



PROJECT MUSE®

## Aquinas on Virtue

Austin, SJ, Nicholas

Published by Georgetown University Press

Austin, SJ, Nicholas.

Aquinas on Virtue: A Causal Reading.

Georgetown University Press, 2017.

Project MUSE.[muse.jhu.edu/book/54262](https://muse.jhu.edu/book/54262).



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/54262>

Access provided at 24 Jan 2020 20:06 GMT with no institutional affiliation



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/).

## CHAPTER 9

---

# Telic Virtue

---

Suggested reading: *Summa Theologiae* I.II 56.3, 57, 58.4, 61.1, 65.1; II.II 2.5, 4.4–5, 23.7, 45.2, 141.6

---

The four causes—formal, material, final, and efficient—consist of two pairs, each with its own characteristic role in virtue theory. Whereas the formal and material causes have to do with the *specification* of virtue, the final and efficient causes are principles of *execution* (compare I.II 9.1). Thus the discussion must move from the static, essentialist to the more dynamic, existentialist aspect of Aquinas’s ethics.<sup>1</sup> What, then, is the final cause of virtue?

### THE FINAL CAUSES

Since virtue is a good operative habit (I.II 55.2–3), on one level virtue’s final cause is simply good operation. “The end of virtue, since it is an operative habit, is operation itself” (55.4c);<sup>2</sup> and “That to which virtue is ordained is a good act” (71.1).<sup>3</sup> Yet this idea just pushes the question back one stage: If the end of virtue is virtuous action, what is the final cause of virtuous operation?

We find a clue in ancient tradition. The monk John Cassian (ca. 360–435) reports a journey to the desert of Scete in search of instruction from the renowned anchorite abbot Moses. The holy abbot begins his teaching: “All arts and disciplines [he says] have a certain *scopos*, that is, target; and they also have a *telos*, that is, their own proper end.”<sup>4</sup> This is the first piece of instruction found in the *Conferences*, the classic text compiling the wisdom of the desert fathers.

The distinction between the *scopos* and the *telos* of any art, science, or, indeed, of any virtue goes back to Peripatetic and Stoic ethics. Abbot Moses illustrates the distinction by means of a farmer who wishes to secure a good harvest and so earn his living (the farmer’s *telos*) but who has little chance of

achieving that goal without applying himself diligently to ploughing the earth, clearing it of weeds, sowing the crop, and so on (the farmer's *scopos*).

While a simple analogy, the insight has immense practical significance. The holy abbot is warning Cassian and his companions that it is not enough to desire the Kingdom of God, like a farmer who dearly wishes for a flourishing harvest and a barn full of grain. The monk must be focused on the more proximate goal or target of the monastic life (its *scopos*) if he is to hope to make any progress to the overall end (*telos*), just as the farmer must take action to achieve the end of a good harvest. A sports coach might say the same to an athlete: dreams of Olympic gold medals are worth little if there is no diligence in application to daily training.

Aquinas likewise distinguishes two final causes of virtue: the *overall end* and the more proximate goal or *target*. Let us begin with the former.

## The Overall End

Virtue's ultimate final cause for Aquinas is the overall end of the whole of human life (*finis communis totius humanae vitae*), which he identifies with beatitude (I.II 2 pr). The basis for this thesis lies in the first question of the *Treatise on Morals*, where Aquinas shows that a condition of the possibility of human action is that it not only be done for an end but for some overall end (1.1–6). Admittedly, virtuous action requires only “virtual,” not “actual” intention toward the true end, just as a person walks home in virtue of a first intention, and need not be consciously thinking always of the destination (see 1.3 ad 3). Nevertheless, the virtues in this conception are qualities that ensure our lives go well as a whole by orienting us to the real, as opposed to the merely apparent or illusory, end of life. “True virtue simply so-called is that which orders to a human's principal good” (II.II 23.7).<sup>5</sup> Virtues are principles of the good human actions by which we arrive at our last end (I.II 6pr, 49pr). Aquinas's virtue theory therefore presupposes the final-causal orientation of good human actions whereby we journey toward the final end. As he explains, “It is of the rationale of virtue that it incline a human being to the good” (II.II 141.1).<sup>6</sup>

Virtue's telic orientation is clarified by the contrast between moral and merely technical rationality—that is, between prudence and art (I.II 21.2 ad 2). By the term “art” (*ars*) Aquinas refers to both the servile and the liberal arts (57.3 ad 3). The servile arts are ordered toward completely external works, and include farming, weaving, being a smith or carpenter, and even military and naval warfare; the liberal arts are more of the interior life and closer to the speculative virtues; they include grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, arithmetic,

geometry, and music. Aquinas distinguishes the teleology of technical and moral reason, art and virtue, as follows: “Reason stands otherwise in matters of art than in morals. For in technical matters, reason is ordered to a particular end, which is something thought up by reason; in moral matters, however, reason is ordered to the overall end of human life” (21.2 ad 2).<sup>7</sup> Art aims at a limited or particular end or good, moral virtue at what is good all things considered. This is why a terrorist pilot who flies a plane into a building may have perfected the art of flying but has badly failed in the moral task of living well. For, “In moral matters, where the ordering of reason to the overall end of human life is what matters, sin and evil are understood by deviation from the order of reason to the overall end of human life” (21.2 ad 2).<sup>8</sup>

