

# A Good Appetite: A Thomistic Approach to the Study of Eating Disorders and Body Dissatisfaction in American Women

Author: Bethany Kieran Haile

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Boston College  
The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences  
Department of Theology

A GOOD APPETITE:  
A THOMISTIC APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF EATING DISORDERS AND BODY DISSATISFACTION  
IN AMERICAN WOMEN

A Dissertation

By

BETHANY KIERAN HAILE

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## **Abstract**

### ***A Good Appetite: A Thomistic Contribution to the Study of Eating Disorders and Body Dissatisfaction in American Women***

Bethany Kieran Haile

Stephen J. Pope, Director

James Keenan, SJ and Barbara Wolfe, Readers

The aim of this dissertation is to expand a contemporary multidimensional discourse on the nature of eating disorders to encompass also a moral dimension. Eating disorders are complex phenomena which include biomedical, psychological, and sociocultural components. This dissertation brings the psychosocial literature on eating disorders and body dissatisfaction into dialogue with contemporary studies in Thomistic moral theology, and argues that such a multidisciplinary dialogue can illuminate new insights both for the study of eating disorders and for recent efforts to recover Thomistic moral theology in a contemporary context.

Beginning empirically, the dissertation examines recent evidence showing that exposure to “thin-ideal images” in the mass media is positively correlated with an increase in body dissatisfaction and eating disorder symptomatology. Socioculturally, the explanation for this phenomenon is called “thin-ideal internalization,” and basically measures the extent to which individuals “buy into” the validity of images using ultra-thin female models as a paradigm of beauty. Women who have a high level of internalization desire to conform to a thin-ideal, and behave accordingly, even when they are rationally aware of the unrealistic and unhealthy nature of such an ideal. Turning to Thomas Aquinas’ moral theology, the dissertation argues that thin-ideal internalization is a form of connatural knowledge, an affective form of knowing (*per modum inclinationis* or *ex instinctu*) which is at the very basis of Aquinas’ moral theology, both

in explaining the operation of habits and in explaining the role of grace in the moral life through charity and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

This dissertation argues that Aquinas' theory of connatural knowledge provides a relevant and constructive contribution to the study of eating disorders, especially on the relationship between body dissatisfaction and eating disorder symptomatology. Additionally, the incorporation of the psychosocial literature on eating disorders into Thomistic moral theology provide a valuable contribution to Thomistic moral theology in the effort to understand the role of the affections in moral deliberation, the development of habits, and the importance of Christian practices in the moral life.

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“For knowledge of any truth whatsoever, a person needs Divine help” (I-II, Q. 109, art. 1), and I am grateful to God for the natural light of intellect, and for the grace of at least a foretaste of those truths which surpass natural reason.

“The natural order requires that he or she who has received a favor should, by repaying the favor, turn to his or her benefactor according to the mode of each” (II-II, Q. 106, art. 3). I wish to thank all who helped and supported me in the writing of this dissertation. I am grateful to my committee and especially to my director, Dr. Stephen J. Pope, for pushing me to be a better scholar and especially for helping me to always think of Thomism as an exercise in “both/and.” Thank you also to Dr. James F. Keenan, S.J. for making the study of theology a human endeavor, and for bringing passion and compassion to even the most rigorous of tasks. Finally, I am grateful to Dr. Barbara E. Wolfe for aiding me in understanding the psychological and biomedical dimensions of eating disorders, and pushing me to constantly consider the practical implications of my studies. Thank you also to the other faculty members who have been teachers and scholarly exemplars, especially Lisa Cahill, Rev. James Weiss, Kenneth Himes, O.F.M, David Hollenbach, S.J., PHEME Perkins, and Pat Kilcoyne.

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Thomas says in his Treatise on Happiness (I-II, Q. 4, art 8) that “in order that a person may do well, whether in the works of the active life, or in those of the contemplative life, he (or she) needs the fellowship of friends.” I have been blessed with many friends in my pursuit of happiness. My gratitude goes out particularly to Erin Galgay, Autumn Ridenour, Steve Okey, Chris Conway, Monica Jalandoni, Meghan Clarke, Kevin Ahern, Erik Ranstrom, Katie O’Neill, Amanda Osheim, Anna and Dan Scheid, Tom Fraatz (who also helped in the editing process). You have made this crazy journey so much fun!

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Finally, I would like to remember my grandfather, Richard Taylor, my grandmother Sue Howell, and my baby Manelisi Mhlongo. May you all rest in eternal friendship with God.

## Introduction

- I. Generation ED
- II. The Moral Dimension of the Study of Eating Disorders
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- IV. You Are What You See: Body Dissatisfaction as a Form of Connatural Knowledge
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### I. Generation ED

We might consider the generation of women<sup>1</sup> currently in their twenties, thirties, and early forties *Generation ED*—the Generation of Eating Disorders. While earlier generations of women may be relatively unaware of the nature and severity of eating disorders, this generation of women, my generation, has grown up with the phrases *anorexic*, *bulimic*, *binge and purge*, and *thinspiration* as major parts of our vocabulary. Those of us who have not experienced a diagnosable eating disorder (and there are a lot who have—an estimated 10 million women in the US currently have an eating disorder) have struggled with some of the *symptoms* of eating disorders. We diet and even starve ourselves for days at a time, we exercise and buy diet pills that promise quick weight loss, and we obsess over every dimple and wrinkle on our bodies, convinced that we are too fat. We may even try to train ourselves to vomit. A friend once told me that in her middle school, several of the girls would go to the bathroom together after lunch to collectively purge their food. My friend recalled that she tried desperately to join them, but was ultimately unsuccessful because her gag reflexes would not allow her to vomit on

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this dissertation, my focus will be on *women* with eating disorders and body dissatisfaction. This is in no way intended to diminish the growing problem of men who suffer from eating disorders and body dissatisfaction, but it seems as if men and women experience these two phenomena in very different ways. However, the idea of knowledge through connaturality and its relevance for the moral life which I develop in this dissertation is relevant for both men and women.

command like the other girls. “Those girls are lucky,” she told me. “My life would be so much easier if I could just get myself to throw up whenever I felt like I ate too much.”

Unlike earlier generations, Generation ED often talks openly about eating disorders and is relatively well-informed about the nature and severity of the illnesses. Gürze Books, which specializes in information on eating disorders and body image, offers over 350 books on eating disorders and related topics from different publishers.<sup>2</sup> There are numerous organizations dedicated to the study of, prevention of, and treatment of eating disorders including the Academy for Eating Disorders (AED),<sup>3</sup> the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA),<sup>4</sup> and the Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy, and Action (EDC).<sup>5</sup> The EDC works to advance federal recognition of eating disorders as a public health priority and lobbies to increase federal funding for prevention, research, education, and care. The AED hosts an annual international conference on eating disorders and publishes a peer-reviewed scholarly journal on eating disorders, the *International Journal of Eating Disorders* (IJED). In addition to the IJED, there is another scholarly journal focused exclusively on eating disorders, *Eating Disorders: The Journal of Treatment and Prevention*.

A number of eating disorder documentaries complement the scholarship. The 2000 NOVA documentary *Dying to Be Thin*, narrated by Susan Sarandon, investigated the causes and possible treatment options for anorexia and bulimia. The 2006 documentary *Starved* followed five women with varying degrees of disordered eating on

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<sup>2</sup> Gürze Books, <http://www.bulimia.com/>, accessed August 20, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Academy for Eating Disorders, <http://www.aedweb.org/>, accessed August 20, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> National Eating Disorders Association, <http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/>, accessed August 20, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Eating Disorders Coalition (EDC), <http://www.eatingdisorderscoalition.org/>, accessed August 20, 2010.

their path to recovery. The 2006 HBO documentary *Thin* received increased attention after one of the film's stars Polly Williams was found dead as a result of complications with her eating disorder.

Increasingly more young adult novels feature characters with eating disorders such as Steve Levenkron's *The Best Little Girl in the World* (which was later made into a movie),<sup>6</sup> Ivy Ruckman's *The Hunger Scream*,<sup>7</sup> Leslea Newman's *Fat Chance*,<sup>8</sup> and Lucy Franks' *I Am An Artichoke*.<sup>9</sup> We see eating disorders portrayed in popular young adult films like Nicholas Hytner's 2000 hit *Center Stage*, a movie about the life of several young ballet dancers, one of whom is bulimic.

Eating disorders are so prevalent that they have recently become the subjects of comedy. In 2005, FX Network aired a one-season situational comedy called *Starved* which featured four friends, each of whom suffers from a different eating disorder. The show was quite controversial, and the National Eating disorders Association called for a boycott of the show due to concerns that it might glamorize eating disorders.<sup>10</sup> Despite such concerns, eating disorder related comedy has enough widespread acceptance that the popular television show *Glee* regularly jokes about them, as when the head cheerleading

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<sup>6</sup> Steven Levenkron, *The Best Little Girl in the World* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1989); David Moessinger, *The Best Little Girl in the World*, (TV), Directed by Sam O'Steen (USA: Aaron Spellings Productions, 1981).

<sup>7</sup> Ivy Ruckman, *The Hunger Scream* (Walker & Company, 1983).

<sup>8</sup> Leslea Newman, *Fat Chance* (Putnam and Grosset, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Lucy Lucy Frank, *I Am an Artichoke* (Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> National Eating Disorder Association, "National Eating Disorders Association Call New TV Sitcom 'Starved' 'No Laughing Matter,'" Press Release, [http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/p.asp?WebPage\\_ID=833](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/p.asp?WebPage_ID=833), Retrieved June 28, 2008.

coach Sue Sylvester notes that she “hasn’t had a full meal since 1987” and jokes about how her cheerleaders are “leaving vomit baggies in their parents’ closets.”<sup>11</sup>

Eating disorders are frequently the highlight of celebrity news, a phenomenon which began with the death of Karen Carpenter in 1983, who died of the age of 32 from cardiac arrest due to anorexia nervosa. Carpenter weighed only 80 pounds at the time of her death and brought national awareness to the imminent danger of eating disorders.<sup>12</sup> Diana, Princess of Wales spoke publicly in a television interview about her long struggle with bulimia.<sup>13</sup> Singer-dancer Paula Abdul, who is now a spokeswoman for the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA), checked into an eating disorder clinic in 1994 after a long struggle with food obsession and over-exercise.<sup>14</sup> Terri Schiavo, around whom a virulent right-to-die debate centered, entered a persistent vegetative state in 1990 as a result of cardiac arrest due to bulimia nervosa.<sup>15</sup> More recently, Mary-Kate Olsen, who entered a treatment center in 2004 for anorexia nervosa, has become a primary figure in a movement called “thinspiration,” a technique used on pro-anorexia and bulimia websites to inspire young women to embrace an anorexic lifestyle.<sup>16</sup> These and other examples reflect the ambiguous presentation of eating disorders in popular culture.

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<sup>11</sup> The particular episode of GLEE dedicated primarily to eating disorders and body image did receive some criticism in the reviews for the “glib” and “conflicting” way in which it addressed the topic. See James Poniewozik, “Glee Watch: Bringing it Back Home,” *TIME Magazine*, April 28, 2010, <http://tunedin.blogs.time.com/2010/04/28/glee-watch-bringing-it-back-home/>, Retrieved August 20, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Barry Morrow, *The Karen Carpenter Story*, directed by Joseph Sargent (USA: Weintraub Entertainment Group, 1989).

<sup>13</sup> “Panorama Interview with Diana, Princess of Whales,” BBC (November, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> National Eating Disorders Association, <http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/>, accessed August 20, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Robert Bazell, “Eating Disorder at Root of Terri Schiavo Case,” *NBC News*, April 4, 2005, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/ID/7318508/MSNBC>, retrieved August 20, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Anna Bardone-Cone and Kamila Cass, “What does viewing a pro-anorexia website do?” *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 40.6 (2007), 537-548; Siri Agrel, “Thin Police,” *CMAJ* 179.2 (2008), 204.

On the one hand, women of my generation know that these illnesses are dangerous, even lethal. On the other hand, we envy those who are lucky enough to be able to starve themselves or purge.

## **II. The Moral Dimension of the Study of Eating Disorders**

I became especially interested in the study of eating disorders in college when I worked in the resident staff program in the dorms and had firsthand experience addressing the complexities of identifying the signs of an eating disorder and making referrals to the appropriate resources. I was surprised to discover that many of my residents “experimented” with eating disorder behavior. Several of the students caught throwing up were only “trying it out” for the first time (which is likely why they were so easily caught). Despite the fact that they had one of the primary signs of an eating disorder, these girls did not actually have a diagnosable psychopathology. Several girls experimented with self-starvation, only to find that they “didn’t have the willpower to keep it up.” At least one addressed me with concern, asking if I thought she had an eating disorder since she wanted to starve herself, but simply could not. “Is it a problem that I want to be anorexic?” she asked.

As I prepared to enter the doctoral program in theological ethics at Boston College, I started exploring the possibility of focusing my studies on eating disorders as *moral* phenomena in addition to psychological or sociocultural problems. While there was no shortage of scholarly material on eating disorders, the literature was all focused on eating disorders as unwilling psychopathologies with either biomedical or sociocultural

causes and largely not within an individual's control. Of all the studies, only two have focused on eating disorders as having a moral dimension.

Simona Giordano's book *Understanding Eating Disorders: Conceptual and Ethical Issues in the Treatment of Anorexia and Bulimia* purports to be the first full philosophical study of ethical issues in the treatment of eating disorders, but her focus is primarily on clinical ethical dilemmas, not on eating disorders as a whole.<sup>17</sup> Giordano wants to challenge a “strong paternalism” found in clinical settings in which clinicians justify intervention like forced feeding based on the fact that patients with EDs have impaired autonomy. Giordano argues that a mental illness diagnosis is no justification for coercive treatment. She concludes that patients with eating disorders are definitely irrational when it comes to food issues but not mentally incompetent, though she leans towards a “weak paternalism” for ED patients when their life is at stake. While Giordano's book is definitely groundbreaking in the study of the ethical issues surrounding eating disorders, I found her clinical framework quite restrictive. Many of those diagnosed with an eating disorder will never enter a clinic, and moreover, her work did not address the phenomenon I witnessed in my residents who actually *tried* to develop an eating disorder.

Michelle Mary Lelwica's book *Starving for Salvation: The Spiritual Dimension of Eating Problems Among American Girls and Women* was much more closely aligned to my interests.<sup>18</sup> Lelwica's interest in eating disorders goes beyond the clinically diagnosable psychopathologies to examine the range of ways in which disordered

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<sup>17</sup> Simon Giordano, *Understanding Eating Disorders* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Michelle Mary Lelwica, *Starving for Salvation: The Spiritual Dimension of Eating Problems Among American Girls and Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).



attitudes and behaviors towards food manifest themselves. Lelwica argues that the underlying cause behind the preoccupation with food and thinness is a desire for fulfillment, a desire that is ultimately *spiritual*. Lelwica's work is refreshing. She acknowledges that disordered eating exists on a continuum, with the psychopathologies of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa at one extreme, and she also acknowledges the complex dialectic that exists between an individual's willed behavior and the ways in which the beliefs and attitudes underlying that behavior are influenced by society. Lelwica and Giordano both provided me with the groundwork to argue that eating disorders are not completely unwilled, involuntary actions, and thus could in fact be examined from a moral perspective. Lelwica specifically helped me to understand that what was important about eating disorders was not so much the specific behavioral manifestation of the illnesses (caloric restriction, bingeing and purging, etc.) but the *underlying desires and dispositions from which these behaviors emerged*.

Because of my commitment to Thomistic virtue ethics, my primary interest in an ethical study of eating disorders is on the interior life of those with eating disorders and related problems, not the specific behaviors. According to a Thomistic approach to virtue ethics, virtues are *habits*, that is, firm and stable interior dispositions to do the good. Virtues, and their corollary vices, are not acts; rather, they are the interior principles underlying acts. The fundamental insight of a Thomistic approach to ethics is that the disposition of the agent is the primary focus of ethics. Thus it seemed to me that such an approach was especially well-suited to the study of eating disorders.

Before entering the graduate program at Boston College, one of my mentors, Jim Keenan, after learning about my interest in eating disorders, put me into contact with Nick Austin, SJ (to whom this dissertation is dedicated). At the time, Nick was doing his doctoral work on Thomas Aquinas' notion of temperance. Nick was integral in developing my understanding of the virtues, and particularly the virtue of temperance, as well as the relevance of the virtues in the moral life. At first, I thought I would focus on the virtue of temperance, which at first glance, seemed most relevant to the topic of eating disorders since it is the virtue which controls and directs the desire for food. However, the more I studied temperance, the more I realized that the disordered desire for food found in people with eating disorders and related problems was only part of the story. Eating disorders are not always, I realized, primarily about food. Disordered attitudes and behaviors towards food in people with eating disorders and other forms of disordered eating are rooted more fundamentally in a disordered view of one's own body. To really address the moral dimension of eating disorders, I would have to focus on body image.

A major breakthrough in my research occurred while doing research for a paper on the advertising industry and its role in perpetuating body dissatisfaction in American women. While it is common knowledge that the advertising industry uses misleading images to sell its products, I discovered that there is an empirical connection between exposure to certain images, specifically what is referred to as *thin-ideal* images of women, and increases in body dissatisfaction and eating disorder symptomatology. Studies show that body satisfaction and self-esteem are significantly more negative after

viewing images of ultra-thin women than after viewing images of women who are of average or above-average weight.<sup>19</sup> The socio-cultural explanation for this phenomenon is called “thin-ideal internalization,” which measures the extent to which individuals accept the value of a media-promulgated thin-ideal. Researchers have found that thin-ideal internalization is one of the best predictors of eating disorder onset and maintenance.

This means that simply by choosing to look at ultra-thin female models, American women are becoming increasingly unhappy with their own bodies, and consequently, more disposed towards developing disordered attitudes and behaviors towards food and their bodies. This was a significant revelation because it allowed me to shift directions *away from* the morality of the mass media and advertising industry’s use of ultra-thin models and *towards* the women who consume these images.

In eating disorder and body image research, there is a clear consensus that the media plays a major role in the promulgation and acceptance of a thin-ideal of female beauty. If there is ever any implicit or explicit discussion of the ethics of the matter, the emphasis is always placed on the mass media, i.e. the mass media as an unjust social structure which is to blame for the use of unrealistic ultra-thin models in order to persuade women that they need to be very thin in order to be beautiful. While I am critical of the mass media’s use of images, I did not want my approach to eating disorders to be yet another critique of the mass media and advertising industry, nor is it within the

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<sup>19</sup> For two meta-analyses on the subject, see Lisa Groesz, Michael Levine, and Sarah Murnen, “The Effect of Experimental Presentation of Thin Media Images on Body Satisfaction: A Meta-Analytic Review,” *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 31, no. 1 (January 2002): 1-16; Shelly Grabe, Monique Ward, and Hyde Janet, “The Role of the Media in Body Image Concerns Among Women: A Meta-Analysis of Experimental and Correlational Studies,” *Psychological Bulletin* 134, no. 3 (May 2008): 460-477.

scope of this dissertation to offer any explanation as to why the media uses the extreme thinness as a paradigm of beauty. I wanted to know rather *why* the mass media was so influential in changing women's self-perception and attitudes toward food and *what a viable response* might be to the way in which the mass media uses imagery. In other words, in exploring the moral dimension of eating disorders and body dissatisfaction, I wanted to focus primarily on the women themselves, and not on the second-hand influence that various groups and institutions exert upon them.

By turning my focus to the women themselves and the way in which their disordered beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors regarding food and body image develop, I came to understand and appreciate the relevance of Thomas' moral theology in a new way. Looking at his moral theology through the lens of women with disordered eating and body dissatisfaction revealed new points of emphasis in Thomas' system. Specifically, I discovered the critical role of "connatural knowledge" in the moral life, a point that is not often explicitly emphasized in contemporary studies of Aquinas' ethics. Connatural knowledge, the mode of cognition based on the appetitive inclination towards an object of desire, allows us to expand the scope of knowledge beyond the activity of the intellect and appreciate the critical role of the emotions in moral knowledge. The recognition of the importance of the emotions in moral knowledge brings Aquinas' overall moral psychology into greater conformity with the conclusions of much of the research in neuroscience on the relationship between intellect and emotion. Connatural knowledge also bridges Aquinas' moral philosophy and theology by explaining how the human person is united to God as an object of love through the gifts of the Holy Spirit

which provide a type of connatural knowledge of God. In short, by bringing the study of eating disorders to bear on Aquinas' moral theology, I gained new insights into the unity underlying Aquinas' moral theology and its ongoing relevance.

Rather than a dissertation on temperance, therefore, this dissertation can actually be seen as an exercise of prudence, that critical virtue of reasoning well about practical matters. Aquinas' moral theory is distinct because it illustrates how the ability to "reason well" is dependent on the extent to which a person's personality (that is, the complex behavioral, emotional, and mental features of a unique individual), is rightly ordered.

### **III. Methodological Clarifications.**

The goal of this dissertation is two-fold. As a dissertation in moral theology, with an audience of moral theologians, its primary goal is to reveal new insights about the role of connatural knowledge and the emotions in Thomas' moral theology. The study of eating disorders and related issues raises a general problem as to how individuals can so consistently behave in a way they know to be unhealthy and unreasonable, both in their desire to conform to a thin-ideal and in the behaviors in which they engage to reach this goal. As this dissertation will illustrate, many women without a diagnosable psychopathology still experience body dissatisfaction and eating disorder symptoms when they fail to conform to the thin-ideal promulgated in the mass media, *even when rationally they acknowledge that this ideal is not healthy, beautiful, or realistic*. It seems that eating disorders and body dissatisfaction are not a result of deficient or erroneous knowledge, but rather, a matter of erroneous or deficient desires. Morally, we might say that eating disorders and body dissatisfactions are the result of a "bad appetite."

In turning to Aquinas' moral system to address this "bad appetite," we are faced with a number of questions: How precisely do the emotions contribute to moral knowledge? How do one's rational beliefs and values affect one's desires? In what sense can the emotions be said to behave rationally? As this dissertation will illustrate, Aquinas' concept of connatural knowledge provides the foundation for answering these and other such questions about the role of the emotions in the moral life. The connection between exposure to a thin-ideal of beauty, body dissatisfaction, and eating disorder symptomatology provides a vivid illustration of how this knowledge operates in the moral life. The empirical evidence connecting the images which one sees with one's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors confirms a critical Thomistic insight about the importance of connatural knowledge over intellectual knowledge in the moral life. What Thomas knew in the 13<sup>th</sup> century we are only beginning to rediscover in our own time—that in a significant way, *we become what we love*.

However, ethics and moral theology are imminently practical disciplines with audiences both within and outside the academy. One of the great advantages of Thomas' moral theory is that it is particularly well-suited to interdisciplinary dialogue, especially with the psychosocial sciences, as evidenced by my mentor Stephen Pope, who has put Aquinas' theory of the order of love (*ordo caritas*) in dialogue with evolutionary psychology on the question of the evolution of altruism.<sup>20</sup> Pope's point is that Thomas' moral theory has much to gain from the empirical contribution of the psychosocial sciences. That is, just as Thomas critically appropriated Aristotelian biology into his

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<sup>20</sup> Stephen J. Pope, *The Evolution of Altruism and the Ordering of Love* (Georgetown University Press), 1995.

moral system, so too can contemporary Thomists incorporate the psychosocial sciences into their theoretical moral endeavors. Yet, insofar as the subject of inquiry within the psychosocial sciences is also a subject of inquiry within moral science, the possibility exists for the psychosocial sciences to benefit from the moral sciences. The subject of eating disorders provides a perfect case of a psychosocial phenomenon with a clear moral dimension, the study of which can be enhanced by the input from Thomistic moral theology.

I propose in this dissertation that Aquinas' system offers valuable resources for understanding this empirical connection we see between exposure to thin-ideal images, body dissatisfaction, and eating disorder symptomatology. Aquinas' notion of connatural knowledge and the relationship of such knowledge to practical matters like the development of habits, the flourishing of individuals, and the knowledge of God provide a valuable means of interpreting the moral dimension of this empirical evidence, and indeed, can illuminate new insights in the study of eating disorders.

#### **IV. You Become What You Do: Body Dissatisfaction as a Form of Connatural Knowledge**

A basic tenet of Thomistic ethics is that every human act (*actus humanus*) is a moral act (*actus moralis*).<sup>21</sup> Human actions include anything that is done intentionally

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<sup>21</sup> Aquinas distinguishes human acts (*actus humanus*) from acts of a human (*actus hominis*) in that the former are done with reason and will and are thus distinctively human whereas the latter are actions which humans share with other animals who lack reason and will. Because only actions which proceed from reason and will can be described as morally good or evil, only human actions can be considered moral actions. Acts of a human are morally indifferent: every action takes its species from its object; while human action, which is called moral, takes its species from the object, in relation to the principle of human actions, which is the reason. Wherefore if the object of an action includes something in accord with the order of reason, it will be a good action according to its species; for instance, to give alms to a person in want. On the other hand, if it includes something repugnant to the order of reason, it will be an

and freely, no matter how small and seemingly insignificant. As moral actions, every human action is subject to moral appraisal under the aspect of good and evil. Operating within a teleological moral framework, the goodness or badness of any act for Aquinas depends on how conducive that act is towards achieving its due end (*telos*), and on how conducive the end of the action is towards the ultimate end of the human agent, which Aquinas (like Aristotle) takes to be happiness (*eudaimonia*).<sup>22</sup> Good actions are ultimately conducive to human happiness; bad actions are those which ultimately detract from human happiness.

Thomistic ethics provides us with an ethic particularly well-suited for ordinary life, a point which receives emphasis in Jim Keenan's teaching and writing:

... [T]ake an imaginary piece of paper and write down five moral matters. Did you include war, abortion, homosexuality, AIDS, racism? Probably. Probably you wrote down big issues that have great social claims on all of us. But now turn the imaginary paper over and write down five concerns with which you woke up this morning. Did these concerns include repairing a relationship; drinking less; eating less; getting more sleep; doing more work or getting more leisure; talking with your spouse, children, or boss; being less compulsive or obsessive; being less timid; being more assertive; confronting a friend; supporting a friend; being more generous? This side of the paper, I suggest is also a moral matter. Ordinary life is the matter for moral reflection, intention, and action.<sup>23</sup>

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evil act according to its species; for instance, to steal, which is to appropriate what belongs to another. But it may happen that the object of an action does not include something pertaining to the order of reason; for instance, to pick up a straw from the ground, to walk in the fields, and the like: and such actions are indifferent according to their species (I-II, Q. 18, art. 8).

<sup>22</sup> I-II, Q. 1, arts. 1-8. Translations of the *Summa Theologica* (referred to as *Summa* or *ST*) come from Fathers of the English Dominican Province. For direct quotes from the *Summa*, I consulted the Christian Classics edition (1981), reprinted with permission from Benziger Bros., Inc. (1948). The online version of this translation was also consulted at [www.newadvent.org/summa](http://www.newadvent.org/summa).

<sup>23</sup> James Keenan, *Moral Wisdom: Lessons and Texts From the Catholic Tradition*, 2nd ed. (New York: Sheed & Ward, 2010), 142-3.



For Aquinas, everything that we do or choose not to do, everything that we say or choose not say, everything that we eat or choose not to eat, and everything that we see or refuse to see is the subject of ethics.

Related to this is the Thomistic insight that *we become what we do*. Actions are not distinct from our character; rather, our actions form our character. If we cheat on a test, we are becoming cheaters. If we snap at our children for being too loud, we are becoming impatient and rude. If we volunteer to bring the Eucharist to the elderly, we are becoming more compassionate and caring. With Thomistic ethics, we have a sort of “moral maximalism” in which everything that we do or do not do matters. Thus, we need to be vigilant regarding our everyday activities lest we become a person we do not want to become. As Etienne Gilson wrote, “As God creates the world, a human being constructs his life.”<sup>24</sup>

It is clear then why Thomistic ethics would be a suitable approach to the moral dimension of eating disorders and body dissatisfaction, especially in light of my focus on the consumption of thin-ideal images of women in mass media. The empirical studies on exposure to thin ideal images and the correlation with increased levels of body dissatisfaction and eating disorder symptomatology give credence to what Thomas knew almost eight hundred years ago: that we become what we do, or in this case, we become what we choose to see.

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<sup>24</sup> Cited by Stephen Pope, “Overview of the Ethics of Thomas Aquinas,” in Stephen J. Pope (Ed.), *The Ethics of Aquinas* (Georgetown University Press, 2002), 31; Etienne Gilson, *L’Esprit de la philosophie medievale* (Paris: Vrin, 1948), 173. Throughout this dissertation, I will use a feminine, rather than a masculine neuter. However, in direct quotes, I will maintain references to a masculine neuter.

This Thomistic insight that “we are what we do” is grounded in his metaphysics, my understanding of which is heavily indebted to Jacques Maritain. Maritain identified his position as a Thomistic critical realism; he contrasted this with the dominant metaphysical and epistemological positions of his day (idealism, neo-Kantianism, pragmatism) which all held that universal concepts are creations of the mind and are not grounded in reality. In response, Maritain argued that what the mind knows is identical with what exists in reality because the essence of the thing known exists immaterially in the mind: “In the act of knowing, the thing (in the very measure in which it is known) and the mind are not only joined, they are strictly *one*, according to Aristotle’s phrase, the intellect in act is the intelligible in act.”<sup>25</sup> Thus his definition of truth as the “*adaequatio rei et intellectus*.”<sup>26</sup> Maritain writes,

This adequation or conformity has nothing to do with a copy or material transfer. Inasmuch as our knowledge comes originally from the senses, all our words, as we noted a little while ago, are drawn from the order of visible and tangible things. . . It is a question of a certain conformity, quite unique in its class, between the way the mind declares itself on the thing and posits it in existence in its own inner act of judgment, and the way the thing exists. It is a correspondence that amounts to an identity, not in relation to the mode of existing in the thing and in the mind, but in reference to the existing of the thing taken in its pure value as intelligible object.<sup>27</sup>

A large part of Aquinas’ writings, and a large part of Maritain’s own metaphysics of knowledge, is devoted to a particular type of knowledge, speculative knowledge, also called knowledge *per modum cognitionis, per usum rationis, per viam intellectus, scientia discursive*, etc. This type of knowledge, according to Maritain, “attains

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<sup>25</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite or The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. by Gerald Phelan from 4<sup>th</sup> edition (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1959), 87.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-88.

intelligible universes which are immanent in the universe of existence . . . these realms of knowledge are universes of abstract natures (grasped in themselves or in substitutes), universes of laws and of necessary relations.”<sup>28</sup>

However, there is another type of knowledge, the knowledge of the world of existence, which “belongs to the realm of experience and history, of factual observation, of certitudes of perception and memory, as well as of conjecture of well-founded opinion. In short, it belongs to the realm of the work of the intellect as immersed in the activity of the senses . . . it belongs to the realm of art, or prudence and knowledge by connaturality.”<sup>29</sup> This second type of knowledge has its root in the appetite and is referred to as knowledge *per modum inclinationis, per connaturalitatem, per modum naturae, per amorem*, etc. As far as speculative matters are concerned, this second type of knowledge, knowledge by connaturality, is of no use, but it is, as Maritain points out, critical for practical matters like art and ethics.

Connatural knowledge is the result of a certain affinity or attraction to a given object, and indeed, connaturality means “affinity.” Connatural knowledge is experimental knowledge of singulars, not universals as with speculative knowledge, and is integrally related to action.<sup>30</sup> Whereas the object of speculative knowledge exists in the intellect as an abstract universal concept, connatural knowledge is a knowledge based on the transformation of the appetite according to the form of a concrete, singular object.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>30</sup> “When it is a question of the order of practical knowledge, then the mind turns back from the heights of metaphysical knowledge towards the world of existence as such, and through the degrees of moral philosophy, the practical sciences continue it and finally, prudence, reaches down to immediate contact with the singular action to be regulated” (Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, 137).

This is important because according to Aquinas, the will can only be moved by concrete, particular objects, that is, *apprehended* objects.<sup>31</sup> According to Maritain, it is the extramental “things” which are the sources of the emotions that provide the basis for connatural knowing:

It (emotion) becomes for the intellect a determining means or instrumental vehicle through which the things which have impressed this emotion on the soul, and the deeper, invisible things that are contained in them or connected with them, and which have ineffable correspondence or coaptation with the soul thus affected, and which resound in it, are grasped and known obscurely.<sup>32</sup>

Donald Haggerty explains the connection between the knowledge and the thing:

“Through active intelligence . . . the emotion is subsequently transformed into a vehicle for knowledge, but always tied indissolubly to the ‘things’ which have become connatural [through the presence of the emotion.”<sup>33</sup> In connatural knowledge, reason, emotion, and sense experience are connected in a single intuitive apprehension.

Connatural knowledge is in a sense, a more powerful form of knowledge than the intellect’s knowledge of concepts because it unites the knower with the object known:

“Knowledge is perfected by the thing known being united, through its likeness, to the knower. But the effect of love is that the thing itself which is loved is, in a way, united to

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<sup>31</sup> “[I]t must be noted that, since every inclination results from a form, the natural appetite results from a form existing in the nature of things: while the sensitive appetite, as also the intellective or rational appetite, which we call the will, follows from an apprehended form. Therefore, just as the natural appetite tends to good existing in a thing; so the animal or voluntary appetite tends to a good which is apprehended. Consequently, in order that the will tend to anything, it is requisite, not that this be good in very truth, but that it be apprehended as good. Wherefore the Philosopher says (Phys. ii, 3) that ‘the end is a good, or an apparent good’” (I-II, Q. 8, art. 1).

<sup>32</sup> Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, 89.

<sup>33</sup> Donald F. Haggerty, “A Via Maritainia: Nonconceptual Knowledge by Virtuous Inclination,” *The Thomist* 62 (1998), 75-96.

the lover, as stated above. Consequently the union caused by love is closer than that which is caused by knowledge.”<sup>34</sup>

Connatural knowledge is the knowledge of love: “the cause of love must needs be love’s object. Now the proper object of love is the good; because love implies a certain connaturalness or complacency of the lover for the thing beloved, and to everything, that thing is a good, which is akin and proportionate to it.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, we desire those things with which we are connatural, and not only do we desire such things, we are also moved to possess them: “the appetible object gives the appetite, first, a certain adaptation to itself, which consists in complacency in that object; and from this follows movement towards the appetible object.”<sup>36</sup> Love, which is made possible by connatural knowledge, is always accompanied by motion. In rational creatures, this motion towards the desired object becomes part of the person’s nature, a process which is called habituation. The connatural knowledge characteristic of a habit is acquired gradually as a result of repeatedly acting in a given sort of way, such that the very nature of the creature is changed (into what Aquinas calls a “second nature”). The more I act on my inclinations or the more I move to possess those objects with which I experience a certain connaturality, the more permanent and stable and strong these inclinations—these *habits*—become. Good *and* bad objects can become connatural to a person. When the object with which one has habitual connatural knowledge is good, we call that habit a virtue. When the object is bad, we call it a vice. In both, however, the habitual inclination towards an object is the result of connatural knowledge. Haggerty reflects,

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<sup>34</sup> I-II, Q. 28, art. 1, ad. 3.

<sup>35</sup> I-II, Q. 27, art. 1.

<sup>36</sup> I-II, Q. 26, art. 2.

[A]n initial attraction toward a virtuous action depends on some connection between a sense perception and the preconscious life of tendential inclination. The presence of moral virtue residing in the appetites implies this possibility. In a manner akin to the production of a creative emotion, certain sense experiences will inevitably provoke tendential movement within the appetites whenever moral virtue inhabits the appetites . . . That the practical intellect subsequently commands a choice by the exercise of prudence follows the preliminary appetitive attraction provoked through the immediacy of a sense perception. The initial sense perception has triggered a reaction in the appetitive life toward a particular virtuous act.<sup>37</sup>

Connatural knowledge is correlated with teleology and ontology, as Antonio

Moreno points out:

There exists a natural correlation between ontology, teleology, and knowledge. . . . If we know the nature of a being, we can guess the nature of the objects fitting to it; and by knowing the finality of certain actions it is possible to determine the nature of the being which is causing them. ‘Operation follows beings,’ says the old principle, and, accordingly, the end of natural beings is always fixed and in proportion to the form . . . .<sup>38</sup>

Moreno goes on to say that connatural knowledge is analogous to instinct in that, as Aquinas notes, “the instinct of animals judges by way of inclination he [Aquinas] calls [knowledge] ‘by instinct.’ Hence, nature, connaturality, instinct, and inclination are the fundamental concepts we need for the understanding of the nature of knowledge *per connaturalitatem*.”<sup>39</sup> In non-rational animals, this “instinct” is natural in that the animal is naturally connaturalized to those objects suited to its nature and ultimate end. A gazelle knows to flee from a lion and knows to eat grass. A human animal, however, has a certain degree of control over what she becomes connatural to. She may become connatural to objects not suited to her nature, and may thus judge by a type of instinct

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<sup>37</sup> Haggerty, “A Via Maritania,” 77.

<sup>38</sup> Antonio Moreno, The Nature of St. Thomas' Knowledge ‘Per Connaturalitatem,’ *Angelicum* 47 (1970), 44-62, 55.

<sup>39</sup> Moreno, 46. See I-II, Q. 68, arts. 1-4.

that bad objects are desirable. However, when connatural knowledge is perfect, she judges objects suited to her nature as desirable and objects not suited to her nature as repugnant in a manner akin to a sort of instinct. Aquinas says that the virtuous person judges the good by means of a certain connaturality:

Wisdom denotes a certain rectitude of judgment according to the Eternal Law. Now rectitude of judgment is twofold: first, on account of perfect use of reason, secondly, on account of a certain connaturality with the matter about which one has to judge. Thus, about matters of chastity, a man after inquiring with his reason forms a right judgment, if he has learnt the science of morals, while he who has the habit of chastity judges of such matters by a kind of connaturality.<sup>40</sup>

The concept of connatural knowledge also reveals the interdependence of the intellect and affections. The intellect knows the nature of the appetite by means of perceiving the activity of the appetite:

The act of the will is nothing but an inclination consequent on the form understood; just as the natural appetite is an inclination consequent on the natural form. Now the inclination of a thing resides in it according to its mode of existence; and hence the natural inclination resides in a natural thing naturally, and the inclination called the sensible appetite is in the sensible thing sensibly; and likewise the intelligible inclination, which is the act of the will, is in the intelligent subject intelligibly as in its principle and proper subject. Hence the Philosopher expresses himself thus –that ‘the will is in the reason.’ Now whatever is intelligibly in an intelligent subject, is understood by that subject. Therefore the act of the will is understood by the intellect, both inasmuch as one knows that one wills; and inasmuch as one knows the nature of this act, and consequently, the nature of its principle which is the habit or power.<sup>41</sup>

The appetite affected by love is the object of evaluation by the intellect, which judges under the universal aspects of the *good* and the *true*. Thus the intellect is able to judge the suitability of the objects perceived and desired by the appetite. Connatural

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<sup>40</sup> II-II, Q. 45, art. 2.

<sup>41</sup> I, Q. 87, art. 4.

knowledge then can be known and judged unsuitable by the intellect, as well as changed if deemed inappropriate.

For example, a person who is addicted to cigarettes smokes because she is connatural with the cigarettes. She does not need to think each instance whether or not to smoke. She smokes habitually because she has a certain affinity with the cigarettes. The more she smokes, the stronger this affinity becomes. Even if her mind tells her that cigarettes are not desirable, that they are bad for her health and a waste of money better spent elsewhere, her appetite still provides the basis of a *knowledge* that cigarettes are desirable, and in the presence of a cigarette, her appetitive knowledge is likely stronger than any rational knowledge she might have. Thus, the smoker smokes, even when she thinks that she does not want to. Yet, smoking cigarettes is not conducive to health, thus our smoker is connatural to an object which is evil in respect to her end. She may instinctively judge cigarettes to be good, but her instincts are wrong in this case. Her connatural knowledge is erroneous.

In this dissertation, I explore how something similar occurs with the exposure to thin-ideal images. A woman diets and exercises, and may even starve herself and purge largely because she experiences a certain affinity with the thin-ideal images she is bombarded by on a day-to-day basis. Based on her appetite, she *knows* that what these images offer is desirable—that extreme thinness is what makes a person beautiful—even if she rationally knows the opposite. This inclinational knowledge shapes how she acts. The more she exposes herself to these images, the more stable her inclination to desire



them, and the more consistently she acts to conform herself to them. Sallie Tisdale elaborates this point:

Today's models, the women whose pictures I see constantly, unavoidably, grow more minimal by the day. When I berate myself for not looking like—whomever I think I should look like that day, I don't really care that no one looks like that . . . I want to look—think I should look—like the photographs. . . The final product is what I see, have seen my whole adult life.<sup>42</sup>

The problem is that these images offer women a lie. To conform to the thin-ideal, one has to act contrary to nature. When a woman aspires to what is unattainable, she experiences sorrow, which we see manifested in body dissatisfaction.<sup>43</sup> When she sees these images as offering something attainable, though with some difficulty, she may engage in actions that are painful or difficult in order to obtain the thinness to which she aspires. Even if she intellectually knows that the images are unrealistic, that the models are air-brushed or that the women have to starve and/or purge to maintain their thinness, and even if she knows that a woman's beauty should not be reduced to thinness, nevertheless her aspiration to conform to the thin women she sees is likely to win out. The more she aspires to conform to a thin-ideal, the more she becomes connatural with it.

A central characteristic of anorectic and bulimic women is that they believe they are “too fat.” However, this sense of being “too fat” is widely prevalent in women without a diagnosable psychopathology and women who are not “overweight.” It is all

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<sup>42</sup> Sallie Tisdale, “A Weight That Women Carry: The Compulsion to Diet in a Starved Culture,” in *Minding the Body: Women Writers on Body and Soul*, ed. Patricia Foster (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 16.

<sup>43</sup> “If the good be not yet possessed, it causes in the appetite a movement towards the attainment of the good beloved: and this belongs to the passion of ‘desire’ or ‘concupiscence’: and contrary to it, in respect of evil, is the passion of ‘aversion’ or ‘dislike.’ Thirdly, when the good is obtained, it causes the appetite to rest, as it were, in the good obtained: and this belongs to the passion of ‘delight’ or ‘joy’; the contrary of which, in respect of evil, is ‘sorrow’ or ‘sadness’” (I-II, Q. 23, art. 4).

too common for women to think that if they lost “just a couple more pounds,” they could be happy. Even the most confident woman is likely to experience at least a twinge of dissatisfaction when she opens a magazine and sees a sexy image of a very thin bikini-clad woman smiling back at her. One woman interviewed about the effect of thin-ideal media images on body image wrote, “They make me sick. They are too thin. But I would kill for one of their bodies.”<sup>44</sup> Another relates, “Here I am, a self-loving, woman-loving, strong and smart woman and I have spent years, hours, days, of my life completely distracted from my life, concerned only with what I looked like and how fat I was, how fat I would be, what I was eating, and what I would be eating.”<sup>45</sup> Pamela Houston writes,

When I was younger I used to believe that if I were really thin I would be happy, and there is a part of me that still believes it’s true. For a good part of my live I would have quite literally given anything to be thin . . . a finger, three toes, the sight of one eye . . . For the majority of my lifetime I would have traded being ugly, deformed and thin for being pretty, whole and fat.<sup>46</sup>

Aquinas’ moral theory is comprehensive enough to address both why this is so—women can become connatural to the images they are exposed to—but also why this connatural knowledge, which is analogous to an instinct, is not deterministic. The speculative knowledge of the intellect and the connatural knowledge provided by the appetite are mutually interdependent. The good of the person is obtained when these two types of knowledge complement one another. Thus, when the object of the affections is contrary to nature, the intellect can work to train the affections to become connatural to

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<sup>44</sup> Sarah Grogan, *Body Image* (Taylor and Francis, 2008), 108.

<sup>45</sup> Lelwica, *Starving for Salvation*, 111.

<sup>46</sup> Pam Houston, “Out of Habit, I Start Apologizing,” in Patricia Foster, *Minding the Body*, 148.

the appropriate goods. The intellect guides the appetite and the appetite guides the intellect. Thus, in the case of exposure to thin-ideal images, Aquinas' moral theory helps us to realize that greater intellectual awareness about the nature of these images and their potential dangers is not the solution. Because the knowledge of the desirability of these images is based on the appetite, it is the appetite which needs to be corrected through a process of re-habitation. Lelwica expresses this idea aptly, stating that women must create "alternative systems of meaning and ways of seeking truth" from what they currently receive from thin-ideal images of beauty:

Since the loss of meaning and sense of disconnection . . . is experienced in the body, cultivating a new awareness means paying attention to its embodied basis. The process of healing is a process of becoming physically and mindfully aware of uncomfortable feelings of dissonance and loss. . . *This process of conversion is not purely or even primarily intellectual.*<sup>47</sup>

In Aquinas' moral theory, the re-habitation process is assisted by the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the Holy Spirit operate by connatural knowledge. God cannot be known through the natural operations of the intellect, except through analogy. The knowledge of God can only come through the connaturality of charity through which a person has affective knowledge of God, and thus moves toward God. As John of St. Thomas points out:

Though the gifts are directed by the Holy Ghost, the purpose of His impulse is not to manifest the truth of objects either intellectually or imaginatively conceived . . . There is required merely an interior movement, a divine stimulation, by which God moves man to the immediate experience of tasting and seeing that the Lord is

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<sup>47</sup> Lelwica, *Starving for Salvation*, 130. Emphasis added.

sweet. Thus God becomes deeply rooted in souls and makes them connatural with divine things.<sup>48</sup>

The gifts of the Holy Spirit direct the appetite to those goods which are truly in accord with the person's end, which Thomas holds to be union with God. The gifts also incline the appetite away from those goods which are not conducive to this end by "sweeping away any possible image, recollection or idea, any passing phenomenon and any distinct consciousness [so that] through the void the intellect becomes connatural to the unconceptualizable spiritual reality of the thing known."<sup>49</sup> This dissertation will rely not only on the moral philosophy, but also on the moral theology of Aquinas and will therefore address some of the same concerns of Lelwica's work, namely, how eating disorders reflect a spiritual desire for fulfillment. It will go beyond Lelwica's work by illustrating how the Holy Spirit operates to re-habituate the person to know and love those goods which are ultimately conducive to achieving that fulfillment.

## **V. Progression of Chapters**

### *Chapter 1: Eating Disorders as "Body Image Disorders:" Review of Literature and Nature of Inquiry*

This dissertation does not aim to disregard the nature of eating disorders and body dissatisfaction as psychological, biomedical, and sociocultural phenomena. Rather, this dissertation aims at entering into an ongoing, multi-disciplinary study of eating disorders as complex, multi-dimensional disorders that have psychological, biomedical,

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<sup>48</sup> John of St. Thomas, *The Gifts of the Holy Ghost* (London ; New York: Sheed & Ward, 1951), 47.

<sup>49</sup> Maritain, "On Knowledge Through Connaturality," *The Review of Metaphysics* vol. 4, no. 16 (June, 1951), 473-481, 476.

sociocultural, and, as this dissertation argues, moral dimensions. In this sense, the goal of this dissertation is to complement, not replace other approaches to these disorders.

The first chapter provides an overview of the different disciplinary approaches adopted in the study of eating disorders, as well as a history of these disorders. This chapter will argue that eating problems exist on a continuum of levels of body dissatisfaction, with the psychopathologies of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa at one extreme.

## *Chapter 2: Thomist Virtue Ethics: An Overview*

The second chapter provides an overview of what is meant by the term “morality” as well as an overview of Thomas’ moral system, with a particular emphasis on the compatibility between Aquinas’ moral theory and the social science with which this dissertation is in dialogue.

This dissertation aims to contribute to an ongoing recovery of Thomistic ethics in three ways, which this chapter will highlight. First, Aquinas’ ethics is appealing in a contemporary context because of the important role he assigns to the emotions. Through the lens of eating disorders and body dissatisfaction, this dissertation will attempt to reveal new insights into the ways the emotions function in the moral life, and particularly, how the emotions relate to knowledge. Second, contemporary studies have noted that Aquinas’ ethics is well-suited to interdisciplinary dialogue with the psychosocial sciences. This dissertation will attempt to illustrate how such interdisciplinary discussion may proceed regarding the topic of eating disorders and thin-ideal internalization. Third, recent studies of Thomistic ethics have emphasized the distinctively *theological* element

of his thought. This dissertation will illustrate how Aquinas' theology is integral, not accidental to his moral system, and is particularly relevant to the question of eating problems and body dissatisfaction.

### *Chapter 3: Connatural Knowledge and Thin-Ideal Internalization*

The third chapter examines a foundational concept for this dissertation—connatural knowledge. This chapter begins empirically. It draws from experimental and correlational studies on thin-ideal internalization and the connection between exposure to a thin ideal and subsequent body dissatisfaction and eating disorder symptomatology. I argue that thin-ideal internalization is a type of connatural knowledge. Women's connatural knowledge often conflicts with their rational or conceptual knowledge, whereby they know that such images are unrealistic and harmful and yet still desire to look at them and obtain what they offer.

This chapter will examine how Thomas' understanding of connatural knowledge is integral for his understanding of ethics, particularly regarding his understanding of habituation. It will also discuss how the concept of connatural knowledge helps us to understand the affective dimension of practical knowledge without reducing the affections to knowledge.

### *Chapter 4: Temperance and the Appetitive Resistance of Thin-Ideal Internalization*

The fourth chapter examines the connatural knowledge proper to habits, and particularly how this connatural knowledge can be changed through the development of virtue. This chapter argues that changing one's habits is not simply a manner of knowing

more, but also changing one's actions. Accordingly, temperance is given particular attention as the virtue which restrains the appetite from pursuing goods not in accordance with reason. This chapter also argues that the study of thin-ideal internalization and eating problems reveals the importance of Aquinas' thesis on the connection the appetite and reason in the development of moral virtue.

#### *Chapter 5: Re-Habituating, Continued: The Theological Dimension of Integral Human Flourishing*

The fifth chapter explores the ways in which flourishing can be inhibited not only by the state of the internal life of the individual, but also by her society. Thin-ideal internalization as a form of connatural knowledge illustrates the fact that even individuals on the path to developing the virtues necessary for integral flourishing are thwarted by their surrounding society, which is constantly rendering them at least partially connatural with the thin-ideal. For example, a woman may restrain from some of the more egregious forms of mass media like women's fashion magazines, yet simply by going on the internet to check her email or look up a recipe, she is nevertheless surrounded by advertisements and images of a thin-ideal.

The limitation of natural virtue in achieving its end (*telos*) in light of the viciousness of the surrounding society points to the need for some additional element in the moral life. In Thomas' theological schema, this is grace, and particularly the grace that comes from the gifts of the Holy Spirit which help to truly connaturalize a person to those goods which lead to ultimate flourishing, which for Thomas is union with God.

*Chapter 6: The Role of the Church in Shaping Character: Practices for a “Dissatisfied Body of Christ”*

The final chapter looks at the role of the church in the moral life, and specifically how the church’s practices of asceticism, prayer, and worship can help women transcend the vicious nature of the surrounding society and develop the connatural knowledge necessary for flourishing. Unlike Lelwica’s work, which is suspicious of traditional forms of Christian spirituality, this chapter appreciates the power of traditional Christian practices in light of their underlying theology and connection to the moral life. This is consistent with the argument of this dissertation that the moral life is shaped both rationally and experientially. The significance of Christian practices in the moral and theological tradition affirms this thesis.

On a final note, this dissertation will utilize the first person plural throughout. The intention here is not to impose any assumptions on the reader. Rather, the intention is to illustrate the highly collaborative and dialogical nature of this work. This dissertation brings into conversation many disparate voices—voices from the psychosocial sciences, voices from the moral sciences, Thomas’ own voice and the voices of his commentators, the voices of my teachers and mentors, and, of course, my own voice. As Michael Sherwin writes, “Every scholar is a weaver. His work is the product of his own art, but is nonetheless a tapestry woven from threads spun by many other voices. If the tapestry of voices is well woven it invites the reader to carry on the conversation.”<sup>50</sup> The “we” utilized in this dissertation is intended as an exercise in

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<sup>50</sup> Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love* (Catholic University of America Press, 2005), xxiii.



humility, not presumption. As such, this work is open to reform and correction from others who choose to enter the conversation.

## Chapter One

### Eating Disorders as “Body Image Disorders:” Review of Literature and Nature of Inquiry

- I. Introduction**
- II. The History of a Modern Condition**
- III. Diagnostic Criteria and Epidemiology**
  - a. Diagnostic criteria and disputes*
  - b. Prevalence*
- IV. Contemporary Approaches: The Multidetermined Nature of Eating Disorders**
  - a. Biomedical approaches*
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  - c. Sociocultural approaches*
  - d. Finding Points of Mutual Concern in the Psychosocial Literature on Eating Disorders and Ethics and Moral Theology*
- V. Thin-Ideal Internalization and Body Dissatisfaction Among Western Women**
  - a. Body Image*
  - b. Reviewing the Psychosocial Literature on Thin-Ideal Internalization and Body Dissatisfaction*
  - c. Why Focus on Women?*
- VI. Conclusions**

#### **I. Introduction**

This dissertation is about eating disorders and the related problem of body dissatisfaction. The argument of this work is that eating disorders are not *only* psychological, biomedical, and sociocultural problems, but moral problems as well.

It may also seem a little odd to dedicate time and effort to writing a dissertation in moral theology on a problem which affects predominantly white, middle to upper-middle class western females at a time when there are so many other pressing moral matters to attend to—the continuing problem of global health epidemics like HIV/AIDS, malaria, and TB, the growing gap between the rich and the poor in the developing world, the rising concern about global warming and the demise of many of the world’s ecosystems, not to mention the major moral

problem of global hunger. There could be almost a hint of irony in writing a dissertation on eating disorders—the voluntary refusal of food in the midst of plenty—when so much of the world’s population goes without enough food.

The statistics on world hunger are staggering in their proportion:<sup>1</sup>

- 1.02 billion people do not have enough to eat, more than the combined populations of the United States, Canada, and the European Union.
- 10.9 million children under age five die in developing countries each year, with 60% of these deaths due to malnutrition and hunger-related illnesses.
- One of every four children in the developing world—roughly 146 million children—are underweight.
- Undernutrition contributes to 53 percent of the 9.7 million deaths of children under age five each year in developing countries.
- The cost of under-nutrition to national economic development is estimated at US\$20-30 billion every year.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization writes, “The silent hunger crisis—affecting one sixth of all of humanity—poses a serious risk for world peace and security.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet, in the United States and much of the rest of the developed western world, we are obsessed with losing weight. According to the Federal Trade Commission, at any given time, 40% of American women and 25% of American men are trying to lose weight.<sup>3</sup> This has led to a widespread preoccupation with weight, body fat, and body shape, a preoccupation that manifests itself especially among women:

Ninety-one percent of women recently surveyed on a college campus reported dieting; 22 percent of them dieted 'always' or 'often.' In 1995, 34 percent of high school-age girls in the United States thought they were overweight. Today, 90 percent do. Over half the females between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five would prefer to be run over by a truck than be fat, and two-thirds surveyed would rather be mean or stupid. The single

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<sup>1</sup> World Food Programme Hunger Stats, <http://www.wfp.org/hunger/stats>, accessed August 20, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations Media Center (June 19, 2009), <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/20568/icode/>, accessed August 20, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Federal Trade Commission, *Commercial Weight Loss Products and Programs: What Consumers Stand to Gain and Lose*, (Washington DC: Federal Trade Commission, 1997), <http://www.ftc.gov/os/1998/03/weightlo.rpt.htm>, accessed August 20, 2010.

largest group of teenagers most likely to consider or attempt suicide is girls who worry that they are overweight. A survey of American parents found that one in ten would abort a child if they found out that he or she had a genetic tendency to be fat.<sup>4</sup>

Roberta Seid notes that diet books outsell all other genres of books, except for the Bible, resulting in a new religious creed for the American people: “Watch your weight, eat right, and exercise.”<sup>5</sup>

The societal preoccupation with losing weight is not wholly without reason, in light of the rapid rise in obesity. Obesity, a growing public health concern in the U.S., is a condition marked by excessive calorie intake for prolonged periods leading to excessive weight gain. Obesity is linked to increased morbidity and mortality rates. For adults, obesity is characterized by a Body Mass Index (BMI) over 30 while a BMI between 25 and 29.9 is considered overweight.<sup>6</sup>

People who are overweight or obese face a number of challenges such as stereotyping and discrimination, which may partially explain the rampant fear of fat that exists in much of the population. Overweight youth are at the greatest risk of being teased; 63% of overweight girls and 58% of overweight boys reported being teased by their peers according to Project EAT, a population-based study of eating patterns and weight concerns.<sup>7</sup> Obese adults are significantly more likely to choose jobs where their weight is hidden, such as telephone sales, in order to avoid harassment and employment discrimination, and a general community based sample of

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<sup>4</sup> Courtney E. Martin, *Perfect Girls, Starving Daughters: The Frightening New Normalcy of Hating Your Body* (Free Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Roberta Pollack Seid, *Never Too Thin: Why Women Are at War with Their Bodies*, 1st ed. (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1989), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Body Mass Index (BMI) is a number calculated from a person's weight and height, providing a standardized means of evaluating weight categories. It is calculated by dividing weight in pounds (lbs) by height in inches (in) squared and multiplying by a conversion factor of 703. Mark B. Cope, Jose R. Fernandez, and David B. Allison, “Genetic and Biological Risk Factors,” *Handbook of Eating Disorders and Obesity*, Ed. J. Kevin Thompson (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2004), 326

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 351.

800 women found that 20% report weight-related mistreatment.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, there are numerous studies indicating that obese and overweight individuals are less likely to get a job and less likely to get a promotion than other individuals of normal weight, even when equally or more qualified than their competitors.<sup>9</sup> "We live in a culture of 'weight-ism' where to be overweight is to be devalued as somehow lacking in moral fiber and disadvantaged in social and employment-related settings," writes eating disorder expert James McSherry.<sup>10</sup>

Like the statistics about world hunger, the statistics on obesity in the United States are staggering in their proportion. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC),

- More than one third of US adults—more than 72 million people—and 16 percent of children are obese.
- Since 1980, obesity rates for adults have doubled, and for children, they have tripled:
- Between 1987 and 2001, diseases associated with obesity account for 27% of the increases in medical costs.
- Medical expenditures for obese workers, depending on severity of obesity and sex, are between 29% and 117% greater than expenditures for workers with normal weight.
- From 1979-1981 to 1997-1999, annual hospital costs related to obesity among children and adolescents increased, rising from \$35 million to \$127 million.<sup>11</sup>

Paradoxically, alongside the tendency that exists in the United States to become ill due to eating too much, there is another tendency. Many people in this country are becoming ill by eating too little (or not eating at all) or by engaging in compensatory measures to prevent digesting food. Feminist author Kim Chernin calls this the “tyranny of slenderness.” Roberta Seid refers to this tendency as a new societal aesthetic, which has dangerous consequences for women:

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 352. 13% reported weight-related mistreatment from strangers and 12% reported weight-related mistreatment from a spouse.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 353.

<sup>10</sup> Kathleen Mary Berg, Dermot J. Hurley, and James A. McSherry, *Eating Disorders* (Radcliffe Publishing, 2002), 1.

<sup>11</sup> Center for Disease Control, "Obesity: Halting the Epidemic by Making Health Easier" (2009), <http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/AAG/obesity.htm>, accessed August 20, 2010.

Behind the growing dominance of the exercise regime and health (and health-food) consciousness were new standards of beauty, far more exacting and more body aware than ever before. A woman now had to be thin and boast a firm body with all adipose tissue taut and shaped. Paradoxically, in this decade of change—of permissiveness and personal liberation, of reverence for the natural, of resistance to superficiality and conformism, and especially, of Women’s Liberation, when all traditional notions about women were challenged—a compelling standard of female beauty emerged, one that locked women into war with their own bodies. The health and exercise ethic sanctified and intensified their preoccupation with fat, food, and fitness—and with physical perfection.<sup>12</sup>

The extreme manifestation of this preoccupation with weight and body image comes in the form of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. Anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa have been the subject of scholarly studies in a wide range of academic disciplines. Biomedical approaches describe these conditions as diseases, caused by biochemical imbalances which can be treated pharmacologically. Psychological approaches, emphasizing how developmental disorders and dysfunctional beliefs lead to erratic behaviors and attitudes towards food and body image, recommend a therapeutic solution. Sociological approaches blame the societal preference for thinness, as manifest especially in media portrayals of women, and push public education and political action as a solution.

This chapter provides a review of the literature on the study of eating disorders. First, this chapter will provide a brief introduction to the history of eating disorders. It will be limited to considering the modern phenomena of eating disorders, rather than analogical historical instances of self-starvation and preoccupation with food. We will then turn to an overview of the three major dimensions of what is known as a “multidimensional” or “multi-perspectival” approach to eating disorders, which includes biomedical, psychological, and sociocultural

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<sup>12</sup> Roberta Seid, *Never Too Thin*, 211.

considerations.<sup>13</sup> A multidimensional approach to eating disorders aims to get at the essence of what an eating disorder is, rather than how it accidentally manifests itself either medically, psychologically, or socially. As James McSherry notes,

Without that multidimensional approach, the numerous and complex factors that are fundamental to the initiation and maintenance of an eating disorder may go unrecognized and unchallenged. If an eating disorder is no more than a mood disturbance to the psychiatrist, malnutrition to the dietitian, a cognitive distortion to the psychologist, a dysfunctional family to the social worker or family therapist, an electrolyte imbalance to the family physician or internist, then the condition becomes misrepresented as its shadow rather than its substance. The larger epiphenomenology is seen as more important than the central issue.<sup>14</sup>

The goal of this expository investigation of the bio- and psycho-social empirical material is to find points of overlap with ethics and moral theology. Thus, the overview of the cognitive and psychosocial literature on eating disorders will culminate in a discussion of the relationship between thin-ideal internalization and body dissatisfaction on the one hand, and with eating disorder onset and maintenance on the other. A focus on thin-ideal internalization and body dissatisfaction not only aligns with one of the most widely accepted causal explanations of eating disorder onset and maintenance, but it also provides a useful entry point for dialogue between the psychosocial sciences and ethics. Consequently, while eating disorders are the overall general concern of this dissertation, the specific focus will be on the underlying causal mechanisms that affect most women in western society, and not just those who meet the diagnostic criteria of an eating disorder. One might say that this dissertation, rather than focusing on eating disorders,

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<sup>13</sup> McSherry notes that "the term 'multidimensional' is deliberately used here in preference to 'multidisciplinary.' Healing for the person with an eating disorder often requires the services of professionals from a variety of health disciplines, but those services may be more problematic than healing unless healthcare providers operate from a shared basic philosophy. Seeing the whole person behind the diagnostic label, appreciating the illness experience and developing an integrated understanding of the dimensions of an illness and what it means to the individual patient all require an approach that goes well beyond the conventional biomedical model that has dominated medical thinking for so many years." Berg, Hurley, and McSherry, *Eating Disorders*, xvi.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

turns its attention rather to what might be called the underlying “perceptual disorder” which is necessary, but not sufficient, for the onset of a diagnosable eating disorder psychopathology.

## II. The History of a Modern Condition

A proper introduction to eating disorders should begin with a definition. However, the discussion of definition is fraught with difficulties and controversies. Even describing anorexia nervosa (AN) and bulimia nervosa (BN) as “diseases” is subject to debate. This introduction will highlight some of these definitional controversies, but it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to respond to every argument that has been raised in this regard.

The first debate concerns whether or not eating disorders are “modern illnesses.” This is especially a point of contention concerning AN. Many books on the subject mention how AN is just one historical manifestation of how women have used food and appetite as a means of attaining a cultural ideal,<sup>15</sup> as a means of controlling and restraining feminine emotions and desires<sup>16</sup> or negotiating the demands placed on women in a patriarchal society,<sup>17</sup> and as a means of forming a symbolic language.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the most thorough contemporary answer to the question of whether or not AN is a modern disease is Joan Jacob Brumberg's treatment of the issue. Brumberg's book *Fasting Girls* argues that symptomatic continuities across time and culture, i.e. food refusal, do not necessarily indicate a similar causal factor or biological basis. She writes,

[T]here are not only changing interpretations of food-refusing behavior but also varying reasons for female control of appetite. Even as basic a human instinct as appetite is transformed by cultural and social systems and given new meaning in different historical

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<sup>15</sup> Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (University Of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>16</sup> Susie Orbach, *Fat Is A Feminist Issue*, 3rd edition (Arrow Books Ltd.), 1998).

<sup>17</sup> Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (University of California Press, 1995) and Morag MacSween, *Anorexic Bodies: A Feminist and Sociological Perspective on Anorexia Nervosa* (Routledge, 1993).

<sup>18</sup> Brumberg, *Fasting Girls*.



epochs . . . anorexia nervosa is a historically specific disease that emerged from the distinctive economic and social environment of the late nineteenth century. Thus the modern clinical term ‘anorexia nervosa’ should be used to designate only a disease of modernity.<sup>19</sup>

This dissertation adopts Brumberg’s position that modern psychological or psychoanalytic theories should not be applied to fragmented historical evidence of female fasting. When referring to AN and BN, this dissertation will refer specifically to the modern manifestation of the condition as linked to a specific cultural, social, and economic environment. However, an introduction to the subject of eating disorders would be remiss in not presenting at least some historical perspective to the topic.

In different historical periods, women have engaged in actions of refusing to eat or digest their food. For centuries, these actions had a decidedly religious significance. Perhaps the two most thorough works on the subject of the religious significance of food to women are those of Rudolph Bell in his book *Holy Anorexia*<sup>20</sup> and Caroline Walker Bynum in her book *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*.<sup>21</sup> Both works identify food and food-related religious practices as a central theme in medieval piety, and both works also acknowledge that these food-motifs were more important for women's piety than for men's. Bell’s hermeneutical lens is primarily psychological. He focuses on individual case histories, and particularly on relevant psychological factors like childhood trauma and sexual frustration. His exploration of “holy anorexia” in terms of individual psychology, however, leads him to a neglect of the social and religious milieu of his studies.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Brumberg, *Fasting Girls*, 2-3.

