Aquinas on the Dangers of Natural Virtue and the Control of Natural Vice

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Abstract

I investigate Aquinas's position that natural virtue can pose dangers to living a moral life, dangers that include natural virtue's inflexibility to circumstance, the opposing vices it may breed if blindly followed, and its aptitude for deceiving people into thinking they are genuinely virtuous. I also consider whether Aquinas regards these problems as remediable given that he sees natural virtue and natural vice as instances of nature being determined to one. He maintains that we can overcome the moral pitfalls that natural virtue and natural vice pose, though perfect mastery is not possible without divine intervention, insofar as our bodily disposition is not directly subject to reason.

Key words: natural virtue, natural vice, nature as a determination to one, temperament, personality type.

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Resumen

Investigo la posición de Tomás de Aquino acerca de que la virtud natural puede implicar la existencia de ciertos peligros para vivir una vida moral; peligros que incluyen la inflexibilidad de la virtud natural ante las circunstancias; los vicios opuestos que pudieran engendrarse, si la virtud natural se siguiera ciegamente; y su aptitud para engañar a la gente e inducirla a pensar que son realmente virtuosos. También considero si Aquino piensa que estos problemas son remediables, con base en su idea de que la virtud y el vicio natural son casos de la determinación de la naturaleza a una sola cosa. En efecto, Tomás sostiene que podemos superar los escollos morales que la virtud y el vicio naturales representan, aunque su dominio perfecto no sea posible sin la intervención divina, puesto que nuestra disposición corporal no está directamente sujeta a la razón.

Palabras clave: virtud natural, vicio natural, naturaleza como determinación, temperamento, tipo de personalidad.

Introduction

Philosophers are far from being the only ones who recognize that some individuals possess natural virtues and/or natural vices. Rather, it is a matter of common experience that this is so. For instance the novelist P.D. James says:

> I think there is badness in all of us. Yes. I would take the religious view that we are all in need of divine grace, but I don't think we are all capable of murder, and I do think there are people who seem to be naturally good. I've met them and they seem to be born generous, kind, stoical, self-effacing, loving, just generally rather good. Others torture animals from childhood; they take pleasure in cruelty

> from really quite an early age. They seem to be born with a greater propensity to evil than the rest of us[1].

When it comes to a philosophical treatment of natural virtue and vice, centuries earlier Thomas Aquinas notes:

> That natural virtue, however, may be given...is manifest through this that particular habits of virtue or vice appear to exist in some men naturally; for certain men immediately from birth seem to be just, or temperate, or brave on account of natural disposition, by which they are inclined to the works of virtue[2].

Certainly the *locus classicus* for the treatment of natural virtue and vice is Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. VI, chapter 13. This passage has received a certain amount of attention from modern day Aristotelian scholars[3]. Surprisingly, however, Thomas Aquinas's treatment of the topic has received next to no attention[4]. I say "surprisingly," not

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[1]P.D. James quoted by Richard John Neuhaus, "While We're at It", *First Things,* CX (February 2001), p. 75 (the quote originally appear in a *Spectator* interview).

[2]*In Decem Libros Ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nicomachum Expositio*, ed. Raymundi M. Spiazzi, O.P., Turin: Marietti 1964, no. 1276. Hereafter cited as *NE*. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1144b1-8.

[3]See, for example, Rosalind Hursthouse, "Practical Wisdom: A Mundane Account", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, CVI (2006), pp. 285-309 and Cristina Viano, "O que é a virtude natural? (Eth. Nic. VI, 13)", *Analytica*, VII-2 (2004), pp. 115-134.

[4]Ramsey Hayden in his article "Natural Virtue" *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review*, XXXVII-2 (Spring 1998), p. 346 claims: "It is a common place that Aquinas accepts Aristotle's basic account of virtue, but there are significant differences between them concerning both perfect virtue and natural virtue." He offers no substantiation for this remark, and neither of the two works he references (Daniel Nelson, *The Priority of Prudence*, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press 1993, and Jean Porter, *The Recovery of Virtue*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press 1990) says any such thing.

so much because I think Aquinas necessarily goes much beyond Aristotle here, but because of the inherent interest of the topic, combined with Aquinas's stature as philosopher. Aquinas himself saw the topic as holding a certain importance, for not only does he elaborates on it in *Commentary on the Ethics of Aristotle*, he also brings it up in five other works as well[5]. Indeed, there are reasons to think that his solicitude is warranted: people today and throughout the ages wonder "can people change?" – a question which in part stems from their observations regarding natural virtue and vice. And people in all ages need to have their eyes opened to the unexpected and cold truth that natural virtue poses dangers to living a moral life. For as we will see, although Aquinas calls the natural virtue the "beginnings of perfect virtue,"[6] he also maintains:

> For someone is able to have a natural inclination to the act of some virtue without prudence; and the greater an inclination they have without the habit of virtue, the worse it is, and the more it is able to push someone to action

Nor do these works treat Aquinas's notion of natural virtue at any length. Hayden's own treatment of Aquinas's views on natural virtue is narrowly focused in function of certain specific questions he is trying to answer, e.g., concerning natural law and Humean natural virtue. In standard works on Thomistic ethics one rarely finds even a brief mention of natural virtue; e.g., there are none in Ralph McINERNY, *Ethica Thomistica,* Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press,1997), and but a couple of lines in Stephen J. POPE, ed., *The Ethics of Aquinas,* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press 2002), pp. 122-23. A few pages are devoted to the notion, though not by name, in a work that draws heavily on Aquinas: Roman CESSARIO, *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics*, University of Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1991), pp. 141-43, 147.

[5]As we will see in this paper, Aquinas speaks of natural virtue and vice in *Quaestio Disputata de Virtutibus in Communi*, *De Virtutibus Cardinalibus*, *Summa Theologiae*, *Commentary on the Sentences,* and *In Libros Politicorum Aristotelis,* in addition to the *Commentary on the Ethics*. He also briefly mentions it in *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate* (22.9, ad 2).

[6]*Quaestio Disputata de Virtutibus in Communi* in *Quaestiones Disputatae*, vol. 2, ed. P. Bazzi et al., Turin: Marietti 1965), 1.8.

> without prudence: as is manifest in the person who has natural courage without discretion and prudence[7].

What I intend to do in this paper is to set out why Aquinas sees natural virtue as a hazard for the one seeking to live a virtuous life, as well as how he thinks its perils can be avoided. Understanding the latter involves, in part, determining whether and in what way we can control natural vice. These questions in turn involve addressing the question of whether one can change one's temperament or personality type, a question that becomes particularly acute in light of the fact that the key notion that Aquinas draws upon in his discussion of natural virtue and vice is "nature is determined to one;" for this might seem to lend credence to the view that biology is destiny, i.e., that one can never rid oneself of inborn propensities to behavior that is morally wrong. This last question and all of the preceding ones will be investigated here with a view to understanding why Aquinas sees natural virtue as a potentially fickle friend, and how he thinks it should be dealt with. Although his advice on the latter is relatively simple, it remains as eminently practical today as it was in his own day.

The Tie Between Nature as a Determination to One and Natural Virtue

The following passage allows us to understand Aquinas's concerns regarding natural virtue and to see how these concerns are tied to the notion of nature being determined to one. The question Aquinas is addressing here is whether virtue is in us by nature:

> In both ways, however, virtue is natural to man according to a certain imperfect beginning. Certainly according to the nature of the species insofar as there are naturally in human reason certain principles that are naturally known,

[7] *Quodlibetum* 12.22 in *Opuscula Philosophica et Theologica*, vol. 2, Castello: Tiferni Tiberini 1886.

