



Faith, Hope, and Love as Virtues in the Theological Tradition

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THE ETHICS OF
POWERLESSNESS

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1. Introduction

In this Green Paper we shall provide an overview of the history of the theology of faith, hope, and love, with specific emphasis on their reception as virtues. As we shall see, the history of these terms has seen marked differences in the way in which each of the three has been understood; the understanding of concept of virtue itself; the understanding of what agency consists in; and the level of involvement of the agent in the acquisition and exercise of the three.

In what follows we shall focus on a number major figures in the history of theology, at times using them as points of departure to discuss the context in which their thinking emerged. We shall begin by discussing the locus classicus of faith, hope, and love within the theological tradition: St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. By examining Paul's letter, we shall identify a number of questions with which to focus our discussion of St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and Paul Tillich.

2: Saint Paul

Faith, hope, and love appear together in the distinctive triadic formulation in chapter 13 of St. Paul's first letter to Corinthians. This is not the only place in which Paul speaks of faith, hope, and love within the same passage; the three are also drawn together in 1 Thessalonians (1:3, 5:7-8)¹ and Galatians (5:4-6)². However, it is the letter to the Corinthians that Paul gives them the most attention. At no point does Paul refer to faith, hope, and love as virtues, let alone theological virtues. Indeed, as we shall see it took until the 13th Century for this term to appear. However, he does draw a distinction between following the law and 'faith active in love' (Gal 5:6). Only the latter is 'in the domain of God's grace' (Gal 5:4). Thus, we find in Paul's letters something resembling the later distinction between deontology and virtue ethics, as well as the grains of Luther's insistence on the radical distance between law and grace, even if only in nascent form. Rather than describing faith, hope and love as virtues, Paul uses the very broad term *pneumatika*—'spiritual things'—to describe the three. In order to understand what Paul has in mind when referring to them as such, we need to look to the context in which they are drawn together in the first place, namely, as part of Paul's efforts to resolve a number of disputes causing disquiet within the burgeoning church in Corinth, in the establishment of which he had been key.

In Chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians, Paul answers two questions of particular relevance to faith, hope, and love.³ The first is the theological question of the relative

¹ 'We call to mind, before our God and Father, how your faith has shown itself in action, your love in labour, and your hope of our Lord Jesus Christ in fortitude' (1:3); 'Sleepers sleep at night, and drunkards are drunk at night, but we, who belong to daylight, must keep sober, armed with faith and love for coat of mail, and the hope of salvation for helmet' (5:7-8)

² 'When you seek to be justified by way of law, your relation with Christ is completely severed: you have fallen out of the domain of God's grace. For to us, our hope of attaining that righteousness which we eagerly await is the work of the Spirit through faith. If we are in union with Christ Jesus circumcision makes no difference at all, nor does the want of it; the only thing that counts is faith active in love.' (5:4-6)

³ In this section, I have been helped by Joseph Fitzmyer's 2008 commentary on Corinthians 1, specifically Chapter 3, D and Ernest Evans' commentary from 1930, specifically Essay F, pp.125-136

value of each of the spiritual things. Paul delineates three categories of *pneumatika*: gifts (*charismata*), services (*diakoniai*), and works (*energemata*) and his list of examples of *pneumatika* is broad.⁴ *Pneumatika* include, but are not restricted to, the utterance of wisdom, the utterance of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, the working of mighty deeds, prophesy, the discernment of spirits, speaking in tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. *Pneumatika* are, then, abilities and actions that are inspired by the Spirit. Since there are different categories of *pneumatika* and many different examples of *pneumatika* within each category, a question naturally arises as to their relative value. Is the interpretation of tongues of more worth than the utterance of wisdom; is a gift of healing to be valued to a lesser degree than the work of prophesy? The members of the Church in Corinth were involved precisely this kind of dispute.⁵

This theological debate was also, however, a political matter. Since not everyone exhibited the same *pneumatika*, the question of the hierarchy of the spiritual things was also a question of the hierarchy of the members of the church. Paul responds to both problems with arguments that attempt to settle the theological question of the relative value of the *pneumatika* while stabilising the political order in the constitution of the Church.

Firstly, Paul argues that since all the *pneumatika* derive from the same source—and since this source is the one Spirit—there is no question of a conflict between them. The will of the Spirit cannot be disunited, so the acts brought about by that will, though diverse in kind, cannot be of the sort to come into conflict. Thus, the differences of value between *pneumatika* should not lead to antagonism between the members of the Church; such disputes have a strictly human explanation. While Paul thus reminds the Corinthians that the spiritual things are all of them works of God, his argument leaves unanswered the question of the relative value of the spiritual things. Even supposing that there is no possibility of conflict between the *pneumatika*, since they are all expressions of God's will, how should we understand their relative value?

Where Paul's first argument identified the same Spirit as the common source of the *pneumatika*, a second argument identifies a common end. According to Paul, to be part of the Church is to be called out to be a participating member in the Body of Christ.⁶ Since the Church is the Body of Christ, each of the *pneumatika* should be considered as a good whose value is derivative of its function within that body. Thus, there is no question of conflict between the *pneumatika*, not only because they originate from the same source, but also because they are all aimed at the same end: the good of the Body of Christ. Since the good of each member of the Church is the good of the Body of Christ, the achievements of any one member is as much a good for any other member as it is for the achiever; they are all for the good of building up the Church (1 Cor: 12:25-26).

By describing the Church as the Body of Christ, however, Paul is also able to address the relative hierarchy of the various *pneumatika*. Just as we might think that

⁴ Each kind of *pneumatika* is linked to a distinct aspect of the divine: the gifts are associated with the Spirit; the services from the Lord; and the works with God. Thus in distinguishing between different ways in which different aspects of human life can be distinctly inspired by the divine, Paul makes an early contribution to the doctrine of the trinity.

⁵ The distinction between various kinds of 'spiritual things' is echoed much later in the work of Aquinas, for whom 'spiritual gifts' were to be distinguished from virtues. We shall return to this distinction later on.

⁶ The word Paul uses to describe the political composition of the church is *ekklesia*, which might be very literally translated as 'those who have been called out'.

the heart is more vital to the good of the body than a short hair on a left eyebrow without thinking that there is a conflict between the two, so too while there is a hierarchy of persons within the Church there is no question of there being a conflict between them, since they are all oriented towards the same good (1 Cor 12:27-8).

Thus, Paul's intervention is an attempt to unify the Church while affirming its hierarchical structure, so as to draw an end to the antagonisms of the Corinthian Church while allowing for differences in value between the different *pneumatika* exhibited by various members of the Church.⁷ He does this by clarifying doctrinal issues with respect to the nature of the Church and the origin and end of the *pneumatika*.

In Chapter 13, however, Paul complicates the matter further. For although he encourages the members of the Church to aspire to prophesy—since this is a more vital feature of the Body of Christ than, say, the speaking of tongues—he claims that there is, besides the *pneumatika* already described, 'a more excellent way', namely: love (*agape*). This is a further complication, since Paul's description of love leaves a number of questions unanswered and which the theological tradition that follows him attempts to answer. In this paper we shall focus on just three of the questions that are raised by Paul's presentation of love.

The first two questions have to do with the precise relationship between love and the other spiritual things. It is not clear how to read Paul on this issue. On the one hand, love is referred to as one of the *charismata*—spiritual gifts—a term that Paul uses to describe a category of *pneumatika*, as we have already seen. This would make it seem that love is of the same order as the other spiritual things, albeit at the top of the hierarchy. On the other hand, however, Paul plainly wishes to distinguish love from other spiritual things in at least one quite fundamental way.⁸ Paul states that without love none of the other spiritual things are of any worth: indeed, absent of love they are 'as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal'. Thus, love cannot be of the same order as the other *pneumatika*, sitting atop a continuous scale of value. This is because love makes the *pneumatika* valuable in the first place. Since love bestows value on the *pneumatika*, it cannot be of the same order of those spiritual things that are made valuable by love. The question of the relationship between love and the other *pneumatika* is difficult, then, because love is identified as a *charismaton* and so it seems a sort of *pneumatikon*, but love is distinguished from the other spiritual things in at least one fundamental respect: since it is that which gives value to the other spiritual things, it cannot be of the same order of value as those spiritual things. What, then, is the relationship between love and the rest of human life such that the former bestows value on the latter?

Paul's letter also leaves it unclear how we should understand the relationship between love, on the one hand, and faith and hope, on the other. Having described the

⁷ In Chapter 14, Paul explains that, while speaking in tongues is a form of direct communication with God, it should be avoided in public unless there is someone who can interpret what is being said. Prophesy is to be preferred, since it is intelligible and serves for building up the Church.

⁸ Besides the distinctive role of love that we are about to describe, Paul also distinguishes love from the rest of the *pneumatika* along the following lines. While the other *pneumatika*, such as prophecies, tongues and knowledge, will come to an end, love will 'remain'. But this distinction itself raises another question: in what sense does love 'remain'? Does this mean that love is essential to Christian life, whereas the other gifts are merely contingent features of that life? Does it mean that love will continue after the death of an individual? Does it mean, even, that while the other *pneumatika* are immature expressions of Christian life, it is only in love that Christianity reaches maturity? (This is, I take it, Evans's interpretation of the abiding character of love (cf. Evans p.133)). In this paper, however, we have only space to note this issue.

ways in which love is different from the other spiritual things, Paul draws a special connection between faith, hope, and love. However, Paul states that love is nonetheless the highest. According to Paul, then, there is something of a double-tiered hierarchy among the *pneumatika*. Firstly, there are those spiritual things which, though differing in value, are all expressions of God's will and aim at serving the health of the Body of Christ, that is: The Church. However, of the *pneumatika* there are three of particular significance: faith, hope, and love. But internal to the triad of faith, hope, and love, love is given special prominence: love is the 'highest'. But what is the relationship between love, on the one hand, and faith and hope, on the other, such that the three are appropriately distinguished from the rest of the *pneumatika* and such that love is nonetheless the highest of the three?

Clearly, there is much more that could be said about Paul's presentation of faith, hope, and love. But from what we have seen so far, we have drawn out two questions concerning the nature of the three which we can use in what follows to focus our investigation of the reception of faith, hope, and love in the post-Pauline tradition. Firstly, how are we to understand the distinction between love and the rest of human life, such that the former bestows value on the latter? Secondly, how are we to understand the relationship between the triad, such that, firstly, the three are appropriately distinguished from the rest of the *pneumatika* and, secondly, that love is nonetheless the highest of the three?

As well as these two, the fact that Paul at no point refers to faith, hope, and love as virtues raises the possibility that they should not properly be considered as such. As we have seen, he clearly identifies one of the distinguishing features of Christian life in contrast to the obedience of the law. But while this is reminiscent of the distinction between deontology and virtue ethics, it is far from isomorphic to it. It is far from clear that the 'faith active in love' that is characteristic of Christian life should be considered a matter of virtue, specifically, especially considering that virtues (as understood in contemporary virtue theory, at least) are often considered to be excellent dispositions of character that have their source in the agent's praiseworthy action. Indeed, as we shall see, the debates over how to understand the source of value for the distinctive features of Christian life was a major fault line in theological discussions over the following centuries. While Aquinas, for instance, was happy with the language of virtue, for reformists such as Luther, such language was altogether repulsive. Indeed, Luther is said to have described Aristotle—one of the most important influences on Aquinas's use of virtue theory—as 'that buffoon who has misled the church' (quoted in MacIntyre (1998), p. 78). Are, then faith, hope and love virtues at all?

In summary, then, our brief presentation of Paul's letters has raised three questions which we shall use to interrogate some of the major figures in the history of theology. Firstly, what is the relationship between love and the rest of human life, such that the former bestows value on the latter? Secondly, what is the distinctive relationship between love, on the one hand, and faith and hope on the other? And thirdly, are faith, hope, and love really virtues at all? To begin with, we shall turn to Saint Augustine, whose *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love* ('*Enchiridion*' hereafter) proved exceptionally influential in the early-medieval period.

Section Summary:

- St. Paul draws together faith, hope, and love in several places. The three receive the most treatment in 1 Corinthians 13
- Love is said to be more excellent than the other *pneumatika* (spiritual things). But faith and hope are drawn into special connection with love.
- Paul's presentation leaves a number of questions unanswered. Principally, we shall focus on the following three:
 1. What is the relationship between love and the rest of human life, such that the former bestows value on the latter?
 2. What is the distinctive relationship between love, on the one hand, and faith and hope on the other?
 3. Are faith, hope, and love really virtues at all?

3: Saint Augustine

In the centuries following Paul's letters, Christian thinkers began to take up questions of virtue in a pastoral context, in which the primary concern was to identify and encourage those traits of character which would serve as helpful correctives against sin. Those working in this tradition drew both on Christian scripture, as well as the contemporary understanding of virtue, inherited from the writings of Roman ethicists, such as Seneca and Cicero. Perhaps the two most influential of these theologians were John Cassian and Pope Gregory the great, for both of whom 'the most urgent challenge of the Christian life is to identify and eliminate the vices which lead to sin' (Porter, (2001) p.100). Since Cassian and Gregory's interest with the virtues lay primarily in pastoral care and so in a form of practice, in their writings we find little theoretical development of either the nature of virtue or a systematic understanding of the relationship between the specifically Christian life and the ideal life described by Hellenistic or Roman texts. The first major thinker to address these questions and so to theoretically carve out Christianity's distinctive understanding of virtue was Saint Augustine. In Augustine's writings, we can find material for detailed answers for each of the questions identified at the end of the previous section. Let us start with the first question: how does Augustine explain love's bestowal of value on human life?

Unlike most people who have never described temperance, fortitude, justice and prudence as 'splendid vices' (*vitia splendida*), Augustine is famous for never having done so; while this phrase is often attributed to him, it has become a commonplace in Augustine scholarship to point out that it appears nowhere in his writing. That fact notwithstanding, the phrase contains something of the spirit of Augustine's position, for by Augustine's lights the Roman virtues were really nothing other than vices in disguise. Indeed, what is required to raise the merely human into a condition of virtue is the reorientation of human life towards the proper love of God, which orientation is effected by God's grace. It is in this way that Augustine elaborates on Paul's claim that love bestows value on human life: for Augustine, it is indeed the case that absent of love all

things are as a sounding brass, for without the proper, loving orientation towards God, human life can only be vicious.

In order to understand Augustine's position, we need to understand the conception of virtue that is at play behind it. This presents an immediate exegetical problem, since within Augustine's writings there are at least four different definitions of virtue: virtue as perfect reason; virtue as perfect love; virtue as good will; and virtue as rightly-ordered love.⁹ However, since our focus shall be on Augustine's *Enchiridion*, we shall restrict ourselves to the conception of virtue most closely contemporaneous with that text, namely: virtue as rightly-ordered love. In *City of God*, during the composition of which the *Enchiridion* was also completed, Augustine articulates his understanding of this conception of virtue in the following terms:

We must, in fact, observe the right order even in our love for the very love with which we love what is deserving of love, so that there may be in us the virtue which is the condition of the good life. Hence, as it seems to me, a brief and true definition of virtue is 'rightly ordered love'. (Augustine (2003) p.637)

Virtue, then, is rightly-ordered love.¹⁰ But how is love rightly ordered? Love is rightly-ordered, Augustine elaborates, when one 'neither loves what he ought not, nor fails to love what he should' (quoted in Torchia, p.13). For love to be rightly-ordered, then, is for it to take its proper object. But what is love's proper object? Augustine holds that love takes its proper object when we use (*uti*) what we should use and enjoy (*frui*) what we should enjoy (ibid.). If we are to understand how Augustine understands rightly-ordered love, then, we need to understand the distinction between use and enjoyment.

