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Virtue and the Happiness of Persons

What is happiness and how do we get it? This is arguably the most perennial and universal question that human beings have asked (and will continue to ask). The reasons for this are both profound and self-evident. First and foremost, everyone, regardless of ethnicity, religion, geo-political or socio-economic context wants to be happy. The profundity of this is on clear display since no one could sincerely object to the statement ‘I want to be happy’; it is truly self-evident, expressing a first principle (and last end) of human action.

The self-evidence quickly subsides, however, when the question turns to defining precisely the *end* and to determining the *means* by which we attain that end. The argument of this essay is essentially twofold: (1) that the ultimate happiness of human persons is found in the contemplation of and union with pure act, insofar as each person has the capacity to receive it, and (2) that the principle means of attaining and increasing that capacity is virtue. Unfortunately, this traditional understanding, taken from both the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions, has largely been lost, even within the Catholic Church, which historically has been the preeminent aegis of both of these traditions in the West¹.

1. Defining and Expounding Our Terms

The principal terms requiring definition and exposition in this essay are: essence, existence, person, virtue, virtual quantity, and happiness². Due to the

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¹ Until I entered the monastery and enrolled in the M.A. program at Holy Apostles Seminary and College, I cannot think of one sermon at the many parishes I attended or any class in high school or college where any of the four cardinal virtues were spoken of at any length worth mentioning.

² The order of this list is not accidental. The order is both metaphysical and pedagogical: the terms start at what is metaphysically more fundamental to that which is subsequent, and the prior terms logically establish (are found explicitly or implicitly in the definition of) the latter.

limited scope of this essay, only those aspects of these terms relevant to the thesis will be emphasized.

A. Essence and Existence

Among the many philosophical contributions St. Thomas Aquinas offers, arguably the most important is what has come to be called the real distinction between essence and existence³. The doctrine of the real distinction is that we can consider *what* something is (essence) without necessarily considering *whether* something is (real existence). So, for example, I can consider what a dragon is (i.e., large, scaly, winged reptile that breathes fire) without positing that such a creature exists in reality (as opposed to simply cognitively). The importance of these two concepts will be made clearest below when we integrate Fr. Erich Przywara's philosophical contributions.

B. Person

St. Thomas does not think it would suffice to explain what it means to be a person from the vantage point of philosophy alone. Instead, he insists that a deep explanation of the person requires a theological perspective. Accordingly, he examines what it means to be a person by contemplating the Trinity of Divine Persons. Following Boethius, St. Thomas argues that the definition of person is "rationalis naturae individua substantia" (an individual substance of a rational nature)⁴. For our purposes, the 'rational nature' part of this definition should be expounded further. While Aquinas is taking up the question of personhood in the context of the Trinity, this definition also applies to the human person. The fact that a human person has a rational nature means, among other things, that it is ordered teleologically toward an end which corresponds to reason/truth.

But Aquinas also goes further with the notion of person, which he says "significat id quod est perfectissimum in tota natura" (signifies that which is most perfect in all nature) and that "hoc nomen persona relationem significat" (this word person signifies relation)⁵. Thus, the consideration of personhood is not tangential to considering the happiness of men. On the contrary, if personhood is truly that which is most perfect, then consideration of the human *qua* person is fundamental for human happiness. This regard for personhood contrasts with those in the perennial tradition who are content to understand the human condition merely in terms of human nature/essence. Further, since persons only exist in relation to other persons, this necessarily means that happiness is also intrinsically relational.

C. Virtue

Aquinas largely follows St. Augustine's definition of virtue: "virtus est bona qualitas mentis, qua recte vivitur, qua nullus male utitur, quam Deus in

³ This subsection is a summary of St. Thomas's argument found in *De Ente et Essentia*.

⁴ STh I, q. 29, a. 1.

