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Acquired and Infused Moral Virtue: A Distinction of Ends

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Abstract

There is a danger in separating out just a small portion of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* for a detailed study while neglecting the larger framework from which this section comes. Yet students of Aquinas have failed to recognize the import of Thomas' discussion of ends, both final and proximate, and how these are related to his later discussion of acquired and infused moral virtue and their relation to charity and prudence in the *Prima Secundae* of his *Summa*. In asserting that charity is necessary for all true virtue, the roles of the Church, the state, their members and even the place and role of grace and nature are confused. A proper understanding of the distinction between acquired natural moral virtue and infused moral virtue and their distinct ends assists in a more complete understanding of the position and responsibilities of each of these in building up a more just earthly society and the ultimate attainment of eternal beatitude.

Keywords

acquired, aquinas, charity, infused, prudence, virtue

In the *Prima Secundae* of the *Summa Theologiae*, St. Thomas outlines the principles of the moral life of man. The first part of Thomas' treatment addresses many of the same topics that Aristotle covers in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, treating them within the scope of Sacred Doctrine and thus with the aid of revelation. The preponderance of Thomas' references to Aristotle in these sections seem to be indicative of the authoritative status held by the Philosopher, at least in Thomas' own opinion. Thomas follows the Philosopher in his discussion of the end of man, in the distinction of the internal movements involved in the human act, in some aspects of the judgment of the quality of a moral act and also in the first part of his treatment of virtue, which deals with acquired moral virtue. Thomas' discussion of this topic necessarily parts ways with that of Aristotle when he

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begins to talk of the virtues only known by revelation, namely, the theological virtues and the infused moral virtues.

Thomas' statement that "charity is the mother and root of all virtues in as much as it is the form of them all,"[1] and his further statement that "only the infused virtues are perfect and deserve to be called virtues simply,"[2] seem to obscure the relationship of the enumerated virtues – acquired, infused and theological – at least in the minds of some readers of St. Thomas. Following Jacques Maritain's treatment of the topic in *Science and Wisdom*,[3] Thomas Osborne argues against Brian Shanley, O.P., who reads St. Thomas as saying that there is a middle type of virtue, acquired virtue, apart from grace that is not merely a disposition.[4] In contrast to Shanley's view, Osborne presents the argument that the natural virtues are mere dispositions or even false virtues because of their inability to be connected through charity and prudence.[5] He posits that natural virtues are incapable of ordering man to any further end or ends commensurate with his natural capabilities.[6] Osborne persists in adhering to this position in a further article[7] responding to the criticisms of Angela McKay[8] on the topic of the relationship of acquired virtue, infused virtue, prudence and charity. Osborne's view, however, does not fit with Thomas' obvious reverence for the Aristotelian delineation of the virtues, nor does it comport with a thorough examination of St. Thomas' own treatment of the moral life in the *Summa Theologiae*. Even while affirming that charity informs virtue, Thomas does not negate the existence or proper place of the natural acquired virtues in the life of man.

[1] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 62.4.

[2] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 65.2.

[3] Jacques Maritain, *Science and Wisdom* (London: The Centenary Press, 1944), 145–154. Maritain takes his reading of St. Thomas from John of St. Thomas.

[4] Cf. Brian J. Shanley, OP., "Aquinas on Pagan Virtue" *The Thomist* 63 (1999): 561–562.

[5] Thomas Osborne, Jr., "The Augustinianism of Aquinas' Moral Theory" *The Thomist* 67 (2003): 301. Although Osborne tends to use the terms grace and charity interchangeably, leading to other difficulties, I limit my own argument to defending the legitimacy of the place of the acquired moral virtues in St. Thomas' thought which is related to his discussion of proportionate and proximate ends, and to showing that in Thomas' thought acquired prudence does not depend on charity. Unfortunately, I am unable to examine fully the other large issue Osborne raises concerning the relationship of grace, charity, the acquired and infused virtues, and the development of each, although this would be fascinating to parse out.

[6] Osborne, 303.

[7] Thomas M. Osborne Jr., "Perfect and Imperfect Virtues in Aquinas" *The Thomist* 71 (2007): 39–64.

[8] Angela McKay, "Prudence and Acquired Moral Virtue" *The Thomist* 69 (2005): 535–55. McKay answers Osborne's problems somewhat indirectly, going to other relevant texts in Thomas' works to prove the authenticity of the acquired virtues, rather than pointing to Osborne's main difficulty regarding due ends.