<sup>20</sup> Bell, *Holy Anorexia*.

<sup>21</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (University of California Press, 1988).

<sup>22</sup> Also known as “inedia prodigiosa” (a great starvation) or “anorexia mirabilis” (miraculously inspired loss of appetite). See (Brumberg 42, 290n).

Bynum resists explaining women's medieval food practices with contemporary psychiatric categories. She sees her subjects' food practices as constructive and creative efforts to use the resources available to them, like food and their body, to shape their worlds and enter into union with Jesus. She writes in the introduction,

Because Jesus had fed the faithful not merely as servant and waiter, preparer and multiplier of loaves and fishes, but as the very bread and wine itself, to eat was a powerful verb. It meant to consume, to assimilate, to become god. To eat God in the eucharist was a kind of audacious deification, a becoming of the flesh that, in its agony, fed and saved the world. Thus, to religious men and women, renunciation of ordinary food prepared the way for consuming (i.e. becoming) Christ, in eucharistic and in mystical union.<sup>23</sup>

These practices, according to Bynum, can only be understood in the context of late medieval Christian society, and do not necessarily shed light on the modern phenomenon of anorexia nervosa. Bynum argues that women today are not striving to cultivate closeness to God in their food practices, but are rather using food refusal to achieve attractiveness and a cultural ideal of beauty which is associated with slimness. In a clear critique of Bell, Bynum writes, "The self-starvation of some thirteenth-, fourteenth-, and fifteenth-century women had a resonance and a complexity that are not captured by the analogy to modern disease entities."<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps the best-known historical case of religiously-motivated self-starvation is that of Catherine of Siena. Obsessive fasting and Eucharistic piety were central element to Catherine of Siena's religious piety. She began fasting and abstaining from meat as a child. Bynum notes that she referred to the pain associated with eating as

[D]ealing out justice [i.e. punishment] to this miserable sinner [i.e., herself] and that she focused all her hunger on the Eucharist. Several eye-witnesses along with Raymond [of Capua] report seeing her shove twigs down her throat to bring up the food she could not bear to have rest in her stomach.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 298-99

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 168.

Catherine also received communion daily, cultivating a greater and greater desire for the Eucharist until she was surviving only on the host, cold water, and bits of herbs.

Catherine of Siena<sup>26</sup> is only one of many other examples of medieval women who used food and their bodies to cultivate a relationship with Jesus Christ and achieve holiness. As Brumberg notes in her history of female fasting practices, by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a variety of social and cultural factors led to the decline of widespread fasting to achieve holiness. During the Protestant Reformation, prolonged fasting was viewed as a work of Satan rather than God, and female fasters were frequently thought to be victims of demonic possessions or evil delusions rather than examples of great holiness. The rising importance of science, rather than religion, to explain worldly phenomena also led to widespread skepticism towards females who claimed to undergo prolonged periods of fasting. Empirical measures like 24-hour surveillance, measuring bodily fluids, and regular weight checks were utilized to verify a girl or woman's claim that she went a significant period of time without eating. By the seventeenth century, prolonged fasting was seen as a medical illness with an organic cause, rather than a supernatural occurrence.<sup>27</sup> Despite the rise of religious skepticism and scientific progressivism, stories of women and girls undergoing prolonged periods of fasting out of religious motivations continued well into the nineteenth century. By the twentieth century, however, medical and psychiatric explanations came to totally replace religious explanations.

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<sup>26</sup> Rudolph Bell's interpretation of Catherine of Siena's and other similar medieval women's behavior is markedly different from Bynum's. Using contemporary psychological theory, Bell concludes that these medieval holy women were engaged in "anorexic behavior patterns" that are "psychologically analogous" to the modern condition of anorexia nervosa, and that anorexia has a psychological continuity across the centuries (Bell, 20). Brumberg offers a conclusion that falls somewhere between that Bell and Bynum: "The existence of a female tradition of anorexia mirabilis does have implications for how we understand anorexia nervosa. From a historical perspective, it becomes evident that certain social and cultural systems, at different points in time, encourage or promote control of appetite in women, but for different reasons and purposes. . . In the earlier era, control of appetite was linked to piety and belief; through fasting, the medieval ascetic strove for perfection in the eyes of her God. In the modern period, female control of appetite is embedded in patterns of class, gender, and family relations established in the nineteenth century; the modern anorectic strives for perfection in terms of society's ideal of physical, rather than spiritual, beauty (Brumberg, *Fasting Girls*, 46).

<sup>27</sup> Brumberg, *Fasting Girls*, 47-100.

Sir William Gull, one of Queen Victoria's physicians, provided the first English-language definition of anorexia nervosa in 1873<sup>28</sup> in a public presentation of a paper entitled "Anorexia Hysterica," in which he distinguished certain forms of self-starvation found mainly in young adult females from the loss of appetite and emaciation that accompanied other organic diseases.<sup>29</sup> Etymologically, "anorexia" means "loss of appetite," which is deceptive because AN is characterized by the suppression, rather than the loss, of appetite. As Hilde Bruch notes, anorectics are obsessed with food, and their lives are totally focused on food.<sup>30</sup> For this reason, some scholars have suggested that AN is "not primarily a lack or a perversion of appetite, but an impulse to be thin, which is wanted and completely accepted by the sufferer. It has been argued that the most precise term is the German, *pubertätsmagersucht*, "adolescent mania of thinness."<sup>31</sup>

Bulimia nervosa is the etymological opposite of anorexia nervosa, meaning "ox hunger."<sup>32</sup> Bulimia nervosa was not named until 1979 by Gerald Russell, who described BN as "an ominous variant of anorexia nervosa." He provided a rich clinical description of the

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<sup>28</sup> Gull was, however, not the first to use the term "anorexia" to describe the condition of food refusal. In his address, Gull admitted that French neurologist Charles Lasègue (1816-1883) had preempted his use of the term "anorexia," to indicate food refusal as a discrete condition rather than a symptom of another condition. Additionally, Lasègue provided a thorough delineation of the medical and mental stages of *l'anorexie hysterique*. The difference between the two accounts is that Lasègue presented anorexia as primarily a psychological condition, whereas Gull's report of the condition presented it primarily as a medical disease. Thus, Gull rejected Lasègue's use of the descriptor "hysterique" in favor of "nervosa," "because it implicated the central nervous system instead of the uterus and allowed that the condition could exist in males." See Brumberg (2000), 119.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 118. William Gull, "Anorexia Nervosa (Apepsia Hysterica, Anorexia Hysterica)," *Transactions of the clinical Society of London* 7 (1874), 22-28.

<sup>30</sup> Hilde Bruch, *The Golden Cage: The Enigma of Anorexia Nervosa*, 1st ed. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001), 90.

<sup>31</sup> Simona Giordano, *Understanding Eating Disorders: Conceptual and Ethical Issues in the Treatment of Anorexia and Bulimia Nervosa*, Issues in biomedical ethics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 18. See also M. Slevini Palazzoli, *L'anorexia mentale: Dalla terapia individuale alla terapia familiare* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1998) and Richard Gordon, *Anorexia and Bulimia: Anatomy of a Social Epidemic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 18.

disorder.<sup>33</sup> His study of BN selected patients who exhibited two criteria: an irresistible urge to overeat accompanied by self-induced vomiting or purging, and a morbid fear of becoming fat.

It was around the time that Russell was conducting his clinical studies on the new condition which would come to be known as “bulimia nervosa” that knowledge of eating disorders started to enter the American public sphere. By the 1970s, the media began to feature stories about women who starved themselves, despite the availability of plenty of food. In 1974, the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, a library reference tool, first featured eating disorders as a contemporary social issue, under the subject heading “starving disease.”<sup>34</sup>

By 1984, the disease had become so commonplace that “Saturday Night Live” featured jokes about the ‘anorexic cookbook,’ and a comedian in the Borscht Belt drew laughs with a reference to a new disease, ‘anorexia ponderosa.’ In *Down and Out in Beverly Hills*, 1986 film audiences tittered at the predictable presence of an anorexic daughter in a lush suburban setting. Today nearly everyone understands flip remarks such as “You look anorexic.” Anorexia nervosa has become common parlance, used as hyperbole by those outside the medical profession (particularly women) to comment on one another’s bodies.<sup>35</sup>

A landmark work on the subject for lay audiences was published by psychiatrist Hilde Bruch in 1978, entitled *The Golden Cage*. In this book, Bruch defined AN as the “relentless pursuit of thinness,” and described how the incidence of AN had been rapidly increasing. In her preface, Bruch writes, “new diseases are rare, and a disease that selectively befalls the young, rich, and beautiful is practically unheard of. But such a disease is affecting the daughters of well-to-do, educated, and successful families.”<sup>36</sup> Her book set forth easily understandable warning signs and symptoms of the condition. She substantiated the book with her patients’ own accounts of dealing with their condition. Bruch’s work helped raise popular knowledge of AN as a

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<sup>33</sup> Gerald Russell, “Bulimia Nervosa: An Ominous Variant of Anorexia Nervosa,” *Psychological Medicine* 9 (1979), 429-448.

<sup>34</sup> Brumberg, *Fasting Girls*, 8.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Bruch, *The Golden Cage*, xix.

psychological condition for which there was help. Brumberg writes on this note that “anorexia nervosa was the disease of the 1970s, to be obscured only by AIDS and the accompanying specter of contagion and pollution that absorbs public attention at this moment.”<sup>37</sup>

### **III. Diagnostic Criteria and Epidemiology**

#### *a. Diagnostic Criteria: Agreement and Disputes*

It is important to draw attention to the classification and diagnostic criteria of eating disorders because conceptual models for the study of eating disorders (such as those that this chapter will review), as well as treatment interventions are heavily influenced by the American Psychiatric Association’s existing classification schemes as outlined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder*.<sup>38</sup>

In 1980, eating disorders were first included as “serious mental illness” in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III). The diagnostic criteria for both anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa were expanded in the 1987 textual revision of the DSM (DSM-III-R), and the criteria was further refined in the 1994 edition (DSM-IV). The most significant development in the DSM-IV was that both anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa were divided into two sub-types. AN was divided into the sub-types of “restricting” or “bulimic” AN, and BN was divided into either “purging” or “non-purging.”<sup>39</sup> The currently used diagnostic criteria are listed in Chart 1.

These diagnostic criteria have been the subject of much controversy, despite their almost ubiquitous use in research. One major point of debate centers on the weight criterion of being less than 85% of expected body weight. This criterion has been criticized as being arbitrarily

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<sup>37</sup> Brumberg, *Fasting Girls*, 10.

<sup>38</sup> *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder*, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV; American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1994) and DSM-IV-TR, 2000.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Cloninger, *Personality and Psychopathology*, (American Psychiatric Publishing, 1999), 68.

identified and unreflective of the wide range of “expected” weights in the general population and across cultures.<sup>40</sup> Others have argued that Body Mass Index (BMI) is a more reliable criterion than body weight.<sup>41</sup>

As some have pointed out, what the DSM-IV diagnostic criteria do not take into account is the evidence of crossover between AN and BN. 25-33% of those with BN have a history of AN, and in a 15.5-year follow up study, 54% of women with AN developed bulimic symptoms.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> D.B. Herzog and S.S. Delinsky, “Classification of Eating Disorders,” *Eating Disorders: Innovative Directions for Research and Practice*, Ed. R.H. Striegel-Moore & L. Smolak (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2001), 31-50.

<sup>41</sup> See J. Hebebrand, P.M. Wehemeier, and H. Remschmidt, “Weight Criteria for Diagnosis of Anorexia Nervosa,” *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 157 (2000), 1024.

<sup>42</sup> Debra L. Franko, Stephen A. Wonderlich, Deborah Little, and David B. Herzog, “Diagnosis and Classification of Eating Disorders,” D. L. Franko et al., “Diagnosis and classification of eating disorders,” *Handbook of Eating Disorders and Obesity* (2003): 61.

### Box 1: DSM IV-TR Criteria for Anorexia Nervosa

- Refusal to maintain body weight at or above a minimally normal weight for age and height: Weight loss leading to maintenance of body weight <85% of that expected or failure to make expected weight gain during period of growth, leading to body weight less than 85% of that expected.
- Intense fear of gaining weight or becoming fat, even though under weight.
- Disturbance in the way one's body weight or shape are experienced, undue influence of body weight or shape on self evaluation, or denial of the seriousness of the current low body weight.
- Amenorrhea (at least three consecutive cycles) in postmenarchal girls and women. Amenorrhea is defined as periods occurring only following hormone (e.g., estrogen) administration.

#### Type

- **Restricting type:** During the current episode of anorexia nervosa, the person has not regularly engaged in binge-eating or purging behavior (self-induced vomiting or misuse of laxatives, diuretics, or enemas).
- **Binge-eating–purging type:** During the current episode of anorexia nervosa, the person has regularly engaged in binge-eating or purging behavior (self-induced vomiting or the misuse of laxatives, diuretics, or enemas).

### Box 2: DSM IV-TR Criteria for Bulimia Nervosa

- Recurrent episodes of binge eating characterized by both:
  1. Eating, in a discrete period of time (e.g., within any 2-hour period), an amount of food that is definitely larger than most people would eat during a similar period of time and under similar circumstances
  2. A sense of lack of control over eating during the episode, defined by a feeling that one cannot stop eating or control what or how much one is eating
- Recurrent inappropriate compensatory behavior to prevent weight gain
  1. Self-induced vomiting
  2. Misuse of laxatives, diuretics, enemas, or other medications
  3. Fasting
  4. Excessive exercise
- The binge eating and inappropriate compensatory behavior both occur, on average, at least twice a week for 3 months.
- Self evaluation is unduly influenced by body shape and weight.
- The disturbance does not occur exclusively during episodes of anorexia nervosa.

#### Type

- **Purging type:** During the current episode of bulimia nervosa, the person has regularly engaged in self-induced vomiting or the misuse of laxatives, diuretics, or enemas.
- **Nonpurging type:** During the current episode of bulimia nervosa, the person has used inappropriate compensatory behavior but has not regularly engaged in self-induced vomiting or misused laxatives, diuretics, or enemas.

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The utility of amenorrhea, the absence of three consecutive menstrual cycles, as a diagnostic criterion for AN has also come into question. Amenorrhea is thought to be a marker



of severe malnutrition and thus a clear sign of an eating disorder. However, amenorrhea is not always clinically evident in individuals who would otherwise meet the criteria for AN. The DSM-IV-TR notes that in patients using hormones such as oral contraceptives, amenorrhea as a diagnostic criterion ceases to be relevant. Adrian Smith and Barbara Wolfe in their review of amenorrhea as a diagnostic criterion conclude that “based on the evidence, amenorrhea in AN does not appear to be a differentiating factor for psychopathology or treatment response.”<sup>43</sup>

There is also debate about the diagnostic criteria for bulimia nervosa. The most significant point of contention concerns the specification of the concept of “an episode of binge eating.” Currently, the DSM IV defines a binge as “an amount that is definitely larger than what most people would eat.” Christopher Fairburn notes that there are two essential features to a binge: (1) the consumption of a large amount of food and (2) the feeling of a loss of control.

However,

It is important to note that the evaluation of the amount eaten is contextual; that is, account is taken of what would be the usual quantity to eat under the circumstances. In clinical practice some patients are encountered whose binges involve the consumption of modest amounts of food, this being especially true of patients with anorexia nervosa. Such episodes do not fulfill the technical definition of a binge, although they may seem very similar. Sometimes they are referred to as 'subjective bulimic episodes' or 'subjective binges'.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> “Low hematocrit is a sign of malnutrition that can occur before, during, and after recovery from the disorder, yet it is not an essential feature. It may be an indicator of severity of dietary restriction. Perhaps too amenorrhea is more of a hypothalamic severity indicator than a criterion for diagnosis per se, with a notable association with body mass index.” Adrian T. Smith and Barbara E. Wolfe, “Amenorrhea as a Diagnostic Criterion for Anorexia Nervosa: A Review of the Evidence and Implications for Practice, *Journal of American Psychiatric Nurses Association* 14 (3), (2008), 209-15.

<sup>44</sup> Christopher Fairburn, “The Management of Bulimia Nervosa and Other Binge Eating Problems,” *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment* 3 (1997): 2-8 *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment* 3 (1997), 2-8, 2. Fairburn and Cooper distinguish between two kinds of binges based on the amount of food consumed and subjective loss of control. Objective binge episodes (OBE) represent binges as they are defined within the DSM IV. The current nosology of BN requires that women have at least two OBEs per week over a period of 3 months. With this definition, women can have subjective binge episodes (SBE) in addition to or even more frequently than OBEs or they can have recurrent OBEs alone. Women who purge but only have SBEs would be diagnosed with an eating disorder not otherwise specified. Pamela Keel, Stephanie Mayer, and Jennifer Harnden-Fischer, “Importance of Size in Defining Binge Eating Episodes in Bulimia Nervosa,” *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 29, no. 3 (2001): 294-301, 295.

A laboratory review revealed that the mean caloric intake of binge episodes was between 3,031 and 4,479 kilocalories, which seems to confirm the first criterion that a binge is first of all the consumption of an unambiguously large quantity of food.<sup>45</sup> However, as Keel, et. al. note, these laboratory studies may not actually reflect the true nature of binge episodes as occurring in non-laboratory settings, with women assigning more emphasis to the experience of loss of control in the binge episode, rather than caloric quantity. In another study, Keel and her colleagues compared caloric quantity of binges between individuals with self-reported binge episodes and those who do not binge; they found that among self-identified binge eaters, 22% did not eat an amount that was larger than their peers who did not binge, although 70% were engaged in compensatory behavior like laxative abuse or vomiting. The authors suggest that there may be a significant population of women who purge and experience subjective binge episodes, but do not meet the DSM IV diagnostic criteria for BN because their objective binge is not large enough.<sup>46</sup>

Another point of contention concerns the criteria that a binge episode occur within a two-hour period. There is no empirical evidence confirming the utility of this designated time frame of a binge episode. Garfinkel, et. al. also point out the lack of empirical data justifying the criterion of frequency, namely that binge episodes occur at least twice weekly for a three-month period.<sup>47</sup> Franko and her colleagues suggest that the specific criteria concerning the frequency and duration of binge episodes should be reevaluated due to the lack of empirical support.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> J. Mitchell et al., "Feeding Laboratory Studies in Patients With Eating Disorders: A Review," *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 24 (1998): 115-124.

<sup>46</sup> PK Keel et al., "What Constitutes an Unusually Large Amount of Food for Defining Binge Episodes?" (presented at the Academy for Eating Disorder's 10th International Conference on Eating Disorders, Boston, April 25, 2002).

<sup>47</sup> Paul Garfinkel, S.H. Kennedy, and A.S. Kaplan, "Views on Classification and Diagnosis of Eating Disorders," *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 40 (1995): 445-456.

<sup>48</sup> D. L. Franko et al., "Diagnosis and Classification of Eating Disorders," *Handbook of Eating Disorders and Obesity* (2003): 58-80.

In addition to AN and BN, the DSM-IV includes a third category of eating disorders as clinically significant but not meeting the full criteria for a diagnosis of either AN or BN. A diagnosis of “eating disorder not otherwise specified” (EDNOS) is given when the patient lacks one of the diagnostic criteria for either AN or BN (e.g. a patient who meets all the diagnostic criteria for AN but has not lost sufficient weight to be considered 15% below ideal) or when a patient does not meet duration criteria (e.g. a patient who binges and engages in compensatory behavior, but does not do so twice a week for three months).<sup>49</sup> Also included in this category are those suffering from binge eating disorder (BED), which is not recognized as a discrete eating disorder.<sup>50</sup> A diagnosis of EDNOS is actually quite common, with estimates between 20-61% of all eating disorder cases falling within the EDNOS category.<sup>51</sup> In addition, women with EDNOS report as much body dissatisfaction as women with AN or BN, and they also report significant impairment and psychosocial stress. Despite the prevalence and clinical significance of EDNOS, very little empirical or systematic research has been conducted on the EDNOS category. However, these diagnostic disputes and the growing recognition of eating disorders outside of the specific diagnostic criteria support the position of this dissertation that eating disorders exist on a continuum, with the psychopathologies of AN and BN at one extreme. While eating disorders as a psychopathology affect only a few women, eating disorders as a larger

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>50</sup> BED is listed as an example under the criteria for EDNOS in the DSM-IV, and is listed in Appendix B as one of the “criteria sets provided for further study.” To meet the criteria for BED, a person must engage in binge activity at least two times a week for six consecutive months, but unlike BN, does not engage in any type of compensatory or purging behavior like laxative use, induced vomiting, or exercising. Those with BED do not usually undergo dietary restriction, but instead combine daily overeating and binge activity, unlike BN where daily diet may be restricted except for binge episodes (Franko, et. al., “Diagnosis and Classification of Eating Disorders,” 72).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 70. See Andersen, et. al., “A Slimming Program for Eating Disorders Not Otherwise Specified: Reconceptualizing a Confusing, Residual Diagnostic Category,” *Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 24 (2001): 271-280; C.G. Fairburn and B.T. Walsh, “Atypical Eating Disorders (Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified),” *Eating Disorders and Obesity: A Comprehensive Handbook*, Ed. C.G. Fairburn and K.D. Brownell (New York: Guilford Press, 2002): 171-77.

sociocultural and moral problem affect a much larger number of women than the diagnostic criteria allow.

*b. Prevalence*

The DSM-IV-TR puts the prevalence rate at approximately 0.5% for anorexia nervosa and between 1.0% and 3.0% for bulimia nervosa.<sup>52</sup> Since the 1950s, the incidence of AN in 15-24 year old females has increased markedly. Current statistics place the incidence of AN at about 8.1 per 100,000 population per year, and the incidence of BN is estimated to be even higher at 11.4 per 100,000, with some estimations as high as 19.2 per 100,000.<sup>53</sup> The increase in incidence may be explained in part by an increase in the number of diagnosed cases that in former years would have either gone undiagnosed or been misdiagnosed due to a general lack of awareness among physicians about the clinical presence of AN and BN. However, epidemiological data on the incidence and prevalence of eating disorders is subject to the methodological difficulty of screening a sufficiently large population for several years. Furthermore, some recent studies estimate that the current incidence rates are underestimates because many who suffer from AN and BN never seek clinical help and remain undiagnosed.<sup>54</sup>

Eating disorders are more common among girls and women, with an estimated male-female ratio ranging from 1:6 to 1:10. In the United States, eating disorders are most common among Caucasian and young Hispanic women, and less common among African American and

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<sup>52</sup> Michael B. First and Allan Tasman, eds., *DSM-IV-TR Mental Disorders: Diagnosis, Etiology, and Treatment* (Chichester, West Sussex, England: J. Wiley, 2004). Prevalence is defined as the total number of cases of eating disorders in the population.

<sup>53</sup> James E. Maddux and Barbara A. Winstead, *Psychopathology* (Routledge, 2005), 231. Incidence is defined as the number of new cases of eating disorders per year in population.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 231. "More recent studies find the incidence rates as high as 300 per 100,000 (.30%) for females and 20 per 100,000 (.02%) for males (Striegel-Moore, Garvin, Dohm, & Rosenheck, "Eating disorders in a National Sample of Hospitalized female and Male Veterans: Detection Rates and Psychiatric Comorbidity," *The International Journal of Eating Disorders* 25, 4 (1999): 405-14."

Asian women. However, the presence of eating disorders in various ethnic groupings is subject to debate due to the fact that appropriate BMI ranges may vary by ethnicity.<sup>55</sup>

Comorbidity with other psychiatric disorders such as depression or obsessive-compulsive disorder is quite high, ranging from 30-50%.<sup>56</sup> The most common disorders to co-vary with AN are depression, anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and various personality disorders.<sup>57</sup> The DSM IV also includes as co-morbid conditions alcohol and drug abuse (more common with the binge eating/purging type of AN) and higher frequency of suicide attempts and borderline personality disorder (comorbid with binge eating/purging type).<sup>58</sup> The most common comorbid conditions with BN are depressive and mood disorders, anxiety disorders, substance abuse (mainly in the form of alcohol and stimulants, with a life-time prevalence of 30%) and personality disorders, particularly borderline personality disorder.<sup>59</sup>

The percentage of patients who recover from AN is rather low, and even among patients who improve symptomatically over time, a substantial proportion continue to have body image disturbances, disordered eating, and other psychiatric difficulties. In a 10-year follow-up study, 42% of patients with AN relapsed in the year following hospitalization.<sup>60</sup> Overall, about two-thirds of AN patients continue to have enduring food and weight preoccupations, even after they no longer meet the full diagnostic criteria for the condition. The overall percentage of

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<sup>55</sup> There is evidence that normal range BMI might be lower in Asian populations than in North American and European populations. American Psychiatric Association, *American Psychiatric Association Practice Guidelines for the Treatment of Psychiatric Disorders* (American Psychiatric Publications, 2006), 1163.

<sup>56</sup> W.S. Agras, "The Consequences and costs of the Eating Disorder," *Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 24 (2001), 371-79.

<sup>57</sup> Herman Charles Fishman and Salvador (FRW) Minuchin, *Enduring Change in Eating Disorders* (Routledge, 2004).

<sup>58</sup> First and Tasman, *DSM-IV-TR Mental Disorders*, 585-86.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 591.

<sup>60</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *APA Practice Guidelines for the Treatment of Psychiatric Disorders*, 1164.

individuals who fully recover from anorexia nervosa is higher among younger patients who receive prompt and thorough intervention at an early stage of the illness.<sup>61</sup>

Patients with BN are more likely to achieve full recovery than patients with AN.<sup>62</sup> One study assessing two- and six-year outcomes of 196 females with bulimia nervosa—purging type (BNP) reported 59.9% of patients achieving a good recovery, 29.4% achieving an intermediate outcome, and 9.6% achieving a poor outcome. The authors conclude, "In comparison to samples with bulimia nervosa or binge eating disorder, the 6-year course of anorexia nervosa was less favorable. Mortality was rather high and symptomatic recovery protracted."<sup>63</sup>

AN has the highest mortality rate of any psychiatric disorder.<sup>64</sup> AN is the leading cause of death among women 15-24 years of age, with an associated mortality rate that is twelve times higher than the death rate of all other causes of death.<sup>65</sup> Sullivan reported a crude mortality rate of 5.9% (178 deaths in 2,006 subjects), with an estimated aggregate mortality rate of 0.56% per year, or 5.6% per decade.<sup>66</sup> The crude mortality rate for subjects with bulimia nervosa, according to a review of 88 different studies, is 0.3% (seven deaths among 2,194 subjects).<sup>67</sup>

#### **IV. Contemporary Approaches: The Multi-determined Nature of Eating Disorders**

It is generally accepted that eating disorders are multi-determined or bio-psycho-social disorders. In 1982, Garfinkel and Garner presented a theoretical model of anorexia nervosa as a

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 1164.

<sup>62</sup> Carolyn Costin, *The Eating Disorder Sourcebook* (McGraw-Hill Professional, 1999), 22.

<sup>63</sup> M.M. Fichter and N. Quadling, "Six-Year Course and Outcome of Anorexia Nervosa," *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 26 (1999), 359

<sup>64</sup> One 21-year study documented a mortality rate of 15.6%. See S. Zipfel, et. al. "Long-Term Prognosis in Anorexia Nervosa: Lessons for a 21-year Follow-up Study," *Lancet* 355 (2000): 721-22.

<sup>65</sup> P.F. Sullivan, "Mortality in Anorexia Nervosa," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 152, no. 7 (July 1, 1995): 1073-1074.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> P.K. Keel and J.E. Mitchell, "Outcome in Bulimia Nervosa," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 154, no. 3 (March 1, 1997): 313-321.

multi-dimensional disorder.<sup>68</sup> The authors argue that an interplay of forces on the biological, psychological, and cultural levels contribute to the genesis of the disorder. Among the various etiological theories and treatment strategies that have emerged in the last three decades, one area of consensus among specialists and researchers is that anorexia and bulimia are complex disorders with a heterogeneous etiology and symptomatology. Psychiatrist Vivian Rakoff writes, “As a clinical entity [anorexia] is the final common pathway of forces as diverse as fashion, social expectation, familial tension, and delusional belief. . . . In spite of claims made from time to time, treatment of anorexia nervosa cannot be defined by a simple formula.”<sup>69</sup>

Current etiological explanation of anorexia and bulimia focus on one of three models: biomedical, psychological, or sociocultural.<sup>70</sup>

#### *a. Biomedical Approach*

The biomedical model of eating disorders emphasizes the biological underpinnings of these conditions. Contemporary research has focused on the role of various neurotransmitter<sup>71</sup> systems such as serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine, or on the role of certain

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<sup>68</sup> Paul E. Garfinkel and David M. Garner, *Anorexia Nervosa : A Multidimensional Perspective*, 1st ed. (Bruner Meisel U, 1982).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., vii. Brumberg also confirms that the etiology of anorexia cannot be attributed to a single paradigm: “No one model, however, explains the current rash of eating disorders and the place of anorexia nervosa in the long history of female food refusal. Anorexia nervosa is clearly a multidetermined disorder that depends on the individual’s biologic vulnerability, psychological predisposition, family, and the social climate.” Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Fasting Girls: The History of Anorexia Nervosa* (Cambridge, Mass: Vintage, 2000).

<sup>70</sup> Steven Wiley Emmett writes that “the multifaceted nature of a phenomenon constituting the paradigmatic psychosomatic disorder of our age” must be researched from three perspectives “biomedical, sociocultural, and psychological—around which all thorough investigations addressing anorexia and bulimia revolve.” “Introduction,” Steven Wiley Emmett, *Theory and Treatment of Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia* (Psychology Press, 1985), xvii.

<sup>71</sup> Mayer and Walsh write that “changes in central nervous system (CNS) serotonin function clearly affect feeding behavior. Another reason to consider a link between disturbances in serotonin function and eating disorders is that many of the symptoms exhibited by patients with eating disorders, such as anxiety, depression, and obsessiveness, also occur in other psychiatric illnesses which respond to treatment with agents which affect serotonin function. It is well established that many of these symptoms develop in psychologically normal individuals during starvation. It is not clear whether disturbances in serotonin are responsible for the development of such symptoms both during starvation and in non-weight-related psychiatric illnesses, or whether similar symptoms develop via differing mechanisms under these different nutritional circumstances” (Mayer and Walsh, 386).

neuroendocrine<sup>72</sup> signals such as corticotrophin-releasing hormone,<sup>73</sup> neuropeptide Y,<sup>74</sup> and leptin.<sup>75</sup> The goal of those emphasizing a biomedical etiology is not necessarily to pathologize eating disorders by neglecting the other causal factors (individual personality, family dynamics, and sociocultural factors), but rather to isolate specific fundamental biological mechanisms that play a significant role in the genesis and perpetuation of anorexia and bulimia in order to identify and develop successful pharmacological interventions.<sup>76</sup>

One of the complications in the biomedical approach to eating disorders is determining whether biological disturbances and physiological symptoms are primary or corollary. In other words, there is some question among researchers whether physiological imbalances are the consequence of the eating disordered behavior (i.e. self-starvation, bingeing/purging) or whether

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<sup>72</sup> While much further investigation of the pathophysiology of the starvation response in anorexia nervosa is needed, Mayer and Walsh recommend the following: "Caloric restriction leads to negative energy balance and reduced fuel stores, and leptin concentrations fall. As leptin levels fall, its inhibitory effects on NPY and weight control are released. NPY is secreted and stimulates CRH production. In addition, increased release of neuropeptide Y leads to decreased sympathetic outflow which reduces energy expenditure, thus attempting to restore the energy balance. The increased production of NPY would also be expected to increase food consumption, and perhaps, the binge eating and increased consumption of low calorie foods evidenced by a significant fraction of patients with anorexia nervosa are reflections of NPY's influence" L.E.S. Mayer and B.T. Walsh, "Pharmacotherapy of Eating Disorders" in *Neurobiology in the Treatment of Eating Disorders* (New York, NY: Wiley), 383-405, 385-6.

<sup>73</sup> Corticotropin-releasing hormone (CRH) and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis (HPA) are involved in the regulation of energy balance. The HPA is activated by starvation under the control of CRH resulting in the rise of serum glucocorticoids. Anorectics seem to have elevated levels of CRH, though the exact role of this hormone in the genesis and perpetuation of anorexia awaits further study. *Ibid.*, 384. See also P.W. Gold, et. al. "Abnormal hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal function in anorexia nervosa pathophysiologic mechanisms in underweight and weight-corrected patients." *New England Journal of Medicine* 314, no. 21 (1986), 3174.

<sup>74</sup> Neuropeptide Y (NPY) is a 36 amino acid peptide which seems to play a role in inciting the consumption of carbohydrate-rich foods, and also reducing energy expenditure. There is some evidence that NPY plays a peripheral role in promoting fat synthesis and storage. Cerebrospinal fluid tests of NPY in anorectics indicate elevated levels of NPY in underweight patients and recently weight-recovered patients (less than two months), which may indicate that the effects of NPY may be ineffective in patients with AN. Mayer and Walsh, "Pharmacotherapy of Eating Disorders," 384. See also Kaye et al. "Altered Cerebrospinal Fluid Neuropeptide Y and Peptide YY Immunoreactivity in Anorexia and Bulimia Nervosa," *Archives of General Psychiatry* (1990), 47, 548-556.

<sup>75</sup> Leptin is a protein product produced by fat cells that seems to work with NPY to limit food intake. While the exact mechanism of leptin is unknown, it appears to promote decrease appetite and accelerate metabolism. Mayer and Walsh, "Pharmacotherapy of Eating Disorders," 385.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 385.



these physiological components play a more fundamental etiological role, establishing an organic basis for the eating disordered behavior.

Janet Treasure notes the advantage of integrating the biomedical approach to understanding and treating eating disorders: “Biology can shape the answers to distraught parents who ask, ‘Why my child?’ or ‘What did we do that was wrong?’ Answers such as, ‘There may be a genetic vulnerability which sensitizes the system to stress at puberty’ can help alleviate the guilt which can paralyze all action and even lead to behaviors which serve to perpetuate the illness.”<sup>77</sup> Such biological data can indeed be liberating for some patients, especially those who have been accused of “choosing” to have an eating disorder. However, the flip side of the biomedical perspective is that it may imbue a sense of biological or genetic determinism into the discussion, which may also render it more difficult for patients to recover if they are told they are somehow genetically predisposed to have an eating disorder. As Cynthia Bulik rightly notes, it is “important to develop a strategy for incorporating this knowledge in a helpful way into patients’ understanding of their disorder. This often includes heavy emphasis on the fallacy of genetic determinism. It remains critical to underscore that the presence of a genetic predisposition in no way guarantees expression of the trait.”<sup>78</sup>

Another problem is that biomedical models do not explain the uneven distribution and increase in the prevalence and incidence of eating disorders in the latter part of the twentieth-century. Moreover, when biomedical models are decontextualized, they can neglect the way in which physical processes are influenced by social conditions and psychology. In her critique of the biomedical approach, Lelwica writes, “By failing to challenge the cultural norms that

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<sup>77</sup> Janet Treasure, “Neurobiology,” *Neurobiology in the Treatment of Eating Disorders*, ed. Hans Wijbrand Hoek, Janet L. Treasure, and Melanie A. Katzman (New York, NY: Wiley, 1998), 383-405, 164.

<sup>78</sup> Cynthia Bulik, “Genetic and Biological Risk Factors,” *Handbook of Eating Disorders and Obesity* (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2004), 13.

encourage women to eat in ways that upset their body's chemistry (whether by starving, gorging, or purging), pharmaceutical solutions indirectly perpetuate the very problems they medicate.”<sup>79</sup>

Eating disorders are complex conditions which are likely to result from a combination of biomedical factors and non-biological factors like personality, sociological pressures, family influences, and moral values. For this reason, biomedical models are best utilized when incorporated with psychological and sociocultural models.<sup>80</sup>

#### *b. Psychological Approach*

Psychological models, perhaps the most common models utilized in the study of eating disorders, regard AN and BN as the manifestations of disturbances in psychological development and functioning. However, like biomedical models, psychological models of eating disorders are best utilized when they are incorporated with models that explain the connection between physiology, psychology, and sociology. Hilde Bruch noted this connection in her 1973 study of eating disorders that "eating, from birth on, is always closely intermingled with interpersonal and emotional experiences, and its physiological and psychological aspects cannot be strictly differentiated."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Michelle Mary Lelwica, *Starving for Salvation: The Spiritual Dimensions of Eating Problems Among American Girls and Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 25.

<sup>80</sup> Simon Giordano writes on this point, "At present, we cannot claim that we have definitely identified the cause or the causes of eating disorders, and probably there is no such thing as a single determinant cause or set of causes. Since many different variables seem to be involved in the development of the disorder, the only plausible approach is a multidimensional and open one. . . . An implication of this approach is that we should avoid thinking of eating-disordered behavior as either 'determined' or 'purposive.' Eating disorders should instead be regarded as the result of interplay of both determinant and chosen elements. This ambiguity well expresses the conflict that the sufferer seems to want and to defend her abnormal eating habits, on the one hand, while, on the other, feels compelled to maintain those habits. The contradiction that is experienced by the person is probably the expression of a condition that is both the result of a choice and the result of factors that are beyond the individual's conscious control" (Giordano, *Understanding Eating Disorders*, 88).

<sup>81</sup> Hilde Bruch, *Eating Disorders: Obesity, Anorexia Nervosa, and the Person Within*, 1st ed. (Basic Books, 1985), 3.

The three dominant interpretive models in the psychological approach to understanding eating disorders are psychoanalytic, family systems, and cognitive behavioral. Psychoanalytic models offer a way of understanding a patient's experience of an eating disorder, examining the meanings attached to the individual's symptoms and the function these symptoms have.<sup>82</sup> Building on the work of Freud, some of the psychoanalytic work focuses on sexuality. In 1895, Freud wrote, "The famous anorexia nervosa of young girls seems to me (on careful observation) to be a melancholia where sexuality is undeveloped."<sup>83</sup> Building on this, Hilde Bruch interpreted AN as an effort to slow or cease the process of sexual maturation and the onset of adulthood. Jane Ogden writes that "vomiting has been considered an attempt to eliminate the unwanted penis of a traumatic sexual experience, fear of fatness has been analyzed as a rejection of pregnancy, and extreme thinness has been assessed as representing actual fear of death."<sup>84</sup> Psychoanalytic theories tend to emphasize that AN and BN usually develop in adolescence during heightened periods of development in the sexual and reproductive areas.

Psychoanalytic theories also tend to explain AN and BN as responses to developmental conflicts that often emerge in childhood and adolescence. Bruch suggested that children may develop an eating disorder to establish power within a family. She emphasized especially the role of the mother, claiming that children brought up by dominant mothers who are constantly aware of their child's needs may not be able to identify and understand their own internal cues that enable them to recognize such sensations as hunger.<sup>85</sup> Thus, an eating disorder, especially AN, may be interpreted as an adolescent or young woman's effort to gain control over her body and her development.

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<sup>82</sup> Jane Ogden, *The Psychology of Eating* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), 202.

<sup>83</sup> Sigmund Freud, "An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17, ed. and trans. James Strackey (W.W. Norton and Company: London, 1966), 106.

<sup>84</sup> Ogden, *The Psychology of Eating*, 202.

<sup>85</sup> Bruch, *Eating Disorders*.

Mothers frequently receive special attention in psychoanalytic theories. According to some psychoanalytic theorists, people with eating disorders have a certain type of mother who is frustrated, depressed, perfectionist, overly competitive, and unable to see her daughter as an independent person. Kim Chernin, in her book *The Hungry Self*, argues that eating disorders are rooted in the problems of mother-daughter identity and separation. Refusing to eat or gain normal weight can be interpreted as an attempt to make emotional contact with the mother in a way that was previously not possible.<sup>86</sup>

The emphasis on the family in the psychoanalytic model overlaps with the second dominant psychological conceptual model, the family systems model. Family systems theory or family process theory first emerged as a psychological model in the 1960s as a unifying framework of the family therapy movement, but has since become a major clinical paradigm in psychiatric practice.<sup>87</sup> This approach focuses on the family rather than the individual based on the assumption that the part (the individual with dysfunctional behavior) cannot be understood apart from the whole (the dysfunctional family of which the individual's behavior is only a symptom). The family systems model interprets eating disorders as conditions that are rooted in family dynamics that manifest themselves in the pathological behavior of the eating disordered girl or woman.<sup>88</sup> Although anorexic families may appear normal, according to family systems theory, the families of the person with an eating disorder are covertly overly-rigid, overprotective, and unable to handle conflict.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Kim Chernin, *The Hungry Self: Women, Eating, and Identity* (New York: Perennial Library, 1986).

<sup>87</sup> Carlfred Bartholomew Broderick, *Understanding Family Process* (SAGE, 1993), 4.

<sup>88</sup> Salvador Minuchin, Bernice L. Rosman, and Lester Baker, *Psychosomatic Families* (Harvard University Press, 1978).

<sup>89</sup> "For the potentially anorexic child, loyalty and protection take precedence over autonomy and self-realization. The child's autonomy is curtailed by the intrusive concern and over-protection of other family members. Large areas of her psychological and bodily functioning remain the subject of others' interest and control long after they should have been autonomous." Emmett, *Theory and Treatment of Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia*, 101.

Whereas psychoanalytic and family systems approaches to eating disorder put specific emphasis on the psychogenesis of eating disordered behavior, the third major theoretical approach, the cognitive-behavioral approach, is more concerned with understanding the maintenance of eating disorder pathology. The core principle of cognitive-behavioral models is that cognition (e.g. thoughts, beliefs, personal truths, attitudes, and assumptions) mediates experience, and that psychological problems like eating disorders arise when cognitive constructs become either overly-rigid or faulty.

Because of the emphasis the cognitive behavioral approach places on beliefs and values, it provides a fitting transition to the final “dimension” of talking about eating disorders, the sociocultural dimension. The cognitive behavioral approach to eating disorders also introduces some of the same themes that we will focus on later in the dissertation in the discussion of connatural knowledge.

### *c. Sociocultural/Feminist Approach*

The third dimension or theoretical approach for understanding eating disorders is the sociocultural approach. Unlike the biomedical approach and most models of the psychological approach, the sociocultural approach is not concerned primarily with the individual who has the eating disorder, but rather with cultural conditions which lead to eating and weight disorders. These cultural conditions include the media's portrayal of extreme thinness as beautiful, gender norms within a patriarchal culture, and a societal preoccupation with food and eating.

Richard Gordon's book *Anorexia and Bulimia: Anatomy of a Social Epidemic* argues that eating disorders are examples of what psychoanalysts and anthropologists call an "ethnic disorder."<sup>90</sup> An ethnic disorder is a pattern of behavior that represents the tensions and conflicts

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<sup>90</sup> Richard Gordon, *Eating Disorders: Anatomy of a Social Epidemic*, 2nd ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 7.

that exist in a society. Gordon cites the historical example of hysteria in the nineteenth century western world, where women were required to be both "exaggeratedly feminine and ornamentally sexual, while at the same time being expected to follow a morally repressive and hypocritical sexual code of behavior."<sup>91</sup> The hysterical woman "dramatized her powerlessness as well as her repressed sexuality through her symptoms, whose illness-like character gave her some power to passively control and manipulate her immediate situation."<sup>92</sup> Gordon claims that just as hysteria was a symptom of its times, eating disorders are also a critical expression of female identity of our own time. Eating disorders, accordingly, are time- and culture-bound syndromes, affecting primarily young, white, affluent women in wealthy developed societies. Eating disorders emerge due to factors like changing female roles, cultural preoccupations with weight, body shape and fitness, and the emphasis the fashion industry and media place on small sizes.

As Gordon's book illustrates, gender is a fundamental concept in the sociocultural approach to eating disorders. Feminist research on eating disorders began to gain prominence in the 1970s alongside the rising public awareness of the disease. Early feminist writers interpreted the condition as a response to the impossible demands placed on women to be powerful and autonomous and dominant professionally while also embracing the feminine ideal of meekness, passivity, and graceful beauty.

Susie Orbach writes in her book *Hunger Strike* that a consumer culture alienates women from themselves and reduces them to commodities. As the title indicates, eating problems are forms of political "protest against the way in which women are regarded in our society as objects

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

of adornment and pleasure."<sup>93</sup> Other writers have expanded on this idea. Using the work of Michel Foucault, some argue that women's bodies are a locus of social control. Accordingly, distinctively female diseases like hysteria and eating disorders can be understood as "socially constructed states that symbolize both the hegemony of scientific medicine and Victorian social constraints on women."<sup>94</sup> Developing an eating disorder "is painted as a young woman's protest against the patriarchy—that is, as a form of feminist politics."<sup>95</sup>

In her book *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness*, feminist therapist Kim Chernin examines the widespread preoccupation with food, weight, and body size, and the meaning that these have in society. She argues that in western culture, women are feared as carnal, seductive, and powerful, and that the fashion and diet industries control and limit the danger of female power by forcing them to shape and reshape their bodies into slender and adolescent forms.<sup>96</sup>

Naomi Wolf's work *The Beauty Myth* argues that male societal power structures have established certain standards of beauty that have resulted in great psychological and social suffering for women. Wolf calls these societal standards of beauty the Professional Beauty Qualification (PBQ), substantiating her study with statistics of how the media and fashion industry have pushed women to do anything necessary to achieve physical perfection. Wolf cites statistics about how these standards of beauty, especially those related to weight and body shape, have become progressively more difficult to achieve. Perhaps most interesting from the feminist perspective is her claim that this societal trend has occurred alongside the feminist push for

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<sup>93</sup> Susie Orbach, *Hunger Strike: The Anorectic's Struggle as a Metaphor for Our Age* (New York, 1986), 63.

<sup>94</sup> Brumberg, *Fasting Girls*, 35.

<sup>95</sup> Brumberg, *Fasting Girls*, 35. See also Bryan Turner, *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory* (Oxford, 1984) which argues that asceticism and denial are forms of "government of the body" and that historically, women's bodies are the focus of social control.

<sup>96</sup> Kim Chernin, *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness* (Harper Perennial, 1994).

greater equality for women and power in society, and that these standards of beauty are part of a backlash against the feminist agenda:

The more legal and material hindrances women have broken through, the more strictly and heavily and cruelly images of female beauty have come to weigh upon us. . . . During the past decade, women breached the power structure; meanwhile, eating disorders rose exponentially and cosmetic surgery became the fastest-growing specialty. . . . More women have more money and power and scope and legal recognition than we have ever had before; but in terms of how we feel about ourselves physically, we may actually be worse off than our unliberated grandmothers.<sup>97</sup>

d. *Finding Points of Mutual Concern in the Psychosocial Literature on Eating Disorders and Ethics and Moral Theology*

Feminist scholars argue that eating disorders are expressions of an accepted society-wide morality. Feminist scholar Roberta Seid writes,

Our culture is swept up in a web of peculiar and distorted beliefs about beauty, health, virtue, eating, and appetite. We have elevated the pursuit of a lean, fat-free body into a new religion. It has a creed: 'I eat right, watch my weight, and exercise.' Indeed, anorexia nervosa could be called the paradigm of our age, for our creed encourages us all to adopt the behavior and attitudes of the anorexic.<sup>98</sup>

Seid's historical study of the rise in eating disorders and the preoccupation with thinness argues that the moral value assigned to weight is a product of the rise in affluence and leisure in American society following the Second World War. She writes about the "growing fear that Americans were getting physically and morally (emphasis) soft. For at the heart of all the campaign literature was a *moral concern* about how Americans would react to postwar plenty and leisure---how they would handle modernization."<sup>99</sup> She concludes,

It is hard to resist the parallel between Victorian attributes toward sex and modern attitudes toward food. In the 19th century, the control of sexual instincts was the acme of virtue; sexual behavior was the yardstick of goodness. Today, eating habits and body

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<sup>97</sup> Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (Random House, 1997), 10.

<sup>98</sup> Patricia Fallon, Melanie A. Katzman, and Susan C. Wooley, *Feminist Perspectives on Eating Disorders* (Guilford Press, 1996), 4

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 6. Emphasis added.



weights have become the yardsticks of virtue, and food rules have become as dour and inhibitory as the sex rules of the 19th century. Perhaps cultures require some kind of instinctual control to feel that they qualify as ‘civilized.’<sup>100</sup>

Food and bodies have moral value, and society’s moral values shape food practices, opinions about beauty, and even conceptions of health.<sup>101</sup> Despite this, the moral dimension of eating disorders goes largely undiscussed. Giordano writes:

Eating-disordered behavior is the consistent implementation of moral values that the person (sufferer) takes seriously. Eating disorders are in an important way an expression of ordinary (or prevalent) morality. Without shared basic concepts of good/bad and right/wrong (the most fundamental of which is probably the idea that causing suffering is morally wrong), eating disorders could not be articulated. . . . Although other variables are also likely to play a role in the articulation of such a complex syndrome, the fight for control that is at the heart of anorexia and bulimia appears unintelligible unless one takes into account the fundamental part played by moral beliefs and ideals.<sup>102</sup>

The moral value that people with eating disorders are expressing, according to Giordano, is the value of lightness. Giordano argues that the impulse to be thin or light can be understood as a moral effort to be good.

Anthropologists Richard O’Connor and Penny Esterik have made a similar claim that individuals with eating disorders are “misguided moralists.” Focusing only on AN, O’Connor and Esterik argue that the anorectics restrictive eating is not just an effort to be beautiful, but rather more importantly, an effort to be good. The eating practices of the anorectic are, therefore, not viewed as something beyond her control, but rather a moral choice. Within the “anorectic diet,” avoiding fat and exercising are virtuous, whereas eating and gaining weight are vicious. O’Connor and Esterik write that these are not “fringe views”:

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 8

<sup>101</sup> For a review of this subject, see John Coveney, *Food, Morals and Meaning, second edition: The Pleasure and Anxiety of Eating*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2006); Leon R. Kass, *The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature* (University Of Chicago Press, 1999); L. Shannon Jung, *Food for Life* (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2004); Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (Cornell University Press, 2002).

<sup>102</sup> Giordano, *Understanding Eating Disorders*, 262.

On the contrary, our informants echo how contemporary culture moralizes eating. Witness the popular prejudice whereby fat people, seen as ‘letting themselves go’, are stigmatized as weak or even bad, while slim people, perceived as strict with themselves, exemplify strength and goodness. Or consider how people readily judge their own eating, speaking of “sinning” with dessert, “being good” with veggies, or “confessing” a late-night binge. What is at stake here is virtue, not beauty. Over the last century or so, as the body has increasingly become a moral arena, eating and exercise have come to test our moral fiber.<sup>103</sup>

O’Connor and Esterik and other scholars recognize that eating disorders have a moral dimension. Giordano’s project, however, attempts to provide a *systematic* moral approach to understanding eating disorders.

Giordano focuses on the issue of autonomy. She argues that because individuals with eating disorders have a moral disorder, and not a mental disorder, they should not automatically be labeled as medically and legally incompetent. This becomes a major ethical in considering coerced medical treatment, which is a common approach to the treatment of people with eating disorders since refusal to gain weight (a goal of most treatment programs) is a major aspect of the condition. According to Giordano, there is nothing in principle to keep the individual with an eating disorder from refusing treatment if she chooses, since she is not mentally ill and thus not mentally incompetent.

Giordano is right to focus on the issue of autonomy as critical for both understanding and treating eating disorders. The question of autonomy has also become a major focus in the case of pro-eating disorder websites, an issue which Giordano does not address. Pro-Ana is a movement, largely web-based, used by people who do not want to recover from their anorexia. Pro-Mia, the somewhat less-popular sister movement, consists of bulimics who do not want to recover. The pro-ana and pro-mia websites offer tips for continuing anorexic and bulimic behavior as well as message boards where users can ask questions, get advice, share ideas, and

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<sup>103</sup> Richard A. O’Connor and Penny Van Esterik, “De-medicalizing Anorexia: A New Cultural Brokering,” *Anthropology Today* 24, no. 5 (2008): 6-9.

generally, meet other people who have either anorexia or bulimia. Many of the websites offer what is known as “thinspiration,” pictures of ultra-thin models and celebrities as a motivator for continuing anorexic and bulimic behavior.

Although these sites have received extensive criticism, most *do* generally acknowledge that anorexia and bulimia cause suffering, and many offer resources aimed at recovery. However, these sites are also generally in favor of the position that anorexia and bulimia are lifestyle choices, not diseases, and as such, support their users’ freedom to decide whether or not to discontinue their anorexic or bulimic behavior. Giordano’s work resonates with the assumption underlying these that eating disorder behavior is an exercise of freedom, not sickness. Giordano argues that any paternalistic intervention in such behavior challenges autonomy and is always accompanied by moral doubt.

While Giordano’s work is a valuable contribution to a moral approach to eating disorders, her focus is mainly on the issue of respecting autonomy, particularly in the most severe cases of force-feeding an anorectic. Moreover, Giordano argues based on a neo-Kantian view of autonomy that, as Servais Pinckaers notes, dichotomizes autonomy and heteronomy such that a person is either autonomous or not.<sup>104</sup> In contrast, a Thomistic approach sees autonomy as more dynamically related to character and “rooted in the natural inclinations which animate the spiritual human faculties: the inclination to truth for the intellect, to beatitude and goodness for the will, the inclination to live in the society of other persons, the natural desire for God, and so forth.”<sup>105</sup> Autonomy, or freedom, to use more Thomistic terminology, develops as a person develops her natural inclinations and her capability for self-direction. For Thomas, the question of freedom is not an either/or (as it seems to be for Giordano), but rather a both/and. Freedom is

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<sup>104</sup> Servais Pinckaers, “Aquinas and Agency: Beyond Autonomy and Heteronomy?” in *The Pinckaers Reader*, 167.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

a capability a person can develop through the development of her natural inclinations in the pursuit of virtue. As such, Thomas' approach seems to be more suited to the issue of eating disorders than Giordano's neo-Kantian approach.

Additionally, Giordano, while noting the biomedical and psychological approaches to eating disorders, seems at times to dismiss their significance in favor for her own moral approach. She writes that *the* crucial aspect of eating disorders is morality, and that "eating-disordered behavior is the consistent implementation of moral values that the person (*the sufferer*) takes seriously."<sup>106</sup> This dissertation, by contrast, aims at *contributing* to a multidimensional approach, and not replacing it. As such, this dissertation argues that eating disorders have a moral dimension, but that they cannot be reduced to expressions of morality. A central thesis of this work is that ethics and moral theology can employ the psychosocial research on eating disorders to enhance and develop moral analysis in a contemporary context. Ethics and moral theology can gain from such empirical studies new insights and resources for the discussion of building character and flourishing in light of the challenges posed by contemporary society, especially for women.

This dissertation will focus on one particular pair of issues within the larger study of eating disorders—those of thin-ideal internalization and body dissatisfaction—which are considered the primary predictors of eating disorder onset and maintenance. The reason for this focus is three-fold: First, this dissertation attempts to move beyond a focus on the particular behaviors manifested in eating disorders, and to examine the dispositions underlying those behaviors. Second, it allows us to examine eating problems on a continuum; the psychopathologies of AN and BN are at one extreme, but eating problems affect many more women than those with a diagnosable psychopathology. This allows us to see the behaviors and

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<sup>106</sup> Giordano, 262.

beliefs associated with eating disorders as differences in *degree* rather than *species* and to see how eating problems are manifest in a myriad of ways in the lives of most women in the United States.<sup>107</sup> Finally, the focus on body dissatisfaction leads us to question what constitutes moral knowledge and where this moral knowledge comes from. As we will see in the next chapters, Aquinas' moral epistemology, and particularly the concept of "connatural knowledge," provides a valuable resource in addressing moral questions which arise in the discussion of eating disorders and body dissatisfaction.

## **V. Thin-Ideal Internalization and Body Dissatisfaction Among American Women**

### *a. Body Image*

"Body image" can be broadly defined as how an individual perceives her or his own body. The study of the psychology and sociology of body image in the contemporary period can trace its roots back to neurologist/psychiatrist Paul Schilder who first became interested in the study of body image in his interactions with World War I amputees who experienced "phantom limb syndrome," the experience of still having a limb, even feeling severe pain, despite the fact that the limb no longer exists. His groundbreaking work, *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body*, argued that body image is an elastic concept anchored not only in brain neurons, but also in one's social environment and interactions with others.<sup>108</sup> Schilder argued for a biopsychosocial approach to body image that could account for the multifaceted nature of body image beyond mere neurological explanations.

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<sup>107</sup> Lelwica chooses a similar route of examining eating *problems* rather than eating *psychopathologies*. She writes that her perspective "locates the pathology of which these problems are symptoms in the ideals and structures of this society, rather than in the minds of those who assimilate its norms. This view recognizes a continuum of eating problems, from the more extreme incidences of anorexia and bulimia to the more common but related problems of compulsive eating, chronic dieting, and body discontent. . . This illuminates the continuities between 'disordered' eating and the 'normal' food patterns of many girls and women today (those based on some degree of restriction, dissatisfaction, obsession, and/or loss of control)" (Lelwica, *Starving for Salvation*, 19).

<sup>108</sup> Paul Schilder, *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body* (Taylor and Francis, 1999).

Since Schilder, the concept of “body image” has become an increasingly important topic of study in a wide range of academic disciplines. The sociology of body image owes its origin as discipline to Bryan Turner, whose influential work *The Body and Society* argued that the body, rather than societal structure, class, and function, should be the axis of sociological analysis.<sup>109</sup> Turner’s journal *Body and Society* established in the mid-1990’s demonstrates the influence and continued interest in his arguments concerning the centrality of the body for sociology. Cash and Pruzinsky’s *Body Images: Development, Deviance, and Change* attempted to bring together research and clinical work on the physical and psychological experience of the human body, focusing especially on the critical importance of the study of body image in the field of psychology.<sup>110</sup> At this point, it is widely accepted that body image is a psycho-social phenomenon, and “to understand it fully, we need to look not only at the experiences of individuals in relation to their bodies, but also at the cultural milieu in which the individual operates.”<sup>111</sup>

There is no necessary connection between an individual’s subjective experience of body image—how they themselves perceive their body—and what is perceived by an outside observer. Distortion in body image is a major experience among those with eating disorders, particularly with anorexia nervosa, in which an individual truly believes she is fat, even when she is dangerously underweight. However, not only those with eating disorders experience distortions in body image. A large number of women and girls experience the feeling of “being fat,” even when they are objectively of average or even below average weight for their height.<sup>112</sup> In fact, the thesis that body dissatisfaction is now normative for women in the western world

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<sup>109</sup> Bryan S. Turner, *The Body and Society* (Blackwell Publishers, 1984).

<sup>110</sup> Thomas F. Cash and Thomas Pruzinsky, *Body Image* (Guilford Press, 2004).

<sup>111</sup> Sarah Grogan, *Body Image* (Taylor & Francis, 2008), 2.

<sup>112</sup> Grogan, *Body Image*, 2.

from age eight upwards has received widespread acceptance, and this has a significant impact on behavior, particularly behavior oriented towards changing one's weight and body shape.<sup>113</sup>

*b. Reviewing the Psychosocial Literature on Thin-Ideal Internalization and Body Dissatisfaction*

As already noted, many have adopted a sociocultural explanation for the high incidence of eating disorders in western society, arguing that this is attributable to the society's idealization of thinness.<sup>114</sup> According to this perspective, women experience significant social pressure to achieve a thin-ideal, and accordingly turn to dieting and exercise. For a notable minority of these women, these behaviors can contribute to the development of an eating disorder. This measure of risk is called "thin-ideal internalization" and describes "the extent to which an individual cognitively buys into societal norms of size and appearance, to the point of modifying one's behavior in an attempt to approximate these standards."<sup>115</sup>

Accepting the sociocultural explanation of eating disorder onset and maintenance is, of course, not meant to deny the other factors implicated in the development of eating disorders. These include a perfectionist personality, low self-esteem, family factors and childhood experience, and genetics. The thesis that eating disorders are multi-determined is widely accepted in the literature.<sup>116</sup> Yet, the sociocultural explanation focusing on the drive for thinness as a major contributing factor to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating provides a way of talking about the subject of eating disorders without limiting the focus of the conversation to

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<sup>113</sup> Grogan, *Body Image*, 3.

<sup>114</sup> See, e.g. D.E. Wilfley and J. Rodin, "Cultural Influences on Eating Disorders," in *Eating Disorders and Obesity: A Comprehensive Handbook*, ed. Brownell and Fairburn (Guilford Press: NY, 1995), 78-82.

<sup>115</sup> J. Kevin Thompson et al., "The Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Scale-3 (SATAQ-3): Development and Validation," *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 35, no. 3 (2004): 293-304, 294. See E. Stice and H.E. Shaw, "Role of Body Dissatisfaction in the Onset and Maintenance of Eating Pathology: A Synthesis of Research Findings," *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 53 (2002): 985-993.

<sup>116</sup> D.M. Garner, M.A. Olmstead, and J. Polivy, "Development and Validation of a Multidimensional Eating Disorder Inventory for Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia," *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 2 (1983), 15-34.

those minority cases in which body dissatisfaction and disordered eating reach the level of a diagnosable psychopathology. In other words, body dissatisfaction and disordered eating are issues that affect most women in western society, and not only those on the extreme end of the continuum who meet the diagnostic criteria for an eating disorder. For example, a growing body of research indicates that body dissatisfaction and disordered eating remain at high levels in mid-life (35-65 years old). One study reported that 43% of a sample of women with a median age of 51 were dissatisfied with their bodies.<sup>117</sup> Another study found that 80% of a sample of women aged 54 wanted to lose weight, and that the group reported more significant body dissatisfaction than at younger ages.<sup>118</sup> Most accept that a moderate degree of dissatisfaction is now normative among women, and that this dissatisfaction provides a strong motivation for women to diet and manipulate their shape and size.<sup>119</sup>

From a sociocultural perspective, disordered eating and body dissatisfaction exists on a continuum, with the psychopathologies of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa on one extreme end of the spectrum. However, many disordered eating behaviors like dietary restraint, purging, laxative abuse, and extreme exercise can be motivated by the drive to achieve a thin figure. Experimental research attests to the importance of body weight in determining the attitudes and behaviors of many women. In one study, participants who were told that they weighed five pounds more than their actual weight reported low self-esteem, and more depression and anxiety than study participants who were told they weighed less than their actual weight or were not

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<sup>117</sup> K.P. Grippo, M.S. Hill, "Self-Objectification, Habitual Body Monitoring, and Body dissatisfaction in Older European American Women: Exploring Age and Feminism as Moderators," *Body Image* (2008), 173-82.

<sup>118</sup> L. McLaren and D. Kuh, "Body Dissatisfaction in Midlife Women," *Journal of Women Aging* 16 (2004), 35-54. See also C. Stevens and M. Tiggemann, "Women's Body Figure Preferences Across the Life Span," *Journal of Genetic Psychology* (1998): 94-102 and DM Lewis, FM Cachelin, "Body Image, Body Dissatisfaction and Eating Attitudes in Midlife and Elderly Women," *Eating Disorders* 9 (2001): 29-39.

<sup>119</sup> J. Rodin, L.R. Silberstein, and R.H. Striegel-Moore, "Women and Weight: A Normative Discontent," in *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, vol 32: Psychology and Gender, Ed. T.B. Sonderegger (University of Nebraska: Lincoln, 1985): 267-307; R.A. Gordon, *Eating Disorders: Anatomy of a Social Epidemic*, 2nd ed. (Blackwell: Cambridge, 2000).



weighed.<sup>120</sup> Another study found that daily weighing over a two-week period resulted in lower self-esteem, regardless of the status of food restraint, illustrating the significance of not only actual weight, but also perceptions of weight for female well-being.<sup>121</sup> However, not only weight perception but also the perception of other body features, and particularly body shape are considered important factors in the drive for thinness and onset and maintenance of disordered eating.<sup>122</sup>

Those studying body image have tended to focus on media influences as playing a major role in both onset and maintenance of body image disturbances and eating problems.<sup>123</sup> Overall, the role of the media in perpetuating an unrealistic ideal of female beauty associated with excessive thinness has been the most widely supported variable found to produce appearance dissatisfaction. A number of studies have examined the impact of media images on the body image of adolescents. Correlational studies show that adolescent girls who read more magazines and watch more television report greater body dissatisfaction<sup>124</sup> Several individual experimental studies have shown that exposure to idealized media images leads to increased body

<sup>120</sup> T. McFarlane, J. Polivy, and C.P. Herman, "Effects of False Weight Feedback on Mood, Self-Evaluation, and Food Intake in Restrained and Unrestrained Eaters," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 107 (1998), 312-18.

<sup>121</sup> J. Ogden and C. Whyman, "The effect of Repeated Weighing on Psychological State," *European Eating Disorders Review* 5 (1997), 121-30.

<sup>122</sup> "Given that many women who are either at a healthy weight or even underweight experience body dissatisfaction and engage in dieting and other behaviors to achieve thinness, it is suggested that body shape, and particularly waist-to-hip ratio (WHR) are more relevant concerns than body weight." (R.H. Striegel-Moore, D.L. Franko, "Body Image Issues Among Girls and Women," in *Body Image: A Handbook of Theory, Research, and Clinical Practice*, ed. T.F. Cash & T. Pruzinsky (Guilford Press: NY, 2001), 183-191.)