### The Target

Besides seeing virtue as oriented to the overall end of human life, does Aquinas acknowledge a target of each specific virtue—that is, a *scopos* as well as a *telos*? There is no doubt that he does, as he refers to the moral virtues as disposing a person well to “those things that are for the end”—that is, the more particular ends that are further referred to the ultimate end (for example, I.II 65.3 ad 1; II.II 23.7). Aquinas gives few clues as to how he conceives of the particular ends of the moral virtues, so a certain amount of speculative reconstruction is therefore necessary.<sup>9</sup>

The distinction between target and overall end is clearest in his discussion of temperance (II.II 141.6 ad 2). Aquinas compares temperance with a builder. The builder’s end in building a house is to earn a living. Aquinas calls this overall goal “the agent’s end” (*finis operantis*). The purpose of the act of building, however, is to produce a house. He calls this more proximate end or target “the action’s end” (*finis operis*). The target and overall end are linked: the builder earns his living by the hard work of building. As with Abbot Moses’s farmer, it is necessary to focus on the *scopos* to achieve the *telos*.

Aquinas applies this same connection to temperance: “We should consider that sometimes the agent’s end and the act’s end are distinct, just as it is clear that the end of building is a house, but the end of the builder is sometimes money. Thus, therefore, the end and rule of temperance itself is beatitude, but of the thing that it uses, the end and rule is the necessity of this life” (141.6 ad 2).<sup>10</sup> All moral virtues aim at the overall end of beatitude (131.1 ad 2); what is distinctive about temperance is that its target, in its proper sphere of emotional attraction, is what is needed (rather than what is wanted). Temperate eating, for example, is guided by what is needed for health and social life, not by transitory peckishness.

Evidence that this distinction applies to all the virtues can be found if we think about the object again. The twofold object of virtue is the material object (matter-about-which) and the formal rationale of the object (the mode). The mode is the method or manner of achieving a good. The mode, therefore, seems to presuppose some good that is to be achieved in some matter rather than itself being fully constitutive of that good. We need a more substantive, rather than purely formal, account of that good. Does one moderate one's appetite and eating habits for physical health or psychological well-being, or is this virtue for some more social or even spiritual good?

It helps to think in terms of at least a threefold object: the material object, the formal object that is obtained, and the formal object by which it is obtained. Applying this to virtue's object, we should expect a threefold analysis:

- (1) The material object: the objective matter of a virtue—that is, the actions, passions, and objects that the virtue concerns, considered as conformable, with some difficulty, to the rational good;
- (2) The object *that*: the target good at stake, to which the virtue is directed;
- (3) The object *by which*: the mode of achieving the target in regard to the material object.

Each virtue will have its objective matter, its target, and its characteristic mode by which the target is attained. For example, temperance is about the concupiscible appetite for pleasant things; its target is what meets the need of human life; its mode is moderation.

When it comes to specifying a particular virtue, how important is it to identify its twofold end (its target and the overall end)? When a habit is rightly ordered to the overall end of human life, then it is specified as a moral virtue, as distinct from a vice (which is oriented to a bad end), from an “art” (which is oriented to some particular good), or an intellectual virtue (which is oriented to some aspect of the true). However, the overall end does not distinguish one moral virtue from any other, since it is a common end that they all share. The proximate end or target, however, will be specific to each particular moral virtue. For, as Aquinas observes, it is the proximate end that determines the species of an act, and therefore of a habit (I.II 1.3 ad 3).

What about the theological virtues? Since their object is God Himself (62.2), there is no distinction between the target and the overall end of faith, hope, and charity; rather, there is only a single end and object, namely, God Himself. This helps to make sense of Aquinas's claim that the theological virtues concern the end itself, whereas the moral virtues concern those things that are for the end (65.3 ad 1). The moral virtues have as their target a good that is not fully constitutive of the overall end but is ordered toward it; the theological virtues,

on the other hand, have as their target some aspect of the divine good itself. For God can be the direct target of virtue in three ways: as the first truth revealed by God (the target of faith), as our highest good attainable by the help of God (the target of hope), or as the highest good lovable by the love of friendship (the target of charity). Since the target of the theological virtues is God, who is the overall end of human life, in these virtues there is no distinction between target and end (between *scopos* and *telos*).

### THE “GOOD USE” THESIS

Virtue’s final cause is morally good operation, which in turn has a twofold final cause in its target and overall end. In the causal definition of virtue, Aquinas adds an important qualification to the idea that virtue’s end is good operation:

Since virtue is an operative habit, its end is operation itself. But we should note that, among operative habits, some are *always* towards something *bad*, for example, vicious habits; some however are *sometimes* towards a *good*, and *sometimes* towards something *bad*, just as opinion disposes oneself towards true and false; virtue, however, is a habit *always* disposing towards *good*. And therefore, to distinguish virtue from those habits disposing oneself sometimes towards good, sometimes to evil, [virtue] is said to be [a habit] “which no one uses badly.” (I.II 55.4c)<sup>11</sup>

The telic orientation of virtue to good operation, Aquinas claims, is of a peculiarly strong form: virtue *always* disposes to good operation. This can be called the “good use” thesis.<sup>12</sup> Positively, it states that a virtue *always* inclines to its own good use or exercise—that is, to good and virtuous acts; negatively, it states that a virtue can *never* be used or exercised badly.<sup>13</sup> The good use thesis is a way of saying that the telic orientation to good operation is essential to virtue.

