

## AQUINAS'S DOCTRINE OF MORAL VIRTUE AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR THEORIES OF FACILITY

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**T**HOMISTIC COMMENTATORS from the post-Scholastic era to the modern period generally restricted their discussions of Aquinas's doctrine on the relationship between the acquired and infused virtues to the question of facility, that is, whether or not each kind of virtue facilitates the acts of the other. R. F. Coerver<sup>1</sup> gives 1943 as a cutoff date for contemporary discussion of the question of facility in the infused virtues. His 1946 dissertation on the topic notes that many theologians of his day had discarded the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic facility and, with the exception of the manuals of Merkelbach (1871-1942) and Hervé (1881-1958), "few of the modern theologians devote much space to the interrelation of the acquired and infused moral virtues."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Rev. Robert Florent Coerver, C.M., *The Quality of Facility in the Moral Virtues*, The Catholic University of America Studies in Sacred Theology 92 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1946).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 113. A literature search from 1946 to 1994 (*The Guide to Catholic Literature, Catholic Periodical and Literature Index*, and *American Theological Library Association Index*) confirms Coerver's observation. The subject of facility in the moral virtues has not appeared as a topic of theological investigation since the 1940s. An exception is Romanus Cessario's *Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics* ([Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991], introduction, 10), which contains a section on the relationship of the acquired and infused moral virtues. After a discussion of Aquinas's distinction between the facility of acquired and infused virtue respectively, Cessario demonstrates how the development of the virtuous life of the Christian depends on the "dynamic interplay which exists between the exercise of the acquired and the enjoyment of the infused virtues." An article by John F. Harvey ("The Nature of the Infused Moral Virtues," *Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America* [1954]: 172-221) gives extended space to the relation of the infused and acquired moral virtues in terms of facility but relies primarily on Coerver's 1946 research. The small number of articles written after 1950 on the relation between acquired and infused

More recently, however, theologians such as Jean Porter<sup>3</sup> and Otto Hermann Pesch<sup>4</sup> have recognized that, in order to facilitate a critical appropriation of Aquinas's doctrine of virtue amidst the contemporary revival of a virtue-based ethics, it is critical that the exposition of his theory be complete. In attempting to assemble such a substantive account, however, one encounters a lacuna in the area of moral virtue. While insisting on the two species of moral virtue, acquired and infused, Aquinas devotes the greatest proportion of the *Secunda secundae* of the *Summa Theologiae* to the analysis of the acquired moral virtues and neglects a correspondingly full exposition of their infused counterparts.<sup>5</sup> Then, in the scattered references in which he does compare and contrast the two species of moral virtue, although he affirms that they can coexist in the Christian,<sup>6</sup> and that the presence of acquired moral virtues exerts<sup>7</sup> a positive impact on

moral virtues demonstrates a shift in thinking from interest in the relation between the acquired and infused moral virtues in terms of facility to their significance within the divine-human unity of Christian moral activity. This article reconsiders the earlier facility discussion in light of the reconstruction of the divine-human unity of moral activity as proposed by Aquinas.

<sup>3</sup> Jean Porter ("The Subversion of Virtue," *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* [1992]: 38) opines that to appropriate Aquinas's virtue theory for contemporary purposes, one needs "to offer some account of the relation of acquired to infused virtues in the case of the individual who possesses both." In the same article Porter argues that because Aquinas does not systematically address the question of the relation between the acquired and infused virtues in the *Summa Theologiae*, one must reconstruct his theory on the basis of his explicit teaching on virtue and related topics. My research into other works in Aquinas's corpus in which he focuses on virtue, namely, *De virtutibus in communi*, *De caritate*, *De spe*, *De cardinalibus virtutibus*, *De veritate*, *In decem libros Ethicorum ad Nicomachum*, and *Scripta super libros Sententiarum*, verifies Porter's conclusion.

<sup>4</sup> Pesch ("The Theology of Virtue and the Theological Virtues," in *Concilium* 191: *Changing Values and Virtues*, ed. Dietmar Mieth and Jacques Pohier [Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1987], 91) insists that an account of Aquinas's doctrine of virtue cannot be complete until one examines in detail "the relationship between the theological and moral virtues, between infused and acquired virtues."

<sup>5</sup> See *STh* II-II, qq. 47-170.

<sup>6</sup> See III *Sent.* d. 33, q. 1, a. 2, qcla. 4, s.c.; *STh* II-II, q. 47, a. 14, ad 1; q. 53, a. 1, ad 3.

<sup>7</sup> In the course of this article, the human soul, its powers, and their perfections, the habits and virtues, are frequently described in a way that connotes hypostatization: the soul understands; the will desires; prudence directs; the acquired moral virtues exert, etc. Aquinas insists that one must always remember that it is the person who wills, the per-

facility in the performance of virtuous acts,<sup>8</sup> he does not discuss precisely how the two species of moral virtue interrelate in the moral activity of the Christian who possesses both.

Accordingly, we need to investigate the following. First, since Aquinas does not engage in an *ex professo* treatment of the question at hand, is it in accord with his theory of virtue to say that, in the Christian who acquires human virtue, the acquired and infused moral virtues coexist in a parallel fashion? That is, do these virtues enable the individual to perform purely natural acts of virtue at one time and purely supernatural acts of virtue at another? Or do both species of moral virtue contribute in some manner to the performance of the same moral act? Second, if the latter is the case, what is the theoretical explanation for a single moral act following from two causes, one natural, the other supernatural?

I will advance a reconstruction of Aquinas's theory of moral virtue by means of a twofold thesis.<sup>9</sup> First, in the Christian who also possesses the acquired moral virtues, each acquired virtue and its infused counterpart are the material and formal principles, respectively, of the perfect realization of that particular moral virtue and constitute a unified virtue that is supernaturally transformed. Or, to state the thesis differently: In the Christian moral life, a perfect moral act directed to a single material object but performed from two ordered motives, natural and supernatural, is able to realize a created good that is a means to attaining the absolutely ultimate end. Second, the theoretical explanation of the unity of perfect moral virtue<sup>10</sup> not only serves as a litmus

son who is prudent, the person who is virtuous. Reference to the soul, powers, or virtues is only for purposes of analysis and classification, and a certain reification of them is not intended to obfuscate the principal point that habits and powers of the human person are properties of a substantial human being pertaining to the accidental category of quality (see *STh* I-II, q. 56, a. 5).

<sup>8</sup> See *STh* I-II, q. 65, a. 3, ad 2.

<sup>9</sup> Aquinas's "theory of the relation between the acquired and infused moral virtues in the Christian" is alternately referred to throughout this investigation as "the theory of the unity of perfect moral virtue."

<sup>10</sup> To understand the first part of the thesis, one must note that (1) Aquinas uses the term "virtue" analogically of human and divine virtue; (2) the terms "matter" and "form," when applied to the relation of these two types of virtue, are also analogical, since both are spiritual qualities when used in reference to virtue; and (3) the term "perfect moral virtue" is applied in its absolute sense only to human virtue transformed by grace.

test for the validity of representative theories of facility but also demonstrates the proper context within which the notion of facility will function as an apt tool in the reconstruction of Aquinas's theory of moral virtue.

## I. FOUNDATIONS FOR THE RECONSTRUCTED THEORY

### A) Aquinas's *Explicit Teaching on "Habitus" and Virtues*

The appropriate first step in grasping what Aquinas explicitly teaches regarding virtue is to investigate his theory of *habitus*.<sup>11</sup> Aquinas's concept of a habit, the genus of virtue, lays a foundation for the thesis of this paper in two ways. First, it highlights the active power of a habit, a cardinal concept in the theoretical part of the thesis which involves the concept of habits related to one another as potency to act or matter to form. In the introduction to his treatise on habit, Aquinas declares that powers and habits are the intrinsic sources of action in the human agent.<sup>12</sup> As a disposition to act, a *habitus* is an active principle or agent that orients a power of the soul to perform a certain operation with ease, promptness, and enjoyment.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Habitus* is a fourth declension noun which, in the nominative case, has the same form in the singular as in the plural. It is derived from the verb *habere*, meaning to have or possess something, or *se habere*, to be in a certain state (see *STh* I-II, q. 49, a. 1). Translations are often misleading. To translate *habitus* with the English word "habit" could confuse contemporary connotations of the word with the Scholastic meaning. Whenever the word "habit" (or *habitus*) is used in this paper, it is used in its Scholastic sense. In short, it does not mean some automatic reflex or response passively developed through repetition (as a twentieth-century person might speak of "a habit of smoking") but rather a deliberate qualification of human powers whose exercise always constitutes a freely chosen act.