<sup>123</sup> Yuko Yamamiya et al., "Women's Exposure to Thin-and-Beautiful Media Images: Body Image Effects of Media-Ideal Internalization and Impact-Reduction Interventions," *Body Image: An International Journal of Research* 2, no. 1 (March 2005): 74-80; KJ Thompson, E. Stice, "Thin-Ideal Internalization: Mounting Evidence for a New Risk Factor for body-Image Disturbance and Eating Pathology," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 1 (2001), 1818-83; LM Groesz, MP Levine, SK Murnen, "The Effect of Experimental Presentation of Thin Media Images on Body Dissatisfaction: A Meta-Analytic Review," *International Journal Eating Disorders* 31 (2001), 1-16; M.P. Levine and L. Smolak, "Media as a Context for the Development of Disordered Eating" in *The Developmental Psychopathology of Eating Disorders: Implication for Research, Prevention, and Treatment*, Ed. L. Smolak, MP Levine, R. Striegel-Moore (Lawrence Erlbaum: Mahwah, NJ, 1996), 233-257.

<sup>124</sup> D R Anderson et al., "Early Childhood Television Viewing and Adolescent Behavior: The Recontact Study," *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 66, no. 1 (2001): I-VIII, 1-147; Michael P. Levine, Linda Smolak, and Helen Hayden, "The Relation of Sociocultural Factors to Eating Attitudes and Behaviors among Middle School Girls," *The Journal of Early Adolescence* 14, no. 4 (November 1, 1994): 471-490

dissatisfaction for girls.<sup>125</sup> Recently, reviews and meta-analyses have confirmed this thesis. A review of experimental studies by Stice and Shaw determined that perceived pressure to be thin and thin-ideal internalization increased the risk for body dissatisfaction, which in turn increased the risk factor for the onset of eating disturbances.<sup>126</sup> This has been confirmed by more recent meta-analyses.

*c. Why Focus on Women?*

A recent study on body dissatisfaction differences between girls and boys found that the impact of media on body image is both stronger and more normative for girls than for boys, though some boys may also be affected.<sup>127</sup> In general, the vast majority of evidence gathered on thin-ideal internalization, body dissatisfaction, and eating disorders has been focused on females. There are many reasons for this disparity, including the higher incidence of eating disorders among women, gender role theories, and the belief that males are at little risk to develop body image dissatisfaction due to exposure to media images.<sup>128</sup> In recent years, researchers have rejected the notion that men are not affected by media images, and recent research has focused on trying to define, measure, and develop theories that account for the male experience of body image disturbance. Qualitative studies have focused on the drive for muscularity as an important

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<sup>125</sup> Robyn Birkeland et al., "Media Exposure, Mood, and Body Image Dissatisfaction: An Experimental Test of Person versus Product Priming," *Body Image* 2, no. 1 (March 2005): 53-61; Duane Hargreaves and Marika Tiggemann, "Idealized Media images and Adolescent Body Image: "Comparing" Boys and Girls," *Body Image* 1, no. 4 (December 2004): 351-361; Duane Hargreaves and Marika Tiggemann, "The Effect of "Thin Ideal" Television Commercials on Body Dissatisfaction and Schema Activation During Early Adolescence," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 32, no. 5 (October 1, 2003): 367-373

<sup>126</sup> Stice and Shaw, "Role of Body Dissatisfaction in the Onset and Maintenance of Eating Pathology: A Synthesis of Research Findings."; See also Eric Stice et al., "Relation of Media Exposure to Eating Disorder Symptomatology: An Examination of Mediating Mechanisms," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 103, no. 4 (1994): 836-840

<sup>127</sup> Hargreaves and Tiggemann, "Idealized Media images and Adolescent Body Image: "Comparing" Boys and Girls." *Body Image* 1, no. 4 (December 2004): 351-361.

<sup>128</sup> See M. McCabe, L. Ricciardelli, "Body Image Dissatisfaction Among Males Across the Lifespan: A Review of Past Literature," *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 56 (2004), 675-685.

aspect of male body image.<sup>129</sup> In a review of the instruments currently available for assessing body image in men, the Drive for Muscularity Scale is considered the best instrument available, and researchers are beginning to explore explanatory theories related to the increase in the drive for muscularity among men in recent years, contributing to an increase in body image disturbance among men.<sup>130</sup>

In their comprehensive review of body image and related disorders, Heinberg et. al. note that women encounter body-image related experiences that men do not encounter, such as sexual abuse/harassment, menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause: "Certainly if the experience of being female is important to the gender difference in depression where the sex ratio is 2:1, consider its possible relevance for eating disorders where the sex ratio is 9:1, and the main symptom is feeling unhappy with one's body."<sup>131</sup> While there is clear evidence that men do in fact experience body dissatisfaction, and there is a correlation between the male experience of body dissatisfaction and eating disturbances, the nature of male body dissatisfaction seems qualitatively different from that of females. For example, men seem more prone to internalize a muscular ideal rather than a thin-ideal. For the sake of clarity, this dissertation will limit itself only to psychosocial research on thin-ideal internalization, body dissatisfaction, and eating disturbances among women, although the theoretical moral evaluation of this phenomenon presented in later chapters clearly has relevance for the male population as well.

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<sup>129</sup> For a meta-analysis, see C.P. Bartlett, C.L. Vowels, and D.A. Saucier, "Meta-analyses of the Effects of Media Images on Men's Body Image Concerns," *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 27 (2008), 279-310. See also G. Adams, H. Turner and R. Bucks, "The Experience of Body Dissatisfaction in Men," *Body Image* 2 (2005), 271-283.

<sup>130</sup> See G. Cafri and J.K. Thompson, "Measuring Male Body Image: A Review of the Current Methodology," *Psychology of Men and Masculinity* 5 (2004), 18-29; D. McCreary, D. Sasse, D. Saucier, and K. Dorsch, "Measuring the Drive for Muscularity: Factorial Validity of the Drive for Muscularity Scale in Men and Women," *Psychology of Men and Masculinity* 5 (2004), 49-58; D. McCreary and D. Sasse, "An exploration of the Drive for Muscularity in Adolescent Boys and Girls," *Journal of American College Health* 48 (2000), 297-304.

<sup>131</sup> Leslie J. Heinberg et al., *Exacting Beauty: Theory, Assessment, and Treatment of Body Image Disturbance*, 1st ed. (American Psychological Association), 1999, 30.

## VI. Conclusions

Eating disorders are clearly severe problems in western society, and as such, deserve the attention of ethicists. However, as multifaceted problems consisting of biomedical, psychological, and sociocultural factors, a moral approach to eating disorders is in danger of becoming reductionistic, focusing on only one dimension of these complex disorders. In order to avoid reductionism, this dissertation aims to take seriously the psychosocial literature on eating disorders, acknowledging the extent to which they are caused by unwilled biomedical factors. However, this dissertation also takes seriously recent developments within cognitive science that illustrate the dynamic connection between external behaviors and the inner life of the mind.

Particularly influential is the work of Antonio Damasio whose work on consciousness, emotion, and the brain illustrates the way in which objects in the external environment cause patterns of nerve cell activity which influences the external behaviors of the whole person.<sup>132</sup> In his introduction to *The Feeling of What Happens*, Damasio reflects how the brain seeks not only to know, but also to avoid knowing—to hide facts rather than reveal them:

One of the things the screen [of the mind] hides most effectively is the body, our own body, by which I mean the ins of it, its interiors. Like a veil thrown over the skin to secure its modesty, but not too well, the screen partially removes from the mind the inner states of the body, those that constitute the flow of life as it wanders in the journey of each day. The alleged vagueness, elusiveness, and intangibility of emotions and feelings are probably symptoms of this fact, an indication of how we cover the presentation of our bodies, of how much mental imagery based on nonbody objects and events masks the reality of the body. Otherwise, we would easily know that emotions and feelings are tangibly about the body. Sometimes we use our minds to hide a part of our beings from another part of our beings.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, 1st ed. (Harvest Books, 2000).

<sup>133</sup> Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 28-9.

Traditionally, it was the task of philosophy and theology to lift this veil off the mind. From the ancient Greek aphorism ascribed at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi to “Know thyself,” to the post-MacIntyre summary of the three questions most foundational to the study of ethics (“Who am I?” “Who do I want to become?” and “How do I get there?”) the task of philosophical and theological ethics is the rigorous pursuit of self-knowledge. In the contemporary period, as Damasio’s work so clearly indicates, this pursuit of self-knowledge cannot be the task of philosophical and theological ethics alone, but must incorporate insights from the psychosocial sciences, much of which indicates that the knowledge a person possesses is not exclusively rational. This dissertation will explore where moral knowledge comes from, particularly when one’s knowledge appears to be contrary to reason. Much of the content of this knowledge of the self lies “under a veil,” but with the cooperative effort of both the psychosocial sciences and a virtue-based philosophical and theological ethic, perhaps the veil can be lifted to an extent—not only to grant a greater depth of self-knowledge, but also to pave the way for a more authentic and successful flourishing.

There are valuable resources in Aquinas’ moral system for answering the question of where moral knowledge comes from and how moral knowledge and a person’s actions may contradict her rational knowledge and rationally-intended actions. The next chapter will provide an overview of Aquinas’ moral theory with the intention of illuminating the elements of his thought that may assist in this inquiry.

## Chapter Two

### Thomist Virtue Ethics: An Overview

#### **II. The Study of Morality**

#### **III. Introducing a Thomistic Approach to Moral Reasoning**

#### **IV. Renewal and Recovery of Thomistic Moral Thought**

- a. *The Role of the Emotions in Thomistic Moral Thought*
- b. *Thomistic Moral Psychology and the Natural and Social Science*
- c. *The Theological Component of Aquinas' Moral Theology*

#### **IV. Conclusion**

This dissertation argues broadly that a Thomistic virtue-based moral framework is especially well-suited for examining the complexities of the moral dimension of eating disorders. This chapter will provide an overview of Thomistic virtue ethics in order to illustrate why such an approach is so well-suited to the study of eating disorders. This chapter will begin methodologically with the nature and object of moral science as used in this dissertation, before turning to the specific resources in Aquinas' system to address the moral dimension of eating disorders and body dissatisfaction.

#### **I. The Study of Morality**

Modern moral scholarship has been greatly influenced by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. At the end of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant remarks that "two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me."<sup>1</sup> This conception of morality as consisting in a sacred moral law has been the dominant conception of morality in the modern period. However, the idea that morality is concerned with a moral law comprised of an

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<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 127.

independent, comprehensive rational system is historically not the only way that the subject of morality has been conceived.

Moral theologian Jean Porter traces the use of term *moralia*, from which we derive our word “morality,” back to Cicero in his work *De Officiis*, a work which shaped subsequent theoretical treatments of morality. Porter first examines Peter Abelard’s appropriation of Cicero’s use of the term *moralia*. She notes that Abelard begins his *Ethica* with this definition: “*Mores dicimus animi civia vel virtutes quae nos ad mala vel bona opera pronos efficiunt*—‘We call *mores* those vices or virtues of the mind which make us prone to bad or good works.’”<sup>2</sup>

Porter goes on to explain that *mores* should be understood as “customs” or “practices,” but

not understood in a legal or sociological sense . . . [and] cannot be equated with ‘morality’ in the sense of a substantive principle or body of precepts, because vices as well as virtues fall within the ambit of ‘mores.’ Rather, Abelard here identifies a set of mental qualities, namely, virtues and vices, in terms of their relevance to human action, and in so doing, he indicates the domain of reflection for his own treatise.<sup>3</sup>

According to Porter, the difference between the Scholastic conception of morality and modern moral theories is that, the Scholastic understanding does not seem to include a set of autonomous, universal, and overriding normative criteria, akin to what Kant refers to in the above-cited conclusion of the *Critique of Practical Reason*. A further difference between the Scholastics and Immanuel Kant, according to Porter, is that Kant seemed to think of the object of his study as “morality,” meaning a distinct and separate entity subject to scrutiny; for the Scholastics, the object of study was human action, of which morality was one dimension: “In

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<sup>2</sup> *Peter Abelard's Ethics*, introduction, trans., and notes by Luscombe, 4. Cited in Jean Porter, “Christian Ethics and the Concept of Morality: A Historical Inquiry,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 26, no. 2 (Fall-Wint 2006): 3-21, 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

short, [the Scholastics] seem to have no idea of a distinctive entity or concept, ‘morality,’ corresponding to special principles, properties, or epistemic faculties.”<sup>4</sup>

Porter acknowledges that the Scholastics did think of morality at least in part as concerned with principles such as “act rationally” and “obey the will of God.” But these principles were only meaningful in specific contexts apart from which they lacked content. The Scholastics did not think that reason alone, apart from experience, could generate substantive normative moral precepts. Instead, Scholastic thinkers postulated that reason could only generate practical precepts through a reflection on human nature, complete with all its needs, vulnerabilities, and desires. Furthermore, for the Scholastics, morality was not about deriving practical precepts from a universal system of transcendent norms, as Kant thought. Moral deliberation was rather an active, inductive process of rational inquiry and practical judgment, which drew on diverse kinds of normative criteria that were unique to the Scholastic context: “The Scholastics’ analysis of precepts . . . emerges within a specific context, namely, the interpretation of scripture, and it proceeds by identifying general norms by reference to a specific set of particulars given in that text. Correlatively, these generalizations take their meaning and point from the specifics that they interpret and tie together, and they are evaluated in terms of their plausibility and fruitfulness seen in relation to those particulars.”<sup>5</sup>

Porter’s critique of the modern, post-Kantian concept of morality is that it uses the language of an earlier morality in a way that is detached from the original context and thus deprived of its meaning:

Instead of speaking of the normative claims generated by an intelligible and good human nature, reflections of the wisdom and loving will of the Creator, we speak in terms of an autonomous, self-legislating reason—which more or less tracks the claims of the older natural law tradition. Instead of speaking of the powers inherent in the human person as

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 12.



an image of God, and the respect due to that image, we speak in terms of the sacredness of conscience, or freedom, or life itself. I myself would certainly agree that freedom, conscience, and life deserve utmost respect, but without a theological referent to give some meaning to claims of sacredness, it is difficult to see what it means to speak of sacredness in this context. We refer to the overriding demands of morality, forgetting that these are an abstraction from the overriding claims of God—whether these are interpreted in terms of God's supreme authority or (as I myself prefer) in terms of the supreme and overriding desirability of a life of happiness lived in charity, here and hereafter.<sup>6</sup>

Porter is especially influenced by Alasdair MacIntyre and his critique of modern moral philosophy. MacIntyre argues that not only modern moral philosophy, but the moral life itself, has entered a grave state of disorder and incoherence. The reason he assigns to this context is that modern moral deliberation consists only of fragments from an earlier conceptual scheme which have been decontextualized from the historical societies in which these fragments were originally meaningful.<sup>7</sup>

MacIntyre's argument is actually an elaboration of an earlier foundational article in moral philosophy by G.E.M. Anscombe entitled “Modern Moral Philosophy.” In this article, Anscombe argues that certain moral concepts like “obligation” are remnants from another historical conception of ethics in which normative moral principles were derived from a Divine Lawgiver. This historical conception of ethics, argues Anscombe, does not exist in the modern period because it lacks the conception of a Divine Lawgiver as the normative force behind its ethical principles. However, the use of this language from an earlier ethical context has thrown

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 13. Porter, in her use of the pronoun “we” refers to contemporary philosophers and ethicists.

<sup>7</sup> MacIntyre begins his book with an allegory akin to the science fiction novel *A Canticle for Leibowitz* where all the sciences have been dismantled, and scientific knowledge must be reassembled from the fragmented remnants. This reconstructed body of knowledge, although superficially similar in appearance to its earlier coherent form, would, according to MacIntyre, lack any meaningful content. Morality, he argues, is in a similar state—some of the pieces are present but the unity and meaning of the whole has been lost: “The hypothesis which I wish to advance is that in the actual world which we inhabit the language of morality is in . . . a state of grave disorder . . . What we possess, if this view is true, are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived. We possess indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have—very largely, if not entirely—lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality” Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, Third Edition*, 3rd ed. (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 2.

modern moral philosophy into disarray. Anscombe proposed that moral philosophy should be abandoned until an adequate modern moral psychology is developed. She also argued that the concept of a moral “Ought” should be abandoned as a conceptual scheme no longer relevant to the modern historical context.<sup>8</sup>

MacIntyre argues along with Anscombe that modern moral language has lost the original context and conceptual scheme which originally provided it with meaning. He argues that the fragmentation of moral language has resulted in what he calls an “emotivist” ethics which assumes that moral principles cannot rest on any rational standard of judgment, and thus are seen only as expressions of individual preferences or personal taste. Moral debate thus takes on a shrill tone, according to MacIntyre, in which both sides are unable to resort to a common and shared rational standard for moral judgment.

MacIntyre traces the breakdown of moral philosophy to the Enlightenment, which severed the previously existing conceptual unity between rational principles of morality and human nature, derived from an Aristotelian teleological framework. However, MacIntyre argues that the moral momentum of the Aristotelian conceptual framework continued even after Enlightenment thinkers rejected the teleology, that is, the concept of human nature, on which this system was based.<sup>9</sup> In this teleological framework, moral principles for action were derived from an evaluation of the dialectic between “human-nature-as-it-is” and “human-nature-as-it-would-be-if-it-achieved-its-*telos*.” That is, the Enlightenment-era moral philosophy accepted the

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<sup>8</sup> G. E. M. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (January 1958): 1-19.

<sup>9</sup> The Aristotelian teleological framework to which MacIntyre refers is based on the idea that human life, like all of creation, has a natural end, or *telos*. Aristotle held that just as one could judge a knife by how well it conformed to its *telos* (cutting), so too could one judge a human being by how well she conformed to her *telos*. This idea of an end or *telos* as something inherent in human nature and shared by all was one element of moral philosophy which Enlightenment thinkers tended to reject: “For many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers, the notion of a shared good for man is an Aristotelian chimaera; each man by nature seeks to satisfy his own desires” (MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 229).

rational principles of moral action derived from Aristotle, but not the Aristotelian conception of human nature from which these principles were derived, as MacIntyre explains:

For if you withdraw those background concepts of the narrative unity of human life and of a practice with goods internal to it from those areas in which human life is for the most part lived out, what is there left for the virtues to become? That explicit and thoroughgoing rejection of Aristotelianism which was the counterpart at the level of philosophy to those social changes whose outcome was to deprive the virtues of the conceptual background made it impossible by the need of the seventeenth century to supply anything like a traditional account or justification of the virtues. Yet the praise and practice of the virtues still pervaded social life, often in highly traditional ways, even though there were quite new problems for anyone wishing to give a systematic account or justification of their place in that life.<sup>10</sup>

Instead of relying on an Aristotelian teleology to generate moral norms, Enlightenment thinkers, according to MacIntyre, appealed either to basic moral sentiments, as with David Hume, or to a transcendent set of rational principles which have normative authority over human beings, as with Immanuel Kant.

Either the virtues—or some of them—could be understood as expressions of the natural passions of the individual or they—or some of them—could be understood as dispositions necessary to curb and to limit the destructive effect of some of those same natural passions.<sup>11</sup>

Both solutions ultimately fail according to MacIntyre because they attempt to root morality in the individual, meaning either in her sentiments or her application of reason, rather than in a publicly shared set of moral values grounded in a shared conception of the good, particular to that society. Whereas Enlightenment thinkers tended to emphasize the goal of universalizability in the articulation of moral norms, MacIntyre is more interested in how particular historical communities articulate particular moral norms grounded in their particular conception of the good. MacIntyre ends *After Virtue* recommending the restoration of social communities with a shared conception of the good, of human excellence, and of particular

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<sup>10</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 228.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 228.

practices. This shared conception of the good must, according to MacIntyre, be able to be articulated rationally, must transcend particular human goods and practices and constitute the good of a whole human life conceived as a unity, and must be specific enough to guide human action in a wide range of particular circumstances.

What Anscombe, MacIntyre, and Porter have in common is the recognition of the discrepancy between modern conceptions of morality and earlier historical conceptions. All of them also indicate some level of discontent with modern conceptions of morality as lacking content and as inadequate for the modern historical context. Defining morality, therefore, is a far from simple process. If we accept the conclusion of these authors, which this dissertation does, there is not one *morality*, but many different *moralties*. MacIntyre expands on this theme in the follow-up work to *After Virtue*, entitled *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?*: “Since there are a diversity of traditions of enquiry, with histories, there are, so it will turn out, rationalities rather than rationality, just as it will also turn out that there are justices rather than justice.”<sup>12</sup>

The point is that there are many different ideas, for example, about what is fair, what a good society looks like, what proper respect for life looks, and what virtues are necessary to flourish. Moral theologian Vincent McNamara writes:

Ask yourself what would someone in an Eastern culture mean by morality, or someone, say, in an African animist culture, or a person who has always lived in deprived circumstances in the slums of a great city, or an agnostic Oxbridge don. We gather them all under the one umbrella of morality, but it may be that there is only a very general family resemblance between their ideas. It may be that the only thing that morality has in common from one society to another is that rules for living are generally accepted in the society, that they are in some way enforced (at least by public opinion) and that in relation to other rules they are considered to be overriding.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 9.

<sup>13</sup> Vincent McNamara, “Approaching Christian Morality,” Michael A. Hayes and Liam Gearon, *Contemporary Catholic Theology: A Reader* (Continuum, 1999): 387.

McNamara goes on to reflect a position similar to the authors addressed above, arguing that morality is,

... in some sense about persons in community ... not a series of unexplained and arbitrary commands and prohibitions coming from heaven only knows where. [Morality] arises rather as the human community's awareness of the claims and demands of interrelatedness. All of morality in the end is about this. It is the search for the acts, attitudes, dispositions—and more fundamentally perhaps the virtues and institutions—that make for successful being with others.<sup>14</sup>

The study of morality, therefore, is always the study, at least in part, of a particular human community, with particular practices, virtues, and conceptions of the good.

## II. Introducing a Thomistic Approach to Moral Reasoning

The reason for this extended introduction to the debate about the state of modern moral philosophy is that if this dissertation is going to offer an approach to talking about eating disorders morally, it must do so within a particular tradition with a particular set of authoritative presuppositions, a particular set of practices with particular standards of excellence, a particular rational language, and a particular, substantive conception of the human good. In *A Short History of Ethics*, MacIntyre writes, “I must adopt some moral vocabulary if I am to have any social relationships. For without rules, without the cultivation of virtues, I cannot share ends with anybody else. I am doomed to social solipsism. Yet I must choose for myself with whom I am to be morally bound. I must choose between alternative forms of social and moral practice.”<sup>15</sup> Porter puts this need in slightly different language, that a theory of morality must be “grounded in a theory of the human good that gives content to the fundamental norms of love of

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<sup>14</sup> Vincent McNamara, “Approaching Christian Morality,” Ibid.: 377.

<sup>15</sup> Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 268.

neighbor and nonmaleficence and provides criteria by which to evaluate the goodness both of actions and of states of character.”<sup>16</sup>

Both MacIntyre and Porter look to history for such an alternative to modern approaches to moral reasoning. MacIntyre turns to Aristotle in *After Virtue*. In a rhetorically powerful chapter, he forces the choice between the Nietzschean tradition and the Aristotelian tradition, concluding that Aristotelianism is philosophically the most powerful of the pre-modern modes of thought. However, in the prologue to the third edition of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre writes,

When I wrote *After Virtue*, I was already an Aristotelian, but not yet a Thomist. . . . I became a Thomist after writing *After Virtue* in part because I became convinced that Aquinas was in some respects a better Aristotelian than Aristotle, that not only was he an excellent interpreter of Aristotle’s texts, but that he had been able to extend and deepen both Aristotle’s metaphysical and his moral enquiries. I . . . learned from Aquinas that my attempt to provide an account of the human good purely in social terms, in terms of practices, traditions, and the narrative unity of human lives, was bound to be inadequate until I had provided it with a metaphysical grounding. It is only because human beings have an end towards which they are directed by reason of their specific nature, that practices, traditions, and the like are able to function as they do.<sup>17</sup>

Porter also turns her focus to the moral thought of Thomas Aquinas. She argues that Aquinas provides a specific-enough theory of the human good (based upon a particular theory of nature) which can generate a particular account of “what it is for a community to be good . . . a just community in which the equality of all persons in certain fundamental respects is preserved.”<sup>18</sup>

This dissertation will also turn to the moral reasoning of Thomas Aquinas as providing the resources best suited to our own constructive task, that of addressing the moral dimensions of eating disorders. In the past decades, there has been a widespread and growing interest among both philosophical and theological circles in the moral thought of Thomas Aquinas for some of

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<sup>16</sup> Jean Porter, *Recovery of Virtue* (Presbyterian Publishing Corpor, 1990), 31-2.

<sup>17</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, x-xi.

<sup>18</sup> Porter, *Recovery of Virtue*, 32.

the same reasons that make him particularly suited for the task of this dissertation. Before beginning this project, however, two caveats are in order.

The first caveat is that this dissertation does not attempt to simply reappropriate the moral thought of Aquinas and apply it to the question of eating disorders. The contemporary moral context, with its starting points, problems, and resources is different than that of Aquinas. It would be naïve to think that we could simply return to Aquinas' ethic and find it sufficient to address such contemporary moral problems like that of eating disorders, which we intend to address here. Thus, this dissertation offers a *critical* reappropriation and application of Aquinas' moral thought.

The second caveat is that Thomas Aquinas' moral thought is shaped by his general worldview, a worldview that is thoroughly Christian. Consequently, Aquinas' treatment of morality is concerned not only with "secular" moral matters, but it also addresses moral concerns raised in light of his Christian faith. In contemporary moral discourse, scholars frequently distinguish between moral philosophy and moral theology, but Aquinas does not present a separate philosophical and theological doctrines of morality. In fact, as Eleonore Stump notes, Aquinas' reflections on morality

are not always isolated in special treatises devoted exclusively to ethics, and the issues that he takes to be essential to theoretical moral thinking are not always cordoned off from issues that we might think of as proper to other, distinct enterprises, including metaphysics, philosophy of mind, philosophical theology, and the theories of action and practical rationality.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the following overview of Aquinas' moral thought will not attempt to separate the philosophical from the theological elements, but will rather present Aquinas' treatment of morality as what it is, a dimension of his theology.

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<sup>19</sup> Scott MacDonald and Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas's Moral Theory: Essays in Honor of Norman Kretzmann* (Cornell University Press, 2007), 2.

The interpretation of Aquinas' moral thought that will be developed and applied in this dissertation will be based on his *Summa Theologiae*, which is translated "Summary of Theology."<sup>20</sup> Aquinas wrote many other works including commentaries on Scripture, commentaries on the twelfth-century textbook called the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, commentaries on Aristotle's works, and individual treatises on topics such as truth and evil; however, the *Summa* is his most thorough, systematic work, eventually becoming a standard theological textbook.<sup>21</sup> Servais Pinckaers notes the historical importance of the *Summa* in his historical overview of Christian morality:

The modern reader, easily put off by the length of the work and deceived by its analytical character, does not usually succeed in grasping an overall view of the work. . . . However, the *Summa* is rightly compared to a Gothic cathedral because of the harmonious ordering of its main lines and the precision of its details. . . . It reaches a point of perfection that has never been equaled, in the establishment of basic principles and elements, in the analysis and coordination of factors entering into moral action, and in the rigorous logic and order prevailing from beginning to end of the work. The perfection of his analysis and the incomparable power of his synthesis result in a sheer masterpiece, equal to the architectural creations of the same century and the greatest philosophical systems. Historically his work is a phenomenon of capital importance. It is an extraordinary production, containing within itself the main themes of earlier traditions, enhanced by a new arrangement and the resolution of innumerable problems. It was to determine the theological tradition of the future.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Thirteenth-century manuscripts present the title *Summa Theologiae*, although printed editions sometimes render this title *Summa Theologica* (Theological Summary). See Brian Davies, "Introduction," Brian Davies, *Aquinas's Summa Theologiae* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005).

<sup>21</sup> While the focus of this dissertation is on the *Summa Theologiae*, it is important to acknowledge that a more comprehensive account of Thomas' moral thought would have to include many more sources. It is especially important to engage Aquinas' biblical commentaries, as Torrell notes, "To get a slightly less one-sided idea of the whole theologian and his method, it is imperative to read and use in a much deeper fashion these biblical commentaries in parallel with the great systematic works." Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Person And His Work*, revised ed. (Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 55.

<sup>22</sup> Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 3rd ed. (Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 220. Pinckaers' enthusiasm for the structure and significance of the *Summa* is widely shared. See Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Aquinas and His Role in Theology*, illustrated edition. (Michael Glazier Books, 2002); Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Aquinas's Summa: Background, Structure, & Reception* (Catholic University of America Press, 2005); Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2002); Aidan Nichols, *Discovering Aquinas: An Introduction to His Life, Work, and Influence*, 1st ed. (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003); Romanus Cessario, *A Short History of Thomism* (Catholic University of America Press, 2005); Thomas F. O'Meara, *Thomas Aquinas Theologian* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1997)



Aquinas began the *Summa* in 1266, and it remained incomplete at his death in 1274.

There is some debate about what type of work it is. Historian Leonard Boyle has made a convincing case for viewing the work as a pedagogical tool designed to improve the teaching of theology in his own Dominican order.<sup>23</sup> “My purpose,” wrote Thomas in the “Prologue,” “is to propose the things that pertain to faith that the instruction of beginners will better be served.”<sup>24</sup> Boyle’s arguments are historical, and his premise is that the historical setting of the *Summa* reveals much about its audience and purpose. Boyle notes that the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 allied the function of hearing confessions with that of preaching, and that the newly-founded Dominican order, the Order of Preachers, was therefore a prime choice to become also the Order of Confessors. This occurred in 1221 when Pope Honorius III gave the Dominican order a general mandate to hear confessions. Aquinas became a member of the Dominican order as a teenager, and in 1265, he was commissioned to start a Dominican house of studies for the formation of new priests at Santa Sabina in Rome. Boyle notes that his curriculum and pedagogy were unconventional at Santa Sabina, and that overall, Aquinas was discontented with

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<sup>23</sup> Boyle’s conclusion has received widespread, but by no means, universal, acceptance. For an alternative view, see John I. Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), chapter 2. Jenkins argues from the pedagogy of Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics* that the *Summa* was written for advanced students already well-trained in philosophy and Scripture. According to Jenkins, Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics* argues that beginners learn by first studying effects before moving on to inquire about causes, because it is effects which are more apparent. In the *Summa*, however, Aquinas does not begin with effects, which are most apparent, but with the First Cause, God, and that which is *least* known to us in this life. He then moves on to God’s effects, that is, Creation, beginning from the least evident—angels—before proceeding to the most evident effect in this life, human beings. Jenkins concludes from this pedagogical structure that Aquinas was writing for those already advanced in observing effects, and thus sufficiently prepared to achieve understanding of causes.

<sup>24</sup> Regardless of what specific audience Aquinas had in mind when he refers to “beginners,” it is clear from the Prologue that one of his motives for writing the *Summa* is his dissatisfaction with contemporary theological pedagogy: “Because the doctor of catholic truth ought not only to teach the proficient, but also to instruct beginners (according to the Apostle: As unto little ones in Christ, I gave you milk to drink, not meat—1 Cor. iii. 1, 2), we purpose in this book to treat of whatever belongs to the Christian religion, in such a way as may tend to the instruction of beginners. We have considered that students in this doctrine have not seldom been hampered by what they have found written by other authors, partly on account of the multiplication of useless questions, articles, and arguments, partly also because those things that are needful for them to know are not taught according to the order of the subject-matter, but according as the plan of the book might require, or the occasion of the argument offer, partly, too, because frequent repetition brought weariness and confusion to the minds of the readers. Endeavoring to avoid these and other like faults, we shall try, by God’s help, to set forth whatever is included in this sacred doctrine as briefly and clearly as the matter itself may allow.”

the way young Dominicans were being trained to live out their charism of preaching and hearing confessions. In particular, Aquinas was dissatisfied with the way Dominican students were presented matters of practical theology (i.e. moral theology) without a larger doctrinal context. Thus, Boyle concludes, Aquinas' goal in writing the *Summa*, which he began during his time at Santa Sabina, was to put practical theology into a full doctrinal and theological context.<sup>25</sup>

The *Summa* is divided into three volumes or parts, each with its own area of inquiry. These parts are generally referred to by their Latin names, the *Prima Pars*, *Secunda Pars*, and *Tertia Pars*. Within each part, the material is divided into "Questions," or general areas of inquiry (e.g. "On the essence of the virtues"), which are further subdivided into articles, or more particular points of inquiry (e.g. "Whether human virtue is a habit."). Each article is further subdivided into a number of "objections," which defend one answer to the particular inquiry (e.g. "It would seem that human virtue is not a habit . . ."). These objections are drawn from various authoritative thinkers (e.g. Scripture, Augustine, Aristotle).<sup>26</sup> The objections are then followed by the "sed contra," which means "on the contrary," which states the opposite view of the objections and cites a corroborating authority (e.g. "On the contrary, the Philosopher says that science and virtue are habits"). Aquinas then goes on to respond in his own words in the corpus of the article to the specific point of inquiry (e.g. "I answer that virtue denotes a certain

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<sup>25</sup> Leonard Boyle, "The setting of the *Summa Theologiae*—Revisited," (Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto, 1982).

<sup>26</sup> Servais Pinckaers has done a formidable study of Aquinas' sources and his Scholastic method. He notes that this method contains two operations: reading (*lectio*) and dialectical disputation (*disputatio*): "reading refers to the teaching of the master, which draws upon great works whose authority stems from the recognized quality. The first function of the master is to explain such works and comment on them. There are the books of Scripture, whose explanation is the prerogative of masters of theology; the writings of the Fathers of the Church, from which the Sentences of the Fathers presented by Peter Lombard are derived; the works of Aristotle, and so forth. These authors are cited by name [unlike living authorities] . . . the disputation for discussion, in the form of 'questions' (*quaestiones*), problems encountered in the sentences of authorities, questions that even reach the point of pitting one authority against another. This connection between reading and disputation gives a dialectical structure to the questions and articles in Scholastic works." Pinckaers notes that these sources or authorities play an epistemological rather than deontological role in the *Summa*. That is, Aquinas does not think one should feel obligated to accept their positions, but rather obligated to respect and seek to understand them. Servais Pinckaers, "The Sources of the Ethics of St. Thomas Aquinas," Pope, *The Ethics of Aquinas*, 18.

perfection of a power . . .”), and then responds specifically to each objection enumerated at the beginning of the article.<sup>27</sup> Although the form of the *Summa* seems foreign at first to many, Brian Davies notes that it is actually

very much a ‘reader-friendly’ text. Yes, it comes from an age long ago. And yes, it draws on sources and ideas unknown to, or disapproved of by many people today. Yet Aquinas in general, and the *Summa Theologiae* in particular, is relatively easy to read. Aquinas writes with great conciseness and clarity. His style is simple and fluent, and, once one has mastered some of his technical terms, his train of thought is readily apparent. He continually succeeds in making it evident where he is *coming from*, where he is *now*, where he is *going*. As Anthony Kenny has said, ‘The ability to write philosophical prose easily comprehensible to the lay reader is a gift which Aquinas shares with Descartes.’<sup>28</sup>

The great advantage to the way that Aquinas organizes the *Summa*, which will become evident in this dissertation, is that he never presents conclusions without extensive attention to arguments to the contrary or without acknowledging the sources on which he bases his own positions.

The first part of the *Summa*, the *Prima Pars* (Ia), is concerned with the existence and nature of God including God’s divine essence and attributes, the Trinity, Creation, and Divine Government. The Second Part, the *Secunda Pars* (IIa), is divided into two parts known respectively as the *Prima Secundae* (I-II) and the *Secunda Secundae* (II-II). Its subject is human beings as created in the image and likeness of God, which is an extension of Aquinas’ previous discussion of anthropology found in the *Prima Pars*.<sup>29</sup> The *Secunda Pars* constitutes the most

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<sup>27</sup> The method for citing texts in the *Summa* consists in designating the “part” with a Roman numeral, followed by Arabic numerals designating the question and article. Aquinas’ responses to particular objections are usually cited with and “ad” preceding the number of the objection. For example, the response to the first objection of the fifty-fifth question and first article of the *Prima Secundae* would appear either I-II, Q. 55, art. 1, ad. 1 or I-II.55.1, ad. 1. For the sake of clarity, this dissertation will use the former form of citation.

<sup>28</sup> Brian Davies, “Introduction,” *Aquinas’s Summa Theologiae*, xiv. Citation from Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 10.

<sup>29</sup> The prologue to the *Secunda Pars* reveals its overall purpose: “Since, as Damascene states (*De Fide Orthod.* ii. 12), man is said to be made to God’s image, in so far as the image implies an intelligent being endowed with free-will and self-movement: now that we have treated of the exemplar, i.e., God, and of those things which came forth from the power of God in accordance with His will; it remains for us to treat of His image, i.e., man, inasmuch as he too is the principle of his actions, as having free-will and control of his actions.”

extensive treatment of Aquinas' moral thought.<sup>30</sup> The first part of the second part, the *Prima Secundae*, addresses topics pertaining to human nature and conduct in general such as the purpose of human life, the metaphysics of human acts, the passions, habits, law, and grace. In the second part of the second part, the *Secunda Secundae*, Aquinas presents a thorough examination of each virtue as an extension of his general treatment of virtue in the *Prima Secundae*, beginning with the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, and then proceeding to the classical "cardinal" virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. He proceeds from the essence of each virtue, to the vices opposed to each virtue, to the corresponding gifts of the Holy Spirit associated with each virtue, to finally the specific precepts associated with each virtue. The *Secunda Secundae* concludes with a discussion of states of life.

The third part, or *Tertia Pars*, was never completed, but has as its subject the exemplar of the image of God, Jesus Christ.<sup>31</sup> The first section of the *Tertia Pars* discusses Jesus Christ's incarnation and role in salvation. It then examines the sacraments as means to salvation, and then examines each sacrament in particular, beginning with baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist,

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<sup>30</sup> Although the *Secunda Pars* is generally considered Aquinas "moral" theology, it is important to realize that Aquinas never intended for this part of the *Summa* to be read as a separate treatise on moral theology, as distinct from the rest of his theological discussions throughout the *Summa*. The division of "moral theology" from "dogmatic theology" is not one which would have been familiar to Aquinas. As John Mahoney notes in his thorough historical study of the development of moral theology, "the technical term *theologia moralis*, referring to a distinctive science systematically separate from other branches of theology, has been in general use only since the end of the sixteenth century and the Thomist renaissance which followed the Council of Trent" (John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1989), viii). This point, that Aquinas did not set out to write a self-contained moral theory, has been made by a number of scholars, and it is widely accepted that Aquinas did not consider himself a professional ethicist, but a theologian who approached moral questions in light of the Christian understanding of God, grace, and the sacraments. To fully understand Aquinas' view on any particular moral inquiry, therefore, it is necessary to reference other parts of the *Summa*, and indeed his entire corpus that pertain to the question.

<sup>31</sup> Again, the prologue reveals Aquinas' purpose for the *Tertia Pars*: "Forasmuch as our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ, in order to "save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21), as the angel announced, showed unto us in His own Person the way of truth, whereby we may attain to the bliss of eternal life by rising again, it is necessary, in order to complete the work of theology, that after considering the last end of human life, and the virtues and vices, there should follow the consideration of the Savior of all, and of the benefits bestowed by Him on the human race. Concerning this we must consider (1) the Savior Himself; (2) the sacraments by which we attain to our salvation; (3) the end of immortal life to which we attain by the resurrection. Concerning the first, a double consideration occurs: the first, about the mystery of the Incarnation itself, whereby God was made man for our salvation; the second, about such things as were done and suffered by our Savior—i.e. God incarnate."

and finally penance. Aquinas died before addressing marriage, ordination, and last rites, although the remainder of the *Tertia Pars* was compiled by others after his death, based on Aquinas' earlier writings on these subjects.

The *Summa* is sometimes described as having a Neoplatonic structure known as the *exitus-reditus* (exit-return) in which the *Prima Pars* addresses the things which emanate from God as first principle, and the *Secunda* and *Tertia Pars* speak of their return to God as the ultimate end.<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, morality is the practical discipline of ordering one's life and activities to God, as part of the return in the *exitus-reditus* schema. Morality is not a body of knowledge about right and wrong actions, but is rather a type of practical wisdom that allows the human person, as created in the image and likeness of God, to grow into greater unity and friendship with God. Torrell summarizes nicely:

Considered as practical knowledge (that is, theology as it directs Christian action—what is commonly called moral theology), theology does not lose its contemplative aim (Ia Q. 1, art. 4). It is still and always directed by the consideration of God, since He is the End in view of which all decisions are made and the Good in connection with which all other goods are situated. To speak of God as beginning and as end is not a purely theoretical option; it concerns the entire Christian life. If God is the source of all being and of every being, he is also the accomplishment of all desires and of all actions.<sup>33</sup>

Thomas Aquinas begins his explicit treatment of morality in the *Prima Secundae* not by defining morality (since he is not attempting to write a separate treatise on morality) and not with a list of moral rules, intrinsically evil acts, or mandatory duties, but rather with a treatise on happiness or beatitude (*beatitudo*).<sup>34</sup> It is important to note the fundamental place given to

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<sup>32</sup> M. D. Chenu, *Toward Understanding St. Thomas* (Regnery Publishing, 1964); Torrell, *Aquinas's Summa*, trans. Benedict M. Guevin (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005).

<sup>33</sup> Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 157.

<sup>34</sup> The Greek word for "happiness," *eudaimonia*, is translated into Latin as *beatitudo*, and is sometimes translated into English as "flourishing" (see John Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*, p. 89, n.1). Terence Irwin, a translator and scholar of Aristotle, writes that the translation "flourishing" fails because that would allow *eudaimonia* to be predicated of plants and animals, which cannot be said to "be happy" in English, but can be said to "flourish." *Eudaimonia* (and *beatitudo*) are, however, used to refer to a distinctly human form of happiness

beatitude at the beginning of the *Secunda Pars*. In the primary textbook of theology used during Aquinas' time, the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, happiness is treated last. Aquinas, by moving the question of beatitude to the beginning, aligns his moral thought more with that of Aristotle, who also places the question of happiness at the beginning of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, without deviating from the Scriptural paradigm. In making this move, Aquinas makes happiness the governing criterion of the rest of his treatment of morality.

Following Aristotle, Aquinas' moral thought is profoundly teleological. That is, his ethics is based on the premise that all things act for an end or purpose, and that to understand anything, one must understand its purpose, or *telos*.<sup>35</sup> The first question, therefore, of Aquinas' treatise on happiness is the question of final cause: "Do human beings act for the sake of an end?"<sup>36</sup> His answer is affirmative: "All things contained in a genus are derived from the principle of that genus. Now the end is the principle in human operations, as the Philosopher<sup>37</sup> states (Phys. ii, 9). Therefore it belongs to man to do everything for an end."

Aquinas first establishes that humans pursue happiness or beatitude (*beatitudo*) as the primary goal or end of their moral actions. However, Aquinas acknowledges that there are different views regarding what makes us happy. In Question two, he examines various candidates such as bodily goods, pleasure, goods of the soul, and created goods as constitutive of human happiness and finds that none of these goods are sufficient for complete and lasting human flourishing. In Question three, Aquinas addresses the distinction between the incomplete beatitude that is possible in this life and the complete and perfect beatitude that is possible only

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(Terence Irwin, *Classical Philosophy* (Taylor & Francis, 1995), 126. This dissertation will use "happiness" or "beatitude" to translate both *eudaimonia* and *beatitudo* except when quoting works that do otherwise.

<sup>35</sup> The purpose of something is also called its "final cause." Thus, to know what a knife is, one must know its purpose, or final cause, which is, of course, to cut.

<sup>36</sup> I-II, Q. 1, art. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Aquinas frequently uses "the Philosopher" when referring to Aristotle. In like manner, he uses "the Master" to refer to Peter Lombard, "the Apostle" to refer to St. Paul, and "the Theologian" to refer to Augustine.

in the vision of God. Questions four and five examine what human beings require for beatitude and how it can be attained.

Craig Steven Titus, drawing on Michael Sherwin's work, notes that

Aquinas structures his arguments around the insights of Aristotle, Augustine, and others. For example, Thomas (I-II, Q.1, art. 7) cites Augustine's (*De Trinitate* xiii.3) claim 'that all men agree in desiring the last end, which is flourishing.' While Augustine's global reflections bring a theological vision to philosophical treatments of happiness, Aquinas employs Aristotle to complete the Augustinian critique of the limits of earthly flourishing.<sup>38</sup>

To understand the normative significance of beatitude for Aquinas' moral thought, we must probe deeper into his understanding of human action.

Aquinas distinguishes between human acts (*actus humani*) and acts of a human being (*actus hominis*). The latter are not human actions qua human, but the former are considered so because they are performed willingly and knowingly. The latter, acts of a human being, include everything that human beings do like snoring, growing hair, digesting food, etc. The former, human acts, are those actions that are distinctively human such as painting a landscape, making a speech, inquiring about God, etc. What makes these actions distinctively human, according to Aquinas, is that they are deliberate and voluntary. Aquinas says that this is how human beings differ from irrational creatures—that they have dominion over their actions.

Of actions done by man those alone are properly called "human," which are proper to man as man. Now man differs from irrational animals in this, that he is master of his actions. Wherefore those actions alone are properly called human, of which man is master. Now man is master of his actions through his reason and will; whence, too, the free-will is defined as "the faculty and will of reason." Therefore those actions are

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<sup>38</sup> Craig Steven Titus, *Resilience and the Virtue of Fortitude*, 99. Titus also notes that Aquinas both distinguishes and interrelates two dimensions of flourishing: "that in which human flourishing consists (from the human side), and that which makes us flourish (the external source)." It is by knowing and loving that human beings partake in the source of flourishing who is God. In order to make this argument, he [Aquinas] defines beatitude in two ways: "'Flourishing, itself, since it is a perfection of the soul, is an inherent good of the soul; but that which constitutes flourishing, viz. which makes humans happy, is something outside one's soul.'" (I-II, Q. 2, art. 7, ad. 3.) The second, or ontological, dimension (*beatitudo ut res*), involves goods, which merit and demand that we love them for themselves. When seeking these goods, we attempt to fulfill the basic human desire for flourishing. He concludes: 'God alone constitutes man's fulfillment.' (I-II, Q. 2, art. 8)" (Titus, 99, 102)

properly called human which proceed from a deliberate will. And if any other actions are found in man, they can be called actions "of a man," but not properly "human" actions, since they are not proper to man as man.<sup>39</sup>

Human actions (*actus humani*) are ordered to an end, meaning human beings have a reason, or a goal in mind, when they act. There are, of course, *proximate ends*, and it is these ends which give acts their genus, such as using a knife to cut something is the goal that gives the act the genus of "cutting." But moral evaluation begins, rather than terminates, in the proximate end. There is some further reason for why I am cutting, which is sometimes referred to as the *remote end* of the action. Perhaps I am hungry, for example, and want to eat a slice of melon. Many different types of actions can be ordered to the same remote end, e.g. peeling a potato, preheating an oven, picking tomatoes. All of these actions are oriented to the same remote end, which is satisfying my hunger.

Both Aristotle and Aquinas hold that there is some ultimate end or goal (*summum bonum*) for which all actions are performed. In other words, all remote ends are ordered to some still-higher end. Thus, if you press for a further reason for the remote end of satisfying my hunger, I may identify that I eat to be healthy and to have pleasure. Both Aristotle and Aquinas think that these ends can be pressed further still. Why do we want to be healthy and experience pleasure? Is there some ultimate end which we come to and cannot press any further? Both answer affirmatively, and they call this ultimate end, to which all other ends are subordinated, happiness. It is with this end that Aquinas begins his ethics: "Whatever a human being seeks, it seeks under the aspect of the good (*sub ratione boni*), and if it does not seek it as its perfect good, which is its ultimate end, it must seek it as tending to that perfect good, since any beginning is ordered to its culmination."<sup>40</sup> All human action, therefore, is in some way a step towards one final end which

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<sup>39</sup> I-II, Q. 1, art. 1.

<sup>40</sup> I-II, Q. 1, art. 6.



is the source of human happiness and perfection. Aquinas' ethics has as its starting point that all-important end.

If human happiness is the starting point of Aquinas' ethics, the remainder can be understood as providing direction and guidance for human action, so that this end may be attained. Aquinas distinguishes between *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* principles guiding human action to its ultimate end. Intrinsic principles include "powers" of the soul, defined as those natural properties of the soul identified as the vegetative, sensitive, appetitive, locomotive, and intellectual powers.<sup>41</sup> Aquinas already addressed these in the *Prima Pars*.<sup>42</sup> In the *Secunda Pars*, he turns his attention to the second intrinsic principle of action, namely habits.

The English word for "habit" is misleading because it connotes something automatic, unconscious, and almost Pavlovian. We might say, "I have a bad habit of biting my fingernails when I am nervous." The implication is, when I experience stimulus X (i.e. nervousness), I automatically respond with reaction Z (i.e. biting fingernails). This use of "habit" has a very different meaning than the sense in which Aquinas uses it. For Aquinas, the word *habit*<sup>43</sup> was a metaphysical category that indicated a durable part of a person's character, inclining the person to certain kinds of actions and feelings. For his definition, Aquinas draws heavily on Aristotle, designating habits as qualities with are (1) durable, and (2) incline a person toward either good or

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<sup>41</sup> See Ia, Q. 77, art. 6.

<sup>42</sup> See Ia, Q. 77-90.

<sup>43</sup> The word habit comes from the Latin word *habitus*, which is the translation of the Greek word *hexis*. For an excellent treatment of the etymology of the word *habit*, see Bonnie Kent, "Habits and Virtues," Pope, *The Ethics of Aquinas*, 116-130. Kent argues that habits arise in the body from actions of some power of the soul that is capable of acting otherwise, or not determined by its nature to act as it does. Kent uses the example of a great baseball pitcher who spends hours training his body to throw a perfect curve ball. Although the body is doing the action, it is the soul, more than the body, that is responsible for the habit because it is the power of the soul which inclines the body to do something well as a sort of second nature. For this reason, habits in the strict sense are never the product of bodily constitution, mere 'animal' instinct, upbringing, or some combination. Nor can they ever compel us to act or react as we do. On the contrary, Thomas argues that we can always refuse to act in accordance with our habits and can even choose to act against our habits" (118-19). See also Servais Pinckaers, "Virtue is not a Habit," *Cross Currents* 12 (1962): 65-82 and Bonnie Dorrick Kent, *Virtues of the Will: The Transformation of Ethics in the Late Thirteenth Century* (Catholic University of America Press, 1995).

evil: "the Philosopher says (Metaph. v, text. 25) habit is a disposition whereby that which is disposed is disposed well or ill, and this, either in regard to itself or in regard to another: thus health is a habit."<sup>44</sup>

Virtues are simply good habits. Likewise, the opposite of virtue, vice, is simply a bad habit. Like habits in general, virtues are qualities of the soul that incline a person to action, and specifically to good actions.<sup>45</sup> Aquinas distinguishes between intellectual and moral virtues. Intellectual virtues are operative habits which incline the intellect to good actions proper to its nature. Aquinas distinguishes between two different types of activities proper to the intellect: theoretical and practical activities. Activities of the intellect have as their object necessary truths which cannot be otherwise; practical activities of the intellect have as their objects truths which are contingent, or can be otherwise. The virtues that perfect the intellect in its theoretical activities are understanding (*intellectus*), science (*scientia*) and wisdom (*sapientia*).<sup>46</sup> Regarding the intellect's practical activities, Aquinas designates one intellectual virtue, art (*ars*), which he defines as "right reason about certain works to be made,"<sup>47</sup> but the bulk of this question deals with the virtue of prudence. Prudence is also a virtue of the practical intellect but differs from art in being concerned not with making something, but rather with doing something. Thus,

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<sup>44</sup> I-II, Q. 49, art. 1. Aquinas does not draw exclusively on Aristotle in his discussion of habits. Although he agrees with Aristotle that habits are qualities of the soul that incline a person to action, Aquinas also accepts that there are different types of habit based on their sources. A habit can come from repeated action, or habituation, as Aristotle maintains (I-II, Q. 49, art. 2), from nature (Q. 51, art. 1), or from God (Q. 51, art. 4). This latter source of habits will become critical in Aquinas' discussions of the infused virtues, which have only God as their source.

<sup>45</sup> The term Aquinas uses to describe this type of habit which inclines toward practical action is *operative habit*.

<sup>46</sup> Understanding is the virtue that perfects the intellect's power to grasp first principles, science perfects the intellect's power to grasp conclusions derived from first principles (e.g. geometry), and wisdom perfects the intellect's power to grasp the first and final causes like God. See I-II, Q. 57, art. 2.

<sup>47</sup> I-II, Q. 57, art. 3. The theoretical intellectual virtues are distinguished from the practical also in the way they are acquired. The former are acquired by imitation and learning from others whereas the latter are acquired by practice. See also Gregory Reichberg, "The Intellectual Virtues," Ed. Pope, *The Ethics of Aquinas*, 131-150; Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

prudence overlaps with the next category of virtue, moral virtue, because it is the virtue that allows a person to lead a good moral life, by directing acts to their end in a proper way.<sup>48</sup>

Moral virtues, the primary focus of the treatise on virtues in the *Prima Secundae*, are virtues that perfect the appetitive power of the soul.<sup>49</sup> In defining these virtues, Aquinas draws attention to the meaning of the word *mos*, from which the word moral is derived. *Mos* means either “custom,” or “a natural inclination to do things.” However, Aquinas points out that Greek uses two terms *ethos* and *ēthos*, and he argues that moral virtues are most properly about the *inclination to act*, which is the power present in the appetitive faculties or the will.<sup>50</sup>

The will is simply the power of the soul by which a human being is in control over her actions, in contrast to natural actions (like digestion) over which a human person has no control.<sup>51</sup> Thomas also calls the will the “the rational appetite.” In Aquinas’ metaphysics, every created being has an “appetite” or internal motion corresponding to its proper nature, and this internal “inclining” or source of motion is what Aquinas calls “appetite.” Aquinas distinguishes

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<sup>48</sup> “Prudence is a virtue most necessary for human life. For a good life consists in good deeds. Now in order to do good deeds, it matters not only what a man does, but also how he does it; to wit, that he do it from right choice and not merely from impulse or passion. And, since choice is about things in reference to the end, rectitude of choice requires two things: namely, the due end, and something suitably ordained to that due end. Now man is suitably directed to his due end by a virtue which perfects the soul in the appetitive part, the object of which is the good and the end. And to that which is suitably ordained to the due end man needs to be rightly disposed by a habit in his reason, because counsel and choice, which are about things ordained to the end, are acts of the reason. Consequently an intellectual virtue is needed in the reason, to perfect the reason, and make it suitably affected towards things ordained to the end; and this virtue is prudence” (I-II, Q. 57, art. 4)

<sup>49</sup> “The subject of moral philosophy is human operation ordered to the end, or even man taken as voluntarily acting for the end” (I-II, Q. 56, art. 3). Thus, willed action is the subject of the study of ethics.

<sup>50</sup> Now “moral” virtue is so called from “mos” in the sense of a natural or quasi-natural inclination to do some particular action. And the other meaning of “mos,” i.e. “custom,” is akin to this: because custom becomes a second nature, and produces an inclination similar to a natural one. But it is evident that inclination to an action belongs properly to the appetitive power, whose function it is to move all the powers to their acts, as explained above (Question 9, Article 1). Therefore not every virtue is a moral virtue, but only those that are in the appetitive faculty (Q. 58, art. 1).

<sup>51</sup> Eleonore Stump’s discussion of the appetitive faculty, or will is superb: “As a kind of natural inclination, will’s metaphysical provenance is more primitive than intellect’s because will is the most subtle terrestrial instantiation of an utterly universal aspect of creation. Not only every sort of soul but absolutely every form, Aquinas maintains, has some sort of inclination essentially associated with it; and so every hylomorphic thing, even if inanimate, has at least one natural inclination. . . Inclination is the genus of appetite, and appetite is the genus of will. The human soul of course involves natural appetites (for example, for food), but its sensory and intellectual modes of cognition bring with them sensory appetites, or passions (for example, for seafood), and rational appetites, or volitions (for example, for food low in fat content) Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (Routledge, 2005), 21.

three levels of appetite. The first is the *natural appetite* which is in all things and is determined by the thing's form. Thus, heavy things have a "natural appetite" to fall towards the ground. The second level of appetite is found only in things capable of cognition or capable of a response to external stimuli received through the senses. Because this appetite is related to sensory experience, it is fittingly called the *sensitive appetite*. The third appetite is particular to creatures that are capable of rational thought, namely human beings, and is aptly called the *rational appetite*.<sup>52</sup>

The appetitive faculties need proper rational guidance, or else they can become destructive. The moral virtues are habits of the appetitive faculties disposing a person to be inclined or "moved" according to reason towards the proper end or *telos* of human life, which we have already established is beatitude. Aquinas distinguishes different moral virtues according to their subject, or the specific appetite on which they work. The virtues that incline the emotions toward the proper end of human life are twofold. Those emotions which have as their object sensory goods like the pleasure of taste and touch (what Aquinas calls the *concupiscible appetite*) are perfected by the moral virtue called *temperance*. Those emotions which have as their object an arduous good like the good of enduring a debilitating illness (what Aquinas calls the *irascible appetite*) are perfected by the virtue of *fortitude*. The rational appetite which has as its object operative goods concerned with relationships with others, namely the *will*, is perfected

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<sup>52</sup> Thomas summarizes the division of the appetite in the Prima Pars: "It must be borne in mind that, since all things flow from the Divine will, all things in their own way are inclined by appetite towards good, but in different ways. Some are inclined to good by their natural inclination, without knowledge, as plants and inanimate bodies. Such inclination towards good is called 'a natural appetite.' Others, again, are inclined towards good, but with some knowledge; not that they know the aspect of goodness, but that they apprehend some particular good; as in the sense, which knows the sweet, the white, and so on. The inclination which follows this apprehension is called 'a sensitive appetite.' Other things, again, have an inclination towards good, but with a knowledge whereby they perceive the aspect of goodness; this belongs to the intellect. This is most perfectly inclined towards what is good; not, indeed, as if it were merely guided by another towards some particular good only, like things devoid of knowledge, nor towards some particular good only, as things which have only sensitive knowledge, but as inclined towards good in general. Such inclination is termed 'will'" (Ia, Q. 59, art. 1).

by the virtue of *justice*. The virtue of the intellect which directs and guides the other moral virtues is called *prudence* (which acts both as an intellectual virtue and a moral virtue).

In distinguishing the moral virtues in this way, Aquinas is recovering a classical division of the virtues into what is called the principle, or *cardinal* virtues, which produce perfect rectitude of the will. However, Aquinas accepts that there are many other virtues which are annexed to these principle virtues like humility, patience, and religion. The moral virtues, as Aquinas addressed in his discussion of habits, are acquired and strengthened by their respective acts. For this reason, the moral virtues are also called “acquired virtues.” One becomes just, for example, by acting justly—giving to others what is due to them—repeatedly and intentionally. Moreover, the moral virtues are dispositions to act in accordance with reason, by which Aquinas means acting according to the right rule or measure. One can either fall short of the right rule or measure, such as when one does not give a person what is due to them, or can exceed the right rule or measure, such as when a person gives more than what is due to a person. The point between too much and too little is what Aquinas, borrowing from Aristotle, calls the *mean*, and it is the mean which corresponds to the standards of right reason.

However, Aquinas recognizes another way that these virtues may be obtained, which renders his account of the virtues distinctly theological, and therefore very different from Aristotle, on whom he has drawn so heavily for his discussion of virtue. As a Christian and a theologian, Aquinas accepts that God can perfect the human appetite by infusing the virtues into the person regardless of human effort. Following Augustine's definition, Aquinas describes these virtues as habits whereby “God works in us, without us.”<sup>53</sup> These virtues differ from their acquired counterparts not just in their cause but in their end is well, with the infused moral

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<sup>53</sup> I-II, Q. 55, art. 4.

virtues directed not towards human beatitude in this life, but rather towards perfect and eternal beatitude which consists of the vision of God in heaven.

Closely related to the acquired moral virtues are the infused theological virtues. Just as the intellectual and moral virtues are distinguished by their objects, so too are the theological virtues, which have as their primary object God. Whereas the moral virtues direct a person to an imperfect temporal beatitude, the theological virtues direct a person toward perfect, eternal happiness that is only possible with God's help. The theological virtue of *faith* perfects the intellect concerning the truths of God, which the intellect cannot grasp on its own. The theological virtue of *hope* perfects the will and inclines it towards that perfect beatitude which is unattainable without God's help. Finally, *charity* also perfects the will in its love for God so that the person may enter into a unity of friendship with God. Like the infused moral virtues, these virtues have God as their cause, and cannot be attained with any human effort, though human effort can dispose a person to receive these graces. Because these virtues are caused by grace, they lead us into the next dimension of Aquinas' moral thought, which is the extrinsic principles of action that make a person good.

Whereas the virtues as "habits" are intrinsic principles which make a person good, there are also extrinsic principles which serve the same goal, namely *grace* and *law*. Although grace is the most important of these two, Aquinas treats of law first in the *Prima Secundae*. Law is defined as an "an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by him who has care of the community, and promulgated."<sup>54</sup> Aquinas distinguishes four different types of law. *Eternal law* is the law governing the universe according to Divine Reason which directs all created things

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<sup>54</sup> I-II, Q. 90, art. 4.

toward their ultimate good.<sup>55</sup> The second type of law, *natural law*, is the way in which rational creatures participate in the eternal law and live according to right reason.<sup>56</sup> The natural law is what orders a person to do some actions, and avoid others.<sup>57</sup> From the natural law comes the third type of law, which is the *human law* that articulates specific, historically contingent precepts to direct a community towards its concrete good.<sup>58</sup> Although the natural law generates precepts regulating behavior, it alone is not sufficient to rightly direct a person to his or her end. Thus, the natural law is supplemented by the final type of law, the *Divine Law*, which serves as both a corrective to the damage done by sin (which leads to imperfect knowledge of the natural law) and also generates additional precepts necessary to direct a person to eternal beatitude. The Divine Law includes both the Old Law, which generates precepts regarding worship, establishing justice within a community, and moral precepts also generated by the natural law, and the New Law which is the law of Christ found in the New Testament.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> “Now God, by His wisdom, is the Creator of all things in relation to which He stands as the artificer to the products of his art, as stated in the I, 14, 8. Moreover He governs all the acts and movements that are to be found in each single creature, as was also stated in the I, 103, 5. Wherefore as the type of the Divine Wisdom, inasmuch as by It all things are created, has the character of art, exemplar or idea; so the type of Divine Wisdom, as moving all things to their due end, bears the character of law. Accordingly the eternal law is nothing else than the type of Divine Wisdom, as directing all actions and movements” (I-II, Q. 91, art. 1).

<sup>56</sup> “All things partake somewhat of the eternal law, in so far as, namely, from its being imprinted on them, they derive their respective inclinations to their proper acts and ends. Now among all others, the rational creature is subject to Divine providence in the most excellent way, in so far as it partakes of a share of providence, by being provident both for itself and for others. Wherefore it has a share of the Eternal Reason, whereby it has a natural inclination to its proper act and end: and this participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called the natural law” (I-II, Q. 91, art. 2).

<sup>57</sup> The natural law is based on the first principle of practical reason which is to “do good and avoid evil,” but specific precepts of natural law are derived from the natural inclinations of rational creatures. The inclination that rational creatures share with all other created things is to preserve their existence, which is the first material precept of the natural law. The inclination that the rational creature shares with other animals leads to other material precepts to reproduce and to educate one’s young. Finally, there are certain inclinations possessed only by rational creatures, from which the material precepts to form societies and seek out knowledge of God are derived (I-II, q. 94, art. 2).

<sup>58</sup> “The kind of training, which compels through fear of punishment, is the discipline of laws. Therefore in order that man might have peace and virtue, it was necessary for laws to be framed: for, as the Philosopher says (Polit. i, 2), “as man is the most noble of animals if he be perfect in virtue, so is he the lowest of all, if he be severed from law and righteousness”; because man can use his reason to devise means of satisfying his lusts and evil passions, which other animals are unable to do” (I-II, Q. 95, art. 1).

<sup>59</sup> I-II, Q. 98-108

The second external principle directing human morality is *grace*. Grace is a supernatural gift infused in the soul which directs a person to God as his or her ultimate end. However, the role of grace is all-encompassing. Grace is necessary to know truth and do good, and is thus an essential component of the moral life.<sup>60</sup>

### III. Renewal and Recovery of Thomistic Moral Thought

In this final section of the chapter, I intend to review three themes in the renewal of Aquinas' moral thought and the way in which this dissertation aims to contribute to our understanding in each area. The three areas of renewal I will examine are (1) Aquinas' view on the role of the emotions in moral deliberation, (2) the integration and dialogue of Thomistic morality with the natural and social sciences, and (3) the distinctly theological character of Aquinas' ethics. Each of these trajectories will be addressed in more detail in the context of eating disorders in the remaining chapters of the dissertation.

#### a. *The Role of the Emotions in Thomistic Moral Thought*

In general, it is widely accepted that, although potentially destructive, the emotions (both the passions of the sensitive appetite and the will) play a positive and integral role in Aquinas' moral thought.<sup>61</sup> Thus, Aquinas has been seen among scholars as a valuable resource in

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<sup>60</sup> In light of the widespread philosophical interest in Aquinas' moral thought, the doctrine of grace has not always received sufficient treatment. As Theo Kobusch indicates, this is based on a mistaken premise: "The doctrine of grace (as well as the doctrine of law) is the philosophical theology that belongs to the metaphysics of act. Symptomatically, even in the treatise on grace, God is designated as the "first mover" in relation to human will, thereby making a central concept of traditional philosophical theology relevant to the teaching on grace. The doctrine of grace is thus not an accidental addition to the doctrine of act, but substantially necessary for the metaphysician of morals or anyone wishing to trace human action to its root" (Theo Kobusch, "Grace," *The Ethics of Aquinas*, 209).