> both of things knowable (scibilium) and of things to be done, which are certain seeds of the intellectual and moral virtues; and insofar as in the will is a certain natural appetite of the good that is according to reason. According to the nature of the individual, [virtue is natural to man] insofar as from the disposition of the body certain are better or worse disposed to certain virtues, according as namely certain sensitive powers are the acts of certain parts of the body, from the disposition of which the powers in question are aided or impeded in their acts, and consequently the rational powers which the sensitive powers of this sort serve. And according to this one man has a natural aptitude for science, another for courage, another for temperance. And in this manner both the intellectual virtues as well as the moral virtues are according to something in us by nature. Not, however, the completion of them. Because nature is determined to one; the completion, however, of virtues of this sort is not according to one mode of action, but in diverse modes according to the diverse matters in which the virtues operate, and according to diverse circumstances[8].

The nature which pertains to natural virtue is not that of the species, but of the individual, i.e., his or her personal physical constitution. Indeed, natural virtue[9] can be defined as an inborn inclination to the acts

[8] *Summa Theologiae*, ed. Instituti Studiorum Medievalium Ottaviensis, Ottawa: Commissio Piana 1953, I-II 63.1. Hereafter cited as *ST*.

[9] Natural virtue in this paper does not refers to virtues that all humans have a natural aptitude for as opposed to infused virtues; nor is it to be understood in the sense that Hume defines it in distinction to artificial virtue. Natural virtue as is being discussed in this paper is sometimes referred to by Thomists as "imperfect virtue". And indeed Aquinas himself after giving the definition of natural virtue often speaks of "imperfecta moralis virtutis (*ST* I-II 65.1) or "virtutes omnino imperfectae" (*De Virtutibus Cardinalibus* 2) or "aliqua inchoatio virtutis" (*De Virtutibus in Communi* 8). Thomas OSBORNE distinguishes the dif-

of a moral virtue which follows from the physical make-up proper to the individual[10].

Moral virtue has to operate in regard to diverse matters and in diverse circumstances, something that natural virtue is unable do, because it is an inclination that is determined to one. It is good to face danger for a worthy cause, but not just for thrills. It is good to be truthful, but not to the point of indiscretion. Natural virtue inclines one to operate in only one manner because it is a function of one's physical make-up, something which is "determined to one."

Nature as *Determinatio ad Unum*

Let us examine what Aquinas understands by the expression "nature is determined to one," as it is key to understanding virtually all his teachings regarding natural virtue and vice. The expression applies most fully to the simplest of natural beings, those that are non-living, given the observed limitations of their motions. As Aquinas notes, fire has the same virtue in Greece and in Persia[11]. Similarly, iron tends to move down, and oxygen tends to move up under the conditions found on earth. They do not tend to move in the opposite directions. Since things act in virtue of their form, and they undergo in virtue of their matter, Aquinas will often say that the forms of inanimate natural things are immersed in matter, and this is why they can do so little[12].

Plants have a higher form than inanimate natural substances, as can be seen from their ability to moves themselves by growing. Aquinas says

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ferent meanings of "imperfect virtue" in "Perfect and Imperfect Virtues", *The Thomist*, LXXI-1 (January 2007), pp. 39-64.

[10]Natural vice, correspondingly, can be defined as an inborn inclination to vice which follows from the physical make-up proper to the individual. See *Scriptum super Sententiis*, Paris: Lethielleux 1956, Bk. II, d. 32, q. 1, art. 3, arg. 2: "from natural make-up, one person is born more prone than another to lust or to anger or to any other genus of sin."

[11]See *NE*, #1025.

[12]See *De Virtutibus in Communi* 4, ad 4 and *Summa Contra Gentiles* II 68.

that "the action of the soul transcends the action of nature operating in inanimate things; but this happens in two ways, namely as to the mode of acting and as to what is done."[13] He goes on to point out that the forms of plants only transcend those of inanimate natural things in their mode of activity. Both plants and the inanimate remain in existence for some period of time. However, plants, unlike inanimate things, preserve their existence though their own activities. Notice how Aquinas speaks of the soul in opposition to nature ("the action of the soul transcends the action of nature operating in inanimate things")[14]. Plants manifest an incipient form of autonomy that the non-living lacks. They are largely[15], but not entirely, determined to one.

Beings that are knowers are still less determined to one. As Aquinas puts it:

> ...there are other higher actions of the soul that transcend those of natural forms even as to what is done insofar as, namely, all things are apt to come to be in the soul according to an immaterial [mode of] being. For the soul is in a certain manner everything according as it is sensing and understanding[16].

[13]See *Quaestio Disputata de Anima* 13.

[14]In the commentary on the *De Anima* Aquinas also contrasts nature with the soul on the grounds that the soul is the principle of an activity that is not determined to one: "It is manifest that this principle [i.e., of growth and decrease] is not nature, but the soul. For nature does not move to contrary places: however, the motions of growth and decrease are according to contrary places. For all vegetables grow, and not only upwards or downwards, but in both ways. It is manifest, therefore, that the principle of these motions is not nature, but the soul" (*In Aristotelis Librum De Anima Commentarium*, Italy: Marietti 1959, no. 257).

[15]The very etymology of nature, "nasci" "to be born" (in Greek, "physis," "birth"), signifies something determinate, namely, like coming from like.

[16]*Quaestio Disputata de Anima* in *Quaestiones Disputatae*, vol. 2, ed. P. Bazzi et al., Turin: Marietti 1965, 13.

The sentient and rational being is not limited to being itself, but in a certain way can be all other things as well. These beings are capable of taking on the forms of other things while retaining their own form. The immaterial mode of reception of knowing beings is what underlies the indetermination of their action. As Aquinas explains:

> Certainly there is agreement [between natural things and intelligent beings] in that in natural things form is present which is the principle of action, and inclination following the form which is called natural appetite from which action follows. However, there is a difference in that the form of a natural thing is a form individuated by matter; whence even the inclination following it is determined to one, but the understood form (forma intellecta) is universal under which many things can be comprehended; whence since acts regard singulars which are in no way adequate to a universal potency, it remains that the inclination of the will stands indeterminately to many: just as if an artisan were to conceive the form of a house in the universal, under which are comprehended diverse shapes of houses, his will would be able to incline to this that he make a square house or a round house or one of some other shape[17].

The intellect is not the act of any bodily organ, and therefore it receives the forms of things in an entirely immaterial way, abstracting both from matter and the conditions of matter. Its object is the universal truth, and the inclination or appetite arising from this knowledge has as its object the universal good[18]. Since no particular good has a necessary connection with the universal good or in this life is known with certitude to

[17] *Quaestiones Disputatae de Malo* in *Quaestiones Disputatae*, vol. 2, ed. P. Bazzi et al., Turin: Marietti 1965, 6.1.

[18] Note that in a sense both the intellect and the will are determined to one. Both the intellect and the will are in a certain way natures. All men desire knowledge, and all desire happiness. See *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate*, in *Quaestiones Disputatae*, vol. 1, ed. Raymundi M. Spiazzi, O.P., Turin: Marietti 1964,

have such a connection, the will is not determined to choosing any particular good[19]. Rather than being determined to one it is "ad utrumlibet", i.e., open to opposites.

As for knowers endowed with sense knowledge, Aquinas has the following things to say in regard to their determination. First, in regard to their knowledge, he points out that:

> One grade [of immateriality] is according as things are in the soul without their proper matter, but nevertheless according to their individuality and individual conditions which follow upon matter. And this grade is that of sense which is receptive of the forms of individuals without matter, but nevertheless in a bodily organ[20].

The type of receptivity that is characteristic of sense conditions the determinacy of the sense appetite:

> The active principle in brute animals is intermediary between the two [i.e., nature and reason]. For the form apprehended through sense is individual, as is the form of a natural thing; and therefore from it follows an inclination to one act as in natural things, but nevertheless the same form is not always received in the sense as it is in natural things, for fire is always hot, but now one form, now others [are received by the sense] e.g., now a pleasurable form, now a saddening form; whence now it [the appetite] flees and now it pursues; and in this it agrees with the human active principle[21].