Augustine lays out the distinction precisely in his *De doctrina Christiana* as follows:

To enjoy [*frui*] something is to hold fast to it in love for its own sake. To use [*uti*] something is to apply whatever it may be to the purpose of obtaining what you love—if indeed it is something that ought to be loved. (The improper use of something should be termed abuse.) (quoted in Cahall, p.118)

Thus, to enjoy something is to love it for its own sake and to use something is to relate to it in service of one's enjoyment of that which should be loved for its own sake. This distinction is normatively laden, however, in the sense that Augustine holds that there are strict limits on what one should enjoy and, therefore, what one should use: 'It is only the eternal and unchangeable things . . . that are to be enjoyed; other things are to be used so that we may attain the full enjoyment of those things' (ibid.); 'The things

⁹ Here I draw heavily upon N. Joseph Torchia's 'The Significance of the Moral Concept of Virtue in St. Augustine's ethics' (1990). Note, also, that each of these definitions treats virtue in the singular: whatever Augustine's understanding of virtue, it is not primarily an understanding of the virtues.

¹⁰ The decidedly reflexive formulation of well-ordered love is quite striking. We must not only love what is deserving of love, we must rightly love the love with which we love. This opens up the possibility of a regression, noted by the American revivalist Johnathan Edwards: 'If virtue consists primarily in love of virtue, then virtue (the thing loved) is the love of virtue, so that virtue consists in the love of the love of virtue. . . .and so on ad infinitum. We never come to any beginning or foundation for virtue; it has no beginning and hangs on nothing! Therefore if the essence of virtue (i.e. beauty of mind) lies in love or a disposition to love, it must primarily consist in something different from both the two kinds of love I have spoken of' (Edwards, p.3)

which are to be enjoyed, then, are the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and the Trinity that consists of them, which is a kind of single, supreme thing, shared by all who enjoy it' (quoted in Hubbard, p.206). In summary, then, God is the only proper object of enjoyment; since God is the eternal and unchanging, He is that alone which can be 'held fast to in love for its own sake'. And since God is the only proper object of enjoyment, all other parts of creation should be used, that is, related to for the sake of the enjoyment of God.

On a natural reading of this distinction—according to which emphasis is placed on using others for the sake of the enjoyment of God—it would seem that enjoyment of God entails using everything else as a mere instrument towards the end of loving God. Torchia appears to endorse this reading and Hannah Arendt outright affirms it (Arendt, p.40). Indeed, on the basis of her reading of the distinction between use and enjoyment as that between means and end, Arendt finds Augustine's position deeply inimical to the development of a community. It is easy to see why she would have drawn this conclusion. It is certainly not obvious how love can be cultivated between people who think of each other as mere tools to be put to work towards attaining a greater good.

This reading, however, is not uncontroversial; Augustine's text accepts a more charitable interpretation. In his recent monograph, for instance, Rowan Williams (2016) argues that Augustine's aim is not to endorse the instrumentalisation of all people and things but, rather, to show how the proper ordering of love undercuts two distinctly human tendencies. The first is to treat objects of love as absolute sources of value. The second is to treat objects of love as being for the sake of the fulfilment of one's own desires. On Williams' reading, Augustine's distinction between use and enjoyment in fact explains how it is possible to first come to love another as both independent of one's projects and concerns and as a mortal, contingent creature.

That this was Augustine's intention, Williams argues, is clear from his discussion of his grief over losing his friend, as described in Book IV of his *Confessions*. In the immediate aftermath of his friend's death, Augustine tells us that he found solace and joy in the company of friends with whom he shared common interests and pleasures, such that he found himself consoled through being 'made one' with his friends:

All kinds of things rejoiced my soul in their company—to talk and laugh and do each other kindnesses; read pleasant books together, pass from lightest jesting to talk of the deepest things and back again; differ without rancour, as a man might differ with himself, and when most rarely dissension arose find our normal agreement all the sweeter for it; teach each other or learn from each other; be impatient for the return of the absent, and welcome them with joy on their homecoming; these and such like things, proceeding from our hearts as we gave affection and received it back, and shown by face, by voice, by the eyes, and a thousand other pleasing ways, kindled a flame which fused our very souls and made us one. (Augustine (1993) p.57)

But the fact that he overcame the pain of loss by throwing himself wholeheartedly into new friendships suggests to Augustine that all he desired from friendship was an expansion of himself through identification with the group. Indeed, the passage above is replete with language of union and identification; Augustine holds that friendship allowed him to experience joy through bonds of recognised familiarity, so much so that the loss of his friend was experienced as a loss of himself:

This is what men value in friends, and value so much that their conscience judges them guilty if they do not meet friendship with friendship, expecting nothing from their friend save such evidences of his affection. This is the root of the grief when a friend dies, and the blackness of our sorrow, and the steeping of the heart in tears for the joy that has turned to bitterness, and the feeling as though we were dead because he is dead. (op cit. p.58)

In other words, Augustine describes the comfort he took from friends as an effort to replace a lost part of himself with a new prosthetic.

But how is it that by loving God for its own sake we are able to love others as independent of our concerns? One possible answer is that love of God makes possible neighbourly love. As we have seen, Augustine holds that absent of love of God, friendship is a problematic form of extended self-love, since in friendship one takes pleasure from activities in which one might identify with others who share one's interests. On this understanding, we value others as friends only insofar as they are sufficiently like us to be identified with in friendship. However, since Augustine also holds that God's love for us is entirely gracious, in the sense that there is nothing we can do to deserve God's love, if we are loveable to God we are so because he loves us: we are loveable in light of God's love, not because of the particular characteristics we display¹¹. In loving others in light of God's love, then, we would love them not in virtue of their distinguishing features or qualities, since none of these draws God's love from Him, but rather in virtue of their being loveable to God. This form of neighbourly love—in which one loves another in respect of their relation to God, which relation holds equally between God and all those whom He loves—is a way of loving another independently of their relation to our personal concerns, since their ability to meet our needs and desires is irrelevant to God's love for them. In this way, one might argue, neighbourly love, made possible by love of God, frees one to love others as existing independently of one's concerns. Nonetheless, there remains a profound tension between the neighbourly love made possible by love of God and the sort of preferential love that is characteristic of friendship.

This reading, however, might seem to run contrary to Augustine's own description of the way in which love of God heals our grief:

Blessed is the man that loves Thee, O God, and his friend in Thee, and his enemy for Thee. For he alone loses no one that is dear to him, if all are dear in God, who is never lost. (ibid.)

That is to say, if you love your friend in God and love your enemy for God, you are blessed since you will never lose those who you love. Here, it seems, Augustine is claiming that in order to guard against the possibility of grief, we need to guard against the possibility of loss. To this end, we need a more durable bond to the object of our affection, which love of God provides. On this reading, God provides relationships of natural love with a guarantee that they cannot be broken.

This reading is problematic, however. As we have seen, Augustine criticises those relationships of natural love that are, in essence, forms of extended self-love. It is difficult to see how such relationships could be any less self-regarding through being

¹¹ This entirely charitable characteristic of God's love has been held to be the defining feature of specifically Christian love: agape, as opposed to (for example) eros.

made more permanently bonded. Indeed, if this was what Augustine had in mind, the problem would in fact be worse. If God provides a kind of permanent adhesion between the lover and his reflection in the beloved, it would seem that God's love would in fact make it impossible for us to love another as anything other than our own reflection. Moreover, if Augustine was suggesting that we should love God in order to guard against loss, he would be claiming that love of God is instrumental to our own ends, which is precisely to reverse the use/enjoyment order of privilege that is definitive of rightly-ordered love. Augustine, then, cannot mean that God provides a sort divine superglue to the bond of friendship, such that those who are dear to us in friendship are never lost. What else could he mean?

There is a way of reconciling Augustine's concern to protect against loss with the possibility that neighbourly love frees us from loving others only as magnifying reflections of ourselves. If I love those who are dear to God, and if all are dear to God, then I love them as my neighbour, since I love them as God loves them, that is, without preference with respect to their individual characteristics. And qua neighbour, I cannot lose the other qua object of natural love, since I am not loving them as the friend with whom I am unified in terms of mutual interests. If the loss of the friend that leads to grief is the loss of a relationship of identification between two people on the basis on shared interests and so on, then I am secured of the possibility of loss not through stronger chemical bonds. Rather, I cannot lose them in that way since the mode of my love for them is not based on valuing them as another me. Through loving them in God, I am not loving the other as another part of myself, so it would be impossible for me to lose them as another part of myself. None of this is, of course, decisive, but hopefully these reflections allow us to see some way of reconciling Augustine's criticism of friendship on the grounds of its being another form of self-love and his claim that love in God frees us from the possibility of losing the other. On the reading I have just sketched, we are secured against loss not through increasing the strength of the bonds, but rather by being freed to love other in a way that is not dependent on mutable relations.¹²

According to Williams' reading of Augustine, love of God also undercuts our tendency to treat the other as an absolute source of meaning and value and so to love them as such is to love them as other than they are, since they are contingent and mortal.¹³ Williams offers the following explanation:

The question which prompts his formulation [that one should love others for the sake of love of God] is whether a human being is appropriately loved in the mode of 'enjoyment', that is, as an end in itself; and his answer, with appropriate qualification, is that this would be to treat another human individual as independently promising final bliss to me, signalling nothing beyond itself. This would be to make the other human being something different from – indeed, something less than – what it in fact is. Each human subject is both *res* and *signum*, both a true subsistent reality and a sign of its maker. If I refuse to treat it as a sign of its maker, I take something from its actual ontological complexity and dignity, while at the same time effectively inflating that

¹² One might, however, argue that the cost of this solution is too high: if this is Augustine's position then it may rule out friendships as such, since the position just sketched rules out the defining characteristic of friendships, namely, their preferential character.

¹³ Taken together, these two tendencies present a remarkable claim about the psychology of grief and friendship. For Augustine would seem to be saying that, absent of love of God, I can only love the other as a reflection of myself in which I find a source of absolute value and immortality. That is to say, if I do not love God, I end up vicariously loving myself as God through finding myself reflected in others.

complexity and dignity to a level it cannot sustain. Only God is to be enjoyed without qualification; only God is a sign of nothing else. (Williams, pp.195-6)

In other words, since only God is an absolute end in itself, to treat another as though she were an absolute end in herself is to burden her with a responsibility that only God can bear. In loving God, we are able to direct our need for security in an absolute end to that which can bear that need. This then frees us to love the other humanly, as the mortal being she is.

According to this more charitable reading of Augustine, then, to use a person 'for the sake of' the love of God is to relate to that person humanly, viz., as a mortal, contingent, and independent being that bears the sign of its maker. It is only in this way that one is able to avoid treating the other as a mere instrument to one's own happiness and without being deceived over the sort of being they truly are.¹⁴

We are now in a position to offer a fuller statement of Augustine's understanding of virtue. On Augustine's account, virtue is well-ordered love. Love is rightly ordered when God (and only God) is enjoyed as the absolute end for all human concern and everything else is used for the sake of that enjoyment. The enjoyment of God frees one to love other people in a manner that is appropriate to their mortal humanity and

¹⁴ On this matter, Augustine may be influenced by Epictetus. In his own *Enchiridion*, Epictetus offers the following advice:

With regard to everything that is a source of delight to you, or is useful to you, or of which you are fond, remember to keep telling yourself what kind of a thing it is, starting with the most insignificant. If you're fond of a jug, say, 'This is a jug that I'm fond of,' and then, if it gets broken, you won't be upset. If you kiss your child or your wife, say to yourself that it is a human being that you're kissing; and then, if one of them should die, you won't be upset. (Epictetus, p.288)

On one reading of this claim, Epictetus' advice is rather chilling, for he is suggesting that one should not be upset over the loss of a member of one's family, which sounds tantamount to callous disregard, rather than love. But note that Epictetus claims that we are prepared to avoid upset over the death of the beloved through bearing in mind the sort of being she is. Thus, anticipating Augustine, Epictetus presupposes that grief over a loved one involves a misconception of the sort of being she is. With this in mind, we can find our way to a (slightly) less chilling reading of Epictetus's position, congruent with Augustine's. If true love of another involves seeing the other as they truly are, and if grief involves masking the other's true nature (if, for instance, it belies the fact that one has not allowed the other's mortality to shape the course of the relationship), then the loving thing to do is to take the other's death calmly, without grief.

It should be noted, however, that while there are strong echoes of this determinately stoic attitude towards grief in *Confessions*—Augustine, notoriously, considers it improper to cry over the death of his mother—in his later writings he came to see grief over lost friends in a different light:

For if their life brought us the consoling delights of friendship, how could it be that their death should bring us no sadness? Anyone who forbids such sadness must forbid, if he can, all friendly conversation, must lay a ban on all friendly feeling or put a stop to it, must with a ruthless insensibility break the ties of all human relationships, or else decree that they must only be engaged upon so long as they inspire no delight in a man's soul. But if this is beyond all possibility, how can it be that a man's death should not be bitter if his life is sweet to us? For this is why the grief of a heart that has not lost human feeling is a thing like some wound or ulcer, and our friendly words of consolation are the healing application. And it does not follow that there is nothing to be healed simply because the nobler a man's spirit the quicker and easier the cure. (Augustine (2003), pp.862-3)

See also: Cary (2011)

independence. With this in mind, we can now turn to the contrast Augustine draws between faith, hope, and love, on the one hand, and the Roman virtues on the other.

As we have seen, well-ordered love is love that takes God as the absolute and loves Him accordingly. Well-ordered love, then, depends on faith in God (a point to which we shall return below). If the pagan virtues are conceived without reference to God, the pagan is not capable of well-ordered love, and hence virtue, since she cannot take God as her absolute concern. Any apparent excellences displayed by the pagan, then, will only be merely apparently excellent, since they will not be ordered towards God as the ultimate end. Absent of love of God, were the pagan to take human flourishing as the ultimate end of concern, by Augustine's lights she would enjoy that which should be merely used (which misuse counts as abuse); in other words, it would be to set up the human good as that which is the ultimate object of human concern, to plant human well-being in place of God.¹⁵ Thus, by Augustine's concept of virtue, pagan 'virtues' can only be vices in disguise.

This is not the whole story, however, for Augustine holds that the Christian conception of virtue allows for the proper understanding of what the Roman virtues are, that is, at their best nothing short of forms of love:

I hold virtue to be nothing else than perfect love of God. For the fourfold division of virtue I regard as taken from four forms of love. For the four virtues... I should have no hesitation in defining them: that temperance is love giving itself entirely to that which is loved; fortitude is love readily bearing all things for the sake of the loved object; justice is love serving only the loved object; prudence is love distinguishing with sagacity between what hinders it and what helps it. (Quoted in Langan, 1978, p.91)

In other words, love of God provides the stable source of value in relation to which the Roman virtues can be properly attuned such that they can, for the first time, come into their own, full maturation by taking their own proper object. It is in this sense that Augustine elaborates on the Pauline claim that love bestows value on the rest of human life. For without love of God, human excellence must fall short of itself by failing to attain its proper end. The Roman virtues only are what they should be when they are forms of love, and this is only possible if one loves God as the absolute end of one's enjoyment.

