

R E V I E W E S S A Y

The Resurgence of Virtue In
Recent Moral Theology

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THE PROMINENCE OF VIRTUE in the history of Western moral thought is well documented. Virtue played a comparably important role in the history of Catholic moral theology in the Patristic and medieval periods, functioning for instance as the key organizing principle in Thomas Aquinas's *secunda pars* treatment of morality in the *Summa Theologiae*. Yet it is also well documented how this prominence of virtue receded, even if it did not completely disappear, in the late Middle Ages and modernity.¹ In this period in Catholic moral theology, the Tridentine manuals of moral theology continued to pay some attention to the virtues, but their main focus was on law, sin, and conscience, all with an eye toward the sacrament of penance.² With some few exceptions, by the Second Vatican Council there was little focus on virtue in Catholic moral theology, and in Western moral thought in general.³

The Second Vatican Council saw a call for renewal in moral theology, seen especially in the oft-quoted injunction that "special care must be given to the perfection of moral theology."⁴ It is safe to say today, as exemplified by the theme of this volume, that virtue once again plays a prominent role in Catholic moral theology. What accounts for this resurgence in recent Catholic moral theology? Though there have been several prominent broad-stroke historical narratives of the decline of virtue, along with arguments for its return to promi-

¹ The most obvious example of an historical account of such demise is of course Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

² The most famous account of this decline in Catholic moral theology is Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. M.T. Noble (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995).

³ Perhaps the most notable exception is the work of Catholic moral philosopher Josef Pieper, whose books on the theological and cardinal virtues are treasures that anticipate by fifty years later developments in Catholic moral thought.

⁴ *Optatum totius*, no. 16.

nence, this essay is an attempt to narrate and analyze that resurgence itself. What happened after the Second Vatican Council whereby virtue returned to this prominence?

The shift is actually more recent than Vatican II. The initial post-conciliar period of Catholic moral theology, in the 1968-1993 period, largely continued this neglect. Major revisionist textbooks of the period, such as Timothy O'Connell's 1990 *Principles for a Catholic Morality*⁵ or Richard Gula's 1989 *Reason Informed by Faith*,⁶ contain nothing on virtue. None of the Curran and McCormick edited "Readings in Moral Theology" volumes in this period focused on virtue. The 850-page collection of Richard McCormick's classic *Notes on Moral Theology*⁷ from 1965 to 1980 has only two index references to virtue, both of which refer in passing to the work of Frederick Carney, but then go on to talk principles-versus-teleology. Never does McCormick devote even a single section, much less a full *Note*, to the virtues. The same neglect exists in John Finnis' 1983 *Fundamentals of Ethics*⁸ and Germain Grisez' 1983 *Way of the Lord Jesus Vol. I: Christian Moral Principles*.⁹

Notably, however, more authors begin to recognize the role of virtue into the 1990's. Timothy O'Connell integrates virtue into his 1998 *Making Disciples*.¹⁰ Curran describes the place of virtue in his 1999 overview, *The Catholic Moral Tradition Today*.¹¹ The *Virtue* volume of "Readings" does finally appear in 2011.¹² John Finnis' 1999 *Aquinas: Moral, Political and Legal Theory* contains dozens of references to virtue.¹³ Nonetheless, even in these examples of more frequent mention of virtue, virtue language is incorporated into already existing methodological frameworks rather than being truly foundational. Curran, for example, subordinates virtue to his relationality-responsibility model, emphasizing the way in which virtues

⁵ Timothy O'Connell, *Principles for a Catholic Morality* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1990).

⁶ Richard Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of a Catholic Morality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989).

⁷ Richard McCormick, *Notes on Moral Theology: 1965 Through 1980* (New York: University Press of America, 1980), 117, 760.

⁸ John Finnis, *Fundamentals of Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1983).

⁹ Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus, Vol. I: Christian Moral Principles* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1983).

¹⁰ Timothy O'Connell, *Making Disciples: A Handbook of Christian Moral Formation* (New York: Crossroads, 1998).

¹¹ Charles Curran, *The Catholic Moral Tradition Today* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1999).

¹² Charles Curran and Lisa Fullam, eds., *Virtue: Readings in Moral Theology No. 16* (New York: Paulist Press, 2011).

¹³ John Finnis, *Aquinas: Moral Political and Legal Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

“modify the fundamental orientation of the person” in relation to God, others, and self.¹⁴ While this is an important move, acknowledging the power of recovering this language for a moral description of agency, it does not substantially modify his discussions of norms, principles, and conscience in judging particular actions. The question of whether the recovery of virtue means a major overhaul of the whole methodological apparatus of the discipline remains largely unaddressed in these authors.

Despite this evidence of slow change, virtue has become increasingly central in recent Catholic moral theology. Thus, the purpose of this essay is to trace the unfolding of virtue ethics through a reading of selected important works since the 1970's, explaining in particular how they develop certain key elements for an ethics of virtue in the contemporary setting. The essay is organized into two parts. The first part examines a set of books that are enormously influential in bringing about the resurgence in attention to virtue. Each of these books provides an account of a virtue-centered morality as a whole, rather than analyzing some central topic for a virtue-centered morality. We identified three such books in moral theology, and in each case complemented examination of the book with a roughly contemporaneous (and equally influential) book in moral philosophy. These three sets of two books each unfold in roughly chronological order, and thus we examine them as the “regeneration,” “growth” and “blossoming” of contemporary virtue ethics.

In the second part we continue the metaphor of the first part and examine the “fruit” of the recent resurgence of virtue ethics. Here we examine recent scholarship that examines in great depth one or more topics central to virtue ethics. Despite the chronology suggested by the gardening metaphor, not all of these books examined in section two were published after those examined in section one. What distinguishes those in section two is that they examine some important facet or facets of virtue ethics instead of offering a comprehensive virtue-based account of morality. Rather than attempt to survey all books that make important contributions of this type, we have chosen four books that address topics at the heart of virtue ethics. We also refer to the essays contained in this volume.

In the course of examining the regeneration, growth, blossoming, and fruits of contemporary virtue ethics, certain themes emerged as central for a virtue approach to morality. We offer four such themes as important elements of any contemporary virtue ethics. Each of the following two sections treats its sample of books in a manner attentive to these four themes. First, we identify how the texts argue for and develop a distinctive teleological version of practical reasoning. Virtue ethics differs from typical modern moral theory not simply by

¹⁴ Charles Curran, *The Catholic Moral Tradition Today*, 113.

adding a focus on character, but by challenging the whole pattern of looking at the moral life implied by standard theories of evaluation centered on either (Kantian) rules or (utilitarian) consequences. This difference has multiple ramifications. Identifying the shape of practical reason in a virtue approach to morality is helpful not only for understanding virtue ethics today, but for developing its research agenda for the future.

The second and third themes we consider arise in a manner related to this view of practical reason. For each text, the problem of the relationship between nature and grace is a challenging and important question. Despite the reliance of virtue ethics on classical “pagan” thought, and despite the attention given in this essay to philosophical as well as theological works, an enormously important contribution of recent theological virtue ethics is explaining the resources in a virtue centered morality for better understanding how (natural) human agency and practical reasoning is oriented toward and transformed by the supernatural.

The same may be said for the importance of the place of the agent within moral communities. Recent virtue ethics is attentive to the important role of the historically situated community for the development and exercise of any individual agent’s practical reasoning. Though this is perhaps the least developed of the four themes we identify here, we claim it is indeed as important as the other three.

The fourth element we address here also concerns historical context. Yet rather than addressing the importance of the historically situated community on agents’ practical reasoning, this fourth element concerns the way in which recent virtue ethicists narrate the importance of virtue in their academic disciplines by attending to some small scale or quite commonly broad scale historical narrative of changes in moral thought. It is noteworthy that a number of our texts include broad, historical meta-narratives which are integral to the author’s arguments for an ethics of virtue. And all are particularly sensitive to their contemporary contexts in developing their constructive proposals. In a sense, this attention to history can be seen as related to the distinct view of practical reasoning in virtue ethics, since practical reasoning is not understood as an abstract ahistorical calculus for living the moral life. We also suggest that the attention especially to contemporary context serves notice that the revival of virtue is not a “nostalgia project,” not an attempt to “go back,” but rather a constructive proposal that moves forward by correcting contemporary problems in moral theology.

THE RESURGENCE OF VIRTUE AS METHODOLOGICALLY CENTRAL TO MORALITY

This first part examines three pairs of books unfolding in roughly chronological order over the past several decades. In each pair, there

is one theological and one philosophical book, both offering comprehensive accounts of morality wherein virtue features prominently. The three pairs represent a chronological order but also progression in their explications of a virtue-centered morality. Later pairs reference earlier ones, and the analysis of virtue becomes increasing technical. We represent this progression through the metaphorical terms: regeneration, growth, and blossoming.¹⁵

*The Regeneration of Virtue Ethics:
Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre*

In the United States, it would be hard to imagine the revival of virtue ethics apart from the work of Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre. Their works genuinely pioneered the field. While they are in key part indebted to certain twentieth century philosophical figures, especially Elizabeth Anscombe, their work clearly identifies virtue as a proper response to the impasses of various schools of ethics of the age. Perhaps it is ironic that a Protestant and an atheist (at the time he wrote *After Virtue*) would play such an important role in reviving this quintessentially Catholic way of thinking.