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Charity as the Form of the Virtues

In question 62 of the *Prima Secundae*, Thomas introduces the theological virtues. These virtues are theological because they are directly infused in man by God, their object is God, and they cannot be known except through Divine Revelation.[9] Thomas points to their preeminence in the moral life, and especially the place of charity, when he states: "all the virtues depend on charity in some way."[10] Charity is the theological virtue that directs the will to the supernatural end of man by "a certain spiritual union, whereby the man is, so to speak, transformed into that end . . . for the appetite of a thing is moved and tends towards its connatural end naturally; and this movement is due to a certain conformity of the thing with its end."[11] Charity is that whereby the soul is likened to its end, which is God himself, and it is this likeness that enables the soul to move toward the supernatural end which is above its natural powers.

Thomas explains more fully the primacy of charity among the theological virtues, "In the order of perfection, charity precedes faith and hope: because both faith and hope are quickened by charity, and receive from charity their full complement as virtues. For thus charity is the mother and root of all virtues, inasmuch as it is the form of them all, as we shall state further on (II-II, 23.8)."[12] Charity, because it serves to transform the will, is higher than faith or hope and gives these their efficacy. Moreover, Thomas is intimating an argument he will make explicit later, namely, charity is related to all the virtues as their form.

Charity's relationship to the virtues is further explicated when, in question 65, Thomas speaks of the connection of the virtues. Building on his argument in the first article in this question, which discusses the unity of the acquired moral virtues in prudence, Thomas looks at the role of charity in uniting the virtues. He explains that in contradistinction to the acquired moral virtues, only the infused moral virtues "produce good works in proportion to a supernatural last end, thus they have the character of virtue truly and perfectly; and cannot be acquired by human acts."[13] He continues,

> Such like moral virtues cannot be without charity. For it has been stated above (I-II, 65.1; I-II, 58.4, 5) that the other moral virtues cannot be with prudence; and that prudence cannot be without the moral virtues, because these latter make man well disposed to certain ends, which are the starting-point of the procedure of prudence. Now for prudence to

[9] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 62.1.
[10] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 62.2.
[11] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 62.3.
[12] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 62.4.
[13] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 65.2.

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> proceed aright, it is much more necessary that man be well disposed toward his ultimate end, which is the effect of charity, than that he be well disposed in respect of other ends, which is the effect of moral virtue . . . It is therefore evident that neither can infused prudence be without charity; nor consequently the other moral virtues, since they cannot be without prudence.[14]

Thus, Thomas argues that the infused moral virtues are connected in infused prudence by means of charity, which orders man to his last end. In the case of infused prudence, charity is what makes man well disposed toward the end to which all his actions are to be directed. In this way, the virtue of infused prudence relies on charity in the direction of man's acts, as acquired prudence relies on the acquired moral virtues in the natural realm. Prudence unites the virtues in the natural realm as they depend on it and it depends on them; in the supernatural realm, infused prudence is directed by charity and directs all the other infused virtues.

The Acquired Virtues and a Distinction of Ends

The discussion of the connection of the infused moral virtues in charity leads Thomas to make a distinction concerning acquired virtues and infused virtues in light of their respective ends. In the same article Thomas makes a claim that is the subject of much misunderstanding:

> It is therefore clear from what has been said that only the infused virtues are perfect, and deserve to be called virtues simply (*simpliciter*): since they direct man well to the ultimate end. But the other virtues, those, namely, that are acquired, are virtues in a restricted sense (*secundum quid*) but not simply: for they direct man well in respect of the last end in some particular genus of action, but not in respect of the last end simply.[15]

This statement is where Osborne's diminished view of the natural acquired virtues takes root,[16] following Maritain.[17] Maritain explains the problem succinctly: "The natural virtues are indeed connected in prudence but prudence concerns the order of means to the end and presupposes rectitude in willing the end. And in the actual state of our nature it is not a *virtus simpliciter*, virtue purely and simply. It only realizes the notion of virtue completely with charity."[18] Maritain then proceeds to delineate what he argues is the meaning of virtue

[14] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 65.2.

[15] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 65.2.

[16] cf. "Perfect and Imperfect Virtues in Aquinas", 43–45; and "The Augustinianism of Aquinas' Moral Theory," 296–297.

[17] cf. Maritain, 145.

[18] Maritain, 148.

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secundum quid. "It is 'a certain inclination (due to nature or habit) to carry out some work which belongs of itself to the category of that which is good.' On the other hand, virtue in the perfect sense of the word is: 'a firm and stable quality which inclines of itself to the doing of a good work in a good way.'"[19] So Maritain sees the virtues *secundum quid* as being only a habit to do a good work, not a good action that by being done well makes the agent good.