We can therefore see Augustine's answer to our first question. Augustine holds that it is only insofar that we love God for the sake of loving God that our concerns take the proper end. It is through the provision of the proper end to human concern that love is able to properly order human life, and only in this way are we able to attain virtue. Thus, Augustine's account of the relationship between love and the rest of human life is in line with Paul's description of love. Love bestows value on all human action and capacity by ordering it towards its proper end; without this ordering, what may appear to be virtuous is in truth as sounding brass, nothing more than a premature and self-aggrandising fanfare.

Does Augustine have an answer to the question of the relationship between faith, hope and love? In order to answer this question, we shall turn to his *Enchiridion*, since it is there that Augustine offers a detailed account of the relationship between these three.

¹⁵ Not to say that Augustine had no concern for human flourishing; in fact, Augustine held that flourishing was a correlate of virtue: if one attains virtue, one is happy. The point is, however, that we attain happiness only by loving God for the sake of loving God, rather than loving God for the sake of happiness.

By Augustine's analysis, faith, hope, and love are mutually dependent. Thus we can surmise that, for Augustine, the reason that faith and hope are given special prominence over the rest of the spiritual things, is that without them there can be no love. Before we begin to work out how Augustine develops the claim that these three are mutually dependent, we should spend some time briefly discussing Augustine's understanding of faith and hope.

Faith, Augustine tells us, is belief in things unseen, clearly echoing Paul's letter to the Hebrews: 'And what is faith? Faith gives substance to our hopes, and makes us certain of realities we do not see' (Heb 11:1). By this, Augustine means that faith is assent to the truth of a proposition, which assent is not grounded in empirical facts that one has seen for oneself but, rather, testimony with respect to claims that could not be grounded in empirical knowledge (see Boespflug (2016)).¹⁶ The specific form of religious faith that is under discussion in the *Enchiridion*, is belief in the Apostle's Creed, the assent to the truth of which is grounded on the testimony of scripture. Hope is, for Augustine, also propositional and doxastic, in the sense that hope is always with respect to some state of affairs described in a proposition. However, unlike faith, which Augustine claims can be directed towards past, present, or future states of affairs and, moreover, good and bad alike, one can only hope for a future state of affairs that one understands to be good.

Augustine is quite precise in specifying the form of mutual dependency between faith, hope, and love: 'Wherefore there is no love without hope, no hope without love, and neither love nor hope without faith' (Augustine (1996) p.9). In other words, love and hope are interdependent and each of this pair is dependent on faith. Augustine is, therefore, committed to the following two claims:

1. Love iff hope;
2. If either hope or love then faith.

He is not committed to the further claim that faith is dependent on either hope, or love. He offers the following reason for not making this further claim: Demons are just as capable of believing that which is grasped by humans through faith. But while humans hope and love, in light of that belief, the demons fear and tremble.¹⁷ Since faith can be shared by the demonic and the virtuous alike, hope and love cannot be conditions on the possibility of faith. If we are to understand Augustine's account of the relationship between faith, hope, and love, then, we need to understand his reasons for making the two specific claims regarding their mutual dependency.

We shall begin with the second claim, that love and hope are dependent on faith. As we have seen, Augustine holds that virtue is well-ordered love. Well-ordered love is love that takes God as that, and that alone, which should be enjoyed, such that everything else should be used for the sake of that enjoyment. Moreover, we have seen that Augustine holds that faith is assent to the truth of a proposition. On this account, well-ordered love plainly depends on belief in God such that one can be appropriately directed, in one's love, towards God. Augustine also holds, however, that human

¹⁶ It is worth noting that the word translated as 'makes us certain' is *elegchos*. While it is a viable reading of this word to take it as a sort of testimony, the Greek admits of other interpretations.

¹⁷ Here Augustine is referring to scripture, namely, James 2:19: 'You have faith enough to believe that there is one God. Excellent! The devils have faith like that, and it makes them tremble'.

reason is, by itself, incapable of grasping that which would be sufficient for beatitude. Thus, human reason depends on that which is added by faith, the content of which is delivered by sources of scriptural testimony such as the Apostle's Creed. Well-ordered love is dependent on faith, then, rather than empirical belief, since one requires belief in God in order to take Him as the absolute object of human concern and one cannot attain belief in God by one's own lights. For similar reasons, Augustine holds that hope is dependent on faith. Since the content of the theologically specific form of hope (namely, in salvation) is provided, again, by sources such as the Creed, hope is dependent on that which allows for the creed to be accepted as true, namely: faith. Thus, the hope in question is the hope for that in which one has faith. Such hope is plainly dependent on faith, since without faith in the Christian doctrine, hope could not take salvation as its object. Thus, love and hope depend on faith.

The more difficult claim to establish is that love and hope are mutually dependent. It is relatively straightforward to argue that hope is dependent on love. We have already seen that Augustine claims that 'The devils also believe, and tremble'. In other words, while the devils also believe in that future in which the blessed hope, the former tremble. What the devils lack, but the blessed possess, is an apprehension of the future in which one has faith as good. It is the blessed's love of God that discloses this future as a good to be hoped for, rather than feared. Thus, absent of love there is no hope, since the love of God bestows value on the futures that one believes in.¹⁸

The most difficult claim to justify is that love is dependent on hope. This is in part down to the paucity of material: Augustine's only word on the matter in the passage in question is a reference to Paul's description of 'faith that worketh by love' which, Augustine claims, 'certainly cannot exist without hope'. Augustine's thought seems to be that the love that is the work of faith is dependent on hope. But this is a more difficult claim to interpret than Augustine lets on. If hope is the hope for one's own salvation, it is not clear how it is even compatible with well-ordered—that is, God-directed—love, let alone a condition on its possibility.¹⁹ How are we, then, to understand this claim?

We can take a clue in the form of Augustine's *Confessions*. The *Confessions* is not best understood on the model of a contemporary autobiography since, as Rowan

¹⁸ One of the returning controversies surrounding faith, hope, and love concerns a *prima facie* tension between faith and hope. Put simply, if we have faith that some state of affairs will come to pass, why do we need to hope for that state of affairs? Indeed, it may even be that faith is incompatible with hope: plausibly, we can only hope for that which we do not take to be certain (all things being equal, I cannot hope that I am alive). Indeed, Peter Lombard held that Jesus hoped for nothing, since he did not suffer from the same lack of knowledge that makes it possible to hope. One way out of this tension is to distinguish between the respective objects of faith and hope. For instance, one might hold that we hope for our own salvation while having faith in God's mercy. In this way, we would have faith in God's mercifulness, but since we do not know whether we will be forgiven by God—for the reason that the future is (for us) open; the person with the most fervent faith might, for all that, fail at the crucial moment—we hope for our own salvation. Yet another way of resolving the difficulty would be to argue that the object of faith, understood as a kind of trust, is God's mercifulness, which fosters hope for future blessedness (I am grateful for Dan Watts in pointing this out to me). Note that this second solution, however, depends on an understanding of faith as non-propositional, which is not compatible with Augustine's account of faith.

¹⁹ As we shall see in the next section, Aquinas has a distinctive answer to this question. For him, hope precedes love in order of generation. We hope for our own salvation, which leads us to love God. But once we love God, hope is perfected and reoriented towards God as the final end. Thus, self-interested hope is a genetic condition on the actuality of love, which is itself a genetic condition on the actuality of other-directed hope.

Williams argues, the act of recollection that is worked out through the *Confessions* is also a form of prayer. Williams puts the point as follows:

Book X.vi/9 asks what it is that the writer loves in loving God; and the answer is that it is no kind of sense-impression – though he labours, here and elsewhere, the analogy between the delight of encounter with God and the delights of the senses. God is ‘the life of my soul’s life’; and, as the life of the soul, God must be sought in the soul’s characteristic activity, and so, above all, in the memory – not as a remembered object of perception, but in the remembrance of ‘joy’ or the remembrance of the desire for joy in the truth. (Williams, p.8)

In other words, since God is the life of the soul and the soul’s characteristic activity is recollection, then one loves God precisely through the exercise of that activity in which the soul is most vividly at work. On Williams’ reading, then, Augustine understands the act of recollection to be an exemplary instance of that faith that works through love, since Augustine enacts his faith in God through a devoted act of worship of Him. If an exemplary instance of the working of faith through love is to be found in the very form of recollection as manifest in the *Confessions*, might this give us a way of understanding how hope is a condition on the possibility of that sort of work?²⁰

There is, indeed, a distinctive role for hope in the process of recollection, one to which Augustine is sensitive in his discussion of memory in Book X. Consider the following passage, for instance:

When I turn to memory, I ask it to bring forth what I want: and some things are produced immediately, some take longer as if they had to be brought out from some more secret place in storage; some pour out in a heap, and while we are actually wanting and looking for something quite different, they hurl themselves upon us in masses as though to say “May it not be we that you want?” (Augustine (1993) p.178)

In this passage Augustine is plainly sensitive to the complicated mode of agency involved in recollection. It is not the case that we have control over the memories we are seeking to recover through the process of recollection. Indeed, as Jacob Klein points out in his discussion of Aristotle’s treatise on recollection, recollection begins with the awareness of having forgotten, since it is only because one does not have the memory at the forefront of one’s mind that one has to begin to recollect in the first place.²¹ Thus the process of recollection is marked by complicated mode of agency in which the subject ‘asks’ his memory to bring to him the memory he seeks, with the awareness that he cannot attain his goal merely by his own activity.²²

²⁰ It is worth noting that the reading I propose below may take us too far from Augustine, since it is in some tension with his account of propositional hope that we have already encountered.

²¹ See Klein p.108ff

²² Matters are in fact rather more paradoxical that Augustine lets on in this passage, however. Typically, in asking for something to be brought to me, I am able to issue a more or less precise description of that which I am looking to recover. For example, if I go to the post office to pick up a parcel I should be prepared to offer a good enough description of the item I am looking to retrieve. But this ability plainly depends on one’s ability to remember what it is that one is looking to have brought to one. Augustine’s myth of recollection, in which recollection proceeds through the issuing of commands for a memory to be brought to one, is unsustainable, since it presupposes that the agent already remembers what it is that he wishes to recollect such that he is able to begin to recollect in the first place, in which case the recollection is redundant. Nonetheless, Augustine’s myth does bring out the point with which we are presently most concerned,

We need not accept the tight connection Williams draws for Augustine between recollection and worship of God in order to draw a lesson from this discussion. All we need to recover from Williams' interpretation is the thought that works of love are marked by the agent's humility with respect to the likelihood of the work's reaching its end. Hope has an obvious place in any work of love that constitutively requires the agent to recognise that, by her own efforts alone, she is powerless to secure the outcome towards which she is working. This gives us a way of understand why Augustine would think it obvious that the faith that works by love depends on hope: if such works depend for their success on powers beyond one's control, one can at best only hope that one succeeds.²³

We are now in a position to summarise Augustine's answer to our second question. Augustine holds that faith is the assent to a proposition, which assent is based on testimony of scripture, such as the Apostle's Creed. Just as with faith, hope is assent to the truth of a proposition. Unlike faith, however, we can only hope for future states of affairs that we deem to be good. Augustine explains the relationship between faith, hope, and love in the following terms. Hope and love are interdependent on each other and dependant on faith. Faith makes possible hope and love by allowing love to take its proper object in God and, similarly, in providing content to eschatological hope. Hope is dependent on love, since without love the future state of affairs in which one has faith may just as well be feared; love secures the appearance of the future in which one has faith as good. Finally, love is dependent on hope insofar as love is the working of faith in worship of God through activities which the agent is aware of being unable to achieve by herself.

We are now in a position to turn to the final of our three questions: According to Augustine, are faith, hope, and love virtues? As our previous discussion might suggest, the answer is rather complicated. As we have seen, Augustine holds that love is not a virtue, but virtue itself, and that the so-called virtues (in the plural) are either vices in disguise or otherwise, if properly ordered, nothing other than forms of love. Thus, for Augustine, love is not one virtue among many. Love is virtue, as such, and the human character traits that we might want to describe as virtues are only virtues if they take the form of love. Moreover, as we have seen, faith and hope are conditions on the possibility of love, bestowed by an act of God's grace. They are not of the same order as the Roman virtues, since they are that by which temperance, fortitude, justice and prudence are reformed into love such that the individual attains virtue.

With this in mind, it is not as surprising as it otherwise might be that in the *Enchiridion* Augustine never describes faith, hope, and love as virtues: in that text he consistently refers to them as graces, in Pauline fashion. That Augustine describes the three as graces, and not virtues, has both retrospective and prospective import. Firstly, Augustine's terminology is plainly rooted in Pauline orthodoxy: as we have seen, Paul

namely, that in undertaking to recollect one accepts that one cannot, in advance, determine the outcome of the recollection by one's own efforts. There is an obvious role for hope in the act of recollection, since it involves undertaking a process the successful outcome of which one cannot guarantee by one's own efforts. In acknowledging that I cannot be sure of the outcome of my recollections, I can at best hope in the good, future outcome, in which I am able to recover in memory that which I seek to find.

²³ I note in passing that this reading puts some pressure on those readings of Augustine that emphasise Augustine's understanding of faith as propositional. A faith that works through its expression in acts is not obviously compatible with faith as assent to a proposition. Nonetheless, there may be a way of reconciling these two positions, if Augustine held that assent to propositions of doctrine is just a part of faith.

describes faith, hope, and love as *charismata*, spiritual gifts. The insistence on faith, hope, and love as graces, then, recalls the scriptural authority of Saint Paul. The language of grace, as opposed to virtue, however, also looks forward to major developments in the theological tradition, for, as we shall see, the distinction between grace and virtue became a major fault line between Scholastic orthodoxy that followed Aquinas and the reformist theology of Luther. For, as we shall see, Luther held that the influence of Aristotle had led to a false emphasis on human achievement and goodness in virtue, which should be corrected by reviving the overwhelming role of God's grace.

We now draw to a conclusion our discussion of Augustine's account of faith, hope, and love. In the following section, we shall offer a brief review of the principal theological developments that led to Thomas Aquinas.

Section Summary:

How does Augustine answer our three questions?

1. What is the relationship between love and the rest of human life, such that the former bestows value on the latter?

Love bestows value on all human action and capacity by ordering it towards its proper end: enjoyment of God

2. What is the distinctive relationship between love, on the one hand, and faith and hope on the other?

Hope and love are interdependent on each other and dependent on faith. Faith makes possible hope and love by allowing love to take its proper object in God and in providing content to hope. Hope is dependent on love, since love secures the appearance of the future in which one has faith as good. Finally, love is dependent on hope insofar as love is the working of faith in worship of God through activities the end of which the agents are self-consciously unable to achieve by their own efforts alone.