<sup>61</sup> In discussing this topic, the terms "emotion" and passion will be used interchangeably. The Latin word *passiones* is the generic term assigned to motions of the sense appetite which Aquinas uses to refer to what contemporary psychology calls emotions or feelings. For an overview of Aquinas' account of the passions, see Mark D. Jordan, "Aquinas' Construction of a Moral Account of the Passions," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 33 (1986): 71-97; Kevin White, "The Passions of the Soul," ed. Pope, *The Ethics of Aquinas*, 103-115.



correcting the fallacy in modern moral discourse that morality is essentially analytical and rationalistic, and capable of generating conclusions with the same clarity and rigor as logic or mathematics.<sup>62</sup> Moral scholarship has grown increasingly aware of the deeply affective and relational components of moral deliberation,<sup>63</sup> and has turned to Aquinas to provide a deeper conceptual clarity to the role of the emotions in morality.<sup>64</sup> For Aquinas, as we have already seen, virtue is not just about *acting* rightly, but also *feeling* rightly. That is, at the heart of the Thomistic conception of morality is a conception of the person who, in a sense, is responsible for both how she acts and how she feels.

Thomas realistically recognizes that one's emotional state can play either a positive or a negative role in moral deliberation. In the next chapter, we will examine how the affective

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<sup>62</sup> Many see this modern antagonism towards the positive role of the emotions in moral reasoning as a result of Cartesian metaphysics which posited a dualistic antagonism between mind and body. Simon Harak sums up this view nicely: "Once Descartes and the Enlightenment had framed the question, setting rationality against embodiment, soul against body, moral agency against being moved, we can easily imagine the results for the study of passions. There are many good histories which summarize the course of those reflections. In general, we can say that Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers began to conceive of affectivity as at best a second order process, which occurred either as a reaction to an external stimulus, or perhaps through some activity of the mind. And all of that prompted ethicists toward an increasing conceptual divorce between reason and the passions because the body was so resistant to changes, were increasingly seen as disturbing the rational processes, and interfering with the rationality or the will of the ideal observer. Cartesian dualism—within the self, and between the self and the other—remained." G. Simon Harak, *Virtuous Passions: The Formation of Christian Character* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2001), 11. For alternative views of Descartes which offer a more positive assessment of his treatment of the emotions, see Amelie Oskenberg Rorty, "Descartes on Thinking with the Body," *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, Ed. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1992), 371-92. Aquinas' anthropology, however, is radically distinct from Descartes, as he views the human person not as body *and* soul, but as a soul (a form) which subsists in, and informs, matter which is the human body. Thus in Aquinas we see a deep affinity and unity between the body and soul, rather than an antagonism.

<sup>63</sup> See Martha Nussbaum's *Upheavals of Thought* for a non-Thomistic approach to the importance of emotions in moral deliberation. Nussbaum draws on the Stoic view that the emotions are thoughts or "cognitions or intentional perceptions and beliefs" rather than passive movements of the sensitive appetite. Just like other cognitions, emotions are a way of seeing and making sense of sensory data. In arguing that emotions are cognitions, Nussbaum challenges the Aristotelian distinction that Aquinas adopts between cognitive and appetitive powers of the soul. Thus, while this is a monumental work that merits much philosophical attention, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to offer a more thorough evaluation and critique. Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge University Press, 2003). For another historical survey in philosophical and psychological conceptions of the emotions, see Robert C. Solomon, *What Is an Emotion?: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, USA, 2003).

<sup>64</sup> See Claudia Eisen Murphy, "Aquinas on Our Responsibility for Our Emotions," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 8 (1999), 163-20; Harak, *Virtuous Passions*; Diana Fritz Cates, *Aquinas on the Emotions: A Religious-ethical Inquiry* (Georgetown University Press, 2009)

inclinations contribute to practical knowledge and the way in which this affective knowledge works with the knowledge of the intellect in the moral life. This appetitive knowledge, or “connatural knowledge” will provide a primary focus of this dissertation. We will also examine the way in which the passions of the sensitive appetite can distract the will from reflecting upon all the relevant components in moral deliberation, and can impede moral judgment by offering distorted perceptions about a given good. If the sensitive appetite is going to be properly conducive to the happiness of the person, it must be ordered or “trained” to enjoy sensible goods in the right way. Temperance and fortitude are the virtues which moderate the movements of the sense appetite and keep them in accordance with reason. As will be evident in the fourth chapter, these virtues allow people appropriately to include their full emotional experience in moral deliberation.

Hilde Bruch considered a patient’s inability to identify accurately and respond to the emotions a fundamental part of anorexia nervosa. In *The Golden Cage*, she wrote that patients with AN “behave as if they had no independent rights, [and believe] that neither their bodies nor their actions are self-directed, or not even their own.”<sup>65</sup> Cognitive therapists have directed their attention to the emotional dysfunction in the patient with an eating disorder, arguing that such emotions (and subsequent behaviors) are a result of false beliefs and assumptions:

These beliefs commonly center around attitudes about the legitimacy, desirability, acceptability, or justification of inner experiences. . . . The conflict between 'how one should feel' and 'how one actually feels' is not always obvious. A patient may simply deny the existence of an emotion in the presence of precursors that could be expected to lead to a particular feeling or state. Sometimes bingeing, vomiting, or intense exercise can interrupt feeling states that are considered 'unacceptable.' For example, one patient assumed that she could only experience anger if it had a 'logical' basis.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Bruch, *The Golden Cage*, 39

<sup>66</sup> David Garner and Paul Garfinkel, *Handbook of Treatment for Eating Disorders*, 2nd ed. (The Guilford Press, 1997), 131.

Thomas' moral psychology and moral epistemology can shine light on some of these questions about the normativity of the emotional experiences of people with eating disorders. In his description of different ways that the emotions are governed by the reason and will, Thomas offers not just a model of identifying, differentiating, and evaluation the emotions, but also an understanding of how the emotions may be habituated into virtuous components of life. Aquinas' moral psychology provides a framework in which emotional responses can be described as either conducive or detrimental to a virtuous, and, ultimately, a happy life. Aquinas' moral system does not dichotomize emotions and reason, but rather shows that the emotions can be rationally expressed. This is why Thomas' moral theory is particularly well-suited to addressing the complexities of the emotional experiences of women with eating problems and body dissatisfaction.

The important role of the emotions in eating disorder onset and maintenance has received some empirical validation. However, many researchers recognize that in order to grasp the full meaning of these empirical conclusions, they must be integrated and understood in light of theoretical and normative theories about the emotions, not only from the psychosocial sciences, but also from moral philosophy. For example, Barrett and Gross have argued that *awareness* of the emotions is the prerequisite to effective emotional regulation: "However, simply having knowledge about emotion is not sufficient; rather, greater accessibility of that emotional knowledge is believed to promote effective emotion regulation."<sup>67</sup> Although this dissertation will argue that Aquinas' moral psychology can shed light on differentiating and assigning normative value to different movements of the emotions, it will also argue that a Thomistic moral

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<sup>67</sup> Lisa Barrett and J. Gross, "Emotion representation and regulation: A process model of emotional intelligence," *Emotion: Current Issues and Future Directions*, T. Mayne & G. Bonnano, Eds., (New York: Guilford), 286-310.

psychology must be interpreted and applied in dialogue with the biomedical and psychosocial sciences. This leads to the second important trajectory in Thomistic moral scholarship.

*b. Thomistic Moral Psychology and the Natural and Social Science*

A recent development in Thomistic scholarship has focused on dialogue with the biomedical and psychosocial sciences. Because Thomistic moral psychology attributes such a positive and important role to the emotions in moral deliberation, it has great affinity with other pursuits in neurobiology, psychology, and sociobiology that also assign a central role to the emotions in moral deliberation. A major thesis among those pursuing the dialogue between a Thomistic moral theology and the sciences is that in order to understand how exactly human emotion functions in moral deliberation, moral theologians and philosophers must take into consideration the empirical understanding of the emotions offered from the perspective of the psychosocial sciences. Reformed theologian James Gustafson has been one of the major theological voices emphasizing the need for theology, and particularly moral theology, to dialogue with the psychosocial sciences. “Theology,” writes Gustafson, “has a claim to be heard” as much as the scientific disciplines, while at the same time, it has a responsibility to be informed by the contributions of the sciences in their “descriptions, explanations, and interpretations of the human.”<sup>68</sup>

Recent scientific research has shed much light on the emotions as empirical phenomena. Psychologist and scientific journalist Daniel Goleman has been one prominent voice among scientists drawing attention to the distinctive function of the emotions in moral reasoning and the cognitive content of the emotions. The primary question motivating Goleman is “what factors

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<sup>68</sup> James Gustafson, *Intersections* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1996), 4, 6.

are at play when people of high IQ flounder and those of modest IQ do surprisingly well?” He argues based on his review of empirical studies in cognitive psychology that

the difference quite often lies in the abilities called here ‘emotional intelligence,’ which includes self-control, zeal and persistence, and the ability to motivate oneself. And these skills . . . can be taught to children, giving them a better chance to use whatever intellectual potential the genetic lottery may have given them.<sup>69</sup>

“Emotional intelligence” or “EQ” as it is commonly known (to contrast it with IQ) is the cognitive element of the emotions which includes people’s ability to (1) know their emotions, (2) manage their emotions, (3) motivate themselves, (4) recognize emotions in others, and (5) handle relationships.<sup>70</sup> Goleman also addresses the moral dimension of his work:

These are times when the fabric of society seems to unravel at ever-greater speed, when selfishness, violence, and a meanness of spirit seem to be rotting the goodness of our communal lives. Here the argument for the importance of emotional intelligence hinges on the link between sentiment, character, and moral instincts. There is growing evidence that fundamental ethical stances in life stem from underlying emotional capacities. . . The ability to control [emotional] impulse is the base of will and character. By the same token, the root of altruism lies in empathy, the ability to read emotions in others; lacking a sense of another’s need or despair, there is no caring. And if there are any two moral stances that our times call for, they are precisely these, self-restraint and compassion.<sup>71</sup>

In a related work, Antonio Damasio argues based on his neurological research that emotions are a critical element of moral deliberation.<sup>72</sup> He proposes that emotion contributes to *reasonable* decision-making.”<sup>73</sup> A major part of Damasio’s research focuses on subjects with neurological damage. Damasio has discovered that in these subjects, the higher-level intellectual abilities like memory, language, and intelligence can remain intact despite damage to the lower-

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<sup>69</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (Bantam, 1995), xii. See also Daniel Goleman, *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (Bantam, 2000)

<sup>70</sup> Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* 43. This model of emotional intelligence was first proposed in Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer, “Emotional Intelligence,” *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality* 9 (1990), 185-211, 189.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>72</sup> Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (Penguin (Non-Classics), 2005).

<sup>73</sup> William C. Mattison, III, “The Role of the Emotions in the Moral Life,” Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Social Sciences (Annual Publication of the College Theology Society)* (Orbis Books, 2001), 284. Emphasis added.

level, emotion-related areas of the brain.<sup>74</sup> Damasio's "somatic marker hypothesis" holds that emotion assists in the reasoning process, rather than simply disturbing it, due to the fact that the reasoning system evolved as an extension of the autonomic emotional system which human beings share with animals.<sup>75</sup> The emotions "mark" certain relevant aspects of a situation, and then integrate this data into the reasoning process, which enables a person to make moral judgments. Damasio concludes that "reduction in emotion may constitute an equally important source of irrational behavior."<sup>76</sup>

Damasio rejects the view that the subcortical areas of the brain, including the brain stem and limbic systems, are responsible for the emotions, and that the neocortical areas of the brain are responsible for higher reasoning abilities and rational deliberation. Damasio instead claims that the neocortex and the subcortex are interdependent in rational (including moral) deliberation. The emotions are not simply the result of primitive neural operations but actually serve as a bridge between the neocortical and subcortical structures. Damasio is particularly interesting because he draws theoretical inferences about the nature of morality from his empirical findings. Thus, he rejects what he calls the "Kantian" ideal of "pure reason" as inadequate to account for how human beings conduct moral deliberation.<sup>77</sup> Human beings do

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<sup>74</sup> Damasio cites the infamous historical example of Phineas Gage, the railroad worker whose frontal lobe was pierced with a large iron rod. Gage survived the accident, and suffered no apparent mental damage, but he did experience radical emotional changes that made him prone to anger, non-compliant, and unable to commit. Damasio hypothesizes that these personality changes were due to the fact that the part of Gage's brain that was damaged was related to him emotional functioning, which, when damaged, left him unable to fully engage in the reasoning process.

<sup>75</sup> It is from the idea that the reasoning process can be separated from the vicissitudes of the body (which Damasio attributes to Cartesian dualism) that Damasio gets the title for his book: "This is Descartes' error: the abyssal separation between body and mind, between the sizable, dimensioned, mechanically operated, infinitely divisible body stuff, on the one hand, and the unsizable, undimensioned, un-pushpullable, nondivisible mind stuff; the suggestion that reasoning, and moral judgment, and the suffering that comes from physical pain or emotional upheaval might exist separately from the body. Specifically: the separation of the most refined operations of mind from the structure and operation of a biological organism" (Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 249-50.)

<sup>76</sup> Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 53.

<sup>77</sup> Damasio misrepresents Kant here. Kant was, of course, aware of the embodied nature of the mind and the limits to reason. Damasio is using the Kantian stereotype in order to show the fallacy of any notion of "pure reason."

not operate by conceiving all possible recourses, weighing them rationally, and selecting the most reasonable option. Rather, the emotions provide the neo-cortex with various possible actions and alternatives which illuminate the relevant features of a decision, enabling a person to act appropriately.

These and subsequent works use scientific evidence to corroborate the general Thomistic insight that the emotions constitute necessary and positive elements of moral agency. Moreover, these and other empirical studies corroborate the Thomistic insight that emotions can be trained and developed. These empirical approaches to the role of emotions in moral psychology are not only relevant, but should be integrated into the philosophical and theological discussion concerning moral psychology and the role of the virtues in moral deliberation.

The empirical evidence provided by the psychosocial sciences also provides the opportunity to expand and correct certain points within Thomistic moral psychology. Several contemporary scholars have noted some of the difficulties of Aquinas' treatment of moral psychology, and specifically the implications of his psychology on his treatment of the moral virtues. Jean Porter puts it succinctly:

It is no part of my purpose to defend Aquinas' philosophical psychology in its entirety. His analysis of the capacities of the human person in terms of distinct faculties of the soul is notoriously difficult to understand. At any rate, we have simply moved too far beyond Aquinas to be in a position to appropriate his psychology as it stands.<sup>78</sup>

The empirical literature not only provides a contemporary example of the ongoing relevance of connatural knowledge in the moral life, but it also provides the basis for criticizing certain conclusions Aquinas drew about the role of reason and emotion in the moral life. Placing Aquinas in dialogue with the biological and psychosocial sciences will challenge certain points of Thomistic moral psychology. However, the points where a Thomistic moral psychology is at

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<sup>78</sup> Jean Porter, *Moral Action and Christian Ethics*, Ed. Robin Gill (Cambridge University Press: New York, 1995), 167.

odds with empirical evidence can be an opportunity to expand or revise Aquinas' moral thought accordingly.

Empirical studies also have much to gain from the Thomistic account of moral psychology and the virtues. For example, these scientific studies lack a larger view of human flourishing and moral normativity which a Thomistic perspective can offer. As Craig Steven Titus writes, "the evolutionary researchers leave a vast field of meaning and purpose out of their investigation."<sup>79</sup> In the following chapters, this dissertation will examine how the psychosocial sciences can be brought into dialogue with a Thomistic moral theology that can shed light on the modern moral problem of eating disorders and body dissatisfaction in American women.

Recently, there have been a few works examining how philosophical and theological accounts of the virtues can illuminate other psychosocial efforts to integrate the emotions more in moral deliberation. Mark Carr specifically examines how the virtue of temperance is relevant to discussions about clinical moral deliberation, specifically in light of the care ethic, which argues for the inclusion of morally appropriate emotions in deliberation.<sup>80</sup> According to Carr, temperance is the virtue which allows people to control their emotional response to a given situation. This is a virtue that is particularly relevant in a clinical setting:

Of fundamental importance to the understanding of emotion is the view that humans are not wholly passive to the movements of emotion. Whether a theory of human psychology rests upon a bi-partite, tri-partite, or unitary concept will not negate the fact that a moral agent is able to be aware of and educate a response to the physiological and/or psychological events that trigger the full experience of emotion.

By integrating both an understanding of the virtue of temperance and an ethic of care, Carr tries to construct a richer account of clinical moral deliberation than is currently practiced. In the

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<sup>79</sup> Craig Steven Titus, *Resilience And the Virtue of Fortitude: Aquinas in Dialogue With the Psychosocial Sciences* (Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 118.

<sup>80</sup> Mark F. Carr, *Passionate Deliberation: Emotion, Temperance, and the Care Ethic in Clinical Moral Deliberation*, 1st ed. (Springer, 2001).



following chapter, we will draw on Carr's work to examine Aquinas' conception of the virtue of temperance in greater depth in order to show how this virtue can shed light on psychological approaches to understanding eating disorders and assigning normative value to the emotions in moral deliberation.

A related work which attempts to integrate Thomistic insights into the psychosocial sciences is Craig Steven Titus' work, *Resilience and the Virtue of Fortitude*. Titus's thesis is that empirical research and Thomistic virtue ethics are mutually illuminating in their studies of resilience, the personal and social ability to cope with hardship and endure difficulty, and the virtue of fortitude. Titus integrates empirical resilience research into his philosophical and theological discussion of moral psychology and the virtue of fortitude to explain how people are able to cope with fear and deal with suffering:

Moral theology, when following Aquinas' example, brings the theological tradition of the church into dialogue with the sciences on human nature and moral agency. . . . can employ resilience research to contribute to a more robust philosophy of nature and philosophical anthropology, to clarify moral analysis and to continue a renewal in moral theology. The various domains of resilience research—psychology, developmental theories, social sciences, and evolutionary theory—offer insights into human nature and moral agency.<sup>81</sup>

By integrating the psychosocial sciences into the Thomistic analysis of moral psychology and especially the moral virtue of fortitude, Titus is able to develop an understanding of how human beings cope with difficulty and endure hardship that is relevant to contemporary moral problems. In the same way, this dissertation intends to put into dialogue the various approaches delineated in the overview in the first chapter (biomedical, psychological, and sociocultural) with a Thomistic moral psychology and virtue-based morality in order to develop a moral analysis of eating disorders that is both sensitive to what other scientific domains contribute and morally relevant to the actual experience of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa.

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<sup>81</sup> Titus, *Resilience And the Virtue of Fortitude*, 364.

What is particularly illuminating about Titus's work from the perspective of moral theology is that he acknowledges that the sciences do not in themselves offer a complete framework or analysis of resilience, and thus from a Christian perspective they need the contribution of moral theology to provide philosophical, metaphysical, and ethical dimensions of their analysis.<sup>82</sup> Titus recognizes that a full understanding of the virtue of fortitude includes a distinctly theological component which operates from the standpoint not of the psychosocial sciences but on the basis of scriptural, patristic, and other theological sources and "involves separating the efficacy of human virtuous acts and dispositions neither from their sources in natural inclinations and capacities nor from their sources in God's constant presence and particular gifts of grace."<sup>83</sup> Thus, Titus acknowledges that there is not only a moral resilience, but also a spiritual resilience, which includes the role of divine support in addition to human agency in dealing with difficulty and enduring hardship:

Grace completes and elevates emotions, reason, and will through resisting and overcoming the difficulties that punctuate our way to our ultimate good. This grace involves a theologically informed hope that permeates daily work as well. . . . On the developmental level, Aquinas' theological approach to enduring hardship and waiting for

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<sup>82</sup> In this project, Titus employs insights from Stephen J. Pope's "critical appropriation model" which draws resources from the natural, social, and theological sciences, but integrates these various contributions in a discriminating way: "we do not pretend that moral theology simply acquires the accumulated 'scientific' status of the study with which it dialogues. That is, we avoid a naturalistic approach that directly draws ethics from psychosocial sciences. We affirm a nonmechanistic view of nature that resists reductionism and materialism, while being open to experiential, realist reflections. . . . In particular, Aquinas accords a tertiary, but important, place to philosophical and other scientific arguments and observations in doing moral theology. These sciences are not on the same level as Scripture and tradition, but they provide 'extrinsic and probable' arguments for understanding human agency. This ordered approach does not denigrate the input that empirical and descriptive sciences bring at the level of human agency, but it puts them in a larger normative and theological context" (Titus 364-5). See Stephen J. Pope's *Human Evolution and Christian Ethics* which argues that Christian ethics and evolutionary theories are in principle consonant with one another if interpreted properly. Nevertheless, Pope acknowledges that the contributions regarding morality offered by the natural and theological sciences are meant to supplement and complement one another, not replace each other: "The unity of truth suggests that the findings of science and the insights of theology are ultimately compatible and, at certain points, mutually enlightening. Scientific perspectives on nature can clarify, enrich, and deepen the minds of those who view the natural world with the eyes of faith. Yet the wellspring of Christian convictions lies not in science but in the personal religious experience made possible by living communities of faith" Pope, *Human Evolution and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3-4. See also Pope, *The Evolution of Altruism and the Ordering of Love* (Georgetown University Press, 1995).

<sup>83</sup> Titus, *Resilience And the Virtue of Fortitude*, xii.

the attainment of good can transform psychosocial resilience insights on pain, suffering, and resisting. As an indispensable element, we have to integrate our own experience, which is based on our experience of God through the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. [But] the level of supernatural or graced virtue cannot find empirical or statistical corroboration based on external observations alone. Aquinas' theological reflections on the life of grace involve the non-empirically verifiable, lived experience of the Christian tradition (scriptural, patristic, mystic, and liturgical sources) that finds able witnesses among the resilient followers of Christ.<sup>84</sup>

In the following moral evaluation of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, the distinctly theological element of Aquinas' moral theology will not be overlooked.<sup>85</sup> This leads to the third trajectory of contemporary Thomistic studies, which focuses on Aquinas as a distinctly *theological* writer.

### c. *The Theological Component of Aquinas' Moral Theology*

Aquinas is often thought to follow Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in his treatment of morality and especially of the virtues.<sup>86</sup> Although many of the authors who study Aquinas' moral philosophy mention the infused virtues and the gifts, one is often left with the impression that Aquinas offered a theory of virtue ethics that can stand alone apart from his theology.<sup>87</sup> Leo

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 368.

<sup>85</sup> A central thesis of this dissertation is that the theological dimension of AN and BN is a necessary component to a full moral understanding of these conditions. As Michelle Mary Lelwica writes, "eating problems are not simply oriented toward the obvious goal of getting thin. . . eating problems point to spiritual hungers—desires for a sense of meaning and wholeness—and such hungers are inextricably intertwined with the politics of these problems." Aquinas' theological contribution of God as the ultimate end of human existence and the source of true happiness can speak to this desire for meaning and wholeness that Lelwica identifies. Lelwica, *Starving for Salvation*, 7. For another example from a specifically Christian perspective calling for the need to integrate grace onto the moral conversation on eating disorders, see Laurel Rae Mathewson, "Lord What Shall I eat? How Much Should I Weigh?" *Sojourners Magazine* (July 2007) <http://www.sojournal.net/index.cfm?action=magazine.article&issue=soj0707&article=070722>, Accessed 30 September 2010.

<sup>86</sup> For example, Vernon J. Bourke argues in his article on Aquinas and natural law that Aquinas' moral theory should be understood as primarily Aristotelian rather than Christian (Vernon J. Bourke, "Is Thomas Aquinas a Natural Law Ethicist?" *The Monist* 58 (1974): 52-66). See also MacDonald and Stump, *Aquinas's Moral Theory*; Ralph M. McInerney, *Ethica Thomistica: The Moral Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, (Catholic University of America Press, 1997); Leo J. Elders, *Ethics of St. Thomas Aquinas: Happiness, Natural Law And the Virtues*, illustrated edition. (Peter Lang Publishing, 2005).

<sup>87</sup> Scott MacDonald and Eleonore Stump write in the introduction to their festschrift on Aquinas' moral theory that the study of Thomistic moral theory has been pursued by "increasingly large numbers of philosophers who have no particular commitment to Thomism as a philosophical or religious movement. Philosophers from different

Elders, in his recent book on Aquinas' ethics states explicitly that Aquinas ethics consists of both philosophical and theological components, but that the "philosophical sections are so complete and coherent they can stand by themselves. . . The texts of the Second Part which consist of philosophical arguments constitute a coherent whole and, in their explanations, remain at the level of natural reason."<sup>88</sup>

However, as we have already seen, Aquinas broke with Aristotle in a critical way in identifying the highest good as a supernatural good (union with God); this also leads him to suggest the existence of infused moral virtues, which can direct the person's action to this supernatural end. In the last several decades, Christian ethicists from both Catholic and Protestant backgrounds have advanced a more thoroughly theological understanding of Aquinas' moral thought. A major figure in recovering the distinctively theological nature of Aquinas' moral theory is Dominican Marie-Dominique Chenu, who emphasized that the practical elements of Aquinas' thought emerge from his dogmatic theology:

Without doubt there is a certain kind of moralist who finds [in Aquinas] only considerations which are in fact preliminary, a metaphysical extrapolation or a mysticism at a distance from practical human conduct and from the special characteristic of human liberty. For St. Thomas, on the other hand, moral science is precisely theological: interior to this high knowing, both theoretical and practical at the same time. Its purpose is to see and to locate all beings and every being in and by their order to God from whom they flow forth in a delineated participation which leads back to God.<sup>89</sup>

In the same vein, Dominican Servais Pinckaers argues that Aquinas' treatment of the moral life takes as its starting point a supernatural finality that is inseparable from the rest of his ethics. Pinckaers presses especially the biblical foundation of Aquinas' ethics, arguing that Aquinas saw the moral section of his *Summa*, including the virtues, as an extended commentary on the

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backgrounds, including many from the mainstream of Anglo-American philosophy, have begun seriously to explore and explicate Aquinas' views on a wide variety of topics" MacDonald and Stump, *Aquinas's Moral Theory*, 1.

<sup>88</sup> Elders, *Ethics of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 23.

<sup>89</sup> Chenu, *Aquinas and His Role in Theology*, 126.

Sermon on the Mount: “So the treatise on the new law is not an isolated segment but a coordinating center of the *Summa theologiae*; it manifests the Christological and biblical nature of Aquinas’ moral theology, and it should serve as a model for stimulating our theological reflection today.”<sup>90</sup> Thomas O’Meara also emphasizes that Aquinas’ moral thought cannot be separated from his theology due to the fact that the supernatural nature of the human telos thoroughly transforms his treatment of ethics in a way that is primarily Christian, and only secondarily Aristotelian:

Precisely by drawing the new currents of his time into a theology, Aquinas became an Aristotelian, a thinker of nature’s forms, and in light of the *De anima*, a moral theologian of faculties, habits, and activities flowing from nature and grace (the Dominicans inevitably mentioned the organic nature of the Christian personality). But Aquinas’ moral theology begins with the selection of the eschaton as the goal of men and women, and for this, it spotlights a second life-principle, grace. Within the pattern of crescendo acquired and infused virtues, realms of realities (laws), and charismatic gifts enter and remain. A moral theology is not Christian because an Aristotelian philosophy is adorned with passages from the Bible, but because it sees reality in light of the kingdom of God and explains how incarnation continues in so many lives. Incarnation is an underlying pattern of the *Summa theologiae* and it reaches from the mission of the Word to the sacrament of the sick and dying.”<sup>91</sup>

Although it is widely acknowledged that Thomas Aquinas was a theologian writing in a theological context, the question remains what sort of practical implications his theological preoccupations had on his moral thought. It is one thing to say that Aquinas’ moral thought is so thoroughly suffused with his dogmatic theology that one cannot be understood without the other; it is quite another thing to point out in what essential ways a Thomistic-based virtue ethics, for example, is transformed in light of his theological commitments. This question is particularly relevant in light of the recent revival of virtue ethics in moral theology. It has been widely accepted and widely discussed among Protestants and Catholics that moral theology has much to

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<sup>90</sup> Thomas F. O’Meara, O.P., “Interpreting Thomas Aquinas: The Dominican School,” in Pope, *The Ethics of Aquinas*, 365.

<sup>91</sup> O’Meara, “Interpreting Thomas Aquinas: The Dominican School,” 366.

gain from integrating an Aristotelian virtue ethics into Christian moral reflection as Aquinas did.<sup>92</sup> But what, on the other hand, do non-Christians have to gain from the explicitly Christian theological virtue ethic that Aquinas offers?

Both Aristotle and Aquinas acknowledge that the acquired moral virtues are extremely difficult to develop given the reality of a sinful world, and that the perfectly virtuous individual is rare. Aquinas does not preclude the possibility that some people have attained perfect acquired virtue, but for most people, such an achievement is not a realistic possibility.<sup>93</sup> However, Aquinas has a better solution than Aristotle's resignation over the possibility of developing virtue. As Jean Porter points out, for Aquinas, "The normal context for the development and exercise of the virtues is the life of grace, which is mediated in the individual through the theological virtues and the infused cardinal virtues (I-II 62.1; I-II 63.3)."<sup>94</sup>

The major difference between the infused and acquired moral virtues is that the former are caused by grace, not habituation, and are, therefore, a free gift from God. As such, a person with infused temperance or courage may not have lived in such a way as to acquire these virtues through acting virtuously, but instead receives such virtues as *gift*. Thus, the person with infused temperance may still struggle habitually with overeating or to eat moderately when she does not want to eat at all, but may, in moments of grace, be able to withstand temptation. As Porter puts it,

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<sup>92</sup> See Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); Gilbert C. Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984); Jean Porter, *The Recovery of Virtue: The Relevance of Aquinas for Christian Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990); Joseph, J. Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics* (Georgetown University Press, 1997).

<sup>93</sup> See I-II, Q. 63, art. 2, ad. 2.

<sup>94</sup> Jean Porter, "Virtue and Sin: the Connection of the Virtues and the Case of the Flawed Saint," *The Journal of Religion* 75, no. 4 (October 1995): 521-539, 529. Aquinas argues that those who possess the theological virtue of charity, which is the mother of the virtues, also possess all of the cardinal virtues by Divine infusion. See I-II, Q. 65, art. 3. For more on the relevance of the theological virtues for the Christian life, see Romanus Cessario, *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1992).

Aquinas' theological commitments have led him to develop his overall account of virtue in such a way as to accommodate (at least partially) the case of someone who combines moral struggle with moral heroism. This reformulation leads him to modify not only Aristotle's claim that moral struggle is incompatible with true virtue, but also the Stoic claim (as he understands it) that virtue is an indivisible quality which does not allow of degrees of attainment (I-II 66.1,2). Yet, there is no apparent reason why these reformulations, taken by themselves, require us to share Aquinas' particular understanding of grace and its relation to the moral life.<sup>95</sup>

We should adopt this understanding of the work of grace in the moral life, argues Porter, because it allows us to grant the possibility that someone might combine persistent moral struggle (and failure) with a life of genuine virtue. The life of grace grants the person a particular commitment to the good that radically transforms the moral life. The life of grace and the infusion of the moral virtues does not give a person perfect moral virtue in the Aristotelian sense, that a person will habitually do the good as second nature without internal struggle, but it does give the person a real commitment to the good that transforms her actions to aim at that good and develop a genuinely good character even in the midst of great moral struggle. In other words, grace gives people qualitatively different capacities which not only allow them to achieve their supernatural telos, which is direct and person union with God, but also to transform their ordinary earthly moral actions so that they are directed toward this ultimate end.

This dissertation will contribute to this discussion of the role of grace in the moral life by examining the gifts of the Holy Spirit as a form of connatural knowledge. The human intellect according to Aquinas is not capable of knowing God in God's essence, but only through God's effects. As such, the experience of God cannot be provided by intellectual concepts or ideas, but rather through connaturality, the affective form of knowledge by which the human person participates in God's very love. As John of St. Thomas noted in his comprehensive commentary on Aquinas' treatment of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, this love develops into a true and objective

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<sup>95</sup> Porter, "Virtue and Sin: the Connection of the Virtues and the Case of the Flawed Saint," 530.

means of knowing, which not only allows a person to know God through love, but also allows her to appraise and judge things according to a habitual principle so that she may act in a way consistent with the will of God. John of St. Thomas writes,

The gifts of the Holy Ghost . . . postulate in the soul principles permanently known by which they are regulated. Though the gifts are directed by the Holy Ghost, the purpose of His impulse is not to manifest the truth of objects, either intellectually or imaginatively conceived, as is the case with prophecy. According to St. Augustine, even an impulse which the human mind unknowingly receives is sufficient. There is required merely an interior movement, a divine stimulation, by which God moves man to the immediate experience of tasting and seeing that the Lord is sweet. Thus God becomes deeply rooted in souls and makes them connatural with divine things. . . . By this connaturality and intimate union to divine things, a man is made capable of penetrating more profoundly divine things and the mysteries of faith, of judging according to either secondary or ultimate causes, and of taking practical counsel in his actions.<sup>96</sup>

Attention to the importance of connatural knowledge in Aquinas' moral thought contributes to the recovery of the distinctly theological nature of Aquinas' moral thought by explaining how grace operates in the moral life of the human person specifically through the virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit. This grace disposes a person on an affective level to divine things according to her ultimate *telos*, which is union with God.

Aquinas' theological commitments are not only relevant to the discussion of virtue, but they also contribute something substantively different than what a purely philosophical account can offer. It is for this reason that this dissertation will probe how the life of grace, the infused moral and theological virtues, and in particular, the gifts of the Holy Spirit all have practical implications for the discussion of the moral dimension of eating disorders, a topic which will be taken up in detail in the sixth chapter. As Servais Pinckaers writes,

The Holy Spirit calls us and makes us understand the Lord's commandments, and he accords us grace that strengthens our new life. Such is the New Law, which gives us 'life in Christ' and 'life in the Spirit' . . . the Christian life, understood as a response to the Lord's call, is neither a solitary nor a purely personal affair. The Christian life takes place in communion with the Church, the body of Christ. Each Christian enters into the

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<sup>96</sup> John of St. Thomas, *The Gifts of the Holy Ghost*, 47.



New Covenant through faith in the person of the Son of God; every Christian receives, from the living tradition entrusted to the apostles and to their successors, the moral prescriptions that need to be conserved faithfully and fulfilled permanently in different cultures, throughout history. . . . Thus the moral life of the Christian is bound to the person of Christ forming his Body, the Church, by the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>97</sup>

## V. Conclusion

Bringing the question of eating disorders and related problems to bear on Thomas' moral system contributes to the ongoing critical recovery of Aquinas' moral thought by showing how his moral system is still relevant in addressing contemporary moral problems like eating disorders and body dissatisfaction. This dissertation aims at contributing to the ongoing recovery of Thomas' moral system by illustrating how the study of eating disorders and body dissatisfaction (a) illuminates new insights about the role of the emotions in moral reasoning, (b) corroborates the claim that a critical recovery of Thomas is enhanced by the integration of the psychosocial sciences, and (c) emphasizes points within Thomas' moral system that prove him to be a distinctly *theological* thinker.

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<sup>97</sup> Servais Pinckaers, John Berkman, and Craig Steven Titus, *The Pinckaers Reader: Renewing Thomistic Moral Theology* (Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 26.

## Chapter Three

### Connatural Knowledge and Thin-Ideal Internalization

- I. A Survey of Empirical Research Linking Media Exposure to a Thin-Ideal, Body Dissatisfaction and Eating Pathology**
- II. The Role of Reason in Human Action**
- III. Connatural Knowledge**
  - a. The Concept of Connaturality in Aquinas*
  - b. Judgment per modum inclinationis*
  - c. Knowledge and Love*
  - d. Choice*
- IV. Connatural Knowledge and Human Action**
  - a. Uniting Knowledge and Love in Human Action*
  - b. Connatural Knowledge and Habits*
  - c. Connatural Knowledge and Aesthetic Judgments*
- V. Thin-Ideal Internalization as Connatural Knowledge**
- VI. Conclusion**

This dissertation argues that the contribution of Thomistic virtue ethics can contribute to multidimensional understanding of eating disorders. In addition, this dissertation argues that the study of eating disorders can contribute to the study of Thomistic virtue ethics, particularly by practically grounding certain elements of his virtue ethics and by clarify certain points of controversy in the recovery of Thomistic virtue ethics such as the affective dimension of practical reasoning. This chapter will contribute both to the study of eating disorders and to the study of Thomistic virtue ethics through the exploration of Thomas’ concept of connatural knowledge.

This chapter begins by examining psychosocial evidence for the claim that “body dissatisfaction” is a critical dispositional element underlying eating disorders, with particular attention to the way in which media exposure influences levels of body dissatisfaction. Recent research has focused on what is called thin-ideal internalization—the level in which one internalizes or “buys into” a societal thin-ideal as transmitted through popular media—as one of

the major potential risk factors for eating and body image problems. Evidence indicates that those who have internalized a thin-ideal are more likely to be dissatisfied with their bodies and develop symptoms of an eating disorder, even when they are aware of the unrealistic and unhealthy nature of such an ideal. Turning to Aquinas, this chapter then examines a mode of affective knowledge called “connatural knowledge” in order to show how one can choose actions one knows to be inconsistent with flourishing. I argue that women who have internalized a thin ideal have become connatural with such an ideal such that they choose actions inconsistent with their rational knowledge regarding this ideal. In addition, the concept of thin-ideal internalization reveals the importance of the affective component in Thomas’ theory of moral action.

### **I. A Survey of Empirical Research Linking Media Exposure to a Thin-Ideal, Body Dissatisfaction and Eating Pathology**

Body image is clearly an important concept to treat in the evaluation of eating disorders. Hilde Bruch considered body image to be the most important feature of anorexia nervosa and argued that a person with AN was unlikely to recover “without a corrective change in the body image.”<sup>1</sup> More recently, James Rosen has noted that weight control strategies of the individual with an eating disorder are of secondary importance to the primary problem of over-concern with body image, such that eating disorders should be known more generally as body-image disorders.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hilde Bruch, “Perceptual and Conceptual Disturbances in Anorexia Nervosa,” *Psychosomatic Medicine* 24 (1962): 187-194, 189.

<sup>2</sup> James Rosen, “Body Image Assessment and Treatment in Controlled Studies of Eating Disorders,” *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 20 (1996): 331-343; James Rosen, “A Comparison of Eating Disorders and Body Dysmorphic Disorder on Body Image and Psychological Adjustment,” *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 44 (1998): 441-49

Body image generally refers to the subjective internal evaluation of an individual's own outer appearance.<sup>3</sup> In other words, "body image" is taken to mean one's own unique perception of his or her own body. Thomas Cash, a leading researcher in body image studies, defines body image as the "multifaceted psychological experience of embodiment. . . encompassing one's body-related self-perceptions and self-attitudes, including thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors."<sup>4</sup> Disturbances in the internal perception of one's own body may affect an individual emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally, and have a strong correlation with clinical conditions like anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa.<sup>5</sup>

Body dissatisfaction has reached extraordinarily high levels among American girls and women. Over half of American girls and undergraduate women report being dissatisfied with their bodies.<sup>6</sup> Research has identified body dissatisfaction one of the most important variables in predicting eating disorder onset and maintenance.<sup>7</sup> Many factors contribute to the rise in body dissatisfaction among American females such as the role of parental messages, peer teasing, and self-esteem.<sup>8</sup> However, researchers are paying increasingly more attention to the role of the media in promulgating what is called a "thin-ideal of female beauty." It is widely acknowledged

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<sup>3</sup> Although the study of body image has in recent years become almost synonymous with image satisfaction, the term has also been used by neurologists and neuropsychologists to describe such conditions as anosognosia (an unawareness of the existence of large portions of one's own body), autotopagnosia (the inability to distinguish right and left sides of the body), and phantom limb pain (the residual pain following a limb lost to injury or amputation). For a survey of the history of the term, see Exacting Beauty, 5-7.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas F. Cash, "Body Image: Past, Present, and Future," *Body Image: An International Journal of Research*, vol. 1, Issue 1 (January 2004): 1-5.

<sup>5</sup> Body Dysmorphic Disorder is characterized in the *DSM-IV* as a psychological disorder consisting of a preoccupation with an imagined defect in appearance or an excessive response to a real defect in appearance that causes significant distress or impairment in social and occupational functioning and that is not better accounted for by another mental disorder (e.g. Anorexia Nervosa). Note that not all body image disturbance is necessarily negative, and a moderate level of body image disturbance may be beneficial, leading to positive behaviors like healthy exercise and moderate nutritious eating. See T.F Cash, P.L. Novy, and J.R. Grant, "Why Do Women Exercise? Factor Analysis and Further Validation of the Reasons for Exercise Inventory," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 78, no. 2 (1994): 539-44.

<sup>6</sup> S. K. Bearman, K. Presnell, & E. Martinez, "The Skinny on Body Dissatisfaction: A Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Girls and Boys," *Journal of Adolescence*, 35 (2006), 217-229.

<sup>7</sup> F. Johnson & J. Wardle, "Dietary Restraint, Body Dissatisfaction, and Psychological Distress: A Prospective Analysis," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 114 (2005), 119-125.

<sup>8</sup> Serena Reese, "Multiple Influences on Women's Body Image," *VAHPRED Journal* 29, no. 3 (Spring 2008): 4-7.

that images of women presented in the media today are thinner than past media images. The average female model is also significantly thinner than the average American woman, with the latter averaging 5'4" and weighing 144 pounds while the former is 5'10" and weighs 111 pounds.<sup>9</sup>

Multiple empirical studies have indicated a significant correlation between exposure to idealized media images and various manifestations of body dissatisfaction. A three-year longitudinal study of female adolescents confirmed a statistical significance between body dissatisfaction and the onset restrictive eating behaviors.<sup>10</sup> A 2002 study by Durkin and Paxton found that in a controlled study of seventh and tenth graders, both grades experienced a significant decrease in body satisfaction and a significant increase in depression attributable to viewing idealized images of females in advertising.<sup>11</sup> A 2003 Australian study investigated the effect of body dissatisfaction in adolescent boys and girls (aged 13-15) after viewing 20 commercials containing idealized thin female images versus 20 nonappearance television commercials.<sup>12</sup> The study found that girls, but not boys, who viewed the commercials with the idealized images reported significantly higher body dissatisfaction compared with nonappearance commercials, supporting the general hypothesis that televised images of attractiveness lead to increased body dissatisfaction in adolescent girls.<sup>13</sup> One 2005 study on young women who were exposed to ultra-thin magazine models found that self esteem declined

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<sup>9</sup> Lelwica, *Starving for Salvation*, 4; See also Katherine Gilday's documentary film *The Famine Within* (1992).

<sup>10</sup> Jill Cattarin and Kevin Thompson, "A Three-Year Longitudinal Study of Body Image, Eating Disturbance, and General Psychological Functioning in Adolescent Females," *Eating Disorders: The Journal of Treatment & Prevention* 2, no. 2 (1994): 114-125.

<sup>11</sup> Sarah Durkin and Susan Paxton, "Predictors of Vulnerability to Reduced Body Image Satisfaction and Psychological Well-Being in Response to Exposure to Idealized Female Media Images in Adolescent Girls," *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 53 (2002): 995-1005.

<sup>12</sup> Non-appearance commercials are not related to physical appearance, e.g. credit card, car, or kitchen appliance commercials.

<sup>13</sup> Duane Hargreaves and Marika Tiggemann, "The Effect of 'Thin Ideal' Television Commercials on Body Dissatisfaction and Schema Activation During Early Adolescence," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, vol. 32, no. 5 (October, 2003): 367-373.

substantially after viewing the magazine images.<sup>14</sup> A 2002 meta-analytic review of 25 studies on the effect of mass media images of the slender ideal on body dissatisfaction found that body image was significantly more negative after viewing thin media images than after viewing images of average or plus-size models. The authors concluded that mass media promulgation of a slender ideal promotes body dissatisfaction.<sup>15</sup> A more recent 2008 meta-analysis by Grabe, et al. examined 90 experimental and correlational studies of the connection between exposure to ultra-thin media models, body dissatisfaction, and negative eating behaviors and beliefs. The analysis concluded that there is a direct causal short-term effect with a similar real-world relationship between exposure to thin-ideal media images, body dissatisfaction, and eating disorder symptomatology.<sup>16</sup>

Researchers in the past few years have been trying to establish tools to measure this correlation between exposure to idealized images, body image dissatisfaction, and the onset of pathological eating behavior. A 1994 study by Stice, et al. investigated the relationship between media exposure and eating disorder symptoms and found a direct effect of media exposure on eating disorder symptoms. The results of the study supported the hypothesis that *internalization* (the level that one “buys into” the media images and accepts the values they convey) mediates the adverse effects of the thin ideal.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> D. Clay, V.L. Vignoles, and H. Dittmar, “Body Image and Self-Esteem Among Adolescent Girls: Testing the Influence of Sociocultural Factors,” *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 15, no. 4 (November 2005): 451-477.

<sup>15</sup> Lisa Groesz, Michael Levine, and Sarah Murnen, “The Effect of Experimental Presentation of Thin Media Images on Body Satisfaction: A Meta-Analytic Review,” *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, vol. 31, issue 1 (January 2002): 1-16.

<sup>16</sup> Shelly Grabe, Monique Ward, and Janet Shibley Hyde, “The Role of the Media in Body Image Concerns Among Women: A Meta-Analysis of Experimental and Correlational Studies,” *Psychological Bulletin* 134.3 (May 2008), 460-476.

<sup>17</sup> Stice et al., “Relation of Media Exposure to Eating Disorder Symptomatology: An Examination of Mediating Mechanisms.” Body dissatisfaction was assessed with a nine-item Body Satisfaction subscale of the Eating Disorders Inventory, the reliability and validity of which is well-documented. Eating Disorder Symptomatology was assessed using the 26-item Eating Attitudes Test (See also David Garner et al., “The Eating Attitudes Test: Psychometric Features and Clinical Correlates,” *Psychological Medicine* 12; D.M. Garner, M.P. Olmsted, and J.

### SOCIOCULTURAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS APPEARANCE SCALE - 3 (SATAQ-3)

Internalization-General: Items: 3, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12, 15, 16, 27

Internalization-Athlete: Items: 19, 20, 23, 24, 30

Pressures: Items: 2, 6, 10, 14, 18, 22, 26

Information: Items: 1, 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 25, 28, 29

Reverse-keyed items: 3, 6, 9, 12, 13, 19, 27, 28

Please read each of the following items carefully and indicate the number that best reflects your agreement with the statement.

**Definitely Disagree = 1**

**Mostly Disagree = 2**

**Neither Agree Nor Disagree = 3**

**Mostly Agree = 4**

**Definitely Agree = 5**

- |   |       |
|---|-------|
| 1. TV programs are an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive."                   | _____ |
| 2. I've felt pressure from TV or magazines to lose weight.  | _____ |
| 3. I <u>do not</u> care if my body looks like the body of people who are on TV.                               | _____ |
| 4. I compare my body to the bodies of people who are on TV.   | _____ |
| 5. TV commercials are an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive."                | _____ |
| 6. I <u>do not</u> feel pressure from TV or magazines to look pretty.   | _____ |
| 7. I would like my body to look like the models who appear in magazines.                                      | _____ |
| 8. I compare my appearance to the appearance of TV and movie stars.   | _____ |
| 9. Music videos on TV are <u>not</u> an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive." | _____ |
| 10. I've felt pressure from TV and magazines to be thin.  | _____ |
| 11. I would like my body to look like the people who are in movies.   | _____ |
| 12. I <u>do not</u> compare my body to the bodies of people who appear in magazines.                          | _____ |
| 13. Magazine articles are <u>not</u> an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive." | _____ |
| 14. I've felt pressure from TV or magazines to have a perfect body.   | _____ |
| 15. I wish I looked like the models in music videos.  | _____ |
| 16. I compare my appearance to the appearance of people in magazines.   | _____ |
| 17. Magazine advertisements are an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive."      | _____ |
| 18. I've felt pressure from TV or magazines to diet.  | _____ |
| 19. I <u>do not</u> wish to look as athletic as the people in magazines.                                      | _____ |
| 20. I compare my body to that of people in "good shape."  | _____ |
| 21. Pictures in magazines are an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive."        | _____ |
| 22. I've felt pressure from TV or magazines to exercise.  | _____ |
| 23. I wish I looked as athletic as sports stars.  | _____ |
| 24. I compare my body to that of people who are athletic.   | _____ |
| 25. Movies are an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive."                       | _____ |
| 26. I've felt pressure from TV or magazines to change my appearance.  | _____ |
| 27. I <u>do not</u> try to look like the people on TV.  | _____ |
| 28. Movie stars are <u>not</u> an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive."       | _____ |
| 29. Famous people are an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive."                | _____ |
| 30. I try to look like sports athletes.   | _____ |

Fig. 1: SATAQ<sup>18</sup>

Polivy, "The Development and Validation of a Multidimensional Eating Disorder Inventory for Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia," *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 2 (1983): 15-34

<sup>18</sup> The Heinberg and Thompson Scale (1995) is provided free for non-commercial purposes. See <http://bodyimagedisturbance.usf.edu/sat/index.htm>, accessed August 23, 2010.

In 1995, Heinberg and Thompson published another study focusing on the “influence of a sociocultural factor [thin-ideal internalization] on the development of body-image disturbance.”<sup>19</sup> Although thin-ideal internalization was considered important in body dissatisfaction, research on this particular variable was hindered by a lack of measurement instruments to document the sociocultural influence empirically. Heinberg and Thompson designed an experiment exposing women to societal images of thinness and beauty as communicated through televised media. The experimental group viewed a 10-minute tape of advertisements that clearly communicated a thin-ideal. The control group watched 10 minutes of advertisements devoid of images of thinness and beauty.<sup>20</sup> The participants were required to complete a series of psychological surveys prior to participating. One was the *Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire* (SATAQ),<sup>21</sup> a scale measuring women's cognitive distortions related to their physical appearance. The SATAQ (see Fig. 1) is designed to measure a person's awareness of societal messages, as well as how thoroughly one has accepted, or in psychological terminology, how thoroughly one has *internalized* those messages.

Participants were also administered the *Visual Analogue Scales* (VAS), a psychometric response scale measuring “state” changes in body satisfaction and mood based on five measure: Anxiety, depression, anger, body dissatisfaction, and overall appearance dissatisfaction. The

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<sup>19</sup> L.H. Heinberg and J.K. Thompson, “Body Image and Televised Images of Thinness and Attractiveness: A Controlled Laboratory Investigation,” *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 14 (1995): 325-338. The authors’ experimental group consisted of 138 Caucasian female undergraduates so that race would not be a variable.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 328.

<sup>21</sup> Leslie J. Heinberg, J. Kevin Thompson, and Susan Stormer, “Development and Validation of the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire,” *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 17, no. 1 (1995): 81-89. The SATAQ was developed to assess the recognition and acceptance of socially-sanctioned standards of appearance in women. The first study isolated two important factors. The first factor was identified as awareness or acknowledgment of a societal emphasis on appearance. The second factor was an acceptance or “internalization” of those standards. Subsequent studies have found that while both factors are associated with body image disturbance, the internalization standard is a stronger predictor of disturbance.



researchers concluded that “media-presented images of thinness and attractiveness may negatively affect mood and body satisfaction.”<sup>22</sup>

Most recent studies in the area of thin-ideal internalization use Heinberg et al.'s (1995) *Sociocultural Attitudes to Appearance Questionnaire*. Studies using the SATAQ report that women who score lower on the internalization scale are more satisfied with their bodies<sup>23</sup> and that internalization of this ideal, *rather than awareness that it exists*, is most crucial in predicting and determining body dissatisfaction.<sup>24</sup> These studies rely largely on Eric Stice's sociocultural explanatory model, which suggests that women are under significant pressure to be thin, and that this pressure is mediated through media imagery and is reinforced through societal pressure from peers and family.<sup>25</sup>

Thin-ideal internalization is thought to work in conjunction with other risk factors in the onset of eating pathology. According to this hypothesis, those who have internalized a thin-ideal are more likely to diet and take other steps to reduce body size, which in turn increases the risk for the onset of symptoms of eating disorders.<sup>26</sup> Research has indicated that thin-ideal internalization is positively correlated with body-image and eating disturbances, and that

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<sup>22</sup> Heinberg and Thompson, “Body Image and Televised Images of Thinness and Attractiveness: A Controlled Laboratory Investigation,” 332.

<sup>23</sup> See Renee Engeln-Maddox, “Cognitive Responses to Idealized media Images of Women: The Relationship of Social Comparison and Critical Processing to Body Image Disturbance in College Women,” *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 24 (2005): 1036-1060

<sup>24</sup> Grogan, *Body Image*, 1995. See also Dale Cusumano and J. Thompson, “Body Image and Body Shape Ideals in Magazines: Exposure, Awareness, and Internalization,” *Sex Roles* 37, no. 9 (November 1, 1997): 701-721

<sup>25</sup> Eric Stice, “Review of the Evidence for a Sociocultural Model of Bulimia Nervosa and an Exploration of the Mechanisms of Action,” *Clinical Psychology Review* 14, no. 7 (1994): 633-661. Stice's influential 1994 study reviewed the evidence for the various appearance-based sociocultural pressures in the etiology of bulimia, dividing these pressures into three categories: a thin-ideal female body, the centrality of appearance in the female gender role, and the importance of appearance for societal success.

<sup>26</sup> J.K. Thompson and E. Stice, “Thin-Ideal Internalization: Mounting Evidence for a New Risk Factor For Body Image Disturbance and Eating Pathology,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 10 (2001): 181-83 181.

internalization is a greater predictor of eating problems and the onset of an eating disorder than other factors.<sup>27</sup>

What is particularly fascinating about the media's effect on body dissatisfaction is the "cognitive disconnect" many women experience in *knowing* that thin-ideal images are not conducive to body satisfaction and ultimate flourishing, yet still *desiring* to conform to the thin-ideal. For instance, one woman interviewed about the effect of thin-ideal media images on body image wrote, "They make me sick. They are too thin. But I would kill for one of their bodies."<sup>28</sup> Sarah Grogan writes,

Most women we have interviewed at Manchester Metropolitan University present complex views relating to the influence of media models. Clearly they aspire to being slim and shapely like the models Claudia Schiffer and Cindy Crawford, who are often cited as the idea. However, they generally feel that extreme thinness is inappropriate and unhealthy. Kate Moss and Amber Valetta are often cited as being too thin. . . . Clearly, women (even the 13-year-olds we have interviewed) are critical of the unrealistic images portrayed to them. However, most women still aspire to a very slim ideal, leaving a wide gap between ideal and current body shape for most women.<sup>29</sup>

Lelwica distinguishes between the conscious *recognition* that a thin-ideal media standard exists, and the mostly subconscious (or habitual) *acceptance* of such images. She relates one telling quote from a black woman: "If I hear 'beautiful woman' the image of a white woman surfaces in me sooner than that of a Black. Strange, because I generally do find Black women a lot more beautiful than white." Another woman acknowledges that these media images are unrealistic, unrepresentative of most women, and rationally undesirable, but still highly influential at some level: "Here I am, a self-loving, woman-loving, strong and smart woman I have spent years, hours, days, of my life completely distracted from my life, concerned only with

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<sup>27</sup> Dale L. Cusumano and J. Kevin Thompson, "Media Influence and Body Image in 8-11-year-old Boys and Girls: A Preliminary Report on the Multidimensional Media Influence Scale," *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 29, no. 1 (2001): 37-44.

<sup>28</sup> Grogan, *Body Image*, 108.

<sup>29</sup> Grogan, *Body Image*, 108, 111.

what I looked like and how fat I was, how fat I would be, what I was eating, and what I would be eating.” Lelwica notes, “This discrepancy illustrates how the uniformity, accessibility, and ubiquity of standard models of womanhood affect the imaginations of diverse girls and women. No female in this culture is immune to the influence of such ideals. Even those who do not subscribe to their ‘truths’ learn to recognize their prominence.”<sup>30</sup>

This chapter will attempt to contribute to this discussion by exploring the moral dimension of thin-ideal internalization. Morally, we see there is often a great difference between what one *thinks* is right and what one *feels* like doing. In Thomistic moral studies, this is more generally a question of the relationship between knowing and willing, or as moral theologian Michael Sherwin describes it, the relationship between knowledge and love.<sup>31</sup> The study of thin-ideal internalization practically grounds this discussion by providing a real-life example of the relationship between knowledge, desire, and action. This discussion provides a useful starting point for the Thomistic approach utilized in this dissertation because the level of internalization points to *dispositional* quality of the person and raises the question of the role of reason in human action.

## II. The Role of Reason in Human Action

A central dictum for Aquinas is that “reason is the rule and measure of human acts.”<sup>32</sup> This has lead some interpreters of Aquinas toward an intellectualism which assumes that moral deliberation has an essentially rational and analytic form in a manner akin to logic or mathematics. Daniel Maguire calls this the “intellectualist fallacy,” and the rejection of this view

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<sup>30</sup> Lelwica, *Starving for Salvation*, 46, 59.

<sup>31</sup> Michael S. Sherwin, *By Knowledge & By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Catholic University of America Press, 2005).

<sup>32</sup> I-II, Q. 90, art. 1.

has gained increasingly more support in Thomistic scholarship, especially as scholars focus more attention on the affective dimension of practical reasoning.<sup>33</sup> As Maguire notes, practical reasoning is distinguished from speculative reasoning in that the latter is concerned with necessary, universal matters, “those matters that could not be other than they are, whether or not everyone knows this. Thus it is true for all that a triangle has three angles which together equal two right angles.”<sup>34</sup> Practical reasoning, on the other hand, regards contingent, particular matters: “Practical reason can achieve valid generalizations, such as ‘act according to reason.’ As soon as you try to specify the dictates of reason in a particular situation, however, the generalization limps.”<sup>35</sup> This is consistent with Thomas' own view:

Speculative reason, however, is differently situated in this matter, from the practical reason. For, since the speculative reason is busied chiefly with the necessary things, which cannot be otherwise than they are, its proper conclusions, like the universal principles, contain the truth without fail. The practical reason, on the other hand, is busied with contingent matters, about which human actions are concerned: and consequently, although there is necessity in the general principles, the more we descend to matters of detail, the more frequently we encounter defects.<sup>36</sup>

For Maguire, the intellectualist fallacy consists in conflating the universality and certainty of speculative reason with that of practical reason. The fallacy is in neglecting the essentially *affective* nature of moral reasoning: “Practical reason is not just a function of intellection, but also, in some way, of volition and affection. It does not just know; it ‘commands,’ ‘petitions,’ ‘begs,’ and ‘orders’ things toward some perceived good (II-II, Q, 83, art. 1).”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Daniel C. Maguire, “*Ratio Practica* and the Intellectualistic Fallacy,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 10 (1982), 22-39. See Daniel Westberg, *Right Practical Reason* (Oxford University Press, 1994), Michael Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love: Charity in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005); Diana Fritz Cates, *Aquinas on the Emotions: A Religious-Ethical Inquiry* (Georgetown University Press, 2010).

<sup>34</sup> Maguire, “*Ratio Practica*,” 24.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>36</sup> I-II, Q. 94, art. 4.

<sup>37</sup> Maguire, “*Ratio Practica*,” 25.

The affective component of practical reasoning has received particular focus in scholarship on the relationship between reason and the emotions (the passions and the affections of the will).<sup>38</sup> Contemporary scholarship has thoroughly noted that in Aquinas' moral psychology, the emotions, despite their potentially destructive nature, can and should play a positive and integral role in moral deliberation. The view of reason characteristic of the "intellectual fallacy" also seems to go against much of the neuro- and psychosocial evidence about the role of the emotions in moral deliberation. Antonio Damasio notably argues that the emotions actually *assist* the reasoning process in knowing how to respond well to the surrounding environment:

The somatic marker hypothesis postulated from its inception that emotions marked certain aspects of a situation, or certain outcomes of possible actions. Emotion achieved this marking quite overtly, as in a "gut feeling," or covertly, via signals occurring below the radar of our awareness (examples of covert signals would be neuromodulator responses, such as those of dopamine or oxytocin, which can change the behavior of neuron groups that represent a certain choice) . . . Clearly, I never wished to set emotion against reason, but rather to see emotion as at least assisting reason and at best holding a dialogue with it. Nor did I ever oppose emotion to cognition since I view *emotion as delivering cognitive information, directly and via feelings*.<sup>39</sup>

Such a view of the emotions as contributing valuable information to moral reasoning has also found support among moral philosophers and theologians. Martha Nussbaum, for example, argues in her towering *Upheavals of Thought* that the emotions are intelligent appraisals or

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<sup>38</sup> In this dissertation, I take "emotion" to be a general term regarding the movement of the appetitive power of the human person towards some good. The word "passion" is used to indicate the specific movement of the sensitive (as opposed to rational) appetite. I use the word "emotion" because much of the non-Thomistic work on the appetite (both in the philosophical and psychosocial literature) uses the term. Carlos Leget observes that "the common sense account of 'emotion' is closest to Aquinas' concept of *affectus* in the broad sense—comprising the movements in the intellective and sensitive part of the appetitive faculties" (Carlos Leget, "Martha Nussbaum and Thomas Aquinas on the Emotions," *Theological Studies* 64 (2003), 574). The word "passion," despite its reference to movements of the sensitive appetite, does not imply that the will (the rational appetite) is irrelevant. Thomas distinguishes the sensory and rational appetite in order to show how the two are united in human action. For a helpful discussion, see Robert Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 35-38.

<sup>39</sup> Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, xiii. Emphasis added.

“value judgments” of the world around us, which contribute substantive content to moral reasoning. She writes,

If emotions are suffused with intelligence and discernment, and if they contain in themselves an awareness of value or importance, they cannot, for example, easily be sidelined in accounts of ethical judgment, as so often they have been in the history of philosophy. Instead of viewing morality as a system of principles to be grasped by the detached intellect, and emotions as motivations that either support or subvert our choice to act according to principle, we will have to consider emotions as part and parcel of the system of ethical reasoning.<sup>40</sup>

Nussbaum has been an influential voice in the broader conversation on the moral significance of emotions, but her account differs substantively from Aquinas. For Aquinas, the emotions are not “thoughts” or “cognitions,” but rather, movements of the appetite regarding a particular object. However, Nussbaum does raise the question about the significance of the emotions for the mind. On this point, Cates writes,

Nussbaum's way of characterizing cognition and the role it plays in evoking emotions is probing and subtle. Her analysis prepares us to look for similar subtlety in Aquinas' account of the cognitive dimension of emotion. Her analysis prepares us also to appreciate the central difference between Aquinas' account of emotion and cognitivist accounts that reduce emotions to their cognitive dimension.<sup>41</sup>

Aquinas' theory on the emotions is particularly valuable, as Cates notes, because it allows for the interdependence of the mind and the emotions without collapsing one into the other. Thomas' account of the emotions is a great example of how Aquinas “distinguishes in order to unite.”

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<sup>40</sup> Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 1.

<sup>41</sup> Cates, *Aquinas on the Emotions*, 64. Diana Fritz Cates' most recent book on Aquinas and the emotions provides a helpful overview and response to Nussbaum's theory of the emotions. According to Nussbaum, emotions are forms of evaluative, object-oriented thoughts. Nussbaum distinguishes emotions from “feelings,” which she identifies as the objectless experiences of pleasures and pain such as the feeling of a pit in one's stomach or the leap of one's heart. She also distinguishes emotions from desires, noting that emotions may but do not necessarily include desires. As Cates summarizes Nussbaum's position, “Emotions are ‘ways of registering how things are with respect to the external (i.e., uncontrolled) items that we view as salient for our well-being.’ They are ‘forms of evaluative judgment that ascribe to certain things and persons outside a person's own control great importance for that person's own flourishing.’ Emotions are thus ways of ‘seeing’ an object as ‘invested with value or importance.’ They are, more specifically, ways of ‘assenting to or embracing a way of seeing [an object], acknowledging it as true.’” (See Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 4, 30, 38).

Nevertheless, the way in which reason and the emotions relate in human action is not always clear in Aquinas. On this point, Ryan, drawing on the work of Daniel Maguire, notes that Aquinas has an implicit acknowledgment of the affective dimension of moral reasoning, though he admits that Aquinas does not explicitly articulate his particular view on this point. Ryan writes that acknowledging such an affective knowledge is “at least consonant with Aquinas’ view of practical reason which orders behavior to what is good.”<sup>42</sup> For Aquinas, writes Ryan, the emotions are

a mode of knowing, a being affected by, and responding to, an object. An emotion is a form of affective knowing or appreciation—a blend of awareness (apprehending an object), of the intentional, the bodily, and the affective, which coalesce as an interactive response to value or disvalue. An emotion, then, has two poles, passive and active, receiving and responding.<sup>43</sup>

Ryan, in his effort to show that the emotions contribute to moral knowledge and practical reasoning, describes emotions as “an affective form of knowing,” which appears to collapse the distinction between the mind and the sensitive appetite in a manner similar to Nussbaum. Cates’ description is perhaps better for our purposes and for respecting Aquinas’ critical distinctions. On the relationship between reason and emotion, she writes,

Aquinas allows us to put crude dualisms to rest and move on. Emotions are not simply thoughts or evaluative judgments or other acts of a ‘rational part,’ nor are they simply motions of a ‘nonrational or animal part.’ They are interior motions that have a complex relationship to a set of powers or capabilities by which we receive and process information about ourselves and the world.<sup>44</sup>

We will now turn to the way in which Thomas’ concept of connatural knowledge can help us understand how practical knowledge can be considered “affective knowledge” without

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<sup>42</sup> Ryan, “On Affective Knowledge and Connaturality in Aquinas,” 51, citing *De Malo* q. 16, art. 6, ad. 13 and ad 8 for the phrase *ratio practica seu affectiva* and Daniel Maguire, *The Moral Revolution*, 255. Ryan uses emotion to describe two forms of affective movement: “Those in the sensitive appetite are called the ‘passions’ or *passiones animae*; those in the intellective appetite (will) are called *affectus* (See ST I, Q. 82, a. 5, ad 1: I, Q. 20, a. 1, ad 1). Hence the phrase ‘human affectivity’ also captures the body/spirit aspect of human personhood” (53, n. 13).