Osborne's position is more nuanced than that of Maritain, although he comes to the same conclusion. Against Shanley's reading of St. Thomas, that pagans have possessed acquired virtues, connected to each other through prudence and thus in a sense perfect, even though these virtues do not direct them to the last end *simpliciter*, Osborne argues that nothing can be ordered naturally without being further ordered to the supernatural end. He explains:

> According to Shanley, the moral virtues that are acquired by the pagans are imperfect in the sense that they do not direct someone towards the last end simpliciter (a. 2), but perfect in the sense that they are connected through prudence (a. 1). Consequently, when in the beginning of article 2 Thomas says that the acquired moral virtues existed in many pagans (in multis gentilibus), Shanley understands him to say that many pagans possessed moral virtues that were connected with each other. In contrast, Maritain and John of St. Thomas argue that in the state of fallen nature there can be no ordering to the natural end without an ordering to the supernatural end. Consequently, although acquired and infused prudence are distinct, there cannot even be perfect acquired prudence in an individual who does not have the infused virtues and whose actions are not ordered to his supernatural end. Moreover, without perfect acquired prudence it is impossible fully to possess the other acquired moral virtues. Therefore, without charity there is no prudence and the moral virtues are not connected.[20]

Here Osborne, at least implicitly, denies the legitimacy of any proportionate proximate end of man, as he logically leaps over due ends to a natural final end being the object of all acquired virtue. It is this lack of consideration of proximate ends proportionate to man's nature that causes his misreading of St. Thomas and ultimately leads him to hold the futility of acquired virtue in actually making man good in some respect.[21]

[19] Maritain, 149.

[20] "The Augustinianism of Thomas Aquinas' Moral Theory," 292.

[21] Cf. "Perfect and Imperfect Virtues in Aquinas," 48: "The distinction between the acquired virtue of someone who lacks charity and the perfect acquired virtue of someone who has charity rests on the distinction between virtuous acts that are referable to the ultimate end but are not so referred, and the same acts that are referred to the ultimate end. An 'imperfect' virtue in this context is a virtue according to which a bad agent performs good acts. This virtue is neither a mere bodily disposition nor a moral virtue that is connected to all the other virtues through prudence."

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Thomas' view of his own statement might be construed differently, however, while not discounting the tension it raises. In question 61 of the *Prima Secundae*, which discusses the designation "principle" as applied to the cardinal virtues, Thomas states, "When we speak of virtue simply, we are understood to speak of human virtue. Now human virtue, as stated above is one that answers to the perfect idea of virtue, which requires rectitude of the appetite: for such like virtue not only confers the faculty of doing well, but also causes the good deed done."[22] This statement of St. Thomas shows that it is not likely Thomas relegates the acquired moral virtues to the status of a mere inclination when he compares the two species of virtue in 65.2. The cardinal virtues, or human virtues as Thomas also calls them here, are those which are recognized as virtue from a human standpoint, as the infused and theological virtues are known only through revelation.

To help clarify the distinction, Thomas points to the realm of action proper to the acquired virtues. In speaking of the different manners of existence of the cardinal virtues, Thomas explains the place of these virtues that are in man by nature. He says, "Again since man by his nature is a social animal, these virtues, in so far as they are in him according to the condition of his nature, are called social virtues; since it is by reason of them that man behaves himself well in the conduct of human affairs. It is in this sense that we have been speaking of these virtues until now."[23] In this way, he affirms the lowest level of true virtue that can be had in man in contrast to perfecting and perfect virtue, which relate man to God as his supernatural end.[24] This human or social virtue is the type of virtue Thomas has been expositing up until this point in questions 55–61. As human virtues, they speak to what man can do by nature to order himself according to reason.[25] The distinction here between inclination and a true virtue that Maritain and Osborne both see, but do not quite understand is a distinction in the degree of human virtues, rather than a distinction in kind as is seen in the supernatural and natural virtues.[26]

This ordering of human acts by reason through virtue recalls the discussion of happiness and ends found at the beginning of the *Prima Secundae*. Thomas shows that man's last end, to which all his acts are ordered, is happiness which as man's perfection is an operation in which the powers of his soul are actualized. This happiness consists most perfectly in knowing the Divine Essence, as Thomas explains:

[22] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 61.1.
[23] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 61.5.
[24] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 61.5.
[25] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 63.2.
[26] Shanley and McKay do not make these distinct distinctions explicit either, as both speak of three grades or levels of virtue.