Much has been written about (and by) both figures. We will focus on a major, though often overlooked, work of each: Hauerwas' early book-length work, *Character and the Christian Life*,¹⁶ and MacIntyre's magnum opus, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*.¹⁷ Hauerwas is more often encountered through essays, his preferred medium, and MacIntyre's work is often represented by *After Virtue*. We believe the monographs examined here, however, allow for a clearer understanding of the distinctive contributions each is making to virtue ethics. Hauerwas' early volume explains why he turns to virtue throughout his life's work, and how he understands that turn to be connected to prominent theologians in the Christian tradition. MacIntyre's second volume spends less time criticizing liberalism and (much) more time spelling out the crucial constructive elements of an ethics of virtue.

Hauerwas' work, originally his dissertation written with James Gustafson, is humbling; few graduate students could achieve its expansive engagement of Protestant ethics, theology, modern philosophy, and the work of Aristotle and Aquinas on the virtues—much less as an original, constructive project that shifts the field. He al-

¹⁵ We are least satisfied with the term regeneration. Though intended to mark a beginning in some sense, we also wanted to indicate that these works represent a sort of rebirth of earlier classical, Patristic, and Medieval resources.

¹⁶ Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1975). References to this book in this section are given parenthetically.

¹⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

ready demonstrates the breadth of his subsequent work in his engagement with such a wide array of conversation partners. Historically, Hauerwas' context is important—and is likely obscure to many students of theological ethics today. Hauerwas' book is not simply a retrieval of Aristotle and Aquinas, but rather a working-through of the contextual challenges involved in such a retrieval. It is not an antiquarian project, nor, importantly, is it a simple imposition of theological or ecclesiological positivism.

So, what is the key context? It is true, and often noted,¹⁸ that his book is throughout critical of the “decisionism” and “superficiality” of situation ethics, in vogue in the late 1960's and early 1970's as a result of Joseph Fletcher's work.¹⁹ However, Hauerwas further claims that its vacuity and “facile optimism” (177) is the result of another development: a “vacuum” left by the work of Barth and Bultmann. While he is “in sympathy with Bultmann and Barth's attempt to describe the Christian life in terms of the relationship of the self to god” rather than merely as a matter of following rules, he worries that their “basic commitment to the priority of God's action” (131) means that “the ethics of character appears as unimportant or pernicious” (130). Consequently, they are never able to develop a proper account of the self as agent. Both “influenced by the phenomenology of the self associated with existentialism,” they so stress the importance of the immediate experience of encounter with God that they are unable to deal with the questions of continuity and discontinuity that are so crucial to agency.²⁰

As a response to this problem, Hauerwas throughout the book advocates for “an ethics of character,” which means a distinctive reconfiguration of our understanding of the agent, which is neither situationist nor existentialist. This addresses the first of the themes we find central in the resurgence of virtue ethics. What does the volume contribute to developing this distinctive view of practical reason? He leads off the book by strongly contrasting the “spectator perspective” on ethics with the “agent perspective.” He suggests the neglect of virtue has much to do with philosophy's resolute focus on the spectator perspective, or third-person perspective, on ethical decisions. Here he draws especially on the philosophical critiques of modern moral philosophy by Anscombe, Foot, and Stuart Hampshire (31-3). He vigorously rejects the existentialist idea of a self “separate from” and causing our actions, as well as its polar opposite, mechanistic

¹⁸ See, e.g., Curran's account of virtue as a response to the realization that “there is more to ethics than quandary ethics.” Curran, *Catholic Moral Tradition Today*, 110.

¹⁹ See Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966).

²⁰ While Hauerwas does not engage this literature, one can easily imagine a similar concern being raised about fundamental option theory in Catholic moral theology, and its underlying Rahnerian anthropology of the “supernatural existential.”

behaviorism. Instead, he claims, “the self does not cause its activities or have its experiences; it simply is its activities as well as its experience” (26). While the “spectator perspective” makes character something to be “overcome” (22), Hauerwas views character as precisely our “capacity to determine [ourselves] beyond momentary excitations and acts” (15). Though Hauerwas does not go much further in developing issues central in our other books, such as the moral psychology of intellect and will²¹ or the role of natural inclinations, he has made the key move of restoring a thicker first-person perspective to accounts of the moral life.

Recall our second element, the problem of nature and grace. As a Methodist, Hauerwas is using different language here, but his book is aiming at the same concern: an adequate account of sanctification. This clearly assumes a certain kind of active transformed self, and yet descriptions of it “have usually assembled an odd mixture of extremely general dispositions and very particular acts—e.g., a Christian is a person whose life is primarily characterized by love and who does not steal” (209). Hauerwas looks to Calvin, Wesley, and Edwards for some resources; he is ultimately looking for some kind of way of working out the issue of “growth” that is not Pelagian or self-justifying. He concludes that “sanctification can be understood as the qualification of our agency by our adherence to God’s act in Christ for us. But as men we know little of the full implications of such a qualification... [and] its implications must be worked out through the concrete employment of our beliefs, attitudes, and actions through which we form ourselves in the actual living of our lives” (220). His agent is not only one with an adequate moral psychology, but also (and more importantly) one who is genuinely shaped by the theological claims of the Christian tradition. Here again, Hauerwas is pioneering by pushing beyond trivial Christian claims about broad attitudes or particular obligations to talk about a self who is genuinely transformed by grace.

As indicated above, Hauerwas is appropriately tentative about claiming too much for the Christian’s agency—he is not going back to the Social Gospel. But how to combine this humility with a real account of agency? Tellingly, Hauerwas proceeds a few pages later to draw the further implication that “our character can be formed only because we are fundamentally social beings” (231).²² Prior to his discovery of John Howard Yoder, the book already suggests that

²¹ Hauerwas does repeat the need for a more integrated understanding of “beliefs and actions” (207) or “thought and action” (230), which is exactly the reason why later authors examine the relationship between intellect and will.

²² It is often overlooked that Gustafson writes a series of essays in the late sixties which are collected in a book titled *The Church as Moral Decision-Maker* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1970).

an ethics of character depends upon a community, and for Christians, this community is the Church whereby “we are determined by Christ” (221).²³ At this point, Hauerwas begins to stake out the position for which he is most famous (and infamous?): that a proper understanding of Church and world is essential for a Christian ethic of virtue. Yet it is noteworthy that the turn to the importance of the Church in Christian discipleship occurs in the context of a search for an adequate moral psychology, where the self is neither radically indeterminate nor wholly determined but rather can “form the given aspects of our experience through our intentions in new and creative ways.” Such a self is “in Christ” when “our character receives its form in relating to a community,” the Church, that provides and orientations and “direction in such a way that we are not dependent on the world’s set patterns and values” (223).

As a philosophical complement to Hauerwas’ book, it would be hard to turn anywhere else than to the work of Alasdair MacIntyre. Indeed, MacIntyre praises Hauerwas in a cover blurb of a 1985 reissue of *Character and the Christian Life*, indicating it remains most profitable to read Hauerwas’ challenges to the impoverishment of both Catholic and Calvinist accounts, “let alone the impoverished and narcissistic perspectives of theological liberalism.” The central arguments of MacIntyre’s *After Virtue*—the importance of teleology and its loss in “the Enlightenment project,” and the centrality of practice and tradition—are well-known, but they are only beginnings for the mature project displayed in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*. *Whose Justice?* offers MacIntyre’s full-blown account of tradition-constituted rationality in its later chapters (349-88); however, that “theory” defending his historicism against charges of moral relativism and perspectivism (353) should not be abstracted from the lengthy history that precedes it, which contains substantial developments of an ethic of virtue.

How does this history contribute to a teleological account of practical reason? In one sense, the importance of the agent perspective is assumed throughout, and is particularly central to the whole idea of tradition-constituted rationality—there simply are no moral agents who are not tradition-constituted. MacIntyre’s account involves a theory, but one “embodied in and presupposed by their practices of enquiry, yet never fully spelled out” (354). That is, like Hauerwas above, MacIntyre emphasizes that virtue ethics does not approach the moral life from a “spectator perspective,” but from a first-person perspective. This is true not only for the individual agent, but also in

²³ According to his memoir *Hannah’s Child* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 117, Hauerwas stumbled across Yoder in 1970, after arriving at Notre Dame, and read the mimeographs of *The Politics of Jesus*. Yoder is not noted anywhere in *Character and the Christian Life*.

terms of the recognition—so central for MacIntyre’s intellectual journey—that ethics can only be properly understood historically, as the working-out of embodied traditions of social practice. The language of virtue cannot be a free-floating tool or a theoretical construct akin to Kantianism. The precise role and form of virtue is dependent on particular contexts in which the language becomes intelligible or unintelligible, as the case may be.