⁵ STh I, q. 29, a. 2-3.

nobis sine nobis operator” (virtue is a good quality of mind, by which he lives rightly, which no one makes bad use, which God does in us without us)⁶. The only correction that Aquinas would make is to exchange *qualitas* (quality) with *habitus* (habit)⁷. Those unfamiliar with St. Thomas will probably be unsure of what to make of the last part of the definition (“which God does in us without us”). This theological addendum to an otherwise philosophical definition is included due to the fact that, for Aquinas, virtue, properly speaking, applies chiefly to what he calls ‘infused’ virtues, as opposed to merely ‘acquired’ virtues⁸. The distinction rests principally on the efficient cause of the virtue in question: infused virtues are caused directly from God while acquired virtues are caused, proximately, by human effort. They can also be distinguished by their formal cause: divine charity (itself an infused theological virtue) is the form of all the infused virtues while prudence (itself an acquired cardinal virtue) is the form of all the acquired virtues. Thus, the acquired virtues are attained through acting according to reason, while the infused are attained (or, better, merited for increase) by acting according to divine charity, which is known through faith (infused knowledge of divine revelation). What is the reason for the infused virtues? Simply, one cannot attain the supernatural end (*beatitudo*) through natural virtues alone⁹. One needs infused, supernatural versions of each of the virtues which correspond to the supernatural end¹⁰.

Another important definition of virtue is found in Aquinas’s *Quaestiones Disputatae de Virtutibus*:

“Virtue, according to its name, points to the perfection of a power. Hence, the Philosopher said in *On the heavens* 1 that virtue is the utmost reach of the power of the thing. But because potency is said with reference to act, a potency is fulfilled when it has its complete activity. And because activity is the end of the agent, since any thing is for the sake of its own activity as for its proximate end, as the Philosopher says in *On the heavens* 1, a thing is good insofar as it has a complete ordering to its end. Hence, virtue makes the one having it good and makes his work good, as is said in *Ethics* 2, and thus it is evident that it is the disposition of the perfected for the best, as is said in *Metaphysics* 7”¹¹.

In this definition, St. Thomas makes clear that every virtue must have a home. That is, virtues do not vaguely float around in the soul, rather each

⁶ STh I-II, q. 55, a. 4.

⁷ STh I-II, q. 55, a. 4, resp.

⁸ See Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Virtutibus*, q. 1, a. 10, trans. R. McNerny, <https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/QDdeVirtutibus.htm> (access: 30.11.2019), for the most thorough treatment of this distinction.

⁹ The acquired (natural) virtues can only, by themselves, be ordered toward a natural end (natural happiness).

¹⁰ See STh I-II, q. 62-63, but chiefly q. 63, a. 3.

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Virtutibus*, q. 1, a. 1, resp.

virtue is attached to a particular power or faculty of the soul¹². As such, virtues perfect various aspects of a human person by reducing the potency of a particular faculty to act (a potency is fulfilled when it has its complete activity). As will be seen below, actualizing the various faculties of a person is a key element in attaining happiness.

D. Virtual Quantity

The notion of virtual quantity or quantity of virtue (*quantitas virtualis* can be translated into English both ways) is an important concept of Aquinas which has been more or less neglected, probably due to its handful of occurrences in the *Summa Theologiae*. His most thorough treatment is found in his reply to an objection concerning the equality of the Divine Persons:

“Quantity is twofold. There is quantity of *bulk* or dimensive quantity, which is to be found only in corporeal things, and has, therefore, no place in God. There is also quantity of *virtue*, which is measured according to the perfection of some nature or form: to this sort of quantity we allude when we speak of something as being more, or less, hot; forasmuch as it is more, or less, perfect in heat. Now this virtual quantity is measured first by its source – that is, by the perfection of that form or nature: such is the greatness of spiritual things, just as we speak of great heat on account of its intensity and perfection... The second effect is operation, for every agent acts through its form. Consequently virtual quantity is measured both in regard to being and in regard to action: in regard to being, forasmuch as things of a more perfect nature are of longer duration; and in regard to action, forasmuch as things of a more perfect nature are more powerful to act”¹³.

Thus, virtual quantity is essentially a measure of *qualitative* features of a substance. The latter part of Aquinas’s exposition is particularly pertinent to this essay, namely that virtual quantity measures perfection of natures and the power of acts. Virtual quantity is a doctrine primarily concerned with the intensity of *esse*; “Aquinas indeed himself exploits the idea of virtual intensity to convey the inward nature of things and the varying degrees of their perfection, especially that of being”¹⁴. In our context, virtual quantity will be used to measure the perfection/happiness of persons.

E. Happiness

St. Thomas deals with the nature of happiness (and unhappiness) at length, even just in the *Summa Theologiae*¹⁵. Due to the scope of this essay, we will have to cut to the chase: man’s ultimate happiness consists in *cognoscendo*,

¹² See in particular Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Virtutibus*, q. 1, a. 3-7.