There are antecedents to the good use thesis in Aristotle.<sup>14</sup> Aquinas, however, draws especially Augustine’s discussion of virtue in *On Free Choice of the Will* (I.II 55.4sc). Augustine derives the good use thesis from the idea that virtue by definition involves right reason: “For no one uses prudence or fortitude or temperance badly, since in all of these, as in justice . . . right reason is active, without which there can be no virtues. But no one can use right reason badly.”<sup>15</sup> Virtue, then, is unlike free will, which, though good and comes from God, can be used badly.<sup>16</sup>

It may be objected that a virtuous act could be used for a bad end, as when someone gives to the poor in order to look good. However, Aquinas would reject this: “The will cannot be called good if a bad intention is the cause of willing. For he who wants to give alms out of vainglory, wants what of itself is

good under the aspect of bad, and, therefore, it is bad insofar as it is willed by him” (I.II 19.7 ad 2).<sup>17</sup> While the deed itself is materially an act of mercy, formally speaking it is an act of vanity. The vainglorious end vitiates the virtue of the act. In general, a good act with an otherwise good object done for a bad end is overall vicious since “good is caused from an integral cause” (18.4 ad 3).<sup>18</sup> Since both virtue’s target and its overall end are good, its act will also be good, as having a good object and end.

It is necessary to obviate a possible misunderstanding. When Aquinas claims that virtue disposes *always* to good operation, is he committing himself to the idea that a virtuous person simply cannot sin? That would be an excessively strong claim, and one that Aquinas himself would reject. As he says, “A habit in the soul does not produce its operation from necessity, but someone uses it when he wills. So someone can decline to use a habit, or act contrary to its act, at the same time that the habit exists in him” (74.1c).<sup>19</sup> Terence Irwin sees a contradiction here: if virtuous people do not always act virtuously, virtue cannot always be inclined to the good.<sup>20</sup> Cajetan anticipates this objection and solves it. The objection confuses the strong telic orientation of virtue toward right use with determinism: “When it is said that a [virtuous] habit imparts . . . right use, this is not to be understood except in the way a habit by its nature imparts [right use]. For a habit does not impart goodness by forcing to it, nor by subjecting a power to itself so entirely, even immovably, that it cannot go to the opposite, but it does so in the manner of an inclination” (in I.II 56.3). Virtues infallibly *incline* to their own good use; in no way does it follow that they infallibly *guarantee* their own good use, since inclinations are not always followed. The kind do not always act kindly, and sometimes can fail to show kindness when they should or even on occasion act cruelly. The virtuous person’s fallibility in acting virtuously shows that sometimes even the virtuous person acts out of character, not that she does not possess that character.

### The Scope of the “Good Use” Thesis

To which virtues does the good use thesis apply? What is its scope? It is not clear that it applies to all virtues in an unqualified way.

The good use thesis has to do with the way virtue is directed toward a virtuous act as its end. However, Aquinas notes that there are two forms that this directedness to good operation can take:

A habit may be ordered to a good act in two ways. In one way, insofar as someone acquires through a habit of this kind *a faculty for a good act*. (For example, someone has a faculty to speak rightly through the habit of grammar, but grammar

however, does not bring it about that a human always speak rightly, for a grammarian can barbarize or commit a solecism; and the same kind of thing applies in the other arts and sciences.) In the second way, some habit not only produces a faculty of acting, but even brings it about that someone *rightly use that faculty*. (Justice, for example, not only brings it about that a human be ready of will to doing just things, but even brings it about that he operate justly.) (I.II 56.3c, emphasis added)<sup>21</sup>

Thus Aquinas affirms that the intellectual virtues (sciences and arts) bestow on a person the faculty (*facultas*) for a good act, whereas the moral virtues bestow right use. The former, he says, are virtues only in a qualified sense (*virtutes secundum quid*), whereas the latter are unqualified virtues (*virtutes simpliciter dicta*) (ibid.). The division of virtue into unqualified and qualified is what is termed an “analogical” rather than “univocal” division: the common genus “virtue” does not survive equally in both members of the division but is more perfectly found in unqualified than in qualified virtue (61.1c).

How does this distinction affect the good use thesis? Yves Simon and Philippa Foot interpret Aquinas as saying that art, as a qualified virtue, does not confer right use: for example, the grammarian can use her habit of grammar to perform a grammatical error, whereas a morally virtuous person cannot use her justice or temperance to perform an unjust or intemperate act.<sup>22</sup> However, consider the more decisive treatment by the Salamancans.<sup>23</sup> Despite Aquinas’s comments about the grammarian barbarizing and committing solecisms, they point out that he soon after claims that someone possessing an art cannot use that art against the art: “When someone having an art produces a bad piece of work, this is not the work of the art, indeed it is against the art, just as when someone lies while knowing the truth, he says what is against, rather than in accord with, his knowledge” (57.3 ad 1).<sup>24</sup> Therefore Aquinas would disagree with Foot and Simon: one cannot use a habit of grammar to perform a grammatical error.

It is difficult to understand what Aquinas is saying. If an art cannot be used against itself, how can grammarians sometimes commit solecisms and barbarisms and pianists sometimes play the wrong notes? Those possessing art do sometimes commit mistakes, after all. This is sometimes done unintentionally, but sometimes, it would seem, done intentionally, as when a grammarian deliberately barbarizes.