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> Final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence. To make this clear, two points must be observed. First, that man is not perfectly happy, so long as something remains for him to desire and seek: secondly that the perfection of any power is determined by the nature of its object. Now the object of the intellect is *what a thing is, i.e.*, the essence of a thing, according to *De Anima* iii. 6. Wherefore the intellect attains perfection, in so far as it knows the essence of a thing.[27]

Thomas proceeds to explain that the intellect moves from knowing the essence of the effect to the essence of the cause, and if the essence of a cause remains unknown, the intellect remains imperfect. In this way, it can be seen that God is the ultimate object of the intellect.

Thomas does not stop with this observation, however, but delineates another type of happiness. In his treatment of happiness in question 5, Thomas makes a distinction between perfect and imperfect happiness. Perfect happiness is the attainment of the perfect good, that is, the vision of the Divine Essence. It can only be had by a kind of participation in this life through the virtue of hope, and it is attained fully only in eternal life.[28] In contrast to this perfect happiness, Thomas distinguishes imperfect happiness thus: "Imperfect happiness that can be had in this life, can be acquired by man by his natural powers, in the same way as virtue in whose operation it consists."[29] Imperfect happiness, then, is the life of one who has the acquired moral virtues.[30] Thomas specifically connects virtue to the attainment of happiness, both perfect and imperfect. He says:

> Man is perfected by virtue, for those actions whereby he is directed toward happiness, as was explained above (I-II, 5.7). Now happiness is twofold, as was also stated above (I-II, 5.5). One is proportionate to human nature, a happiness, to wit, which man can obtain by means of his natural principles. The other is a happiness surpassing man's nature, and which man can attain by the power of God alone.[31]

This imperfect happiness cannot be conflated with perfect happiness, nor is it a substitute for perfect happiness and man's final end as it is not the full perfection of man.

The distinction between perfect and imperfect happiness also helps to clarify a flaw in Osborne's account of virtue. For Osborne, man ordered to anything less than supernatural beatitude is disordered and

[27] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 3.8.
[28] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 5.3.
[29] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 5.5.
[30] cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 55.1: "Virtue denotes a certain perfection of a power. Now a thing's perfection is considered chiefly in regard to its end. But the end of power is act. Wherefore the power is said to be perfect, according to as is it determinate to act."
[31] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II 62.1.

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so does not possess true virtue. In contrast, Thomas is affirming the ordering of acquired virtue to a true but imperfect happiness. This kind of misreading is in large part due to an isolated reading of Thomas' account of virtue separate from his account of happiness and his entire cosmological teleology. In this way, Osborne is able to specifically reject Shanley's explanation of Thomas' account regarding the end of acquired virtue. Shanley explains Thomas' position on the last end of man in relation to acquired political virtue:

> While the *bonum commune* is a truly human good whose pursuit by the will offers the prospect of a life of virtue, it is not the ultimate end of human nature. The will is ordered to the *bonum universale et infinitum*. To know and love God is the *ultimus finis* of human nature. Only the beatific vision can satisfy human nature. Hence the fundamental moral imperative is rectification of the will with respect to God; this is the precondition for complete moral virtue.[32]

While not denying the primacy and singleness of the last end of man, Shanley affirms acquired virtue as accomplishing a true good in a certain respect. This supports Thomas' division of perfect and imperfect happiness by giving the latter more clear content.

Osborne discards this view on the grounds that Thomas had a much broader view of the common good and political life than is generally held now. He says:

> Although Thomas distinguishes between the supernatural end of man and the political common good, he does not think that they are independent. The pagans were able to perform some good political acts. The issue is whether without charity someone can acquire moral habits that are the same as the acquired virtues possessed by someone who is correctly ordered to God.[33]

While reaffirming Osborne's main contention (which has not yet been answered), this statement in no way counters Shanley's assertion. Thomas does indeed see the common good of the political community as ultimately being orderable to the supernatural end of man, which is God. This, however, does not mean that each individual man, ordered to the common good by acquired virtue and thus to imperfect happiness, is ordered also and at the same time to his own supernatural end through charity. The two realms of acquired and infused virtue direct man to distinct ends. The acquired virtues can only direct man in reference to proximate proportionate ends and imperfect happiness, while the infused virtues guided by charity direct him to perfect happiness in supernatural beatitude.[34]

[32] Shanley, 567, referencing *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 1.8; 2.8; 3.8.

[33] Osborne, "The Augustinianism of Thomas Aquinas' Moral Theory", 290–291.

[34] I do not mean to claim here that these two are not related in a sense, but only to emphasize that acquired natural virtue has a sphere of action that is proper to it.