¹³ STh I, q. 42, a. 1, ad 1, (aquinas.cc translation).

¹⁴ F. O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 156-157.

¹⁵ See principally STh I-II, q. 1-5, but it could easily be argued that the whole of the *prima secundae* and *secunda secundae* take up the question of human (un)happiness.

et amando Deum (knowing and loving God)¹⁶. This is further specified by Aquinas as the “vision of the divine essence”¹⁷. That is, our ultimate happiness is found in a relational act (vision and loving-union) with Pure Act (God), or, to put it another way, our ultimate happiness is found in the full actualization of our potency as persons. This beatific vision is not automatically attained, however, since one must be free of all moral impurities and disorders, be perfected in love in order to be admitted, and be given the grace to super-actualize our faculties (through the infused virtues) in order to see God¹⁸. In this life, however, we can only attain to a certain level of actuality, and thus only a certain level of happiness.

2. Fr. Erich Przywara’s Insights

Fr. Erich Przywara SJ (1889-1972) was a Polish theologian and philosopher who taught primarily in Germany. He finds the most fundamental principle of explaining the reality of things in terms of an analogical, participatory relationship of being (the *analogia entis*), which finds its principle in God’s act of creation¹⁹. According to Przywara, there is a fundamental metaphysical problem which concerns all of creation: *Sosein in-über Dasein* (essence is in-and-beyond existence)²⁰.

What does ‘essence in-and-beyond existence’ mean? It means that literally every created thing on this side of eternity is never fully itself. Metaphysically speaking, the essence (what a thing is) is never, at any given moment, fully in act, fully existent. Thus, the quiddity of a thing can be truly said to be found in a given thing as it currently exists, *but not in its fullness*. The quiddity always transcends the way an observable thing manifests it. Thus, every created essence is *in-über* existence.

3. Bringing the Concepts Together

The argument of this essay is that ultimate happiness is found in contemplation of and union with pure act, insofar as each person has the capacity to receive it, and the principal means of attaining and increasing that capacity is

¹⁶ STh I-II, q. 1, a. 8, resp. This, of course, is man’s *supernatural* end, supernatural happiness. Man’s natural end, natural happiness, will not be considered in this essay due to space constraints, but suffice it to say that man’s natural end is attained through the perfecting of the natural virtues (principally temperance, prudence, justice, and fortitude) which allows him to stabilize his soul enough to contemplate the highest truth for prolonged periods (see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, 7-8 and Aquinas’s commentary on it for further details).

¹⁷ STh I-II, q. 3, a. 8, resp.

¹⁸ See Revelation 21:27, Ephesians 5:5, Matthew 5:48, et al.

¹⁹ This also happens to be the title of his most significant work, only recently translated into English, E. Przywara, *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, trans. J. R. Betz, D. B. Hart (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

virtue. Virtue, as defined above, however, is not something which we are born with²¹. Since this is the case, then the default position of a human person is one of *unhappiness* or (more positively considered) as one who is potentially happy. The metaphysical cause for this unhappiness, following Przywara, is that our essence, our human nature, is not fully actualized, *and we know it*. This realization, of course, is the first (and necessary) step to attaining happiness, for, as common sense dictates, the first step to overcoming a problem is first admitting that the problem exists.

When considering the movement from potential happiness to actualized happiness, it quickly becomes apparent that general platitudes such as ‘be better’ or ‘seek fulfillment’ are grossly insufficient for moving from A to B; human life is much too complicated for platitudes. Instead, the vast and robust doctrine of the virtues expounded by St. Thomas is not only appealing but necessary. From a common-sense perspective, this is so because the doctrine of the virtues allows one to take the truly complex, multi-faceted problem of happiness and break it up into manageable pieces. The rest of this section will expound upon the acquired and infused cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice. In order to make this intelligible according to the nature of the *telos*, namely union with God, a brief excursus on the theological virtue of charity is necessary.

A. Excursus on Charity

Although this is primarily a philosophical paper, the fact that human happiness ultimately finds its fulfillment in union with God means that some digression into theology is necessary. As briefly noted above, Aquinas argues that charity is the form of the infused virtues, but elsewhere he goes much further as to argue that “*caritas est forma virtutum, motor et radix*” (charity is the form, mover, and root of the virtues)²². What does he mean when he claims that charity is the *form* of the virtues? St. Thomas explains:

²¹ See Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Virtutibus*, q. 1, a. 8.