In another sense, MacIntyre adds to the account of practical reason by demonstrating the nature of the crises periodically recurring within the virtue tradition. The most crucial crisis arises out of the tension between moral excellence understood as role-fulfillment and the achievement of victory (which MacIntyre terms “the goods of effectiveness”) (42). For instance, in Homer being a good person simply means fulfilling one’s socially-identified role; but what if some other way of acting can secure victory? And what if that other way is dishonorable? This is a problem of justice (understood in terms of desert), but MacIntyre’s key move is to recognize that ancient rival accounts of justice themselves depend upon the different forms of practical rationality aimed at goods of excellence versus goods of effectiveness.

MacIntyre claims Plato’s transcendental response to this tension is surpassed by Aristotle, who develops a practical rationality whereby one grasps the good through particulars and then applies these general forms to particular questions (*phronesis*). Such a grasp thus makes virtue reliant on the well-ordered polis, such that “the human being who is separated from his social group is also deprived of the capacity for justice” and practical rationality (96). Virtue is dependent on the desires of the agents being rightly oriented to standing commitments, which themselves need to be rightly oriented—there is no standard external to the polis by which it can be judged (122), since rationality and justice are in part constituted by polis participation. Putting Aristotle “very much at odds with characteristically modern views of rationality” (123), this view agrees with Hauerwas’ agent perspective by refusing any attempt to do ethics outside and apart from the agent’s desires and commitments.

The extended treatment of the Scottish Enlightenment tradition acts as a foil to this narrative; the ultimate triumph of Hume is not an Aristotelian vindication of the goods of excellence, but rather a morality of effective satisfaction of individual desires, in which the community is understood instrumentally as a tool to maximize individual satisfaction. In particular, MacIntyre shows how Hume’s apparent defense of gentle, sympathetic social relations is really a matter of “using” those social relations for the self, and (for leaders) of managing them effectively to enable some cooperation of these individuals with their diverse preferences. Hume is thus the ancestor of Bentham and Mill, and of a politics in which there is no overall hu-

man good, but merely individuals with preferences, which are understood to have ultimate weight for action. Justice then becomes a matter of procedures to “tally and weigh” all the competing preferences... or in fact attempt to engage in a power struggle to defend and maximize one’s own preference-satisfaction. In this sense, modern liberal justice is, on MacIntyre’s account, not rational because the practical rationality it presumes in agents is simply discovering effective means to satisfy desires. Hume’s practical rationality—as is the case for subsequent utilitarian accounts—is only of effective *means*, but cannot adjudicate ends, and can do so politically only by some kind of “tyranny of the majority” account of aggregate good.

MacIntyre as a philosopher is less concerned with our theme of nature and grace.²⁴ But his account displays—in an impossible-to-untangle way—the important themes of practical reasoning and community. Notice that, in the histories summarized above, there is a crucial problem that arises in any agent-perspective morality (i.e. any virtue ethic) when faced with a choice between what appears (given the agent’s identity) “the right thing to do” and the thing that will actually bring the agent the concrete outcome he/she desires. MacIntyre’s history of this divergence in *Whose Justice?* is an illustration of the claim, made in *After Virtue*, that “[u]tilitarianism cannot accommodate the distinction between goods internal to and goods external to a practice,” and thus is teleological in a radically different way than Aristotelianism.²⁵ While this claim about internal goods is not a robust account of “nature,” it opens the way for it.²⁶ Certainly Hauerwas and (especially) MacIntyre allied themselves with defenders of the natural law in many cases.²⁷ But it is important to note that

²⁴ However, MacIntyre does indicate that “a crucial difference between Aquinas and Aristotle” concerns the experience of “disobedience” in relationship to the divine law, an experience for which “the only remedy is divine grace” (181). This difference involves the integration of the Augustinian conception of *voluntas* into “Aristotle’s scheme” of practical reason (190).

²⁵ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 198. For continued engagement with the utilitarian tradition, see MacIntyre’s essay “Intractable Disputes,” in *Intractable Disputes about the Natural Law: MacIntyre and His Critics*, ed. Lawrence Cunningham (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 1-52, esp. 27-32, 38-51, where MacIntyre argues why utilitarians cannot give an adequate account of moral rules.

²⁶ For his further development of this topic see *Dependent Rational Animals* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999).

²⁷ Hauerwas less so than MacIntyre. Hauerwas maintains that sociologically, it is interesting that what America has taught Catholics is that they can only maintain their presumptions about “natural law” ethics insofar as they lived in the enclaves of subculture Catholicism. Given this, he worries that the language of natural law can be “misleading,” insofar as it neglects the essential communal context. See *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 96-97. For a discussion of Hauerwas and Catholic natural law, see David Cloutier, “Seeing the Whole: How Protestants Help Us Read the Natural Law,” in *In*

MacIntyre's defenses of natural law move in a quite different way than do some other Catholic defenders of norms.²⁸ For him, arguments over norms cannot be settled by recourse to abstract theories, in part because norms require for their rationality a grasp of the telos, and a grasp of the telos requires participation in a community with a conception of virtue. Isolating the question of norms and nature from that of community is impossible.

Both Hauerwas and MacIntyre "regenerate" virtue in their quest to find ways to overcome entrenched impasses in their respective fields, Protestant ethics and moral philosophy. In so doing, their projects, while particularly highlighting the communal character of practical rationality, contribute broadly to telling the historical account of why the language of virtue became lost and needs to be found.

*The Growth of Contemporary Virtue Ethics:
Servais Pinckaers, O.P. and Julia Annas*

We turn next to one of the most important and influential books in post-Vatican II Catholic moral theology, *The Sources of Christian Ethics* by Fr. Servais Pinckaers, O.P.²⁹ In line with the other books in this section, Pinckaers' most important work is an argument for a renewal in our understanding of morality as a whole, a renewal in which virtue features prominently. The amount of explicit attention to virtue (and especially to technical examination of virtue) in this book is somewhat limited. Nevertheless, in ways described below, it sets the trajectory for at least a generation of Catholic moral theologians, a trajectory in which virtue plays a major role. Thus, like Hauerwas, Pinckaers sets clear pathways for ensuing work on virtue.

Search of a Universal Ethic: A New Look at Natural Law, eds. William C. Mattison III and John Berkman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming).

²⁸ See "How Can We Learn What Veritatis Splendor Has to Teach?" in *Veritatis Splendor and the Renewal of Moral Theology* eds. J.A. DiNoia and Romanus Cessario (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 1999), 73-94, and "Intractable Disputes," 23-25. In both cases, MacIntyre's argument in support of natural law requires not an assertion of first principles, but rather an engagement with other disputants in the exploration of the norms implicated in common and necessary community practices. MacIntyre writes, "If, then, any conformity to the precepts of the natural law is a precondition of the kind of learning, both for oneself and in relationship to others, which develops maturity of rational judgment, any attempt to locate human freedom in a freedom to make choices which are prior to and independent of the precepts of the natural law is bound to be not only theoretically mistaken but also practically misguided.... [W]hat this erosion of rules is always apt to lead to is a surrender of human relationships to competing interests." "How Can We Learn," 85.

²⁹ Pinckaers, *Sources of Christian Ethics*, further references in text. It was first published in French in 1986 as *Les sources de la morale chrétienne: sa method, son contenu, et son histoire* (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1986). For a more condensed version of the overall argument see *Morality: A Catholic View*, trans. Michael Sherwin, O.P. (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2001).

How does Pinckaers address what we are calling the teleological view of practical reason so central in virtue approaches to morality? Four features of his book stand out. First, in a seemingly innocuous opening chapter to the first part of the book, Pinckaers compares and contrasts what he calls moral (or reflective) knowledge on the one hand and positivist (or behavioral science) knowledge on the other. This turns out to be an emphasis on intentionality and the first-person perspective, or what *Veritatis splendor* would call years later “the perspective of the acting person.”³⁰ Though the chapter may initially seem out of place given Part One’s ensuing examination of how Christian ethics is “human and Christian” (addressed below with regard to the second feature of the resurgence in virtue ethics, attention to nature and grace) and Part Two’s magisterial history of moral theology, this shift to the agent perspective both makes possible and deputizes the three remaining features of the book central for this essay.

That perspective is crucial for the second feature of Pinckaers’ book addressed here, his distinction between a morality of happiness and a morality of obligation, arguably the dominant feature of the book. Pinckaers famously identifies “two main periods in the history of morality, the first dominated by the question of happiness and the second by the question of obligation” (18-19). His account of the former’s culmination in the High Scholasticism of St. Thomas Aquinas, and the latter’s exemplification in the post-Tridentine manuals of moral theology, is well known.³¹ Yet the way this distinction entails a first person perspective and leads to a focus on virtue may be less clear. He reminds us, “For St. Thomas, in the mainstream tradition of Aristotle and the Fathers of the Church, the question of happiness is incontestably the first consideration in Christian moral theory. It is natural to everyone. It points to the question of our last end, which presupposes a certain amount of reflection” (6). It is this reflection that is developed in the ensuing chapter on types of knowledge. Reflective intentionality, which Pinckaers insists is not “extrinsic” to human action (12), orders our actions ultimately to our final end which Christians understand to be supernatural happiness in union with God and others. Such an approach “leads to a different organization of the subject matter [of moral theology], according to the virtues rather than the commandments. Ethics becomes the science of ways leading to true happiness, those qualities of soul and

³⁰ *Veritatis splendor*, no. 78.