22.5: "However nature and the will are ordered in this way that the will itself is a certain nature; because everything that is found in things is called a certain nature. And therefore it is necessary to find in the will not only that which is of the will, but even that which is of nature." Hereafter cited as *DV*.

[19] See *ST* I 82.2 and ad 1: "Whether the will wants all that it wants from necessity."

[20] *Quaestio Disputata de Anima* 13.

[21] *Quaestiones Disputatae de Malo* 6.1.

Animals through sensation are able to receive the forms of other things. However, since the sense does not receive in an entirely immaterial mode, it perceives the individual as individual. The intellect not only knows things, but it knows what it means to know; and so it can think about it own act of knowing. The sensitive being knows sensible particulars. It is conscious; it knows when it is awake and sensing. However, the sense cannot go beyond the particular knowledge that it has so as to be able to understand its own act. It can make judgments, but it cannot judge its own judgments. As Aquinas puts it:

> But the judgment [that animals are capable of] is in them from natural estimation, not from some process of putting two and two together (non ex aliqua collatione), since they are ignorant of the reason for their judgment; on this account their judgment does not extend to all things as does the judgment of reason, but only to certain determinate things[22].

Aquinas goes on to note that a "consequence of the fact that their judgment is determined to one is that their appetite and action is determined to one."[23] Animals, unlike plants, move voluntarily in pursuit of or flight from certain things, but cannot say to themselves: Should I be feeling this way? Should I act on my feelings? They cannot evaluate the reasons for their feelings and actions, for they do not grasp universal principles in terms of which such evaluations are made[24]. The movement of their appetite is a function only of the apprehension of their senses[25].

[22]*DV* 24.2.

[23]*DV* 24.2.

[24]See *ST* I 59.3 and *DV* 24.1.

[25]See *DV* 23.1: "through appetite they [animals] are inclined to something of themselves, insofar as they desire something from the apprehension of that thing; but that they incline or not incline to the thing that they desire is not something subject to their disposal."

Nature as Determined to One and the Sense Appetite in Humans

In the rational animal that is ourselves, the sense appetite has more flexibility than it does in animals, insofar as it falls under the influence of reason. A human being is a body, a living thing, a sensitive being, and a rational being. The substantial form of man is one, and it is immaterial in the strict sense. The various powers of man show the different levels of determination to one just mentioned, with the exceptions of intellect and will that surpass the other powers in not being determined to one[26]. Now, in humans the potencies of matter which in non-knowing beings are actualized by vegetative soul do not fall directly under the control of the rational soul[27]. However, the sensitive powers are not so immersed in matter, and this is why they can, to some extent, be influenced by reason.

> There is found a certain gradation in forms. For there are certain forms and powers that are completely imbedded (depressae) in matter, every action of which is material; as it manifest in the forms of the elements. The intellect, however, is completely free from matter; whence even its oper-

[26]See *Quaestio Disputata de Anima* 10: "If one takes 'wholeness' to refer to virtue and power, then the whole [soul] is not in every part of the body, nor even the whole in the whole, if we speak about the human soul. For it was shown in the questions above because the human soul exceeds the capacity of the body, there remain for it power for performing certain operations without communication with the body, such as to understand (intelligere) and to will. But as to the other operations that are exercised through bodily organs, the whole virtue and power of the soul is in the whole body; not, however, is it in any part of the body, because diverse parts of the body are proportioned to diverse operations of the soul. Whence, according to that power only so much of it is in the bodily part which regards the operation that is exercised through that part." See also *ST* I 76.8, ad 3.

[27]See *ST* I-II 17.8, ad 1: "[T]o the extent that some act is more immaterial, to that extent it is more noble, and more subject to the command of reason. Whence from the very fact that the vegetative powers of the soul do not obey reason it appears that they are the least of these powers." See also, *NE* #242.

> ation is without communion with the body. The irascible and concupiscible stand in a middle mode. For the bodily change which is connected with their acts shows that they use a corporeal organ; that they are further in a certain mode elevated from matter is shown through this that they move by the command of reason and that they obey reason. And thus there is virtue in them, i.e., insofar as elevated above matter, they obey reason[28].

Nature as Determined to One, Physiological Imbalances, and Moral Virtue

One might question whether the rational faculties have no control over one's physical make-up or at least over certain aspects of one's physiological state, something that is a product of one's vegetative powers. Certainly one can make choices about one's diet, and diet has more or less definite ties with one's health. Although some people who eat a healthy diet become seriously ill, while others who eat a poor diet live long lives, generally the opposite is the case. However, while the rational faculties can direct the sense of sight to look for fruit in the refrigerator, and the hands to pick up an apple, they cannot command the body to utilize healthy foods in a manner that produces health. Aquinas thus notes:

> The powers of the vegetable soul do not obey reason as to their proper acts, as is said in Bk. I of the *Ethics*; but certain acts of the sensitive or motive parts are ordered to the act of the vegetative part; and these acts are subject to the command of reason[29].

There are foods, drinks, dietary supplements, and medicines that one can take on a regular basis that have an effect on the emotions one habitually feels. For example, certain vitamins help some women eliminate

[28] *De Virtutibus in Communi* 4, ad 4.

[29] *Scriptum super Sententiis*, Bk. II, 2 d. 20, q. 1 a. 2, ad 3.

or mitigate the mood swings associated with PMS (something that some women are more prone to than others often due to their physical make-up). And drugs can be taken to control depression, something which afflicts especially those of melancholic temperament. Aquinas notes the effect that drinking has on the emotions of confidence and hope:

> [Aristotle] says that 'lovers of wine are more confident on account of the heat of the wine'; whence above it was said that drunkenness also contributes to the goodness of hope; for the warmth of the heart repels fear and causes hope on account of the extension and amplification of the heart[30].

And he points out that taking a bath helps mitigate sadness:

> [S]adness according to its species is naturally opposed to the vital motion of the body. And therefore those things which restore the nature of the body in its due state of vital motion oppose sadness and mitigate it[31].

Again, reason cannot directly control how the body will react to what one chooses to ingest, and what one ingests does not change one's physical make-up, but only one's body chemistry for a certain period of time.

Aquinas is right that reason cannot directly command the vegetative powers[32]. He sees that we can indirectly affect the emotions that proceed from the physical make-up proceeding from these powers by doing

[30]See *ST* I-II 45.3.

[31]*ST* I-II 38.5.

[32]See *DV* 11.1: "In natural things something pre-exists in potency in two ways. In one way, in a complete active potency; namely, when an intrinsic principle is able to sufficiently bring about a perfect act, as is manifest in healing: for from the natural virtue which is in the sick person, the sick is brought to health. … When therefore something pre-exists in a complete active potency, then an extrinsic agent does not act except by helping the intrinsic agent, by ministering to it those thing by which it is able to pass into act; as the doctor in healing is a minister to nature (which is what principally operates), by strengthening nature, and by applying medicines which are as instruments that nature

things such as bathing or drinking alcohol. When he speaks of the control that we have over our emotions in the context of discussing virtue, he rarely suggests that we use these sorts of physical remedies to calm or instigate emotion. It does stand to reason that some of these remedies are of limited applicability; one cannot jump into a bathtub every time one is feeling excessively sad or into a cold shower every time one is experiencing lust. Some of these remedies, however, can be applied on a regular basis, e.g., getting regular exercise can help a person with a choleric temperament become calmer. One place where Aquinas does speaks about employing a habitual physical remedy for disordered emotion is when he addresses the question of whether religious should do manual labor. In his discussion he points out that one of the benefits of manual labor is that it "is ordered to curbing concupiscence, insofar as through it the body is worn out."[33] Aquinas also maintains that fasting has the physiological effect of repressing lust and he holds that this is especially true of abstaining from meat[34].