<sup>43</sup> Ryan, 53.

<sup>44</sup> Cates, *Aquinas on the Emotions*, 10.

reducing the emotions to cognitions. Not only does connatural knowledge help us to understand the ways in which the emotions make moral reasoning possible, it also, as Jacques Maritain writes, “obliges us to realize in a deeper manner the analogous character of the concept of knowledge.”<sup>45</sup>

### III. Connatural Knowledge

#### a. *Connaturality in Aquinas*

Aquinas uses the language of connaturality (which means simply “with nature”) in a variety of ways. In one use, two things are said to be connatural with each other because they share the same nature.<sup>46</sup> Two things can also be connatural in the sense that they share the same principle of being, as children are connatural with their parents. Aquinas also uses the language of connaturality to describe inclination. A being is said to be connatural to a thing in the sense of being drawn by nature to that thing. This could be a natural connaturality, in the sense that heavy objects are drawn downward because they are connatural with the center of the earth.<sup>47</sup> The connatural end of a human being, for example, is the sort of happiness (*beatitudo*) to which the human is naturally created for. Grace makes the human person connatural with an end which surpasses the natural human capabilities of human beings, supernatural happiness. Grace enables the human person to become connatural with the Divine Nature.<sup>48</sup> Something can also be

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<sup>45</sup> Jacques Maritain, “On Knowledge Through Connaturality,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 4, no. 16 (June 1951): 473-481.

<sup>46</sup> In I, Q. 93, art. 6, ad 3, Aquinas refers to the connaturality between the Divine Persons, who share the same nature.

<sup>47</sup> I-II, Q. 26, art. 1, “In the natural appetite the principle of this movement is the appetitive subject’s connaturalness with the thing to which it tends, and may be called “natural love”: thus the connaturalness of a heavy body for the centre, is by reason of its weight and may be called “natural love.” See also I-II, Q. 26, art. 2, “Now a natural agent produces a twofold effect on the patient: for in the first place it gives it the form; and secondly it gives it the movement that results from the form. Thus the generator gives the generated body both weight and the movement resulting from weight: so that weight, from being the principle of movement to the place, which is connatural to that body by reason of its weight, can, in a way, be called “natural love.”

<sup>48</sup> Q. 62, art. 1: “Now man’s happiness is twofold, as was also stated above (Question 5, Article 5). One is proportionate to human nature, a happiness, to wit, which man can obtain by means of his natural principles. The



connatural to a thing as the natural object of its appetite, as the will is connatural with the good, and the intellect is connatural with the true. In this same sense, Aquinas says that it is connatural for human beings to proceed from the sensible to the intelligible.<sup>49</sup> At the level of inclination, connaturality concerns “fittingness,” and is integrally tied into Aquinas’ teleology. A thing is connatural with an end (*telos*) or object in which it shares a certain conformity or fittingness.<sup>50</sup>

We are concerned here with knowledge through connaturality (*per connaturalitatem*). Connatural knowledge is a kind of knowledge that develops through the activity of the emotions and human experience. Much has been written on the concept of “intuitive” and “experiential knowledge.” For example, the French philosopher Henri Bergson argued that experience and intuition play as critical a role in human knowledge as rational and scientific inquiry. Arguing against a Kantian metaphysics, Bergson argued that knowledge was not the result of disinterested analysis but rather a kind of “sympathy” with the thing known.<sup>51</sup> Bergson, however, like others who follow in his steps, quite often severs this experiential knowledge from the intellect.

Michael Sherwin writes that the tendency to separate knowledge and love is an influence of

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other is a happiness surpassing man's nature, and which man can obtain by the power of God alone, by a kind of participation of the Godhead, about which it is written (2 Peter 1:4) that by Christ we are made "partakers of the Divine nature." See John of St. Thomas, *The Gifts of the Holy Ghost*

<sup>49</sup> I, Q. 86, art. 4, ad. 2: “it is connatural to our intellect to know things by receiving its knowledge from the senses”

<sup>50</sup> I-II, Q. 26, art. 1, ad. 3: “Natural love is not only in the powers of the vegetal soul, but in all the soul's powers, and also in all the parts of the body, and universally in all things: because, as Dionysius says (Div. Nom. iv), "Beauty and goodness are beloved by all things"; since each single thing has a connaturalness with that which is naturally suitable to it.”

<sup>51</sup> See Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind* (Wisdom Library, 1946). While there are similarities between Bergsonian intuitionism and the Thomistic concept of connatural knowledge, there are important differences between the two positions. Maritain, himself advocating the Thomistic position, published his first book *La Philosophie Bergsonienne* (1913) which was a harsh criticism of the "irrationalism" of Bergson. However, both stress the importance of intuition, though in different ways. Bergson defined intuitions as "the kind of intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible." (*The Creative Mind*, 7) In moral philosophy, as we will see, Maritain held that human beings possess a kind of preconceptual, intuitive knowledge through "connaturality" which is the foundation of the good actions performed by good people in concrete situations (See *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*). However, Maritain does not deny the distinctive role of the intellect in coming to know the truth, and like Thomas, his distinctions are for the purpose of showing the unity of the person in human action. The intellect and the affections are not opponents, but work together in the hylomorphic unity of the person to know the truth. More will be said of this later in the chapter.

contemporary rationalism that goes against the ancient insight that “love talks with better knowledge, and knowledge with dearer love”:

For Augustine, nothing is loved that is not first known. Deeper knowledge will either increase or diminish this love. Moreover, our judgments are deeply shaped by our loves. These two aspects of knowledge and love seem to dance in uneasy tension within the human heart. The temptation is to focus on the one aspect to the detriment of the other.<sup>52</sup>

As we will see, the concept of connatural knowledge plays a considerable role in human existence and can help to explain how practical reasoning can be “affective” without severing the connection between the mind and the affections or reducing the affections to cognitions.

*b. Judgment per modum inclinationis*

Because the human intellect cannot know the world in a single act of apprehension, Aquinas holds that human beings must come to knowledge of the world through judgment and reasoning. Unlike God or the angels who can grasp the essences of material things in a single act of apprehension, human beings must reason discursively, meaning in stages of judgment and deduction, by which the human mind progresses from imperfect knowledge to perfect knowledge. Aquinas writes:

To understand is simply to apprehend intelligible truth: and to reason is to advance from one thing understood to another, so as to know an intelligible truth. And therefore angels, who according to their nature, possess perfect knowledge of intelligible truth, have no need to advance from one thing to another; but apprehend the truth simply and without mental discussion, as Dionysius says (Div. Nom. vii). But man arrives at the knowledge of intelligible truth by advancing from one thing to another; and therefore he is called rational. . . hence it is that human reasoning, by way of inquiry and discovery, advances from certain things simply understood--namely, the first principles; and, again, by way of judgment returns by analysis to first principles, in the light of which it examines what it has found.<sup>53</sup>

In other words, human beings cannot understand something through a simple act of apprehension. Apprehension is necessary for understanding, but it is not sufficient. Further

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<sup>52</sup> Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love*, xvii.

<sup>53</sup> I, Q. 79, art. 8.

steps are necessary in addition to apprehension, namely, inquiry into the object of apprehension. This inquiry ultimately terminates in a judgment, an accurate determination of the apprehended data. “What is judgment if not an act by which the mind asserts that a predicate and a subject, which differ in notion or in their intramental existence, are identical in the thing, or outside the mind?” writes Maritain.<sup>54</sup> Judgment is accordingly an act of synthesis. It is a matter of putting together all the pieces of data one gains in inquiry in order to say that the apprehended object is X. Aquinas compares this to the action of a judge who decides what is right in a given situation, which is akin to what the intellect does in the act deciding what something is:<sup>55</sup>

The word ‘judgment,’ from its original meaning of a right decision about what is just, has been extended to signify a right decision in any matter whether speculative or practical. Now a right judgment in any matter requires two things. The first is the virtue itself that pronounces judgment: and in this way, judgment is an act of reason, because it belongs to the reason to pronounce or define. The other is the disposition of the one who judges, on which depends his aptness for judging aright.<sup>56</sup>

Properly speaking, judgment is an act of the intellect. However, this does not imply that Aquinas views all judgment as a cool, detached, neutral means of piecing the world of apprehension together. The intellect can indeed reason in such a fashion, as when it makes judgments about the veracity of the Pythagorean Theorem, for example. Simply because the intellect *can* reason in such a manner does not mean that the intellect always does so. This is assumption, as we saw, is part of the “intellectualist fallacy,” the idea that impartial operations of the intellect together with the senses can provide an accurate guide to action. Those who accept some form of this view generally think the emotions either inhibit the attainment of practical

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<sup>54</sup> Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, 97. “The proper function of judgment,” writes Maritain, “consists in making the mind pass from the level of simple essence or simple object signified to the mind, to the level of thing or subject possessing existence (actually or possibly), a thing of which the object of thought (predicate) and the subject of thought (subject) are intelligible aspects.”

<sup>55</sup> II-II, Q. 60, art. 1. judgment properly denotes the act of a judge as such. Now a judge [*judex*] is so called because he asserts the right [*jus dicens*] and right is the object of justice, as stated above (Question 57, Article 1). Consequently the original meaning of the word ‘judgment’ is a statement or decision of the just or right.

<sup>56</sup> II-II, Q. 60, art. 1, ad. 1.

knowledge by corrupting the reasoning process, or assume that the emotions are simply extensions of thought in the person with knowledge.<sup>57</sup>

Such a view of reason is not Aquinas' who holds that emotion is integral to the way in which human beings come to judge the world. At the beginning of the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas distinguishes two ways of coming to a judgment, and two corresponding forms of knowledge. The first is judgment by cognition (*per modum cognitionis*); the second is judgment by inclination (*per modum inclinationis*):

Since judgment appertains to wisdom, the twofold manner of judging produces a twofold wisdom. A man may judge in one way by inclination, as whoever has the habit of a virtue judges rightly of what concerns that virtue by his very inclination towards it. Hence it is the virtuous man, as we read, who is the measure and rule of human acts. In another way, by knowledge, just as a man learned in moral science might be able to judge rightly about virtuous acts, though he had not the virtue. The first manner of judging divine things belongs to that wisdom which is set down among the gifts of the Holy Ghost: 'The spiritual man judges all things' (1 Corinthians 2:15). And Dionysius says: 'Hierotheus is taught not by mere learning, but by experience of divine things.' The second manner of judging belongs to this doctrine which is acquired by study, though its principles are obtained by revelation.<sup>58</sup>

In order to clarify this distinction, later in the *Summa* he uses an example from human action where he says that the person without virtue makes judgments about good actions by an act of

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<sup>57</sup> Ayn Rand writes, for example, in *The Virtue of Selfishness* "Emotions are the automatic results of man's value judgments integrated by his subconscious; emotions are estimates of that which furthers man's values or threatens them, that which is for him or against him—lightning calculators giving him the sum of his profit or loss. . . . Man is born with an emotional mechanism, just as he is born with a cognitive mechanism; but, at birth, both are 'tabula rasa.' It is man's cognitive faculty, his mind, that determines the content of both. Man's emotional mechanism is like an electronic computer, which his mind has to program—and the programming consists of the values his mind chooses. But since the work of man's mind is not automatic, his values, like all his premises, are the product either of his thinking or of his evasions: man chooses his values by a conscious process of thought—or accepts them by default, by subconscious associations, on faith, on someone's authority, by some form of social osmosis or blind imitation. Emotions are produced by man's premises, held consciously or subconsciously, explicitly or implicitly" (27).

<sup>58</sup> I, Q. 1, art. 6, ad. 3: cum iudicium ad sapientem pertineat, secundum duplicem modum iudicandi, dupliciter sapientia accipitur. Contingit enim aliquem iudicare, uno modo per modum inclinationis, sicut qui habet habitum virtutis, recte iudicat de his quae sunt secundum virtutem agenda, inquantum ad illa inclinatur, unde et in X Ethic. dicitur quod virtuosus est mensura et regula actuum humanorum. Alio modo, per modum cognitionis, sicut aliquis instructus in scientia morali, posset iudicare de actibus virtutis, etiam si virtutem non haberet. Primus igitur modus iudicandi de rebus divinis, pertinet ad sapientiam quae ponitur donum spiritus sancti secundum illud I Cor. II, spiritualis homo iudicat omnia, etc., et Dionysius dicit, II cap. de divinis nominibus, Hierotheus doctus est non solum discens, sed et patiens divina. Secundus autem modus iudicandi pertinet ad hanc doctrinam, secundum quod per studium habetur; licet eius principia ex revelatione habeantur.

reason, whereas virtuous person judges matters of human action according to a certain “connaturality”:

Wisdom denotes a certain rectitude of judgment according to the Eternal Law. Now rectitude of judgment is twofold: first, on account of perfect use of reason, secondly, on account of a certain connaturality with the matter about which one has to judge. Thus, about matters of chastity, a man after inquiring with his reason forms a right judgment, if he has learnt the science of morals, while he who has the habit of chastity judges of such matters by a kind of connaturality.<sup>59</sup>

In this example, both the person lacking virtue and the virtuous person can arrive at a correct judgment, but they arrive at such a judgment in different ways. According to Aquinas, right judgment can be achieved either through the perfect use of reason or through inclination. The virtuous person is inclined towards the object of virtue (*inquantum ad illa inclinatur*)<sup>60</sup> and therefore judges the object of her inclination, by means a certain connaturality with that object (*per quondam connaturalitatem ad ipsa*),<sup>61</sup> to be good. Judgment *per modum cognitionis* leads to notional or speculative knowledge attained by rational study. In other places, Aquinas refers to this mode of judging as *per studium et doctrinam*, *per modum rationis*, and *secundum perfectum usum rationis*. Judgment *per modum inclinationis* leads to connatural knowledge, *per connaturalitatem*. O'Reilly describes the different manners of judging as a difference in

the rule or measure which is employed in each case. In the case of knowledge *per modum inclinationis*, the inclination of the virtuous man is invoked. In the case of knowledge *per modum cognitionis*, it is the intellectual knowledge concerning moral matters which furnishes the measure; this is so even when virtue is lacking in the case of the one who judges.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> II-II, Q. 45, art. 2: sapientia importat quandam rectitudinem iudicii secundum rationes divinas. Rectitudo autem iudicii potest contingere dupliciter, uno modo, secundum perfectum usum rationis; alio modo, propter connaturalitatem quandam ad ea de quibus iam est iudicandum. Sicut de his quae ad castitatem pertinent per rationis inquisitionem recte iudicat ille qui didicit scientiam moralem, sed per quandam connaturalitatem ad ipsa recte iudicat de eis ille qui habet habitum castitatis. Sic igitur circa res divinas ex rationis inquisitione rectum iudicium habere pertinet ad sapientiam quae est virtus intellectualis, sed rectum iudicium habere de eis secundum quandam connaturalitatem ad ipsa pertinet ad sapientiam secundum quod donum est spiritus sancti,

<sup>60</sup> I, Q. 1, art. 6, ad. 3.

<sup>61</sup> II-II, Q. 45, art. 2.

<sup>62</sup> Kevin E. O'Reilly, *Aesthetic Perception: A Thomistic Perspective* (Four Courts Press, 2007), 61.

Aquinas does not explicitly develop the differences between these two manners of judging, but the fact that he makes the distinction both times in reference to wisdom leads us to assume that he regarded both forms of judgment as important means by which human beings arrive at knowledge pertaining to action. Thomas Gilby writes in his appendix to the *Prima pars* that, although much of the scholarly focus on Aquinas has been on his understanding knowledge *per modum cognitionis*, Thomas intended the *Summa* itself to be an exercise in the second mode of knowledge, that which proceeds from affection and union. Gilby argues that the purpose of the *Summa* is to help readers live in “communion with God, not just to stock his mind with the right ideas on the subject.”<sup>63</sup> In the first question of the *Summa*, notes Gilby, citing the above quotation, Aquinas makes his first reference to an alternative mode of judging than that by notional, discursive study:

There he speaks of judgment by bent *per modum inclinationis*, in contrast to judgment by inquiry, *per modum cognitionis*. Elsewhere he refers to this flair for the reality behind and the promise beyond abstract conceptualization as a sure discernment by kinship, *propter connaturalitatem*, rather than by the application of reasoning, *secundum perfectum usum rationis*; as a recognition rising from natural attraction rather than reached by rational choice, and setting up a relationship as it were of marriage, *affinitas*; as a familiarity from habit or second nature, *secundum habitualement dispositionem*, and physical disposition rather than from an effort of attention; as sympathy, *compassio*, and undergoing, *patiens*, rather than learning about, *discens*; as acting with instinctive sureness rather than with reflective certitude; as sharing in God's absolute and simple knowledge rather than reaching the truth through ratiocination; as prompting, *instinctus*, touching, *contactus*, and real union; as a being made like, *assimilatio*, in an experience charged with love, *cognitio affectiva sive experimentalis*.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Thomas Gilby, "Appendix 10: The Dialectic of Love in the *Summa*," *Summa Theologiae: Christian Theology (Ia. I)* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 124.

<sup>64</sup> Gilby, 124.

The knowledge that results from judgment *per modum inclinationis* is, according to Gilby, a knowledge “deeper and wider than the forms represented in clear consciousness” and is “too intimate to be evaluated in rational terms.”<sup>65</sup>

Connatural knowledge is knowledge that does not result from the discursive process of the intellect in the act of reasoning. Rather, it is knowledge of the world that comes from a certain emotional affinity with certain objects. Connatural knowledge is “experimental” knowledge, as Maritain describes it, meaning it is the knowledge of singulars which are really present in the intellect. Maritain writes that it is in moral experience that we are provided the most widespread instance of connatural knowledge:

It is in the experiential—not philosophical—knowledge of moral virtues that Thomas Aquinas saw as the first and main example of knowledge through inclination or through connaturality. It is through connaturality that moral consciousness attains a kind of knowing—inexpressible in words and notions—of the deepest dispositions—longings, fears, hopes or despairs, primeval loves and options—involved in the night of the subjectivity. When a man makes a free decision, he takes into account not only all that he possesses of moral science and factual information, and which is manifested to him in concepts and notions, but also all the secret elements of evaluation which depend on what he is, and which are known to him through inclination, through his own actual propensities and his own virtues, if he has any.<sup>66</sup>

O'Reilly expresses a similar view. He describes connatural knowledge as “a synthesis of two moments which constitute the spiritual life of man, namely knowledge and love.”<sup>67</sup>

### *c. Knowledge and Love*

Connatural knowledge, observes Maritain, “obliges us to realize in a deeper manner the *analogous character* of the concept of knowledge.”<sup>68</sup> The reason is that, while it is the intellect which arrives at such knowledge, this process is dependent on the affections. Connatural

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<sup>65</sup> Gilby, 124.

<sup>66</sup> Maritain, “On Knowledge Through Connaturality,” 477-78.

<sup>67</sup> O'Reilly, *Aesthetic Perception*, 63.

<sup>68</sup> Maritain, “On Knowledge Through Connaturality,” 473. Author's emphasis.

knowledge is knowledge *per amorem*, the knowledge proper to love. Love, says Aquinas, “is something pertaining to the appetite; since good is the object of both.”<sup>69</sup> Love is what provides the integral dynamism of Aquinas’ general teleology, for it is by love which all things move toward their end: “the name ‘love’ is given to the principle movement towards the end loved. In the natural appetite the principle of this movement is the appetitive subject’s connaturalness with the thing to which it tends, and may be called ‘natural love.’”<sup>70</sup> Most generally, love (*amor*) is the inclination a thing has towards a given end, an end which is loved because it is, in some way, suitable or fitting: “Likeness, properly speaking, is a cause of love.”<sup>71</sup> In things without knowledge, the condition for love is a connaturality provided by nature, in the way a stone is connatural with the center of the earth and is thus inclined downward. In creatures with knowledge, the condition for love is still a sort of connaturality in either the sensitive or intellectual appetite, but it is a connaturality which follows an apprehension. In creatures with knowledge, explains Aquinas,

Good is the cause of love, as being its object. But good is not the object of the appetite, except as apprehended. And therefore love demands some apprehension of the good that is loved. For this reason the Philosopher says that bodily sight is the beginning of sensitive love: and in like manner the contemplation of spiritual beauty or goodness is the beginning of spiritual love. Accordingly knowledge is the cause of love for the same reason as good is, which can be loved only if known.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> I-II, Q. 26, art. 1.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> I-II, Q. 27, art. 3. Thomas goes on to distinguish the two ways in which likeness may be the cause of love: “One kind of likeness arises from each thing having the same quality actually: for example, two things possessing the quality of whiteness are said to be alike. Another kind of likeness arises from one thing having potentially and by way of inclination, a quality which the other has actually: thus we may say that a heavy body existing outside its proper place is like another heavy body that exists in its proper place: or again, according as potentiality bears a resemblance to its act; since act is contained, in a manner, in the potentiality itself. Accordingly the first kind of likeness causes love of friendship or well-being. For the very fact that two men are alike, having, as it were, one form, makes them to be, in a manner, one in that form: thus two men are one thing in the species of humanity, and two white men are one thing in whiteness. Hence the affections of one tend to the other, as being one with him; and he wishes good to him as to himself. But the second kind of likeness causes love of concupiscence, or friendship founded on usefulness or pleasure: because whatever is in potentiality, as such, has the desire for its act; and it takes pleasure in its realization, if it be a sentient and cognitive being.”

<sup>72</sup> I-II, Q. 27, art. 2.



In human and non-human animals, love is not only an automatic inclination following form, as it is in things without knowledge like heavy objects that “love” the ground and subsequently fall downward. Rather, love can also be a passion.

A passion, says Aquinas, “is the effect of the agent on the patient.”<sup>73</sup> Aquinas relates the word “passion” (*passio*) to “passive,” first in the sense of “mere reception” in that “we speak of ‘feeling and understanding as being a kind of passion,’” and secondly in the sense of gaining some form and losing the other.<sup>74</sup> In this way, love is a passion:

Now a natural agent produces a twofold effect on the patient: for in the first place it gives it the form; and secondly it gives it the movement that results from the form. . . In the same way the appetible object gives the appetite, first, a certain adaptation to itself, which consists in complacency in that object; and from this follows movement towards the appetible object. For ‘the appetitive movement is circular,’ as stated in *De Anima* iii, 10; because the appetible object moves the appetite, introducing itself, as it were, into its intention; while the appetite moves towards the realization of the appetible object, so that the movement ends where it began. Accordingly, the first change wrought in the appetite by the appetible object is called ‘love,’ and is nothing else than complacency in that object.<sup>75</sup>

Love, then, is the transformation of the appetite according to an apprehended object, thus resulting in a certain affinity between the appetite and object, resulting in motion towards the object. We can contrast the relationship between agent and form in the case of love with that of knowledge. In knowledge, the form exists *in* the agent as an immaterial universal. Knowledge, accordingly, does not result in motion. In love, however, the agent is *transformed*, not by an abstract universal, but by a concrete, particular object. As a result of the transformation of the appetite, the agent is inclined toward the object. It moves toward the object in order to be in

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<sup>73</sup> I-II, Q. 26, art. 2.

<sup>74</sup> I-II, Q. 22, art. 1.

<sup>75</sup> I-II, Q. 26, art. 2.

union with it: “Union belongs to love in so far as by reason of the complacency of the appetite, the lover stands in relation to that which he loves, as though it were himself or part of himself.”<sup>76</sup>

Love as a passion exists both in creatures without reason as well as rational creatures. As such, love is simply a transformation of the sensitive appetite following the apprehension of some concrete particular. In rational creatures, love exists also in the will, which Aquinas refers to as *dilectio*. The dictum that “the good is the cause of love” holds true also for the will. In the same way that every appetite follows a form, the will follows the apprehension of a good as good.<sup>77</sup> The will, says Aquinas, only moves towards the good as realized in concrete particular objects: “As the Philosopher says, a universal opinion does not move except by means of a particular opinion; and in like manner the higher appetite moves by means of the lower.”<sup>78</sup> The will is not only inclined toward something rationally apprehended as good; it is also inclined to something apprehended as good in its particularity. Although the will has a fixed general final cause (happiness), it is not inclined to any particular object. Nevertheless, anything that the will wills must be under the general aspect of its final cause, the happiness of the agent. For the will to will anything, it must be apprehended as a good: “in order that the will tend to anything, it is requisite, not that this be good in very truth, but that it be apprehended as good. Wherefore the Philosopher says (Phys. ii, 3) that ‘the end is a good, or an apparent good.’”<sup>79</sup>

However, Aquinas also says that “the will’s object is proposed by reason . . . since the will can tend to the universal good, which reason apprehends.”<sup>80</sup> This will depends on the intellect because “the apprehensive power presents the object to the appetite.”<sup>81</sup> In other words, the act of love depends on the prior knowledge of *what* to love, that is, the object. This raises the

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<sup>76</sup> I-II, Q. 26, art. 2.

<sup>77</sup> I-II, Q. 8, art. 1.

<sup>78</sup> I, Q. 80, art. 2, ad. 3.

<sup>79</sup> I-II, Q. 8, art. 1.

<sup>80</sup> I-II, Q. 19, art. 3.

<sup>81</sup> I-II, Q. 13, art. 1.

question what type of knowledge moves the will. If the will is dependent on the intellect for its object, it is unclear how a person can hold certain rational concepts such as “extreme thinness is neither beautiful nor healthy and is not conducive to my ultimate flourishing” and nevertheless will certain actions which conflict with this knowledge such as dieting, starving, and purging in order to look like certain ultra-thin models. If the will is completely dependent on the intellect for its object, then engaging in a willed action contrary to one’s flourishing would simply be a matter of a failure of knowledge. But the evidence on thin-ideal internalization reveals this not to be the case. Women who have a high degree of internalization may know rationally that a thin-ideal is unrealistic and unhealthy, and yet may nevertheless willfully engage in certain actions contrary to that knowledge. If the will’s “knowledge” does not come exclusively from reason, where does it come from? To answer this question, we must turn to Aquinas’ explanation of choice.

#### *d. Choice*

Choice, says Aquinas, implies something belonging both to the intellect and to the will:

The Philosopher says that choice is either ‘intellect influenced by appetite or appetite influenced by intellect.’ Now whenever two things concur to make one, one of them is formal in regard to the other. Hence Gregory of Nyssa says that choice ‘is neither desire only, nor counsel only, but a combination of the two. For just as we say that an animal is composed of soul and body, and that it is neither a mere body, nor a mere soul, but both; so is it with choice.’<sup>82</sup>

In choice, we see the dependency of reason on appetite. Although judgment pertains to the intellect, the intellect cannot make a judgment regarding concrete particulars without the influence of the appetite. On this point, O’Reilly notes, “Indeed, the intellect works on behalf of the will instead of exercising its activity for its own ends. Choice can quite legitimately be

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<sup>82</sup> I-II, Q. 13, art. 1.

termed ‘an appetitive reasoning.’”<sup>83</sup> The condition necessary for choice is, therefore, a synthesis of knowledge and love. Citing Camporeale, O’Reilly goes on:

Camporeale points out that since every reality is one in itself (*unum per se*), if it is to be grasped in its totality and unity it must perforce be attained at the same time as true and as good. Consequently, it must simultaneously be *known* and *loved*. ‘Unless the appetibility of a reality is grasped in its intelligibility and its intelligibility is grasped in its appetibility, the being of the object in its unity and totality will always in some way escape the subject.’ Knowledge of the object will be perfect only if it takes place in the very love of the object. The necessity of affective knowledge thus becomes clear.<sup>84</sup>

Michael Sherwin makes a similar point:

Will and reason then are not entirely separate faculties in the moral agent. Will continually influences belief, for better or worse, and is ideally able to influence it through a sustained attention to reality. . . [the human person] is a unified being who sees, and who desires in accordance with what he sees, and who has some continual slight control over the direction and focus of his vision.’<sup>85</sup>

In this process, the sense appetite (and its corresponding passions) plays an integral role. As appetites, the passions follow some apprehension. This apprehension is always under the aspect of “good” or “fitting” and is dependent on the “cogitative power,” an internal sense which applies universal values like “good” or “beneficial” to particular objects apprehended by the outer senses.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> O’Reilly, *Aesthetic Perception*, 69. Citing George P. Klubertanz, SJ, *The Philosophy of Human Nature* (New York, 1953), 242.

<sup>84</sup> O’Reilly, *Aesthetic Perception*, 64. Citing Camporeale, ‘La conoscenza affettiva,’ 257.

<sup>85</sup> Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love*, xix-xx. Citing Iris Murdoch, “The Idea of Perfection,” *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge, 1970), 37, 40.

<sup>86</sup> The sensory apprehensive power includes the five exterior and five interior senses. The five exterior senses—sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell—are the way in which the apprehensive power receives a sensory external species. These five exterior senses are complemented by the internal senses. Drawing on Avicenna’s (*De Anima* iv, 1), Aquinas identifies five interior sensitive powers: common sense, fantasy, imagination, and the estimative and memorative powers. These sensitive apprehensive powers all contribute to shaping the sensory or animal appetite. The sensory or animal appetite is what translates sensory information perceived through the sensitive apprehensive power into an appetite, a movement toward something in the environment as good for that organism. Pasnau notes that “just as animals have a special cognitive capacity to receive information, so they must have a special appetitive capacity to make use of that information. Because this special capacity is not a natural appetite, and because it is a distinctive feature of living things, it is sensible to ascribe the capacity to the soul” (Pasnau, *On Human Nature*, 10.)

Although the sense appetite can be moved automatically by some apprehension (what Aquinas calls an antecedent passion),<sup>87</sup> rational creatures are distinct in their experience of passion in that they do not automatically have to act on their passions, but rather, can control the movement of the sense appetite through the consent of the will. The passions, therefore, are connected to the will. It is through the love of the sense appetite that the will develops its own loves, for good and for ill. Kevin White writes,

[The sensitive appetite] has an edge over will in predisposing action, for action concerns what is individual, and sense-appetite, unlike will, is a power directed to individual things, capable of making them appear in a certain light (I-II, Q. 9, art. 2, ad 2; I-II, Q. 77, art. 1). . . Goodness or evil of action may be increased by ‘consequent’ passion, which follows a judgment of reason, either by ‘overflow’ of the will’s movement into sense-appetite, or by reason’s choice to let sense-appetite be affected in a way that allows reason to act more readily (I-II, Q. 24, art. 3, ad).<sup>88</sup>

We will return to the how the passions are shaped by reason, and subsequently, can be considered either good or evil, but for now, it is important to note that together with the passions, the will moves toward concrete particulars realized in human action. The passions point the will towards the concrete goods that allow it to realize its final good, happiness. Thus, the will is dependent on the passions, and both are dependent on knowledge.

### **III. The Role of Connatural Knowledge in Human Action**

#### *a. Uniting Knowledge and Love in Human Action*

The will, according to Aquinas, is influenced, but not determined by reason. As Pasnau notes,

Reason may tell us to cheat, but the will can insist on honesty; reason may counsel silence, but the will can urge us to speak. In such cases it is the will that is in control, in

<sup>87</sup> I-II, Q. 17, art. 7. In this way, the movement of the passions is, in essence, morally neutral, and is only good or evil to the extent that the passion is commanded by the will.

<sup>88</sup> White, “The Passions of the Soul,” in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, 106.

virtue of its fixed dispositions and desires, which hold independently of reason's dictates (considered in the short term). The will cannot entirely repudiate reason, but the will shapes reason just as much as reason shapes will.<sup>89</sup>

When love and knowledge both provide an object for the will, love, says Aquinas, has more power on the will:

Knowledge is perfected by the thing known being united, through its likeness, to the knower. But the effect of love is that the thing itself which is loved, is, in a way, united to the lover, as stated above. Consequently the union caused by love is closer than that which is caused by knowledge.<sup>90</sup>

However, knowing and loving, while logically distinct, are unified in action. When one makes a judgment *per modum inclinationis*, one is not making a judgment made *without* knowledge.

Rather, connatural knowledge is the synthesis of love and knowledge—a synthesis of cognitive and affective activity. Moral knowledge, therefore, according to this approach to virtue ethics, is neither purely rational nor purely affective, but rather a synthesis of both the intellect and the affections.

The hylomorphic unity of the human person also explains how one particular power can overcome the other. If the soul's full energies are employed in the act of cognition, of knowing, such cogitation can impede the affective movement of the soul. Aquinas says that the concentration of the intellect can actually overcome the sensitive appetite so that it no longer experiences certain sensible functions: "In the powers of the soul there is an overflow from the higher to the lower powers: and accordingly, the pleasure of contemplation, which is in the higher part, overflows so as to mitigate even that pain which is in the senses."<sup>91</sup> More

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<sup>89</sup> Pasnau, 228.

<sup>90</sup> I-II, Q. 28, art. 1, ad. 3.

<sup>91</sup> I-II, Q. 38, art. 4, ad. 3. An example of this is Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons' "invisible gorilla" experiment. In this experiment, subjects were asked to watch a video of two groups of people in black and white shirts tossing a ball and count the number of times the people in black shirts tossed the ball. In the middle of the video, a person dressed in a gorilla suit walked to the middle of the screen, pounded its chest, and then walked off screen. When the subjects were later asked if they had seen the gorilla (which was on screen for about four

commonly, however, the soul's activities get concentrated on affection and its accompanying form of judgment. In this way, a person under the influence of anger may judge a thing good that he would not so judge if not under the influence of that passion:

Now it is evident that according to a passion of the sensitive appetite man is changed to a certain disposition. Wherefore according as man is affected by a passion, something seems to him fitting, which does not seem so when he is not so affected: thus that seems good to a man when angered, which does not seem good when he is calm.<sup>92</sup>

As O'Reilly summarizes, "in effect, we enjoy direct experimental knowledge of affective reactions which are grasped by consciousness without the mediation of reasoning, just as we "perceive the will in the act of will, and life in vital activity." For "what is in the soul by essential presence is known by experiential knowledge."<sup>93</sup>

*b. Connatural Knowledge and Habit*

Connatural knowledge, as knowledge that has its source in affective inclination, is primarily a result of habits, which more consistently and reliably incline a person than the passions. The human soul is not given a natural instinct to perform all the operation necessary for its fulfillment, but needs something further added. Aquinas calls this further need a habit (*habitus*). Strictly speaking, a habit is a quality that does not substantially alter a person, but rather is a disposition added and modifying the substantial unity of the human person. Gilson defines a habit as "a disposition of the subject in reference to his [or her] own nature . . . by which a being determines the manner in which he [or she] realizes his [or her] definition."<sup>94</sup> A habit is a quality of the soul which either helps or hinders the soul in achieving what the soul

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seconds), about half of the subjects replied "What gorilla?" The participants were concentrating their attention so much on one thing (counting the number of times the ball was passed) that they simply did not see the gorilla.

<sup>92</sup> I-II, Q. 9, art. 2. We will return to this point in chapter four where we will discuss the training and reformation of the emotions through ethical self-cultivation and changing one's emotional habits.

<sup>93</sup> O'Reilly, *Aesthetic Perception*, 65. See Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Etienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York, 1929), 312.

needs to achieve in order to be fulfilled. In other words a habit either facilitates or hinders a person in realizing his or her natural end.

Habits are not, it is important to note, routine acts performed almost without thinking, like tapping one's fingers while one reads or stumbling out of bed in the morning and pouring a cup of coffee. Habits are rather dispositions of a person's soul inclining them to not only certain actions, but also towards *certain emotional responses* like desire. Take the example of the person who has a habit of drinking coffee in the morning. This coffee drinker has a habit of seeing coffee in the morning as a good, suitable for waking up the mind after a long night's sleep. She does not have to rationally consider whether coffee is desirable or not. She is simply disposed to desire coffee.

How a person is habitually disposed will determine which things she regards as desirable. Aquinas distinguishes between two types of habits, namely, good habits (virtues) by which a person is connatural with a true or objective good, and bad habits (vices), by which a person is connatural with false or apparent goods. The virtuous person is distinct because she desires the true good. What distinguishes a true good (as opposed to an apparent good)? A true good is one which is in accordance with right reason. Right reason specifically helps a person determine whether or not the particular good at hand is *conducive to achieving the ultimate good of the person*. In other words, true or false goods differ from one another in whether or not they are ordered to the right ultimate end, the flourishing of the person. Cocaine may seem like a good to a person habitually disposed to perceive cocaine as a good, and in this sense, cocaine is seen as an apparent good. However, we can look at whether cocaine is conducive to the ultimate flourishing of the person and nevertheless make a judgment that cocaine is not a true good



because it does not contribute to the flourishing of the individual.<sup>95</sup> As Aquinas writes, a good “is truly good, because, considered in itself, it can be directed to the principal good, which is the last end; while the other is good apparently and not truly, because it leads us away from the final good.”<sup>96</sup>

Although our habits lead us to make judgments *per modum inclinationis*,<sup>97</sup> recall that Aquinas identifies another form of knowledge, namely, knowledge *per modum cognitionis*. By means of the latter form of judgment, Aquinas says that a person who does not possess a certain virtue may still make a correct moral judgment *by a cognitive process* “just as a man learned in moral science might be able to judge rightly about virtuous acts, though he had not the virtue.”<sup>98</sup> Thus, by study, a person may still choose an objective good, despite having a contrary resistant desire. Let us return to our example of the coffee drinker. Say her doctor tells her that the morning caffeine jolt is causing high blood pressure. Our coffee drinker may subsequently decide not to have her morning cup of coffee for the sake of her health, though she in fact still desires it. Such an act is chosen because it is conducive to some end, namely health, which is cognitively recognized by the intellect as a good, though the actions conducive to this end are not

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<sup>95</sup> O'Reilly notes helpfully: “Aquinas steers a *via media* between objectivism and subjectivism. The ontological constitution of an object is such that is good in so far as it is perfect, and this is so independently of human apprehension. A habit will incline a faculty to that which is truly good in so far as the habit itself is proportioned to the good; it will incline the faculty to that which is lacking in goodness in so far as it lacks due proportion to the good; such as a man is, so does his end appear to him (*quails unusquisque est, talis finis videtur ei.*, ST, I-II, Q. 9, art. 2). The objective ontological constitution of the object, however, remains unaffected by human apprehension. The goal of the moral life, when viewed in these terms, is to achieve a right proportion between our internal subjective constitution and the objective constitution of external reality. (O'Reilly, *Aesthetic Perception*, 67-68 n.)

<sup>96</sup> II-II, Q. 23, art. 7

<sup>97</sup> Damasio also confirms that the affective inclination of a person is a process of habituation that includes the interaction between reason and emotion over time to determine what is good: “The quality of one’s intuition depends on how well we reasoned in the past; on how well we have classified the events of our past experiences in relation to the emotions that preceded and followed them; and also on how well we have reflected on the successes and failures of our past intuitions” (*Descartes’ Error*, xiii).

<sup>98</sup> I, Q. 1, art. 6, ad. 3.

affectively desired. Ideally, her appetite will gradually change to no longer regard the morning cup of coffee as desirable.

The virtuous person's rightly ordered affective inclinations allows her to view reality with clear eyes, to affectively select not only which goods to desire, but initially even which goods to see. As O'Reilly notes,

Because of his rightly ordered affectivity and his consequent heightened intellectual assessment of reality, the virtuous man is able to achieve objectivity in his consideration of the facts of any particular situation. His preferences are in accord with and a reflection of reality. The corrupt man, on the other hand, cannot achieve such objectivity. His disordered affectivity distorts his perception of the situation and so his selection of data does not reflect reality as it is. His selection of data is, rather, a construction of his own subjectivity. Affectivity therefore, when it reacts to the facts of a given situation, betrays the value system of the subject: he approves what he considers and considers what he approves. 'By a sort of self-economy the quality of the personality tends to reinforce itself: the subject finds what he wanted to find.'<sup>99</sup>

Even for the person lacking virtue, the realization of true goods in human action is possible through the intervention of reason, and especially as reason shapes the emotions. The knowledge gained through science, medicine, philosophy, and religion potentially have a great impact on one's emotional responses. One may cease desiring a certain product of clothing upon visiting the sweatshop in which it was made. In like manner, one may experience anger rather than desire in response to media images of women after learning about feminist theories. However, while such appetitive changes may be instantaneous, more often, they happen gradually, a subject to which we will return in the next chapter.

### c. *Connatural Knowledge and Aesthetic Judgments*

Before turning to an evaluation of how these moral concepts might have significance for morally evaluating the empirical research on thin-ideal internalization, we must briefly note how

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 71. Citing Caldera, *Le jugement par inclination*, 119.

these concepts are also significant for aesthetic knowledge, or knowledge of the beautiful.<sup>100</sup>

Goodness and beauty, according to Aquinas, are alike in that both are the cause of love:

Beauty and goodness in a thing are identical fundamentally; for they are based upon the same thing, namely, the form; and consequently goodness is praised as beauty.<sup>101</sup>

Natural love is not only in the powers of the vegetal soul, but in all the soul's powers, and also in all the parts of the body, and universally in all things: because, as Dionysius says (Div. Nom. iv), 'Beauty and goodness are beloved by all things'; since each single thing has a connaturalness with that which is naturally suitable to it.<sup>102</sup>

An aesthetic appreciation is when an individual sees a certain object with desire, in what

O'Reilly calls the aesthetic *visio*, which he contrasts with an intellectual appreciation. A person with an intellectual appreciation "views the object from the outside, as it were, for it is precisely love which unites the lover with the object of his love. . . One might say that an appropriate emotional response is a necessary condition for that psychological proportion between subject and object which gives rise to the aesthetic *visio*."<sup>103</sup> Drawing from Maritain's aesthetic writings, O'Reilly argues that the knowledge proper to art appreciation is a specific form of connatural knowledge. This aesthetic perception occurs "not by means of concepts and conceptual knowledge, but by means of an obscure knowledge . . . through affective union."<sup>104</sup>

O'Reilly notes,

Knowledge through connaturality as it pertains to poetic (i.e. artistic) knowledge is affected by means of emotion. Thus, whereas concepts are the medium of science (or of scientific insight), emotion is the medium of poetic insight. However, it is not merely emotional because although it is affected through the instrumentality of feeling, it issues

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<sup>100</sup> Aquinas lists three constitutive elements of beauty, namely right proportion (i.e. the suitability of the matter to the form), integrity (meaning the perfection of a form in that the thing possess all of its parts) and clarity (meaning the capacity of a form to communicate itself). See O'Reilly, "The Formal Constitutive Elements of Beauty," *Aesthetic Perception*, 18-30.

<sup>101</sup> I, Q. 5, art. 4, ad. 1

<sup>102</sup> I-II, Q. 26, art. 1, ad. 3.

<sup>103</sup> O'Reilly, *Aesthetic Perception*, 82.

<sup>104</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York, 1953), 114-15. See O'Reilly, *Aesthetic Perception*, 54.

from the intellect. . . [T]he emotion, which is the proper medium of creative intuition, gives form to a work of art as well as being the intentional vehicle of reality known through inclination or connaturality.<sup>105</sup>

We see a clear parallel in this view of aesthetics and Aquinas' theory of habituation in the way the intellect is formed over time to view certain things as beautiful by means of a certain connaturality. O'Reilly argues that we are conditioned through habituation and through our specific communities to regard certain things as beautiful. As we continually choose to regard these objects as beautiful (and hence desirable), we become connatural with them, thus influencing subsequent judgments of beauty. As O'Reilly notes, "In all experiences of beauty, reason is shot through with an emotional coloring; consequently, on judging an object as beautiful, a human subject will also be convinced, on account of the emotional grip to which this object gives rise, that all others should also deem it to be beautiful."<sup>106</sup> Aidan Nichols calls this process a "communion of sympathy," by which a person perceiving an object also becomes sympathetic to the meaning or significance assigned to this object by the affective inclination.<sup>107</sup>

A quotation from O'Reilly is particularly apt:

[All artwork] enshrines its own set of values or disvalues—religious, moral, social, political, cultural. . . Artifacts are in effect revelatory, that is to say, they are privileged loci in which values are distilled and by means of which they are communicated to others. . . And values, by definition, can never be neutral; they can never be a matter of indifference. These values are always ensconced in the material conditions of the medium in which they are communicated, and the very allure of these conditions can facilitate the transmission and adoption, perhaps unconscious, of (dis)values perhaps heretofore alien to his religious, moral, social, political, or cultural make-up. A work of art invites us to 'dwell in the experience' which it offers; and *we never remain uninfluenced or unchanged by a genuine experience*. In this view, it is not just poetry that can corrupt; corruption lies within the capability of all the arts.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> O'Reilly, *Aesthetic Perception*, 55-6.

<sup>106</sup> O'Reilly, *Aesthetic Perception*, 90.

<sup>107</sup> Aidan Nichols, *The Art of God Incarnate: Theology and Image in Christian Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1980), 91.

<sup>108</sup> O'Reilly, *Aesthetic Perception*, 91-92. Emphasis added.

Margaret Miles in her work *Image as Insight* warns that the contemporary mind is wary that images are so powerful in their effect. She writes, “we are willing to grant that images may inform or entertain us, but not that they can operate independently of our conscious minds to give shape to our desire, to channel our long, to make us who we are.”<sup>109</sup> Miles argues along with this chapter that our experiences shape us. What we see, what we eat, what we listen to, the people we spend time with, all shape our affective inclinations, from the moment we come into existence. Our experiences open us up to new ways of experiencing sense perception in the future, and close us off to others. Images especially shape by habitual attention a person’s values, attitudes, and behavior. As Miles notes, “whether we acknowledge it or not, images retain their role of formation by attraction.”<sup>110</sup>

#### **IV. Thin-Ideal Internalization as Connatural Knowledge**

The final section of this chapter in will apply the Thomistic conception of connatural knowledge through to the empirical data on thin-ideal internalization. My argument is that connatural knowledge provides a conceptual tool with which to understand the connection between *choosing to look at* thin-ideal images, and being *shaped* morally by these choices. The empirical data on thin-ideal internalization and eating disorder symptomatology allows us to see practically how connatural knowledge is related to action.

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<sup>109</sup> Margaret R. Miles, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 146. Miles’ book argues in contrast to modern ideas of the ineffectualness of images, medieval Christians recognized implicitly that “physical vision, by which the object that engages one’s visual ray becomes a permanent part of one’s soul, even if it recedes from the mind and is ‘forgotten’ . . . If we were to apply the medieval theory in the modern world, we would have a full-time job avoiding images that overtly or covertly foster the marginalization and oppression of human beings. On the other hand, if we accept the modern idea of vision, an idea that flatters our sense of independent and autonomous conscious choice, we consider ourselves unaffected by the images surrounding us. Neither of these ideas seems fully satisfactory” (146-47).

<sup>110</sup> Miles, *Image as Insight*, 147.

This section of the dissertation will focus on thin-ideal internalization through looking at women's fashion magazines.<sup>111</sup> Magazines are highly effective means of communicating and influencing a large audience, and are therefore an important way of promulgating a thin-ideal. First of all, these magazines are widely available. The most popular female fashion magazines until recently circulated over 1 million magazines/month, although there is some evidence that magazine audiences are transitioning to more of a web-based medium.<sup>112</sup> Lelwica notes that her own decision to focus on the thin-ideal of women as portrayed in magazines, rather than television or the Web, was due largely to the huge readership these magazines enjoy: "Whether or not you purchase them, you see them practically everywhere: passing by the newsstand, waiting for a doctor's appointment, standing in line at the grocery store. Their relatively affordable price and portable form makes it possible for most girls and women to view them virtually anytime, anywhere." Sarah Grogan cites a statistic that on average, each copy of *Vogue Magazine* is read by sixteen women.<sup>113</sup> Despite the seeming ubiquity of women's fashion magazines, they are regularly easy to avoid (compared to television and internet-based means of promulgating a thin ideal). Women have a relatively high level of control over their exposure to fashion magazines, and subsequently, their exposure to images of a thin-ideal.

Mass communication research since the latter half of the twentieth century has focused on how the media affects viewers, and to what degree viewers are capable of resisting media

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<sup>111</sup> Other forms of media like television, movies, and internet advertising also promulgate a thin-ideal. However, I will limit my discussion to magazine images because (1) more empirical studies on the effect of these images on body dissatisfaction and eating pathology are available and (2) because magazine images are much easier to resist (by abstaining from buying and reading them) than other forms of the thin-ideal found in television commercials and internet advertising.

<sup>112</sup> Lelwica, *Starving for Salvation*, 40, 166 n: "None of the magazines I consider, including *Cosmopolitan*, *Mademoiselle*, *Glamour*, *Seventeen*, *Essence*, *Elle*, *Allure*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Vogue*, and *Mirabella*, circulates less than a million copies each month. In the March 1993 issue of *Mademoiselle*, for example, the editor claims a readership of over 5 million; in the December 1993 issue of *Glamour*, the editor claims a readership of over 9.4 million." See also "The Full Story on Magazine Circulation Vitality," Magazine Publishers of America, <http://www.magazine.org/ASSETS/D58FC5CF200F4FFBB1731E9EFD59C450/MAG-Circulation-Vitality-2009.pdf>

<sup>113</sup> Grogan, *Body Image*, 95-6.

influence. One of the earliest models describing media effects is called the direct effects or “hypodermic needle” model. According to this model, media content is seen as mainly responsible for media effects, with the audience being more or less passive recipients of the content and associated values communicated through mass media (hence the name “hypodermic needle.”) The main alternative to the Effects Model is called the “Uses and Gratifications Model.” This model was developed in the 1940s and 50s by Paul Lazarsfeld and Joseph Klapper,<sup>114</sup> and hypothesizes a more active and participatory role of audiences in determining the content and values espoused in mass media, individual media consumption habits, and the effects that the media content will have on audience behavior. As Sarah Grogan notes,

Uses and gratifications theory would suggest that some images presented in the media may be viewed by women (and men) yet have no significant effect on them, because they actively reject the message. Perhaps viewers are too aware of the unrealistic nature of the images portrayed in the media to allow such images to affect their self-concepts.<sup>115</sup>

About-Face, a web-based media education program, is based on the Uses and Gratification Model, arguing that women, if properly educated, can resist the toxic influence of the mass media espousal of thin-ideal image of female beauty. Their mission statement states: “Our ultimate goal, the About-Face vision, is to imbue girls and women with the power to free

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<sup>114</sup> P. Lazarsfeld, B. Berelson, and H. Gaudet, *The People's Choice* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1948); J. Klapper, *The Effects of Mass Communication* (Free Press: New York, 1960). See also Grogan, *Body Image*, 94-116. Two influential contemporary theories of media effects draw on the Effects Model, assuming that media content plays a stronger role on effects than the active participation of the audience. Leon Festinger's Social Comparison Theory predicts that people use images projected by the media as unconscious standards of comparison of other people, in order to produce a more favorable self-evaluation. An alternative view of media effects comes from a more recent theory called the Self Schema Theory, which focuses on how individuals process the content of media messages, incorporating those media messages into their own concept of self. Two proponents of this theory, Philip Myers and Frank Biocca, argue that body image and an individual's internalized ideal body is a mental construction, subject to change through exposure to new information. They argue that the mass media portrays the socially represented ideal body as unrealistically thin, which in turn causes women to evaluate their own body image as unacceptably large. Both theories explain how the media plays a major if not direct role in body dissatisfaction among women exposed to thin-ideals of beauty. See Leon Festinger, “A Theory of Social comparison Processes,” *Human Relations* 7 (1954), 117-40; H. Markus, “Self-Schema and Processing Information About the Self,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 35 (1977), 63-78; P. Myers and Fr. Biocca, “The Elastic Body Image: The Effects of Television Advertising and Programming on Body Image Distortions in Young Women,” *Journal of Communication* 42 (1992), 108-33.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

themselves from the burden of body-image problems so they will be capable of fulfilling their varied and wondrous potentials.”<sup>116</sup> A typical article featured on the About-Face website states,

The more we know about digitally slimmed-down hips, flawless skin, and computerized toned bodies, the more we can resist their influence. Knowledge is power, so spread the news, whether it’s about that magazine cover in the grocery store check-out line or that billboard looming over Times Square—remind people that airbrushing probably contributed to that image.<sup>117</sup>

However, this assumes that knowledge is sufficient to counteract the effects of the thin-ideal.

We have already observed, however, that simply *knowing* that such images are unrealistic is not necessarily enough to keep from desiring what such images offer.

Aquinas’ concept of connatural knowledge helps show how choosing to look at thin-ideal images shapes a woman to regard such images—and what the values they offer—as desirable.

The more she chooses to look at such images, the more she becomes connatural with them. This affective inclination potentially has more power in shaping her action than any rational knowledge she may have about the unhealthy or unrealistic nature of a thin-ideal. Regarding the disconnect between rational and affective knowledge, O’Reilly observes:

While there is indeed an intellectual appreciation, it can rightly be questioned whether there is real understanding. Real understanding requires that the human subject be connatured with the object of his perception; and such connaturing is affected through a configuring of his affective structure in such a way that the contours of his understanding of the object are aligned with the objective constitution of the reality at hand.<sup>118</sup>

Even when a woman rationally judges that these images and the values they communicate are not desirable, her affective inclinations still contribute to how she judges the goodness of the images she sees. The more she acts on her affective inclination to look at the

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<sup>116</sup> From the *About-Face* Mission Statement, <http://www.about-face.org/aau/mission.shtml>

<sup>117</sup> “False Images: Kelly Clarkson and Twiggy Get Modified,” *About-Face*, Sept. 14, 2009 <http://about-face.org/blog/archives/1443>

<sup>118</sup> O’Reilly, *Aesthetic Perception*, 82.



images, the more she becomes connatural with them. Eventually, this affective inclination towards the thin ideal becomes part of her character. Lelwica's comment on this is particularly telling:

The pictures in women's magazines are not simply images of women. They are also bodily symbols. More specifically, they are icons of womanhood, pointing to a seemingly transcendent truth—a feminine ideal—that many girls and women recognize as Ultimate. This recognition is neither fully conscious nor unconscious: *it is habitual*.<sup>119</sup>

Lelwica compares the power these images have to shape character with Christian icons:

[H]istorical Christians were keenly aware of these images' formative power. Unlike most present-day viewers, whose repetitious exposure to a plethora of visual images tends to dilute awareness of the images' influence, medieval persons expected to be shaped by the images they saw.<sup>120</sup>

The concept of connatural knowledge allows us to recognize that choosing to look at these images is not a neutral act. A woman so thoroughly exposed to a standard of beauty that emphasizes thinness is more likely to judge herself and others according a standard of thinness. Even if she rationally judges thinness to be less important than other standards of beauty, her affective inclination nevertheless leads her to judge thinness as desirable, not only in herself, but in others. Additionally, she is more likely to engage in certain actions as a means to achieving thinness for herself. She may cease to desire food as a good the more she desires extreme thinness as a good. She may choose to diet, to exercise compulsively, to constantly weigh herself, etc., all in order to attain the ideal which her appetite is attracted to. As Aidan Nichols

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<sup>119</sup> Lelwica, *Starving for Salvation*, 41. Emphasis added.

<sup>120</sup> Lelwica, 42. See Margaret Miles, *Image as Insight: Visual understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (Beacon Press: Boston, 1985); *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Beacon press: Boston, 1989).

writes, “Such looking shifts our whole way of reading the significance of the world. In its wake we find our own existence reshaped from the experience of what we have seen.”<sup>121</sup>

This understanding of eating problems as related to affective knowledge aligns well with the cognitive-behavioral approach to eating disorders described in the first chapter. According to cognitive-behavioral theories (CBT), false knowledge regarding weight and body shape manifest in behavioral disturbances like dietary regulation, purging or exercise. These behavioral disturbances are an attempt to compensate for feelings of low self-worth and self-esteem.<sup>122</sup> By changing this false knowledge, we can also change how we act. This approach is based on five principles:

1. Self-worth of the individual with an eating disorder is overly determined by body weight, shape, and appearance
2. Individuals with eating disorders overvalue weight and shape to compensate for feelings of low self-esteem
3. Individuals with eating disorders attempt to self-regulate their emotional world and manage stressful interpersonal situations, at least in part, with food
4. Eating disorders are multidetermined, and different factors can predispose, precipitate, and perpetuate an eating disorder
5. The symptoms of the eating disorder are not simply symbolic representations of underlying problems but are also significant in their own right and require focused attention.<sup>123</sup>

CBT therapy focuses on engaging and challenging the cognitions and behaviors of the person with an eating disorder. The focus is placed first on *changing the actual behaviors*—the

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<sup>121</sup> Nichols, *The Art of God Incarnate*, 100.

<sup>122</sup> For an introduction to CBT, see Judith Beck, *Cognitive Therapy: Basics and Beyond* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995). Some of the foundational work the CBT approach to eating disorders is done by Fairburn and Garner. See David Garner and K.M. Bemis, “Anorexia Nervosa: A Cognitive-behavioral Approach to AN,” *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 6 (1982), 123-150; D. Garner, K. Vitousek, and k. Pike, “Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Anorexia Nervosa,” *Handbook of Treatment for Eating Disorders*, Ed. D. Garner and P. Garfinkel, (New York: Guilford Press, 1997), 94-144; C.G. Fairburn, “Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment for Bulimia,” *Handbook of Psychotherapy for Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia*, Ed. D.M. Garner and P.E. Garfinkel (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), 160-92; C.G. Fairburn, Z. Cooper, R. Safran, “Cognitive Behavior Therapy for Eating Disorders: A “Transdiagnostic” theory and Treatment,” *Behavior Research and Therapy* (2002).

<sup>123</sup> Kathleen Pike, Michael Devlin, and Katharine Loeb, “Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy in the Treatment of Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, and Binge Eating Disorder,” J. Kevin Thompson, *Handbook of Eating Disorders and Obesity*, 1st ed. (Wiley, 2003), 133-35.

symptoms of the eating disorder—“with the assumption that interrupting the behavioral cycles will have a direct impact on daily functioning and that such impact will also force an individual to gain awareness of and change the dysfunctional conditions that are core to the eating disorder as well.”<sup>124</sup> Much of the therapeutic task is put directly into the hands of the patient who is assigned therapeutic work to do between sessions such as self-monitoring of eating and interpersonal experience, as well as cognitive exercises to identify the beliefs and values that may be causing the behavior. Like the view of connatural knowledge provided in this chapter, the cognitive-behavioral approach places emphasis on the connection between *action* and *knowledge*. According to the argument advanced in this chapter, women can do much to prevent the internalization of a thin-ideal by avoiding exposure to thin-ideal images, particularly by avoiding women’s fashion magazines and other easily avoidable sources of these images.

It should also be mentioned that recognizing the way in which practical knowledge develops through desire and action has significant bearing on the way body dissatisfaction and eating disorder awareness programs are conducted. It is not enough, as indicated in the About-Face Mission Statement, to simply make women more aware of the destructive potential these images have. Awareness is not enough to counter the affective inclination towards these images and their associated values as good and desirable. Rather, women must change their actions and habits. Empirical research supports the view that how one behaves in response to a thin-ideal is more important than what one knows about it. For example, a 2005 study extended earlier studies demonstrating the negative impact the media has on women's body image by investigating the level of attention and exposure time to thin-ideal images. The study found that

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 136.

that exposure to thin models increased weight-related anxiety, but that anxiety was further heightened by *high attention* to the images.<sup>125</sup>

To more fully help women resist the effects of the thin-ideal, eating disorder and body dissatisfaction awareness programs must appeal to the embodied, affective, and emotional attraction of these images, rather than simply trying to cultivate a cognitive awareness that these images are unrealistic or unhealthy. Lelwica expresses this idea aptly, stating that women must create “alternative systems of meaning and ways of seeking truth” than they currently receive from the images of beauty they are currently exposed to in magazines:

Since the loss of meaning and sense of disconnection . . . is experienced in the body, cultivating a new awareness means paying attention to its embodied basis. The process of healing is a process of becoming physically and mindfully aware of uncomfortable feelings of dissonance and loss. . . *This process of conversion is not purely or even primarily intellectual.*<sup>126</sup>

In the next chapter, we will examine how such an “embodied conversion” might be realized in Aquinas’ theory of virtue.

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<sup>125</sup> Amy Brown and Helga Dittmar, “Think “Thin” and Feel Bad: The Role of Appearance Schema Activation, Attention Level, and Thin–Ideal Internalization for Young Women’s Responses to Ultra–Thin Media Ideals,” *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 24, no. 8 (December 2005): 1088–1113.

<sup>126</sup> Lelwica, *Starving for Salvation*, 130. Emphasis added.

## Chapter Four

### Temperance and the Appetitive Resistance of Thin-Ideal Internalization

- I. The Emotions: A Review**
- II. The Virtue of Temperance**
  - a. Beginning With Temperance*
  - b. The Scope of Temperance as a Virtue*
  - c. Reason's Relation to Temperance*
- III. Temperance of the Eyes: The Mode of Restraint and the Control of Vision**
- IV. Disciplining the Eyes With Regards to Thin-Ideal Images**
- V. Temperance as Satisfying Desire**
- VI. Conclusion**

We saw in the last chapter that the act of the appetite in its attraction to an apparent good provides a source of judgment for the intellect in a way contrasted with the intellect's rational discursive way of judging. This allows Aquinas to account for how a person may judge something as a good against her rational judgment to the contrary. One may cognitively acknowledge, for example, that the thin-ideal images of beauty found in popular women's magazines are not conducive to one's own flourishing, and yet still affectively judge these images as good to look at when given the opportunity.

In most people, there is a certain degree of discontinuity between what they know rationally and what they are affectively inclined toward. We saw this was the case with women who know that the thin ideal is unhealthy and unrealistic, yet nevertheless desire to conform to it. These women have a habit, an acquired second nature, which causes them to desire thinness as a good, despite the fact that they know the thin-ideal is unrealistic and dangerous.

This leads us into the question of *how* one may go about reforming the appetitive power so that it is in agreement with the judgments of reason. It is clear that an increase in rational knowledge is alone not enough to change one's desires. Rather, one must change one's appetite.

Snell notes that in Aquinas, developing the connaturality proper to habit is not a matter only of right judgment, but also of action, “or at the very least the actualization of a potency. The chaste person does not only judge correctly about chastity, she *acts* chaste, she *is* chaste. Chastity has become her nature. . . . All this to say that Aquinas allows for more than he says; not judgment only but action, not assent only, but ascent.”<sup>1</sup>

This chapter examines how people may change their connatural inclinations away from things that ultimately make them unhappy. If women who have internalized a thin ideal possess a bad form of connatural knowledge (“bad” meaning that it leads them to make judgments which ultimately make them unhappy like “I should be thinner than I am currently” or “I need to look like Kate Moss in order to be attractive”), how then can such women acquire “good” connatural knowledge which ultimately leads them to make judgments conducive with happiness? To answer this question, we must address the virtue of temperance.

## **I. The Emotions: A Review**

Emotions are psychosomatic events involving a corporeal change or “transmutation.” Aquinas describes anger, for example, as the “fervor of the blood around the heart, resulting from an exhalation of the bile.”<sup>2</sup> This corporeal transmutation is why we say that we “feel” an emotion. We may feel our face become hot, our stomach may sink, our ears may ring, our throats tighten, or our heart leap in the various emotional states in which we find ourselves.

By the power of the intellect, a rational creature can both apprehend and evaluate the corporeal transmutations under the species of good or evil. A person may apprehend the “boiling of her blood” upon seeing a certain individual who has recently slighted her. The intellectual apprehensive power, working with the sensory apprehensive power, may determine that the

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<sup>1</sup> R.J. Snell, “Connaturality in Aquinas: The Ground of Wisdom,” *Quodlibet Journal*, vol. 5, no. 4 (October 2003).

<sup>2</sup> I-II, Q. 48, art. 2.

object of these transmutations does not warrant such a response. Perhaps the person has apologized for the slight and therefore is no longer judged worthy of anger. As Cates notes, “a healthy, well-integrated person who is ‘in touch’ with his or her body is usually aware of such changes,” although this is not necessarily the case.<sup>3</sup> A person may be distracted by a task and may not apprehend the corporeal changes she is undergoing. In this sense, her emotion might take her for surprise. Moreover, the corporeal changes that accompany an emotion may be quite subtle. One may experience only a modest flushing of the face, for example, upon apprehending an object that makes that person angry, rather than a “boiling of the blood,” as Aquinas describes anger.

Emotions, in so far as they are human, involve judgments regarding an apprehended object. The emotions provide the basis for such a judgment without directly involving the higher intellectual powers in discursive reasoning. However, reason also provides a basis for judging the object of an emotion. Good emotions are those which tend toward good objects, that is, those that are in conformity with reason. However, the goal of the moral life is to train one’s emotions to pursue objects in accordance with reason without having to employ reason in one’s evaluative judgment. Good habits incline a person intuitively toward good objects, that is, to judge *per modum inclinationis* those goods that are in accordance with reason. Bad habits, on the other hand, incline the person towards objects not in accordance with reason, and as such, to judge these objects *per modum inclinationis* badly. Human emotions, therefore, are dynamic activities involving simultaneously the reason and the appetite.

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<sup>3</sup> Diana Fritz Cates, *Aquinas on the Emotions*, 85.