To answer this question it helps to distinguish between three different kinds of mistake or error that someone possessing an art can commit. First, there are *errors of non-use*. A teacher of English writes an email to a friend and cannot be bothered to ensure her sentences are grammatically correct. Such errors are indeed against the art *but do not involve the use of the art*. This kind of error, therefore, does not pose any conceptual challenge. When a person commits an error of non-use, the art is not used badly, it is simply not used.



The second kind of error are *artful errors*. For example, a grammarian illustrates a barbarism or solecism for her students, or the comic pianist Les Dawson hits exactly the wrong note for comic effect. This kind of error, the artful error, appears to confirm the argument of Foot and Simon and presents a counterexample to Aquinas's claim that an art can never be used to produce a bad work. A grammarian can sin, grammatically speaking; a pianist can intentionally play the wrong the note. However, as the Salamancans point out, Aquinas elsewhere points out that to evaluate a work of art, technically speaking, is to ask whether the product conforms to the idea that the artisan intended to realize in reality (21.2 ad 2). Error or success in execution of art is defined by reference to the intended product. To illustrate, Aquinas makes the surprising observation that a sin or error proper to an art can be committed in one of two ways: by producing a bad work while intending to produce a good one or by *producing a good work while intending to produce a bad one* (21.2 ad 2). If the comic pianist were to accidentally hit the right note, that would not be due to his artfulness as a piano player; it would, strictly speaking, be an error.

It follows that, contrary to Foot and Simon, artful errors are not errors against art but rather are successful exercises of it. If a grammarian produces a barbarism or solecism for the instruction of her students, the so-called error is not something hidden within the artist's action. Rather, it is what is artfully aimed at by the artist's action. Materially it is an error, but formally it is exactly right and artful; the grammarian has in a sense made no error, but got things exactly right.

What sense, then, can be made of the claim that arts, as virtues only in a qualified sense, can be used badly? It would seem that any use of the habit of grammar is by definition grammatical and therefore correct. The solution comes when we note that there are also *moral errors*—that is, sins in their fullest sense. A person uses her grammar to blaspheme or detract from someone's good name in perfectly good English. The error here is not in the art itself but in the use of the art for a bad end. The reason that the good use thesis does not apply strictly to qualified virtues such as the arts and sciences is that they can be used badly, morally speaking. The good use thesis, therefore, applies strictly to unqualified virtue: only unqualified virtues, such as the moral virtues, prudence, and the theological virtues, cannot be used badly in any way.<sup>25</sup>

This leads to a problem about the causal definition of virtue. If the qualified virtues, such as the arts and sciences, are virtues in some sense, then the good use thesis must apply to them in some qualified way. The thesis is a definitional one: it says that something cannot count as a virtue unless it is always oriented to the good, and it cannot be used badly.

Cajetan offers the solution. He shows that there is indeed a weaker sense in which the good use thesis applies, even to the qualified virtues (in I.II 55.4,

57.3). In a qualified sense of “bad use,” not even arts and sciences can be used badly, since they cannot be used to produce a work contrary to the goodness proper to those habits: artful errors are not really errors against art. In the unqualified sense, however, arts and sciences can be used badly, in the sense of what Cajetan calls a “bad extrinsic end”—for example, when a grammarian uses her grammar to form a grammatically correct blasphemy or unjust insult.

So the good use thesis does apply in a *qualified* sense to the *qualified* virtues, but in an *unqualified* sense to the *unqualified* virtues. For the qualified virtues (arts and sciences) always incline to their own good use by the technical goodness proper to those habits; the unqualified virtues incline to their own good use simply or morally speaking.

The deep reason that unqualified virtue inclines to morally right use, and cannot be used badly, is precisely because this kind of virtue has a necessary connection to a rightly ordered will. Aquinas argues that since it is the will that applies powers and habits to acts, their use is principally and primarily an act of the will; it is the prime mover, as it were, of any operation (I.II 16.1). The production of right use, Aquinas infers, “belongs only to those habits that are related to the appetitive part of the soul, since it is the appetitive power of the soul that produces the use of all powers and habits” (57.1c).<sup>26</sup>

This helps to clarify further the contrast between qualified and unqualified virtue. Qualified virtue can be perfect in its own domain, whether or not its possessor has a rightly ordered will (57.4). As Aquinas explains regarding art, “It does not pertain to the praise of an artisan, insofar as he is an artisan, with what will he does his work; but how excellent is the work which he does” (57.3).<sup>27</sup> However, unqualified virtue “requires rectitude of appetite, for this kind of virtue not only produces a capacity for acting well, but also causes the very use of a good work” (61.1c).<sup>28</sup> Unqualified virtue—that is, virtue always inclining to right use morally speaking—cannot exist without a rightly disposed will. Consequently, while we need virtue in order to use art well, virtue does not need yet another virtue to be used well since, by perfecting the inclination of the will, it inclines to its own good use (57.3; 61).

### THE PROBLEM OF THE COURAGEOUS NAZI

Many virtue theorists seem to deny or qualify the good use thesis since they often concede that a virtue can be used for a bad end. For further clarification, then, it helps to explore Aquinas’s thesis through a “test case” first raised by Peter Geach: the “courageous” Nazi. Geach asks a challenging question: Did the young Germans who adopted the Nazi cause wholeheartedly, and were ready to sacrifice their lives for it, possess the virtue of courage? Geach

responds: “There can be no virtue in courage, in the facing of sudden danger or the endurance of affliction, if the cause for which this is done is worthless or positively vicious. . . . Endurance or defiance of danger in pursuance of a wrong end is not virtuous and in my book is not courageous either.”<sup>29</sup> For Geach, the morally bad exercise or use of a habit is never in any sense virtuous.

