, but a theory that makes less use of this excuse is clearly to be preferred. And, with
respect to the spirited virtues, it does seem that an Aristotelian can explain many things that are obscure within the Humean model.

On one level, the set of emotions or actions that I have called “expressions of spirit” provide a class of states that are not easily identified either as beliefs or as desires. Bonaventure suggests that there must be a spirited virtue simply because, to his way of thinking, there is an identifiable aspect of human nature that cannot be explained in any other way. Thus, he argues that:

> Just as a person naturally desires to be enlightened and delighted, so he naturally desires to be glorified... therefore, just as there are to be found within us virtues perfecting and directing the soul with respect to the enlightenment of truth and the delight of goodness (namely faith and charity), so there will be with respect to the arduous and excellent. But nothing could accomplish this except hope.\(^{25}\)

The human craving for honor and glory is, Bonaventure thinks, a separate phenomenon from the desire for understanding or love. This is what manifests itself in displays of spirit. So, as discussed above, in spirited acts and emotions we see apparent inconsistencies in belief that (at least as Bonaventure sees it) are not easily explained by cognitive confusion or irrationality willfully embraced. Likewise, we see variations in desire that do not obviously correspond either to the agent’s good or even to his perception of his own good. The existence of such curious emotions and actions ought, *prima facie*, to move

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\(^{25}\) Item, sicut homo naturaliter appetit illuminari et dilectari, ita etiam naturaliter appetit gloriari, et hoc dico secundum ipsius animae supremum: ergo sicut in nobis est reperire aliquas virtutes perficientes et dirigentes ipsam animam respectu veri illuminatis et respectu boni delectantis utpote fidem et caritatem; ita erit respectu ardui et excellentis; hanc autem non est dare nisi spem: ergo etc. (26.2.4 fund. 4).
us to consider whether there might be mental states other than beliefs and desires.

Much of the strength of the argument lies in the fact that the “curious” actions and emotions that Hume labored to explain away really aren’t curious at all. In fact, they’re entirely familiar. We can predict them, understand them, and offer reasonable explanations for them. We can make sense of the intoxication of gambling, the excitement of the sports fan, or Catherine Sloper’s refusal to give her father the satisfaction of having been right about the character of her beloved. Furthermore, in the case of virtuous actions, our understanding goes beyond mere identification or sympathy. We can actually explain why these spirited reactions are potentially a good thing, which enables human beings to accomplish worthwhile goals despite hardship or opposition.

In the final analysis, though, it may not be so important to agree on the number of mental states that should be included in our action theory. The really interesting questions may concern the relationship between beliefs and desires. Bonaventure bridges them through this intermediate thing, spirit, which enables desire to shape belief while belief helps to gratify desire. It may be that a person could construct a kind of belief/desire model that understands the categories of “belief” and “desire” in a somewhat more expansive way. This model might explain the relationship between them such that each can shape and influence the other, and an appropriate combination of beliefs and desires might be understood to magnify and reinforce one
another in such a way as to produce the kinds of behavior or emotions that Bonaventure would attribute to acts of spirit.

Such a thing would be a significant departure from a Humean-type psychology, which, as explained above, is noteworthy for the separation posited between beliefs and desires. And it might well be that positing this third category, spirit, is the most helpful way of explaining those attitudes that don’t obviously fit into either of the other two. But, whether or not the tripartite model is taken seriously in its own right, it does at least seem to reveal some weaknesses in the classic Humean view which suggest that beliefs and desires interact more closely than Hume supposed, that we will need a developed account for this if we are to satisfactorily account for human behavior.

This will conclude my discussion of action theory, but before finishing with the topic of hope, it will be best to say something about the Christian and Aristotelian treatments of the spirited virtues. Thus far I have discussed the spirited part of the soul in general, but I have not commented on ways in which Bonaventure’s theory would differ from, for example, an Aristotelian one. From what has been said so far, it might even seem that hope is little more than a Christian name for courage. But in fact, Bonaventure does dramatically diverge from the Aristotelian understanding of spirited virtue, and in order to understand this, it will be necessary to look more closely at Aristotle’s account of courage.
Virtues young and old

Aristotle addresses the virtue of courage at the end of the fourth book of the

*Nicomachean Ethics*, when he treats the set of virtues (courage and temperance) that relate to the parts of the soul that obey reason. Here he tells us that:

> whoever stands firm against the right things and fears the right things, for the right end, in the right way, at the right time, and is correspondingly confident, is the brave person; for the brave person’s actions and feelings accord with what something is worth, and follow what reason prescribes.\(^{26}\)

In the pages that follow\(^{27}\) he sets further conditions on the exercise of courage. A courageous act must be done with some genuine possibility of attaining the fine or noble end. Thus it is not brave to die of a disease or in a shipwreck, since this merely involves succumbing to the inevitable. Further, the danger in question must be real and not imagined. So, a person who successfully conquers a phobia cannot properly be called brave since there was no real danger in the first place.

The next requirement insists that the courageous person must knowingly face something that is genuinely dangerous. People cannot be called brave merely for being cocky or ignorant, and although it is often called “liquid courage,” alcohol does not truly make people brave since its only real effect is to impair their judgment. More interestingly, mercenary soldiers also are not brave. Although they may impress with their strength and bravado, this is


\(^{27}\) The following discussion is taken from *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 3, Chapter 8, 1116a, 18-1117a, 28.
really just evidence of their expectation that, given their battle-hardened skills, they should win the day easily. In the event that they do encounter real danger, the mercenary soldiers will show their true colors by running away.

Lastly, Aristotle insists that the courageous person must stand fast for the sake of the fine. Mere willingness to risk death does not in itself evidence courage. So, soldiers who fight because they fear the punishment for desertion are not brave, and neither are thrill-seekers or revenge-driven people who risk their lives for no good reason. Citizen soldiers, who stand and fight in order to preserve their family’s honor and good name, have something very close to courage, because honor is a genuine good. Still, even these people fall a little short of true virtue, because the truly brave person would fight for the fine itself (which perhaps in this case might be the safety of the city, or some other larger goal.)

Looking over this list of criteria, courage looks like rather a confusing virtue. The Aristotelian moral virtues are supposed to involve the application of reason to a particular sort of thing. Prudence plays a fairly general role, taking stock of all those details that are relevant to determining correct action. Temperance is reason as applied to the appetites, and justice applies reason to situations involving distribution or exchange. To what does courage apply?

A potential source for confusion lies in the fact that the Aristotelian virtues are supposed to be the ingredients of a flourishing life. It is easy to see how temperance would contribute to this, since a person enslaved to particular appetites will be hindered in his appreciation of life’s other goods. Justice is a
more complicated case, but there is a strong Platonic tradition (seen especially in the *Republic* and the *Gorgias*) of arguing that the unjust ultimately suffer the most for their crimes. Courage, on the other hand, is a virtue that quite literally might kill you. And for Aristotle, death effectively puts an end to flourishing.

In certain cases, it really does seem that cowardice will contribute more to a person’s ultimate flourishing. Consider, as an example, a soldier whose unit is carrying out an important mission in enemy territory. When the soldier is captured, the enemy commander threatens to torture him to death unless he reveals the location and purpose of his team. It seems undeniable in this case that we would want the courageous person (who is after all concerned with the good and the fine) to remain loyal to his comrades and country by refusing to supply the information. On the other hand, this will lead to the soldier’s death, which will end his flourishing permanently. How, then, has this virtue benefited the soldier personally?

The answer must lie in the fact that, for Aristotle, virtue is a disposition that one has at all times, even when it is not visibly being exercised. So, whether or not the soldier decides to stay loyal to his team will not be a reflection merely of the state he is in at the moment he makes the decision. Rather, it will reflect much more broadly on the soldier’s general character and on his life as a whole. He could not betray his comrades unless, even before that point, he had been *the sort of person who might betray his friends*. By the same token, we could suggest that the possibility of losing one’s life in such an incident is a kind of occupational hazard of being a virtuous individual. A
person who is habituated to be honorable and brave may thereby meet a nasty end. Nonetheless, it might be worth the risk, if that is what it takes to live a life of virtue.

Why, though, is it worth the risk? What is the content of this virtue, and why does it make life so good? Set in the context of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, we can presume that courage makes life better because it is a component of a right valuing of the goods one encounters in the world. The person who values things properly will be happier, but that person will also need to accept that his own life and welfare is not always the most important good. So, in the example above, the soldier will find military life far more meaningful if he appreciates the value of the long-term objective (protecting his homeland from unjust invasion, for example) as well as the value of strong and trusting bonds with his fellow soldiers. But, as part of valuing such goods, he will need to form dispositions to protect them, very possibly at the cost of his own welfare or even his own life.

