The freedom of the mind for God: reflexivity and spiritual exercises in Thomas Aquinas

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THE FREEDOM OF THE MIND FOR GOD: REFLEXIVITY AND SPIRITUAL EXERCISES IN THOMAS AQUINAS

a dissertation by

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Abstract

*The Freedom of the Mind for God: Reflexivity and Spiritual Exercises in Thomas Aquinas*

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Directed by Stephen F. Brown

The study of Thomas Aquinas generally focuses on theological questions in his work, and ignores certain aspects of what might be called his “spiritual life.” Though there are exceptions to this rule, there are numerous themes in the writings of Thomas Aquinas which have not been given their due. In light of this fact, this dissertation seeks to provide an extended treatment of two components of the work of Thomas Aquinas which receive little attention: the role of spiritual exercises in his writing, and the form of reflexivity—one’s understanding of and relation to one’s self—he recommends. As a way of approaching these issues, I draw from the work of two historical philosophers, Pierre Hadot and Michel Foucault, using the methodological questions they employ in their writings on the classical world.

Both Hadot and Foucault argued that there was something different about the way philosophy was accomplished in the antique world, something which was lost as philosophy shifted in the modern period. Hadot’s work focuses, in particular, on the use of spiritual exercises in the formation of the person—that is, how a person becomes the ideal form they ought to be. Foucault, on the other hand, focused on the alternative form of reflexivity as found in the work of classical philosophers, and used it for fruitful comparison and critique of the contemporary forms of reflexivity found in the modern world. Both of these thinkers, however, never included in their study the medieval period, or at least not in an extended and meaningful
way. Their questions, however, are particularly relevant to the work of Thomas Aquinas, as he offers both an extended treatment of spiritual exercises, as well as a form of reflexivity similar in many ways to classical forms.

As a way of highlighting these two topics in Thomas Aquinas, I first provide an overview of the work of Pierre Hadot and Michel Foucault as it relates to these topics. I then move onto a discussion of the current state of scholarship on “spirituality” in Thomas Aquinas, and suggest the ways in which this dissertation can improve on this current state. In the subsequent chapters, I begin a discussion of the concept of virtue as found in Thomas Aquinas, and its relation to both spiritual exercises and reflexivity, the description of which in Thomas forms the basis for the next two chapters. Finally, I turn to an in depth application of these methodological questions by turning to two different works of Thomas; first, I turn to his De perfectione spiritualis vitae, a short and rarely read work in which Thomas explains the practices which accompany the formation of a person in charity. Second, I turn to the Summa Theologiae and the cardinal virtues, drawing attention to the presence of spiritual exercises in a work typically treated as merely expositional.
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Chapter 1 - Survey of Literature, Method and Argument

This is a dissertation on the work of Thomas Aquinas, one which intends to supplement the understanding of his spirituality. Though there are studies of the spiritual life in Thomas, the methodology of this study will be different. In particular, through engagement with the work of Pierre Hadot and Michel Foucault, I hope to bring to light aspects of the work of Aquinas previously uninvestigated. The principal interests of Hadot and Foucault’s later work is on the nature of ancient philosophy, and in particular the spiritual exercises and reflexive notion of the self that accompanied these philosophies. The work of Foucault and Hadot, though it has been applied to figures from early Christianity, has yet to be applied in a full length study to medieval thinkers. This provides the rationale for this dissertation, to study Thomas Aquinas’s spiritual exercises and his understanding of the relationship of self to self.

For those not familiar with the entirety of Thomas’s oeuvre, it may be surprising to discover that Thomas wrote on anything other than academic questions. Aquinas is, however, concerned with the entire range of the spiritual life, which can be seen in his short work *De perfectione spiritualis vitae*. This text, written in response to negative judgments of the religious orders from secular clergy, explains how a Christian can pursue perfection as far as possible in this life, and the practices that aid in attaining this perfection.

Before moving on to the particulars of my argument, it will be helpful to first provide an overview of the work of Pierre Hadot and Michel Foucault, and to briefly describe how their work will influence this study of Aquinas. I will then provide an overview of
the literature on Aquinas, and the few instances where the study of Hadot and Aquinas has overlapped.

**Hadot and Philosophy**

The work of the French historical philosopher Pierre Hadot identified a component missing from the world of modern philosophy. His great innovation came in the identification of philosophy as a “way of life,” and the accompaniment of this way of life by certain “spiritual exercises,” an insight derived from his study of ancient philosophy. In this understanding, only when a person lived their philosophy could they properly be called a philosopher. One of his most repeated quotations comes from Henry David Thoreau’s book *Walden*: “Nowadays, there are philosophy professors, but no philosophers.”

Thoreau’s point, which is one Hadot heartily endorses, is that there is a difference between thinking and living, and in the modern world the great majority of our philosophical undertakings are concerned only with speculative knowledge or theoretical matters, and not with changing one’s way of life. Hadot argues that, in the ancient world, while knowledge is important to the philosopher, it is only a part of a far more important project: the task of total self-cultivation. In this project, the philosopher is deeply concerned with working on his self, and only along with the conversion into something different can that philosopher come to “know” something about the universe.

Hadot, therefore, draws a sharp contrast between two types of thought. One, he will suggest, can properly be called philosophy, while the other, drawing from the Stoics, is

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better labeled “logos kata philosophian,” discourse about philosophical matters. It is a recurring theme or criticism among philosophers that some are not actually accomplishing philosophy, but only talking about it—think, for example, of Plato’s criticism of the Sophists. This specific criticism, that there are those who do not do philosophy but only speak it, is also directed at the medieval Scholastics. Hadot, in particular, sees the development of the university methods of learning in the 13th century as one instance of philosophy losing its practical core:

If ancient philosophy established such an intimate link between philosophical discourse and the form of life, why is it that today, given the way the history of philosophy is usually taught, philosophy is presented as above all a discourse, which may be theoretical and systematic, or critical, but in any case lacks a direct relationship to the philosopher’s way of life?

The causes of this transformation are primarily historical: it is due to the flourishing of Christianity. As we have seen, Christianity presented itself very early as a “philosophy” in the ancient sense of the term....Gradually, however, and for reasons we shall explore later, Christianity, particularly in the Middle Ages, was marked by a divorce between philosophical discourse and way of life....All that persisted was the philosophical discourse of certain ancient schools, in particular the discourses of Platonism and Aristotelianism. Yet, separated from

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the ways of life which inspired them, they were reduced to the status of mere
conceptual material, which could be used in theological controversies. 3

This is a rather intriguing argument, and Hadot is certainly not the first to point to
Scholasticism as problematic in a number of ways. As will be discussed later in this
chapter, there are several difficulties with Hadot’s understanding of Scholastic thought.
Most importantly, Hadot overlooks the spiritual and philosophical life of academic
thinkers from this period. Hadot is not necessarily to blame for his lack of awareness of
this aspect; it appears to be the standard reading of Scholastics to focus only on their
academic work, to dismiss their biblical commentaries and sermons as hobbies, and
finally to critique them for having a deficient spiritual life.

For Hadot, the problems of Scholastic thought did not end in the middle Ages, but
continue up to the present day. Given the connection of the rise of the university with the
rise of scholasticism, and the endurance of university structures from that earlier period,
it is inevitable that one would find a continuation of many of the same forms and methods
of teaching from that earlier period. This means, to Hadot, that the university system is
generally predicated on a faulty concept of philosophy. Beyond the university, certain
philosophical systems continue this division, as Hadot explains: “The partisans of neo-
scholastic or Thomist philosophy have continued, as in the middle ages, to view
philosophy as a purely theoretical activity.” This is not necessarily a bold claim, and is

3 What is ancient philosophy? 253
certainly in line with the standard perception of scholastic thought over the centuries. But is it correct?4

For Scholasticism in general, and for the work of Thomas Aquinas in particular, I argue that it is not. Aquinas does not approach philosophy or theology as a purely theoretical activity, nor does he lack a concern for the transformation of the person through education and training. Hadot’s argument overlooks several of the key features of Scholasticism in the 13th century in favor of his original characterization. In reality, Thomas is concerned with the whole person and their development, and though he does not identify the work of the Christian as the “philosophical life” as other thinkers from around this period do,5 he is devoted to the concept of the vita spiritualis, the spiritual life.

Hadot is certainly aware of the concept of the spiritual life, and he does not believe that all of Christianity lacks the understanding of philosophy held by Greek and Roman philosophers. Instead, he is making a specific argument about the nature of Scholastic thought, and suggesting that it lost some of the values that Christianity once held. It is in fact from Christianity, and from scholarship on Christian theologians, that Hadot draws some of the more important concepts in his work. In “Ancient Spiritual Exercises and ‘Christian Philosophy’” Hadot cites Paul Rabbow’s work Antike Schriften über

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4 Speaking of neo-Scholasticism and neo-Thomism in general, it seems as if an argument can be made that this is not the case for all parties involved. One can look, for example, to the efforts of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, called the “Sacred Monster of Thomism,” and see a number of works on the “Spiritual Life.” These works, while they may continue to treat philosophy as a “handmaiden” as Thomas in some sense does, do view Christianity as a way of life, and seek to integrate theoretical material into a practical existence. They also employ spiritual exercises. This is not the main subject of this thesis, however. Cf., Perfection chretienne et contemplation: selon S. Thomas d’Aquin et S. Jean de la Croix.
5 Most notably Bernard of Clairvaux, but also Meister Eckhart and others. Bernard of Clairvaux is one figure who is critical of “university” learning, though at the time the universities were not fully established.
Seelenheilung und Seelenleitung auf ihre Quellen untersucht, as a key source of inspiration. In this work, Rabbow describes the ancient practice of a “moral exercise,” something which is then developed in Christianity into a “spiritual exercise.” Rabbow writes:

Spiritual exercises, then, which resemble moral exercises like a twin, both in essence and structure, were raised to their classical rigor and perfection in the Exercitia Spiritualia of Ignatius of Loyola. Spiritual exercises thus belong primarily to the religious sphere, since their goal is to fortify, maintain, and renew life “in the Spirit,” the vita spiritualis.\(^7\)

Admittedly, if one were to turn to the work of Thomas Aquinas, as well as those commentators on his work, the vast majority is not focused on explicit matters of the “spiritual life.” Instead, one finds a strong emphasis placed on disputation about theological quandaries and issues that appear to have no bearing on quotidian realities. But, as Hadot will emphasize about ancient authors, our approach to earlier texts often misses key aspects of the writer’s thought because of the differences in our context. This lack of perspective, I argue, is true of the work of Thomas Aquinas, and Hadot and others have missed certain aspects of Thomas’ work.

Thomas does in fact care about the spiritual life, and does view Christianity as a way of life. In addition to this, he offers a variety of spiritual exercises that aid in the

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\(^6\) Rabbow used “moral exercise” to distinguish non-Christian practices of philosophers from Christian exercises. As Hadot will note, “moral exercise” is an inadequate term and is rightly replaced by “spiritual exercise,” as the practices referred to alter the whole person, and not just the ethical aspect.

formation of a person, in order that the person may approach the world, other persons, and God in a different way. The primary source for my argument is his short work, *De perfectione spiritualis vitae*, which offers an explanation of the spiritual life and examples of exercises that aid in its advancement. From this first source, we are provided with a lens to approach the *Summa Theologiae* and works of Thomas, one which highlights Thomas’ understanding of the life of Christians as taking a specific form, accompanied by a process of self-formation.

**The development of Hadot’s thought**

The direction of Pierre Hadot’s work has taken a number of interesting turns over the course of his career. A summary of his interests can be found in interviews with Hadot himself\(^8\) and in an article by Wayne Hankey.\(^9\) Hankey portrays Hadot’s academic pursuits as at first a product of Hadot’s interest in mysticism and his personal desire for religious experience:

Early in his scholarly career, Hadot labored at the Plotinian and Porphyrian neoplatonisms and their fruits in Victorinus and Augustine. He had had mystical experiences as a youth which were not associated with his practice of Catholicism. After reading some of the classic Christian mystical authors while at seminary, he ardently attempted union, but was discouraged by his spiritual

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directors. Indeed, he was brought to the point of questioning whether “le message Chrétien est compatible finalement avec la mystique.” Hadot then began work on Plotinus with his text *Plotin ou la simplicité de regard*. Hadot describes his changing opinions on the matter:

To sum up my inner evolution, I would say the following: in 1946, I naively believed that I, too, could relive the Plotinian mystical experience. But I later realized this was an illusion. The conclusion of my book *Plotinus* already hinted that the idea of the “purely spiritual” is untenable.

Not long after this, however, Hadot began to focus his work on Stoic thought, culminating in his 1977 article “*Exercices Spirituales*.” This transition is once more explained as the product of a changing opinion regarding the “best” variety of philosophy:

Yet, as I grow older, Plotinus speaks to me less and less, if I may say so. I have become considerably detached from him. From 1970 on, I have felt very strongly that it was Epicureanism and Stoicism which could nourish the spiritual life of men and women of our times, as well as my own. That was how I came to write my book on spiritual exercises.

Hadot’s work is thus built upon a valuation of certain types of philosophy over others, something which Hadot acknowledges without reserve. His work is therefore intended

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10 Ibid., with references to Hadot, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, p. 25-32 ; see p. 128-129. Ibid., p. 126 ; see p. 32

11 *Philosophy as a Way of Life* 281


13 *Philosophy as a Way of Life* 280-281
not only to bring to the surface a manner of life lost in the course of history, but to critique contemporary philosophy in general and reinvigorate philosophy as a way of life.

As mentioned above, Hadot’s work points to Christianity as the source of this problem in western thought, and specifically the Christian Scholasticism of the middle Ages. The details of this argument will be discussed in greater detail at the end of this chapter, but it is important to note that Hadot had softened his stance on a number of these arguments by the end of his life. Instead of arguing for the almost complete absence of philosophy as a way of life from the modern world, Hadot started to turn his focus to those appearances in authors from the modern period of the use of spiritual exercises. His final text, *N’oublie pas de Vivre*, is a study of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s writings, and an examination of his use of antique sources and the perspectives found therein, including a detailed explanation of his use of spiritual exercises.\(^{14}\) He also wrote on Nietzsche and Spinoza, and Michel de Montaigne.\(^{15}\)

**Philosophy as a way of life**

Philosophy as a “way of life” is a concept offered by Hadot to describe the differences between theoretical philosophy and philosophy as practiced by some in the ancient world. Hadot writes, “Philosophy then appears in its original aspect: not as a theoretical construct, but as a method for training people to live and to look at the world in a new way.”\(^{16}\) This does not mean that philosophy is limited to the ethical; instead, all aspects of philosophical thought are integrated into what is traditionally considered the

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\(^{15}\) *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, et al.

\(^{16}\) *Philosophy as a Way of Life* 107
Arnold Davidson writes that for Hadot, in his description of ancient philosophy, “the distinction between theory and practice is located within each of the parts of philosophy; there is a theoretical discourse concerning logic, physics, and ethics, but there is also a practical or lived logic, a lived physics, and a lived ethics.” These three aspects also lead to three areas of concern for cultivation of the self: judgments, desires, and inclinations. The activity of philosophical discourse related to logic actually provides a foundation for the functional implementation of logic in one’s life: practicing logical thinking at a theoretical level forms one to be capable of thinking logically in the every day, and thus one is able to develop sound judgment. The same is true for physics and ethics: physics in this account relates to a tempering of desires and inclinations, as if one understands the nature of the world, its status as temporary and one’s part in it as a human, then one does not cling to the same desires or foster the same inclinations.

The theoretical practice of ethics also relates to the actual practice of ethics. To the many persons who have made the claim that they did not become ethical by reading Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Hadot would have two responses: 1. We are not reading the text correctly; ancient texts must be read differently, and if the expectation is transformation, then one must be willing to engage in the practices recommended by the text. 2. We have lost the oral accompaniment to ancient philosophy: ancient philosophy took place most often in the setting of a school; the everyday discourse of that school,

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17 *Philosophy as a Way of Life* 24: referring to “la philosophie antique: une ethique ou une pratique” pp.18-29 and “Philosophie, discours philosophique, et divisions de la philosophie chez les stoiciens”; and Hadot, *La Citadelle Interieure*, ch. 5.

18 This is an account of Stoic thought.
which was almost never written down, is an interpretive key to understanding the implementation of that way of life.

**Spiritual Exercises**

In order to form oneself to live as a philosopher, Hadot identifies certain activities which he calls “spiritual exercises,” with the precedent for the term coming from Ignatius of Loyola. Once more, these exercises are a defining feature of early philosophy and are, according to Hadot’s judgment, mostly lost from the world with the rise of Scholastic thought. Hadot, again in describing the philosophical schools of the first millennium, writes:

All schools agree that man, before his philosophical conversion, is in a state of unhappy disquiet. Consumed by passions, torn by worries, he does not live a genuine life, nor is he truly himself. All schools agree that man can be delivered from this state. He can accede to genuine life, improve himself, transform himself, and attain a state of perfection. It is precisely for this that spiritual exercises are intended. Their goal is a kind of self-formation, or *paideia*, which is to teach us to live, not in conformity with human prejudices and social conventions— for social life is itself a product of the passions—but in conformity with the nature of man, which is none other than reason.  

Spiritual exercises take a number of forms, a brief list of which might include: research, investigation, reading, listening, attention, meditations, therapies of the passions, remembrance of good things, self mastery, and the accomplishment of duties.  

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19 *What is Ancient Philosophy?* 102  
20 Ibid., 84
common thread of these exercises is that they have an effect on the self, and the soul in particular (hence, spiritual), and are a key component of moral training. Even when taking the form of a bodily action, like occupying a certain location or practices of generosity, the importance is secondarily upon the action, and primarily the impact that action has on the soul. Through repetition of these exercises, and the formation of habits of thought and practice, one is aided in the formation of virtues.

Spiritual exercises take a variety of forms, as Hadot will note. Important to this thesis is the fact that the practices of logic, disputation, and speculative thought all fall under the umbrella of spiritual exercise in Hadot’s understanding. Hadot argues this because he recognizes that philosophers of the ancient world were not concerned only with developing answers from their speculation; instead, the point of philosophical thought is that a person can not only provide an explanation of “justice,” for example, but rather that they become persons who are capable of complex thought, prudent implementation and effective action in facing difficult issues.

**Attention to oneself**

According to Hadot, “attention (*prosoche*) is the fundamental Stoic spiritual attitude,” and is one of the principal spiritual exercises of the Ancient world.

Attention takes several different forms in different philosophical or religious settings,

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21 *Philosophy as a Way of Life* 84
22 As will be developed in the second chapter, attention is a form of the reflexive relation of the self to itself. Modern attention to the self and self-awareness differs in several key ways from the classical format, most importantly in that modern form of attention approaches the self as an object of knowledge. Attention is discussed in this dissertation as a way of highlighting the continued presence of classical tropes in Thomas Aquinas’s work, and to emphasize this specific, understudied aspect of his spirituality.
and is one of the best ways of differentiating these philosophies. Hadot describes this attention in Stoics:

It is a continuous vigilance and presence of mind, self consciousness which never sleeps, and a constant tension of the spirit. Thanks to this attitude, the philosopher is fully aware of what he does at each instant, and wills his actions fully. Thanks to his spiritual vigilance, the Stoic always has “at hand” (procheiron) the fundamental rule of life: that is, the distinction between what depends on us and what does not.²³

On the other side of this is the example of Epicurean attention:

By the same token, the spiritual exercise of trying to live in the present moment is very different for Stoics and Epicureans. For the former, it means mental tension and constant wakefulness of the moral conscience; for the latter, it is, as we have seen, an invitation to relaxation and serenity. Worry, which tears us in the direction of the future, hides us from the incomparable value of the simple fact of existing.²⁴

At work here are different definitions of happiness and different conceptions of the philosophical life. And yet, it is clear that there is a fair amount of overlap in the spiritual exercises employed by these distinct groups of philosophers, as well as the emphasis on maintaining the control of reason in the pursuit of either wakefulness or serenity.

The varying modes of attention are a product of varying first principles. Stoics, according to Hadot, are focused on the idea of holding concern over only what it is

²³ Philosophy as a Way of Life 84
²⁴ Ibid., 88
possible to control, and attention to one’s self aids in the observation of this principle because it is concerned only with the present moment. He writes, speaking generally of ancient philosophy:

Attention to the present moment is, in a sense, the key to the spiritual exercises. It frees us from the passions, which are always caused by the past or the future—two areas which do not depend on us. By encouraging concentration on the miniscule present moment, which, in its exiguity, is always bearable and controllable, attention increases our vigilance. Finally, attention to the present moment allows us to accede to cosmic consciousness, by making us attentive to the infinite value of each instant, and causing us to accept each moment of existence from the viewpoint of the universal law of the cosmos.25

The move to pay attention to the self is the crucial step to beginning the life of the philosopher. Without first paying attention to one’s self in minute detail, there is no possibility of moral growth, as it is in part through the examination of actions and the habits they represent that the person learns what is good and what is bad. Hadot finds this emphasis on attention to oneself in the early Christian authors as well. He writes of prosoche: “Such is the philosophical attitude par excellence. It is also the attitude of the Christian philosopher.”26 The emphasis on attention to oneself is found in Clement of Alexandria, in the Cappadocians, Origen, Athanasius’ Life of Antony, Dorotheus of Gaza and several others. In large part, Hadot suggests, the spiritual exercises and the emphasis on prosoche found in these thinkers is not something original to Christianity, but is

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25 Philosophy as a Way of Life 85
26 Ibid., 130
instead a product of these writers’ philosophical educations in Greek philosophy. Seeing the usefulness of these exercises, these writers then “Christianized” the exercises; that is, appropriated the exercise and incorporated it within the practice of Christian growth in the likeness of God, and further, justified and explained the practices with reference to scriptural passages. And yet, as Hadot and Foucault will both suggest, the spiritual exercises of ancient philosophy do not remain entirely the same once they are employed in Christianity. Michel Foucault especially will focus on the different form of attention to oneself as found in Christian writers from the antique period.

**The development of Michel Foucault’s thought**

Foucault’s interests, much like Hadot’s, changed dramatically over time. To give a much too brief summary, his early work was interested in the concepts of madness and medicine, in particular the “archaeology” of these concepts and their development over time. In the 1970s, his work shifted slightly in focus to questions of discourse and truth, before shifting again with his work *Discipline and Punish*. In this latest work, the project that would become his principal interest for the rest of his life (d. 1984) comes to the center. At this time, Foucault begins to study the person, the subject, in greater detail, a pursuit continued in his next work, identified in English as the three part series *The History of Sexuality*.

Though Foucault never acknowledged any sharp break\(^\text{27}\) with his early work in interviews or writings of his own, he did acknowledge that his interests had shifted. In one interview from the early 1980s, he said:

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\(^{27}\) See Eric Paras’ *Foucault 2.0*, which suggests that Foucault’s thought takes a radical turn later in his career. This suggestion is considered rather contentious.
I would say that if now I am interested, in fact, in the way in which the subject constitutes himself in an active fashion, by the practices of the self, these practices are nevertheless not something that the individual invents by himself. They are patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested, and imposed on him by his culture, his society, and his social group.\(^{28}\) Foucault, therefore, sought to maintain a connection underlying all his work, and not acknowledge a major shift. It is important, however, that Foucault even would speak about studying how the “subject constitutes himself in an active fashion,” something which is not particularly possible or of interest to the structuralist.

The first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, originally published in France in 1976, was interested primarily in the 18\(^{th}\) and 19\(^{th}\) centuries. In this work, Foucault identified the concept of the reflexive self, and from that point on attempted to locate the origin of this concept. The reflexive self is the idea that a person is capable of, in various ways, of watching one’s self; that is, their thoughts, actions, and intentions, evaluating them, and then renouncing or encouraging those activities. The notion of reflexivity is deeply connected with the philosophic use of the Delphic precept “Know thyself.” This phrase comes to occupy a central place in philosophic texts, in that, in order to become an ethical person, one must have awareness of all one’s actions, and be able to direct them towards the proper end. In his subsequent work, Foucault worked back through history in an attempt to find the origins of the reflexive self in Christian and then Greek cultures. This led to the subject matter of the latter two volumes in the series, entitled *The Use of*

\(^{28}\) Qtd in Strozier, Robert M. *Foucault, Subjectivity, and Identity: Historical Constructions of Subject and Self*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002. 141
Pleasure and The Care of the Self, both published before Foucault died in 1984. Foucault also commented extensively on the Greek and early Christian world in his lectures at the College de France, including his The Government of the Living, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, The Government of Self and Others, and The Courage of Truth, all given between 1980 and 1984. These lectures, and the later volumes of the The History of Sexuality, are all concerned with reflexivity and the practices of the self, the arts of living that were employed by figures from the past to develop themselves into ethical subjects, the details of which will be explained below.

The later interests of Foucault are in part a product of his interactions with several thinkers. His affection for Hadot is well known, and he cites Hadot’s article “Exercices Spirituels” in The Care of the Self and The Use of Pleasure. Another important French figure was Paul Veyne, whose work was focused on Ancient Greek and Roman society and religion. Eric Paras identifies several other influences, especially those with whom Foucault lectured at UC Berkeley, where he split his time from 1978 onward, and in particular, Peter Brown’s The Making of Late Antiquity is cited as a key source of inspiration for Foucault’s interests.

It is important to note that Foucault’s work was never completed due to his death in 1984. The greatest gap left is also the one that is most relevant for this thesis, namely the history of Christianity in terms of self-relation and techniques of the self from the first few centuries through Descartes. Though Foucault planned a fourth volume in The History of Sexuality, one which was to cover at least a portion of Christian history, it was never completed, and will not be published, under the terms of his will.
Michel Foucault: the arts of living

Two key terms for Foucault are the concepts of the “art of living” and “practices of the self.” The art of living is a theme identified by Foucault from its origins in Ancient Greek philosophy. He writes:

This “cultivation of the self” can be briefly characterized by the fact that in this case the art of existence—the techne tou biou [art of living] in its different forms—is dominated by the principle that says one must “take care of oneself.” It is this principle of the care of the self that establishes its necessity, presides over its development, and organizes its practice.29

Foucault’s conception of ethics and the cultivation of the self are in direct relation to his concept of the aesthetics of existence or an aesthetic ethics. Though this argument is difficult to make concisely without oversimplifying, there is a sense in which Foucault is intrigued by the idea of living a “beautiful life,” and the implications a concept of beauty has for ethical decision making. Ancient thinkers, Foucault suggests, in pursuit of such a life, would undertake activities to make their lives and their selves as good, true and beautiful as possible. This idea leads to a further important distinction identified by Foucault, given as the distinction between “philosophy” and “spirituality.” He writes:

We will call, if you like, “philosophy” the form of thought that asks, not of course what is true and what is false, but what determines that there is and can be truth and falsehood and that one can or cannot separate the true and the false. We will call “philosophy” the form of thought that asks what it is that allows the subject to

have access to the truth and which attempts to determine the conditions and limits of the subject’s access to the truth. If we call this “philosophy,” then I think we would call “spirituality” the pursuit, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself in order to have access to the truth. We will call “spirituality” the set of these pursuits, practices, and experiences, which may be purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etcetera, which are not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject’s very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth.30

At stake here, among many other claims, is one of Foucault’s most important distinctions, namely the concept of the person’s access to knowledge. Foucault argues that prior to Descartes,31 the expectation was that a person would have to be transformed in order to gain access to truth or knowledge; that is, an untransformed person cannot simply learn a given thing, but must be transformed in order to first prepare oneself to receive this knowledge. This is one of the major distinctions between antique and modern philosophy in Foucault’s mind, and leads to three hallmarks of “spirituality,” as explained by Davidson:

31 Foucault recognizes that the claim that the “spirituality” based concept of transformation as a requirement of accessing truth is also found in Descartes, something also pointed out by Hadot. But, as Davidson explains, “it is nevertheless clear that Foucault understands the ‘Cartesian moment’ not primarily as a chronological moment but as a conceptual moment in the history of thought, the moment in which philosophy is disconnected from spirituality.” Hermeneutics xxv
1) “Spirituality postulates that the subject as such is not capable of having access to the truth, and, more specifically, that truth is not given to the subject by a simple act of knowledge founded on his status as subject;

2) In order to have access to the truth, the subject has to undergo a conversion or transformation, and therefore his very being is at stake;

3) Once the subject has access to the truth, the effects of spirituality on the subject are such that his very being is fulfilled, transfigured, or saved.\(^{32}\)

It is thus possible to read Foucault as in many ways making an argument similar to Hadot: philosophy as it is accomplished in the modern world, generally speaking, is fundamentally different than pre-Cartesian thought. It is marked by the concept of transformation, and is not simply a matter of right knowledge.

Another distinction is found in the difference between “morals” and “ethics.” Though the linguistic difference is one of different roots in Latin and Greek, Foucault identifies a functional difference between the two. Xavier Pavie explains:

Michel Foucault, dans “*Usage de Plaisirs, techniques de soi,*” va differencier la notion de morale de celle d’ethique. Le premier terme signifie l’ensemble de “valeurs et de regles d’action proposees aux individus et aux groupes par l’intermediare d’appareils prescriptifs” comme la famille, l’ecole, l’Eglise...L’individu va ainsi se soumettre plu ou moins a cette morale, a ce code qui lui est propose, et va devoir adapter une conduite.

This is contrasted with the concept of “ethics:”

\(^{32}\) *Hermeneutics* xxiv
Foucault determine l'ethique en considerant que c'est la "façon dont l'individu doit constituer telle ou telle part de lui-meme comme matiere principale de sa conduite morale." Le travail ethique est celui que l'on va effectuer sur soi-meme, et non pour rendre son comportment en phase avec un code moral.\textsuperscript{33}

The distinction between “morals” as a code or set of rules and ethics is also identified by Davidson, though it is explained as the distinction between “practices of the self and moral codes of behavior, or between a \textit{tekhne} and form of life and a corpus of rules.”\textsuperscript{34}

Eric Paras identifies this distinction as well, writing:

\textit{Arts of living \textit{[tekhne tou biou]} as they existed in the ancient world, Foucault told his audience in January of 1981, were less concerned with teaching one what to \textit{do} than with teaching one how to \textit{be}. Rather than providing a model of behavior or choreographing a set of gestures, ancient arts of living aided individuals to modify and model their being itself.}\textsuperscript{35}

Much as Hadot’s work illustrated, Foucault’s efforts leave us with a conception of the work of ancient philosophers that differs rather sharply from modern notions of ethics and philosophy.

Foucault identified that an art of living is accompanied by several practices that aid in the accomplishment of this transformation and change in one’s way of being. He writes that these included:

\textsuperscript{33} Xavier Pavie, 2009. \textit{Apprentisage de Soi: Exercices Spirituels de Socrate a Foucault.} Paris: Eyrolles. 115-116
\textsuperscript{34} Hermeneutics xxvii
\textsuperscript{35} Paras 128
“intentional and voluntary practices by which men not only fix rules of conduct for themselves, but seek to transform themselves, to modify themselves in their singular being, and to make of their life a work that bears certain aesthetic values and responds to certain criteria of style.”

The means by which persons attempted to “transform” or “modify” themselves took the form of what Foucault calls “practices of the self.” These are quite similar to Hadot’s “spiritual exercises,” though again there are different points of emphasis.

**Practices of the self**

Foucault is particularly interested in three main groups of practices of the self: mathesis, melete, askesis; learning, meditation, exercise. Learning is, of course, the growth in knowledge of a person within the teachings of a philosophy. But, Foucault writes, the form of knowledge in the thinkers under examination, or at least the areas of interest which these thinkers sought to obtain knowledge, can be contrasted with the views of the modern world. He writes:

In sum, knowledge involving these four conditions (the subject’s change in position, the evaluation of things on the basis of their reality within the kosmos, the possibility of the subject seeing himself, and finally the subject’s transfiguration through the effect of knowledge), constitutes, I believe, what would be called spiritual knowledge.

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37 Ibid.
38 *Hermeneutics* 308
Later in this lecture, Foucault identifies this mode of knowledge in relation to the modern world, referencing a quotation from Goethe: “I think we have here the last nostalgic expression of a knowledge of spirituality which disappeared with the Enlightenment, and the sad greeting of the birth of a knowledge of intellectual knowledge.”

In analyzing the four aspects of spiritual knowledge, one cannot help but notice their intimate connection with the person doing the thinking, with the sole exception being the observation of things in the *kosmos*. And yet, even this form of knowledge has a direct impact on the person, as understanding of the *kosmos* as a whole involves an understanding of where the human fits in among all the other things and activities of the universe.

The form of knowledge described above does not, in itself, represent an overriding shift from enlightenment forms of thought, though certainly there are differences. Instead, the main points of departure are found in the two succeeding practices, meditation and exercise. For Foucault, meditation (*melete*) is an exercise or activity that represents a sort of implementation or internalization of various types of knowledge, whether sayings or metaphysical understandings. He identifies two key aspects of meditation in Greek and Roman thinkers: “The *meditatio* involves, rather, appropriating [a thought] and being so profoundly convinced of it that we both believe it to be true and can also repeat it constantly and immediately whenever the need or opportunity to do so arises.”

The second aspect is also dependent on the concept of implementation:

39 Ibid., 311
40 Ibid., 357
What I mean is that the *meditatio* involves not so much thinking about the thing itself as practicing the thing we are thinking about. Obviously the most famous example is the meditation of death. Meditating death (*meditari, meletan*), in the sense that the Greeks and Latins understand this, does not mean thinking that you are going to die. It does not even mean convincing yourself that you really are going to die....Meditating death is placing yourself, in thought, in the situation of someone who is in the process of dying, or who is about to die, or who is living his last days....It is becoming, through thought, the person who is dying or whose death is imminent.41

When approaching the concept of meditation in ancient thought, therefore, one should consider the close relation of thinking about something to cultivating oneself. Of particular importance for this thesis is the concept of repeated meditation for the sake of keeping something “at hand,” something which will appear in the work of Thomas Aquinas.

Finally, the term “askesis” is of particular importance in Foucault’s work. Askesis refers, in Greek, to exercise or repeated practices, and is particularly connected with the acquisition of virtue in ancient writers. Foucault, however, gives the term a slightly different emphasis: “The *askesis* is a set of practices by means of which the individual is able to acquire, to assimilate the truth, and to transform it into a permanent principle of action: *aletheia* becomes *ethos*.”42 The mention of *aletheia*, truth, is particularly

41 Ibid., 357-358
important in this discussion, as Foucault will elsewhere contrast “truth” and “law” in his discussion of ethics. He writes, “Askesis is not established and does not deploy its techniques by reference to an authority like the law.”

“Law,” conceptually speaking, refers to something similar to “morals” in Foucault’s mind. Thus, Foucault is making the point that askesis in the cultivation of the self is not a matter of preparing oneself for the observation of a set of rules, but rather the cultivation of oneself into the type of person who is aligned with truth, and thus can make decisions about moral activity.

**The self and the subject in Hadot and Foucault**

Foucault’s understanding of the self and subjectivity is one of his most important contributions to contemporary thought, and providing a complete treatment of Foucault’s thoughts on these matters is too expansive a task for this work. At the same time, however, the work of Pierre Hadot is not nearly as interested in the “subject” or self, and as such does not provide nearly the same amount of discussion. In fact, it is hard to find instances where Hadot can be compared to Foucault’s conclusions on the self, other than the instance described above. Foucault’s understanding of self and subject is tied to his work on the modern world. Paras writes:

> In *Discipline and Punish, The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, and elsewhere, he challenged the self-evidence of the individual, and flatly denied that individuality could be opposed to authority as if the two were somehow antithetical. Rather, he argued, individuals were the *product* of highly rationalized discursive systems; they were the effect of a modern configuration of power.\(^{44}\)
Foucault’s understanding of self and subject, therefore, are intended to complicate the modern notion of self in use from the rise of the enlightenment onwards. We are not “individuals” blessed with a rational mind and given the option of “self-creation.” Instead, the “self” is a product of processes of power, which leads to the development of different varieties of selves in different periods of history. In particular, Foucault, as mentioned above, draws a distinction between the self of the ancient world and the self of the modern world, something which Hadot will do, as well. This distinction is found principally in the relation of the soul to knowledge, especially self-knowledge. Foucault is committed to tracing this development backwards in time to its origins, which he eventually will place in early Christianity. Paras explains:

From the time of Plato, the soul’s accession to truth was a matter of conversion or metanoya: it was a unitary movement in which the soul pivoted upon itself and turned from the darkness to the light. This discovery of truth and light was simultaneously the discovery of the soul’s own truth, because the soul was necessarily of the same nature as the being that illuminated it. It was with Tertullian, Foucault argued clearly and unambiguously, that this pedagogically oriented path to truth—a truth which was out there—began to come apart. Thereafter, Christian thought started along a new path: one in which the soul must turn within, must constitute itself as the protagonist of a procedure in which it will constantly be an object of knowledge.⁴⁶

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⁴⁵ “In each case, Foucault accepts the Enlightenment ontology of ‘man’ as the capacity for objective self-examination.” Strozier 142.
⁴⁶ Paras 119
In this sense, Foucault's project is one that seeks to define the different ways of being a subject, the primary difference in these forms lying in the nature of reflexive self-relation. In Foucault’s argument, the post enlightenment self becomes an object of knowledge; that is, one can approach oneself as an object of knowledge, as something to be studied via scientific scrutiny. In Greek and Roman thinkers, on the other hand, the self is not approached as an object of knowledge to be described, but as a locus of thought and action to be sculpted into an ideal form. In this earlier understanding of self, therefore, it is difficult to properly speak of a “self,” because this self lacks most of the defining characteristics of the modern self.

This leads to one of the important differences between the work of Foucault and Hadot. Hadot is critical of Foucault for offering a version of the “self” that is “precisely focused far too much on the ‘self,’ or at least a particular conception of one.” After first explaining his criticism of Foucault’s conception of taking pleasure in the self, he writes,

Secondly, and most importantly, it is not the case that the Stoic finds his joy in his “self;” rather, as Seneca says, he finds it “in the best portion of the self,” in “the true good.” The “best portion of oneself,” then, is, in the last analysis, a transcendent self. Seneca does not find his joy in “Seneca,” but by transcending Seneca;” by discovering that there is within him—within all human beings, that is, and within the cosmos itself—a reason which is part of universal reason.

Foucault, however, is not necessarily in disagreement with Hadot in all cases. In his explanation of Stoic thinkers, he writes:

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47 Philosophy as a Way of Life, 207
48 Referring to Seneca, Letter 23, 6
49 Philosophy as a Way of Life 207
So, the spiritual exercise of Marcus Aurelius tends towards a sort of dissolution of individuality, whereas the function of Seneca’s spiritual exercise— with the subject’s move to the world’s summit from where he can grasp himself in his singularity— was, rather, to found and establish the subject’s identity, its singularity and the stable being of the self it constitutes.\textsuperscript{50}

Foucault, as seen in the description of Marcus Aurelius, is comfortable using the term “self” even in instances where the self being discussed is a non-individualized self. Likewise, when Foucault speaks of Seneca establishing a singularity or a “self,” he is not necessarily arguing that Seneca’s notion of self is the modern definition, understood as the whole person, body, soul, memories, experiences, and ongoing activities, and that Seneca is therefore participating in a contemporary understanding of self realization.

Hadot’s reading of Foucault on this subject, then, can be called into question, as it appears that Hadot is attributing a contemporary notion of selfhood into Foucault’s work, which is precisely what Foucault is working against.

There still remains the question of how to approach the term “self” in work completed on the ancient world. It appears best, at least in this instance, to follow the lead of these two thinkers, and use the term “self” as a sort of placeholder which requires definition for each particular thinker it refers to. It is also essential to differentiate between the self considered wholly, perhaps better called the “person,” and the self considered essentially, better called the “true self.” Even when a thinker like Marcus Aurelius advocates a form of selfhood which stresses identity with universal reason, they do not deny responsibility for the actions taken by that person which are outside reason. Nonetheless, the true self

\textsuperscript{50} Hermeneutics 307
which that person should identify as, or understand themselves to be, is that universal reason. In most thinkers, however, the distinction between self and true self is not made, or at least not made frequently. Furthermore, the term “self” is mainly found in reflexive form of language (se), and not as a noun as in modern language.

All of these factors complicate the straightforward use of the term “self;” it remains, however, essential to use the term, if for no other reason than the difficulties of talking about practices of one’s own person without using the word. Whenever the term self appears, therefore, it should be understood in immediate reference to the figure under study, and the definition of self or true self offered by that thinker. This dissertation will seek to avoid the encroachment of a contemporary understanding of self\(^{51}\) into the study of Aquinas and earlier thinkers, while at the same time using the term. The use of the term, therefore, is as a placeholder of sorts, either to a person as a whole, or as that aspect of the person which they are to identify themselves as according to the practices and teachings of their system of thought.

**Further differences between Foucault and Hadot**

A second difference between Foucault and Hadot is found in their interest, or lack thereof, in the varying branches of philosophy. As mentioned above, Hadot places a great deal of emphasis on explaining the entirety of the philosophical project including the three branches, logic, physics, and ethics. Foucault, on the other hand, was less enthused about anything that fell outside of ethics. Arnold Davidson mentions a conversation Foucault had with Paul Veyne: “One day, when I [Veyne] asked Foucault:

\(^{51}\) Where the self is understood as a the sum of the desires, actions, memories, hidden feelings, actions, and so on, each of which can be discovered and held as an article of knowledge, the discovery of which contributes to the development of self-knowledge.
‘The care of the self, that is very nice, but what do you do with logic, what do you with physics?’, he responded: ‘Oh, these are enormous excrescences!’” Davidson explains further:

One way of describing Hadot’s misgivings about Foucault’s interpretation of ancient spiritual exercises is to say that Foucault not only gave a too narrow construal of ancient ethics, but that he limited the “care of the self” to ethics alone. Foucault made no place for that cosmic consciousness, for physics as a spiritual exercise, that was so important to the way in which the ancient philosopher viewed his relation to the world. Hadot also critiques Foucault’s project as appearing to try to create an “a culture of the self which is too aesthetic,” a result of his presentation of the care of the self being solely about ethical self-fashioning.

This difference points to a distinction in the overall projects of Hadot and Foucault. Hadot is quite vocal about the end of his project: he believes that modern humanity can employ the spiritual exercises he writes about from the ancient world to aid in the living of the best possible life, regardless of our acceptance of all the points of dogma that accompanied these spiritual exercises. He writes, “I believe firmly—albeit perhaps naively—that it is possible for modern man to live, not as a sage (sophos)—most of the ancients did not hold this to be possible—but as a practitioner of the ever-fragile exercise of wisdom.”

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52 Philosophy as a Way of Life 24  
53 Philosophy as a Way of Life, 211  
54 Ibid.
Foucault’s project, on the other hand, is far more difficult to describe. Foucault would never give a simple endorsement of any philosophical system, and as many critics of Foucault have suggested, it is sometimes difficult to identify what, if any, positive content his work has. It appears to many eyes that his work simply has a critical function to highlight oppression or the appropriation of truth by institutions and groups. It is, however, possible to interpret Foucault’s work as recommending something similar to what Hadot recognized above, namely a philosophical mode of living, one which is made possible through resistance to societal power by the practice of certain spiritual exercises. In this way, Foucault can be said to recommend, in a qualified sense, that people take on the activity of self-fashioning, while at the same time not recommending any specific content or ideal form as an end to that activity. What is clear about Foucault’s work is that his historical project, at least in his later work, does have a clear focus: reflexivity. Davidson characterizes Foucault’s work as “an analysis of the forms of reflexivity.”

Paul Allen Miller, likewise, writes of Foucault’s work that “the goal is to study the relationship of the self to itself.” More importantly, Foucault was particularly interested in determining how the “Christian” form of reflexivity came about. Robert Strozier writes:

Foucault generally speaks of self-relation in Christian Europe as taking the form of self-decipherment and self-purification. This means that the individual was obliged to examine its own desires, inclinations, and impulses to apply a hermeneutics to consciousness and its hidden recesses. The results of these

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55 *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, xxii (Davidson Introduction)
56 Miller 205
discovery procedures were then to be matched to a licit/illicit index of thoughts and behaviors. 57

For Foucault, the Christian form of self-relation is distinguished from the ancient forms in a number of key ways. First, Foucault will suggest that the Stoic or Epicurean does not want to “decipher” the self, as if to arrive at an “objective” knowledge, but to know the self, meaning to be aware of one’s present activities and setting in the cosmos. Likewise, the philosophers did not intend to “purify” themselves by ferreting out hidden sins from their consciousness. Finally, they did not employ a code of morals, as Foucault suggests that Christians would often do; instead, the system of morality was based on the right action of the virtuous person. The issue of reflexivity for the purposes of this dissertation will be discussed in more detail at the end of this introduction, and in the second chapter. 58

Aquinas and Spirituality

Shifting the discussion to the subject of this dissertation, I will now provide an overview of scholarship on Thomas Aquinas and the spiritual life. One of the important distinctions between the work of Foucault and Hadot and scholarship on Scholastic spirituality is the differing definition of spirituality. As will be shown below, the terminology of spirituality or “spiritual life” has not been formalized, and the definitions

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57 Strozier 175
58 Another figure bearing mention is Martha Nussbaum, whose work on virtue, reason and emotion in ancient philosophy has held an influential place in contemporary ethics. Though the focus of her work falls out of the immediate focus of this dissertation, it is worth mentioning my awareness of her efforts, as well as her disagreements with Foucault and Hadot. In her work *The Therapy of Desire*, she acknowledges Foucault and Hadot, while suggesting their work is incomplete, in part from its lack of emphasis on the work of reason. I have selected Foucault and Hadot precisely because of their emphasis on practices, and a fuller treatment than I can provide here would suggest that Nussbaum does not offer sufficient development of the role of exercise in ancient philosophy.
offered are rather diverse. For this dissertation, I will be using Foucault’s definition, but I will also provide an overview of the various understandings of the term.\textsuperscript{59}

**Scholarship on the Spiritual Life of Thomas Aquinas**

A number of classic works approach the question of spirituality (variously defined) in Thomas, including, most notably, chapters in Etienne Gilson’s *The Christian Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*. In chapters entitled “The personal life” and “the religious life,” Gilson provides an overview of what the *Summa*, in particular, recommends for the life of the Christian. It is important to note, however, that Gilson’s argument presumes that, “the world he [Thomas] is thinking about is not the world of monks,” in reference to the *secunda pars* of the *Summa*. This judgment also informs Gilson’s chapter on the “religious life” in Thomas, which does not substantively engage with the fact that Thomas was a Dominican friar, nor with the fact that Thomas held any interest in the professed religious life, despite the inclusion of the question on the vows (II-II.188).

Gilson’s presentation of Thomas is one that is repeated up through the present era, as most scholars are eager to present Thomas’s potential relevance to people from all walks of life, rather than understanding Thomas within the milieu of medieval Dominicans. That said, Gilson does offer a succinct description of what the spiritual life is for Thomas:

\begin{quote}
To return to Foucault’s definition, he writes: “We will call ‘spirituality’ the set of these pursuits, practices, and experiences, which may be purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etcetera, which are not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject’s very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth.” I find this definition of spirituality to be more robust than traditional understandings of spirituality as practices of prayer or devotions to God in that it is concerned with the whole person in relation to their beliefs and to their world. Furthermore, it emphasizes the significance of a change in perspective, something which is central to medieval thinkers, as well.
\end{quote}
When grace divinizes the human soul it not only re-establishes the balance which had once been destroyed, but causes a new life to spring up, a life freely given to nature. This life participates in the divine and so, by reason of its source, will move spontaneously into the order of the eternal. It is called the “spiritual life,” a term which implies that absolute transcendence of body and time which is characteristic of divine things. And since it is by charity that man’s participation in the divine is accomplished, the spiritual life is the supernatural life of a soul divinized by charity.  

The key elements of the spiritual life are present in Gilson’s description, but there are a few issues, as well. Grace, charity, and the creation of a “new life” are all present in Thomas, but Gilson, I would argue, moves too far in suggesting that the “spiritual life” somehow transcends “body and time.” In fact, Thomas’s description of the “spiritual life” as found in the *De Perfectione Spiritualis Vitae*, as well as in the *Summa*, is rather concerned with mundane things, such as the daily activities of the professed religious person, and is very much concerned with the body and our proper relation to it.

Other forms of presentation include W.H. Principe’s short work *Thomas Aquinas’ Spirituality*, which focuses on Aquinas’s practices of prayer and contemplation. Principe argues that Thomas’s spirituality is not an “interior-oriented” but a “God-oriented spirituality.” While it is perhaps the case that Thomas’s understanding of interiority is different than other thinkers on the subject, it seems clear from his writings on the virtues that he is very much concerned with the interior life, defined as the thoughts, intentions,

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emotions, and attitudes of a person. Principe makes reference to the virtue of prudence as an example of his argument that Thomas is not “interior-oriented;” in the second and fourth chapter of this dissertation, however, I will make an opposing argument, and suggest that Thomas’s writings on prudence demonstrate his specific form of interiority.

Gilson’s manner of presentation is to a great extent continued in subsequent writings on the spirituality of Thomas. Robert Barron’s *Thomas Aquinas, Spiritual Master* is intended as a response to works like Principe’s, which he thinks focus too much on the stereotypical notion of spirituality, namely worship, prayer, and contemplation. Instead, Barron identifies the central themes of Thomas’s work, like “creation” or “trinity,” (not unlike Gilson) and then offers an explanation as to how these theological statements relate to a person’s spiritual life. Nicholas Healy’s work *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian of the Christian Life*, is structured in a manner similar to Barron’s, but provides more information about the Dominican order, and the influence the Dominican concept of formation had on Thomas.

**Torrell**

Neither of these works approaches J.P. Torrell’s writings on the spirituality of Thomas. In an article written to recount his major work on spirituality in Aquinas, *Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master*, Torrell writes:

If we could disengage the major elements that would sum up the principal characteristics of a spirituality inspired by Thomas, it seems to me that we could focus everything around six dominant ideas. I have already said that it was a [1] Trinitarian spirituality, as well as an [2] “objective” spirituality (as distinct from
“subjective”). ... It should be added, however, that it is a [3] “realistic” spirituality (in the sense that it makes room for the whole person, body and soul) and a spirituality of [4] human flourishing (for beatitude does indeed complete the quest for happiness anchored in the human heart). If one were to fear that these words smack too much of naturalism, it was enough for me to recall that I was also dealing with a spirituality of [5] divinization (Thomas uses the word), and a spirituality of [6] “communion,” for the human being’s social dimension only reaches its definitive state through communion with the Triune God.  

Torrell’s work represents a monumental achievement in advancing the understanding of Thomas Aquinas the theologian as it considerably deepens our appreciation of his thought outside of either theological subtleties or questions of theoretical ethics, whether in the natural law or the virtues. And in large part, I do not disagree with Torrell’s findings on the spirituality of Thomas.

And yet, while the aim of this thesis is not to quibble with Torrell on his findings or dispute his presentation, nonetheless, there is a key point in his characterization of Thomas’s work that I would take issue with. The area of concern is the identification of his “spiritual attitude” as being an “objective” rather than “subjective” mode. Torrell explains this distinction:

61 Torrell, Jean-Pierre. 2011. Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas. Thomistic Ressourcement Series. Vol. 2. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press. 183. Torrell explains what he means by “spirituality” in Thomas in the same chapter, p. 175: “...but I did not seek to reconstruct, more or less artificially, a spiritual theology that Thomas himself did not leave us. It is in this sense that “spiritual master” is a bit too strong in characterizing what I wanted to do, but it remains true that the exercise of theology in his school allows us to acquire a certain number of basic philosophical and theological positions by which we arrive at a certain way of perceiving God and the world, and by which we develop a certain spiritual attitude—an attitude that a modern historian could qualify as a mindset, which seems to me to correspond rather well with what we also call ‘spirituality.’” This dissertation argues that Torrell is mistaken in his hesitance to find a ‘spiritual theology’ in the work of Thomas Aquinas.
In the modern age of reflexive thought, books of spirituality have emphasized the second actor: the human being engaged in a spiritual adventure. Therefore, they describe the states of his soul, his progress, his failures, the paths he traverses, the methods of prayer he should use. Obviously there is nothing of the kind in Aquinas (although one can certainly find aspects of these themes in Aquinas, which I have gathered together in chapter 14 of *Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master*). On the other hand, it is God who is at the forefront of Thomas’s theology. This is evident to anyone who studies the outline of the *Summa*: not only is God the main subject of the first pages, but he utterly dominates the synthesis itself. According to the schema *exitus-reditus*, which is well known, everything proceeds from God and everything returns to him. The outcome is a radically different way of seeing things and, in my opinion, it is the first characteristic of a spirituality that wants to be inspired by Aquinas: instead of being centered on preoccupations that are “subjective” (even in the best sense of the word), it is resolutely “objective,” that is, centered on God.\(^6^2\)

The problem with this characterization is that it repeats one of the most common issues found in readers of Thomas, namely the overemphasis on speculative or philosophical matters. Torrell is in fact well aware of this issue, and in the above mentioned chapter 14 cites what he considers the oft overlooked explanation of the Secunda Pars as the “movement of the rational creature towards God.”\(^6^3\) If we were to look at the list

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\(^{62}\) *Christ and Spirituality* 177

provided by Torrell and examine where these things appear in the *Summa Theologiae*
alone, and not even in other works, we actually find all of them.

1. The states of the soul – Thomas writes rather expansively on this subject, whether one
   is speaking of the ultimate state of our soul in terms of eternal destination, or the
   variations we experience as wayfarers. For example, we can turn to the discussion of
   faith, and in particular whether some have more faith than others (II-II.5.4) or the
   possibility of lifeless faith (II-II.4.4). This continues with charity, including the
   questions of by what means a person gains or loses the virtue of charity.

