

CAN CHRISTIANS POSSESS THE ACQUIRED CARDINAL VIRTUES?

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The article proposes, contrary to much of contemporary Thomistic scholarship, that according to Thomas Aquinas's categorizations of virtue, the person in a state of grace cannot possess the acquired cardinal virtues. Arguing from Aquinas's theory of virtue as to why this is the case, the article examines texts that are commonly interpreted to say otherwise, and addresses reasons that prompt contemporary moralists to posit the acquired cardinal virtues in the Christian.

THIS ARTICLE PROPOSES TO ANSWER a very simple question: Can Christians possess the acquired cardinal virtues?¹ The question concerns the differences and similarities between the virtues possessed by people who are in a state of grace and those who are not. More specifically, granting that, for people who are not in a state of grace, there may exist virtues inclining them to act well (i.e., acquired cardinal virtues), do people who *are* in a state of grace and thus possess different (i.e., infused theological and infused cardinal) virtues *also* possess the same virtues that may be found in those not in a state of grace, namely, the acquired cardinal virtues?

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¹ The term "Christian" is used here to signify a person in a state of sanctifying grace or of friendship with God. This signification may not be true of all who are called Christian and may be true of some who are not so called. This issue is beyond the scope of this article.

"Acquired cardinal virtue" is a technical category in Thomistic terminology. It relies on two bases of categorization for virtues: acquired vs. infused, and cardinal (or, commonly, moral) vs. theological. Below I address these different bases of categorization and the relationships between them.

Since this question relies on how the virtues are categorized, and since there is actually broad agreement among contemporary Thomistic moralists as to what we are trying to describe through categorizations of virtue in the graced life, it would help to note what all scholars writing on this topic today hold in common. All agree that grace perfects nature, and thus all find it important to name some continuity persisting in the person (and in the virtuous activity) before and after the reception of sanctifying grace. The question is really how to name that continuity. All also agree that even in the presence of sanctifying grace, dispositions contrary to virtuous action commonly persist. How to name both those contrary dispositions, and especially what they become when (or if) they develop into well-ordered dispositions, is less clear.

Scholars do indeed differ on how to relate the acquired virtue vs. infused virtue distinction to these points of agreement. Most contemporary scholars² writing on Thomistic virtue affirm the existence of the acquired cardinal virtues in the Christian, who by definition possesses the infused cardinal virtues. My thesis is that Christians cannot possess acquired cardinal virtues. Why do contemporary Thomistic moralists so commonly claim otherwise? While many scholars affirm the simultaneous presence of infused and acquired cardinal virtues, they rarely provide an argument as to why the infused and acquired cardinal virtues may be said to exist simultaneously in a Christian. This alleviates the burden of this article, as I claim that this position is too often simply assumed rather than proved. But there are also legitimate reasons prompting such a position, and they have to be addressed.

The article unfolds in two main sections. The first offers, on the basis of the work of Thomas Aquinas, two arguments why the acquired cardinal virtues cannot exist in a Christian. It then examines two texts from Aquinas commonly cited in defense of the claim that Christians can indeed possess the acquired cardinal virtues. It shows that these two texts need not be interpreted this way, and that both on their own terms and especially in light of the aforementioned arguments are best interpreted as not making this claim. The second section surveys contemporary scholarship on the

² I focus here on contemporary Thomistic scholarship. Affirming the presence of acquired cardinal virtues in the Christian may or may not be the majority position in the long tradition of Thomistic commentary and scholarship. While historical inquiry into this question is important, it lies beyond the scope of this article. For treatments of it, see the often-cited studies: Robert F. Coerver, C.M., "The Quality of Facility in the Moral Virtues" (Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1946); Gabriel Bullet, *Virtus morales infuses et virtus morales acquises selon Saint Thomas D'Aquin* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1958); David Manley, "Grace and the Transfiguration of Virtue: Grace and the Moral Virtues in St. Thomas Aquinas" (unpublished manuscript, 2003); Angela McKay Knobel, "Two Theories of Christian Virtue," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84 (forthcoming); and Renée Mirkes, "Aquinas's Doctrine of Moral Virtue and Its Significance for Theories of Facility," *Thomist* 61 (1997) 189–218.

infused cardinal virtues and identifies three concerns (two of which are rooted in an interpretation of a particular text in Aquinas's work on virtue) that prompt contemporary moralists to affirm the existence of the acquired cardinal virtues in the Christian. This section then demonstrates that in each case the position of this article that the Christian cannot possess acquired cardinal virtues can account not only for the very concerns (and particular texts) that prompt thinkers to affirm such virtues, but also for those concerns in a manner that is more consistent with claims central to Aquinas's moral thought. A brief conclusion identifies some of the concerns, beyond accurate interpretation of Aquinas's thought on grace and virtue, that drive my thesis.³

Before proceeding it may help to hint at some of those concerns so as to indicate why this inquiry matters beyond the narrow confines of Thomistic scholarship on categorizations of virtue. At stake here is an accurate understanding and way of speaking about how God's grace transforms human activity in the life of discipleship. My guiding question—can Christians possess the acquired cardinal virtues?—is a lens into broader questions about nature and grace, and divine and human agency. How can we present an account of graced life where action is truly our own, and yet made possible only by God's grace in ways that transcend unaided human capacities? Too often an account is offered that compartmentalizes the graced life into separate arenas where God is at work versus where human agents are at work. This article seeks to offer a more integrated account of the graced transformation of virtuous activity. Of course, given the disintegration that is human sinfulness, any such account will have to be simultaneously an account of moral development toward integration. This article seeks not only to answer its more focused question to inform these broader questions but also to demonstrate how its more focused question is commonly answered wrongly in contemporary Thomistic scholarship, with problematic ramifications for the broader questions raised here.

ACQUIRED CARDINAL VIRTUES IN THE CHRISTIAN? TWO THOMISTIC ARGUMENTS TO THE CONTRARY

Argument One: Singularity of the Last End

Two distinct but interrelated arguments are offered here as to why the Christian in a state of grace cannot possess the acquired cardinal virtues.

³ This outline raises the question, Is this an article on what Aquinas said, or an article on what is the case? These two different questions, even if frequently answered the same way, need to be distinguished. Here I treat them together since my contention is that although Aquinas does not clearly answer my thesis question, the position that Christians cannot possess acquired cardinal virtues is both truer to his overall thought and more in accord with reality.

The first argument rests upon the singularity of a person's last end. Aquinas claims that all human action is for an end,⁴ and that there is one last end of a person's life rather than several or even an infinite number of last ends.⁵ Furthermore, Aquinas claims that a person wills all, whatsoever he or she wills, for this last end.⁶ Aquinas cites Augustine in affirming that this last end is happiness.⁷ According to Aquinas, there are two kinds of happiness:

One is proportionate to human nature, a happiness, to wit, which man can obtain by means of his natural principles. The other is a happiness surpassing man's nature, and which man can obtain by the power of God alone, by a kind of participation of the Godhead, about which it is written (2 Pet 1:4) that by Christ we are made "partakers in the divine nature."⁸

The context of this quotation is Aquinas's treatment of the theological virtues. Given that virtues direct us toward happiness, the type of happiness toward which one is directed in one's life matters a great deal in determining what type of virtues one possesses. This reference to types of virtue warrants a brief excursus into Aquinas's categorizations of virtue, which will further illuminate the meaning of the guiding question of this article.

In the question containing the above quotation on types of happiness and in the following question (*ST* 1–2, qq. 62–63), Aquinas offers three distinct ways to categorize virtues and explains how these categorizations are related to one another.⁹ One way is according to their last end, namely, natural or supernatural happiness. Some virtues direct us toward natural happiness as our last end, while some direct us toward supernatural happiness as our last end. Another way to distinguish virtues is by their cause, namely, as *acquired* by human activity alone or as *infused* by God's grace.¹⁰ As I show below, these two categorizations graft perfectly onto each other,

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (hereafter *ST*), English Dominicans translation (New York: Benziger, 1948) 1–2, q. 1, a.1. Translations are taken from this text unless otherwise noted. Latin texts are taken from *Summa theologiae*, vols. 4–12 of *Opera omnia iussa edita leonis xiii p.m.* (Rome: Typographia polyglotta, 1888–1904).

⁵ *ST* 1–2, q. 1, a. 4 and 5.

⁷ *ST* 1–2, q. 1, a. 7.

⁶ *ST* 1–2, q. 1, a. 6.

⁸ *ST* 1–2, q. 62, a. 1.

⁹ For more on categorizations on virtue in Aquinas and the relationships between the different categorizations, see William C. Mattison III, "Aquinas's Categorizations of Virtue: Historical Background and Contemporary Significance," *Thomist* 74 (2010) 189–235.