In Aquinas' moral theory, temperance and fortitude are the virtues located in the sensitive appetite, and specifically, the concupiscible and irascible appetite, respectively.<sup>4</sup> Temperance and fortitude are the *affective* virtues, as Ryan notes, "that guide the emotions through which we construe and evaluate our world. They blend cognitive and affective aspects that help us to know, appreciate, and respond to the object in our world insofar as they are values or disvalues."<sup>5</sup> Throughout the remainder of this chapter, we will focus on temperance, and specifically, the role of temperance in contributing to moral knowledge.<sup>6</sup>

## II. The Virtue of Temperance<sup>7</sup>

Recall the following critical text in Aquinas' treatment of connatural knowledge: "He who has the habit of chastity judges rightly of such matters by a kind of connaturality."<sup>8</sup> The habit of chastity inclines one to make judgments regarding chaste acts without involving the higher discursive powers. The habitually chaste person knows on some deep and (possibly inexpressible level) which actions regarding sexuality are good as a result of her habit of

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<sup>4</sup> "The sensitive appetite is one generic power, and is called sensuality; but it is divided into two powers, which are species of the sensitive appetite--the irascible and the concupiscible. . . since the sensitive appetite is an inclination following sensitive apprehension, as natural appetite is an inclination following the natural form, there must needs be in the sensitive part two appetitive powers--one through which the soul is simply inclined to seek what is suitable, according to the senses, and to fly from what is hurtful, and this is called the concupiscible; and another, whereby an animal resists these attacks that hinder what is suitable, and inflict harm, and this is called the irascible." (I, Q. 81, art. 2)

<sup>5</sup> Ryan, "Affective Knowledge and Connaturality in Aquinas," 56.

<sup>6</sup> I am indebted to my friend and colleague Nicholas Austin for the understanding of temperance I lay out in this and subsequent chapters. Austin's dissertation provides a causal method for exploring the virtue of temperance based on the four Aristotelian causes--formal, material, final, and efficient--in which Aquinas bases his definition of virtue: "For Thomas, the four causes of a moral virtue are its *mode* (formal cause), *matter* and *subject* (material cause), *proper end* (final cause) and *agent* (efficient cause). Less technically, they can be expressed in terms of five guiding questions to be used in understanding any given virtue: What is the practical wisdom actualized by that virtue? What is the sphere of life with which the virtue is concerned? What aspect of the human heart and mind does the virtue modify? What is the virtue for? What causes the virtue to exist and increase? To answer to these five questions is to give an account of a moral virtue." Nicholas Owen Austin, "Thomas Aquinas on the Four Causes of Temperance" (Boston College, 2010), Abstract.

<sup>7</sup> The word "temperance" has a wide range of connotations, and is especially associated with the "temperance movement" in the United States, a social movement associated with prohibition that was in favor of complete abstinence from alcohol. In this dissertation, temperance will refer only to the moral virtue as understood in the Aristotelian-Thomistic intellectual tradition.

<sup>8</sup> II-II, Q. 45, art. 2.



chastity: “only those who have particular virtues have dispositions for cognition of the things related to the virtues. Thanks to the disposition, one can come to know these things rightly and more perfectly.”<sup>9</sup> This connaturality, as we have already noted, is a form of love which brings about desire for certain objects and joy in the union of the agent to these objects. We have also noted how this connaturality is acquired in the appetite so that the human person is said to acquire a “second nature.” These habits, or acquired connatural knowledge, determine the affective response of the agent. Ryan notes,

The affective capacity of the person can be modified and hence grow in sensitivity, intensity, and scope. The affective virtues, then, are not primarily about actions (though they may lead to actions). Their primary habitual disposition as virtues (their condition of possibility, their attunement to being itself as good) is toward the fitting emotional response, namely one that is according to right reason. . . A person is changed such that the orientation or habitual disposition to what is good becomes connatural or second nature.”<sup>10</sup>

As we will see, this acquired connaturality is integrally related to the virtue of temperance, the “deliberately cultivated, stable disposition to respond well to certain objects of experience,” as Cates describes the virtue.<sup>11</sup> “It is partly a disposition to respond well in action,” she goes on, “but Thomas’ main concern is with the affective dimension of our responsiveness.”<sup>12</sup>

#### *a. Beginning With Temperance*

Temperance is the cardinal virtue that “withdraws man from things which seduce the appetite from obeying reason.”<sup>13</sup> It is the virtue “chiefly concerned with those passions that tend towards sensible goods, viz. desire and pleasure (*circa concupiscentiam et delectationem*), and

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<sup>9</sup> Taki Suto, “Virtue and Knowledge: Connatural Knowledge According to Thomas Aquinas,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 58 (September 2004): 61-79, 62-3.

<sup>10</sup> Ryan, *Affective Knowledge and Connaturality in Aquinas*, 57.

<sup>11</sup> Diana Fritz Cates, “The Virtue of Temperance,” in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, 321-22.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

<sup>13</sup> II-II, Q. 141, art. 2.

consequently with the sorrows that arise from the absence of those pleasures.”<sup>14</sup> Temperance orders the strongest sensory desires and pleasures, specifically the pleasures of touch, which include pleasures of food, drink, and sex.<sup>15</sup> As such, temperance “takes the need of this life, as the rule of the pleasurable objects of which it makes use, and uses them only for as much as the need of this life requires.”<sup>16</sup>

Temperance is not the most excellent virtue, but it is indispensable to the moral life. In his discussion of whether temperance is the greatest of the virtues, Aquinas answers that temperance is not the greatest of the virtues because it concerns primarily the individual, rather than the multitude, thus rendering justice more excellent. Nevertheless, he ascribes to temperance a particular importance in its concern for those most basic appetites of the human being which she shares with animals. It is the virtue of temperance which distinguishes the human sensitive appetite from the sensitive appetite of brutes or beasts.<sup>17</sup> This, coupled with the necessity of the sensitive appetite for the needs of this life, gives temperance a particularly important role in the moral life.<sup>18</sup>

Josef Pieper claims that temperance is indispensable because of its role in self-preservation:

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<sup>14</sup> II-II, Q. 141, art. 3. Recall that Aquinas divides the appetitive power into both an intellective and a sensory component. The sensitive appetite is the power by which a person is inclined towards or away from sensory pleasures and pains. The sensitive appetite includes the concupiscible and irascible appetites. The concupiscible appetite is the appetite concerned with simple goods, including, but not limited to, food drink and sex. The irascible appetite is concerned with difficult goods, i.e., goods which are difficult to obtain due to some obstacles, including, but not limited to dangers of death. Temperance is the virtue which brings the concupiscible appetite in accord with reason; fortitude is the virtue which brings the irascible appetite in accord with reason.

<sup>15</sup> II-II, Q. 141, art. 4.

<sup>16</sup> II-II, Q. 141, art. 6.

<sup>17</sup> “Honor and beauty are especially ascribed to temperance, not on account of the excellence of the good proper to temperance, but on account of the disgrace of the contrary evil from which it withdraws us, by moderating the pleasures common to us and the lower animals” (II-II, Q. 141, art. 8, ad. 1).

<sup>18</sup> “Now moderation, which is requisite in every virtue, deserves praise principally in pleasures of touch, with which temperance is concerned, both because these pleasures are most natural to us, so that it is more difficult to abstain from them, and to control the desire for them, and because their objects are more necessary to the present life” (II-II, Q. 141, art. 7).

The discipline of temperance, understood as selfless self-preservation, is the saving and defending realization of the inner order of man. . . . The natural urge toward sensual enjoyment, manifested in delight in food and drink and sexual pleasure, is the echo and mirror of man's strongest natural forces of self-preservation. The basic forms of enjoyment correspond to these most primordial forces of being, which tend to preserve the individual man, as well as the whole race, in the existence for which he was created (Wisdom I, 14). But for the very reason that these forces are closely allied to the deepest human urge toward being, they exceed all other powers of mankind in their destructive violence once they degenerate into selfishness.<sup>19</sup>

We might say then that temperance, while not first in the order of perfection, is first in the order of generation. The development of temperance is a bridge between the natural appetite—the first nature—and the acquired appetite or “second nature” that follows from habit. If the moral life has a starting point, temperance is it. This chapter will argue moral progress in lives of women adversely affected by exposure to a thin-ideal begins with temperance. Temperance curbs the appetite from those sources of pleasure which are destructive and threaten inner-order. More specifically, for the women in question, we will focus on the harmful *visual* pleasures related to the thin-ideal in the mass media. We will argue that for most women in this society, progress in the moral life begins in part by *controlling what one sees*, which is a task of temperance.

Temperance is often thought of as the virtue which curbs the appetite from excessive pleasures of food, drink, and sex. While these are important functions of temperance, a focus on thin-ideal internalization and eating disorders helps us appreciate the integral role of temperance in curbing the appetite from the visual pleasures that come from a thin-ideal as well, thus expanding the role of temperance to other underemphasized areas of the moral life.

*b. The Scope of Temperance as a Virtue*

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<sup>19</sup> Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 150.

For Thomas, the word “temperance” can be used to describe a general virtue, a specific virtue, or a potential part of a virtue. As regards temperance as a general virtue, Thomas has in mind the form of virtue (the order of reason) without any specific matter: “the word ‘temperance’ has a twofold acceptation. First, in accordance with its common signification: and thus temperance is not a special but a general virtue, because the word ‘temperance’ signifies a certain temperateness or moderation, which reason appoints to human operations and passions: and this is common to every moral virtue.”<sup>20</sup> In contrast, temperance can be considered a specific or special virtue when its form inheres in a *particular* matter. In the same article, Aquinas explains: “if we take temperance antonomastically, as withholding the appetite from those things which are most seductive to man, it is a special virtue, for thus it has, like fortitude, a special matter.” Following Aristotle, Aquinas says that the matter of moral virtue concerns passions and actions.<sup>21</sup> The matter of temperance in this sense is the pleasure of touch, and more specifically, those pleasures associated with the activities necessary to preserve the life of the individual or species, namely, food, drink, and sex.<sup>22</sup>

Temperance can, however, apply to other specific matters besides simply food, drink, and sex. In order to illustrate how this is the case, Aquinas distinguishes between the three different parts of temperance, namely, the integral, subjective, and potential parts. The integral parts [*partes integrales*] “are the conditions of the concurrence of which are necessary for virtue: and in this respect there are two integral parts of temperance, ‘shamefacedness,’ whereby one recoils from the disgrace that is contrary to temperance, and ‘honesty,’ whereby one loves the beauty of temperance.”<sup>23</sup> The subjective part [*partes subiectivae*] is the species which is differentiated

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<sup>20</sup> II-II, Q. 141, art. 2.

<sup>21</sup> II-II, Q. 157, art. 1.

<sup>22</sup> II-II, Q. 141, art. 3-5; I-II, Q. 64, art. 1.

<sup>23</sup> II-II, Q. 141, art. 3.

according to the specific matter. The subjective parts of temperance are abstinence (regarding food), sobriety (regarding drink), chastity (concerning sex), and purity (concerning other pleasures of the flesh). Finally, the potential parts [*partes potentials*] are like secondary virtues, having some distinct determinate matter besides the pleasures of food, drink, and sex: “for while the principal virtue observes the mode in some principal matter, these observe the mode in some other matter wherein moderation is not so difficult.”<sup>24</sup>

In identifying the potential parts of temperance, Aquinas again makes a distinction between three kinds of matter to which the form of temperance (the mode of reason) may apply: interior motions, exterior motions, and exterior things. The virtues annexed to temperance that moderate interior motions are continence, humility, and gentleness. The virtue annexed to temperance regarding external actions is modesty.<sup>25</sup> Finally, the virtues annexed to temperance regarding external things are specified according to the quantity and quality of external things. Regarding the former, Aquinas identifies lowliness and contentment; regarding the latter, Aquinas identifies moderation and simplicity.<sup>26</sup> The potential parts of temperance illustrate how the virtue of temperance can extend to other activities and pleasures than those associated with food, drink, and sex while still remaining a specific virtue, that is, a virtue having a particular form and matter. The virtues annexed to temperance, despite having different matters, share the form of temperance, which is the mode of restraint.<sup>27</sup>

### *c. Reason's Relation to Temperance*

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<sup>24</sup> II-II Q. 142, art. 4.

<sup>25</sup> II-II, Q. 143, art. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> The annexation of secondary to principal virtues depends on the mode of virtue, which is, so to speak, a kind of form of the virtue, rather than on the matter. Now meekness and clemency agree with temperance in mode, as stated above, though they agree not in matter (II-II, Q. 157, art. 3, ad. 2.)

In his general treatise on the virtues, Aquinas notes that in the acquired virtues, there is both a formal and quasi-material element: “the material element in these virtues is a certain inclination of the appetitive part to the passion and operations according to a certain mode: and since this mode is fixed by reason, the formal element is precisely this order of reason [*ordo rationis*].”<sup>28</sup> The formal cause of moral virtue is, therefore, the order of reason, a point Thomas repeats at the beginning of his “Treatise on Temperance”: “As stated above (I-II, 55, 3), it is essential to virtue to incline man to good. Now the good of man is to be in accordance with reason, as Dionysius states (Div. Nom. iv). Hence human virtue is that which inclines man to something in accordance with reason.”<sup>29</sup>

In identifying the formal cause of any specific moral virtue, Thomas says that the form is specified by the matter: “The formal element is one generically, on account of the unity of the agent: but it varies in species, on account of the various relations of the receiving matter.”<sup>30</sup> The order of reason, then, as formal cause, is one in genus, but distinct in species which is determined by a specific matter.<sup>31</sup> As Aquinas establishes in *De Malo*, diversity of matter also requires diversity in form.<sup>32</sup> With this in mind, the form of temperance (the specific mode of the order of reason) is determined by the matter in which the form adheres:

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<sup>28</sup> I-II, Q. 67, art. 1.

<sup>29</sup> II-II, Q. 141, art. 1.

<sup>30</sup> I-II, Q. 60, art. 1, ad. 2. Thomas is responding to a particular objection that if species are determined by form, and all moral virtues share the form “order of reason,” then there must be only one moral virtue: “habits differ, not in respect of their material objects, but according to the formal aspect of their objects. Now the formal aspect of the good to which moral virtue is directed, is one thing, viz. the mean defined by reason. Therefore, seemingly, there is but one moral virtue” (arg. 2).

<sup>31</sup> Sometimes, however, the matter receives the form from the agent, but not in the same kind specifically as the agent, as is the case with non-univocal causes of generation: thus an animal is generated by the sun. In this case the forms received into matter are not of one species, but vary according to the adaptability of the matter to receive the influx of the agent: for instance, we see that owing to the one action of the sun, animals of various species are produced by putrefaction according to the various adaptability of matter (Q. 60, art. 1).

<sup>32</sup> Even in natural things, diversity of matter causes diversity of species, when diversity of matter requires diversity of form (*De Malo* II.6).

For the formal principle of the virtue of which we speak now is good as defined by reason; which good is considered in two ways. First, as existing in the very act of reason: and thus we have one principal virtue, called “Prudence.” Secondly, according as the reason puts its order into something else; either into operations, and then we have “Justice”; or into passions, and then we need two virtues. For the need of putting the order of reason into the passions is due to their thwarting reason: and this occurs in two ways. First, by the passions inciting to something against reason, and then the passions need a curb, which we call “Temperance.” Secondly, by the passions withdrawing us from following the dictate of reason, e.g. through fear of danger or toil: and then man needs to be strengthened for that which reason dictates, lest he turn back; and to this end there is “Fortitude.”<sup>33</sup>

The specific form of temperance, that is, the particular order of reason determined by the particular matter of temperance, is *restraint*.<sup>34</sup> The virtue of temperance, therefore, is the restraint of the concupiscible appetite from those pleasures that are contrary to the order of reason.<sup>35</sup>

Although temperance is the virtue which restrains the appetite from those pleasures not in conformity with reason, it would be simplistic to say that the temperate person is a person who merely *restrains* from undue pleasure. The temperate person is one who can enjoy sensible pleasures properly, by not indulging too much, but also by not restraining too much.<sup>36</sup> More importantly for the purposes of this dissertation, the virtue of temperance is what allows a person

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<sup>33</sup> I-II, Q. 61, art. 2.

<sup>34</sup> “Parts are assigned to the principal virtues, in so far as they imitate them in some secondary matter as to the mode whence the virtue derives its praise and likewise its name. Thus the mode and name of justice consist in a certain ‘equality,’ those of fortitude in a certain ‘strength of mind,’ those of temperance in a certain ‘restraint,’ inasmuch as it restrains the most vehement concupiscences of the pleasures of touch” (Q. 157, art. 3).

<sup>35</sup> Thomas’ argument is that the concupiscences of food, drink, and sex, are particularly power and in special need of restraint, which temperance serves to restrain. See II-II, Q. 141, art. 7.

<sup>36</sup> Josef Pieper writes that temperance as “moderation” is “too negative in its implication and signifies too exclusively restriction, curtailment, curbing, bridling, repression—all again in contradiction to the classic prototype of the fourth cardinal virtue.” He goes on to note that the Greek word *sophrosyne* from which the Latin *temperantia* is derived connotes the more positive notion of “directing reason” in the widest sense. And the Latin stays close to this far-ranging significance. In St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (12, 24 f) we read: *Deus temperavit corpus*. ‘Thus God has established a harmony in the body giving special honor to that which needed it most.’ There was to be no want of unity in the body; all the different parts of it were to make each other’s welfare their common care.’ The primary and essential meaning of *temperare*, therefore is to dispose various parts into one unified and ordered whole” (Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 146. Austin argues in his dissertation that temperance has two modes—restraint and what might be called “enjoyment” or “proper use:” One can be too restrained, but one cannot be too temperate; temperance, therefore, is not restraint alone. . . . The appropriate response to human hungers and appetites can often be joyful fulfillment, in grateful recognition of the gifts of God” (Austin, 76, 77).

to make judgments about sensible goods without involving the higher discursive powers.

Temperance is an appetitive knowledge of which sensible pleasures are good to pursue, and the knowledge of how these sensible pleasures are to be pursued.

### III. Temperance of the Eyes: Restraint and the Control of Vision

We will now turn to an examination of one of the potential parts of temperance, namely, the virtue of *studiositas* and the corresponding vice of *curiositas*. As a potential part of temperance, *studiositas* shares the *ratio* of temperance applied to a different matter than the pleasures of food, drink, and sex. Aquinas begins his discussion of *studiositas* by identifying the matter of this virtue as knowledge. But, we may ask, how can this be the case? Aquinas has already established that temperance deals generally with the pleasures of touch, and ascribes another virtue, prudence, to knowledge. However, Aquinas makes a distinction which allows *studiositas* to fall under the virtue of temperance as a potential part. When looking at knowledge, we can distinguish between the knowledge *itself*—which is the matter of the prudence—and the *appetite* for knowledge, which is the matter of temperance.

Man's mind is drawn, on account of his affections, towards the things for which he has an affection, according to Matthew 6:21, 'Where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also.' And since man has special affection for those things which foster the flesh, it follows that man's thoughts are concerned about things that foster his flesh, so that man seeks to know how he may best sustain his body.<sup>37</sup>

*Studiositas* is, therefore, the mode of temperance (restraint) applied to the appetite for knowledge of external things.

Pieper calls the specific matter of *studiositas* the “concupiscences of the eyes.” Just like the desire for food, drink, and sex are particularly in need of restraint, so too is this the case with the visual pleasure:

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<sup>37</sup> II-II, Q. 166, art. 1, ad. 2.



There is a gratification in seeing that reverses the original meaning of vision and works disorder in man himself. The true meaning of seeing is perception of reality. But ‘concupiscence of the eyes’ does not aim to perceive reality, but to enjoy ‘seeing.’ St. Augustine says of the ‘concupiscence of the palate’ that it is not a question of satiating one’s hunger but of tasting and relishing food; this is also true of *curiositas* and the ‘concupiscence of the eyes.’<sup>38</sup>

Visual pleasures may be inordinate in a number of ways. They may be pursued from a bad motive, so that a person might take pride in her knowledge.<sup>39</sup> Such pleasures might also be inordinate in not being directed to the appropriate end.<sup>40</sup> The pleasures of the eyes may also be inordinate in their object. That is, this appetite for knowledge may be directed at truths beyond which the human intellect can understand, thus leading the intellect into error.<sup>41</sup> The object of the appetite for knowledge may also be contrary to the Christian faith.<sup>42</sup> Finally, the object of the appetite for knowledge may be trivial and worldly things that fill the mind with distracting or even harmful images, such as “when a man is withdrawn by a less profitable study from a study that is an obligation incumbent on him; hence Jerome says, ‘We see priests forsaking the gospels and the prophets, reading stage-plays, and singing the love songs of pastoral idylls.’”<sup>43</sup> It is this final matter of *studiositas* which pertains most to the study of thin-ideal internalization. The

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<sup>38</sup> Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 1st ed. (University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 200.

<sup>39</sup> “When one tends by his study to the knowledge of truth as having evil accidentally annexed to it, for instance those who study to know the truth that they may take pride in their knowledge. Hence Augustine says (De Morib. Eccl. 21): ‘Some there are who forsaking virtue, and ignorant of what God is, and of the majesty of that nature which ever remains the same, imagine they are doing something great, if with surpassing curiosity and keenness they explore the whole mass of this body which we call the world. So great a pride is thus begotten, that one would think they dwelt in the very heavens about which they argue.’” (II-II, Q. 167, art. 1).

<sup>40</sup> “When a man desires to know the truth about creatures, without referring his knowledge to its due end, namely, the knowledge of God. Hence Augustine says (De Vera Relig. 29) that ‘in studying creatures, we must not be moved by empty and perishable curiosity; but we should ever mount towards immortal and abiding things.’” (II-II, Q. 167, art. 1).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.: “When a man studies to know the truth above the capacity of his own intelligence, since by so doing men easily fall into error: wherefore it is written (Sirach 3:22): ‘Seek not the things that are too high for thee, and search not into things above thy ability . . . and in many of His works be not curious,’ and further on (Sirach 3:26), ‘For . . . the suspicion of them hath deceived many, and hath detained their minds in vanity.’”

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.: “This is superstitious curiosity, of which Augustine says (De Vera Relig. 4): ‘Maybe, the philosophers were debarred from the faith by their sinful curiosity in seeking knowledge from the demons.’”

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

pleasures that come from looking at thin-ideal images looks a lot like the desire for useless and destructive knowledge which Pieper says leads to the “roaming unrest of the spirit.”

Roaming unrest of the spirit . . . manifests itself in verbosity, in unbridled desire ‘to burst forth from the citadel of the spirit into diversity,’ in inner restlessness, in instability of place as well as instability of resolution, and especially in the insatiability of *curiositas*. Accordingly, the degeneration into *curiositas* of the natural wish to see may be much more than a harmless confusion on the surface of the human being. It may be the sign of complete rootlessness. . . It reaches the extremes of its destructive and eradicating power when it builds itself a world according to its own image and likeness: when it surrounds itself with the restlessness of a perpetual moving picture of meaningless shows, and with literally deafening noise of impressions and sensations breathlessly rushing past the window of the senses.<sup>44</sup>

The virtue of *studiositas* exercises the mode of temperance—restraint—on the desire for knowledge in order to protect the person from this “roaming unrest of spirit.” *Studiositas* is a critical virtue for the ordering of the rational creature’s inner self because, as we have seen, all human knowledge of particulars begins as sense knowledge. Alice Ramos writes,

All our knowledge begins in sensation but does not end there, it seems appropriate that Aquinas should consider the role that our senses play in acquiring knowledge: the sense that is targeted is that of sight, which may desire to see things that are useless, harmful, or unlawful. . . As long as we apply ourselves in an ordered or measured way to the knowledge of sensible things, that is, to maintain or sustain our bodies, or for the sake of intellectual knowledge, whether speculative or practical, Aquinas says that this attention to the knowledge of sensible things is virtuous. When, however, sense knowledge is not directed toward what is useful, it is an obstacle to useful considerations. Sense knowledge can thus distract us from speculative knowledge, from the contemplation of wisdom, and we can in this way ‘become foolishly dull.’<sup>45</sup>

Thus, *studiositas* is not simply the virtue which restrains the appetite for knowledge, but also a more specific virtue which restrains the eyes from seeing what is inappropriate. Aquinas says explicitly in the *sed contra* on his article on the relationship between *curiositas* and sense knowledge:

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 200-201.

<sup>45</sup> Alice Ramos, “Studiositas and Curiositas: Matters for Self-Examination,” *Educational Horizons* 83, no. 4 (Sum 2005): 272-281, 277. See Aquinas ST II-II, Q. 167, art. 2.

Augustine says (De Vera Relig. 38) that ‘concupiscence of the eyes makes men curious.’ Now according to Bede (Comment. in 1 John 2:16) ‘concupiscence of the eyes refers not only to the learning of magic arts, but also to sight-seeing, and to the discovery and dispraise of our neighbor's faults,’ and all these are particular objects of sense. Therefore since concupiscence of the eyes is a sin, even as concupiscence of the flesh and pride of life, which are members of the same division (1 John 2:16), it seems that the vice of curiosity is about the knowledge of sensible things.<sup>46</sup>

Aquinas refers in this article specifically to sight-seeing, which he describes as “when the knowledge of sensible things is directed to something harmful, as looking on a woman is directed to lust.”<sup>47</sup> While sight-seeing need not be sinful, as Aquinas notes in the objection to this article,<sup>48</sup> this action “becomes sinful when it renders a man prone to the vices of lust and cruelty on account of things he sees represented.”<sup>49</sup> So watching a violent battle would only be sinful if it induced the watcher towards acts of violence. In the same way, looking at a woman need not be sinful if the viewing does not stir up feelings of inappropriate sexual desire. However, both of these activities have the potential to become sinful, in which case the eyes need to be disciplined by the virtue of *studiositas*.

This virtue is particularly relevant to contemporary moral concerns about what people see. Alice Ramos notes in reference to the virtue of *studiositas* restraining the appetite to see,

We can no doubt be reminded here of anyone who wastes his or her time “flipping” channels on television, viewing one sensuous or violent scene after another, or engaging in readings of, for example, cheap magazines on newsstands which promote gawking and excite the imagination without promoting any aesthetic and moral values. It is no wonder that persons habituated to such sorts of diversion commit crimes in our schools and victimize innocent people with random acts of violence.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> II-II, Q. 167, art. 2.

<sup>47</sup> II-II, Q. 167, art. 2.

<sup>48</sup> “Further, curiosity would seem to refer to watching games; wherefore Augustine says (Confess. vi, 8) that when ‘a fall occurred in the fight, a mighty cry of the whole people struck him strongly, and overcome by curiosity Alypius opened his eyes.’ But it does not seem to be sinful to watch games, because it gives pleasure on account of the representation, wherein man takes a natural delight, as the Philosopher states (Poet. vi). Therefore the vice of curiosity is not about the knowledge of sensible objects.”

<sup>49</sup> II-II, Q. 167, art. 2, ad. 2.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. “*Studiositas and Curiositas*,” 278.

It is for this reason that the virtue of *studiositas* is particularly relevant for our discussion of the moral dimension of eating disorders. In the previous chapter, we saw how empirical evidence confirms that continuous exposure to thin-ideal images in popular media significantly disposes a woman to experience greater body dissatisfaction and increases the likelihood that she will develop eating disorder symptoms.<sup>51</sup> Research examining the role of media exposure on self-image and body dissatisfaction strongly correlates media exposure with body dissatisfaction and dysfunctional appearance beliefs.<sup>52</sup>

We know now that simply *knowing* that these images are potentially destructive is not enough to protect women from their negative effects. If we think of viewing these images as constituting “sight-seeing” in the negative way that Aquinas uses the term, we can conclude that the appetite for such images must be restrained by the virtue of *studiositas*. The empirical evidence on thin-ideal internalization can show us how this virtue can be developed through action which leads to the connatural knowledge integral to temperance.

In his explanation of knowledge, Aquinas explains that “the received is in the receiver according to the mode of the receiver.”<sup>53</sup> In speculative knowledge, knowledge is caused by the fact the object of knowledge, the thing known or the thing *received*, takes on a new form in the intellect because the external material object must take on an immaterial existence in order to be known by the mind. In other words, in cognitive or speculative knowledge, the known object is changed in the process of abstracting from the material to the immaterial. In affective knowledge, on the other hand, it is not the known object which is changed, but rather, the agent,

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<sup>51</sup> A meta-analysis of studies investigating the effects of viewing Western idealized images concluded that exposure to those images induces and enhances body dissatisfaction. (Groesz, et. al., “The Effect of Experimental Presentation of Thin Media Images on Body Satisfaction: A Meta-analytic Review. *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 31 (2001), 1–16).

<sup>52</sup> Stice et al., “Relation of Media Exposure to Eating Disorder Symptomatology: An Examination of Mediating Mechanisms.”

<sup>53</sup> I, Q. 84, art. 1: “*Receptum est in recipient per modum recipientis.*”

the knower who “changes his way of being, forming a certain likeness (similitude) of the object in himself and thus acquiring the connaturality with the object.”<sup>54</sup> Moreno illustrates this point with the example of the alcoholic, who is “inclined towards alcohol because he is connaturalized to it, an affinity which is consequence of the abuse of alcohol. There exists a certain affinity between the alcohol and the alcoholic. The common sense of people expresses this connaturality by saying that the subject is an alcoholic. . .”<sup>55</sup>

But also recall that this connaturalization occurs gradually. The appetite is not connatural with anything in particular, but becomes connatural to things like alcohol by a gradual process of fittingness or attunement. Human animals of the same species, unlike non-rational animals, possess different activities and operations according to their dispositions. The thesis that “according as each is, such does the end appear to him” explains how one person can judge something to be a good that another finds repugnant. A person not connatural to alcohol in the same way as the alcoholic may experience a certain repugnance in the presence of large quantities of liquor which the alcoholic experiences with desire. The alcoholic does not become connatural with alcohol overnight, however, but gradually. She acquires a dispositional inclination to alcohol over time. In this sense, habituation is the efficient cause of habit. One’s acquired nature depends on how one acts over time. “It takes more than one sparrow to make a spring,” quips Aristotle, and so also a habit. The perfection of the habits also depends on training and habituation: “One can perfect virtues by repeating virtuous actions voluntarily and repeatedly. Hence, Aquinas claims that human individuals are responsible for their habits, for the appearances of the things that are determined by the habits, and for the actions they choose

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<sup>54</sup> Suto, “Virtue and Knowledge,” 71.

<sup>55</sup> Moreno, “The Nature of St. Thomas’ Knowledge ‘Per Connaturalitatem,’” 51.

based on the appearances.”<sup>56</sup> A habit, therefore, presupposes the repetition of certain actions which transform the habit into second nature and “gradually adapt the potency with the formal objects to that which the habit tends.”<sup>57</sup>

A person who has the habit of temperance does more than merely restrain from undue sensual pleasures; she also has the appropriate emotional response motivating her restraint and enjoyment:

The terminus or outcome of the affective virtues is not an action but the changes in the subject (power or faculty) from which emerges the appropriate level of emotional response. The affective capacity of the person can be modified and hence grow in sensitivity, intensity, and scope. The affective virtues, then, are not primarily about actions (though they may lead to actions). Their primary habitual disposition as virtues (their condition of possibility, their attunement to being itself a good) is toward the fitting emotional response, namely one that is according to right reason. Hence, to adapt Aristotle, the virtuous person is disposed to respond emotionally, to the right things, at the right time, and to the right degree. This is how they exercise their rationality and contribute to human well-being and growth both personally and in the realm of our relationships.<sup>58</sup>

This means that growth in temperance, the perfection of the virtue, requires acting in the ways which a temperate person would act. However, the actions prerequisite for the development of temperance require the guidance of the rational appetite informed by prudence. It is *prudence* which determines right action, that is, *how* to act in temperate ways.

One cannot choose which specific good action is proper to any specific virtue without prudence, a thesis Aquinas shares with Aristotle:

No moral virtue can be without prudence; since it is proper to moral virtue to make a right choice, for it is an elective habit. Now right choice requires not only the inclination to a due end, which inclination is the direct outcome of moral virtue, but also correct

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<sup>56</sup> Suto, “Virtue and Knowledge,” 74.

<sup>57</sup> Moreno, “The Nature of St. Thomas’ Knowledge ‘Per Connaturalitatem,’” 50.

<sup>58</sup> Ryan, “Affective Knowledge in Aquinas,” 57.

choice of things conducive to the end, which choice is made by prudence, that counsels, judges, and commands in those things that are directed to the end.<sup>59</sup>

Aquinas argues for the connection of moral virtue to prudence earlier in his treatise on the virtues:

Moral virtue cannot be without prudence, because it is a habit of choosing, i.e. making us choose well. Now in order that a choice be good, two things are required. First, that the intention be directed to a due end; and this is done by moral virtue, which inclines the appetitive faculty to the good that is in accord with reason, which is a due end. Secondly, that man take rightly those things which have reference to the end: and this he cannot do unless his reason counsel, judge and command aright, which is the function of prudence and the virtues annexed to it. Wherefore there can be no moral virtue without prudence.<sup>60</sup>

An agent needs prudence in order to choose a *temperate*, or *courageous*, or *just* course of action.

Virtuous actions are relative both to the agent and to the circumstances, and it is the task of prudence to determine how best to act in light of the circumstances one finds oneself in. Joseph Pieper observes,

There may be a kind of instinctive governance of instinctual cravings; but only prudence transforms this instinctive governance into the ‘virtue’ of temperance. . . Prudence is needed if man is to carry through his impulses and instincts for right acting, if he is to purify his naturally good predispositions and make them into real virtue, that is, into the truly human mode of ‘perfected ability.’<sup>61</sup>

Prudence brings a person’s actions into conformity with the rule of reason, and it is the rule of reason which sets the standard of goodness in any particular action.<sup>62</sup> Pieper writes that the whole doctrine of prudence can be summed up in the statement that “the intrinsic goodness of man—

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<sup>59</sup> I-II, Q. 65, art. 1.

<sup>60</sup> I-II, Q. 58, art. 4.

<sup>61</sup> Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 6-7.

<sup>62</sup> I-II, 1. 64, art. 1: “Moral virtue derives goodness from the rule of reason.”

and that is the same as saying his true humanness—consists in this, that reason prefaced in the cognition of truth shall inwardly shape and imprint his volition and action.”<sup>63</sup> Pieper goes on:

‘Reason,’ means to him [Aquinas] nothing other than ‘regard for and openness to reality,’ and ‘acceptance of reality.’ And ‘truth’ is to him nothing other than the unveiling and revelation of reality, of both natural and supernatural reality. Reason ‘perfected in the cognition of truth’ is therefore the receptivity of the human spirit, to which the revelation of reality, both natural and supernatural reality, has given substance. Certainly prudence is the standard of volition and action; but the standard of prudence, on the other hand, is the *ipsa res*, the ‘thing itself,’ the objective reality of being. And therefore the pre-eminence of prudence signifies first of all the direction of volition and action toward truth; but finally it signifies the directing of volition and action toward objective reality. The good is prudent beforehand; but that is prudent which is keeping with reality.<sup>64</sup>

Temperance itself is brought about by actions which are ultimately governed by prudence.

Prudential action gradually transforms a person’s affectivity through what might be called

“interiorization, a process in which one grows cognitively and affectively and one comes to see that ‘virtuous acts are good and is pleased in doing them.’”<sup>65</sup> The virtue of temperance grows out of temperate actions, so that one begins to apprehend good objects as desirable and bad objects as repugnant.

Another way of describing the development of temperance is that it necessitates that one make judgments about moral matters *per modum cognitionis*, that is, based on one’s rational and discursive knowledge, rather than on one’s appetitive knowledge. Recall again that critical statement on moral judgment: “A man learned in moral science might be able to judge rightly about virtuous acts, though he had not the virtue.”<sup>66</sup> By judging rightly (*per modum cognitionis*) about which acts are conducive to virtue, the goal is to eventually train the appetite to provide the

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<sup>63</sup> Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 8.

<sup>64</sup> Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 9.

<sup>65</sup> Ryan, 58, citing Clifford G. Kossel, S.J., “Natural Law and Human Law (Ia IIae., qq. 90-97),” in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Pope, 169-93, at 188, n. 51.

<sup>66</sup> I, Q. 1, art. 6, ad. 3.



basis for such judgments (*per modum inclinationis*) without having to appeal to the higher discursive powers, such that a person may act in ways consistent with virtue promptly, consistently, and with pleasure. The growth of temperance is therefore a cooperative effort of intellect and emotion:

For Aquinas, there is a drive toward that stage called perfect virtue whereby it is exercised not only accord to (*secundum*) right reason but with (*cum*) right reason. Here, it is not just the case of the emotion increasing the goodness of actions by the influence of the will (either by overflowing of intensity or by deliberate arousal). Clearly, virtue's goal is that the moral act (and for affective virtues, its appropriate emotion) be measured not according to right reason but 'with' right reason. It is not so much ordered, pointed in the 'right direction' by reason but 'in tune with' right reason. Alternatively, emotions, guided by virtue, have moved from fittingness in its conditional form (*consans*, *conveniens*) to one of being 'naturally fitted' (*connaturalis*). Feeling, thinking, willing resonate with each other that this particular response is 'right.' Intellect, will and emotions seem here to have a relationship that is certainly not one of control and is more collaborative than directive.<sup>67</sup>

The intended end in developing temperance is, therefore, the acquisition of knowledge, but not the rational knowledge of right and wrong or good and bad, but rather, the affective knowledge of those goods which will ultimately make one happy.<sup>68</sup>

How does this play out practically? Returning to the question of thin-ideal internalization, we might be able to discern with greater clarity how a person develops temperance. A person who knows rationally that thin-ideal images are dangerous and not conducive to overall flourishing is not necessarily temperate if she still desires to conform to these images. Temperance requires that her desires conform to reason. Her desires are shaped by right action towards these images. Thus, if she wants to develop temperance towards the thin

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<sup>67</sup> Ryan, 58-9.

<sup>68</sup> Ryan also notes that Aquinas is using virtue as a basic analogue when he refers to the connaturality of virtue: "Growth toward a habit is gradual. It seems to follow that the transition from one form of fittingness to the other (emotions as *conveniens/consans* to attuned emotions as connatural means that one can have greater or lesser degrees of connaturality. Aquinas suggests this when he says that habit is like a second nature yet it falls short of it (I-II, Q. 52, art. 1, ad. 1) (Ryan, 59 n. 40).

ideal, the woman who desires extreme thinness even when she knows it is unhealthy must *restrain from looking at the thin ideal*.

#### **IV. Disciplining the Eyes With Regards to Thin-Ideal Images**

Given the relationship between media images and the internalization of socio-cultural standards for appearance, researchers have begun to focus their attention on possible interventions on the media's negative effect.<sup>69</sup> Shaw and Waller suggest helping individuals to become more discriminating in their use of the mass media, developing strategies to reduce acceptance of the media's presentation of the thin ideal. Heinberg and Thompson recommend investigating the mechanisms behind the cognitive strategies used by women capable of resisting thin-ideal internalization in order to teach such strategies to more vulnerable women. They argue that training in such resistance strategies may reduce the impact that such images have on body dissatisfaction and eating pathology.<sup>70</sup> Rita Freedman holds that body image and self-perception is in a constant state of flux that depends on recent experiences such as exposure to media images. She suggests that cognitive-behavioral interventions can challenge "faulty cognitions" and that women can develop new ways of conceptualizing sensory data can be used on an individual level to resist media influence.<sup>71</sup>

Unfortunately, such intervention strategies have not proven significantly effective. Smolak, et. al. found that developing strategies for critically evaluating media messages, along with a focus on nutrition, dieting, self-esteem and reducing the stigma associated with obesity, result in an increase in knowledge, but have little overall effect on body image or eating-related

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<sup>69</sup> J. Shaw and G. Waller, "The Media's Impact on Body Image: Implications for Prevention and treatment," *Eating Disorders* 3 (1995): 115-123.

<sup>70</sup> Leslie Heinberg and Kevin Thompson, "Body Image and Televised Images of Thinness and Attractiveness: A Controlled Laboratory Investigation," *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 14 (1995): 325-338.

<sup>71</sup> Rita Freedman, "Cognitive-Behavioral Perspectives on Body Image Change," in *Body Images: Development, Deviance, and Change*, Ed. Thomas Cash and T. Pruzinsky, (New York: Guilford Press, 1990): 272-295.

attitudes and behaviors.<sup>72</sup> In their survey of research aimed at resisting thin-ideal internalization, Thompson and Heinberg conclude that it is “not enough to teach girls and women to reject problematic media messages.”<sup>73</sup> They recommend the positive effects on boycotting advertisers who promulgate a thin-ideal and writing letters of complaint to executive members of corporations whose advertisements are offensive.

Studies *do* indicate that reduced exposure to media promulgating a thin-ideal may result in reduced body dissatisfaction and disordered eating symptomatology. A 2003 study found that girls who significantly increased their exposure to fashion magazines had increased symptomatology, whereas girls who had significantly decreased their exposure to fashion magazines exhibited decreased symptomatology.<sup>74</sup> Vaughan and Fouts, the authors of the study, write that

girls may seek particular media exposure to (a) learn how to become thinner and/or more attractive; (b) identify wishfully with magazine models and television characters who have body shapes they admire; and (c) provide a basis of social comparison, which may serve as additional motivation to lose weight. That is, as girls increase their media exposure, their eating disorder symptomatology may also increase. As their symptomatology increases so may their media use, thus producing a spiral of reciprocal influence and exacerbation of a preexisting condition. On the other hand, girls who decrease their media exposure may concomitantly decrease their eating disorder symptomatology. This could be due to improved social skills, increased internal locus of control, and greater positive self-concept as they negotiate early adolescence.<sup>75</sup>

This study implies that changes in magazine exposure could be related to changes in eating disorder symptomatology. In their conclusion, Vaughan and Fouts offer a suggestion as to why

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<sup>72</sup> L. Smolak, M.P. Levine, and F. Schermer, “Lessons from Lessons: An Evaluation of an Elementary School Prevention Program,” in *The Prevention of Eating Disorders*, ed. G. Van Noordenbos and W. Vandereycken (London: Athlone, 1998), 137-172.

<sup>73</sup> Kevin Thompson and Leslie Heinberg, “The Media’s Influence on Body Image Disturbance and Eating Disorders: We’ve Reviled Them, Now Can We Rehabilitate Them?,” *Journal of Social Issues* 55, no. 2 (1999): 339-353.

<sup>74</sup> Kimberley K. Vaughan and Gregory T. Fouts, “Changes in Television and Magazine Exposure and Eating Disorder Symptomatology,” *Sex Roles* 49, no. 7 (October 1, 2003): 313-320.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

reduced exposure to media may be more effective in reducing eating disorder symptomatology than media awareness campaigns:

Although public service announcements in the media that target children and adolescents are helpful in promoting healthy living . . . they may not tap the emotional processes (e.g., emotion regulation/ dysregulation) that contribute to and/or mediate the relationship between changes in media use and eating disorder symptomatology.<sup>76</sup>

It seems as if preliminary empirical research suggests that restraining oneself from viewing media images promulgating a thin ideal is an effective technique in improving body satisfaction and reducing eating disorder symptomatology. Curbing the appetite to see such images, in other words, may very well have an effect in reducing eating disorder predisposition and maintenance. On this note, Rebecca Glauert, et. al., in their recent study of exposure to thin-ideal images conclude:

Women's perceptions of body normality and ideal were easily malleable by exposure. In addition, greater body dissatisfaction and internalization of the thin Western ideal were related to (i) a smaller most normal and ideal body, (ii) a greater discrepancy between the most normal and most ideal-rated body, and (iii) a reduced effect of exposure to fat bodies. *Reduced updating of perceptions of body normality and body ideals in response to experience may be one mechanism that maintains body dissatisfaction.*<sup>77</sup>

I want to suggest that such “reduced updating of perceptions” is precisely the act necessary for the development of temperance. It is a matter of not consenting to the pleasure that may come from seeing glossy magazine cover of an ultra-thin bikini-clad woman or super-skinny supermodel. One may look at such magazines and feel a twinge of desire: “If only I looked like that.” Upon rationally recognizing that one's desires are out of line with what one knows rationally (“That woman is too skinny!”), the temperate course of action would be to avert one's eyes, to look at something else. In such a way, one can begin to retrain the appetite to desire

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 318.

<sup>77</sup> Glauert and et. al., “Body Dissatisfaction and the Effects of Perceptual Exposure on Body Norms and Ideals.” Italics added.

those things which one knows to be rationally desirable, healthy, and virtuous. By avoiding thin-ideal images in popular media, one can conceivably, at least to some degree, resist the internalization process by which one becomes conformed to these images and subsequently experiences greater body dissatisfaction and eating disorder symptomatology.

## V. Temperance as Satisfying Desire

Restraining the visual appetite from thin-ideal images is indeed necessary for the development of temperance regarding these images. By restraining from extremely thin-ideal images, even if one inwardly desires to see the images these magazines contain, one may not only develop the inward disposition to resist looking at these magazines, but eventually may overcome the desire to look at these images at all. One may begin to regard such images on the affective level with disgust and revulsion rather than desire. When one's desires are aligned with what one rationally knows to be the right thing to do, one is said to have a virtue. Aquinas calls the person who struggles to oppose dangerous pleasures "continent" in that her appetite and reason are not aligned, but continence is a necessary step on the path to development of a full virtue.<sup>78</sup>

The need to resist exposure to thin-ideal images, especially as portrayed in women's fashion magazines, has also been recognized by certain feminists. In her pivotal book *The Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolf expresses her pessimism regarding the possibility of changing media images:

The marketplace is not open to consciousness-raising. It is misplaced energy to attack the market's images themselves: Given recent history, they were bound to develop as they

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<sup>78</sup> II-II, Q. 155, art. 1: "Continence has something of the nature of a virtue, in so far, to wit, as the reason stands firm in opposition to the passions, lest it be led astray by them: yet it does not attain to the perfect nature of a moral virtue, by which even the sensitive appetite is subject to reason so that vehement passions contrary to reason do not arise in the sensitive appetite."

did. While we cannot directly affect the images, we can drain them of their power. We can turn away from them, look directly at one another, and find alternative images of beauty in a female subculture. . . We can lift ourselves and other women out of the myth—but only if we are willing to seek out and support and really look at the alternatives.<sup>79</sup>

Most feminist writers, however, do not recommend a “fashion magazine boycott” or advocate avoiding exposure to magazines that promote an unrealistic thin ideal. Understanding the importance of temperance and the moral psychology underlying this critical virtue may lead to a more widespread recognition that it is not enough to simply know that women’s magazines promote an unrealistic ideal; true resistance to the negative impact these magazines have must also be seen as a matter of abstaining from looking at them.

One possible response to this argument is that it is excessively negative in its focus on restraining the appetite. Nick Austin, SJ, whose own work on temperance has been both inspiration and information for my own position, argues that “temperance, currently, is a public relations disaster.”<sup>80</sup> He cites Herbert McCabe in arguing for a more comprehensive, positive, and attractive approach to temperance: “The business of acquiring temperateness is more usually a matter of restraining appetite than encouraging it. Here too, however, education cannot consist solely of negative prohibitions: it is more fruitful to make the good attractive than the bad repulsive.”<sup>81</sup> Austin goes on:

This is a delicate balance to strike: to recognize the moral importance of restraint, and yet present temperance as more than the avoidance of excess and dissipation; to renounce judgmentalism without surrendering judgment; to avoid moralism without ceasing to be moral. A rhetorical strategy of ‘just say no’ is likely to be ineffective. Indeed, a purely proscriptive approach is counter-productive, as it lends to the prohibited activity the allure of transgression. Thomas provides a more helpful principle: ‘good is a more powerful mover than evil, because evil does not move except in virtue of the good’ (I-II.60.5 ad 4). What we need . . . is a new rhetoric for temperance, one that portrays it as

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<sup>79</sup> Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (Random House, Inc., 1997), 377.

<sup>80</sup> Austin, 323.

<sup>81</sup> Herbert McCabe, *On Aquinas* (Continuum, 2008), 169.

more than a virtue of mere negation, but shows that it is founded on the deeper affirmation of positive values. We need to show that temperance is attractive.<sup>82</sup>

Austin's point is that a characteristic mark of true temperance is that it regards suitable objects with desire, and experiences joy at the possession of such objects. Because the experience of temperance should not only be revulsion in the presence of an unsuitable object, but also desire and enjoyment in the presence of suitable objects, the acts by which temperance is acquired must include something beyond mere restraint from unsuitable goods. Temperance also requires the *pursuit* of suitable goods. The development of temperance requires a dialectic of restraint and pursuit, or as Austin describes it, "fasting and feasting."

Caroline Knapp, however, who struggled for many years with anorexia, illustrates in her book on female appetites the danger of thinking exclusively in terms of dialectic between restraint and indulgence, which she claims is precisely what women with eating disorders do:

Satisfying hungers, taking things in, indulging in bodily pleasures—these are not easy matters for a lot of women. . . [there is] a suspicion among many women that hungers themselves are somehow invalid or wrong, that indulgences must be earned and paid for, that the satisfaction of appetites often comes with a bill. Eat too much, want too much, act too sexual or too ambitious or too hungry, and the invoice will arrive, often delivered with an angry hiss of self-recrimination. You're a pig, a sloth; you suck. Desire versus deprivation, indulgence versus constraint, nurturance versus self-abnegation; these are on this stage, the lead players in a particularly female drama.<sup>83</sup>

Knapp recognizes that restraint can actually lead to excessive desire and over-indulgence in another area. Although she was not eating, she was excessive in her consumption of cigarettes and alcohol. The dialectic of restraint and indulgence in her own experience did not lead to moderation of consumption, the goal of temperance. Rather, it led to a split self that was both overly restrictive and overly excessive.

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<sup>82</sup> Austin, 325.

<sup>83</sup> Caroline Knapp, *Appetites* (Counterpoint Press, 2004).

By way of alternative, Knapp presents the following reflection of Renoir's painting "Bathers":

The women linger at the water's edge, and they are stunning in the most unusual way: large women, voluptuous, abundant, delighted. They lounge along the river bank, they lift their arms toward the sun, their hair ripples down their backs, which are smooth and broad and strong. There is softness in the way they move, and also strength and sensuality, as though they revel in the feel of their own heft and substance.

Step back from the canvas, and observe, think, feel. This is an image of bounty, a view of female physicality in which a woman's hungers are both celebrated and undifferentiated, as though all her appetites are of a piece, the physical and the emotional entwined and given equal weight. Food is love on this landscape, and love is sex, and sex is connection, and connection is food; appetites exist in a full circle, or in a sonata where eating and touching and making love and feeling close are all distinct chords that nonetheless meld with and complement one another.<sup>84</sup>

Knapp then goes on to describe her own battle with anorexia and her eventual encounter with a therapist who was particularly interested in appetite. She recognized, with the help of this therapist, that she simply did not know how to enjoy herself, how to take delight in any particular experience, how to really experience pleasure. The goal of her book is to answer the question: "what liberates a person enough to indulge appetite, to take pleasure in the world, to enjoy being alive? Within that question lies the true holy grail, the heart of a woman's hunger."<sup>85</sup>

Women do not know what they want, argues Knapp, largely because they are distracted by false desires created and cultivated by consumer culture. By constantly consuming media (Knapp does not focus on magazines though she does emphasize the particular egregiousness of this mode of media), women are habituated to say "I want, I want," but never given the resources to turn inward, to identify their true desires:

Beyond the world of appearances and consumer goods, expression of physical hunger and selfish strivings rarely meet with such consistent support. . . The onset of a

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<sup>84</sup> Caroline Knapp, *Appetites* (Counterpoint Press, 2004).

<sup>85</sup> Knapp, *Appetites*, 21.



complicated set of conflicts between an expansive array of options on one hand and a sense of deep uncertainty on the other, a feeling that this freedom was both incomplete and highly qualified, full of risks. . . as though I were standing before an enormous table of possibilities with no utensils, no serving spoons, no real sense *that I was truly entitled to sample the goods , to experiment or indulge or design my own menu.*<sup>86</sup>

In fact, the consumer culture is meant to do precisely this—distract women from discovering their authentic desires: “Things—identifiable objects, products, goals with clear labels and price tags, men you’ve known for five minutes make such a hand repository for hungers, such an easy mask for other desires, and such a ready cure for the feeling of edgy discontent that emerge when other desires are either thwarted or unnamed.”<sup>87</sup> Freedom allows a woman to discover her own desires and to satisfy them, but this process of turning inward to answer what it is that she wants necessitates a refusal to turn outward in search of ready-made answers:

Steering hope away from false gods, shepherding the focus back toward the heart, learning to see one’s private pain in a larger context, coming to link body with spirit. This of course is the essence of revolutionary work, and it always requires the reframing potential of language, the ability of words to fuel insight, rearrange facts, break down old paradigms. A psychiatrist tells me about her efforts to get women to think differently about sexuality, which is often a battle fought with words: Her patients get terribly hung up on language; they hear the word sexy and they thin, a black garter belt that you never wear; . . . She is forever steering her clients away from imagery, forever telling them, This is junk, forget about, this is a bubble-gum fantasy dreamed up for men, it has nothing to do with reality, all it does is keep you disconnected from your body.<sup>88</sup>

Identifying desire, defining desire, satisfying previously unknown hungers, according to Knapp, requires developing a vision that runs counter to consumerism. For each woman, this process will be different. Each woman will have to develop in her own language an alternative vision. But on one point, Knapp is clear. The new vision does not exist in *Glamour* magazine or *Redbook*. One must direct one’s vision away from such ready-made solutions if one is to see oneself clearly. Knapp provides a powerful example of this process of turning away from

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<sup>86</sup> Knapp, *Appetites*, 38-9.

<sup>87</sup> Knapp, *Appetites*, 143.

<sup>88</sup> Knapp, *Appetites*, 159-60.

consumer culture in order to turn inward to the place of real feminine desire in her description of Leslie who read the book called *Fat!So?: Because You Don't Have to Apologize for Your Size*, by Marilyn Wann and subsequently realized that “there are people who exist in the world with fat bodies and healthy egos and a full range of entitlements, shame-free. She has not dieted since. *She stopped poring through women's magazines for weight loss tips and dieting how tos.* She gave up the constant vigilance and worry. She began to inhabit her body, instead of fighting it, and to embrace the idea of her own presence.”<sup>89</sup> She describes how daunting this is, having to talk to friends about being fat, facing criticism that she is angry or accusations of not having willpower:

Leslie's stance on fat required a fundamental reframing of values, and a slow stripping away of the most ingrained assumptions behind them . . . In an act that seems to cast the matter of choice in a new light, Leslie has reinvented [the master], altered its conception of identity, traded in the words *I want to be skinny* for something considerably broader and less enslaving: *I want to be myself, I want to have a life beyond the scale and the calorie counting, I want my sense of dignity and value and strength to exist independently of my width.*<sup>90</sup>

Nowhere in the book does Knapp use the word “temperance,” perhaps because of the word's excessively negative connotation with restraint. But the book is a description of precisely what temperance is—a freedom to truly enjoy those things conducive to one's happiness. The acts by which temperance is acquired—restraint and pursuit—must be understood within a teleological framework. We do not restrain because restraint is good; we restrain for the sake of something. We restrain for some goods so that we may be free to pursue greater ones.

Knapp's reflection also illustrates the necessary connection between temperance and prudence. Prudence functions to intend and choose actions that will lead to the right realization of one's appetite. As Keenan notes, “its [prudence's] twin function of perfecting practical reason

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<sup>89</sup> Knapp, *Appetites*, 114. Emphasis added.

<sup>90</sup> Knapp, *Appetites*, 117.

and leading the inclination to their virtuous realization is what gives prudence the overarching role of directing the entire person in the way of life.”<sup>91</sup> Josef Pieper refers to prudence as making possible a true knowledge of reality and a realization of the good: “He alone can do good who knows what things are like and what their situation is,” Pieper writes.<sup>92</sup> He goes on

There can be false and corked ways leading even to right goals. The meaning of the virtue of prudence, however, is primarily this: that not only the end of human action but also the means for its realization shall be in keeping with the truth of real things. This in turn necessitates that the egocentric ‘interests’ of man be silenced in order that he may perceive the truth of real things, and so that reality itself may guide him to the proper means for realizing his goal.<sup>93</sup>

Pieper goes on to connect prudence and justice in that the person who does not look at herself with the clear eyes of prudence in turn cannot look at others truthfully, and hence cannot be just.<sup>94</sup> It is the task of prudence to see the truth beyond the thin-ideal, and to recognize that excessive thinness as promoted in thin-ideal media images is not an effective means of achieving the end of temperance—the pleasures afforded by this life. It is also prudence which dictates the means to achieving the temperance envisioned by Knapp. It is prudence which seeks out other sources of sensory pleasure outside the thin-ideal: rowing on the Charles, contemplating fine art, refusing to diet.

Austin is right to say that temperance cannot be solely reduced to restraint. Through prudence, the temperate person has a habit of responding to sense impressions which are beautiful.<sup>95</sup> The temperate person knows how to properly enjoy bodily pleasures, but she knows how to experience pleasure with a sense of peace and tranquility. Another way of looking at temperance, rather than a dialectic of restraint and pursuit, might be in terms of *depth* of

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<sup>91</sup> James Keenan, “The Virtue of Prudence,” in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, Ed. Stephen Pope, 263.

<sup>92</sup> Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (Pantheon Books, 1954), 10.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>95</sup> II-II, Q. 141, art. 2, ad. 3.

pleasure. Perhaps we can simply enjoy certain pleasures more when there are less to enjoy. The pleasures of sex can be pursued with depth when there is only one partner with whom to pursue them. The pleasure of art can often be enjoyed more when there is only one piece in front of you to really contemplate. According to this way of looking at temperance, we do not restrain in order to justify indulging at a later time, nor do we fast so that we may feast. We restrain because such restraint is a prerequisite for enjoyment. Perhaps more importantly, restraint is what makes the *freedom* to enjoy possible.<sup>96</sup> Paradoxically, as Knapp's book so beautifully illustrates, without restraint, there is no freedom. This is not a dialectic of fasting and feasting or of withholding the appetite from pleasure in order to indulge in pleasure later. It is rather a recognition that without restraint, there *is* no pleasure. It is a restraint for the sake of pursuing what is really desired. What one pursues, says Knapp, is not so important as that one is free to pursue.

Knapp discovered and was able to fulfill one of her own authentic desires by rowing on the Charles River, an activity which gives her the sense of spiritual and corporeal satisfaction she sees in the women in the Renoir painting. But knowing such pleasure could even exist required, just as it had for Leslie, a fundamental reframing of values, a voluntary turning *away* for the sake

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<sup>96</sup> The difference between Austin's approach and my own is more a matter of emphasis than substance. Austin acknowledges the importance of restraint, and at times, acknowledges it as the primary "mode" or "formal cause" of temperance. He does, however, think that for his purposes, the importance of restraint has been overemphasized. He writes, "Admittedly, there is a possibility that someone could abstain to excess. For example, Thomas warns against fasting to such an extent that the body does not have what it needs (II.II.147.1). Yet the desires for food, drink and sex are biologically based impulses that can exhibit extraordinary power and tend to overrun their bounds. The primary mode of temperance, therefore, must be one of restraint. The argument is successful insofar as it shows that restraint is required with regard to the passions of attraction: the mode of temperance, then, must include restraint. Yet . . . human beings can go wrong with regard to passions, not only by letting them outrun their due bounds, but also by failing to integrate them properly into the life of virtue. There is therefore a twofold challenge posed by the matter of temperance: not only to restrain our appetitive inclinations, but also to form and integrate them according to reason. Corresponding to this twofold challenge, then, I claim that Thomas would have done better to propose a twofold mode of temperance, involving not only restraint, but also the due ordering of the passions of attraction. Not to acknowledge this more positive side to the mode of temperance would be to concede too much to a Stoic, anti-passion version of temperance." (Austin, 75). My concern is that in the effort to identify a more positive, attractive mode of temperance, Austin at times goes too far in neglecting to identify the positive role Aquinas already ascribes to the primary mode of restraint.

of turning *towards*. To find authentic satisfaction on a morning row, to enjoy a well-prepared meal, and to see the beauty of a Renoir painting rather than thinking dismissively, “Feh, fat people,” requires a freedom that only temperance informed by prudence can provide.

Knapp’s account of turning inwardly to discover one’s own authentic desires by turning away from ready-made answers generated by consumer culture has particularly strong parallels with Josef Pieper’s discussion of temperance as “selfless self-preservation:”

Temperance implies that man should look to himself and his condition, that his vision and his will should be focused on himself. That notion that the primordial images of all things reside in God has been applied by Aquinas to the cardinal virtues also: the primordial divine mode of *temperantia*, he states, is the “turning of the Divine Spirit to Itself.” For man, there are two modes of this turning toward the self: a selfless and a selfish one. Only the former makes for self-preservation; the latter is destructive. In modern psychology we find this thought: genuine self-preservation is the turning of man toward himself, with the essential stipulation, however, that in this movement he does not become fixed upon himself. (“Whosoever fixes his eyes upon himself gives no light.”) Temperance is selfless self-preservation. Intemperance is self-destruction through the selfish degradation of the power which aims a self-preservation.<sup>97</sup>

Temperance is, therefore, the proper love of self. Temperance is not merely restraining some desires and indulging in others. Temperance is rather the identification of those desires which are most authentic, which most come from inside the person, in order to fulfill those desires.

But, as Pieper notes, “without rational self-restraint even the natural hunger for sense perception or for knowledge can degenerate into a destructive and pathological compulsive greed.”<sup>98</sup> Pieper goes on to note that intemperance is the destruction of the self, the endless pursuit of things which ultimately do not satisfy, and make a person incapable of both self-knowledge and also knowledge of true reality:

If such an illusory world threatens to overgrow and smother the world of real things, then to restrain the natural wish to see takes on the character of a measure of self-protection

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<sup>97</sup> Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 147-48.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

and self-defense. *Studiositas*, in this frame of reference, primarily signifies that man should oppose this virtually inescapable seduction with all the force of selfless self-preservation; that he should hermetically close the inner room of his being against the boisterous pseudo reality of empty shows and sounds. It is in such an asceticism of cognition alone that he may preserve or regain that which actually constitutes man's vital existence: the perception of the reality of God and His creation, and the possibility of shaping himself and the world according to this truth, which reveals itself only in silence.<sup>99</sup>

## VI. Conclusion

Empirical studies on resisting thin-ideal internalization provide a practical illustration of the role of temperance in the moral life. Body dissatisfaction and eating pathology are positively correlated with exposure to images endorsing a thin-ideal, and negatively correlated to neutral images. Additionally, body dissatisfaction and eating pathology tends to decline when exposure to such images declines, indicating that restraining from looking at such images is, to some extent, an effective strategy of resisting the attitudes and behaviors associated with eating disorders. We have described this phenomenon in terms of connaturality. Exposure to a thin-ideal renders one connatural to that ideal such that one judges it on an appetitive level as suitable or worthy of desire. It is through temperance that a person becomes connatural to true goods, that is, goods conducive to flourishing. The development of temperance is, however, dependent on acting ways conducive to the development of the virtue, namely by refraining from the pursuit of a thin-ideal in order to render a person no longer connatural to it.

We have also seen that restraint is only part of the picture. Restraint, in Thomas' teleological framework is always *for the sake of* enjoyment. Restraint gives a person the freedom to enjoy. Temperance, in this sense, is a liberatory virtue. Temperance frees us from the pursuit of false desires and allows us to identify and satisfy those desires which are authentically ours.

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<sup>99</sup> Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 203.

Of course, the argument of this chapter focuses on the individual. Temperance is primarily, though arguably not exclusively, an individual virtue.<sup>100</sup> Sarah Grogan notes that this focus on the individual is perhaps one reason why feminist authors do not advocate a widespread boycott on women's magazines:

[Some feminist writers] believe that women (as a group) should reject traditional media conceptions of body image completely. Wendy Chapkis argues that women need to reject traditional cultural ideals and celebrate the 'natural body.' Sandra Bartky promotes a revolutionary aesthetic of the body which perceives a range of body shapes to be acceptable, and which challenges traditional conceptions of 'slim as beautiful.' One of the difficulties inherent in these approaches is they are long-term solutions, and solutions that many not be acceptable to many women because they would involve separation from mainstream culture. An alternative is to challenge the media, and the beauty and fashion industries, to force changes.<sup>101</sup>

Joseph Pieper says that the purpose of temperance as inherent self-love is not, however, a love which seeks itself blindly, but "with open eyes endeavors to correspond to the true reality of God, the self, and the world."<sup>102</sup> It is only through temperance that a person may find happiness.

In the next chapter, we will further complexify this notion of the relationship between temperance and happiness, and the way in which the ubiquity of a thin ideal makes full restraint impossible, thus rendering women in this society always to some extent connatural to a thin-ideal, indicating the need for another principle in the moral life to facilitate the achievement of happiness, grace.

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<sup>100</sup> Austin argues convincingly that temperance is both an individual and social virtue and his arguments for this claim will be examined in the following chapter.

<sup>101</sup> Grogan, *Body Image*, 114-15.

<sup>102</sup> Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 149.

## Chapter Five

### Re-Habituation, Continued: The Theological Dimension of Integral Human Flourishing

- I. Happiness: The End of Virtue**
  - a. Flourishing: The Final Cause of Virtue*
  - b. Perfect Beatitude*
  - c. Imperfect Beatitude*
- II. The Limits of Virtue: Socialization and Relating to a Thin-Ideal of Female Beauty**
  - a. True Temperance in Relation to a Thin-Ideal of Female Beauty*
  - b. The Social Context of Character Development*
  - c. Algorithm-Driven Contextual Advertising: A Contemporary Illustration of the Way Social Context Limits the Development of Virtue*
  - d. Thin-Ideal Internalization and Social Sin*
- III. Graced Human Flourishing: Transforming the Vision of a Thin-Ideal**
  - a. The Theological Virtues and Gifts of the Holy Spirit*
  - b. The Role of Grace in Natural Human Existence*
  - c. Living a Graced Human Life in Light of a Thin-Ideal of Female Beauty*
  - d. Humility and Social Conversion*
- IV. Conclusion**

We have already seen how the development of temperance is dependent on right actions, necessarily connecting temperance and prudence. This connection indicates the overall role of the intellect in moral action as one which “is certainly not one of control and is more collaborative than directive.”<sup>1</sup> Temperance requires that a person *restrain* from pursuing things reason determines are not conducive to overall happiness, and *pursue* objects which reason determines ultimately are conducive to happiness. The goal of temperance is that one may begin to judge these good objects consistently, swiftly, and pleasurably through connaturality.