Other authors have not been so convinced that the Nazi’s courage is not a virtue. Is the Nazi’s courage a virtue in any sense, given that it can be used for a bad end? We will examine four different ways of looking at the problem to see how well Aquinas’s good use thesis survives.

### Germinal Virtue

The first approach is offered by Alasdair MacIntyre. He asks us to consider: “What would be involved, what was in fact involved, in the moral re-education of such a Nazi.”<sup>30</sup> Such a person would have to unlearn many vices and learn many virtues. However, “it is crucial that he would not have to unlearn or relearn what he knew about avoiding both cowardice and intemperate rashness in the face of harm and danger.”<sup>31</sup> MacIntyre claims, then, that since the young Nazi would not have to acquire courage in his postwar moral reformation (although he would have to acquire justice and other virtues), he does possess courage even before his conversion.

MacIntyre makes a contribution: there is something in the Nazi’s character that endures his moral reformation. Yet the Thomistic viewpoint would question MacIntyre’s concept of courage as a virtue since it does not recognize any final cause beyond the object or target of persevering in the face of risk. Aquinas insists that the virtue of fortitude has an essential relation to its further overall end: “It belongs properly and in itself to the object of fortitude to withstand the dangers of death and to attack the enemy with danger *on account of the common good*” (II.II 2.5c, emphasis added).<sup>32</sup> Enduring dangers for no good reason is not virtuous. The Nazi’s courage seems not to count as the moral virtue of fortitude, because it lacks telic orientation to an overall good end.

How, though, do we incorporate MacIntyre’s positive contribution, that the “courage” of the young Nazi persists through his moral reformation? A Thomistic approach can do this through Aquinas’s concept of germinal virtue (*inchoatio virtutis*).<sup>33</sup> Germinal virtue is incomplete virtue; it is an inclination that falls short of the full nature of virtue but has the potential to grow into it as a child becomes an adult. It may arise as a gift of nature or by habituation (I.II 65.1c). In either case, germinal virtue differs from complete virtue (*virtus perfecta*) in that the latter is directed and informed by prudence.<sup>34</sup>

Aquinas observes that a germinal virtue can be morally problematic:

A natural inclination to the good of virtue is a germinal virtue but not a complete virtue. For an inclination of this kind can be more dangerous the stronger it is, unless right reason is joined to it, through which a right choice of those things which are fitting for a due end is made, just as a running horse, if it be blind, falls harder and is more badly injured the faster it runs. (58.4 ad 3).<sup>35</sup>

Germinal virtue is not unqualified virtue since, lacking prudential direction to a due end, it does not dispose to its own right use. However, the analogy with the blind horse's swiftness suggests that a germinal virtue not merely falls short of perfect virtue but that it can also be a kind of vice. Ordinarily swiftness in a horse is an excellence, but when this excellence is combined with blindness, the result is worse overall than if the blind horse were slow. Similarly, a germinal virtue, when combined with certain character deficiencies, may lead to a result that is worse overall than if it were absent.

Something similar seems to hold of the Nazi's courage. It does place a person "closer" to full virtue in the MacIntyrean sense, in that, as a germinal virtue, it can grow into full virtue. This is why the Nazi has less work to do in order to reach full virtue than if he lacked this trait: not that he possesses the virtue of courage simply speaking but that he has the germinal virtue of courage. However, when combined with his injustice, it has the especially toxic result of a man being prepared to give his life for an unjust cause. The germinal virtue of courage in the Nazi is "more dangerous," like the swiftness of a blind horse.

### Secondary Actional Virtue

Gregory A. Trianosky offers an approach that contrasts with MacIntyre's. Trianosky distinguishes *primary actional virtues* that involve a concern or motivation to act rightly, such as justice, from *secondary actional virtues* that "enable us better to carry through on our good motives (or which perhaps serve to augment their force)."<sup>36</sup> Self-control and courage, as secondary actional virtues, are not virtues of good motivation and do not aim at any particular good result. Rather, they serve the primary actional virtues and enable us to act rightly.

Trianosky's secondary actional virtues are exceptions to the good use thesis since they can serve whatever projects a person happens to have, even if they are evil. Trianosky has no hesitation in stating that courage and self-control "seem to be traits which can actually enable bad people to do worse things."<sup>37</sup> For Trianosky this ability to do worse things does not mean that they are not really virtues; it merely shows that virtues can be "subverted by the company

they keep”—namely, by defects of character with which they coexist.<sup>38</sup> The Nazi may possess courage and self-control, and in him they can be virtues, but in this case they make their possessor worse, not better.<sup>39</sup> This would be a shock to Aquinas (and Aristotle), for whom “a virtue is what makes its possessor good, and his work good” (I.II 56.1 arg 2).<sup>40</sup> Trianosky’s secondary actional virtue can make a morally bad person worse and his work even more evil.

Trianosky does, however, offer a way of making sense of his paradoxical claim. He proposes an interesting analogy: “A virtue is a state, disposition, relation, or quality with a certain power. Being a virtue is like being an explosive. The gunpowder in a certain keg may still *be* an explosive even if due to its dampened condition it cannot now *operate as* an explosive.”<sup>41</sup> For Trianosky the courage of the Nazi is like damp gunpowder: it is still a virtue, but it cannot operate as a virtue while the Nazi possesses his other defects of character. It retains its “normative power” to contribute to the overall moral worth of the possessor and to contribute to the goodness of his actions, even though it may fail in this instance to do so.