¹⁰ *ST* 1–2, q. 63, aa. 2 and 3. The infused virtues under discussion here are always voluntary habits of activity. Therefore, saying a virtue is infused does *not* mean it inclines us to activity that is not truly our own. Nor does it necessarily mean that the virtue is caused by God without any involvement of the person who receives the virtue. The English term "infused" can have this connotation. These virtues are commonly best understood as "grace-enabled," since they are not possible without God's grace even though they incline us to actions that are truly our own.

such that all acquired virtues are always directed toward our natural happiness as last end. Conversely, all infused virtues are always directed toward our supernatural happiness as last end. The third distinction concerns what Aquinas calls the object of virtue. The theological virtues concern God directly, as their object.¹¹ The moral and intellectual (or, for my purposes here, “cardinal”)¹² virtues have as their object not God but “other things” accessible to unaided human reason that may (or may not) be further referred to God and supernatural happiness as our last end.¹³

How are these three different bases of categorizing virtues related to one another? Since the theological virtues have God (who is our supernatural happiness) as their object and end, they are always infused and never acquired. But this is not always the case with the cardinal virtues. When the cardinal virtues direct us to “other things” whose object is not God but rather activities accessible to unaided human reason, and yet do so in relation to God as our supernatural last end, then they are rightly called infused cardinal virtues, since human persons cannot even do this-worldly activities in a manner directed toward supernatural happiness without the grace of God.¹⁴ When the cardinal virtues direct us to “other

¹¹ *ST* 1–2, q. 62, a. 1.

¹² Aquinas often distinguishes, on the basis of object, the theological virtues from the “moral and intellectual” virtues. Thus scholars commonly speak of the theological virtue vs. moral virtue distinction in Aquinas, which is accurate. But since Aquinas distinguishes “moral” virtue sometimes from theological virtue and sometimes from intellectual virtue (e.g., *ST* 1–2, q. 58), I use “cardinal” virtue here in reference to the moral virtues that are distinguished from the theological virtues. This terminology is adopted in certain contemporary scholarship; see Michael Sherwin, O.P., “Infused Virtue and the Effects of Acquired Vice: A Test Case for the Thomistic Theory of the Infused Cardinal Virtues,” *Thomist* 73 (2009) 29–52. Aquinas himself also occasionally uses this terminology (e.g., *ST* 1–2, q. 61) due to his claim that the four cardinal virtues in a sense “cover” all moral virtues (*ST* 1–2, q. 61, aa. 1 and 2).

¹³ *ST* 1–2, q. 62, a. 2: “The object of the intellectual and moral virtues is something comprehensible to human reason.” See also *ST* 1–2, q. 63, a. 3, ad 3 where Aquinas describes theological virtues as directing us to “God immediately” and cardinal virtues as directing us to “other things.”

¹⁴ This article addresses only those who affirm the existence of the infused cardinal virtues both in reality and in Aquinas’s thought. No doubt Aquinas recognized the existence of infused cardinal virtues (*ST* 1–2, q. 63, a. 3), though of course one could argue—and indeed moral theologians have argued—that in reality there exist no such virtues. The argument is that they are superfluous, given the presence of the theological virtues and acquired cardinal virtues directed by charity to one’s supernatural end. I find this position untenable not only as a reading of Aquinas but also in reality, but laying out my argument is beyond the scope of this article. Many of the scholars engaged below, who, contrary to my thesis, affirm the existence of acquired cardinal virtues in the Christian, are nonetheless concerned with explaining and defending the existence of the infused cardinal virtues, a project I completely endorse.

things,” whose object is not God but rather activities accessible to unaided human reason, and do so in relation to the last end of natural happiness (i.e., happiness proportionate to human nature), then they are rightly called acquired cardinal virtues, since human persons can at times do this-worldly activities in a manner directed toward natural happiness as last end. Though the infused cardinal virtues possess the same objects¹⁵ as the acquired cardinal virtues (which is why both are rightly called “cardinal”), these two types of virtue differ both in their efficient cause (infusion or acquisition) and in their last end (supernatural or natural happiness).

In sum, based on these three distinctions (last end, cause, and object), there are three total types of virtue: infused (supernatural) theological virtues, infused (supernatural) cardinal virtues, and acquired (natural) cardinal virtues. What do these categorizations and their relations to one another have to do with my thesis question, and in particular with this first argument based upon the singularity of the last end? I am trying to determine whether the Christian (who by definition is infused with God’s grace, is directed toward the last end of supernatural happiness, and possesses the first two types of virtue) possesses the third type of virtue, namely, the acquired cardinal virtues. Though most scholars who address this question say yes, I contend that the Christian cannot possess the acquired cardinal virtues.

Returning to the singularity of the last-end argument to support this thesis, Aquinas claims all virtues that direct a person to supernatural happiness are and can only be infused. Indeed, Aquinas claims that “virtue which directs man to the [supernatural] good as defined by Divine Law, and not by human reason, *cannot be caused by human acts*, the principle of which is reason, but is produced in us by the divine operation alone.”¹⁶ Therefore, acquired cardinal virtues cannot direct a person to the supernatural last end. Conversely, Aquinas claims all virtues that direct a person to natural happiness as the last end are acquired. Indeed, he claims that “the civil good is not the last end of the infused cardinal virtues of which we are speaking, but of the acquired virtues of which philosophers spoke.”¹⁷

¹⁵ More specifically, the two types of virtue possess the same “material” object. Aquinas states in his later discussion (examined below) that the infused cardinal virtues and the acquired cardinal virtues share the same material object but differ as to their formal objects. See *ST* 1–2, q. 63, a. 4.

¹⁶ *ST* 1–2, q. 63, a. 2, emphasis added.

¹⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on Virtue: Quaestio disputata de virtutibus in commune* and *Quaestio disputata de virtutibus cardinalibus* (henceforth DQCV), a. 4, ad 3, trans. Ralph McInerny (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine’s, 1999) 105–40. Translations are taken from this text unless otherwise noted. This particular translation is mine, from the Latin in *Quaestio disputata de virtutibus cardinalibus*, Parmae ed., in vol. 8 of *Opera Omnia* (New York: Musurgia, 1948–1950) 626–38. As I indicate below, when categorizing virtues Aquinas uses the term “civil good” synonymously with “natural good.”

Therefore, infused cardinal virtues—even if fulfilling a person’s natural end—do not direct a person to the natural end as last end.¹⁸

From these claims conclusions regarding the possibility of Christians’ possessing the acquired cardinal virtues can be stated clearly:

- The human person wills all for an end (*ST* 1–2, q. 1, a.1).
- Every human person has one last end (*ST* 1–2, q. 1, a. 4 and 5).
- The human person wills all that he wills for the last end (happiness) (*ST* 1–2, q. 1, a. 6 and 7).
- Happiness is twofold, natural and supernatural (*ST* 1–2, q. 62, a. 1).
- The virtues by which one wills natural happiness as one’s last end are always acquired and never infused (DQCV, q. 4, ad. 3).
- The virtues by which one wills supernatural happiness as one’s last end are always infused and never acquired (*ST* 1–2, q. 63, a. 2).
- Therefore, the human person directed toward the last end of supernatural happiness cannot possess the acquired cardinal virtues.

To anticipate a possible objection, can a Christian have acquired virtues toward objects accessible to reason but not as one’s last end? According to this view, one could possess infused cardinal virtues that enable one to act in matters accessible to human reason toward one’s supernatural last end, but also possess acquired cardinal virtues that would help one do those same activities well toward the natural end but not as last end.¹⁹ Why people find a need to posit a parallel set of acquired cardinal virtues to direct one in the same activities as the infused cardinal virtues will be addressed below. My own argument will be that theirs is a legitimate, indeed crucial, concern but one that can be accommodated without

¹⁸ The descriptor “last” end must be emphasized here. Aquinas never claims that the infused cardinal virtues do not fulfill our natural end even as they point us toward our supernatural end. I do not argue against a natural end in the life of the Christian. I do, however, argue against the natural end as *last* end in the life of the Christian, which it seems no Thomist could contest. For a very illuminative discussion of teleology in Aquinas, see Daniel McInerney, *The Difficult Good: A Thomistic Approach to Moral Conflict and Human Happiness* (New York: Fordham University, 2006) esp. 34–54. McInerney occasionally distinguishes the “absolutely ultimate end” (which is called here simply the “last end” from Aquinas’s *finis ultimus*) from other “ultimate ends.” He recognizes that the latter are shaped by their further reference to the “absolutely ultimate end” (42) but uses this terminology, despite the potential for confusion, both to emphasize the fact that such “ultimate ends” (his term) can be “desirable for their own sake” (52) and to more easily engage the “incommensurability” theorists.

¹⁹ For a critical examination of arguments for how acquired and infused cardinal virtues exist simultaneously in a person, see Angela McKay Knobel, “Can the Infused and Acquired Virtues Coexist in the Christian Life?” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 23:4 (2009) 381–96. See also her “Two Theories of Christian Virtue” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84 (2010) 599–618.

positing such a parallel set of virtues. The more immediate argument is that the existence of such a parallel set of virtues is actually impossible on Aquinas's terms, for two reasons. The first reason concerns the above argument about the singularity of the last end. If a person has one last end, and "wills all whatsoever he wills" toward that one last end, then it is not possible on Aquinas's terms to possess a set of acquired cardinal virtues that are not willed toward one's last end. Of course, if one's cardinal virtues are directed toward one's supernatural end, then on Aquinas's terms they are no longer rightly called acquired, since any virtue directed toward the supernatural last end *cannot* be obtained by human action alone. As for the second reason this claim is not possible on Aquinas's terms, we turn to the second argument of this section.

