

**Reason and Faith in the Journey to God**

For St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) God’s creation brings the universe into being and God’s redemption brings this creation to its fulfillment.

- Ultimate harmony between right reason and right faith is built into the very structure of the universe.
- Aquinas’s major intellectual project was to explore this harmony by bringing together:
  a) Aristotle (newly arrived in the West from the Middle East, e.g., Averoes)
  b) The Church Fathers (most especially Augustine)
- He used the Christian scriptures as the framework for this project.
- His *Summa Theologiae* (written to introduce beginners to theology) takes up this task in three parts:
  1- God (the origin of humans),
  2- The Journey to God (the concern of morality), and
  3- Christ, who, as human, reveals the road to God.
  - Virtue is the primary vehicle by which humans travel that road.
  - The gifts of the Spirit take over at the limits of virtue and transform virtue into a vehicle that surpasses these limits.

**Teleology**: the study of human activity aimed at goals.

- [Greek *telos* = end, purpose, goal + *logos* = study of; account of]

**Aquinas** takes a teleological approach to morality in three senses.

1) *Telos as complete fulfillment*. All created beings seek the fullest realization of their nature and its potential. Aquinas calls this fullest realization of a thing’s (created) nature its ultimate *telos*. For humans this final *telos*, called happiness, is friendship with God. Happiness is to be completely fulfilled. Only God, who is the fullness of being and happiness, can completely fulfill the human desire for happiness.

2) *Telos as a moral standard*. The subject of morality = distinguishing uses of human freedom that advance happiness from those that impede it. An exercise of human freedom that promotes full friendship with God is morally good; one that impedes it is morally bad. Note: Aquinas maintains that God builds a moral order into the universe so that some actions (e.g., murder and adultery) can never advance friendship with God.

3) *Telos as driving the virtues*. Virtues are the ways that humans fulfill themselves. Aquinas distinguishes two main classes of virtues: cardinal and theological.

   - **Cardinal virtues** fulfill our created nature. Humans are created as rational and political animals. Thus humans fulfill this created nature by developing fully their rational capacities so that the human community and its individual members flourish.

   - **Theological virtues** fulfill us beyond our created nature and direct us to a supernatural end, i.e., participation in the Divine nature. While cardinal virtues allow us to realize ourselves fully in human society, theological virtues transform the cardinal virtues (through grace) so that we can realize ourselves fully in Divine as well as human society.

- Jesus reveals what it means to be fully human as participation in the life of God.
When Is a Disposition Needed?
* Humans need dispositions whenever freedom is involved in realizing our potential.
* Dispositions are not needed if there is only one possible way of acting.
* Thus, dispositions = particular ways we have conditioned, arranged, & inclined our freedom.

Aquinas’s Concept of a Disposition (or Habitus)
- A disposition (or habitus) is an acquired condition or quality that integrates
  -1- ability (skill) learned and developed through reason; and
  -2- inclination of the will (leaning, tendency, orientation, and readiness)

-A disposition is also a kind of “second nature” or “acquired nature” (as distinguished from a nature determined by birth alone).

Examples of dispositions given by Aquinas help us to grasp the logic of this term.
(a) conditions or acquired qualities of the soul
   - virtues such as justice, courage, temperance, faith, hope, and charity
   - vices such as cowardice, recklessness, intemperance, injustice, insensibility
(b) states of mind or intellect
   - beliefs and knowledge of principles of logic or scientific facts or the Bible
(c) skills or capacities that are relatively permanent
   - an ability to speak a foreign language
(d) tendencies or inclinations of the will
   - generosity, mildness, and modesty

A Disposition Is Not a) An Action Or b) An Undeveloped Possibility
a) Dispositions are sources of actions. Dispositions lead us to act in relatively predictable ways. Actions, in turn, help to form patterns of reasoning and willing that dispose our future actions. In other words, our actions both shape and express our dispositions (or traits of character). The same holds true for virtues or vices, i.e., they are not actions but they are expressed through actions.

b) A disposition is half-way between a capacity and an action. In other words, a disposition represents a mid-point between a) pure potentiality: everything being equally possible and attractive vs. b) full actuality: everything has been decided and done.