3. Are faith, hope, and love really virtues at all?

In his 'Enchiridion' Augustine never describes faith, hope, and love as 'virtues'. Rather, they are 'graces'. He holds that love is virtue, not one among many and, moreover, that either the cardinal virtues are nothing more than vices in disguise or nothing other than forms of love.

4: Saint Thomas Aquinas

a) Aquinas's Predecessors

In the previous section, we saw that Augustine distinguished between faith, hope, and love, on the one hand, and the Roman virtues, on the other, along the following lines. While the former constitute virtue, and are bestowed by God's grace, the latter are not really virtues at all unless properly ordered by love. Moreover, when they are properly ordered by love, they are in fact nothing other than aspects or forms of love. Thus, for

Augustine, love is virtue. We also noted that the term ‘theological virtues’ appears nowhere in Augustine’s writings. This is hardly a surprise: Given his understanding of virtue as proper love of God, the qualification ‘theological’ is either tautological or misleadingly indicates that there is another sort of virtue, besides that bestowed by God. It is thus understandable that Augustine does not offer a substantial account of the cardinal virtues in their own right, at least nothing comparable to what would come later on, nor develop a systematic account of their relation: in denying that the cardinal virtues are virtues at all, he lacks ground and motivation to work on a systematic presentation of their relation.

During the 12th Century, however, when Christianity was in dominance in Europe and the struggles of early Christianity against Greco-Roman learning were at a safe historical distance, however, theologians began to pay much closer attention to the cardinal virtues in their own right and to develop systematic accounts of their relation to faith, hope, and love.²⁴ Of these medieval theologians, Thomas Aquinas is perhaps the most obviously associated with the specific notion of the ‘theological virtues’. This is for good reason; Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae* is one of the most systematically advanced and influential works of theology of the medieval period and the distinction between theological and cardinal virtues plays a crucial role in that work. But Aquinas’ work is not the origin of the distinction between theological and natural virtues. Aquinas was in fact contributing to a discussion that had been going on for decades. Before we begin to discuss Aquinas’s specific contribution to this discussion, it will help to briefly situate it with relation to his near contemporaries.

In the late 11th Century and into the early 12th Century, medieval theology was beginning to be influenced by what Nederman has called an ‘underground Aristotelianism’, which, prior to the emergence of the *Nichomachean Ethics* in Latin, drew on Aristotle’s *Organon* and what fragments of his other writings were transmitted through authors such as Boethius.²⁵ Theologians did not just restrict their studies in ancient moral thought to Aristotle: interest was revived in the ethical texts of Seneca and Cicero. Consequently, ethics was increasingly considered a discipline in its own right and taught as such in universities:

Ethics had found no place among the seven liberal arts as they were described in the programmes of Boethius, Cassiodore, and Isidore. In the twelfth century attempts were made to find a place for it in systems of teaching. Some writers, such as Honorius of Autun, Stephen of Tournai, and Godfrey of Saint-Victor, freely appended ethics to the end of the list of the seven arts. Hugh of Saint-Victor sandwiched it, as a part of practical philosophy, between logic (grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric) and theoretical philosophy (theology, physics, and mathematics). William of Conches advised that after a student had studied eloquence (grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric) and before he approached theoretical philosophy (the study of corporeal beings in mathematics and physics and of incorporeal beings in theology) he should be instructed in practical philosophy, in ethics, economics, and politics. (Luscombe, xviii)

Within the discipline of ethics, questions naturally emerged as to the proper categorisation of the rather disordered lists of virtues handed down from disparate classical thinkers. Moreover, the renewed attention to classical ethical thought brought

²⁴ See Luscombe, xxi

²⁵ See Nederman 1989 and 1989-90.

Thus, we find pictorial representations of Roman virtues as part of a system that includes the theological virtues. The theoretical accounts of virtue that emerged soon after these representations, however, further elaborated the relation between the 'natural' and 'theological' virtues in different ways. The different directions taken by these elaborations further reflect the disparate origins of medieval moral thought. The two most prominent of these theoretical accounts of virtue are those developed by close contemporaries Peter the Lombard and Peter Abelard. Peter Abelard, following the emergent Aristotelianism, understood virtues as excellences of character, as dispositions towards good action.²⁷ The Lombard's main work is the *Sentences*, a theological text book that brought together teachings of the Church fathers as well as other influences and was a set text in courses of theology at least until the Reformation. In this work, and in contrast to Peter Abelard, the Lombard defined virtue as a quality of the mind that is worked in us by God independently of our own action. Moreover, the Lombard explicitly distinguishes between four categories of virtue:

The virtues fall into four categories, which Peter treats one by one in distinctions 23–36 of book 3: the theological virtues of faith and hope (dist. 23–26), the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance (dist. 33), and the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of God), which are considered virtues as well (dist. 34–35). A detailed treatise on charity is inserted between the theological and the cardinal virtues, in distinctions 27–32. (Rosemann, p.140)²⁸

In summary, by the early 12th century there was a renewed interest in ancient thought; an intellectual climate in which ancient thought is given explicit attention in universities; Christian texts included pictorial representations of faith, hope, and love as comprising a distinct set of virtues within an overarching system of virtue; and there was a live dispute between the two major sources of Christian ethics as to the understanding of virtue, which dispute reflected the pagan and Christian origins of medieval moral thought. It is in this context that we find theologians beginning to systematically relate the two spheres of influence within an overarching schema, thus laying the ground on which it would make sense to distinguish distinctly theological virtues from non-theological virtues.

Of Aquinas's immediate precursors in the attempt to synthesise the disparate moral traditions, providing solutions to the problems that came with the dispute between the Lombard and Abelard, the two of particular prominence are Albert the Great, Aquinas's teacher, and William of Auxerre, whose project of systematic theology

²⁷ See Porter (2001) p.101, although compare with Kent (2013) who argues compellingly that the only plausible source for the 12th Century conception of virtue as disposition was Augustine's treatise on marriage.

²⁸ To claim that love is treated as a category of virtue is a little misleading, since Peter holds that love is nothing short of the Holy Spirit itself. Moreover, the Lombard holds that faith and hope are specifically human goods, arguing that Christ had no need for either of these, since each denotes an imperfection of knowledge that we cannot attribute to God. For a more detailed account of the Lombard's theology, see Rosemann (2004).

Albert further extended and developed. Moreover, it is in William's writings that we find one of the earliest—if not the first—description of theological virtues:

Having spoken of the theological virtues we must now treat of the cardinal virtues [*de politicis*] before we speak about the gifts of the Holy Spirit (quoted in Cunningham, p.53).

Thus, not only did Aquinas inherit a problematic from an already flourishing tradition of theological thought, he also inherited its terminology. How, though, does Aquinas develop his own answer to the question of the relationship between the cardinal and theological virtues?

b) Aquinas

In order to understand Aquinas' account of the relationship between the theological virtues and the rest of human life, we need first to understand what he takes to be natural goodness. This will allow us to see how, for him, the naturally attainable virtues of temperance, fortitude, justice, and prudence are insufficient for the attainment of the human good. Since the human good, properly understood, should be conceived as friendship with God, the natural virtues are insufficient for attaining that good. This is the role of the theological virtues, which are but three of the infused virtues, virtues that are bestowed on the human by God.

There are two steps to understanding the outline of Aquinas's position on the natural goodness of human beings. The first is to understand Aquinas's general account of goodness, and the second is to see how this is determined in the case of the human good. We shall take each point in turn.

Aquinas finds a tight connection between goodness and being, such that an entity is better or worse according to the degree of its reality.²⁹ According to Aquinas, in order for an entity to be anything at all, it must be unified in such a way that separates it from other entities. The chair in front of me, for example, is distinct from the table it is pushed underneath and the carpet into which its legs press down. It is distinct from these other entities because it is unified in such a way that excludes the table and the carpet. If it had no constitutive form, by virtue of which it was separate from other entities, the chair would not be anything at all, rather as an iceberg would cease to be if it melted into the ocean.

If, one day in the void, you encountered two chairs emerging from the dark, the chairs would be numerable by virtue of their individual unity and hence distinctness from each other. In order for the chairs to be chairs, as opposed to nothing more than a pair of discrete entities in close proximity, however, Aquinas holds that they must be unified in a way that is characteristic of a kind. In other words, an entity counts as being a particular kind of thing thanks to its having a form of unity that is characteristic of the kind to which it belongs.

According to Aquinas, however, any particular entity can attain the form that is characteristic of its kind to a greater or lesser degree. Consider, for example, a cup of

²⁹ In this section I draw heavily upon Jean Porter's *Recovery of Virtue* (1994), specifically chapters 2 and 3. See also Anthony Kenny's (2005)

tea into which one continues to pour milk. The drink in front of one will transition from being a cup of tea, through being a milky cup of tea, to being a tea-infused cup of milk. We might think of this transition of the gradual loss of the drink's distinctive reality as a cup of tea. For in this case, what makes the tea distinctive as a cup of tea is the particular balance of the admixture of tannins and water, which characteristic form of unity is gradually corrupted.

We are now in a position to see why Aquinas finds such a close connection between being and goodness. Consider again our cup of tea. As the encroaching tide of milk begins to overwhelm the infused water, it is not just that the contents of the cup begin to lose their identity as a cup of tea: the drink before us also becomes an increasingly worse cup of tea. To call such a drink a cup of tea would not just be obtuse, it would be an abomination. For, according to Aquinas, the characteristic form of an entity, in virtue of which it is what it is at all, provides a standard according to which any entity counts as a good or bad example of that sort of thing. The degree to which an entity attains in reality the form characteristic of its kind, the closer it approximates the good.³⁰ Thus, Aquinas finds a very tight connection goodness and being. According to this metaphysics, for a house to be a bad house is for it to be less of a house, since it is less of a realisation of the ideal. And if, to paraphrase A. A. Milne, your house does not look like a house but a tree that has been blown down, it is not just that you have before you a bad house: you no longer have a house at all.

Thus, for Aquinas, for something to be is for it to some degree realise the norms constitutive of the natural kind of which it is an instance. The better something is, the more it is what it is and the converse also holds. What is the ideal form of the human being according to which we are (and are thus better or worse examples of) human beings?

Human beings are living creatures. Aquinas distinguishes living beings from non-living beings on the grounds that the former are capable of moving themselves, rather than being entirely determined by external causes. Since a living being is, by definition, of the sort to be capable of moving itself, it has a distinctive relationship to the good, that is, to the ideal of the kind that is realised to some degree by the creature. This relationship is one of striving, through which living creatures pursue the realisation of the goodness constitutive of their kind. Non-living beings, by contrast, are entirely determined from without as to the degree of their realisation of the ideal of their kind.

A rock, for example, is not itself involved in whether or not it remains a rock, gets smashed to bits under a worker's hammer, or reduced to magma under the weight of the earth. That it counts as a rock at all is explained entirely by external causation. Living creatures, in contrast, move themselves towards that which sustains their characteristic form of unity, and avoid those things that threaten it. Although living

³⁰ Doubtless many will find much to object to in Aquinas' metaphysics. One might suppose, for example, that of course a bad chair is bad, but it is no less a chair for that reason. Indeed, if a chair becomes less of a chair through being more of a bad chair, doesn't that undermine the ground from which we might claim that the chair is bad in the first place? Consider, one last time, our sadly milky cup of tea. If the drink is adjudged bad with respect to its being a cup of tea, it must be a cup of tea in order to be thought a bad one of those. The less secure our warrant to judge the entity a cup of tea, the less secure our warrant to judge the entity bad by that standard. Of course, there are replies to be made to this sort of response (one might suppose, for example, that the drink is increasingly bad qua tea and increasingly good qua tea-flavoured milk, the difference being that the former description is less easily applied to the entity before us, but while applicable still true), here we note only that the matter is not uncontroversial.

creatures move themselves towards ends that are good for them, however, the ends towards which most living creatures move themselves are determined by natural necessity. A bee, for instance, does not have a range of possible goods to choose between as it leaves the hive for the day: it simply goes about pursuing the things that are set as objects of pursuit by its nature.

Human beings are yet more distinctive still, for while other living creatures are naturally inclined to strive towards those stimuli that draw the creature towards its own good, human beings are capable of free and rational decision. This distinctive feature of human life is of profound importance, since it means that in order for a human being to pursue a course of action, it has to freely choose to pursue that course of action: since the objects of human striving are not set in advance by natural necessity, human beings have to figure out how to act for the best among the available options. Thus, thanks to the lack of natural necessity in the determination of human inclination, in order to strive towards the ends that are truly good for human beings, humans must figure out what ends they are to pursue. The distinctive form of human striving, then, is one in which the human being moves itself towards those stimuli that it judges to be good for it through rational assent. In other words, human striving is characteristically action: behaviour guided by choice constrained by norms of rationality.

In summary, Aquinas held that there was no substantial gap between normativity and being, since for something to be is for it to attain a degree of reality with respect to the ideal of its kind, the fullest degree of such realisation being the good for that being. Living creatures are distinctive in that they strive after their own good, with human beings being still more distinctive insofar the character of their striving is action: behaviour guided by a free, (ideally) rational decision as to what should be done.

With this in mind, we can begin to see the distinctive role Aquinas envisages for the so-called natural virtues of temperance, fortitude, justice, and prudence. In keeping with the ontology of virtue developed over the previous decades, Aquinas held that virtues were dispositions toward correct action.³¹ In other words, the virtues are those dispositions that incline the human being towards the sustenance of the form characteristic of the species, namely, behaviour guided by rational choice of ends for action. Thus, the virtues should be considered as those stable dispositions of character that dispose the human individual towards action directed towards its proper end. It is, thus, through proper action (behaviour guided by ideally rational choice) that the human being attains its highest degree of reality that it can achieve by its own efforts and, thereby, attains the highest good it can achieve by its own efforts.

There is much more that can be said about Aquinas's moral theory. Aquinas has, after all, a detailed account of the role played by each of the moral and intellectual virtues in the attainment of the natural, human good. We have seen enough, however, to begin to see the general shape of the connection between the natural human good and the theological virtues, on Aquinas's understanding.

So far, then, we have seen in rough outline Aquinas's account of the natural human good. To attain the natural good, humans must judge the right course of action appropriate to the maintenance of their characteristic form, which course the agent then acts to attain. The natural virtues are those dispositions that dispose the human towards such rationally chosen action. The qualification 'natural' is important, however.

³¹ See Kent (2013)

For, as many scholars of Aquinas are at pains to stress, Aquinas held that the human good as such is not fully specifiable in entirely natural terms.

Jean Porter, for instance, argues that the natural good—attainable through the acquisition of the cardinal virtues through habitual action—is, for Aquinas, only the ‘proximate’ moral aim of human action. This proximate aim of human action is not in itself sufficient for human beings attaining their own good, however, since the distal and true human good is supernatural: beatific vision of and friendship with God. But this vision and friendship is itself only attainable through the presence of the infused virtues, those dispositions towards action characteristic of the life of grace. Thus, the characteristic form of human beings, the attainment of which is the distinctly human good, is not attainable by human action.

Eleonore Stump has taken this insight in a distinctively Augustinian direction. According to Stump, Aquinas held that the natural virtues are not really virtues at all. She points out that Aquinas holds that the natural virtues can be had without the presence of love and that no virtues can be held without love. But ‘this conclusion can be true only if, in his view, the acquired virtues are not real virtues at all’ (Stump (2012) p.95). On this reading, then, Aquinas held with Augustine that the natural virtues are, at best, mere illusions of moral excellence.

