PROJECT MUSE®

Philosophical Virtues and Psychological Strengths: Building the Bridge ed. by Romanus Cessario, O.P., Craig Steven Titus, and Paul C. Vitz (review)

Kevin White

Nova et vetera, Volume 14, Number 1, Winter 2016, pp. 371-374 (Review)

Published by The Catholic University of America Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/nov.2016.0012>

➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/609206>

arguments in a way that maintains the distinction between second and first order discourse. Fifth, Ku leaves no room for doubt that Thomas's theology of the Father is a scripturally saturated enterprise through and through, repeatedly drawing the reader's attention to the biblical bases for Thomas's arguments.

It should be said that Fr. Ku's book does suffer from certain small stylistic deficiencies. However, he demonstrates awareness of these and perhaps rightly suggests that, given the amount and type of material with which he is engaged, certain aesthetic shortcomings were all but inevitable. That he was able to keep the text to 300 pages is quite an achievement in itself, after all. But because of his continuing use of outline in structuring the book and its argument, at times the volume reads as if it simply *were* an outline, albeit one with a bit more filling out. And the recurrence of the outline's numeric and alphabetic signposts in the body of the text, signaled with brackets and parentheses, is often more distracting than enlightening. One might also have hoped for footnotes rather than endnotes. And those readers who are not already somewhat familiar with St. Thomas's theology and/or the technical intricacies of early scholastic theology will find Ku's work difficult to inhabit. Nonetheless, these considerations detract in no way from the significance of the theological gem Fr. Ku has provided us. Whatever its weaknesses, its great strengths are its demonstration of Thomas scriptural genealogy, its display of Thomas's thought and development across multiple texts, and its illuminating engagement with St. Bonaventure's (and others') contrasting theological positions. **N V**

T. Adam Van Wart
Southern Methodist University
Dallas, Texas

Philosophical Virtues and Psychological Strengths: Building the Bridge edited by Romanus Cessario, O.P., Craig Steven Titus, and Paul C. Vitz (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2013), 322 pp.

THE WISDOM OF CATHOLICISM, accumulated and handed down through centuries of experience and reflection, remains a resource of tremendous proportions, although one that is, by and large, neglected today, not least by Catholics themselves. The present volume proposes to draw on this resource for the benefit of the contemporary psychological sciences and their application in therapy. The contributors help establish "a foundation column near the side of philosophy" for the "bridge" between the philosophical virtues and the psychologi-

cal strengths mentioned in the title (293). At the heart of their considerations, therefore, is the notion of virtue.

Virtue, as Catholic tradition has it, is a stable quality of mind, a “habit” of soul, by which one has a fixed disposition to act rightly as a rule, and in so doing, to lead a good life. The virtuous man or woman is the constant one, the reliable one. Together with reason, truth, nature, and being, virtue is one of the great *Leitmotifs* of Western thought. After much elaboration by Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, the theme of virtue was given a Christian inflection by the Fathers of the Church and the scholastics. In the modern world, the word virtue has taken on a prim and priggish tone, but the human excellence that it names continues to show up regularly in human affairs, as does, of course, its opposite, vice. More recently, the theme of virtue has been revived by philosophical scholars under the somewhat awkward term *virtue ethics*, a term whose reach is taken to include the work of some Thomistic philosophers and theologians, including such notable figures as Josef Pieper, Servais Pinckaers, and Alasdair MacIntyre.

The theme of virtue enters into an ancient analogy between philosophy and medicine: as medicine heals the body, it was thought, so philosophy heals the soul, which it does by cultivating true virtue. Medieval Christianity took up this theme of health of soul under the name *cura animarum*, the care or cure of souls exercised by priests, especially in their preaching and hearing of confessions. The term *cura animarum* coincides semantically with the modern word *psychiatry*, and the obvious similarity between the sacrament of confession and psychiatric consultation—two situations in which one is assured that one can “come clean” with the truth about oneself—has often been noted.