Argument Two: Difference in Formal Object in Acts of Acquired and Infused Cardinal Virtues (*ST* 1–2, q. 63, a. 4)

Regarding the second argument as to why Christians cannot possess the acquired cardinal virtues, perhaps Aquinas's most important text is *ST* 1–2, q. 63, a. 4, which asks whether acquired virtues and infused virtues belong to the same species. He answers no. He claims that acquired and infused virtues may be said to possess the same material object.²⁰ For example, the object of temperance is the good with respect to pleasures of touch. So acquired temperance and infused temperance are indeed both accurately called temperance. However, acquired temperance and infused temperance differ as to their formal object, since the formal object is determined from how the mean is fixed with regard to action concerning the material object. Acquired virtues and infused virtues concern different last ends, and thus they rely on different rules, namely, the rule of human reason and the divine rule, respectively. This difference results in the setting of different means and thus different actions. Since virtues, as habits, are distinguished by their formal objects, it follows that acquired and infused virtues differ as to their species.²¹

What has any of this to do with whether Christians possess the acquired cardinal virtues? Christians in the state of grace are directed toward supernatural happiness as their last end, with the result that their actions are

²⁰ They also specify the same natural human capacities.

²¹ In addition to *ST* 1–2, q. 63, a. 4, see also Aquinas's claims about the difference in species between acquired and infused cardinal virtues at *ST* 1–2, q. 64, a. 1; Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on the Virtues* 1–104 in *Disputed Questions on Virtue*, trans. Ralph McNerny, henceforth DQV. The Latin used for this article is taken from *Quaestio disputata de virtutibus in communi* 8:545–80, q. 10 aa. 8–10; *Commentary on the Sentences* 3, d. 33, q. 1, a. 2, qc. 4. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super sententiis magistri Petri Lombardi*, vol. 3, ed. Maria Fabianus Moos (Paris: Lethielleux, 1929–1947).

fixed by divine rule. To assert that persons continue to possess and act on the acquired cardinal virtues would be to assert that such persons (not only possesses two last ends, an argument addressed above, but) would have to perform actions concerning the very same activity based upon two distinct rules, namely, the rule of human reason and the divine rule. Yet Aquinas claims that these two rules engender different means, and thus different acts, and thus different sets of virtues inclining one toward those acts. And therefore to claim that one could simultaneously possess acquired and infused cardinal virtues would be to claim that one and the same person could possess two different habits inclining to one act, with regard to one and the same activity, in two distinct ways that differ formally.

Interpreting Aquinas's Texts Commonly Cited in Support of the Rival Position

The main concerns driving Thomistic moralists to affirm that Christians possess the acquired cardinal virtues I address below, showing that these valid concerns can be more easily accommodated without positing a parallel set of acquired cardinal virtues alongside the infused cardinal virtues. Before turning to that task, however, I address two of Aquinas's texts that are most commonly cited by those who affirm the simultaneous presence of acquired and infused cardinal virtues.

The first such text, and the one that seems most directly to address the topic of my thesis, is *ST* 1–2, q. 51, a. 4, ad. 3.²² The objector claims that if God infuses habits, “there will be two habits of the same species in the same man, one acquired and one infused. Now this seems impossible, for two forms of the same species cannot be in the same subject.” Given that the objector concludes that acquired and infused virtues cannot reside in the same person, one might assume that Aquinas claims in his reply that indeed they can. However, Aquinas claims in the reply that “acts produced by an infused habit do not cause a habit, but strengthen the already existing habit.”²³ Some contemporary moralists, likely assuming that the “already existing habit” is the acquired cardinal virtue, use this passage as evidence that, for Aquinas, one can simultaneously possess acquired cardinal virtues and infused cardinal virtues.²⁴

²² For a sustained examination of this text in the context of the relationship between the acquired and infused virtues, see Angela McKay Knobel, “Relating Aquinas's Infused and Acquired Virtues: Some Problematic Texts for a Common Interpretation,” forthcoming in *Nova et Vetera*.

²³ *ST* 1–2, q. 51, a. 4, ad 3.

²⁴ A good example of a contemporary author who relies on this text to claim that Christians can possess the acquired cardinal virtues is Inglis (see his “Aquinas's Replication of the Acquired Moral Virtues” 20).

Understanding the text this way, however, raises issues of interpretation, not only due to inconsistencies with the central Thomistic claims outlined above, but even on the terms of this text itself. Aquinas's primary claim in this reply is that acts produced by an infused habit do not cause a habit but strengthen an already existing habit. In other words, the assumption is that there will *not* be *two* habits inclining one person toward the same material object.²⁵ What is the "already existing habit" that is strengthened? It must be an infused virtue; since we are talking about acts produced by an infused habit, the infused habit is already existing. Yet what if an acquired cardinal virtue was present before the reception of the infused cardinal virtue? Would, then, the "already existing habit" be the acquired cardinal virtue? Even if one granted the prior presence of an acquired cardinal virtue, there is no claim here that the acquired cardinal virtue remains. The claim is that the already existing habit is strengthened, and we know from the text itself that an infused habit already exists ("acts produced by an infused habit").²⁶ If an acquired virtue did exist before the infused virtue, the infused virtue has either replaced the acquired habit—or, if one prefers, has (literally) trans-formed²⁷ it—into a new ("strengthened") habit, now directed toward a supernatural last end with the resulting formal difference in species of action and habit.²⁸

The other text that seems to argue against my thesis, and the text that is most frequently cited by those who claim that a single person may possess both acquired and infused cardinal virtues, is Aquinas's *Disputed Questions on Virtue*, q. 10, ad 4.²⁹ The objection basically claims that infused virtues

²⁵ See the parallel objection and response in DQV, q. 10, ad 7, where Aquinas again refuses to claim that there may be two habits in a person concerning the same material object. See also DQV, q. 10, ad 19.

²⁶ Lest one think that acts of the infused virtue could strengthen a habit that was and still remains an acquired cardinal virtue, it must be recalled that the acts of acquired and infused cardinal virtues differ in species (*ST* 1–2, q. 63, a. 4). Aquinas claims that habits are distinguished by their objects (*ST* 1–2, q. 54, a. 2) and, more specifically, by their formal, as opposed to material, objects (ad 1). Therefore acts of infused virtue cannot be said to strengthen or further ingrain a habit that remains an acquired cardinal virtue since the latter is directed toward acts of a different formal object.

²⁷ This word is hyphenated to call attention to its literal meaning of "change the form of," as in Aquinas's claim that acts of such virtues have different formal objects.

²⁸ See also the parallel texts in DQV, q. 10, ad 7–10, where Aquinas explicitly claims that infused virtues need not be of the same species as acquired virtues.

²⁹ See Romanus Cessario, O.P., *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 2009) 168; Bonnie Kent, *Virtues of the Will* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1995) 33; Bonnie Kent, "Habits and Virtues (Ia IIae, qq. 49–70)," in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Washington: Georgetown University, 2002) 116–30, at 125; Sherwin, "Infused Virtue"

are not necessary since grace can order acquired virtues to eternal life. This is a less subtle version of the non-Thomistic position that there are no infused cardinal virtues since charity can direct the acquired virtues toward the supernatural end of humanity. In his response Aquinas affirms both that charity must be infused in order for one to merit eternal life, and that other virtues are infused along with charity.³⁰ But in that response Aquinas claims that “an act of acquired virtue is not able to be meritorious unless mediated by an infused virtue.”³¹ This can be taken to mean that acquired virtues persist as such even when their acts are made meritorious through the mediation of infused virtue. Though Aquinas says the latter, he never says the former, namely, that the acquired cardinal virtues persist as acquired virtues. Indeed, as noted above, Aquinas insists that acts of acquired cardinal virtues cannot be directed toward the last end of supernatural happiness, toward which any meritorious act is certainly ordered. If an act is ordered toward supernatural happiness, it is no longer an act of an acquired cardinal virtue. Furthermore, given his consistent claim that acquired virtues and infused virtues direct a person to acts of the same material object, but with different formal objects or species, it is actually impossible that a person with infused virtue—say, temperance—could continue simultaneously to possess and act out of acquired temperance since that would lead the person to two different actions with regard to the same activity but at the very same time. The mediation of infused virtue is more properly said to (again, literally) transform the act of the acquired virtue to make it meritorious. In some sense the acts of the acquired virtue do persist, namely, as acts with the same material object. That is why, for example, acquired temperance and infused temperance are both rightly called temperance. But the difference in rule results in a different mean and thus a different formal object of the act. Therefore the act is no longer properly said to be one of acquired temperance, even while it is still properly called temperance.