²² *Ibid.*, q. 2, a. 3, resp. It should be noted that this does not contradict what was said above when we claimed that prudence is the form of the natural virtues. Prudence is indeed the form of the *natural* virtues while charity is the form of the infused virtues (including infused prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude). This is so because the natural acquired virtues *qua* natural can never immediately order actions to the supernatural end which charity commands. As Aquinas argues elsewhere: Now an act of virtue is given form in three ways. This is done first of all in so far as the due conditions for the substance of the act are placed, setting limits to the act and establishing it in the mean of virtue. The act of virtue has this from prudence; for the mean of virtue is determined by a correct norm, as is said in the Ethics. In this sense prudence is called the form of all the moral virtues. But the act of virtue thus established in the mean is, as it were, material in regard to the ordination to the last end. This order is conferred upon the act of virtue by the command of charity. In this sense charity is said to be the form of all the other virtues (*De Veritate*, q. 27, a. 5, ad 5).

“In all voluntary acts, the end’s contribution is formal, for the following reason. Each act receives its form and species in keeping with the agent’s form, as heating does from heat. Now, the will’s form is its object, which is what is good and an end, just as the intellect’s form is what is intelligible. Therefore, the end’s contribution must be formal in the will’s activity”²³.

The formal cause of a thing is *what (quid est)* the thing is. In the context of actions, it is fundamentally what the act is. St. Thomas gives an example where *what* the act is, is not necessarily obvious. He says, “Someone who steals in order to fornicate is materially [i.e., the material cause] a thief, but is formally [i.e., the formal cause] an intemperate”²⁴. Appearances can be deceiving. This is true even with manifestly good acts, such as almsgiving. If one gives alms to the poor but does it for the sake of vainglory rather than charity, it is actually a formally *evil* act, even though materially generous.

In the context of the virtues *qua* virtues (that is, as habits), charity gives them their forms by ordering them toward the supernatural end of God, who is love itself. Charity, which finds its ‘seat’ in the will, is of peculiar importance in attaining the end of union with God because love (an act of charity) is the only way that we can actually attain God in this life. This is so for multiple reasons. First, as a virtue, the theological virtue of charity has *as its object* God himself, while the moral virtues (even the infused ones) have for their object “the supernatural means proportioned to our last end”²⁵. Second, even though the intellect is, absolutely considered, ‘nobler’ than the will, and will surpass the will in importance in the beatific vision, in this life, relatively considered, the love of God is better than the knowledge of God (*melior est amor Dei quam cognitio*)²⁶. This is so because “when we know God, we draw Him in a way to ourselves, and in order to represent Him to ourselves, *we impose on Him the bounds of our limited ideas*; whereas when we love Him, it is we who are drawn to Him, lifted up to Him, such as He is in Himself”²⁷. And third, “*cognitio Dei, quia est mediata, dicitur aenigmatica, et evacuatur in patria, ut patet I ad Cor. XIII. Sed caritas non evacuatur, ut dicitur I ad Cor. XIII. Ergo caritas viae immediate Deo adhaeret*” (Knowledge of God, which is mediated, is said to be enigmatic, and will be emptied [i.e., pass away] in the native land [heaven], as stated in 1 Corinthians 13. But charity will not be emptied [i.e. pass away], as is said in 1 Corinthians 13. Therefore, charity of the way immediately adheres to God)²⁸.

²³ Ibid., q. 2, a. 3, resp.

²⁴ Ibid., q. 2, a. 3, resp.

²⁵ R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life: Prelude of Eternal Life*, vol. 1, trans. M. T. Doyle (St. Louis, MO.: B. Herder Book Co., 1951), 52.

²⁶ STh I, q. 82, a. 3, resp.

²⁷ R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, 157, emphasis added.

²⁸ STh II-II, q. 27, a. 4, s.c.

With the preeminence of charity established, we can now move on to the cardinal virtues.

B. The Four Cardinal Virtues: Acquired

As mentioned above, Aquinas, following a venerable tradition going at least back to Aristotle, teaches that every virtue is attached to a power or faculty in the human person. There are four major ‘parts’²⁹ of the soul which can be distinguished: the intellect, the will, the concupiscible appetite, and the irascible appetite³⁰. The four cardinal virtues correspond with these four aspects of the person: prudence orders the intellect, justice orders the will, temperance orders the concupiscible appetite, and fortitude orders the irascible appetite³¹.