2. Progress – Thomas is equally expansive on this topic, and we could include under this
   heading the virtues, development in virtue, practice in the virtues as recommended in
   the principal parts of prudence, the way of acquiring virtue through study and
   exercise, the spiritual life, the life of the religious, and the vows. Thomas also
   indicates the importance of rightly ordered control of the passions by reason.

3. Failures - the vices – the passions controlling reason, the failure to choose the proper
   end, the decision to lavish oneself in pleasure, wealth, external objects, and so on.64

4. The paths one traverses – Thomas describes a variety of paths in the *Summa
   Theologiae*, but is drawn in particular to the religious life and, I would argue,
   recommends the Dominican lifestyle as the ideal form of life for the Christian. He

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64 The extent to which the vices and virtues are personal to Thomas, that is, are actually his vices and
virtues, is an impossible question. Though I would argue that his own experience influences his
construction of the account of the virtues and vices, and especially his description of subjectivity, it is not
necessary to hold this conclusion to accept the premise that Thomas does provide an extremely robust
description of the process whereby the formation of the human takes place, and that it is an integral aspect
of his “objectively” oriented project as a whole. That is, though the project is focused on God, it is
essential that the human be formed by God and his or her own efforts in attaining to the end, even if God’s
grace accounts for all of our efforts.
covers this in the acts which “pertain especially to certain men” (II-II.179-189), but also in the section on the virtue of religion (II-II.81-100).

5. The methods of prayer one should use – This is actually one of the most important issues for Thomas, as he establishes with the first question of the *Summa* the significance of the practice of contemplation. Contemplation, which is a form of prayer, is returned to throughout the *Summa*, but is discussed specifically in II-II.180, including a discussion of Richard of St. Victor’s stages of contemplation. Thomas also discusses intercessory prayer in II-II.83.

For Torrell to state, therefore, that “obviously, there is nothing of the kind in Aquinas,” seems strange. I would argue instead that the *Summa Theologiae* as a whole, but especially the *secunda pars*, is a book of moral formation, intended to teach Christians, and in particular, young Dominican friars, the way humans return to God, including the practices, exercises, internal states, and forms of prayer that accompany the person on this path. I do not think that Torrell would necessarily disagree with this characterization, so perhaps what Torrell is intending by “subjective” is something other than my interpretation. Nonetheless, it seems that Thomas is preoccupied with the “subjective” to a great extent, especially because the spiritual life and the work of theology are not simply about obtaining the right knowledge, but precisely about becoming a person renewed through grace and exercise, a process which requires the observation of one’s actions, thoughts, and intentions, and taking steps to correct them, in addition to the efforts of God.

*Academic formation in Aquinas*
One of the most salient themes in the work of Thomas Aquinas is that of the importance of intellectual formation. In particular works by M. Michele Mulchahey, Fainche Ryan, and Mark Jordan describe in detail the importance of academic training for Thomas, and the specifics of his methods in the context of the Dominican order. Jordan’s *Rewritten Theology* describes how the structure of the *secunda pars* is intended to aid in the practices of moral formation, but also details the role of the *Summa Theologiae* as a whole. Much as was the case with Torrell, my intention is not to revise the arguments made in these works, but instead to focus on aspects that are either treated lightly or overlooked by these authors.

Mulchahey’s *First the Bow is Bent in Study: Dominican Education before 1350* is an imposing masterpiece which provides a thorough overview of the writings and practices related to the development of the specifically Dominican spirituality. In one sub-chapter, “the cultivation of a new interior life,” Mulchahey discusses some manuals of contemplation and practices of prayer offered by early Dominicans. Notably, for the purposes of this dissertation at least, she does not discuss Aquinas’s contributions to this area in this chapter. Instead, when Aquinas does appear, it is in the context of his work developing academic curriculums for the Dominican order, and in particular his work at Santa Sabina.

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The work offered by Fainche Ryan and Mark Jordan is committed to describing the pedagogical orientation of the *Summa Theologiae*. While Jordan’s work describes the efforts of the *secunda pars*, Ryan’s work suggests that the *Summa* as a whole can be understood as a pedagogy of formation in holiness. As he writes:

The project of the entire *Summa* is to lead the Christian partaking in its narrative to God. Thomas the Christian had two central questions occupying his intellect. The first, ‘what is God?’ lead him to try and name God, while the second ‘how do human persons become holy?’ might be said to be the question of the *Summa*. Ryan’s work is another excellent contribution to academic formation in Aquinas, but does not spend much time on the spiritual and ethical formation that accompanied it. Jordan’s work, on the other hand, is interested in discussing the structure of the *secunda pars*, as well as the fact that Thomas had no conception of “moral theology” as understood today. In this work, Jordan does not discuss the habits and formation that lead to the acquisition of the virtues, only the connection of Aquinas’s teaching on ethics with the rest of the *Summa* as a theological whole.

**Poverty and other virtues in Aquinas**

A number of studies recently undertaken describe Aquinas’s understanding of the religious life through his teachings on poverty. The three main works are Christopher Franks’ *He Became Poor: The Poverty of Christ and Aquinas’s Economic Teachings*, Jan van den Eijnden’s *Poverty on the Way to God: Thomas Aquinas on Evangelical Poverty*,

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68 Ryan 107 – in a footnote to the last sentence, Ryan adds “’How do human persons becomes holy’ is the question of this work; that it might also be the question of the *Summa* is less obvious, and some might suggest too anthropocentric a claim.” Although I would not be inclined to reduce the *Summa* to a question, I would agree with Ryan’s indication of that question’s importance. At the very least, if Thomas did not think the *Summa* would help to form good Christians, he would not have written it.
and Ulrich Horst’s *Evangelische Armut und Kirche*. Each of these works intends to provide a more complete understanding of Aquinas’s ethics. If we take seriously the claim of Jordan and others\(^6\) that Aquinas does not consider moral theology a separate sphere, then it appears strange that Aquinas’s religious life as a member of the Dominican order is rarely discussed in treatments of his ethics. As Franks writes, “Despite growing appreciation for Thomas Aquinas as a theologian, and despite broad recognition of his perfectionism, his works on religious life remain largely unremarked on in scholarship on his ethics.”\(^7\) Franks’ work is explicitly oriented towards correcting this omission in contemporary ethics, while van den Eijnden’s work is more historical in nature, as is Horst’s. Each of these works will be essential to discussing the vow of poverty in this dissertation, though they are less concerned with the practices accompanying poverty.

**Work on Thomas and Hadot**

Though I have not been able to find any scholars who have analyzed the potential application of Foucault’s work to medieval thought,\(^7\) at least in written form, several writers have begun to include the work of Hadot in their studies of Thomas. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering are two important figures in this emerging area. Their work, however, does not represent a substantive engagement with Hadot’s work; instead,


\(^7\) Philipp Rosemann’s book is the exception to this statement. Rosemann, Philipp. 1999. *Understanding Scholastic Thought with Foucault*. The New Middle Ages. 1st ed. New York: St. Martin’s Press. It is not, however, interested in the work of late-career Foucault, that is, questions of reflexivity and techniques of the self.
themes from Hadot’s work are employed in the study of Aquinas in order to provide a different perspective.

As the work of Levering and Emery has illustrated, Thomas’s theoretical work has practical concerns. This means that, for example, the explanation of and meditation on a doctrine like the Trinity is not simply an exercise about the increase of knowledge, but also has an impact on the way a person lives. Emery’s article “Trinitarian Theology as a Spiritual Exercise”\textsuperscript{72} discusses the purpose of Trinitarian theology in Thomas, as well as the purpose of speculative theology in general. He cites from the \textit{Summa Contra Gentilium}:

In order to manifest this kind of truth, one must provide likely, probably reasons \textit{(rationes aliquae verisimiles)} for the exercise and comfort of the faithful \textit{(ad fidelium quidem exercitium et solatium)} and not in order to convince opponents; for the insufficiency of these reasons would rather confirm them in their error if they thought that we adhered to the faith for such weak reasons.\textsuperscript{73}

For Emery, the two most important words in this passage are “exercise and comfort.” Comfort, \textit{solatium}, has a whole range of meaning in Thomas that is lost in our English word “comfort.” Emery summarizes these meanings by writing:

The search for “reasons” in order to manifest the faith procures for believers support, remedy, defense, and spiritual consolation by giving them a grasp of the


\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 58
intelligibility of their faith and showing them that this faith resists the objections (heresies and rational arguments) that are posed to it.\textsuperscript{74}

This is one important aspect of establishing the theme of theology as a way of life in Thomas, as theology thus provides a person confidence in their beliefs, freeing them to live accordingly. Hadot will also point to a similar argument among Stoic thinkers of the Hellenistic period, who sought to provide a rationale for following their way of life while recognizing that the only conclusive demonstration of its authenticity came from the full experience of living their manner of life. Solace and confidence in one’s way of life is one part, but it is secondary in Hadot’s and Emery’s understanding to the practice of exercise.

The use of the term “exercise” is central to this dissertation, and the concept plays a key role in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Emery explains:

As for the word “exercise” (\textit{exercitium}), it indicates the nature and purpose of the theologian’s study. St Thomas often applies this theme of exercise (\textit{exercitatio} and \textit{exercitium}) to study and teaching sustained by perseverance, training, and frequent practice. The study and teaching of wisdom are counted among the “spiritual exercises” (\textit{spiritualia exercitia}) that lead one to know God and to love him.\textsuperscript{75}

Thus, for Thomas, even “speculative” activity is involved in the formation of persons. This scheme of exercise fits into Thomas’ work as a whole, as well. For the intellectual

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 59
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 60. Referring to SCG III.132 “studium sapientiae, et doctrina, et alia huiusmodi spiritualia exercitia.” See also ST II-II.122.4 ad 3. Also important is the fact that to grow in the love of God, the virtue of charity, is the purpose of the spiritual life.
\end{flushright}
aspect of the person, the study of sacred doctrine and Trinitarian theology contributes to the development of the mind and increases its ability to understand divine things. Emery continues: “The exercise consists in passing from corporeal realities to spiritual realities, from light things to those that are more arduous, from a simple teaching to a more subtle teaching, from faith to a spiritual understanding of the faith.”

Emery and Levering have shown, therefore, that even when discussing aspects of speculative theology, Thomas is still interested in the formation of the human person, and thus have shown the benefit of employing Hadot’s method to improve our understanding of Thomas.

An article by Wayne Hankey has also offered an encounter between Hadot and Thomas, though Hankey is more interested in Hadot’s reading of neo-Platonism than his reading of Scholastic theology. Hankey does argue, however, that Hadot offers a misreading of the Scholastics in general and Aquinas in particular, one that appears to be rooted in a preference for “non-religious” or “less religious” philosophy, exemplified by the Stoics in contrast to figures like Porphyry or Plotinus.

**Defining important terms**

Before moving to the main argument of this work, it will also be helpful to define some key terms that will be found throughout. In particular, the terms spirituality, spiritual exercises, and reflexivity will now be defined. For spirituality, I am drawn to the definition offered by Foucault:

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76 Ibid., 60
78 The work of Thomas Hibbs also acknowledges the potential application of Hadot to Thomas Aquinas, although his engagement with Hadot is not overly substantial.
We will call “spirituality” the set of these pursuits, practices, and experiences, which may be purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etcetera, which are not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject’s very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth.79

This definition is a step removed from Christianity, of course, but still applies to Thomas. It also represents an improvement over the common understanding of the term, which is often concerned only with practices of prayer or relationship with God. Instead, Foucault’s definition emphasizes the importance of the fundamental change to the soul’s perspective and understanding that is a requirement in ancient philosophy and in Christianity. To speak of Thomas’s spirituality and discuss only his understandings of prayer or God as found in his academic works is clearly inadequate. To this end, my study of the spirituality of Thomas will be focused on the exercises Thomas recommends for a person to increase their virtue and change their being such that they have access to the truth, which is found specifically in the increase of charity and the eventual experience of the beatific vision.

Another important term is “spiritual exercises.” The term is in fact used by Thomas Aquinas, as will be discussed in the next chapter. In this dissertation it refers to repeated actions that serve to improve the soul and render it more capable of moral and intellectual virtue. These exercises include: research, investigation, reading, listening, attention, meditations, therapies of the passions, remembrance of good things, self mastery, and the

79 Hermeneutics of the Subject 15
accomplishment of duties. Thomas cites things like religious poverty, forms of prayer, and exercises related to the virtue of religion. Thomas will also cite sacraments or prayer as spiritual exercises as, through the reception of grace, the soul is formed by God for right action. In this situation, the exercise is the person’s commitment to participating in the sacrament, while the resulting moral change is gratuitous.

The term “reflexivity” refers to the practice of the self in relationship to the self. For Foucault, there are multiple forms of reflexivity, with the key distinction lying in the difference between an objective and subjective reflexivity. Objective reflexivity is identified by Foucault with Christian practices: Christian thinkers, he suggests, analyze the self in order to provide an objective account of who they are, of their “true self,” understood as a description of one’s qualities. This is distinct from Foucault’s characterization of pre-Christian reflexivity, which he suggests is a “subjective” account. The subjective form of reflexivity is not intended to provide an account of a “true self,” but rather is an activity oriented towards improving ethical action. In subjective reflexivity, the self watches the self actively in order to improve one’s virtue, instead of being able to identify one’s past errors as a part of the self. Foucault explains:

It seems to me that in this Christian askesis there is, therefore, a movement of self-renunciation which proceeds by way of, and whose essential moment is the objectification of the self in a true discourse. It seems to me that pagan askesis, the philosophical askesis of the practice of the self in the period I am talking about, involves rejoining oneself as the end and object of a technique of life, an art of living. It involves coming together with oneself, the essential moment of

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80 Philosophy as a Way of Life 84
which is not the objectification of the self in a true discourse, but the subjectivation of a true discourse in a practice and exercise of oneself on oneself.\(^{81}\)

Regardless of whether Foucault’s characterization of reflexivity is accurate\(^{82}\) in its distinction between Christian and Greek and Latin forms, the concept is identified by both Foucault and Hadot as central to the development of an ethical subject. Moral improvement is contingent on the self’s ability to watch itself, both in the moment to aid decision making, and after the fact through reflection to identify errors and places for future improvement. This is the basis for Foucault’s identification of subjective reflexivity with the art of living, in that this form of reflexivity is about creating or cultivating a new self, not explaining the current “true” self.

**The Argument**

There are several arguments being made in this dissertation, or rather one primary argument with a variety of implications. First, I argue that Thomas is an inheritor and participant in the variety of philosophy described by Hadot and Foucault, though, of course, his thought contains several differences from earlier writers. This means that Thomas can be read as recommending and describing a certain way of life that not only accompanies our theological endeavors, but is actually the purpose of and reason for those intellectual efforts. To advance in the spiritual life requires a conversion of understanding, a change in habits of thought and outward practices, and the maintenance of a specific form of life in order to attain to what he describes in a qualified way as

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\(^{81}\) *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 331-332

\(^{82}\) I intend to demonstrate later in this dissertation why it is not by showing that Aquinas’s understanding of reflexivity is best understood as a “subjective” form by this definition.
“perfection.” The description of these aspects forms the bulk of this thesis, and it can be broken into three main questions:

1) What are the spiritual exercises of Thomas Aquinas? What is the ideal person these exercises aid in the realization of? How do these exercises interact with his theology of grace?

2) What is the nature of reflexivity in Thomas? How does the self watch the self? Is the person approached as an object of knowledge? Is there a “true self”?

3) What is the nature of attention in Thomas? What are the practices associated with self knowledge? What are the repeated apothegms that are maintained at hand (e.g. “Do good and avoid evil)?

These three questions lead to three arguments for this dissertation. First is the argument that Thomas Aquinas is in fact committed to spiritual exercises, and describes them throughout his work. In particular, I will argue that Thomas viewed the religious orders as “schools” for “spiritual exercise” and training in perfection. Thomas repeatedly affirms our dependence on grace, but will also state that man “must do what he can.” Furthermore, these spiritual exercises are devoted to two specific ends, namely the development of the governance and capacity of reason and the ordering of our interior affections.

For the second and third question, I argue that, for Aquinas, what is found is best described, in Foucault’s terms, as a subjective form of reflexivity. For one, Thomas limits self-knowledge as a formal question to knowledge of the soul as it is in action.

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Thus, Foucault’s description of the Christian practice of deciphering “hidden” aspects of the self does not properly apply. Additionally, Thomas is not interested in the construction of a “self” in the modern sense; instead, Thomas employs Pauline language to develop the concept of the “old self” and “new self,” where the old self is identified as the sensitive aspect of the person, in conjunction with its sinful desires and mistaken judgment, while the new self is the mind\textsuperscript{84} renewed by grace with the directing of the soul by reason. Thomas identifies this movement towards the new self as a process of increasing in likeness to God, and not as a question of coming to a unique or authentic “selfhood.” This self is not approached as an object to be described, but is instead watched by oneself only for the purpose of ensuring correct thought and action in the moment. It is a deified self, one which grows in likeness to Christ as it increases its perfection. As part of this spirituality, and for the purpose of moral flourishing, the human being should consider themselves to be their mind (where this includes the intellect and will, but is identified primarily as the chief power), not their sensitive aspect, something which results in a sort of withdrawal of concern from things external to the mind, namely external things (poverty), external relations and the body (chastity), and the directing of one’s body and will (obedience).

This form of reflexivity is rather different from a modern understanding of the self. It is dependent entirely on the action of the individual; if we are to speak of a “self” in

\textsuperscript{84} Thomas acknowledges different definitions for the term “mind,” including Augustine who will describe the mind as “reason, will, and memory” (ST 1.79.6 sed contra) and “spirit and essence” (ST 1.79.1 ad 1). Thomas will also indicate that the term “mind” is used interchangeably with intellect, a term which can refer at once to the entire soul, as well to the specific power of the soul as “intellect.” Furthermore, intellect and reason are identified as the same power (ST 1.79.8). This makes it difficult to know precisely what Thomas is indicating when he uses any of these terms without qualification.
Thomas, it is a transitional self, formed by whatever action that person is currently undertaking. Knowledge of this self,\textsuperscript{85} furthermore, is not directed towards describing or enumerating its qualities, nor even understanding or uncovering habits. Habits are only known as they are in action, and can only be modified as they are enacted or refused.

The decision making process, for Thomas, resides in the intellect or reason, which is the aspect of the human capable of deriving conclusions to present to the will. The intellect must, therefore, be preserved such that it is able to better direct those actions, such that the continued growth in the likeness of the divine is continued. The emphasis on intellect in the decision making process is necessary when discussing the practical aspects of the work of Thomas Aquinas, and is not intended to rewrite our understanding of the role of the will and other aspects of the human as developed by scholars of Thomas Aquinas.

Thomas does have a more positive view of the body and the sensitive nature, and a less autocratic understanding of the reasoning mind, than many of his contemporaries. Nevertheless, as this dissertation will show, the intellect plays a central role in the living of a moral life for Thomas Aquinas, and he employs numerous spiritual exercises and practices for the sake of developing the influence of the reason over the body, such that are actions are always approvable by reason.

This leads to an overall argument about the nature of spirituality in Thomas. I argue that Thomas’s spirituality, the set of practices he recommends for preparing the person to access truth, are focused on freeing the mind from encumbrance for the sake of God. As Thomas writes in the \textit{Summa Contra Gentiles}, “Now, the perfection to which these three counsels give a disposition consists in detachment of the mind for God” (\textit{in vacatione}

\textsuperscript{85} Speaking of a particular self, and not of humans in general, as seen in ST 1.75-89.
mentis circa Deum consistit). The sum of exercises in Thomas, therefore, looks for the development and maintenance of the ability of the intellect, such that it is capable at most all times of ensuring that all human thoughts and actions are in alignment with reason. As Diana Fritz Cates suggests, the potential negative influence of emotions is a concern in Thomas, and provides the reason “why it is crucial to cultivate virtuous habits of emotion, so that one’s emotions arise and persist in ways that are inherently reasonable or consistent with good judgment, and one retains the ability to transcend, examine critically, and affect deliberately...” the motions of the sensitive appetite. This does not mean that reason is an autocratic tyrant over the rest of the person; instead, the goal is that all human actions be reasonable, that is, be approvable by the processes of rational thought.

Towards a composite picture of the spirituality of Thomas Aquinas

This dissertation will serve in developing our understanding of the spiritual life recommended by Thomas Aquinas, but it will not be an exhaustive treatment of this topic. Instead, it will be focused on two aspects of Thomas’s thought, namely the exercises and subjectivity recommended by Thomas in the pursuit of perfection. In focusing on these aspects, what will not be treated in an extensive manner is the area of Thomas which receives the most attention: his speculative thought and understanding of academic formation. As the above has suggested, there are already in existence several works on these subjects, many of which provide substantial contributions towards understanding spirituality in Thomas. Instead, the focus will be on, as Foucault writes,

86 SCG 3.130.6.
“the set of these pursuits, practices, and experiences...which are not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject’s very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth.”

These sets of exercises can, I argue, be fruitfully broken into three categories:

1. A notion of the self – Thomas recommends a specific form of subjectivity, one reminiscent of descriptions of classical thinkers. The higher powers of the soul are considered the proper source of direction or action, not the desiring aspect of the person; the self is also separated from outward attachment, even to one’s own will.

2. A notion of virtue – That is, virtue in the general sense of a concept of excellence. Thomas is committed to the idea of limited human perfection possible in this life, and the worthiness of its pursuit. Virtue is in part a product of grace, and certainly the most important variety is a result of grace, but Thomas never indicates a laissez-faire attitude to such things. He recommends spiritual exercises and constant attention to self and rational analysis of thought and action as ways of preventing the person from falling into sin. Though humans may not merit an increase in grace and therefore virtue through action, they can lose grace by acting sinfully, which acts of sin are preventable through action. Thus, the rationale for the religious life, which most preserves the person from sinful behavior, increasing the possibility of a further gift of grace.

3. A notion of the primary action of reason – This final point is essential to understanding the entirety of Thomas’s project. The fundamental task of reason is twofold: when speculative, it is to choose the truth, and reject falsehood. When practical, it is to choose the good, and reject evil. These simple statements can be
understood as providing the rationale for Thomas’s work in the *Summa Theologiae*,
which contains statements of falsehood, then rebutted by the statement of truth,
followed by a rejection of each of the false statements. Thomas expects this
capability to be fundamental to a person engaged in the Dominican mission and
following the footsteps of Christ.

**Overview of Chapters**

In the second chapter, I will provide an account of virtue, grace, and spiritual
exercises in Thomas. This chapter is focused on defining virtue ethics in Thomas
according to a standard offered by Thomas Hibbs, namely that a virtue ethic should offer
some description of “(a) some conception of the ideal person (b) some list of the virtues
necessary to become a person of that type, and (c) some view of how persons come to
possess the relevant virtues.”

This ideal person, I argue, can only be Jesus Christ for Thomas, and the virtues necessary for this emulation can only be acquired through grace.
This does not lead to quiet prayer for grace, however; instead, Thomas provides an
expansive account of spiritual exercises which aid in the acquisition of virtue, and
identifies the religious orders as schools for spiritual exercise. Though the virtues of
Christ are not acquired except through grace, the spiritual life of one in the religious
orders helps a person to avoid sin; and sin, as mentioned above, prevents the reception of
future grace.

In the third chapter, my focus moves to the question of reflexivity in Thomas. After
providing a further discussion of the concept of reflexivity in Foucault, my argument will

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center on the prime indicator of reflexive understanding of the self, which is the mode of attention to one’s self that is recommended. Attention as a concept in Aquinas will also be discussed, first in relation to solicitude in the virtue of prudence, as well as the importance of the love of God and the love of neighbor as referent of all thoughts and actions.

These two chapters establish a foundation for a further engagement with the primary texts of Aquinas. In the fourth chapter, I will focus on the *De perfectione spiritualis vitae*, describing the spiritual exercises found within this text, and how this text provides us with a further insight into the reflexive understanding of the person found in Aquinas.

In the fifth chapter, I will provide a description of the spiritual exercises found in the *Summa Theologicae*, and the reflexive understanding of self suggested in this text. I accomplish this by providing a discussion of different aspects or virtues which form the components of the cardinal virtues. In discussing how spiritual exercises related to the fear of death aid one in the formation of the virtue of fortitude, the structure and practices associated with the cardinal virtues are highlighted.

Finally, in the conclusion, I will provide an overview of the findings of this work before turning to the potential implications for contemporary ethics. The employment of Foucault and Hadot as sources for methodological questions implies a certain conclusion, namely that there is something amiss, to a certain extent, with the way contemporary philosophy and theology are accomplished. As this dissertation will highlight, Thomas Aquinas has a robust set of practices, and provides a foundational mode of understanding the self, both of which hold implications for the way a person lives. In contemporary
ethics, practices and understandings of the self are not often described, something which suggests a point of deficiency in comparison with certain pre-modern works.
Chapter 2 - Progress, Virtue, and Spiritual Exercises

Thomas Aquinas would, according to contemporary categories, be considered a virtue ethicist. Beyond the regular use of the word “virtue,” an ethics of virtue is one that focuses on the development of character instead of adherence to a code of rules. The simplest explanation, and one often repeated, is that in virtue ethics, a good person does what is right, whereas in other ethical systems, a person who does what is right is good. The focus, therefore, is on the development of a certain type of person, from whom proceed virtuous actions. A virtue ethics is an ethics of cultivation, an ethics of progress, and is thus a system that speaks of a beginning, middle, and end goal for humans.

Thomas Hibbs offers this explanation:

By contrast with its chief competitors, a normative virtue theory would treat the assessment of character and the virtues and vices constitutive of character as more fundamental than either the assessment of action and duty, which is basic in Kantian deontology, or the assessment of the value of the consequences of action, which is basic in utilitarianism. Thus understood, virtue ethics would have the task of developing and defending (a) some conception of the ideal person (b) some list of the virtues necessary to become a person of that type, and (c) some view of how persons come to possess the relevant virtues.  

The goal of this chapter is to answer these three points (ideal person, their virtues, and how they got them) from the work of Thomas Aquinas. This would represent a greater effort than might be covered in a single chapter, however, and to that end, I will be
focusing on certain aspects of Thomas’s conception of virtue. First, it would appear accurate to say that the entire secunda pars, and in particular the secunda secundae, serve as a description of these three points. There is an extensive listing of virtues and vices, both moral and theological, and explanations of the methods of acquiring virtue, specifically through imitation of persons, study, and exercise. Finally, there is the conception of the ideal person, one which is more subtly contained in Thomas’s work. The ideal person and moral exemplar for all people is Jesus Christ, and, as Thomas argues, we should learn our behavior from his example, and from the saints, insofar as they imitated Christ.

These questions determine the structure of this chapter: what are the virtues? How are they acquired? From whom do we learn them? For the first question, I will offer a brief overview of Thomas’s understandings of habit and virtue, including an explanation of the varieties of virtues. After this, I will move to a discussion of the growing of habits. In particular, I will argue for the importance of “practice” or “exercise” in relation to growth in acquired virtue. For Thomas, a virtue is acquired either by means of repeatedly performing virtuous actions which produces a habit, or through an infusion of grace. Without God’s action, it is only possible for a person to become virtuous by acting virtuously, and not simply by learning on a theoretical level the proper action to take (though proper reasoning plays an important role in deciding the correct action). It is also possible to supplement the development of the virtues by indirect means; as in the case of the virtue of prudence, which can be aided by the increase in one’s ability for memory. Thus, a person who has developed numerous experiences over the course of time, reflects
on these experiences, and from them derives knowledge based on the circumstances and outcomes of those experiences, which then inform that person’s prudent decision making in future actions. This leads to a discussion of the spiritual exercises that are found in Thomas, and his use of the term.

For Thomas, it is important to note that acquired virtues are not the only form of virtues. Thomas also offers the concept of infused virtues, that is, virtues infused within the human person by God. The primary discussion of infusion is found in his description of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, but also in the context of moral or intellectual virtue. In the case of moral and intellectual virtue, though these virtues are typically thought of as acquired, they also can benefit from the infusion of grace by God. Thus there are infused and acquired versions of most all virtues, including prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude, though there is not much agreement among scholars about the specific nature of the relationship between the two of these.  

The concept of infusion plays a significant role in his theology and ethical perspective, and an understanding of the importance of infusion is central to understanding Aquinas’s conception of ideal form of life. For a person to process in virtue, they must be disposed to practice virtue and avoid vice. Further, they must maintain and grow in relationship with God through the practice of prayer, contemplation, and the sacraments.

The ideal form of life is possible for all persons, therefore, in that no person is technically prevented from relationship with God or growth in virtue. Thomas, however, will repeatedly state that the person who is fully committed to growth in the likeness of

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91 See Jean Porter, Eleanor Stump, Andrew Pinsent, James Keenan, Lawrence Dewan, Josef Pieper, among others.
God should choose the religious life, that is, membership in a religious order with professed vows. He identifies life as a professed religious person to be the form of life that grants the person the greatest opportunity for an increase in charity and grace from God through the avoidance of sin. Thomas is careful not to be Pelagian in his insistence on the work of the religious orders, but it is clear that he views the professed religious life as a place of “spiritual training,” one that best prepares the human for devotion to God and service to their neighbor. This does not mean that persons outside of religious orders have no chance for sainthood or spiritual greatness; on the contrary, one example Thomas repeatedly cites and returns to is the figure of Abraham, someone who appears consistently in the *De perfectione spiritualis vitae*. Abraham is cited as an example of a non-celibate and wealthy person who is obedient only to God, who at the same time is deemed righteous. Thomas, therefore, acknowledges that it is possible to live a full Christian life according to the counsels outside of a religious order, without celibacy or poverty; still, he repeats that life outside of a religious order is far more difficult and less secure, and thus life in the religious order is ideal for those seeking perfection.

Finally, I will offer a discussion of Thomas’s conception of the ideal person, which I will argue is found in the religious state following the counsels of Christ in imitation of Christ. Thomas particularly identifies the religious orders as places of exercise, unmatched by any other place in the world for their ability to aid people in the movement

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92 Thomas is in fact critical of diocesan priests for not taking vows related to poverty, chastity, and obedience, and puts them below monks and bishops in his ranking of members of the clergy.

93 Strictly interpreted – Abraham is still, poor, chaste and obedient in that he has ordered affection for his possessions and does not covet that of others, he is chaste in that he only engages in appropriate relations with his wife, and he is obedient in that he obeys God, which is actually the main point of the vow of obedience.
towards perfection, through growth in the virtues, and preservation from sin. Again, religious orders are not the only possible place for humans to grow in grace, but they are identified as an ideal place for this to occur. Thomas views the ideal religious order as a combination of the contemplative and active life, where the fruits of the contemplative life are shared through the undertaking of an active life, a description applicable in most ways to his own Dominican order.\textsuperscript{94} For Thomas, this hybrid form of life is in fact modeled upon the life of Christ, and a person who seeks to lead this form of life should model their actions and habits on those seen in Christ. This leads to a description of the concepts of the \textit{imago dei}, and the \textit{exemplar dei} and other key terms that for Thomas guide humans in the development of virtue.

\textbf{The Argument}

Presenting Thomas from the perspective of virtue ethics does not suggest much of anything new about Thomas.\textsuperscript{95} Instead, the goal of this chapter is to offer something different. While Thomas will recognize that there are many valid forms of life, the professed religious life is the one he identifies as the safest and surest form of devoting one’s life to God. Furthermore, Thomas, in the fashion of the early philosophical schools and monastic thinkers from early Christianity, identifies religious orders as a school for spiritual exercise and growth. Their purpose is to help persons become better conformed to the image of God, and to do this through teaching and practicing exercises which aid in

\textsuperscript{94} Thomas does not often refer to the “Dominican” order, or generally name religious orders in his writings on the matter.

\textsuperscript{95} As will be mentioned, Thomas does not abide by the modern distinctions of varieties of ethics, and thus would not self-identify as a virtue ethicist. I have chosen a virtue ethics approach for the reason that it highlights the practical aspect of moral living, in that virtue requires study, exercise, and infusion, and is not simply a matter of rational choice.
the avoidance of sin and growth in acquired virtue. And, by the avoidance of sin, one does not lose the opportunity for added grace, nor sacrifice the graces already given, thus placing them in the best possible position for an increase in grace to be given by God. This provides us with an image of the ideal person for Thomas; they are chaste, poor, and obedient, with a life modeled after Christ, engaging in contemplation of God always and sharing those fruits, and practicing spiritual exercises to aid in their conformity with Christ.

Virtue

Aquinas does not abide by the modern distinctions between ethics and spirituality, and it can be easily demonstrated that for Thomas to be a virtuous person involves what we now call “religion” and the spiritual life. This section will serve as a brief introduction to Thomas’s ethics, focusing specifically on how the person develops into a moral person through the acquisition and infusion of moral and theological virtue.

For Thomas, ethics and spirituality are about progress (profectus) and growth (crescere). As he writes in the prologue to his commentary on Philippians:

In this text the life of the saints is described under three aspects: first, its narrowness, when it is called a path: “For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life” (Matt 7:14); “That path no bird of prey knows, and the falcon’s eye has not seen it” (Job 28:7); secondly, its splendor when he says, the light of dawn: “For once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord” (Eph. 5:8). For the just shine, and as a result, their life shines. Thirdly, its progress (profectu), because it is always growing (crescit): “Long for the pure spiritual
milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation” (1 Pet 2:2); and even this until the full day of glory; “When the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away” (1 Cor 13:10).96

The life of the just, for Thomas, is about always becoming better. The saint is always seeking after perfection, and always working to make that perfection a reality. Thus, the person is always trying to increase in virtue and increase in the love of God and neighbor. This perspective underlies all of Thomas’s thought on the question of how one ought to live.

a) The virtues one must acquire

Thomas argued that the human is a composite of body and soul. The soul serves as the form of the body, and in distinction from Platonists and others, the soul is not truly complete without the body, though it can exist separately. The soul is the principle of our movement, our knowledge, our willing, and our living, and thus is the source of our moral action. To that end, the soul holds qualities, certain of which are particularly important for ethics: habits. Thomas defines a habit as a “disposition of a subject which is in a state of potentiality either to form or to operation.”97 There are various forms of habits in Thomas, ranging from the habit of health to the virtue of prudence. Health, in


97 ST I-II.50.1 - Respondeo dicendum quod, sicut supra dictum est, habitus est quaedam dispositio alicuius subiecti existentis in potential vel ad formam, vel ad operationem.
this instance, refers to the disposition of the body and soul to be healthy, and, further, the habitual choosing of the means for preserving health. A person in good health has the habit of health brought into action from its status in potentiality, so long as those things which negatively affect health are prevented. Likewise prudence, a cardinal virtue, is a type of habit, in this case a virtue. The habit of prudence disposes one to right reason about things to be done, as will be explained in further detail in the coming chapters.

As mentioned above, virtues are a specific variety of habit. Thomas defines a virtue as “a good quality of the soul, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us, without us.” This definition is actually from Augustine, and Thomas accepts it with qualifications, modifying the definition when referring to the non-theological virtues by taking away the “which God works in us, without us” clause. The non-theological virtues are either moral or intellectual, giving us three types of virtue: moral, intellectual, and theological.

The distinction between the three types of virtues results from the difference in the faculty they perfect and in what they dispose the person to do. Thomas explains that the intellectual virtues, or the virtues of the “speculative intellect,” are “those which perfect the speculative intellect for the consideration of truth,” the result of which is “understanding.” Understanding, however, dwelling as it does in the speculative intellect, is not sufficient for a person to act virtuously. As Thomas writes:

Accordingly, for a man to do a good deed, it is requisite not only that his reason be well disposed by means of a habit of intellectual virtue; but also that his

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98 ST I-II.55.4 obj.1 and following.
99 ST I-II.57.2
appetite be well disposed by means of a habit of moral virtue. And so moral
differs from intellectual virtue, even as the appetite differs from the reason.\textsuperscript{100}

Intellectual virtues, therefore, refer to the consideration of right reason, while moral
virtues refer to the habit and practice of right action. Thomas identifies four cardinal
virtues: prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude. Prudence is understood to be a
hybrid virtue, both moral and intellectual, in that it is located in the intellect, but it is
concerned with matters of action. The moral virtues, on the other hand, are located in the
will, properly speaking, though temperance, properly speaking concerns the regulation of
the sensitive appetite. Thomas describes the cardinal virtues as follows: “prudence is the
virtue that commands; justice, the virtue which is about due action between equals;
temperance, the virtue which suppresses desires for the pleasures of touch; and fortitude,
which strengthens against the dangers of death.”\textsuperscript{101}

The final variety of virtue is the theological. As Thomas notes, Aristotle only
identifies two forms of virtue, moral and intellectual.\textsuperscript{102} The reason for the addition of
the third is a different understanding of the final goal for human life in Thomas, namely
our eternal beatitude in God, beyond our natural end. The moral and intellectual virtues,
therefore, are capable of directing us only to our natural end, and not towards
supernatural happiness. Thomas explains:

\textsuperscript{100} ST I-II.58.2 - Sic igitur ad hoc quod homo bene agat, requiritur quod non solum ratio sit bene disposita
per habitum virtutis intellectualis; sed etiam quod vis appetitive sit bene disposita per habitum virtutis
moralis. Sicut igitur appetites distinguitur a ratione, ita virtus moralis distinguitur ab intellectuali.

\textsuperscript{101} ST I-II.61.3 - Et secundum hoc, dicuntur principales, quasi generals ad omnes virtutes, utputa quod
omnis virtus quae facit bonum in consideration rationis, dicatur prudential; et quod omnis virtus quae facit
bonum debiti et recti in operationibus, dicatur iustitia; et omnis virtus quae cohibet passions et deprimit,
dicatur temperantia; et omnis virtus quae facit firmitatem animi contra quascumque passions, dicatur
fortitudo.

\textsuperscript{102} ST I-II.58.2 sed contra
And because such happiness surpasses the capacity of human nature, man’s
natural principles which enable him to act well according to his capacity do not
suffice to direct man to this same happiness. Hence it is necessary for man to
receive from God some additional principles, whereby he may be directed to
supernatural happiness, even as he is directed to his connatural end, by means of
his natural principles, albeit not without divine assistance. Such like principles
are called “theological virtues”: first, because their object is God, inasmuch as
they direct us aright to God: secondly, because they are infused in us by God
alone: thirdly, because these virtues are not made known to us, save by Divine
revelation, contained in Holy Writ.  

In this explanation, Thomas gives us two important points about the theological virtues:
1. “they direct us to God aright” and 2. “they are infused in us by God alone.” Both of
these points distinguish the theological virtues from the moral and intellectual virtues.
Also, because these virtues are infused by God alone, it would seem this might
complicate our understanding of spiritual relationship with God: if we are entirely
dependent on God for being rightly directed to God and for achieving our end in God,
what can the person do to encourage these virtues, if anything?

b) How one acquires these virtues, natural and supernatural

103 ST I-II.62.1 - Et quia huiusmodi beatitude proportionem humanae naturae excedit, principia naturalia
hominis, ex quibus procedit ad bene agendum secundum suam proportionem, non sufficient ad ordinandum
hominem in beatitudinem praedictam. Unde oportet quod superaddantur homini divinitus aliqua principia,
per quae ita ordinetur ad beatitudinem supernatalem, sicut per principia naturalia ordinatur ad finem
connatunalem, non tamen absque adiutorio divino. Et huiusmodi principia virtutes dicuntur theologicae,
tum quia habent Deum pro obiecto, inquantum per eas recte ordinamur in Deum; tum quia a solo Deon obis
infunduntur; tum quia sola divina revelation, in sacra Scriptura, huiusmodi virtutes traduntur.
The human is directed towards a natural end of happiness, and towards a supernatural happiness called beatitude. As Thomas repeatedly affirms, the way to both of these ends is virtue, and thus a person should desire virtue as they desire happiness. They thus need to become virtuous:

In like fashion, too, it is clear that beatitude is the reward of virtue. Therefore, they who tend to beatitude must be virtuously disposed. But we are stimulated to virtue both by words and by examples. Of course, his examples and words of whose goodness we have the more solid opinion induce us the more effectively to virtue. But an infallible opinion of goodness about any pure man was never tenable—even the holiest of men, one finds, have failed in some things. Hence it was necessary for man to be solidly grounded in virtue to receive from God made human both the teaching and the examples of virtue. For this reason our Lord himself says: “I have given you example that as I have done to you do also.”

Our end is beatitude, therefore, and the path is through virtue. One way we are “stimulated” to virtue is from words and examples, with Thomas holding in mind specifically the figure of Christ and the things written about him.

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105 As Thomas will indicate, beatitude requires charity as that which leads to the union of lover and beloved. Charity, therefore, serves as the primary end of the spiritual life, as will be indicated in the chapter on the De perfectione spiritualis vitae. This project, however, is focused on the means whereby charity is preserved, and the possibility of a further infusion of charity is maintained.
But words and examples alone are not enough to make a virtuous person. Virtues are habits, and habits grow through repeated actions. Thomas affirms this principle, but also adds to it. For one, he writes, “So, too, repeated acts cause a habit to grow. If, however, the act falls short of the intensity of the habit, such an act does not dispose to an increase of that habit, but rather to a lessening thereof.”\textsuperscript{106} For example, if a just person were to return stolen goods to their proper owner, but also keeps some of the goods, that action would fall short of his habit of justice, and would lessen his virtue. Thomas therefore recommends “\textit{studium et exercitium},” that is, “exercise and study,” for the acquisition of virtue. He writes:

Some moral virtues perfect man as regards his general state, in other words, with regards to those things which have to be done in every kind of human life. Hence man needs to \textit{exercise} himself at the same in the matters of all moral virtues. And if he \textit{exercise} himself, by good deeds, in all such matters, he will acquire the habits of all the moral virtues.\textsuperscript{107}

Exercise, in this sense, does not simply mean “practice,” in the sense of imitating the performance of an act, as we might conceive of it; instead, it refers to the enactment of virtuous activity on a regular, repeated basis. In order to become virtuous, we must study and learn about good things, but also do those good things with such regularity that our good habit is increased.

\textsuperscript{106} ST I-II.52.3
\textsuperscript{107} ST I-II.65.1 ad 1- Ad primum ergo dicendum quod virtutum moralium quaedam perficiunt hominem secundum commune statum, scilicet quantum ad ea quae communiter in omni vita hominum occurrunt agenda. Unde oportet quod homo simul exercitetur circa materias omnium virtutum moralis. Et si quidem circa omnes exercitetur bene operand, acquiret habitus omnium virtutum moralis.
The actions of the just person mentioned above, in keeping some of the goods for himself, constitute a sin, an indication of vice. Thomas explains the implications of this:

By virtues, again, man is disposed to beatitude, and so by sin he is blocked therefrom. Sin, of course, the contrary of virtue, constitutes an obstacle to beatitude; it not only induces a kind of disorder in the soul by seducing it from its due end, but it also offends God to whom we look for the reward of beatitude, in that God has the custody of human acts.\textsuperscript{108}

Sin and vice, therefore, prevent us from realizing our end in God, and thus humans should want to avoid them. The question that follows, of course, is how we do so. For Thomas, as many figures before him, the answer lies in our reason: “Thus, acts of virtue are suitable to human nature, since they are according to reason, whereas acts of vice are discordant from human nature, since they are against reason. Hence it is clear that habits are distinguished specifically by the difference of good and bad.”\textsuperscript{109} A person, therefore, who reasons well about things to be done, made or thought, following the words and examples of virtuous person, and repeatedly performs well the activities about which he has reasoned, becomes a virtuous person.

As indicated above, however, the acquired virtues also have infused forms. These infused forms are dependent upon the human’s reception of grace from God. They have the same matter as the acquired version of the virtue, but a person with the acquired

\textsuperscript{108} SCG 4.54.8 - Sicut virtutibus homo ad beatitudinem disponitur, ita et peccatis impeditur. Peccatum autem virtuti contrarium, impedimentum affert beatitudini, non solum inordinationem quandam animae inducens secundum quod eam ab ordine debiti finis abducit, sed etiam Deum offendens, a quo beatitudinis praemium expectatur, secundum quod Deus humanorum actuum curam curam habet…

\textsuperscript{109} ST I-II.54.3 - Sicut actus virtutum naturae humane convenient, eo quod sunt secundum rationem, actus vero vitiorum, cum sin contra rationem, a natura humana discordant. Et sic manifestum est quod secundum differentiam boni et mali, habitus specie distinguuntur.
virtue possess a fuller knowledge of the proper end of the virtue, namely God. This changes, theoretically at least, the specific content of a given action, and results as well in a different degree of merit.

That much seems clear about the moral and intellectual virtues. But the question still follows as to how we might acquire the theological virtues, without which we cannot attain to our supernatural end. Thomas explains this in several instances, including the virtue of faith: “...since man, by assenting to matters of faith, is raised above his nature, this must needs accrue to him from some supernatural principle moving him inwardly; and this is God. Therefore faith, as regards the assent which is the chief act of faith, is from God moving man inwardly by grace.”¹¹⁰ Faith, therefore, and the rest of the theological virtues are entirely dependent on God’s acting through us. This would seem to limit our own efforts toward attaining our supernatural end. And yet, there are still certain actions we can take which can aid in our reception of an increase in the theological virtues from God. Thomas writes:

The religious state was instituted chiefly that we might obtain perfection by means of certain exercises whereby the obstacles to perfect charity are removed.

By the removal of the obstacles of perfect charity, much more are the occasions of sin cut off, for sin destroys charity altogether. ¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ ST II-II.6.1 - Quia cum homo, assentiendo his quae sunt fidei, elevetur supra naturam suam, oportet quod hoc insit ei ex supernaturali principio interius movente, quod est Deus. Et ideo fides quantum ad assensum, qui est principalis actus fidei, est a Deo interius movente per gratiam.

¹¹¹ ST II-II.186.1 ad 4 - Ad quartum dicendum quod religionis status principaliter est institus ad perfectionem adipiscendam per quaedam exercitia quibus tolluntur impedimenta perfectae caritatis. Sublatis autem impedimentis perfectae caritatis, multo magis exciduntur occasiones peccati, per quod totaliter tollitur caritas.
This passage establishes a connection between the acquired and infused virtues, in that the further perfected we are in the acquired virtues, the less likely we are to sin. When we are able to avoid sin, we do not forfeit whatever charity God has infused in us, and we remain open to the further infusion of charity.\footnote{There are, of course, infused moral and intellectual virtues, whereby God grants “other habits” such that they are proportional to the theological virtues, in the sense that they are directed towards the supernatural end. See ST I-II.63.3}

**How one acquires these virtues: Spiritual Exercises**

Having established the connection between acquired virtue, exercise, and charity, we now have a foundation for a discussion of spiritual exercises in Thomas. Thomas actually employs the term “spiritual exercises,” and does so in a few different contexts. The principal instances are found on the one hand in reference to the acquisition of wisdom, and on the other, the religious life. One example is found in the *Summa Contra Gentilium*:

Now if it were necessary for followers of voluntary poverty to make their living by manual labor, the result would be that they might take up the greater part of their lives in this kind of work; consequently, they would be kept away from other, more necessary activities, such as the pursuit of wisdom and teaching, and other such spiritual exercises (*spiritualia exercitia*).\footnote{SCG 3.132.14 - Si autem voluntariam paupertatem sectantes oporteret labore manuiali victum acquirere, sequeretur quod circa huiusmodi laborem maius tempus suae vitae consumerent; et per consequens impediretur ab aliis magis necessariis actionibus, quae etiam magnum tempus requirunt, sicut sunt stadium sapientiae, et doctrina, et alia huiusmodi spiritualia exercitia.}

In this instance, The spiritual exercises described are those related to the increase of knowledge and the formation of students. Thomas is perhaps best known for his focus on
academic work, so that he would identify those activities as spiritual exercises is not surprising.

In the next instance, however, from the *Summa Theologiae*, other specific activities which accompany the religious life are identified as spiritual exercises. This is perhaps a less studied aspect of Thomas, but one that is central to his own way of life. He includes activities which fall under the vows of the religious state that aid in the avoidance of sin and increase in charity:

As was shown above (II-II.188.1), the religious state is a spiritual schooling (*spirituale exercitium*) for the attainment of the perfection of charity. This is accomplished through the removal of the obstacles to perfect charity by religious observances; and these obstacles are those things which attach man’s affections to earthly things. Now the attachment of man’s affections to earthly things is not only an obstacle to the perfection of charity, but sometimes leads to the loss of charity, when through turning inordinately to temporal goods man turns away from the immutable good by sinning mortally. Hence it is evident that the observances of the religious state, while removing the obstacles to perfect charity, remove also the occasions of sin: for instance, it is clear that fasting, watching, obedience, and the like withdraw man from sins of gluttony and lust and all other manner of sins.

Consequently it is right that not only those who are practiced (*exercitati*) in the observance of the commandments should enter religion in order to attain to yet
greater perfection, but also those who are not practiced (*exercitati*), in order the more easily to avoid sin and attain to perfection.\(^{114}\)

The passage above, in its description of the religious state as a “*spirituale exercitium*” provides the main point of interest for this dissertation. It is in the context of the religious state and in describing religious observances that Thomas is most vocal about the role of spiritual exercises. Explaining the work of the religious orders and Thomas’s explanation of the vows will provide the main subject matter for the third chapter of this dissertation.

Thomas also will refer to certain outward physical actions as a spiritual exercise. In this instance, Thomas describes the practice of kneeling in prayer as a “spiritual exercise” for the inner soul:

This is a symbol of humility for two reasons. First, a man belittles himself, in a certain way, when he genuflects, and he subjects himself to the one he genuflects before. In such a way he recognizes his own weakness and insignificance.

Secondly, physical strength is present in the knees; in bending them a man confesses openly to his lack of strength. Thus external physical symbols are

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\(^{114}\) ST II-II.189.1 - Respondeo dicendum quod, sicut ex supra dictis patet, status religionis est quoddam spiritual exercitum ad consequendum perfectionem caritatis, quod quidem fit inquantum per religionis observantias auferuntur impedimenta perfectae caritatis. Haec autem sunt quae implicat affectum hominis ad terrena. Per hoc autem quod affectus hominis implicatur ad terrena, non solum impeditur perfectio caritatis, sed interdum etiam ipsa caritas perditur, dum per inordinatam conversionem ad bona temporela homo avertitur ab incommutabili bono mortaliter peccando. Unde patet quod religionis observantiae, sicut tollunt impedimenta perfectae caritatis, ita etiam tollunt occasiones peccandi, sicut patet quod per ieiunium et vigilias et obedientiam et alia huiusmodi, retrahirur homo a peccatis gulae et luxuriae, et a quibuscumque alii peccatis. Et ideo ingredi religionem non solum expedit his qui sunt exercitati in praeceptis, ut ad maiorem perfectionem perveniant, sed etiam his qui non sunt exercitati, ut facilius peccata vitent et perfectionem assequantur.
shown to God for the purpose of renewing and spiritually training (*exercitium spirituale*) the inner soul.\textsuperscript{115}

And finally, in an explanation of the purpose of baptism\textsuperscript{116}:

Secondly, this is suitable for our spiritual training (*spirituale exercitium*): namely, in order that, by fighting against concupiscence and other defects to which he is subject, man may receive the crown of victory. Wherefore on Romans 6:6, “that the body of sin may be destroyed,” a gloss says: “If a man after baptism live in the flesh, he has concupiscence to fight against, and to conquer by God’s help.”\textsuperscript{117}

These references, taken together, provide the scope of spiritual exercises in Thomas, which is admittedly rather broad. They cover the full range of the moral and intellectual virtues, and also, by implication, have an impact on the reception and preservation of the theological virtues. In covering Thomas’s use of the term “spiritual exercises,” it is important to note that the full range of spiritual exercises suggested by Thomas is not limited to those areas where he explicitly identifies an activity as an “exercise.” Instead, the supposition is that as Thomas uses the term generally, and thus any exercise for developing virtue, disposing one to relationship with God, or for preventing the enactment of sinful habits found in Thomas can be considered a “spiritual exercise.”

\textsuperscript{115} Commentary on Ephesians 3:14 [#166] - Quod est signum humilitatis propter duo. Primo quia qui genua flectit, quodam modo parvificat se, et subicit se ei, cui genua flectit: unde per huiusmodi ostenditur recognitio propriae fragilitatis et parvitatis. Secundo quia in genu est fortitude corporis. Quando ergo quis genua flectit, protestatur debilitatem suae virtutis. Et inde est, quod exterior signa corporalia exhibentur Deo ad conversionem, et exercitium spirituale animae interioris.

\textsuperscript{116} The role of the sacraments in increasing moral capability and progressing in the spiritual life is central to Thomas’s work. It is, unfortunately, outside of the direct subject matter of this work, however, so will be not treated in sufficient detail.

\textsuperscript{117} ST III.69.3 - Secundo, hoc est conveniens propter spirituale exercitium, ut videlicet contra concupiscentiam et alias passibilitates pugnans homo victoriae coronam acciperet. Unde super illud Rom VI, ut destruatur corpus peccati, dicit Glossa, *si post baptismum vixerit homo in carne, habet concupiscentiam cum qua pugnet, eamque adiuvante Deo, superet.*
The spiritual exercises that Thomas describes bear a close resemblance to those offered by earlier thinkers. Hadot, citing listings offered by Philo Judaeus, Galen, and others includes research, thorough investigation, reading, listening, attention (*prosoche*), self-mastery, indifference to indifferent things, meditations, therapies of the passions, remembrance of good things, and the accomplishment of duties.\footnote{118} Hadot further divides spiritual exercises into four categories: 1. Attention 2. Meditations 3. Intellectual 4. Practical. Each of these four categories is found in Aquinas, albeit at times in different ways than in ancient thinkers.