<sup>12</sup> "Principium autem intrinsecum est potentia et habitus" (prologue to *STh* I-II, qq. 49-54: Leonine edition, 6:309).

<sup>13</sup> Understood in hylomorphic terms, a habit is related to a power as form to matter or act to potency. It determines or perfects a power, which has the potency to act indeterminately, and causes it to act in a determinate way in an easy and steadfast manner. Because human beings can act in more than one way and because they are subject to random, chance influences, their actions require habituation. They can choose and determine their goals and the means to those goals. Human agents, therefore, need added dispositions to ensure that they act in accord with their nature. Good *habitus* ensure that the rational powers and their natural dispositions toward truth and goodness function optimally. *Habitus* are vicious if these basic dispositions are relativized in evil choices, that is, in choices that cripple the practice of the natural good habit.

The second way Aquinas's theory of *habitus* lays a foundation for my thesis is by illustrating that a habit is also a passive power or agent, that is, capable of receiving further perfection from a superior habit. Aquinas is careful to point out that habits, like human activity, are complex. For example, a good habit of the intellect, such as the habit of science, functions optimally only when the possible intellect and the interior cognitive senses are perfected in their respective activities.<sup>14</sup> From another perspective, a habit of science, although materially a habit of the knowledge of conclusions reached by reasoning, is also formally a habit of the first principles known by insight from which this reasoning proceeds. Moral *habitus* are also complex. Although essentially an appetitive habit, a moral habit is accidentally or secondarily a habit of the intellect, that is, prudence.<sup>15</sup> The habit of the intellect is related to the habit of the appetite as the accidental form of a power is related to the substance of the soul, that is, as form to matter.

The material and formal principles of a composite human habit (e.g., the habit of a particular science) have the following significance. The habit that is the material component (e.g., the habit of memory) is the necessary substratum for the perfecting form (the habit of science) and, while maintaining its own essential form, the habit of memory is further defined by the form that it receives from the superior habit of science. The reality of the composite habit of science transcends that of either component principle. Therefore neither the habit of memory nor the habit of science *in se* is a habit in an absolute sense. Alone the inferior or superior habit is imperfect or incomplete, but together the ordered components form one complete or perfect habit that is unified by the form of the superior habit.

When we move from Aquinas's discussion of *habitus* to good habits or virtues, especially human or acquired virtue, three

<sup>14</sup> See *STh* I-II, q. 50, a. 3, ad 3.

<sup>15</sup> Aquinas speaks of moral virtue as a requirement of prudence. See *STh* I-II, q. 57, a. 4. "Therefore, for right reason about things to be done which is prudence, it is necessary that man have moral virtue" ("ideo ad rectam rationem agibilium quae est prudentia, requiritur quod homo habeat virtutem moralem") (*STh* I-II, q. 58, a. 5: Leonine, 6:376). All English translations of Latin texts are mine.

points of central interest vis-à-vis the thesis emerge. First, Aquinas's analogous use of the term "virtue" creates a fluid hierarchy of human virtue. Insofar as the criterion for superior human virtue is that which inheres in the most perfect human faculty, the intellect, and that which is directed to the noblest human activity, contemplation, intellectual acquired virtue ranks higher than, or is superior to, acquired moral virtue. But when Aquinas defines human virtue in its absolute sense as that which involves the will directed to the formal good, then acquired moral virtue ranks as virtue in an absolute sense (*simpliciter*) while intellectual virtue is virtue in a restricted sense (*secundum quid*).<sup>16</sup>

With Aquinas's introduction of infused virtue into the hierarchy of virtue, however, the superiority of acquired moral virtue is itself relativized. Since divine or infused virtue is directed not to a particular good but to the absolute Good,<sup>17</sup> acquired moral virtue is no longer virtue in an absolute sense but, in reference to infused virtue, is virtue in a restricted sense. Nevertheless, because Aquinas demonstrates the complementarity of the

<sup>16</sup> For Aquinas, the speculative virtues are more excellent than the moral virtues, objectively speaking, because they proceed more directly from the rational part of the human soul and are directed to the ultimate end, the contemplation of God. They are less excellent in the *fullest sense of virtue*, however, because they lack an act of the will directed to a formal good. Since only the will, or faculties directed by the will, is directed to *bonum ut bonum*, only virtues that perfect these appetites are virtues strictly speaking. Therefore, in the order of human virtue, only moral virtues are virtues in an absolute sense. "Thus only the habits pertaining to the appetitive part can be called virtue, not, however, the intellectual habits, and especially not the speculative habits" ("sic solum habitus respicientes appetitivam partem virtutes dici possunt, non autem intellectuales, et specialiter speculativi") (III *Sent.*, d. 23, q. 1, a. 4 qcla. 3, sol. 1: Moos, 3:712).

<sup>17</sup> If the human agent is to move toward an end, the end must be known and desired, i.e., it must be seen as attainable and lovable. Faith is the virtue that enables the human being to know God for, through faith, "the mind comprehends those things which it hopes for and loves" ("apprehendit intellectus ea quae sperat et amat") (*STh* I-II, q. 62, a. 4: Leonine, 6:405). Hope is the virtue that gives the recipient the confidence that God is attainable, for, perfected by hope, the will reaches out to its end with a "movement of intention tending toward [the good] itself as if toward that which is possible to attain" ("motum intentionis, in ipsum tendentem sicut in id quod est possibile consequi") (*STh* I-II, q. 62, a. 3: Leonine, 6:403). And charity is the virtue that enables the person to love God because "through it [the will] is transformed, so to speak, into that end" ("per quam quodammodo transformatur in illum finem") (*ibid.*).

respective ends of acquired moral virtue (particular good) and infused moral virtue (absolute Good), it can be argued that he presents acquired moral virtue as disposed toward infused moral virtue.

Second, Aquinas sets the active-passive potency of the natural dispositions as the standard for the causality that is characteristic of human virtue.<sup>18</sup> Hence, just as the natural dispositions or "seeds of virtue" are the perfecting principles of the inferior power of their respective faculties, so is it reasonable to argue that acquired moral virtue is the perfecting principle of the natural dispositions that are subordinate to it. Just as natural dispositions are the perfectible or material principles of the more perfect principles of the acquired intellectual and moral virtues, so is it reasonable to argue that acquired moral virtue is the perfectible or material principle of infused virtue, which is superior to it.

Third, through his theory of the unity of human moral virtue, Aquinas demonstrates that perfect moral virtue is materially an acquired moral virtue and formally a virtue of prudence. He asserts that knowledge alone fails to ensure good human activity; the human appetites, both rational and sensitive, can present formidable opposition to the direction of reason and demand the perfection of the moral virtues to dispose them to obey reason, that is, to obey the direction of prudence.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, perfect moral virtue in the human order, or relatively perfect moral virtue, is a composite virtue that is formally a virtue of prudence and materially a virtue of justice, temperance, fortitude, or their allied virtues.

<sup>18</sup> The natural dispositions or "seeds of virtue" are passive principles because they are receptive to the form of the perfected or acquired virtue, and they are active agents because, like the natural principle of fire, they induce their own form into the power from which their action originates. In this way, natural dispositions, with a graduated impact, impress their form on their respective powers and on each act that proceeds from their powers until by the frequent repetition of these acts the habits of the virtues and sciences are perfected.