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Why Are Dispositions So Important?

From the moral perspective of Aquinas, to help an old lady across the street is not necessarily a good action performed by a good person. **You must do it** for the right reason and in the right way. Only when such an action is done, for example, **out of a disposition** for charity that is firmly integrated into one’s character can both the action and the agent achieve their fullest potential. In order to become virtuous, the actor must truly enjoy the good that the action realizes and be capable of realizing this good as called for by a variety of circumstances. In short, the real action in the moral arena occurs in the ways that, over the long haul, we pattern our freedom through doing as well as being.

Aquinas’s ethic of virtue and character places emphasis on the bulk of human activities that occur in moral “auto-pilot.” (Compare William James and neurologist Antonio Damasio.) The familiar patterns of our doing and being generate a powerful momentum that steers the multitude of small, ordinary behaviors, thoughts, and feelings down a well-worn path. Dispositions are the ways that we generate moral energy and momentum in our reasoning and willing.

For Aquinas, How Does A Disposition Differ From A Habit?

- **Habit** = a regularly occurring pattern of activity that results from repetition.
  * Animals without reason can have habits that develop out of natural instincts. However, without reason and its capacity for knowledge of choices, such animals have no free will to dispose. Without free will, they cannot have dispositions.

- **Disposition** = a particular way that we have rationally enabled and inclined our freedom.

- **Acquiring and losing dispositions.** Confusion can arise from the fact that habits can lead to dispositions in humans.
  * Indeed, dispositions are acquired and strengthened through repeated activity that shapes human intellect and will. For example, a prisoner in a Nazi labor camp who is physically forced to perform repulsive activities, may be able to resist acquiring a disposition to perform such activities by repeatedly withholding the consent of his spirit to this activity. As a result he may develop a firm disposition to resist such activities in the future.

  * Similarly, dispositions are lost by lack of activity (“use it or lose it”) or by contrary repeated activity that alters human intellect and will. A person who is disposed to be honest can lose this disposition by frequent lying.

What Is A Virtue?

- Etymology [Latin: *virtus*--strength; from the Greek: *arête*--the excellence of a thing.
  -- The *arête* of a knife = to cut well; the *arête* of a racehorse = to race well]

- Virtues are dispositions that incline and enable humans to achieve moral excellence by realizing their full potential. Virtues harmoniously integrate will and reason so that humans flourish.
What Are The Three Steps By Which Virtues Acquired?
(1) overcome bad dispositions
(2) acquire good dispositions
(3) Adhering to and enjoying God and God's way through a continual transformation

What Are The Differences Between The Cardinal And Theological Virtues?

Cardinal = directed to other humans and directed by reason; fulfill human nature.

Theological = directed to God and directed by God’s redeeming grace; transform cardinal virtues and fulfill human possibilities for sharing in God’s life.

-- What are the other names that Aquinas gives to the cardinal and theological virtues and why?

Cardinal virtues =
-1- Natural: because they develop our created (natural) capacity of reason
-2- Acquired: because they are not given at birth; we acquire them as we develop our reason
-3- Political/Social: because they enable us to flourish through participation in human society

Theological virtues =
1. Supernatural: because they surpass our created nature [Super = above, beyond]
2. Deiform: because they receive their form or likeness from God [Dei = God]
3. Instilled or infused: because God’s transformation of our dispositions take the form of the theological virtues. This transforming presence of God is “grace”.

What Are The Cardinal And Theological Virtues?

Cardinal virtues = courage, temperance, justice, prudence.

Theological virtues = faith, hope, charity

How Are Each Of These Virtues Defined?
- Each is defined as
  a) a particular kind of excellence
     For example, courage is a particular excellence in holding firm to what is right despite fearful or aggressive emotions
  b) the mean between two extremes.
     For example the golden mean between cowardice and recklessness.