The category of attention as a spiritual exercise is certainly present in Aquinas, and will be described in more detail in the next chapter on reflexivity, and in the fourth chapter in the discussion of prudence and other virtues. The concept of attention as a spiritual exercise is grounded in the Delphic maxim, “know thyself.” As Hadot writes: “Although it is difficult to be sure of the original meaning of this formula [“know thyself”], this much is clear; it invites us to establish a relationship of the self to the self, which constitutes the foundation of every spiritual exercise.”\footnote{119} For Thomas, attention takes the form of solicitude, a part of the virtue of prudence, whereby one is called to awareness of one’s activities and vigilance against being led astray. Attention, likewise, is seen as the essential orientation of the human, in that a person inclined to behave morally must consider their self, and determine how to direct their behavior in an appropriate and reasonable manner. Without this first turn to self-awareness, a person is not capable of “human” action, according to Thomas.

\footnote{118} Philosopy as Way of Life 84
\footnote{119} Ibid., 90
Meditations are also found in Aquinas. One repeated example is the encouragement, taken from the Psalms and elsewhere, to meditate on all of God’s works.\textsuperscript{120} Another is found in the virtue of prudence; memory is one of its quasi-integral parts, the aspects of a virtue required for its perfection. Thomas cites Aristotle in the question of “whether a habit can be caused by one act.” Thomas writes: “But with regard to the lower apprehensive powers, the same acts need to be repeated many times for anything to be firmly impressed on the memory. And so the Philosopher says (\textit{De memor. et remin.} 1) that ‘meditation strengthens memory.’”\textsuperscript{121} In another instance, Thomas describes how our consistent and repeated reflection on prior experiences keeps them fresh in our mind, and thus able to serve us in future moral consideration.\textsuperscript{122} Another of the key areas of meditation for Aquinas is meditation on the scriptures, something which he repeatedly encourages his readers and students to undertake.

This leads to a discussion of the third category, the intellectual exercises. As Hadot writes, “the exercises of meditation and memorization require nourishment. This is where the more specifically intellectual exercises...come in.”\textsuperscript{123} For Aquinas, nourishment comes from academic work, from the reading of the scriptures and works of theology. Thus, the intellectual practices for Aquinas are legion. It is possible to understand the entirety of Thomas’s corpus as representing a form of spiritual exercise, in particular the \textit{Summa Theologiae}.\textsuperscript{124} The ability to think in disputational form, to engage in the

\textsuperscript{120} SCG II.1.6  
\textsuperscript{121} ST I-II.51.3  
\textsuperscript{122} ST II-II.49.1 ad 2  
\textsuperscript{123} Philosophy as a Way of Life 86  
\textsuperscript{124} For a discussion of disputatio/quaestio as an “intellectual exercise,” see Philip W. Rosemann, \textit{Understanding Scholastic Thought with Foucault}, especially chapter 3, “Scholastic Intellectual Practices.”
methodology of the *quaestiones*, requires that a person be able to produce both the argument and the counterargument to any given question. Given the Dominican order’s role in preaching against heresies, this format is intuitive. Furthermore, the study of scriptures and theology gives students resources for meditation and contemplation.

Practical exercises are described by Hadot as “those intended to create habits,” and he cites as examples the practice of indifference to indifferent things and freeing oneself from the control of the passions. These exercises are of particular importance to the religious life for Thomas, and each of the vows can be understood as a practical exercise. Poverty frees our affections from material things, chastity frees our affections from other humans, and obedience frees our affections from ourselves. With our affections withdrawn from earthly things, it is possible to devote them fully to our affection for God, and then according to the order of charity, our souls, our neighbors, our bodies. Each of the vows, and the practices that accompany them, will be discussed in the third chapter. Practical exercises are also seen in the moral virtues; though Thomas does not accept the extirpation of the passions as described by the Stoics, he does prioritize the role of reason in rightly ordering both our actions and our passions. The ordering of the passions by reason is another exercise of great importance to Aquinas.

Taken together, these exercises form the *askesis* of Aquinas. Not to be confused with asceticism, an *askesis* is simply the set of exercises offered by a certain thinker, philosophy, or school. Each *askesis* is different and reflects the theological or philosophical tenets of the different groups they belong to. Aquinas’s *askesis*, to speak in general terms, is more intellectually oriented than the Stoics or Epicureans, for example,

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125 Ibid.
in that there is a greater emphasis in his work on the full understanding of Christian theology. It also, however, contains many of the same practical exercises and components as these earlier philosophies, an aspect of his work which is significantly underappreciated.

The spiritual exercises of Thomas Aquinas, therefore, include practices associated with the sciences, such as reading, study, and contemplation, while also including practices related to the observation of the moral virtues in general, and the virtue of religion in particular. The goal of spiritual exercises is identified by Thomas as perfection in charity, though these spiritual exercises are not a means but instead a way of creating an opportunity for the infusion of charity to occur and be preserved. It is possible to suggest that there are two main types of spiritual exercises for Thomas among the four categories described above (attention, meditations, intellectual, practical), though there is often overlap between them. These are as follows:

1. Spiritual exercises for the preservation or improvement of reason.

2. Spiritual exercises concerning the will.

**Spiritual exercises for the preservation or improvement of the reason**

As for the first variety, these exercises are committed towards the human’s reason, specifically towards preserving it from undue influence from the passions, external attachments, ignorance, or irrational action. This first variety is actually the primary purpose of most spiritual exercises, and is a point of emphasis in Martha Nussbaum’s treatment of ancient thought, as mentioned previously in the Introduction. In fact, one could argue that these exercises are in fact one of the original philosophical
exercises. Hadot suggests that this exercise finds its origin in Plato, and in particular from the *Phaedo*:

> We can perhaps get a better idea of this spiritual exercise\(^{126}\) if we understand it as an attempt to liberate ourselves from a partial passionate point of view—linked to the sense and the body—so as to rise to the universal normative viewpoint of thought submitting ourselves to the demands of the Logos and the norm of the Good.\(^{127}\)

While it is rightly stated that Aquinas has a more favorable view of the body than traditional Platonism, the principle is still quite similar. Reason, in the moral person, is the “first principle of all human acts,”\(^{128}\) even of the person living in grace, and without reason functioning at the behest of itself and not the passions, a person cannot be moral. For this reason, Aquinas is particularly interested in exercises that preserve or increase the rational ability of a person.

In order for a person to act morally, one must have their reason in the position of governance over the soul and its desires. For Aquinas, this is embodied in the virtue of prudence, which is best described as “right reason about things to be done.” Furthermore, the primary activity of prudence is directing the human person in moral action. Thomas writes:

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\(^{126}\) The spiritual exercise of “separating the soul from the body.” As Hadot notes, this exercise is ripe for misinterpretation, and does not refer to any achievement of “trance or catalepsy,” but instead refers to separating the mind from the inputs of the body in order to be able to reason clearly.

\(^{127}\) *Philosophy as a Way of Life* 94. “...all the arguments in the Phaedo...show the goal of this philosophical separation is for the soul to liberate itself, shedding the passions linked to the corporeal sense so as to attain the autonomy of thought.”

\(^{128}\) ST I-II.58.2 - Respondeo dicendum quod omnium humanorum operum principium primum ratio est.
But the practical reason, which is directed to action, goes further, and its third act is “to command,” which act consists in applying to action the things counseled and judged [actions one and two]. And since this act approaches nearer to the end of the practical reason, it follows that it is the chief act of the practical reason, and consequently of prudence.”  

For Aquinas, prudence is foundational for moral virtue, in that “Moral virtue cannot be without prudence, because it is a habit of choosing, i.e. making us choose well.”

Without the intellectual aspect of virtue, even if a person possesses the other moral virtues in their underdeveloped form, a person cannot achieve the perfection of virtue. This is because a person who does not study or exercise their rational faculty in any way will encounter difficulties in choosing correctly the proper action to take.

One of the main tasks in developing the faculty of reason is found in preserving it from the undue influence of the passions. Contemporary discussions of the passions are rather contentious, and scholarship on Aquinas and the passions offers some rather different conclusions. One conclusion of this work, however, which is important to repeat, is that Aquinas does have a favorable view of certain passions, and does not adhere to a “Kantian” understanding of the need for all rational thought to be separated from emotion.

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129 ST II-II 47.8
130 ST I-II 58.4
131 Though one should always follow the dictates of their conscience, Thomas does believe that a person should take due measure to provide the rational faculty with knowledge and to be exercised in making the correct decision.
A passion is a “movement of the sensitive appetite,” and considered in itself, it is morally ambiguous.\textsuperscript{132} Passions, however, become referable to “good or evil” depending on whether they are in accord or disaccord with reason.\textsuperscript{133} There are eleven passions identified by Aquinas, each with a different aspect of concern. Paul Gondreau, citing, the French edition of the Summa, offers this listing:

The concupiscible passions
The good object that is suitable to me: this is love or like
It attracts me: this is desire
I possess it: this is pleasure or joy
The evil object that is not suitable to me: this is hatred or dislike
It repulses me: this is aversion
I am succumbing to it: this is sorrow

The irascible passions
The good object is difficult but possible to attain: this is hope
It is impossible to attain: this is despair
The evil object is threatening me but possible to avoid: this is courage
It is impossible to avoid: this is fear
It is here, against me: this is anger.

In one passage which is remarkable for its clarity on this matter, Thomas writes: “The passions of the soul, in so far as they are contrary to the order of reason, incline us to sin: but in so far as they are controlled by reason, they pertain to virtue.”\textsuperscript{134} It is possible, therefore, to identify two distinct classes of passions: affections, which are good passions, and passions, understood negatively. This distinction is present in Thomas’s own work on the subject, especially the negative use of the term “passion.”\textsuperscript{135} It is important to note

\textsuperscript{132} ST I-II.59.1
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{134} ST I-II 24.2 ad 3 - Ad tertium dicendum quod passions animae, inquantum sunt praeter ordinem rationis, inclinant ad peccatum, inquantum autem sunt ordinatae a ratione, pertinent ad virtutem.
\textsuperscript{135} See Gondreau on “defect,” The passions of Christ’s Soul in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, pp. 220ff. referring to ST I-II.41.1 “Properly speaking, passion is a movement of an appetitive power that uses a bodily organ to produce a modification. Most properly those movements are called passions that imply some harm or evil.” Proprie dicitur passio motus appetitivae virtutis habentis organum corporale, qui fit
that in identifying these two categories, the above principle holds; a passion is good when it proceeds from reason, and does not impinge the activities of the rational faculty. A passion is bad when it does not proceed from reason, and it moves out of the sensitive appetite into the rational faculty, altering one’s reason.

That Aquinas believes the ideal for humans is to have these sorts of passions proceed from the judgment of reason is best affirmed in his discussion of the passions of Christ’s soul. As Gondreau notes, “Because most scholarly studies on human affectivity in the thought of Thomas Aquinas have ignored the role of passion in Christ’s humanity, the notion of passion as defect has all but eluded the attention of Thomist scholars.”136 In fact, the discussion of passions in Christ is entitled “The defects of soul assumed by Christ.”137 The defects as identified include sin, the “fomes” of sin, ignorance, and for passions, pain, sorrow, fear, wonder, anger, with Thomas asking in what way Christ experienced these. He acknowledges first that the passions are in Christ differently than they are in humans. The differences result not from Christ being a different sort of

cum aliqua transmutatione corporali; et adhuc propriissime illi motus passiones dicuntur qui important aliquod nocumenum.

136 Gondreau 220 – This is especially important to mention, as it renders many accounts of the passions in Thomas Aquinas inadequate. This is true of the work of Diana Fritz Cates, whose work has become the standard interpretation of Aquinas on the emotions in recent years. While her work makes many great strides in improving our understanding of the emotions in Aquinas, it does not discuss the passions as they appear in Christ, and provides only a brief discussion of the passions as hindrances. As my dissertation suggests, these are not minor points in Thomas Aquinas: if Christ is the prime exemplar, and we become Christ-like through grace, then a description of the ideal forms of emotion ought to include a description of the emotions as Jesus experienced them. Furthermore, Cates overlooks the entirety of the religious life as described by Thomas, including those areas which suggest a slightly more combative view towards the passions than that suggested by Cates. This oversight leads me to argue for the priority of Gondreau’s treatment, which discusses these issues in greater detail. See Cates, Diana Fritz. 2009. *Aquinas on the Emotions: A Religious-Ethical Inquiry*. Moral Traditions Series. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press. See also, Miner, Robert C. 2009. *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions: A Study of Summa Theologiae : 1a2ae 22-48*. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press. Lombardo, Nicholas E. 2011. *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press.

137 ST III.15
human, but because Christ possessed the fullness of grace, as well as a special gift. Of the three ways in which the passions are in Christ differently than us, Thomas writes:

First, as regards the object, since in us these passions very often tend towards what is unlawful, but not so in Christ. Secondly, as regards the principle, since these passions in us frequently forestall the judgment of reason; but in Christ all movements of the sensitive appetite sprang from the disposition of the reason....Thirdly as regards the effect, because in us these movements, at times, do not remain in the sensitive appetite, but deflect the reason; but not so in Christ, since by His disposition the movements that are naturally becoming to human flesh so remained in the sensitive appetite that the reason was no wise hindered in doing what was right. In this discussion of the passions, Thomas is far more vocal on the susceptibility of the human than at any point in his earlier questions in the *secunda pars*. Our passions tend to be 1. Wrongly directed 2. Do not proceed from the judgment of reason 3. Move from the sensitive appetite into the reason, affecting its operation. In Christ, however, who is cited by Thomas as being the moral exemplar of humans, as will be discussed in detail below, these passions exist mainly as “propassions.” Thomas writes of the passion of sorrow in Christ:

138 The gift of the “conservation of powers.”
139 III.15.4 - Primo quidem, quantum ad objectum. Quia in nobis plerumque huiusmodi passions feruntur ad illicita, quod in Christo non fuit. Secundo, quantum ad principium. Quia huiusmodi passions frequenter in nobis praeventiit iudicium rationis, sed in Christo omnes motus sensitive appetites oriebantur secundum dispositionem rationis….Tertio, quantum ad affectum. Quia in nobis quandoque huiusmodi motus non sistunt in appetitu sensitive, sed trahunt rationem. Quod in Christo non fuit, quia motus naturaliter humanae carni convenientes sic ex eius dispositione in appetitu sensitive manebant quod ratio ex his nullo modo impediebatur facere quae conveniebant.
Now what is virtuous is man’s chief good, and what is sinful is man’s chief evil, since these pertain to reason which is supreme in man, yet there are certain secondary goods of man, which pertain to the body or to the exterior things that minister to the body. And hence in the soul of the wise man there may be sorrow in the sensitive appetite by his apprehending these evils; without this sorrow disturbing the reason. And in this way we are to understand that “whatsoever shall befall the just man, it shall not make him sad,” because his reason is troubled by no misfortune. And thus, Christ’s sorrow was a propassion, and not a passion.\(^\text{140}\)

In this instance, Thomas is using the Stoic distinction between passions and propassions, where a passion is understood as a movement of the sensitive appetite that impinges upon the activity of reason. A propassion, therefore, would have all of the bodily signs associated with a passion, and is felt in the sensitive appetite, but the feeling proceeds from a rational judgment and does not impede any future rational judgment. Thomas’s goal in affirming that Christ only felt propassions is an effort to do two things: 1. Preserve Christ’s sinlessness 2. Allow Christ to experience pain. As he affirmed above, when a passion is not ordered to reason it inclines to sinful behavior.\(^\text{141}\) And yet, given that Christ is without sin, his reason must have rightly ordered his passions at all times.

\(^{140}\) III.15.6 ad 2 - Quod est signum humilitatis propter duo. Primo quia qui genua flectit, quodam modo parvificat se, et quamvis autem honestum sit principale hominis bonum, et ihonestum principale hominis malum, quia haec pertinent ad ipsum rationem, quae est principalis in homine; sunt tamen quaedam secundaria hominis bona, quae pertinent ad ipsum corpus, vel ad exteriors res corpora deservientes. Et secundum hoc, potest in animo sapientis esse tristitia, quantum ad appetitum sensitivum, secundum apprehensionem huiusmodi malorum, non tamen ita quod ista tristitia perturbed rationem. Et secundum hoc etiam intelligitur quod non contristabit iustum quidquid ei acciderit, quia ex scilicet ex nullo accidente eius ratio perturbatur. Et secundum hoc tristitia fuit in Christo, secundum propassionem, non secundum passionem.

\(^{141}\) ST I-II 24.2 ad 3
At the same time, however, Christ must be able to experience pain and sorrow in the crucifixion, else the crucifixion loses its effect on humanity. 142

One final point is important to make concerning the passions of Christ, and this is the “control of the Divine power.” Thomas explains:

In us, the natural order is that the soul’s powers mutually impede each other, i.e. if the operation of one power is intense, the operation of the other is weakened. This is the reason why any movement whatsoever of anger, even if it be tempered by reason, dims the mind’s eye of him who contemplates. But in Christ, by control of the Divine power, “every faculty was allowed to do what was proper to it,” and one power was not impeded by another. Hence, as the joy of his mind did not impede the sorrow or pain of the inferior part, so, conversely, the passions of the inferior part no-wise impeded the act of reason. 143

Due to the special circumstances of Christ, namely his having the fullness of grace, the powers of his soul are conserved. This means, effectively, that Jesus, while suffering on the cross, would still be able to learn, meditate, or contemplate. His pain would not be lessened by meditation, nor would his contemplation be affected by pain. This leads to an important conclusion: if Christ is the exemplar of all human behavior, and if in Christ all passions “sprang from the disposition of reason,” 144 then it appears true that humans

142 ST III.15.5 ad 1
143 ST III.15.9 ad 3 - Ad tertium dicendum quod in nobis, secundum naturalem ordinem, potentiae animae mutuo se impediunt, ita scilicet quod, cum unius potentiae operatio fuerit intense, alterius operatio debilitetur. Et ex hoc procedit quod motus irae etiam si sit secundum rationem moderatus, utcumque impediet oculum animae contemplantis. Sed in Christo, per moderationem divinae virtutis, unicum potentiae permittebatur agree quod erat ei proprium, ita quod una potential ex alia non impediebatur. Et ideo, sicut delectionation mentis contemplantis non impediebat tristitiam vel dolorem inferioris partis, ita etiam e converse passions inferioris partis in nullo impediebant actum rationis.
144 ST III.15.4
should aspire to maintain the control of reason over their passions in the same way as Christ.

Humans, therefore, since they are left with the challenge to imitate Christ as the moral exemplar, seem called to maintain reason’s direction over the passions, and ensure that all passions are, in Stoic terms, propassions. In order for us to avoid sinning through our having a passion, Aquinas writes that the passion must proceed consequently from reason and observe the mean. This principle can be seen in an extended discussion of the history of thought concerning the passions, where Thomas describes first the Stoic position, then the Peripatetic, and argues that they do not in fact disagree except for their terminology. He states that the difference “is nevertheless, in reality, none at all, or but little, if we consider the intent of either school.” At the conclusion of this discussion, Thomas appears to affirm the Peripatetic position. He writes:

Hence it is evident that Cicero was wrong in disapproving (De Tusc. Quaest. iii, 4) of the Peripatetic theory of a mean in the passions, when he says that “every evil, though moderate, should be shunned... so this mean in the diseases or passions of the soul is not sound.” For passions are not called “diseases” or “disturbances” of the soul, save when they are not controlled by reason.

Aquinas’s attempt to smooth over the distinction between the Stoics and the Peripatetics stems from the differing conception of what a passion is in both schools. For the Stoics,

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145 ST I-II 24.2 - Ex quo patet quod Tullius, in eodem libro, Peripateticorum sententiam, qui approbabant mediocratatem passionem, inconvenienter improbat, dicens quod omne malum, etiam mediocre, vitandum est, nam sicut corpus, etiamsi mediocriter aegrum est, sanum non est; sic ista mediocritas morborum vel passionum animae, sana non est. Non enim passiones dicuntur morbi vel perturbationes animae, nisi cum carent moderatione rationis.

146 Ibid.
a passion is defined as a movement of the sensitive appetite that impinges or harms reason, as opposed to a propassion, which is a passion that does not leave the sensitive appetite. The Peripatetics, on the other hand, use the term “passion” to describe both of these things, and condemn those sorts of passions that impinge on the judgment of reason. Thus, in Aquinas’s interpretation, the result is the same; passions that do not “deflect” reason are acceptable, and therefore, Thomas approves primarily of propassions.

The implications of this are interesting for our understanding of the human person. It means that the human may rightly feel the full range of emotions, and, more to the point, they in fact should experience these feelings, following the example of Christ. A person may feel anger at injustice or sadness, sorrow after experiencing an evil action, and wonder at learning something incredible. Those passions, however, must proceed from a correct judgment about the matter, and be limited to one’s sensitive appetite. Human feeling is thus affirmed, but in a limited way. One may feel sad at the death of a loved one, but should not feel so sad that it impinges upon one’s thought and action. The feeling should remain a feeling, experienced bodily in the sensitive appetite, but should not cause intellectual misjudgments, as something that alters the operation of the mind.

An example of this is found in Thomas’s *Commentary on First Thessalonians*, where he writes concerning sorrow for the dead:

Therefore, he [Paul] forbids them to indulge in inordinate sorrow when he tells them, *you may not grieve*. It seems, though, that the Apostle views sorrow for the dead benignly. Nevertheless, he cautions them not to grieve overmuch, *as others.*
Someone who grieves for the dead does possess compassion. A person grieves first because of the dissolution of the frail body; for we ought to take care of the body for the sake of the soul. “O death, how bitter is the reminder of you to one who lives at peace among his possessions” (Sir. 41:1). Secondly, a person grieves because of the separation and departure which is so painful to friends. “Surely the bitterness of death is past” (1 Sam. 15:32). Thirdly, we mourn because death reminds us of our own sin. “For the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Fourthly, because death reminds us of our own death. “For this is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to heart” (Ec. 7:2). So moderate sorrow is permitted. “Weep less bitterly for the dead, for he has attained rest” (Sir. 22:11).

Thomas’s interpretation of this letter as approving of “moderate” sorrow follows from his writings on the passions. The concern is not that we avoid all passions; instead, our passions should be moderated according to reason and proceed from reason, for which Thomas provides the rationale in the four reasons why it is proper to feel ordinant sorrow at the death of a loved one.  

**Spiritual exercises for the will**

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148 A comparison between the Phaedo, especially the final scene of Socrates’ death, and the principles described here, is rather interesting. Socrates’ condemns those who cry and lament, sending them away, while it is repeatedly acknowledged how sad it is to be separated from a friend.
In this group of exercises, there are three categories. Unlike the first, the specific intent of these exercises is not developing the rational faculty, though reason may play a role in this pursuit. This category of spiritual exercises can be broken into three groups, based on the area of concern for the spiritual exercises: 1. Spiritual exercises for growth in a certain virtue 2. Avoidance of a certain vice 3. Redirection of the affections. As for the first of this category, growth in a certain virtue, there are several examples that can be provided. In one example cited earlier in this chapter, the practice of kneeling in prayer is a spiritual exercise intended to train the person in the virtue of humility.\footnote{Commentary on Ephesians 3:14 [#166]} By kneeling before God, the truth of one’s position before God is instilled and becomes habitually known by the individual. The action is physical; but through awareness of the meaning of the action, one may internalize humility before God. In another example, by practicing the connected virtues of justice, e.g. the virtue of religion, one increases the habit of justice insofar as religion is an aspect of justice.

As for practices related to the avoidance of a specific vice, Thomas provides an example in the \textit{De Perfectione}. He writes that, as an aid to the preservation of chastity, one should avoid the company of women, citing a mistranslation of Sirach 42:12: “Behold not everybody’s beauty; and tarry not among women. For from garments cometh a moth, and from a woman the iniquity of man.”\footnote{De Perfectione 9} In itself, spending time in the company of women is not, of course, a vice. But the monk, who knows “his own frailty”\footnote{Ibid.} should avoid “gazing at women, and especially at young ones,” in order to avoid the vice of lust. A person who practiced this as an aid to chastity would first have
sufficient attention turned to themselves so as to be aware of their vision, and then take
the necessary action to turn themselves away and distance themselves from any
accompanying lustful thoughts.

As noted above, Aquinas affirms certain “passions” as being good and essential
qualities. This is certainly the case, and can be clearly seen in Aquinas’s De Perfectione,
among other places. In this text, Aquinas teaches how we are called to direct all of our
affection towards God, such that there is nothing we do actually or habitually that does
not come out of the love of God. As Aquinas notes, Augustine and others have identified
three “good passions:” “As Augustine says (City of God xiv, 8), “for the three
passions”—desire, joy and fear—the Stoics held three eupatheias i.e. good passions in
the soul of the wise man, viz. for desire, will; for joy, delight; for fear, caution.”152 Of
these three, Aquinas regularly affirms the importance of desire or will, specifically
directing it to an appropriate end. As such, the specific exercises that accompany the
vows, and the vows themselves, are directed towards our holding proper affections
according to the order of charity. The vow of poverty limits our desires for material
things, the vow of chastity our desire for sex, a wife, or children, while the vow of
obedience limits our love of ourselves.

How one acquires these virtues: The Religious Life

Given that Thomas is a Dominican friar, it is not surprising that he might recommend
the religious life. Thomas is, of course, open to other forms of life, and quite often does
write with the laity in mind. It can be argued, as well, that the secunda pars of the

152 ST III.15.6 ad 2
Summa Theologiae asks the question of how we should live, and ends with the answer in the form of the treatise on the religious orders (II-II.179-189). As he writes:

Consequently, it is right that not only those who are practiced in the observance of the commandments should enter religion in order to attain yet greater perfection, but also those who are not practiced, in order to more easily avoid sin and attain to perfection. 153

Everybody, so it seems, should join the religious orders. Thomas does not argue this explicitly, nor would I argue that he necessarily intends that everyone should join a religious order; yet he clearly thinks that becoming a religious is one of the surest ways a person can show their devotion to God and avoid sin. This is, in part, a result of Thomas’s conviction that humanity is in need of healing from sin, and thus, using a metaphor from the early philosophical schools, he writes:

Now it has been stated that the perfection of charity is the end of the religious state. And the religious state is a school or exercise for the attainment of perfection, which men strive to reach by various practices (exercitiis), just as a physician may use various remedies in order to heal. 154

This is the end that Thomas’s short work De Perfectione Spiritualis Vitae seeks to explain in greater detail, and will be covered in chapter three in greater detail. In this section, I will cover what Thomas says about the religious life in the Summae.

153 ST II-II.189.1 – (Latin cited previously)
154 ST II-II.186.2 – sicut etiam medicus ad sanandum uti potest diversis medicamentis. – For the use of the Physician metaphor in Ancient sources, see Nussbaum, The Therapy of Desire, pp.316-319; Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject 97-99;
First, Thomas recognizes that there are different varieties of religious orders. He distinguishes them, however, by their ends and by their exercises. He writes:

Now there are various works of charity to which a man may devote himself; and there are also various kinds of exercise. Wherefore religious orders may be differentiated in two ways. First, according to the different things to which they may be directed: thus one may be directed to the lodging of pilgrims, another to visiting or ransoming captives. Secondly, there may be various religious orders according to the diversity of practices; thus in one religious order the body is chastised by abstinence in food, in another by the practice of manual labor, scantiness of clothes, or the like.\footnote{ST II-II.188.1 - Sunt autem diversa caritatis opera quibus homo vacare potest, sunt etiam diversi modi exercitiorum. Et ideo religiones distinguere possunt dupliciter. Uno modo, secundum diversitatem eorum ad quae ordinantur, sicut si una religio ordinetur ad peregrinos hospitio suscipiendos, et alia ad visitandos vel redimendos captivos. Alio modo potest esse diversitas religionum secundum diversitatem exercitiorum, puta quod in una religione castigatur corpus per abstinencias ciborum, in alia per exercerium operum manualium, vel per nuditatem, vel per aliquid aliud huiusmodi.}

In this passage, Thomas hints at the purpose of the exercises, and suggests one of the primary roles, namely chastising the body and its desires. This concept is central to understanding the main goal of the religious life for Thomas, namely the orientation of all of one’s affections towards God. He writes:

At the same time, too, some obstacles to acquiring beatitude are removed from man. For, since the perfect beatitude of man consists in the enjoyment of God alone, as shown above, necessarily every man is kept from participation in the true beatitude who cleaves as to an end to these things which are less than God.
But man was able to be misled into this clinging as to an end to things less than God in existence by his ignorance of the worthiness of his nature.  

The goal of the religious life, and of all human life, for that matter, is to love God to the greatest possible extent. This, Thomas suggests, is made possible in the most straightforward manner by the religious life because of the specific exercises it contains. The stated goal of Thomas’s exercises serves as a key distinction from some ancient sources, while it illustrates a clear connection with others. As he explains further in the *Summa Theologiae*:

As stated above, the religious state is an exercise and a school for attaining to the perfection of charity. For this, it is necessary that a man wholly withdraw his affections from worldly things; since Augustine says (Confessions X, 29), speaking to God: “Too little doth he love Thee, who loves anything with Thee, which he loveth not for Thee.”

This is a tremendously difficult standard, but it is one that Thomas will continuously repeat, especially in his *De Perfectione Spiritualis Vitae*, which will be discussed in the third chapter.
The challenge of redirecting affections is not an easy one, but Thomas provides methods for reaching towards this end. A bit further on, he explains how the redirection of the affections is undertaken:

This is accomplished through the removal of the obstacles to perfect charity by religious observances; and these obstacles are those things which attach man’s affections to earthly things. Now the attachment of man’s affections to earthly things is not only an obstacle to the perfection of charity, but sometimes leads to the loss of charity, when through turning inordinately to temporal goods man turns away from the immutable good by sinning mortally. Hence it is evident that the observances of the religious state, while removing the obstacles to perfect charity, remove also the occasions of sin: for instance, it is clear that fasting, watching, obedience and the like withdraw man from the sins of gluttony, lust, and all other manner of sins.\(^{159}\)

“Religious observances” take a number of forms, referring to any exercises done as part of the religious life or through the virtue of religion. These observances are further classified by Thomas, in that most of them fall under the heading of one of the three vows taken by members of religious orders. He writes:

All other religious observances are directed to the three aforesaid principal vows; for if any of them are ordained for the purpose of procuring a livelihood, such as

\(^{159}\) ST II-II.189.1 - …quod quidem fit inquantum per religionis observantias auferuntur impedimenta perfectae caritatis. Hae autem sunt quae implicat affectum hominis ad terrena. Per hoc autem quod affectus hominis implicatur ad terrena, non solum impeditur perfectio caritatis, sed interdum etiam ipsa caritas perditur, dum per inordinatam conversionem ad bona temporalia homo avertitur ab incommutabili bono mortaliter peccando. Unde patet quod religionis observantiae, sicut tollunt impedimenta perfectae caritatis, ita etiam tollunt occasiones peccandi, sicut patet quod per ieiunium et vigilias et obedientiam et alia huiusmodi, retrahit homo a peccatis gulae et luxuriae, et a quibuscumque aliis peccatis.
labor, questing, and so on, they are to be referred to poverty; for the safeguarding of which religious seek a livelihood by these means. Other observances whereby the body is chastised such as watching, fasting, and the like, are directly ordained for the observance of the vow of continence. And such religious observances as regard human actions whereby a man is directed to the end of religion, namely the love of God and his neighbor (such as reading, prayer, visiting the sick, and the like), are comprised under the vow of obedience that applies to the will, which directs its actions to the end according to the ordering of another person.\footnote{ST II-II.186.7 ad 2 - Ad secundum dicendum quod omnes aliae religionum observantiae ordinantur ad praedicta tria principalia vota. Nam si qua sunt instituta in religionibus ad procurandum victum, puta labor, mendicitias vel alia huiusmodi, referuntur ad paupertatem, ad cuius conservationem religiosi per hos modos victum suum procurant. Alia vero, quibus corpus maceratur, sicut vigiliae, ieiunia et si qua sunt huiusmodi, directe ordinantur ad votum continentiae observandum. Si qua vero sunt in religionibus instituta pertinentia ad humanos actus quibus aliquis ordinatur ad religionis finem, scilicet ad dilectionem Dei et proximi, puta lectio, oratio, visitatio infirmorum, vel si quid aliud est huiusmodi, comprehenduntur sub voto obedientiae, quod pertinet ad voluntatem, quae secundum dispositionem alterius suos actus ordinat in finem.}

In this way, Thomas proceeds with his argument from the general to the specific; the good live in a way that seeks beatitude, and all of the religious observances helpful in seeking beatitude fall under the three vows of the religious life. It is important to note that Thomas was engaged in a debate over the existence of the religious orders, particularly the mendicant orders, and whether or not they should be allowed involvement in the universities.\footnote{Thomas’s works on the matter include: \textit{Contra Impugnantes} from \~1255 to his later \textit{De Perfectione} from the early 1270s.} Thus there is a bit of an edge to his remarks concerning the validity of the religious order and the work they do. He continuously refers to the importance of the practices that aid in reaching perfection, as well as to the superiority of professed religious life.
The vows, as Thomas explains them, are particularly oriented towards the reorientation of the affections. The vow of poverty is, of course, directed towards the withdrawal of the affections from external goods. If a person does not own anything themselves, they cannot either love them inordinately or be worried about them. The vow of continence is directed towards the withdrawal of the affections from other persons, especially women and children, and the accompanying concerns. Thomas writes:

The religious state requires the removal of whatever hinders man from devoting himself entirely to God’s service. Now the use of sexual union hinders the mind from giving itself wholly to the service of God, and this for two reasons. First, on account of its vehement delectation, which by frequent repetition increases concupiscence, as also the philosopher observes (NE III, 12): and hence it is that the use of venery withdraws the mind from that perfect intentness on tending to God...Secondly because it involves man in solicitude for the control of his wife, his children, and his temporalities which serve for their upkeep.162

For the first two vows, the affections must be withdrawn from external things, namely material objects and familial relations. In Thomas’s description of the problematic nature of sex, it is noteworthy that he does not describe it as sinful, as perhaps Augustine in his less charitable moments might. Instead, Thomas condemns sex as preventing the mind

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162 ST II-II.186.4 - Respondeo dicendum quod ad statum religionis requiritur subtractio eorum per quae homo impeditur ne totaliter feratur ad Dei servitium. Usus autem carnalis copulae retraitit animum ne totaliter feratur in Dei servitium, dupliciter. Uno modo, propter vehementiam delectationis, ex cuius frequenti experientia augetur concupiscentia, ut etiam philosophus dicit, in III Ethic. Alio modo, propter sollicitudinem quam ingerit homini de gubernatione uxoris et filiorum, et rerum temporalium quae ad eorum sustentationem sufficient.
from tending to God properly, both by distracting through concupiscence and from worry over wife and child.

The third vow, obedience, would seem to be less clearly connected with something external, but there is a sense in which the vow of obedience still relates to something which is properly external. This is more clearly explicated in the De Perfectione, with its discussion of obedience as self-abandonment, but is also suggested in the Summa Theologiae. In speaking of whatever hinders the affections from being directed to God, Thomas writes:

Such hindrances are of three kinds. First, the attachment to external goods, which is removed by the vow of poverty; secondly, the concupiscence of sensible pleasures, chief among which are venereal pleasures, and these are removed by the vow of continence; thirdly, the inordinateness of the human will, and this is removed by the vow of obedience.\(^{163}\)

The external thing identified by Thomas is the “inordinate will,” the part of the soul that wills sinfully in contrast to the authority of reason. Thomas will further identify these three vows as the offering of one’s external goods, one’s body, and one’s soul, respectively. The vow of obedience is of particular interest, because in the discussion of this vow especially one important form of reflexivity is found in Thomas. Thomas is interested in having us hold our inordinate will as something separate from our “true” self. If the person is successful in this distinction, whenever sinful movements of the will

\(^{163}\) ST II-II.186.7 - Huiusmodi autem sunt tria. Primo quidem, cupiditas exteriorum bonorum. Quae tollitur per votum paupertatis. Secundum autem est concupiscencia sensibilium delectationum, inter quas praecluent delectationes venereae. Quae excluduntur per votum continentiae. Tertium autem est inordinatio voluntatis humanae. Quae excluditur per votum obedientiae. Similiter autem sollicitudinis saecularis inquietudo praecipueingeritur homini circa tria.
are felt, they can be ignored and dismissed. This, in part, is a product of the mental
eexercise of no longer identifying with the sinful desires one feels. The issue of reflexivity
will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

**How one acquires these virtues: Contemplation and intellectual growth**

No description of the spirituality of Aquinas is complete without mentioning its
intellectual aspect. This area of Thomas has been well treated previously, however, so I
will not dwell on it.¹⁶⁴ Instead, I will mention three important aspects of Thomas’s
thought that are informed by an academic orientation, and how these aspects are
supported by exercises. As indicated above, Thomas is engaged in debates over the
religious orders. Beyond this general debate about their existence, he also argues for the
validity and relative superiority of the Dominican order in particular. In one instance, he
writes:

> Accordingly we must say that the work of the active life is twofold. One proceeds
> from the fullness of contemplation, such as teaching and preaching....And this
> work is more excellent than simple contemplation. For even as it is better to
> enlighten than merely to shine, so is it better to give to others the fruits of one’s
> contemplation than merely to contemplate.¹⁶⁵

Thomas’s response clearly aligns with the goals of the Dominican order, namely to teach
and to preach, in distinction from other orders. Answers like this one explain why

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¹⁶⁴ See Mulchahey, Emery, Ryan (Fainche), some Thomist articles, and so on.
¹⁶⁵ ST II-II.188.6 – see also ST III.40.1 ad 2: As stated in the II-II.182.1 and 188.6, the contemplative life
is, absolutely speaking, more perfect than the active life, because the latter is taken up with bodily actions:
yet that form of active life in which a man, by preaching and teaching, delivers to others the fruits of his
contemplation, is more perfect than the life that stops at contemplation, because such a life is built on an
abundance of contemplation, and consequently such was the life chosen by Christ.
Thomas was so insistent in his refusal to join the Benedictine order in favor of the Dominicans; his choice was not incidental, but a reflection of his understanding of the ideal form of life.

Though Thomas accepts the importance of the active life, the contemplative life is still one of the main goals of human existence. For one, the contemplative life is bound to his understanding of happiness, about which he writes “Consequently, for perfect happiness the intellect needs to reach the very Essence of the First Cause. And thus it will have perfection through union with God as with that object, in which alone man’s happiness consists.”166 This definition restricts perfect happiness to after death, but Thomas will suggest that some “participation” in perfect happiness is possible in this life, and this is found in the activity of divine contemplation.167

In order for a person to be accomplished as a teacher and preacher, one must be exercised in study and practiced in contemplation. This is not an easy task, as Thomas will repeatedly explain, and requires an extended time period for one to become proficient. As Thomas writes in a question on symbols and faith:

The truth of faith is contained in Holy Writ, diffusely, under various modes of expression, and sometimes obscurely, so that, in order to gather the truth of faith from Holy Writ, one needs long study and practice, which are unattainable by all

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166 ST I-II.3.8 - Ad perfectam igitur beatitudinem requiritur quod intellectus pertingat ad ipsam essentiam primae cause. Et sic perfectionem suam habebit per unionem ad Deum sicut ad obiectum, in quo solo beatitudo hominis consistit, ut supra dictum est.
167 ST II-II.5.3
those who are required to know the truth of faith, many of whom have no time for study, being busy with other affairs.\textsuperscript{168} For Thomas, this justifies the use of symbols in teaching the truths of the faith, but more importantly, explains the process of formation for those who do have the time to learn directly from scripture. It is clear that Thomas and the Dominican order as a whole were experimenting with different didactic methods, trying to find a more effective and less confusing pedagogy than Peter Lombard’s \textit{Sentences}.\textsuperscript{169} Further, this study is not simply for the sake of increasing knowledge, but as Mark Jordan notes, serves a double goal: Thomas begins the Roman \textit{Lectura} by announcing that teaching is governed by a double intention, the demonstration of truth and the acquisition of blessedness. Every other science is typed to one half or another of this intention. Some seek only the cognition of truth, while others seek the means to blessedness. Only theology “completely contains and teaches” both the speculative and the practical.\textsuperscript{170}

For Thomas, the study of scripture and of God does not contain discrete areas of concern. Instead, the process of studying is a matter of moral formation, and moral formation is a prerequisite to the increase of knowledge.

\textsuperscript{168} ST II-II.1.9 ad 1 - Ad primum ergo dicendum quod veritas fidei in sacra Scriptura diffuse continetur et variis modis, et in quibusdam obscure; ita quod ad eliciendum fidei veritatem ex sacra Scriptura requiritur longum studium et exercitium, ad quod non possunt pervenire omnes illi quibus necessarium est cognoscere fidei veritatem, quorum plerique, alis negotiis occupati, studio vacare non possunt. \\
\textsuperscript{169} Cf. discussion of this topic in Mulchahey and Jordan. \\
\textsuperscript{170} \textit{Rewritten Theology} 123
Thus Thomas does maintain the priority of the practice of contemplation, as both the goal, and in the Aristotelian sense, the activity that is most divine for humans. As he writes in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*:

If then the final happiness of man does not consist in those exterior advantages which are called goods of fortune, nor in goods of the body, nor in goods of the soul in its sentient part, nor in the intellectual part in respect of the moral virtues, nor in the virtues of the practical intellect, called art and prudence, it remains that final happiness of man consists in the contemplation of truth. This act alone in man is proper to him, and is in no way shared by any other being in this world.\(^{171}\)

Contemplation of the divine is also the product of our love for God, the increase of which, as has been explained, is the purpose of the spiritual life. As Thomas writes, “We are urged to the vision of the first principle, namely God, by the love thereof; wherefore Gregory says (Homily 14 *in Ezekiel*) that ‘the contemplative life tramples on all cares and longs to see the face of its creator.’”\(^{172}\) This is, in fact, the way Thomas opens his *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*: “All those who think rightly recognize that the end of life is found in the contemplation of God.”\(^{173}\) The practice of contemplation, however, is not simply a matter of thinking. Instead, it requires a great deal of preparation, not only in study and intellectual exercise, but also exercise in the moral life. Thomas writes:

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\(^{171}\) SCG 3.37.1 - Si igitur ultima felicitas hominis non consistit in exterioribus, quae dicuntur bona fortunae; neque in bonis corporis; neque in bonis animae quantum ad sensitivam partem; neque quantum ad intellectivam secundum actum moralium virtutum; neque secundum intellectuales quae ad actionem pertinent, scilicet artem et prudentiam: relinquitur quod ultima hominis felicitas sit in contemplatione veritas.

\(^{172}\) ST II-II 180.1 ad 2

\(^{173}\) Qtd. in Torrell, *Christ and Spirituality*, 7
I answer that, the active life may be considered from two points of view. First, as regards the attention to and practice of external works: and thus it is evident that the active life hinders the contemplative, in so far as it is impossible for one to be busy with external action, and at the same time give oneself to Divine contemplation. Secondly, the active life may be considered as quieting and directing the internal passions of the soul; and from this point of view the active life is a help to the contemplative, since the latter is hindered by the inordinateness of the internal passions. Hence Gregory says (Moralia vi, 37):

“Those who wish to hold the fortress of contemplation must first of all train in the camp of action. Thus after careful study they will learn whether they no longer wrong their neighbor, whether they bear with equanimity the wrongs their neighbors do to them, whether their soul is neither overcome with joy in the presence of temporal goods, nor cast down with too great a sorrow when those goods are withdrawn. On this way they will know when they withdraw within themselves, in order to explore spiritual things, whether they no longer carry with them the shadows of things corporeal, or, if they follow them, whether they prudently drive them away.”

174 ST II-II.182.3 - Respondeo dicendum quod vita activa potest considerari quantum ad duo. Uno modo, quantum ad ipsum studium et exercitium exteriorum actionum. Et sicut manifestum est quod vita activa impedit contemplationem, inquantum impossibile est quod aliquis simul occupetur circa exteriore actiones, et divinae contemplationi vacet. Alio modo potest considerari vita activa quantum ad hoc quod interiores animae passiones componit et ordinat. Et quantum ad hoc, vita activa adiuvat ad contemplationem quae impeditur per inordinationem interiorum passionum. Unde Gregorius dicit, in VI Moral., cum contemplationis arcem aliqui tenere desiderant, prius se in campo per exercitium operis probent, ut sollicite sciant si nulla iam mala proximitis irrogant, si irrogata a proximitis aequanimiter portant, si obiectis bonis temporalibus nequaquam mens laetitia solvitur, si substructis non nimio maerore sauciantur. Ac deinde perpendant si, cum ad semetipos introrsus redeunt, in eo quod spiritualia rimantur, nequaquam secum rerum corporalium umbras traheunt, vel fortasse tractas manu discretionis abigunt.
Hence the work of the active life conduces to the contemplative, by quelling the interior passions which give rise to the phantasms whereby contemplation is hindered.

For Thomas, therefore, there is no contemplative life without a moral active life. This further reinforces the purpose of the religious life and its accompanying vows, in that they provide suitable moral preparation for the ordering of the “internal passions,” rendering persons capable of contemplation without distraction. The end goal of contemplation of God for the human is thus greatly served by the spiritual exercises that Thomas recommends; it is, in fact, impossible to attain to the end Thomas recommends without the exercises that accompany and prepare one for the practice of contemplation.

c) What the ideal person looks like

Moving on to the third aspect of an ethics of virtue, I will now attempt to provide some description of the ideal person for Thomas. This effort is complicated in that Thomas does not provide a summary or description of the ideal person in the form of the sage or the philosopher; instead, Thomas gives as the primary exemplar the figure of Christ. He writes, in describing the reasons for Christ’s incarnation:

Fourthly, with regard to well-doing, in which He set us an example; hence Augustine says in a sermon (xxii de Temp.): “Man who might be seen was not to be followed; but God was to be followed, Who could not be seen. And therefore God was made man, that He Who might be seen by man and Whom man might follow, might be shown to man.”

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175 ST III.1.2 - Quarto, quantum ad rectam operationem, in qua nobis exemplum se praebuit. Unde Augustinus dicit, in quodam sermone de navitate domini, homo sequendus non erat, qui videri poterat, Deus sequendus erat, qui videri non poterat. Ut ergo exhiberetur homini et qui ab homine videretur, et quem homo sequeretur, Deus factus est homo.
That Aquinas accepts Augustine’s suggestion that “man who might be seen was not to be followed” is particularly interesting. As shown above, the acquisition of virtue is accomplished through “words and examples,” as was quoted above. And yet, as Thomas will repeat once more, though humans provide some examples, the primary example is still Christ. He writes:

Of course, his examples and words of whose goodness we have the more solid opinion induce us the more effectively to virtue. But an infallible opinion of goodness about any pure man was never tenable—even the holiest of men, one finds, have failed in some things. Hence it was necessary for man to be solidly grounded in virtue to receive from God made human both the teaching and the examples of virtue. For this reason our Lord himself says: “I have given you example that as I have done to you do also.”

The example of Christ holds priority for another reason: our likeness to God. For Torrell, this is one of the key points of Thomas’s spirituality, and provides the foundation to all of Thomas’s work on that subject. He writes:

Accordingly, we find in Thomas a doctrine of Christological exemplarity that is developed along two lines. In Christian experience, the most immediately accessible is moral exemplarity. It emphasizes both Christ as the model of virtue to be imitated and the human being’s efforts to cooperate with God through the grace that he or she has been given....The second reference to Christ as primary model is ontological exemplarity. It lays the stress on the new creature fashioned by God in the image of the Image. This occurs by means of grace: grace comes

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176 SCG 4.54.7 – (Latin cited at n.103).
from God and hence conforms us to him, but it also reaches through Christ and hence is Christo-conforming.¹⁷⁷

To become Christ-like is thus the primary goal of Thomas’s ethics and spirituality. Christ is the only trustworthy exemplar, and further, he is the only mediator of God’s grace, through which it is possible to become more like God.

As Torrell and others have suggested, deification is an important concept for Thomas. Though the use of this term is not overabundant, it is found with sufficient regularity to affirm that he holds this doctrine.¹⁷⁸ More importantly, it underlies the entire theological worldview of Thomas. He writes, again in discussion of the reasons for Christ’s incarnation:

Fifthly, with regard to the full participation of the Divinity, which is the true bliss of man and end of human life; and this is bestowed upon us by Christ’s humanity; for Augustine says in a sermon (xiii de Temp.): “God was made man, that man might be made God.”¹⁷⁹

Augustine there repeats the axiom made famous by Athanasius in his De Incarnatione. Though this is perhaps traditionally understood as a theological principle, it in fact underlies all of Thomas’s ethics, an intuitive fact given that Thomas did not understand ethics, spirituality, and theology to be discrete spheres. In order to become most like God, Thomas identifies a single activity. He writes:

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 120-121
¹⁷⁸ See Fainche Ryan, Anna Williams, Torrell, et al.
¹⁷⁹ ST III.1.2 - Quinto, quantum ad plenam participationem divinitatis, quae vere est hominis beatitudo, et finis humanae vitae. Et hoc collatum est nobis per Christi humanitatem, dicit enim Augustinus, in quodam sermone de Nativ. Domini, factus est Deus homo, ut homo fieret Deus.
I answer that, since man is said to be in the image of God by reason of his intellectual nature, he is the most perfectly like God according to that in which he can best imitate God in his intellectual nature. Now the intellectual nature imitates God chiefly in this, that God understands and loves himself.\textsuperscript{180}

This twofold activity of understanding and loving God determines the course of human activity, and is best exemplified, according to Thomas, in the activity of contemplation. Because contemplation is the highest activity, our lives should be ordered towards ensuring that contemplation is possible and effective.

Though Thomas here commends the contemplative way of life, it is well known that Thomas was not a withdrawn quietist. Instead, as a member of the Dominican order, he was committed to sharing the fruits of contemplation with all persons. In describing the perfection of fraternal charity, he writes:

The third degree consists in enriching our neighbor with such spiritual benefits as are supernatural and exceed human reason….Such benefits are instruction in divine truth, direction to God, and the spiritual communion of the sacraments....He who bestows upon others gifts of this nature practices a singular perfection of brotherly love; for it is by means of these gifts that man attains to union with his last End, in which consists his highest perfection.\textsuperscript{181}

\textsuperscript{180} ST I.93.4 - Respondeo dicendum quod, cum homo secundum intellectualem naturam ad imaginem Dei esse dicatur, secundum hoc est maxime ad imaginem Dei, secundum quod intellectualis natura Deum maxime imitari potest. Imitatur autem intellectualis natura maxime Deum quantum ad hoc, quod Deus seipsum intelligit et amat.

\textsuperscript{181} De Perfectione 14 - Sunt autem alii qui bona spiritualia et divina supra naturam et rationem existentia proximis largiuntur: scilicet doctrinam divinorum, manudactionem ad Deum, et spiritualium sacramentorum communicationem…Huiusmodi autem bonorum collatio ad singularem quandam
Once more, the exemplar of this form of life is Christ. Thomas writes:

As stated in II-II 182.1; II-II 188.6, the contemplative life is, absolutely speaking, more perfect than the active life, because the latter is taken up with bodily actions: yet that form of active life in which a man, by preaching and teaching, delivers to others the fruits of his contemplation is more perfect than the life that stops at contemplation, because such a life is built on an abundance of contemplation, and consequently such was the life chosen by Christ.\(^{182}\)

The Christ-like, deiform person in this life is therefore one who contemplates and shares the fruits of their contemplation, bringing others into a stronger love of God.

This characterization of his theology matches well with descriptions of his work as a whole. Take, for example, Thomas F. Ryan’s description of the end product of academic formation: “Thomas seeks to produce students who not only preach well but also model a wise, prayerful—indeed Christ-like life, a life in which words and actions flow and are expressive of a heart aligned with God.”\(^{183}\) As Ryan affirms, and as this chapter has hopefully demonstrated, Thomas is concerned with the formation of the whole person, from academic to spiritual to moral, and provides exercises which detail this process.

**Conclusion**

Returning to the opening of this chapter, the stated goal was to provide a description of the virtue ethics of Thomas. To do so, using Hibbs’ description of virtue ethics as a

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\(^{182}\) ST III.40.1 ad 2 - Ad secundum dicendum quod, sicut in secunda parte dictum est, vita contemplativa simpliciter est melior quam activa quae occupatur circa corporales actus, sed vita activa secundum quam aliquis praedicando et docendo contemplata aliis tradit, est perfectior quam vita quae solum contemplatur, quia talis vita praesupponit abundantiam contemplationis. Et ideo Christus talem vitam elegit.

\(^{183}\) Ryan, *in Psalmos* 144
frame, a description of the list of virtues, how these virtues are acquired, and what the
ideal person looks like was provided. The most important of these areas for Thomas is
certainly the description of the ideal person. The identification of the ideal human with
Jesus sets an elevated goal for those human persons intent on their end in God. But while
this is an arduous goal, the provision of grace by God makes it possible, and the
preservation of grace becomes one of the principal goals of the spiritual life. In order to
preserve grace, and increase opportunities for its infusion, one must avoid sin, something
which is accomplished by living according to the direction of reason in all aspects of
one’s life.
Chapter 3 - Reflexivity

In this chapter, I will discuss reflexivity in Thomas Aquinas. The concept of reflexivity, the relationship of the self to itself, is a central concern of philosophic and theological thinking, mainly because of its role in moral development. To become a moral person, one must first be aware of his or her thoughts, actions, and intentions, such that they have the chance to guide them rightly. In this way, a person “watches” these thoughts and actions, creating a relationship of self to self. As a foundation for this chapter, I will discuss the use of this concept, and the use of the Delphic precept “know thyself,” in Hadot and Foucault. I will then proceed to discuss reflexivity in Thomas Aquinas, and suggest some of the salient similarities and differences between classical thinkers and Aquinas on this matter.