Prudence orders the intellect by habituating our minds to “transform knowledge of reality into realization of the good”³². That is, prudence ensures that “the objective cognition of reality shall determine action; that the truth of real things shall be determinative”³³. Here it becomes clear why prudence informs (establishes the form) of the natural virtues: without a sound understanding of objective reality (science/philosophy) and the ability to correlate this truth with goodness (right action, determined through prudence), then no virtuous act can be made. Thus, Aquinas can boldly state that “if there were temperance in the sensual appetite and there were not prudence in the reason, then the temperance would not be a virtue”³⁴. That is, without prudence, virtue cannot exist³⁵.

Justice orders the will by “adapting [the will] in the right way to the others we must interact with and establish a balanced relationship with them”³⁶. That is, it forms our wills to consistently seek the good, not only for ourselves, but also in relation to others, giving to each their due. This good, of course, is first apprehended by the rational power of man as that which is in conformity with reality.

Temperance orders the concupiscible appetite by moderating the legitimate desires of man (principally the created goods of food, drink, and sex) so that

²⁹ The soul is metaphysically simple, but certain parts can be virtually distinguished.

³⁰ St. Thomas deals with these for major areas of anthropology in many of his works, but a good introduction is STh I, q. 77-82.

³¹ See in particular Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Virtutibus*, q. 1, a. 3-7.

³² J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 22.

³³ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁴ STh II-II, q. 4, a. 5, resp.

³⁵ This preeminence of prudence is not arbitrary or insignificant. As Pieper forcefully argues: “The fact is that nothing less than the whole ordered structure of the Occidental Christian view of man rests upon the pre-eminence of prudence over the other virtues. The structural framework of Occidental Christian metaphysics as a whole stands revealed, perhaps more plainly than in any other single ethical dictum, in the proposition that prudence is the foremost of the virtues. That structure is built thus: that Being precedes Truth, and that Truth precedes the Good” (*The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 3-4).

³⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Virtutibus*, q. 5, a. 1, resp.

man can maintain focus on higher, more intellectual, goods. In its acquired form, it does not repudiate the real goodness in created things but seeks their ‘rational mean’ by which the whole human person can function at the highest level.

Fortitude orders the irascible appetite by habituating the passions of the irascible appetite (most notably hope, anger, and courage) to work in favor of achieving difficult and worthy ends, principally the attainment of virtue and the eradication of vice in the soul. The notion of a ‘worthy end’ is essential to fortitude as a virtue because fortitude is only praiseworthy if it aligns with justice. That is, if one struggles bravely for something which is not actually good, then he is a fool, lacking sense and virtue.

C. The Four Cardinal Virtues: Infused

As noted previously, there are, broadly considered, two forms of each cardinal virtue: acquired and infused. The relationship between the acquired (or natural) virtues and their infused varieties is not as clear as it is sometimes made out to be³⁷. St. Thomas himself comments substantively but only briefly on the infused cardinal virtues:

“But since it behooves a man to do his utmost to strive onward even to Divine things, as even the Philosopher declares in *Ethic.* 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. 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 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. Besides these there are the virtues of those who have already attained to the Divine similitude: these are called the *perfect virtues*. Thus prudence sees naught else but the things of God; temperance knows

³⁷ Josef Pieper goes on a (legitimate) rant of the usual and overly-simplistic “grace builds on and perfects nature”: “Very often the proposition about nature presupposed and perfected by grace is cited as a self-evident ‘explanation.’ But the fact is that this expresses an almost impenetrable mystery. Moreover, the dictum primarily concerns the domain of generalities and essences, not that of immediate and concrete existence. More exactly, the accord of the natural order with the new life of friendship with God must not be construed to be immediately ‘given’ or realizable in smooth and ‘harmonious’ development. To be sure, we incline to think in terms of such harmonies from long habit. But the writings of the great friends of God make plain, on almost every page, that the actual life of a Christian is ruled by a different kind of structural law; that life on earth, which has ‘not yet’ attained the peace of concord, the concrete combination of the natural and supernatural, is subjected to all sorts of liabilities to contradiction and disharmony” (*The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 36).

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”³⁸.