Finally, against recent attempts to cash out Aquinas’s moral theory in secular terms, Thomas F. O’Meara has also stressed the essentially theological character of Aquinas’s account of the human good (see O’Meara). On O’Meara’s reading, Aquinas held that ‘nature’ is a category that is parallel but opposed to ‘grace’. Both refer to characteristic forms of unity that are distinctive of human beings. But only grace refers to that specifically spiritual form of human life. Since grace is opposed to nature in terms of its being a distinct form of existence, and since the ‘natural’ form of human existence is not the human good as such, those ‘virtues’ of the natural good should not be thought of as virtues at all, since they do not dispose the agent towards action characteristic of her true—that is, spiritual—good.

These criticisms of the attempt to account for Aquinas’s moral philosophy in entirely human terms are well founded; as Stump in particular argues convincingly, there is a wealth of material in Aquinas’s writings that militates against reading his project as an effort to graft Christian theology onto a framework of pagan ethics, despite a number of prominent readings of Aquinas in this light.³² Perhaps most telling of all is Aquinas’s most definitive statement of his understanding of virtue, which he attributes to Augustine and affirms in its own right:

A virtue is a good quality of the mind by which one lives righteously, of which no one can make bad use, and which God works in us without us. (ST I-II q. 55, a. 4)^{33, 34}

³² See, for instance, Kenny (2005)

³³ In fact, this definition of virtue is lifted from Peter the Lombard’s *Sentences*. The Lombard attributes it to Augustine but, as it happens, it is his own construction, apparently composed as an alternative to that of Hugh of Saint Victor. See (Bejczy, p.119). For support, compare Bonnie Kent (2013), in which Kent argues that the understanding of vice as disposition in the 11th and 12th Centuries derives more from Augustine’s treatise on marriage than it does Aristotle’s *Ethics*.

³⁴ All quotes from Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae* are taken from the online version at <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/> (unless otherwise noted).

Aquinas could not be clearer: virtue is worked in us, without our own efforts, by God. Thus the natural or acquired ‘virtues’, which are by definition the result of our own habitual action, cannot be considered virtues, properly considered (‘simply’ (*simpliciter*) without ‘qualification’, as Aquinas puts it elsewhere³⁵), since virtue proper is not brought about by our own effort.

Aquinas holds that the distinction between the infused virtues and the natural virtues, then, is radical. What is the nature of the distinction? How is it that love in particular bestows value on the rest of human life?

To begin with, we should examine the distinction Aquinas draws between the infused virtues and the natural virtues. We have already noted that, for Aquinas, the natural virtues are those dispositions towards the best action that can be attained by a human being through her own efforts. The form of life that is shaped by the presence of the four cardinal virtues is the natural or proximate good of the human being: natural, since it is attainable by the agent’s action, and proximate, since it is not the human good as such—the true good for human beings is distal and supernatural. Grace, in contrast, does not name individual, discrete items that are given to individuals by God but, rather, the condition of life in which a graced individual lives, if she has been raised up to virtue by God. It is within this framework that Aquinas characterises the distinction between the natural and infused virtues. The natural virtues are those dispositions towards action that is exemplary of the natural human good, whereas the infused virtues are those dispositions towards action that is exemplary of the supernatural human good, the life of which is grace.³⁶

The infused virtues are comprised of four which share a name with the four cardinal virtues—temperance, fortitude, justice, and prudence—as well as the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. Even though the four moral, infused virtues are homonymous with the natural, cardinal virtues, they comprise a distinct set of virtues. Since virtues are dispositions towards actions, and since actions are identified by reference to the end to which the agent is directed, the identity of a virtue is fixed in part by reference to the end of the action to which that virtue is a disposition. Accordingly, because the infused virtues are by definition dispositions towards ends that are different in kind from the natural virtues, the infused virtues must be distinct from the natural cardinal virtues, despite sharing the same names.³⁷ Among the infused

³⁵ ‘It is therefore clear from what has been said that only the infused virtues are perfect, and deserve to be called virtues simply: since they direct man well to the ultimate end. But the other virtues, those, namely, that are acquired, are virtues in a restricted sense, but not simply’ <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2065.htm#article2>

³⁶ Matters are more complicated still, since Aquinas further distinguishes between the infused virtues and the spiritual gifts. Stump offers a concise account of this distinction:

Aquinas gives a relatively clear explanation of the function of the gifts. They are something like enzymes for the theological virtues, and especially the theological virtue of love, which is the *sine qua non* of the whole ethical life. An enzyme can bind with one active ingredient of a biochemical reaction and, altered in form and function by that binding, it can interact with another substrate to catalyze a reaction which would go very imperfectly without the enzyme. In the same way, for Aquinas, the gifts of the Holy Spirit have the effect of anchoring the infused theological virtues more deeply in a person’s psyche and enabling them to have their desired effect there. The gifts of the Holy Spirit as-it-were cement the infused virtues into the psyche. (Stump, 96)

³⁷ The two sets of virtues are further distinguished by their genesis: the natural virtues can be acquired by human action alone, whereas the infused virtues are dependent on God.

virtues, however, there is a further distinction to be drawn between the infused or 'formed' equivalents to the cardinal virtues and the theological virtues, of which there is no natural equivalent.

Aquinas's account of the distinction between the natural moral virtues, infused moral virtues, and theological virtues, respectively is, then, quite complex. Happily, Etienne Gilson provides the following helpful summary of the distinction:

There is accordingly a twofold distinction to be made among virtues: first, between theological and moral virtues; second, between natural moral virtues and supernatural moral virtues. Theological virtues and supernatural moral virtues have in common that they are neither acquired nor acquirable by the practice of what is good. As we have said, we cannot naturally practice the good here in question. How could we form a habit of doing something of which we are incapable? On the other hand, the theological virtues are distinguished from the supernatural moral virtues in that the former have God for their immediate object, while the latter bear directly upon certain definite kinds of human acts. Since they pertain to supernatural moral virtues, these acts are directed toward God as to their end. But they are only directed toward him; they do not reach him. The virtue of religion furnishes us with a striking example of this difference. It is in every way a virtue directed toward God. One who possesses this virtue of religion must render to God the worship that is his due, when, where and as it should be rendered. The supernatural moral virtues allow him to act for God; the theological virtues allow him to act with God and in God. By faith we believe God and in God. By hope we entrust ourselves to God and hope in him because he is the very substance of our faith and hope. By charity the act of human love reaches to God himself. We cherish him as a friend whom we love and by whom we are loved, and who through friendship is transported into us and we into him. For my friend I am a friend; hence I am for God what he is for me. (Gilson, 383-4)

In summary, the infused moral virtues are distinguished from the natural moral virtues in terms of the end of the actions towards which the respective sets of virtues dispose the agents. Only the infused moral virtues set the love of God as the end of action. The theological virtues are distinct from the infused moral virtues, however, since the theological virtues take God as the immediate object of action, whereas the actions expressive of the infused moral virtues are only mediately directed towards God. In combination with our brief discussion of grace, we can summarise the point as follows. The infused virtues are those dispositions towards action that is conducive to the attainment of the form of unity that is characteristic of the life of grace, whereas the natural virtues are those dispositions towards action that is conducive to the attainment of the form of unity that is characteristic of the natural life.³⁸ The theological virtues are infused virtues that take God as the immediate, rather than distal, end, whereas for the other infused virtues it is the converse.

With this framework in place, we can now begin to see how Aquinas conceives of the prominence of love among the virtues, theological and infused. Aquinas explains why love is the highest among the theological virtues along two lines of argument. The first argument picks up on the immediacy of the relation to God that is attained by love,

³⁸ There is an ambiguity here, since Aquinas claims that the 'action' that is expressive of the infused virtues is worked 'in us', rather than by us. This would make it appear that the action characteristic of grace is not distinguished solely by its object (i.e., its end) but also its subject: for those actions expressive of the infused virtues, we are not straightforwardly the agent, rather, something like a medium for God's love.

while the second refers to the proper orientation of all action towards its proper end. By the first argument, love is the most excellent since it immediately attains the proper object of virtue (God) to the highest degree:

Since good, in human acts, depends on their being regulated by the due rule, it must needs be that human virtue, which is a principle of good acts, consists in attaining the rule of human acts. Now the rule of human acts is twofold, as stated above (Article 3), namely, human reason and God: yet God is the first rule, whereby, even human reason must be regulated. Consequently the theological virtues, which consist in attaining this first rule, since their object is God, are more excellent than the moral, or the intellectual virtues, which consist in attaining human reason: and it follows that among the theological virtues themselves, the first place belongs to that which attains God most.

Now that which is of itself always ranks before that which is by another. But faith and hope attain God indeed in so far as we derive from Him the knowledge of truth or the acquisition of good, whereas charity attains God Himself that it may rest in Him, but not that something may accrue to us from Him. Hence charity is more excellent than faith or hope, and, consequently, than all the other virtues, just as prudence, which by itself attains reason is more excellent than the other moral virtues, which attain reason in so far as it appoints the mean in human operations or passions.³⁹

Faith, hope, and love each take God as their rule, and in this sense attain him. But since faith and hope attain God but only in reference to our own good, they attain God to a lesser degree than love, which rests in God for no other purpose. Thus, love is the highest among the theological virtues.

By the second argument, Aquinas holds that love is that by which the proper end of all action is set, thereby making virtuous action possible in the first place:

If, however, we take virtue as being ordered to some particular end, then we speak of virtue being where there is no charity, in so far as it is directed to some particular good. But if this particular good is not a true, but an apparent good, it is not a true virtue that is ordered to such a good, but a counterfeit virtue. [...] If, on the other hand, this particular good be a true good, for instance the welfare of the state, or the like, it will indeed be a true virtue, imperfect, however, unless it be referred to the final and perfect good. Accordingly no strictly true virtue is possible without charity. (ibid.)

Thus, Aquinas, with Augustine, explains the normative distinction between love and the other virtues partly in terms of the orientation towards goodness that love, distinctly, provides. It is for this reason that Aquinas can hold that love is the 'form' of the virtues. It is the form of the virtues since it brings them into conformity with the supernatural human good, namely, action towards love of God:

In morals the form of an act is taken chiefly from the end. The reason of this is that the principal of moral acts is the will, whose object and form, so to speak, are the end. Now the form of an act always follows from a form of the agent. Consequently, in morals, that which gives an act its order to the end, must needs give the act its form. Now it is evident, in accordance with what has been said, that it is charity which

³⁹ <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3023.htm>

directs the acts of all other virtues to the last end, and which, consequently, also gives the form to all other acts of virtue: and it is precisely in this sense that charity is called the form of the virtues, for these acts are called virtues in relation to “informed” acts. (ibid.)

With Augustine, Aquinas also holds that there is a tight connection of interdependence between the theological virtues. His way of cashing out the precise relationship is importantly different from Augustine’s, however. To recall, Augustine held that love and hope are interdependent and that each of love and hope is dependent on faith. For Aquinas, however, there is a genetic progression from faith to hope and finally to love, but it is only once love is present that the theological virtues are perfected. Thus, Aquinas’s position is that the imperfect virtue of faith is a condition on the possibility of the imperfect virtue of hope. Imperfect hope is itself a condition on the possibility of love. But once love is present, hope and faith are perfected. Accordingly, imperfect faith and hope bring about love, but love, in turn, brings about perfect faith and hope. We shall spend some time spelling out this relationship in a little more detail.

Aquinas holds that faith is a precondition on hope, for roughly the same reasons as Augustine: one must assent to that which has been revealed in order to have confidence in that good that is to come, namely, our personal salvation. Without faith in the doctrine of Christianity, there would be no content to hope. Thus, faith is a condition on the possibility of hope.

Further in keeping with Augustine, Aquinas holds that it is only on the basis of our confidence in the good that is to come (our hope) that we are then able to love God. Where Augustine simply stated that it was obvious that hope is a precondition on love, however, Aquinas spends more time explaining his position. As Wawrykow puts it: ‘One loves only on the basis of knowing what is to be loved and having a confidence that what is to be loved can be attained. Remove faith and hope, and there is no charity’ (Wawrykow, p.300). In other words, Aquinas holds we only love what we hope we can attain. At this point, it may seem as though Aquinas held that we only ever love God in order to serve our interests, since he claims that we can only love on the basis of the possibility of attaining the good for ourselves. But this would be a flat out contradiction of his claim, noted earlier, that in love we rest in God for no other purpose. Aquinas’s position is, however, more nuanced than it may first appear.

Aquinas resolves this difficulty by distinguishing between imperfect (unformed) and perfect (formed) virtues. This distinction is that between the dispositions before and after they have been given their proper end by love. Aquinas holds that hope precedes love in the order of generation of the theological virtues. This means that it is imperfect hope that makes possible love. But once love is present, it reforms the virtues that made it possible by giving them their proper end. Thus Aquinas would concede that prior to the presence of love, it is indeed the case that we are directed finally towards our own self-interest. But self-interested imperfect hope makes possible the love that transforms it into other-directed hope for the good of our friends, principal among whom is God:

Now there is a perfect, and an imperfect love. Perfect love is that whereby a man is loved in himself, as when someone wishes a person some good for his own sake; thus a man loves his friend. Imperfect love is that whereby a man loves something, not for its own sake, but that he may obtain that good for himself; thus a man loves what

he desires. The first love of God pertains to charity, which adheres to God for His own sake; while hope pertains to the second love, since he that hopes, intends to obtain possession of something for himself.

Hence in the order of generation, hope precedes charity. For just as a man is led to love God, through fear of being punished by Him for his sins, as Augustine states [...] so too, hope leads to charity, in as much as a man through hoping to be rewarded by God, is encouraged to love God and obey His commandments. On the other hand, in the order of perfection charity naturally precedes hope, wherefore, with the advent of charity, hope is made more perfect, because we hope chiefly in our friends.⁴⁰

We have now seen enough of Aquinas's position to answer our three questions. Firstly, how does Aquinas explain the bestowal of value on human life by the presence of love? As we have seen, Aquinas holds that we are only able, by our own efforts, to attain the proximate or natural good for human beings. The natural good is only ever a sham state of virtue, since it is not directed towards the good that is proper to the human being: God. The infused virtues, which are present thanks exclusively to God's action, make possible exemplary action proper for the spiritual good of the human being. Among the infused virtues, there are three theological virtues—faith, hope, and love—which take God as their immediate object. Love is of especial prominence among the theological virtues since it sets the proper end of all of the infused virtues and, thereby, forms them into virtues properly conceived. Therefore, Aquinas holds that love bestows value on the rest of human life by forming the dispositions towards good action to their proper end. Moreover, his account gives us an answer to the second question of the relation between the theological virtues. On Aquinas's account, faith makes possible hope, since it is only on the basis of assent to belief in the creed that we can hope for the good that is to come. Moreover, Aquinas holds that faith and hope (as unformed virtues) are conditions on the possibility of love. When love is present, however, it forms the theological virtues (as well as the rest of the virtues) and thereby raises them to the status of true virtue for the first time. Thus, the unformed virtue of faith is a condition on the possibility of the unformed virtue of hope, which together are conditions on the possibility of love. Love is a sufficient condition for the formation of faith and hope into virtues, properly conceived. Finally, in answer to our third question, Aquinas plainly holds that faith, hope, and love are virtues. Contrary to Peter the Lombard, who held that love simply was the presence of the divine spirit, Aquinas holds that in receiving grace we exemplify the form of life in which we are disposed towards proper action by the presence of the infused virtues, which include the theological virtues. The theological virtues are virtues, then, since they dispose us towards proper action.