For Thomas, the relationship of self to self is dependent on the notion of the movement of the person towards something, namely increased relationship with God on the path to perfection. This relationship is accomplished through the imitatio Christi, the increase of grace, and the ordering of the soul and body according to reason. The most salient example of reflexivity is found in Thomas’s treatment of the passions and affections of the soul, which were discussed in the previous chapter. He suggests that within the person, drawing from Pauline language, there is an “old self” and a “new self.” The old self is identified with the “flesh,” where flesh does not mean bodily material, but rather sin, sinful desires, and disordered affections. He also will identify the old self with the sensitive aspect of the human, at least when that aspect is disordered. The new self, on the other hand, is modeled on Christ, and is identified with the imago dei. Thus, it is
identified with the mind, or the intellectual nature of the human. There is a relationship, therefore, between the imago dei within oneself and the sensitive aspect of the soul with its concupiscences and passions. The movements of this sensitive aspect, furthermore, can stand in opposition to the desires or judgments of the mind, creating a sort of internal strife within the person.

Aquinas’s repeated encouragement to put away the old self represents a key feature of the reflexive understanding of the self. Aquinas intends that the human person a) be aware of one’s thoughts, passions, and the movements of one’s will b) be able to determine whether they are sinful or disordered and c) dismiss them as not being part of the new self, which is the aspect of the person one should be committed to. Furthermore, Thomas recommends that we undertake practices that dispose us to holding certain affections, and prevent us from having sinful desires. In this way, it is possible for persons to distance themselves from the sinful, unredeemed aspect of themselves, and instead turn fully to the aspect being sanctified by grace.

The relationship of old self to new self is an example of a reflexive self-relation. But, it is important to note, that Thomas is not employing a modern notion of “self,” where self means the total sum of a person’s actions, thoughts, abilities, and so on. Instead, the old self is to be “put away,” meaning that a person should not identify with their sinful desires; that is, a person is not identified as these sinful desires, but only as truly acting in accordance with their self when acting correctly. A person should consider themselves to be their mind, where the mind is understood as intellect and will,
in accordance with reason, this because a person is the image of God; and thus, a person is that part of the soul conformed to Christ.

Thomas also does not recommend “self-knowledge” in the modern sense. For Thomas, habits cannot be known unless they are in act, so there is no call to extended self analysis of thoughts, as if those thoughts were constitutive of a “self.” The human is never static in Thomas’s mind; habits are always increasing or decreasing, whether through grace or activity, and thus a person changes constantly. In fact, this person, if they are Christian and pursuing an ideal form of life, is in the process of being formed in the divine image.

This chapter is a description of how a person can come to “know thyself” in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Thomas, as far as I have been able to find, does not use the phrase “nosce teipsum” at any point in his work. Nonetheless, self-knowledge (in a certain sense) is an undeniably important aspect of his thought. In order to highlight this aspect, and in particular the relationship within which the knowledge of self is derived, I will highlight some of the spiritual exercises Thomas recommends as a means of improving oneself morally. I will provide a description of the concept of self-knowledge, and then of the concept of reflexivity.

Following this discussion, I will then provide an overview of Foucault’s treatment of Christian reflexivity and self-knowledge, in particular discussing his contention that Christian self-knowledge bears a close resemblance to modern practices of the self, and that they represent, to a certain extent, a divergence from Classical practices. Foucault

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184 Or “scito teipsum,” the title of Abelard’s ethics. For Abelard, self-knowledge consists in knowing the intention behind one’s actions, a point of emphasis which matches with his suggestion that all that matters to God’s judgment is our good or bad intention.
argues that the Christian is interested in an “objective” knowledge of the self, as well as a total self-renunciation resulting from this increase in self-knowledge. I will argue that, for Thomas, Foucault’s description does not apply, and that Thomas can be distinguished from those figures that Foucault focused his work on.\footnote{It is important to note that I do not endorse Foucault’s particular reading of figures from the antique period. A number of studies forthcoming and already extant have suggested there are a number of problems with the conclusions Foucault draws. I am interested in the questions Foucault is asking, and asking them about the work of Aquinas, and not endorsing or rejecting Foucault’s reading of those earlier texts. Furthermore, it is unlikely that Foucault would presume his description of antique thinkers to simply hold over for those in the medieval period.}

After the description of Foucault’s work, I will proceed to the question of self-knowledge and reflexivity in Aquinas. Answering this question begins with a description of the formal question of the soul’s knowledge of itself in Thomas; in particular, I argue that Thomas’s description of the soul only being able to know itself as it is in act clashes with Foucault’s description of Christian self-knowledge as an examination of “hidden” thoughts.\footnote{Foucault finds this form of reflexivity in an earlier form in figures like John Cassian. See Foucault’s “The Battle for Chastity.”}

Finally, I proceed to a discussion of reflexivity in Thomas Aquinas. I argue that, in Thomas’s description, reflexivity in a moral person is never simply a relationship of the self to itself, but rather a relationship of God → person → that person’s thoughts and actions → the actions of others. Thomas intends that person be solicitous in watching their thoughts and actions and directing them to the proper activity; at the same time, he acknowledges the limits of reason in maintaining a constant vigilance, and thus encourages persons to chastise their “concupiscences,” and thereby, with the reduction in sinful desires, it becomes easier to avoid sin. Solicitude is accomplished, for one, by emphasizing that a human is most their rational nature, and not their sensitive nature, but
also, by suggesting the importance of holy fear. Holy fear is the ordinate fear of God, the knowledge that God is aware of all our thoughts and actions, and thus we should be directing them rightly. Likewise, solicitude extends beyond the self, in that when Thomas encourages us to be solicitous over ourselves, he often encourages us to watch our neighbors as well, and to encourage them to avoid sinful behavior.

And further, returning to one of the main elements of Foucault’s description of Christian reflexivity, I argue that Thomas is not interested in an “objective” knowledge of the self, or approaching the self for any “hidden” knowledge. Thomas’s account of reflexivity is interested rather in the immediate knowledge and control of present activities. Though contrition for past sins is present in Aquinas, it is not a point of emphasis. Instead, the new man, one reformed in Christ, is one who has put past sins and practices behind him, and is instead focused on maintaining the state of perfection he finds himself in. This requires attention to the self and awareness of present activity; but it does not require any sort of discovery of hidden desires. It requires relationship with God and due fear of God, and an awareness of the practices of others, but it does not encourage any primitive form of psychoanalysis for one’s self or one’s community. Self-knowledge is only possible, for Thomas, as the soul is in act, and thus hidden things are only known as they are manifested, and thus uncovered, something which does not occur by interrogating the self. Finally, Thomas is not interested in developing a “self” in the modern sense of the word. Thomas is intent on bringing the person closer to the true definition of a human person, which, for him, is a person made to the image of God renewed by grace and actions in alignment with reason.
**Know Thyself**

Reflection on the *gnothi seauton* ("know thyself") is one of the defining features of western philosophy. Pierre Hadot writes, “Although it is difficult to know the original meaning of this formula, this much is clear; it invites us to establish a relationship of the self to the self, which constitutes the foundation of every spiritual exercise.” Although the original meaning is perhaps lost, it can likely be agreed that it did not have the range of philosophical meanings it came to possess later in its history. Hadot offers three of these philosophical meanings:

To know oneself means, among other things, to know oneself *qua* non-sage: that is, not as a *sophos*, but as a *philo-sophos*, someone *on the way toward* wisdom. Alternatively, it can mean to know oneself in one’s essential being; this entails separating that which we *are not* from that which we *are*. Finally, it can mean know oneself in one’s true moral state: that is, to examine one’s conscience.

As will be shown below, Thomas’s reflexivity includes each of these meanings in the form of wayfarer, new self, and the governance of reason. The Christian is called to know himself as one on the way towards God, i.e. wayfarer, one on the way towards perfection. This means that though a person may be in a state of “perfection,” so long as humans remain enfleshed with an earthly body, there is still a chance or even likelihood of sin. Thus, vigilance is required to preserve oneself from sin. In regards to the second

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188 Ibid.
189 Where “governance” is not understood as “dictatorship.” That the human is a soul-body composite, and that there are reciprocal influences throughout the whole of this composite, is presumed in this dissertation, and has been fruitfully discussed elsewhere. Nonetheless, any practical account of how a human ought to act necessarily must emphasize the intellectual aspect, the intellect being the first principal of all human actions.
part of Hadot’s definition, the person is called to know himself as the new man, and to put off the old man, which is accomplished by separating one’s identity\textsuperscript{190} from the concupiscences of the flesh. This new man is identified with the person of Christ, and with increasing in the likeness of God. Finally, for the third aspect, Thomas will emphasize that true human nature is that which accords with reason, and for a person to act out of accord with reason is to be controlled by something outside of that person. To act in accord with reason requires the constant vigilance of reason and its ordering of our thoughts and actions. To this end, Thomas describes the importance of watching ourselves and being aware of our thoughts and actions, such that it is possible to direct them rightly.

\textit{What is Reflexivity?}

Reflexivity is a broad term that covers self-knowledge, understanding of true self, self-examination and knowledge, practices of self-control, abandonment or denial of self, and so on; it refers essentially to any instance where a person observes, analyzes, or deliberates with an aspect or aspects of their own person. In Foucault’s lectures \textit{The Hermeneutics of the Subject}, he identifies three major forms of reflexivity, each corresponding to a specific period in history. For Foucault, a central point of distinction in the varieties of reflexivity is the difference in the understanding of knowledge and its relation to the person. Beyond their use of knowledge, different forms of reflexivity represent different self understandings; each form of reflexivity hinges on an

\textsuperscript{190} I use the term identity with some hesitation, recognizing that it is not found in Thomas according to this usage. What is meant by the modern usage is not at all foreign to Thomas, however; Aristotle employs the concept of “true self” in the \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, which Thomas commented on, in that instance to refer to the intellect.
understanding of what the person’s “true self” is in relation to the universe. The three forms are schematically offered by Foucault as follows:  

1) Memory – “The subject is modified since in the act of memory, he brings about his liberation; his return to his homeland and to his own being.” In this form of reflexivity, the philosopher “remembers” his origins and original location in the universe, which provides the grounding for his identity. It is, of course, identified with Plato and Platonic thought, but will also be present in Christian thinkers, though in a modified form. For Christians, what is remembered is not that we were once souls that have fallen to earth (though Origen is perhaps an exception), but rather that humans were made in the image of God, an image which is now covered over by sin.

2) Meditation – “This form of reflexivity carries out the test of what one thinks and acts as he thinks, with the objective of the subject’s transformation and constitution as...an ethical subject of the truth.” Foucault identifies this form of reflexivity primarily with Stoic thinkers, but also as the dominant form of reflexivity throughout the medieval period. Foucault’s characterization of this form is, however, a bit incomplete, in that his description emphasizes only the relation of self to self, and not what this relationship is fixed or grounded upon. Thus, by way of example, the Stoic’s relationship of self to self does not stop with the self, as if the person were able to determine their proper mode of living on their own. Instead, the person examines their self with a view towards incorporating the understandings derived from physics, ethics, and logic, and their relation to the divine, thus transforming their manner of

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life and their perspective towards reality. Meditation as a form of reflexivity is quite often founded upon a concept of divinization, of becoming like God.

3) Method – “Method is a form of reflexivity that makes it possible to fix the certainty that will serve as a criterion for all possible truth, and which, starting from this fixed point will advance from truth to truth up to the organization and systemization of an objective knowledge.” This third form of reflexivity is identified in particular with enlightenment thinkers and with Descartes. Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum* is understood as providing a certain starting point, one which provides a basis for all further knowledge. The self is approached with the goal of deriving a scientific, objective understanding of what it is.

It is important to note that Foucault’s description of the forms of reflexivity is offered by him as a sketch or broad outline, and that there is a fair degree of overlap among each of these forms in the course of history.

Despite his hesitance, Foucault is clear that there is a significant rupture between the first two and the third. Most importantly, this distinction lies in the perspective one takes to approach the self. Instead of remembering what one is or examining the actions of thoughts of the self for the purpose of moral action, the final form attends to the self as an object of knowledge, that is, something to be studied and understood. When the Stoic examines the self and its desires and actions, it is not for the purpose of coming to a concrete understanding of the person, such that the sum of human faculties, desires and actions constitute a person “me.” Instead, the Stoic analyzes thoughts, habits, and desires for the purpose of becoming a moral person. The distinction can be seen further in the
response to the imperative, “know thyself.” The Platonist “knows thyself” when they remember that they are a soul in the process of returning to the divine, and distinguishes this self from those thoughts and actions which do not accord with the true self. The Stoic “knows thyself” when they vigilantly analyze their thoughts and actions to ensure that they accord with and proceed from reason. The “method” thinker “knows thyself” when they are able to provide an objective account of the self as an object of knowledge; that is, one might say, I am a person who has these desires, has accomplished these things, holds this role in society, and is all these things in combination.

**Reflexivity and models of the person**

The distinction between these two types of thinking is essential to understanding both reflexivity in pre-modern thinkers in general, and the thought of Aquinas in particular. For Aquinas, self-understanding is predicated on the proper understanding of oneself as a rational soul made in the image of God, with the possibility, through grace, of recovering the original clarity of that image. Aquinas’s model is not predicated on any form of unique self-realization; in fact, self-realization in Aquinas is to realize oneself as a soul that desires only God, and a denial of identity with those aspects of the person which desire proximate, sinful things.

These two models highlight an essential difference in reflexivity from the pre-modern to the modern. In our modern notion of the self, it is possible to speak of the self as something entirely independent from outside concerns, that is, a self can only be in relationship to itself. In the pre-modern era, however, there is never truly a place where
the self is only in relationship to itself. For Aquinas, the self is always in relation to the world, to other persons, and to God. As he writes in the *Summa Theologiae*:

For the first thing that occurs to a man who has discretion, is to think of himself (*seipso cogitet*), and to direct other things to himself as to their end, since, the end is the first thing in the intention. Therefore, this is the time when man is bound by God’s affirmative precept, which the Lord expressed to by saying: “Turn ye to Me...and I will turn to you.”

In this passage, Aquinas speaks of the moral development of the person. And the “first thing” that occurs to a person once they achieve a sufficient stage of “discretion” is to consider the self and direct it suitably. The proper direction, Aquinas suggests, is that a person be directed to God, after which, God will respond in turn. This is the case, as well, for Seneca, as Strozier writes:

Seneca distinguishes between mind and body, although the animus, the seat of reason and judgment, regulates desires and the impulse toward action and thus the relation to the world. Reason and mind constitute the form of human nature, and self-reflexivity as well, as the ability of consciousness to see itself in relation the world or turned towards its own resources. The self is placed between itself and the world.

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192 *ST* I-II.89.6 ad 3, with reference to Zechariah 1:3 -- Primum enim quod occurrit homini discretionem habenti est quod de seipso cogitet, ad quem alia ordinet sicut ad finem, finis enim est prior in intentione. Et ideo hoc est tempus pro quo obligatur ex Dei praecepto affirmativo, quod dominus dicit, *convertimini ad me, et ego convertar ad vos*, Zachariae I.

In Strozier’s description of Seneca, the self takes up a relationship not only with the self, but with the world below and the divine reason above. These external aspects are an essential part of self-relation in Seneca, and no person is complete without their context in the cosmos as a whole, including their immediate relations. The purpose of reflexivity, therefore, is not simply that a person becomes “self-aware.” Instead, what is developed is a mode of living that draws greater attention to the connections and relationships of a person’s life, and how these impact action. The “external” parties in a reflexive relationship are found in both the world, that is in persons, communities, and so on, but also the divine, in the influence of divine reason or in the constant presence of God.

Foucault’s explanation of Christian reflexivity and self-knowledge

Providing a description of Foucault’s thoughts on Christian forms of reflexivity is complicated by the fact of his death before the completion of a comprehensive project on the topic. The works available do not represent a sustained treatment, but rather hints and suggestions in articles and classroom lectures, most of which lack the full weight of substantiation. Nonetheless, Foucault is consistent in his presentation of the nature of Christian reflexivity, and his understanding of the techniques of the self employed in Christianity from its earliest periods through to the present day.

For Foucault, Christianity is a confessional religion centered on two types of confession. The first is the confession of a certain truth, namely the dogmas of the Christian religion. The second is the confession of oneself, namely the necessity of providing an account of one’s temptations and habits of sinful thought, all of which must
be confessed to others. These two forms of confession are interrelated, as Foucault explains:

A Christian needs the light of faith when he wants to explore himself, and, conversely, his access to the truth cannot be conceived of without the purification of the soul...In Christianity, these two types of truth obligation, the one concerned with access to light and the other concerned with discovering truth inside oneself, have always kept a relative autonomy – even after Luther and Protestantism.

Foucault’s contention is that there is a distinction in these two types of confession which keeps them functionally separate; that is, though a person needs the light of faith to see within his self, the movement of understanding faith and understanding oneself are separate movements in different directions. In describing the thought of Augustine, he writes:

Libido is the result of one’s will when it goes beyond the limits God originally set for it. As a consequence, the means of the spiritual struggle against libido do not consist, as with Plato, in turning one’s eyes upwards and memorizing the reality one has previously known and forgotten. The spiritual struggle consists, on the contrary, in turning one’s eyes continuously downward or inward in order to decipher, among the movements of the soul, which one comes from the libido.

The movement of self-confession, therefore, is an internally focused movement for Foucault, one which can be discussed separately from the task of learning about God. He distinguishes this movement from that seen in Platonic philosophy and Buddhist thought.

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195 Ibid., 15.
First, he argues that Plato’s philosophy counters libido not by turning within and providing a description of the self and its desires, then renouncing them, but by remembering that the true self is the soul in relation to the One. Furthermore, Christianity, he argues, does not hold the self to be an illusory thing, as in the case of Buddhism. Instead, Christian practices of the self are committed to uncovering the true self, which is the self of hidden desires and sexual longings. He writes:

I would also like to underline that the Christian discovery of the self does not reveal the self as an illusion....This task has two objectives. First, there is the task of clearing up all illusions, temptations and seductions that can occur in the mind and discovering the reality of what is going on – within ourselves. Second, one has to get free from any attachment to this self, not because the self is an illusion but because the self is much too real. The more we discover the truth about ourselves, the more we want to renounce ourselves, the more we need to bring to light the reality of ourselves.196

Christianity, therefore, according to Foucault, is about the goal of self-purification accomplished through self-knowledge. The person wishes to grow in relationship to God, but to do so they must be pure in mind and will. To do so, Foucault suggests, they must be fully aware of those aspects of their self which are impure, and then renounce them, which creates a path to purity. Foucault continually identifies Christian spirituality as possessing an essentially exegetical function: “Christian spirituality was not to give knowledge of the self the memorial function of rediscovering the subject’s being, but rather the exegetical function of detecting the nature and origin of internal impulses

196 Idid., 11.
within the soul.” The problem with this characterization, however, is that it seems to elide some of the distinctions in the history of reflexivity Foucault uncovers elsewhere in his project. In order for a characterization of “Christian spirituality” to be applicable to Christianity as a whole, including before and after the Enlightenment, it would seem necessary to leave a space.

But, as the work of Christopher Gill has suggested, to use the term “self” in reference to both modern and pre-modern thought in an interchangeable way is a questionable activity. Second, to suggest that, for Christians, a person’s true self is the sum of their desires and sexuality is easily called in to question. Though other historical examples could be cited, for the purposes of this dissertation I will provide only the example of Thomas Aquinas, and suggest that Foucault’s description of Christian subjectivity does not apply to all Christian thinkers.

Self-Knowledge in Aquinas – The soul’s knowledge of itself

The formal question of whether or how a person can know their self is not directly asked in Aquinas, nor would that be expected. The closest approximation of this question can be seen in ST I.87, “How the intellectual soul knows itself and all within itself.” This question is split into four articles, each of which asks about a separate aspect of the soul: essence, habits, intellect, will. Though there are nuances in each of these four articles which will be discussed below, Thomas gives his overriding principle in his response to the first article. He writes, “Everything is knowable so far as it is in act, and not so far as

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it is in potentiality: for a thing is a being, and is true, and therefore knowable, according as it is actual. In part, this suggests that Foucault’s description of a Christian practice of ferreting out “hidden” desires is not an aspect of Thomas’s work, as desires which are “hidden” do not manifest in thought or action, and thus do not affect the person. Nor is Thomas’s description of self-knowledge, either in the formal discussion of the *Summa Theologiae*, or in the practical discussions found in his Biblical Commentaries, in any way interested in deciphering “hidden” desires; as mentioned above, Thomas does not identify illicit desires as being properly a part of oneself.

This means that humans have a rather limited access to their own soul, in a certain sense, for, as Thomas explains, the soul is in potentiality, and is only knowable when it is in action:

Now the human intellect is only a potentiality in the genus of intelligible beings, just as primary matter is a potentiality as regards sensible beings; and hence it is called “possible.” Therefore in its essence the human is potentially understanding. Hence it has in itself the power to understand, but not to be understood, except as it is made actual.

For a human to “know thyself,” therefore, they can only analyze the actions of their soul and body. A person cannot, therefore, know that they have a habit of lust simply by

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199 *ST* I.87.1 – *Respondeo dicendum quod unumquodque cognoscibile est secundum quod est in actu, et non secundum quod est in potentia, ut dicitur in IX Metaphys., sic enim aliquid est ens et verum, quod sub cognitione cedit, prout actu est.
200 Thomas does not speak of “hidden” desires, but typically of hidden sins, that is, sinful actions a person has taken and then refused to confess.
201 *ST* I.87.1 – *Intellectus autem humanus se habet in genere rerum intelligibilium ut ens in potentia tantum, sicut et materia prima se habet in genere rerum sensibilium, unde possibilis nominatur. Sic igitur in sua essentia consideratus, se habet ut potentia intelligens. Unde ex seipso habet virtutem ut intelligat, non autem ut intelligatur, nisi secundum id quod fit actu.*
thinking about their soul, except as they are aware of their own lust as it is actualized in thought and action.

So what is it that a soul can know about itself? It can know that it exists, something which is made possible again through actions. Thomas explains: “This happens in two ways; in the first place, singularly, as when Socrates or Plato perceives that he has an intellectual soul because he perceives that he understands.” In this first instance, the soul is capable of reflecting on itself, that is, to be aware of its own activity, and by this awareness of its own activity, illustrate its own existence. Thomas continues: “In the second place, universally, as when we consider the nature of the human mind from knowledge of the intellectual act.” In this instance, Thomas suggests that we can know that the soul exists from developing an understanding of the intellectual aspect of the soul by awareness of the soul’s power to undertake intellectual acts. This second form of knowledge is only possible after “careful inquiry” into the nature of the soul, that is, the study of the structure and the faculties of the soul. In this form of knowledge, a soul knows that it exists not because it is evident through simple reflection, as in the first form, but over time by discerning the faculties of the soul (again, known only by their actions). What Thomas is referring to, it would seem, is precisely the understanding of the soul he offers in the *prima* and *secunda pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*; that is, a formal discussion of the nature of the soul, its operations, powers, and essence.

Second, a soul holds some knowledge of its habits; but this knowledge is possible only as it arises from repeated action. Thus, in the same way as the soul’s essence, there

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202 ST I.87.1 – Uno quidem modo, particulariter, secundum quod Socrates vel Plato percipit se habere animam intellectivam, ex hoc quod percipit se intelligere. Alio modo, in universali, secundum quod naturam humanæ mentis ex actu intellectus consideramus.
are two ways of knowing that we have a habit: “The first kind of knowledge of the habit arises from its being present, for the very fact of its presence causes the act whereby it is known.”203 This means that a human can know they have the virtue of fortitude only when they accomplish an act of courage repeatedly, and with eventual ease. Once the courageous acts occur, then the habit of fortitude which produced that act is known to be present in the soul. Thomas continues: “The second kind of knowledge of the habit arises from a careful inquiry, as is explained above of the mind.”204 Again, Thomas seems to be referring the formal discussion of habits and their variety, one which he offers in the I-II.49-54.

Third, a soul holds some understanding of its own act. This question connected to the object of the intellect’s understanding, which is why Thomas answers the question with a foray into the intellect’s object in the Divine and Angelic intellects. The discussion of these two intellects, divine and angelic, establishes their fundamental difference from the human intellect, a difference which relates directly to the question of the soul’s knowledge of its action. For God, the intellect’s object is its own intellectual act, because “His essence is His act of understanding.”205 Second, there is the angelic understanding of its own act and essence, which can be “logically” divided into two actions, yet the understanding of both is accomplished in a single action. This is differentiated from the human’s understanding of its own act. The object of the human intellect is, as Thomas explains, “being” and the “true.” Whereas God understands these things immediately, 

203 ST I.87.2 – Et prima quidem cognitio habitus fit per ipsam praesentiam habitus, quia ex hoc ipso quod est praeens, actum causat, in quo statim percipitur.  
204 Ibid. – Secunda autem cognitio habitus fit per studiosam inquisitionem, sicut supra dictum est de mente.  
205 ST I.87.3 – ...quia sua essentia est suum intelligere.
since God is being and truth, and the angel understands these because of the special nature of its intellect in its relation to God, the human intellect is oriented to material realities. Thus, our intellect can understand “being” and “true” “as considered in material things.”206 For that reason, the human does not understand its own intellectual act in the manner of God or an angel, but rather the human knows the object first, and then is able to understand the action of knowing the object.

Finally, the soul has knowledge of the actions of the will. Again, will is known in the soul insofar as it is enacted. Thomas writes:

Hence the Philosopher expresses himself thus (De Anima iii, 9)—that “the will is in the reason.” Therefore the act of the will is understood by the intellect, both inasmuch as one knows that one wills; and inasmuch as one knows the nature of this act, and consequently, the nature of its principle which is the habit or power.207

The soul therefore knows its own will in two ways: first, from the action, and second, from the habit or power from which the action must have proceeded. Though a person can know that they have a habit or power which can produce a certain action representative of willing a certain way, one cannot know that one wills a certain way without an action to reflect on.

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206 ST I.87.3 ad 1
207 ST I.87.4 – Unde et philosophus hoc modo loquendi utitur in III de anima, quod voluntas in ratione est. Quod autem intelligibiliter est in aliquo intelligente, consequens est ut ab eo intelligatur. Unde actus voluntatis intelligitur ab intellectu, et inquantum aliquis percipit se velle; et inquantum aliquis cognoscit naturam huius actus, et per consequens naturam eius principii, quod est habitus vel potentia
This leads to an important point about the soul’s knowledge of itself. For Thomas, we do not have knowledge of our affections or our intentions except as they are enacted. As Thomas writes of the affections:

The affections of the soul are in the intellect not by similitude only, like bodies; nor by being present in their subject, as the arts; but as a thing caused is in its principle, which contains some notion of the thing caused. And so Augustine says that the soul’s affections are in the memory by certain notions.\(^{208}\)

This passage suggests that the affections of the soul are in the intellect insofar as an act of the intellect contains some notion of the activity. Thus an act of affection for God contains with it some notion that it is an act of affection towards God. But, without an action or thought, the notion of the affection will not be present in the intellect. The affections of the person remain knowable, therefore, only insofar as they are enacted and then reflected in the intellect.

This remains true for the intention for which an act is accomplished, which Thomas believes to be wholly unknown to us except as intentions are reflected by works. In his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, he writes:

In another way something is not known because it is wholly unknown and invisible, and in such a way are those things unknown which are in the will. In the will there is the intention of the end, which of its nature is invisible. For what

\(^{208}\) ST I.87.4 ad 3 – Ad tertium dicendum quod affectus animae non sunt in intellectu neque per similitudinem tantum, sicut corpora; neque per praesentiam ut in subiecto, sicut artes; sed sicut principiatum in principio, in quo habetur notio principiati. Et ideo Augustinus dicit affectus animae esse in memoria per quaedam notiones.
man does or thinks is manifest through works, but by what intention he does this is utterly uncertain. These things, however, are not unknown to God. Thomas writes here that the intention of the will is essentially unknowable, except to God. Again, in his *Commentary on the Psalms*, Thomas discusses the lack of human access to the intention. He writes:

Therefore he says “*examines.*” There are three ways [of examining] in man: one is apparent, namely an exterior work: and two are hidden, namely the intention and the delight. These two are hidden in us, but apparent to God. And since they are known, though hidden from us, thus it is said, *examines the heart,* since the intention is known, *and the kidneys* [inner being], that is, the delight, namely whether the delight is in the praise of the Lord or of man. But since to examine is to inquire, and to inquire is from ignorance, this is not applicable to God. But it is shown that God knows evidently, since it is said, *Let the wickedness of sinners be consumed,* it is fittingly said, *examines* [i.e., *tests*]: since in tribulation the condition of humans is shown to the greatest extent. We cannot, therefore, know the end to which each person is directed, except as it is reflected in a person’s actions, and then only in a limited way. The fact that intention and

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209 Commentary on Hebrews 4, lecture 2, 104. – Alio modo non cognoscitur aliquid, quia est omnino ignotum et invisibile, et sic ea quae sunt in voluntate, sunt ignota. In voluntate autem est ipsa intentio finis, quae de natura sua est invisibilis. Quid enim homo facit vel cogitat manifestatur per opus, sed qua intentione hoc faciat, penitus est incertum. Ista autem non sunt occulta Deo.

210 Commentary on the Psalms 7, no. 5 – the vulgate of Jerome provides a variant word, *probator,* for Thomas’s *scrutans.* In the last sentence, he makes a play on the words by using “*examines*” in the sense of tests and referring to the passage in the Psalms which refers to God’s testing of sinners through tribulation. – Dicit ergo *scrutans.* Tria sunt in homine: unum appares, scilicet exterius opus: et duo quae latent, scilicet intentio et delectatio. Haec duo nobis latent, sed Deo patent. Et quia Deo sunt nota, licet nobis occulta, ideo dicit, *scrutans corda,* quia novit intentionem, et renes, idest delectationem, utrum scilicet delecteris in laude Dei vel hominum. Sed quia scrutari est inquirere autem est ignorantis, hoc a Deo removet. Et ut ostendat quod Deus evidenter scit; cum dixit, consumetur, etc., convenienser dixit, *scrutans:* quia in tribulatione maxime apparat conditio hominum.
delight are hidden from humans, even from our own minds, speaks to the nature of reflexive self-understanding in Thomas, highlighting its limited role.

Self-knowledge, therefore, as described by Thomas is possible only in a partial manner. The human being is not an object of knowledge that can be deciphered in a simply through observation; instead, the person must come to self-knowledge over time, and through repeated observation of repeated actions. Further, what is received from this observation is not a static form of knowledge; instead, a person’s habits and actions are always changing, and thus what a modern person would call a “self” is always changing. For the pre-modern thinker, a changing person is intentional; as indicated in the previous chapter, the spiritual life is about progress and growth, and these are only possible through the person and God changing the self in a movement towards perfection, as far as that is possible in this life.

**Self Knowledge and Spiritual Exercises**

Self-knowledge was treated above as a formal question of possibility, but Thomas also discusses the person’s knowledge of their self in the context of spiritual practices. Moving in this direction returns to the imperative of the “*nosce teipsum*” where it is interpreted as a crucial aspect of moral practice. Returning to the passage from the *Summa Theologiae* cited above:

> For the first thing that occurs to a man who has discretion, is to think of himself (*seipso cogitet*), and to direct other things to himself as to their end, since, the end

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211 The appearance of this discussion of self knowledge and *prosoche* (attention) follows the emphasis in this dissertation on the appearance of classical concepts at work in Thomas Aquinas. Though these concepts take alternative forms, they maintain many of the same elements, and our understanding of them can be renewed when read in light of the work of classical authors, and with the methodological questions of Hadot and Foucault.
is the first thing in the intention. Therefore, this is the time when man is bound by
God’s affirmative precept, which the Lord expressed by saying: “Turn ye to
Me...and I will turn to you.”

The admonition “turn ye to me...and I will turn to you” provides the end to which the
human’s intention should be directed. In order to do so, however, the person must direct
their self by paying attention to their self. Aquinas will repeatedly mention the
importance of vigilance in watching oneself to preserve oneself from falling into sin.

It is important to note that Thomas does not emphasize attention in the manner of the
Stoics or the Epicureans. The language used by Thomas is not the same as the
Epicureans or the Stoics as it relates to self-knowledge; he does not encourage persons to
“know thyself” throughout his writings, at least not in such terms. Further, when Thomas
encourages persons to pay attention to themselves, he usually encourages them to pay
attention to others as well, in order to help ensure that others do not fall into sin. And
finally, Aquinas will offer words of caution about the inability of reason to maintain
constant vigilance over all of one’s actions and affections.

Nonetheless, attention is an essential part of Thomas’s spirituality. In the De
Perfectione and elsewhere, Thomas repeatedly emphasizes that the spiritual life is about
the love of God, and we love God “if there be nothing in us which is wanting to divine
love, that is to say, if there is nothing which we do not, actually or habitually, refer to
God.” Working from the traditional injunction to love God with heart, mind, soul, and
strength, Thomas describes different aspects of the person and their actions which must

\footnote{212} ST I-II.89.6 ad 3, with reference to Zechariah 1:3. Latin cited previously.
\footnote{213} De Perfectione 5 – Alio vero modo ex toto corde, mente, anima et fortitudine Deum diligimus si nihil
nobis desit ad divinam dilectionem, quod actu vel habitu in Deum non referamus.
be referred to God. The love of God with the whole heart is accomplished “when we order our life to the service of God; and when, in consequence, all our actions are, virtually, directed to him.” The love of the whole mind is accomplished “when we subject our understanding to him, believing what has been divinely transmitted to us.” The love of the whole soul is accomplished “when all that we love is loved in God, and when we refer all of our affections to the love of Him.” Finally, the love with the whole strength is accomplished “when all our words and works are established in divine charity according to the precept of St. Paul, ‘Let all your things be done in charity.’”

Be Watchful

In order for any of these objectives to be accomplished, persons must hold certain forms of self-awareness to preserve themselves from taking the wrong path. These types of attention the self are found in different forms in Thomas’s writings, though for the purposes of this dissertation I will discuss only two. The first are general encouragements taken from lines of scripture which encourage the person to be watchful over their person and others. The second is found in descriptions of the virtue of prudence, and in the qualities of the prudent person. Each of these aspects repeats the importance of paying attention to the regulation of one’s activities in the struggle to prevent sin.

First, Thomas will mention with some regularity the importance of watching and examining one’s thoughts and actions, and controlling oneself to prevent sin. In one extended section in his Commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews, Thomas writes of the

\[214\] Ibid., with reference to 1 Cor. 16:14.
importance of being watchful over oneself and others, working from a single word from
the letter. In this section, he discusses the importance of examining oneself:

He says, *Watch*. For each one of you ought to consider in himself what condition
he is. Gal. 6:4: *But let everyone prove his own work*. Jer. 2:23: *See thy ways in
the valley*. *Watch, therefore, brothers*, as to whatever is in yourself, since
everyone is a part of the community, and each one is *commanded by God
correcting his neighbor*, Ecclesiasticus 17:12. *Watch*, that is, examine one
another, *lest perhaps something is in you*, as is said: many among you are in a
perfect state, but because of fragility and the freedom of will it is possible there is
evil in some of you. Job 4:18: *Behold, they that serve him are not steadfast, and
in his angels he found wickedness. How much more shall they that dwell in houses
of clay, who have an earthly foundation, be consumed as with the moth?* John
6:71: *Have I not chosen twelve? And one of you is a devil?* One therefore cannot
be too solicitous for himself; but also for those in his community.

But why? *Lest perhaps there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, to
depart from the living God*. See the evil of which the apostle speaks, namely the
unbelieving heart, that is, one infirm in faith, in which consists the malice of the
soul: since just as the good of the soul is in adhering to God, Psalm 72:27: *But it
is good for me to adhere to my God*, so it is that to withdraw from God through
unbelief is evil for man. ...And thus, it is said *scattered*, since through unbelief
one withdraws from the living God.
But if this evil is found in anyone, is he to be despaired of? No, rather he ought to be exorted, that is, admonished: thus it is said *but exhort one another every day*, that is, continuously scrutinizing their consciences, and inducing them to good...  

This passage emphasizes the importance of attention to oneself for the purpose of analyzing one’s behavior and sentiment and preventing movement away from God. This section of commentary is based on Hebrews 3:12, “Take heed (*videte*), brethren, lest perhaps there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, to depart from the living God.” Working from that sentence, Thomas encourages his audience to self-examination and the examination of others as part of the “community” (*societas*). The word he uses for examines, *probare*, holds a range of meanings, including test, tempt, approve, recommend, certify, and demonstrate. In translating the word as “examines,” however, one should not understand the term as referring to something in the vein of a psychiatric examination. Instead, the admonition to examine should be understood as watching the “external act,” as explained in the quote above from Psalm 7. Thus, a person should...
watch his neighbor’s action, and his own actions and thoughts, to be on the lookout for something being done inordinately.

In this first quotation, the sin referred to is the product of unbelief. In the same commentary, Thomas also comments on the possibility of “fornication” among the brothers. He recommends that persons “contemplate” themselves and others to prevent the error of carnal sins. The verses he is commenting on here are Hebrews 12:15-16: “Looking diligently (contemplantes), lest any man be wanting to the grace of God: lest any root of bitterness springing up do hinder and by it many be defiled: lest there be any fornicator or profane person.”

Thomas writes:

Whence it is said *lest there be any fornicator*, he admonishes the avoidance of sins contrary to holiness, and he opposes especially carnal sins, namely luxury and taste (*gula*), which are brought about through carnal delights, through which the mind is stained. Thus are the mind and flesh stained. And thus these vices are especially to be avoided. And the first, luxury, saying *contemplating*. And not only in oneself, but *lest there be any fornicator*, so also one should contemplate this in his neighbor.

The Vulgate translation of “looking diligently” is apt in its understanding of contemplation, as Thomas does not mean contemplation in the sense of thinking about the divine things. Instead, Thomas is encouraging his audience to take note of their

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216 From the Vulgate – Contemplates ne quis desit gratiae Dei ne qua radix amaritudinis sursum germinans inpediat et per illam inquinentur multi, ne quis fornicator aut profanus ut Esau qui propter unam escam vendidit primitiva sua.
217 Commentary on Hebrews ch. 12 lec. 3 – deinde cum dicit *ne quis fornicator*, monet vitare peccata contraria sanctimoniae, cui specialiter opponuntur peccata carnalia, scilicet luxuria et gula, quae perfi ciuntur in delectatione carnali, per quam mens inquinantur. Unde ista mentem et carnem inquinant. Et ideo specialiter monet ista vitari. Et primo luxuriam, dicens *contemplantes*. Et non solum quilibet in seipso, sed *ne quis fornicator*, ita quod quilibet in proximo suo hoc contemplateur.
thoughts and actions and the actions of others in the avoidance of error. In this way, “contemplantes” holds the sense of “consider thoroughly,” and the object of this consideration is one’s own person and the others in proximity. But once more, it is the actions immediate to the moment, and the preservation from the ongoing risk of sin, rather than an exploration into the depths of one’s “character.”

The efforts of attention to self are not limited to an awareness of actions, but also relate to the distinction between inner discourse and exterior action. In a passage from his *Commentary on the Psalms*, Thomas describes the three origins of sin in humans. These three are from an irascible, a rational, and a concupiscible error within us, each of which leads to sin. For the second of these, Thomas writes: “Second, he prevents the vice of the rational, namely deceit, saying: *those things you say in your hearts*, you supply them as they are in you; as it is said: so that one thing is not said in the heart, and another thing is pretended externally.” Briefly remarked on here is a classic trope of classical thought, the importance of aligning internal speech with external action. Foucault and Hadot both comment on this concept in classical authors, and it is not surprising to find the concept mentioned in Aquinas.

Finally, in commentary on Psalm 12, Thomas again once more mentions the role of attention in avoiding sin. He writes, “Similarly, as long as man is solicitous in resisting sin, he will not fall into death; but when he sleeps, he falls.” The reference to sleep

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218 The *Postilla super psalmos* dates from 1272-1273.  
219 Commentary on the Psalms 4 no. 4 - Secundo prohibet vitium rationalis, scilicet simulationem, dicens: *quae dicitis in cordibus vestris*, supple sint in vobis; quasi dicat: non aliud sitis in corde et aliud praetendatis extra.  
220 Commentary on the Psalms 12 no. 4 - Similiter et quamdiu homo sollicitus est ut peccato resistat, non cadit in mortem; sed quando dormit, occiditur.
here simply means “fails to pay attention,” the result of which is invariably a mistaken action. The importance of solicitude in avoiding error is something that is repeated in the *Summa Theologiae*, especially in discussion of the virtue of prudence. In response to the question of whether solicitude is a part of prudence, Thomas writes:

> According to Isidore (Etymologies X), a man is said to be solicitous through being shrewd and alert, in so far as a man through a certain shrewdness of mind is on the alert to do whatever has to be done. Now this belongs to prudence, whose chief act is a command about what has already been counseled and judged in matters of action....Hence it is that solicitude belongs properly to prudence, and for this reason Augustine says (*De Moribus Eccles.* XXIV) that “prudence keeps most careful watch and ward, lest by degrees we be deceived unawares by evil counsel.”

In this instance, solicitude is described as an alertness and preparedness to carry out the activity deemed proper through counsel. It is only with the quotation from Augustine which rounds out the discussion do we see solicitude carrying the same sense as used in the commentary on Psalm 12 above. In this quotation, the importance of self awareness of activities and the wariness of the source of counsel is explained.

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221 Solicitude, it should be noted, is used in different ways by Thomas. In some instances it has a negative valence, in that persons who are overly solicitous about are criticized by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, a criticism seconded by Thomas. On the other hand, however, Thomas will mention the importance of being properly solicitous over oneself and others in regard to moral matters. This latter use is less frequent, though still present.

222 ST II-II.47.9 – Sic autem pertinet ad prudentiam, cuius praecipuus actus est circa agenda praecipere de praeconsiliatis et iudicatis. Unde philosophus dicit, in VI Ethicorum, quod oportet operari quidem velociter consiliata, consiliari autem tarde. Et inde est quod sollicitudo proprie ad prudentiam pertinet. Et propter hoc Augustinus dicit, in libro de moribus Eccles., quod prudentiae sunt excubiae atque diligentissima vigilantia ne, subrepente paulatim mala susione, fallamur.
Opposed to the virtue of prudence is the vice of negligence, which Thomas describes specifically in terms related to solicitude. Negligence is defined as “a lack of due solicitude,” and, in particular, it is a failure to take on the specific acts of reason central to the actions of prudence. This is unsurprising given the emphasis in Thomas’s work on reasoning well in relation to moral matters, but one solution for the problem of negligence offers an interesting perspective into Thomas’s moral psychology of the person. He writes:

The fear of God helps us to avoid all sins, because according to Proverbs 15:27, “by the fear of the Lord everyone declineth from evil.” Hence fear makes us avoid negligence, yet not as though negligence were directly opposed to fear, but because fear incites man to acts of reason. Wherefore it has already been stated above (I-II.44.2), when we were treating of the passions, that “fear makes us take counsel.”

Fear of God is actually one of the repeated aids to moral living, appearing not only in discussions of prudence, but also in temperance. In fact, though temperance lacks a formal discussion of the accompanying gift from grace, it is mentioned in a reply to an objection. In this instance, Thomas identifies “fear” as the corresponding gift of temperance, in that through awareness of God’s presence and knowledge of our activities, and a desire to avoid offending God, we avoid those things which are sinful. Thomas writes, “Now man stands in the greatest need of the fear of God in order to shun those

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223 ST II-II.54.1 – Respondeo dicendum quod negligentia importat defectum debitae sollicitudinis.
224 ST II-II.54.2 ad 4 – Ad quartum dicendum quod timor Dei operatur ad vitionem cuiuslibet peccati, quia ut dicitur Prov. XV, per timorem domini declinat omnis a malo. Et ideo timor facit negligentiam vitare. Non tamen ita quod directe negligentia timori opponatur, sed inquantum timor excitat hominem ad actus rationis. Unde etiam supra habitum est cum de passionibus agetetur, quod timor facit consiliativos.
things which are most seductive, and these are the matter of temperance: wherefore the gift of fear corresponds to temperance also."\textsuperscript{225} The presence of God in this manner speaks to a further aspect of self understanding, in that God essentially acts as a third party in our reflexive experience. It is not enough for a person to watch their self, to be aware of every action; instead, a further inducement is suggested. In this understanding, the person is one aspect of a larger equation, and their attention is directed towards God on one end, to the proper fear of and due desire to avoid offending God. On the other side, the person must watch their own thoughts and actions, and distinguish those aspects which belong to the new and old self. Finally, they are called upon to watch others, and to encourage them if they fall short. The picture, therefore, we develop of reflexivity in Aquinas is not of a basic self-relation, but a self-relation that participates in community with others and with God.

\textit{Old and New Man}

Still, there is more to be said regarding the nature of reflexive self-understanding in the work of Aquinas. In particular, one important issue can be seen in his treatment of the Pauline concept of the old man and the new man. As Paul writes in Ephesians, “You were taught to put away your former life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts.”\textsuperscript{226} From the few brief references found in Paul, Thomas develops the concept in concert with the rest of his thought on the ideal form of life. He uses these two types to refer to aspects of the human person, and, most importantly, to underline the implications

\textsuperscript{225} ST II-II.141.1 ad 3 – Maxime autem homo indiget timore divino ad fugiendum ea quae maxime alliciunt, circa quae est temperantia. Et ideo temperantiae etiam respondet donum timoris.

\textsuperscript{226} NRSV – “To put off, according to former conversation the old man, who is corrupted according to the desire of error.” Vulgate – Deponere vos secundum pristinam conversationem veterem hominem qui corrumpitur secundum desideria erroris.
of his understanding of human nature. As Thomas writes in his *Summa Theologiae*: “It is essential to virtue to incline man to good. Now the good of man is to be in accordance with reason, as Dionysius states (*Divine Names iv*). Hence human virtue is that which inclines man to something in accordance with reason.”²²⁷ Not only is it good for humans to be inclined towards reason; it is, in fact, an aspect of their very nature as humans that they be aligned towards reason and the good. This point is explained further in the rest of this article on temperance, from which the above quote originates. What is good for humans to do is necessarily arrived at because of their human nature. He continues:

Nature inclines everything to whatever is becoming to it. Wherefore man naturally desires pleasures that are becoming to him. Since, however, man as such is a rational being, it follows that those pleasures are becoming to man which are in accordance with reason. From such pleasures temperance does not withdraw him, but from those which are contrary to reason. Wherefore it is clear that temperance is not contrary to inclination of human nature, but is in accord with it. It is, however, contrary to the inclination of the animal nature that is not subject to reason.²²⁸

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²²⁷ ST II-II.141.1 – Sicut supra dictum est, de ratione virtutis est ut inclinet hominem ad bonum. Bonum autem hominis est secundum rationem esse, ut Dionysius dicit, IV cap. De Div. Nom. Et ideo virtus humana est quae inclinat ad id quod est secundum rationem. Manifeste autem ad hoc inclinat temperantia, nam in ipso eius nomine importatur quaedam moderation seu temperies, quam ratio facit. Et ideo temperantia est virtus.

²²⁸ ST II-II.141.1 ad 1 – Ad primum ergo dicendum quod natura inclinat in id quod est conveniens unicumque. Unde homo naturaliter appetit delectationem sibi convenientem. Quia vero homo, inquantum huiusmodi, est rationalis, conequens est quod delectationes sunt homini convenientes quae sunt secundum rationem. Et ab his non retrahit temperantia, sed potius ab his quae sunt contra rationem. Unde patet quod temperantia non contrariatur inclinationi naturae humanae, sed convenit cum ea. Contrariatur tamen inclinationi naturae bestialis non subjectae rationi.
In this passage, Thomas mentions two natures, each of which can be found, in certain ways, within the human person. The nature that we ought to act in accordance with is, of course, the human nature, which is aligned with right reason.

For Thomas, however, this distinction leads to something more than a simple admonition to abide by reason. Instead, it leads to the development of a complex mode of self-understanding, one which is dependent on a question of what one considers oneself to be. For Thomas, the person is called to identify themselves properly, and to do so by identifying with the new man being renewed by grace in Christ, and to deny the old man. In a passage from his *Commentary on the Psalms*, Thomas describes these two aspects of the human person:

> Our soul has two faces: one faces God and is according to reason; the other faces the flesh according to the sensitive nature, which comprehends things as far as they are corporeal. And just as a thing delights in its own good, thus man delights in that which he considers his soul. Indeed sinners consider their soul to be that which they principally strain towards: since whatever is preeminent in a thing is that which it is identified as, just as a king is his kingdom. And therefore those who have principally a sensitive nature delight in it; while those who understand, love the intelligible aspect. No one therefore hates the soul insofar as he esteems the principal aspect. The good therefore hate [the soul] with respect to the sensitive nature; the bad hate [the soul] in its intelligible nature.\(^{229}\)

\(^{229}\) *Commentary on the Psalms* 10 no. 4 – Sed quod mali quodammodo odium seipsos, et etiam boni quodammodo se odium, declaratur hoco modo. Anima nostra duas habet facies: unam versus Deum secundum rationem, aliam versus carnem secundum naturam sensitivam, quae tantum corporalia comprehendit. Et sicut quaelibet res diligat propium bonum, ita homo diligat illud quod aestimat animam.
Thomas is here critical of those “sinners” who consider the soul to be what it chiefly desires from its sensitive aspect. Instead, Thomas corrects them, stating that the human is chiefly the rational nature, and thus a person should love their rational nature and hate, charitably, their sensitive nature. The concept of charitable self-hatred will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, but the concept of hatred of self leads to a discussion of the new and old man.

This passage can be brought into further relief by referencing Thomas’s *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle repeatedly mentions that the thing which is most properly human is the reason or intellect. Thomas cites this concept, employing the same example of a king and his kingdom as in the above passage:

Third, at “As a state,” he proves what he had taken for granted: that the person who loves the most dominant element in him, the intellect or reason, particularly loves himself. He proves this by three arguments. The first is: in the state it is the most authoritative part that especially seems to be the state. Hence what the rulers of a state do is said to be done by the whole state; and the same reason holds for any other composite of several parts. Consequently, in man it is his reason or intellect, his principal element, that especially seems to be man.

Therefore, he who loves his intellect or reason, and treats it well seems to be philautos or a lover of self most of all.²³⁰ (1869

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suam. Peccatores enim aestimant animam suam quod principaliter intendunt: quia quaelibet res est illud quod est praecipuum in ea, sicut rex dicitur regnum. Qui ergo naturam sensitivam habent principale diligunt eam; qui autem intellectivam, eamdem amant. Nullus ergo odit animam quantum ad id quod aestimat principale. Boni ergo odiunt quantum ad naturam sensitivam; mali quantum ad intellectivam. See also ST 2.2.25.7 on whether sinners love themselves.

²³⁰ *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics* 1869, bk.9, lec.9, n.4. - Tertio ibi, quemadmodum autem, etc., probat quod supposuerat: scilicet quod ille qui amat id quod est principalissimum in ipso scilicet.
As in the above passage from Thomas’s *Commentary on the Psalms*, a specific aspect of
the human is singled out and identified as the person. In this instance, however, the term
which is identified as the person is not the “rational nature” but the “reason.” In the
*Summa Theologiae*, Thomas approaches this passage once more, though the meaning is
not necessarily clarified. He writes:

According to the philosopher, a thing seems to be chiefly what is principle in it;
that what the governor of a state does, the state is said to do. In this way
sometimes what is principle in man is said to be man; sometimes, indeed, the
intellectual part, which in accordance with truth, is called the “inward” man; and
sometimes the sensitive part with the body is called man in the opinion of those
whose observation does not go beyond the senses. And this is called the
“outward” man.231

The inward and outward, or inner and outer, man are also Pauline terms which appear
synonymously with the old and new man. This provides yet another exposition of the
same principle in Thomas, though again the phrase “intellectual” part is not entirely
precise. Nonetheless, the “chief power” of the intellectual soul is the intellect, which
provides the name for specific variety of soul that is the form of the human.

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231 ST 1.75.4 ad 1 - Ad primum ergo dicendum quod, secundum philosophum in IX Ethic., illud potissime
videtur esse unumquodque, quod est principale in eo, scilicet ratio vel intellectus; et sic ille qui diliget intellectum vel
rationem et ei largitur bona, maxime videtur esse philautus, idest amator sui.
Human nature for Thomas is fundamentally good, reasonable, and rational, and this by virtue of its intellectual soul. Yet, while this is the case, the human still has a sensitive aspect, and that sensitive aspect can lead people astray. Again, this is a matter of the proper end of human life, which is found in the full contemplation of God. As Thomas writes: “So it is that the more a soul is free of the passions and is purged from affections for earthly things, the higher it rises in contemplation of truth and tastes how sweet the Lord is.” If this is the proper end of humans, then it is necessary that we take on practices to redirect our affections from earthly things towards divine things, and in this way, that we adopt practices which distance ourselves from our sensitive aspect. Thomas, it would seem, is encouraging persons to abandon care for a real aspect of oneself.

But, for Thomas, it is not simply a matter of “self-renunciation,” strictly speaking. Instead, a person is their rational nature, and all other aspects that seek to hold influence over that rational nature are considered external. What is rejected, therefore, is not the self, but an external aspect which provides misdirection. As Thomas writes:

Now according to his nature, man is rational. And thus when he acts according to reason, he is acting by his own proper motion and is acting of himself; and this is a characteristic of freedom. But when he sins, he is acting outside reason; and then he is moved by another, being held back by the limitations imposed by that

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Commentary on John vol. 1 ch. 1 lec. 12 (translation p.87). The Commentary on John is dated from 1269-1272, and emphasizes the contemplative aspect, in that it interprets the Gospel of John to be an essentially contemplative oriented work. This partially explains the apparent disconnect with other works of Thomas which hold a more positive view of material things, but the emphasis on ascendance is still consonant with the description contemplation in the Summa Theologicae, especially that of ST II-II.180.4 ad 3.
other. Therefore, everyone who commits a sin is a slave of sin: “whatever 
overcomes a person, is that to which he is a slave” (2 Pet. 2:19).233

To hear language of this sort is rather interesting, in that Thomas appears to be indicating 
that sin is not one of our capabilities. And, in a way, he is saying this: the human, in this 
limited mode of moral self-understanding, is its rational nature, and when it fails to act in 
accordance with the higher parts of its soul, it is being moved by something outside of it, 
in most cases, the sensitive nature. The person is still responsible for sin, as Thomas will 
make abundantly clear throughout his works; still, Thomas is clear that if we are to speak 
of an “identity” or a “self,” our self is our rational nature, and, chiefly, our intellect.