³¹ Pinckaers vividly documents the contrasting approaches to morality through a comparison of Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae* (on which the Catholic manuals purport to be based) and the standard manuals of modern Catholicism, identifying the clear omissions of the later and how central topics in morality are transformed in their morality of obligation perspective, if not neglected.

heart we call the virtues” (19). It should be evident that the focus for ethics is not rules, as it is in moralities of obligation. However, it should be noted that “precepts and obligations” do retain an important role in moralities of happiness, though a role that is “secondary, at the service of the virtues” (6).³²

The third contribution to practical reasoning in the context of virtue found in Pinckaers’ *magnus opus* concerns the relationship between intellect and will in human freedom. In a detailed chapter on rival interpretations of Augustine’s definition (through Lombard) of free choice, Pinckaers explains how different views of the relationship between intellect and will are actually at the heart of the different approaches to morality. These different views also engender rival visions of freedom, which he calls freedom for excellence (correlated with morality of happiness) and freedom of indifference (correlated to morality of obligation).³³ In short, the more voluntaristic freedom of indifference entails a freedom of choice that *precedes* intellect and will (reminiscent of Hauerwas’ indeterminate existential self) whereas a freedom for excellence such as that found in virtue ethics entails a delicate interplay and mutual dependence between intellect and will (331-2). In this latter approach, freedom is born of that interplay, rather than preceding it.

A similar dynamic is in play with regard to the fourth contribution of this book to the element of practical reasoning, namely, the role of natural inclinations in such reasoning. Pinckaers explains how natural inclinations, rather than impediments to a human freedom (understood as existing only when wholly uninfluenced as in voluntarism or its flip side determinism), are rather the very font of human freedom and practical reasoning (400-5). This holds not only of the distinctively human inclinations toward truth and goodness, but even in those humanized inclinations we share with other creatures. Catholics will recognize this argument echoed several years later in *Veritatis splendor*.

As for the second crucial element of the resurgence in virtue ethics, Pinckaers also addresses the relationship between nature and grace. His historical account documents how the legalistic shift in approaching the moral life entails a concurrent fragmentation of sub-disciplines in theology, with moral theology being cleaved off from systematic / fundamental theology on the one hand and spiritual theology on the other hand (254-9). But most crucially, he engages the context of some immediately post-conciliar moral theology, namely,

³² For more on how a morality of happiness regards rules as constitutive of happiness, see Herbert McCabe, O.P., *The Good Life: Ethics and the Pursuit of Happiness* (London: Continuum, 2005), 6.

³³ For a superb summary of all four of these terms, and their evident relations to one another, see Pinckaers, *Morality*, 74

the extent to which ethics is “distinctively Christian” and yet continuous with secular and non-Christian moralities. During this period Catholic moral theology had not yet adequately articulated how a morality could simultaneously be accessible to and applicable to all, and yet thoroughly informed by Christian faith. Indeed, according to the prevailing view of this time, Christian ethics was largely a “human ethic,” with Christian faith serving mainly a sort of supporting and motivational role rather than specifying moral actions (95-101). With chapters overviewing the problem, exploring ethics and Scripture (in Paul and the Sermon on the Mount), and finally inquiring as to how “Christian” St. Thomas’s teaching is, Pinckaers contributed to reversing the trend and presented a thoroughly Christian ethic, one sustained by the new law and lived in the infused virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Yet even while unabashedly detailing the graced features of the Christian moral life, Pinckaers nonetheless emphasized the “harmony existing between evangelical faith and philosophical reason” (189), a harmony and continuity we will see further developed in later works on virtue ethics.

Overall Pinckaers’ *The Sources of Christian Ethics* is trajectory-setting. It identifies central issues that those concerned with a virtue-centered approach to moral theology will focus on for decades to come. The book, along with other writings of Pinckaers, in effect commissions a next generation of scholars to do the necessary and more detailed work in continuation of the renewal of Catholic moral theology that he so effectively advanced.

As a philosophical complement to Pinckaers’ work, we turn to Julia Annas’s influential *Morality of Happiness*.³⁴ Annas provides a detailed account of varieties of ancient ethics with a methodological concern to address “a growing sense that there is something deeply inadequate about the view that when we systematize theories about our ethical views we are faced with...a simple choice between consequentialist and deontological ways of thinking” (4). She focuses on ancient ethical theories, but in a manner prompted by concerns about modern moral theories. Though she offers no master narrative à la MacIntyre, like him she examines ancient approaches in contradistinction to modern ones, as full-blown alternative accounts of what we mean by ethics.³⁵

Despite obvious differences between her work and that of Pinckaers, in no small part due to their distinct disciplines (e.g., Annas has nothing on nature and grace), there are significant similarities

³⁴ Julia Annas, *Morality of Happiness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

³⁵ For particular attention to those differences, see pp. 440-55 (cf. 4-10). She claims that unlike modern moral theories, ancient ethical theories make no claim to be either hierarchical or complete (440; cf. 7-8), a claim that is picked up by Rhonheimer below.

in these two projects. First, like Pinckaers, Annas turns to historical resources that are too often neglected today to help rectify deficiencies in contemporary moral thought. And second, as evident in the very title of her book, Annas joins Pinckaers in the affirmation of the importance of happiness, and concomitantly virtue, for a more adequate account of morality.³⁶ Annas explores the ways that nearly all ancient ethics were moralities of happiness (though with not insignificant differences). In her in-depth analysis of these ancient schools of moral thought Annas makes important contributions to our first theme regarding this set of books, namely, a teleological account of practical reasoning.

The first of the book's four parts is entitled "The Basic Ideas," and its two chapters offer as excellent an introduction to the basic concepts of virtue ethics as exists anywhere. In the first chapter called "Making Sense of My Life as a Whole," she identifies key components for practical reasoning in a virtue perspective. First she identifies a person's "final end" with "the ultimate object of desire" (35) and explains how the final end "unifies and organizes all my other aims and goods" (39). She explains that since "my final end involves my activity," there is an "almost complete absence in ancient ethics of anything resembling consequentialist ideas" (37). She also describes the importance of the first person perspective in ancient ethics, later claiming that ancient ethical theories take as their starting point "the point of view of the reflective person who realizes that her life is given a definite direction by whatever it is that she takes to be her overarching value or view of what matters. Ancient ethics begins from this viewpoint" (440), a viewpoint called here the "perspective of the acting person."

In the second chapter called "The Virtues," Annas continues to explore how ancient ethical theories explained the virtues and practical reasoning in light of this first person perspective. These hundred pages are the best introduction available for the basic concepts needed for any account of practical reasoning in virtue ethics. Here she explains the concept of a stable disposition commonly called a habit. In an enormously insightful explanation of the role of prudence in virtue ethics, she examines both how good one need be to qualify to possess a virtue (what she calls "the unity of *a* virtue") and how the different ways of being good are connected to one another (which she calls "the unity of *the* virtues"). She explains the role of affect or emotion in virtue ethics, here as in the previous (and following) sections attending to important differences in Stoic and Aristotelian ap-

³⁶ Annas' book was written in 1995, nine years after Pinckaers' book appeared in French but the same year as its English translation. Neither author appears in the bibliography of the other. No claims are made here about any causal relationships in their thought despite their common use of "morality of happiness."

proaches. Finally she examines the role of rules in virtue centered practical reasoning.

Though it is this first part of her book that stands as arguably the most important contemporary contribution to a technical analysis of virtue-centered practical reasoning in ancient ethics, each of the ensuing three parts of her work develops questions within virtue in more detail. Part Two examines the topic of nature, demonstrating that ancient appeals to nature were extraordinarily nuanced, and attend not only to “givens” but also teleological standards of flourishing. That is, ancient appeals to nature are not foundational or simply “empirically specifiable” (217)—notions Annas associates with overly-rigid modern “ethical naturalism.” Her inquiry into ancient ethical thought on nature richly rewards anyone who seeks to better understand the staple topic of natural law. Part Three surveys ethical schools of thought on the topic of justice. This section offers resources from antiquity on key questions for Catholic moral theology, such as connaturalization and the distinct types of love, and the relationship between self-love and love of others.³⁷ Finally, Part Four examines similarities and differences in how ancient ethical schools describe happiness. Besides providing an account of the near universal³⁸ recognition of the centrality and function of happiness in ancient ethics, she also examines differences on topics such as the meaning of pleasure and the relative importance of virtue and external goods for human happiness. The richness of this book is clear from its evident influence on the authors of the next section.