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Thomas' question on charity in the *Secunda Secundae* sheds more light on the issue of acquired virtue and infused virtue and the ends toward which each is directed. Here Thomas more fully explicates what he means when he says charity unites by transforming one into the end[35] by explaining charity itself. He shows that charity is "the friendship of man for God"[36] and extends from this friendship to those whom God loves because God loves them.[37] It is a movement of the soul whose principle is both the human agent and the Holy Spirit without the habit of any other virtue.[38] Thomas reasserts his earlier statement concerning the dependence of the other virtues on charity:[39] "Charity is included in the definition of every virtue, not as being essentially every virtue, but every virtue depends on it in a way."[40]

These statements concerning charity are clarified in the eighth article of the same question, where Thomas shows that charity is the form of all the virtues. He explains,

> In morals, the form of an act is taken chiefly from the end. The reason of this is that the principle of moral acts is the will, whose object and form, so to speak, are the end. Now the form of an act always follows from the form of the agent. Consequently in morals, that which gives an act its order to the end, must needs give the act its form. Now it is evident in accordance with what has been said that it is charity which directs the acts of all the other virtues to the last end, and which, consequently, also gives the form to all the other acts of virtue: it is precisely in this sense that charity is called the form of the virtues, for these are called virtues in relation to "informed" acts.[41]

Because the will has a certain similitude to that toward which it tends,[42] and charity is said to transform the will to the final end,[43] the will, which is the principle of moral acts, takes its form from the end, that is charity. And thus, because charity is the form of the will and the act takes its form from the form of the agent, the acts performed by the will possessing charity are themselves informed by charity. The good acts informed by charity that man performs thus are virtues in that they effectively dispose man well to his final end.[44]

[35] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 62.3.
[36] *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 23.1.
[37] *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 23.1.
[38] *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 23.2.
[39] cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 65.2.
[40] *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 23.4.
[41] *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 23.8.
[42] cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 8.1: "Now every inclination is to something like and suitable to the thing inclined."
[43] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 62.3.
[44] cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 49.4: "Habit implies a disposition in relation to a thing's nature, and to its operation or end, by reason of which disposition a thing is well or ill

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The replies to the objections in this article further clarify the place of charity. In these replies, Thomas explains that charity is not the form in that it is exemplar or essential cause of the other virtues, "but rather by way of efficient cause."[45] Charity causes the infused virtues to be meritorious and thus to attain the goal of the beatific vision. Thomas also says, "Charity is compared to the foundation or root in so far as all the other virtues draw their sustenance and nourishment therefrom."[46] And further, "Charity is said to be the end of the virtues because it directs all other virtues to its own end."[47] Charity's place in the moral life is that it gives the infused virtues the ability to be meritorious.[48]

After discovering specifically the role of charity in the infused virtues, the place of the acquired virtues is more clearly ascertained. Thomas devotes almost an entire article to this topic in the question on charity, where he ties together the notions of virtue, proximate and final ends and the good.[49] Thomas begins with a reminder that virtue concerns the good, which has the character of an end. He explains that as ends can be divided into proximate particular ends and the final end, so good can be divided. While man's final end is God, to whom man is ordered by charity, Thomas distinguishes two different ideas of proximate proportionate goods and ends. He explains: "Man's secondary and, as it were, particular good may be twofold: one is truly good, because considered in itself it can be directed to the principle good, which is the last end; while the other is good apparently and not truly, because it leads us away from the final good."[50] A true proportionate good of man is that which can ultimately be referred to the final good of man, anything else is only an apparent good, not a true good, and so cannot have true virtue ordered to it.

In light of these distinctions, Thomas is able to reaffirm and further clarify the statement he made earlier concerning virtue *simpliciter*, as well. He states: "Accordingly, it is evident that simply true virtue is that which is directed to man's principle good; thus also the philosopher says (Physics vii) that *virtue is the disposition of a perfect thing*

disposed thereto." and *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 55.4: "virtue is a habit which is always referred to good."

[45] *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 23.8.

[46] *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 23.8.

[47] *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 23.8.

[48] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 114.4: "Human acts have the nature of merit from two causes: first and chiefly from Divine ordination inasmuch as acts are said to merit the good which is Divinely ordained. Secondly, on the part of free will, inasmuch as man, more than other creatures, has the power of voluntary acts by acting of himself. And in both these ways does merit rest chiefly with charity."

[49] *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 23.7.

[50] *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 23.7.