There is something helpful in Trianosky’s analogy: it makes a similar point as Aquinas’s example of the swiftness of the blind horse. What is missing from Trianosky’s viewpoint, however, is an adequate final causal analysis of virtue. He says that self-control and courage are not primary or motivational virtues; rather, they are secondary actional virtues that serve whatever motivations the agent happens to have. Aquinas makes a somewhat similar point when he claims that temperance and fortitude are “preservative” rather than “productive” of the rational good (II.II 123.12). However, there is a distinction: they are preservative *of the rational good*, not simply of whatever goals the person happens to have. To throw one’s life away for no good reason is not an act of virtue, “To tolerate death is not praiseworthy in itself, but only insofar as it is ordered to some good that consists in an act of virtue, for example, to faith and the love of God” (124.3c).<sup>42</sup> Fortitude is oriented to the immediate object or target of enduring risks (*finis operis*) but only as conducive to some good further end (*finis operantis*). Aquinas is correct, therefore, that a good overall end belongs “properly and in itself to the object of fortitude” (2.5c).<sup>43</sup> Fortitude, as an unqualified virtue, is not merely a “secondary actional virtue.”

## The State of Virtue

A third approach can be based on Aquinas and Cajetan. Trianosky is right to raise the question of the coexistence of virtues with vices. Following in biblical tradition, Aquinas distinguishes between a living faith and a lifeless faith, or between “formed” and “formless” faith (II.II 4.4). The former, on Aquinas’s

account, is a faith animated by charity; the latter is a faith that continues to exist in someone who has lost charity due to sin. Aquinas claims that since charity pertains to the will, and faith primarily is situated in the intellect, a faith that becomes lifeless due to the loss of charity will remain the same habit (*ibid.*). If it is the same habit, then is it still a virtue? Aquinas asserts that it is not:

Unformed faith is not a virtue, because even if it has the perfection of a due act of informed faith on the side of the intellect, it does not however have a due perfection on the part of the will. In the same way also, if temperance were in the concupiscible, and prudence were not in the rational [power], temperance would not be a virtue, as we have already seen. For both an act of reason and an act of the concupiscible is required for an act of temperance, just as an act of the will as well as an act of the intellect is required for the act of faith. (4.5c)<sup>44</sup>

Formed faith is a virtue and unformed faith is not a virtue, yet formed faith and unformed faith are one and the same habit, just as formed and unformed temperance are one and the same. Is it a problem that Aquinas seems to be saying that *being a virtue* is accidental to the habits of faith and temperance?

Cajetan suggests a promising solution: while *being a virtue* is essential to the habits of faith and temperance, what is accidental is *being in the state of virtue*, and therefore being a virtue in the unqualified sense (in I.II 65.1 n.4). Unformed faith and temperance in any given person are indeed virtues, but the person is not in the state of virtue because of the absence of charity (in the case of faith) or prudence (in the case of temperance). Only a virtue in the state of virtue deserves to be called an unqualified virtue since only then is the good use thesis strictly verified in its regard: “It is necessary that virtue properly and simply so-called is a principle of a virtuous work simply, and not in a qualified way; whereas virtue not in the state of virtue does not produce such a work, because it is defective, insofar as deprived of its proper state.” (Cajetan, *ibid.*) Cajetan interprets Aquinas’s claim that unformed faith or temperance are not virtues by saying they have the essence of virtue but are not in the state of virtue, and hence are not virtues *in the unqualified sense*.

Cajetan’s distinction between the essence and state of virtue is helpful. To paraphrase Trianosky, “Being a virtue is like being an explosive. The gunpowder in a certain keg may still *be* an explosive even if due to its dampened condition it is not now in the *state* of being an explosive, nor does it *operate* as an explosive.” The idea makes sense on the supposition that the virtues, in their perfect form, are an interconnected whole (II.II 65). For example, one may be disposed to drink temperately and lack any immoderate desire for intoxicating drink, yet fail to be temperate because one easily gives in to peer pressure. So one cannot be temperate in an unqualified sense unless one has the relevant

virtues of standing firm in the face of unwelcome peer pressure. Temperance can be helped, or subverted, by the company it keeps.

How might this Cajetanian perspective relate to the question of the courageous Nazi? Courage can count as a virtue in the state of virtue only if it is oriented to an overall good end as provided by a motivational virtue such as justice, formed faith, or charity. It is possible the Nazi possesses not merely the germinal virtue of courage but also the virtue of courage itself in its essence; however, due to its coexistence with his folly and injustice, the Nazi's courage does not exist in the state of virtue nor does it operate as a virtue.

If so, it is not merely that courage exists without justice but that in the young Nazi it coexists with injustice. His courage does not merely lack the state of virtue; it exists in him *in the state of vice* because, as Trianosky rightly points out, it makes him worse overall and makes his acts more evil. Like swiftness in a blind horse, courage in a Nazi makes him and his evil works still more vicious.