Before turning to those authors, it should be noted how the authors of this section provided “the growth” referenced in this section’s title. Reminiscent of Alasdair MacIntyre, Pinckaers provides a meta-narrative and identifies the key conceptual moves—for Pinckaers especially the notion of a morality of happiness—that commissions the work of a next generation of Catholic moral theologians. Annas offers the philosophical technical analysis of core concepts in ancient virtue ethics—with a broad historical narrative in mind even if not her focus—that launches scholarship in the ensuing decades on a host of topics such as the role of emotion in the life of virtue and the connection of the virtues. The work of these two authors is invaluable in any ensuing comprehensive virtue ethic in moral theology or philosophy.

³⁷ See esp. her discussion of Aristotle’s self-love and the Stoics’ “familiarization” (*oikeiosis*), which illuminate inquiry into Thomas Aquinas’s thought on topics such as connaturalization and *amor concupiscentiae* / *amor amicitiae*.

³⁸ The Cyreniacs serve Annas as the exceptional ancient school of thought that proves the rule (e.g., 426-7).

The Flowering of Contemporary Virtue Ethics:

Jean Porter and Martin Rhonheimer

In many ways, we can understand the four books we have already discussed as clearing the way and laying the groundwork for a full-blown contemporary ethic of virtue. It remained for others to provide such an ethic in Catholic moral theology, and perhaps the most comprehensive example in Catholic moral theology of the last decade is Jean Porter's *Nature as Reason: A Thomistic Theory of the Natural Law*.³⁹ It may seem odd to include this particular text on natural law in this section of the review essay.⁴⁰ But Porter's text makes a case for a comprehensive approach to moral theology where virtue features prominently.⁴¹ As will be clear in the following, it continues many of the same themes of Hauerwas' and Pinckaers' works, while also advancing the discussion of virtue with more technical precision.

Reminiscent of the books surveyed above, Porter's project includes attention to the historical context of her study. Chapter One provides a broad stroke meta-narrative of natural law in scholasticism, its evolution (or, really, deformation) in modernity, and twentieth century articulations of natural law alongside common Christian critiques of that concept. The scope and focus of her narrative differs from those of Pinckaers or MacIntyre, but she similarly describes changes in moral thought in modernity (through a focus on natural law), changes that eclipsed and thus call for renewed attention to happiness and virtue.

Clearly the major contribution of the text, though, is its thorough development of what we have been calling a teleological version of practical reason, with attention to all the key controversies involved in any such account. In chapter 2, Porter examines whether or not it is still accurate to speak of there being nature or natures, particularly given recent advances in the evolutionary sciences. It is in this chapter that Porter does some prolegomenous work defending moral realism (in a non-foundational sense) and explaining what she does and does not mean in saying that morality can be "natural." Most im-

³⁹ Jean Porter, *Nature as Reason: A Thomistic Theory of Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

⁴⁰ Though it may seem to make more sense to include Porter's *The Recovery of Virtue* which is one of the first postconciliar books on virtue by a Catholic moral theologian (Louisville: WJKP, 1990), the more recent *Nature as Reason* better meets this section's criteria of a comprehensive approach to ethics with technical material on virtue.

⁴¹ As Porter herself says in the opening line of her book, "In this book, I will set out a theological account of the natural law, taking my starting points from medieval natural law theorists (especially, but not only, Aquinas) and developing them into a constructive moral theory within the context of contemporary perspectives and concerns" (1). Needless to say, virtue features prominently in those contemporary perspectives and concerns.

portantly for this essay, it is here that she defends a teleological understanding of nature—including both prerational and rational human inclinations—in a manner that invites the analyses of happiness, virtue, and practical reasoning in the ensuing chapters.

In Chapter Three, we find a systematic presentation of the centrality of happiness and virtue for morality. The impact of Annas' book on this chapter is enormous. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that this centerpiece of Porter's book on a virtue-centered morality (this chapter but also the next) is in effect a contemporary (not ancient) moral theological (not philosophical) version of Annas.⁴² Porter's main pre-contemporary interlocutor is Aquinas, but she also engages numerous contemporary thinkers, some of whom are included in this volume. Like Annas, Porter begins with an examination of happiness, explaining how some vision of happiness—in connection with the perfection of natural human capacities or powers—is operative in any natural and / or supernatural account of morality. Before the more technical attention to practical reasoning found in the following chapter, Porter treats three topics that mirror Annas' book sections: the roles of both external goods and virtue in happiness; the role of nature in the articulation of moral norms; and, the role of self-love and norms of justice in an account of happiness. Though it does not go into quite the depth of Annas' work, this chapter is as valuable as Annas' work in providing—in Porter's case for moral theology—a comprehensive introduction to virtue-centered morality.

The technical detail does, however, come in Chapter Four, which contains an analysis of practical reasoning itself. It begins by describing perhaps the two most regnant accounts of human practical reasoning today, namely those of Kant and Hume. Porter then explains how a Thomistic account of reasoning shares affinities with both approaches but is reducible to neither. By the time the chapter examines the difficult matter of delineating the moral object (and turns to end of life decision-making as an example), it may be unclear how this foray into practical reasoning fits into a survey of works on virtue. But the turn to prudence in the chapter's final section reveals that the formulation of particular norms in contingent matters (in a manner that is indeed rule-governed though not the simple application of rules) is the activity of the human natural inclination to reason practically, an activity that is done well only through the virtue of prudence. Therefore this chapter helps connect topics that are too commonly examined separately in Catholic moral theology, namely, virtue and natural law. This connection prompts Porter to make the bold claim that "a Thomistic theory of natural law is not

⁴² With the exception of Finnis and Grisez (who mainly provide an opposing position), no contemporary author is cited more than Annas in Porter's book.

at odds with a virtue-oriented approach to morality; this theory of natural law *is* a theory of virtue” (323, emphasis in original).

This bold statement then necessarily leads Porter into an examination of another of our topics in this introduction, nature and grace. After all, given the importance of theological virtue and supernatural happiness for a Christian virtue ethic, the above equation of Thomas’s virtue theory with his natural law theory may seem surprising. After all, the latter is by definition applicable to and accessible to all through unaided human reason. Porter words the tension this way: “The Thomistic theory of the natural law is paradoxical because it straddles those divisions, affirming both that the natural law reflects universal aspects of human experience and that it can only be fully understood in theological terms” (324). Examining this question, namely, the relationship between nature and grace as it pertains to the natural law and virtue, is the focus of Chapter Five. Porter devotes extensive attention to this issue in the context of historical scholarship on the relationship between contemporary work on natural rights and medieval roots for that thought. But at the end of the chapter she turns to the virtues. Porter is rightly careful to guard against the eclipse of attention to the natural in the context of grace. Indeed she claims the “practical imperatives of grace are informed by, and to some extent constituted by, the imperatives stemming from nature” (389). The normative importance of the natural pertains even in the life of grace. That said, Porter also recognizes how the demands of natural virtues are “transformed” and not “merely supplemented” in the context of grace (392). She summarizes the (distinct) close connections between natural law and virtue, and nature and grace by saying:

A Thomistic account of the natural law takes its teleological focus from an account of happiness, understood as the practice of the virtues. This section clarifies and develops that claim by showing that the relevant conception of happiness is to be identified with the practice of the infused virtues, including faith, hope, and charity as well as the infused cardinal virtues. Thus, the theory of natural law being presented is tethered to an ideal of terrestrial happiness, but the terrestrial happiness in question is directly oriented toward a still more complete form of happiness, which it anticipates in ways we cannot now grasp (396).

Thus, for Porter, a key vehicle for working out the relationship of nature and grace is infused cardinal virtue. In a sense, Porter’s approach can be seen as another way of working out the problem Hauerwas and Pinckaers encounter in understanding how to talk about both virtue and grace. Hauerwas ultimately appeals to a supernatural sociology, and Pinckaers to Scripture and spirituality. Porter’s Thomistic articulation of the role of the infused cardinal virtues offers a

way to connect the topics of practical reasoning and nature / grace quite explicitly.

Given the technical detail of Porter's book, a complementary book would have to at least match Porter's level of detail, and we find such a match in Martin Rhonheimer's *The Perspective of Morality: Philosophical Foundations of Thomistic Virtue Ethics*.⁴³ A philosophical work, Rhonheimer nonetheless is as attentive to and articulate regarding the intimate relationship between theology and philosophy as it concerns virtue, even as he approaches the topic from the latter discipline. Rhonheimer's book appears in English in 2011, but its meandering path toward arrival in that edition makes it difficult to place neatly in any chronological narrative.⁴⁴ What *can* certainly be said is that it is a tour de force, rightly described as behemoth, offering precisely the sort of comprehensive articulation of a virtue-centered approach to morality that justifies its inclusion here.

Like our other books, Rhonheimer contextualizes his project of what he calls "classical" virtue ethics as preferable to Kantian and utilitarian approaches to morality.⁴⁵ In this effort he is indebted to Annas, explicitly at times.⁴⁶ In fact the first main chapter of Rhonheimer's book mirrors Annas' book in its treatments of the first person perspective and happiness.⁴⁷ Perhaps the signature element of Rhonheimer's account is a detailed explanation of human intentional action from the "perspective of the acting person," including discussion of how a person's ultimate end functions in relation to more proximate ends. Though explained in detail in this chapter, it is a characteristic that carries through the entire book (e.g., 46, 135-6, 249), making it a kind of culmination of Hauerwas' argument for an "agent perspective." Indeed it is actually referenced in the book's title, *The Perspective of Morality*, since with "moral" Rhonheimer means to reference the first person (rather than observer) perspective of human action.