<sup>19</sup> To cite only one example, it is not enough for someone to be well-disposed toward temperate acts in food, drink, and sex by moral virtue; one must also have the knowledge of how, where, why, and when to be temperate through the intellectual virtue of prudence before one can be assured of actually being temperate.

Furthermore, with the composite nature of relatively perfect moral virtue, a single human virtue consisting of ordered components that are in a matter-form relationship, Aquinas sets the precedent for the composition of an absolutely perfect moral virtue. That is, through the unifying presence of prudence, Aquinas defines the prototype of each species of human virtue, both intellectual and moral, as a composite virtue. Similarly, through the unity of charity,<sup>20</sup> he defines absolutely perfect moral virtue as a virtue that is formally an infused virtue and materially an acquired virtue. All the infused moral virtues, Aquinas insists, depend on charity.<sup>21</sup> Charity, or supernatural love of God, is the form, source, and end of all action that is supernatural and meritorious. As a result, besides acts of faith, hope, and charity, Christians can posit supernatural acts of fortitude, temperance, justice, prudence, and their allied virtues, acts that are the means to attaining their supernatural end or happiness. The other moral virtues cannot exist without prudence, and prudence cannot exist without the other moral virtues, for the latter dispose a person to certain natural ends from which the judgment of prudence begins. But for prudence to judge rightly regarding the supernatural end, the virtue of charity that fits the agent to that end must be present.<sup>22</sup> In other words, an infused moral virtue,

<sup>20</sup> For Aquinas, the principle that charity is the form of the virtues means, in its most general sense, that charity perfects the acts of the other virtues by commanding or directing them to their ultimate end, in effect by making the justified capable of acts of love that would otherwise exceed the power of the human will.

In *De caritate*, Aquinas reiterates the notion of charity as an exemplary form (*forma exemplaris*), but he qualifies the notion slightly by explaining that charity is an effective exemplar form (*exemplar effectivum*), a form producing acts like itself. Here charity is the form of the virtues not so much as generating other virtues like itself but as producing virtues that operate like itself. The nexus between charity and the other virtues is underscored in Aquinas's description: "charity, considered as an act, not only has an exemplarity, but it also has a motive and effective force. For there is no effective exemplar without its copy, because it produces something in being. And thus charity does not exist without the other virtues" ("Caritas quantum ad actum non solum habet exemplaritatem, sed etiam virtutem motivam et effectivam. Exemplar autem effectivum non est sine exemplo; quia producit illud in esse; et sic caritas non est sine aliis virtutibus") (*De caritate* 3, ad 8: Vivès, 14:239).

<sup>21</sup> See *STh* I-II, q. 65, a. 3, and ad 1; *De virtutibus cardinalibus* 2.

<sup>22</sup> Aquinas insists that charity is essential to the infused moral virtues. The infused virtue of prudence is able to judge correctly regarding the supernatural end only by means of the direction of charity. Likewise, the other infused moral virtues that are con-



having received its perfect form from charity, is also able to effect, produce, and create its own form or perfection in its acquired counterpart, enabling the acquired virtue to function just like the infused.

Finally, although Aquinas teaches that a particular acquired virtue and its infused analogate have the same material act, they have different formal objects or motives.<sup>23</sup> The motive for practicing supernatural temperance in regard to food, for example, is a supernatural measure: Christians should chastise their bodies and bring them into subjection. The motive for practicing natural temperance in regard to food is a natural measure: food should not harm the body nor hinder reason.<sup>24</sup> The end of an acquired moral virtue is good behavior in human affairs; the end of an infused moral virtue is to perfect the person as a citizen of heaven. Because of the ordered relationship of imperfect to perfect principles, Aquinas demonstrates that the motive and end of acquired moral virtue is included within, or is the material component of, the motive and end of infused moral virtue. As a

nected with prudence and cannot exist without it, also require the perfection of charity in order to direct the agent to the absolutely ultimate end (*ad finem ultimum simpliciter*). What Aquinas appears to be saying is that the line of command or direction from charity to the infused moral virtues, except for prudence, is a mediate one. Prudence maintains its command of the other moral virtues on the supernatural plane; charity informs prudence directly and, through prudence, the other infused moral virtues. In one sense, then, both charity and prudence connect the infused moral virtues, but charity is their ultimate bond because all the divine virtues are directed to the end of charity.

<sup>23</sup> See *Sth* I-II, q. 63, a. 4; *De virtutibus* 10, ad 7, 8, 9; *III Sent.*, d. 33, q. 1, a. 2, qcla. 4.

<sup>24</sup> "Habits are specifically distinguished in two ways: in one way . . . according to the specific and formal characters of their objects. . . . It is evident, however, that the mean which is imposed on desires of this sort according to the rule of human reason differs from that mean which is imposed according to the divine rule. For example, in the consumption of food, by human reason the mean is established that it should not injure bodily health nor impede the act of reason. But according to the rule of divine law, it is required that, by abstinence from food and drink and from other like things, man *should chastise his body and reduce it to servitude*" ("dupliciter habitus distinguuntur specie. Uno modo . . . secundum speciales et formales rationes obiectorum. . . . Manifestum est autem quod alterius rationis est modus qui imponitur in huiusmodi concupiscentiis secundum regulam rationis humanae, et secundum regulam divinam. Puta in sumptione ciborum, ratione humana modus statuitur ut non noceat valetudini corporis, nec impediatur rationis actum; secundum autem regulam legis divinae, requiritur quod homo *castiget corpus suum, et in servitutem redigat*, per abstinentiam cibi et potus, et aliorum huiusmodi") (*Sth* I-II, q. 63, a. 4; Leonine, 6:411; see also *ibid.*, ad 1).

result, an act of temperance following from a perfect virtue of temperance is a single act performed from two ordered motives and for two ordered ends.<sup>25</sup>

### *B) Aquinas's Teaching on Structurally Related Issues*

We have demonstrated the compatibility of the reconstructed theory of the relation between acquired and infused moral virtues with Aquinas's explicit teaching on virtue, but it is also possible to verify the validity of this theory by illustrating its complementarity to his indirect teaching regarding this question, that is, in respect to cases that are analogous to the relation of the two species of moral virtue and that illustrate his conception of the unity of any entity that consists of distinct components ordered to each other as matter to form.<sup>26</sup> For example, Aquinas argues that the informed human act, though composed of the material-formal components of the commanded act and the act of command, is one act.<sup>27</sup> The human person, though composed of the material-formal principles of body and soul, is one human

<sup>25</sup> As far as the intention of an act is concerned, Aquinas insists that the human agent is able to intend more than one thing at the same time. Therefore, since intention responds to both a final and a proximate end, it is possible to do one and the same act for both a natural and a supernatural end. See *STh* I-II, q. 12, a. 3.

<sup>26</sup> See G. P. Klubertanz, "The Unity of Human Activity," *The Modern Schoolman* 27 (January 1950): 75-103.

<sup>27</sup> "But just as in the genus of natural things a certain whole [being] is composed of matter and form as, [for example] the man who is one natural being is composed from soul and body, although [this whole] may have many part, so also, in human acts, the act of an inferior power is related to the act of the superior power materially. For the inferior power acts in virtue of the superior power moving it; even so the act of a prime mover is related to the act of its instrument formally. Hence, it is evident that a command and the act commanded are one human act, just as some whole [thing] is one, but as to its parts is many" ("Sicut autem in genere rerum naturalium, aliquod totum componitur ex materia et forma, ut homo ex anima et corpore, qui est unum ens naturale, licet habeat multitudinem partium ita etiam in actibus humanis, actus inferiores potentiae materialiter se habet ad actum superioris, in quantum inferior potentia agit in virtute superioris moventis ipsam: sic enim et actus moventis primi formaliter se habet ad actum instrumenti. Unde patet quod imperium et actus imperatus sunt unus actus humanus, sicut quoddam totum est unum, sed est secundum partes multa") (*STh* I-II, q. 17, a. 4; Leonine, 6:121).

person.<sup>28</sup> The activity of Christ, though composed of the material-formal causes of human and divine activity, is a single activity,<sup>29</sup> and the Divine Law, though composed of the material-formal elements of the Old Law and the Gospel Law, is a single law.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, we can deduce, *mutatis mutandis*, what Aquinas might have said if he would have asked the question "How do the acquired and infused moral virtues function within the justified person?" Moral virtue in the Christian, though composed of acquired and infused moral virtue, is an indivisible but composite virtue that is formally an infused moral virtue and materially an acquired moral virtue.