To some extent, all virtues may require (or at least be enhanced by) an ability to appreciate goods beyond one’s own welfare. The just person, for example, will appreciate the value of others’ rightful claims on his goods and resources. But courage, as we saw in the beginning, involves standing firm *in the face of danger* for the sake of the fine. So the courageous person needs, not only to value things to the right degree, but also to value them in a particular way. The courageous person realizes that all goods can be lost, and responds appropriately to that fact.
Death is a fixed and enduring feature of the Aristotelian worldview, which puts an end to all enjoyment of good. Since all things die or pass away, all goods must be appreciated as temporary or ephemeral; the person who allows herself to lose sight of this fact will enjoy worldly goods in the wrong sort of way. And indeed, there is a sense in which pleasure can be enhanced by the knowledge that the valued thing will soon be gone. There is a certain poignant sweetness to the enjoyment of the last day of a vacation, the last fresh berries from the garden, or the final hours spent with a beloved person before a long separation. Autumnal beauty takes some of its loveliness from the very fact of its transitory character, as Gerard Manley Hopkins has so masterfully illustrated in his famous poem.28

The courageous Aristotelian, because he appreciates all goods precisely as ephemeral, can respond to this tragic feature of the world with steadfast resolve. He will not waste what life and energy he has dreading its eventual loss, nor will he spoil its finest goods by trying to preserve them past their time. The courageous Aristotelian will not, like the youths in a previous example, behave rashly because he has lost sight of his mortality. He will pass through life with what we might regard as an “autumnal” appreciation of its beauties and joys, conscious of himself as a transitory being witnessing a fleeting moment of time.

It is perhaps no surprise that, as Alasdair MacIntyre has remarked, “there is something very middle-aged about the spirit which Aristotle

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breathes.” Even in youth, the virtuous Aristotelian must hold in his mind the idea that everything he loves will eventually pass, and might even be lost in the immediate future (since death or misfortune may often strike unexpectedly.) But this will no doubt make it difficult for the virtuous person to capture the flowering optimism and confidence that inspire young people to attempt great things, and to lay the groundwork for an anticipated bright future. The Aristotelian’s happiness must always be tinged with wariness and even sadness. It seems not characteristic of the Aristotelian virtuous agent to have, in the words of Josef Pieper, “that aspiration that is at once relaxed and disciplined, that adaptability and readiness, that strong-hearted freshness, that resilient joy, that steady perseverance in trust that so distinguish the young and make them lovable.”

It is here that courage can be fruitfully contrasted to hope. Where courage anticipates the eventual passing of all goods, hope anticipates their eventual restoration and perfection. Both spirited virtues are attached to a kind of narrative, but the ending of each story is very different. It makes sense that, on a literary level, the Greeks were famous for their tragedies, while it was a world suffused with Christian sensibilities that developed the “happily ever after” cliché.

“Hope,” says Bonaventure, “causes a person to trust, and in making him trust, causes him to anticipate.” This is a statement that could not as easily

29 Alasdair MacIntyre, A Short History of Ethics, p.59.
30 Josef Pieper, Faith, Hope, Love, p. 98.
31 Spes enim facit confidere, et faciendo confidere facit exspectare (26.2.4).
be made of Aristotelian courage. Hope, because it relies on an immutable Creator, comes with guarantees that the Aristotelian must do without. All natural ambitions may be frustrated, despite the agent’s best efforts and regardless of how virtuous he may be. God, however, can be trusted to be faithful regardless of vicissitudes of earthly life. The hopeful Christian can always look ahead with absolute confidence to a bright future, while his courageous counterpart braces for the possibility of failure. Thus, the Aristotelian must always live with the circumspection and moderation of the old; it is only the Christian who can remain forever young.

Finally, the Aristotelian and Christian narratives differ in one more important way. The Aristotelian’s courage ultimately springs from a true appreciation of his own abilities as a virtuous agent. He seeks victory and honor through his own activities and skills, and himself emerges as the hero of the narrative. Christian hope, however, is a theological virtue, infused into the soul together with faith and charity. This means that the Christian’s triumph ultimately depends, not on himself, but on God. Consequently, the hopeful Christian’s “internal narrative” will be replete with gratitude and trust, and focused on the God from whom salvation will eventually come. For this reason, Christian hope can never be self-absorbed. As Bonaventure says, “There are many who expect beatitude, and yet care little for themselves and much for God.”

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32 Multi autem sunt qui beatitudinem exspectant, et tamen parum de se et multum de Deo curant (36.1.1 ad 5).
By the time charity is reached in any extended treatment of the Christian virtues, it is hard to avoid that dubious feeling that one sometimes gets near the end of a very complex mystery or adventure story, wherein the author has created such a monstrously tangled web of interweaving plot lines that it seems almost impossible that all will be brought to a satisfactory resolution. For a novelist, a complicated plot can be a high-risk and high-reward project. It isn’t easy to make it work, but if it does all come to a stirring, satisfying conclusion, the novel will be a pleasure to read. In Christian moral philosophy, charity must be the capstone that will tie the whole project into a unified whole. Charity is the crown jewel of all the Christian virtues; as Bonaventure says, “Charity orders the virtues of the soul, and moves them all, as much the theological as the cardinal virtues.”¹

That the “story” has been a complicated one, few would deny. Every value theory must deal with puzzles of one kind or another, but Bonaventure’s faces particular challenges given its goal of straddling the line between two very different classes of goods. Christendom has many times seen the formation of ascetic or rejectionist groups who “left the world” (in the sense of cutting themselves off deliberately from greater society, and from natural goods and

¹ Caritas omnibus virtutibus animae imperat et omnes movet, tam theologicas quam cardinales. (3.27.1.2 fund. 4).
pleasures), in order to concentrate completely on God, the uncreated Good. In large part, the perpetual impulse to do this sprang from an understandable concern that the love of earthly things might distract the mind from more important goods. Without *per se* condemning such efforts, Bonaventure does apparently think it possible to live a good Christian life without leaving the world. But this requires a careful balancing of natural and supernatural goods, which, as the last chapters have hopefully made clear, is a complicated task.

What is needed at this stage is a super-virtue, capable of regulating all the other virtues. The super-virtue must be able to measure the value of all other goods, and relegate them to their proper places in life. In the Aristotelian ethics, prudence plays this role. But prudence is only suited to valuing earthly (in Bonaventure’s view, *created*) goods, and not to navigating the divide between created and uncreated goods. The super-virtue must have all the perceptiveness of prudence, while at the same time seeing each created good against the backdrop of the eternal and uncreated good.

For Bonaventure, charity is the super-virtue. Charity is the highest form of love and the moving force behind all truly virtuous action. As the greatest of the virtues, charity is a virtue of enormous complexity. Both in the *Commentaries* and in many of his other works, Bonaventure writes about it at great length, showing special interest to the relationship between God and human beings. Giving a full and satisfactory treatment to this virtue could be the work of several more dissertations, and certainly this single chapter will not be sufficient to do justice to the subject. My goal here, however, will be to
elucidate the *formal* role of charity, and to explain how, in Bonaventure’s view, it can be the virtue that ultimately forms all the others.

Although he designates charity as the regulating super-virtue and the capstone of the moral life, Bonaventure’s treatment of charity *qua* regulating virtue is fairly cursory. He explains in abstract terms what charity does, and then moves on to a more detailed discussion of God’s love (which, while interesting, is more suited to a theological work than to the present one.) When it comes to actual description of how charity will manifest itself in an ordinary life, Bonaventure’s treatment offers scant detail.

This is disappointing. In many ways, by withholding these details, Bonaventure has failed to answer the most pressing questions concerning charity. Nonetheless, as I will argue, the theory that he sketches in outline has fascinating ramifications, and great potential to be developed into a comprehensive theory with real explanatory power. To show this, I will begin by discussing in general terms the problem of partiality, and why it poses challenges of one sort or another for every moral theory. Next, I will consider how Bonaventure’s theory deals with this problem. I will conclude by indicating which questions are *not* addressed in the *Commentaries*, and by suggesting some ways in which other, later thinkers have been able to carry the torch passed by Bonaventure, thus filling some of the holes that are left in his account.
**The problem of partiality**

In the lives of normal humans, love never goes out of style, but in the realm of ethical discourse this is not the case. Ethicists of all ages must contend with an apparent tension between two morally significant goals. The first is the need to respect the just claims, as well as the inherent moral worth, of all individuals. In part, this demand is underlined by an intuition that all human beings have an intrinsic value (perhaps even equal value, though I will not here attempt to discern what that might mean, or what the implications would be) and that that value should be acknowledged, regardless of whether or not the person has any further grounds for making claims on others. In addition, though, there might be other legitimate grounds for making claims against others which deserve acknowledgment. The virtue traditionally posited for dealing with such situations is justice.