It is not clear why Aquinas does not explore more fully whether a partial remedy for natural vice should not be sought in actions geared to achieving a more balanced physiological state[35]. In some cases, it seems questionable whether adopting such means is ultimately conducive to

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uses for healing." Even if someday we are able to change those aspects of our physical make-up responsible for emotion through gene therapy or something of the sort, it still would be the case that this change comes about by our doing something, and not simply by our willing it (unlike willing to imagine [e.g.,] a food as building muscle).

[33]*ST* II-II 187.3. Aquinas goes on to point out later in the article that subduing the flesh can be brought about by other means than manual labor, e.g., by fasting and vigils.

[34]See *ST* II-II 147.1 and 8 (especially ad 1).

[35]On the opposite pole from Aquinas (who puts relatively little emphasis on how physiological impinges on moral virtue) is Peter of Abano, who takes a purely naturalistic approach to moral virtue, and ultimately seems to conflate it with a balanced physiological state. See Matthew Klemm, "Medicine and Moral Virtue in the *Expositio Problematum Aristotelis* of Peter of Abano", *Early Science and Medicine*, XI-3 (2006), pp. 309-35.

virtue, e.g., having a shot of liquor before delivering speeches instead of controlling one's fear by exercising control over it from within. At any rate, there are many interesting and difficult questions here that unfortunately Aquinas does not address. It would seem that actions that aim at treating an abnormal state are morally appropriate. It would certainly seem to be a good thing for a choleric person to get regular exercise in order to be mellower. But should people suffering from lust take medication to lower their libido (so-called chemical castration)? And what about the fact (which will be explored further below) that natural vice often brings with it a natural virtue: should one use physical remedies to tamp down a natural vice when doing so may also diminish a natural virtue? (This question is somewhat similar to the question of whether individuals suffering from mental illness should be put on medication when this also results in a loss of their creativity.)

The Dangers Posed by Natural Virtue Due to its Determination to One

It is time to return to consider in more detail something Aquinas does speak about, namely, the troublesome consequences of natural virtue being determined to one. Natural virtue shares this sort of determination in common with natural vice, as both are a function of an individual's "complexio" or physical make-up. The reason why natural virtue is called virtue, and often passes for genuine virtue, is because it motivates one to perform acts in accord with the extreme that is closer to the mean of virtue. Recall that virtue lies in a mean between two vices that are extremes. The extreme closer to the mean is the one the acts of which are more similar to the acts of virtue, and it is also the one that people in general are less inclined to. A person who is timid by natural disposition is ill-disposed to perform acts like to those brave people perform, whereas someone who is fearless by temperament is readily disposed to doing so, and the latter person is the one we call naturally brave. A person who had only a moderate amount of natural confidence, while not ill-disposed to performing the type of acts most associated with being brave, at the same

time is not readily disposed to doing so either, and thus such a person is not called naturally brave. The person acting according to natural virtue, however, will still inevitably make mistakes, since natural virtue is fixed towards an extreme[36], and does not adapt itself to circumstance[37].

Aquinas often points out that in the absence of prudence, the stronger the inclination of natural virtue, the worse it is and the more damage it can do, using comparisons such as "the more vigorously a blind person runs, the greater his injury when he strikes a wall."[38] The more naturally fearless one is, the more likely one is to engage in activities such as daredevil stunts that may lead to injury or death. The more naturally generous one is, the more quickly one is liable to end up in debt. The more naturally abstemious one is, the more likely one is to suffer the consequences of inadequate diet.

Natural virtue does not only cause problems due to its inflexibility to circumstance, it also causes problems when it comes to acts of virtues which require a motion of the appetite opposite to that to which natural

[36]The person who possesses natural virtue and the person who possesses the vice that more resembles the virtue will act in the same manner. The difference is that the vicious person does so through deliberate choice. Natural virtue is something a person is born with. An infant or young child is not yet able to exercise their capacity for deliberation, but first needs to acquire moral experience. Gradually they become aware that they should not blindly follow feeling in regard to matters of temperance and courage. At this point, they begin to make choices about whether and how they are going to manage their emotions. If they repeatedly choose not to exercise discrimination in following the direction their natural virtue inclines them to, they will eventually acquire the vice that resembles their natural virtue, and the vice of imprudence as well (and may also acquire vices contrary to the natural virtue).

[37]See *De Virtutibus in Communi* 8: "There is however a certain incipient or incomplete (inchoatio) virtue which follows from the nature of the individual, according as a given person is inclined to the act of some virtue from his natural make-up or from the impression of the heavenly bodies. And this inclination is a certain incomplete (inchoatio) virtue.... For if someone were to follow this sort of inclination without the discretion of reason, he would frequently err."

[38]*De Virtutibus in Communi* 6, ad 4. This comparison is drawn from Aristotle *NE* 1144a11.

virtue inclines. Here we are referring to the familiar phenomena "the virtues of our vices" and "the vices of our virtues." As Aquinas explains:

> [T]here may be a natural inclination to those things which pertain to one virtue. But there may not be an inclination by nature to those things which pertain to all the virtues; because a natural disposition that inclines to one virtue inclines to the contrary of another virtue. For instance, the person who is disposed by nature to courage, which lies in pursuing difficult things, is less disposed to meekness, which consists in restraining irascible emotions. Whence we see that animals that are naturally inclined to the act of some virtue are inclined to the vice contrary to another virtue; as the lion is naturally audacious, but also naturally cruel[39].

Examples of the virtues of one's vices and vices of one's virtues abound. There are people who are extremely truthful and honest, but then are also unduly frank. People who set high goals for themselves are often intolerant of others' mistakes ("he was hard on others and hard on himself"); whereas people who don't set high goals for themselves are often indulgent when it comes to the failings of others. People who are diligent and conscientious can also be humorless. P.D. James mentions people who take pleasure in cruelty from early childhood. He does not mention the positive side of such individuals: they would be more likely to protect a friend attacked by a gang or a pack of dogs than would kindly natured individuals who are incapable of murder[40].

That natural virtue is not virtue only reveals itself plainly when virtuous action demands that we go against the natural flow of feeling, and we

[39] *De Virtutibus in Communi* 8, ad 10.

[40] It is arguable that the ancient equation of virtue with "virtus" or manly courage is an instance of mistaking natural virtue for moral virtue. For the natural virtues of the male are to overcome competitors and other enemies, and to father offspring. Accordingly, while courage was highly regarded, chastity was not.

consequently fail. In the meanwhile, we are seduced into thinking that we are virtuous because our actions are mostly good, when really, even when they are good, they are not virtuous in the strict sense, since they proceed more from feeling than from a habit involving reason. This illusion is at the basis of thinking that it is possible to have one virtue without having all the others.[41] When we act chiefly according to natural virtue, we are doing mainly what we feel like doing, rather than acting out of a rational judgment that looks to the good of the person as a whole. And not only then do we fail to act in a truly virtuous manner, in addition we cultivate vice at the same time. As Aquinas puts it:

> [T]here are certain virtues which order man in those things which happen in human life such as temperance, justice, meekness, and things of this sort; and it necessary in regard to these that man, when he exercises himself in the act of a given virtue, at the same time exercise himself in the action of the other virtues, and then he will acquire every habit of virtue at the same time; either that or it will be the case that he does well in regard to one [virtue] and badly in regard to the others, and then he will acquire the habit contrary to another virtue, and the consequence of this is the corruption of prudence without which no disposition which is acquired through the act of some virtue has properly the notion of virtue....[42]

[41] *ST* I-II 65.1: "Imperfect moral virtue, as temperance or fortitude, is nothing other than some inclination existing in us to some work belonging to the genus of good things to be done, which inclination is either in us from nature or from custom. And when one takes the moral virtues in this mode, they are not tied together, for we see that someone who from natural make-up or from some habit is prompt when it comes to the work of liberality is nevertheless not prompt when it comes to the work of chastity." The article goes on to explain why the perfect moral virtues are interconnected in such a manner that the possession of one requires the possession of all the others.