## II. INADEQUATE THEORIES OF FACILITY<sup>31</sup>

### A) *The Suarezian Theory of Facility in the Moral Virtues*

The main lines of the sixteenth-century Scholastic response to the objection that infused moral virtues do not confer facility<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> "It is not necessary to ask if the body and soul are one [thing] as neither [is it necessary to ask whether] the wax and its shape are [one thing]" ("non oportet quærere si unum est anima et corpus, sicut neque ceram et figuram") (cited in *STh* I, q. 76, a. 7, s.c.: Aristotle, *De anima* 2.1 [412b 6-9]).

<sup>29</sup> "Dionysius posits a *theandric* operation, that is, a *divine-male* or *divine-human* operation in Christ, not through some confusion of the activities or powers of both natures but, through this, that his divine action uses his human action and his human action participates in the power of the divine action" ("Dionysius ponit in Christo operationem *theandricum*, idest *divinam-virilem* vel *divinam-humanam*, non per aliquam confusionem operationum seu virtutem utriusque naturae, sed per hoc quod divina operatio eius utitur humana eius operatione, et humana operatio participat virtutem divinae operationis") (*STh* III, q. 19, a. 1, ad 1: Leonine, 11:240).

<sup>30</sup> See *STh* I-II, q. 91, a. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Coerver identifies a number of principal opinions regarding facility among Thomistic commentators between the mid-16th and 20th centuries. Of these, the opinions of Suárez and Billot are, in Coerver's estimate, the two main theories. See Coerver, *Facility*, 65-67.

<sup>32</sup> John Duns Scotus, O.F.M. (1274-1308) denied the existence of infused moral virtues distinct from theological virtues, particularly from charity which he argued is sufficient to direct the acquired virtues to a supernatural end. Subsequent to this refutation, an extensive debate ensued over the existence and the nature of infused moral virtue (see Coerver, *Facility*, 10-11; Cessario, *Moral Virtues*, 103-4). Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Scholastics, in the revival of theological speculation that accompanied the Counter-Reformation, defended Aquinas's doctrine on the infused moral virtues against two principal objections: first, the moral virtues are not infused; second, these supposed virtues do not confer facility in the practice of virtue.

can be traced to Francisco Suárez (1548-1617), who, followed by the Salmanticenses (Discalced Carmelites) and J. B. Gonet, O.P. (ca. 1616-81),<sup>33</sup> introduced the distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic facility in reference to the acquired and infused moral virtues, respectively. He explains the distinction thus:

A twofold facility can be distinguished: one is intrinsic which *per se* is in each faculty in relation to the act to which [that faculty] is inclined; the other is through the removal of impediments which occur *per accidens*. These [infused] virtues, therefore, give the first kind of facility inasmuch as they confer an intrinsic ease of acting to the acts to which they are connaturally inclined as to their own end and ultimate act. Therefore, since these virtues are intrinsically in their powers, they are as certain weights inclining the powers to their proper acts. In this way, they give intrinsic facility. . . . But they do not supply an extrinsic facility because the contrary difficulty comes either from natural ignorance or inconsideration, or from the stirrings of concupiscence, or from the corruptibility of body; these impediments, however, are not taken away by the [infused] virtues.<sup>34</sup>

Suárez argues that although the intrinsic facility of the infused virtues qualifies as facility in a broad sense by conferring a positive inclination of the faculty to the good of virtue, it does not remove external impediments that may cause difficulties in the exercise of the virtuous act.<sup>35</sup> In order for the intrinsic facility of the infused virtue to become operationally functional, it needs to

<sup>33</sup> Coerver (*Facility*, 26-28) points out that in his *Clypeus theologiae thomisticae contra novos ejus impugnatores*, Gonet quotes verbatim the definition of intrinsic and extrinsic facility from the *Cursus Theologicus*, a theological treatise based on the outline of the *Summa Theologiae*, the bulk of which was written in the seventeenth century by the Salmanticenses, Discalced Carmelites of the College of St. Elias in Salamanca, Spain.

<sup>34</sup> "Duplex enim facilitas . . . distingui potest: una est intrinseca, quae per se inest cuicumque facultati respectu actus ad quem inclinatur; alia est per ablationem impedimentorum quae per accidens occurrunt. Hae igitur virtutes priorem dant facilitatem, eo ipso quod intrinsecam conferunt operandi facultatem ad actus ad quos connaturaliter inclinantur tanquam ad finem suum, et ultimum actum. Unde cum hae virtutes intrinsece insint suis potentiis, sunt veluti pondera quaedam ad suos actus inclinantia potentias. Hoc ergo modo dant intrinsecam facilitatem sicut supra etiam de Theologicis virtutibus tetigimus. At vero extrinsecam facilitatem non praebent, quia contraria difficultas provenit aut ex naturali ignorantia vel inconsideratione, aut ex fomite concupiscentiae, vel corporis corruptibilitate; haec autem impedimenta per has virtutes non auferuntur" (Suárez, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 9, book 6, chap. 9, n. 9: Coerver, *Facility*, n. 52).

<sup>35</sup> Coerver, *Facility*, 29.

be complemented by the extrinsic facility of the acquired virtue. In what way acquired virtues render this assistance is the next issue to be investigated.

After making the distinction between the extrinsic facility associated with the acquired virtues and the intrinsic facility proper to the infused virtues, Suárez discusses yet another difficulty that is both practical and theoretical. Experience teaches that there is an extrinsic facility of action connected with the repeated exercise of infused virtues. How does one account for this kind of facility? Suárez suggests two logical sources:

First, as a result of the same [repeated] supernatural and infused acts that are from infused habits or those that are elicited by divine help, other habits are acquired, or, second, as a result of other natural acts which can be produced concerning the same matter of the infused habits . . . habits are produced proportionate to such acts.<sup>36</sup>

In the first solution, an acquired habit that is generated directly from the repeated acts of infused moral virtues is the origin of the facility. For example, repeated acts of infused prudence would produce an acquired virtue of prudence which, in turn, lends a facility of action to the infused virtue. Suárez rejects this theory "because a habit which is acquired concerning natural acts tends toward acts of the same kind as those from which it originated and toward the same object under the same formality; the acquired habit cannot tend to the same object under the same formality [as an infused virtue] because that object is supernatural."<sup>37</sup> Therefore, infused acts of virtue could no more generate an acquired virtue than acquired acts of virtue could produce infused virtue. As Suárez states, "A natural quality does

<sup>36</sup>"Primo, quia per eosdem actus supernaturales et infusos, qui ab habitibus infusis; vel per divinum auxilium eliciuntur, alii habitus acquiruntur. Secundo, quia per alios actus naturales qui circa easdem materias habituum infusorum fieri possunt . . . producuntur habitus talibus actibus proportionati" (Suárez, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 9, book 6, chap. 14, n. 2; Coerver, *Facility*, 36 n. 2).