Although some scholars at times used other texts to support the thesis that the Christian can possess both acquired and infused virtue,³² the two texts treated above (with parallels) most directly address my thesis and are consistently cited in support of the position that the Christian can possess the acquired cardinal virtues. However, in light of this first section’s

49; Denis J. M. Bradley, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1997) 16–17; Andrew J. Dell’Olio, *Foundations of Moral Selfhood: Aquinas on Divine Goodness and the Connection of the Virtues* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003) esp. 102, 135.

³⁰ In *ST* 1–2, a. 63, q. 3, Aquinas expands this argument in reference to the infused cardinal virtues (my translation).

³¹ *DQV*, q. 10, ad 4 (my translation).

³² E.g., *ST* 2–2, q. 47, a. 14, ad 1 and *ST* 1–2, q. 65, a. 3, ad 2. In the next section I will address these two texts.

arguments, it should be clear that these texts certainly need not, and indeed should not, be interpreted as Thomas claiming that one can possess acquired and infused virtues simultaneously. Such a *prima facie* reading of those texts, while understandable, is not only questionable, given the texts themselves, but is also inconsistent with other central Thomistic claims with regard to virtue. I now address the reasons why moralists commonly affirm that the parallel sets of virtue do exist in the same person.

CONCERNS PROMPTING THE CLAIM THAT CHRISTAINS POSSESS BOTH ACQUIRED AND INFUSED CARDINAL VIRTUES

Perhaps the most consistent claim made in the contemporary treatments of the thesis question is that Aquinas's writing on it is far from decisive, and that more study is needed.³³ The task for this section is to determine why, then, scholars commonly affirm the presence of the acquired cardinal virtues in the Christian.³⁴ The section is subdivided according to three

³³ For repeated assertions to this effect see: Kent, *Virtues of the Will* 32; Sherwin, "Infused Virtue" 49; Terence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study*, 3 vols. (New York: Oxford University, 2007) 1:649; Jean Porter, "The Subversion of Virtue: Acquired and Infused Virtues in the *Summa Theologiae*," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1992) 19–41, at 38; Inglis, "Aquinas's Replication of the Acquired Moral Virtues" 19; and Mirkes, "Aquinas's Doctrine of Moral Virtue" 190–91.

³⁴ For explicit affirmations of the presence of the acquired cardinal virtues in the life of the Christian, see: Bradley, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good* 22; Jennifer Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008) 87–88; Pamela M. Hall, *Narrative and the Natural Law: An Interpretation of Thomistic Ethics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1994) 83, also 80, 85; Robert Miner, "Non-Aristotelian Prudence in the *Prima Secundae*," *Thomist* 64 (2000) 401–22, at 421; Michael Sherwin, O.P., *By Knowledge and By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 2005) 172; Sherwin, "Infused Virtue" 48, 51; Kent, *Virtues of the Will* 33; Kent, "Habits and Virtues" 125; Inglis, "Aquinas's Replication of the Acquired Moral Virtues" 19; Dell'Olio, *Foundations of Moral Selfhood* 134, 141; and Mirkes, "Aquinas's Doctrine of Moral Virtue," 191. Cessario suggests this is his position as well, claiming that in the Christian life the infused and acquired cardinal virtues "work together" (*Moral Virtue and Theological Ethics* 165). Several contemporary Thomists who raise this issue do not fall squarely on one side. These include Porter, Irwin, and Pinckaers. Porter takes no explicit stand. The latter two use terminology about the relationship between the infused and acquired cardinal virtues that I could endorse, even if the author in each case does not explicitly affirm that the acquired cardinal virtues do not exist in the Christian. For instance, Pinckaers ("Place of Philosophy in Moral Theology," in *The Pinckaers Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Craig Steven Titus [Washington: Catholic University of America, 2005] 64–73, at 67) speaks of how the infused cardinal virtues "transform" the acquired cardinal virtues, a claim I can affirm. Yet he also once claims that the former are "added" to the latter, which

different concerns (with the second and third focusing on how particular texts in Aquinas's work on virtue should be interpreted). In all three cases I will show that the concern, while legitimate, is accommodated more accurately and effectively by my thesis.

Concern One: Grace Perfects Nature

I begin by noting a concern—really an axiomatic claim—of all those writing on Thomistic moral theology, namely, that grace perfects nature.³⁵ Everyone addressed in this article affirms this claim; the challenge, of course, is to explain what it means in the particular matter at hand. Put most simply, each moralist holding the position that Christians possess the acquired cardinal virtues wishes to maintain that, though the infused cardinal virtues elevate the Christian's activities toward a supernatural end not accessible to unaided human nature, there is nonetheless continuity between those graced actions (performed out of infused virtues) and the natural human activity of the acquired cardinal virtues—which I wholeheartedly affirm.³⁶ As one contemporary Thomistic moralist puts it, “the infused virtues discover the requisite psychological structure for their operation.”³⁷ The implication of this quotation is that this requisite psychological structure persists in the life of graced virtue, and this is absolutely true.

would not be affirmed here. Irwin says the infused cardinal virtues “extend the outlook of,” and “are perfections of,” the acquired cardinal virtues, but never decisively claims whether or not the latter persist (*Development of Ethics* 647; see also 645). Etienne Gilson is cited as an adherent of the view that the acquired cardinal virtues cannot exist in the Christian (Kent, *Virtues of the Will* 33; Dell'Olio, *Foundations of Moral Selfhood* 129). See Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Random House, 1956) 338–49. However, despite his well-known claim that Aquinas's entire *Secunda secundae* (including even *ST* 2–2, qq. 47–170) is about the infused virtues (338–39), Gilson never explicitly claims that the acquired cardinal virtues are not present in the Christian, which is my claim here. In fact, he makes divergent claims on this question and thus his position could be interpreted either way.

³⁵ See *ST* 1, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2: “grace does not take away nature but perfects it” (my translation).

³⁶ No post-20th-century discussion of nature and grace should fail to mention the influence of Henri de Lubac's *Surnaturel* and the debates over this work continuing to this day. One of the legitimate concerns of those who oppose de Lubac is to guard the integrity of the natural end of humanity, even in the person in a state of grace. Nothing in my article denies the persistence of human nature with its own teleological integrity, even in a person directed toward the supernatural *last* end of friendship with God. Therefore, while my more focused inquiry into the acquired virtues in the Christian life may have ramifications for that broader debate, I cannot treat them here.

³⁷ Cessario, *Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics* 123. See also Inglis, who says rightly that “there is a *psychological continuity* between a person's acquired and

Infused cardinal virtues “discover” created human nature and enable it to persist fulfilled even as it is directed toward a fulfillment that transcends simply natural fulfillment. The challenge, however, is accurately to name the nature that persists even while directed toward a happiness beyond its own capacities. Certain contemporary moralists assume that the nature that persists is “acquired cardinal virtue.” Consider the following example from Dell’Olio of how one seamlessly moves from human nature to natural virtues: “A divinized human being is still a human being and thus retains all that belongs to the natural powers of the human being. Yet, the natural virtues are now put to the service of a new end by their existence in a new type of person.”³⁸ This quote perfectly exemplifies how one can rightly insist that human nature and its powers persist in the life of grace, and yet wrongly assume that which persists is natural virtue. The primary task of

infused acts of virtue” (“Aquinas’s Replication of the Acquired Moral Virtues” 21, emphasis added).

³⁸ Dell’Olio, *Foundations of Moral Selfhood* 134. This problematic move of equating human nature or human powers with “natural virtues” is not limited to Dell’Olio. Miner also rightly claims that “grace ordinarily involves the cooperation of nature,” and then concludes that a person on the way toward the ultimate end will possess “both types of virtue,” such that “the concept of acquired prudence, then, survives the introduction of infused prudence” (“Non-Aristotelian Prudence” 421). The last phrase can be accurate depending on what “concept” is said to persist, but the context makes it clear that Miner means that acquired prudence itself persists. In the next line he says it is placed within a “new teleology,” presumably meaning the supernatural end. Yet, as shown above, it is impossible on Aquinas’s terms for acquired prudence to be directed toward the last end of supernatural happiness. In addition, consider Cessario who, while addressing the “requisite psychological structure” noted above, also claims that “the infused virtues . . . cannot by themselves account exclusively for any human action” (*Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics* 123). This claim is an accurate depiction of how grace perfects nature (and is a more accurate depiction than Miner’s use of “ordinarily”). Cessario continues this with his claims that “grace perfects nature” (169) and that supernatural beatitude occurs “without destroying human nature” (166). Yet, although Cessario never explicitly denies that the Christian possesses the acquired cardinal virtues, he clearly implies as much when insisting that acquired and infused virtues “work together” (165). (He also cites Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God according to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* [Rome: Apollinare Studi, 2001] approvingly over McKay Knobel’s work, even though I found nothing in Feingold’s work that explicitly takes a stand on my thesis question. If anything, Feingold’s conclusion [671–75] and passages particularly relevant to how grace directs a person to a supernatural happiness not accessible to unaided human nature [620–25, where he relies heavily on *ST* 1–2, q. 62, a. 1] seem to indicate that my position would be more in accord with his goal of denying the possibility of a [nonelicited] natural desire for the beatific vision.) Finally, even Gilson, who, as noted above, is not clear on my thesis question, uses the term “natural virtues” in a confusing manner (*Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* 343, 347).

this first part of section two is to examine the above claim that the “natural virtues” persist in the life of one with infused cardinal virtues.