[42] *De Virtutibus Cardinalibus* in *Quaestiones Disputatae*, vol. 2, 2, ad 9. See *NE* nos. 1286-87: "For we see that the same man is not inclined to every virtue,

The more one is simply yielding to a natural tendency to honesty, generosity, etc., the more one is habituating oneself to acting according to that feeling apart from the judgment of reason, and thus in other situations one is then even more liable to act according to the vices of one's virtues. So it is not just when natural virtue leads us manifestly awry that it is bad. In a more subtle way it can be just as bad and maybe even worse when it leads us to perform acts of virtue. For we are liable to think that we are truly virtuous, when in fact we are simply doing what comes natural to us, all the while fostering other vices.

Sometimes, then, one is accidentally better off suffering from natural vice than possessing natural virtue, namely, insofar as one is less likely to have illusions about one's virtuousness. Indeed others generally quickly let a person know that he is a grouch or cheapskate or chicken, etc. Thus the person suffering from natural vice is more likely to recognize that he needs to make an effort[43] to acquire virtue than is the person of natural

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but one to liberality, another to temperance, and so forth. For it is easy for everyone to arrive at that to which they are naturally inclined. It is however difficult to attain something contrary to natural impulse. Therefore it follows that the man who is naturally disposed to one virtue and not to another knows, i.e., attains this virtue to which he is naturally disposed....but he never attains the virtue to which he is not naturally disposed. What was just said is verified in regard to natural virtue, not however, in regard to moral virtue according to which someone is said to be good simply. And this therefore because no one of the virtues can be had without prudence, or prudence without them, as has been show. And thus when prudence, which is one virtue, is present in someone, at the same time there will be present with it all virtues, none of which would exist if prudence did not exist."

[43]See *In Libros Politicorum Aristotelis*, ed. Raymundi M. Spiazzi, O.P, Italy: Marietti 1951, nos. 1121-23: "[I]t can happen that although someone from heavenly influence or natural disposition is inclined neither to governing nor to the works of intellect or of virtue, if nevertheless through choice they set themselves to the study of wisdom and the practice of virtue, they will turn out to be people of understanding and ones that govern well. Whereas just the opposite will happen if those who are well born as to these things let themselves become lazy and give themselves over to the practice of bad works: they will become foolish and govern badly, and will become the slaves of others."

virtue who tends to feel good about the way he is behaving and who receives approbation from others. People who are prone to lust generally know they have a problem. People who are naturally chaste, on the other hand, may not realize that they are not truly chaste until caught off guard the first time they experience a moderate physical attraction for someone. People who are naturally cowardly generally do not think that they are brave. It is the naturally virtuous who sometimes fail to realize that they are not truly virtuous until faced with a difficult situation demanding courage over and above what they are naturally disposed to or until the ill consequences of some rash act they have performed makes them aware of their imperfection—and sometimes even then the naturally virtuous continue to entertain the illusion that they are truly virtuous.

There is another reason why a person is sometimes better off possessing a natural vice rather than a natural virtue.[44] While natural vice per se is not conducive to living a morally good life, some natural vices have better natural virtues associated with them than their counterpart vices do. For example, people who are excessively candid tend to be forthright and truthful, and people who are phony and who lie tend to be diplomatic. Truthfulness is a better virtue than diplomacy. Thus one is morally better off possessing the natural vice of excess candor than the natural virtue of diplomacy, to the extent that the former is accompanied by truthfulness, whereas the latter is accompanied by lying. The possession of a certain natural virtue, then, may end up being more detrimental than beneficial to the acquisition of true virtue when its attendant natural vice is more serious than is the vice corresponding to the absence of that virtue.

[44]Some natural virtues are accompanied by substantial natural vices. E.g., a person who is easy to get along with may have no backbone, i.e., they may be almost lacking an irascible appetite. It will be very hard for this person to acquire the virtue of courage. And all the more so to the extent that performing the acts which natural vice inclines one to results in the formation of a bad habit. Then the person not only has the bad natural inclination to grapple with, but in addition the inclination that comes from habit.

Can We Overcome the Dangers of Natural Virtue that are Due to its Determination to One?

We see the importance of recognizing our natural virtues as natural. However, it might then seem that once one has recognized this, one can really do nothing about it. For to the extent that we cannot permanently change our physiology, it seems then that natural virtue is a permanent handicap. While there is some truth in this, still as was mentioned earlier the concupiscible and irascible appetites stand in between the powers that are entirely imbedded in matter and those that are entirely free from matter;[45] their *determinatio ad unum* is not so great that they cannot be influenced by reason. Let us reconsider this teaching of Aquinas by looking to other passages in his works.

First, recall that the principal purpose of our emotions is to allow us to execute rational decisions more promptly and efficiently[46]. The deliberate activities involving emotion center on things needed for personal survival or for the continuation of the species[47]. For example, in situations of danger such as coming across an angry dog or horned cattle in

[45]See *De Virtutibus in Communi* 4, ad 4, quoted earlier in the body of this article.

[46]See *DV* 26.7: "[W]hen the will chooses something through the judgment of reason, it more promptly and more easily does it if along with it emotion is aroused in the lower part; because the lower appetite is in closer proximity to the motion of the body. Whence, Augustine says: 'The motion of compassion serves reason, when a person in anger experiences compassion, so that justice may be preserved.' And this is what the Philosopher says in the second book of the Ethics bringing in a verse from Homer: 'Rouse courage and intense anger'; because, namely, when someone is virtuous with the virtue of courage, the emotion of anger following upon the choice of virtue makes for a greater promptness of action; if, however, it would precede, it would perturb the mode of virtue."

[47]See *ST* I-II 91.6: "And nevertheless if one considers the inclination of sensuality according as it is in other animals, it is thus ordered to the common good, i.e., to the conservation of nature in the species or in the individual. And this is also the case in man, according as sensuality is subject to reason. But it is called 'fomes' according as it departs from the order of reason."

a pasture the adrenaline rush that accompanies fear contributes greatly to our ability to leap the fence. We could make ourselves schedules for when we ought to eat as is done for unconscious patients, but it is much easier to remember to eat because we feel hungry. Virtue then cannot involve the eradication of emotion, but rather:

> the virtues perfect us to pursuing in a due manner the natural inclinations which pertain to natural law. ... There is, however, a certain special inclination of nature for removing things that are harmful; whence an irascible power separate from the concupiscible power is even given to animals[48].

The inclinations of both the concupiscible and irascible appetite are natural; however, the good for humans does not simply consist in the natural goods proper to the animals, i.e., survival and reproduction; consequently, the sense appetite needs to be guided by reason in accord with the human good.

All humans have a concupiscible and irascible appetite naturally ordered to reason, but some individuals' appetites are better disposed to following reason than are others'. As we have seen, natural virtue is the individual's inclination to acts of moral virtue[49] which arises chiefly from the physical make-up underlying the concupiscible and irascible appetites[50].

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[48]*ST* II-II 108.2. See *De Virtutibus in Communi* 4: "When…it is necessary that the operation of man regard those things which are the object of the sense appetite, it is required for the goodness of operation that there be in the sense appetite some disposition or perfection, by which the said appetite readily obeys reason; and this we call virtue."

[49]Note that I have been focusing on moral virtue. There are also natural virtues which dispose one to the acquisition of intellectual virtue, such as the natural virtue of *synesis* (good judgment about moral matters) which results from the good disposition of the internal sense, the common sense (see *ST* II-II 51.3, 1).