In the last chapter, we focused on the relatively easy example of how a thin-ideal is communicated through women’s fashion magazines. In this chapter, we will expand our scope to see how a thin-ideal is ubiquitous in American society—on television, in movies, in newspapers, and especially in internet advertising. No matter how much a woman restrains from

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<sup>1</sup> Ryan, “Affective Knowledge in Aquinas,” 59.



pursuing a thin-ideal, she is constantly bombarded with it every time she goes on the internet, even to check her email. This challenges the extent to which she can develop temperance, and consequently happiness, in this life. Aquinas borrows from Cicero on this point, stating that “*consuetudo quasi natura est*” (custom is like second nature).<sup>2</sup>

The seeming implication of the ubiquity of a thin-ideal is that women in this society will never achieve the true happiness that comes from virtue. Morally, one may address this problem as pointing to the need for social reform. While social reform is absolutely necessary, Thomas’ virtue ethics also offers resources on an individual level for those suffering from the effects of society’s acceptance of the validity of the thin ideal. Grace works in the moral life to help suffering and oppressed individuals transcend their unjust social conditions. Grace also transforms the individual on the affective level, by making her connatural with divine things, thus continuing the focus of this dissertation on the affective component of moral knowledge. Grace, however, is not something which works against a person’s nature, but rather with (*cum*) her nature, perfecting her appetites and capacities and directing them ultimately towards their ultimate goal. It is appropriate, therefore, to contextualize the discussion of grace in the moral life within a larger discussion of happiness.

## **I. Happiness: The End of Virtue**

### *a. Flourishing: The Final Cause of Virtue*

Thomas’ virtue ethics is a teleological moral system in which all acts are ordered to some end, and it is from the end toward which these acts are oriented that they obtain their moral status. In addressing the end (or final cause) of virtue, Aquinas distinguishes between the *proximate* and *remote* end. The proximate end of the virtue is the “operation itself,” that is, the

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<sup>2</sup> II-II, Q. 49, art. 2.

virtuous action. The remote end of the virtue is what those virtuous actions are ultimately for. This remote end Aquinas calls happiness.<sup>3</sup> The idea here is that virtue is oriented towards virtuous action, but that those actions are oriented towards another end of happiness. Virtuous actions are defined as such because they are ordered to this remote end. In other words, the “restraint” constitutive of temperance (say, restraining from looking at thin-ideal images) would be considered restraint conducive to temperance because it was oriented towards the remote end of beatitude (flourishing).

At this point, we may ask what such flourishing looks like on a more substantive level. According to scholars within the psychosocial sciences, human flourishing connotes a sort of “optimal development” of the person, consisting of three main components. First, *physical well-being* is strongly associated with a person’s flourishing. This is not just the absence of physical disease or handicaps, but rather a more holistic notion, as found in the World Health Organization’s definition of health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”<sup>4</sup> Health might therefore more appropriately be defined as “soundness of body.” This is closely related to the second component of flourishing—*psychological health*—which has become the focus of positive psychology and can be defined a number of ways including “self-actualization,”<sup>5</sup> “objective

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<sup>3</sup> Recall that Aquinas begins his moral treatise in the *Secunda pars* not with freedom, law, or conscience, but rather on the question of the finality of moral agency. His argument in these introductory articles is that a person’s ultimate goal, that towards which all their actions are oriented, is happiness (*beatitudo*) or flourishing. Substantively, as we will see, this flourishing consists in friendship with God.

<sup>4</sup> “WHO | Frequently asked questions,” <http://www.who.int/suggestions/faq/en/index.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Abraham Harold Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, 3rd ed. (HarperCollins Publishers, 1987). In his research on human motivation, Maslow posited a hierarchy of needs progressing from physiological concerns, to safety, to belongingness and love, to finally the need for esteem, with lower needs being met before higher ones. The ultimate goal of self-actualization is described as a state of actualized potentialities on a variety of levels including the ability to accept and deal with oneself, one’s environment, other people, and one’s ultimate goals. Characteristic of the self-actualized person were what Maslow called “frequent peak experiences,” feelings of awe and wonder and hope which positively transformed normal daily life.

happiness,”<sup>6</sup> or “optimal functioning.”<sup>7</sup> As Titus notes, “of particular interest is a continuum model of health that identifies neither with any one definition nor with the popular notion of health as a static state. Instead it views health as a continuum or composite of sensation, perception, cognition, and emotion, which forms an overall healthy pattern of experience and behavior.”<sup>8</sup> Finally, psychosocial flourishing encompasses also *social health*, which includes sound relationships, love, and care.

Aquinas would agree that each of these dimensions of “optimal development” is necessary for happiness. Temperance informed by prudence acts to order the concupiscible appetite towards those physical and psychological goods conducive to “optimal development.” This is what distinguishes true temperance from false (or apparent temperance)—true temperance is directed towards the real psycho-social good of the person. With the input of the psychosocial sciences, we get a better idea of what constitutes this real psycho-social good. Accordingly, we can say that satisfaction with one’s body is constitutive of the psycho-social good of the person, thus necessitating the act of restraint towards those things ultimately not conducive to achieving this (thin-ideal images).

Aquinas’ approach to human flourishing, however, goes beyond what is offered by the psychosocial sciences in both its complexity and comprehension. First, Aquinas repeatedly insists that the ultimate human end (*telos*) is twofold (*duplex*). The natural human end is that which is achievable by the natural capacities without the influx of divine grace. The other

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<sup>6</sup> D. Kahneman, “Objective Happiness,” in *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology*, Ed. D. Kahneman, E. Diener, and N. Schwarz (Russell Sage Foundation: New York, 1999), 3-25.

<sup>7</sup> Positive psychology is a relatively new discipline which studies the factors that allow individuals, communities, and societies to flourish by focusing on the role of positive emotions such as joy, interest, contentment, and love as markers and producers of “optimal well-being.” See Christopher Peterson, *A Primer in Positive Psychology*, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press, USA, 2006); Martin Seligman, *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment* (Free Press, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Titus, *Resilience and the Virtue of Fortitude*, 106.

“supernatural” end is possible only by means of divine grace.<sup>9</sup> Some have interpreted Aquinas in saying that there are two competing ultimate ends, or that the supernatural end is not related at all to the natural end.<sup>10</sup> However such an interpretation threatens the unity of the moral self.<sup>11</sup> Supernatural happiness does not replace natural happiness, but rather, profoundly affects the way in which natural happiness can be achieved in this life. Through its orientation towards a higher goal than “optimal flourishing,” the human appetite pursues things which are not only conducive to health and happiness, but also conducive to union with God. This transforms the nature of the actions a person may prudentially seek out in order to develop temperance and the other virtues necessary for flourishing. As we will see in the next chapter, actions like fasting, prayer, and worship, in their orientation towards a supernatural end, can help develop in the person temperance and the other virtues necessary to live a good life and achieve union with God. However, in this chapter we will examine how the supernatural end is not a superfluous end with only “other-worldly” implications. Rather, this supernatural end is necessary even in this life because of sinful conditions which make the development of virtue incredibly difficult, if not impossible to achieve. Aquinas is realistic about the power of sin to limit the development of virtue, and as such, grace is necessary not only to direct the person towards her supernatural end (union with God), but also to make possible the attainment of her natural end. By rendering

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<sup>9</sup> “There is a twofold ultimate perfection of rational or of intellectual nature. The first is one which it can procure of its own natural power; and this is in a measure called beatitude or happiness. Hence Aristotle (Ethic. x) says that man’s ultimate happiness consists in his most perfect contemplation, whereby in this life he can behold the best intelligible object; and that is God. Above this happiness there is still another, which we look forward to in the future, whereby ‘we shall see God as He is.’ This is beyond the nature of every created intellect” (I, Q. 62, art. 1). See also I-II, Q.3, art. 6.

<sup>10</sup> For a more thorough treatment of this debate, see Denis J.M. Bradley, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good: Reason and Human Happiness in Aquinas’ Moral Science* (Catholic University of America Press: Washington DC, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> Andrew J. Dell’Olio, *Foundations of Moral Selfhood: Aquinas on Divine Goodness and the Connection of the Virtues* (Peter Lang Publishing, 2003).

creatures connatural with a supernatural end, God also helps the rational creature transcend the unjust social systems which thwart the development of virtue in this life.

b. *Perfect Beatitude: Supernatural Happiness*

In Question two of the *Prima Secunda*, Aquinas considers an exhaustive list of possible candidates for human happiness, including wealth, honor, glory, power, goods of the body, pleasure, and goods of the soul. All of these he finds lacking in terms of providing complete and lasting human flourishing. Despite the importance of the external and internal goods of this life, Aquinas nevertheless rejects all other goods but God as constituting complete, or perfect, human flourishing. Only God, in other words, can fully satisfy the rational creature's desires:

It is impossible for any created good to constitute man's happiness. For happiness is the perfect good, which lulls the appetite altogether; else it would not be the last end, if something yet remained to be desired. Now the object of the will, i.e. of man's appetite, is the universal good; just as the object of the intellect is the universal true. Hence it is evident that naught can lull man's will, save the universal good. This is to be found, not in any creature, but in God alone; because every creature has goodness by participation. Wherefore God alone can satisfy the will of man, according to the words of Psalm 102:5: 'Who satisfies thy desire with good things.' Therefore God alone constitutes man's happiness.<sup>12</sup>

The various affective yearnings of the person points to her need for ultimate satisfaction in God, as Dell'Olio observes:

The soul is not a complete being in-itself; it is a process of becoming. Indeed, it is a process of becoming in relationship to that which is fully perfective of it, namely God, who is absolute perfection or goodness-itself. This is the metaphysical basis or the objective state of affairs that corresponds to the subjective experience of the restlessness of the heart, the passionate striving that Augustine believed characterized human existence: 'You have made us tending toward yourself (*ad te*), and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.'<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup><sup>12</sup> I-II, Q. 2, art. 8

<sup>13</sup> Dell'Olio, *Foundations of Moral Selfhood*, 68.

In other words, we are made *by God for God*, an end that can only be achieved by the participation in God's very existence; this end, Aquinas notes in the Prologue of the *Prima Secundae*, exists in a special way for rational creatures.<sup>14</sup> This is why the fulfillment of the perfection of the rational creature cannot be achieved by means of a rational creature's natural internal capabilities—something from without is needed, which Aquinas identifies as the infusion of divine grace, by which the creature is rendered capable of “a kind of participation in divinity.”<sup>15</sup>

This supernatural end of the rational creature is not a dominant *telos*, at the expense of all other human ends, but rather, an inclusive one. Even if the ultimate perfection of the rational creature consists in the intimate union with God, it is still the creature, in her substantial unity of body and soul, which tends towards this ultimate *telos* in her desire for perfection. This “tending toward perfection” is reflected in the variety of appetites within the person—those inclinations towards the good which the rational creature needs to achieve her own perfection. It is the whole person, consisting of body, will, and intellect, involved in this appetitive seeking of the good:

The person becomes its full self through its relationships to others, whether the others are objects of desire, persons, or God. The self becomes perfected through its relatedness or ‘openness’ to object of desire that are good, that is, are perfective of the self by virtue of

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<sup>14</sup> “Since, as Damascene states (*De Fide Orthod.* ii. 12), man is said to be made to God's image, in so far as the image implies *an intelligent being endowed with free-will and self-movement*: now that we have treated of the exemplar, *i.e.*, God, and of those things which came forth from the power of God in accordance with His will; it remains for us to treat of His image, *i.e.*, man, inasmuch as he too is the principle of his actions, as having free-will and control of his actions” (ST, “Prologue”).

<sup>15</sup> I-II, Q. 62, art. 1: “Now man's happiness is twofold, as was also stated above (Question 5, Article 5). One is proportionate to human nature, a happiness, to wit, which man can obtain by means of his natural principles. The other is a happiness surpassing man's nature, and which man can obtain by the power of God alone, by a kind of participation of the Godhead, about which it is written (2 Peter 1:4) that by Christ we are made ‘partakers of the Divine nature.’ And because such happiness surpasses the capacity of human nature, man's natural principles which enable him to act well according to his capacity, do not suffice to direct man to this same happiness. Hence it is necessary for man to receive from God some additional principles, whereby he may be directed to supernatural happiness, even as he is directed to his connatural end, by means of his natural principles, albeit not without Divine assistance. Such like principles are called ‘theological virtues’: first, because their object is God, inasmuch as they direct us aright to God: secondly, because they are infused in us by God alone: thirdly, because these virtues are not made known to us, save by Divine revelation, contained in Holy Writ.”

their own perfection. Our ‘openness’ to the good we desire thus allows the self to be ‘formed in the good.’<sup>16</sup>

A basic Thomistic tenet is that grace perfects, not destroys, nature. We can think of the rational creature’s ultimate perfection—its supernatural beatitude—as a continuation of the imperfect beatitude it achieves in this life. The rational creature’s ultimate supernatural end does not negate its natural end. There is one ultimate end for the human being—union with God—which is achieved in different degrees through the various activities of the rational creature *in this life*, activities which achieve their perfection when helped by the infusion of grace. Grace elevates all the internal capabilities of the human person to their supernatural fulfillment. As Thomas Gilby notes, “Morality is part of the business of living, and on this earth, not in heaven; it is a category affecting wayfarers, *viatores*, not those possessing eternal happiness, *comprehensores*.”<sup>17</sup> The emphasis on grace in this chapter and in Aquinas is not intended to advocate for a supernatural or otherworldly morality, but rather to show the implications of grace on moral action in this life. As Titus notes, Aquinas’ “emphasis on the beatific vision does not . . . distance the whole person from the search for and participation in that flourishing that already finds partial fulfillment in the present through love of the good, prayerful meditation, contemplation of beauty, and study of truth.”<sup>18</sup>

### *c. Imperfect Beatitude: The Happiness of this Life*

Imperfect beatitude should not be considered a separate or competing end from supernatural beatitude. Aquinas treats imperfect beatitude not in order to show how the rational person can achieve happiness outside of God’s grace, but rather, to show how grace works

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<sup>16</sup> Dell’Olio, *Foundations of Moral Selfhood*, 68.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Gilby, Appendix 5, vol. 18 of Blackfriars edition of *Summa Theologiae*, 142.

<sup>18</sup> Titus, *Resilience and Fortitude*, 102.

through the natural capacities of the person to direct her towards God. In Aquinas' moral theory, imperfect beatitude consists in the development of the full range of human powers. We can see the parallel here with the psychosocial sciences in defining flourishing as "optimal development." Aquinas' idea of "optimal development" is dependent on the development of the natural virtues. Virtue specifies what is necessary for a fulfilled human existence at the natural level. Any particular action takes its virtuous character from this natural, albeit it, imperfect end to which the rational creature is connatural. Connatural with physical and psychic health, temperance directs the appetite away from those things which endanger health and toward those things which support health.

Connaturality with the natural end is sufficient for the rational creature to develop those habits necessary to achieve the natural end. In other words, a person is naturally capable of achieving the end to which she is connatural. By making us naturally connatural with health, God has given us the internal powers necessary to achieve health. Moreover, we know what constitutes health in action because of our connaturality with this end—doing things conducive to health are pleasant and doing things conducive to illness are repugnant.

Our potencies toward achieving this end, however, are undeveloped (and, of course, limited to some extent by sin). These potencies must be actualized through habituation. Through acquiring habits, an aptitude is acquired in the sensitive and intellectual appetites to achieve a given end. In other words, a person is not connatural with health in the way a heavy object is connatural with the center of the earth. Acquired connaturality is based on natural connaturality, but is not fully determined by nature. There are many ways a person may achieve health. Some may run marathons and eat a high protein diets while others may do yoga and eat only an organic vegetarian diet. In each case, the acquired "second" nature is different from the



natural “first nature,” but it is not *indifferent*. In each particular case, the end (in this case, health) determines the goodness of the acquired habits for achieving this end.

We can see more clearly why looking at thin-ideal images may be bad from a moral perspective. While looking at such images is not in and of itself bad, it helps to habituate a person (to acquire a second nature) which is ultimately not conducive to her natural end. By looking at thin-ideal images, a woman becomes more dissatisfied with her body to the extent to which it does not conform to the thin-ideal. She subsequently chooses actions with the goal (*telos*) of conforming to the extreme thinness embodied in these images. Many of these actions like extreme dieting or laxative abuse or vomiting are not conducive to overall health. As such, we can say that the desire to conform to an extremely-thin ideal is not a virtuous desire because it is not conducive to a woman’s optimal flourishing.

## **II. The Limits of Virtue: Socialization and Relating to a Thin-Ideal of Female Beauty**

### *a. True Temperance in Relation to a Thin-Ideal of Female Beauty*

In light of this discussion of happiness, let us think about how temperance may be developed through prudence regarding thin-ideal images. Throughout a person’s life, she is exposed to many different images in different contexts. Upon reflection, she may discover that she derives pleasure from looking at women’s fashion magazines under certain contexts—at the gym, in waiting rooms, on her subway commute. How is she to know if her pleasure is consistent with her ultimate goal to be happy (i.e. how is she to make a prudential judgment)? She may ask herself, “How do I feel about myself after looking at *Cosmo* for an hour?” or “How do I look at my friends differently when I read *Self* at the gym?” She may discover that she feels

more insecure about her body after reading these magazines. She may feel a greater desire to diet, or to start exercising more regularly, or even to experiment with laxatives and diuretics. She may find herself spending more time examining her friends' bodies, and comparing herself to them. And she may conclude that this is not the sort of person she wants to be. If her goal in life is to be a confident, self-assured woman who sees the beauty of her friends in more ways than in the size and shape of her bodies, she may decide that the frequency with which she reads fashion magazines, or the types of magazines she is reading, or the level of seriousness with which she approaches the content of the magazines is not conducive with her good and her goals. This interiority and self-knowledge is integral in the development of temperance.

*b. The Social Context of Character Development*

Yet, she may not be able to approach her consumption of magazines in such a cool and detached way, especially if she has become thoroughly connatural to thinness as a good, and in particular, if those around her have become thoroughly connatural to thinness as a good. If everyone around her believes that one must to be extremely thin in order to be healthy and happy, it may be difficult, and even impossible, for a woman to recognize that looking at thin-ideal images in magazines is making her less healthy and *unhappier*. Our social context determines to a great extent what we consider good and ultimately conducive to happiness. Thomas has been criticized for neglecting the importance of social context in the development of virtue. Jean Porter argues that Aquinas' virtue ethics needs reformulation in that he "has no sense of the dynamic development of the psyche, and perhaps more importantly, he also has very little sense of the significance of social forces in shaping individual identity."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Jean Porter, *Moral Action and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 167. Craig Steven Titus, I think rightly so, responds that Porter's critique is "overstated." He writes, "There is no reason to defend Thomas for not having foreseen contemporary debates (and advances) concerning human individuation and socialization."

The virtuous person is able to “rationally reflect on her actions” in light of her goals and the person she wants to become. But Porter is right to point out that this process is challenged or facilitated by the way in which a person has been socialized. Porter’s point is that the way in which a person interacts with her community, i.e., how she is socialized, is integral to how well she is able to engage in the sort of rational reflection necessary for the development of virtue.

Lisa Tessman also recognizes both the usefulness and limits of virtue ethics for discussing human flourishing in light of the powerful ways in which environments socialize people. In her book *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles*, Tessman argues that virtue ethics is useful in theorizing about oppressive social contexts because it directs one to focus on moral selves rather than social structures.<sup>20</sup> Tessman’s focus throughout the book is the way in which “being oppressed” limits one’s potential for developing the virtues necessary for flourishing. Tessman recognizes that in the process of character development, “one cannot act as an autonomous agent whose actions result solely from her will. One cannot simply will one’s character to change.”<sup>21</sup> Tessman’s description of the way in which oppressive systems limit the development of virtue echoes in Marilyn Fry’s “Oppression.”

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However, we need to look deeper in order to examine the developmental insights that Aquinas expresses through his moral anthropology” (Titus, *Resilience And the Virtue of Fortitude*, 180.)

<sup>20</sup> Lisa Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2005), 11. “Oppression can be seen as interfering with flourishing [in that] it creates circumstances external to the oppressed agent (whether that agent be virtuous or not) that limit options so that every way one turns one runs into barriers that make it difficult or impossible to gain or be granted freedom. . . . In response to this way in which oppression interferes with flourishing, political resisters must fight for structural changes to remove the barriers, and indeed, these are that the sorts of changes that (radical) resistance movements do focus on. While I certainly think that fighting for structural changes is of primary importance in the struggle against oppression, what I have focused on here is tied to the second way in which oppression interferes with flourishing, something that is less often attended to by oppositional communities, perhaps because it cannot be addressed solely through structural changes. The second way in which oppression interferes with flourishing is that it gives rise to moral damage in the oppressed agent; one way that it does this is by creating inclinations that conflict with liberatory principles, thus barring the possibility of full virtue” (27).

<sup>21</sup> Tessman, *Burdened Virtues*, 23. Tessman cites Sandra Bartky in her observation that “the politics of personal transformation has tended to proceed on the false assumption that a feminist-oriented change in character is at least largely a product of will and that it can follow from feminist conscious-raising” (Tessman, 24). Bartky claims that “feminism lacks an effective political practice around issues of personal transformation.” (Sandra

The experience of oppressed people is that the living of one's life is confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable, but are systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict or penalize motion in any direction. It is the experience of being caged in: all avenues, in every direction, are blocked or booby trapped.<sup>22</sup>

The social context of virtue is a major emphasis in the work of moral philosopher

Alasdair MacIntyre. "I am never able to seek for the good or exercise the virtues only *qua* individual," writes MacIntyre in *After Virtue*. "I inherit from the past my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. These constitute the given of my life, my moral starting point."<sup>23</sup> MacIntyre contrasts his conception of the "socially-embedded individual" with the notion of the individual put forth by modern liberalism:

From the standpoint of individualism I am what I myself choose to be. I can always, if I wish to, put in question what are taken to be the merely contingent social features of my existence. I may biologically be my father's son; but I cannot be held responsible for what he did unless I choose implicitly or explicitly to assume such responsibility. I may legally be a citizen of a certain country, but I cannot be held responsible for what my country does or has done unless I choose implicitly or explicitly to assume such responsibility. Such individualism is expressed by those modern American who deny any responsibility for the effects of slavery upon black Americans, saying, 'I never owned any slaves.'<sup>24</sup>

Although the moral self is, according to MacIntyre, a social self, brought into the world already bearing certain communal features of her identity, he does not conclude that the self is thereby *determined* by her heritage, or that she does not have responsibility for her own moral development. The particularities of our birth, biology, family, and nation may constitute our particular moral starting point, but the search for the good is a universal which transcends these

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Bartky, "Feminine Masochism and the Politics of Personal Transformation, Femininity and Domination (Routledge: New York, 1990), 61).

<sup>22</sup> Marilyn Frye, "Oppression," *The Politics of Reality* (Crossing Press: Trumansburg, NY, 1983), 4.

<sup>23</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 220.

<sup>24</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 220.

particularities.<sup>25</sup> However, an ethic of virtue, if it is to be realistic, must account for these particular circumstances in which the universal good is sought. Thus, a virtue-based approach to morality must examine the social and environmental forces which facilitate or hinder the development of virtue. For those who suffer from the psychopathologies of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, there are biomedical and psychological factors to take into account. More importantly for our purposes is the fact that the social context in which women habituate themselves in this country is one which affirms the value of extreme thinness as healthy and beautiful. Women in this country are born into a society which teaches them to actualize their desires for health and beauty through conformity with an extremely-thin ideal. Moreover, the more women internalize this ideal, the more prevalent it becomes, and the stronger the social acceptance of its validity becomes. We can see how this plays out through online contextual advertising.

*c. Algorithm-Driven Contextual Advertising: A Contemporary Illustration of the Way Social Context Limits the Development of Virtue*

Contextual advertising is a form of behavioral advertising in which companies track consumer's activities online in order to deliver advertising targeted specifically to the individual consumer's interest. Companies engaging in behavioral advertising keep track of consumer's internet searches, the Web pages they visit, and the type of content they view on these websites.<sup>26</sup> Contextual advertising depends on a complex network of advertisers, publishers, ad networks, and consumers. The *advertiser* is the company trying to sell or promote a product through internet ads. The *publisher* is the owner of a web page on which advertisements appear, who is trying to generate revenue through advertising. The *ad networks* serves as a mediator

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<sup>25</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 221.

<sup>26</sup> "FTC Staff Proposes Online Behavioral Advertising Privacy Principles," *Federal Trade Commission*, December 20, 2007, <http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2007/12/principles.shtm>.

between the advertiser and publisher, selling the algorithm to generate context-appropriate ads and sharing revenue with the publisher.

Finally, there are the internet users or *consumers* who generate revenue for the ad network and publisher by clicking on advertising links in what is called a *pay-per-click model* (PPC)—the advertisers pay the publisher according to the number of clicks per advertisement, usually a fee of \$0.03-0.05 per click. This fee is normally determined by an auction process in which advertisers bid on search phrases and the position in which their ad will appear on the publisher's site. More frequently-used phrases and site locations with more user traffic are more expensive. The pages and ads are matched by an algorithm which classifies both into a common taxonomy of ascending specificity. Each category of the taxonomy is represented as a collection of “bid phrases” corresponding to that category. For example, the query “Paris bistro” might be categorized under the category of “travel,” “restaurant,” and “food.” Advertisers can bid on these words or phrases to have their ad appear at a certain frequency whenever these phrases occur. Travelocity, for example, may bid to have an ad for “Flight deals to Paris” occur when this particular phrase appeared, as may Petit Robert bistro, a popular French restaurant in Boston. Obviously, the Travelocity ad will get more clicks since it appeals to a more general interest—flights to Paris—based on the keywords used, as opposed to Petite Robert, which will likely only appeal to Boston residents or visitors. Consequently, ad networks are constantly trying to improve the algorithm and taxonomy to generate only the most appropriate—and likely to get clicked--advertisements.<sup>27</sup>

These advertising tools have become indispensable to companies trying to cultivate a web presence in advertising, and they are often the main source of revenue for publishers maintaining

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<sup>27</sup> Andrei Broder et al., “A Semantic Approach to Contextual Advertising,” in *Proceedings of the 30th Annual International ACM SIGIR Conference on Research and Development in Information Retrieval* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: ACM, 2007), 559-566, <http://portal.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=1277837>.

a webpage. Many are surprised to find that Google, the leading online destination in every country, generates 99% of its \$21-billion per year annual revenue from advertising.<sup>28</sup> The algorithm used by Google's AdWords not only displays contextual ads on publisher's pages, but also makes it exponentially more likely that an ad will appear again and again if a user clicks on it. If we take the above example of the search query "Paris bistro," Travelocity's ad for "Travel deals to Paris" will show up more frequently the more people click on it. In turn, Petit Robert's ad will show up less frequently as it is usurped by ads receiving greater user traffic.

As people become more reliant on the internet for news, information, entertainment, and networking, and as internet-based technologies like iPhones, Droids, and Apple's new Tablet become cheaper and more widely available, the exposure to advertising will steadily increase. Moreover, weight loss, beauty, and food are some the most popular ad categories people are exposed to. According to a report by the National Advertising Review Council (NARC) and the Better Business Bureau (CBBB), leading product categories in advertising are food and beverages, dietary supplements, and household and beauty products, with internet advertising dominating the market.<sup>29</sup> It is within these categories that a thin-ideal of beauty is most widely promulgated. FatLoss4Dummies.com, FireYourFat.com, and similar sites can now bid to have their ad appear when an internet user searches for food, health, and beauty-related products, thus dramatically increasing the number of viewers exposed to their advertising. Unlike magazine ads which are targeted towards a specific audience of those buying the magazine (and can generally be avoided by simply not buying or reading the magazines), internet advertising promulgating a thin-ideal reaches a much wider audience, and is much more difficult—if not

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<sup>28</sup> Andrew Goodman, *Winning Results with Google Adwords* (McGraw Hill Professional, 2008), 9.

<sup>29</sup> Lee Peeler, *CBBB Statement to Congress on Advertising Trends and Consumer Protection* (Washington D.C., 2009), <http://www.bbb.org/us/article/cbbb-statement-to-congress-on-advertising-trends-and-consumer-protection-11635>.

impossible—to avoid. These advertisements appear on a wide variety of websites, including news and information-related websites like CNN.com, NYTimes.com, and FoodNetwork.com. Contextual advertising on the internet thus provides a good contemporary example of an *oppressive social structure* (to use Tessman's language) which limits the ability of many individuals to develop the virtues necessary for flourishing.

On average, US internet users spend an average of 66 hours per month (over two hours a day) on the internet.<sup>30</sup> In that time, a woman is exposed to hundreds of ads per hour, many of which promote a thin-ideal of feminine beauty.<sup>31</sup> Some argue that it is not just the increased exposure in terms of time that makes internet advertising so potentially damaging to women—it is also the highly interactive nature of the internet. Many ads have images which flash or move, and contextual advertising makes it possible constantly to change which specific ads a woman sees based on the popularity of a given advertisement.

It seems fair to argue that women in the US have been socialized in such a way as to severely limit their ability to engage in the rational self-reflection necessary for the development of virtue. By choosing to look at thin-ideal images by clicking on an internet ad, we are making it more likely that other women will see those images when they surf the web. Moreover, contextual advertising makes it more likely that women will see these images when they use the internet to search for health products or food recipes. This means that a woman may be trying to actualize her potential for health (which she pursues because she knows that health is part of being happy) when she goes on the internet to look for a healthy winter soup recipe or medical facts about body mass. If, however, she sees on the webpage an image of an ultra-thin model

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<sup>30</sup> Nielsen Company, "U.S. Web Users Spent Just Over 66 Hours on the Computer in November," *Nielsen Wire*, December 14, 2009. [http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online\\_mobile/u-s-web-users-spent-just-over-66-hours-on-the-computer-in-november/](http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online_mobile/u-s-web-users-spent-just-over-66-hours-on-the-computer-in-november/)

<sup>31</sup> "The average person sees between 400 and 600 ads *per day*—that is 40 million to 50 million by the time s/he is 60 years old. One of every 11 commercials has a direct message about beauty (this isn't counting the indirect ones)," (Mimi Nichter, "Hype and Weight," *Med-Anthropology*, 13 (3) (September 1991): 249-84).



with the words “Lose ten pounds of belly fat,” she becomes more likely to judge ultra-thinness as conducive to health. The ubiquity of thin-ideal images, particularly on the internet, makes it less likely that women will judge these images as not conducive to their ultimate happiness.

The empirical literature on thin-ideal internalization indicates that the more women are exposed to these images, the more likely they are to be dissatisfied with their bodies. Aquinas’ understanding of temperance in light of the empirical studies indicates that if women restrain from looking at such images, they can over time become more satisfied with their bodies and overall happier. But if the thin-ideal is everywhere, how reasonable is it to say that women simply need to restrain from looking at it? While many feminist and sociocultural approaches to eating disorders would emphasize the need for social reform, internet advertising illustrates the limit to any attempt to reform a society which has so internalized a thin-ideal. Thin-ideal images are everywhere, and the more women seek them out, the more prevalent they become and the more widespread their acceptance on an appetitive level. It is sufficient to say that on a social level, women in this country simply do not know how to be beautiful or healthy outside of an extremely thin-ideal. The unjust social context limits the ability of women in this country to actualize their potential to achieve their natural end. In theological terms, we call this sin.

#### *d. Thin-Ideal Internalization and Social Sin*<sup>32</sup>

Traditionally, sin defines a “word, deed, or desire contrary to the Law of God.”<sup>33</sup> The question of the larger dimension of sin that transcends individual choices started to receive more

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<sup>32</sup> The use of the term “social sin” here goes beyond, but not against, the Thomistic notion of sin. Accordingly social sin is used here as sin only by analogy, with personal sin constituting the primary analogue. There is extensive debate about the nature of social sin, especially in the modern and contemporary period following a recognition of the inadequacy of a purely individualistic notion of sin as promoted by the manualist tradition (See Jack Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to fully enter into and respond to each contour in this debate. For a helpful overview, see Mark O’Keefe, *What are They Saying About Social Sin?* ((New York): Paulist Press, 1990).

ecclesial attention at the turn of the twentieth century and became a major point of focus in the Second Vatican Council. The pastoral constitution on the Church *Gaudium et spes* states,

Socialization, as it is called, is not without its dangers.... While on the one hand in fulfilling his calling (even his religious calling) man is greatly helped by life in society, on the other hand it cannot be denied that he is often turned away from the good and urged to evil by the social environment in which he lives and in which he is immersed since the day of his birth. Without doubts frequent upheavals in the social order are in part the result of economic, political, and social tensions. But at a deeper level they come from selfishness and pride, two things, which contaminate the atmosphere of society as well. As it is, man is prone to evil, but whenever he meets a situation where the effects of sin are to be found, he is exposed to further inducements to sin, which can only be overcome by unflinching effort under the help of grace.<sup>34</sup>

After Vatican II, the concept of social sin became a great point of emphasis in Catholic moral theology, especially in light of the evolution of liberation theology. In 1971, the World Synod of Catholic Bishops released a document entitled *Justice in the World*, which highlighted the new attention devoted to structural sin:

This [aspiring to justice] however will not satisfy the expectations of our time if it ignores the objective obstacles which *social structures* place in the way of conversion of hearts, or even of the realization of the ideal of charity. It demands on the contrary that the general condition of being marginal in society be overcome, so that an end will be put to the systematic barriers and vicious circles which oppose the collective advance towards enjoyment of adequate remuneration of the factors of production, and which strengthen the situation of discrimination with regard to access to opportunities and collective services from which a great part of the people are now excluded.<sup>35</sup>

A key point in this particular passage is that social sin requires a “conversion of hearts,” what we might call an affective reorientation toward the good.

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<sup>33</sup> I-II, Q. 71, art. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Paul VI, Pastoral Constitution of the Church, *Gaudium et spes*, #25, December 7, 1965.  
[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html)

<sup>35</sup> World Synod of Catholic Bishops, “Justice in the World,” (1971), 16.  
[http://www.osjspm.org/majordoc\\_justicia\\_in\\_mundo\\_offical\\_test.aspx](http://www.osjspm.org/majordoc_justicia_in_mundo_offical_test.aspx)

There are clear parallels between the theological treatment of social sin and the process of internalizing a thin-ideal of female beauty, especially in the way we have been treating the moral dimensions of the latter. In his introduction to social sin, Mark O’Keefe writes,

In large measure persons learn their attitudes, values and views of reality from the societal structures in which they are born. What has become objectified becomes internalized. . . If the structures of the society into which one is born enshrine certain values, then one is likely to be aware of and accept these values. . . Bernard Häring in particular emphasizes the importance of society as a teacher of value. The ability to apprehend value is crucial to moral formation since conscience itself is formed in relationship to the social context in which the moral agent finds himself or herself. . . individuals can be ‘blind’ to values precisely because society has failed to embody or enshrine these values.<sup>36</sup>

The language is different, but the idea is the same—certain values inscribed into the very structures of society, in this case, equating female beauty with extreme-thinness—inhibits the ability of people within that society to develop the internal powers necessary for flourishing:

By clouding their perception of values in general or of significant particular values, social sin disposes persons to choose lesser values in particular situations because the higher values cannot be clearly perceived. Further, even where the values are perceived with some clarity, one’s freedom of choice may not be sufficiently strong to act on one’s vision. One sees the values present in the situation, but one is unable to choose appropriately because of habitual patterns of acting built on bad examples offered by others.<sup>37</sup>

This description sheds light on the problem of media advertising and the onset of eating disorders. The advertising industry uses certain models as paradigms of beauty because those models are desirable to consumers, and in turn, consumers find these images desirable because the advertising industry uses them. As a result, consumers and advertisers have a distorted image of beauty and health. This dialectical relationship between consumers and advertisers is

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<sup>36</sup> Mark O’Keefe, *What Are They Saying About Social Sin*, 50. O’Keefe goes on to note the distinctly theological implications of social sin: “All-pervasive blindness to value . . . is found in varying degrees in those who have made a wrong ‘fundamental option’ and thus have failed to find their own true identity. Blind to the most basic and absolute value which is God, they are blind also to other values. This blindness is, however, never absolute and final as long as moral freedom and responsibility can be awakened” (51).

<sup>37</sup> O’Keefe, *What Are They Saying About Social Sin*, 63.

mutually reinforcing. If social and personal sin are thought of as coessential, the solution to the advertising industry's use of distorted images of beauty and health cannot be attributed to just individual action. As O'Keefe notes, "Social sin not only perpetuates injustice, it may also dispose individuals to further personal sin. It does so by clouding their knowledge of values and by crippling their ability to freely choose the good."<sup>38</sup> We might say the sinful social structure women find themselves in makes it difficult, if not impossible, to turn the appetite to anything other than an ultra-thin ideal.

Are we simply to conclude that the ubiquity of a thin-ideal prevents women from fully flourishing? The language of sin points to the need for something beyond the language of social reform. The language of sin points to the need for grace. The personal infirmity and damage caused by social injustice can ultimately find full healing only in God's grace. Aquinas argues that human beings need God's grace at two levels: first, for doing good, and second, for healing the broken human nature, damaged as a result of sin.<sup>39</sup> Regarding this second level, Aquinas says that in the present state of sin, human nature is unable to accomplish even the good which is connatural to it, "just as a sick man can of himself make some movements, yet he cannot be perfectly moved with the movements of one in health, unless by the help of medicine he be cured."<sup>40</sup>

Sometimes talk of grace in the moral life is used to underscore the necessity of human action. However, if we understand grace as the power which makes the person connatural with an end surpassing her nature—union with God—we can move beyond petty dualisms that pit grace against works and see rather how grace operates through natural human desires to point her towards her good which sin may prevent her from seeing. In other words, grace (particularly as

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>39</sup> See I-II, Q. 111, art. 3.

<sup>40</sup> I-II, Q. 109, art. 2.

mediated through the practices of the Christian community, as we will see in the next chapter) can assist in reconnaturalizing a person in accord with authentic flourishing in this life, even in the midst of oppressive social structures.

### III. Graced Human Flourishing: Transforming the Vision of a Thin-Ideal

#### a. *The Theological Virtues and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit*

We have already noted that in Aquinas, the moral virtues are connected by prudence. Prudence, however, is also connected with the theological virtue of charity (*caritas*). Aquinas says that the moral virtues are connected through prudence in a similar way that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are connected through charity.<sup>41</sup> This raises a question regarding the role of charity in the moral life. Although Aquinas is clear that virtue is theoretically possible without infused grace, he does say that without charity, the virtues are “imperfect,” i.e., they do not attain the last end.<sup>42</sup>

Aquinas links the moral virtues to the natural perfection of the human person, arguing that the moral virtues remain “imperfect” because, although they direct the human person to her natural end, they do not bring her to her *ultimate* end—God. Charity, on the other hand, brings the human being to a greater degree of perfection than the acquired moral virtues, because it enables the rational creature to participate in the true good, the Divine Goodness.<sup>43</sup> Charity and

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<sup>41</sup> II-II, Q. 68, art. 5: “As the powers of the appetite are disposed by the moral virtues as regards the governance of reason, so all the powers of the soul are disposed by the gifts as regards the motion of the Holy Ghost. Now the Holy Ghost dwells in us by charity.”

<sup>42</sup> II-II, Q. 23, art. 7: “There is, however, another act of one lacking charity, not in accordance with his lack of charity, but in accordance with his possession of some other gift of God, whether faith, or hope, or even his natural good, which is not completely taken away by sin, as stated above (10, 4; I-II, 85, 2). On this way it is possible for an act, without charity, to be generically good, but not perfectly good, because it lacks its due order to the last end.”

<sup>43</sup> “The [second type of happiness] is a happiness surpassing man's nature, which man can obtain by the power of God alone, by a kind of participation of the Godhead, about which it is written (2 Peter 1:4) that by Christ we are made ‘partakers of the Divine nature.’ And because such happiness surpasses the capacity of human nature, man's natural principles which enable him to act well according to his capacity, do not suffice to direct man to this same happiness. Hence it is necessary for man to receive from God some additional principles, whereby he may be

other grace-inspired habits differ from the acquired habits in that their object and their cause is God, who is the ultimate end exceeding the natural capacities of the rational creature.<sup>44</sup> More specifically, whereas the moral virtues are acquired over time through habituation, the grace-inspired habits are infused directly by God. This means that, by grace, God infuses the habits necessary for both supernatural and natural happiness into the rational creature. By both habituation and grace, God directs the rational creature towards happiness.

Charity works with the acquired virtues to direct the person to her ultimate end. As Eberhard Schockenhoff writes, “Man’s path to God is thus though of not simply as a preparation for the reception of future happiness after death but rather as a *growth process of a happiness already realized initially in moral acts . . .*”<sup>45</sup> The inward movement of grace, cooperating with the natural interior movements of the sensitive appetite, will and intellect, is enacted by the infusion of the theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the Holy Spirit (and the corresponding fruits) are dependent on charity, for it is by charity that we are made connatural with God. Maritain observes:

As we confront God, there is no other way of going beyond knowledge through concepts except by making use, in order to know Him, of our very connaturality. . . What is it that makes us radically connatural with God? It is sanctifying grace whereby we are made consorts *divinae naturae*. And what makes this radical connaturality pass into act; what makes it flower into the actuality of operation? Charity. We are made connatural to God through charity.<sup>46</sup>

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directed to supernatural happiness, even as he is directed to his connatural end, by means of his natural principles, albeit not without Divine assistance. Such like principles are called ‘theological virtues’: first, because their object is God, inasmuch as they direct us aright to God: secondly, because they are infused in us by God alone: thirdly, because these virtues are not made known to us, save by Divine revelation, contained in Holy Writ” (I-II, Q. 62, art. 1).

<sup>44</sup> I-II, Q. 62, art. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Eberhard Schockenhoff, “The Theological Virtue of Charity,” translated by Grant Kaplan and Frederick G. Lawrence in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, edited by Stephen Pope, 245. Emphasis added

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 260. Maritain notes also how connatural knowledge is in a way more perfect than faith because it “is a suprahuman and supernatural mode of knowledge. The human and natural mode of knowing . . . consists in knowing by ideas or concepts, and consequently, in matters that concern divine things, by analogy with created realities, for the manner in which our concepts signify is determined by them. That is why faith, even though it does reach God according to His very inwardness and His proper life, *secundum suam propriam quidditatem*,

Charity works with the gifts of the Holy Spirit to direct the moral life to its ultimate end. The Holy Spirit provides a distinctively Christian form of assistance in the moral life. The gifts of the Holy Spirit (wisdom, understanding, knowledge, council, fortitude, piety, fear of the Lord) are grace-infused habits rendering a person connatural toward divine things. The effect of the gifts in the rational creature is a type of knowledge of the means and ends necessary for ultimate happiness, the pursuit of which begins in this life. This grace-inspired knowledge is not a rational knowledge in the form of commands and precepts, but a deeper kind of knowing, inexpressible in words and concepts, of what is good and true and how to act in order to achieve happiness. It is a connatural knowledge made possible by grace, rendering the soul “thoroughly mobile under divine inspiration.”<sup>47</sup> The connatural knowledge proper to the gifts, as other kinds of connatural knowledge discussed earlier, is knowledge which leads to action. It is *inclinal* knowledge, a knowledge which cannot remain idle but seeks to be in union with its object, which in this case, is God. John of St. Thomas makes this clear in his treatment of the gifts of the Holy Spirit:

Though the gifts are directed by the Holy Ghost, the purpose of his impulse is not to manifest the truth of objects, either intellectually or imaginatively conceived, as is the case with prophecy. According to St. Augustine, even an impulse which the human mind unknowingly receives is sufficient. There is required merely an interior movement, a divine stimulation, by which God moves man to the immediate experience of tasting and seeing that the Lord is sweet. Thus God becomes deeply rooted in souls and makes them connatural with divine things. . . . By this connaturality and intimate union to things divine, a man is made capable of penetrating more profoundly divine things and the mysteries of faith, of judging according to either secondary or ultimate causes, and of taking practical counsel in his actions.<sup>48</sup>

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reaches Him thus only at a distance and remains a mediate knowledge, enigmatic, in the words of St. Paul; in the sense that . . . faith has to make use of formal means, proportionate to our natural mode of knowing—concepts and conceptual formulas, analogical or rather superanalogical notions” (259).

<sup>47</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite or The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald Phelan, 4th ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), 260.

<sup>48</sup> John of St. Thomas, *The Gifts of the Holy Ghost*, 47.

We should not assume that these graced habits are unrelated to the acquired moral habits constituting the moral virtues. Rather, just as imperfect natural happiness is a participation in and a foretaste of supernatural perfect happiness, so too are the natural virtues of this life integrally connected to the supernatural virtues that make happiness in the next life possible. As John of St. Thomas notes, “From this connaturality, the gift of wisdom judges divine things. . . Prudence gives counsel in actions and according to a correct estimation of things to be believed, while the gift of understanding penetrates these matters of faith.”<sup>49</sup> Perhaps more importantly for our purposes, charity makes possible the attainment also of happiness in this life. The effects of charity in the soul are called the fruits of the Holy Spirit, most notable being the fruits of joy and peace. Through charity, a person is united to God as her ultimate satisfaction, and consequently experiences joy and peace. Schockenhoff writes,

External harmony is a necessary presupposition for peace, but this can only last if one lives with oneself in peace and finds the right order of one’s strivings, passions, and wishes. Yet both—the peace in the self and peace among the community—are only possible in God. For God is for each person the highest, unique fulfilling good, and at the same time, what is most in common for all. The longing of the human heart is so great and so deep that God alone is great enough to fill it.<sup>50</sup>

*b. The Role of the Grace in Natural Human Existence*

Aquinas does not conceive of the ultimate (supernatural) human end as a dominant human end, but rather as an inclusive one. Although ultimate happiness is a supernatural state of existence found only in the next life through the assistance of divine grace, it is a happiness which begins in this life, and indeed, a happiness which is a continuation and participation of what is begun on earth. By attending to the supernatural end of the rational creature, Aquinas in no way intends to neglect the importance of achieving happiness in this life through the perfection of the natural internal capabilities of the person. As Dell’Olio notes,

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<sup>49</sup> John of St. Thomas, *The Gifts of the Holy Ghost*, 48.

<sup>50</sup> Schockenhoff, “The Theological Virtue of Charity,” 256.



The natural perfection of the self as image of God is not unrelated to the supernatural perfection of the self as likeness of God. In a sense, the image of God in the human being is ‘nested’ in the likeness of God, in the way nature in general is nested within what transcends but also includes it. Image and likeness, nature and grace, exist together in the human being, in the context of the person’s movement in this life towards fulfillment and completion, that is, in the quest for self-perfection.<sup>51</sup>

By directing all her appetites to God through the infusion of grace, God is also redirecting those appetites which may have become misdirected through sin. In other words, grace renders the person able to transcend the way in which the world limits her ability to lead a good life and to flourish. Pieper explains this grace-infused view of virtue as giving the rational creature the ability to “hold as nought all the things of this world:”

By the superhuman force of grace-given love, man may become one with God to such an extent that he receives, so to speak, the capacity and the right to see created things from God’s point of view and to ‘relativize’ them and see them as nought from God’s point of view, without at the same time repudiating them or doing injustice to their nature.<sup>52</sup>

However, the “contempt” for the world motivated by charity is very different from a simple hostility to created reality. Pieper goes on,

Only a closer union with the being of God which is nourished by love raises the blessed man beyond immediate involvement in created things. At this point in our argument we reach a limit. Beyond that limit, only the experience of the saints can offer any valid knowledge, any valid comment. We would only remind our readers how intensely the great saints loved the ordinary and the commonplace, and how anxious they were lest they might have been deceived into regarding their own hidden craving for the ‘extraordinary’ as a ‘counsel’ of the Holy Spirit of God.<sup>53</sup>

This being said, Aquinas is clear that the imperfect or incomplete flourishing experienced in this life is *enhanced* by a participation in supernatural beatitude, which grants a foretaste of that ultimate fulfillment which is to come. This foretaste of supernatural happiness has

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<sup>51</sup> Dell’Olio, *Foundations of Moral Selfhood*, 89.

<sup>52</sup> Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 39.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

implications both for one's supernatural end (union with God) and one's natural end (living well in this life). In particular, by directing her actions toward her supernatural end, grace works to make possible in this life what was before extremely difficult or impossible.

Made docile to the Holy Ghost by the gifts, the soul is led to eternal life by conquering difficulties which exceed the power of human reason and the virtues. The more the soul approaches eternal life through acts of the gifts, the more it casts off the comforts and blandishments of this life. Its separation from the things of the world, from its delight and riches, gives it an approach to true happiness which is eternal life.<sup>54</sup>

Moreover, the gifts help the soul to overcome its erroneous pursuit of happiness in sensible goods, goods like those sought in thin-ideal images. When a woman desires extreme thinness because she has been rendered connatural to thin-ideal images, her desires are not consistent with true happiness. The gifts inspire her to resist this futile pursuit, and to seek beauty and happiness in objects which truly satisfy. John of St. Thomas notes that

Many err in seeking happiness in sensible things, whose opposition to spiritual goods makes them impediments to progress. Detachment from the goods of this life and the proper disposition to approach true happiness could never be accomplished through the rule of reason and the virtues in their human and limited way. . . . Only acts proceeding from the gifts through the motion and impulse of the Holy Ghost are equal to the task.<sup>55</sup>

Grace habituates the appetite to take pleasure in things which are ultimately conducive to happiness not through commands and rational precepts, but rather, through the sort of holy delight that comes from connaturality with the ultimate end. John of St. Thomas calls this a "taste and savor of divinity," what Aquinas refers to as the fruits of the Holy Spirit.<sup>56</sup>

In his discussion of the fruits, Aquinas illustrates how grace transforms action on an experiential level, by accompanying action conducive to one's ultimate end with a sort of holy delight, joy, and peace. In other words, the connaturality with the ultimate end satisfies the

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<sup>54</sup> John of St. Thomas, *The Gifts of the Holy Ghost*, 272.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 272.

<sup>56</sup> I-II, Q. 70, art. 2.

appetite in a way that transforms the pursuit of happiness in this life. In particular, the fruit of peace frees the soul from outside disturbances and internal restless desire.<sup>57</sup> Dell'Olio notes,

In a manner similar to Augustine in the *City of God* (19.12-13), for Aquinas, it is the peace that one possesses through the love of God that distinguishes the happiness in this life of those with infused virtues from those without such virtues. For in the case of those who experience the imperfect happiness of this life without the spiritual union with God that thoroughly satisfies the longing of the will, the desire for further goods still remains. 'For even though man has something he wants, his heart is restless as long as there still remains something else for him to want that he cannot at the same time have.' The external disturbances that thwart the attainment of such goods, however, do not affect the happiness of the person who enjoys the fruits of the spirit. For, as Aquinas says, 'he whose heart is perfectly satisfied by one thing is not able to be disturbed by anything else, since he values everything else as nothing' (I-I, Q. 70, art.3).<sup>58</sup>

Peace, therefore, is a result of the purity of the will which is not torn in different directions by opposing and conflicting desires. Peace is what the appetite experiences when it is able to desire ultimately the one good towards which all other goods are subordinated. Pieper's description of the grace-filled life in this life is particularly beautiful, and leads us into the practical ways in which these reflections can bear on the discussion at hand. Pieper writes that the grace-filled life grants the human person

. . . the fundamental attitude of justice toward the being of things and correspondence to reality. The eye of perfected friendship with God is aware of deeper dimensions of reality, to which the eyes of the average man and the average Christian are not yet opened. To those who have this greater love of God, the truth of real things is revealed more plainly and more brilliantly; above all the supernatural reality of the Trinitarian God is made known to them more movingly and overwhelmingly. Even supreme supernatural prudence, however, can have only the following aim: to make the more deeply felt truth

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<sup>57</sup> I-II, Q. 70, art. 3: "Now the perfection of joy is peace in two respects. First, as regards freedom from outward disturbance; for it is impossible to rejoice perfectly in the beloved good, if one is disturbed in the enjoyment thereof; and again, if a man's heart is perfectly set at peace in one object, he cannot be disquieted by any other, since he accounts all others as nothing; hence it is written (Psalm 118:165): 'Much peace have they that love Thy Law, and to them there is no stumbling-block,' because, to wit, external things do not disturb them in their enjoyment of God. Secondly, as regards the calm of the restless desire: for he does not perfectly rejoice, who is not satisfied with the object of his joy. Now peace implies these two things, namely, that we be not disturbed by external things, and that our desires rest altogether in one object. Wherefore after charity and joy, 'peace' is given the third place."

<sup>58</sup> Dell'Olio, *Foundations of Moral Selfhood*, 84.

of the reality of God and the world the measure for will and action. Man can have no other standard and signpost than things as they are and the truth which makes manifest things as they are; and there can be no higher standard than the God who is and His truth.<sup>59</sup> And of the man who ‘acts truth’ the Holy Scriptures (John 3:21) tell us that he ‘comes to the light.’

The appetite made connatural with its supernatural end can thus turn to transformative action in this life that would not be possible without divine assistance, transformative action which deepens the union with God within oneself and for others.

*c. Living a Graced Human Life in Light of a Thin-Ideal of Female Beauty*

By examining the exposure to a thin-ideal of human beauty, we have seen that every action, even the most seemingly mundane and ordinary like looking at a fashion magazine, are *moral* actions and contribute to the overall happiness of the moral agent. Aquinas’ virtue ethics reveals the importance of restraint in the moral life in order to cultivate the appetite to take pleasure in those goods truly conducive to happiness. Restraining from thin-ideal images is an important step in habituating the appetite to take proper pleasure things like body image and food.

However, in a society where the thin-ideal is so ubiquitous, how are women to fully restrain from seeking it out? Every time a woman goes on the internet, the value of extreme thinness is reinforced. Thomas’ virtue ethics allows us to acknowledge that true virtue—and true happiness—is impossible to fully achieve in this life due to the consequences of sin. The ubiquity of thin-ideal images illustrates this. As long as society is obsessed with extremely unnatural and unhealthy thinness as the ultimate standard of beauty, even the most confident woman is likely to feel a twinge of dissatisfaction when she compares herself with this standard.

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<sup>59</sup> Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 39-40.

Grace, however, grants the person a “renewed vision” which enables her to see herself in relationship with God, and to direct all of her actions towards ultimate union with God as her ultimate satisfaction. As Dell’Olio explains, the “purifying” or graced moral virtues

help the wayfarer to cling lovingly to God by a prudence which ‘in contemplating divine things, despise the things of this world and directs all its thoughts to God alone’ . . . a temperance that ‘relinquishes, as far as nature allows, the needs of the body,’ a courage or fortitude that ‘prevents the soul from excessively fearing the loss of the body and the ascent to heavenly things,’ and a justice whereby ‘the whole soul consents to following the ways thus proposed.’<sup>60</sup>

#### *d. Humility and Social Conversion*

The emphasis on the theological component of Aquinas’ virtue ethics and the impossibility of achieving happiness outside of grace points to the necessity of humility in the moral life. This move may seem counterproductive in light of the fact that humility is often connoted with subordination, which is clearly a problem for women whose connaturality with a thin-ideal of beauty prohibits them from flourishing. Yet, Aquinas’ notion of humility reconciles both the human capacity for greatness in the moral life with the human need for divine grace in order to achieve ultimate fulfillment.<sup>61</sup>

As Titus argues, “humility is endemic to Aquinas’ approach to Christian greatness and initiative” and is therefore integrally connected to a notion of magnanimity, or greatness of soul.

He writes,

Insofar as human beings are neither their own creator nor completely self-sufficient, they need the assistance of others (human and divine) and must put trust in them. The resources for this confident hope that we can triumph involve (1) recognizing the real dimension of our own strengths and resources, (2) observing friends’ capacity to aid us and other sources of help, and (3) believing in the promises of divine assistance. . .

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<sup>60</sup> Dell’Olio, *Foundations of Moral Selfhood*, 141-2.

<sup>61</sup> For a very fine treatment of humility in the moral life, see Lisa Fullam, *The Virtue of Humility: A Thomistic Apologetic* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2009). In this revision of her dissertation, Fullam argues that humility is a meta-virtue, a necessary prerequisite for the development of the other virtues necessary for flourishing.

Consequently, a person must have confidence not only in himself, in other human beings, and in society, but above all in the assistance and promises of God.<sup>62</sup>

Humility is the virtue which disposes the rational creature to seek out help from God and others in cultivating her own natural abilities. To humble oneself, according to Aquinas, involves acknowledging our limitations and dependency.<sup>63</sup> Whereas the acknowledgment of one's limitations may be accompanied by sorrow in light of what one *cannot* accomplish, grace-inspired humility grants a certain delight and peace in realizing one's dependence on others and on God.

Lisa Fullam says that humility is the virtue which “renders our self-assessment reasonable by inviting us to look outside ourselves.”<sup>64</sup> It is also the virtue which clears the mind to discern the right course of action through prudence even under the strong influence of the appetite. Humility is the virtue which makes possible prudential judgment regarding the thin-ideal even when the person's affective inclination is strongly oriented towards thinness. Humility is acquired by a practice of other-centeredness: “The process of other-centeredness requires us to make prudential decisions about who we will learn from. Who will we accept as

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<sup>62</sup> Titus, *Resilience and Fortitude*, 304. See II-II, Q. 129, art. 6, ad. 1: “it surpasses man to need nothing at all. For every man needs, first, the Divine assistance, secondly, even human assistance, since man is naturally a social animal, for he is sufficient by himself to provide for his own life. Accordingly, in so far as he needs others, it belongs to a magnanimous man to have confidence in others, for it is also a point of excellence in a man that he should have at hand those who are able to be of service to him. And in so far as his own ability goes, it belongs to a magnanimous man to be confident in himself.”

<sup>63</sup> “It belongs properly to humility, that a man . . . know his disproportion to that which surpasses his capacity. Hence knowledge of one's own deficiency belongs to humility” (II-II, Q. 161, art. 2); “It is contrary to humility to aim at greater things through confiding in one's own powers: but to aim at greater things through confidence in God's help, is not contrary to humility” (II-II, Q. 161, art. 2, ad. 2); “every man, in respect of that which is his own, ought to subject himself to every neighbor, in respect of that which the latter has of God's . . . a man may esteem his neighbor to have some good which he lacks himself, or himself to have some evil which another has not: by reason of which, he may subject himself to him with humility.” (II-II, Q. 161, art. 3); “We must not only revere God in Himself, but also that which is His in each one, although not with the same measure of reverence as we revere God. Wherefore we should subject ourselves with humility to all our neighbors for God's sake, according to 1 Peter 2:13, ‘Be ye subject . . . to every human creature for God's sake’; but to God alone do we owe the worship of latria” (II-II, Q. 161, art. 3, ad. 1).

<sup>64</sup> Fullam, *The Virtue of Humility*, 138.

moral teachers?”<sup>65</sup> Humility inclines one to solidarity, first by discovering that there are others who are in need of attention.

Humility is also true self-knowledge, and more specifically the knowledge that we have sinned, that we are sick, that we are in need of assistance. Humility is thus a prerequisite of grace: “Humility, in sense, enables wisdom to be acquired: the weakness revealed by honest self-examination leads us to allow grace to transform us.”<sup>66</sup> We can see then how humility is necessary for social conversion of sinful social structures. Social conversion goes beyond merely finding certain individuals to blame—advertisers, for example—but rather of acknowledging one’s own participation in sin via structures that induce and perpetuate sin. This implies that everybody involved in the advertising industry, including consumers, participate in its sinfulness.

The first step of social conversion, according to O’Keefe, is to recognize how sin has become rooted in a particular structure: “Such an analysis must be particularly sensitive to the complex and intricate interaction of structures of different types—for example, the relationship of economic structures and political structures (i.e. how money ‘talks’) and the relationship of political and religious structures (i.e. how religious symbols and myths can be used to legitimate political injustices.)”<sup>67</sup> The second step of social conversion, which is sometimes called *conscientization*<sup>68</sup> is acknowledging one’s own participation in sin by participation in a sinful structure: “All people must become aware of the manner in which structures operate, in which

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<sup>65</sup> Fullam, *The Virtue of Humility*, 158.

<sup>66</sup> Fullam, *The Virtue of Humility*, 94.

<sup>67</sup> O’Keefe, 89.

<sup>68</sup> See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. (Philadelphia: Westminister, 1974). See also Gust A. Yep, “Freire’s Conscientization, Dialogue, And Liberation: Personal Reflections on Classroom Discussions of Marginality.” *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies*, Volume 3, Number 2, (April, 1998), 159-66.

they lend passive or active support to them, and in which evil becomes embodied in these structures.”<sup>69</sup> Finally, social conversion must be initiated by a firm commitment to social action.

*Boycott Anorexic Marketing* and *About Face*, groups dedicated to stopping the practice of displaying underweight models in ads by identifying particularly egregious companies and organizing consumer boycotts, are examples of how this step of social conversion may be enacted. Another example is the Dove Self-Esteem Fund which is a network of local initiatives sponsored by the company Dove to support organizations that foster self-esteem in young girls.<sup>70</sup> Dove has also taken the initiative of using non-models to advertise for their products in what they call their “Campaign for Real Beauty.”<sup>71</sup> Dove’s campaign is intended to show how real women embody beauty in ways that do not conform to the societal standard of extreme thinness. These initiatives recognize that both consumers and advertisers are responsible for the promulgation of an extremely-thin ideal in media images, and as such, strive to initiate change on both the consumer-level and the corporate level. All of these are important steps in resisting the societal acceptance of thinness.

However, for Christians, recognizing and responding to social sin is an opportunity for personal conversion and openness to the role of grace in the moral life. It is a fundamental Christian affirmation that such conversion always occurs at God’s initiative. This occurs, however, with human cooperation, and indeed, human effort must be exerted on the path to conversion and its appropriation for the moral life. This knowledge of the role of God’s grace in bringing about individual and social change can help those deeply enmeshed in the unjust structure to not despair at the limitation of human efforts or the slowness of social change. As

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<sup>69</sup> O’Keefe, 88.

<sup>70</sup> <http://www.campaignforrealbeauty.com/supports.asp?section=&id=93>

<sup>71</sup> <http://www.campaignforrealbeauty.com/flat3.asp?id=2287>



Mark O’Keefe notes, “Sin, both social and personal, must always be understood within the broader context of God’s redeeming action in Christ and Christ’s victory over sin.”<sup>72</sup>

#### **IV. Conclusion**

This chapter tries to emphasize that grace does not simply grant a person an “other-worldly” focus, allowing her to put off happiness until the next life. Rather, grace transforms her abilities to achieve happiness in this life. Directed towards a supernatural end, moral actions constitutive of happiness in this life take on a new dimension. Through her connaturality with God, the person begins to desire and delight in those things ultimately conducive to her happiness. Moreover, grace makes it possible to transcend unjust social structures and participate in social conversion. The emphasis on grace in this chapter is to show that in Thomas’ virtue ethics, God is working in this life through the natural capacities of the person and through human social structures to lead people to happiness. In the next chapter, we will examine how the church through her practices of asceticism, prayer and worship, may also participate in this process of bringing grace to bear on action in social conversion.

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<sup>72</sup> O’Keefe, *What Are They Saying About Social Sin*, 97.

## Chapter Six

### The Role of the Church in Shaping Character: Practices for a “Dissatisfied Body of Christ”

- I. The Role of the Church in the Moral Life**
- II. Practices and Virtue**
  - a. What Are Practices?*
  - b. Practices Theologically Understood*
  - c. The Transformative Potential of Religious Practices*
- III. Ecclesial Practices for Forming a More Satisfied Body of Christ**
  - a. Asceticism*
  - b. Prayer*
  - c. Worship*
- IV. Conclusion: Eating Disorders and the Role of the Church**

It is appropriate at the end of our study of the moral dimension of eating disorders and body dissatisfaction to turn to the role of the church. While some works on eating disorders are skeptical of a specifically “Christian” contribution, and may place much of the blame for the current problems of eating disorders and body dissatisfaction on patriarchal forms of Christianity, this dissertation appreciates the way in which Christian theology and practices have positive value in the study of eating disorders. Lelwica, though ultimately wary of traditional Christian practices, does acknowledge the religious or spiritual nature underlying eating problems in women:

Many [girls and women] experience the rules and values of the dominant culture as void of truth, and they carry this void in their bodies, feeding it, starving it, vomiting it up. I characterize the hungers that this emptiness breeds as spiritual because I believe that they signal a desire for meaning and wholeness in the face of injustice, suffering, and uncertainty. To understand girls’ and women’s struggles with food and their bodies, we must see how these struggles function as precarious solutions to a crisis of meaning: as symbolic-ritualizing attempts to fill a void, to construct some hope. ‘Of course we went on a diet,’ a woman who

spent half of her young life purging, bingeing, and starving explained. ‘We were scared and hollowing out; we needed a religion.’<sup>1</sup>

In the last chapter, we saw how the desire for God has profound moral implications.

Lelwica’s comments confirm this, but they also raise the question of how current religious structures can satisfy this desire for God in women who look for spiritual satisfaction in extreme thinness.

The growing emphasis on virtue within Christian ethics has brought with it a new emphasis on the church community and the stories, beliefs, and virtues contained within worship and liturgy. This turn to the church and its practices within Christian virtue ethics is a recognition that all reasoning proceeds from a social context, and the church provides such a context. On this note, Robin Gill writes that

. . . the specific insight of virtue ethics, which is especially relevant to a study of churchgoing and Christian ethics, is that the moral life is shaped by particular communities despite their actual frailties and ambiguities. Whereas there has been a tendency for moral philosophy to focus upon ethical decision-making as if individuals could act solely on the basis of autonomous reasoning virtue ethics is more distinctly sociological in character. . . Within virtue ethics, properly understood, the mechanisms of socialization become at least as important as from rational criteria.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the final chapter of this dissertation turns to the church as the agent of Christian socialization from which Christians learn and are shaped by the Christian virtues.<sup>3</sup> We

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<sup>1</sup> Lelwica, *Starving for Salvation*, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Robin Gill, *Churchgoing and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 26-27.