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to that which is best: and in this way no true virtue is possible without charity."[51] Yet, even while asserting the primacy of the infused virtues informed by charity, Thomas does not ignore the acquired moral virtues. He says, "If, however, we take virtue as being ordered to some particular end, then we may speak of virtue being where there is no charity, in so far as it is directed to some particular good."[52] He continues, recalling the dissimilarity between true goods and apparent goods: "But if this particular good is not a true but an apparent good, it is not a true virtue that is ordered to such a good but a counterfeit virtue."[53] True but imperfect virtue orders man to a true good that is not his ultimate end. Thomas explains this point, contrasting it with the false virtue ordered to a false good: "If, on the other hand, this particular good would be a true good, for instance the welfare of the state, or the like, it will indeed be a true virtue, imperfect, however, unless it be referred to the final and perfect good."[54] He concludes, "Accordingly no strictly true virtue is possible without charity."[55] This article thus upholds and clarifies the distinction made in question 65 article 2 of the *Prima Secundae*. Virtue *secundum quid* is virtue with reference to a proximate particular good, a proximate particular end, which is not further ordered to the ultimate good, the final end, but is not opposed to a further ordering to the ultimate end through charity. The acquired natural virtues, while not able to bring man to his final end, still perfect man in a certain respect according to his nature and thus with reference to a proximate and proportionate good.

To answer the objections of Osborne and Maritain, however, it is not enough to know Thomas' definition of virtue *secundum quid*, but also whether or not Thomas thinks it is possible for man to attain it; as Osborne makes clear he is not addressing a purely hypothetical question.[56] It appears that Thomas does believe it is possible to possess virtue *secundum quid*. He states, "Human virtue directed to the good which is defined according to the rule of human reason can be caused by human acts: inasmuch as such acts proceed from reason, by whose power and rule the aforesaid good is established."[57] This virtue is not a mere isolated act, but one that actually makes man good, as Thomas has already affirmed in the same article.[58] Furthermore, Thomas actually believed that some had managed to

[51] *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 23.7.
[52] *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 23.7.
[53] *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 23.7.
[54] *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 23.7.
[55] *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 23.7.
[56] "The Augustinianism of Thomas Aquinas' Moral Theory", 284.
[57] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 63.2.
[58] cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 63.2: "man's virtue perfects him in relation to the good".

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acquire this virtue. He says, "It is possible by means of human works to acquire moral virtues insofar as they produce good works that are directed to an end not surpassing the natural power of man: and when they are acquired thus they can be without charity, even as they were in many of the Gentiles."[59] It seems then that Thomas did believe not only that it is possible to acquire the natural moral virtues, virtues *secundum quid*, but also that there have been some who have possessed these virtues.

The Connection of the Virtues in Prudence and Charity

It is now necessary to answer the specific objection of Maritain and Osborne, namely that there can be no true prudence without charity.[60] Osborne's interlocutors, McKay and Shanley, counter Osborne's position by pointing to three distinctions within Thomas' usage of moral virtue: the infused moral virtues, which are true virtues *simpliciter*, the acquired moral virtues, which are true virtues *secundum quid*, and mere dispostions or habits to individual virtuous acts, which are not true virtue at all, but false virtue.[61] McKay and Shanley utilize these three distinctions within Thomas' treatment of virtue to show that Maritain and Osborne are conflating Thomas' distinct virtue *secundum quid* and false virtue. They observe that, although Thomas does not make a clear distinction between perfect and imperfect virtue in speaking of the acquired virtues in article 1 of question 65 and perfect and imperfect virtue concerning their relationship to charity in article 2 of the same question, the threefold distinction he makes elsewhere should lead to the realization that the virtues *secundum quid* are not the imperfect virtues of the first article.[62] This distinction, while helpful in proving that Thomas does maintain the place of the natural acquired virtues, does not specifically answer the objection concerning prudence.[63]

As Osborne and Maritain rightly note, for Thomas, prudence is key in the connection of the virtues. Thomas explains:

[59] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 65.2.

[60] This is the position Osborne finally argues, however, his thesis statement is more general, arguing that the natural acquired virtues cannot be had together, and thus prudence cannot be had without an unspecified grace. This thesis is actually corroborated by Thomas' argument in *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 109, if Osborne means grace and not charity specifically, as his later argument suggests.

[61] cf. Shanley, 562–563; McKay, 537–538.

[62] McKay, 536; Shanley, 563.

[63] McKay does answer the specific objection regarding prudence in the third part of her essay using the *Secunda Secundae*, however there is a more proximate text that answers the question sufficiently, once the main difficulty of ends is clarified.