This leads to Thomas’s understanding of the old and new man. The old nature is 
whatever is aligned with sin and sinful actions, while the new nature is aligned with 
reason and with Christ. In an extended passage from his Commentary on Colossians, 
Thomas describes the new and old natures, and the way of putting the old man off and 
putting the new man on. In this first section, Thomas describes the old self:

So Paul tells us to get rid of these things, Put off the old nature, because it has 
grown old by sin: “what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish 
away” (Heb 8:13). This old nature, this old self, is approaching decay, because 
sin is the road to decay. In addition, sin destroys virtue and spiritual beauty. The 
oldness of our nature, of course, was brought in by the sin of our first parent:

“Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and

8 (translation p. 126) – homo autem secundum suam naturam est rationalis. Quando ergo movetur 
secundum rationem, proprio motu movetur, et secundum se operatur, quod est libertatis; quando vero 
peccat, operatur praetur rationem, et tune movetur quasi ab alio, retentis terminis alienis: et ideo qui facit 
peccatum, servus est peccati; 2 Pet. 2:19.
so death spread to all men because all men sinned” (Rom. 5:12). This old nature, therefore, or this old self, is the oldness of sin: “We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed” (Rom. 6:6). We are to put off this old self with its practices: “Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts” (Eph. 4:22).

Thomas associates the old nature with the corruption inherited through the original sin of Adam, which has been transmitted to us. This is the nature we have received from birth, and with this nature come certain practices, namely sinful practices according to “deceitful lusts.” As Thomas continues, he explains the new self:

The new nature of the self is the mind, renewed from within, because before grace our mind is subject within to sin, and when it is renewed by grace it becomes new: “Your youth is renewed like the eagle’s” (Ps. 103:5); “For neither circumcision counts for anything, not uncircumcision, but a new creation” (Gal. 6:15). Yet there is an oldness that still remains in our flesh. Nevertheless, if you follow the judgment of the new nature, the new self, you are putting on the new nature or new self; while if you lust according to the desires of the flesh, you are

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putting on the old self or nature: “Put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24).\textsuperscript{235}

Thomas again continues with the dichotomy between flesh and mind. The new self is to be led by the judgment of the rational nature renewed and restored by grace. Still, as Thomas reminds us, the human person is not solely their mind, nor do they fully escape the possibility of sinful desires. This occurs because “there is an oldness that still remains in our flesh,” that is, a propensity towards sin. In interpreting this line, it is important to note that Thomas is not blaming flesh, that is, corporeal matter, but rather the possibility of the person being led astray by the sensitive aspect of the soul. Hence, he writes that we ought to “follow the judgment of the new nature.” Still Thomas is perhaps not as optimistic about the extent of human perfection as others in the Christian tradition, as he appears to believe that there is no point at which sinful desires either stop or our vigilance about our behavior can stop, short of the reception of the fullness of grace.

Finally, in the last portion of this passage, Thomas identifies in specific terms the qualities that the new self possesses. As was indicated in the previous chapter, the ideal person is one made to the image of God, and this is precisely what Thomas understands by the term “new self.” He writes:

\begin{quote}
Ibid. – Novus homo est animus interius renovatus, quia homo, ante gratiam, habet mentem interiorem peccato subiectam, et quando reparatur per gratiam, habet novitatem. Ps. CII, 5: renovabitur ut aquilae juventus tua. Gal. ult. 15: \textit{in Christo Iesu neque circumcisio, neque praeputium aliquid valet, sed nova creatura}. Nova creatura est gratia innovans, sed adhuc vetustas remanet in carne. Sed si sequaris iudicium novi hominis, tunc induis novum hominem; si vero concupiscis secundum desideria carnis, induis vetustatem. Eph. IV, v. 24: \textit{induite novum hominem, qui secundum Deum creatus est in iustitia, et sanctitate veritatis. Deinde cum dicit et induentes, etc., describit novum hominem. Et primo ostendit renovationis modum, secundo ubi renovetur, tertio secundum quid renovatur. Ostendit ergo quod interior homo vetus per ignorantiam Dei, renovatur per fidem et agnitionem Dei. II Cor. III, 18: in eadem imaginem transformamur a claritate in claritatem, tamquam a domini spiritu. Sed ubi est haec renovatio? Ibi, scilicet ubi est imago Dei, quae non est in potentiis sensitivae partis, sed in mente.}
\end{quote}
Then when Paul says, *and have put on the new nature*, he describes the new self. First, he shows how this renewal takes place, second, where it takes place. He shows that the inner self, having become old by its ignorance of God, is made new by faith and the knowledge of God: “we are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor 3:18). And where is this renewal taking place? It is taking place where the image of God is, and this is not in the sense faculties, but in the mind. And so Paul says, *after [in the sense of “with respect to”] the image of its creator*. In other words, the image of God in us is being renewed.  

Through our alignment of what we consider ourselves to be with the rational aspect of our nature, we are actually aligning ourselves with the image of God. This is, of course, accomplished through grace and not our own actions, but can at least be described as a co-operation between humans and God.

In another passage from Thomas’s *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, Thomas provides more specifics of the old nature. In particular, he describes how the old nature is not something “exterior,” that is, outside of the soul, but that a person actually becomes “old” in their soul through adherence to sinful actions.

First, what does the old man mean? Some hold that the old man is external and the new man interior. But it must be said that the old man is both interior and

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236 Commentary on Colossians ch. 3 lec. 2 – Eph. IV, v. 24: *induit novum hominem, qui secundum Deum creatus est in iustitia, et sanctitate veritatis*. Deinde *cum dicit et induentes, etc.*, describit novum hominem. Et primo ostendit renovationis modum, secundo ubi renovetur, tertio secundum quid renovatur. Ostendit ergo quod interior homo vetus per ignorantiam Dei, renovatur per fidem et agnitionem Dei. II Cor. III, 18: *in eadem imaginem transformamur a claritate in claritatem, tamquam a domini spiritu*. Sed ubi est haec renovatio? Ibi, scilicet ubi est imago Dei, quae non est in potentii sensitivae partis, sed in mente.
exterior; he is a person who is enslaved by a senility in his soul, due to sin, and in his body whose members provide the tools for sin. Thus a man enslaved to sin in soul and body is an old man. He is already on the way to corruption, or is actually beginning to decay since “that which decayeth and grow old is near its end” (Heb. 8:13). And so man subjected to sin is termed an old man because he is on the way to corruption. On this account, he goes on, *corrupted according to the desire of error*. Anything will corrupt when it deviates from the order of its inner being.

Man’s nature longs for what accords with reason; and truth is reason’s perfection and good. Hence, when someone’s reason sways toward error, and his desire is corrupted from this error, he is referred to as an old man. 237

This passage helps to clarify what Thomas means in condemning the flesh; it is not that the flesh is inherently sinful, but rather by a person’s decision to follow the desires of the sensitive appetite out of accord with reason, a person is behaving according to the flesh. The problem, therefore, still lies in the soul, that is, in the interior of the person, and their failure to follow what is proper to themselves, reason. The person is thus called upon to deny the desires of the flesh, and not to harm or renounce the flesh itself. Thomas describes how this is accomplished: “In Colossians 3:9, the apostle indicates how to leave the old man behind: *Stripping yourselves of the old man with his deeds.* The substance of

237 Commentary on Ephesians Ch. 4 lec. 7 – Primo quid intelligatur per veterem hominem. Dicunt aliqui, quod hic homo vetus exterior, novus vero dicitur interior. Sed dicendum est quod homo vetus dicitur tam interior quam exterior, qui subiicitur vetustati quantum ad animam per peccatum et quantum ad corpus, quia membra corporis sunt arma peccati. Et sic, subjectus homo peccato secundum animam et corpus, dicitur vetus homo, secundum quod illa vetusta sunt, quae sunt in via corruptionis, vel in ipso corrumpi: *quia quod antiquatur et senescit, prope interitum est*, ut dicitur ad Hebr. VIII, 13. Et sic homo subjectus peccato dicitur vetus, quia est in via corruptionis; propter quod subdit qui corruptitur secundum desideria erroris. Nam unumquodque corrumpitur, cum recedit ab ordine naturae suae. Natura autem hominis est, ut desiderium eius tendat ad id quod est secundum rationem. Perfectio autem et bonum rationis est veritas. Quando ergo ratio tendit ad errorem, et desiderium ex hoc errore corruptitur, tunc vetus homo dicitur.
human nature is not to be rejected or despoiled, but only wicked actions and conduct.”

This distinction is helpful in clarifying the ascetic aspect of Thomas’s spiritual practices; Thomas is not, in distinction from the caricature of medieval figures, a believer in bodily disfigurement for the purpose of chastising the flesh. The goal in chastising the flesh is to create a mind capable of rejecting the impulses of the sensitive aspect of the soul, not to harm the corporeal part of the body.

This is emphasized as well in a passage from Thomas’s *Commentary on Galatians*. In this section, Thomas indicates the proper means of restraining the fleshly aspect of the person, working from Galatians 5:24: “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” He writes:

He does not say that they shun vices and concupiscences, because a good physician cures well, when he applies remedies against the cause of the disease. But the flesh is the root of vices. Therefore, if we would shun vices, the flesh must be tamed: “I chastise my body and bring it under subjection” (1 Cor 9:27). But because the flesh is tamed by vigils, fasts and labors—“Torture and fetters are for a malicious slave; send him to work that he be not idle” (Sir 33:28)—and one is led to such works out of devotion to Christ crucified. Therefore he specifically says, *they have crucified*, i.e., conformed themselves to Christ crucified by afflicting their flesh: “Our old man is crucified with him that the body of sin may

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238 NRSV. Douay-Rheims: “And they that are Christ’s have crucified their flesh with the vices and concupiscences.” Vulgate: Qui autem sunt Christi carnem crucifixerunt cum vitiis et concupiscentiis.
be destroyed” (Rom 6:6); that I may live to God: with Christ I am nailed to the cross (2:19).  

There are a number of interesting elements in this passage. First, the employment of the physician metaphor for moral treatment is noteworthy; the disease afflicting humans in this situation are the vices and concupiscences, and these may be “cured” by taming the flesh. The practices Thomas recommends for taming the flesh are found in a line taken from John Cassian’s Collations, and is one which Thomas repeats throughout his works. “Vigils, fasts, and labors,” are three practices Thomas recommends for chastising and restraining the flesh, and each of these will appear with greater explanation in other locations. Finally, this method of chastising the flesh is not about bodily torture. For Thomas, as will be developed in the next chapter of this dissertation, the practices of fasting, vigils, and labors do not involve doing bodily damage to oneself. Fasting, for Thomas, is about restraining oneself only to what food is necessary for proper bodily function. Vigils, or concerted times of prayer, are not practiced by ignoring the needs of the body; likewise, Thomas includes reading, writing, and contemplation under the

umbrella of “labor,” and does not recommend much manual labor for those engaged in
the religious orders. Thomas explains this further in the same lecture:

But because they do not crucify the flesh by destroying nature, for “No one hates
his own flesh” (Eph 5:29), but with respect to matters that are contrary to the
Law, for that reason he says, with the vices, i.e., with the sins, and
concupiscences, i.e., passions, whereby the soul is inclined to sin. For he does not
crucify his flesh well who leaves room for passions; otherwise, since reason is not
always alert to avoid sin, as it ought, he might fall at some time: “Go not after thy
lusts, but turn away from thy own will” (Sir 18:30); “Make not provision for the
flesh in its concupiscence” (Rom 13:14).240

As Thomas suggests, the work of “crucifying the flesh” is a matter of the proper presence
of the passions within a person, and not a question of inflicting bodily harm in order to
resist vices and concupiscences. What a person ought to do, instead, is avoid sin,
something which is accomplished in two ways. The first is the alertness of reason in
watching the self and preventing inappropriate thoughts and actions; the second is
through the redirection of the affections, and the movement away from sinful desires.
This second aspect becomes necessary because “reason is not always alert to avoid sin.”
Since this is the case, a person is aided in avoiding sin by not having the desires that lead

240 Commentary on Galatians ch. 5 lec. 7 – Quia vero non crucifigunt carnem destruendo naturam, quia nemo carnem suam odio habuit, ut dicitur Eph. V, 29, sed quantum ad ea quae contrariantur legi, ideo dicit cum vitiis, id est cum peccatis, et concupiscentiis, id est passionibus, quibus anima inclinatur ad peccandum. Non enim bene crucifigit carnem qui etiam passionibus locum non aufert, aliter cum ratio non semper invigilet ad peccata vitandum, ut oportet, posset quandoque cadere. Eccli. XVIII, 30: post concupiscentias tuas non eas, et cetera. Rom. XIII, 14: carnis curam ne feceritis in desideriis, et cetera.
to sin. In the next chapter, working from the *De Perfectione*, Thomas describes what are essentially practices of distraction to help a person avoid those sinful desires.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the work of Thomas Aquinas on the matter of self-relation. As Christopher Gill writes, in quoting from Plato’s *Republic* and describing one of the classical models of personhood, “the oligarchic person is ‘never free of internal strife’ and is a ‘double person’ a ‘διπλους, because there is a constant struggle between the reason and the rest.’” This characterization is absolutely true for Thomas, as seen from his description of the concept of the Old and New man. This double person, however, does not mark the extent of the relationship of the self. The practices which accompany the distinction between Old and New self also call one’s attention to God and to the neighbor. The person, therefore, is called to seek God, and to aid others in seeking God as well. This pursuit requires vigilance and solicitude, an ordered fear of God, and a desire to accomplish the good.

The account of reflexivity in Thomas is one of some tension, therefore. For persons who are fully blessed by grace, however, like Jesus, the lower faculties are fully aligned with the direction of reason, and no tension exists. For the rest, however, a reliance on grace and the practices which help align the rest of one’s faculties with reason are required. These practices, especially solicitude and watchfulness over the self, closely resemble many of the classical aspects of reflexive self-understanding. There is no emphasis on uncovering any sort of deep, hidden truth within the self; self knowledge is momentary, and is about the examination of actions and thoughts with regard to

241 Gill 245
determining a proper thought or course of action. As will be suggested in the next chapter, the practices associated with the examination of thoughts are rather limited, with Thomas essentially recommending the immediate dismissal of any illicit thoughts of any sort. With this practice, there is no possibility of the examination of illicit thoughts, merely their discarding.
Chapter 4 - On the vows and the perfection of the spiritual life

Following the introduction to Aquinas and the concepts of spiritual exercise and reflexivity, this next chapter will provide an analysis of Aquinas’s *De perfectione spiritualis vitae* as a key example of his employment of these two areas of moral development. The *De perfectione* is a treatise on perfection, written in the context of the debate over the role of religious orders and poverty which began in the middle of the 13th century. It is an especially important text for this dissertation in that it offers, in a condensed form, an explanation of perfection, the practices which serve as a means to perfection, and the understanding of self requisite for this pursuit. In this way, it serves as an abbreviated description of the whole of Thomas’s teaching on how one ought to live.

This chapter will cover a number of issues: first, the context of the *De perfectione* and its popularity. Second, Aquinas’s understanding of human perfection, as described in both the *De perfectione* and in the *Summa Theologiae* and *Summa Contra Gentiles*, and the importance of the three vows of the religious orders. Finally, I will turn to a discussion of the *De perfectione* in detail, an effort which will represent much of this chapter. In this discussion, I will focus on the description Thomas offers of the three means to perfection, namely poverty, continence, and obedience, and the accompanying practices which are subsumed under these means. As Thomas will repeatedly emphasize, being poor, chaste, and obedient does not make a person perfect; but the practices of these three can aid in a person’s becoming perfect through the grace of God.
These three means to perfection represent, of course, the three vows taken by members of religious orders, including Thomas’s own Dominican order. Thomas does not, however, refer to them as vows initially, nor does he refer to any specific religious order. Instead, poverty, continence, and obedience are discussed as general means to perfection, one which can in fact be embodied and fulfilled by rich, married men. This is especially important to note: Thomas does not write the *De perfectione* only for the religious orders, though the text, of course, holds the greatest resonance with their way of life. Thomas continually responds to questions regarding Abraham and other exemplars from the Hebrew Scriptures who were wealthy, married, and did not have a hierarchy to be obedient to. This does not exclude them from perfection, however; as Thomas writes of Abraham, he was poor in that he had no affection for external things; he was continent in that his sexual activity took place in a rightly ordered manner within the confines of marriage; he was obedient in that he was obedient directly unto God. Thus, the *De perfectione* is a manual for all people concerning the path to perfection in this life.

What is represented in this description of the spiritual life is an emphasis on contemplation and the life of the mind similar to that found in classical thinkers. Poverty, continence, and obedience represent a reprioritization of affections in the person; poverty is the separation of one’s undue affections from external things; continence is the separation of one’s affections from other persons, including family members, children, wives, and so on, where these form obstacles to charity; obedience is

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242 Seneca does, in fact, provide a description of the spiritual life rather similar in his encouragement to avoid the attachment of affections to things, other humans, and the orientation of the person towards Reason. The philosopher’s requirement of leisure is precisely for separation from goods, people, and personal requirements.
the separation of one’s affections for one’s own will. This movement of separation and redirection of affections affirms the priority of place for the *intellectus* and its relationship to God. In Thomas, one separates one’s undue affections from all of the lower aspects of the person, including the body, the sensitive appetite, and the will, but a person never disregards their higher rational faculty.\(^{243}\) The reason for this control of the lower aspects is clear; the emphasis in Thomas is on preparing the person for contemplation of God, something which is better accomplished through the proper disposition of one’s affections.

Poverty and continence are accompanied by certain practices directed towards the withdrawal of the affections from external things. As Thomas describes poverty in this text, a person in voluntary poverty is not necessarily materially poor, but rather lacks attachment to the material things surrounding their person, using them only as necessary for the maintenance of the body and the efforts of the religious life. Likewise, the continent person is not necessarily someone who avoids all sexual activity, but that person who has due attachment to their relations. At the same time, however, Thomas does offer a special chapter on “aids to the preservation of chastity,”\(^{244}\) one which provides spiritual exercises directed towards the celibate life of a professed religious person. In this chapter, Thomas describes seven exercises aimed at maintaining the chastity of a person, each of which will be described in detail below.

\(^{243}\) Though Thomas speaks of separating affections from such things, he makes clear that he is only speaking of preventing undue solicitude over such concerns. A person should always provide due care for their own body, just not such care as would prevent them from the love of God.

\(^{244}\) *De Perfectione* 9
This movement of affections also provides a further description of the relationship of self to self in Thomas. As was established in the previous chapter, the person should seek to identify as their rational nature in order to live a moral life. This does not, however, mean a denial or removal of the affections or of the will. Instead, the affective aspect of a person performs in a reasonable way, in concert with one’s reason. Nonetheless, Thomas does recommend a certain distancing of the person from the lower faculties. In the *De perfectione*, Thomas explains that the vow of obedience is about “charitable self-hatred” and the sacrifice of one’s own will to God. For members of religious orders, this is accomplished by a vow of obedience to follow the direction of one’s superior, who serves as a proxy for God. In describing this vow, Thomas uses reflexive language like self-hatred, self-abnegation, and self-denial to describe the mindset necessary for achieving this form of obedience. Furthermore he argues, in distinction from the previous two means that “this practice of salutary self-abnegation and charitable self-hatred [obedience], is, in part, necessary for all men in order to salvation, and is, partly, a point of perfection.” Thomas justifies this statement by appealing to Dionysius, summarizing him thus: “it is in the nature of divine love that he who loves should belong not to himself, but to the one beloved.” For the human to love God, therefore, a degree of renunciation of self is necessary.

*Argument*

Once more, the human is approached as a project to be worked on, one which requires constant maintenance and care to keep from going astray. As described in the

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245 De Perfectione 10
246 Ibid.
previous chapters, the identity Thomas believes humans ought to hold is with their intellect or mind. In identifying as mind, a true “self” is not produced, however; there is no language of self-realization or true self in Thomas. Instead, the person is encouraged to take up a position that distances the mind from the other aspects of the human life, such that the mind is able to operate without encumbrance. Thus, for poverty, the person renounces goods so that he does not have to use his mind for the procurement of goods, saving its activity for contemplation. Likewise for chastity, an unmarried man does not need to provide for a family, and he is able to combat sexual desires, such that they lessen their hold on the person over time. The vow of obedience does even more, in that a person no longer has to consider precisely his own activities, in terms of where he is going or what he is doing, though it is still of great importance that a person be aware of his actions and only obey when it is morally approvable.

In these three movements away from encumbrance, there is a profound comment on the nature of sin and human perfection for Thomas. Sin and perfection are the two options for the human mind; each originates with the activity of thought, and the nature of each thought leads to a chain reaction. A sinful thought, as Thomas will explain in the section on chastity, quite often leads to a sinful action. The consideration of good things, however, will preserve the person from sinful action.

Most importantly, in terms of the reflexive understanding of the self, there is no emphasis on confessing or providing an account of any “self.” As seen previously, the interior movement of Thomas’s spirituality leads to treating most of the human person as “extrinsic” to the thing that is most properly the self. This prevents any need for
confessing a sinful thought as something “self-constituting;” that is, a person’s identity is not constituted by their actions, whether good or bad. Thomas still acknowledges the need for confession and repentance, but these are accomplished more towards preventing future error, and less because of the weight of sin.

*The Perfection of the Spiritual Life*

The *De perfectione spiritualis vitae* is perhaps one of the least read of Thomas’s works in modern times. This is, one may suggest, a result of two overriding characterizations of the text which serve to preclude its consideration. First, it is understood as a product of the debate over the validity of mendicant orders, a statement which is in many ways accurate, but requires further qualification. Torrell dates the *De perfectione* to the early months of 1270, “since its last chapters echo the *Quodlibet XIV* of Gerard of Abbeville held at Christmas 1269.” This places the text about fifteen years after Thomas’s original defense of religious orders, the *Contra impugnantes Dei cultum et religionem*. In each of these works, Thomas responds to critiques from those in university positions against the existence of the new religious orders in general, and in particular their involvement in the universities. Thomas responds by providing an explanation of what the religious orders do, why they are justified, and why those arguing against them are incorrect. The two works share many similarities, but there is one key difference. The *De perfectione* contains an extended teaching on the subject of perfection, and a detailed explanation of the observance and intent of the vows taken by

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247 Confession and repentance in Thomas needs further discussion in Thomas, especially in light of his spiritual practices. Thomas does not show much concern for the practice of confession in most of his writings, though repentance will make a few appearances.

248 Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas* I, 85. Gerard’s Quodlibet was critical once more of the mendicant orders and their emphasis on poverty.
professed religious. This leads to the second characterization of the text, again from Torrell:

The interest of the *De perfectione* is not limited to the history of this polemic.

From the very outset, its teaching on Christian perfection and the religious life begins an exposition that will find its completion in the *Summa* and is already rather different from the one in the *Contra Gentiles*. Furthermore, this little work marks a decisive stage in Thomistic theology about the bishop’s office.\(^{249}\)

The *De perfectione* is thus understood in two ways: first, as an example of polemic in the debate over religious orders, and second, as a sort of trial run to the questions found in the *Summa Theologiae* on “The acts which pertain especially to certain men” (cf. *ST* II-II.181-188). For these reasons, many are inclined to overlook the text in favor of the *Summa Theologiae*.

Despite this characterization, there is to be found in the *De perfectione* an important reflection of the spiritual life according to Thomas Aquinas. Thomas never wrote a short spiritual treatise as did his contemporaries, e.g. Bonaventure’s *Lignum vitae* or *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, or Albert’s *De adhaerendo deo*. The *De perfectione* does, however, represent a rather similar entry, and was in fact a widely distributed work. J.N. Hillgarth, in his lecture, *Who Read Thomas Aquinas?*, describes the work as “very popular” and writes that “118 copies of the *De perfectione* survive, as compared to only one or three copies of the works against which Thomas was writing.”\(^{250}\) He writes

\(^{249}\) Ibid., 86.

\(^{250}\) Hillgarth 6. Leonard Boyle’s work *The setting of the ‘Summa Theologiae’ of Thomas Aquinas* identifies 67 copies of the *prima pars* of the *ST*, 57 of the *prima secundae*, 56 of the *secunda secundae*, and 37 of the *tertia pars*.
further that “The Contra impugnantes, a defense of mendicants, and the De perfectione spiritualis vitae, an apologia for religious orders, were copied for Benedictine houses from Normandy to Austria.”

Regardless of previous characterizations, the De perfectione does provide some important teachings, which provide us with a fuller picture of the spiritual practices of Thomas Aquinas. In particular, the first fifteen chapters are of particular interest (out of twenty-six total in the work), the last several chapters containing teachings on the work of bishops and responses to criticisms from opponents. These first chapters contain Thomas’s teachings on perfection, the vows, and charity. These chapters also provide practical advice less apparently found in Thomas’s Summae, in the form of spiritual exercises. These aspects make the De perfectione not only an “apologia” for religious orders, nor a simple defense of mendicant orders, but a text which offers an in-depth teaching of how one progresses towards perfection within the spiritual life, which is available to all persons. In Thomas’s own words, in introducing the text, he describes it as a “treatise on perfection, explaining what is meant by the term; how perfection is acquired; what is the state of perfection; and what are the employments befitting those who embrace this state.”

The decision to emphasize the place of the De perfectione in the corpus of Thomas Aquinas is the result of several considerations. First, the texts popularity in its own day provides a warrant for modern readers to at least be aware of the text. Second, its subject

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251 Hillgarth 11.
252 De Perfectione 1 - Quoniam quidam perfectionis ignari, de perfectionis statu vana quaedam dicere praesumpserunt, propositum nostrae intentionis est de perfectione tractare: quid sit esse perfectum, qualiter perfectio acquiratur, quis perfectionis status, et quae competant assumentibus perfectionis statum.
matter: the *De perfectione* contains in a concise form the teaching of Thomas Aquinas on the spiritual life, including a focus on the three vows of the religious orders (poverty, chastity, and obedience), and how these are actually applicable in the life of all persons, even those who are wealthy and married (e.g., Abraham). Although much of the text is committed to an explanation of the various offices of persons in the church, and to a defense of the mendicant orders, the chapters on the spiritual life provide a teaching that serves as an important entry point into the work of Thomas Aquinas.

**The End of the Spiritual Life**

For Thomas, the spiritual life is about the pursuit of perfection, which holds many degrees. Thomas writes that “we must bear in mind that the word ‘perfect’ (*perfectum*) is used in several senses. A thing may be absolutely perfect or it may be perfect relatively.”

Perfection for humans is understood to consist in the possession of charity, something which is possible in a limited way while we remain on earth. The priority of charity is understood by Thomas to be a teaching of Paul: “Paul considers charity as the chief element in perfection.” Therefore, “the spiritual life consists, principally, in charity.”

This love in which perfection consists is not limited to the love of God. Instead, following Christ’s two “precepts of charity,” humans are called to the love of God and the love of neighbor.

According to the *De perfectione*, there are three ways to enact the love of God, and thus three possible ways of being perfect. The first form of perfection is God’s alone, and refers to God’s perfect self-love. The second refers to the love achieved by the

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253 Ibid.
254 Ibid., 1
255 Ibid., 2
blessed, those who dwell in the presence of God. Finally, the third way of loving God refers to humans as they are now in the world (wayfarers). Perfect perfection is not possible in this life; instead, perfection for wayfarers consists in the “endeavor, as far as we can, to emulate” the perfection of the blessed. For these persons, the love of God is perfect if there is “nothing in us which is wanting to divine love, that is to say, if there is nothing in us which we do not, actually or habitually, refer to God.”

For Thomas, the means to the state of perfection are not found simply in the precepts (laws) of the Bible, but in the counsels provided by Jesus (as was commonly accepted at that time). This distinction, between counsels and precepts, is particularly interesting, and is actually found in an article in the Summa (II.II 184.3). Thomas is careful to say that the counsels do not overstep the precepts given, and that perfection is not restricted to those who follow the counsels. He does say, however, that the counsels “call” or “invite” humans to perfection in this life, something which occurs in a different way than is possible in the observance of precepts.

The calls provided by the counsels, in concert with the vows of the religious, provide the structure for the next sections in the De Perfectione. These three are, of course, poverty or “the renunciation of earthly possessions,” continence or “perpetual chastity,” and third, “the abnegation of our own will,” or obedience. These three vows form the key means to the achievement of the perfection of the spiritual life, and in his discussion of each of these categories, Thomas provides practical advice as to how it is possible to realize the pursuit of these goals.

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256 Ibid., 6
257 Ibid., 5
258 Ibid., 6
This practical advice is centered on a passage from Augustine, which Thomas summarizes as follows:

It is abundantly clear that the human heart is more intensely attracted to one object in proportion as it is withdrawn from a multiplicity of desires. Therefore, the more a man is delivered from solicitude concerning temporal matters, the more perfectly he will be enabled to love God. Hence Augustine says in the Book of 83 Questions that the hope of gaining or keeping material wealth is the poison of charity; that, as charity increases, cupidity diminishes; and that when charity becomes perfect, cupidity ceases to exist. Hence, all the counsels which call man to perfection tend to withdraw his affections from temporal objects; so that his soul is enabled the more freely to turn to God by contemplating Him, loving Him, and fulfilling His will.\(^{259}\)

The withdrawal and redirection of desires provides the logic for the three vows taken by the members of religious orders. The renunciation of material possessions separates our affections from the things we use to live, and limits our concern to the greatest extent possible, thereby freeing us for the love of God. Likewise, the renunciation of earthly ties and matrimony separates our affections from other people, and our affection for our own sensitive nature. Finally, obedience separates our affections from our own freedom of willing. For Thomas, this completes the separation of our affection from things

\(^{259}\) Ibid., Manifestum namque est quod humanum cor tanto intensius in aliquid unum fertur, quanto magis a multis revocatur. Sic igitur tanto perfectius animus hominis ad Deum diligendum fertur, quanto magis ab affectu temporalium removetur. Unde Augustinus dicit in libro LXXXIII quaeestionum quod venenum caritatis est cupiditas diminutio; perfectio vero nulla cupiditas. Omnia igitur consilia, quibus ad perfectionem invitamur, ad avertatur, ut sic liberius mens tendat in Deum, contemplando, amando, et eius voluntatem implendo.
external to the divine and to the divine image within us, allowing for the proper directing
of the affections towards God. Again, this separation is predicated in terms of freeing us
from solicitude over external things, not by suggesting the essential immorality of those
things which are rejected. Thomas recognizes that external goods, marriage, family, and
one’s own will are not essentially wrong, thus needing to be renounced; instead, he is
arguing that our continued concern over all these things, i.e. the need to provide food and
shelter for oneself, watch over one’s family, and choose the best course of life for
oneself, are activities that distract us from committing ourselves fully to the love and
praise of God in contemplation and action.

*The Summae on Perfection*

Thomas repeats the threefold distinction in defining perfection in the *Summa
Theologiae*, though the discussion is accomplished in different terms. Instead, Thomas
relates perfection to the capacities held in each part of the relationship of love. The first
form is “absolute, and answers to a totality not only on the part of lover, but also on the
part of the object loved,” whereas the second form, “answers to an absolute totality on the
part of the lover,” and not to the object loved as well. God is perfect as lover and
beloved, because the object is fully loved and understood and loves itself; the objective
loved and the lover stand in perfect unity in this understanding, and thus, love is perfect.
In the second form of perfection, which Thomas again identifies with the “blessed,” it is
the affective faculty of the person which always tends to the object loved, which remains,
to an extent, a separate entity, thus limiting the possibility of perfection.
The third form of perfection, as above, refers to human perfection as possible in this life. Again, it is dependent on the degree of charity present within us, and the removal of all impediments\footnote{The term “impediment” appears well over 1000 times in Thomas, especially in noun and verb forms, mainly to refer to external things, passions, or other motions which negatively impact charity, reason, or the will. For the use of the term in this dissertation, see the following: SCG 3.133.4 (n.246), Perfectione 9 (n.285, n. 282, n.291, n. 316) ST I-II.46.4 ad 3 (n.346) II-II.123.1 (n.371, n.372) SCG 4.54.8 (n.107) ST II-II.186.1 ad 4 (n.110) ST II-II.189.1 (n.113, n.158) SCG 4.54.3 (n.155) SCG 3.133.4 (n.264) II-II.184.2 (n.260) SCG 3.136.13 (n.274) ST II-II.25.7 (n.302) I-II.33.3 (n.344) I-II.48.3 (n.347) SCG 3.132.14 (n.112) III.15.4 (n.138) ST III.15.9 ad 3(n.142) ST II-II.186.4 (n.161) ST II-II.182.3 (n.173) This is an often overlooked aspect of the thought of Thomas Aquinas, but as its repeated occurrence in this dissertation suggests, without any intended collation on my part, it plays an important role in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. It is translated in a number of ways: hindrance, impediment, obstacle, or as a verb, to hinder, or to impede.} to this charity. The impediments to charity are, of course, sin and misdirected affections. Thomas explains:

Such perfection can be had in this life, and in two ways. First, by the removal from man’s affections of all that is contrary to charity, such as mortal sin; and there can be no charity apart from this perfection wherefore it is necessary to salvation. Secondly, by the removal from man’s affections not only of whatever is contrary to charity, but also of whatever hinders the mind’s affections from tending wholly to God.\footnote{ST II-II.184.2 - Et talis perfectio potest in hac vita haberi. Et hoc dupliciter. Uno modo, inquantum ab affectu hominis excluditur omne illud quod caritati contrariatur, sicut est peccatum mortale. Et sine tali perfectione caritas esse, non potest. Unde est de necessitate salutis. Alio modo, inquantum ab affectu hominis excluditur non solum illud quod est caritati contrarium, sed etiam omne illud quod impedit ne affectus mentis totaliter dirigatur ad Deum.}

The answer provided in the *Summa Theologiae* is largely the same as that seen in the *De perfectione*, and certainly holds the same implications for human action. The human should, in order to attain the perfection of charity, avoid sin and direct the affections fully towards God.
This description can also be seen in Thomas’s understanding of the “perfecting” virtues. Thomas describes these as the “virtues of men who are on their way and tending towards the Divine similitude.” He writes;

Thus prudence, by contemplating the things of God, counts as nothing all the things of the world, and directs all the thoughts of the soul to God alone: temperance, so far as nature allows, neglects the needs of the body: fortitude prevents the soul from being afraid of neglecting the body and rising to heavenly things; and justice consists in the soul giving a whole-hearted consent to follow the way thus proposed....Thus, prudence sees naught else but the things of God; temperance knows no earthly desires; fortitude has no knowledge of passion; and justice, by imitating the Divine Mind, is united thereto by an everlasting covenant.

Such are the virtues attributed to the Blessed, or, in this life, to some who are at the summit of perfection.262

One immediately notices the cardinal virtues in this passage, especially in that Thomas here gives them a particularly “religious” appearance. This sort of interpretation of “tending to perfection” runs throughout Thomas’s work, and is not limited to the De perfectione. The emphasis in the passage above, and elsewhere, is a complete focus on the divine and a withdrawal of affection, as far as is reasonably possible, from worldly things.

262 ST I-II.61.5 - Ita scilicet quod prudentia omnia mundana divinorum contemplatione despiciat, omnemque animae cogitationem in divina sola dirigat; temperantia vero relinquat, inquantum natura patitur, quae corporis usus requirit; fortitudinis autem est ut anima non terreatur propter excessum a corpore, et accessum ad superna; iustitia vero est ut tota anima consentiat ad huius propositi viam....Ita scilicet quod prudentia sola divina intueatur; temperantia terrenas cupiditates nesciat; fortitudo passiones ignoret; iustitia cum divina mente perpetuo fodicere societur, eam scilicet imitando. Quas quidem virtutes dicimus esse beatorum, vel aliquorum in hac vita perfectissimorum.
Elsewhere in the *Summae*, Thomas presents this distinction as the difference between necessary and inordinate solicitude. These two texts provide a relatively consistent approach with that seen in the *De Perfectione*, though with a more expansive treatment of the subject. In one section in the *Summa Contra Gentilium*, Thomas describes in detail the rationale for the three vows. He writes:

Moreover, in the general mode of human life, human concern is devoted to three items: first, to one’s own person, what he should do, or where he should spend his time; second, to the persons connected with him, chiefly his wife and children; and third, to the acquisition of external things, which a man needs for the maintenance of life. So, to cut off solicitude for external things the counsel of poverty is given in the divine law...And to cut off concern for wife and children there is given man the counsel of virginity or continence....Finally to cut off man’s solicitude even for himself there is given the counsel of obedience, through which man hands over the control of his own acts to a superior.\(^{263}\)

It is noteworthy that at no point in this discussion, or in the previous one in the *De Perfectione*, that Thomas mentions the renouncing of the mind. This is for the simple reason that freeing up the mind for its proper activity is the intent of all these actions. As indicated in the second chapter of this dissertation, the end of human life is found in the contemplation of God. Thomas understands the vows of the religious to be precisely for

\(^{263}\) SCG 3.130.2 - Occupatur autem humana sollicitudo, secundum communem modum humanae vitae, circa tria: primo quidem, circa propriam personam, quid agat, aut ubi conversetur; secundo autem, circa personas sibi coniunctas, praecipue uxorem et filios; tertio, circa res exteriore procurandas, quibus homo indiget ad sustentationem vitae. Ad amputandum igitur sollicitudinem circa res exteriore, datur in lege divina consilium paupertatis: ut scilicet res huius mundi abiiciat, quibus animus eius sollicitudine aliqua implicari posset....Ad amputandum autem sollicitudinem uxoris et filiorum, datur homini consilium de virginitate vel continencia....Ad amputandum autem sollicitudinem hominis etiam circa seipsum, datur consilium obedientiae, per quam homo dispositionem suorum actuum superiori committit.
the sake of freeing the mind for contemplation. He writes that “the perfection to which these three counsels give a disposition consists in detachment of the mind for God.”

The goal of the vows, therefore, is not found in the content of each vow, but the degree to which they contribute to the detachment of the mind from worldly concerns, which results in the freedom to contemplate the divine. Thomas repeats this in the *Summa Contra Gentilium*:

For poverty in itself is not good, but only insofar as it liberates from those things whereby a man is hindered from intending spiritual things. Hence, the measure of its goodness depends on the manner in which man is freed by means of it from the aforementioned obstacles. And this is generally true of all external things: they are good to the extent that they contribute to virtue, but not in themselves.

The same can be said for obedience and for chastity; they are not, in themselves, “good” things, but they become good by virtue of their contribution to the contemplation of God.

Again, one of the more important concepts in Thomas is the question of solici
tude. As suggested in the previous chapter, there is a positive valence to the term, especially in regard to due concern over moral action. Thomas is also highly concerned about inordinate solici
tude (a vice), however, which provides part of the rationale for the vows. He writes:

Our Lord forbade not necessary but inordinate solici
tude. Now there is a fourfold solici
tude to be avoided in temporal matters. First, we must not place our end in

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264 SCG 3.130.6 - Perfectio autem ad quam praedicta disponunt, in vacatione mentis circa Deum consistit.
265 SCG 3.133.4 - Non enim paupertas secundum se bona est: sed inquantum liberat ab illis quibus homo impeditur quominus spiritualibus intendant. Unde secundum modum quo homo per eam liberatur ab impedimentis praedictis, est mensura bonitatis ipsius. Et hoc est commune in omnibus exterioribus, quod in tantum bona sunt in quantum proficiunt ad virtutem, non autem secundum seipsa.
them, nor serve God for the sake of the necessities of food and raiment. Second, we must not be so anxious about temporal things as to despair of God’s help: wherefore our Lord says: “Your father knoweth that you have need of all these things” (Mt. 6:32). Thirdly, we must not add presumption to our solicitude; in other words, we must not be confident of getting the necessaries of life by our own efforts without God’s help: such solicitude Our Lord sets aside by saying that a man cannot add anything to his stature (Mt. 6:27). [Fourthly] We must not anticipate the time for anxiety; namely, by being solicitous now for the needs, not of the present, but of a future time: wherefore He says: “Be not solicitous for tomorrow...” (Mt. 6:34).  

This form of solicitude, the due care for oneself and those immediate to you, is not only approvable, it is morally necessary in most situations. The reduction of this form of solicitude is accomplished through the vows, as even though this form of solicitude is justifiable, it still retains some of its distracting characteristics.

The Means of Perfection

As indicated above, the three primary means to perfection are found in the renunciation of material things, earthly bonds, and one’s own will. In the De Perfectione, Thomas provides a teaching on each of these vows, and describes some of the practices.

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266 ST I-II.108.3 ad 5 - Ad quintum dicendum quod dominus sollicitudinem necessarium non prohibuit, sed sollicitudinem inordinatam. Est autem quadruplex inordinatio sollicitudinis vitanda circa temporalia. Primo quidem, ut in eis finem non constitutamus, neque Deo serviamus propter necessaria victus et vestitus. Unde dicit, nolite thesaurizare vobis, et cetera. Secundo, ut non sic sollicitemur de temporalibus, cum desperacione divini auxilii. Unde dominus dicit, scit pater vester quia his omnibus indigetis. Tertio, ne sit sollicitudo praesumptuosa, ut scilicet homo confidat se necessaria vitae per suam sollicitudinem posse procurare, absque divino auxilio. Quod dominus removet per hoc quod homo non potest aliquid adiicere ad staturam suam. Quarto, per hoc quod homo sollicitudinis tempus praecoccupat, quia scilicet de hoc sollicitus est nunc, quod non pertinet ad curam praesentis temporis, sed ad curam futuri. Unde dicit, nolite solliciti esse in crastinum.
associated with them. The description of each of these practices will comprise the remainder of this chapter.

**The Means of Perfection: Poverty**

Thomas is quite explicit that the practice of poverty is not primarily concerned with the renunciation of material possessions, but rather focused on the interior disposition of the soul to outward things. The emphasis on the internal disposition of the soul towards material things is located first in Aquinas’s interpretation of Christ’s teachings contained in the New Law. Describing how the New Law “directed man sufficiently as regards interior actions,” he writes:

> Our Lord explained the manner of fulfilling those precepts which the Scribes and Pharisees did not rightly understand: and this affected chiefly those precepts of the Decalogue. For they thought that the prohibition of adultery and murder covered the external act only, and not the internal desire.\(^{267}\)

In this instance, Thomas is referring to Christ’s interpretation of the commandments, not the counsels. And yet, the same principle holds for the counsels; the counsel of voluntary poverty does not concern only the external act of having no possessions, but insists that holding the proper detachment from material things is essential to the proper observance of the counsel.

This principle is expressed quite clearly in Thomas’s question on “the state of perfection in general.” In replying to the suggestion that the religious state is more

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\(^{267}\) ST I-II.108.3 ad 1- ...in quibus scribae et pharisaei non rectum intellectum habebant. Et hoc contingebat praeceps circa tria praecepta Decalogi. Nam circa prohibitionem adulterii et homicidi, aestimabant solum exteriorem actum porhiberi, non autem interiorem appetitum.
perfect than that of bishops, since religious follow poverty while bishops do not, Thomas explains the significance of internal ordering. He writes:

Renunciation of one’s possessions may be considered in two ways. First, as being actual: and thus it is not essential, but a means to perfection, as stated above (a.3). Hence nothing hinders the state of perfection from being without renunciation of one’s possessions, and the same applies to other outward practices. Secondly, it may be considered in relation to one’s preparedness, in the sense of being prepared to renounce or give away all: and this belongs directly to perfection.²⁶⁸

Bishops, therefore, while they are wealthy, are always ready to give their money away as necessary. This may have been news to many of the bishops in Thomas’ day, but this was his way of accounting for their perfection. This also furthers the point that poverty, for Thomas, is not about the lack of material possessions, but the interior disposition of the soul towards external goods.

*The Observance of Poverty*

From Aquinas’s work on poverty in the *De Perfectione*, three aspects can be described. These three are:

1. The giving up of material possessions
2. The renunciation of the desire for possessions
3. Detachment from material things

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²⁶⁸ ST II-II 184.7 ad 1 - Ad primum ergo dicendum quod abrenuntiatio propiorum facultatum dupliciter considerari potest. Uno modo, secundum quod est in actu. Et sic in ea non consistit essentialiter perfectio, sed est quoddam perfectionis instrumentum, sicut supra dictum est. Et ideo nihil prohibet statum perfectionis esse sine abrenuntiatione propiorum. Sic etiam dicendum est de alis exterioribus observantios. Alio modo potest considerari secundum praeparationem animi, ut scilicet homo sit paratus si opus fuerit, omnia dimittere vel distribuere. Et hoc pertinent directe ad perfectionem.
The first aspect of poverty is derived from the story found in Matthew 19, where a young man seeking to be perfect asks Jesus what is required of him. After the man explains how he had perfectly observed the commandments his entire life, Jesus responds, “If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell all that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven; and come, follow me.” Aquinas, and an immense number of commentators before him, understood this statement as a counsel given by Christ recommending voluntary poverty as a way of life. Christ’s statement was taken literally, that a person should divest themselves of all material property, giving it to the poor. The reason for this is not because possessions are inherently immoral, but because they distract one’s focus and affections away from God. First, Thomas cites Jerome: “And, ‘Behold,’ says Jerome in his Commentary on Matthew, ‘the cause of this sadness. He had many possessions, which, like thorns and briars, choked the seed of the Lord’s words.’” In this quotation, possessions stand in the way of the person accepting the words of Christ, and allowing them to grow within and change the person. Aquinas also cites from St. Augustine’s *Epistle to Paulinus and Therasia*:

> When earthly things are inordinately loved, those that we already possess fetter us more closely than those that we desire; for why did this young man go away sad, save because he had great possessions? For, it is one thing not to be anxious to acquire the things that we lack, but quite another to be ready to divest ourselves of those that we possess. For the things that are not ours we can repudiate as
extrinsic to ourselves, but our own possessions are dear to us as the limbs of our body.\textsuperscript{269}

This quotation points to one of the key aspects of Thomas’s thought on the spiritual life, namely the narrowing of the identification of the self. The rich man identifies so strongly with his possessions, that he considers them to be intrinsic to himself; that is, as if they were his arms and legs. The vow of poverty, by divesting the person of these possessions, withdraws the identity from external things inward to the immediate body, and then to the soul. The human is not its possessions, and therefore, these possessions can be dispensed with.

The second aspect to be given up is the desire for possessions. This follows the above interpretive principle of the New Law, in that it takes a concrete exterior act and adds a prohibition on the interior act as well. Again citing from Augustine, this time his comments on “For it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven”:

From these words, says Augustine, (lib. \textit{De quae est. evang.}) “the disciples understood that all they that covet riches are included in the number of the rich; otherwise, considering how small is the number of the wealthy in comparison to the vast multitude of the poor, they would not have asked, ‘who then shall be saved?’”\textsuperscript{270}

\textsuperscript{269} De Perfectione 7 - Augustinus etiam dicit in Epist. Ad Paulinum et Therasiam, quod \textit{terrena diliguntur artius adepta, quam concupita constringant; nam unde iuvenis ille tristis discessit, nisi quia magnas habebat divitas? Aliud est enim nolle incorporare quae desunt, alius idam incorporata divellere. Illa enim velut extranea repudiuntur, ista velut membra praeciduntur.}

\textsuperscript{270} Ibid. - Ex quibus verbis, ut Augustinus dicit in Lib. De quae est. Evang., discipuli adverterunt, omnes qui divitas cupiunt, in divitum haberi numero: alioquin cum pauci sint dividus in comparatione multitudinis pauperum, non quaesivissent discipuli: \textit{quis ergo poterit salvus esse?}
In this quotation, Augustine suggests that all those, even if they are poor, who desire riches are included in the numbers of the rich. Thomas accepts this, and writes:

In truth, it is impossible for those to enter Heaven who love money inordinately. Far easier is it for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. The latter feat would indeed be impossible without violating the laws of nature. But, if a covetous man were admitted into Heaven it would be contrary to Divine justice, which is more unfailing than any natural law.\(^\text{271}\)

The task of the person seeking to follow Christ, then, is to withdraw their affections from material things and orient them towards God and neighbor. This is, of course, easier said than done, but Thomas does not provide much further information on practices regarding the withdrawal of affections from material things in the \textit{De Perfectione}.\(^\text{272}\)

The third aspect of poverty in the \textit{De Perfectione} is given in a slightly different context than the previous two. The first two presume the actual renunciation of possessions, whereas the third aspect presumes the possibility that a rich man can be perfect. Thomas, responding to suggestions that “Matthew, Bartholomew, and Zacchaeus were rich” and were still able to enter into Heaven, writes that this problem “cannot be answered if we hold that it is the mere renunciation of wealth which constitutes perfection.” Instead, Thomas returns to the example of Abraham. He writes:

A rich man may be perfect if his affections be not entangled in his possessions, but devoted entirely to God. In this way, Abraham was perfect. The words of the

\(^{271}\) Ibid. - Eos vero qui divitias inordinate amant, impossibile est intrare in regnum cælorum, multo magis quam ad litteram camelum per foramen acus transire: hoc enim est impossible, quia repugnat naturae; illud vero, quia repugnat divinae iustitiae, quae est virtuosior omni natura creatæ.

\(^{272}\) There are a few references to the practice of separating affections from material things in scriptural commentaries.
Lord spoken to him, “walk before me and be perfect,” make it clear that the perfection of the Patriarch was to consist in walking before God, and in loving Him with a love so perfect that it reached to contempt of himself and of all that belonged to him....Our Lord, we repeat, did not mean by this counsel that rich men cannot be perfect, or cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven; but He meant that they cannot do so easily. The virtue of Abraham was very great; for, although possessed of great wealth, his heart was detached from riches.273

There are two key points in this passage in reference to Abraham. The first identifies Abraham’s perfection to consist in a love “so perfect” that it leads to “contempt” (contemptus) for self and possessions. Thomas takes the traditional “contemptus mundi” found throughout Christian theologies into a position at once more moderate and more radical. The emphasis is not on the separation from material goods as in previous explanations, but the interior disposition which grants true separation from external things, something found only in the perfection of the love of God as far as possible in this life.

Second, is the principle of detachment. In the final sentence of the above passage, which reads literally as “his soul had freedom from wealth,” Thomas expresses one of the central tenets of his teaching on the spiritual life. Wealth is a great risk for humans because they are likely to become attached to it. Any attachment, in Thomas’s mind,

273 De perfectione 1 - Potest ergo contingere quod aliquis divitias possidens perfectionem habeat, caritate perfecta Deo inhaerens; et hoc modo Abraham divitias possidens perfectus fuit, no quidem habens animum divitiis irretitum, sed totaliter Deo coniunctum: et hoc significant verba domini dicentis ad eum: ambula coram me, et esto perfectus: quasi in hoc eius perfectionem esse ostendens quod coram Deo ambulaverit, eum perfecte amando usque ad contemptum sui et omnium suorum...Non enim dominus ea ratione hoc dedit consilium quasi divites perfecti esse non possint, aut intrare in regnum caelorum; sed quia non de facili possunt. Magna ergo virtus fuit Abrahae quod etiam divitias possidens, a divitiis liberum animum habuit.
detracts from the love and contemplation of God, and thus remaining “detached” is essential for progression in the spiritual life. The vows represent an ascending scale of detachment, moving in proximity to the person, detaching from exterior possessions, close relations, and self.

**The Means of Perfection: Chastity**

Moving to the second means of perfection as described by Thomas, we come to the principle of chastity. Chastity, like poverty, is given an expansive treatment by Thomas, and once more includes persons who are married but chaste in internal action. The rationale for chastity is also taken from a counsel found in the scriptures, this time from Paul’s letters: “He that is without a wife, is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please God. But he that is with a wife, is solicitous for the things of the world, how he may please his wife.”

The problem with a wife and family is similar to the problem present in the person of wealth, namely the concern over these things prevents proper contemplation of God. This point is made in the *Summa contra Gentiles*:

> It should be said that solicitude and occupation which encumber those who are married, concerning their wives and children and the procuring of the necessities of life, are continuous. But the disturbance which a man suffers in the fight against concupiscent tendencies is for a limited time. For this decreases as a result of a man refusing to consent to it...Thus, concupiscent feelings are weakened by acts of abstinence and other corporeal practices suitable to those who have the vow of continence. Moreover, the enjoyment of corporeal delights distracts the mind from its peak activity and hinders it in the contemplation of

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274 1 Corinthians 7:32
spiritual things much more than the disturbance that results from resisting the concupiscent desires for these pleasures, because the mind becomes very strongly attached to carnal things through the enjoyment of such pleasures, especially those of sex. For enjoyment makes the appetite become fixed on the thing that is enjoyed. And so, for those people who devote their attention to the contemplation of divine things and of every kind of truth, it is especially harmful to have been addicted to sexual pleasures and particularly beneficial to abstain from them.275

As explained here, the justification for avoidance of certain activities is not in the fact of their sinfulness, but in the fact that they serve to distract from the contemplation of God. When a person, in this account, gives in to corporeal practices and enjoys them, their mind is not able to contemplate at the highest possible level. The mind instead becomes distracted by or even focused on corporeal things, which blind the person to divine things.