Justice has an impersonal or anonymous quality to it; this is why, for example, Lady Justice is blindfolded. Since her goal is to consider all legitimate claims and award each his due, the just person tries to avoid being swayed by emotional or affective criteria, searching instead for an impartial standard of value. Justice seeks to escape from the peculiarities of any particular person’s situation, in order to better perceive each thing’s objective worth. And given the size and scale of nations and institutions (perhaps especially modern nations and institutions), this seems like an essential ingredient to a flourishing society.
What can we say, then, of love? Although it certainly seems to be an essential ingredient for a flourishing human life, love may be problematic for the person who strives for impartiality. For most people, close human relationships are one of the primary things that makes life fulfilling and worthwhile. Caring about particular people more than others is not an aberrant human behavior; quite the contrary, it seems essential to conducting normal human affairs and, more generally, living a happy life. We are, as Aristotle famously observed, social animals, built to forge bonds with others of our own kind. To do this, however, we must willingly embrace a kind of partiality. We value our mothers or brothers or friends not merely on the basis of an objective evaluation of their moral worth, but also on the basis of their relationship to us. But, once we come to love particular other people, we naturally wish to promote their welfare. Here the partiality of love can come into tension with the impartiality of justice.

A value theory seeks to answer questions such as: what should I care about? How should I determine my priorities in life? What sorts of things should I work to protect or promote? In answering such questions, a person must decide what role to give to partiality or affective attachments. As a “bottom line”, should I value things according to their objective worth, or should I value them according to the significance that they have to me? Although the overwhelming majority of ethicists would like, at the end of the day, to reap the advantages of both a “partial” and an “impartial” ethical view,

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2 One interesting exploration of this theme can be found in Jonathan Lear’s *Love and Its Place in Nature*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).
it does seem that one or the other must be chosen as a starting place. On the one hand, I might begin by generating criteria or strategies for determining the objective value of things, and then proceed to search for justifications for prioritizing my special relationships. On the other hand, I might begin by affirming the value of my personal relationships, and then seek a way to extend these so as to recognize the just claims of those for whom I have no special feeling.

In modern philosophy, the first of these methods has dominated most ethical discourse. Utilitarianism offers the greatest happiness principle as one objective criterion for determining moral worth; Kant, with his strong emphasis on rational consistency, offers an alternate path to the same larger goal. A few exceptional figures (Frankfurt, for example) have tried to make love a central part of their value theories, but it was especially in the 1980’s that a larger philosophical movement developed, using a “care-oriented” perspective as a standpoint from which to criticize modern value theory.

One of the important figures in this movement was the psychologist Carol Gilligan, whose 1982 book, *In a Different Voice,* opened questions about the moral significance of love and whether it was being culpably neglected. Gilligan set out to explore the relationship between justice and love (or, as she preferred, “care”) which, she claimed, represented two different possible “orientations” towards ethics. Some individuals, she contended, were more inclined to understand ethical issues in terms of justice, while others were

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more concerned with care. Gilligan resisted any attempts to claim superiority for one or the other of these two orientations. Instead she hypothesized that the “justice” and “care” perspectives were effectively just two different construals of the same thing.

Gilligan used the experiments of Gestalt psychologists on perceptual organization as an analogy to illustrate the point, with particular focus on the famous duck-rabbit picture.\(^4\) When shown an ambiguous picture portraying both a duck and a rabbit, different people are inclined to see different things, depending on their personal background and interests. Although the viewer’s reaction might reveal something about his own mental state, neither way of seeing the picture is inherently more right; both shapes can equally be found in the picture. “Thus, a bird-watcher and a rabbit-keeper are likely to see the duck-rabbit figure in different ways; yet this difference does not imply that one way is better or a higher form of perceptual organization.”\(^5\)

Although Gilligan set justice and care side by side as “separate but equal” orientations towards ethics, others were inclined to be more critical of justice-oriented ethical views. Kantian ethics, in particular, came in for much criticism, mainly stemming from the worry that the Kantian’s conception of human goodness has no very clear or direct relationship to human thriving. In the Kantian view, it seems possible for individuals or even whole societies to

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\(^4\) Although there is some controversy about the origins of this test, the first psychologist to actively discuss it in a scholarly work was Joseph Jastrow in his 1900 publication, *Fact and Fable in Psychology*. (Boston; New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1900)

exemplify moral behavior superlatively well without thereby living lives that most of us would regard as happy or meaningful. To the love-oriented theorist, this seems like a rather severe defect. Annette Baier summarizes the point as follows:

The main complaint about the Kantian version of a society with its first virtue justice, construed as respect for equal rights to formal goods such as having contracts kept, due process, equal opportunity including opportunity to participate in political activities leading to policy and law-making, to basic liberties of speech, free association and assembly, religious worship, is that none of these goods do much to ensure that the people who have and mutually respect such rights will have any other relationship to one another than the minimal relationship needed to keep such a ‘civil society’ going. They may well be lonely, driven to suicide, apathetic about their work and about participation in political processes, find their lives meaningless and have no wish to leave offspring to face the same meaningless existence. Their rights, and respect for rights, are compatible with very great misery, and misery whose causes are not just individual misfortunes and psychic sickness, but social and moral impoverishment.6

This is a haunting worry for a society that places a high priority on maintaining the sorts of goods Baier mentions (due process, basic civil liberties, access to the political realm and the opportunity to affect policy-making, etc.); is it possible to achieve all these goods and still be, as Baier puts it, “morally and socially impoverished” either individually or even as a society?

On reflection, it seems likely that this is possible. While on the one hand it does seem right to value fair treatment, civil liberties, respect for human rights and so forth, the fact remains that these are not, for most of us, what makes life both precious and meaningful. If asked to make a list of the things that have made our lives worthwhile, very few would list, “being entitled to due process under the law.” Instead, for most of us, our thoughts would immediately turn to our families and friends, and perhaps other cherished

things such as music, nature, cherished hobbies or professional accomplishments, and so forth. Literature is filled with figures who pursue justice single-mindedly only to find in the end that they have lived small and empty lives (we might think, for example, of Javert in Les Miserables), but it is difficult to imagine a person living a life replete with warm and loving human relationships, and nonetheless being filled with bitter regrets at the end of it.\textsuperscript{7} In other words, it does seem to be our loves, far more than our duties or the structures of a well-ordered society, that can give our lives meaning and worth.

At the extreme end of the justice-and-care debate stand a few theorists who insist that care is itself sufficient for a satisfactory moral theory, and that there is no need to carve out a space for justice. Nel Noddings, an educational theorist inspired by Gilligan’s writings, wrote an essay outlining the ethics of care in which she boldly denied that she had any need to “justify” a care-oriented perspective in terms that a duty-oriented person would accept. “I am not standing alone before some tribunal,” she declared.

\begin{quote}
What I seek is completion in the other -- the sense of being cared-for and, I hope, the renewed commitment of the cared-for to turn about and act as one-caring in the circles and chains within which he is defined. Thus, I am not justified but somehow fulfilled and completed in my own life and in the lives of those I have thus influenced.\textsuperscript{8}
\end{quote}

Although Noddings’ attention to the importance of love might seem laudable, she stands open to criticisms of a different kind. One cannot but wonder whether her single-minded interest in “one-caring” might not be shaken if, say,

\textsuperscript{7} The exception would be if that person had somehow betrayed the people he loved, or been betrayed by them. But that, of course, would only further support the point that his loves were the primary thing that had given his life meaning, such that losing them would be a devastating blow.

\textsuperscript{8} Nel Noddings, “Caring”, from \textit{Justice and Care}. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 22.
a judge in a civil suit were to rule against her as an act of “caring” towards a plaintiff who was closer to him “in the circles and chains within which he is defined.” And although Gilligan’s solution does leave a space for justice, it also seems inadequate to solve the philosophical puzzle. Justice and care may both be important parts of human life and society, but they are very different parts. If society is to survive by balancing “justice people” against “care people”, how are they to understand one another?9

More importantly, however, justice and care are both important, not just to society as a whole, but to every individual person. Gilligan may persuasively argue that particular individuals are more sensitive to one or the other, but in the last analysis we cannot address the philosophical problem simply through a division of roles. This would raise the question: must “care” people be excluded from jobs in law enforcement or politics, lest they inflict egregious injustices on strangers? Must “justice” people be condemned to lives of loneliness and isolation due to their inattention to loving relationships? Gilligan’s work is interesting and provocative, but from a philosophical standpoint, it probably raises more questions than it answers about the relationship between justice and love.