From this perspective, Rhonheimer continues to develop in detail key topics in virtue ethics. We find careful attention to happiness

⁴³ Martin Rhonheimer, *The Perspective of Morality: Philosophical Foundations of Thomistic Virtue Ethics* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011).

⁴⁴ See *The Perspective of Morality*, ix, where Rhonheimer explains how the text was substantively complete in 1989, first published in Italian in 1994, and appeared "considerably enlarged" in German in 2001. It is this latter text that is the basis of the English edition. Thus MacIntyre, Pinckaers, and especially Annas appear prominently, though Porter does not.

⁴⁵ In this he is concerned to reject what he calls recent "radical" virtue ethics which he dismisses as relativist (e.g., *The Perspective of Morality*, 15).

⁴⁶ Rhonheimer cites Annas liberally in his book, with a majority of citations found in his introductory chapter on classical virtue ethics as distinct from modern ethics.

⁴⁷ This is actually Chapter Two. Chapter One is a nine page prolegomenous chapter on ethics and philosophy.

both as something sought and something done, a distinction traced back to Aristotle and labeled by Pinckaers the objective and subjective meanings of happiness.⁴⁸ This treatment, like that of Porter, is heavily dependent on Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* treatise on happiness (I-II 1-5). Rhonheimer immediately connects this foundational topic to practical reasoning, by explaining how the latter is best understood as prompted by the desire for happiness, and is helpfully understood in the form of the practical syllogism. Rhonheimer even continues in this section to offer his understanding of the delineation of the object of human action in relation to further goals commonly called intentions. Rhonheimer thus joins Porter in connecting topics that are too often treated separately, namely, virtue and happiness on the one hand and practical reasoning and the object of action on the other hand. Indeed, Rhonheimer returns to the topic of practical reasoning in his final chapter, connecting it to conscience and prudence as well as to topics such as moral norms and the debate over proportionalism. Akin to Porter, Rhonheimer's virtue-centered account is thoroughly integrated with attention to standard topics in moral action theory.

Rhonheimer does also include a central chapter on the moral virtues. While Rhonheimer does devote attention to each of the cardinal virtues, his analysis is palpably more basic and introductory than his work on practical reasoning. This could prompt the criticism of his work that virtue plays only a secondary role to the formulation of norms in practical reasoning, a criticism Rhonheimer rightly levels against Kant (325-6). However, this critique would be misplaced, and that the different depth of attention to virtue is likely a reflection of the lesser amount of attention to that topic in moral philosophy and Rhonheimer's own work. What substantive claims make him less susceptible to this critique? Rhonheimer repeatedly recognizes the importance of connaturality for practical reasoning, something that is gained by the attunement of our appetites by the virtues. In other words, good practical reasoning requires the moral virtues. Relatedly, Rhonheimer throughout his work treats the importance of the connection of the virtues (e.g., 244, 306, 374). In line with classical thought, Rhonheimer recognizes the mutual dependence of moral virtue upon prudence, but also prudence upon moral virtue. For these reasons, along with his final chapter cementing an anti-Kantian approach to norms and decision-making due to Rhonheimer's clear roles for nature and prudence, Rhonheimer's heavy emphasis on

⁴⁸ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), i.7. See Servais Pinckaers, O.P., "Aquinas's Pursuit of Beatitude: From the *Commentary on the Sentences* to the *Summa Theologiae*" in *The Pinckaers Reader*, eds. John Berkman and Craig Steven Titus (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 93-114.

practical reasoning is rightly understood as part of, rather than substitute for, a virtue-centered approach to morality.

Rhonheimer's book offers as much technical treatment of virtue as anyone (including Annas), and does as much as anyone (including Porter) to examine virtue in close connection to nature and practical reasoning. Rhonheimer offers—in line with the other books in this section and with Porter as the “flowering” of that trajectory—a comprehensive virtue-centered approach to morality that develops extensively the themes we have identified as marking these crucial books in the resurgence of virtue in moral theology.

THE FRUITS OF THE RECENT RESURGENCE OF VIRTUE IN MORAL THEOLOGY

The previous section presents a roughly chronological narration of the resurgence of virtue-oriented moral thinking over the past several decades, highlighting several themes that are central in that resurgence. The purpose of this final section is to identify and review recent scholarship that continues the trajectories set by these comprehensive books. What differentiates these books from those of the previous section? It is not strict chronology; indeed, some addressed here appeared before some in the previous section. It is rather that the following work is representative of more narrowly-focused technical inquiry into themes revealed to be crucial by the works of the previous section. This distinction, like that of chronology, is not hard and fast. Surely the books of the previous section offer technical analysis important to the resurgence in virtue ethics. And in some cases the work of this section offers broad scale review of topics central to virtue ethics. That said, the books of this section might be thought of as “fruits” in the resurgence of virtue in moral theology in that they offer more focused inquiry into topics related to themes of the last chapter rather than more comprehensive accounts of the importance of virtue-centered moral thought.

How did we choose the following work? It was an obvious choice to analyze the essays in this volume, highlighting how their work manifests and furthers the trajectories we previously identified. But we also selected four monographs, which (in our view) make key contributions to virtue ethics, contributions which should not be overlooked as the field moves forward. They are Daniel Westberg's *Right Practical Reason: Aristotle, Action, and Prudence in Aquinas*;⁴⁹ John Bowlin's *Contingency and Fortune in Aquinas's Ethics*;⁵⁰ Michael Sherwin, O.P.'s *By Knowledge and By Love: Charity*

⁴⁹ Daniel Westberg, *Right Practical Reason: Aristotle, Action, and Prudence in Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

⁵⁰ John Bowlin, *Contingency and Fortune in Aquinas's Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

and *Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*;⁵¹ and, Jennifer Herdt's *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices*.⁵² Other books surely could have been chosen—others were discussed—and their selection is not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, as with the essential books in the prior section, we are suggesting that these books are crucial for understanding virtue ethics, and so deserve careful attention. In what ensues there is no one paragraph length summary of each book or essay. The books we adduce are well reviewed, and the essays treated here are found in this very volume. This section examines the relevance of each piece of work with regard to the original themes we proposed at the outset, showing how these scholars take up those themes and advance our thinking on each of them. Doing so demonstrates how the fruits of the resurgence in virtue ethics have begun and continue to ripen.

The first consistent theme in recent work on virtue identified in the previous section is a focus on practical reasoning. This is of course a broad topic, and one not limited to virtue-centered approaches to morality. Yet what unifies attention to this broad topic in virtue-focused moral thought is recognition of the importance of a first person perspective, or the perspective of the acting person. With that starting point, attention is given to a whole host of topics including the importance of the last end, the relation of intellect and will, the relationship between virtue and natural law, and the connectivity of the virtues. How do the four monographs chosen exemplify such a virtue-centric attention to first-person practical reasoning?

Two in particular add crucial elements to a proper treatment of practical reasoning. John Bowlin's book comes close to mimicking the sort of comprehensive account of morality that characterizes the books of the previous section. However, his book is placed here because he examines that host of themes through a unifying topic, "insisting that [Thomas Aquinas's] account of the moral life cannot be read aright without attending to his remarks about contingency and fortune, virtue and difficulty" (15). Bowlin expresses concern that treatments of Aquinas's ethics often regard "the treatise on law as the main event" when it is in fact a "side show." Bowlin argues that Aquinas is far less concerned with anxieties over "our most basic moral obligations" than are modern interpreters; instead, Aquinas appreciates that "we can be genuinely confused about what our basic obligations require of us in concrete circumstances" (4-5). It is the genuine contingency of such circumstantial actions that drives him to

⁵¹ Michael Sherwin, O.P., *By Knowledge and By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005).

⁵² Jennifer Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

appeal to the moral virtues, because of “their ability to cope with these contingencies” (6). Thus, his early description of the project: “Aquinas’s account of agency—caused by intellect and will, made distinctively human by the natural law, corrupted by sin, and perfected by virtue and grace—is best understood in light of talk about contingency” (6). After demonstrating the importance of contingency and fortune for virtue in a first chapter examination of courage, Bowlin takes on the difficult question of how one’s will as intellectual appetite seeks the general and necessary good in justice and yet operates in contingent situations which are in important senses indeterminate. His next chapter’s foray into recent debates over natural law suggests that despite their important differences, the accounts of two rival positions⁵³ on how the first principles of natural law generate specific moral guidance both fail to recognize the importance of contingency in that process—or, more trenchantly, they try unsuccessfully to tame the problem of contingency, thus veering dangerously close to making Aquinas’s treatment of ethics a form of utilitarianism or Kantianism. He ends by examining a central question in ancient ethics, the relationship between happiness and virtue, again in light of contingency and how such attention impacts the claim that virtues are both a function in achieving happiness and have their own intrinsic value. In short, Bowlin offers a wide-ranging examination of various facets of a virtue-centered approach to morality, all unified by attention to the oft-neglected topic of contingency.