[50]Later I discuss how the natural virtue of justice may not be entirely due to dispositions of the sense appetite.

Even in those whose appetites are better disposed, however, the determination to one of their natural virtue sometimes results in emotional responses inappropriate in a given situation. Now in order to be virtuous it is not enough that untoward emotions be overridden by reason, the emotions themselves must possess some perfection according to which they readily follow reason. That is the difference between the continent person and the virtuous one; the continent person experiences strong emotion contrary to reason, but does not give into it, whereas the virtuous person's emotions are largely in accord with reason. However, it seems that one cannot do anything directly about the emotions one feels due to one's physical make-up. And so it would seem that one could never become virtuous. Aquinas raises a very similar question in an objection in the *De Veritate*:

> the motions of sensuality are passions of the soul to which determinate dispositions of the body are required, as Avicenna determined; hot and subtle blood is required for anger, and temperate blood for joy. But the disposition of the body is not subject to reason. Therefore neither is the motion of sensuality[51].

Aquinas responds:

> the disposition of the body which pertains to the make-up of the body is not subject to reason; but this is not required in order for the said passions to exist in act, but the only thing required is that a man be capable of them. The actual transmutation of the body, e.g., the rising of blood around the heart, or something of this sort, which is concomitant with the act of passions of this sort, follows imagination, and on this account is subject to reason[52].

[51] *DV* 25.4 obj 5.
[52] *DV* 25.4, ad 5.

Regardless of the emotional response dictated by one's natural constitution, one is still capable of acquiring moral virtue so long as one can elicit the appropriate emotions[53]. As Aquinas explains, the sense appetite is "naturally made to be moved by the cogitative power" (which some call 'particular reason'), and "particular reason itself is naturally made to be moved and directed in man according to universal reason, whence in syllogistic reasoning conclusions concerning singulars are concluded to from universal propositions."[54] Aquinas goes on to note that: "Anyone can experience this in himself; for by applying certain universal considerations, anger or fear or something of the sort is mitigated, or even instigated."

Reason has another way of acting upon feeling in addition to drawing a conclusion about a particular thing to be done as useful or harmful to the individual, and that is by commanding the imagination to form images contrary to those the unruly emotion is proceeding from. To understand the difference between these two techniques, it is helpful to consider a distinction Aquinas makes in regard to the sense appetite (which he refers to here as "sensuality"):

> Thus, therefore, the proper object of sensuality is the thing good or suitable to the one sensing it: which happens indeed in two ways. In one way, because it is suitable to the being itself of the one sensing, such as food and drink, and other things of this sort; in another way because it is suitable to the sense for the purpose of sensing, as a beauti-

[53]See *ST* I-II 17.7, ad 2: "[T]he quality belonging to the body is related to the act of the sense appetite in two ways. In one way, as preceding it, according as someone is physically disposed in some manner to this or that emotion. In another manner, as consequent to it, as when someone heats up out of anger. Therefore, the preceding quality is not subject to the command of reason because either it is from nature, or it is from some prior motion which is not able to immediately calm down. But the consequent quality follows the command of reason because it follows the local motion of the heart, which is moved in diverse ways according to the diverse acts of the sense appetite."

[54]*ST* I 81.3.

> ful color is suitable to sight for the purpose of seeing, and moderate sound to the hearing for the purpose of hearing, and so forth.[55]

Sugar suits young humans sense of taste, but a lot of sugar is bad for their health. Medicine may taste bad, yet be good for one's health. Reason, then, can both influence emotion by concluding that this candy bar is unhealthy, and also by directing the imagination to represent the candy bar as something causing obesity or sickness. This difference in approach is seen in ads against smoking that list the various diseases it may cause as compared to those that show a person who has lost her fingers as a consequence of a disease contracted due to smoking. Aquinas speaks of the latter strategy when he says:

Since the same thing can be considered under diverse conditions, and rendered delectable and horrible, reason opposes sensuality by means of the imagination of something under the notion of delectable or disagreeable, according as it appears to it [i.e., to reason]; and thus sensuality is moved to joy or sadness[56].

Aquinas suggests yet a third way in which we can control emotion:

> Sometimes emotion is not so strong as to cut off the use of reason. And then reason can shut out emotion by turning to other thoughts[57].

Distracting ourselves from whatever is causing undue emotion is always an option, granted that memories of things that provoke strong emotion have a tendency to come back to mind despite our willing that they not do so.

Aquinas points out even a fourth way in which we can control emotion:

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[55] *DV* 25.1.
[56] *DV* 25.4.
[57] *ST* I-II, 77.6.

> [I]n powers ordered and interconnected to each other things so stand that an intense motion in one of them, and chiefly in the higher one of them, redounds in the other. Whence, when the motion of the will through choice directs itself towards something, the irascible and the concupiscible follow the motion of the will[58].

Here Aquinas is not speaking of reason persuading the emotions, but of the person making a concerted effort of will. Aquinas speaks of the effect of sheer force of will when discussing the general remedy for vice, which consists in aiming for the other extreme:

> For when we strive to draw back a great deal from a sin to which we are prone, then we eventually just barely arrive at the mean. And he [Aristotle] gives a similitude with those who straighten a twisted tree; when they want to straighten it, they turn it in the opposite direction, so that it thus returns to the middle position. And it should be considered here that this is the most efficacious way of acquiring virtue; namely, that a man strives to the contrary of that to which he is inclined either from nature or custom. The way that the Stoics posited is nevertheless easier, namely, that a man little by little draws back from those things to which he is inclined. . . . The way that Aristotle states here is appropriate for those who desire vehemently to draw away from vice and to arrive at virtue; whereas the Stoics' way belongs more to those who have a weak and lukewarm will[59].

Training the sense appetite is somewhat like training a dog. The dog has its natural inclinations, e.g., to run after certain other animals. The

[58] *DV* 25.4.

[59] *NE* nos. 375-76. See also, *ST* I-II, 77.6: "The sense appetite can stand to free will antecedently or consequently.… It stands consequently, however, according as the motions of superior powers, if they are vehement, redound in the lower powers; for the will cannot move intensely to something without some passion being aroused in the sense appetite."

master needs to take charge to direct these inclinations. For example, one trains a dog to heel by pulling it back on its leash, contrary to its natural inclination to run after animals that it senses. In some cases, though, one might want to set the dog chasing after some animal. For this reason, it is not sufficient to be continually restraining the dog until it gets used to following, but one must also train the dog to listen to one, so that when it is appropriate it will chase. As we have seen, the interactions between the rational faculties and the sense appetite are more intimate and more complex. However, the similarity is that one wants first and foremost to train the appetite to readily listen to reason, while at the same time recognizing that if this is to be the case one may need to train the appetite so that its response is no longer that which was natural to it, but in a direction that will more often be in accord with reason. The direction in which the appetite will tend, once trained, is determinate. The appetite's tendency to readily obey reason will also become determinate. However, since reason does not always dictate the same responses, the sense appetites, to the extent they are trained to listen to reason, share something of its indeterminacy[60].