Using The Golden Mean To Schematize The Cardinal Virtues

courage (right aggressive emotion – fear/anger) .

cowardice ---------------------------------- COURAGE -------------------------------recklessness

justice (right will towards others; giving each her due)
giving more or less than is due  ---------- JUSTICE ----- failing to respect human dignity

- **temperance** (right appetite or well balanced/directed passion)

overindulgence/uncontrolled appetite -- TEMPERANCE ---underindulgence/repressed desire

- **prudence** (right reason/judgment of practical affairs)

unconsidered judgment  ------------------- PRUDENCE -------paralysis of analysis/
overly measured judgment

- **Understanding the Theological Virtues**
  - **Charity**
    - a disposition to
      a) mutually share in God’s life and God’s loves as a friend; and
      b) respond freely and graciously to God’s gifts by sharing them with others
    - the mother and form of all virtues: virtues are born from charity and ordered by it.

  - **Faith**
    - a disposition to believe, trust, and commit to truth revealed and promised by God but not fully seen by humans

  - **Hope**
    - a disposition to move toward the good which we cannot fully possess (God) and to patiently and joyfully anticipate and desire what God has promised.

- **How Does The Fulfillment Of The Cardinal Vs. Theological Virtues Differ?**
  - The two classes of virtues enable humans to experience two levels of happiness.

    1) **Cardinal virtues** enable **natural** happiness which is proportionate to human nature and attainable by exercise of our natural capacities, and, most especially, our highest natural capacity, i.e., reason.

    2) **Theological virtues** enable **supernatural** happiness which is beyond our natural capacities and "out of proportion to our nature." Supernatural happiness is a participation in Divine happiness by friendship with God.

- **How Do The Cardinal and Theological Virtues Interact?**
  - Cardinal virtues enable us to acquire a taste and ability for the good. They prepare us to say "yes" to God’s offer of friendship with “ease and joy.” Without these virtues we wouldn't be able to appreciate what we are saying yes to. We would not be capable of freely saying yes. While God might instill such
appreciation, we would still have to undergo a transformation in order to consent to it. The less one has the virtues the more extensive, alien, and arduous the transformation.

- Christian moral maturity is about finding wholeness by allowing ourselves to receive a gift that will truly make us whole.

 ➢ How Do The Virtues Relate To The Gifts Or Fruits Of The Holy Spirit?

Cardinal Virtues: We act from dispositions acquired through our natural capacities
Theological Virtues: We act from supernatural dispositions infused into us by God
Gifts of the Spirit: God acts directly through us with our consent

- While the virtues proceed from us (even those instilled into us by God work through our human agency), the gifts proceed directly from God and God acts in us.

- The gifts of God’s Spirit are dispositions to be in the most intimate harmony with God such that God acts directly through us.

- These gifts change us at the limits of our virtue. However, they do not replace the cardinal and theological virtues. Rather, they transform the virtues such that God’s spirit acts through us with our consent. "Charity becomes the Spirit." This Spirit becomes the power by which we move. We live in and through the body of Christ or the community of God’s friends. Through the gifts we begin to share in the fullness of Divine life.

➢ Thomas’ Vision Of The Moral Life.

✧ Goodness as the path the wholeness. Morality begins with a restlessness, a moral tug to realize our potential for good, and an abiding desire for wholeness. The point of morality is not simply learning to be good. It is finding the fulfillment, peace, and wholeness that goodness makes possible.

✧ In the end, wholeness comes to us as a gift. Ultimately, the moral life is not so much a matter of what we achieve but what we allow ourselves to receive. To receive God's love fully is to respond in kind by sharing this gift of love with others who are beloved to God.

✧ Happiness is the completion of the virtues in the gifts of the Spirit. Happiness is not simply getting what we want. First and foremost, happiness is learning to desire rightly so that we say yes to what will truly make us whole and fulfilled. The virtues make us capable of saying yes to our highest destiny. The gifts of the Spirit emerge from and complete the theological virtues only after these virtues have become firmly rooted in our character.