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9 Gilligan does attempt to answer this question in In a Different Voice. Her practical suggestions seem to depend, however, on a high degree of mutual understanding which it might be difficult to develop if human societies are truly bifurcated in such a dramatic way.
Virtue ethics and love

Is there another philosophical approach that can more harmoniously integrate the goods of justice and care? One promising candidate might be contemporary virtue ethics, which is certainly sensitive to the relationship between moral goodness and human thriving. Virtue ethicists such as Michael Stocker, Rosalind Hursthouse and Michael Slote have even transitioned away from Gilligan’s preferred language of “care” and begun talking regularly about “charity”, together with a whole list of other related virtues (courtesy, kindness, consideration, sensitivity, etc.) that seem to fit into the general pattern of valuing goodness and niceness and loving human relationships.\(^\text{10}\) It seems fairly clear that love plays a robust role in virtue ethics. Can we say the same of justice?

Justice is regularly listed among those virtues which the excellent human being will exemplify. Still, there are good reasons to suspect that justice may get the short end of the stick in a contemporary virtue ethics. Given her focus on the virtues as a component of a thriving human life, the virtue ethicist will always find it easier to explain the value of “loving” virtues like kindness and generosity, which seem clearly to enhance personal happiness. Justice, with its demand for objectivity and impartiality, poses more of a challenge for a

\(^{10}\) This is striking because mentions of love and charity are scarce, not only in the works of deontologists or utilitarians, but also in the writings of those thinkers generally acknowledged to be the forebears and founders of virtue ethics -- on the one hand Aristotle, and on the other more modern thinkers such as Elizabeth Anscombe and Philippa Foot. Although Aristotle does discuss such social virtues as friendliness or generosity, charity never makes it into his list of virtues, and Anscombe and Foot (in her early writings at least) tend to focus more on the cardinal virtues, with very little said about love. Foot’s later writings do contain some discussion of charity, but interestingly, this virtue is all but absent in her early writings.
virtue theorist. This may explain why, even without actively striking justice from the lists, many virtue theorists seem content to let it fade into the background as a secondary concern.

Christopher Miles Coope is one thinker who has pressed this criticism, arguing that recent works on virtue ethics have been more and more inclined to ignore justice, making way for ever more demanding portrayals of the virtuous person as a model of generosity and love. In *Modern Virtue Ethics*[^11^], Coope notes three main strategies that have been used to sideline justice. First, its currency can be weakened by inflation, as ever-longer lists of benevolent virtues are produced. When justice slides in unobtrusively between sensitivity and graciousness, it is less likely to be noticed, and concerns about justice begin to seem like a relatively minor aspect of the moral life. This paves the way for the next strategy of discussing injustice by means of laughably trivial examples, such as Christine Swanton’s famous cake-cutting mishap[^12^]. The implication is that justice is primarily the domain of children squabbling over cake, and other such petty questions; morally mature individuals would presumably want to concern themselves with more important matters.

Finally, the scope of justice can be diminished considerably by siphoning much of its traditional ground off into other more love-oriented virtues; instead of being “unjust”, certain heinously wrong actions might be relabeled.


[^12^]: In this example, Swanton’s two sons are sharing a piece of cake, and the older boy cuts the cake carelessly and then takes the larger piece for himself. Cf. *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 244.
an innocent man is “callous” or “cruel”, while failing to honor a promise is “dishonest.” Thus, without actually declassifying justice as a virtue, virtue theorists can simply downplay its significance to the point where it seems a minor part of the moral life.

The tendency of virtue ethicists to downplay justice may be understandable in light of the given to it by rival ethical theories, but Coope’s criticisms still have some force. It seems that virtue ethics has difficulty in accommodating the demands of justice, just as deontology and utilitarianism have difficulty in incorporating love into their theories in a serious way.

None of the above analysis is meant to suggest that modern moral theories are hopeless. All theories have stronger and weaker points, and each of the above-mentioned theories have developed strategies to compensate for apparent weaknesses. Thus, for example, utilitarians recognize that their theory has difficulty justifying special relationships, and that this is a potential problem insofar as such relationships are an important part of human life. This is why utilitarians like Peter Railton have developed “sophisticated utilitarianism”, which is intended to allow for special relationships within a basically utilitarian framework. By the same token, theorists like David Velleman have attempted to develop an account of love on a fundamentally Kantian foundation. And even if Coope is right that many virtue theorists have shied away from a robust treatment of justice, this is not definitive evidence that virtue ethics could not be adapted to meet this demand.
Still, the fact remains that it is difficult for all of these theories to give a full and serious treatment to both partial and impartial goods. This is significant, because there is a need both for partiality and for impartiality within every society or individual life. In general, each ethical theory is well suited to provide one of these, and less well suited to provide the other. Thus, every ethicist faces certain challenges if he is to find a way to incorporate both kinds of good into his moral theory.

The defining role of love in human character

Bonaventure is no exception to this general rule. For Bonaventure, however, charity is the key to his resolution of the tension between justice and love. By placing God at the center of his moral universe, he seeks to find a kind of impartiality through extreme partiality.

Just as the habit of faith habituates the soul to believe everything believable and to assent to the highest truth for its own sake and beyond all other things, so the habit of charity enables it to love everything lovable and attach itself to the highest Good for its own sake and beyond all things.¹³

In this quote, Bonaventure offers two pairings of dispositions and alludes to the intimate connection between God and creation. Faith assents to the highest truth “for its own sake” but also thereby enables the faithful person to explore

¹³ Sicut enim habitus ipsius fidei habilitat animam ad credendum omnia credenda et ad assentendum primae Veritati propter se et super omnia; sic et habitat habitus caritatis ad amandum omnia amanda et adhaerendum primae Bonitati propter se et super omnia (3.27.1.4).
the truth more generally. Likewise, charity attaches itself to the highest good for its own sake, but from this love for God springs a love for everything else that is good. Explaining how this can be so will require some discussion of love and moral psychology.

The comparison to faith may be helpful if we think back to the discussion in chapter five of belief-forming processes. If a teacher or parent wishes to put a child in a good position to discover the truth, she should not simply present him with a list of facts. Rather, she should try to instill in him good methods for discovering things for himself. This might involve learning to look up books in a library, to avoid being influenced by hateful prejudices, to critically analyze arguments that are presented to him, and so forth. In general, though, a person who loves to learn and knows how to do so will discover many important truths, and his life will accordingly be enriched.

As we saw in chapter six, many philosophers (particularly in the early modern era) viewed desire as a more or less uncontrollable component of human nature. Bonaventure would disagree. He regards it as possible to develop and train one’s loves, and to instill good love-forming processes. In this way, a person can reliably love what is good, just as the person with good belief-forming processes will believe what is true.

As a first step to understanding this, consider what one finds looking over a page of personal ads. By way of attracting a compatible match, people will generally list their loves and interests. In part, they presumably hope to find a romantic prospect with matching interests; two people who share a
passion for geocaching or red wine will immediately be able to think of things to do together. Still, someone who is looking for a serious relationship hopefully realizes that such pleasures will not form a very significant component of their shared life, if indeed such a life develops. Such a person might list his loves and interests, not merely in hopes of planning fun activities, but also because he hopes that describing the things he loves will be an effective way of describing himself. Knowing what a person cares about is a significant part of understanding who he is.

In itself, this doesn’t prove very much. A Humean could certainly agree that people’s interests depend in part on what she is exposed to; for example, a person who was taken to the ballpark as a child is more likely to develop an interest in baseball, and a person with musical training is more likely to enjoy opera. A person’s exposure tends to vary according to his education, and according to the culture, subculture or class in which he was raised. Thus, if a person’s key interests are bonzai, classical music and watercolors, I can make some educated guesses about his education and background; likewise if he likes football, pancakes and monster trucks. So even if we agree that a person’s interests are revealing in various ways, this might be nothing more than a statistical correlation reflecting differences in exposure.

Surely, though, there is more to love than this. The associations among loves are complex, but at the same time they are associated in ways that we can recognize and explain. Sometimes the association is merely causal (“my first piano teacher was a nasty piece of work, but she did help me to appreciate
Handel”), but sometimes it goes beyond that, so that the association with one beloved thing is a constitutive part of what makes another lovable. This is obviously true of places or objects with sentimental associations; I might love the campus of my alma mater, my childhood baseball glove, or the smell of the perfume that my mother always wore to church, in a way that is obviously bound up with the pleasant associations these things have for me. For deeply sentimental loves, the pleasant associations might seem to be nearly the whole explanation for the love. The ratty old glove, for example, has little worth in its own right, and is only valuable in virtue of what it represents. The perfume is loved more as an extension of my love for my mother than as a good in itself.