How Natural Virtue's Determination to One Compares to Moral Virtue's Determination to One

Moral virtue itself is a "determinatio ad unum" of a certain sort. Human beings have certain natural inclinations which are determinate: first

[60] Again, already at the level of sense there is a certain degree of indeterminacy. A dog does not run after just any other animal, but discriminates rabbit from snake. Although, the naturally brave are often naturally lacking in meekness, most people tend both to be naturally cowardly and naturally vengeful; this shows a certain degree of indeterminacy of the irascible appetite since it tends to opposite movements when one's life is threatened and when one has been the victim of some wrong. Reason's guidance and training of the emotions imparts the sense appetites with even further flexibility, resembling the way that a trained dog chases certain specific things, and does not chase others, over and above what its instincts incline it to.

and foremost to be happy, with the attendant inclinations to live, to live in harmony with others, etc[61]. These inclinations can only be fulfilled through virtuous acts. However, we are not determined by nature to perform virtuous acts, but are open to performing vicious acts as well. The very purpose of acquiring moral virtue is to overcome this natural indetermination so that we can live happy lives. We determine ourselves to performing virtuous acts by repeatedly performing virtuous acts, thus acquiring the habit of virtue[62]. Virtue is not open to opposites, unlike art which is "ad utrumlibet." E.g., the temperate person is not open to overeating, whereas the grammarian is open to intentionally making mistakes in grammar[63]. The "determinatio ad unum" of moral virtue differs from that of natural virtue insofar as moral virtue involves reason. Virtue is a habit of choosing. Such a habit is never so fixed as to entirely preclude free choice of the opposite, though such a choice may be extremely difficult[64]. Also, moral virtue is a "determinatio ad unum" as to the end, e.g., temperance is fixed upon eating and enjoying other bodily pleasures moderately. However, the means to this end are not fixed, but must be determined by reason. The temperate person is not determined to always eating a certain amount; whereas the naturally temperate person always tends to eat a small amount of food. And the naturally brave always tends to advance and never to retreat—that is, so long as their natural capacity is sufficiently great as to enable them to withstand to the danger. The naturally virtuous thus lack the virtuous person's determination to one end, but are fixed in what in many cases would be an appropriate means to the end of virtue. Finally, insofar as certain moral virtues have their completion in the sense appetite, they are determined up to a point insofar as the sense appetite in question has been trained to respond in a certain direction; however, in true virtue the sense appetite has also been trained to listen to reason which discerns the means appropriate to the circumstances and commands the sense appetite accordingly. As was

[61]See *ST* I-II 94.2.

[62]See *De Virtutibus in Communi* 9.

[63]See *NE* nos. 315, 316.

[64]See *De Virtutibus in Communi* 1 and ad 12.

noted above, "and thus virtue is in them [the sense appetites], i.e., insofar as they are raised above matter and obey reason."[65] (The topic of moral virtue as a "determinatio ad unum" merits more extensive treatment than can be devoted to it here.)

The Problematic Case of Natural Justice

A question arises how one could be naturally disposed to the virtue of justice (and the virtues annexed to justice), given the virtue of justice perfects the will, which has no bodily organ. There is no doubt that some from birth are naturally honest (lying goes against their grain) and/or have a strong sense of justice. Like all natural virtues these are accompanied by natural vices such as undue frankness in the case of the former and things such as legalism, excessive insistence upon one's rights, and/or vindictiveness in the case of the latter. I think that different explanations may be operative in different cases of natural justice. Sometimes natural virtues related to justice are emotion driven, e.g., naturally generous people often give to others because they *feel sorry* for them. And some of those who naturally shun physically harming others do so out of squeamishness; they have no stomach for violence or gore. Sometimes the naturally just seem to be such due to the lack of strong emotions which would make acting justly difficult; they are naturally dispassionate and thus tend to be more objective in their judgments. In other cases, the naturally just seem to be such due to natural virtues on the side of the cognitive faculties, namely, on the part of the internal senses necessarily involved in moral choice (insofar as the latter necessarily bears on particulars). Aquinas associates the virtue of sympathetic judgment (*gnomen*) with fairness[66], and goes on to say of it and other like habits that:

> because they concern singulars, it is necessary they in some way concern the sensitive powers which operate through

[65] *De Virtutibus in Communi* 4 ad 4.

[66] See *NE* nos. 1243-44.

> bodily organs. And therefore these habits seem to be natural: not that they are entirely from nature, but from a certain natural disposition of the body, certain individuals readily acquire those habits, so that with a little experience these habits are completed in them…and a sign that they are in certain individuals according to nature is that we think that they follow the ages of man, according to which his bodily nature is changed. For there is some age, namely, old age, which has understanding and sympathetic judgment (*gnomen*) on account of the quieting of bodily and animal changes, as if nature was their cause[67].

Given the connection between *gnomen* and fairness, those who possess a natural disposition for *gnomen* are likely to also be naturally fair.

The question of the causes of natural justice merits more extensive treatment than I have given it here. One final observation: the naturally just will not be fixed in an extreme in the same manner as the naturally temperate and brave to the extent that the mean of justice has an extrinsic measure rather than being relative to the individual, as is the case of temperance and courage.

How to Counteract Natural Virtue's Tendency to Foster Natural Vice

Let us now turn to considering how we can counteract natural virtues troublesome tendencies. From considerations we made earlier we can see that when it comes to controlling the natural vices of one's natural virtues four approaches can be adopted: 1) reason can apply general moral principles in order to draw a specific conclusion that will impact upon emotion via the cogitative power; 2) reason can direct the imagination to represent the object of choice in a way that will move the unruly sense appetite in the opposite direction; 3) reason can direct itself to thoughts other than those related to what is provoking the emotion;

[67] *NE* nos. 1251-52.

4) the will to some extent can diminish an untoward emotion by choosing to override it in a forceful manner. Again, as we saw earlier, Aquinas never explicitly suggests that individuals do things in view of adjusting physiological imbalances underlying their natural vices.

It is possible that certain individuals suffer from pathologies that render them incapable of feeling, much less eliciting, a given emotion. Even if this is not their fault, and they act in accord with right judgment, still, they would be unable to attain the fullness of moral perfection that people ordinarily can attain through repeated choices. As Aquinas explains:

> Since the good of man consists in reason as in its root, that good will be so much more perfect to the extent it can be turned to more things which are fitting for man. Whence, no one doubts that it pertains to the perfection of the moral good that the acts of the exterior members are directed by the rule of reason. Whence, since the sense appetite is able to obey reason…it pertains to the perfection of the human or moral good that the passions themselves of the soul be ruled by reason.
>
> Just as it is better that man both want the good and perform the external action, so too it pertains to the perfection of the moral good that a man is moved to the good not only according to the will, but also according to the sense appetite[68].

A person might be unable to feel pity due to an accident or operation that affected his brain. This person could still judge the misery of given individuals to be a bad thing and could choose to help them[69]. However, to the extent he cannot also feel an appropriate amount of pity, there is an imperfection in his morally good choice. It is possible that a person

[68] *ST* I-II 24.3.

[69] See *ST* II-II 30.3, "Whether Mercy is a Virtue."

have an inborn defect of this sort. For the most part, though, personality type, strong as it may be, does not prevent one from being able to elicit suitable emotion.

How to Counteract Natural Virtue's Tendency to Drive One to Performing Bad Acts

The general remedy for the moral failures provoked by natural virtue due to its blindness to circumstance is considerably easier. Nature has given to one person what another is only able to acquire through diligent application, namely, a tendency towards an emotion that in the greater number of cases is in accord with the mean determined by reason. What this person chiefly has to do is get this tendency to obey reason, instead of moving unchecked. This means that now again he has to make an effort to restrain his natural impulse. Thus, while one person after a protracted battle gets himself to the point that he desires to eat an appropriate amount, at the appropriate time (and so forth), a person with a high metabolism does so without any great effort. While one person after diligent practice finally manages to control his fears of speaking in public, a person who is outgoing by temperament has little or no problem doing so, but needs rather to check on occasion his tendency to be glib. If the naturally virtuous act with the deliberate understanding that what they are doing is appropriate, with repetition they will come to possess moral virtue, and it sure will have been a lot easier for them to come by it, than it would have been for those of sensual or timid temperament. Again, what is crucial for the development of true virtue from natural virtue is that the individual exercises discernment and avoids simply going with the flow of natural feeling. In the words of Aquinas:

> For if someone has a strong inclination to the work of some moral virtue and does not exercise discretion in the work of that virtue, grave harm will occur, either to his own body, as in those who are inclined to abstinence without discretion, or with respect to exterior things, if he is in-

> clined to liberality; and similarly in the case of the other virtues. But if an inclination of this sort accepts understanding when operating so that, namely, it operates with discretion, then it will differ greatly according to the excellence of its goodness. And the habit, which will be like the operation performed with discretion, will be properly and perfectly virtue, i.e., moral virtue[70].