This concludes our discussion of Aquinas's answer to our three questions. Before we move on, however, we shall briefly discuss Aquinas's characterisation of the love of God as friendship. For this discussion shall help us later on to identify some of the major fault lines between the Scholastic theology that Aquinas greatly influenced and the reformist theology of Luther, who we shall discuss in section VI.

⁴⁰ <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3017.htm>

Aquinas's account of friendship is complex and our treatment of it here shall have to be brief.⁴¹ But there are a number of features we can highlight to draw out the distinctiveness of Aquinas's claim that love of God is a sort of friendship and which will show something of why this idea was found to be so controversial later on. We can begin by noting Aquinas's definition of friendship:

On this sense three things pertain to friendship, namely, "benevolence" which is here called "affection"; "concord," and "beneficence" which is here called "humanity."⁴²

'[f]irst benevolence, which consists in this that someone wills the other person good and his evil wills not, second, concord that consists in this that friends will and reject the same things, third, beneficence, which consists in this that someone does good for the person he loves and does not harm him' (quoted in Schwarz pp.6-7)

In particular, there are difficulties with extending the ideas of concord and beneficence to our relationship with God, which we shall now briefly review.

The idea that we can share the will of a friend is, though not without problems, easy enough to grasp when it comes to relationships between human beings. Friends wish not to disagree with each other and seek out common pursuits, the success of which they can both enjoy (recall Augustine's description of his friendships with those with whom he could share joys and books). But matters are further complicated when we consider the issue of the possibility of the congruence of the relationship between our own will and that of God. As Schwarz has helpfully shown, Aquinas analyses the will into three features: the end of the will, the object of the will, and the rational connection between the end and the object. This is, roughly, the distinction between that end that is willed (for example, the well-being of the friend), that which is willed for the sake of that end (for example, some particular state-of-affairs that is conducive to the friend's well-being), and the understanding of the rational connection between the object and the end. For example, my will might be to help my friend (the end) by giving him some chocolate (bringing about a particular state of affairs: the object) for the reason that my friend loves chocolate. Thus there is an end, object, and rational connection between the two that are constitutive of my willing to help him.

But with this framework in place, it does not take long to notice that human beings would face a number of problems in adjusting their wills to that of God's. For example, we may be able to know the end that God wills—the good as such—and even believe that the current state of affairs is an object of God's will—that is, I might be able to affirm the proposition that this current state of affairs is in God's plan—without being able to comprehend the connection between the object and the end. For example, it might well be that I am able to grasp that the death of a loved one is part of God's plan for the unfolding of goodness throughout time, but it might be (most likely will be) the case that I am unable to grasp how the death of my loved one figures in God's plan. How, then, am I to be unified with God in the sense of sharing his will if, as

⁴¹ For a helpful and detailed account of his position, see Schwarz, on which, with Stump, I draw upon in what follows.

⁴² <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3080.htm>

is often the case, I lack one of the constituent features of God's will, namely, the understanding of the connection between the means and the end?⁴³

Finally, it is also problematic to suppose that we can somehow desire to act for the sake of God's good. This position is controversial, not least because it is far from clear that God could be helped by human action. For if God could be helped, it would seem that there is some limit to his power, since one can only be helped in something that one is unable to achieve easily by oneself. There is a further problem, however, when we consider the particular character of benefaction that Aquinas draws from Seneca. On Aquinas's account, in being a benefactor to a friend, one puts the friend in debt to one's benefaction. Roughly speaking, in giving you a gift I put you in debt to repay the gift with an act of kindness. This is plainly problematic, however, when extended to our relationship to God. Firstly, it is not obvious that we can give God anything at all, since that may presume that He is lacking in something which it is in our preserve to provide. There is a further problem, however: given that we are able to give something to God, it would seem to follow from Aquinas's account of benefaction that we thereby put God in our debt, that we somehow deserve a response of kindness from God by dint of our own, benevolent action. But if that is the case, then it would seem to undermine the purely charitable character of God's love, since this would appear to be a response to legitimate claim made by the human after all.

None of these criticisms is decisive, of course. But we have seen enough of Aquinas's account of friendship to note the difficulties and tensions that arise when friendship is used as an analogue or model for our ideal relationship with God. For with each of the three aspects of friendship that Aquinas discusses, the friendship aims towards a mutuality and parity of resource and ability that seems difficult to reconcile with the kind of insistence on difference between the human and divine upon which later theologians, such as Luther, will place great emphasis.

We have now concluded our discussion of Aquinas's account of the theological virtues.⁴⁴ In the following section we shall discuss the Protestant challenge to virtue theology and the distinctive understanding of faith, hope, and love that comes with such a challenge. To this end, we shall focus on the theology of Martin Luther. We shall then be in a position, in the final section, to review the return of virtue in both Catholic and Protestant thought in the modern period.

⁴³ Schwarz Porzecanski (2003) develops a compelling solution to this problem. See also Mulhall (2015). According to both, the problems with understanding the connection between that God is the answer to a certain sort of question (for Schwarz, the question in question is 'why is this (bad thing) happening?'; for Mulhall 'why is there something rather than nothing?') and how he is the answer to the question demand that one takes a different attitude towards the question as such. Schwarz recommends a patient waiting for the answer to be revealed, whereas Mulhall recommends accepting such questions as riddles with no answer that can be provided from within the business of trying to answer it.

⁴⁴ It would be a large mistake to think that after Aquinas no one discussed the virtues. To name just two important examples: Duns Scotus discussed the virtues at length (see (1997) Part VI in eds. Wolter and Frank) as did Ockham (see Suk (1950) and Wood (1997)). For Brevity's sake, however, we shall have to pass these developments without discussion.

Section Summary:

Although Aquinas's *Summa* is one of the most important developments of the theology of the theological virtues, Aquinas inherited the distinction. It appears in the work of Albert the Great (Aquinas' teacher) as well as William of Auxerre, whose systematic theology and engagement with Aristotle were influential on Albert. William of Auxerre was developing a distinction present in the work of Peter the Lombard and Peter Abelard and, before them, in schematic representations of trees of virtues, in textual illuminations.

How does Aquinas answer our three questions?

1. What is the relationship between love and the rest of human life, such that the former bestows value on the latter?

*Aquinas's answer is complex. Aquinas defines virtue as a quality of the mind that is moved in us by God without us. He also makes a distinction between 'natural virtues' and 'infused virtues'. The natural virtues are those excellences of character we can achieve by our own effort; the infused virtues are brought about by grace. In order for these claims to be consistent, Aquinas must hold that the 'natural virtues' are not **really** virtues, on the model of Augustine. Rather, only the infused virtues are virtues, since it is only these which are brought about by God **without us**.*

Of the infused virtues there are some that Aquinas calls 'theological': faith, hope, and love. As with Augustine, Aquinas holds love has the effect of ordering human action towards its proper end. Unlike Augustine, Aquinas characterises this end as friendship with God.

2. What is the distinctive relationship between love, on the one hand, and faith and hope on the other?

Faith generates hope, insofar that faith in Christian doctrine draws us to hope in our own salvation. Hope leads us to love, insofar as we come to love that which will bring about our salvation. But once we attain love, faith and hope are reformed away from self-interest towards friendship with God.

3. Are faith, hope, and love really virtues at all?

By Aquinas's lights, faith, hope, and love really are virtues, since they are those dispositions towards action that are brought about by God alone.

5: Reformation Theology

In the previous two sections, we were helped in our aim of finding answers to the three questions raised in discussion of Paul by the fact that both Augustine and Aquinas attempt to draw more or less precise distinctions between faith, hope, and love. In contrast to Aquinas, however, we find in the writings of Martin Luther no similar attempt to fit theology into a systematic metaphysics. Moreover, in contrast to even Augustine,

Luther is rather dissatisfied, if not to say incensed, with the inclination towards philosophy he finds in his precursors:

how many foolish opinions befog us in metaphysics! When shall we learn to see that we are wasting much precious time with such useless studies. . . Indeed, I believe that I owe this duty to the Lord of crying out against philosophy and turning men to Holy Scripture. . . . I have been in the grind of these studies for, lo, these many years and am worn out by it and, on the basis of long experience, I have come to be persuaded that it is a vain study, doomed to perdition. . . . It is high time that we be transferred from these other studies and learn Jesus Christ and 'him crucified.' (Luther, quoted in Pauck, lii)

Rather, we find in Luther a vociferous rejection of many theological positions that were in circulation among his contemporaries, an equally pointed dismissal of scholastic systematic methodology, and a call to return to scriptural authority as the basis of theology. Indeed, Luther even holds that the 'theological virtues', as catalogued by the scholastics, are among the 'most hateful and tedious catalogue of distinctions' and are 'utterly useless, indeed altogether harmful'.⁴⁵ In what follows, then, we shall not be tracing the systematic connections between the concepts of faith, hope, and love as Luther understands them, for Luther draws no such distinctions. Indeed, it will only be after an extended discussion of Luther's theology in general that we shall eventually be able to return our focus to the three questions we have been posing to the previous figures we have discussed. In any event, Luther has much to say about the 'theological virtues', even if he would reject the terminology, much of which led to a profound reorientation of theology. First, we shall turn to Luther's trademark doctrine of *sola fide*, that we are 'justified by faith alone.'

What others have learned from Scholastic theology is their own affair. As for me, I know and confess that I learned there nothing but ignorance of sin, righteousness, baptism, and of the whole Christian life. I certainly did not learn there what the power of God is, and the work of God, the grace of God, the righteousness of God, and what faith, hope, and love are. . . . Indeed, I lost Christ there, but now I have found him again in Paul. (Luther, quoted in Pauck p.xi)

Here, Luther refers to his reading of Paul's letter to the Romans. It was through Luther's encounter with this epistle in particular that he came to one of his most infamous and central doctrines: it is only through faith that 'human beings are able to find acceptance in the sight of a righteous and holy God' (McGrath, p.361); we are justified by faith alone:

Through no preparation will you be worthy, nor through any work will you be fitted for the sacrament [of penance], but through faith alone. This is because only faith in the word of Christ justifies, makes alive, makes worthy, and prepares; without faith all other attempts are strivings of presumption or despair. But he who is just does not live on the basis of his disposition but on the basis of faith (Luther, quoted in Green, p.76)

With this doctrine, Luther overturned a returning theme of those theologians we have discussed so far, namely, that love is of most central importance to Christian life.

⁴⁵ See Martin Luther LW, 39: p.36-37

Before we discuss the implications of Luther's doctrine on his understanding of hope and love, we shall spend some time laying out some of the most important features of his distinctive theology and the place of the doctrine of justification within it.

As we have seen in the previous sections, the medieval development of the concept of the theological virtues is concerned with specifying those dispositions towards excellent action. For Aquinas, faith, hope, and love are the perfections of a set of virtues which, once in place, make it possible for us to act for the good. The centrality of action is further emphasised by the concept of a deadly sin, that is, an action that is sufficient to destroy the state of grace bestowed by God. Thus good action is the final end of a good human life, which end is attainable through the presence of dispositions towards that action—the virtues—which are put in place by God's grace but which can be corrupted by improper action.

By placing action at the heart of Christian moral theology, it is possible to understand the human relationship to the Christian law—paradigmatically represented by the commandments—in a particular way. If the law stipulates those commandments that any human should meet in order to attain righteousness, and if the virtues are those dispositions towards excellent action, then it is natural to conclude that action consistent with the law is that to which the human is disposed by the presence of the virtues and that righteousness is therefore within the grasp of a human being formed by the requisite virtues. Thus, the Thomist virtue-theoretical model of human excellence makes it possible to understand the law of the commandments as that description of the conditions for action to which we should expect the righteous to attain.

The theology of Martin Luther can be read in large part as a vehement rejection of any theology that places human action at the centre of the conception of moral righteousness: 'it is sheer madness to say that man can love God above everything by his own powers' (Luther, quoted in Pauk, p.xlvii).⁴⁶ According to Luther, this conception of righteousness disastrously downplays and indeed masks the depth of sin in human beings. Indeed, Luther holds that human beings are essentially sinful, thanks to the fall, and are for that reason incapable of attaining justification—or, for that matter, making matters worse for themselves—by their own works:

It is evident that no external thing has any influence in producing Christian righteousness or freedom, or in producing unrighteousness or servitude. (Luther, quoted in Hardt, p.174)

For that reason, any religious ceremony, practice or theology that supposes it is so much as possible to attain virtue by proper practice is in fact and deed an exercise of proud hypocrisy. In this spirit, Luther reads 1 Corinthians 13 as having the primary aim of silencing and humbling 'haughty Christians', an aim he finds to be as relevant as his own time as it was in Paul's:

Could one bring about for himself the distinction of being the sole individual learned and powerful in the Gospel, all others to be insignificant and useless, he would willingly do it; he would be glad could he alone be regarded as Mister Smart. At the same time he

⁴⁶ In keeping with the style of his time, Luther tends not to name particular theologians with whom he takes exception, but 'the opinions against which he [Luther] argues [in his lectures on Romans] are mainly those of Pierre d'Ailly and Gabriel Biel' (I). Apparently Luther himself was not well-acquainted with Aquinas (see Hardt, p.393 n2).

affects deep humility, great self-abasement, and preaches of love and faith. But he would take it hard had he, in practice, to touch with his little finger what he preaches.⁴⁷

Luther's radical rejection of the prevailing focus on action and ceremony in place of inward spirituality is very clearly present in his understanding of the role of the law of the commandments. Luther agrees with those who might insist on the point that the law sets out those conditions we would have to meet to attain righteousness by our own efforts. As Couenhoven elaborates Luther's view:

The law gives a picture of perfect righteousness; it consists of moral rules that human beings are commanded to follow; it sets forth the right "orders of creation"; it is spoken in the imperative form - Do this! The law often takes the form of "if . . . , then . . . , " making God's promises conditional. The law accuses and threatens sinful human beings, revealing their many transgressions. (Couenhoven, p.66)

However, Luther disagrees with those who would suppose that it is in principle possible for us to meet the standards that are set by the law. According to Luther, the law is presented to us as that which we cannot attain in principle, owing to our fallen nature. Rather than setting out those conditions which we are reasonably expected to attain to, then, the law instead reveals us to be powerless to attain the standards which are demanded of us:

For example, the commandment, 'You shall not covet,' is a command which proves us all to be sinners, for no one can avoid coveting no matter how much he may struggle against it. ... As we fare with respect to one commandment, so we fare with all, for it is equally impossible for us to keep any one of them. (Luther, quoted in Martin, p.105)

With these issues in mind, it may seem that Luther self-consciously distanced himself from those scholastics he opposed on a similar point to that from which Augustine separated himself from the Pelagians. And indeed, Luther himself understood himself to be following in Augustine's footsteps in precisely this way:

I know what Gabriel Biel says, and it is all very good, except when he deals with grace, love, hope, faith, and virtue. To what an extent he there Palagianizes together with his Scotus, I can now not explain by letter. (Luther, quoted in Pauk, p.liii)

The Pelagians had argued that human beings were capable of attaining moral excellence without the assistance of God's grace, purely through the proper exercise of free will. Augustine's criticisms of this view were supported by the Council of Carthage in 418 and thereafter dominated. Plainly, Luther, with Augustine, would have had much to disagree with Pelagius, and may have found similar tendencies in those scholastics with whom he was familiar, but it is worth noting that it would be a mistake to draw a contrast between Luther and Aquinas on this point.