Sometimes, though, a love might be developed through and for another person, while at the same time “holding its own”, as it were, as a valuable thing in itself. As a possible example, consider a father who has a great love of bird watching, and of a particular sort of terrain (swamps and wetlands, say) in which a rich variety of birds can be found. He takes his daughter with him on several bird watching trips, which she initially enjoys mainly as an opportunity to please her father and spend time with him. But eventually, with his help, she too learns to appreciate the beauty of the wetlands and their rich variety of bird life. In time the daughter grows up, and the father passes on, and their happy father-daughter outings are just a memory. But she retains a love of wetlands, which she endeavors to pass on to her own children despite the fact her father is no longer around to participate. She might even say that she wanted to share this good with her children “for his sake.”
What kind of love is this? Obviously, the daughter is not maintaining her hobby merely to please her father, who is no longer around to participate. Further, she does love the bird watching itself; it is not mere filial piety that compels her to continue the custom. On the other hand, her father is more than just the efficient cause of this attachment. Her love for birds is bound up in some way in her love for him, not only for sentimental-type reasons (because she has such happy memories of the time they spent together, etc etc) but also because her father’s great appreciation for birds and wetlands was constitutive of his character in some way, and of a *good* part of his character. Loving him taught her to love wetlands, and loving wetlands is one way that she can continue to love him even after he is gone. Teaching her children this same love can be a kind of legacy or tribute to him, while at the same time enriching their lives for its own sake.

In the above example, a thing is loved both in and through a beloved person, and the association between the two loves confirms and intensifies both. This same effect might be intensified still further when the beloved thing was *created* by a beloved person. A poem, a painting, a quilt, a garden, and a musical composition, are just a few examples of good things that require human makers. When finished, these goods will reflect something of the good of their creators, such that someone who loved the creator could also love the creation with particular intensity, appreciating not only its intrinsic goodness, but also the way in which that goodness is a reflection of the goodness of the beloved creator. So, for example, if my grandmother is a wonderful gardener, I
might love her garden in a special way because she made it, while at the same time loving her in a special way as the sort of person who could create such a beautiful thing.

Bonaventure explains this point with his own example, when he points out that, “the love of friendship, which is in a friend, extends to the child of a friend, such that the child of friend is also a friend, and is loved.” He goes on to explain that, because the friend’s child reflects the image of the friend, our love of our friends will naturally extend to their children. This is a particularly nice illustration of the point, in that the offspring of those we love will reflect their parents both in their physical characteristics and also in those habits and character traits that are acquired from their parents over the course of their upbringing. Both can potentially contribute to the love that parents feel towards their children, but also towards the love that others might extend from parent to child. Needless to say, this will not be a purely instrumental valuing; the child is lovable in his own right, and hopefully his friends relations and will care about him as an individual, and not merely qua offspring of his parents. Nonetheless, his connection to them is neither an incidental feature, nor a merely efficient cause of the love that others feel for him. Especially in the early years, it will probably be those who think of the child as “so-and-so’s son or daughter” who do the most to love and care for him, since it will take some time for the child to develop a well-defined personality of his own.

\[14\] ...amor amicitiae, qui est in amicum, se extendit ad amici filium, ita quod filius amici amicus est et dilectus (3.28.1.1).
If love is more than desire, and is in fact a deep and defining part of our character, then it might be that many or even all of our loves are interconnected through a web of associations. Exploring the nature of these interrelationships in all their complexity would be a momentous task. As a first observation, though, it seems reasonable to suggest that it is our more committed or ardent loves that will define us the most, while lesser attachments will have a less significant effect. Here at last we can see the foundation of the “good love-forming process” that was alluded to above. For a philosopher like Bonaventure, a person’s loves should be organized and structured in accordance with a unified and virtuous character. Just as our beliefs should be oriented towards the truth, our loves should be organized around the good. This will be possible if we have central, defining loves which give meaning to our other, more trivial loves. People who lack any important attachments may try to distract themselves with trivial amusements, and for them their various attachments may not be ordered in a discernible way. Ultimately, though, such people’s lives will be superficial and fairly meaningless. The most virtuous person will be the one who knows what is centrally important, and who enjoys even the unimportant things in a way that both derives from and reflects the central love.

**Charity as unifying virtue**

In light of this discussion, we can now return to the problem of justice and love. As we saw in the last section, there is a tension between these, because
love values something insofar as it is good *to* or *for* me, whereas justice tries to disregard personal interest by way of appreciating the objectively right course of action. Love is important because it endows life with meaning, but justice is needed to prevent people from trampling the rights of others in pursuit of their own interests (and the interests of those that they love.)

What if everyone could love everyone else? Philosophically, this seems to solve the problem. It would make life meaningful for everybody, and at the same time would motivate everyone to respect others’ rights. The problem with this solution is not theoretical, but practical. The world is big and life is short, and human beings have limited cognitive capacities. It would be utterly impossible even to *meet* every person in the world, to say nothing of developing the sort of intimate association that we could fairly term “love.” While we might more plausibly feel a kind of general goodwill towards all fellow human beings, this will not solve the justice/love problem, since it presumably will not be enough to prevent us from prioritizing particular beloved people’s interests over those of strangers.

In Bonaventure’s view, it isn’t necessary to get to know every other human being in order to love them. We only need to know one being: God. This is the central love around which all our other loves should be organized. Love of God is the single disposition that is capable of transforming all others into their perfected forms, since, as he explains, “love is a weight that causes us to
strive towards God, and to rest in God, just as the bodily things through their weight must be situated and established in their own proper place.”

Reflecting on the above discussion of interconnected loves, we can see why love of God is the only disposition that could encompass every other good. We can learn to love good things through a beloved person who loves them, as in the bird watching example. But, since God loves everything that exists, this will give the charitable person a reason for loving everything. Similarly, we can love a thing because it was made by a beloved person. Since God is the Creator of everything, this will lead to a very wide, all-encompassing love of everything that exists. The (apparent) demand of impartiality towards all created goods is met through partiality towards their Creator. That Bonaventure sees the love of God and the love of other human beings as being part of the same disposition is clear when he writes that:

And if it (the movement of charity) is towards one as towards an object and towards the other as towards a final end, then there can be one and the same movement in neighbor and in God. This is clear because through one act of love the neighbor is chosen for God’s sake, and thus there is a single movement combining both.

Thus we can see that, in Bonaventure’s view, there is no necessary tension between the demands of justice and the one, great overarching love that is the unifying feature of all of his moral theory. On the contrary, charity, because it

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15 Ratione finis quietationis: quia, cum amor sit pondus, facit in Deum tendere et in Deo quiescere, sicut corporalia per sua pondera in propriis locis situari habent et stabiliri (3.27.2.1).
16 Si est in unum tanquam in objectum et in alterum tanquam in finem ultimum; sic potest esse unus et idem motus in proximum et in Deum, ut patet, quia uno actu dilectionis diligitur proximus propter Deum, et est ille motus quasi collativus (3.27.2.3).
first embraces the creator and lover of all things, is able to dispose the virtuous person to behave well and justly towards every other person.

This solution shows promise, but it requires considerable development. A moral theory based in the love of God has resources at its disposal for obliging everyone to attend to others’ just claims. Thus, it avoids the worst potential pitfall of a “partial” viewpoint; since everyone is beloved of God, no one can be dismissed as worthless. Even those who appear to do little good in the world are still God’s creatures, who reflect some part of his image. A Christian will therefore be barred from egregious acts of injustice, such as murder or genocide, which are usually justified on the grounds that the victim has no value.\(^\text{17}\)

The tensions between justice and love will not be dispelled so easily, however. It takes considerable wisdom and insight to balance the obligations that we have to friends and family against our obligations to strangers or the world as a whole. Neat theoretical tricks like this one can only serve as a starting point from which a satisfactory solution may be found. Before that potential can be realized, however, we will need to develop a much richer account of the way in which the love of God can give rise to a universal love for all. What kind of love is it that a charitable Christian has towards, say, a stranger on the other side of the world? Once that question has been answered, still more work will be required to see how this kind of love should be balanced against the more particular attachments we have to people (or things) that we

\(^{17}\) This is not to say, obviously, that self-identified Christians may not still be guilty of grave sins. There will always be hypocrites.
love not only for God’s sake, but also for the significant role that they play in our own lives.

Disappointingly, Bonaventure does very little to answer these questions. Having laid the groundwork for a solution, he mostly leaves the development of the project to others. How and why he does this will be the subject of the next section.