The problem of marriage, therefore, is twofold, namely solicitude and carnal pleasure. Neither of these is inherently sinful; a person who has a family rightfully must care for them, and a husband and wife should engage in sexual activity for the sake of procreation. Thomas, it must be said, does not think that everyone should be a celibate

275 SCG 3.136.13 - Ad quinto dicendum quod sollicitudo et occupatio quam habent hi qui coniugio utuntur, de uxoribus, filiis, et necessariis vitae acquirendis, est continua. Inquietatio autem quam homo patitur ex pugna concupiscientiarum, est ad aliquam horam. Quae etiam minoratur per hoc quod ei aliquis non consentit: nam quanto aliquis magis delectabilibus utitur, tanto magis crescit in eo delectabilis appetitus. Debilitantur etiam concupiscientiae per abstinentias, et alia exercitia corporalia quae conveniunt his qui continentiae propositum habent. Usus etiam corporalium delectabilium magis abducit mentem a sua altitudine et impedit a contemplatione spiritualium, quam inquietudo, quae provenit resistendo concupiscentiis horum delectabilium: quia per usum delectabilium, et maxime venereorum, mens maxime carnalis inhaeret: cum delectatio faciat quiescere appetitum in re delectabili. Et ideo his qui ad contemplationem divinorum, et cuiuscumque veritatis, intendunt, maxime nocivum est venereis deditos esse, et maxime utile ab eis abstinere.
religious. He does, however, think that those who pursue perfection should be inclined to avoid the distractions of familial life by avoiding those problems in chastity. Further, he will suggest that those who engage in any sort of sexual behavior, even within the confines of marriage, limit the capability of their minds and prevent the fullest possible contemplation of divine things.

The problem of pleasures is discussed by Thomas repeatedly in the ST. In a passage focused on the problems of the vices, Thomas makes the connection explicitly between carnal pleasures and the weakness of the mind. He writes:

Now carnal vices, namely gluttony and lust, are concerned with pleasures of touch in matters of food and sex; and these are the most impetuous of all pleasures of the body. For this reason, these vices cause man’s attention to be very firmly fixed on corporeal things, so that in consequence man’s operation in regard to intelligible things is weakened, more, however by lust than by gluttony, forasmuch as sexual pleasures are more vehement than those of the table.

Wherefore lust gives rise to blindness of mind, which excludes almost entirely the knowledge of spiritual things, while dullness of sense arises from gluttony, which makes a man weak in regard to the same intelligible things.276

In this passage, Thomas points to the problem of lust, namely that it prevents man’s contemplation of spiritual things. This results from the distraction provided by

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276 ST II-II.15.3 - Vitia autem carnalia, scilicet gula et luxuria, consistunt circa delectationes tactus, ciborum scilicet et venereorum, quae sunt vehementissimae inter omnes corporales delectationes. Et ideo per haec vitia intentio hominis maxime applicatur ad corporalia, et per consequens debilitatur operatio hominis circa intelligibilia, magis autem per luxuriam quam per gulum, quanto delectationes venereorum sun vehementiores ciborum. Et ideo ex luxuria oritur hebetudo sensus, quae quasi totaliter spiritualium bonorum cognitionem excludit, ex gula autem hebetudo sensus, quae reddit hominem debilem circa huiusmodi intelligibilia. Et e converso oppositae virtutes, scilicet abstinentia et castitas, maxime disponunt hominem ad perfectionem intellectualis operationis.
indulgence in carnal pleasures, namely the focus of the mind on material things and the sense pleasures derived from them. For Thomas, however, there is an alternative, found in the form of the virtues contrary to lust and gluttony. He writes:

On the other hand, the contrary virtues, viz. abstinence and chastity, dispose man very much to the perfection of intellectual operation. Hence it is written (Daniel 1:17) that “to these children” on account of their abstinence and continence, “God gave knowledge and understanding in every book and wisdom.”

These two virtues are part of the virtue of temperance, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. Nonetheless, virtue provides the response to the problem of sexual pleasure for Thomas. Though he suggests that they dispose to “perfection of intellectual operation,” these virtues do not have much in the way of a positive content; instead, they are virtues directed specifically towards changing habits of thought and preventing the human from becoming oriented towards material things. For Thomas, the problem of chastity is not a problem of the body, but of the mind, and is one that must be faced primarily within the soul.

In a question on bodily harm to others, Thomas provides further emphasis on the importance of the soul in dealing with lust. Responding to the suggestion that self-mutilation as a way of avoiding lust was outlawed, he agrees, and writes:

A member should not be removed for the sake of the bodily health of the whole, unless otherwise nothing can be done to further the good of the whole. Now it is always possible to further one’s spiritual welfare otherwise than by cutting off a

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277 Ibid., - Et e converso oppositae virtutes, scilicet abstinence et castitas, maxime disponunt hominem ad perfectionem intellectualis operationis. Unde dicitur Dan. I, quod pueris his, scilicet abstinentibus et continentibus, dedi Deus scientiam et disciplinam in omni libro et sapientia.
member, because sin is always subject to the will: and consequently in no case is it allowable to maim oneself, even to avoid any sin whatever. Hence Chrysostom, in his *Exposition on Matthew* 19:12 (Homily 62 in Matth.), “there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven,” says: “Not by maiming themselves, but by destroying evil thoughts, for a man is accursed who maims himself, since they are murderers who do such things.” And further on he says, “Nor is lust tamed thereby, on the contrary it becomes more importunate, for the seed springs in us from other sources, and chiefly from an incontinent purpose and a careless mind: and temptation is curbed no so much by cutting off a member as by curbing one’s thoughts.”

It is clear that Thomas is not employing a modern biological understanding of the libido in humans. Instead, lust, gluttony, and anything sinful for that matter, are all products of a soul which is not oriented towards its proper end.

**Example of Christ’s Chastity**

Chastity, like poverty, is an essential value for those committed to following Christ because it is understood as a value held by Christ himself. Thomas writes in his *Commentary on 1 Timothy*:

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278 ST II-II 65.1 ad 3 - Ad tertium dicendum quod membrum non est praecidendum propter corporalem salutem totius nisi quando aliter toti subveniri non potest. Salutem autem spirituali semper potest aliter subveniri quam per membro praecisionem, quia peccatum subiacet voluntati. Et ideo in nullo casu licet membrum praevidere propter quodcumque peccatum vitandum. Unde Chrysostomus, exponens illud Matth. XIX, sunt eunuchi qui seipsum castraverunt propter regnum caelorum, dicit, non membrorum abscisionem, sed malarum cogitationum interemptionem. Maledictioni enim est obnoxius qui membrum abscedit, etenim quae homicidarum sunt talis praeumit. Et postea subdit, neque concupiscentia mansuetior ita fit, sed molestior. Aliunde enim habet fontes sperma quod in nobis est, et praeipsque a proposito incontinenti et mente negligente, nec ita abscedio membri comprimit tentationes, ut cogitationis frenum.
Regarding himself, chastity orders life and mind since it is extremely indecent that the lives of ministers be discordant with the life of the Lord. Sirach 10:2: “As the judge of the people is himself, so are his ministers.” Now, Christ so loved chastity that He willed to be born from a virgin, and He Himself kept it; hence it follows: in chastity.279

The points discussed in this brief paragraph provide the justification for the practice of chastity, especially in ministers. The first concern is that Christ was not only chaste in his life, but chose a virgin womb for his birth, suggesting that chastity was an essential value. Second, chastity “orders life and mind.” This was mentioned above, and will be discussed in more detail below, but chastity, in Thomas’s mind, frees a person from the stress of caring for family and allows the person to avoid sexual pleasure, which is the variety of pleasure most destructive to the work of reason.

Means of Perfection: What is Chastity?

In the De perfectione, chastity is defined in the same expansive manner as poverty. Chastity, in this account, moves far beyond a simple avoidance of sex with other persons. It is again possible to identify three aspects of chastity in this text, which are as follows:

1. Discrete hatred of family
2. Avoidance of marriage and children
3. Separation of affections from pleasures and personal connections

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279 Commentary on I Timothy ch. 4 lec. 3 - Quantum ad se, vitam et mentem ordinat castitas, quia indecens est nimir, ut vita ministroum discordet a vita domini. Eccl. X, 2: secundum iudicem populi, sic et ministri eius. Christus autem sic castitatem dilexit, ut de virgine vellet nasci, et ipse eam servavit, ideo sequitur, in castitate.
This first aspect is perhaps surprising to readers of Thomas, especially those familiar with his account of the order of charity. At the same time, however, it can be understood as a logical conclusion of the principles of perfection he outlines.\textsuperscript{280} So Thomas writes:

\begin{quote}
The things to be first given up are those least closely united to ourselves.

Therefore, the renunciation of material possessions which are extrinsic to our nature, must be our first step on the road to perfection. The next objects to be sacrificed will be those which are united to our nature by a certain communion and necessary affinity. Hence, our Lord says, “if any man come to me and hate not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26).\textsuperscript{281}
\end{quote}

This hatred is properly limited by Thomas, and does not represent a true lack of affection or interaction. Much like in the description of poverty seen above, Thomas is not recommending the complete cessation of contact with family members. Instead, what is hated in others is whatever prevents the person from moving closer to God in love and contemplation. Thomas explains this with a quote from Gregory the Great:

\begin{quote}
Thus we must bear this discrete hatred towards our kinsfolk, loving in them what they are in themselves, and hating them when they hinder our progress towards God. For, whosoever desires eternal life must, for the love of God, be
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{280} It is also perhaps understandable if one is familiar with Thomas’s biography. As a teen, his family locked him up for a year in hopes of preventing his joining of the Dominican order, and later, repeatedly tried to make him abbot of the Benedictine house at Monte Cassino, a rather prestigious position, against his wishes. I think his discussion of discrete hatred of family should be read with this background in mind.

\textsuperscript{281} De perfectione 8 - Prius enim relinquenda occurrunt quae minus nobis coniuncta existunt: unde in primo loco occurrit ad perfectionem tendentibus exteriora bona relinquere, quae a nostra natura sunt separata. Post haec vero relinququenda occurrunt ea quae nobis naturae communione et affinitatis ciusque necessitate coniunguntur. Unde dominus dicit, Luc. XIV, 26: \textit{si quis venerit ad me, et non odit patrem suum et matrem et uxorem et filios et fratres et sorores...non potest meus esse discipulus.}
independent of father and mother, of wife, children, and relations, yea, detached from self, in order that he may the better know God, for whose sake he loses sight of very other. For it is but too clear that earthly affections warp the mind and blunt its keenness.\textsuperscript{282}

The idea of detachment again lies behind the explanation of chastity, as it is suggested that the human can only properly adhere to God when unencumbered by familial bonds. This need for detachment extends to the self, as is seen in both of these quotations, a fact which will provide the justification for the next stage, obedience.

The second aspect, namely the avoidance of marriage and children, is a further example of the emphasis on the freedom of the person from worldly concern. The justification is provided in 1 Corinthians 7:32, “He that is without a wife, is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please God. But he that is with a wife, is solicitous for the things of the world, how he may please his wife.” Though this is perhaps a simplistic distinction, it is central to Aquinas’s understanding of the true perfection of the human. Thomas believes that marriage, for one, is inherently distracting in that it requires the man provide nourishment and housing to wife and children, but also that it distracts in that part of marriage is the exchange of physical affection. Allowing for any sort of physical affection, regardless of whether it is “moral” or “immoral,” weakens the mind in Thomas’s understanding. Hence, Thomas offers this comment:

\textsuperscript{282} Ibid. - \textit{Sic enim exhibere proximis nostris odio discretionem debemus: ut in eis et diligamus quod sunt, et habeamus odio quod in Dei nobis itinere obsistunt. Quisquis enim iam aeterna concupiscit, in eam quam aggreditur causam Dei, extra patrem, extra matrem, extra uxorem, extra filios, extra cognatos, extra semetipsum fieri debet; ut eo verius cognoscat Deum, quo in eius causa neminem cognoscit. Manifestum namque est quod carnales affectus intentionem mentis diverberant, eiusque aciem obscurant.}
Therefore, the second means whereby a man may be more free to devote himself to God, and to cleave more perfectly to Him, is by the observance of perpetual chastity. But continence possesses the further advantage of according a more peculiar facility to the acquirement of perfection. For the soul is hindered in its free access to God, not only by the love of exterior things, but much more by the force of interior passions. And, amongst these passions, the lust of the flesh does, beyond all others, overpower reason. Hence in Book 1 of the *Soliloquies*, Augustine says, “I know nothing which doth more cast a manly soul down from the tower of its strength, than do the caresses of a woman, and the physical contact essential to marriage.” Thus continence is most necessary to perfection.\(^{283}\)

The reference to Augustine is telling, and Aquinas is in many ways repeating the viewpoint of late Roman and Greek thinkers towards the inherent weakening of mind and resolve resulting from sexual acts.\(^{284}\) It is noteworthy that throughout the *De perfectione*, there is no reference to any theory of pollution or purity as a justification for avoiding contact with women. The logic for chastity is simple in this situation: sexual activity

\(^{283}\) *De perfectione* 9 - Ut ergo homo liberius Deo vacet, eique perfectius inhaereat, secunda ad perfectionem via est perpetua observatio castitatis. Habet autem et hoc continentiae bonum aliam idoneitatem ad perfectionem adipiscendam. Impeditur enim animus hominis ne libere Deo possit vacare, non solum ex amore exteriorum rerum, sed multo magis ex interiorum passionum impulsu. Inter omnes autem interiores passiones maxime rationem absorbet concupiscientia carnis, et venereorum usus: unde Augustinus dicit in I Lib. De Soliloquiorum: *nihil esse sentio quod magis ex arce deiciat animum virilem, quam blandimenta feminae, corporumque ille contactus, sine quo uxor haberi non potest*. Et ideo continentiae via est maxime necessaria perfectionem consequendam.

\(^{284}\) The celibacy of thinkers from the late antique period was widely known among Christian authors, and also dismissed. The justification for the practice of celibacy was rather similar to what Thomas writes here, namely that by being freed from the responsibilities of a wife and children, and from sexual desires, one can contemplate more effectively. This takes on a different significance for Christians, however, in that the example of Christ’s celibacy plays a key role in emphasizing its fitness for others.
weakens the mind, and the perfect person must have a strong mind, so they must temper sexual activity.

Furthermore, Aquinas repeatedly indicates that those who live a life of perpetual virginity receive this as a grace from God, and not as something one can simply choose, citing 1 Corinthians 7:7, “I would that all men were even as myself, but everyone hath his proper gift from God; one after this manner, and another after that.” Nonetheless, as has been previously mentioned in this work, Aquinas believes that the human must do everything they can to make the reception of grace possible and functional in their life. He adds, therefore: “But, lest anyone should, on the other hand, fail to use his own endeavor to obtain this gift, Our Lord exhorts all men to it.” Immediately after this line, Aquinas then refers to the passage cited above from Chrysostom’s *Commentary on Matthew*, that “there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs, not by mutilation, but by resisting evil thoughts.” The problem of continence, therefore is a problem of a mind committed solely to God.

Finally, the third aspect of chastity is the separation of affections from close relations. This third aspect again arises in response to the counterpoint of Abraham, who was, of course, married to Sarah and still deemed perfect by God. Aquinas responds to this objection first:

If anyone should object to us the example of Abraham, and of other just men of old, who were perfect without refraining from matrimony, we will answer them in the words written by Augustine in his book *de bono conjugali*. “The continence that is a virtue is that of the mind, not of the body. And virtue is sometimes
revealed in deeds, and sometimes lies disguised as a habit. The patience of John who did not suffer martyrdom was equal in merit to that of Peter who was slain; and Abraham who begat sons, was equal in continence to the virgin John....Therefore, any one of the faithful who observes continence may say, ‘I certainly am no better than Abraham; but the chastity of celibacy is superior to the chastity of married life. Abraham practiced the one actually, the other habitually. For he lived chastely as a husband, and could have lived continently had he been unmarried.’”

Though Augustine seems to pay only a backhanded compliment to Abraham’s chastity in this passage, it is clear that Abraham’s perfection is affirmed. This perfection of chastity, therefore, is found in the mind, in the form of a devotion to God alone, and a due separation from concerns over the material world. Aquinas concludes this thought, adding: “The conclusion of Augustine agrees with what has already been said about poverty. For Abraham had arrived at such perfection that his heart never wavered in love to God on account of either temporal possessions or of wedded life.” The continence of the mind, therefore, is ability of a person to remain committed to God regardless of their interaction with other persons, something which is the more easily accomplished by prudently avoiding as many of these separating contacts as possible.

285 De Perfectione 9 - Si quis autem obiectionem moveat de Abraham qui perfectus fuit, et aliis iustis antiquis a matrimonio non abstinentibus; patet responsio per hoc quod Augustinus dicit in Lib. De bono coniugali: continencia non corporis, sed animi virtus est. Virtutes autem animi aliquando, in opere manifestantur, aliquando in habitu latent. Quocirca sicut non est impar meritum patientiae in Petro, qui passus est, et in Ioanne, qui passus non est; sic non impar meritum est continentiae in Ioanne, qui nullas expertus est nuptias, et in Abraham, qui filios generavit. Et illius enim caelibatus et illius connubium pro temporum distributione Christo militaverunt. Dicat ergo fidelis continens: ego quidem non sum melior Abraham; sed melior est castitas caelibum quam castitas nuptiarum; quarum Abraham unam habuit in usu, ambas in habitu: caste quippe coniugaliter vixit.
Means to Perfection: Hindrances to chastity

Thomas identifies three “hindrances to chastity,” that is, three aspects of human life which contribute to a person engaging in illicit behavior: “The first arises from the body. The second from the mind. The third from external circumstances, whether they be of persons or of things.” For each of these issues, Thomas suggests exercises which can help to prevent the person’s falling into incontinence.

In regard to the first of these, the body, it is important to once more emphasize that the body is not sinful for Aquinas, as sin is from the will. Instead, the body can contribute to sinful behavior in that it is through the body’s interaction with the sensitive soul that separating pleasure is experienced. Such pleasure increases one’s concupiscent desires for sense pleasures, an aspect which occurs in the soul. Thomas takes Paul’s discussion of the flesh and the spirit as the basis for this first hindrance:

The body is an obstacle to continence. As Paul says, “the flesh lusteth against the spirit,” and “the works of the flesh are fornication, uncleanness, unchastity, and the like.” Concupiscence is that law of the flesh, of which, in his epistle to the Romans, Paul says, “I see another law in my members fighting against the law of my mind.”

Again, what is being described is not an actual struggle of the mind against the body; using Thomas’s understanding of the human person, this is not possible. Instead, the

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286 De Perfectione 9 - Triplex autem esse impedimentum continentiae apparet. Primum quidem ex parte corporis; secundum ex parte animae; tertium ex parte exteriorum personarum vel rerum.

struggle is between one aspect of the soul, namely the sensitive appetite, and another, namely the intellect. The sensitive appetite does communicate actual bodily needs, like hunger or thirst, but it also communicates the enjoyment of pleasure which is then experienced in the sensitive aspect of the soul. When a person enjoys this pleasure, the soul increases in its concupiscence for that pleasure, and ignores its rational aspect.

As part of this discussion, Thomas appears to make reference to the theory of the humors as found in classical and medieval medical thought. He says:

Now the more the flesh is pampered, by superabundance of food and by effeminacy of life, the more will its concupiscence increase. For, as Jerome says, “A man heated with wine will quickly give rein to lust.” He, then, who desires to undertake a life of continence must chastise his flesh, by abstention from pleasure, by fasts vigils, and such like exercises.288

In his *Commentary on Ephesians*, Thomas provides further encouragement to avoid wine on the basis of “heating.” He writes, “Yet you ought also be careful to abstain from superfluous wine since excessive food and drink is a cause of sensuality; and especially wine which warms and excites a man.”289 Thomas then cites two stories from the scriptures, pointing to one found in the book of Esther, and the other the story of Lot, each of which portrays the drunkenness resulting from wine in a negative light.

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288 Ibid. - Quanto autem caro magis fovetur per ciborum affluentiam et deliciarum mollitiem, tanto huiusmodi concupiscencia magis crescit: unde Hieronymus dicit: *venter mero aestuans cito despumat in libidinem*. Oportet igitur continentiae viam assumentibus, carnem propriam, abstractis deliciis, vigiliis et ieiunis, et huiusmodi exercitiiis castigare.

289 Commentary on Ephesians ch. 5 lec. 7 - Dicit ergo: dixi quod *fornicatio et omnis immunditia non nominetur in vobis*: sed ad hoc cavendum debetis a vino superfluo abstinere, quia cibus et potus superfluos est causa luxuriae, et praecepue vinum, quod calefacit et movet.
Thomas is rather moderate on wine, and details Paul’s encouragement to Timothy to take some wine for his “infirmities” in his *Commentary on 1 Timothy*. He thus encourages moderation, as he writes:

...after his warning against “chambering and impurities,” he concludes, “make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences.” (Romans 13:14) He rightly lays stress upon the concupiscences of the flesh, i.e. its desire for pleasure; for it is incumbent on us to make provision for what is necessary for our body, and Paul himself says, “No man ever hated his own flesh, but nourisheth it and cherisheth it.” (Ephesians 5:29)

The task, therefore, is to find the proper balance of food and drink for the person, such that by their eating they are able to maintain health, but not inspired to sensual behavior. This is a somewhat modest spiritual practice, in the sense that it does not view any particular quality to be gained from the practice of excessive fasting or abstinence; instead, the proper form of abstaining from most things (except sexual activity and thoughts) is to approach them in a way which avoids their becoming a matter of import or distraction. This principle is well illustrated in Paul’s comments to Timothy, advising him not to be overly abstinent in his life such as to cause himself bodily harm. Thomas picks up on this recommendation, and writes:

And since on this account he [Timothy] was completely weak, he says, “do not still,” that is after you are so weak, “drink water.” And why? Because, as it says in Lev.

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290 Commentary on Romans, ch. 13, lec. 3 - Sed notandum quod non dicit simpliciter carnis curam ne feceritis, quia quilibet tenetur ut carnis curam gerat ad sustentandum naturam, secundum illud Eph. V, 29: nemo umquam carnem suam odio habuit, sed nutrit et foveat, et cetera.
2:13: *Whatsoever sacrifice thou offerest, thou shalt season it with salt*, that is, the salt of discretion. Rom. 12:1: *Your reasonable service.* And so he says, “but use a little wine,” that is, not unto drunkenness. Eccles. 31:36: *wine drunken with moderation is the joy of the soul and the heart.* “For thy stomach’s sake, and thy frequent infirmities” which have come upon you because of your abstinence. The Gloss says: “Take pains so that, if possible, a duty begun may be gradually increased rather than lessened through thoughtlessness.”

Thomas, therefore, recommends the meeting of bodily necessities, albeit in a limited way only to meet the basic requirements of health. There remains a significant risk inherent in food and wine, which can overly “heat” a person and incline them to luxury or other material pleasures. But food and wine, in and of themselves, are not to be avoided as part of the spiritual life for Thomas.

The second hindrance comes from the mind, in particular from the consideration of illicit thoughts. In this situation, as opposed to the moderation of food intake, the recommendation is that the person seeks to curb all inappropriate thoughts as soon as they arise. He writes:

An obstacle to continence arises also from the mind, if we dwell on unchaste thoughts. The Lord says by his Prophet, “Take away the evil of your devices from my eyes” (Isaiah 1:16). For evil thoughts often lead to evil

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deeds....Amongst all evil thoughts, those which most powerfully incline unto sin are thoughts concerning carnal gratification. Philosophers assign two reasons for this fact. First, they say, that as concupiscence is innate in man and grows with him from his youth upwards, he is easily carried away by it when his imagination sets it before him....The second reason is given by the same philosopher (Book 3 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*), “Pleasure is more voluntary in particular cases than in general.” It is clear that by dallying with a thought we descend to particulars; hence, by daily thoughts we are incited to lust.²⁹²

There are several important points in this passage for facing the problem of sexual desire in Thomas. First, concupiscence is innate, that is, natural, and in living a celibate life one must counter that inclination. Because it is always present, as Thomas will mention elsewhere, the celibate person cannot at any point “dally” with thoughts about such matters. This leads to the conclusion, namely that unchaste thoughts must be curbed at every moment. Thomas finishes this passage with a conclusion from the Gloss: “On this account, Paul (1 Corinthians 6:18) warns us to ‘Fly fornication;’ for, as the Gloss says, ‘It is permissible to await a conflict with other vices; but this one must be shunned; for in no other means can it be overcome.’”²⁹³ The desire for sensual pleasures, because it is innate in humans, is always to be curbed, according to Thomas. This principle explains

²⁹² *De perfectione* 9. Ex parte autem animae propositum continentiae impeditur, dum lascivis cogitationibus aliquis immoratur; unde dominus per prophetam dicit, Isai. 1, 16: *auferte malum cogitationum vestrarum ab oculis meis.* Malae enim cogitationes plerumque ad male facendum inducunt...Inter ceteras tamen cogitationes malas magis ad peccandum inclinant cogitationes de delectationibus carnis. Cuius ratio etiam secundum philosophorum doctrinam duplex assignari potest. Una quidem quia, cum talis delectatio sit homini connaturalis, et a juventute connotrita, facile in ipsam appetitus furtur, cum eam cogitatio proponit. ...Secunda ratio est, quia, ut idem dicit in 3 Ethic., delectabilia in particulari sunt magis voluntaria quam in universali. Manifestum est autem quod per moram cogitationis ad particularia quaeque descendimus.

²⁹³ Ibid.
several of the aids that follow, in that they are particularly oriented towards occupying
the mind, and preventing it from engaging in illicit thought.

The third hindrance, which Thomas identifies as arising from “external
circumstances, whether they be of persons or things,” is not explained in any detail in this
piece. Nonetheless, it is possible to understand that Thomas is referring to the
importance of avoiding social situations which may incline a person to illicit behavior.

**The means of perfection: Aids to the preservation of chastity**

In one of the more interesting sections of the *De perfectione*, Thomas provides a
list of spiritual exercises which help the person to observe chastity. As mentioned in the
previous discussion, Thomas believes that though chastity is a grace, the person must do
all they can to help in its observance. Thomas, therefore, provides several exercises
which help a person maintain physical and mental celibacy as part of the religious life.
These exercises are given in response to the “hindrances to continence,” and each
exercise relates to a specific hindrance.

Thomas presents these “aids” in the form of an extended list, providing a short
explanation for each of them, usually with a citation from scripture to support their role.
By way of introducing these exercises, he writes: “But, as there are many obstacles in the
way of chastity, there are also many remedies against such obstacles.” Thomas identifies
several aids explicitly, but also includes a number of other exercises in the conversation.
The aids identified include:

1. Prayer and contemplation of divine things
2. The study of scripture
3. Occupying the mind with good thoughts
4. Bodily toil
5. Mental disquietude
6. Avoiding certain extrinsic circumstances
7. Fasting, vigils, and labor, scant clothing and reading

Aid 1: Prayer, contemplation, and meditation

The first of these aids, that of prayer and contemplation, appears rather unremarkable at first glance. That Thomas considers contemplation important has been well established through the course of this dissertation. Still, it is intriguing to find contemplation explicitly linked with the avoidance of sexual contact. For Thomas, this relates explicitly to his explanation of the hindrance to continence resulting from the mind. In that explanation, Thomas emphasizes that any thought of carnal gratification causes a person to move from universals to particulars, and leads to the mind’s distraction and pursuit of these illicit thoughts. As a means of countering this tendency, Thomas encourages the person to always occupy the mind with good things, such that it cannot be occupied by illicit thoughts. Thomas explains:

The first and chief remedy is to keep the mind busied in prayer and in the contemplation of divine things. This lesson is taught us in Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians (5:18), wherein he says, “Be ye not drunk with wine wherein is luxury; but be ye filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms, hymns and spiritual canticles” (which pertain to contemplation) “singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord” (whereby prayer is implied). Hence, in Isaiah (48:9),
the Lord says, “For by my praise I will bridle thee, lest thou shouldst perish.” For the divine praise is, as it were, a bridle on the soul, checking it from sin.\footnote{De perfectione 9 - Quorum primum et praecipuum est ut mens circa contemplationem divinorum et orationem occupetur; unde apostolus dicit ad Ephes. V, 18: nolite inebriari vino, in quo est luxuria; sed impleamini spiritu sancto, loquentes vobismet ipsis in Psalmis et hymnis et canticis spiritualibus: quod ad contemplationem pertinere videtur: cantantes et psallentes in cordibus vestris domino: quod ad orationem videtur pertinere. Hinc dominus per prophetam dicit, Isai. XLVIII, 9: laude mea infrenabo te, ne intereas. Est enim quoddam frenum animam ab interitu peccati retrahens laus divina.}

In citing the passage from Paul, Thomas makes two of his own interpretations, relating “hymns and spiritual canticles” to contemplation and internal melodies to prayer. In Thomas’s Commentary on Ephesians, he explains this passage in more detail. He writes:

He then touches on the subject matter of meditative prayer when he says in “psalms and hymns and spiritual canticles.” To sing is to make use of the psaltery; and thus in “psalms,” that is, in good works....And “hymns,” that is, by divine praises: “A hymn to all his saints,” (Psalm 148:14)...And “spiritual canticles” concerning the hope of eternal realities...Hence, we meditate on honest actions and what we should do; on the divine praise, and what we should imitate; and on the joy of heaven we should render homage to, and how.\footnote{Commentary on Ephesians, ch. 5 lec. 7. – Materiam vero meditations tangit, cum dicit in Psalmis, et cetera. Psallere est ut Psalterio. Et sic in Psalmis, id est bonis operationibus....Et hymnis, id est laudibus divinis....Et canticis spiritualibus, scilicet de spe aeternorum...Meditemur ergo de recta operatione quid faciendum, de divina laudatione quid imitandum, de caelesti iucundatione quid et quomodo serviendum.}

In this passage, Thomas describes the subject of meditation for Christians, and offers an account that includes much in the way of ethical material. In his interpretation, meditation on the Psalms refers to meditation on “good works,” while hymns are sung in praise to God for the saints and their exemplary behavior, our imitation of them becoming the subject matter of our thoughts. Furthermore, even the meditation of “eternal realities” leads to the practical matter of how we can render proper homage to
the source of all good things. Meditation, in this understanding, is intimately connected with the practice of living a life devoted to good actions, and requires our consideration of them.

The practice of meditation is a product of the Holy Spirit, given to us by God. The presence of the Holy Spirit grants a few effects to the person.

The first effect of the Holy Spirit is a holy meditation, and the second is a spiritual exultation; from frequent meditation, the fire of charity is enkindled in the heart.

“My heart grew hot within me: and in my meditation a fire shall flame out” (Psalm 38:4). And from this a spiritual joy is born within the heart; thus he mentions “singing and making melody” so that our will would be stirred by spiritual joys to undertake good works. “I will sing with the spirit, I will also sing with the understanding” (1 Cor. 14:15). Meditation, therefore, is not solely an activity concerned with the mind, but one that inspires the will to perform good works.

The logic for the activity of praising God in contemplation, meditation, and song, in addition, of course, to praising God, is that the practice of praise serves as a “bridle” on the soul, preventing it from going astray. The language of “bridling” and “curbing,” which are present throughout the discussion of chastity are central to Aquinas’s discussion of the virtue of temperance, which will be analyzed in detail in the next

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296 Ephesians ch. 5 lec. 7 - Ibid. - Sic ergo effectus spiritus sancti primus est sacra meditatio, secundus spiritualis exultatio, quia ex frequenti meditacione ignis charitatis in corde accenditur. Ps. XXXVIII, 4: *concaluit cor meum intra me, et in meditacione mea exardescet ignis, et cetera.* Et hinc generatur laetitia spiritualis in corde. Et ideo dicit cantantes et psallentes, id est ut affectus nostri afficiantur gaudio spirituali ad operanda bona. 1 Cor. XIV, 15: *Psallam spiritu, psallam et mente.*
chapter. In the *De perfectione*, the bridling of the soul is accomplished by using prayer and contemplation as a means of occupying the mind, preventing it from moving astray into illicit thoughts. Furthermore, the practice of prayer and contemplation can be employed in response to unchaste thoughts; that is, a person upon realizing that they were engaging in thoughts of a questionable nature would turn to prayer or contemplation, thereby occupying the mind with divine things instead of physical pleasures.

**Aid 2: Study of the Scriptures**

The second aid to chastity is found in the study of scriptures. As in the above case with prayer, the preservation of chastity is not accomplished as an immediate result of the practice of reading, but instead comes about because the reading of scripture occupies the person’s mind with a concentrated activity. Thomas explains:

The second remedy is the study of the scriptures. “Love the study of Holy writ” says Jerome to the monk Rusticus, “and thou wilt not love the vices of the flesh.” And Paul says in his exhortation to Timothy (1 Tim 4:12-13), “Be thou an example of the faithful in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith, in chastity,” immediately adding, “Till I come, attend unto reading.”

There are, of course, further salutary effects of reading the scriptures beyond that of occupying the mind, one of which Thomas also describes in this passage, namely the redirection of the affections away from carnal things. But the reading of scripture is also aligned explicitly with the general goal of the study of theology or *sacra doctrina*. In a

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passage from his commentary on 2 Timothy, Thomas explains the twofold effect of scripture as referring to the distinction between practical and speculative reason. He writes:

The effect of sacred scripture is twofold: it teaches man to know the truth and persuades him to work justice. John 14:26: *But the paraclete, the Holy Ghost...will teach you all things to be known, and bring all things to be done to your mind.* And therefore it is profitable to know the truth and direct it into action.

For there is the speculative reason and the practical reason. And in each two things are necessary: that it know the truth and refute errors. For this work is the work of the wise man, namely not to lie and to refute the liar.298

Within this comment, one can understand a reference to the work of the Dominican order in its efforts to refute the heresies active in Europe at that time. It is not enough for a person to know the truth; one must also be able to explain to others (including oneself, presumably) the reason why alternatives to the truth are in fact false.

The study of scripture is also related to the goal of perfection, which is the specific concern of those in the religious life. Thomas explains:

The effects of scripture are fourfold: regarding the speculative reason, to teach the truth and to reprove falsity; regarding the practical reason, to free one from evil

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and lead him to the good. Its ultimate effect is that it leads men to perfection. For it does good not in whatever manner, but it perfects. Hebrews 6:1: *Let us go on to things more perfect.* And so he says, *that the man of God may be perfect,* since a man cannot be perfect unless he is a man of God.299

The effects of scripture, therefore, are 1. Teach the truth 2. Disprove falsehood 3. Free from evil 4. Lead to the good. The result of all these things, as Thomas suggests, is that a person is lead to perfection through God.

Thomas expands slightly upon the importance of the study of scripture in the *Summa.*300 Study of the scriptures is required not only to improve contemplation, as a person who is too simple may fall into error through excessively grasping in contemplation, but also is necessary for the practice of preaching to the people in general. Finally, Thomas returns to the point provided in the *De Perfectione:* “It helps us to avoid the lusts of the flesh….For it turns the mind away from lustful thoughts, and tames the flesh on account of the toil that study entails.”301 By busying the mind principally, but also the body through the exertion of long hours of study, a person will theoretically have less energy to devote to illicit thoughts that might contribute to sinful activity.

**Aid 3: Occupying the mind with good thoughts**

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299 Ibid. - *Sic ergo quadruplex est effectus sacrae scripturae, scilicet docere veritatem, arguere falsitatem; quantum ad speculativam; eripere a malo, et inducere ad bonum: quantum ad practicam. Ultimus eius effectus est, ut perducat homines ad perfectum. Non enim qualitatem bonum facit, sed perficit.* Hebr. VI, 1: *ad perfectionem feramur. Et ideo dicit ut perfectus sit homo Dei, quia non potest homo esse perfectus, nisi sit homo Dei.*

300 ST II-II 188.5

The third aid is one of the most interesting in the *De perfectione*, but also one of the most challenging to interpret. Thomas gives only a brief explanation of what he means, and his two points are accomplished through quotations. The first quotation is from Chrysostom, and has been cited previously, while the second is from Philippians. He writes:

The third preservative against concupiscence is to occupy the mind with good thoughts. Chrysostom, in his commentary on Matthew, says that, “physical mutilation is not such a curb to temptation, and such a source of peace to the mind, as is a habit of bridling the thoughts.” Paul also says to the Philippians (4:8), “For the rest brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever modest, whatsoever just, whatsoever holy, whatsoever lovely, whatsoever of good fame, if there be any virtue, if any praise of discipline, think on these things.”

The two quotations suggest two aspects of occupying the mind with good thoughts: first, illicit thoughts must be brought to a close, something which is accomplished by curbing them with an alternative thought. This leads to the second aspect, which is to maintain thoughts of good things as much as is possible. A person, therefore, is aided in their pursuit of chastity if they are able to think good thoughts as a means of cutting off further pursuit of illicit thoughts.

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302 *De perfectione* 9 - Tertium remedium est quibuscumque bonis cogitationibus animum occupare: unde Chrysostomus dicit super Matthaeum quod abscissio membrorum non ita comprimit tentationes et tranquillitatem facit, ut cogitationis frenum: unde apostolus ad Philipp. IV, 8, dicit: *de cetero, fratres, quaecumque sunt vera, quaecumque pudica, quaecumque insta, quaecumque sancta, quaecumque amabilia, quaecumque bonae famae; si qua virtus, si qua laus disciplinae, haec cogitate.*
This suggestion is provided further explanation if we turn to the *Summa Theologiae*. In his questions on charity, Thomas writes about the importance of proper self-love. He explains:

On this way the good love themselves, as to the inward man, because they wish the preservation thereof in its integrity, they desire good things for him, namely spiritual goods, indeed they do their best to obtain them, and they take pleasure in entering into their own hearts, because they find there good thoughts in the present, the memory of past good, and the hope of future good, all of which are sources of pleasure. Likewise they experience no clashing of wills, since their whole soul tends to one thing.\(^{303}\)

The thinking of good thoughts, therefore, is the hallmark of the person perfected in charity. In addition to good thoughts, the person will have memory of past goods and hope of future goods, all of course in reasonable measure. Additionally, the soul is unified; because there are no illicit thoughts present which would lead the sensitive appetite astray, or at least any which hold power of distraction, there is no internal strife between internal powers.

The question of what, precisely, those good thoughts are, is a more difficult question. It is, however, treated in the commentary on the passage from Philippians 4:7-9 which recommends consideration of those good things. In commenting on verse 7, Thomas

\(^{303}\) ST II-II.25.7: namely, God - Et secundum hoc boni diligunt seipsos quantum ad interiorem hominem, quia etiam volunt ipsum servari in sua integritate; et optant ei bona eius, quae sunt bona spiritualia; et etiam ad assequenda operam impedunt; et delectabiliter ad cor proprium redeunt, quia ibi inveniunt et bonas cogitationes in praesenti, et memoriam bonorum praeteritorum, et spem futurorum bonorum, ex quibus delectatio causatur; similiter etiam non patiuntur in seipsis voluntas disensionem, quia tota anima eorum tendit in unum.
provides some further ground for understanding what a “good thought” is. Thomas is commenting on the passage, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” In doing so, he expounds on the nature of the peace which humans are granted by God. He writes:

Peace, according to Augustine, is the tranquility of order...From that profound source in which peace exists it flows first into the beatified, in whom there is no disturbance either of guilt or of punishment; then it flows into saintly men: the holier he is, the less his mind is disturbed: “Great peace have those who love thy law” (Psalm 119:165)....Now because God alone can deliver the heart from all disturbance, it is necessary that it come from Him: hence he says, of God: and this, inasmuch as peace considered in that source passes all created understanding...  

In this passage, Thomas establishes that those who are “saintly” experience the peace of God, given by God directly. This peace delivers the heart from disturbance. It is important to note that this passage, which is commenting on purity of heart, is indebted to a number of earlier thinkers. First, Thomas receives his understanding of “pure of heart” from Cassian’s *Conferences*, who also defines this characteristic as one who is free from mental or emotional disturbance. Cassian’s term “pure of heart” is actually his

304 Commentary on Philippians ch. 4 lec. 1- Pax, secundum Augustinum, est tranquillitas ordinis, perturbatio enim ordinis destructio pacis...Ab isto profundo, in quo est pax, derivatur primo et perfectius in beatos, in quibus nulla est perturbatio, et nec culpae, nec poenae, et consequenter derivatur ad sanctos viros. Et quanto est magis sanctus, tanto minus patitur perturbationem mentis. Ps. CXVIII, 165: pax multa diligentibus legem tuam, et non est illis scandalum....Quia vero cor nostrum ab omni perturbatione non potest esse alienum nisi per Deum, oportet quod per ipsum fiat. Unde dicit Dei. Et hoc secundum quod consideratur in ipso principio, exuperat omnem sensum creatum, quia, ut dicitur.
translation of Evagrius’ *apatheia*, which, of course, finds its origins in Stoic thought on the perfect human, the wise man.

To be occupied with “good thoughts,” therefore, means that the mind is free from the disturbance of misguided thoughts and affections. To be a person who received the gift of peace is, much as the description of perfection seen above, is to be one whose affections never stray from the good and whose mind never strays from the truth.

Thomas explains further:

*And the peace, therefore, will keep your hearts*, i.e. your affections, so that you will never depart from the good in anything: “keep your heart with all vigilance; for from it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23); *and your minds*, so that they not deviate from the truth in anything. And this, *in Christ Jesus*, by whose love your affections are kept from evil and by whose faith your mind continues in the truth.

For the object of a good act is either the object of the intellect or of the affections: the object of the intellect is the true; the object of the affections is the good....Hence he says, *finally brethren*, i.e. since you are so minded, think of *whatever is true* through faith: “Love truth and peace” (Zech. 8:19).

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Thomas approaches this passage from the two core aspects of the person, namely the affections and the mind. The affections are peaceful when they desire only the good, particularly the highest good, while the mind is peaceful when it never “deviates” from the truth. This distinction leads into his Commentary on Philippians 4:8-9; to experience that peace of mind and heart is to constantly think of whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, and whatever is pure.

In commenting on Philippians 4:8, Thomas interprets this passage as providing an encouragement to correct action. As Thomas explains, “the object of a good act is either the object of the intellect or of the affections: the object of the intellect is the true; the object of the affections is the good.” These “objects” refer to the aspects mentioned in Paul: true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, in Thomas’ translation. Having already mentioned truth, Thomas then describes the objects of the affections. In order for the object to be directed towards a good act, there are certain qualifications, as Thomas explains:

Of necessity are three things: first, that it be good in itself; hence he says, *whatever is honorable [chaste]*: “but the wisdom from above is first pure” (James 3:17); secondly, that it be directed to one’s neighbor; hence he says, *whatever is just*: “blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness [justice], for they shall be satisfied” (Matt. 5:6); thirdly, ordained to God; hence he says, *whatever is pure [holy]*: “That we might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life” (Luke 1:74).306

306 Ibid. - Primo ut integer sit in se; et quantum ad hoc dicit quaecumque pudica, id est casta. Iac. III, 17: quae desursum est sapientia, primum quidem pudica est, et cetera. Item quod sit directus ad proximum;
Thomas encourages people, therefore, to “think on these things,” that is, to use them as a means of determining the rightness of a given action. Thomas thus recommends a process of thinking through actions to determine their relative morality, one that can be seen to form a sort of checklist of prudential decision making. If, in deciding a proper course of action, a person routinely analyzes their options in terms of honor, righteousness, and purity, this mode of determining proper action can become habitual, and help to avoid the thinking of illicit thoughts in decision making.

On the other side of this, this aid can perhaps be interpreted as an encouragement to avoid the thinking of illicit thoughts in general. Thomas may have something in mind similar to the encouragement provided by the doctor/philosopher Galen, who encouraged those seeking abstinence to “refrain completely from spectacles, not to tell stories, or recall memories which could stimulate his desire.”

In occupying the mind with good thoughts, a person must avoid all those things which incline one towards carnal pleasures, and thus be selective in their memory and in their discourse.

**Aid 4: Toil**

The exercise of the body as a means of avoiding sin is as old, at least, as the scriptures themselves, so it is no surprise to find it included on this list. It is, however, interesting to see how expansive an understanding of bodily toil Thomas will allow for, a result of his work in the university and the Dominican order. Thomas writes:


*307* Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, 136-37
The fourth help to chastity is to shun idleness, and to engage in bodily toil. We read in the book of Sirach (33:29), “Idleness hath taught much evil.” Idleness is preeminently an incentive to sins of the flesh. ...Jerome likewise writes, in his letter to the monk Rusticus, “Do some work, so that the devil may always find thee employed.”

He does not say much more on this topic in the De perfectione, so turning to the Summa Theologiae on this subject will be helpful. In the ST, in his questions on the religious life, Thomas asks whether or not religious orders are bound to manual labor. Thomas first explains the purpose of manual labor:

I answer that manual labor is directed to four things. First and principally to obtain food; wherefore it was said to the first man (Genesis 3:19): “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,” and it is written (Psalm 127:2): “For thou shalt eat the labors of thy hands.” Secondly, it is directed to the removal of idleness whence arise many evils; hence it is written (Sirach 33:28-29): “Send” thy slave “to work, that he be not idle, for idleness hath taught much evil. Thirdly, it is directed to the curbing of concupiscence, inasmuch as it is a means of afflicting the body; hence it is written (2 Corinthians 6:5-6): “In labors, in watchings, in fastings, in chastity.” Fourthly it is directed to almsgiving...

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309 ST II-II.187.3 - Respondeo dicendum quod labor manualis ad quatuor ordinatur. Primo quidem, et principaliter, ad victum quarendum. Unde primo homini dictum est, in sudore vultus tui veseeris pane tuo. Et in psalmo, labores manuum tuarum quia manducabis, et cetera. Secundo, ordinatur ad tollendum otium, ex quo multa mala oriuntur. Unde dicitur Eccli. XXXIII, mittes servum in operationem, ne vacet, multam
Of these four reasons, the middle two are of the greatest significance in this discussion.

For the second, Thomas repeats the quotation found in the *De perfectione* taken from Sirach, “For idleness hath taught much evil.” As in the *De perfectione*, idleness particularly inclines to “sins of the flesh,” thus leading to the rationale for the third thing which manual labor is directed to, namely the “curbing of concupiscence.” Thomas thus repeats the reasoning for manual labor in the ST found previously in the *De perfectione*.

Though Thomas has established the reasoning for manual labor, the discussion of what manual labor *is* has not yet finished. Instead, focusing on the intended end of manual labor, Thomas provides an alternative means of arriving at that end. He writes:

Insofar as manual labor is directed to the removal of idleness, or the affliction of the body, it does not come under a necessity of precept if we consider it in itself, since there are many other means besides manual labor of afflicting the body or of removing idleness: for the flesh is afflicted by fastings and watchings, and idleness is removed by meditation on the Holy Scriptures and by the divine praises. Hence a gloss on Psalm 118:82, “My eyes have failed for Thy word,” says: “He is not idle who meditates only on God’s word; nor is he who works abroad any better than he who devotes himself to the study of knowing the truth.” Consequently for these reasons religious are not bound to manual labor, as neither are seculars, except when they are so bound by the statutes of their order.\(^{310}\)

\(^{310}\)Ibid. - Secundum autem quod opus manuale ordinatur ad otium tollendum, vel ad corporis macerationem, non cadit sub necessitate praecepti secundum se consideratum, quia multis aliis modis potest vel caro macerari, vel etiam otium tolli, quam per opus manuale. Maceratur enim caro per ieunia et vigilias. Et otium tollitur per meditationes sanctarum Scripturarum et laudes divinas, unde super illud
Thomas thus excludes some members of the religious orders from manual labor in itself, but not from toil in general. As his description of the fourth aid indicates, the exercise is to “shun idleness” and engage in “bodily toil.” As Thomas here explains, the effects of manual labor to remove idleness and curb concupiscence are equally accomplished by fastings and watchings and by meditation on Holy Scripture.

The importance of the meditation on the scriptures is especially important for Thomas, as it provides part of the justification for the orientation of the religious orders dedicated to the life of learning and the university. In a general question on whether or not religious orders are permitted to engage in study of any kind of knowledge, Thomas answers in the affirmative, and then provides an explanation of the reasons for study. The first is the goal of enlightening the intellect, by which one is led to moral action, while the second is for an increase in knowledge in order to combat heretics. The final purpose is again related to chastity and abstinence:

For it helps us to avoid the lusts of the flesh; wherefore Jerome says, (Epistle 125 to the monk Rusticus): “Love the science of the Scriptures and thou shalt have no love for carnal vice.” For it turns the mind away from lustful thoughts and tames the flesh on account of the toil that study entails according to Sirach 31:1,

“Watching for riches [honestas] consumeth the flesh.” It also helps to remove the
desire of riches, wheretofore it is written (Wisdom 7:8): “I...esteemed riches nothing in comparison with her.”311

In conclusion of this question, Thomas also mentions the help that scripture provides by inclining persons to be better suited to obedience, thus referencing all three of the vows of the religious life in this section on the effect of study. More importantly, study is identified with toil, with the difficult work of the mind engaging in study of knowledge. The passage above cites from one of Jerome’s letters, the full passage reading:

Always have a book in your hand and before your eyes; learn the psalms word by word, pray without ceasing, keep your senses on alert and closed against vain imaginings. Let your mind and body both strain towards the Lord, overcome wrath by patience; love the knowledge of the scriptures and you will not love the sins of the flesh. Do not let your mind offer a lodging to disturbing thoughts, for if they once find a home in your breast they will become your masters and lead you on into fatal sin. Engage in some occupation so that the devil may always find you busy.312

The need for constant work is clearly stated in this passage, with Jerome recommending a variety of activities to occupy oneself and one’s mind to avoid sinful thoughts and actions.

Aid 5: Mental disquietude

311 ST II-II.188.5 - Unde hieronymus dicit, ad rusticum monachum, ama Scripturarum studia, et carnis vitia non amabis. Avertit enim animum a cogitatione lasciviae, et carnem macerat, propter studii laborem, secundum illud Eccli. XXXI, vigilia honestatis tabefaciet carnes. Valet etiam ad auferendum cupiditatem divitiarum. Unde Sap. VII dicitur, divitas nihil esse dixi in comparatione illius.
312 Jerome, Epistles, CXXV.11
The next two aids are taken directly from Jerome’s letter to the monk Rusticus, and are given in response to a question posed by Rusticus to Jerome. The question is now that Rusticus has decided to take up the monastic lifestyle, where he should be living. Jerome, writing in a time which predates the formal organization of the religious orders, runs through the options and arrives at an eventual conclusion. The three options for living are as follows: 1. At home 2. Alone, in a remote place 3. In a monastery-school (ludo monasteriorum). Jerome concludes the third is the best option for the young monk.

For the fifth aid, Thomas tells us of Jerome’s recommendation of constant mistreatment and abuse as a means of helping a person to chaste living:

A fifth remedy for concupiscence lies in certain kinds of mental disquietude. Jerome relates, in the epistle quoted above, that in a congregation of cenobites there dwelt a young man who could not, by means of fasting or any laborious work, free himself from yielding to the temptations of the flesh. The superior of the monastery, seeing that the youth was on the point of yielding, adopted the following means for his relief. He commanded one of the most discreet among the fathers to constantly upbraid the young man, to load him with insults and reproach, and after treating him thus, to lodge complaints against him with the Superior. Witnesses were called, who all took the senior father’s part. This treatment was continued for a year. At the end of that time, the superior questioned the youth about his old train of thought. “Father” was the reply, “I am scarcely permitted to live. How in such straits shall I be inclined to sin?”

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313 De perfectione 9 - Quintum remedium adhibetur contra carnis concupiscentiam etiam per aliquas animi perturbationes: unde Hieronymus refert in eadem Epist., quod in quodam coenobio quidam adolescens
Though the methodology is different from the previous four aids, the rationale is the same. The greatest danger to chastity is the mind wandering from carnal thoughts to the enacting of carnal pleasures. In order to avoid this, the young man in this story is prevented from thinking about much of anything by the creation of false accusations and charges against him. The young man, presumably, would become so consumed with defending himself, avoiding the mistreatment, and facing punishment, that he would have no time for his former habits of thought to lead to the enactment of an inappropriate activity.

In Jerome’s letter, the point is provided by the final line, which answers a question put forth by Rusticus as to whether or not he should live in solitude. Jerome’s response, at the end of this story, is “If he had been alone, by whose help could he have overcome temptation?” In the story immediately preceding this one, Jerome describes how he, when living alone in the desert, had consistently given in to the “heat of his nature.” His solution was to take up the study of Hebrew with someone living nearby, and to toil in that effort, in part as a means of distraction.

The context for Dominicans was rather different, in that they would not have had the option of living an anchoritic way of life. Nonetheless, the solution, presumably, is rather similar. The specter of having someone else watching over you, which results from living in a community, is a great aid to the observance of chaste living. Though

nulla operis magnitudine flammarum poterat carnis extinguere; eum periclitantem pater monasterii hac arte servavit. Impositio cuidam viro gravi ut iurgiis atque conviciis insectaretur hominem, et post irrogatam inuiriam primus veniret ad quaerimonias, vocati testes pro eo loquebantur qui contumeliam fecerat. Solus pater monasterii defensionem suam opponebatur, ne abundanti tristitia frater absoreberetur. Ita annus ductus est, quo expleto interrogatus adoloscens super cogitationibus pristinis, respondit: Papae, vivere me non licet, et fornicari libet?
Thomas rarely, if ever, mentions the immediate sort of master-student relationship as one finds in Jerome or Seneca, he will, as seen in the previous chapter, consistently indicate the importance of those in community watching out for the spiritual health of their neighbor.

**Aid 6: Extrinsic circumstances**

This aid is perhaps the most simple help to the observance of chastity provided by Thomas in the *De perfectione*. Based on the recognition that if one has no opportunity for physical or visual interaction with those who serve as the objects of carnal desire then there is no possibility of illicit behavior, Thomas recommends avoiding the company of those who might incline to such thoughts or actions. Again, this recommendation is rooted in passages from Jerome’s letter. In one section, he writes, “For the reasons then which I have given above, I wish you not to live with your mother.” One of these reasons is that in that household, there are a number of servant girls, and “in a house full of girls you would see things in the daytime that you would think about in the night.”