Without getting into the added complexity of having multiple stages of infused virtues, the question could legitimately be asked, “Don’t the infused virtues make the natural (acquired) virtues irrelevant?” The answer is no. Briefly, the acquired virtues allow for the more consistent and powerful expression of the infused virtues. For example, if one is unable to refrain from eating a third piece of cake (something which would fall under the acquired virtue of temperance), one should not be surprised to find that he is unable to fast from a whole meal for love of God (an act of infused temperance). Likewise, it would be difficult to imagine someone who has the infused fortitude necessary for martyrdom not to have the acquired fortitude to patiently endure a canceled airplane flight.

4. The Personalist Interpretation

In view of the developments of personalism in the past century, Przywara’s insight of essence *in-über* existence can also be developed as persons *in-über* existence. What is the significance of this? According to Przywara, our level of existence, our virtual quantity of *esse*, is constantly in flux, either increasing or decreasing³⁹. In the context of the human person, as argued above, this flux or drama of existence is chiefly that of the drama between virtue and vice, between good and evil, a drama within our souls. If we take Przywara’s ideas without modification, however, what we are left with is the conclusion that attaining ultimate happiness is fully actualizing essence. This is, I argue, inadequate, principally due to the fact that human persons cannot be reduced to an abstract essence, even one as noble as a rational animal made in the image and likeness of God. That is, in heaven, the saints will not be considered, in the final analysis, as fully actualized essences, but rather as fully actualized *persons*. And this is no small change, for, considered as essences, all human beings are the same; considered as persons, all human beings (even identical twins) are utterly unique. This movement from considering essences to contemplating persons allows for a more accurate assessment of reality *as it actually exists* (and will exist). If we put too much emphasis on essences, we simply have no way to account for the fact that, among all the canonized saints (those who have been judged to have attained a heroic level of

³⁸ STh I-II, q. 61, a. 5, resp.

³⁹ This is why some, such as Ferdinand Ulrich, consider creation to be a drama of being; see Ulrich’s *Homo Abyssus* as a notable example.

the virtues, and thus coming closest to full actualization in this life)⁴⁰, there are no two which are alike. For example, explaining how St. Augustine of Hippo and St. Thérèse of Lisieux are both considered great saints (given that their lives, in many ways, couldn't be more existentially different) on the basis of a fully actualized shared essence would be an exercise in futility.

Personalism also helps to reorient the virtue ethics expounded above. Often, virtue ethics is presented in such a way that appears *impersonal*. That is, it is often presented in terms of fulfilling essences/natures/powers. This, of course, is true, but it tends to leave unsaid a key aspect of virtue, namely that all virtue has to do with good habits *between persons*. As defined above, personhood is intrinsically relational, and virtue, as perfections of persons, thus also must be intrinsically relational. Therefore, even a virtue such as temperance, understood in a narrow sense of man's relation with food and drink, has an essential role to play in good/loving relations with others. For example, a virtuous and happy man does not refrain from dessert simply because he wants to avoid indigestion, rather he does it so that there is more for others and so that he can better love others by reducing, even in a small measure, the selfishness that plagues us all.

Conclusion

Happiness is what everyone seeks, yet there appears to be a dearth of it today in the West. The argument of this essay, in part, is that this lack of happiness (or abundance of potency in regard to happiness) is principally due to the fact that most have lost sight of what human persons are and how virtue is a *sine qua non* of personal fulfillment/happiness. This *sine qua non* aspect of virtue finds its foundation in the metaphysical structure of the human person, as perfections of powers and right ordering of appetites, so that the human person can attain his *summum bonum*. Thus, God must be brought back to the fore in philosophy and psychology, for He plays a direct role in attaining the supernatural, unconditioned good of the human person, namely, Himself.

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Summary

The perennial tradition of virtue, grounded in the real natures of human persons, is essential for giving a robust answer to the question: 'What is happiness, and how do we get it?' This essay principally follows the metaphysical, psychological, ethical, and theological principles as expounded by St. Thomas Aquinas, primarily as found in his *Summa Theologiae*. These principles give us a solid foundation in order to build upon the work of more recent figures, espe-

⁴⁰ Under the current canonization process, a candidate needs to have demonstrated heroic levels of virtue in: faith, hope, love, prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude.

cially Fr. Erich Przywara, Fr. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, and Josef Pieper. Their insights, grounded in personalism, produce a genuine and faithful development of a Thomistic understanding of personal happiness as the end of man.

Keywords: Happiness, metaphysics, analogy of being (*analogia entis*), virtue.

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