## Counterfeit Virtue

There is a fourth possible approach to understanding the Nazi's courage. In his discussion of charity, Aquinas speaks of *counterfeit* virtue (*falsa similitudo virtutis*) (II.II 23.7). Counterfeit virtue is a candidate when it comes to categorizing the Nazi's courage. Eugene F. Rogers also claims that "the Nazi counterfeits courage."<sup>45</sup>

There is a basis for this claim in Aquinas's text (23.7). He says that simply true virtue (*simpliciter vera virtus*) is that which directs to the principal good and the ultimate end of human life. Virtue that directs to a limited good without order to the final and complete good will be true but incomplete (*vera virtus, sed imperfecta*). Virtue that directs to a merely apparent good will be *counterfeit* virtue. Aquinas points to the counterfeit virtue of the miser who devises cunning schemes for gain, avoids self-indulgence because of its expense, and goes through fire and water to avoid poverty. The reason why the miser's "prudence," "temperance," and "fortitude" are counterfeit is that they are oriented to the wrong overall end. It may be that since the Nazi's courage is ordered to an illusory final good, the Nazi cause, this courage is a counterfeit virtue.

## The Nazi's Vicious Courage

So how should we describe the young Nazi's courage: as a germinal virtue, as a virtue existing in the state of vice, or as a counterfeit virtue? To answer this

question we need to be clear about the difference between germinal virtue, virtue not in the state of virtue, and counterfeit virtue. The three are similar in that they all lack a fixed order toward a true good. However, counterfeit virtues have an *intrinsic* negative teleology in that they are essentially directed toward a particular bad end. The miser, after all, possesses only the false similitudes of prudence, temperance, and fortitude since the strong overriding goal is toward possessing money at all costs. These similitudes are, therefore, strictly vices. Both virtues existing in the state of vice and germinal virtues have an *indeterminate* teleology to serve good or bad ends. This is why they are not virtues in the unqualified sense, as they can be used badly: they fail to satisfy the good use thesis and therefore the strict causal definition of virtue.

Aquinas does not give us a way of reading into the soul of a thinly characterized fictional character. He and Cajetan do, nevertheless, offer a way of understanding the possibilities. Note, however, that in all three cases the courage of the young Nazi possesses a telic orientation to an unjust end. His courage therefore comes out either as a vice or as a virtue (germinal or otherwise) existing in the state of a vice. Either it is corrupt of itself or it is corrupted by the company it keeps. Unqualified virtue—virtue in the state of virtue—is always oriented to a good overall end. The final cause of virtue is the good.

## NOTES

1. Compare Jacques Maritain, *An Introduction to the Basic Problems of Moral Philosophy* (Albany, NY: Magi, 1990), 94.

2. 55.4c: “Finis autem virtutis, cum sit habitus operativus, est ipsa operatio.”

3. 71.1: “Id autem ad quod virtus ordinatur, est actus bonus.”

4. John Cassian, “Conference I, with the Abbot Moses,” in *Conlationes* 23, vol. 13, I: *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, ed. Michael Petschenig (Vindobonae, Austria: Apud C. Geroldi filium, 1886), 8n2.

5. II.II 23.7: “virtus vera simpliciter est illa quae ordinat ad principale bonum hominis.”

6. II.II 141.1: “de ratione virtutis est ut inclinet hominem ad bonum.”

7. 21.2 ad 2: “ratio aliter se habet in artificialibus et aliter in moralibus. In artificialibus enim ratio ordinatur ad finem particularem, quod est aliquid per rationem excogitatum. In moralibus autem ordinatur ad finem communem totius humanae vitae.”

8. 21.2 ad 2: “Sed in moralibus, ubi attenditur ordo rationis ad finem communem humanae vitae, good definition of ordo rationis semper peccatum et malum attenditur per deviationem ab ordine rationis ad finem communem humanae vitae.”

9. Dominic Farrell, *The Ends of the Moral Virtues and the First Principles of Practical Reason in Thomas Aquinas* (Rome: Gregorian Biblical Bookshop, 2012), chap. 3.



10. 141.6 ad 2: “Considerandum est autem quod quandoque aliud est finis operantis, et aliud finis operis, sicut patet quod aedificationis finis est domus, sed aedificatoris finis quandoque est lucrum. Sic igitur temperantiae ipsius finis et regula est beatitudo, sed eius rei qua utitur, finis et regula est necessitas humanae vitae.”

11. I.II 55.4c: “Finis autem virtutis, cum sit habitus operativus, est ipsa operatio. Sed notandum quod habituum operativorum aliqui sunt semper ad malum, sicut habitus vitiosi; aliqui vero quandoque ad bonum, et quandoque ad malum, sicut opinio se habet ad verum et ad falsum; virtus autem est habitus semper se habens ad bonum. Et ideo, ut discernatur virtus ab his quae semper se habent ad malum, dicitur, qua recte vivitur, ut autem discernatur ab his quae se habent quandoque ad bonum, quandoque ad malum, dicitur, qua nullus male utitur.”

12. For statements of this thesis see I.II 55.4, 56.3, 57.1; 3 ad 1–2, 57.4, and 61.1. Chadwick Ray refers to it as the “no-bad-use thesis,” which emphasizes the negative rather than the positive aspect. See Ray, “A Fact about the Virtues,” *The Thomist* 54, no. 3 (1990): 429–51.

13. To clarify, Aquinas concedes that someone may badly use virtue *as an object*, for example, by taking undue pride in virtue, but he insists that one cannot badly use it *as the principle of a bad action*, since then the act of a virtue would itself be an evil; see I.II 55.4 ad 5, and compare *Super Sent.*, lib. 2 d. 27 q. 1 a. 2 ad 5.

14. Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin, 1991), 69 [1355b].