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> No moral virtue can be without prudence since it is proper to moral virtue to make a right choice, for it is an elective habit. Now right choice requires not only inclination to a due end, which inclination is a direct outcome of moral virtue, but also a correct choice of things conducive to the end, which choice is made by prudence that counsels, judges and commands in those things that are directed to the end. In like manner one cannot have prudence unless one has the moral virtues: since prudence is *right reason about things to be done* and the starting-point of reason is the end of the thing to be done, to which end man is rightly disposed by moral virtue. Hence just as we cannot have speculative science unless we have understanding of the first principles, so neither can we have prudence without the moral virtues: and it follows from this clearly that the moral virtues are connected with one another.[64]

Thomas is saying that one cannot make a correct choice concerning what is to be done without a proclivity to a due end and the proper understanding concerning the means to the due end. The propensity to the due end is supplied by the moral virtues, which make the agent good and so, in a way, similar to a due end which is his perfection in some aspect.[65] Thomas does not say that the moral virtues have to direct man to his ultimate end, but only to a due or proportionate end. This comports with the above argument concerning the sphere of operation of the virtues *secundum quid*: the acquired moral virtues are capable of directing man to a proximate natural end, which does not substitute for the ultimate supernatural end, nor is it necessarily opposed to it. From this it can be seen that the natural acquired virtues and prudence develop together in perfecting man in reference to some proper, but not the ultimate, end of man.[66]

As Osborne seems to deny any proximate end in the life of man not further ordered through charity, his view conflates the manner in which prudence connects the acquired virtues and charity and prudence connect the infused moral virtues. However, Thomas' argument about how charity works to connect the infused virtues maintains a distinction between infused and acquired virtue that cannot be held without holding distinct ends for each species of virtue:[67]

[64] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 65.1.

[65] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 5.4, 5.

[66] Here Osborne is correct in thinking that this perfecting of man is only imperfect, because it cannot lead man to his ultimate perfection or perfect happiness, but only imperfect happiness. It is not correct, however, to say that these virtues are imperfect in the sense that they are merely inclinations to do what is good.

[67] I do not mean to say that somehow the proximate end is not further ordered to the supernatural end in one with charity, but only that it does not have to be further ordered to make it a true good, as Thomas himself says in *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 23.7.

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> In so far as [virtues] produce good works in proportion to a supernatural last end, thus they have the character of virtue, truly and perfectly; and cannot be acquired by human acts, but are infused by God. Such like virtues cannot be without charity. For it has been stated above (I-II, 65.1; 58.4, 5) that the other moral virtues cannot be without prudence; and that prudence cannot be without the moral virtues because these latter make man well disposed to certain ends, which are the starting point of the procedure of prudence. Now for prudence to proceed aright, it is much more necessary that man be well disposed toward his ultimate end, which is the effect of charity, than that he be well disposed in respect of other ends, which is the effect of moral virtue: just as in speculative matters right reason has the greatest need of the first indemonstrable principle, that *contradictories cannot both be true at the same time*. It is therefore evident that neither can infused prudence be without charity; nor, consequently, the other moral virtues, since they cannot be without prudence.[68]

Thomas explains that in the infused virtues charity is that which inclines man to the ultimate and supernatural end, whereas in the previous article he explained that the moral virtues are what inclines man to his due end in the realm of the acquired virtues. He distinguishes between these principles to show that the place that the moral virtues had in regard to prudence in the sphere of the acquired virtues, virtues *secundum quid*, is the place that charity holds in the sphere of the infused virtues, virtues *simpliciter*. In the case of the acquired moral virtues, acquired prudence relies on the inclination to the due end given by the acquired moral virtues to choose the proper means to the due end, and thus the acquired virtues develop together. In the case of the infused virtues, infused prudence relies on charity to give the inclination to the due end. The other infused moral virtues rely on both charity to give the inclination to the due end and prudence to determine the means to the due end and are thus connected through charity and infused prudence.

Osborne's argument, positing that the acquired moral virtues cannot be without charity because prudence depends on charity, misconstrues a few key facets of Thomas' argument. He conflates the place of the acquired and infused virtues, not realizing, perhaps, that what most separates them in Thomas' mind is the inclination to the end.[69] If Osborne had kept the distinction of ends clear, he might not have made his second mistake, which directly concerns prudence. Thomas unambiguously distinguishes the relationship of acquired prudence and the acquired moral virtues and infused prudence, charity, and the infused moral virtues. For Osborne, charity is the only principle

[68] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 65.2.

[69] cf. *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 23.7: "If, on the other hand, this particular good be a true good, for instance the welfare of the state, or the like, it will indeed be a true virtue, imperfect, however, unless it be referred to the final and perfect good."

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that can direct prudence, because it is the only principle capable of leading man to his ultimate end.[70] For Thomas, however, acquired prudence necessarily has its own place in the life of man, directing the actions of the acquired virtues in their proper spheres. The collapse of this distinction, as Osborne has accomplished, leads to a confusion of the natural and supernatural realms. Without a clear distinction, men come to expect natural virtue to attain supernatural ends, or supernatural virtue to supply for what should be done by nature.