<sup>37</sup>"quia habitus qui acquiritur circa actus naturales, inclinatur ad actus ejusdem rationis cum his a quibus genitus est, et ad idem objectum sub eadem ratione formali; habitus acquisitus non potest inclinare ad idem objectum sub eadem ratione formali, quia illud objectum supernaturale est" (Suárez, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 9, book 6, chap. 14, n. 7).

not have a natural appetite toward the supernatural."<sup>38</sup> Instead, Suárez suggests that the facility of action associated with the exercise of infused virtues originates directly from the grace of God that increases the effective power of the infused virtue. The repetition of purely supernatural acts of virtue, then, disposes faculties for ease in the exercise of infused virtue "by removing impediments, by moderating some affections, or by in some way excluding repugnant habits."<sup>39</sup>

Suárez explains that a second possible source of extrinsic facility associated with the exercise of infused virtue has its origin in purely natural acts of acquired virtue. In this case, acts of acquired prudence exercised independently of acts of infused prudence would communicate facility to the virtue of infused prudence. Suárez endorses the second theory but nuances it. Although the repetition of purely natural acts of virtue does not confer direct extrinsic facility of action on the infused virtues, it does give a *per accidens* extrinsic facility. In other words, there is a connection between purely natural acts of acquired virtue and purely supernatural acts of infused moral virtues in that the exercise of the acquired virtue, being directed to the same material object as the infused virtue, contributes a facility of action, or ease of performance, to the latter.

In sum, then, according to Suárez the acquired and infused moral virtues are principally related in one way: the repeated exercise of purely natural acts of acquired virtue can communicate a certain facility of action to their infused counterparts. That is, they do not directly or positively assist in the performance of supernatural acts of virtue, but they assist in an indirect or dispositive way by removing impediments, moderating affections, and excluding vices. Only the grace of God and repeated acts of purely supernatural virtue, however, contribute directly and positively to facility in the infused virtues.

<sup>38</sup> "tum quia naturalis qualitas non habet naturalem appetitum ad supernaturalia" (ibid.).

<sup>39</sup> "tollendo impedimenta, moderando aliquos affectus, vel habitus aliquo modo repugnantibus excludendo" (ibid., n. 24; Coerver, *Facility*, 37 n. 3).

### B) Critique

Suárez is correct in his recognition and interpretation of basic Thomistic principles regarding the differences between the acquired and infused virtues. However, if he had carried the implications of these principles to their logical conclusion, he would have come to a different verdict. As it stands, he contradicts the very principles he initially upholds.

First, it should be conceded that the distinction Suárez makes between extrinsic facility proper to an acquired virtue and intrinsic facility associated with infused virtue (theological and moral) is a faithful interpretation of the brief references of Aquinas to the question. Furthermore, Suárez's definitions of the nature of the two kinds of facility are accurate representations of the distinctions noted by Aquinas. In sum, by eradicating impediments to virtuous acts, acquired virtues make the performance of those acts easy, prompt, and enjoyable. Infused moral virtues, on the other hand, are infused by God rather than acquired through human practice, and therefore do not confer an extrinsic facility of action. They do incline the person to the good of virtue, however, and the respective human power to the good of virtuous acts.

Nevertheless, after this clear delineation of the distinct kinds of facility peculiar to acquired and infused virtues, Suárez contradicts himself when he insists that extrinsic facility of action *cannot* be attributed to acquired virtues but comes directly from grace, particularly from the persistent exercise of the infused virtues. It is probably correct to suggest that such a conclusion is an effort by Suárez and proponents of his theory of facility to be solidly anti-Pelagian.<sup>40</sup> But it must be said that, by the time he wrote the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas was also thoroughly anti-Pelagian; yet he manages to keep in balance the supremacy of divine intervention and the dignity of human effort. While Aquinas admits the complementarity and reciprocity between human and divine effort in the Christian moral life, Suárez appears to underscore the preeminence of the divine by denying any human contribution to supernatural moral activity.

<sup>40</sup> Billot, *De virtutibus infusis*, 58.

Second, it should be conceded that Suárez correctly maintains two complementary rules that Aquinas sets down throughout his treatise on virtue: first, virtues are divided into different species based on their distinct formal objects; second, the effects of virtue are proportionate to their cause so that, for example, infused virtue cannot be said to be the cause of acquired virtue, nor acquired virtue the cause of infused virtue. Based on their specific difference, Suárez contends that repeated acts of infused virtue cannot produce an acquired virtue anymore than repeated acts of acquired virtue can generate supernatural virtues. A supernatural effect, therefore, cannot have a natural cause and vice versa. If this principle is applied logically to facility in virtue, an acquired virtue cannot produce intrinsic facility, and an infused virtue cannot generate extrinsic facility. Suárez, therefore, accurately interprets Aquinas's teaching on the specific difference between the acquired and infused moral virtues by reasoning that if one wants to account for the extrinsic facility that experience indicates can also be associated with repeated acts of infused virtue, one cannot say that the acquired virtue responsible for this facility is generated by an infused virtue. Nevertheless, instead of insisting that the acquired virtue would have to be produced by a proportionate natural cause, he denies his original association of extrinsic facility with acquired virtue and claims that the extrinsic facility of the infused virtue comes directly from grace and from the repeated acts of infused virtues.

Perhaps the underlying flaw that is responsible for Suárez's inconsistent reasoning is his exclusive notion of moral virtue, namely, his assumption that in the Christian life there can be purely natural or purely supernatural virtues. The comprehensive or inclusive view of virtue proposed by Aquinas and supposed in the thesis of this study, namely, that perfect virtue for the Christian who also possesses the acquired virtues is a composite but single entity, dictates that every Christian virtue, adequately considered, is an ordered reality in which the component parts are related as matter to form. A moral virtue, in its absolutely perfect state, is formally speaking supernatural or an infused virtue and materially speaking natural or an acquired moral virtue. For an infused moral or theological virtue to be



rated as a complete or perfect example of that kind of virtue, both the material and the formal causes or principles must make their proper contribution. The formal cause is the supernatural perfection that determines the composite virtue to be the kind that it is; the material cause is the natural perfection that is in potency to the perfecting formal cause and is able to be determined by it, while at the same time exercising its own reciprocal causality.

There is no evidence in Aquinas, then, to support the claim that, in the life of the Christian who also possesses the acquired virtues, there is the possibility of performing purely natural acts of acquired virtue. One could argue that there might be Christian acts of moral virtue that are performed predominantly from natural motives, but taking into account what Aquinas says about virtual intention and charity, even these acts would be formally supernatural.<sup>41</sup>

Although Aquinas speaks of a Christian who performs exclusively supernatural acts of diligence or prudence, he also points out that such an act falls short of perfect virtue or the "fuller" virtue of diligence.<sup>42</sup> A moral virtue of diligence or prudence that lacks a material component only aids the individual to make good decisions regarding supernatural life; it does not also help him to decide well in human affairs. Suárez's exclusive notion of virtue requires him to substitute a caricature of infused virtue—an act that is purely supernatural—for the inclusive notion of perfect moral virtue presented by Aquinas. Only when absolutely perfect moral virtue is understood as a single, ordered reality do the examples of Aquinas that allude to a lack of facility in those who are practicing infused moral virtue make any sense. The reason that the person still suffers a lack of ease in the performance of infused virtues after their restoral following sacramental penance, for example, is that the infused virtue is still linked with the material component of an acquired vice or a vicious disposition. Until the person is able to replace the acquired vice with an acquired virtue, ease in performing the infused virtue

<sup>41</sup> See *De car.*, 11, ad 2.

<sup>42</sup> See *STh* II-II, q. 47, a. 14, ad 1.

cannot occur. If Suárez were correct and the repeated acts of purely supernatural infused virtues and grace produced a direct extrinsic facility, Aquinas's examples would be nullified. The individual who repents and therefore possesses the infused virtues and practices them should, in the Suarezian view, perform them with ease.