Would Aquinas say, as Dell’Olio does, that “natural virtue” persists in the one with infused virtue? The answer is no. To demonstrate this, it is first necessary to show that for Aquinas the natural virtues are functionally equivalent to the acquired cardinal virtues, which is why in this article on the acquired cardinal virtues, it is worth examining what Aquinas says about the natural virtues. Then it can show, as I did in the previous section, that for Aquinas the acquired cardinal virtues (and thus the natural virtues) can never be directed to supernatural happiness. Note that contemporary Thomistic moralists consistently and rightly associate the acquired cardinal virtues with the natural virtues.³⁹ So my initial claim here, that acquired cardinal virtues are natural virtues, is actually not contested in the literature. But it is still worth tracing the claim in Aquinas’s texts to help identify exactly how a legitimate concern among contemporary moralists nonetheless leads them to erroneous claims about virtue.

As noted above, Aquinas claims that the acquired cardinal virtues always direct a person toward the civil, or political, good.⁴⁰ Therefore, despite the fact that “acquired” refers to the efficient cause of virtue, and “political” and “civil” refer to the last end when ascribed to virtue, the terms may be consistently aligned.⁴¹ Where do “natural” virtues fit into this discussion? Aquinas consistently uses the terms “natural” and “human,” *when applied to virtue*, as terms of art that designate the political or civil end as last end.

Because a person is by nature a political animal, such virtues, inasmuch as they exist in a person according to one’s nature, are called political, inasmuch as according to these virtues one conducts one’s self well in human affairs. . . . But because it pertains to a person also to be able to reach onward to divine things . . . it is necessary to posit some virtues between political virtues, which are called human virtues, and exemplar virtues, which are called divine virtues.⁴²

³⁹ I use “associate” here because in Aquinas’s technical terminology regarding virtue, the terms “acquired,” “cardinal,” and “natural,” when applied to virtue, refer to three different bases of categorization, as I emphasized in section one. They may be functionally identified, or “associated,” but they are not properly equated since they are based on different categorizations. See Mattison, “Categorizations of Virtue” 217–21.

⁴⁰ As noted in section one, Aquinas claims in DQCV, q. 4, ad 3: “The civil good is not the last end of the infused cardinal virtues of which we are speaking, but of the acquired virtues of which philosophers spoke.” See also DQV, q. 9, ad 18 where Aquinas claims that “there is no need that political virtue be had by infusion of grace.”

⁴¹ For the equation of “political” and “civil” virtue see DQCV, q. 4, ad 7: “The political virtues of which he speaks are ordered only to the civil good of the present life.”

⁴² *ST* 1–2, q. 61, a. 5 (my translation). Most English translations of this passage render *animal politicum* as “social animal,” which, while not inaccurate on its own,

This quotation establishes that human virtues are political virtues. Though it is not explicit in this quotation that the “human affairs” or activities that the human (or political, or civil) virtues enable one to do well are directed toward the natural end as last end, Aquinas does make precisely this claim elsewhere with regard to the political/civil virtues, as noted above.⁴³ Therefore, “political,” “civil,” and “human,” when applied to virtue, refer to the natural end as last end.

Is “natural” rightly equated with these three terms (political, civil, human) when applied to virtue? Aquinas consistently uses “natural” with regard to virtue in contexts where he is distinguishing natural happiness as last end from supernatural happiness as last end. In the quotation on humanity’s two types of happiness cited in section one, Aquinas begins by claiming that it is by virtue that a person is led to those acts ordering him or her toward happiness.⁴⁴ Aquinas proceeds to differentiate two types of happiness, natural and supernatural, clearly implying that they entail two corresponding sets of virtue. Aquinas does use the term “supernatural” here with regard to virtues that orient one toward supernatural happiness. But he does not here label some virtues “natural,” even though he speaks of virtues perfecting the person according to his or her natural capacities. However, elsewhere Aquinas uses “natural virtue” and even explicitly equates it with political (and thus human and civil) virtue.⁴⁵ In sum, it is legitimate on Aquinas’s terms to employ the terms “civil” and “political” and “human” and “natural” interchangeably when he ascribes them to virtue. All these terms refer to natural happiness as the last end of the person. Furthermore, although the acquired cardinal virtues are categorized on a different basis (efficient cause and object, as opposed to last end), they may be functionally equated with natural virtues. Once again, none of the contemporary moralists writing on the topic of this article contest that we may employ “acquired cardinal virtue” and “natural virtue” interchangeably.

Having established both that the acquired cardinal virtues may be equated with natural virtues, and that natural virtues are always directed to a last end of happiness commensurate with human nature,⁴⁶ it should be

fails to make clear the connection Aquinas is identifying between this Aristotelian anthropological claim and the medieval category of virtue called “political.”

⁴³ See DQCV a. 4, ad. 3. See also *In III. Sent.* d. 33, q. 1, a. 2, qc. 4, ad 2.

⁴⁴ *ST* 1–2, q. 62, a. 1.

⁴⁵ See *ST* 2–2, q. 136, a. 3, ad 2: “The good of a political virtue is commensurate with human nature; and consequently the human will can tend thereto without the help of sanctifying grace. . . . On the other hand, the good of grace is supernatural, wherefore man cannot tend thereto by natural virtue.”

⁴⁶ In further support of this central claim from section one, see again the quotation from the previous note where Aquinas claims “one *cannot* tend thereto [supernatural happiness] by natural virtue” (*ST* 2–2, q. 136, a. 3, ad 2, emphasis added).

clear why, given the two arguments of my first section, the Christian cannot possess the natural virtues. First, the Christian is by definition directed toward the last end of supernatural happiness. Since a person has only one last end and does everything for that last end, the Christian cannot have natural happiness as his or her last end, and therefore cannot possess the natural virtues, which direct one toward natural happiness as the last end. Second, given that the infused cardinal virtues differ from acquired cardinal virtues (or functionally, natural virtues) in species, the Christian with infused cardinal virtues (which is being granted here) cannot simultaneously act in the same activity based on two sets of virtues that incline to formally different actions. Therefore, the Christian cannot possess the natural virtues, understood as functionally equivalent to the acquired cardinal virtues.⁴⁷

Thus, in rightly attempting to emphasize that nature persists even while perfected in the life of graced virtue, thinkers who therefore conclude that natural virtues (and therefore acquired cardinal virtues) remain in the graced life fail to realize that for Aquinas “natural” when applied to virtue is a term of art signifying the last end of natural happiness commensurate with human nature.⁴⁸ One cannot, therefore, equate the claim “nature

⁴⁷ These two arguments also defeat a particularly subtle form of the position that the acquired cardinal virtues persist in the Christian life, as held by Mirkes and to some extent by Dell’Olio, both tracing it back to George Klubertanz. See his “Une théorie sur les vertus morales ‘naturelles’ et ‘surnaturelles,’” *Revue Thomiste* 59 (1959) 565–75. For the historical precedents of this position, see n. 4 above.) This view rightly emphasizes that the infused cardinal virtues change the formal object of virtuous activity. They explain this change by claiming that in the virtuous action of the Christian, the infused cardinal virtues serve as form to the matter of the acquired cardinal virtues. This is close to Aquinas’s position but importantly distinct. Aquinas uses the language of form and matter in the crucial *ST* 1–2, q. 63, a. 4. But there the material object is identified by the type of activity, e.g., eating for the virtue of temperance. The matter of that activity is thus informed by the infused cardinal virtues, resulting in action that differs in species from acquired cardinal virtue. So the matter is actually the type of activity, or more precisely, the natural human potency toward that type of activity. The formal element is provided by whatever specifies that activity, be it the rule of human reason for the acquired cardinal virtues or the divine rule of the infused cardinal virtues. Contra these thinkers, Aquinas cannot claim that the acquired cardinal virtues persist as matter, since it is the function of a habit (in this case the acquired virtue of temperance) to inform and specify the activities of that natural human potency according to the appropriate rule. Since that specification occurs via infused temperance, the continuity that persists is properly named as eating, or temperance with regard to eating, but not the acquired virtue of temperance.

⁴⁸ Unfortunately this technical terminology can lead to misunderstandings. For example, claiming the Christian does not possess natural virtues could wrongly lead one to think that graced virtues are unnatural. But this is false. They are “supernatural,” a term frequently used by Aquinas. Similarly, claiming that the

persists in the life of grace” (which is true) with the claim “natural virtue persists in the life of graced virtue” (which is false). Given the technical meaning of “natural” as a reference to last end when applied to virtue, one need not (and indeed cannot) employ “natural virtues” to identify the nature that persists when grace perfects nature.