Thomas, however, makes a distinction between natural due ends and the ultimate end of man. Virtue *secundum quid* is directed to an end that does not exceed man's nature, and this is the end toward which acquired moral virtue is capable of directing man. In this sphere, acquired prudence assists man in choosing the proper means toward the natural end to which he is already inclined through the practice of acquired moral virtues. Thus, while acquired and infused prudence both direct the acts of the respective virtues which they connect, they rely on different principles for their own inclination to their respective ends.

Conclusion

Without a proper distinction between natural and supernatural virtue it is difficult to sustain the necessary distinction between the natural and the supernatural in the practical order. Requiring charity for the possession of natural acquired virtue collapses the necessary distinction between the natural and supernatural realms resulting in other difficulties on personal and societal levels. On the personal level, the real necessity of charity for salvation could be easily forgotten if persons display an abundance of true natural virtue, or even the mere inclination to virtue. Being a good person is not enough to attain a supernatural end, only a limited natural one. Conversely, an individual with a great deal of charity, but without the requisite acquired virtue might be thought fit for a position requiring a superlative amount of natural virtue. Not all have the ability to lead and direct others successfully, and the infusion of charity does not change this in itself.

Virtue also has a role on the societal level, as Shanely implied in the case of acquired virtue by calling it political virtue. On this level, too, the distinction between natural and supernatural must be made. Human societies and institutions cannot be held to the level of perfection that is required of individuals gifted with charity. Societies and institutions do not have as their goal the eternal salvation of man, nor can they bring about an approximation of paradise on earth. The

[70] "Perfect and Imperfect Virtues in Aquinas", 48; "The Augustinianism of Thomas Aquinas' Moral Theory", 301.

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collapse of the distinction between the natural and supernatural, however, leads to impossible expectations for merely human institutions, as they begin to pursue goals that are outside their reach. The distinction also needs to be made for the sake of the supernatural society of the Church. The lack of this proper distinction in the Church leads to an undue focus on natural needs, which, while important are not her primary goal, thus supplanting the fulfillment of spiritual needs, which only the Church can offer.

Clearly, an examination of Thomas' treatment of virtue in the second part of the *Summa Theologiae* shows that he does not negate the place of the acquired natural virtues expounded by Aristotle, nor does he fall prey to the difficulties raised by failing to distinguish the natural and supernatural realms. For Thomas, true and perfect virtue, virtue *simpliciter*, is infused moral virtue which is able to direct man to his final end, the beatific vision, under the direction of infused prudence influenced by the theological virtue of charity. Charity makes these virtues effective and meritorious because it transforms the will of man into the likeness of its own end.

The natural acquired virtues are virtues *secundum quid*. They are directed toward truly human goods and ends which are not opposed to man's final good and end. The virtues *secundum quid* are in no way false virtue or mere dispositions, as is asserted by Maritain and Osborne, but are virtues in a restricted sense because they are not efficacious in directing man to his final and ultimate end, but only to natural ends. These virtues are acquired by man through good acts and simultaneously make man good. The happiness attained by these virtues comports with Thomas' definition of imperfect happiness.

In light of this distinction between natural acquired virtues and the infused moral virtues, the distinction between infused and acquired prudence is more clearly seen, in contrast to the argument set forth by Maritain and Osborne. A close reading of question 65 articles one and two shows that the connection of the virtues in prudence differs between the infused and the acquired virtues. The acquired virtue of prudence finds the rectitude of the will towards the good through the habit and disposition of the moral virtues. Acquired prudence and the acquired moral virtues develop together in their perfection and in the natural perfection of the agent. Infused prudence however, rather than relying on the infused moral virtues, relies on charity with respect to its inclination to its end, and in this way is able to direct the acts of the infused moral virtues.

Osborne, following Maritain, fails to be attentive to the end, and thus departs from St. Thomas, who frequently reminds his readers that the end is the reason for human action. By failing to differentiate the place of virtues *secundum quid* and virtues *simpliciter* through not properly distinguishing the goods and ends attained by each, Maritain and Osborne can more easily misconstrue the relationship

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of charity to acquired virtue, and thus the place of prudence in the life of acquired virtue and the life of grace. In conclusion, the thesis put forth by Maritain and Osborne concerning the relation of prudence, charity and the acquired moral virtues shows a misunderstanding of Thomas' thought, and can lead to more serious confusions of the proper workings of grace and nature.

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