A bit earlier, Jerome also says, “See your mother often, but do not be forced to see other women when you visit her. Their faces may dwell in your heart and so ‘a secret wound may fester in your breast.’” The aid, therefore, is to simply avoid situations which may lead to unchaste thoughts or actions, and the main source of these thoughts is interaction with women. Thomas explains:

A great obstacle to continence arises from extrinsic circumstances, such as constant intercourse with women. We read in Ecclesiasticus (Sirach 9:9), “Many

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314 Describe by Jerome in his *Epistle 125 to the monk Rusticus*, and in Seneca’s *Epistles to Lucilius*.
315 Jerome, Epistle CXXV.11
have perished by the beauty of a woman, and hereby lust is enkindled as a fire...for her conversation burneth as fire.” And, in the same chapter, the following safeguard is proposed against these dangers: “Look not upon a woman that a mind for many, lest thou fall into her snares. Use not much the company of her that is a dancer, and hearken not to her lest thou perish by the force of her charms.”...Jerome, in his book against Vigilantius, writes that a monk, knowing his own frailty, and how fragile is the vessel which he carries, will fear to slip or stumble, lest he fall and be broken. Hence, he will chiefly avoid gazing at women, and especially at young ones, lest he be caught in the eyes of a harlot, and lest beauty of form lead him on to unlawful embraces.317

The fear in this explanation is, like the one above, that the “train of thought” requires only a simple spark for the progression from illicit thought to illicit action. As soon as a person, especially a young man, receives any sort of visual stimuli, there is a substantial risk of being inclined to sinful action.

**Aid 7: Fasting, vigils, and bodily labor**

Thomas repeatedly returns to the same quotation ascribed to Abbot Moses and found in Cassian’s *Conferences*. Thomas writes:

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317 De perfectione 9 - Ex parte autem exteriorum rerum propositum continentiæ impeditur per aspectum et frequentia colloquia mulierum et earum consortia: unde dicitur Eccli. IX, 9: *propter speciem mulieris multi perierunt: et ex hoc concupiscientia quasi ignis exardescit: et postea subditur, colloquium illius quasi ignis exardescit.* Et ideo contra hoc est adhibendum remedium quod ibidem dicitur; *ne respicias mulierem multivolam ne forte incidis in laqueos illius: cum saltatrix ne assiduus sis, nec audias illam, ne forte pereas in efficacia illius*...Unde Hieronymus contra Vigilantium scribens dicit, quod monachus sciens imbecilitatem suam, et vas fragile quod portat, timet offendere ne impingat et corruat, atque frangatur; unde et mulierum, et maxime adolescentularum, vitat aspectum, ne eum capiat oculus meretricis, ne forma pulcherrima ad illicitos ducat amplexus.
Abbot Moses, in his Conferences to the Fathers, says that in order to preserve purity of heart, “we ought to seek solitude and to practice fasting, watching, and bodily labour: to wear scant clothing; and to attend to reading…” It is for this reason that such exercises are practiced in the religious life. Perfection does not consist in them; but they are, so to speak, instruments whereby perfection is acquired. Abbot Moses therefore, continues, “Fasting, vigils, hunger, meditation on the scriptures, nakedness, and the privation of all possessions, are not themselves perfection; but they are the instruments of perfection.”

This quotation from Abbot Moses appears frequently in the *Summa*, especially when Thomas is writing about the religious orders. For Thomas, this quotation does well to describe the essential aspects of the religious life for him. It is interesting to note, however, that some of these things are not necessarily practices Thomas himself would have shared. If we were to draw a conclusion from his purportedly enormous physical size, it seems unlikely that we would be able to claim that he fasted regularly.

Furthermore, his definition of “bodily labor” and “toil” for Dominicans centered on intellectual exercises, like the study of scripture, and not manual labor. This is not to take

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318 De perfectione 9 - Ex quo patet quod, sicut abbas Moyses dicit in collationibus patrum, *pro puritate cordis servanda, solitudo sectanda est, ac ieiuniorum inediam, vigilias, labores corporis, nuditatem, lectionem, ceterasque virtues debere nos suscipere noverimus; ut scilicet per illas ab universis passionibus noxiis illaesum parare cor nostrum, et conservare possimus, et ad perfectionem caritatis istis gradibus innitendo conscendere. Ob hoc igitur in religionibus sunt huiusmodi opera instituta; non quia in ipsis principaliter consistat perfectio; sed quia his quasi quibusdam instrumentis ad perfectionem pervenit. Unde post pauc a ibidem subditur: *igitur ieiunia, vigiliae, meditatio Scripturarum nuditas ac privatio omnium facultatum, non perfectio, sed perfectionis instrumenta sunt.*

319 Thomas’ size is widely debated (hence, “dumb ox”). Also suggested is the fact that he ate only once a day, as was common practice within the religious orders. This can be considered a practice of fasting, and depending on the size of the meal, may also have allowed him to maintain a robust figure.
anything away from Thomas’ spiritual practice, but only to suggest that his spirituality is of a qualitatively different sort than that found in the Desert Fathers.

**The Means of Perfection: Obedience**

The final means of perfection identified by Thomas is obedience. Once more, it is given an expansive definition, one which is not limited to the religious life, though it properly finds its home there. Thomas explains:

The vow which, of all the three religious vows, belongs most peculiarly to the religious life is that of obedience. This is clear for several reasons. First, because, by obedience man sacrifices to God his own will; by chastity, on the other hand, he offers his body, and by poverty his external possessions. Now, since the body is worth more than the material goods, the vow of chastity is superior in merit to that of poverty, but the vow of obedience is of more value than either of the two. Secondly, because it is by his own will that a man makes use either of his body or of his goods: therefore, he who sacrifices his own will, sacrifices everything else that he has. Again, the vow of obedience is more universal than that of either poverty or chastity, and hence it includes them both.  

As Thomas remarks, obedience is more “universal” than the other vows, in that it relates to the sacrifice of oneself, specifically one’s will. The intent of the vow of obedience is

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320 De perfectione 11 - Inter haec autem tria quae ad religionis statum diximus pertinere, praecipuum est obedientiae votum: quod quidem multiplicantur apparat. Primo quidem, quia per obedientiae votum homo Deo propria voluntatem offerit; per votum autem continentiae offerit ei sacrificum de proprio corpore; per votum autem paupertatis de exterioribus rebus. Sicut ergo inter hominis bona corpus praefertur exterioribus rebus, et anima corpore; ita votum continentiae voto paupertatis praefertur, votum autem obedientiae utrique. Secundo quia per propria voluntatem homo et exterioribus rebus utitur et proprio corpore. Sic igitur qui propria voluntatem dat, totum dedisse videtur. Universalius igitur est obedientiae votum quam continentiae et paupertatis; et quodammodo includit utrumque.
not necessarily obedience to one’s superiors, however. Instead, obedience is recommended because it is the final offering that a person can present to God. As explained in the above passage, a person offers those things immediate to their body by poverty, their body itself through chastity, and their will through obedience.

This understanding is repeated in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* in its explanation of the counsels of the religious life. Thomas writes:

Now, the perfection to which these three counsels give a disposition consists in detachment of the mind for God. Hence, those who profess the aforesaid vows are called religious, in the sense that they offer themselves and their goods to God, as a special kind of sacrifice: as far as goods are concerned, by poverty; in regard to their body, by continence; and in regard to their will, by obedience. For religion consists in a divine cult, as was said above.\(^{321}\)

One is likely to notice in each of these explanations, however, that the one thing which is not given up is the mind. As is stated in this passage, the counsels lead towards “detachment of the mind for God” (*in vacatione mentis circa Deum consistit*). For one, this illustrates the role the mind continues to play in the activity of perfection, especially contemplation, but also in the work of watching oneself. As will be argued below, obedience to a superior does not allow for thoughtless action; instead, the same vigilance of mind in determining moral action is required. Further, the goal of obedience, and the other vows for that matter, is the freedom of the mind for God.

\(^{321}\) SCG 3.130.6 - *Perfectio autem ad quam praedicta disponunt, in vacatione mentis circa Deum consistit. Unde et praedictorum professores religiosi dicuntur, quasi se Deo et sua in modum cuiusdam sacrificii dicantes: et quantum ad res, per paupertatem; et quantum ad corpus, per continentiam; et quantum ad voluntatem, per obedientiam. Religio enim in cultu divino consistit, ut supra dictum est.*
As in the above vows, the vow of obedience as described by Thomas provides a clear example of the reflexive relationship of self to self in his work. The human can look on all things except his mind as extrinsic, as possible to renounce, as outside the immediate domain of concern, and in fact should do so in order to best contemplate God. There are many layers to this reflexivity and to Thomas’s understanding of the self; as is clear from the remainder of his work, especially on the virtues, the person does not actually lose all concern for exterior possessions, body, social connections, and individual will. Rather, there is recognition that these things do not hold the ultimate concern for us. Thus we are willing to give all of our possessions to the poor in poverty; we are willing to give up our bodies to the service of God in chastity; and we are willing to give up our lives in martyrdom through the abnegation of our own will. Everything must be held, so to speak, at arm’s length, such that we are willing to part with it if the situation calls for it.

In this way, the Christological background to Thomas’s explanation of perfection is made clear. In Thomas’s understanding, Christ gave up material possessions to better serve God. Likewise, Christ was chaste, and kept himself from social connections, even separating ties to his family if they tried to prevent him from preaching. And, finally, Christ was obedient to God’s will even unto his death.

Obedience in the *De perfectione*

Thomas’s teaching on obedience is dependent on several different influences. Most significantly are these three sources: the Rule of Benedict, Dionysius, and Gregory the Great. In introducing obedience, Thomas writes: “It is not only necessary for the perfection of charity that a man should sacrifice his exterior possessions: he must also, in
a certain sense, relinquish himself.” The term relinquish, in Thomas *derelinquat* or *relinquat*, is reminiscent of the language used in the Rule of Benedict in his discussion of obedience. One passage reads:

> Such as these, therefore, immediately leaving their own affairs and forsaking their own will (*relinquentes statim quae sua sunt et voluntatem propriam deserentes*), dropping the work they were engaged in and leaving it unfinished (*et quod agebant imperfectum reliquentes*), with the ready step of obedience follow up with their deeds the voice who commands them.

A connection is further seen in the emphasis on obedience as a matter of the abandoning one’s will. The title of the chapter in the *De perfectione* on obedience is “Of the third means of perfection, namely, the abnegation of our own will.” This connection serves as a foundation for Thomas’s explanation of obedience, but he will go well beyond this by including the other two thinkers mentioned above.

Dionysius is perhaps the most intriguing appearance. Though his influence on Thomas’s thought is well established, his presence in a spiritual treatise of this sort is notable, especially in that he is providing what some might consider a radical doctrine. Thomas writes:

> Dionysius, in chapter IV of *The Divine Names* says that “divine love causes a man to be out of himself, meaning thereby, that this love suffers him no longer to belong to himself but to Him whom he loves.” Paul, writing to the Galatians

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322 De perfectione 10 - Non solum autem necessarium est ad perfectionem caritatis consequendam, quod homo exetiora abiciat, sed etiam quodammodo se ipsum derelinquat.
(2:20), illustrates this state by his own example, saying, “I live, now not I, but
Christ liveth in me,” as if he did not count his life as his own, but as belonging to
Christ, and as if he spurned all that he possessed, in order to cleave to him. Thomas employs the concept found in Dionysius and Galatians to confirm what he had already been teaching, namely that a person caught up in divine love renounces attachment to all things that impede that love. And one of the possible impediments is the identification of the self as a certain thing, that is, a certain person with desires and interests and a history existing outside of God. As Thomas explains of Paul, “he did not count his life as his own, but as belonging to Christ.”

In this teaching, the “self” is one of the possessions which it is possible to renounce. This self is identified with the will specifically, but appears also to refer to the sum of actions and desires a person holds. This self renunciation and identification of the “true” self with Christ is an essential aspect of our spiritual life, according to Thomas. He writes:

This practice of salutary self-abnegation and charitable self-hatred, is, in part, necessary for all men in order to salvation, and is, partly, a point of perfection. As we have already seen from the words of Dionysius quoted above, it is in the nature of divine love that he who loves should belong, not to himself, but to the one beloved. It is necessary, therefore, that self-abnegation and self-hatred be proportionate to the degree of divine love existing in an individual soul. It is

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De perfectione 10 - Dicit enim Dionysius, 4 cap. De divinis nominibus, quod *divinus amor est extasim faciens, id est hominem extra se ipsum ponens, non sinens hominem sui ipsius esse, sed eius quod amatur: cuius rei exemplum in se ipso demonstravit apostolus dicens ad Gal. II, 20: *vivo ego, iam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus*, quasi suam vitam non suam aemtans, sed Christi: quia quod proprium sibi erat contemnens, totus Christo inhaerebat.
essential to salvation that a man should love God to such a degree, as to make
Him his end, and to do nothing which he believes to be opposed to the Divine
love. Consequently, self-hatred and self-denial are necessary for salvation.325

In these last two clauses, we have a further explanation of what Thomas intends in the
idea of “self.” If salvation requires that humans do nothing which is opposed to divine
love, and if the accomplishment of such things requires hatred and denial of self, then it is
clear that Thomas understands the self to be something inclined towards sin. This is
confirmed in his use of a passage from Gregory the Great. He writes:

Hence Gregory says in his Homily, “We relinquish and deny ourselves when we
avoid what we were wont (through the old man dwelling in us) to be, and when
we strive after that to which (by the new man) we are called.” In another homily
he likewise says, “We hate our own life when we do not condescend to carnal
desires, but resist the appetites and pleasures of the flesh.”326

We thus return to Paul’s concept of the Old and New man, discussed in the previous
chapter. The self which one renounces is the will, yes, but it is specifically our own self
willing that we are called to renounce, not the faculty itself. Thomas intends to
emphasize that what we are renouncing is sinful self-will, the willing that insists on itself.

325 De perfectione 10 - Huius autem salubris abnegationis et caritavi odii observatio partim quidem
necessaria est ad salutem et omnibus qui salvantur communis: partim autem ad perfectionis pertinet
complementum. Ut enim ex supraposita Dionysii auctoritate apparat, de ratione divini amoris est ut amans
non sui ipsius remaneat, sed amati. Secundum ergo divini amoris gradum necesse est et odium et
abnegationem praedictam distinguere. Est autem necessarium ad salutem ut homo sic Deum diligat ut in eo
finem suae intentionis ponat, nihilque admittat quod contrarium divinae dilectioni existat: et ideo
consequenter et odium et abnegatio sui ipsius est de necessitate salutis.
326 Ibid., Cum, ut Gregorius dicit in omelia, vitamus quod per vetustatem fuimus, et ad hoc nitimur quod per
novitatem vocamus; et sic nosmet ipsos relinquinimus et abnegamus. Et sicut in alia omelia dicit: tunc bene
animam nostram odimus, cum eis carnalibus desideriis non acquiescimus, cum eius appetitum frangimus
et eius voluptatibus reluctamus.
The renunciation of our will is a particularly difficult thing, as Thomas emphasizes, precisely because it is one of our most cherished possessions. With reference to Aristotelian teachings on the matter, Thomas explains the significance of the practice of renouncing our own will, and how it follows consequently on the other two means of perfection, poverty and chastity:

Now the more dearly a thing is loved according to nature, the more perfect it is to despise it, for the sake of Christ. Nothing is dearer to any man than the freedom of his will, whereby he is the Lord of others, can use what he pleases, enjoy what he wills, and is master of his own actions. Just, therefore, as a person who relinquishes his wealth, and leaves those to whom he is bound by natural ties, denies these things and persons; so, he who renounces his own will, which makes him master, does truly deny himself. Nothing is so repugnant to human nature as slavery; and, therefore, there is no greater sacrifice (except that of life), which one can make for another than to give himself up to bondage for the sake of that other. The will is still treated here as something which can be sacrificed, something suitably extrinsic to the person.

It should be noted that, up to this point, Thomas has yet to mention anything related to the traditional domain of obedience, namely the religious being bound to obey the

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327 Aristotle's discussion of slavery suggests that nothing is more repugnant to a human than the loss of his own will, because freedom of will is held by us according to our nature.
328 De perfectione 10 - Nihil autem est homini amabilius libertate propriae voluntatis. Per hanc enim homo est et aliorum dominus, per hanc aliis uti vel frui potest, per hanc etiam suis actibus dominatur. Unde, sicut homo dimittens divitias, vel personas coniunctas, eas abnegat; ita deserens propriae voluntatis arbitrium, per quod ipse sui dominus est, se ipsum abnegare inventur. Nihilque est quod homo naturali affectu magis refugiat quam servitutem: unde et nihil posset homo pro alio amplius impendere post hoc quod se ipsum in mortem pro eo traderet, quam quod se servituti eius subiugaret.
direction of his superior. It is clear that this is not the primary intent of the vow for Thomas; instead, obedience is about doing the will of God, the example of which comes from the life of Christ. Nonetheless, Thomas does acknowledge in passing the submission of one to another:

Others there are who make a complete sacrifice of their own will, for the love of God, submitting themselves to another by the vow of obedience, of which virtue Christ has given us a sublime example. Abnegation of our own will, as Christ did, “but not my will, but yours be done.”

Even in this passage, however, it is possible to understand the reference to submission to another as referring to submission to God, as this is precisely the nature of the obedience taken on by Christ in the passage cited. In the *De perfectione*, therefore, Thomas considers obedience in regard to perfection to be primarily about our direct obedience to God, which is accomplished by loving God to such a degree that we hold ourselves in a secondary position to the divine.

**Obedience in the Summae**

This understanding of obedience can be contrasted with that found in the *Summae*, provide a more traditional treatment of the subject. For example, in the brief discussion of obedience in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Thomas explains obedience as follows:

Finally, to cut of man’s solicitude even for himself, there is given the counsel of obedience, through which man hands over the control of his own acts to a superior. Concerning which it is said: “Obey your prelates and be subject to

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329 Ibid. - Aliqui vero libertati propriae voluntatis totaliter abrenuntiant, se propter Deum alis subicientes per obedientiæ votum. Cuius quidem obedientiæ exemplum praecipuum in Christo habemus.
them. For they watch as being ready to render an account of your souls” (Heb. 13:17).

In this passage, obedience is considered only in the limited manner of being a relationship of lower to superior. The logic for the vow of obedience is the same as for the previous two, in that it is especially ordained to the freedom of the mind from solicitude for the purposes of contemplation. As is clear, however, the treatment found in the De perfectione emphasizes none of these aspects of obedience, focusing as it does only on self-denial as a pursuit of divine love.

The treatment seen in the Summa Theologiae includes elements found in both the Summa contra Gentiles and the De perfectione. In II-II.104 on obedience, Thomas asks whether subjects (speaking generally) are bound to obey their superiors in all matters. In a reply to the third objection, he writes:

Religious profess obedience as to the regular mode of life, in respect of which they are subject to their superiors: wherefore they are bound to obey in those matters only which may belong to the regular mode of life, and this obedience suffices for salvation. If they be willing to obey even in other matters, this will belong to the superabundance of perfection; provided, however, such things be not contrary to God or to the rule they profess, for obedience in this case would be unlawful.

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330 SCG 3.130.2 - Ad amputandam autem sollicitudinem hominis etiam circa seipsum, datur consilium obedientiae, per quam homo dispositionem suorum actum superiori committit. Propter quod dicitur Hebr. Ult.: obedite praepositis vestris et subiacete eis: ipsi enim pervigilant, quasi rationem redditur pro animabus vestris. As Thomas mentions soon after this passage, “The highest perfection of human life consists the mind of man being detached (vacet) from care, for the sake of God.” 3.130.3
Accordingly, we may distinguish a threefold obedience; one, sufficient for salvation and consisting in obeying when one is bound to obey: secondly, perfect obedience, which obeys in all things lawful: thirdly, indiscreet obedience, which obeys even in matters unlawful. \(^{331}\)

The answer to the question, therefore, is yes, but with a very important caveat. The person ought to obey in those instances pertaining virtue, and can also go beyond what is necessary in obeying in “all things lawful.” Thomas is careful to note that the religious only obey when the order is lawful, and thus, though the human is freed from some degree of solicitude concerning their actions, they are still tasked with the analysis of right and wrong.

Thomas continues this thought in a different question of the *Summa Theologiae* by appealing, in a restrained manner, to the description of obedience seen in the *De perfectione*. In question II-II.186, “Things in which the religious state properly consists,” Thomas asks in article 5 “is obedience necessary?” The answer, as established from the general discussion provided above in question 104 is “yes,” and in a special way for religious. First, “religious need to be placed under the instruction and command of someone as regards things pertaining to the religious life.” Second, the domain of obedience in the religious life is different in kind from that of persons who live in the world. Thomas explains:

\(^{331}\) ST II-II.104.5 ad 3 - Ad tertium dicendum quod religiosi obedientiam profitentur quantum ad regularem conversationem, secundum quam suis praeflatis subduntur. Et ideo quantum ad illa sola obedire tenetur quae possunt ad regularem conversationem pertinere. Et haec est obedientia sufficiens ad salutem. Si autem etiam in alii obedire voluerint, hoc pertinebit ad cumulum perfectionis, dum tamen illa non sint contra Deum, aut contra professionem regulae; quia talis obedientia esset illicita. Sic ergo potest triplex obedientia distingui, una sufficiens ad salutem, quae scilicet obedit in his ad quae obligatur; alia perfecta quae obedit in omnibus licitis; alia indiscreta, quae etiam in illicitis obedit.
To obey one’s superiors in matters that are essential to virtue is not a work of supererogation, but is common to all: whereas to obey in matters pertaining to the practice of perfection belongs properly to religious. This latter obedience is compared to the former as the universal to the particular. For those who live in the world, keep something for themselves and offer something to God; and in the latter respect, they are under obedience to their superiors: whereas those who live in religion give themselves wholly and their possessions to God, as stated above (1 and 3). Hence, their obedience is universal.  

As Thomas writes, the obedience of religious requires that they “give themselves wholly” to God. Obedience in this understanding is not a question of always obeying, but a readiness to obey even at the cost of one’s individual concerns and interests.

**Conclusion**

This chapter aimed to provide an overview of the concept of perfection in relation to spiritual exercises and reflexive relationship to self as found in the *De perfectione*, and through that text to others in Thomas’s corpus. It is clear that the concept of the freedom of the mind plays a central role in what Thomas intends by these exercises and practices, and in his recommendation of the ideal relationship of self to self. In the vows, one sees a gradual refinement of the conception of self: the person is not their possessions, nor their relationships or responsibilities, nor their sexual desires, nor their own intentions or

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332 ST II-II.186.5 ad 1 - Ad primum ergo dicendum quod obedire praelatis in his quae pertinent ad necessitatem virtutis, non est supererogationis, sed omnibus commune, sed obedire in his quae pertinent ad exercitium perfectionis, pertinet proprie ad religiosos. Et comparatur ista obedientia ad aliam sicut universale ad particulare. Illi enim qui in saeculo vivunt, aliquid sibi retinent et aliquid Deo largiuntur, et secundum hoc obedientiae praelatorum, subduntur. Illi vero qui vivunt in religione, totaliter se et sua tribuunt Deo, ut ex supra dictis patet. Unde obedientia eorum est universalis.
wishes. Instead, they are, properly speaking, to be identified with the mind renewed by
Christ, the New Man, which is the mind freed for contemplation and love of God.
Chapter 5 - Virtues, Exercises, and Reflexivity

In this final chapter, the discussion will now turn to the cardinal virtues. The goal of this discussion is twofold: first, to highlight the importance of preserving the direction of the intellect in each of the virtues, and second, to emphasize the recurrence of exercises throughout the *Summa Theologiae* and its treatment of the moral virtues. As has been argued in previous chapters, the centerpiece of living an ethical life for Thomas is the ability of the mind to watch itself and the soul, evaluate its thoughts and actions, and act in accordance with what is deemed correct. This is, first of all, a reflection of his understanding of the relationship of self to self, one which suggests that a person should identify as that aspect which is best in themselves, namely the mind. This understanding is expressed in a variety of ways in Thomas, but most significantly in the difference between the New and Old Man, a Pauline distinction, where the New Man is identified as the mind renewed by Grace in Christ, and the Old Man is the sensitive nature of the human. In addition to this perspective on the self, Thomas recommends a variety of exercises or practices which seek to uphold the beneficial power of the mind, and to separate it from inordinate influence of the other aspects of the human person.

This is, in fact, one of the specific goals of the virtues, each of which occupies a position in the relationship between sensitive nature and the rational nature. The four cardinal virtues, Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude, play an intermediary role, where they seek to preserve the power of reason and avoid the undue influence from things extrinsic to the reason. As Thomas writes:
The proper end of each moral virtue consists precisely in conformity with right reason. For temperance intends that man should not stray from reason for the sake of his concupiscences; fortitude, that he should not stray from the right judgment of reason through fear or daring.\textsuperscript{333} The same is true for prudence, which chooses the mean of reason in relation to actions, and justice, which is acting in accordance with reason in dealings with other persons. Each of these virtues upholds reason as the primary principle of right action in the moral life.

To that end, this chapter will cover each of the four cardinal virtues, and describe two aspects of each, namely their relation to the reflexive understanding of self offered by Thomas and described one of the exercises recommended for the upholding of reason. Before discussing the virtues in detail, however, I will first discuss the difference between virtues and perfecting virtues, before going into more detail on the relation of the virtues to the passions. In particular, this chapter will argue that Thomas provides several different methods for reducing the impulse and power of the passions, and redirecting them away from having an undue effect on the intellect. There are some examples of where the passions play a “positive” role, but it is always limited to proper alignment with the judgment of reason. In addition to the moderation of the passions by reason, Thomas provides a few other methods of controlling passions. This chapter will

\textsuperscript{333} ST II-II.47.7 - Respondeo dicendum quod hoc ipsum quod est conformari rationi rectae est finis proprius cuiuslibet moralis virtutis, temperantia enim hoc intendit, ne propter concupiscentias homo divertat a ratione; et similiter fortitudo ne a recto iudicio rationis divertat a ratione; et similiter fortitudo ne a recto iudicio rationis divertat propter timorem vel audaciam.
discuss some of these briefly, including the practices of contemplation, tears, and the moderation of anger by love.

The discussion will then move to the cardinal virtues, and provide a brief account of each in relation to reflexivity and a practice. The first, prudence, emphasizes the form of reflexivity described in this dissertation. The relationship of self to self, the mind turned to watch over the whole soul and body, is precisely what occurs in the virtue of prudence. It is also the virtue which enacts the identity of the human with the better part of themselves, namely their reason. This understanding of prudence is consonant with many classical treatments, including Plato and Aristotle, as well as others in the Platonic tradition. In the virtue of prudence, Thomas describes the process whereby one accomplishes moral reasoning, a process which begins with memory. In the act of memory, a person recalls previous experiences or references which serve as guides in determining the proper course of moral action in the current event.

The virtue of justice is slightly different from the other three under discussion. It is found in the will, instead of the intellect as in the case of prudence, or the sensitive appetite, as in the case of fortitude and temperance. For Thomas, this means that justice is not about the passions, but is rather an inclination towards the rendering of each person their due. Furthermore, justice is not essentially about the internal relations of the person, as in the other virtues, but only about dealings with others. This understanding alters slightly, however, when the discussion turns to the just relationship of the human to God.

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334 See, for example Shadi Bartsch, *The Mirror of the Self*, p. 11. N.b., Bartsch appears to use a different understanding of the term “reflexivity,” limiting it to those thinkers who believe that there is a privileged access to self-knowledge, that is, that it is objective. She in particular identifies Seneca and Descartes as examples.
which in fact results in a certain orientation of the person towards God. The Christian, therefore, as an act of justice, offers their mind to God in faith, as an act of offering the best of what each person has to offer, which is the offering due to God.

In the virtue of fortitude, the secondary place of the body is once more emphasized by Thomas. As established in previous chapters, Thomas has a moderate approach to the role of the human body, especially in comparison with thinkers contemporary to him. Nonetheless, as is apparent in his discussion of the fear of death, the body is appropriately sacrificed or otherwise restrained at certain times for the sake of virtuous actions. Thomas also recommends the practice of the premeditatione malorum, the meditation on evil events before they happen, as a supplement to the virtue of fortitude and a means of reducing fear.

Finally, the virtue of temperance serves as a direct mediator between the pleasures and desires of the sensitive appetite and the work of the intellect. In describing the virtue of temperance and its role, Thomas repeatedly employs terms found in the raising of children and in the taming of wild animals. The role of temperance, therefore, is to provide a “bridle” for the soul, a means of restraining and redirecting the soul to its proper end, one in alignment with reason.

**Virtues and Perfecting Virtues**

The connection of the virtues with reason is made repeatedly in Thomas, and is not really a point of contention. A problem arises, however, when the power of reason is emphasized to the point of suggesting a hegemonic authority over the rest of the human person. For Thomas, this is decidedly not the case; he recognizes three possible sources
for human action. These three are the reason, the will, and the sensitive faculty. For Thomas, each of these three can, at different points, present an impetus or suggestion for action to a person. For example, when a person is hungry, the sensitive faculty will communicate a bodily feeling of hunger. There is nothing inherently wrong with the sensitive faculty communicating this bodily need, nor is there anything wrong with the person following the bodily need and providing food for his own body. In fact, to avoid food to the extent that it causes bodily harm is roundly condemned by Thomas. As is the alternative, the vice of gluttony, where one eats more food than is necessary for the sake of enjoying the pleasure of food. This is where the rational faculty comes in; it is tasked with moderating the movements of the appetitive aspects of the human person. The reason evaluates the desires, moderates them, and approves a course of action in alignment with its judgment. Nonetheless, despite the central role of reason, Thomas does not locate the moral virtues (justice, fortitude, temperance) in the mind, but in the respective appetitive aspects which they help to moderate.

The importance of this distinction is found in the differing conception of the human person between Thomas and the “opinion of Socrates.” Thomas writes that Socrates believed that “every virtue is a kind of prudence,” meaning that it is primarily intellectual or rational in nature. For Socrates, in this description, all that the human needs is knowledge in order to act morally. If a person is aware of the proper course of action, they then follow through on that course. Thomas understands this to be false, because of the nature of the appetitive faculty. He writes, “The appetitive faculty obeys the reason, not blindly, but with a certain power of opposition.” He then proceeds to describe the
control of the reason in Aristotelian terms as a “political power,” where individual subjects are free to maintain their opposition. In Thomas, as has been discussed more extensively in previous chapters, these subjects represent a choice of identity for each person, and are also characterized as the New Man and the Old Man. The question of identity solves the matter to a certain extent, as it selects the source of action to be held as primary. At the same time, however, it does not solve the problem of internal dissent.

Harmony within a person is instead accomplished with the help of the moral virtues. Though the “habits or passions of the appetitive faculty cause the use of reason to be impeded in some particular action” at various points, this is not necessarily the case. Thomas explains:

Accordingly for a man to do a good deed, it is requisite not only that his reason be well disposed by means of a habit of intellectual virtue; but also that his appetite be well disposed by means of a habit of moral virtue. And so moral differs from intellectual virtue, even as the appetite differs from the reason. Hence, just as the appetite is the principle of human acts, in so far as it partakes of reason, so are the moral habits to be considered virtues in so far as they are in conformity with reason.\(^{335}\)

The virtues, therefore, serve a number of important purposes, not least the accomplishing of right action. But in order for this right action to be accomplished, the person needs to have the virtues moderating their passions and desires. Without this moderation, a person

\(^{335}\) ST I-II.58.2 - Sic igitur ad hoc quod homo bene agat, requiritur quod non solum ratio sit bene disposita per habitum virtutis intellectualis; sed etiam quod vis appetitiva sit bene disposita per habitum virtutis moralis. Sicut igitur appetitus distinguitur a ratione, ita virtus moralis distinguitur ab intellectuali. Unde sicut appetitus est principium humani actus secundum quod participat aliquahter rationem, ita habitus moralis habet rationem virtutis humanae, inquantum rationi conformatur.
remains in internal conflict, and reason is affected by passions and desires which should not be allowed to influence it.

The moral virtues, therefore, stand in direct relations to the passions and desires of the appetitive aspect of the person. In fact, in a passage from his *Commentary on 1 Timothy*, Thomas suggests that the virtues stand in relation to the concept of purity of heart. As was suggested in the previous chapters, Thomas’s use of the term “pure of heart” is consistent with Cassian’s use of the term, where Cassian used it as a translation of Evagrius Pontus’ *apatheia*, taken again from the Stoics. Thomas writes:

For the precepts of virtue are given for this, that a heart may be pure. Of these virtues whose matter is the passions, some are ordered to the mode of regulating these passions, just as it is temperance which orders concupiscence, meekness anger, fortitude fear and foolhardiness. Now by these passions is purity of heart disturbed, and so these virtues make a heart pure.\(^{336}\)

The virtues, therefore, contribute to the command of reason by maintaining purity of heart or the operation of the reason without undue influence from the passions.

There is also the further distinction found in the moral virtues between acquired and infused. In his discussion of the cardinal virtues, however, this distinction is not precisely made. In ST I-II.61.5, Thomas asks how the cardinal virtues can be divided. He names four categories, according to the English translation: social, perfecting, perfect, and exemplar virtues. It is important to note those virtues given as “perfect” and

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\(^{336}\) 1 Timothy ch. 1 l. 2 - Ad hoc enim quod cor sit purum, dantur praecepta virtutum, quorum quaedam ordinantur ad modum rectificandi passiones quorum, scilicet virtutum, materiae sunt passiones sicut temperantia quae ordinat concupiscentiam, mansuetudo iras, fortitudo timores et audacias. Per has autem passiones turbatur purtas cordis.
“perfect” are translations of the “purgatoriae” and “purgati animi,” that is, purifying virtues, and virtues of the purified soul. Thomas will, as will be suggested below, identify these virtues with the pursuit of perfection (hence the translation as given). As has been shown in this dissertation, Thomas has a particular interest in the pursuit of perfection, so it would seem that the description of “perfecting” virtues would hold special interest.

In this question, Thomas responds to four objections, where each objection refers to a passage from Macrobius which is then rebuffed in the same objection. The rebuttal in three out of four objections originates from a non-Christian philosopher, while the fourth is Thomas’s own objection referring to a technical matter. The first refers to the exemplar virtues, the virtues which exist in the prime exemplar (God). As Aristotle points out, it is absurd to describe God as virtuous when God has no passions to moderate. Thomas, however suggests it is appropriate to do so analogously. Second are the perfect virtues, virtues which exist in a person who is so perfected that the virtues no longer have the same operations. Third are the perfecting virtues, which exist in the person who is on their way to having perfect virtue. The perfecting virtues are of particular interest, in that they refer to the person who “flies from human affairs and devotes himself exclusively to the things of God.” The rebuttal is from Cicero, and is in the form of a condemnation of any sort of renunciation of social practices. Finally, Thomas arrives at the social virtues, which are denied their existence on the grounds that only justice deals with the particulars of others.
Of particular interest in this dissertation are the perfect and perfecting virtues. Thomas affirms their existence—after first confirming the accurate distinction of exemplar and social virtues, writing that humans must have an end in God, and that the virtues always govern appropriate behavior in regards to social interaction. The perfecting virtues, on the other hand, are described as something “between” the social virtues and the exemplar virtues. Thomas writes:

But since it behooves a man to do his utmost to strive onward even to Divine things, as even the Philosopher declares in Ethics X, 7, and as scripture often admonishes us—for instance: “Be ye...perfect as your heavenly father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48), we must needs place some virtues between the social or human virtues and the exemplar virtues which are divine.337

Here the justification for the translation of these virtues as “perfecting,” is given, in the connection with the passage from the Sermon on the Mount. The perfecting virtues seem to refer to what readers of Thomas call the “supernatural end” for humans, and it would seem possible to map the difference between acquired and infused onto these distinctions. And yet, the citation from Aristotle should raise some concern in this interpretation. If even Aristotle, a pagan, believes that devotion to God calls for an alteration in the understanding of the virtues, this complicates the original interpretation. Instead, it seems likely that the “perfecting” virtues gesture towards the practices associated with

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337 ST I-II.61.5 - Sed quia ad hominem pertinet ut etiam ad divina se trahat quantum potest, ut etiam philosophys dicit, in X Ethic.; et hoc nobis in sacra Scriptura multipliciter commendatur, ut est illud Matth. V, estote perfecti, sicut et pater vester caelestis perfectus est, necesse est poner quasdam virtutes medias inter politicas, quae sunt virtutes humanae, et exemplares, quae sunt virtutes divinae.
the philosophical life in the earlier era, and with the practices of Christian perfectionism found in Thomas’s own time.

This identification with the practices of perfection is rather straightforward to make, especially when one reads the *De perfectione spiritualis vitae*. The content of the perfecting virtues follows immediately upon many of the key principles described in that text. Thomas writes:

Now these virtues differ by reason of a difference of movement and term: so that some are virtues of men who are on their way and tending towards the Divine similitude; and these are called “perfecting” virtues. Thus prudence, by contemplating the things of God, counts as nothing all the things of the world and directs all the thoughts of the soul to God alone: temperance, so far as nature allows, neglects the needs of the body; fortitude prevents the soul from being afraid of neglecting the body and rising to heavenly things; and justice consists in the soul giving a whole hearted consent to follow the way thus proposed.³³⁸

As was suggested in the previous chapters, the practice of the spiritual life in Thomas is concerned precisely with each of the habits suggested by these reinterpreted cardinal virtues. There are also the virtues of the perfect, which Thomas describes as follows:

Besides these are the virtues of those who have already attained to the divine similitude: these are called the “perfect virtues.” Thus prudence sees naught else

³³⁸ Ibid. - Quae quidem virtutes distinguuntur secundum diversitatem motus et termini. Ita scilicet quod quaedam sunt virtutes transeuntium et in divinam similitudinem tendentium, et haec vocantur virtutes purgatoriae. Ita scilicet quod prudentia omnia mundana divinorum contemplatione despiciat, omnemque animae cogitationem in divina sola dirigat; temperentia vero relinquat, inquantum natura patitur, quae corporis usus requirit; fortitudinis autem est ut anima non terreatur propter excessum a corpore, et accessum ad superna; iustitia vero est ut tota anima consentiat ad huius propositi viam.
but the things of God; temperance knows no earthly desires; fortitude has no
knowledge of passion; and justice, by imitating the divine mind, is united thereto
by an everlasting covenant. Such are the virtues attributed to the blessed, or, in
this life, to some who are at the summit of perfection.\textsuperscript{339}

Thomas thus considers it not only possible for a person to live unaffected by passions in
this life; he considers this to be a sign of living a blessed life.\textsuperscript{340} Once more, though this
perhaps sounds like a Stoic interpretation of Christianity, there is more nuance to this
presentation. In his reply to the second objection, Thomas provides a more detailed
explanation of the relation of the passions to the virtues:

Human virtues, that is to say, virtues of men living together in this world, are
about the passions. But the virtues of those men who have attained to perfect
bliss are without passions. Hence Plotinus says that the “social virtues check the
passions,” i.e. they bring them to the relative mean; “the second kind,” viz. the
perfecting virtues, “uproot them”; “the third kind,” viz. the perfect virtues, “forget
them; while it is impious to mention them in connection with virtues of the fourth
kind,” viz. the exemplar virtues. It may also be said that here he is speaking of
passions as denoting inordinate emotions.\textsuperscript{341}

\textsuperscript{339} Ibid. - Quaedam vero sunt virtutes iam assequentium divinam similitudinem, quae vocantur virtutes iam
purgati animi. Ita scilicet quod prudentia sola divina intueatur; temperantia terrenas cupiditates nesciat;
fortitudo passiones ignoret; iustitia cum divina mente perpetuo foedere societur, eam scilicet imitando.
Quas quidem virtutes dicitus esse beatorum, vel aliquorum in hac vita perfectissimorum.

\textsuperscript{340} Thomas uses the term “passions” in a variety of ways; he is presumably using the term in this instance
only to refer to the negative form of the passions, those which negatively alter a person’s judgment.
Additionally, he is likely referring only to Jesus who, as Thomas explains in his question on the defects
assumed by the soul of Christ, only experienced “propassions,” and not full-fledged passions. ST III.15

\textsuperscript{341} Ibid., ad 2. - Ad secundum dicendum quod virtutes humanae sunt circa passiones, scilicet virtutes
hominum in hoc mundo conversantium. Sed virtutes eorum qui plenam beatitudinem assequuntur, sunt
absque passionibus. Unde Plotinus dicit quod passiones politicae virtutes molliunt, idest ad medium
The last clause in this response is crucial to understanding the role of emotions in Thomas. It is true, as many recent interpreters have emphasized, that Thomas has a positive role for certain emotions in his theology. At the same time, however, it is quite clear that there are a number of emotions which are considered problematic, and that it is one of the primary responsibilities of the moral virtues to moderate or “uproot” these passions.

**The problematic passions**

The problematic passions are, for the most part, identified *prima secunda* in the section on the passions. Thomas there discusses passions both positive and negative, and the nuances involved therein. In this section, the manner in which passions can take a negative role will be discussed, as a way of providing a foundation to a discussion of the moderation of passions. It is important to note once more that though passions require moderation by reason, they are not in and of themselves negative. Anger, for example, can be good or bad; good when it proceeds from reason and does not impinge on reason, and bad when it proceeds incompletely from reason or alters the judgment of reason. Pleasure, likewise, is singled out by Thomas as having positive and negative qualities. Pleasure of all kinds is inevitable; for example, it is impossible to avoid feeling bodily pleasure after consuming a meal. Nonetheless, the pleasure to be valued is that which results from right operation, and not from operations which detract from relationship with God.
To expand briefly on this subject, the passion of pleasure is treated in several different places by Thomas. At one point, Thomas contends with the false opinion that all pleasures are evil, something which he (via Aristotle) attributes to early Greek thinkers. He writes:

Some have maintained that all pleasure is evil. The reason seems to have been that they took account only of sensible and bodily pleasures which are more manifest; since, also in other respects, the ancient philosophers did not discriminate between the intelligible and the sensible, nor between intellect and sense (De anima iii, 3). And they held that all bodily pleasures should be reckoned as bad, and thus that man being prone to immoderate pleasures, arrives at the mean of virtue by abstaining from pleasure. But they were wrong to hold this opinion.  

Those philosophers were wrong to hold that opinion because “none can live without some sensible and bodily pleasure.” Instead of shunning all pleasure, therefore, Thomas instead emphasizes the goodness of the end which is desired by the appetitive drive. As Thomas says in the reply to the third objection of the next article, “just as it happens that not every good which is desired, is of itself and verily good; so not every pleasure is of itself and verily good.” The relative goodness or worth of the pleasure is dependent
upon the end which is fulfilled. This is confirmed in the final article of this question.

Thomas writes:

On the other hand, the pleasures of the sensitive appetite are not the rule of moral
goodness and malice; since food is universally pleasurable to the sensitive
appetite both of good and of evil men. But the will of the good man takes
pleasure in them in accordance reason, to which the will of the evil man gives no
heed.\(^\text{344}\)

Thomas here suggests that the pleasures experienced by a person do not necessarily have
a moral value in themselves. Instead, the crux of the matter in determining the morality
of pleasure is in its relation to reason. The good person will eat and take pleasure in food
in alignment with reason; that is, they will eat a sufficient amount for their bodily health,
and not eat simply for the pleasure of eating (the vice of gluttony). The evil person,
according to Thomas, measures the worth of the pleasure derived from the situation
without regard for the judgment of reason.

Thomas also acknowledges that certain pleasures are beneficial to reason, while
others lack this characteristic. The line Thomas draws appears to be a traditional one, in
that he distinguishes between the pleasure which accompanies the actions of the intellect
and bodily pleasures. Thomas writes:

As is stated in *Nicomachean Ethics* X.5, “appropriate pleasures increase
activity...whereas pleasures arising from other sources are impediments to
activity.” Accordingly there is a certain pleasure that is taken in the very act of

\(^{344}\) ST I-II.34.4 - Delectationes autem appetitus sensitivi non sunt regula bonitatis vel malitiae moralis, nam
cibus communiter delectabilis est secundum appetitum sensitivum, bonis et malis. Sed voluntas bonorum
delectatur in eis secundum convenientiam rationis, quam non curat voluntas malorum.
reason, as when one takes pleasure in contemplating or in reasoning: and such pleasure does not hinder the act of reason, but helps it; because we are more attentive in doing that which gives us pleasure, and attention fosters activity. On the other hand bodily pleasures hinder the use of reason in three ways.\textsuperscript{345}

The three ways in which pleasures hinder bodily activity are as follows: 1. By distracting the reason. 2. By being contrary to reason. 3. By fettering the reason. A pleasure can distract the rational faculty by causing the person to focus on the pleasure and ignore their reason. Additionally, a pleasure, by being contrary to reason, can “destroy the estimate of prudence,” that is, negatively affect someone’s judgment of the proper course of action and implementation thereof. Finally, reason is fettered by certain pleasures. In this case, Thomas cites the example of the drunkard, who is presumably so immersed in the bodily pleasure of drunkenness that the mind is considered in some sense “absent” due to the overwhelming presence of pleasure.

Thomas does single out another form of bodily pleasure as being of particular danger to the judgment of reason: sexual pleasure. This is not surprising given his emphasis on the importance of chastity. As Thomas writes, “For man to be much given to sexual pleasure contributes to the dissolution of good moral behavior; because, since this pleasure greatly occupies the mind, reason is withdrawn from things which should be done rightly.”\textsuperscript{346}

\textsuperscript{345} ST I-II.33.3 - Respondeo dicendum quod, sicut dicitur in X Ethic., delectationes propriae adaugent operationes, extraneae vero impediunt. Est ergo quaedam delectatio quae habetur de ipso actu rationis, sicut cum aliquis delectatur in contemplando vel ratiocinando. Et talis delectatio non impedit usum rationis, sed ipsum adiuvat, quia illud attentius operamur in quo delectamur; attentio autem adiuvat operationem. Sed delectationes corporales impediunt usum rationis triplici ratione.

\textsuperscript{346} SCG 3.125.4
A similar principle is applied in Thomas’s discussion of anger. Though Thomas will repeatedly acknowledge anger as having certain valid characteristics, he also offers certain cautions. This is because the nature of anger is often to overcome the efforts of reason, though proceeding from a judgment of reason. Thomas suggests that anger is the product of a judgment of reason based on the analysis of circumstances. A person realizes that from some interaction they were wronged, and they then feel a desire for vengeance. This is, in fact, a rational process, and would seem to meet the criteria for being a valid emotion, in that it proceeds in alignment with reason. Thomas, however, does not find this to be the full story with anger. He writes:

As stated in *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.6, “anger listens somewhat to reason” in so far as reason denounces the injury inflicted, “but listens not perfectly,” because it does not observe the rule of reason as to the measure of vengeance. Anger, therefore, requires an act of reason; and yet proves a hindrance to reason. Anger, therefore, starts with a judgment of reason. But from this judgment of reason comes a bodily response, which can hinder reason. In fact, Thomas writes:

Now it has been stated that anger, above all, causes a bodily disturbance in the region of the heart, so much as to effect even the outward members.

Consequently, of all the passions, anger is the most manifest obstacle to the

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347 ST I-II.46.4 ad 3 - Ad tertium dicendum quod, sicut dicitur in VII Ethic., ira audit aliqualiter rationem, sicut nuntiantem quod iniuritatum est ei, sed non perfecte audit, quia non observat regulam rationis in rependendo vindictam. Ad iram ergo requiritur aliquis actus rationis; et additur impedimentum rationis. Unde philosophus dicit, in libro de Problemat., quod illi qui sunt multum ebrii, tanquam nihil habentes de iudicio rationis, non irascuntur, sed quando parum ebrii, irascuntur, tanquam habentes iudicium rationis, sed impeditur.
judgment of reason, according to Psalm 30:30: “My eye is troubled with wrath.”

Thomas, however, finds that anger is in fact so essential an accompaniment to the judgment of reason, that the accompanying hindrance to the processes of reason is acceptable, provided it not be too great. In fact, Thomas assigns an essential role to anger in the virtue of fortitude. He also states that a lack of due anger is in fact a vice, and represents a failure to pursue punishment following judgment.

The method of keeping passions like anger and pleasure moderated remains in the activity of reason. This is a heavy burden for rational faculty to maintain, and Thomas will at other times suggest alternative aids to virtues other simply a correct judgment, such as certain of those aids discussed in the previous chapter as aids to chastity.

**Moderation of passions by means other than Reason**

Though reason is suggested as the primary means of moderating passions, Thomas does recommend other practices. These practices, for the most part, include the activity of the intellect, in particular in the forms of contemplation and prayer as means of reducing the force of passions. Thomas does suggest the power of love as a means of reducing a desire for vengeance or punishment, as well. A person can, at a moment when determining the course of action after being wronged, remember the love they ought to feel for all humanity and reduce their desire for undue punishment. Thomas also,

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348 ST I-II.48.3 - Dictum est autem quod ira maxime facit perturbationem corporalem circa cor, ita ut etiam usque ad exterióra membra derivetur. Unde ira, inter ceteras passiones, manifestius impedit iudicium rationis; secundum illud Psalmi XXX, *conturbatus est in ira oculus meus.*

349 ST II-II.123.10

350 ST II-II.158.3 and ibid., ad 1 (“he that is entirely without anger when he ought to be angry, imitates God as to lack of passion, but not as to God’s punishing by judgment.”)
interestingly enough, recommends tears or groans as a means of overcoming sorrow, as well.\textsuperscript{351}

**Prudence – memory and command**

In this section, I will describe two aspects of the virtue of prudence. In one aspect, that of memory, I will describe the set of exercises associated with the practice, and describe their relation to the form of reflexivity suggested by Thomas. In the other, that of “constancy” I will describe a virtue which aids in the performance of the virtue of prudence, and describe how this virtue further demonstrates the relationship of self to self in Aquinas. Before moving further, I will first provide a brief overview of the virtue of prudence in relation to the passions and its function in a virtuous person.

The virtue of prudence holds a central role in the moral life for Aquinas. Occupying a hybrid role as an intellectual and moral virtue, prudence takes on the role of applying “right reason to action.”\textsuperscript{352} It is acquired in the same way as other virtues, whether acquired through exercise of the virtue or divinely infused. Thomas explains:

Acquired prudence is caused by the exercise of acts, wherefore “its acquisition demands experience and time” (\textit{Nicomachean Ethics} II, 1), hence it cannot be in the young, neither in habit nor in act. On the other hand gratuitous prudence is caused by divine infusion…This by practice merits increase, until it becomes perfect, even as the other virtues.\textsuperscript{353}

\textsuperscript{351} Thomas was said to have the “gift of tears,” as a number of accounts of his life attest.
\textsuperscript{352} ST II-II.47.4
\textsuperscript{353} ST II-II.47.14 ad 3 - Ad tertium dicendum quod prudentia acquisita causatur ex exercitio actuum, unde \textit{indiget ad sui generationem experimento et tempore}, ut dicitur in II Ethic. Unde non potest esse in iuvenibus nec secundum habitum nec secundum actum. Sed prudentia gratuita causatur ex infusione divina….sed per exercitium meretur augmentum quousque perficiatur, sicut et ceterae virtutes.
This passage points to several important aspects of Thomas’s account of the virtues. First, the distinction between acquired and infused is suggested here. Thomas adds the caveat that infused prudence is in “regards to acts necessary for salvation.” This is a rather limited purview for infused prudence, and suggests that the virtue in fact has two separate virtues, functionally speaking, with different areas of concern (acts for salvation, and acts for human society). This seems like an untidy solution, and Thomas would assuredly not want to make an actual distinction and have two virtues. In dealing with the problem of how to describe the connection between an acquired and an infused virtue, a solution offered by Rene Mirkes holds great appeal.

He writes:

The comprehensive or inclusive view of virtue proposed by Aquinas and supposed in the thesis of this study, namely, that perfect virtue for the Christians who also possess the acquired virtues is a composite but single entity, dictates that every Christian virtue, adequately considered, is an ordered reality in which the component parts are related as matter to form. A moral virtue, in its absolutely perfect state, is formally speaking supernatural or an infused virtue and materially speaking natural or an acquired moral virtue.354

Mirkes here suggests, using the concept of form and matter, that the infused virtue provides the form and the acquired virtue provides the material. This connection allows us to speak of a composite virtue where divine infusion of a virtue can still play a role in areas of human concern. He explains further: “A moral virtue of diligence or prudence

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that lacks a material component only aids the individual to make decisions regarding supernatural life; it does not also help him to decide well in human affairs."\textsuperscript{355} As suggested above, therefore, a person who only has the infused virtue of prudence decides prudently only in relation to areas of supernatural concern. A fully formed “perfect” virtue includes both aspects.

This is important for how the virtue of prudence is discussed. By accepting the concept of composite virtues, this should allow us to discuss prudence in all the senses described in the above passage on the four varieties of virtues. Thus, when the virtue of prudence in Christians is described, it can be considered to include the definition of the virtue in the “perfecting virtues,” where prudence “counts as nothing all the things of the world and directs all the thoughts of the soul to God alone;” and, it includes, further the social virtues of right reason about things to be done in areas of human concern.

Prudence in the Christian is, therefore, partially a product of experience and partially a matter of divine infusion. The factor of experience is especially important; it is why prudence is not in the youngest persons, and is typically seen in the old. Being old and experienced is not enough for prudence, however; it also requires a commitment to memorizing one’s experiences through repeated consideration of them. The practice of memory will be described more below.