Charity in daily life
Charity, understood as a love for God, may successfully accommodate the demands of justice. But does this solution work a little too well? Thus far Bonaventure has discussed how the love for God creates a very general and widespread set of obligations. This is the key to the success of the solution; it does apply to everyone, and thus creates obligations with respect to everyone, as justice demands. But what happens, in that case, to more individual, personal loves? The solution offered may, for example, give me a sufficient reason to love my mother – she is my “neighbor”, created in God’s image, and destined for adoption as a child of God. But this argument would apply equally well to everybody else’s mothers. Have I no legitimate excuse, then, for caring particularly about my own mother’s fortunes, or for making her welfare a special priority of mine?

Bonaventure has suggested a means by which the demands of justice can be reached through love. The effort was impressive, but the victory will be hollow if, in the final analysis, the charitable Christian is plunged into the
same sea of problems faced by utilitarians or Kantians, seeking ways to give
attention to personal loves without violating his more general ethical duties.
The fact that the Christian’s universal love is directed through a person, and
not a rational deduction or utility calculus, may open some avenues to her that
would not be available to the utilitarian or Kantian. But this will only be
possible given a more careful and detailed exploration of the nature of human
love, both for the divine and for other created beings. What is needed is a
phenomenology of human love, which would enable us to explore the
plausibility of Bonaventure’s general theory.

The two sections of the Commentary which look most promising in this
regard are twenty-eight and twenty-nine, both of which deal with natural
objects of love. In Distinction 28, Bonaventure presents us with various objects
and considers whether and why the charitable person would love them. He
speculates as to whether we ought to love animals (yes, because God has
placed them under our stewardship), wicked men and demons (here we must
distinguish between their natures and their attendant defects, loving the
former and hating the latter), our bodies (yes, because they will be perfected
with us in the Resurrection), and non-personal objects (yes, insofar as these
also have final ends). This section does contain some hints and beginnings of a
phenomenology of love; for example, Bonaventure distinguishes between things
that should be loved ex caritate imperante and ex caritate eliciente, thus
indicating that in some cases charity merely commands us to love a particular
thing, whereas in others love should be elicited by the goodness of the thing
itself. However, Bonaventure never develops this concept in a systematic way, and the picture is further complicated by a brief and unheralded mention of natural affection as another relevant phenomenon, whose relationship to charity remains unexplained.\(^\text{18}\)

Distinction 29 deals with the *ordo amoris*, the order of love. This initially looks promising, since the purpose of the *ordo amoris* is to explain the relationships that various loves bear to one another. But unfortunately, this section is sorely lacking in descriptive detail. Charity is described as the “unitive virtue” by which all things are bound together into one, and also as the *pondus inclinans* that weighs the relative value of all things while at the same time drawing the soul back towards God. Again, the strategy is clear, and it is clear that he wishes all loves to relate in some way back to God. But Bonaventure never makes a serious effort to show how our particular commitments (to our own children, friends, spouse, etc.) should be weighed against the objective moral order. The reader is left feeling that a significant part of the project has been left undone.

The best that can be said is that Bonaventure does at least seem to understand that there a place for a phenomenology of natural love, even if he shows little inclination to develop one. His one brief mention of this subject is found in the twenty-ninth distinction, after questions establishing

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\(^{18}\) This occurs in the section concerning love for non-rational beings, which is to say, animals. Bonaventure explains that, in man’s original (prelapsarian) condition, he had a natural affinity for animals, and so, insofar as he moves closer to this condition of natural innocence, a person is liable to regain as well this natural affection. St. Francis is offered as a prime example of this. However, Bonaventure never discusses the relationship of this natural affection to the virtue of charity. See Distinction 28, Article 1, Question 1.
(unsurprisingly) that God must be preferred to all others, and that we ought to value our own salvation above that of others.\footnote{This is itself a provocative point, and one which a utilitarian like John Stuart Mill would not approve. That Bonaventure is thinking along anti-utilitarian lines is even more clear from his development of the point, when he explains that, “Therefore, for the reasons shown it must be concluded that, in the ordering of charity, one’s own salvation must be preferred to that of a neighbor. And a sign of this is that anyone who neglects his own salvation to attend to that of another is blamed, and regarded as stupid. And a further sign of this is that, if a man out of charity ought to love his neighbor as himself, such that they should be in every respect equal, then he ought to love two neighbors twice as much as himself, and three thrice as much, and so it escalates.” \textit{Concedendae sunt igitur rationes ostendentes, quod in ordine caritatis praefertur dilectio sui dilectioni ipsius proximi. Et huius signum est, quia illi reprehenduntur et stulti reputantur, qui salutem propriam negligunt, ut procurent alienam. Huius etiam signum est, quia, si homo ex caritate deberet diligere proximum quantum se ipsum, ita quod esset ibi omnimoda aequalitas, iam duos proximos deberet diligere duplo quam se ipsum, et tres in triplo, et sic ulterius ascendendo (3.29.1.3). Here Bonaventure does seem to see that a universal obligation to all might place intolerable burdens on the individual.}} Next Bonaventure considers whether parents or children ought to be loved more (parents, because we owe them more, although our natural inclination is to bestow more love on our children). Finally, he broaches the question of whether near relations may have preference over strangers. Here we finally see some discussion of the relationship between the natural order of human loves and the objective order of goods that is perceived by charity. What we find is that Bonaventure confirms that there is a natural order of loves, and that it is appropriate for charity to respond to that natural order.

Bonaventure’s views on the subject may best be shown through a particularly revealing objection:

The reason for loving one’s neighbor through charity is that he is in the image of God. Therefore, if a near relation and a stranger are equally in God’s image, it seems that they must be loved equally out of charity.\footnote{Item, ratio diligendi proximum et caritate est ipsa imago Dei; si ergo domesticus et extraneus aequaliter sunt imago Dei, videtur, quod ex caritate aequaliter sunt diligendi (3.28.1.3).}

To this Bonaventure replies that:
To those who object that the reason for loving a neighbor is his image, it should be said that this is the common and general reason, but apart from this there can be other special reasons. This order and distinction, although it can’t be applied to common and general conditions, can nonetheless be applied to special ones. And therefore, although near relations and strangers are uniformly in God’s image, it doesn’t follow that they are to be uniformly loved.\textsuperscript{21}

In further developing this point, he goes on to observe that:

those close to us are loved before foreigners, and this is not a part of a disordered nature, but can rather be a part of the ordering of nature. For, as was mentioned at the first, the right order of diffusion is that common cause should be made first with those close to us, and then with more remote people. Therefore because charity doesn’t remove the right order from nature, so it is that supervening charity completes that order of nature, and is said to be perfected with the same order to be ordered, not because that order must coincide with it for its own sake, but because it coincides with the reason of nature, in which it is.\textsuperscript{22}

Clearly Bonaventure is aware that there is work to be done in juxtaposing the order of charity against the order of natural loves. He sustains the common intuition that we can owe more to intimate acquaintances or family (domestici) and indicates that this is in no way contrary to charity. In fact, Bonaventure clearly sees a deep harmony between natural and supernatural love. Charity should not undo the well-formed dispositions of a well-formed nature; rather, it should complete them.

\textsuperscript{21} Ad illud quod obiicitur, quod ratio diligendi proximum est imago; dicendum, quod ista est ratio communis et generalis, sed praeter hanc possunt esse aliae speciales. Ordo autem et distincto, quamvis non attendatur penes conditiones generales, attendi potest penes speciales. Et propterea, quamvis domesticus et extraneus sint uniformiter ad imaginem Dei, non tamen sequitur, quod sint uniformiter diligendi (3.29.1.6 ad 3).

\textsuperscript{22} Et ideo est alius modus dicendi, quod ordo qui attenditur penes praedictas, non tantum est ipsius caritatis sicut tolerentis, sed etiam est ipsius sicut regulantis naturam et ei consonantis. Quod enim primo diligentur propinqui quam extranei, hoc non est naturae inordinatae, sed potius de ordinatione naturae. Sicut enim prius tactum est, rectus ordo diffusionis est, ut prius communicetur propinquiori et deinde remotori. Quoniam ergo caritas rectum ordinem a natura non aufert; hinc est, quod caritas superveniens illum ordinem naturae perficit, et perficiendo dicitur eodem ordine ordinari, non quia ordo ille competat sibi secundum se, sed quia competit ei ratione naturae, in qua est (3.19.1.6).
This is a deep and provocative thought. Unfortunately, though, this is the last we hear on the subject. The remaining sections are devoted to describing charity in its perfection (which mostly focuses on the relationship between the individual and God) and to discussing the nature of God’s love for creation. Of course, some of this material could contribute to the question at hand, in the context of a lengthy theological discussion. In the end, though, the plain fact seems to be that understanding natural love and its place in the good human life was never high on Bonaventure’s list of priorities. We crave more details on the shape of a good human life, but he never provides them.