Finally, Suárez's conclusions about facility in the infused virtues fail to provide an explicit discussion of the implications of the theory of facility for the larger question of the interplay between human moral effort and divine intervention in the life of a Christian. Instead of making an "end" of the theoretical discussion of facility and the insight it gives about the relationship between the acquired and infused virtues, Aquinas's doctrine on perfect moral virtue in the Christian acts as a "window" that opens onto the broader view of the divine-human interplay in the Christian life as a whole. The first practical implication that one can draw from Aquinas's schema is that human moral effort in the Christian life is not to be suppressed or neglected. By its very nature, human activity lies open to or is dispositive toward divine intervention with its purifying and perfecting power. God expects human beings to do their part and accepts human effort as the very complement of grace.<sup>43</sup> The second practical implication is that grace and divine infusion of virtue is the primary or formative cause of Christian moral activity. Grace permeates nature. The contribution of the Christian, by way of the exercise

<sup>43</sup> It is well to note here that Aquinas's concept of nature and grace, which the matter/form relation of the acquired and infused moral virtues presages, bears little resemblance to the "standard view of nature and grace in post-Tridentine and neo-Scholastic theology" to which Karl Rahner (*Nature and Grace*, trans. Dina Wharton [London and New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963], 1; see esp 1-44) strenuously objected. For Aquinas, grace transforms nature without destroying it; grace corrects and perfects nature without denying its dignity. Rahner was correct, then, in his criticism of later Thomistic commentators who taught that the natural and supernatural "interpenetrate as little as possible," or that nature's orientation to grace "is thought of as negatively as possible," or that the natural being of man "is a closed system complete in itself with grace as a pure superstructure that leaves what is beneath unchanged" (ibid., 7). Aquinas's theory of the unity of perfect moral virtue, with its focus on an existential description of the nature/grace composite of the moral act of a Christian, accomplishes precisely what Rahner insists contemporary theology must teach about grace, namely, how grace "penetrates our conscious life, not only our essence but our existence too" (ibid., 26).

of virtue, takes place only because of the antecedent gratuitous will of God; divine grace precedes all human effort. Human moral activity and the growth and development of virtue in the Christian life have their source and their ultimate meaning and perfection in God.

### C) Billot's Theory of Facility in the Moral Virtues

If the concept of facility is to be applied to the infused virtues, Louis Cardinal Billot argues, it must include more than the conferral of the possibility of supernatural activity. The facility of the infused virtue must also confer an inclination to the object of virtue (i.e., the good), or an inclination to acts of virtue (i.e., the actual pursuit of the good). These two types of inclination are formally distinct and existentially separable, however. One could have an inclination to the object of virtue without having the inclination to the act of virtue.<sup>44</sup> In order to illustrate his point, Billot appeals to the example of two persons who are in bad health. The first has a strong desire to get well, but he has no inclination to take medicine that he dislikes. The second does not have a burning desire to get well, but he has no aversion to taking medicine. The infused virtues confer the first kind of facility in that they give a "special inclination to the good which is its object,"<sup>45</sup> but they do not confer the second type of facility, that is, an inclination to acts of virtue. Only the acquired virtues suppress their contrary vices, temper the passions, and thus make possible the prompt and easy exercise of acts of virtue. Nevertheless, Billot maintains that the facility of the infused virtues still qualifies as facility in the broad sense because it includes an inclination to the good.<sup>46</sup>

Regarding the question of whether an acquired virtue communicates a facility to its concomitant infused virtue, Billot agrees with Suárez that, if the Christian possesses the acquired moral virtues, they confer a *per accidens* facility in performing

<sup>44</sup> Coerver, *Facility*, 32.

<sup>45</sup> "specialem inclinationem ad bonum quod est eius obiectum" (Billot, *De virtutibus infusis*, 34).

<sup>46</sup> Coerver, *Facility*, 32.

supernatural acts of virtue.<sup>47</sup> But, in response to the question of whether repeated acts of the *infused* virtues contribute to the facility of the *infused* virtues, Billot maintains that human experience teaches that they produce acquired habits and, therefore, facility.<sup>48</sup> In the lives of saints, for example, there is no adequate explanation for the facility that one sees in their practice of the infused virtues unless one admits that through the repetition of supernatural acts an acquired virtue is produced. The latter ensures that "the natural power is better subjected to the same infused virtue, and it is always more and more disciplined to perform promptly according to [the infused virtue]."<sup>49</sup>

Against the Suarezian position that describes God as the direct or *per se* origin of the facility of the practice of the infused virtues, Billot argues that grace is an extrinsic factor, and the kind of facility that accrues to the infused virtues is intrinsic to the respective faculty. Also, when Suárez and proponents of his view admit that the facility that belongs to the repetition of acts of infused moral virtues moderates passion, Billot asserts that "they implicitly concede our conclusion, namely, that a habit is generated by which ease of practice of the same virtue is positively acquired."<sup>50</sup> It is inconsistent for proponents of the Suarezian theory, on the one hand, to admit that the facility that follows from the repetition of the infused virtues moderates passions and removes impediments to virtue and, on the other, to deny that repeated acts of infused virtue produce an acquired virtue.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, to hold such a position is absurd because it is tantamount to admitting that, despite the repetition of infused virtue, Christians will never have the ease, readiness, and delight in their moral activity that persons without grace exhibit who possess acquired virtue.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>49</sup> "naturalis potentia eidem infusae virtuti melius subiicitur, et semper magis magisque disciplinatur ad prompte operandum secundam ipsam" (Billot, *De virtutibus infusis*, 50; see Coerver, *Facility*, 55 n. 67).

<sup>50</sup> "implicite concedunt conclusionem nostram, videlicet: generari habitum quo facilis exercitii eiusdem virtutis positive acquiritur" (Billot, *De virtutibus infusis*, 51).

<sup>51</sup> Coerver, *Facility*, 55-56.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

In response to Suárez's argument that an infused virtue with its specific formal object cannot produce a concomitant acquired virtue with a different formal object, Billot contends that this claim substitutes an obscure point for an obvious fact. He advises that, first, the abstruse remarks concerning the specific formal objects of the infused and acquired virtues ought to be abandoned in favor of the straightforward empirical datum that facility does develop from the repetition of acts of infused moral virtue.<sup>53</sup> As Billot insists: "What is more clear than that from repeated acts of infused virtue the same facility of exercise is totally acquired as is ordinarily acquired from any repetition of human acts?"<sup>54</sup> Second, if one makes a distinction between the way a habit is caused by repeated acts and the way acts are caused by a habit, the difficulty of diverse formal objects can be resolved.<sup>55</sup>

When we analyze the way an act is caused by a habit, Billot explains, it is clear that the act takes on the same formal determination as its respective habit and the faculty it perfects. On that account, only supernatural acts will follow from a power perfected by a supernatural virtue. According to the mode of operation of a supernatural virtue, then, a supernatural habit neither produces an acquired virtue or act nor is it directed to the same formal object as the acquired virtue.

But if we examine the way a habit is caused by repeated acts, it is possible to argue that a natural virtue can proceed from a supernatural virtue; a natural virtue is virtually contained in the supernatural, and the natural virtue is directed to the same formal object as the supernatural.<sup>56</sup> Billot argues that although each faculty, as a passive power, receives the impressions of repeated supernatural acts, it does not receive their supernaturality. The faculty, exercised in the same way by repeated acts of both acquired and infused moral virtues, is indifferent to natural or

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>54</sup> "quid clarius quam quod ex frequentatione actuum virtutis infusae eadem omnino acquiritur exercitii facilitas, quae acquiri solet ex qualibet repetitione actuum humanorum?" (Billot, *De virtutibus infusis*, 53).