Temperament's Impact upon Living a Moral Life

Temperament or the physical make-up from which natural virtue and vice spring thus does not determine one's moral destiny. At the same time, Aquinas recognizes that we cannot change our temperament insofar as it is rooted in our physical make-up, and thus that the inclinations naturally proceeding from it, among which are counted natural virtues as well as natural vices, remain an obstacle to the acquisition and exercise of moral virtue, albeit one that can be surmounted:[71]

> Every act of virtue, however, using a bodily organ, depends not only on the power of soul, but also on the disposition of the bodily organ, as sight on the power of vision and on

[70] *NE* no. 1279. See also *NE* no. 575: "Among all passions, the courage that is due to anger (furor) seems to be more like in nature to true courage, such that if it receives choice in advance and works for the sake of a fitting end, it will be true courage. And he [Aristotle] expressly says 'receiving in advance' because in true courage anger ought to follow choice not precede it."

[71] It is true that Aquinas is not optimistic as to whether most people will overcome their natural vices: "the heavenly bodies are not able to change the will either of one man or of the multitude, but they can change their very bodies. The will is inclined in some manner from the body itself, granted not in a necessary manner because the will can resist it, just as a person choleric due to natural make-up is inclined to anger, but nevertheless can resist this inclination through free will. With the exception of the wise, who are few in comparison to the foolish, people do not resist bodily inclinations…" (*DV* 22.9, ad 2). See also, *ST* I-II 9.5, ad 3.

> the quality of the eye, through which it is aided or impeded. Whence also the act of the sense appetite depends not only on the appetitive power, but also on the disposition of the body. That which is on the side of the power of the soul follows apprehension. The apprehension of imagination, however, since it is particular, is ruled by the apprehension of reason, which is universal, as particular active power by universal active power. And therefore the act of the sense appetite to this extent is subject to reason. However, the quality and disposition of the body is not subject to the command of reason. And therefore total subjection of the motion of the sense appetite to the command of reason to that extent is impeded[72].

Again this is not to the point that we cannot acquire moral virtue. But Aquinas is realistic as to how far human virtue can go. [73] He does not think that the sense appetite can ever be made perfectly subject to reason, not even in the virtuous: "passions inclining one towards evil are not totally destroyed neither through acquired virtue nor through infused

[72] *ST* I-II 17.7.

[73] Part of the reason for the rebellion of the lower appetites in some cases is rooted in inclinations that stem from inborn physical dispositions, but part arises simply from the nature of these appetites which automatically respond to sensed or imagined good (or difficult good) even when this is not the good according to reason (see *De Virtutibus in Communi* 4, ad 8). One might think that the perfect subjection of the sense appetite to the will was natural to man, and the loss of this was due to original sin. Aquinas maintains, however, that just as death is natural, so too conflict between the appetites is natural: "For that man in the original state was so constituted that reason completely contained the lower powers, and the soul the body, was not from the virtue of natural principles, but from the virtue of original justice superadded through divine liberality. When this justice was removed due to sin, man returned to the state suited to him in virtue of his natural principles.... Just as therefore man naturally dies, nor can be led to immortality except by way of miracle; so too the concupiscible naturally tends towards what is pleasurable, and the irascible to what is difficult, outside of the order of reason" (*DV* 25.7).

virtue, unless perhaps by a miracle."[74] Through habituation such inclinations can be made less vehement, but they cannot be entirely eradicated.[75]

Conclusion

We have seen in this paper how Aquinas's teachings on the way in which natural virtue and vice involve a determination to one allows him to articulate positions both on the dangers posed by natural virtue and on how to overcome them, as well as how to control natural vice.

To the extent that matter predominates in a thing, to that extent the thing is limited as to what it can do. To the extent that form predominates in a thing, to that extent it is less determined and more determining of what it does. Among all the beings on earth, human beings, in virtue of their immaterial souls, are least determined to one, and indeed have faculties which are not determined to one: the will by nature is determined to wanting happiness, but is not determined to choosing any means in view of obtaining happiness. Though the rational faculties have no organ, the rational soul is naturally the form of a body, and as such its full power is not realized in every part of the body, but rather that power is realized as accords with the disposition of the part. In human beings the vegetative powers are so much a function of the body that the rational soul

[74] *De Virtutibus in Communi* 10, ad 14. See also *DV* 25.7, ad 4: "the temperate person, according to the Philosopher, does not totally lack movements of concupiscence, but lacks vehement ones, of the sort that can be present in the continent person."

[75] See *De Virtutibus in Communi* 1.4, ad 7: "[T]he entire rebellion of the irascible and concupiscible cannot be destroyed through virtue; since from their very nature the irascible and concupiscible oppose reason in regard to that which is good according to sense; granted this can happen through divine power, which is able to even change natures. Nevertheless, that rebellion is diminished through virtue, to the extent that the said powers become accustomed to be subject to reason; whence it is from something extrinsic that they have what pertains to virtue, namely, from the dominion of reason over them; of themselves, however, they retain something of their proper motions, which are sometimes contrary to reason." See also *NE* no. 239 and *De Virtutibus Cardinalibus* 1, ad 6.

has no direct control over them. The sensitive powers lie between reason and the vegetative powers as to their physicality, and their motions are affected both by reason and by the vegetative powers.

Considering the sensitive power from the side of the vegetative ones we see that the vegetative powers are responsible for one's bodily make-up (genetic material from one's parents is presupposed). Since the rational powers lack direct control over the vegetative powers, they consequently lack direct control over one's actual physical make-up, and also over the inclinations to emotion which may follow upon one's make-up. Herein lays the explanation for the dangers posed by natural virtue and the difficulty involved in controlling natural vice. Some individuals have natural inclinations that are in the line of true virtue. However, since these inclinations are determined to one by one's physical constitution, they lack the flexibility to circumstance requisite for true virtue, and they also often bring with them vices, something which comes apparent in situations where the opposite movement of appetite is needed (e.g., those naturally patient with others' failings often have trouble setting high goals for themselves). Indeed, as we have seen, in some cases one is ultimately better off not possessing certain natural virtues because of the gravity of the natural vices associated with them. Rendering natural virtue even more dangerous is how readily it can be mistaken for genuine virtue, for it resembles true virtue both in the acts it generally inclines one towards, and in the pleasure that accompanies these acts.

Considering the sensitive powers insofar as they are affected by reason, Aquinas maintains that fostering the development of true virtue from natural virtue, as well as controlling one's natural vices, are not hopeless undertakings. Reason, while unable to change temperament, is able to influence the sense appetite via both its ability to divert itself to other thoughts and to direct the cogitative power and the imagination; and the will is able to strenuously resist disordered emotion repeatedly and by this means to some extent to tame it. The rational faculties are thus able to habituate the sense appetites so that they become increasingly responsive to reason, and cease to be stuck in the rut of moving only in keeping with their natural disposition. Reason can and must ex-

ercise discernment and control if it is to overcome the blind tendencies to both good and bad that a person possesses due to his physical make-up, and ultimately acquire true virtue. Aquinas then does not endorse the pessimistic view that biology is moral destiny, though at the same time he realistically notes that even the virtuous will be impeded at times by their temperament--just as even a well-trained dog is liable to sometimes bolt after a squirrel.[76]

[76]I wish to thank S. Jensen, W. Murray, and an anonymous reviewer for their helpful comments.