Considered in the larger context of his complete corpus of work, we can perhaps understand why this subject would never have occupied a central place in Bonaventure’s thinking. To begin with, throughout his entire life, Bonaventure was intensely concerned about the relationship of the human soul to God. This is the most constant and prominent feature both of his scholarly works and his mystical writings. It is therefore not surprising that he would take the soul’s relationship to God as the starting point of all his moral theorizing, giving natural human love a much less prominent role.

In addition, Bonaventure’s work on charity should be considered within the context of the philosophical problems of his day. His primary concern was to make a space for Aristotelian-type reasoning within a Christian-Augustinian framework. In order to make that possible, charity was needed as a regulating virtue that could hold all other virtues together. Establishing that theoretical framework was, for him, a higher priority than exploring the nuances of human
love on a more ordinary, day to day level. So great was his need for a forest that he had no time for studying trees.

**Looking beyond the Scholastic synthesis**

Having come so far with Bonaventure, it seems unfortunate to end on such an inconclusive note, and yet, this is one of the liabilities of a *Sentences* commentary. Depth is sometimes sacrificed to breadth, and suggestive tidbits are often left underdeveloped as the philosopher continues on through the *Sentences*. Sometimes a thinker may return to these topics later in his scholarly life, and develop them at greater length. Unfortunately, that is not the case here. Although Bonaventure wrote at some length about God’s love, he never returns in a serious way to the issue of natural love, nor does he ever offer significant insight into the way that natural loves might be transformed by supernatural graces.

Even beyond the issue of justice and love, we are left with a host of questions that cannot be answered without a more in-depth treatment of natural love. For example, we might wonder: in what sense can non-Christians love one another, without access to supernatural grace? What remains of a Christian’s loves when charity is lost through mortal sin? What is the process by which charity shapes all other loves around its central goal? Although Bonaventure’s work has opened some promising avenues for further exploration, he has by no means left us with a fully complete and satisfactory moral theory.
It would be wrong, however, to suggest on this basis that Bonaventure’s ethical theory is a failure. Very few moral thinkers manage to answer every important question when setting out their moral philosophy. Occasionally a thinker (Kant, for example) may be commended for the unusual comprehensiveness and consistency of his theory, but even then there are always further important questions to be analyzed and debated. Instead of looking at completeness, then, it might be better to see whether a thinker has contributed to a developing theory in a way that enables future philosophers to carry the project further. Looked at from this perspective, Bonaventure’s success is considerable.

For a systematic treatment of the phenomenology of love, the world would wait a long time. Although love has always been a topic of interest particularly in the Christian world, it wasn’t until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that phenomenologists such as Edmund Husserl became interested in the kind of systematic study of human experience that was suited to complement the medieval virtue theory. Max Scheler famously wrote on the phenomenology of love, and in his wake several Christian scholars realized the potential of this sort of study to augment the medieval picture of Christian-Aristotelian virtue. Among these were such thinkers as Josef Pieper, Karol Wojtyla, and Dietrich von Hildebrand. Von Hildebrand in particular is often cited as having a special affinity with Bonaventure, and his works, especially *The Nature of Love*, offer a thorough and extended exploration of the subject of natural love.
For a student of medieval philosophy, reading von Hildebrand is initially a bit of a shock. One can read all the way through *The Nature of Love* without finding any of the familiar touchstones that undergird the medieval discussion of love; von Hildebrand even manages to devote an entire chapter to the subject of charity without ever mentioning *virtue*. Like the good phenomenologist that he is, he focuses his attention constantly on the phenomenon of human love, describing with painstaking detail the different manifestations of love, its excesses, its costs, and the absolutely central place that it occupies within the life of a human being. Although he does address the subject of love for God, and the transformative effect that it can have on natural human loves, he never engages in the kind of abstract speculation that would treat love as a formal capacity without inquiring into the realities of human experience.

Taking his work as a whole, however, it is evident that he is indebted to the work of thinkers like Bonaventure for describing the virtue of charity in such a way as to make room for the sort of phenomenological study that von Hildebrand undertakes. Had he been writing a millennium earlier, von Hildebrand would have had to contend with the worry that natural love was in tension with supernatural, and that a successful phenomenology of natural love might render God, Gospel and sacraments superfluous. As it was, these questions had already been extensively discussed by the medievals, who had left a wealth of resources for figures like von Hildebrand to find. Born in 1889 and educated both in continental phenomenology and in Catholic thought, he
was able to do his phenomenology of love within a securely-established framework of medieval thought.

Although he rarely discusses them explicitly, we can see the influence of the medievals, and Bonaventure especially, shining through in the Catholic phenomenologists. Unsurprisingly, the place where von Hildebrand leans most explicitly on a Scholastic-type understanding of virtue is in his discussion of charity. And here we encounter once again a familiar topic: the need to balance love against the demands of justice. In particular, von Hildebrand addresses the difference between the charitable person and what he calls a “morally conscious person.”

The charitable person, as in Bonaventure’s view, is the one who loves God above all other things, such that all other loves are somehow connected with or derivative from this central love. The morally conscious person lacks supernatural virtue, but has natural moral virtue, and recognizes the demands of justice such that he deliberately limits his loves in order to avoid offending against the greater moral order. Von Hildebrand tells us that a morally conscious person might very well be willing to risk alienating a beloved person, even if he loves this person very deeply, for the sake of fulfilling a moral demand. Nonetheless, he maintains that there is a tremendous difference between the morally conscious person and the one who has been infused with the divine gift of charity.

We see clearly how this is different from the case of penetrating the natural categories of love with the spirit of caritas. Here the love for God, from which flows the primacy of morality in relation to earthly happiness, does not just stand next to these loves, imposing a limit on their tendencies in the event of a conflict, but here the natural love,
as we see, is penetrated by the love for God and by the holy goodness and kindness of caritas; it is established in the world of God’s holy law, formed from within, so that it takes on an entirely new quality (261). 23

Although he never explains it in these terms, von Hildebrand is clearly thinking here about the capacity of charity to unify all positive dispositions together into a single virtuous character. This eliminates the necessity for “tragic” circumstances wherein a beloved person must be injured in order to meet with the demands of justice. Whereas the morally conscious person must impose limitations on his loves in order to conform with these demands, the charitable person realizes that all good things are united in God. Both his own good, and his beloved’s, are connected to God and to the good as a whole. Injustice separates the beloved person from God, poisoning not only the beloved’s relationship with God, but also her relationship to the lover himself. Thus a truly authentic love would exclude wrongdoing, not merely for justice’s sake, but for the sake of the love itself.

Although the theory is intriguing in its own right, it is mentioned in the context of this discussion for the sake of making a larger point about Bonaventure, and the way in which his ideas were eventually extended through the work of later philosophers. Von Hildebrand, in The Nature of Love and other works, has developed the sort of thorough and sophisticated phenomenology of natural love that was lacking in Bonaventure. At the same time, von Hildebrand is clearly depending on a moral theory very much like Bonaventure’s, in which the virtue of charity is infused into the soul by God, so

23 Dietrich von Hildebrand, The Nature of Love. (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2009).
that the *ordo amoris* can be perceived and embraced. Von Hildebrand makes no effort to create, defend or even explicitly describe such a theory himself, but his reliance on it is obvious in passages such as this.

Looking at the larger picture, it would seem that von Hildebrand’s indebtedness to Scholasticism goes beyond specific passages in which he explicitly references supernatural love. By incorporating natural philosophy into a specifically Christian morality, Scholasticism opened a space for philosophers like von Hildebrand to do phenomenology within the context of a Christian philosophy.