Surely Aquinas affirms that human nature persists in the person with infused cardinal virtue. But his affirming this does *not* commit him to affirming the persistence of the acquired cardinal virtues in the life of infused virtue. So how can he maintain that nature persists? This is easily seen by a quick comparison to how nature persists in the theological virtues, which are always infused and never acquired. Aquinas never claims that natural or acquired counterparts to the theological virtues persist in the life of one with sanctifying grace.⁴⁹ Do the theological virtues therefore defy the Scholastic axiom that grace perfects nature? Not at all. They perfect and elevate human nature, and in particular its powers of intellect and will. The same is true of the infused cardinal virtues, which perfect and elevate not the acquired cardinal (or natural) virtues, but human nature and its powers (in this case, intellect, will, and the passions). Rightly claiming that human nature persists and is (re-)specified in the infused cardinal virtues does not equate to the claim that natural acquired virtues persist, since, as Aquinas clearly states, the change in last end in these different types of virtue differentiates the species of the virtues and the formal objects of their respective activities. The acquired cardinal virtues habituate human powers according to the rule of human reason. The infused cardinal virtues habituate the same powers, directed toward the same sorts of activities, but in a formally distinct manner based on the divine rule.⁵⁰ Thus in understandably attempting to maintain natural continuity, given the possession of the infused cardinal virtues, thinkers who do so by maintaining that natural acquired cardinal virtues persist mistakenly attempt to describe that continuity by employing terms of art (i.e., “natural,” and “acquired”) that refer not merely to the presence of human nature but to the last end to which that nature is directed.

Christian does not possess the human virtues does not mean the graced life in in-human or non-human, but rather super-human, a term only rarely employed by Aquinas (e.g., *ST* 1–2, q. 61, a. 1, ad 2).

⁴⁹ Thomists debate whether natural hope or natural faith exists for Aquinas. I do not engage this debate here because one’s position in this debate has no bearing on the claim that fully possessing the theological virtues of faith and hope requires the possession of some acquired counterpart. No one in this debate affirms this latter claim, or that natural faith or hope would have the same “object” as the theological virtues of faith or hope, namely, God’s very self.

⁵⁰ *ST* 1–2, q. 63, a. 4. Note here the claim that these types of virtues not only differ as to formal object/species but also share the same material object

In sum, the first reason why thinkers affirm the presence of acquired cardinal virtues in Christians is due to the laudable attempt to affirm that grace perfects nature. Yet they do so by mistakenly labeling the “natural” that persists as acquired cardinal virtue, a claim that is incompatible with Aquinas’s own claims about virtue.

Concern Two: Explaining Further Growth in the Life of Graced Virtue

The second and perhaps even more common reason why thinkers affirm the persistence of acquired cardinal virtues in Christians is to explain how there remains room for further growth in the development of virtue in the Christian life. Aquinas himself acknowledges quite clearly that the infused cardinal virtues do not necessarily grant the facility of action so commonly associated with virtuous action. In another passage frequently cited by those affirming the need for acquired cardinal virtues in the Christian life, Aquinas claims that

it happens sometimes that a man who has a habit, finds it difficult to act in accordance with the habit, and consequently feels no pleasure and complacency in the act, on account of some impediment supervening from without. . . . Sometimes the habits of moral virtue experience difficulty in their works, by reason of certain contrary dispositions remaining from previous acts. This difficulty does not occur in respect of acquired moral virtue: because the repeated acts by which they are acquired, remove also the contrary dispositions.⁵¹

All Thomistic moralists agree that Aquinas accurately describes the life of infused virtue here, and that ideally one moves beyond the presence of such “contrary dispositions” so as to possess greater “facility” in virtuous action. The question is how to describe what is happening when this development occurs.

Although Aquinas here claims that the infused virtues do not necessarily grant facility in the manner always obtained with the acquired virtues, he never says that obtaining such facility occurs in the person with the infused cardinal virtues by obtaining the acquired cardinal virtues. Yet that is exactly what he is commonly understood to say.⁵² Inglis, for instance, citing this very passage, claims: “Aquinas argued that it is easier for one with acquired virtue to live the life of infused virtue than it is for one with the

⁵¹ *ST* 1–2, q. 65, a. 3, ad 2.

⁵² For examples of the claim that the acquired cardinal virtues provide facility for the infused cardinal virtues, see Inglis, “Aquinas’s Replication of the Acquired Moral Virtues” 22; Dell’Olio, *Foundations of Moral Selfhood* 137–38, 141; Sherwin, “Infused Virtue” 49–51; Mirkes, “Aquinas’s Doctrine of Moral Virtue” 217–18. Miner (“Non-Aristotelian Prudence” 421) implies that this occurs when noting that infused prudence may operate without facility and then immediately discussing how a person would “hope to” possess both types of virtue (infused and acquired prudence).

infused virtues alone.”⁵³ Taking this argument to its logical conclusion, the author makes two claims that are incompatible with clear positions of Aquinas. First, he claims that “acquired virtue can enable one to move more easily toward the final end.”⁵⁴ As noted above, it is by definition impossible for an acquired virtue to move one toward the final end of supernatural happiness. Second, he claims that “for Aquinas, a single action can be simultaneously one of acquired and infused moral virtue.”⁵⁵ That this cannot be the case based on *ST* 1–2, q. 63, a. 4 (and parallel passages) has already been established. It is noteworthy in this discussion of facility that though many moralists are willing to ascribe acquired cardinal virtues to the person with infused cardinal virtues despite those two sets of virtues inclining a person to acts with different formal objects, no scholar, to my knowledge, ever describes the presence of contrary dispositions as the possession of an (acquired) vice while simultaneously possessing the infused cardinal virtues.⁵⁶ It is, of course, nonsensical to claim that one can possess a virtue and a vice with regard to the same type of activity or material object.⁵⁷ After all, vices and virtues incline a person to acts of different species. But then, infused cardinal and acquired cardinal virtues do so as well.

What *does* happen when the person with infused cardinal virtues incrementally dispels contrary dispositions through repeated action, if this cannot be described as the obtaining of acquired virtues? There are plenty of resources in Aquinas’s work on virtue to describe this dynamic, resources that do not entail the contradictions with other important claims in Aquinas’s work on virtue. First, in his treatment of the increase of habits, Aquinas claims that one of the ways a habit increases is by the greater participation of the person in that habit. “Such increase of habits and other forms is not caused by addition of form to form, but by the subject participating more or less perfectly, one in the same form.”⁵⁸ This claim helps further substantiate the above interpretation of Aquinas’s claim in *ST* 1–2, q. 51, a. 4, ad 3: “acts produced by an infused habit do not cause a habit, but strengthen an already existing one.”⁵⁹ This latter text should not

⁵³ Inglis, “Aquinas’s Replication of the Acquired Moral Virtues” 22.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ As the above quotation from *ST* 1–2, q. 65, a. 3, ad 2 indicates, these contrary influences are more rightly called “dispositions” (*contrariae dispositiones*) than habits, or in this case, vices.

⁵⁷ See DQV, q. 10, ad 16 where Aquinas claims that in the case of one with the vice of intemperance who is contrite and receives the infused virtue of temperance, what remains in that person is no longer rightly called the habit of intemperance, but rather a certain disposition (*quasi dispositio quaedam*).

⁵⁸ *ST* 1–2, q. 52, a. 2.

⁵⁹ See also DQV, q. 10, ad 19.

(as it commonly is) be taken to suggest that acts of infused virtue strengthen the existing habit of acquired cardinal virtue. Aquinas is making precisely the opposite point, that acts proceeding from the already present infused cardinal virtue do not cause another habit, but strengthen the infused cardinal virtue. The immediately ensuing articles on increase in habits explain how: by a greater participation of the subject in the relevant infused cardinal virtue.⁶⁰ Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that it is not compatible with Aquinas's work on virtue to claim that the person with the infused cardinal virtues who gains facility of action is obtaining a parallel set of acquired cardinal virtues.

Second, Aquinas's description of growth in charity is another resource in his work for explaining how one with infused cardinal virtues can grow in facility without positing the development of acquired virtues in the same person. No one explains growth in charity, which entails greater facility in acts of charity, by positing some acquired theological virtues parallel to the infused theological virtue charity.⁶¹ How then does growth occur? Aquinas affirms that charity not only increases but increases "by beginning to be more and more in the subject"⁶²—he uses the terms *radicari* and *radicatio*: charity takes greater "root" in the subject. Furthermore, Aquinas offers a beautiful, practical account of spiritual development in his depiction of the three stages in the growth of charity, namely, beginning, progress, and perfection.⁶³ His depiction of what occurs in the "beginner" with charity is

⁶⁰ In addition to *ST* 1–2, q. 52, a. 2 cited above, see also *ST* 1–2, q. 52, a. 1 where Aquinas twice claims that one of the ways we may speak of the perfection of a form (such as a habit) is with regard to the subject's participation in it.