<sup>55</sup> Coerver, *Facility*, 68.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-69; Billot, *De virtutibus infusis*, 60.

supernatural formation.<sup>57</sup> What happens when the faculty is formed by repeated supernatural acts is that it acquires a disposition and a propensity to perform similar acts of virtue. In other words, this disposition and propensity are the acquired habit and the facility that follows from it. Therefore, when the active agent determining the faculty is the repeated acts of infused virtue, the disposition or facility that is produced in the faculty is nevertheless an acquired virtue.<sup>58</sup> Thus, according to the way in which a habit is produced by acts, there is a common formal object between the acquired and infused virtue, and therefore a univocal predication between the substance of the acquired moral act and that of the act of the infused virtue.<sup>59</sup>

In defense of the position that the facility that accompanies repeated acts of infused virtue has its source in acquired virtue as generated from the infused, Billot has his own interpretation of the following passage from the *Summa Theologiae*. (Coincidentally, this text is also used as a proof for the Suarezian argument that an infused virtue cannot produce an acquired virtue.)

Acts which are produced by an infused habit do not cause some habit but strengthen a preexisting one, just as medicines brought to a naturally healthy man do not cause health but rather reinforce the health already possessed.<sup>60</sup>

Billot argues that if this text is understood in its context, it does not contradict his position.<sup>61</sup> First, Aquinas is referring to both the theological virtues and the infused moral virtues when he refers to the category of "infused virtue." Second, it must be noted that Aquinas is presupposing the principle that two habits of the same species cannot exist in the same subject. With this context in mind, one can interpret Aquinas as saying that the

<sup>57</sup> Coerver, *Facility*, 58.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 58, 69.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>60</sup> "Dicendum quod actus qui producuntur ex habitu infuso, non causant aliquem habitum, sed confirmant habitum praeexistentem: sicut medicinalia adhibita homini sano per naturam, non causant aliquam sanitatem, sed sanitatem prius habitam corroborant" (*STh* I-II, q. 51, a. 4, ad 3; Leonine, 6:329; cited in Coerver, *Facility*, 61 n. 84).

<sup>61</sup> Coerver, *Facility*, 61-62.

infusion of virtue does not mean that two species of the same virtue exist in the Christian at the same time. Neither the repeated acts of theological virtue nor the repeated acts of infused moral virtue produce virtues of the same species. For that reason, the exercise of infused moral virtue (one species) cannot produce infused moral virtue (same species), nor can the exercise of infused moral virtue produce acquired moral virtue, because, in Billot's schema, "the *per accidens* infused virtue [infused moral virtue] is of the very same species as the acquired virtue."<sup>62</sup> Based on the same principle, the exercise of repeated acts of theological virtue (one species) cannot generate other theological virtues (same species). However, Aquinas does not, according to Billot, rule out the possibility that the repeated exercise of theological virtue (one species) is able to generate acquired virtue (different species). Thus Billot concludes that Aquinas's text does not contradict his theory that the exercise of infused theological virtues produces an acquired virtue.

#### D) Critique

In Billot's theory of facility in the infused virtues, the acquired and infused virtues are related in two ways. First, repeated acts of purely natural or acquired virtue can communicate an accidental extrinsic facility to the performance of their infused counterpart. Second, repeated acts of infused theological virtue generate acquired virtue which, in turn, confers to the theological virtues a *per se* facility of action.<sup>63</sup> Billot's notion of a natural virtue being virtually contained in an infused theological virtue means that the acquired and infused virtue are directed to the same object, the supernatural end, and therefore are of the same substance. Although this approximates Aquinas's idea of a composite moral virtue in the Christian life, Billot is unsuccessful, on another score, in doing justice to Aquinas's inclusive concept of moral virtue in the life of grace. Having categorized the acquired

<sup>62</sup> "infusus *per accidens* omnino eiusdem speciei est cum acquisito" (Billot, *De virtutibus infusis*, 56).

<sup>63</sup> As discussed above, the first type of facility is called accidental because it follows from acts performed independently of the infused virtues. *Per se* facility follows directly from repeated acts of infused virtue.

and infused moral virtues as the same species of virtue, and following Aquinas's principle that two species of the same virtue cannot exist in the same subject, Billot is unable to extend his analysis of *per se* facility in the infused virtues to include the question of the relationship between the two species of moral virtue. Failing on that point, he is also prevented from mining completely the rich vein that Aquinas explores, namely, the human fullness of moral virtue in the Christian life, with its even richer implications for the interplay of nature and grace in the moral activity of the justified.

In his observations regarding the communication of an accidental facility from the acquired virtues to the infused, Billot displays the same exclusive theory of moral virtue as Suárez. Accordingly, the Christian is able to practice purely natural acts of virtue which, in helping to remove impediments to the exercise of virtue, make performance of acts of infused virtue easier.

As discussed above, this exclusive notion of Christian virtue cannot be reconciled with Aquinas's presentation of absolutely perfect moral virtue. In the Christian who also possesses the acquired virtues, moral virtue is a composite, ordered reality. It consists of an acquired virtue or material component and an infused virtue or formal component that together enable the justified to perform moral acts that are directed to one material object under two different but ordered formalities. We have already noted that Aquinas does recognize that moral virtue in its perfect state does not belong to every Christian. However, although he alludes to the fact that some Christians perform good acts from the infused virtues alone,<sup>64</sup> Aquinas does not present the reverse possibility of a Christian who performs purely natural acts of virtue. He admits, of course, that the good pagan can be naturally virtuous,<sup>65</sup> but even these virtues must be understood against Aquinas's remarks that all good acts are the result of divine and human causality.

<sup>64</sup> In *STh* II-II, q. 47, a. 14, ad 1, Aquinas presents the case of an infused virtue of diligence that suffices for good judgment regarding supernatural matters versus a "fuller" supernatural virtue of diligence that equips one for good judgment in both eternal and temporal affairs.

<sup>65</sup> See *STh* I-II, q. 65, a. 2.



Essential to Billot's theory is his assertion that what ought to be given primary consideration in the discussion of facility is not the obscure point of the specific difference between the acquired and infused virtues that Suárez emphasizes but a datum of universal experience, namely, that the practice of acts of infused virtues is accompanied by a facility of action. There are two criticisms to be raised against this assertion. First, as we have already pointed out, personal experience and examples from texts of Aquinas contradict Billot's insistence on a direct corollary between facility and the exercise of infused virtues. Aquinas's example of a Christian who, following a sincere act of contrition for serious sin, experiences difficulty in his practice of virtue due to acquired vicious dispositions challenges Billot's suggestion that facility or an acquired virtue universally accompanies the exercise of infused virtues. The fact that, after recourse to the sacrament of penance, a person once again possesses the infused virtues but still experiences a lack of facility in their performance belies Billot's theory. Similarly, the case of a saintly person who possesses the infused virtues and who practices supernatural acts of temperance but who, as a recovering alcoholic, struggles to stay sober because he lacks the acquired virtue of temperance or the material component of Christian moral virtue also rebuts Billot's assumption. What conforms more closely to a lived experience of the graced life for many is the situation of a Christian who exercises infused moral virtues without having the acquired counterpart and who struggles in the practice of moral virtue. Therefore, only when that exercise of infused moral virtue is accompanied by an *ease* of practice can we posit the existence of the acquired virtues as the source of that facility. In short, facility *can* accompany the performance of infused virtues, but it does not universally do so.

The more fundamental question that Billot's theory answers only unsatisfactorily is: What is the cause of the acquired virtue that confers facility in the performance of infused virtues when it is present? Certainly Billot has discovered part of the answer when he connects facility with the possession of acquired virtues. Yet when he maintains that the acquired virtues are generated from the repeated acts of infused virtue, it is clear that he does

not grasp the whole answer. It is consistent for Billot to argue in this manner because he ignores the implications of Aquinas's teaching on the difference of formal objects between the acquired and the infused virtues. If he had recognized the connection between the specific difference of the acquired and infused virtues and Aquinas's principle of the proportion between cause and effect, he would eventually have had to justify his claim that an infused virtue containing a supernatural perfection could generate a virtue containing a natural perfection.