As we have seen, Aquinas held that it is only through the infusion of the theological virtues by God's grace that we find ourselves disposed towards proper action. Thus, contrary to the Pelagians, Aquinas would insist that we are not capable of

⁴⁷ All quotes from Luther's sermon on Corinthians 13 are taken from the online edition available here: <https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=Luther|reference=1Cor.13&options=NHVUG>

attaining virtue by our efforts alone. However, as we have also noted, Aquinas held that the state of grace bestowed by God can be lost by the improper exercise of free will. Therefore, it is still within the remit of human agency to retain or cleave to a state of righteousness and also to depart from that state, even if it is not within human capacity to attain that state autonomously. So even if it is not quite right to tar Aquinas and the Pelagians with the same brush, Luther would nevertheless disagree with Aquinas on even this restricted role of human freedom in holding firm to virtue. According to Luther, there is nothing we can do to meet the law; there is nothing we can do to pull us apart from God's grace; no one of our actions will be counted by a forgiving God.⁴⁸ As Luther memorably puts it:

⁴⁸ A comparison with one of Luther's contemporaries can further draw out the distinctiveness of Luther's position. Erasmus held, with Luther, that there is no possibility of attaining virtue in this life. Moreover, Erasmus was also preoccupied with the semblance of virtue, that is, the human capacity for pride in the imputation of moral achievements that outstrip ethical capacity and the tendency to engage in outward practices that avow commitment to the Christian life but which in fact serve as a masquerade for the pursuit of glory:

Along with vices that masquerade as virtues, Erasmus worries about indifferent things that are falsely claimed to be gateways to sanctity, things that wear the "mask of piety without its genuine force." In this category Erasmus places what he calls the religion of ceremonies. Far from expressing a pure heart/soul/mind, "ceremonies" such as celebrating Mass daily, venerating the relics of the saints, holding vigils, fasting, even silence and prayer serve too often to conceal the lack thereof. If you focus on such externalities, he says, "outwardly you are a Christian, but in private you are more pagan than the pagans. (Hardt, p.108)

According to Erasmus, the way to overcome the hypocrisy of practice and to transform the heart is by 'putting on Christ', that is, to self-consciously play the part of virtue in taking Christ to be a perfect exemplar. In setting up an exemplar, one undertakes to emulate the life of the exemplar. Emulation is distinct from imitation: where the latter seeks merely to copy the deeds of the exemplar, the former seeks to undertake the manner in which the deeds were performed, so as to surpass the works of the exemplar. For example, were a composer to attempt to emulate an exemplar, she would not merely attempt to copy the style of the exemplar in imitation but, rather, draw inspiration from the exemplar to come up with even better compositions. Taking Christ as an exemplar is, however, deeply paradoxical. While exemplars in artistic practice can in principle be surpassed, such that one becomes oneself exemplary of a practice, Christ is, by definition, exemplary of human life as such. Were he to be surpassed, he would not be Christ. It is for this reason that Erasmus can hold that the business of 'putting on Christ' is in fact a counter to the hypocrisy he found to be rife among his contemporaries. For in taking Christ to be an exemplar, one has to be self-consciously aware of one's inability to in fact attain to the exemplar through emulation; one has to be self-consciously aware of being directed towards virtue without ever being able to finally attain it. (For comparison, see our earlier discussion of recollection in Augustine, Rowan Williams's article on religious experiences in the reformation (in which he contrasts the self-consciously open-ended Augustinian search for self with the Calvinist attempt to self-interrogate so as to discover whether one is in fact destined to heaven or hell), Stanley Cavell's discussion of 'moral perfectionism', and Kierkegaard's discussion of exemplars in section 1 of 'Concluding Unscientific Postscript'.) That is to say, one overcomes one's hypocrisy by being self-conscious with respect to one's inability to attain the exemplary standard and yet nonetheless ironically strive towards such attainment.

In contrast, Luther holds that the only means by which we can overcome our hypocritical pride is by acting in a way that is transparent to our sinful nature: we have to act out the fact that we are sinners. As Hardt puts it:

The image of God in us has been utterly destroyed by Adam's fall. This means that we cannot hope through imitating Christ to become participants in the divine activity of assimilating copy to exemplar. Imitation becomes "mere" imitation, branded as external, superficial, potentially deceptive. It is not sufficient to recognize the partial and provisional character of human virtue, not sufficient to

Man is like a horse. Does God leap into the saddle? The horse is obedient and accommodates itself to every movement of the rider and goes whither he wills it. Does God throw down the reins? Then Satan leaps upon the back of the animal, which bends, goes and submits to the spurs and caprices of its new rider... Therefore, necessity, not free will, is the controlling principle of our conduct. God is the author of what is evil as well as of what is good, and, as He bestows happiness on those who merit it not, so also does He damn others who deserve not their fate" (Luther, quoted in O'Hare pp.266-267)

But if, as Luther holds, we are entirely incapable of attaining righteousness by our own efforts, if indeed our actions are entirely irrelevant with respect to our standing before God's eyes, how are we to avoid total despair and despondency in our attempt to be transparent to our own sinfulness? Or, moreover, why should we not take this as a licence to do as we please, regardless of right or wrong?⁴⁹

There are at least two layers to Luther's response. The first is to point out the freeing effect of relinquishing a sense of agency over one's own righteousness. If we are aware that we are to be judged in accordance with our actions, such that those who are deemed by God to have lived well are given eternal reward and those who have failed by these standards handed in place eternal damnation, we might easily understand all our actions in relation to our reward or punishment and, moreover, act always through a mood of fear. How, one might ask, is one to genuinely love God or, for that matter, anyone else at all under a state in which one's actions are quite naturally related always back to one's own good and in which one is fearful of one's own damnation? One plausible benefit of the Lutheran response is the possibility that it might free the believer from such anxieties. Knowing that there is nothing one can do, one way or the other, to attain virtue by one's own actions, one is freed from having to think of one's actions in terms of eternal reward and, therefore, freed from having to have one's own good as the final end of the action. Thus, a Lutheran might hold, relinquishing a sense of agency with respect to one's own righteousness allows one to be concerned with others' needs without reference to one's own reward or punishment: 'as a matter of fact, to be blessed means to seek in everything God's will and God's glory and to want nothing for oneself neither here nor in the life to come' (Luther, quoted in Pauck, p.lv).

Even if it is the case that we are freed to the possibility of acting genuinely for the other through giving up on being able to do anything about our righteousness, such an

recognize that we are in process and have not yet arrived. Nor it is the case that the active practice of neighbour love can foster virtue of the heart, though passive veneration cannot. Rather, the starting point must be a moment of utter passivity, in which we relinquish any reliance on human agency. We must begin not by "acting the part" of virtue but instead by seeming to be what we are in fact—sinful. (op. cit. 174)

(It is not clear that the act of relinquishing can be properly cast as 'purely passive', as Hardt seems to do here.)

⁴⁹ As a case in point, consider Luther's response to those who might take issue with the particular scatological verve with which he often attacked his opponents: 'I have written a third sort of book against some private and (as they say) distinguished individuals - those, namely, who strive to preserve the Roman tyranny and to destroy the godliness taught by me. Against these I confess I have been more violent than my religion or profession demands. But then, I do not set myself up as a saint'

attitude is plainly not sufficient for attaining that possibility. From the perspective of one who has relinquished a sense of power with respect to their virtue, despair is just as likely a response: surely it is not enough to ‘want nothing for oneself’, one must also somehow be motivated towards love for the other. Indeed, how are we to avoid turning in on ourselves entirely and fixating on our sins? This was certainly a live danger—as is attested by the fact that Luther himself would spend up to six hours a day in confession—and one not missed by Erasmus:

‘[W]as it necessary,’ writes Erasmus in his response to Luther’s teaching on the divinely bound will, that ‘in avoiding the Scylla of arrogance, you should be wrecked on the Charybdis of despair or indolence? ... There is an abundance in human life of weakness, vices, crimes, so that if any man wishes to look at himself he can easily put down his conceit’ (Gaebler, p.115)

Given that one blockade to the prospect of Christian love is removed, what might save us from despair? Luther holds that the gospel teaches the possibility of faith and redemption in light of that faith, which faith also inclines the agent towards good action. Luther describes his epiphany in an autobiographical text as follows:

At last, God being merciful, as I thought about it day and night, I noticed the context of the words, namely, ‘The justice of God is revealed in it; as it is written, the just shall live by faith.’ Then and there, I began to understand the justice of God as that by which the righteous man lives by the gift of God, namely, by faith, and this sentence ‘The justice of God is revealed in the gospel’ to be that passive justice with which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written: ‘The just lives by faith.’

This straightaway made me feel as though reborn and as though I had entered through open gates into Paradise itself. From then on, the whole face of Scripture appeared different. I ran through the Scriptures then as memory served, and found that other words had the same meaning, for example: the work of God with which he makes us strong, the wisdom of God with which he makes us wise, the fortitude of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God.

And now, much as I had hated the word ‘justice of God’ before, so much the more sweetly I extolled this word to myself now, so that this passage in Paul was to me a real gate to Paradise. (quoted in Pauck, p.xxxvii)

Thus, according to Luther, were it not for the promise of justification through faith alone, which he finds articulated in Paul but present throughout scripture, the consciousness afforded by the experience of powerlessness with respect to the law would indeed lead one towards hatred and despair. But the gospel teaches that there is another way: passive receptivity to God’s grace in faith and the justification that comes through belief. How is it that faith, however, can save from despair? It is important to see that Luther has a particular understanding of faith that departs from the Augustinian and Thomist views that we have discussed previously. While both Augustine and Aquinas held that faith was assent to the propositions of doctrine, Luther holds that faith is trust and confidence in God’s promises – a *mode of comportment* rather than a propositional attitude:

Justifying faith is not intellectual assent to revealed truth [...] rather, it is trust (*fiducia*) in the promises of God, supremely the promise of forgiveness couples with the resulting

union of the believer with Christ. Luther later defines this as a “grasping faith” (*fides apprehensiva*), which takes hold of and receives Christ. (McGrath, p.363)

As Couenhoven puts it: ‘Luther holds that the law drives the unbelieving to the gospel - when in the law they see their sinfulness and the punishment that is their due, they run to the gospel that promises salvation in Christ’ (p.66). In cleaving to the promise of salvation with trust and confidence despite the inherent sinfulness of our nature, we are both freed from the anxieties of seeking salvation as a reward for good action and saved from the prospect of crippling despair.

Interestingly, Luther appeals to similar metaphors to Erasmus in his attempt to explain how faith justifies, since he claims that through faith the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, since Christ covers our sins:

Notice that it is one and the same man who serves both the law of God and the law of sin, that he is at the same time righteous and one who sins ... Notice, then, what I stated before: The saints are at the same time sinners while they are righteous; they are righteous because they believe in Christ whose righteousness covers them and is imputed to them, but they are sinners because they do not fulfill the law and are not without concupiscence. They are sick people in the care of a physician: they are really sick but healthy only in hope and in so far as they begin to be better, or rather, are being healed; i.e., they will become healthy. Nothing could be so harmful to them as the presumption that there were in fact healthy, for it would cause a bad relapse. (quoted in Pauck xlv)

Ironically, despite Luther's insistence on frank self-knowledge and honest confession of our sinful state, we are finally "justified by the merits of another" (LW 31:347). This claim might appear simply to replace one sort of "hypocrisy"—the act put on by the student of virtue—with another sort of deception. We don't put on an act by imitating Christ, but we do "put on" Christ; Christ's alien righteousness (*iustitia Christi aliena*) is imputed to us despite our inherent sinfulness. We exchange roles with Christ; we are "clothed in" Christ, while he takes on our "mask" as sinner (LW 26:284,288,290). God, audience of this cosmic drama, applauds the disguises. (Hardt, p.179)

Thus, by Luther's reckoning, it is through our belief in Christ and faith in the promises of salvation that we allow Christ to cover over our sinful nature such that it is not counted by God in his reckoning of us. We are thus justified and confident in our salvation, thereby pulled by faith from the likelihood of despair in the face of our powerlessness to attain to the law by our own ability. In summary, Luther holds that scripture teaches that we cannot escape sin. We are essentially sinners and this is revealed to us in our necessary failure to meet the law. Nonetheless, we need not be despondent, since the gospel teaches that we are justified not through our works but, rather, through our faith, which faith imputes to us the righteousness of Christ. How does Luther's understanding of faith transform his understanding of hope and love?

Luther's conception of faith, so understood, plainly has an effect on the way in which he understands hope. On the one hand, it seems that Luther's conception of hope is quite close to that of Augustine, namely, assent to belief in a future good that is assured on grounds of testimony and not confirmed by empirical experience:

the saints are always aware of their sin and seek righteousness from God in accordance with his mercy. And for this very reason, they are regarded as righteous

by God. Thus in their own eyes (and in reality!) they are sinners—but in the eyes of God they are righteous, because he reckons them as such on account of their confession of their sin. In reality they are sinners; but they are righteous by the imputation of a merciful God. They are unknowingly righteous, and knowingly sinners. They are sinners in fact, but righteous in hope. (quoted in McGrath, p.363)

Through our empirical experience of ourselves, we know ourselves to be sinners and, by that score, not at all righteous. But faith grants us confidence in salvation through union with God, which perspective we are not (yet) able to attain. Thus, we are righteous in hope, on an Augustinian understanding of hope, since it is assent to belief in a good we cannot see ourselves as (yet) attaining.

Nonetheless, in Luther more than many other theologians, there is a clear reason for a relegation of the value of hope. Hope, we might naturally presume, is assent to a belief in the uncertain possibility of one's own salvation. We hope for something that is possible but uncertain and over which we have not the power to control the outcome. To this extent, hope appears to be plainly in some degree of tension with faith, as Luther understands it, since faith demands of the agent that she cleave to trusting in her own salvation. If faith grants us trust in our eventual salvation, wherefore hope?

Luther lays the ground for a response to this problem in his reading of 1 Corinthians 13, in which he directly addresses Paul's discussion of faith, hope, and love. There Luther claims that the hope to which Paul refers is hope for the good of others:

Love despairs of no man, however wicked he may be. It hopes for the best. As implied here, love says, "We must, indeed, hope for better things." It is plain from this that Paul is not alluding to hope in God. Love is a virtue particularly representing devotion to a neighbour; his welfare is its goal in thought and deed. Like its faith, the hope entertained by love is frequently misplaced, but it never gives up. Love rejects no man; it despairs of no cause. But the proud speedily despair of men generally, rejecting them of no account.