In terms of technical analysis of practical reasoning in the Thomistic tradition, Daniel Westberg’s book is the clear gold standard. If modern virtue ethics is often traced back to Elizabeth Anscombe’s complaint about the need for an adequate “moral psychology,” Westberg’s book provides the richest and most detailed response. This book, originally a doctoral dissertation written under Herbert McCabe, O.P., is an extraordinarily clear (though not uncontested) account of the process of practical reasoning with a focus on the interplay between reason and will. First person perspective accounts of practical reasoning require attention to this topic, to explain both how free choices are anchored by a (more or less) accurate apprehension of the world around us (contra voluntarism), and to explain how nonetheless one’s will (and indeed one’s passions) shape that apprehension for good or bad (contra intellectualism). His account of the stages of practical reasoning, rooted as it is in attention to both the metaphysics of agency and Thomas’s psychology of action, flows naturally to an account of the virtues, and particularly prudence, which is exactly what we find in the final section of the book. Typical of the high-quality monographs surveyed in this section,

⁵³ Bowlin examines the work of Jean Porter—in her *Moral Action and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)—and Germain Grisez.

Westberg recognizes and briefly treats the relationship between the topic of his focus and other topics germane to a virtue approach to morality, including the importance of law, the connection of the virtues, and even the place of the new law. But his lasting contribution is the meticulous account of Thomas's work on practical decision-making, with its focus on the mutual dependence of intellect and will.

Notably, both Westberg and Bowlin give extensive attention to the workings of the virtue of prudence. Bowlin offers an extensive analysis in his second chapter of how Aquinas's complex treatment of prudence makes sense in the light of recognition that choosing the good is both contingent and difficult. Because the good is "singular and contingent, [it] cannot be captured by a simple set of rules that could serve as the standard of virtuous action... Consequently, there is no substitute for prudential judgment, no procedure for discovering the good apart from its labors" (79). Westberg's book actually begins with the problem of prudence and its general neglect in moral theology both before and after Vatican II; he concludes after an extensive survey that prudence is often "ignored or lamely presented and certainly not integrated with metaphysics, psychology, and theology in the way St Thomas achieved" (12-13). Both books are distinguished by recognition that the absence of a rigorous analysis of prudence tends to leave moral theologies tilting either toward legalism or toward appeals to a suspiciously non-rational "conscience." A genuine perspective of the acting person demands more; hence, this is a major pathway for further development in virtue ethics.

The other two monographs identified could also be addressed in the context of practical decision-making. Michael Sherwin's book also offers a careful analysis of the stages of practical decision-making, one that is heavily influenced by Westberg even as he departs from his interlocutor on those stages in a manner attentive to relating more clearly Thomas's work on these stages to Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* claims about use and enjoyment. But Sherwin's book is treated below, due to its main contribution. Though he starts with an analysis of the relationship between intellect and will in practical decision-making, his primary contribution is his account of that relationship in the theological virtues of faith and love, and corresponding expansion of Westberg's brief remarks on the relationship between charity and prudence (as well as the other cardinal virtues).

So, too, with Jennifer Herdt's book. Though her careful attention to the dynamics of how virtues are attained and grow might fit in these paragraphs on practical decision-making, extended treatment of her monograph follows later, for her focus is on the relationship between "natural" and graced virtue, with expert attention to the variety of accounts in early modernity and their lasting impact on key En-

lightenment figures. It is worth mentioning here, however, Herdt's distinctive engagement with Rousseau and the modern "ethics of authenticity" that proceeds from his thought. Herdt notes Rousseau's implacable opposition to "habituation" and his insistence on protecting the "natural" development of the person from the pernicious forces of social imitation (292). Herdt's analysis leads her to suggest that the legacy of "hyper-Augustianian" suspicion of imitation virtues ("splendid vices") drives Rousseau, and that if his account is read in this fashion, there are possibilities for virtue ethics to engage more constructively with the powerful yet seemingly anti-virtue impulses that animate modern desires for actions to be "authentic." In a sense, "authenticity" names a kind of modern ideal for moral agency, albeit one in significant tension with practical reasoning as presented in the virtue tradition—hence, Herdt's book is key for facilitating this needed engagement.

What do the essays contained in this volume contribute analysis of practical decision-making in the context of virtue approaches to morality? This theme runs rampant throughout the essays. In her inquiry into the debate over pagan virtue and in particular the "content" of the natural last end, Knobel explicates and illuminates what it means to act for a last end in one's life, a dynamic seen in the previous section as central to any virtue-centered account of morality. Cochran's mining of Stoic thought for its potential contributions to early Protestant thought on faith is at root an account of the relationship of reason and will, which given the Protestant emphasis on faith alone must be (even if not exclusively) identified *within* the activity that is Christian faith. Fullam also exemplifies the attention to intellect and will in recent work on virtue given her account of humility in Teresa of Avila. Fullam organizes that analysis in large part by attending to humility's concern for truth (intellect) as well as its status as moral (will).

Attention to practical reasoning continues in other essays. Pinches forays into recent debates over the moral object. Those familiar with his earlier work on the importance of narrative and context for action analysis will be perhaps surprised at his essay's argument that such attention does not replace, but in fact requires, attention to what Thomists call the "natural species" of an action.⁵⁴ Clark relies on the work of Linda Zagzebski on moral exemplars to offer perhaps this

⁵⁴ In his important *Theology and Action: After Theory in Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), Pinches' post-Wittgensteinian emphasis on the challenges of act description lead him to state: "Herein lies the future of moral inquiry: namely, the careful and critical attention to the great variety of our descriptions" (158). While in that book he stresses the ways in which descriptions "cannot be divorced from community" insofar as "moral descriptions must be sustained by a group of language users" (159), this emphasis on community should not be seen as precluding his treatment of "natural species" here.

volume's most ambitious methodological argument. Taking to heart the virtue ethics assertion that virtues are not simply reducible to rules, Clark offers an account of practical reasoning in which exemplars are primary. This focus on exemplars offers resources for Catholic moral theology to be more Christocentric, as also seen in *Veritatis splendor* and the work of Livio Melina. Clark also demonstrates how exemplarism in moral theology not only does not replace a virtue-centered approach, but rather is compatible with and indeed augments a virtue-centric moral theology.

Two other essays contribute to a virtue-centered account of practical reasoning by addressing the classic question of the "limit" of a virtue, where limit describes primarily the goal or highest reach of activity expressed by some human capacity, but also indirectly the source of limitations to that expression. Bowlin looks to the contemporary virtue of tolerance to examine both how the current broken human condition limits (restricts) the expression of tolerance, but then examines in the context of discussion of the relationship between acquired and infused virtue how God's grace can extend the limit (reach) of tolerance. Kim's essay on the connectivity of the virtues not only illuminates traditional arguments in support of connectivity resting on the relationship of intellect and will (and passion) and thus prudence and other moral virtues; his account of how affirmation of this connectivity does not preclude growth in the moral life is also implicitly an examination of how a virtue can be attained and yet its limit (reach) extended as the person continues to grow morally.

All this work demonstrates that analysis of moral action (and by extension, questions of natural law) have been renewed and pushed forward in recent work on virtue. The same can be said about the relationship between nature and grace, a perennial theological topic that is at the heart of virtue approaches to moral thought, and quite evident in the work surveyed in this section.

Turning first to the monographs, Jennifer Herdt's *Putting on Virtue* is a fine example of how a focus on virtue can provide an illuminating lens into discussions of nature and grace. Although her focus can be properly called the status of pagan virtue in early modernity (the book is subtitled *The Legacy of the Splendid Vices*), it is equally well understood as an inquiry into the role of human effort in the development of virtue. She sets the stage for early modernity with an overview of the thought of Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas on these matters. She notes the important contributions of Augustine and Aquinas to the topic of the attainment and development of virtue in the Christian life, but also identifies problem areas (Augustine's depiction of pagan virtues as splendid vices and Aquinas's imprecise articulation of the "balance" between acquired and infused virtue) that contribute to inadequate approaches to this topic in early moder-

nity. Her implicit affirmation of the Scholastic axiom that grace perfects nature is evident in her endorsement of Erasmus' "humanist" approach to the "problem of the semblance of virtue," over the "hyper-Augustianism" of Luther and the (Jansenist) "Anatomists" (13). Hyper-Augustianism ends up demanding "an utter break with eudaimonism" and emerges "out of a demand for a kind of freedom and thus a kind of disinterestedness that Augustine himself would not have found intelligible" (105).