The principal flaw of Billot's conclusion regarding the cause of the facility that accompanies the performance of infused virtue is that he neglects to take account of an important factor in the generation of a virtue: a perfection or virtue is produced in its respective power only when the act that is repeatedly performed contains the perfection of that virtue. To acquire a natural virtue of prudence, for example, the person needs repeatedly to perform acts that contain the perfection of right reason until the accumulated effect of these acts brings the power from a state of potency to actuality, and the person is able consistently and with ease to judge rightly about what is to be done in the here and now. It is the perfection or the goodness of the repeated act in which the agent wills the good as a good for himself that is responsible for the formation of the virtue. Against Billot's claim that the power itself, merely by its repeated exercise, produces a perfection or virtue, it is necessary to point out that the power *in se* is in potency; it *lacks* perfection and only becomes determined, actualized, or perfected through repeated acts that contain the perfection of the virtue being formed. In short, one cannot explain the cause of a perfected power or virtue by something within the power itself, because the power is only in potency to the virtuous disposition.

Billot is correct to insist that the natural faculty lacks the capacity to receive the supernatural character of the repeated acts of an infused virtue. This, after all, is precisely why Aquinas insists that supernatural virtues must be infused by God. But Billot is led to a faulty conclusion regarding the cause of the acquired virtue and its facility when he neglects the point that

human faculties *do* have the capacity to be determined by the natural perfection of repeated acts of acquired virtue. This natural perfection follows from the mean of the virtue set by the rule of reason which is realized in the formal object or motive of the act. The perfection or mean of the acquired virtue of temperance in food consists of the practice of moderation in food from the motive of promoting health of mind and body. This virtue is acquired by the person who, over time and in varying circumstances, deliberately chooses to eat moderately in order to promote a healthy mind and body and to become a productive member of the temporal city. Only after the faculty of the concupiscible power is exercised by acts containing this perfection does the power acquire the perfection of that virtue and the concomitant ease of performance. In sum, Billot's conclusion that acquired virtue proceeds from repeated acts of infused virtue not only contradicts the Thomistic principle that effects are proportionate to their causes, but also deviates from Aquinas's explanation of the correlation between the perfection of the repeated acts and the actualization of the respective power in the process of acquiring virtue.

Billot's attempt to prove that there is no contradiction between the text of Aquinas that states that repeated acts of infused virtue do not produce another habit of the same species,<sup>66</sup> and his own theory that repeated acts of infused theological virtue generate an acquired virtue,<sup>67</sup> also deserve closer examination. First, Billot argues that the passage applies to virtue infused *per se*, that is, to theological virtue, not to infused moral virtues. Second, viewed in this framework, the text only denies that acts of theological virtue are able to produce other theological virtues. But it does not exclude the possibility that acts of theological virtue are able to produce virtues of other species, such as acquired virtues. Therefore, in concluding that repeated acts of theological virtue (one species of virtue) can produce acquired virtue (a different species of virtue), Billot emphasizes

<sup>66</sup> See *STh* I-II, q. 51, a. 4.

<sup>67</sup> Billot, *De virtutibus infusis*, 55-56.

that he does not violate Aquinas's principle that virtues of the same species cannot coexist in the same subject.<sup>68</sup>

The logic of Billot's argumentation, particularly regarding the specific likeness of the acquired and infused moral virtue, completely diverts him from the question of the relation between the repeated acts of infused moral virtue and facility. One can only speculate that, if he had taken into account the specific difference between the acquired and infused moral virtues, he might have been led to a correct account of the proportionate cause of that acquired virtue, namely, repeated acts of acquired virtue. From that conclusion he might have reasoned further to the important implications that follow from the relation of acquired to infused moral virtue represented in the concept of facility. Particularly, he would have had an incipient insight into Aquinas's view of the divine-human cooperation in Christian moral action, a view that accepts human effort as the "matter" that is capable of being transformed by grace. However, aside from such speculation about what Billot might have concluded, we are left with only the tenuous connection that he sees between acquired virtues and their infused counterparts by way of an accidental facility that is communicated from the former to the latter.

### III. CONCLUSION: AN ADEQUATE THEORY OF FACILITY

As we have argued, neither of the representative theories of facility accurately represents Aquinas's concept of the relation between the acquired and infused moral virtues. Certainly, Billot's is a more faithful interpretation; he recognizes that the theological virtue and its acquired counterpart form a single virtue, although he does not explain their relationship in terms of matter and form. The opinion of Suárez, in failing to assign any role to acquired virtue in the *per se* facility of the infused virtue, completely neglects the notion of the acquired virtue as the material component of perfect moral virtue and thereby minimizes the importance of human effort in the Christian moral life.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

These critiques of the theories of Suarez and Billot might tempt one to conclude that using the concept of facility to identify Aquinas's view of the unity of perfect moral virtue is unproductive at best or counterproductive at worst. I would like to argue that the insight that led four centuries of Thomistic commentators to use the issue of facility as a way to reconstruct Aquinas's theory of the relationship between the acquired and infused virtue is essentially a sound one. However, this approach will only lead to an accurate interpretation of Aquinas's view of Christian moral virtue when facility is assessed within its full context. In other words, it is critical that the notion of facility is understood, first, within the perspective of Aquinas's notion of the composite nature of perfect virtue discussed in part 1. Second, the theory of facility and its implications for the relation of the acquired and infused moral virtues can only be properly understood within the context of Aquinas's teaching on other issues that deal with a single, ordered reality, such as those discussed in part 2. And, third, an adequate understanding of facility depends on a careful implementation of the relevant Thomistic principles that figured in both the theories of Suárez and Billot and their critiques in this chapter. Our concluding remarks will be directed to the question: How is the topic of facility an effective key to a recognition and substantiation of the matter-form relation of the acquired and infused moral virtues within the unity of perfect moral virtue?

Aquinas's distinction between the type of facility proper to the acquired virtues and that proper to the infused, as well as his examples of lack of facility mentioned above, indicate that only when both types of facility are present in Christian moral activity is the person able to perform supernatural acts of virtue with ease. When one recalls the recurring motif of Aquinas that it is unthinkable that God would provide in a less generous way for the execution of the life of grace than he does for the life of natural virtue, it is clear that, according to Aquinas, ease in performance is something that should mark Christian moral activity just as it does the activity of the non-Christian. In other words, in the very way that Aquinas defines the facility proper to the acquired and infused virtues respectively, he indicates that both ought to be

integral qualities of the moral activity of the Christian and, therefore, characteristics that ought to mark the Christian life. The acquired virtue and its facility constitute the material component of Christian moral virtue; this comprises the visible or observable facility. This facility allows for the easy performance of virtuous acts due to the moderation of passions and the destruction of contrary vices that can only come as a result of the repetition of acts of virtue over time in varying circumstances. The infused moral virtue and its facility comprise the formal component of Christian moral virtue since the infused moral virtue enables the faculty and its natural virtue to adhere firmly to the good of virtue and, through charity, to be ordered to the supernatural end.

The incomplete nature of each type of facility implies their complementarity. The intrinsic facility of the infused virtue cannot be operationally functional without the extrinsic facility of the acquired virtue, and this latter cannot be depended on in the midst of temptations to sin unless united to the perfection of intrinsic facility. If extrinsic-intrinsic types of facility, proper to the acquired and infused moral virtues, respectively, are ordered components of a single reality related to each other as matter to form, *a fortiori* the virtues that generate those respective qualities must also be so ordered. It follows, then, that the relationship between the qualities of extrinsic and intrinsic facility is analogous to the relationship between the acquired and infused moral virtues that produce those types of facility.

In a search for the theoretical explanation for the causality of the acquired virtue that confers extrinsic facility on the performance of supernatural acts of virtue, one must be guided by the principle that effects are proportionate to their causes. The acquired virtue and its concomitant facility, then, can only be generated by a cause proportionate to them, that is, by repeated acts of natural virtue. This conclusion leads to another: in Aquinas's view, in the context of the generation of facility in the performance of supernatural acts of virtue, human moral effort is a constitutive element which, when transformed by the supernatural, forms an operational unity with grace and the infused virtues.