Measured by a standard of fruitfulness, then, Bonaventure’s works was worthwhile. Faced with the immense problem of reconciling the natural and supernatural accounts of human goodness, he was able to bring them together on multiple fronts. He developed an intriguing account of the relationship between the natural and supernatural end. He explained in considerable detail how the mechanisms for acquiring natural and supernatural virtue could work in tandem to inculcate virtuous dispositions. He offered insight into the role Christian hope could play in adding a third dimension to the Aristotelian picture. Finally, he specified the formal role that charity must play in order to give rise to a rich, fulfilling and nuanced moral philosophy.
Appendix A

A Brief Biography of St. Bonaventure

The life of St. Bonaventure can be told briefly, since reliable sources of information about it are relatively few.¹ He was born in 1221 in Bagnorea, a small town perhaps 80 miles north of Rome. He was baptized with his father’s name, Giovanni (and for that reason is occasionally referred to as “John of Fidanza,”²) but he seems to have been better known by the name “Bonaventura” even from childhood. The reasons for this are not entirely clear. One legend holds that the name came from St. Francis himself. When afflicted by a dangerous childhood illness, Bonaventure’s mother brought him to the famous poor man of Assisi, hoping for a miraculous cure. Upon seeing the infant Giovanni, St. Francis cried out with a happy explanation, “O buona ventura!” thus predicting the important role the child would one day play in the Franciscan Order. Although there is some evidence that that story originated in the 15th century, making it unlikely to be literally true, there is still reason to believe that it has some basis in fact. St. Bonaventure himself records, in his Life of St. Francis, that he suffered a

¹ The best account of Bonaventure’s early life can be found in the first chapter of Gilson’s The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure, (Paterson: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1965),1-78.
² According to certain medieval sources, Bonaventure’s father was a physician who served the noble family of Fidanze di Castello. This may be the reason for the occasional addition of “Fidanza” to the name. (Gilson 1965, 1).
grave childhood illness which inspired his mother to implore Francis' aid in curing her son.\(^3\) The boy did indeed make a full recovery, and thus Bonaventure himself was apparently persuaded from a young age that he owed his life to St. Francis, and that it would consequently be fitting for him to devote it to furthering the work of the Friars Minor.

He must have entered the order young, though the precise year is not known. It may have been as early as 1238, or it may have been a few years later, but in any case it must have been before the death of Alexander of Hales in 1245, since it is clear that Bonaventure did study under Alexander, and indeed, was a favorite pupil\(^4\). Presumably Alexander was largely responsible for the young Franciscan’s early grounding in Augustinian philosophy, and his influence was evidently profound, because Bonaventure writes on several occasions of his indebtedness to his great teacher.

Of his education in Aristotelian thought, the details are not known, but several of Aristotle's works were being taught at the University of Paris at the time of Bonaventure’s studies there (the *Organon*, the

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\(^3\) It is uncertain whether the child was in fact brought to the living Francis, or whether his mother appealed for Francis' intercession after the time of his death. The former possibility is by no means unlikely, however, since Bagnoarea is an easy distance from Assisi, and Bonaventure would have been about five years old by the time of Francis' death. Bonaventure himself mentions the incident only in the context of introducing his biography of St. Francis, explaining that he would never have considered himself worthy of documenting the life of such a great man, had he not been obliged to do so, “being moved thereto by the urgent request of our General Chapter, and no less by the devotion which I am bound to bear to this our holy Father, by whose merits and invocation I was (as I well remember), while yet a child, delivered from the jaws of death” (from *The Life of St. Francis*, tr. Henry Edward Manning, 1867, p. 7). The fact that Bonaventure remembers the incident may indicate an actual encounter with the famous saint, which, if it occurred, must have been shortly before Francis' death.

\(^4\) Another legend holds that Alexander was so delighted with the young Bonaventure’s intellect and character that he rhapsodized, “In him, Adam seems not to have sinned.”
Physics and also the Metaphysics), and Bonaventure may also have attended some of the lectures of Albert the Great, who taught at Paris between 1245 and 1248. In any case, the works of Aristotle would certainly have been much discussed in the University of Paris at that time. But however he came by it, Bonaventure’s training in Aristotelian thought was obviously fairly extensive. His Commentaries show the thinking of a scholar exposed to Aristotle from his early years, and he must have had a thorough grounding in Greek philosophy before they were finished sometime around 1250 or 1251.

The progress of his academic career was hindered by political tensions not of his own making. Bonaventure was given a license to teach at the University of Paris in 1248. That he was not recognized as a Doctor for nine more years was neither a reflection on his industry nor on his philosophical abilities; rather, it was the result of a political standoff between the university and the Mendicant Orders over issues of authority. The university, as was usual for medieval corporations, considered itself entitled to exercise a considerable amount of discipline over its Doctors and especially Masters (who essentially functioned as apprentices.) But the Mendicants, having taken vows of obedience to their own religious superiors, insisted on viewing the university’s authority as secondary. The antagonism between the two organizations

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5 The conflict began with fairly practical matters, as when, for example, the Mendicants refused to join the university in canceling all lessons as part of a boycott. But it quickly elevated into a battle of theories as non-Mendicant academics began speculating as to whether or not the
moved the university to dig in its heels by refusing to elevate any
Mendicants to the position of Doctor, until at last Pope Alexander IV
intervened on the side of the Mendicant Orders. He commanded that
Thomas Aquinas of the Order of the Preachers, and Bonaventure of the
Friars Minor, should at once be received as Doctors of Theology, and
when this order was backed up by nothing less than a Papal Bull, the
university begrudgingly complied.\textsuperscript{6} The two men were made Doctors
together on October 2, 1257. This effectively marked the end of
Bonaventure’s university career.

The fact was that, in the earlier months of that same year, John of
Parma had chosen to resign his office as the Minister General of the
Friars Minor. When asked to name his successor, the retiring general
named Brother Bonaventure of Bagnorea, a choice that met with
widespread approval. By the time he received his doctorate eight months
later, Bonaventure was already burdened with administrative concerns
that would occupy much of his attention for the rest of his life. He never
taught at the university again, although he still made visits there, and
probably also had a few extended stays. But, whether in Paris or
elsewhere, he certainly continued to write. In the five years following his
election as Minister General he wrote the \textit{Journey of the Mind to God} and

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orders should be part of the university setting, and even whether or not they should exist at all. Naturally this provoked a somewhat more heated controversy, which was no doubt fueled on some level by the awareness that the Church favored the presence of the Mendicants in the universities, and hoped to use them as a tool to help transform this powerful institution into an arm of the Church.
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\textsuperscript{6} For a more detailed discussion of this controversy, see Gilson, p. 9-13.
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his *Life of St. Francis*. Ten years later he wrote his *Collationes* (a collection of Lenten Sermons) and *De decem donis Spiritus sancti*. His *Collationes in Hexaemeron* were finished in 1273. In addition to these major works, he wrote a number of shorter works, including mystical writings, commentaries on Scripture, and treatises concerning the functioning of the Friars Minor. Thus, administrative duties notwithstanding, Bonaventure did manage to author a substantial body of academic and spiritual works. Fifteen years after his departure from the university, his reputation as one of the great minds of the Church had not diminished, but, quite the contrary, was firmly established both within his own order and beyond.  

As so often happens, fame and reputation carried a price. In 1273 Pope Gregory X once again sought to make Bonaventure a Cardinal and Bishop of Albano. He again sought to avoid this office but, for the second time in his life, found the course of his personal career plans firmly settled by a Papal Bull. Accordingly, he relinquished his leadership of the Franciscans in May of 1274 and dutifully donned his red hat.  

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7 Though now treasured in some circles as a spiritual classic, this work is also the source of some controversy, because it represents as well a kind of censorship. In the decades following Francis’ death, disputes about his life and his intentions for the order became so heated among the Franciscans that Bonaventure, as Minister General, finally decided to curb the controversy by writing himself a definitive biography of the great saint. By his orders, all other versions were ordered to be destroyed. Though no doubt frustrating from the standpoint of a historian, the measure seems to have been fairly effective at accomplishing its administrative goal.  


9 Another charming (though likely untrue) legend holds that, when the emissaries from the Vatican arrived to give Bonaventure his red cardinal’s hat, he was busy washing dishes after the evening meal. Seeing their errand, he sighed, and asked them to please just hang the garment on a nearby tree branch while he finished tidying up the kitchen.
happened, however, he was not forced to endure the tedium of this office for long. During that same year, he travelled with Pope Gregory X to the Council of Lyons, where he officially installed Brother Jerome of Asculum as the new Minister General, and addressed the Council concerning the reunion of the Eastern Churches. This was to be his final discourse.

Shortly after the conclusion of the Council, Brother Bonaventure of the Friars Minor became suddenly ill and died. He was buried there at Lyons, in the presence of Gregory X and many other high officials of the Church. His canonization took place on the 14th of July, 1482, and in 1587 he was declared a Doctor of the Universal Church.
Models Evaluated on the Faith Schema

**Epistemic Strength Scale**
- Counts as Knowledge
- Plausible
- Consistent

**Transparency Scale**
- Rationally Demonstrable
- Communicable
- Requires Privileged Knowledge

**Affection Scale**
- God as sole Authority
- God as exclusive teacher
- God as teacher

Plantinga’s Aquinas/Calvin Model
Bonaventure Model

Appendix B


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