15. *De Libero Arbitrio* II.18.50: “Nam neque prudentia neque fortitudine neque temperantia male quis utitur; etiam in his enim omnibus . . . recta ratio uiget, sine qua uirtutes esse non possunt. Recta autem ratione male tui nemo potest.”

16. *De Libero Arbitrio* II.19.53.

17. I.II 19.7 ad 2: “voluntas non potest dici bona, si sit intentio mala causa volendi. Qui enim vult dare eleemosynam propter inanem gloriam consequendam, vult id quod de se est bonum, sub ratione mali, et ideo, prout est volitum ab ipso, est malum.”

18. 18.4 ad 3: “bonum autem causatur ex integra causa.”

19. 74.1c: “habitus in anima non ex necessitate producit suam operationem, sed homo utitur eo cum voluerit. Unde simul habitu in homine existente, potest non uti habitu aut agere contrarium actum. Et sic potest habens virtutem procedere ad actum peccati.”

20. Terence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study*, vol. 1: *From Socrates to the Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 541.

21. I.II 56.3c: “Dupliciter autem habitus aliquis ordinatur ad bonum actum. Uno modo, inquantum per huiusmodi habitum acquiritur homini facultas ad bonum actum, sicut per habitum grammaticae habet homo facultatem recte loquendi. Non tamen grammatica facit ut homo semper recte loquatur, potest enim grammaticus barbarizare aut soloecismum facere. Et eadem ratio est in aliis scientiis et artibus. Alio modo, aliquis habitus non solum facit facultatem agendi, sed etiam facit quod aliquis recte facultate utatur, sicut iustitia non solum facit quod homo sit promptae voluntatis ad iusta operandum, sed etiam facit ut iuste operetur.”

22. Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (New York: Clarendon, 2002), 8–9; and Yves R. M. Simon, *The Definition of Moral Virtue* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986), 69.

23. *Cursus Theologicus*, Tract. 12, *De Virtutibus*, in I.II 56.3, nn.1–2 (6:231–32).

24. 57.3 ad 1: “cum aliquis habens artem operatur malum artificium, hoc non est opus artis, immo est contra artem, sicut etiam cum aliquis sciens verum mentitur, hoc quod dicit non est secundum scientiam, sed contra scientiam.”

25. There is an apparent exception in the case of (unformed) faith that arises from the fact that it is in the first place a speculative or intellectual virtue. See II.II 47.13 ad 1.

26. 57.1c: “pertinet solum ad illos habitus qui respiciunt partem appetitivam, eo quod vis appetitiva animae est quae facit uti omnibus potentiis et habitibus.”

27. 57.3: “Non enim pertinet ad laudem artificis, inquantum artifex est, qua voluntate opus faciat; sed quale sit opus quod facit.”

28. 61.1c: “quae requirit rectitudinem appetitus, huiusmodi enim virtus non solum facit facultatem bene agendi, sed ipsum etiam usum boni operis causat.”

29. Peter Thomas Geach, *The Virtues*, Stanton Lectures 1973–74 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 160.

30. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 180.

31. *Ibid.*

32. II.II 2.5c: “ad obiectum fortitudinis proprie et per se pertinet sustinere pericula mortis et aggredi hostes cum periculo propter bonum commune.”

33. I.II 49.1 ad 3; 58.4 ad 3; 65.1, 2, 4; *On the Virtues* 1.8c.

34. When Aquinas refers to *virtus perfecta* it is not of virtue that lacks no degree of excellence but rather virtue that possesses all the components of virtue in the full sense, such as orientation to good use: *completa virtus*, as he sometimes calls it (*On the Virtues* 1.10 ad 1).

35. 58.4 ad 3: “naturalis inclinatio ad bonum virtutis, est quaedam inchoatio virtutis, non autem est virtus perfecta. Huiusmodi enim inclinatio, quanto est fortior, tanto potest esse periculosior, nisi recta ratio adiungatur, per quam fiat recta electio eorum quae conveniunt ad debitum finem, sicut equus currens, si sit caecus, tanto fortius impingit et laeditur, quanto fortius currit.”

36. Gregory W. Trianosky, “Virtue, Action, and the Good Life: Toward a Theory of the Virtues,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (June 1987): 128.

37. *Ibid.*, 130.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*, 132–33.

40. I.II 56.1 arg 2: “virtus est quae bonum facit habentem, et opus eius bonum reddit.”

41. Trianosky, “Virtue, Action, and the Good Life,” 132.

42. 124.3c: “tolerare mortem non est laudabile secundum se, sed solum secundum quod ordinatur ad aliquod bonum quod consistit in actu virtutis, puta ad fidem et dilectionem Dei.”

43. 2.5c: “ad obiectum fortitudinis proprie et per se pertinet.”

44. 4.5c: “Fides autem informis non est virtus, quia etsi habeat perfectionem debitam actus fidei informis ex parte intellectus, non tamen habet perfectionem debitam ex parte voluntatis. Sicut etiam si temperantia esset in concupiscibili et prudentia non esset in rationali, temperantia non esset virtus, ut supra dictum est, quia ad actum temperantiae requiritur et actus rationis et actus concupiscibilis, sicut ad actum fidei requiritur actus voluntatis et actus intellectus.”

45. Eugene F. Rogers, “How the Virtues of an Interpreter Presuppose and Perfect Hermeneutics: The Case of Thomas Aquinas,” *Journal of Religion* 76, no. 1 (January 1996): 77–78.