<sup>3</sup> Particularly influential in this regard has been the work of Stanley Hauerwas. For Hauerwas, the church is the agent of Christian socialization by acting as the bearer of the Christian story: “The contention and witness of the church is that the story of Jesus provides a flourishing of gifts which other politics cannot know. It does so because Christians have been nourished on the story of a savior who insisted on being nothing else than what he was. By being the son of God he provided us with the confidence that insofar as we become his disciples our particularity and our regard for the particularity of our brothers and sisters in Christ contribute to his Kingdom. Our stories become part of the story of the Kingdom.” (Stanley

will begin by briefly discussing the theoretical foundation of the connection between moral theology and the church. Then we will turn to a more specific discussion of the importance of practices within an ethic of virtue. We will then turn to three specific practices—asceticism, prayer, and worship in order to illustrate how practices shape the moral life through the development of certain virtues.

The specific insight of this dissertation has been that the moral life is shaped more experientially than rationally, and that knowledge through connaturality—that is, the knowledge produced in the intellect not through conceptualization but rather by affective inclination—provides a useful conceptual tool for understanding eating disorders and body dissatisfaction morally. In this chapter, we will continue this examination of the importance of knowledge by connaturality in the moral life, illustrating how the practices of the church provide a sort of “holy experiential knowledge” which may counter the negative experiential inclinations possessed by women with eating disorders. That it, by participating in and experiencing the practices of asceticism, prayer, and worship, women may gain a sort of connaturality with goods not only conducive to flourishing, but also to salvation, which, as Lelwica argues, is the ultimate hunger underlying eating problems.<sup>4</sup>

## **I. The Role of the Church in the Moral Life<sup>5</sup>**

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Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 51.)

<sup>4</sup> Hence the title of her book *Starving for Salvation*.

<sup>5</sup> For only a cursory overview of the topic of the role of the church within moral theology, see Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*, 1st ed. (Abingdon Press, 1989); Don E. Saliers, E. Byron Anderson, and Bruce T. Morrill, *Liturgy and the Moral Self: Humanity at Full Stretch Before God* (Pueblo Books, 1998); James Keenan, *Practice What You Preach: Virtues, Ethics, and Power in the Lives of Pastoral Ministers and Their Congregations* (Sheed & Ward, 1999); Timothy M. Brunk, *Liturgy and Life: The Unity of Sacrament and Ethics in the Theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet* (Peter Lang Publishing, 2007)

The ecclesial dimension of Aquinas' moral theology has not always been recognized, and with good reason. Throughout the whole moral part of the *Summa Theologiae*, the *Secunda pars*, Thomas almost never refers to Christ, the church, or the mystical body.<sup>6</sup> Servais Pinckaers responds that despite this seeming separation of morality from spirituality in the *Summa*, there is really no separation between the moral part, the *Secunda pars*, and the two dogmatic parts in the *Prima* and *Tertia pars*:

The doctrine on the Trinity, in particular on the Word and on the Holy Spirit, found in the *prima pars*, pertains to the morality set forth in the *secunda pars* that we can thus identify as Trinitarian and spiritual. In a parallel way, the doctrine of the *tertia pars* on Christ and the mystical Body is intimately linked to Aquinas' moral teaching, which we can call Christological and ecclesial. Thus we can say that all the virtues studied in the *Secunda secundae* from a dynamic whole; they are directed to Christ through faith, hope, and charity.<sup>7</sup>

The recognition of the ecclesial dimension on Aquinas' ethics can also be traced back to the work of Dominican theologian Yves Congar. In a 1939 essay entitled "The idea of the Church in St. Thomas Aquinas," Congar argues that Aquinas' implicit ecclesiology (he wrote no separate treatise on the church) is profoundly ethical and theocentric:

The substance of the Church is made of the new life which men receive by the three virtues of faith, hope, and love, and which is a life driven Godwards, which has God for its end, and the objects of divine life as its determining principles. For St. Thomas, the Church is the whole economy of the return towards God, in short, the *secunda pars* of his *Summa Theologica*.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Servais Pinckaers, in his essay on "The Body of Christ," cites Roberto Busa's concordance in noting that in the *Prima Secunda*, Aquinas refers 306 times to *Christus*, and 397 times in the *Secunda Secundae*, though the name of Christ appeals in only one of the article titles (II-II, Q. 2, art. 7), and only one article treats the mystical body (II-II Q. 183, art. 2). Pinckaers, Berkman, and Titus, *The Pinckaers Reader*, 28.

<sup>7</sup> Pinckaers, "The Body of Christ," 28-29.

<sup>8</sup> Yves Congar, "The Idea of the Church in St. Thomas Aquinas," *Thomist* 1 (1939): 331-59, 339.

The Church, according to Congar's reading of Aquinas, is the realization of the mystical body of Christ, through which its members become recipients of the grace necessary for new life and the flourishing characteristic of supernatural beatitude. The nourishment and flourishing that comes from being incorporated into Christ's body makes the Church the "economy of realization of the Body of Christ, Church-as-Institution. . . The Church visible, the Church institutional, is the ministry of the faith and of the Sacraments of the faith, by which men are grafted into Christ and realize the Mystical Body which is the church in its inward substance."<sup>9</sup>

For both Congar and Pinckaers, Christ is the key point of connection between the church and the moral life. Christ is the end of the virtues, and he in person is the way to both flourishing and salvation. As Pinckaers notes, "This link is actualized by the sacraments, grouped around the Eucharist, which builds the Body of Christ, the Church. The entire *tertia pars* is connected to the *secunda pars*: the person of Christ, the incarnate Word, becomes the source and the object of the virtues and of the gifts . . . we can better perceive the personal dimension of Thomas' ethics in relationship with the person of Christ."<sup>10</sup> Key for both the church and the moral life is the virtue of charity: "through charity all the members of the Church, with their own functions, collaborate and unite for the good of the whole body, which is the church; charity also infuses in all the virtues their unity of action."<sup>11</sup>

There are repercussions of this in the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar. The Church, according to von Balthasar, is the "place where the process of conforming

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<sup>9</sup> Congar, "The Idea of the Church," 335.

<sup>10</sup> Pinckaers, "The Body of Christ," 29.

<sup>11</sup> Pinckaers, "The Body of Christ," 37.

humanity to the person and event of Christ is begun, the place where men dedicate themselves, in a faith that listens and obeys, to this event that is a person, are formed by him (sacramentally), and seek through their lives to make him effective in the world.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, the church is the place in which believers become connatural with divine things such that she may judge the things of this world in a way consistent with the beatitude to which she is called. As John of St. Thomas writes,

By this connaturality and intimate union to things divine, a man is made capable of penetrating more profoundly divine things and the mysteries of faith, of judging according to either secondary or ultimate causes, and of taking practical counsel in his actions. . . . From this connaturality, the gift of wisdom judges of divine things, as St. Thomas teaches. Prudence gives counsel in actions and according to a correct estimation of things to be believed, while the gift of understanding penetrates these matters of faith.<sup>13</sup>

This chapter will examine the way in which Christian practices—those shared activities which form a way of life—help make its members connatural with the divine things necessary for them to act with wisdom and charity, and more specifically, resist the destructive nature of thin-ideal images which prevent women from both flourishing and living their faith.

## **II. Practices and Virtue**

### *a. What are practices?*

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<sup>12</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 7 of *Theology: The New Covenant* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 445.

<sup>13</sup> John of St. Thomas, *The Gifts of the Holy Ghost*, 47-48.

Since the seminal work of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, there have been a number of works reflecting on the connection of social identity with community practices.<sup>14</sup> MacIntyre defined a *practice* as

any coherent and complex form of socially established co-operative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.<sup>15</sup>

There are three characteristics of a practice according to MacIntyre: (1) practices are complex, social activities, which (2) have internal goods, and (3) require certain standards of excellence to achieve these goods. Another way of thinking of practices is as highly-involved socially established actions which arise over time within a community in a way that sustains the identity of the group. Practices form both the individual who engages in the practice, and the community in which the practice arises. As such, practices are distinct from individual skills or activities. Planting a tomato plant, accordingly, would not be a practice, while farming would be. Shooting hoops would not be a practice, while playing a pick-up game of basketball would. To use MacIntyre's example, chess is a practice; tic-tac-toe is not.

MacIntyre emphasizes that practices are characterized by certain internal goods which are distinct from external goods which come as a result of the practice. A sports

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<sup>14</sup> The reflection on the importance of practices for community identity spans several disciplines. From a sociological perspective, see Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2000); Robert Wuthnow, *Growing Up Religious: Christians and Jews and Their Journeys of Faith* (Beacon Press, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.



analogy is illuminative here. Basketball is a communal practice with certain internal goods—athleticism, hand-eye coordination, teamwork, cooperation, fortitude—which benefit the person participating in the practice merely by the fact that she is participating. It is these internal goods which make basketball what it is, and without which basketball would lose its meaning.<sup>16</sup> These internal goods are distinct from the external goods that might be associated with basketball—fame, wealth, college scholarships, and Nike contracts. While one who excels at basketball as a practice may gain such goods, they are not unique to basketball (one could gain the external good of a Nike contract by participating in the practice of, say, golf).

MacIntyre used the concepts of internal and external goods to elaborate on his definition of *virtue* as “an acquired human quality, the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods internal to practices and the lack of which prevents us from achieving any such goods.”<sup>17</sup> MacIntyre’s conception of practices and virtues must be understood within the context of a narrative unity of life, a life in which all practices are clearly oriented towards an ultimate goal, an ultimate goal which provides an answer to what is the “good life of the person.” MacIntyre writes in his discussion of the narrative unity of life:

Some conception of the good for man is required. Whence is such a conception to be drawn? Precisely from those questions which led us to attempt to transcend

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<sup>16</sup> MacIntyre himself uses the example of chess to explain what is meant by internal goods. He notes that there are two classes of goods that one may gain by engaging in the practice of chess. The first set of goods, external goods, include money, fame, and even power, but these external goods are not specific to chess. One may become rich, famous and powerful by engaging in other activities besides chess. Yet the imaginative, analytic, and strategic skills that come from playing chess may be gained only by engaging in chess specifically. These latter goods are internal goods.

<sup>17</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 190.

that limited conception of the virtues which is available in and through practices. It is in looking for a conception of *the* good which will enable us to order other goods. . . . It is in the course of the quest and only through encountering and coping with the various particular harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which provide any quest with its episodes and incidents that the goal of the quest is finally to be understood. A quest is always an education both as to the character of that which is sought and in self-knowledge.<sup>18</sup>

As such, the virtues are not only those qualities which enable a person to achieve the internal goods of a specific practice. They are also qualities which enable us to pursue a good life.

The quest for a good life always takes place within a living tradition, which MacIntyre defines as a “historically extended, socially embedded argument . . . precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition.”<sup>19</sup> MacIntyre writes that a tradition extends over generations, perhaps centuries. An example might be a philosophical tradition (Aristotelianism), a science (Newtonian physics), or a religion (Christianity). Practices, and the individuals who participate in these practices, are embedded within the larger tradition. MacIntyre notes that

. . . the history of a practice in our time is generally and characteristically embedded in and made intelligible in terms of the larger and longer history of the tradition through which the practice in its present form was conveyed to us; the history of each of our own lives is generally and characteristically embedded in and made intelligible in terms of the larger and longer histories of a number of traditions.<sup>20</sup>

Thus for MacIntyre, it is ultimately in a given tradition that the unity of life is grounded because “tradition” provides a definition of a “good life.”

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<sup>18</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 219.

<sup>19</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 221.

<sup>20</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 222.

*b. Practices Theologically Considered*

We can definitely apply MacIntyre's understanding of practices to a Christian context. *Christian* practices are complex social activities (e.g. worship) with certain internal goods (communal unity) and certain standards of excellence (love of God, love of neighbor). These practices exist within the over 2000-year-old Christian tradition which formally defines the ultimate human good as union with God. Dorothy Bass, drawing from MacIntyre, identifies three characteristics of Christian practices: Practices address fundamental human needs and conditions through concrete human actions; practices are done together over time; and practices possess standards of excellence.<sup>21</sup> She goes on to say that "when we see some of our ordinary activities as Christian practices, we come to perceive how our daily lives are all tangled up with the things God is doing in the world. Now we want to figure out how to pattern our practices after God's, and it becomes our deepest hope to become partners in God's reconciling love for the world."<sup>22</sup>

From a theological perspective, we might say that Christian practices are those visible actions within the Christian community that serve to transform human desire into the self-giving love embodied in the life and death of Jesus Christ, thereby shaping the

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<sup>21</sup> Dorothy C. Bass, *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, 1st ed. (Jossey-Bass, 1998), 6-7.

<sup>22</sup> Bass, *Practicing Our Faith*, 8. Echoing Bass, Julia Hanlon Rubio's book *Family Ethics: Practices for Christians* examines the way in which Christian practices shape the everyday life of the family. Broadly, her argument is that "mainstream American family life is problematic both for families and for the common good, [that] the Christian tradition serves as a valuable resource for Christians seeking a better vision of what families are for and a direction in which families ought to go, [and] that distinctive disciplines or practices are necessary if families are to resist the culture and live their faith." (Julie Hanlon Rubio, *Family Ethics: Practices for Christians* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010).

Church into that same pattern of self-giving love.<sup>23</sup> With MacIntyre clearly in mind, Kenda Dean writes that

What unites practices, despite centuries of innovation, is their common referent in the suffering love of Christ—which is why, after two thousand years, we still recognize them. Praise celebrates God’s suffering love in contemporary worship bands and in the Divine Liturgy. Justice imitates the self-giving love of God in intentional Christian communities and in youth groups collecting for UNICEF. Testimony points to the passion of God on the lips of a preacher or on the t-shirt of teenager. In fact, practices’ fidelity to the passion of Christ is the only safeguard the church has against a time-bound, culture-bound, or style-bound Christianity. In every place and every time, we hear the gospel proclaimed in our own ‘language’ through the practices of faith—the ‘tongues’ of Christian tradition.<sup>24</sup>

Christian practices are those actions which form Christians’ individual and collective identity, an identity which, in the words of Moltmann, “can be understood only as an act of identification with the crucified Christ.”<sup>25</sup> Moltmann goes on, “If Christian

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<sup>23</sup> For this theological understanding of Christian practices, I am indebted to Kenda Dean’s very fine book *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church*. Dean writes that “Christ’s Passion transforms [desire] into sacrificial love that finds expression in the witness of the church and is made visible in the practices of Christian community that shape human relationships according to a ‘cruciform pattern’ of self-giving love. The Holy Spirit employs these relationships to infuse the world with Christ’s redeeming Passion. Jesus enters the world in these practices again and again—only this time, through us” (15). While Dean’s book is written for an audience of those ministering to youth, and as such she emphasizes practices with adolescents in mind specifically, her argument on the importance of approaching Christian practices theologically is relevant for the church as a whole, a point which she herself recognizes. She writes in the introduction that “every adult is a junior high kid with wrinkles,” and as such, her book is not just about youth ministry, but about “ministry, about being the church in which God calls young people [and all people] to play an irreplaceable and irrepressible part” (2). Dean’s argument is that youth ministry is impoverished by its inattention to theology, and particularly the theological significance of passion. Dean’s work is helpful in light of this final chapter of the dissertation in that she is trying to identify practices for young people to target, not overcome their passion, in order to become faithful Christian witnesses. It is unfortunate that her book pays only passing glance to the issues of body image, body satisfaction and eating disorders, a privation this chapter hopes to fill.

<sup>24</sup> Dean, *Practicing Passion*, 152. Dean goes on: “Two millennia later, we have refined—but we have yet to improve upon—the basic parameters of practices set forth by the earliest Christians. *Leitourgia* (liturgy), *koinonia* (hospitality and fellowship), *kerygma* (proclamation), *didache* (teaching and discipleship), *diakonia* (compassion), *doxologia* (praise and worship), and *marturia* (witness) provide the historical framework for this discussion” (153-4).

<sup>25</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 19.

identity comes into being by this double process of identification, then it is clear that it cannot be described in terms of that faith alone, nor can it be protected against decay by correct doctrinal formulae, repeatable rituals and set patterns of moral behavior.”<sup>26</sup>

Kenda Dean echoes Moltmann’s warning regarding the limit of Christian practices:

Conforming to a community’s practices, even Christian ones, does not necessarily create Christians. . . Faith is the gift of the Holy Spirit, meted out by degrees or by debacle, and is not the product of religious practices. . . Christian nurture offers a sense of group affiliation, but—as decades of confirmation graduates bountifully illustrate—this is not the same thing as a passionate commitment of faith.<sup>27</sup>

Both Dean and Moltmann recognize that the church is more than a voluntary association that forms group identity and social cohesion through shared practices. Christian practices, like other cultural practices, are indeed transformative. However, Christian practices alone cannot form the identity of the Christian in the fullest sense of the word, nor can they direct the Christian towards her ultimate goal—union with God. Christian practices are distinct because, like the virtues, they are enlivened and perfected by grace. That is, Christian practices, like all practices, might be actions which are efficacious in the lives and social relationships of those performing them, but Christian practices are unique in that God is acting through them. Kenda Dean writes,

Practices are God’s multifaceted means of grace in the material world of human interaction, conduits of life that enliven our witness and that imbue us with the grace that makes holy passion possible. Practices are trail signs, left by generations of Christians who have gone before us that point to the way of the cross—reminders that in dying to self there is new life, assurance that in leaping into the chasm that separates us from God we will find God.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Dean, *Practicing Passion*, 146-7.

<sup>28</sup> Dean, *Practicing Passion*, 151.

Christian practices, enlivened by grace, enable the Christian to try to imitate the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and in doing so, they strive to establish a new pattern of relating to God and relating to others.

*c. The Transformative Power of Christian Practices*

One of the misconceptions this dissertation is trying to challenge is that one can always change one's behavior simply by changing one's beliefs or developing more informed beliefs. We have seen that Aquinas in his conception of connatural knowledge does not support this opinion—our action is largely determined by our loves, in addition to our rational commitments to certain moral principles. Additionally, the empirical evidence on thin-ideal internalization and body dissatisfaction support the Thomistic thesis regarding the importance of affective knowledge. Simply knowing that an image is unrealistic or contrary to flourishing is not sufficient to prevent being affected—both in attitude and action. Change of behavior requires a change of heart.

Practices provide this bridge between the change of heart and the change of behavior integral to the moral life. Margaret Miles' book *Practicing Christianity* challenges the widespread assumption that “change in behavior follows, rather than precedes, insight.”<sup>29</sup> By way of contrast, Miles argues that it is

The integration of thought and practice that defined the religious self. In contrast to twentieth-century consensus, most historical people thought it was obvious that insight follows change; changed behavior—changed activities—produce insight. . . the aim of religious practices was the production of a combination of understanding and strong experience that created a religious self and, ultimately,

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<sup>29</sup> Margaret R. Miles, *Practicing Christianity: Critical Perspectives for an Embodied Spirituality* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 89.

together with many people who have had the same experience and understanding, community. ‘Insight’ was perhaps the ultimate goal, but the crucial need for a method of achieving the goal was met by the daily exercises of particular practices that cumulatively created the consciousness, the psychic ‘place’ at which the insight might be achieved. *By the integration of a carefully performed program of dehabituating exercise, thoughts, visualizations, bodily postures and verbal formulae, a state of consciousness was accomplished in which the desired insight seemed to appear spontaneously, that is, accompanied by an experience of effortless receptivity.*<sup>30</sup>

Practices, according to Miles, create experiential knowledge by de-habituating and re-habituating the body and psyche to conform to certain communally-established goods.

Miles explains, “Because the religious self is created from the very same energy that was formerly spent on the social self and its agenda, the self-importance of the socialized self must be reduced to nothing in order to achieve the new self-identification. . . a self defined by its relation of trust and confidence in God.”<sup>31</sup> Kenda Dean writes that “faith practices occasion ‘little deaths’ of the fractured, socially constructed ego. In giving ourselves away in love, we continually ‘die’ and ‘rise’ along with Jesus, decreasing so that Christ may increase.”<sup>32</sup>

With the important dictum that grace perfects, not destroys nature, we can thereby say that Christian practices *transform the person into her true self*, the person God created her to be. Through practices like worship, service to the poor, and prayer, the believer does not cease to exist, but grows to have the fulfillment of existence. “A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy,” says Jesus in the Gospel of John, “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.”<sup>33</sup> Another way of talking

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<sup>30</sup> Miles, *Practicing Christianity*, 90. Emphasis added.

<sup>31</sup> Miles, *Practicing Christianity*, 110.

<sup>32</sup> Dean, *Practicing Passion*, 159.

<sup>33</sup> John 10:10

about this is in the language of conversion, as Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon point out: “[In] acquiring practices . . . something is gained; something is lost as well. Rarely are practices acquired without some cost, without detoxification, without letting go of the practices of a former existence in order to embrace another.”<sup>34</sup>

Christian practices, therefore, do not merely express Christian belief in God, but also and perhaps most importantly, *experientially* shape faith in God. As Dean notes, “practices instill theological insight as well as enact it, for in these acts of witness God ‘practices’ grace in us.”<sup>35</sup> Christian practices make believers connatural with divine things such that they are no longer connatural with destructive things of the world.

### **III. Ecclesial Practices for Forming a More Satisfied Body of Christ**

The practices which we discuss here—asceticism, prayer, and worship—are by no means an exhaustive list. The church has many other practices—confession, the corporeal works of mercy, community discernment, testimony, praise, and the list goes on—which are important and relevant in the lives of its members, and especially in the lives of those with eating disorders of some kind. However, the practices we discuss are representative practices, with a long history in the Christian tradition, and widely shared (with certain significant differences) among the various denominations of Christianity. Though our focus will be on a Roman Catholic theological evaluation of these practices, I utilize authors from other Christian denominations in the hope that this chapter will be found significant for a wider *Christian* audience, not only a Roman Catholic one.

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<sup>34</sup> Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 80.

<sup>35</sup> Dean, *Practicing Passion*, 161.



a. *Ascetic Practices: Mortifying the Flesh*

The word “asceticism” comes from the Greek word *askesis*, meaning simply “training,” “exercise,” or “discipline.” Asceticism is associated with self-denial, mortification, and suffering. As such, the word “asceticism” frequently carries a negative connotation. In fact, the Eating Disorder Inventory<sup>36</sup> includes an “Asceticism (A) Scale” which consists of seven items that “assess the tendency to seek virtue through the pursuit of spiritual ideals such as self-discipline, self-denial, self-restraint, self-sacrifice, and control of bodily urges.”<sup>37</sup> An elevated clinical A scale raw score indicates “a very strong tendency to place positive connotations on achieving virtue through self-restraint. There also is considerable guilt and shame surrounding the experience of pleasure.”<sup>38</sup> Although some clinicians have observed that “drive for thinness” is beginning to replace ascetic motives as the primary motivation in those with eating disorders, some may nevertheless find it dangerous to refer to the positive aspects of ascetic practices in light of the potential for abuse. In fact, the prevalence of ascetic tendencies in individuals with eating disorders may reflect an appropriation of a tendency within Christian history in which ascetic

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<sup>36</sup> The Eating Disorder Inventory (EDI) provides objective scores and profiles that are useful in treating individuals with anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. The EDI is a self-report measure, administered in about 20 minutes, and consists of 91 items organized onto 12 primary scales that yield six composite scores: (1) Eating Disorder, (2) Risk Ineffectiveness, (3) Interpersonal Problems, (4) Affective Problems, (5) Overcontrol, and (6) General Psychological Maladjustment. (David M. Garner, *Eating Disorder Inventory*, 3rd ed. (Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc., 2004).

<sup>37</sup> Garner, *EDI*, 17. The seven items on the Asceticism Scale are (1) I am ashamed of my human weakness, (2) I would like to be in total control of my bodily urges, (3) Self-denial makes me feel stronger spiritually, (4) Easing for pleasure is a sign of moral weakness, (5) I believe that relaxing is simply a waste of time, (6) I am embarrassed by my bodily urges, (7) Suffering makes you a better person.

<sup>38</sup> Garner, *EDI*, 74.

practices have often been taken to an unhealthy extreme of disparagement of the body, self-abuse, and contempt for the created order.<sup>39</sup>

In the Christian tradition, however, we have a different view of ascetic practices. Just as the virtue of temperance, if properly understood, restrains the appetite not as an end in itself but for the sake of enjoyment, so too are ascetic practices a “no” as a means to a greater “yes.”<sup>40</sup> For Aquinas, the characteristic ascetic practices of fasting and abstinence are considered parts of virtue not because the restraint characteristic of asceticism is good in itself, but rather because of the good *toward which* ascetic restraint is ordered.

Aquinas considers fasting, an act of abstinence, one of the “subjective parts” of temperance.<sup>41</sup> Aquinas understands abstinence as a virtue controlling the enjoyment of sensual pleasures, and most particularly the pleasures of food. One of the first purposes of fasting is the regulation of the affections, and in particular, the movements of the

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<sup>39</sup> Margaret Miles writes that “in Christianity, an endemic problem exists in the contradiction between a rhetoric of disparagement of the body and theological descriptions of the permanent integrity of body and soul. Contempt for the body, a prominent feature of devotional manuals, is fundamentally inconsistent with the Christian doctrines of creation, the Incarnation of Christ, and the resurrection of the body. Throughout the history of Christianity, the problem of the relative value of the body and soul has been written about a great deal, precisely because it is so difficult to define a rationalization of productive ascetic practice that does not seem to slight the goodness and integrity of physical existence” (Miles, *Practicing Christianity*, 95).

<sup>40</sup> Thomas writes, “It must, however, be observed that it is sometimes praiseworthy, and even necessary *for the sake of an end*, to abstain from such pleasures as result from these [pleasurable] operations” (II-II, Q. 142, art. 2). He then goes on to give four examples of such abstinence, according to their different ends: bodily, social, psychological, and spiritual. “Thus, for the sake of the body’s health, certain persons refrain from pleasures of meat, drink, and sex; as also for the fulfillment of certain engagements: thus athletes and soldiers have to deny themselves many pleasures, in order to fulfill their respective duties. On like manner penitents, in order to recover health of soul, have recourse to abstinence from pleasures, as a kind of diet, and those who are desirous of giving themselves up to contemplation and Divine things need much to refrain from carnal things.”

<sup>41</sup> II-II, Q. 147, art. 2: “Habit and act have the same matter. Wherefore every virtuous act about some particular matter belongs to the virtue that appoints the mean in that matter. Now fasting is concerned with food, wherein the mean is appointed by abstinence. Wherefore it is evident that fasting is an act of abstinence.”

concupiscible appetite: "The element essential to the Christian practice of abstinence," notes Loughlin, "is moral." He goes on,

When the definitive aspects of human nature, namely its reason and will, are turned away from the highest things with which they are properly concerned . . . the consequence is the corruption, abdication, and ultimately the submission of the higher's ruling capacity to that of the lower. In short, unless one loves, desires, and enjoys that which is highest, namely that which specifically and appropriately speaks to one's perfection as a human being, one will eventually be corrupted and enslaved by lesser goods and loves, in time becoming the very thing loved, molded to it in both thought and feeling."<sup>42</sup>

Abstinence, therefore, has important affective effects. Abstinence is a remedy for the appetite which has become connatural with lesser goods. As a practice, abstinence serves to direct one's minds and desires in a way few practices can. Loughlin writes,

It is in light of this that ecclesial authorities have a responsibility to teach their people the nature and value of fasting so that they might help them to focus their minds effectively upon those things that are important to their humanity and happiness, to turn their entire being toward God, to consider how they stand with respect to their Creator, and to make recompense for their sins, but not to the point that they are made incapable of performing their work in the world or of fulfilling their social and familiar duties."<sup>43</sup>

Because Aquinas considers food the main objects of fasting and abstinence, it seems that his views would be irrelevant for girls and women with eating problems who do not know how to enjoy the pleasures of food. However, our study of eating disorders has also shown that thin-ideal images also constitute such a sensual pleasure, and so we can properly say that abstinence applies to these pleasures as well, a point which is consistent with Aquinas: "Properly speaking fasting consists in abstaining from food, but speaking metaphorically it denotes abstinence from anything harmful, and such

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<sup>42</sup> Stephen Loughlin, "Thomas Aquinas and the Importance of Fasting to the Christian Life," *Pro Ecclesia* 17, no. 3 (Summer 2008), 347-48.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.

especially is sin.”<sup>44</sup> Additionally, one of the great advantages of Thomas' treatment of fasting and abstinence is his attention to the needs of the flesh and observing due moderation for the sake of health: “in abstaining from food a man should act with due regard for those among whom he lives, for his own person, and for the requirements of health.”<sup>45</sup>

The fact that women's habituation to a thin-ideal often manifests itself in disordered behavior towards food indicates that food-related ascetic practices are likely to be ineffective, if not explicitly harmful, in the lives of such women.<sup>46</sup> The prevalence of body dissatisfaction and eating disorders among western women challenges the Christian community to reconceptualize the way in which ascetic practices are undertaken. One way in which ascetic practices are being reconceptualized in the current context is through the idea of “media fasts.”<sup>47</sup> Tom Beaudoin, in his book *Consuming Faith*,

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<sup>44</sup> II-II, Q. 147, art. 2, ad. 2.

<sup>45</sup> II-II, Q. 146, art. 1. In the next article, we writes, “The mean of virtue is measured not according to quantity but according to right reason, as stated in Ethic. ii, 6. Now reason judges it expedient, on account of some special motive, for a man to take less food than would be becoming to him under ordinary circumstances, for instance in order to avoid sickness, or in order to perform certain bodily works with greater ease: and much more does reason direct this to the avoidance of spiritual evils and the pursuit of spiritual goods” (II-II, Q. 147, art. 1, ad. 2).

<sup>46</sup> For a very fine treatment of the role of fasting within the Christian tradition and its positive, life- and body-affirming role in the moral life, see Kathleen M. Dugan, “Fasting for Life: The Place of Fasting in the Christian Tradition,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63, no. 3 (Fall 1995), 539-548. For a reflection on how fasting is connected to a desire for “self transcendence” in a way that is both subversive of secular materialism and limited by narcissistic pathology characterized by a “depleted, starved inner life,” see Jo Nash, “Mutant Spiritualities in a secular Age: The ‘Fasting Body’ and the Hunger for Pure Immanence,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 45, no. 3 (August 2006), 310-327. Although I recognize the very positive dimensions of fasting, such ascetic practices have a great potential to do more harm than good in a current context characterized by significant body dissatisfaction related to weight.

<sup>47</sup> Austin argues that Thomas' asceticism is particularly relevant for today's consumer culture: “To live according to need means to limit oneself to what is essential. This requires a recovery of the moral distinction between necessity and luxury (superfluity). Indeed, to live according to need means saying ‘no’ to what may seem desirable, to engage in a continual ‘editing’ process, always subtracting what is a merely wanted, not needed. It means growing in ‘the fine art of limiting oneself to the essential; that is, in the virtue of simplicity. . . Temperance is the negation of the superficial ‘more’ of consumerist or

identifies media fasts as way of resisting consumer culture by providing a critical distance between the person and the images and advertisements she is normally surrounded by, so that she can evaluate the way in which such images are influencing her imagination and behavior. Beaudoin writes that

[O]ur seeing typically makes us less conscious of our bodies, not more, and does not obviously affect what we are seeing. This is very different from our experience of touch, which usually makes us aware of what our body is doing, and which affects or is affected by our touch. Sight is also the one sense that allows us to engage the world from afar. You don't have to get 'involved' in the world to see it. In other words, an intensely visual culture fosters the misconception that we are disembodied people. This is a dangerous temptation for Christians who are already uneasy about Jesus living, dying, and rising as a fully human Jewish man.<sup>48</sup>

Dean also acknowledges the potential value of this reconceptualization of asceticism noting that "Mennonite teenagers at a church in Ontario sponsor 'media fasts' during Lent in which they swear off television, music, movies, video games, and the Internet (unless required for homework) as a way to renounce media images that may impede their journey to the cross."<sup>49</sup> Such practices, says Dean, by "renouncing some of consumerism's shackles also help [to] transcend popular attempts to define [people] as less than they are."<sup>50</sup>

Miles writes that in our contemporary world, ascetic practices will need to be individually tailored, noting that it "seems unwise to predict which ascetic practices (if any) might be uniformly useful in addressing women's issues as well as the common

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hedonist culture for the sake of affirmation of the deeper 'more' of truly human and Christian life" (Austin, *Thomas Aquinas on the Four Causes of Temperance*, 236, 238.)

<sup>48</sup> Tom Beaudoin, *Consuming Faith: Integrating Who We Are with What We Buy* (Sheed & Ward, 2004), 100-101.

<sup>49</sup> Dean, *Practicing Passion*, 206.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

problems of the nuclear world.”<sup>51</sup> Individual and communal practices of self-discipline will vary from community to community. However, Miles goes on to say that

People who speak and write within Christian perspectives should turn our attention to interpretations of Christianity that emphasize love for the beauty and goodness of the created world, the equality of lifestyles in providing the circumstances within which a Christian loves God by—not instead of—loving other people, and concern over the part that the history of Christianity has played in the making of the nuclear world.<sup>52</sup>

In light of this, ascetic practices have an important role to play in the life of all Christians, but especially in the lives of those woman experiencing profound body dissatisfaction, disordered eating, and eating disorders. Margaret Miles notes that “ascetic practices rely on the intimate and strong connection of body and soul so that exercises that deconstruct the socialization and condition inscribed on the body by the ‘world’ can produce a new organizing center or ‘self.’”<sup>53</sup> She goes on to conclude that the real point of ascetic practices is not to “give up” certain objects, but to modify the self. The deprivation or restraint which provides the form of ascetic practices is for the sake of shifting attachment from sensible objects to spiritual objects:

By deprivation, sensory habituation is deconstructed; the result is *what Thomas Aquinas called the ‘renewal of the senses.’* Ascetic practices can also relieve sensory fatigue. Periods of silence, of sexual abstinence, of solitude, and of fasting readily demonstrate the extent to which the senses habituate and fatigue, becoming, in the course of ordinary living, ‘data-reduction agencies’ rather than alert observers of the world so sounds, smells, sights, and touch. Ascetic practices can break the bondage of the senses to the psyche’s agenda, a form of habituation in which any stimulus that does not relate directly to physical and psychic protection is ignored.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Miles, *Practicing Christianity*, 103.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>53</sup> Miles, *Practicing Christianity*, 96.

<sup>54</sup> Miles, *Practicing Christianity*, 97. Emphasis added.

In other words, ascetic practices can be a powerful way of acknowledging the importance of the body in determining the state of the soul.<sup>55</sup>

It is important to emphasize that the knowledge gained through ascetic practices of what to affirm and what to deny is largely an experiential knowledge. One does not learn moderation or balance only by conceptualizing or theorizing what moderation and balance consist in; rather, one learns moderation and balance also through practice. We learn by doing.

### *b. Prayer*

Aquinas believed that all prayers are ultimately expressions of hope for the happiness that we will eventually experience in God, when we see God face to face.<sup>56</sup> In Aquinas' view, prayer is not about getting God to change God's mind or to convince God to do something God originally was not going to do. Aquinas sees prayer rather from a human perspective, as a training ground in desire. Prayer teaches us what we want by getting us to ask for it. Timothy Radcliffe draws from Thomas in calling prayer

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<sup>55</sup> Elaine Scarry writes in *The Body in Pain* that "the self-flagellation of the religious ascetic . . . is not (as is often asserted) an act of denying the body, eliminating its claims from attention, but a way of so emphasizing the body that the contents of the world are cancelled and the path is clear for the entrance of an unworldly, contentless force" (Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, (Oxford University Press: New York, 1985), 34). Of course, not all ascetics fit this characterization of using ascetic practices to affirm the goodness of the body. Simone Weil's asceticism, for example, was notoriously ambiguous. She avoided almost all physical contact, and her self-starvation eventually led to her death, but she also believed that by embracing her own physical suffering, she could help alleviate the physical suffering of others. In other words, by denying her own body, she could affirm the bodies of the poor and downtrodden with whom she powerfully identified. One of her biographers, David McLellan, wrote that "certainly there are few lives which involve as much paradox as hers," pointing perhaps to the ambiguous nature of all ascetic practices, particularly in their potential for abuse (Gavin D. Flood, *The Ascetic Self* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 39. For a biography of Simone Weil, see Francine Du Plessix Gray, *Simone Weil*, First Printing. (Viking Adult, 2001).

<sup>56</sup> II-II, Q. 17, art 2: "We ought not to pray God for any other goods, except in reference to eternal happiness. Hence hope regards eternal happiness chiefly, and other things, for which we pray God, it regards secondarily and as referred to eternal happiness."

“the interpreter of desire.” “We hope for what we pray for. . . Prayer educates our desires and makes us passionate people.”<sup>57</sup> Jesus tells his disciples, “Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and the door shall be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7). In reference to this passage, Radcliffe writes, “We must become ever more insistent. We begin by just asking, and if that does not work, we must search, and finally we may have to hammer on the doors of heaven. God might not give if we ask just in a routine, automatic way. *God wishes us to desire passionately.*”<sup>58</sup> Miles too expresses a similar sentiment. According to Miles, prayer is the most central practice for defining and forming the self. She defines prayer as “a habit of interior attentiveness, an activity that creates a formerly unknown self, *a self neither imagined nor sought by secular culture.*”<sup>59</sup>

While the word “prayer” tends to be used generically for communication with God, prayer as a practice takes on many forms—verbal, meditative or mental, and contemplative prayer—and each is significant for transforming the lives of those who experience body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. For example, Miles notes the importance of incorporating images into meditative prayer, a prayer technique which can clearly serve as a corrective to the dissatisfaction associated with the internalization of a

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<sup>57</sup> Timothy Radcliffe, *Why Go to Church?: The Drama of the Eucharist* (Continuum, 2009), 93. Radcliffe is drawing on Aquinas here: “The Lord is said to hear the desire of the poor, either because desire is the cause of their petition, since a petition is like the interpreter of a desire, or in order to show how speedily they are heard, since no sooner do the poor desire something than God hears them before they put up a prayer, according to the saying of Isaiah 65:24, “And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will hear.” (II-II, Q. 83, art. 1, ad. 1).

<sup>58</sup> Radcliffe, 92. Emphasis added.

<sup>59</sup> Miles, *Practicing Christianity*, 126. Emphasis added.



thin idea. Miles says that we tend to think of prayer as verbal, but prayer might be stimulated and challenged by a visual image:

The most intense and vivid religious states were thought to be accessible to the viewer who followed the instructions of numerous devotional manuals on how to use visual images to focus meditation and contemplation. . . . What could not be activated as readily by verbal descriptions of Gospel stories was the emotional attachment of the viewer, a crucial factor for devotional engagement. The immediate accessibility of the painted scene to the eye of the viewer made it possible for the viewer to imagine herself present at the scene depicted. She was instructed by sermons and devotional manuals to reproduce in herself empathically the thoughts and emotions experienced by the original participants in the depicted story.<sup>60</sup>

John of Damascus, in his defense of images in Christian life, argues that the rejection of images is akin to a rejection of the importance of the Incarnation: “Perhaps you are sublime and able to transcend what is material . . . but I, since I am a human being and bear a body, want to deal with holy things and behold them in a bodily manner.”<sup>61</sup>

Consistent with this idea, Thomas Aquinas describes contemplation as the integration of sensory and spiritual senses: “In the present state of life human contemplation is impossible without sense imagery.”<sup>62</sup>

Prayer is often strongly associated with contemplation. Aquinas divides the human life into the active and the contemplative. The contemplative life is defined as the contemplation of the divine truth, and as such, is the proper end of human life.<sup>63</sup> In discussing contemplation, Aquinas distinguishes the act of the intellect and will in order

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<sup>60</sup> Miles, *Practicing Christianity*, 133.

<sup>61</sup> John of Damascus, *The Orthodox Faith* 4, 16, trans. Constantine Cavarnos, *Orthodox Iconography* (Institute for Byzantine and Greek Studies, 1977), 51.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Aquinas in James Earl Massey, *An Anthology of Devotional Literature*, 2nd ed. (Evangel Publishing House, 2001), 148.

<sup>63</sup> II-II, Q. 180, art.4

to show how the two are united in the contemplation of truth as an appetible good.

Although contemplation properly belongs to the intellect “as regards the essence of the action” of contemplation, the “motive cause of the exercise of that action belongs to the will, which moves all the other powers, even the intellect, to their actions”:

Now the appetitive power moves one to observe things either with the senses or with the intellect, sometimes for love of the thing seen because, as it is written (Matthew 6:21), ‘where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also,’ sometimes for love of the very knowledge that one acquires by observation. Wherefore Gregory makes the contemplative life to consist in the ‘love of God,’ inasmuch as through loving God we are aflame to gaze on His beauty. And since everyone delights when he obtains what he loves, it follows that the contemplative life terminates in delight, which is seated in the affective power, the result being that love also becomes more intense.<sup>64</sup>

We see continuity between Aquinas’ treatment of connatural knowledge and contemplation in that both reveal the intellect’s dependence on the affections.

Walter J. Burghardt, in his aptly-titled article “Contemplation: A Long Loving Look at the Real” quotes the contemplative Carmelite William McNamara who called contemplation “a pure intuition of being, born of love. It is experiential awareness of reality and a way of entering into immediate communion with reality.”<sup>65</sup> The language of “intuition” is particularly appropriate for the purposes of this dissertation because it emphasizes that contemplation is largely not the result of a rational effort.

Contemplations as “intuitive communion,” as Burghardt describes it, is not only the product of the study or speculation. Rather, it is *affective*. Burghardt compares contemplation to falling in love, “for contemplation is not study, not cold examination,

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<sup>64</sup> II-II, Q. 180, art. 1

<sup>65</sup> Walter J. Burghardt, SJ, “Contemplation: A Long Loving Look at the Real,” in George W. Traub, *An Ignatian Spirituality Reader* (Loyola Press, 2008), 91.

not a computer. . . From contemplation comes communion.”<sup>66</sup> Like love, contemplation requires the whole person, including the body:

I am not naked spirit; I am spirit incarnate; in a genuine sense, I am flesh. And so I am most myself, most human, most contemplative when my whole person responds to the real. . . Not only my mind, but my eyes and ears, smelling and touching and tasting. Not sense utterly unshackled; for at times reason must temper the animal in me. But far more openness, far more letting-go, than we were permitted of old, in a more severe spirituality, where, for example, touch was ‘out,’ because touch is dangerous. No one ever thought of reminding us that free will is even more dangerous. Or cold reason.<sup>67</sup>

Recognizing the importance of the body and bodily desire also requires incorporating the body into prayer. Especially in our image-driven society, embodied nonverbal prayers can assume extraordinary significance. Dean writes that Christian youth are particularly good at incorporating, perhaps unconsciously, embodied prayer into their repertoire of practices, which she claims can be “nurtured into more sustained forms of contemplation.” She writes, “Prayers of confession written on the last day of camp and tossed ritually into a fire; hopes written on cards and nailed to a cross; intercessory ‘ribbons’ tied to a gate or a tree as memories of those they have prayed for—these are all concrete expressions of our friendship with God and can symbolize God’s friendship with us.”<sup>68</sup>

Embodied prayer can also take the form of assuming certain physical postures which reflect the virtues that such prayer cultivates. Bowing, genuflecting, or lying prostrate can symbolize humility, and have often been encouraged in the Christian tradition. However, perhaps more helpful in a contemporary context might be standing

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<sup>66</sup> Burghardt, “Contemplation,” 93.

<sup>67</sup> Burghardt, “Contemplation,” 92-3.

<sup>68</sup> Dean, *Practicing Passion*, 241.

with arms extended upwards, symbolizing the dependence on God and the bountiful gifts God bestows through prayer. As Miles writes, “the insight that a person’s bodily stance affects her psychological state was well known to the authors and readers of historical devotional manuals.”<sup>69</sup>

The distinctively *communal* dimension of Christian prayer is important to emphasize for those with body dissatisfaction and eating disorders who think that they can just pray to God or let God heal them. Take, for example, the following recollections from Christie Pettit in her anorexia memoir: “Doesn’t the bible promise that we can do all things through Christ? . . . I thought that if I would only concentrate harder when I prayer or pray more wholeheartedly, then God would heal me.”<sup>70</sup> “I thought if I simply prayed for God to free me from my obsession, I would be normal again. . . I expected to be able to heal myself through prayer alone. I read verses such as Mark 11:34— ‘Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours’—and I took them to mean that if I only prayed harder, if I only believed more deeply, then God would simply take my problem away.”<sup>71</sup> Pettit eventually comes to realize the important communal element of prayer: “I have since learned that there is nothing wrong with getting help from others and that God actually gives us other people so that we can strengthen one another . . . God gives us other people so that we can help each other, encourage each other, and work together for his kingdom.”<sup>72</sup> “Although this experience [with an eating disorder] really broke me down,

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<sup>69</sup> Miles, *Practicing Christianity*, 134.

<sup>70</sup> Christie Pettit, *Empty: A Story of Anorexia*, Revised. (Revell, 2006), 43.

<sup>71</sup> Pettit, *Empty*, 46-47.

<sup>72</sup> Pettit, *Empty*, 46.

it was just what I needed. I realized that my weakness is what connects me to others. It is because of my weakness that I am human, just like everyone else, and that I need a Savior. . . that bonds me with others, and that makes me need Christ so desperately.”<sup>73</sup>

Eventually, Pettit realizes the true humility that comes from the practice of prayer:

Through my experience, God taught me that it is not good to be constantly comparing myself to others in any way. My identity and my self-confidence should not come from being skinnier than everyone else, from being a really good tennis player, or even from having supportive parents. My self-confidence has to come from my identity in Christ and the security of God’s unconditional love for me. ‘Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight’ (1 Peter 3:3-4). I learned that I need to rest my identity on my inner self alone. . . To enjoy my uniqueness, I must first be comfortable with myself. If I am secure in my identity in Christ, then I will be able to appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of those around me.<sup>74</sup>

Pettit’s progression reveals how the practice of prayer leads to the development of virtue. Pettit learns, for example, prayer-formed humility. As Kotva notes, “prayer teaches us true humility. It teaches us that we are not God. It takes our attention off ourselves. It helps us to recognize our limitations, failures, and needs. But prayer also teaches us that God cherishes us and that all of us are equally God’s children.”<sup>75</sup>

As we learn to pray for others, the practice of prayer also helps us to develop the virtue of justice. We learn that others are as much God’s children as we are. When perfected by grace, prayer is transformed into friendship—friendship with God and with

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<sup>73</sup> Pettit, *Empty*, 71.

<sup>74</sup> Pettit, 106.

<sup>75</sup> Kotva, “Transformed in Prayer,” 151. On the subject of humility, John of St. Thomas says that this virtue “strikes at the root of the desires [for wealth, power and honour], our own self-esteem; by the inspiration of the gift of the fear of the Lord one is led to despise these goods for the excellence and abundance of goodness one finds in God. *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” (John of St. Thomas, *Gifts of the Holy Ghost*, 21).

one another. Dean writes that “since all communion begins with God’s self-communication, prayer is also an indispensable practice of spiritual friendship, a basic form of God’s self-communicating passion.”<sup>76</sup>

Prayer is a practice characterized not only by the internal goods of communion with God, but also by the external goods that can challenge a media-saturated society. Prayer turns the gaze towards God, which allows one to see oneself as beautiful and beloved, rather than a gaze focused on thin-ideal images which lead to the perception of oneself as inadequate, as unattractive, and as needing to change one’s body to conform to the ideal. Prayer allows us to know ourselves as we are known, and to love ourselves as we are loved. Prayer as a practice leads to satisfaction and gratitude, not to dissatisfaction. Prayer allows us to find friendship in God so that we may find friendship with ourselves, and with others. Prayer allows us to *see* ourselves and *see* others by acknowledging that we are *seen* by God.

### *c. Worship*

We have already established that, according to Aquinas, God created human beings for happiness—*beatitudo*—for flourishing over the course of a complete human life. This concept of beatitude in its fullest sense consists of enjoying union with God through the beatific vision. “Lord, you have made us for yourself,” writes Augustine in the introduction to his famous autobiographical reflection *The Confessions*, “and our

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<sup>76</sup> Dean, *Practicing Passion*, 238.

hearts are restless until they rest in you.”<sup>77</sup> This resting in God’s very self is what Aquinas calls friendship with God, and this friendship is the very essence of charity, an insight which he bases on John 15:15: “I will not now call you servants: for the servant knows not what his lord does. But I have called you friends because all things, whatsoever I have heard of my Father, I have made known to you.”<sup>78</sup> This friendship, though only brought to fulfillment in the life to come, nevertheless begins in this life, in the same way that happiness begins in this life and is brought to its supernatural fulfillment in the life to come. The clearest example of this friendship with God as experienced on earth, as M. Therese Lysaught argues, is in worship:

To be in God’s presence and to rejoice in it is nothing other than worship! Worship—or liturgy—is the beginning of the Christian moral life because here we . . . meet again and again God’s ultimate act of love for us—his laying down his life for his friends and his enemies. And what can we do but respond to the amazing gift of God’s love by loving God in return, praising God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and body?<sup>79</sup>

Worship as friendship, as Cavanaugh reminds us, is not an exclusive friendship between the individual worshipper and God, but is rather a communal activity. Cavanaugh writes in his essay “Pilgrim People” that God’s salvific activity “occurs not through coercion, but rather through attraction. As such, salvation history can be thought

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<sup>77</sup> Saint Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* (Penguin Classics, 1961), I.I.

<sup>78</sup> II-II, Q. 23, art. 1. “Accordingly, since there is a communication between man and God, inasmuch as He communicates His happiness to us, some kind of friendship must needs be based on this same communication, of which it is written (1 Corinthians 1:9): ‘God is faithful: by Whom you are called unto the fellowship of His Son.’ The love which is based on this communication, is charity: wherefore it is evident that charity is the friendship of man for God.”

<sup>79</sup> M. Therese Lysaught, “Love and Liturgy,” in David Matzko McCarthy and M. Therese Lysaught, *Gathered for the Journey: Moral Theology in Catholic Perspective* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 28.

of as a “cosmic love story, the story of the erotic attraction between God and humanity.”<sup>80</sup> He goes on to note that

Having faith in Christ is more like joining a movement than having a personal philosophy. The individual Christian life is swept up into a larger movement of cosmic proportions, the healing of the cosmos. This does not mean that one’s own personal faith life is unimportant. It just means that one’s faith life unfolds within a story much larger than the self.<sup>81</sup>

The communal aspect of the Christian life finds its fulfillment in the worshipping church, and in particular through the sacraments which are the “visible practices that constitute the communal life of the people of God.”<sup>82</sup>

Worship is transformative on the level of Christian vision. Using an analogy from human relationships, we can say that when we enter into a friendship, we begin, to a limited extent, to see things through the friend’s eyes. In worship, particularly in the listening of the story of God’s love for God’s people, the Christian, also in a very limited way, begins to see things from God’s perspective:

We enter into the world of the Scriptures, the world of God’s Word, where we learn the story of God’s constant love for God’s people, and how that love opens up to the entire world through the mission to the Gentiles and the redemption of all creation. We learn what it means to be God, what it means to love, to be merciful, kind, faithful, and so on. . . The stories that shape us are critical for ethics, for we can only act and live in a world that we can see. . . Until I hear the story of ‘love one’s enemies,’ that cannot become an option for how I live. Moreover, it cannot become an option for how I live unless I practice it. Liturgy is one place where we practice how to do these things, where we learn what it means to live within this new creation.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> William Cavanaugh, “Pilgrim People,” in *Gathered for the Journey*, 94.

<sup>81</sup> Cavanaugh, “Pilgrim People”

<sup>82</sup> Cavanaugh, “Pilgrim People,” in *Gathered for the Journey*, 102.

<sup>83</sup> Lysaught, “Love and Liturgy,” 33.



William Spohn in his *Go and Do Likewise* emphasizes the importance of hearing the story of Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture for Christian moral life. The story of Jesus, according to Spohn, plays “a normative role as a concrete universal for Christian ethics. Through faithful imagination his story becomes paradigmatic for moral perception, disposition, and identity.”<sup>84</sup> Drawing on David Tracy's work on analogy, Spohn claims that the analogical imagination links the moral reflection of the Christian community with the actions of Jesus. The analogical imagination “provides the cognitive content for obeying the command, ‘Go and do likewise,’ by revealing patterns of Jesus' life that provide normative guidance.”<sup>85</sup> This in turn develops the Christian's moral perception (what the Christian ought to see), the Christian's moral disposition (what the Christian ought to desire), and the Christian's identity (who the Christian ought to be). For Spohn, the primary function of Scripture in the moral life is to allow the Christian to identify with Christ, and to see the world in a distinctively Christian way. Spohn writes, “Because Christ has identified with our human condition, Christians can identify with him.”<sup>86</sup> This biblically-formed vision allows the Christian to be an instrument of God's love in the world. Part of this new identity of the Christian includes a change in perception, which Spohn addresses in depth in his fifth chapter “Correcting Perception.”

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<sup>84</sup> William C. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (Continuum, 2000), 2. It is important to note that no matter how transformative worship may be for its participants, the distinction between creature and Creator remains, which is why faith remains ever necessary in the Christian's earthly pilgrimage, as the Apostle Paul says in the Second Letter to the Corinthians: “So we are always courageous, although we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. We walk by faith and not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:6-7)

<sup>85</sup> Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 50. See also Hays' discussion of metaphor-making in Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation, A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, 1st ed. (HarperOne, 1996). See also Sandra M. Schneiders, I.H.M., “The Pascal Imagination: Objectivity and Subjectivity in New Testament Interpretation,” *Theological Studies* 43, no. 1 (March 1982).

<sup>86</sup> Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 50.

Spohn argues that correcting perception is a matter of “sharpen[ing] moral perception by discarding the old lenses of selfish existence and replacing them with the central images and metaphors of scripture. Correction of sight works together with rectification of the heart's dispositions, since hope, compassion, love, and obedient service are necessary to see aright.”<sup>87</sup>

The connection between worship and ethics is manifest especially in the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, Jesus, the “new man” who is the source of all ethics is encountered by the church, and from whom the church draws her very life. In consuming Christ who offers his body as pure gift, the believer is able to participate in Jesus’ own self-giving love, and to offer herself as a gift in the same way as Christ, a point Benedict XVI makes clear in his first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love):

Faith, worship, and ethos are interwoven as a single reality which takes shape in our encounter with God’s *agape*. Here the usual contraposition between worship and ethics simply falls apart. ‘Worship’ itself, Eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented.<sup>88</sup>

In the Eucharist, Jesus’ model of love (“love one another as I have loved you”) becomes not a command, but a reality.<sup>89</sup>

Thus, in the liturgy we gather as the church, the body of Christ, to dwell with the one whose identity we have taken. God—as God always does—takes the initiative, becomes present to us, reaches out to us again and again. . . We train our bodies to live as he lived—to pass peace, to keep silence and listen attentively to God, to give abundantly of our gifts. We are formed in the habit of being

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<sup>87</sup> Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 100.

<sup>88</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 14,  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html)

<sup>89</sup> John 13:34

receptive to God's action in the world. We come to know the fullest vision of 'the good life,' or God's life with us, standing at the gates of heaven, never forgetting that the shape of the Christian life this side of the gate is the cross—that is, as the Way, is yet heaven.<sup>90</sup>

Like prayer, in the Eucharist we learn to know ourselves and others as we are known.

Such knowing is transformative, and in a significant way for those with bodily dissatisfaction and disordered eating. In the Eucharist, the believer is fed bodily and spiritually. In the Roman Catholic tradition, the doctrine of transubstantiation holds that the Eucharistic elements are truly converted into the body and blood of Christ.<sup>91</sup>

Margaret Miles (who is not a Catholic) writes that

The doctrine assumed an intimate interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual by which physical food can nourish spiritual life. The implicit statement this doctrine makes about the essential nature of human beings suggests that the boundaries of body and soul are not absolute, but permeable. Because the Eucharistic elements combine spiritual and physical elements, they simultaneously provide food for both aspects of human beings.<sup>92</sup>

Such an understanding of the Eucharist as nourishing the physical and spiritual life indicates that, like physical food, the Eucharist is not merely beneficial but *necessary* for life. The practice of the Eucharist makes clear that physical and spiritual life are connected. Just as feeding the physical body with physical food can nourish the soul, so too does nourishing the soul with Christ's body nourish the recipient's physical body. Francis de Sales expresses this concept particularly beautifully: "Just as hares in our mountains become white in winter because they neither see nor eat anything but snow,

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<sup>90</sup> Lysaught, "Love and Liturgy," 36.

<sup>91</sup> The doctrine of transubstantiation was formerly defined at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.

<sup>92</sup> Miles, *Practicing Christianity*, 107.

so, by adoring and eating beauty, purity, and goodness itself in this divine sacrament you will become wholly beautiful, wholly good, and wholly pure.”<sup>93</sup>

What is important to note for the purposes of this dissertation is that the transformative process that happens in worship, and particularly in the Eucharist, is intended to make the believer connatural with God. Christian practices help the believer develop that affective knowledge necessary to live rightly. The believer is subsequently able to “see rightly” both by her own direct efforts, by the illumination of her mind by the Holy Spirit, making it “clear-sighted in its perception and penetration of [matters of faith].”<sup>94</sup> As John of St. Thomas writes,

These things are not experienced except through an affection and a correctly ordered estimation of the end. Such an understanding and knowledge of spiritual things from an experimental affection of its very nature tends to experimental evidence. For the unified and specific nature of this gift is the perfection and illumination of the mind for the connatural and experiential understanding and penetration of spiritual truths. This connaturality is had only through love—*What adheres to God is one spirit*. . . From this loving connaturality springs full and consummate evidence through the penetration and understanding of the mysteries outside the vision of the essence of God.<sup>95</sup>

Worship illumines the mind with a knowledge of spiritual truths by making it connatural to them, thus granting the believer by grace an experience of the sweetness of God. This allows the human mind to be moved by the Holy Spirit, even in this life, by a sort of

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<sup>93</sup> Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 119.

<sup>94</sup> John of St. Thomas, *Gifts of the Holy Ghost*, 94.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

spiritual instinct which “leads us toward truth and good with the spontaneity of a natural impetus.”<sup>96</sup>

In his recent book, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire*, William Cavanaugh examines the relevance of the Eucharist in a consumer context, arguing that the practice of the Eucharist both challenges and transforms our consumptive practices. He warns that the Eucharist is not just another kind of spirituality commodified for the individual believer. “The practice of the Eucharist is resistant to such appropriation,” he writes, “because the consumer of the Eucharist is taken up into a larger body, the body of Christ.” Cavanaugh goes on,

The act of consumption is thereby turned inside out: instead of simply consuming the body of Christ, we are consumed by it. St. Augustine hears God say, ‘I am the food of the fully grown; grow and you will feed on me. And you will not change me into you like the food your flesh eats, but you will be changed in too me. In the Christian view, we do not simply stand apart, as individuals, from the rest of creation—appropriating, consuming, and discarding. In the Eucharist we are absorbed into a larger body. The small individual self is de-centered and put in the context of a much wider community of participation with others in the divine life. At the same time, we do not lose our identities as unique persons, for as Paul says, each different member of the body is valued and needed for the body to function (I Cor. 12:12-27).’<sup>97</sup>

We can clearly apply this idea to the consumption of thin-ideal images. The consumption of such images transforms the interior life of the consumer in a way she is largely not aware of. The images become a part of her by making her connatural with them, such that they transform her desires and prompt her towards certain beliefs and behaviors consistent with what these images communicate. By consuming thin-ideal images, the consumer is swept up into an eating disordered body, and thus begins to behave in certain

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<sup>96</sup> Pinckaers, “Morality and the Movement of the Holy Spirit,” *The Pinckaers Reader*, 394.

<sup>97</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 54-5.

disordered ways towards her body and food, even in ways contrary to her consciously-held beliefs and values. By way of contrast, in the Eucharist, the “consumer” is incorporated into the body of Christ. In the Eucharist, the believer is made by grace connatural with the Christ, such that she is prompted to believe and act like Christ by a sort of spiritual instinct. This spiritual instinct, as Pinckaers writes, “guides our choices, suggests initiatives, guards us from dangers, and helps us to surmount errors.”<sup>98</sup>

#### **IV. Conclusion: Eating Disorders and the Role of the Church**

This chapter has argued that the church, through its practices, has the potential to bring to life a powerful and relevant moral theology in light of the problems posed by thin-ideal internalization. Body dissatisfaction among females, with the psychopathologies of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa as the most extreme manifestation, present a major challenge to the church in bringing to bear the significance of God’s relationship with people in every aspect of their daily lives. For many women in this country, one of the most significant problems they face is their overall unhappiness with their bodies, which requires a lifestyle of often-obsessive attention to food, caloric intake, and exercise, all of which detracts from a life of flourishing.

This chapter has argued that we might understand the practices of the church as a sort of antidote towards the practices characteristic of women with eating disorders. What is particularly distinctive about the practices of the church is that they have internal goods which are the result of grace—that is, the gifts of the Holy Spirit—which allow the

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<sup>98</sup> Pinckaers, “Morality and the Movement of the Holy Spirit,” in *The Pinckaers Reader*, 391.

individual engaged in the practice to achieve certain standards of excellence beyond her own ability. In the asceticism practiced by women with eating disorders, reason and will are turned away from spiritual things and become fixated on loathing the body. In Christian asceticism, reason and will are turned by grace to focus on the highest things, and to love material and bodily goods in a way conducive to the pursuit of the higher spiritual goods which ultimately lead to happiness (beatitude). The person is transformed by grace rendering her connatural to a certain vision of the good and mode of acting.

In like manner, prayer is the turning away from an egotistical focus on the self, and a subsequent turning towards God. By elevating the sight towards heavenly things, one learns how to rightly desire the things of this earth. Again, this knowledge that is gained through the practice of prayer is distinguished from the knowledge gained through willful and conscious study. As John of St. Thomas writes, knowledge of this sort “is based not on philosophical inquiry but on Sacred Scripture, which asserts that knowledge in such gifts is founded upon love and a sort of savor. ‘Taste and see’ or again, ‘a good understanding to all who do it.’”<sup>99</sup>

Finally, in worship, by contemplating and consuming God in the Eucharist, the believer is brought into union with God and made malleable to the promptings (*instinctus*) of the Holy Spirit to act in a way consistent with the order of love. Christian worship fosters a knowledge of spiritual realities (i.e. that union with God is to be desired above all things) and makes it possible to begin to see oneself in light of the way God sees. Drawing on a distinction from Courtney Martin's *Perfect Girls, Starving*

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<sup>99</sup> John of St. Thomas, *The Gifts of the Holy Ghost*, 99.

*Daughters*, Kristin Johnston Largen distinguishes between being “noticed” and being “seen.”<sup>100</sup> The former is characterized by a brief value judgment by a stranger—a wink or a grin from a man which indicates “I think you are attractive,” a look of envy from another woman, a comment about an outfit or a hairstyle. In contrast, being seen is a lasting, intimate, profound encounter with another person. Largen then posits that what Jesus offers is a chance to be seen:

Think back to Jesus' encounter with Nathanael (John 1), or his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). In both these cases, Jesus truly seeing them equates to Jesus truly knowing them; and this results in a transformation of their very identity and their self-understanding. Jesus' act of seeing and knowing enables them to see and know themselves in a new way--and that new identity, that new vision is a concrete experience of the gospel.<sup>101</sup>

Being *noticed*, notes Largen, relies on our own abilities, our own worth. Being *seen*, in contrast is an acknowledgment of value and worth that is unearned. When we are seen by God, we realize that “we don't have to pretend with God; we don't have to put on a show or put on our best face; and we don't have to earn God's love by looking perfect or acting perfect. Instead, being seen and being known by God are, at their core, powerful metaphors that point to the experience of being loved by God, forgiven by God, adopted by God, and brought into God's family.”<sup>102</sup>

We do a great disservice to morality if we fail to recognize the way the little, everyday things shape our character. A great insight of a Thomistic approach to moral theology is the recognition that what we look at, what we say, and every little thing we do

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<sup>100</sup> Courtney E. Martin, *Perfect Girls, Starving Daughters: The Frightening New Normalcy of Hating Your Body* (Free Press, 2007).

<sup>101</sup> Kristin Johnston Largen, “Being Seen vs. Being Noticed,” *Dialog* 48, no. 1 (2009): 7-8.

<sup>102</sup> Largen, “Being Seen,” 7.



shapes our characters, shapes us into the people we are because all these little things shape our appetite. Maritain writes perspicaciously:

Philosophers and philosophical theories supervene in order to explain and justify, through concepts and reasoning, what from the time of the cave-men men have progressively known through inclination and connaturality. Moral philosophy is reflective knowledge, a sort of after-knowledge. It does not discover the moral law. The moral law was discovered by men before the existence of any moral philosophy. Moral philosophy has crucially to analyze and rationally to elucidate moral standards and rules of conduct whose validity was previously discovered in an undemonstrable manner, and in a non-conceptual, non-rational way; it has also to clear them, as far as possible, from the adventitious outgrowths or deviations which may have developed by reason of the coarseness of our nature and the accidents of social evolution.<sup>103</sup>

The moral approach to eating disorders provided in this dissertation shows that morality is so much more than simply knowing the right thing to do. Morality is about developing the inclination towards true goods, the greatest of which is God who alone satisfies all our desires. Morality is about learning how to live with a “good appetite.” Bon appétit!

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<sup>103</sup> Maritain, “On Knowledge Through Connaturality,” 480.

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