⁶¹ Although he never posits an acquired charity to aid one's growth in charity, Dell'Olio claims that the acquired cardinal virtues can play such a role: "The acquired virtues help support the growth and strength of charity by providing a certain stability of character" (*Foundations of Moral Selfhood* 141). Of course, should this claim mean simply that the prior possession of acquired cardinal virtue may "assist" the ensuing infused virtues through helping preempt the presence of contrary dispositions, I do not deny this; nor is it the topic of this article. Dell'Olio further claims that, *in the one possessing the infused virtues*, the acquired virtues persist and continue to assist the infused virtues.

⁶² *ST* 2–2, q. 24, a. 4. See also *ST* 2–2, q. 24, a. 5: "charity increases only by its subject partaking of charity more and more."

⁶³ For more on this account of moral and spiritual development rooted in Aquinas's stages as found in *ST* 2–2, q. 24, a. 9, see Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1995); Craig Steven Titus, "Moral Development and Making All Things New in Christ," *Thomist* 72 (2008) 233–58; and Paul Wadell, *The Primacy of Love: An Introduction to the Ethics of Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Paulist, 1992). See also Craig Steven Titus, "Moral Development and Connecting the Virtues: Aquinas, Porter, and the Flawed Saint," in *Ressourcement Thomism: Sacred Doctrine, the Sacraments, and the Moral Life; Essays in Honor of Romanus Cessario, O.P.*, ed. Reinhard Hüter and Matthew Levering (Washington: Catholic University of America, 2010) 330–52.

that one is concerned primarily with avoiding sin and resisting bad desires, a state of affairs reminiscent of the one with a lack of facility in the infused cardinal virtues due to the presence of contrary dispositions. When charity increases, these contrary dispositions are dispelled. Nowhere does Aquinas claim that this is achieved by possessing some acquired virtue parallel to charity, and so neither is it necessary to posit a set of acquired cardinal virtues to explain increasing facility within acts of the infused cardinal virtues.⁶⁴

In sum, the commonly recognized need for further development in the person with the infused cardinal virtues, particularly with regard to facility in action and further habituation with regard to contrary dispositions, does not justify the positing of acquired cardinal virtues to “replicate”⁶⁵ the infused cardinal virtues.⁶⁶ Nowhere does Aquinas claim that this is what occurs, and indeed certain texts that have been interpreted to mean just that are best interpreted otherwise, both on their own and especially in

⁶⁴ See Sherwin, “Infused Virtue,” for an excellent account of the need for the infused cardinal virtues, their compatibility with contrary dispositions, and the possibility of growth in such facility. Toward the end of the article he examines “the relationship between the infused and acquired cardinal virtues in the one who has both” (49). He affirms this possibility only with a quick reference to DQV, q. 10, ad 4, even while noting that Aquinas says “virtually nothing” on this matter. He offers a brief attempt to explain how one could affirm the simultaneous presence of infused and acquired cardinal virtues through a comparison to how charity commands the acts of infused cardinal virtues. For a superb account of this latter dynamic, see Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love* 179–203. Despite the apparent parallel between charity’s command of the infused cardinal virtues and the infused cardinal virtues’ command of the acquired cardinal virtues, there are two crucial dis-analogies. First, charity commands the acts of *infused* cardinal virtues. (Indeed Sherwin’s article explains well why we cannot simply say charity commands acts of acquired cardinal virtues, rendering infused cardinal virtues pointless and nonexistent.) Thus in the case of charity commanding infused cardinal virtues, both virtues share the same last end, which is not the case with acquired and infused cardinal virtues. Second, charity commands acts of *other* virtues, which is not the case with the infused and acquired cardinal virtues where the material object is the same even while the formal object differs.

⁶⁵ This term is employed by Inglis in the title of, and throughout, his article.

⁶⁶ This is especially true since Aquinas is quite clear that the infused cardinal virtues govern the passions as well as the intellect and will (DQV, q. 10, ad 14). Given that the well-ordered passions are a (if not the primary) source of facility in moral action (see *ST* 1–2, q. 24, a. 3; see also *ST* 2–2, q. 158, a. 8 for an example of the passions providing facility with regard to anger), it is not clear why the development of well-ordered passions would require the parallel presence of acquired cardinal virtues if, as Aquinas explicitly says, passions can be governed by infused cardinal virtues. In fact, affirming the need for the acquired cardinal virtues to give facility seems to entail not only a rejection of Aquinas’s claim that the infused cardinal virtues govern the passions but also precisely the sort of compartmentalization of the person addressed in the conclusion of this article.

light of other claims Aquinas makes about virtue. Furthermore, the legitimate concerns that prompt contemporary moralists to posit this solution are actually better addressed with other readily available resources in Aquinas's thought, resources that do not engender the problems caused by positing the acquired cardinal virtues in Christians.

Concern Three: The "Breadth" of Infused Prudence's "Coverage"

Yet another reason posited for the possibility of acquired cardinal virtues in the life of a Christian is the evident lack of "coverage" provided by the infused cardinal virtues in certain areas of life. This concern is similar to the previous one, as both describe how there is room for growth in the graced life of infused virtue. Yet these concerns are slightly different and thus treated distinctly here, for two reasons. First, whereas in the previous concern the room for growth is in greater facility with regard to acts the person with infused virtue is already committing, in this third concern I examine room for growth in activities "not necessary for salvation" and not yet occurring in the one with infused virtue. Put differently, while the previous part examined how the person with infused virtue could grow so as to act well with greater facility, this part examines how the person with infused virtue can grow so as to act well in more areas of his or her life. Second, the concern in the previous part is addressed by Thomists through interpretation of ST 1–2, q. 65, a. 3, ad 2, while the concern in this part is addressed through interpretation of another text.

The key text for the concern addressed in this part appears in Aquinas's discussion of prudence. In response to an objector's claim that not all who have prudence possess one of its subsidiaries, diligence (*industria*), Aquinas claims that all with infused prudence have diligence with regard to things "necessary for salvation," whereas "there is moreover a fuller diligence, through which someone is able to provide for himself and for others not only those things which are necessary for salvation but also those things pertaining to human life. And such diligence is not in all who have grace."⁶⁷ Aquinas is clearly stating here that people with infused prudence may in fact not be fully prudent (more specifically, diligent) in certain activities in life that are not necessary for salvation. Some contemporary moralists have taken this claim to imply that in those arenas not necessary for salvation, if the habit of good action *is* obtained, what is obtained is acquired prudence. Therefore, ideally one possesses both infused prudence and acquired prudence. For a particularly clear example of this—quoted at length because it illustrates the conclusion targeted here as well as the

⁶⁷ ST 2–2, q. 47, a. 14, ad 1 (my translation). For a helpful treatment of this text, see Mckay Knobel, "Relating Aquinas's Infused and Acquired Virtues."

problems that result in such a conclusion—consider the following observation by Herdt:

Aquinas . . . insists . . . that *full* virtue requires both infused and acquired virtues. When he takes up the question of whether prudence exists in all who have grace, he notes that infused prudence “is merely sufficient with regard to things necessary for salvation.” There is a second prudence, which is “more than sufficient” or “fuller,” “whereby a man is able to make provision both for himself and for others, not only in matters necessary for salvation but also in all things relating to human life” (II-II:47.14 ad 1). This form of prudence does not exist in all who have grace, the implication being that full prudence requires both infused and acquired prudence. Only when both infused and acquired virtues are present is it possible to act readily and harmoniously for the sake of the ultimate end.⁶⁸

But Aquinas never says that both infused and acquired virtues are needed together. Furthermore, claiming such is problematic not only on the terms of this text considered in itself but also with regard to other central claims in Aquinas’s work on virtue.

As for the text itself, nowhere does Aquinas say that the “fuller” prudence is a combination of acquired and infused prudence rather than the subject’s greater participation in infused prudence. For Aquinas to claim such would have to imply that the activities “not necessary for salvation” were not only *not* being referred to the ultimate end (which he affirms), but also incapable of being so ordered (which he never claims and would never claim). To claim that a person becomes fully well habituated in such activities by obtaining acquired cardinal virtue implies that the most perfect last end of these activities is the civic good, or natural flourishing. This creates a dual last-end situation since the person in question is granted to possess the infused cardinal virtues. Furthermore, it suggests that the “things pertaining to this life” are not orderable according to the divine rule governing infused prudence, given that they are accessible to unaided human reason and may be done well (in the person without sanctifying grace) for the natural end as last end. As Dell’Olio writes:

The naturally acquired prudence of the Christian allows him to act in accord with the measure of right reason in situations that call for the operation of this kind of prudence, as in civic matters. Yet his overall judgments are nonetheless guided by the higher measure of divine wisdom, through the virtue of infused prudence, which, after all, does not destroy natural wisdom but rather adds to it.⁶⁹

Here again we see the legitimate concern to affirm that grace perfects nature.⁷⁰ Yet this affirmation of grace perfecting nature is actually a

⁶⁸ Herdt, *Putting on Virtue* 87–88.

⁶⁹ Dell’Olio, *Foundations of Moral Selfhood* 136.