Prudence is also found in older persons because of the nature of human passions. Thomas explains: “Prudence is rather in the old, not only because their natural disposition calms the movement of the sensitive passions, but also because of their long

\textsuperscript{355} Ibid., 205.
experience.”\textsuperscript{356} This is because, like the faculty of reason in general, the virtue of prudence is also susceptible to the negative influence of passions. In fact, it is the passions which are the primary area of concern in maintaining an upright virtue of prudence. In a question on whether prudence is taken away by forgetfulness, Thomas answers affirmatively, but adds that “prudence is not taken away directly by forgetfulness, but rather is corrupted by the passions.”\textsuperscript{357} As mentioned above, the primary opponent of reason are the passions associated with sexual relations. Thomas singles these out as being particularly problematic for prudence, writing that “the enjoyment of sexual relations ‘greatly corrupts the judgment of prudence.’”\textsuperscript{358}

One of the roles of prudence, therefore, is to moderate passions. The moderation of passions is not the primary role of prudence, but it is a connected aspect, in that selecting the proper course of action also includes feeling a certain way about those actions. Thomas writes: “Just as a natural agent makes form to be in matter, yet does not make that which is essential to the form to belong to it, so too, prudence appoints the mean in passions and operations, and yet does not make the searching of the mean to belong to virtue.”\textsuperscript{359} For the proper operation of prudence, therefore, the passions must be kept from having an undue influence on the functioning of the intellect, and then must proceed according to the mean appointed by reason.

\textit{Prudence and Reflexivity}

\textsuperscript{356} ST II-II.47.15 ad 2\textsuperscript{357} ST II-II.47.16\textsuperscript{358} SCG 3.125.5\textsuperscript{359} ST II-II.47.7 ad 2
In a subjective form of reflexivity such as found in the work of Thomas Aquinas, the virtue of prudence takes on a central role. Self-knowledge is predicated primarily as the moderation of actions, as there is no other knowledge of self that can be held or is a true matter of concern. Instead, the mind is turned to consider itself in the form of its mental processes as they are enacted in the stages of decision making. For Thomas, as well, the virtue of prudence is connected with the essential split in the person between New Self and Old Self. The distinction between these two is the classical distinction between the intellectual and the sensitive aspects of the person, and as thinkers since Plato and Aristotle have emphasized, one should direct the other.

**Prudence and Memory**

Thomas’s description of the virtue of prudence is extensive and detailed, and it will be impossible to cover any fair portion of it in this treatment. But one of its most important parts is memory, which plays an important role in the decision making process. In describing “precipitation,” the movement of impulse in soul and body, Thomas also indicates the proper process of reasoning in determining action. He writes:

Now the summit of the soul is the reason, and the base is reaching in the action performed by the body; while the steps that intervene by which one ought to descend in orderly fashion are “memory” of the past, “intelligence” of the present, “shrewdness” in considering the future outcome, “reasoning” which compares one thing to another, “docility” in accepting the opinions of others. He that takes counsel descends by these steps in due order, whereas if a man is rushed into
action by the impulse of his will or of a passion, without taking these steps, it will be a case of precipitation.\textsuperscript{360} The qualities Thomas mentions are found in the question on the “quasi-integral” parts of prudence, though not all of them are included.\textsuperscript{361} Memory is the first step in determining a proper action, as in the memory a person draws from the dictates of experience to help in determining a proper course of action. The problem with having a virtue dependent on experience is that there are an infinite number of events and variations with those events which are possible. This makes it less likely that a person will have experienced an event with same singulars in the past. Experience and memory, however, provide the person with knowledge which enables them to derive provisional guidelines or generalizations about the proper course of action. Thomas writes: “Nevertheless experience reduces the infinity of singulars to a certain finite number which occur as a general rule, and the knowledge of these suffices for human prudence.”\textsuperscript{362} Because a person cannot know every singular they encounter in their life, it is necessary, based on past experience, to derive guidelines for action from the memory of past events.

Memory, therefore, plays a foundational role in human prudence, dependent as it is on experience and the derivation of general rules. It is, of course, also central to the

\textsuperscript{360} ST II-II.53.3 - Summum autem animae est ipsa ratio. Imum autem est operatio per corpus exercita. Gradus autem medi, per quos oportet ordinate descendere, sunt memoria praeteritorum, intelligentia praesentium, solertia in considerandis futuris eventibus, ratiocinatio conferens unum alteri, docilitas, per quam aliquis acquiescit senstentiis maiorum, per quos quidem gradus aliquis ordinate descendit recte consiliando. Si quis autem feratur ad agendum per impetum voluntatis vel passionis, pertransitis huiusmodi gradibus, erit praecipatio.

\textsuperscript{361} In question ST II-II.49, those parts are given as memory, understanding or intelligence, docility, shrewdness, reason, foresight, circumspection, caution. The reason for the difference in the placement of docility in the order, and for the absence of foresight, circumspection, and caution, is not explained in that article by Thomas.

\textsuperscript{362} ST II-II.47.3 ad 2
intellectual project, so Thomas will provide some teaching on the practices associated with an effective memory. In his article on memory in the quasi-integral parts, Thomas provides a set of practices to aid in memory.

1. Create an unwonted illustration of the thing
2. Consider the memory and place it in relation to others
3. Be “anxious and earnest” in order to keep the memory close by
4. Reflect on the memory often

The first practice of memory, creating an unwonted illustration of a thing, is connected with the limits of the human mind. Though it is possible for humans to think in terms of things which are “spiritual” in the sense of non-material, the mind, according to Thomas, has a further grasp on things which are material. For this reason, he says, the memory is typically placed in the sensitive aspect of the soul.\footnote{ST II-II.49.1 ad 2} By taking a conceptual idea and giving it a material image in the mind, it is easier to remember.

The second practice of memory concerns the way in which the mind works in its flowing from one image to the next. Thomas explains:

Whatever a man wishes to retain in his memory he must carefully consider and set in order, so that he may pass easily from one memory to another. Hence the philosopher says (De memor. et remin. II): “sometimes a place brings memories back to us: the reason being that we pass quickly from the one to the other.”\footnote{Ibid. - Secundo, oportet ut homo ea quae memoriter vult tenere sua consideratione ordinate disponat, ut ex uno memorato facile ad alium procedatur. Unde philosophus dicit, in libro de Mem., a locis videntur reminisci aliquando, causa autem est quia velociter ab alio in alium veniunt.}
In this explanation, Thomas appears to suggest a practice of considering the connections between memories in a repeated manner, such that connections are clear and the memory sought for can quickly be brought to mind. If we work to associate our memories with whatever triggers them, then the memory can be more easily brought to mind. For prudence, this means that if faced with a particular circumstance related to what one has previously experienced, the memory of the past actions are quickly brought to mind and help guide in the present action.

The third and fourth practices of memory are related to emotional and mental repetition. The third, as indicated above, is accomplished by a person’s being “anxious and earnest” about the memory to be kept. By being anxious about a given thing, the memory’s importance is “impressed on the mind.” Finally, a person can better retain a memory by constantly revisiting that memory. Thomas again associates this with the “natural order” of passing from one memory to another. By revisiting a given memory, it is more likely that a person will come to that memory when thinking through a given thing.

These practices of association are helpful, but the question still remains as to what specific content the person should be committing to memory. The answer, for Thomas, is likely to be as expansive as the entirety of his corpus; but there are certain points which are especially important in relation to the spiritual life. In his *Commentary on Ephesians*, Thomas points to the example of Christ’s response to the devil during his temptation in the wilderness. He writes:
Thus the Lord brought forward authoritative texts of the Holy Scripture to oppose the devil’s temptations. We ought to do the same; if tempted to gluttony, “Not in bread alone doth man live” (Deut. 8:3), or “the kingdom of God is not meat and drink” (Rom. 14:17). If tempted to sensuality, “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Ex. 20:14); if to theft, “thou shalt not steal” (Ex. 20:15)—and so on with any others.365

Thomas offers these words in the context of a discussion of the theological virtue of faith, suggesting that this practice transcends the human practice of the moral virtues. Nonetheless, the connection between prudence and memory can be seen in the connection of scripture with moral restraint. By repeatedly remembering and following the authority of scripture on a given moral issue, a person is provided with sound guidance and is able to act virtuously.

Justice

In arriving at the next virtue, justice, it is a bit more of a challenge to continue with the present mode of interpretation. This is a result of the nature of justice for Thomas, which he suggests is fundamentally about the relationship and interaction of one person with others. Thus, unlike prudence, temperance and fortitude, each of which involves the moderation of passions and the emphasis on identity with reason, justice is less an internal virtue and more an external one. This is certainly true, but as in the case of the other virtues, justice requires an internal orientation in order to produce the ideal

365 Commentary on Ephesians ch. 6 lec. 4 - Unde dominus Diabolo tentanti producebat et opponebat auctoritates sacrae scripturae. Et sic debemus facere, si tentat de gula, secundum illud Deut. VIII, 3: non in solo pane vivit homo, vel illud: non est regnum Dei, esca et potus. Si de luxuria: non moechaberis. Si de furto: non furtum facies; et sic de aliis.
behaviors for a human on the way to perfection. For Thomas, justice as a virtue is intimately connected with justification, and as a prerequisite for this, calls for the commitment of the mind to God. Justice in this sense still retains its original definition of rendering to each one what is due; in this case, however, what is due to God is everything a person has, especially the best part of themselves, which is their intellectual aspect.

**Justice as Orientation**

As mentioned above, justice has a rather straightforward definition in Thomas, taken in part from Aristotle. Thomas writes, “And if anyone would reduce it to the proper form of a definition, he might say that “justice is a habit whereby a man renders to each one his due by a constant and perpetual will.” Most importantly, this definition mentions the “constant and perpetual will”—justice being a moral virtue, it is found in the will, not in the intellect, as was the case with prudence. In addition, the virtue of justice is connected with the matter of judgment, whereby a person decides what the right thing is to be rendered to that other. Though judgment is an aspect of justice, it specifically inclines the person towards the following through of the judgment, which originates from a different virtue. As Thomas explains:

The spiritual man, by reason of the habit of charity, has an inclination to judge aright of things according to the divine rules; and it is conformity with these that he pronounces judgment through the gift of wisdom: even as the just man

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366 ST II-II.58.1
pronounces judgment through the virtue of prudence conformably with the ruling of the law.\textsuperscript{367}

Justice, therefore, is about in the inclination of the will towards the performance of actions in conformity with reason and wisdom. It does not, however, govern the arrival at those judgments, something accomplished in the higher parts of the soul. Nor does justice deal with the lower parts of the soul, as mentioned above. Thomas writes, in response to the question of “whether justice is about the passions?”:

The true answer to this question may be gathered from a twofold source. First from the subject of justice, i.e. from the will, whose movements or acts are not passions, as stated above (ST I-II.22.3, ST I-II.59.4), for it is only the sensitive appetite whose movements are called passions. Hence justice is not about the passions as are temperance and fortitude, which are in the irascible and concupiscible parts. Secondly, on the part of the matter, because justice is about man’s relations with another, and we are not directed immediately to another by the internal passions. Therefore justice is not about the passions.\textsuperscript{368}

Justice, in this specific sense, would appear to be a rather restricted virtue, in that it does not judge on its own and does not moderate passions. Instead, the virtue of justice is about the will in its ability to ensure that the way proposed is followed through. This is,

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{367} ST II-II.60.1 ad 2 - Ad secundum dicendum quod homo spiritualis ex habitu caritatis habet inclinationem ad recte iudicandum de omnibus secundum regulas divinas, ex quibus iudicium per donum sapientiae pronuntiat, sicut iustus per virtutem prudentiae pronuntiat iudicium ex regulis iuris.

\textsuperscript{368} ST II-II.58.9 - Respondeo dicendum quod huius quaestionis veritas ex duobus apparat. Primo quidem, ex ipso subiecto iustitiae, quod est voluntas cuius motus vel actus non sunt passiones, ut supra habitum est; sed solum motus appetitus sensitivi passiones dicuntur. Et ideo iustitia non est circa passiones, sicut temperantia et fortitudo, quae sunt irascibilis et concupiscibilis, sunt circa passiones. Alio modo, ex parte materiae. Quia iustitia est circa ea quae sunt ad alterum. Non autem per passiones interiores immediate ad alterum ordinamur. Et ideo iustitia circa passiones non est.}
in fact, precisely the definition of justice offered in the description of the perfecting virtues, where Thomas writes that “justice consists in the soul giving a whole hearted consent to follow the way thus proposed.”369 Perfect justice, on the other hand, is described this way: “justice, by imitating the divine mind, is united thereto by an everlasting covenant.”370

The question remains how a person might actually give that whole hearted consent, or even imitate the divine mind, in the pursuit of justice. Thomas’s Commentary on Galatians provides a bit of insight for this matter. In a discussion of the justice of Abraham, Thomas first notes that “justice consists in paying a debt,” a definition similar to the one provided above. Furthermore, he indicates that “man is indebted to God and to himself and to his neighbor,” and this indebtedness is because of God. Because this indebtedness is from God (i.e., God is the source of all things, thus the source of indebtedness), “the highest form of justice is to render to God what is God’s.” For humans, this takes the form of rendering to God what is highest internally, as Thomas explains:

Now whatever is in man is from God, namely intellect and will and the body itself, albeit according to a certain order; because the lower is ordained to the higher, and external things to internal, namely, to the good of the soul.

Furthermore, the highest thing in man is his mind. Therefore the first element of justice in a man is that man’s mind be subjected to God, and this is done by faith:

369 ST I-II.61.5  
370 Ibid.
“Bringing into captivity every understanding unto the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).\textsuperscript{371}

\textit{Fortitude – premeditatione malorum and the fear of bodily death}

Moving on to the virtue of fortitude marks a shift in the variety of virtues under discussion. The next two, fortitude and temperance, are concerned with parts of the appetite, and thus deal directly with the moderation of emotions. As Thomas explains:

Wherefore it belongs to human virtue to make man good, to make his work accord with reason. This happens in three ways: first, by rectifying reason itself, and this is done by the intellectual virtues; secondly, by establishing the rectitude of reason in human affairs, and this belongs to justice; thirdly by removing the obstacles to the establishment of this rectitude in human affairs.\textsuperscript{372}

The virtues of temperance and fortitude, therefore, are particularly concerned with removing obstacles. The obstacles to the rectitude of reason are, as previously established, inordinate passions, as Thomas explains once more:

Now the human will is hindered in two ways from following the rectitude of reason. First, through being drawn by some object of pleasure to something other than what the rectitude of reason requires; and this obstacle is removed by the virtue of temperance. Secondly, through the will being disinclined to follow that

\textsuperscript{371} Commentary on Galatians ch.3 lec. 3 - Dei autem est quidquid est in homine, et intellectus et voluntas et ipsum corpus; sed tamen quodam ordine, quia inferiora ordinantur ad superiora, et exteriora ad interiora, scilicet ad bonum animae; supremum autem in homine est mens. Et ideo primum in iustitia hominis est, quod mens hominis Deo subdatur, et hoc fit per fidem. Il Cor. X, 3 (5): \textit{in captivitatem redigentes omnem intellectum in obsequium Christi.}

\textsuperscript{372} ST II-II.123.1 - Et ideo ad virtutem humanam pertinet ut faciat hominem et opus eius secundum rationem esse. Quod quidem tripliciter contingit. Uno modo, secundum quod ipsa ratio rectificatur, quod fit per virtutes intellectuales. Alio modo, secundum quod ipsa rectitudo rationis in rebus humanis instituitur, quod pertinet ad iustitiam. Tertio, secundum quod tolluntur impedimenta huius rectitudinis in rebus humanis ponendae.
which is in accordance with reason, on account of some difficulty that presents itself. In order to remove this obstacle, fortitude of the mind is requisite, whereby to resist the aforesaid difficulty even as a man, by fortitude of body, overcomes and removes bodily obstacles. Hence it is evident that fortitude is a virtue, in so far as it conforms man to reason.\textsuperscript{373}

The virtue of temperance will be discussed in the next section, in order to detail its role in the moderation of pleasure and desire. Fortitude, on the other hand, is located in the irascible appetite, and concerns primarily the moderation of fear and daring.\textsuperscript{374} The virtue of fortitude is intimately connected with the ability to remain constant in conviction and to follow through on the command of reason.

In this section, I will discuss the virtue of fortitude in relation to its moderation of fear and, in particular, the fear of death. The fear of death is one of the prime matters of concern for the virtue of fortitude, as humans have a strong natural impulse to preserve their life. For the Christian, however, the fear of death is different. This is because, through Christ and the teachings of the scriptures, there is no longer a need to fear bodily death because of the assurance of Christ’s victory over death. The overcoming of the fear of death, and alternatively, fear of other great evils, is accomplished in two ways. First, it is accomplished by the recognition of what Christ’s death on the cross means for all

\textsuperscript{373} Ibid. - Dupliciter autem impeditur voluntas humana ne rectitudinem rationis sequatur. Uno modo, per hoc quod attrahitur ab aliquo delectabili ad aliud quam rectitudo rationis requirit, et hoc impedimentum tollit virtus temperantiae. Alio modo, per hoc quod voluntatem repellit ab eo quod est secundum rationem, propter aliquid difficile quod incumbit. Et ad hoc impedimentum tollendum requiritur fortitudo mentis, qua scilicet huismodi difficultatibus resistat, sicut et homo per fortitudinem corporalem impedimenta corporalia superat et repellit. Unde manifestum est quod fortitudo est virtus, inquantum facit hominem secundum rationem esse.

\textsuperscript{374} ST II-II.123.3 “therefore fortitude is about fear and daring, as curbing fear and moderating daring.”
humanity; and second, the *praemeditatione malorum*, the foreseeing and experiencing of evils.

In regard to the reflexive relation to self as presented by the virtue of fortitude, the same pattern is seen. The role of fortitude in its moderation of fear is to preserve the reason; in fact, it is called to follow this to such an extent that, at least for the Christian, the death of the body is secondary to the violation of reason. An example of this, of course, would be found in the act of martyrdom, whereby a person requires fortitude to overcome the fear of death and to face death for the sake of “truth and justice.” The body, in this situation, is but one more thing external to the self of reason, one which in extreme situations is rightly sacrificed for the sake of charity.

**Fortitude and the fear of death**

As Thomas indicates, fortitude is not about just any fear, but the fear of death. This understanding of fortitude is consistent in most treatments, and receives its greatest specificity in Aristotle, where he identifies fortitude with the fear of death in battle. In that situation, the fortitude of the brave is commended, since they are willing to endure the risk of death in order to preserve the good of their country or city. For Thomas, while he admits this is the case, the virtue of fortitude is given a more expansive treatment, as it is apparent that a person encounters the risk of death in a number of situations.

In Thomas’s *Commentary on Hebrews*, he provides an extensive treatment on the fear of death, and the reason why Christians need not possess it. The verses under commentary are 2:14-15, in the translation from the Vulgate:

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375 ST II-II.124.1
376 ST II-II.123.4 “Therefore the virtue of fortitude is about the fear of dangers of death.”
Therefore, because the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner hath been partaker of the same: that, through death, he might destroy him who had the empire of death, that is to say, the devil: and might deliver them, who through the fear of death were all their lifetime subject to servitude.

The importance of Christ’s death is remarked upon several times in Thomas’s work, and many times referring back to this passage. In the tertia pars of the Summa Theologiae, for example, Thomas writes of the reasons for Christ’s death, that “Thirdly, that by dying he might deliver us from fearing death: hence it is written (Hebrews 2:14-15) [the passage quoted above].” In the commentary, Thomas provides more nuance to this explanation. He writes:

Among all fears, however, the fear of death is the greatest. For it is the end of terrible things. Hence, if a man overcomes this fear, he overcomes all; and when fear is overcome, all disordered love of the world is overcome. Thus Christ by his death broke this fear, because he removed the fear of death, and consequently the love of the present life. For when a person considers that the Son of God, the Lord of death, willed to die, he no longer fears death. That is why before the death of Christ it was said: O death, how bitter is the remembrance of you (Sir. 41:1); but after Christ’s death the Apostle expresses a desire to be dissolved and

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377 ST III.50.1
be with Christ (Phil. 1:23): Hence, we are told: *fear not those who kill the body* (Matt. 10:28).\(^{378}\)

There are several important points contained in this quotation. Thomas first identifies the significance of the fear of death, something which is also seen in his discussion of fortitude in the *Summa Theologiae*. But second, and perhaps more importantly, Thomas attributes to the overcoming of the fear of death the power of overcoming “all disordered love of the world.” This is a rather significant suggestion, especially given the discussion found in the *De perfectione* which established as a primary end the redirection of the affections away from the world. Thomas suggests in this passage that the inordinate affection for the world is the result of the fear of death; that by fearing the end of our time, we as a result cling to the material things around us in hopes of avoiding our end.

Thomas then explains how one can overcome the fear of death, namely through the consideration of Christ’s death. By understanding that Christ “willed to die,” this should lessen or remove our fear of death. Though Thomas does not immediately explain what he means by this, or why this should have an impact on our own approach to death, in the following section he explains in greater detail. He writes:

> It should be noted that he freed us from the fear of death, first of all, by showing the immortality that awaited us. As a result, man could scorn temporal death:

> *Christ is risen from the dead, the first-fruits of those who sleep* (1 Cor 15:20);

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\(^{378}\) Commentary on Hebrews Ch. 2 lec. 4 sec. 144 - Inter omnes autem, timor mortis est maximus. Est enim finis terribilium. Unde si homo timorem istum superat, superat omnes; et hoc superato, superatur omnis amor mundi inordinatus. Et ideo Christus per mortem suam fregit hoc ligamen, quia abstultit timorem mortis, et per consequens amorem vitae praesentis. Quando enim considerat homo, quod filius Dei, vitae praesentis. Quando enim considerat homo, quod filius Dei, dominus mortis, mori voluit, non timet mori. Et inde est quod ante mortem Christi dicebat ille in Eccl. XLI, 1; *o mors, quam amara est memoria tua.* Sed post mortem Christi clamat apostolus, Phil. I, 23: *desiderium habens dissolvi et esse cum Christo.* Unde Matth. X, 28: *nolite timere eos qui occidunt corpus*, et cetera.
second, by giving us a foretaste of death, he made us more ready to undergo death for Christ: *Christ suffered for us, leaving you an example* (1 Pet 2:2). Third, by opening the gate to glory, which was closed before his death; as a result, we not only do not fear death, but we desire it: *having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ, which is much better* (Phil. 1:23).³⁷⁹

Humans, therefore, should not fear death because immortality is offered to them, because Christ endured death previous to us, and because it is heaven which awaits us. And, in Thomas’s mind, this should serve to cut us off from inordinate worldly desires which distract us from the love of God. This would also seem to remove the need for the virtue of fortitude, being as it is about the fear of death.

This is, of course, not entirely the case, as fortitude covers more than the fear of death, although the root cause of fear is found in the possibility of death. Nonetheless, a person still needs fortitude. As Thomas explains in the perfecting and perfect virtues, “fortitude prevents the soul from being afraid of neglecting the body and rising to heavenly things,” and “fortitude has no knowledge of passion.”³⁸⁰

**Fortitude and premeditatione malorum**

One of the practices identified in the first chapter as appearing in the work of Foucault and Hadot is the *premeditatione malorum*, the practice of considering and experiencing evils before they occur as a form of preparation. This exercise is mentioned

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³⁷⁹ Ibid., sec. 146 - Et notandum quod liberavit nos a timore mortis, primo ostendendo futuram immortalitatem, et ex hoc homo parvipendit mortem temporalem. I Cor. XV, 20; *Christus resurgens primitiae dormientium*, et cetera. Secundo praegustando voluntariae mortem, ex quo promptiores efficimur ad subeundum mortem pro Christo. I Pet. II, 21: *Christus passus est pro nobis, vobis relinquens exemplum*, et cetera. Tertio aperiendo aditum ad gloriam, qui ante mortem suam non patebat, et ex hoc non solum non timemus mortem, sed desideramus eam. Phil. I, 23: *desiderium habens dissolvi et esse cum Christo*, et cetera.

³⁸⁰ ST I-II.61.5
in multiple places in the *Summa Theologiae*, and in Thomas’s corpus in general. It appears in the discussion of the passion of fear, where Thomas writes:

As stated above (I-II.42.3, I-II.41.2), the object of fear is an imminent evil, which can be repelled, but with difficulty. Now this is due to one of two causes: to the greatness of the evil, or to the weakness of him that fears; while unwontedness and suddenness conduce to both of these causes. First, it helps an imminent evil seem greater. Because all material things, whether good or evil, the more we consider them, the smaller they seem. Consequently, just as sorrow for a present evil is mitigated in the course of time, as Cicero states (*Tusculan Disputations* III.30); so, too, fear of a future evil is diminished by thinking about it beforehand.³⁸¹

This practice works, theoretically, for all fears, insofar as one of the main factors in fear is that a thing be “unwonted.” The extent to which we are unfamiliar with a given thing increases our fear of it, as we are not accustomed to it and the reactions it engenders. Thus, by thinking dangers before they occur, we reduce our unfamiliarity with a given thing, and thus reduce our fear.

This practice is identified as an aid to fortitude, though it is not a necessarily and indication of the virtue. In a question on whether fortitude is about sudden occurrences, Thomas discusses the practice of *premeditazione*:

³⁸¹ ST I-II.42.5 - Respondeo dicendum quod, sicut supra dictum est, obiectum timoris est malum imminens quod non de facili repelli potest. Hoc autem ex duobus contingit, scilicet ex magnitudine mali, et ex debilitate timentis. Ad utrumque autem horum operatur quod aliquid sit insolitum et repentinum. Primo quidem, facit ad hoc quod malum imminens maius appareat. Omnia enim corporalia, et bona et mala, quanto magis considerantur, minora apparent. Et ideo sicut propter diuturnitatem dolor praesentis mali mitigatur, ut patet per Tullium in III de Tusculanis quaesti; ita etiam ex praemeditatione minuitur timor futuri mali.
Two things must be considered in the operation of fortitude. One is in regard to its choice: and thus fortitude is not about sudden occurrences: because the brave man chooses to think beforehand of the dangers that may arise, in order to be able to withstand them, or to bear them more easily: since according to Gregory (Hom. XXV in Evang.), “the blow that is foreseen strikes with less force, and we are able more easily to bear earthly wrongs, if we are forearmed with the shield of foreknowledge.”

Thomas goes on to explain that a person without the virtue of fortitude may likewise practice the premeditation, without themselves holding the virtue of fortitude. This practice can also be connected with the death of Jesus, as seen in the passage quoted in the previous section. By thinking about the death of Christ on the cross, we can be strengthened to face our own death, seeing as Christ went through it previous to us.

*Temperance – Bridle of the soul*

The final of the cardinal virtues, temperance, plays a central role in the moderation of pleasures and desires. It is located specifically in the concupiscible appetite, but nonetheless moderates all the passions that a person can experience. As is the case with the other virtues, temperance also demonstrates key aspects of Thomas’s reflexive understanding of the self. This difference is especially important in regards to the virtue of temperance, or more precisely, to the desires and pleasures associated with his virtue.

As established in the third chapter on reflexivity, the human person is comprised with a

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382 ST II-II.123.9 - Respondeo dicendum quod in operatione fortitudinis duo sunt consideranda. Unum quidem, quantum ad electionem ipsius. Et sic fortitudo non est circa repentina. Eligit enim fortis praemeditari pericula quae possunt imminere, ut eis resistere possit, aut facilius ea ferre, quia, ut Gregorius dicit, in quadam homilia, iacula quae praevidentur minus feriunt, et nos mala mundi facilius ferimus, si contra ea clipeo praescientiae praemunimur.
functional distinction between the intellectual and sensitive parts of a person. This is expressed in a number of different ways in Thomas, including new and old self, interior and exterior man, rational nature and corporeal nature. In a passage from his Commentary on Second Timothy, Thomas explains the distinction in response to a question on love of self. He writes:

I respond that in man there are two things: rational nature and corporeal nature.

Regarding the intellectual or rational, which is called the interior man, as said in 2 Cor. 4:16, a man ought to love himself more than all others because he would be stupid to will to sin so that he might withdraw others from sin. But regarding the exterior man, it is praiseworthy that he loves others more than himself. Hence, those who in this way love themselves so much are blameworthy.\(^{383}\)

This distinction in aspects of the person suggests a discussion found in Thomas’s Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics. In this passage, Thomas comments on a section from book ten, where Aristotle writes: “For, though this is a small part of us, it far surpasses all else in power and value; it may seem even, to be the true self of each, being the principal and better part. Consequently, it would be strange if a person were to choose to live not his own life but the life of some other.”\(^{384}\) Thomas writes:

We have stated in the ninth book (1868, 1872) that each thing is thought to be especially that which constitutes its chief part, since all other parts are its tools, so

\(^{383}\) Commentary on 2 Timothy ch. 3 lec. 1 sec. 92 - Dicendum est quod in homine duo sunt, scilicet natura rationalis et corporalis. Quantum ad intellecualem seu rationalem, quae interior homo appellatur, ut dicitur II Cor. IV, 16, homo debet plus se diligere quam omnes alios, quia stultus esset qui vellet peccare ut alios a peccatis retrahat; sed quantum ad exteriorem hominem, laudabile est ut alios plus diligat quam se. Unde illi qui se sic tantum amant, sunt vituperabiles.

\(^{384}\) Nicomachean Ethics 1177b31-1178a8
to speak. And so when man lives in accordance with his intellect, he lives in accordance with the life most proper to him; for it would be strange if a person were to choose to live not his own life but the life of some other. As Thomas again reiterates, the persons who lives according to desires and not according to reason does not live by his own command, but at the behest of “some other.” This “other” is the non-rational aspect of the soul when it acts outside of alignment with reason.

It is at this point that the virtue of temperance finds its key significance. Temperance is the hinge point between the sensitive aspect of the soul and the rational soul. It is the preserver of the command of reason through its moderation of the passions of the lower soul. It is, therefore, the virtue that best represents the divided self as found in Thomas.

Thomas emphasizes the importance of temperance especially for those who preach and teach. In his Commentary on First Timothy, Thomas describes many of the qualities necessary for an effective minister, including the recommendation of chastity:

Then when he says, “Keep thyself chaste,” he shows him he ought to comport himself. And this is reasonable enough since it happens that someone is so concerned with others that he neglects himself. Hence, he first exhorts him to chastity; second, he checks the immoderate use of abstinence, when he says, “Do not still drink water.” He says, therefore: You, who ought to correct others, “keep thyself chaste.” 1 Cor. 9:27: *But I chastise my body, and bring it into subjection: lest perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway.* Indeed, Timothy was a man of great abstinence, and he wore down his body to

385 Commentary on the NE 2109
avoid sins of the flesh. Eccles. 2:3: *I thought in my heart, to withdraw my flesh from wine.*

In this passage, Thomas recommends that a person pay attention to their self, a theme repeated in the *Commentary on First Timothy.* The practice described in the above passage of chastity, where the abstinence of Timothy is commended (in a qualified manner), is that of a training through restraint. This connects directly with the practices of temperance, as well as the verbal metaphors used to describe the practice. In particular, the appearance of terms used in regards to animals, namely the term “bridle” (*frenum*) and the verb “to curb” (*refreno*), is indicative of the potential lack of control possible from an unrestrained appetite. These terms appear consistently in the discussion of temperance in Thomas in describing the functioning of reason in relation to the passions.

As the previous chapter suggested, Thomas’s view of the religious life is not overly ascetic in its approach to pleasures. Further, Thomas does not recommend the

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387 See also Commentary on 1 Timothy ch. 4 lec. 3, for a “*cura sui*” reference. Also, it is worth noting that though Thomas encourages attention to oneself, he also thinks our ability to evaluate our actions is rather limited. From his *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*: We can have pleasure only in what we know. But we can examine our neighbors better than ourselves and their actions better than our own because every man is a bad judge of his own case on account of the private affection he has for himself.” 1896, commenting on Aristotle, NE “Now we can study our neighbors better than ourselves, and their actions better than our own.”
388 Other terms include *coerceo, retraho, cohibeo, reprimo, and deprimo*, all of which have classical connotations relating to self-restraint.
consideration of all pleasures as evil\textsuperscript{389} nor does he think all passions as necessarily wrong.\textsuperscript{390} The human desires by its very nature, and takes pleasure in having those desires filled, and this is an inevitable truth of human life for Thomas. Nonetheless, there is a need to train these desires and restrain them, lest they cause the human to depart from the best part of themselves, their reason.

\textit{Temperance and the inner child}

Another repeated theme throughout the \textit{Summa Theologiae’s} discussion of temperance is the reference to childish behavior. This first appears in a discussion of the vice of intemperance. Thomas explains:

A thing is said to be childish for two reasons. First, because it is becoming to children, and the Philosopher does not mean that the sin of intemperance is childish in this sense. Secondly, by way of likeness, and it is in this sense that sins of intemperance are said to childish. For the sin of intemperance is one of unchecked concupiscence, which is likened to a child in three ways.\textsuperscript{391}

The image suggested here is a powerful one, in that Thomas is suggesting that without training, human desires remain those of children. The concupiscent appetite, desiring aspect of a person, therefore, must be examined and restrained, a description of moral development which aids in clarifying our picture of reflexive relationship. The person

\textsuperscript{389} ST I-II.34.1 ad 2
\textsuperscript{390} ST I.95.2 ad 3
\textsuperscript{391} ST II-II.142.2 - Respondeo dicendum quod aliquid dicitur esse puerile dupliciter. Uno modo, quia convenit pueris. Et sic non intendit philosophus dicere quod peccatum intemperantiae sit puerile. Alio modo secundum quandam similitudinem. Et hoc modo peccata intemperantiae puerilia dicuntur. Peccatum enim intemperantiae puerilia dicuntur. Peccatum enim intemperantiae est peccatum superflue concupiscientiae, quae assimilatur puero quantum ad tria primo quidem, quantum ad id quod uterque appetit.
watches their concupiscent appetite as something external to them, something to be restrained, disciplined and redirected, as if it were a child.

This leads to Thomas’s description of the three ways the sin of intemperance is “likened to a child.” The first is found in their yearning for similar things. As Thomas explains:

First, as regards that which they both desire, for like a child concupiscence desires something disgraceful. This is because in human affairs a thing is beautiful according as it harmonizes with reason. Wherefore Tully says (De Officiis 1, 27) under the heading “Comeliness is twofold,” that “the beautiful is that is in keeping with man’s excellence in so far as his nature differs from other animals.” Now a child does not attend to the order of reason; and in like manner “concupiscence does not listen to reason,” according to the Nicomachean Ethics VII, 6. Though it is possible to bring the sensitive appetite into alignment with reason, there are still a number of desires which are internal and natural to the person which will always remain, regardless of the direction of reason. These are especially the need for food and water, and sexual desires which, although they lessen in old age, remain throughout a person’s life. This fact provides the need for the discipline of these desires, as Thomas explains:

Secondly, they are alike as to the result. For a child, if left to his own will, becomes more self-willed: hence it is written (Sirach 30:8): “A horse not broken
becometh stubborn, and a child left to himself will become headstrong.” So, too, concupiscence, if indulged, gathers strength: wherefore Augustine says

(Confessions VIII, 5): “Lust served became a custom, and custom not resisted became necessity.”

In order to prevent the power of concupiscence, as Augustine suggests, persons must not allow themselves to indulge without restraint, lest they create a permanent habit of indulgence. This final aspect of training is made especially clear in the third correlation. Thomas writes:

Thirdly, as to the remedy which is applied to both. For a child is corrected by being restrained (coercetur); hence it is written (Proverbs 23:13-14): “Withhold not correction from a child...thou shalt beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from Hell.” In like manner by resisting concupiscence we moderate it according to the demands of virtue. Augustine indicates this when he says (Music. VI, 11) that if the mind be lifted up to spiritual things, and remain fixed “thereon, the impulse of custom,” i.e. carnal concupiscence, “is broken, and being suppressed is gradually weakened: for it was stronger when we followed it, and though not wholly destroyed, it is certainly less strong when we curb it (refrenamus).”

Hence the philosopher says (Nicomachean Ethics III, 12) that “as a child ought to

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393 Ibid. - Secundo conveniunt quantum ad eventum. Puer enim, si suae voluntati dimittatur, crescit in propria voluntate, unde dicitur Eccl. XXX, equus indomitus evadit durus, et filius remissus evadet praeceps. Ita etiam et concupiscencia, si ei satislat, maius robur accipit, unde Augustinus dicit, in VIII Confess., dum servitur libidini, facta est consuetudo, et dum consuetudin non resistitur, facta est necessitas.
live according to the direction of his tutor, so ought the concupiscible to accord with reason."

The appearance of the quotation from Proverbs in the above passage is rather striking, especially in that it appears to suggest serious physical discipline to restrain the body. For Thomas, however, as mentioned previously, the concupiscible appetite is located in the soul, not in the body. Thus, though bodily discipline aids in the observance of temperance, the most important factor is in the control of the thoughts of the mind. The quote from Augustine, therefore, is instructive, and is similar to the recommendations Thomas gives in his “aids to the observance of chastity” discussed in the previous chapter.

394 Ibid. - Tertio, quantum ad remedium quod utrique praebetur. Puer enim emendatur per hoc quod coercetur, unde dicitur Prov. XXIII, noli subtrahere a puero disciplinam, tu virga percuties eum, et animam eius de Inferno liberabis. Et similiter, dum concupiscentiae resistitur, reductur ad debitum honestatis modum. Et hoc est quod Augustinus dicit, in VI musicae, quod mente in spiritulia suspensa atque ibi fixa et manente, consuetudinis, scilicet carnalis concupiscientiae. Impetus frangitur et paulatim repressus extinguitur. Maior enim erat cum sequeremur, non omnino nullus, sed certe minor, cum refrenamus. Et ideo philosophus dicit, in III Ethic., quod quemadmodum puerum oportet secundum praecptum paedagogi vivere, sic et concupiscibile consonare rati.
Chapter 6 – Conclusion

Though it is perhaps possible to speak generally of a few forms of reflexivity throughout history, it is clear that these forms take on far more specific characteristics when instantiated in particular persons, and that it is also possible for a diversity of forms to exist concurrently in history with one another. For Thomas Aquinas, as this paper has argued, the form of self-understanding is heavily influenced by classical Greek and Roman texts, and the practices and writings of early Christian monks. This form of reflexivity identifies the higher parts of the soul as the true source of what a person is, and attempts to bring the lower parts of the soul and body into alignment with this teaching. Additionally, in distinction from some forms of Christian reflexivity, Thomas does not place an emphasis on the analysis and examination of one’s past sins, nor on the possibility of accessing “hidden” desires. Instead self-awareness and self-knowledge consist in moment to moment awareness of self, which is requirement for a person to be capable of acting morally. This is exemplified first and foremost in the virtue of prudence, but also found in the other virtues, and found in the spiritual exercises which contribute to the spiritual life.

The goal of this dissertation was to describe the nature of reflexive self-relation and spiritual exercises in the work of Thomas Aquinas, looking to a broad range of his writings. Also, by highlighting his understanding of these things, it suggested the specific form of person that Thomas thought humans on the way to perfection should

395 The extent to which those figures in the early church, including Cassian who was singled out by Foucault as particularly invested in this mode of thinking, actually practiced the rooting out of “hidden” sins, is not entirely clear. It appears the term hidden is simply used for “not disclosed,” rather than any suggestion of some sort of subconscious desire or a memory of an action actually blocked from consciousness.
attempt to become, with the aid of grace. I have suggested perhaps a more narrow understanding of the ideal person in Thomas’s mind than from that traditionally suggested, in that the focus of this work has been on the religious life. It should be noted once more that Thomas accepted a wide variety of forms of life as effective, and that he did not insist on a single path. As was demonstrated in the discussion of the professed religious life, however, Thomas found the surest means of living a life devoted to God and charity to be in the profession of the vows. This argument is justified from Thomas’s own work, and in particular, from the *De perfectione spiritualis vitae*. Thomas believes that the ideal life is found in the imitation of Christ, and, through grace, the reformation of the soul in the image and likeness of God. To accomplish this requires not only grace, but a life where it is possible to avoid the temptations of sin. And though it is possible to avoid sin and be a married, wealthy person, this end is more easily accomplished if one takes the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Furthermore, to imitate Christ means to contemplate and then share the fruits of contemplation, something which the Dominican order in particular was committed to. For this reason, Thomas quietly recommends the way of life practiced by the Dominicans as providing a more secure way on the path to perfection.

In this conclusion, I will briefly provide a summary of the findings of this dissertation, separated into the two main aspects of this work: reflexivity and spiritual exercises. This section serves as a preamble to the discussion of the ethics of human formation in the contemporary world: given that, as others have shown, and I have outlined, alternative forms of reflexivity exist, each with their own techniques of self-
knowledge, it might reasonably be asked which is currently most popular, and what role entities like the state or the education system have in continuing that form of self-relation. Given that Hadot and Foucault’s writings, as the introduction demonstrated, provide accounts of formation which are intended to serve as alternatives to the current modes of cultural formation, and, in fact, to offer techniques of resistance, it can be asked of what use or place might a Thomistic account of human formation be employed for. By taking on the practices of these earlier figures, one could potentially live in a different way, and have a different relationship to the self, than that offered in popular concern.

**Thomas on Reflexivity**

The reflexive relationship of self to self is expressed in numerous ways for Thomas Aquinas, but it holds one key point: the governance of the self is accomplished when it is the higher powers of the soul directing the lower aspects. The use of the terms “old self” and “new self”—where the old self is identified with sin and the sensitive appetite of the human, and the new self is identified with Christ and the intellectual aspect of the person—serve as indicators of this difference in identity. Though Thomas certainly affirms that a whole person is the whole person, body and soul, the person reformed by grace is one that identifies the self with the intellectual powers, and does not allow themselves to be directed in thought and action by the lower parts of that self, which are “extrinsic.”

This form of self-understanding is further expressed in the work of the cardinal virtues. For Thomas, the virtues serve to moderate passions and align action with the higher part of the soul. Even when these virtues are infused, the person is still called
upon to act in alignment with the intellect or the reason benefited by grace, and to deny
the input from the lower aspect of the soul. Prudence, therefore, exemplifies this identity,
serving in its role as a hybrid of intellectual and moral virtue. For Thomas, the person
who will behave morally is the person who allows the direction of prudence to serve as
guide at all times. To be prudent requires self-knowledge in the limited classical sense—
that is, knowledge of one’s immediate thoughts and actions, a judgment of whether they
are good or bad, and a suitable habit of bridling negative thoughts and engaging in
positive ones. Though Thomas will spend a fair amount of time discussing the structure
of the soul, as Aristotle and others before him have done, this form of self-knowledge
serves in the spiritual life only to supplement the understanding of the practices found
therein.

Most importantly, the practices of self-knowledge do not include the discovery of
“hidden” sins, nor the detailed categorization of evil thoughts as they arise. Negative
thoughts are to be dismissed in Thomas, replaced by contemplation of the divine,
repetition of scripture, and the remembrance of good actions of others, especially Christ.
Thomas, as he repeatedly mentions, does not approve of the practice of dabbling with a
sinful thought, as he believes it likely to lead to other sins. Self-knowledge is about
determining a proper course of action, and preserving oneself from entertaining sinful
thoughts which might lead to sinful behavior. This would seem to exclude the practice of
dwelling on past sins, and detailed analysis of the feelings which accompanied them. For
Thomas, to be a person on the way to perfection requires that the entirety of the sinful life
be placed in the past, along with any sense of shame for those past sins. To be perfect
means to approach God as a person redeemed from sin, as a person who is dead to sin, as a person who has destroyed the “old self.” This requires a separation from sin in all forms, even and especially the recollection of our past sins, which should have been put behind us.

This is one further implication of this dissertation which bears mentioning in this conclusion, though impossible to cover it in any detail without moving beyond the scope of this work. It seems possible to read the work of Aquinas as a response to “culture” on two fronts: first, the culture of medieval society and its conception of the ideal person; and second, to the culture of popular religion contemporary to his writing. This would provide his work with the same role as that assigned to “philosophy” by Foucault and Hadot, as a response to unproductive formation by outside influences. In order to develop a full picture of the way in which Thomas’s work functions as a response, one would need to compile a picture of reflexive relation in medieval culture and reflexive relation within other church figures, a task which is a rather substantial challenge, which is why I only tentatively offer this particular argument. Still, however, there is much in terms of spiritual exercises and understandings of the person that appears to be distinct in Thomas and other similarly minded scholastics, and these techniques can be understood as a resistance to alternative forms of self-understanding. These alternative forms would have to be studied and established, but it seems likely that there are multiple alternative forms existing alongside dominant cultural modes.

*Thomas on Spiritual Exercises*
The second aspect of this dissertation is found in providing an account of the goal of the spiritual exercises contained in the work of Thomas Aquinas. This is accomplished, first and foremost, in describing the nature of the spiritual life for Thomas, something which is found primarily in the religious orders. Though non-professed persons can, of course, be in right relationship with God, as mentioned above, the surest way is found in the religious orders like Thomas’ own Order of Preachers. Thomas views these religious orders as schools for spiritual exercise, where a person is trained and aided in the spiritual life, helping to ensure the preservation of grace, and leading to other opportunities for the reception of the same. While Thomas, by the end of his career at least, clearly refutes any sort of Pelagian thinking, he does nonetheless recommend a host of activities designed to ensure the preservation of grace through the avoidance of sin. The avoidance of sin is best accomplished by acting in accordance with the direction of the higher aspects of the person, and this is precisely what the spiritual exercises seek to ensure.

Many of the spiritual exercises present in Thomas’s work are ordered especially to ensuring the governance of reason. This does not mean that reason is the only part of the human that plays a central role, nor does it mean that Thomas ignores the rest of the human person. The governance of reason means that all human acts are approvable by the rational faculty, and thus can be considered moral. In fact, a number of exercises which are not “rational” occur, including the practice of kneeling during prayer as a spiritual exercise, which trains the soul in humility before God. Other exercises include the practice of taking a bath as a way of assuaging sorrow, or in the shedding of tears. These exercises, each in their own way, serve to preserve the governance of reason,
whether by the moderation of passions or other affects, or by strengthening its ability through education and meditation.

A more expansive description of the spiritual exercises recommended by Thomas was found in chapters four and five. The most noteworthy of these exercises are those mentioned by Thomas in connection with the preservation of chastity, a series of exercises suggesting prayer, contemplation, reading, and moderate corporal discipline related mostly to intake of food and wine, as well as the avoidance of company with women. These practices are connected with the importance of preserving the form of reflexive self-understanding found in Thomas: in order to avoid the negative influence of the lower aspects of the person, including those passions which impinge upon the proper functioning of reason, one must build the virtues which provide the capacity for moral action.

**Contemporary ethics and reflexivity**

Though Foucault would likely balk at any suggestion that his work had a particular argument to be made for contemporary ethics, it is clear that it does offer a substantial critique. The study of the reflexivity of the past is a way of critiquing the reflexivity of the present, and suggesting that perhaps the modern self is not a philosophical constant, nor a beneficial one. It is perhaps possible, further, to suggest that in studying alternative forms of reflexivity, the alternatives suggested can inform practices for developing contemporary self-understanding. This is a more dangerous assumption, as there is much to critique in the medieval perspective of the self and its practices. Nonetheless, it is clear that thinkers like Thomas Aquinas offer a robust description of the difficulties
inherent in the moral life, and guidance on practices associated with strengthening oneself to meet those difficulties.

This line of questioning is especially relevant given the ascendance of virtue ethics as a modern category. Given the description of the practices taken on by Thomas, it can fairly be asked whether this revival—as found in figures like Alistair MacIntyre, et al.—actually represents a complete engagement with the practices of an ethic of virtue. This dissertation has suggested that the system of virtue ethics found in Thomas is not considered an entity apart from the rest of his theology, including the question of self-understanding and spiritual exercises. Should this mean, therefore, that if a person wants to be a modern adherent of Thomas Aquinas’s thought, then they must take steps to alter their own relationship of self to self? Does that person need to embrace a faculty psychology, identify with their intellect, and thus deny alternative accounts of human identity?

Though this might seem an insignificant change, there are tremendous implications. First, a person would have to deny many of the innovations made in self-understanding with the advent of modern psychology. Self-examination (or self-knowledge) would not mean analysis of feelings and desires in order to understand what constitutes the “true self.” Instead, examination is always of the present moment, with a person’s past used only as a source of experience to benefit future moral decision making through the work of prudence. Base desires are not identified with the person, whose true self is constituted in reason.
In contemporary thought, though we have begun a re-appropriation of the concept of virtue, a similar effort has not been made in adopting the spiritual exercises, worldview, and reflexive understanding of the self from that period. There are, of course, a multitude of reasons why this has not occurred, not least of which is that the modern world emphasizes individual identity and self-expression. If one were to ask Thomas Aquinas who he was—though this question would not have the same resonance to anyone in the medieval period—he might likely respond that he was a person on the way to perfection. That, or provide an explanation of the generic structure of the human person, and the explanation that a human with grace is directed by the higher aspects of their soul. If, however, one asks this question of a contemporary virtue ethicist, what is the answer we receive? In all likelihood, the answer would contain something different, including especially personal aspirations and achievements. Kwame Anthony Appiah offers something of a description of what constitutes a person in his *The Ethics of Identity*: “As we come to maturity, the identities we make, our individualities, are interpretive responses to our talents and disabilities, and the changing social, semantic and material contexts we enter at birth.”  

That is, Appiah suggests, our identity is constructed out of a combination of our abilities, our social location, and the conceptual world we belong in. This stands in opposition to the form of “identity” found in the pre-modern world, which answers the question of who we are with a general definition of an ideal human. This distinction has been detailed by Christopher Gill in his work on ancient Greek thought. Gill suggests that there are two fundamental patterns of reasoning, one modern and the other pre-modern, each which is dependent on fundamentally different conceptions of the 

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396 Appiah, Kwame Anthony. *The Ethics of Identity.* 163
relationship to the self. The first is the “subjective-individualist,” which is marked by five characteristics:

1. “To be a ‘person’ is to be conscious of oneself as an ‘I’, a unified locus of thought and will.

2. To be a ‘person’ is to be capable of grounding one’s moral life by a specifically individual stance (for instance, that of ‘autonomy’, in one of the possible senses of this term)... 

3. To be a ‘person is to be capable of the disinterested kind of moral rationality that involves abstraction from localized interpersonal and communal attachments, and from the emotions and desires associated with these.

4. To be a ‘person’ in the fullest sense, is to exercise one’s capacity for autonomy in establishing moral principles for oneself or in realizing one’s own (authentic) selfhood. Those capacities, in turn, presuppose a special kind of absolute or ‘transcendental’ freedom.

5. To be a ‘person’ is to understand oneself as the possessor of a unique personal identity; this necessarily raises the question of the relationship between having personal identity and being human.”

The “subjective-individualist” model of the self is centered on the concept that a person is truly unique. The core distinction, especially in distinguishing this model from classical thought, is in the idea of the realization of an “authentic selfhood.” Whereas classical

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thought does indicate the possibility of a “true self,” this self is a universal self, the rational human nature, not one defined by the flowering of one’s unique attributes.

Gill, working from his reading of mainly Greek philosophy and poetry, suggests that the “objective-participant” model is the standard in pre-modern periods. In contrast to the subjective-individualist model, the emphasis for the ethical systems with this model of personhood is in becoming person who reasons well and has their actions, emotions, and affections directed by reason. Whereas in the modern era, as Gill suggests, the person seeks to retract from communal attachments and the accompanying emotions and desires in order to think autonomously,\(^\text{398}\) the classical model does not view affections and attachments proceeding from reason as inherently disruptive, and thus includes them in rational discourse. Gill provides these five points:

1. “To be a human being (or a rational animal) is to act on the basis of reasons, though these reasons may not be fully available to the consciousness of the agent.

2. To be a human being is to participate in shared forms of human life and ‘discourse’ about the nature and significance of those shared forms of life. The ethical life of a human being is expressed in whole-hearted engagement with an interpersonal and communal role and in debate about the proper form that such a role should take. The ultimate outcome of these two types of participation is both (a) objective knowledge of what constitutes the best human life and (b) a corresponding character and way of life.

\(^{398}\) This is perhaps a caricature of Kantian thinking, and there are always issues in making generalizations about broad periods of time, but there is certainly some foundation for this distinction.
3. To be human is to be the kind of animal whose psycho-ethical life (typically conceived as ‘dialogue’ between parts of the psyche) is capable, in principle, of being shaped so as to become fully ‘reason-ruled’ by (a) the action-guiding discourse of interpersonal and communal engagement and (b) reflective debate about the proper goals of a human life.

4. To be human is to be capable, in principle again, of becoming fully ‘reason-ruled.’ But the extent to which any given human being is able to develop in this way depends on the extent to which she is able to participate effectively in these types of interactive and reflective discourse.

5. To be human is to understand oneself as, at the deepest level, a human being. The fullest possible development of human rationality involves reflective understanding of what ‘being human’ means, and of how this relates to participation in other kinds of being, such as animal and divine.”

The distinction between these two types of thinking is essential to understanding both reflexivity in pre-modern thinkers in general, and the thought of Aquinas in particular. For Aquinas, self-understanding is predicated on the proper understanding of oneself as a rational soul made in the image of God, with the possibility, through grace, of recovering the original clarity of that image. Aquinas’s model is not predicated on any form of unique self-realization; in fact, self-realization in Aquinas is to realize oneself as an intellectual soul that desires only God, and a denial of identity for those aspects of the person which desire proximate, sinful things.

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399 Ibid., 12.
Thomas’s theology emphasizes the “freedom” of the mind for God, though by freedom he meant its unencumbrance, and with this emphasis come several practices and perspectives on our relation to ourselves. There is, I believe, much to be said for following how this practice contributed to moral development in Thomas’s mind, and why he considered it a key component of the spiritual life. There is, further, much in the work of Thomas Aquinas which can influence how we approach ourselves and our moral lives. It is apparent that the observance of the virtues requires formation, and that the goal of becoming Christ-like requires more than devotion. To this end, in modern treatments of the virtues, a greater emphasis on the exercises which accompany these virtues is warranted. For, without the exercises and accompanying conception of the self, the virtues remain incompletely developed.
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