As many even non-Catholics might agree, the theme of virtue finds its most perfect expression in the *Summa theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas, a work whose central part contains Aquinas’s most complete account of virtue in general, the seven great virtues in particular, the three theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity), and the four cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, courage, and moderation). Leonard Boyle has shown that an important context for the *Summa* is the concern of the Dominican order, from its beginnings, with *cura animarum*. Aquinas evidently saw a close connection between care of souls and the doctrine of virtue. Most of the contributors to this volume draw on the works of Aquinas, especially the *Summa theologiae*. Several of them also refer to the form of psychotherapy called cognitive therapy, the premise of which is that awareness of truth can of itself be curative.

The essays are the fruit of meetings organized by the Scholarly Research Center of the Institute for the Psychological Sciences in Arlington, Virginia. Gladys Sweeney, Academic Dean Emerita of the Institute, and Romanus Cessario, O.P., one of the editors of the collection, have played important roles, both theoretically and practically, in eliciting the contributions and bringing them together into a whole. Other notable influences on the contributors include Benedict Ashley's *Theologies of the Body: Humanist and Christian* (1995) and St. John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et ratio* (1998). (Fr. Ashley, who also contributed to the volume, passed away on February 23, 2013, shortly before the volume was published.)

The volume is divided into three sections, the first consisting of two introductory essays. Romanus Cessario ("Fresh Beginnings from Classical Foundations") presents the interdisciplinary, bridge-building aims of the volume. Kenneth Schmitz ("Overarching Considerations") provides metaphysical context by giving an account of the transcendental properties of being, then indicates how each of the essays in the central section of the volume can be placed in this context.

The central section consists of eight essays in Thomistic philosophy, each of which includes suggestions for therapeutic application of philosophical principles. Christopher J. Thompson ("At the Therapist's Door") proposes that conversation between Thomists and clinical psychologists should begin in the setting of the contemporary counselor, who must be aware of what it means to be a human person, made to pursue one's own good, and ultimately one's beatitude. Matthew Cuddeback ("Personal Unity") presents Aquinas's account of the nature of the human soul, its union with a body, and its powers. John Cuddeback ("Ordered Inclinations") discusses the ordering of human inclinations and the measuring of human action in light of man's true end. Craig Steven Titus ("Reasonable Acts") develops several aspects of the large and complex topic of right practical reason.

Tobias Hoffmann ("Free Choices") gives a clear and thoughtful Thomistic account of will and free choice and reflects on the meaning of freedom. Paul Gondreau ("Balanced Emotions") provides a metaphysical account of the emotions, then shows how emotion can participate in reason and thereby become ordered to the human good; he draws implications for clinical therapy in cases of intemperance. Daniel McNerny ("Poised Strength") discusses effective cognitive therapy with particular reference to the irascible appetite. He shows how disturbing passions of the irascible appetite, such as anger, hope,

daring, and striving for honor, can be turned to good use in therapy; and he presents Aquinas's sophisticated analysis of the virtue of the irascible appetite, namely, courage, into elements of attack (confidence and magnificence) and endurance (patience and perseverance). J. David Franks ("Tempered Desire") discusses temperance, in particular chastity, in the context of an interesting, non-Marxist critique of the pernicious effects of consumerist ideology on human desire.

Three essays make up the concluding section. Roger Scruton ("Modern Philosophical Anthropology") provides an alternative to the volume's predominantly Thomistic approach by discussing modern "anthropology" and the modern theme of "subjectivity," especially as developed in the German tradition stemming from Kant. Benedict M. Ashley ("Mental Health and Human Well-Being") reviews the articles of the central section and closes with the pertinent suggestion that Thomists might look more closely into what Aquinas calls the *vis aestimativa* in animals and the *vis cogitativa* in human beings. Paul C. Vitz ("Postscript") brings the volume to a close by proposing that fuller application of the analyses and suggestions of the foregoing essays must be carefully worked out with reference to particular pathologies and mental problems. By way of illustration, he briefly describes the work of two students at the Institute for the Psychological Sciences, Leslie Trautman and Eric Gudan.

The editors and contributors are evidently motivated by the admirable hope that Thomistic insights can be made to serve the prudence of contemporary counselors of troubled souls. May it prove to be so. Meanwhile, this collection of essays provides much material for reflection, not just for therapists, both Catholic and non-Catholic, but also for Thomistic scholars with an interest in Aquinas's astonishingly accurate understanding of human nature. N.V

Kevin White

Catholic University of America
Washington, DC