⁷⁰ Shortly after this passage Dell’Olio writes, “For Aquinas, the naturally acquired virtues maintain their own integrity while still requiring subordination to the supernatural virtues in order to move the human being to the complete or

compartmentalization of grace and nature. Dell'Olio's quotation makes it clear that in this view infused prudence governs one's "overall judgments" according to the divine rule, and yet that some arenas of life (here "civic matters") are not—and indeed it seems cannot be—governed by that infused prudence thus requiring the presence of acquired prudence.⁷¹ This is not grace perfecting nature, but rather grace alongside of nature, with graced virtue directing activity in some matters of prudence and acquired virtue directing activity in other matters of prudence. Never does Dell'Olio explain why the "fuller" prudence could not be the greater participation of the subject in infused prudence such that one's overall judgments include even civic matters.

The claim that the "fuller" prudence is a combination of acquired and infused prudence is enormously problematic, and not simply due to its suggestion of two last ends as well as the engendering of compartmentalized areas of one's life governed by different rules. It also implies that to be "full," virtues given by God's grace require acquired virtues, which by definition are obtained by human effort alone. No one denies the common necessity of further growth in infused cardinal virtue, but to explain that growth (in facility or, in this case, by areas of activity) by the development of acquired virtues dangerously suggests the reliance of God's grace on human effort. Josef Pieper, in a paragraph affirming the necessity of both acquired and infused virtues in a "graced unity," recognized the problem in asserting that the "fuller" prudence requires acquired virtue:

We must, however, guard against the misunderstanding that Thomas is here speaking of a pre-eminence of natural and "acquired" prudence over supernatural and "infused" prudence; rather, he means the pre-eminence of that "fuller" prudence in

'fuller' perfection of the self" (ibid. 137). Here Dell'Olio explicitly connects the grace-perfects-nature concern and the concern over the reach of prudence by using the word "fuller." For all the reasons noted in part one of this section, his claim would be accurate had he said "human nature maintains its own integrity" rather than "naturally acquired virtues maintain. . . ." Part of what is happening here is a confusion of categorizations of virtue by end vs. by object. Dell'Olio would be right to insist that the natural human capacities governed by prudence, and the activities that are the material object of prudence, persist in the graced life. But his saying that the acquired virtues persist even while subordinate to the supernatural virtues, means that he fails to recognize that for Aquinas this descriptor of efficient cause (acquired) is always correlated with a categorization by last end (supernatural), and so the claim is actually impossible.

⁷¹ Dell'Olio here cites Daniel Westberg, *Right Practical Reason: Aristotle, Action, and Prudence in Aquinas* (New York: Oxford University, 1994) 256. However, Westberg's careful analysis of the changes brought on by infused virtue not only never explicitly supports the existence of the acquired cardinal virtues in the Christian, but it also seems far more compatible with the position that the acquired cardinal virtues do not exist in the Christian.

which the natural *and* the supernatural, the acquired *and* the given, are combined in a felicitous, in a literally “graced” unity.⁷²

Though Pieper rightly denies the preeminence of acquired prudence over infused prudence, his claim that “full” prudence requires acquired prudence is subject to the very same problem. No one, of course, denies the necessity of human nature in infused prudence. After all, despite being possible only through God’s grace, infused prudence is truly the person’s own. Yet, claiming that infused prudence requires human nature is not the same as affirming the necessity of acquired prudence for the completion of infused prudence.

Consider one last example of the erroneous interpretation of *ST* 2–2, q. 47, a. 14, ad 1 targeted here. Addressing precisely this text, Hall writes:

Thomas invokes this usefulness of acquired virtue in securing the natural goods of human life. Infused prudence is sufficient for the end of salvation, giving one the discernment to determine (and do) what is necessary to this end. But it does not confer ability and experience for directing matters with regard to this life, even as it is subordinated to God. In referring to the “other industry [i.e., diligence],” presumably industry given through acquired prudence, Thomas suggests a cooperative or collaborative effort between the infused and acquired virtue.⁷³

Here we see my target claim stated baldly. Yet Aquinas never makes such a claim regarding the cooperation/collaboration of infused and acquired virtues; nor does he speak of an “other industry,” instead using the term “fuller.” Furthermore, we see here an inaccurate grasp of infused prudence. Though infused prudence guarantees discernment only of what is necessary for salvation, it does indeed include “directing matters with regard to this life,” as it must if it is to be the cardinal virtue of prudence. If it did not, there would be two separate realms in a person’s life—what is necessary for salvation and matters with regard to this life—along with two separate virtues (directed to two different last ends) guiding activity in each arena. This quotation perfectly reveals how a position affirming the necessity of both types of prudence necessarily compartmentalizes activities in human life into two unrelated groups, even though both are supposed to be the matter of prudence.

In sum, despite a plausible *prima facie* reading of *ST* 2–2, q. 47, a. 14, ad 1 to suggest that one with infused prudence ideally possesses also acquired prudence, and despite a genuine need to explain how those with infused

⁷² Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1966) 14. Dell’Olio relies heavily on this paragraph, and he in turn is a main source for Herdt’s analysis. Thus Pieper’s interpretation of *ST* 2–2, q. 47, a. 14, ad 1 is a main source of the problematic interpretation of this text with regard to the relation of acquired and infused cardinal virtues in contemporary Thomists.

⁷³ Hall, *Narrative and Natural Law* 82–83.

prudence can continue to grow in their possession of prudence, the claim that Christians therefore ideally develop acquired prudence alongside infused prudence fails both as an adequate interpretation of this text and as a solution to the issue of explaining development in the one with infused virtue. Reminiscent of my section one, this “solution” entails affirming that a person has two last ends, which is impossible for Aquinas. The solution entails the claim that acquired and infused prudence operate “collaboratively” even though Aquinas insists repeatedly that acts of these two types of virtue differ formally (e.g., *ST* 1–2, q. 63, a. 4). The solution also entails the claim that acquired virtues help us “act harmoniously for our ultimate end,” despite the fact that Aquinas clearly denies this possibility (*ST* 1–2, q. 63, a. 2). More pertinent to the exact text here, such a “solution” also compartmentalizes the activities of one’s life into distinct realms of acquired and infused prudence. Though it is true (as Aquinas acknowledges) that some activities of this life ideally governed by prudence are not so governed in the one with infused prudence, explaining that development by a greater participation in infused prudence both avoids the conflicts with other central claims in Aquinas’s work on virtue and more satisfactorily explains the problem Aquinas addresses in this particular text.

CONCLUSION

By this point my arguments in support of the claim that there cannot be acquired cardinal virtues in the Christian should be evident. They center on both the singularity of an individual person’s last end and the difference in species between acts of acquired and infused cardinal virtue. These are, of course, closely related claims, given the role of the end in delineating the species of acts of virtues. It should also be clear that, while laudable concerns drive contemporary commentators to affirm the existence of acquired cardinal virtues in Christians, those concerns can be accommodated, and indeed accommodated better, by not positing the existence of acquired cardinal virtues in the Christian.

With the specific question of this article having been addressed, it may be helpful to conclude with a return to the questions I mentioned at the outset regarding the stakes of this argument. Although one clear concern driving my article is reading Aquinas accurately, I have broader concerns about how we understand and speak more generally about the transformation of human life by God’s grace, a transformation that in this life is not complete. Aquinas provides a beautiful account of how the human person, with all his or her natural capacities, remains that human person whose natural capacities are fulfilled in a state of grace, even as those capacities are further directed toward a fulfillment that far exceeds those unaided capacities. Of course, due to our sinfulness we commonly fall short of such a beautifully

integrated life, and live in disintegration. Indeed, even in possession of God's sanctifying grace, we may act virtuously but without facility due to the presence of contrary dispositions, or we may fail to act virtuously in certain areas of our lives not directly related to salvation. Yet to claim that the needed growth occurs through the development of acquired cardinal virtues is to say that such development occurs without God's help, and that the development is not directed toward our supernatural last end of friendship with God. Given that a person in a state of grace is granted to possess the infused cardinal virtues, the result of this account is a compartmentalized person at times acting well naturally and at other times acting well supernaturally. Besides painting a portrait of a fragmented virtuous life, this problematic view suggests a competitive account of divine and human agency, where it is "either we or God" causing good activity. Surely this is not the intended outcome of those who affirm the presence of the acquired cardinal virtues in the Christian. The graced life of infused virtue is always a life of truly human activity, even as the person's activity surpasses its natural end toward a supernatural last end made possible only by God's grace. It is therefore best to conclude, as both a description of graced lives and an interpretation of Aquinas's work on virtue, that the Christian cannot possess the acquired cardinal virtues.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Earlier versions of the article published here were presented at the 2010 Medieval Congress in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and at the 2010 Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church Conference in Trento, Italy. The author is grateful for feedback from these conferences as well as for critical comments from, among others, Angela McKay Knobel, Joseph Capizzi, Craig Steven Titus, Thomas Joseph White, O.P., and Gregory LaNave.