Herd't's concern, reminiscent of Hauerwas' project described in his abovementioned book, is to shear Christian moral thought of the assumption that participation in the growth of virtue on the part of the believer is at least an implicit rejection of grace. What Hauerwas recognizes in the 20th century theologies of Bultmann and Barth, Herdt further identifies in an extensive pre-modern historical trajectory. She laments how a heritage of hyper-Augustianism leads to twin problems in Christian ethics. On the one hand, for Christian moralists this heritage has made it enormously difficult to dispel "the anxiety that the virtues cannot be cleansed from the taint of the splendid vices" (345). On the other hand, the total hostility to self-development and habituation in Christian ethics ends up creating the space where a "secular conception of morality" can emerge, as exemplified in different ways by Rousseau, Hume, and Kant. "'True' Christian virtue" is relegated to the "realm of mysterious divine activity," leaving open an analysis of human virtue purely in terms of "human activity and control" (342). Herdt hopes a better appreciation of the mimetic nature of virtue in Christian moral discourse can both further liberate virtue from Pelagian stereotypes and reveal the continuities (notwithstanding clear differences) between Christian virtue and "natural" virtue. As she points out approvingly in summarizing this "mimetic conception of virtue" in Erasmus and early modern Jesuit plays, the "messy interpenetration of activity and passivity, of nature and grace... is not a failure to recognize a nature/grace distinction but rather an affirmation that all we encounter is nature fallen-and-in-process-of-redemption, fallen nature shot through with grace" (163).

Such virtue-rooted attention to and illumination of the relationship between nature and grace is evident in Michael Sherwin, O.P.'s *By Knowledge and By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*. If Westberg's book is an examination of the relationship between intellect and will to offer an account of practical decision-making that necessitates the virtues, Sherwin's book offers a comparable account on the natural level as precursor to his account of how charity necessitates both the knowledge of God that is faith and the knowledge of temporal matters that is infused prudence. As noted above, Sherwin is a helpful dialogue partner with Westberg on the stages of practical decision-making. But his primary

contribution is an account of how, in the book's title and in reference to two quotes from Aquinas, knowledge and love operate in conjunction in the life of grace. This happens in one manner when charity operates in conjunction with faith (and the gifts of understanding and knowledge); it happens in a related though distinct manner when charity operates in conjunction with infused prudence (and the gifts of counsel and wisdom) and by extension the other infused moral virtues. Sherwin's book not only offers an account of the moral importance of faith, but also offers perhaps the most thorough explanation of how the activities of the (infused) moral virtues are commanded by, and thus transformed in light of, charity.

This question of how Christian moral action can be truly graced and yet not wholly discontinuous with "natural" morality vexed Catholic moral theology in the years following Vatican II, as debate focused on whether Christian ethics was simply a "human ethic," albeit with supernatural "motivation." Sherwin rightly notes that theories that regard charity as moral motivation that is "antecedent to and independent of practical reasoning" ironically leave the Christian moral life "disembodied," since "charity is not linked to any specific kinds of acts" (233). Sherwin's book meticulously explicates Thomas Aquinas's approach to this issue, explaining how for Thomas "charity commands the acts of the other virtues by drawing them into its own act of loving God" (180). Yet even so grace perfects, rather than obliterates, nature.

Even though the intellect requires a higher measure infused by God in order for it to act according to the exigencies of the heavenly kingdom, this infused measure must function as a principle elevating an essentially human process of practical reasoning. Infused prudence is truly infused; it is a gift of God's grace. Yet, infused prudence is also truly prudence; it is a virtue that disposes the practical intellect of the human person to judge and command rightly about the proper means to attain our ultimate end (179).

Thus Sherwin offers a Thomistic account of how Christian faith and love transform, literally, the moral life. In the presence of this loving inclination [charity], a prudence exists that disposes the intellect to reason rightly about those things that are ordered to the [supernatural last] end. In other words, unlike the theologies of moral motivation, Aquinas's theology of charity is able to show how our love for God shapes our practical judgments about our actions here on earth. Reason is able to judge rightly about the actions that lead us to our eternal harbor, because charity elevates and inclines our wills toward that harbor (238).

This dynamic of at least implicitly identifying commonalities between moral action in both the natural and graced realms is ubiquitous in the essays of this volume. Several authors evidence this simply in the intellectual resources they employ in service to a Christian

virtue ethic. Cochran relies on Stoic thought to augment early Protestant thought on the centrality of faith as not only a cognitive, but also what she calls a “moral,” endeavor. Kim relies on Stoic and Aristotelian analysis of the connectivity of the virtues to present his own Thomistic account. And even with his explicitly Christocentric and ecclesio-centric project, Clark identifies resources from Linda Zagzebski’s account of exemplarism to provide what is lacking in the thought of someone like Melina.

While the above paragraph describes how essays marshal resources from outside Christianity to augment their moral theology, there are also occasions in the enclosed essays where authors directly address the nature-grace relationship through the lens of virtue. Knobel’s inquiry in the “content,” if you will, of the natural (last) end and to what extent it includes knowledge of and love of God is a clear investigation of the nature / grace relationship. Though Kim’s argument on the possibility for growth in the connected moral virtues is not explicitly attentive to the relationship between acquired and infused moral virtues, his argument sets the stage for an account of growth in infused moral virtue as a greater participation in the graced life. Finally, Bowlin offers a direct analysis of the relationship of acquired and infused moral virtues, and then turns to a concrete example in tolerance to demonstrate both the continuities and divergences between the “natural” and graced versions of this virtue. As should be clear, work on the relationship between nature and grace continues in and indeed is invigorated by a virtue-centered approach to moral theology.

We turn lastly to another important feature of virtue-centered moral thought identified in the previous section, namely, the importance of the community. Explicit attention to the role of community is far less evident in recent research than the previous two topics, particularly in the four monographs. It does play some role in the texts. For example, Bowlin notes that a proper understanding of prudence illuminates why, in Aquinas, “common goods trump private goods.” Because of the difficulties with which it deals, prudence can never do without “drawing on the experience of prudent friends” with whom one “share(s) common ends” and a common life (79). Hence, individual good simply cannot be adequately pursued except if proper common life is maintained. Herdt responds to concerns that Erasmus’ understanding of virtue rejects the “traditional corporative structure” of medieval life, noting that he is certainly not recommending “a vision of private pursuits of perfection.” Instead, those “most fully formed in Christ” should assist those more in need, vesting the authority of exemplarity not in “coercing by threats” but in “inspiring by example” (120-1). But in these cases, the communal/political character of the life of virtue is not a central theme of the books.

A similar pattern appears in our contributions here. There is some explicit examination of the role of the community in specifying virtue. Clark's work on exemplarism explains how Christ—and the Body of Christ which is the Church, including the saints—functions to specify the virtuous Christian life. And even though Pinches's work on "natural species" could seem to actually preclude any significant role for the community, in conjunction with his earlier book on moral action we have in Pinches a model of how attention to the importance of community need not preclude technical philosophical precision in act description. Other essays evidence the importance of community more implicitly by the virtue-related topics they address, which are more often treated with tools of "social ethics." O'Connell's work on virtue and racism comes most obviously to mind here; too often, the urgent concerns of those working on ethical issues of race and ethnicity have not been attended to in virtue ethics. Part of the problem is a disconnect between categories of social analysis and those of virtue, a disconnect which O'Connell moves to bridge. Fullam's look at Teresa of Avila on humility in the context of concern for women's being subjugated by injunctions to humility develops an analogous point of needed connection. Finally, Bowlin's analysis of tolerance is a fitting use of a contemporary virtue to address perennial questions about virtue. But it seems safe to say that of the topics distilled from the previous section as important to the resurgence of virtue, there is most room for growth in attention to the importance of the community in specifying the virtuous life.

The purpose of this essay has been to call attention to major works that have contributed to the development of virtue ethics, and map how the work in this volume might be seen as continuing the trajectories evidenced in those books. We have identified several central themes evident in the texts that exemplify the recent resurgence of virtue in moral theology, and then showed how these themes receive even further development in several monographs and in the original essays in this volume.

In doing this work, we especially want to emphasize two things about the trajectory of virtue ethics. One, we hope to have demonstrated that virtue ethics is not an antiquarian project, one that merely involves refurbishing ancient ethical ideas. Rather, it has emerged as an ongoing constructive project in moral theology. At the same time, secondly, we hope to have shown that it is an ongoing project that involves precision. Too often in Catholic moral theology, the "technical energy" of the discipline has been consumed by the focus on specifying particular norms (and their application; e.g. in contemporary bioethics). We think that technical energy has been and should continue to be directed toward enriching our understanding of virtues and their application. Our review—and the essays in this volume—attempt to highlight important themes in the resurgence of virtue, in

hopes of contributing to the ongoing development of virtue-centered moral theology. **M**

Start studying Moral Theology Review. Learn vocabulary, terms and more with flashcards, games and other study tools.Â argues that the just and moral life is the good life, and the most fulfilling and happy life is a virtuous life; the question is not how to live but how to live well; the good life and morally good life are one in the same. morality of happiness. Socrates' view: not that we feel happy every time we act morally, but that following genuine moral rules is what we all truly want in life since it itself constitutes living a good satisfying life. morality of obligation.Â sub-virtue of prudence: nimble decisiveness/ the ability to quickly size up an unexpected situation and act well to achieve one's good goals. conscience.