As we have previously noted, the tension between faith and hope can be resolved by distinguishing between the content of both. If faith is confidence in God's promise, hope is only in conflict with that if it involves something less than conviction in that for which one has faith. Here Luther claims that since Christian love is, properly speaking neighbourly love—that is, pace Aquinas, not love of God—it seeks the good for others, which involves believing that despite the other's behaviour, righteousness is not necessarily denied him. Such a belief entails that one also believes that it is possible for the other to do good, however, regardless of how awful a person the other has been hitherto. The Lutheran's conviction in the sinfulness of human beings, however, means that the possibility of the good for others can only be one of hope, since it holds out the possibility that they can be saved despite themselves.

If Luther, then, were to stick to this interpretation of Christian hope as hope for others despite their inclination towards bad action, he would go some way towards mitigating the tension between that and his understanding of faith, since there is no obvious incompatibility between confidence that God will keep his promise and hope that the other will be saved through receiving grace: we might hope that the apparently faithless will eventually be recipients of grace. Nonetheless, we have seen that Luther

does not appear to be consistent in this, since he claims that we are righteous in hope, by which he means that we can only hope for our own righteousness, since it is beyond the pale of what is available to us empirically. To this extent, there remains an unresolved difficulty in reconciling Luther's understanding of faith with his conception of hope.

Paul's discussion of the faith, hope, and love presents two further problems for Luther's theology of faith, however, as Luther recognises in his sermon. The first problem concerns Paul's apparent claim that there can be faith without love:

But strangely, Paul says, "If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" [...] We hold, and unquestionably it is true, that it is faith alone which justifies and cleanses. [...] But if it justifies and purifies, love must be present. How is it, then, Paul speaks as if faith without love were possible?

The problem is that, according to Luther's understanding of Paul's conception of faith in Romans, love is the expression of faith in those who are justified. How can it be that the Christian has faith and yet fails to express this in love for the neighbour?

Luther considers three possible replies to this objection. The first reply supposes that the faith to which Paul refers is not the Christian faith, in particular, but rather some faith in God in general. By this response, it is possible that one has some generalised sense of faith in God absent of neighbourly love. The second responds that Paul has in mind those who have fallen from Christian faith: 'Many begin but do not continue. They are like the seed in stony ground. They soon fall from faith. The temptations of vainglory are mightier than those of adversity. One who has the true faith and is at the same time able to perform miracles is likely to seek and to accept honor with such eagerness as to fall from both love and faith'. By this response, Luther supposes that it is possible for one to have Christian faith, properly speaking, and to fall from this state. On this understanding, Paul is referring to the lapsed faithful. While Luther does not disagree with either of these responses, he prefers a third reply:

Paul in his effort to present the necessity of love, supposes an impossible condition. For instance, I might express myself in this way: "Though you were a god, if you lacked patience you would be nothing." That is, patience is so essential to divinity that divinity itself could not exist without it, a proposition necessarily true. So Paul's meaning is, not that faith could exist without love, but on the contrary, so much is love an essential of faith that even mountain-moving faith would be nothing without love, could we separate the two even in theory.

In other words, Luther contends that Paul means that, *per impossibile*, were there to be such a thing as faith without love, it would be as sounding brass. Thus, Paul's claim is a conditional of which the antecedent cannot be affirmed.

The second issue is perhaps even more problematic for Luther's theology and concerns Paul's claim that of faith, hope, and love, love is the highest. For how can love be the highest if, as Luther contends, we are justified by faith alone? Should not faith be accorded priority? Luther is typically forthright in his dismissal of those readings of Corinthians 13:13 that contrast with his own view:

The sophists have transgressed in a masterly manner as regards this verse. They have made faith vastly inferior to love because of Paul's assertion that love is greater than

faith and greater than hope. As usual, their mad reason blindly seizes upon the literal expression. They hack a piece out of it and the remainder they ignore. Thus they fail to understand Paul's meaning; they do not perceive that the sense of Paul concerning the greatness of love is expressed both in the text and the context.

Against these quite natural readings of Paul's letter, Luther argues that Paul meant only that love is the greatest in duration: faith and hope are necessary only for the duration of our lifetime, since they concern our eventual salvation. But faith allows for trust in eternal love:

For surely it cannot be disputed that the apostle is here referring to the permanent or temporary character respectively of love and other gifts, and not to their rank or power.

The difficulty of this argument, however, is clear in the failure of Luther's own attempt to explain the account by way of a metaphor:

So, then, faith justifies through the Word and produces love. But while both Word and faith shall pass, righteousness and love, which they effect, abide forever; just as a building erected by the aid of scaffolding remains after the scaffolding has been removed.

If faith is like the scaffolding and love is like the building, it is difficult to see how this is not further grist to the mill of Luther's opponents, since we do not typically hold the scaffolding to be of more value than the building it supports through construction.

This concludes our presentation of some of the central features of Luther's theology. Although his attempts to square his radical position with Paul's letter to the Corinthians are not without difficulties, we shall put the problems to one side for now; presently, we shall turn to John Calvin's attempts to resolve precisely the same problems that dogged Luther and assess whether he has any greater success. Before turning to Calvin, however, we can finally return to the three questions with which we have interrogated the other theologians we have discussed so far and draw some general conclusions. Firstly, how would Luther explain Paul's apparent claim that love bestows value on the rest of human life?

As we have just seen, Luther would reject outright the thought that love bestows value on the other aspects of human life, insofar as this view entails either that love is somehow separable from faith or that love is of a higher rank than faith. According to Luther, it is only by faith that we are justified in the eyes of God, and love is that which is expressive of faith. As we have seen, Luther provides a distinctive interpretation of the crucial passage of 1 Corinthians that attempts to square this passage with his own interpretation of Paul's letter to the Romans. For Luther, love—which, properly understood is neighbourly love—is an expression of faith, which we cannot attain by our own powers.

With this in mind, we can see what resources there are in Luther's theology to answer the question of the connection between faith, hope, and love, although we should not expect anything like the systematic answers we were able to draw from Augustine and Aquinas. Faith is the trust in the promise for salvation that is to come, the righteousness for which we hope. Notwithstanding the tension between these two claims, love is neighbourly love and abides in unity with God, but is also that which is

expressive of faith through good works. But these works are not to be considered as that in light of which one is judged by God but, rather, as that which is made possible by righteousness in hope: faith as grace.

We can now draw to a close our discussion of Luther by considering how he might have answered our final question, namely, whether faith, hope, and love are properly considered virtues at all. While Luther does at times refer to hope and faith as virtues ('Paul begins to mention the nature of love, enabling us to perceive where real love and faith are to be found. A haughty teacher does not possess the virtues the apostle enumerates'⁵⁰ – my emphasis), as we have seen he vehemently rejects the virtue-theoretical framework that was dominant in scholastic theology at his time. Luther rejected the scholastic emphasis on the importance of virtues on the grounds that this placed undue focus on the specification of excellent and attainable action, which was completely anathema to Luther's reading of Paul. For Luther, virtue theory is ruled out of bounds insofar as it is connected to excellent action, and insofar as it reserves any role at all for agency in the attainment of justification in the eyes of God.

Nonetheless, Luther's rejection of the language of the virtues leaves him in a rather paradoxical situation. For while Luther vehemently rails against the suggestion that human agency has any role to play in the attainment of justification, he nonetheless insists on the importance of characteristics such as faith, humility, patience and love. Indeed, he at times even suggests that it is an obligation of faith to cleave to the confidence in God.⁵¹ What is the sense of these appeals if not to encourage precisely a proper exercise in agency? The difficulties reach their most perplexing at those points at which Luther urges passivity. We might put the problem in a form of a dilemma: either passivity to faith is the type of thing that can be urged, in which case it is an exercise of agency and therefore not really passivity at all; or passivity cannot be urged, in which case all the sermonising for the sake of encouraging passivity is just so much hot air.

There is, however, a way out of these difficulties, given a change in the understanding of agency. To recall, Luther's dissatisfaction with the scholastic emphasis on the importance of virtues was that they were geared towards proper action, as if the attainment of justification were something that we could earn. But it only follows that there is no role for a theology of virtues on the operative assumption that agency could only be involved in justification as something that brings it about. We might still hold out a sense of a role for the agent, and so for a role for a virtue theology, insofar as there is a distinct mode of agency that is not directed towards bringing about justification but, rather, in living properly in light of one's powerlessness precisely to effect one's salvation. In fact, some of Luther's discussion points in this direction. We might think of Luther's tirades against hypocrisy and his correlate encouragement of humility as, for example, urging precisely this sort of exercise of agency: the agent is no longer encouraged to act in such a way to attain virtue; rather, she is encouraged to relate properly to her own finitude, her own inability to attain the good life by dint of her own action. As we shall see in the final section, we might read the existentialist theology of Paul Tillich as developing this line of argument.

⁵⁰ <https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=Luther&reference=1Cor.13&options=HNVUG>

⁵¹ 'Now, if we were not to cleave by faith unto Christ as true God, God would be robber of the honor due him, and we of life and salvation. It is our duty to believe in God only, who is the Truth; without him we cannot live or be saved' The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther, Volume 6 p.207

This concludes our discussion of Luther's theology. Before we turn to Tillich, however, we shall briefly discuss the way in which Luther's reformation project was developed in the work of John Calvin. Specifically, we shall turn to Calvin's commentary on 1 Corinthians. For Calvin, as we shall see, has distinctive answers to the problems that faced Luther in his attempt to square the doctrine of *sola fide* with 1 Corinthians 13.

Calvin, with Luther, held that it is through faith that we are justified. Consequently, as with Luther, Calvin faces particular difficulties when squaring his understanding of the centrality of faith with those passages in 1 Corinthians in which Paul appears to present love as of greater importance than either faith or hope. As we shall see, Calvin has distinctive answers to the problems that faced Luther, developed in his own commentary of 1 Corinthians 13. In what follows, our aim shall not be to draw out Calvin's answers to our three questions but, rather, to see what aid Calvin might alternative solutions he describes to the problems Luther faced in holding fast to the doctrine of *sola fide*, despite Paul's insistence that love is the highest.

First of all, consider the passage in which Paul appears to claim that we might have faith without love. This is problematic for Calvin, since he rejected the Scholastic distinction between formed and unformed virtues. To recall, Aquinas held that virtues such as faith and hope are, in the first instance, self-interested. According to Aquinas, the theological virtue of hope is at first hope for one's own salvation. Love, which is consequent on hope in our own salvation, reforms faith and hope such that they take their proper object: love of God in friendship. Love thus transforms the unformed virtues of faith and hope into their formed equivalents. The distinction between formed and unformed faith did not sit well with Calvin, insofar as it encourages the interpretation of unformed faith as a sort of imperfect preparation for virtue. In contrast, Calvin holds that faith comes perfectly formed all at once without being earned or in any way achieved by the agent herself. But if faith comes fully formed or not at all, what could Paul mean in claiming that it can exist without love? It may seem that a faith that was not also loving would be imperfect in comparison to a faith that was entwined with love.

In response to this problem, Calvin follows a line of argument rather close to the first of the three surveyed by Luther in the latter's own commentary on the text. According to Calvin:

That faith, of which he [Paul] speaks, is special, as is evident from the clause that is immediately added— so that I remove mountains. Hence the Sophists accomplish nothing, when they pervert this passage for the purpose of detracting from the excellence of faith. As, therefore, the term faith is (πολύσημον) used in a variety of senses, it is the part of the prudent reader to observe in what signification it is taken. Paul, however, as I have already stated, is his own interpreter, by restricting faith, here, to miracles. It is what Chrysostom calls the "faith of miracles," and what we term a "special faith," because it does not apprehend a whole Christ, but simply his power in working miracles; and hence it may sometimes exist in a man without the Spirit of sanctification, as it did in Judas.⁵²

⁵² All references to Calvin's commentary are taken from the online edition, available here: http://www.ccel.org/study/1_Corinthians_13

Thus, according to Calvin, the term ‘faith’ has a number of different senses. The sense of ‘faith’ deployed by Paul can be rightly imputed to Judas and, perhaps, those demons referred to by Augustine. Both Judas and the demons believe that Christ has the power to work miracles. But this is different from the Christian faith: Christian faith is different in kind and is essentially loving.

Now, one might take Calvin to be merely splitting hairs on this point: what advancement over the distinction between unformed and formed virtues is it to insist that there are at least two senses of faith, one which is not necessarily loving and the other which is? This appears still to admit that there is a sort of faith that is not loving. But is this not precisely the point that Calvin rejects? Calvin’s point seems to be, however, that we might admit that there is some sort of faith that is not essentially loving, but this should not be thought of as a precursor to proper Christian faith, of which the latter is a particular reformation. We can admit different senses of faith, then, without inferring that this difference is one between different stages of the genesis of properly Christian faith. Rather, Christian faith is essentially loving and is brought about at once and by God’s grace alone.

When Calvin turns to Paul’s statement that love is the most excellent way, we find him making claims which would not be entirely out of place in Aquinas:

[He] now declares that he will show them something of greater importance — that everything be regulated according to the rule of love. This, then, is the most excellent way, when love is the regulating principle of all our actions. And, in the outset, he proceeds upon this — that all excellencies are of no value without love; for nothing is so excellent or estimable as not to be vitiated in the sight of God, if love is wanting.

The main truth in the passage is this — that as love is the only rule of our actions, and the only means of regulating the right use of the gifts of God, nothing, in the absence of it, is approved of by God, however magnificent it may be in the estimation of men. For where it is wanting, the beauty of all virtues is mere tinsel — is empty sound — is not worth a straw — nay more, is offensive and disgusting

In these passages, it appears as though Calvin is sailing rather close to Aquinas’s position: love is the principle of good action insofar as it orients it towards action towards its proper end. However, while Calvin may agree with the Scholastics this far, he attempts to block an inference he accuses the ‘papists’ of fallaciously drawing, namely: that since love is of central importance in ordering action towards its proper end it is therefore central to our justification. Such an inference appears to depend upon the presumption that it is only through the proper ordering of our actions that we are justified. But it is precisely this strong connection between action and justification that reformists such as Luther and Calvin militated against. What, then, is Calvin’s argument against the ‘papist’ inference?

First, Calvin has to explain in why love is ‘the greatest’ if it is not the case that it justifies. At this point, Calvin follows Luther in affirming that Paul meant to affirm that love is of greatest temporal duration. He goes beyond Luther, however, in that he seems to accept—if only for the sake of argument—that love is greatest in every respect. Calvin claims that even if we were to grant this, it would not follow that love need have anything to do with effecting our justification. As Calvin puts it:

It is, however, surprising how much pleasure Papists take in thundering forth these words. “If faith justifies,” say they, “then much more does love, which is declared to be greater.” A solution of this objection is already furnished from what I have stated, but let us grant that love is in every respect superior; what sort of reasoning is that — that because it is greater, therefore it is of more avail for justifying men! Then a king will plow the ground better than a husbandman, and he will make a shoe better than a shoemaker, because he is more noble than either! Then a man will run faster than a horse, and will carry a heavier burden than an elephant, because he is superior in dignity! Then angels will give light to the earth better than the sun and moon, because they are more excellent! If the power of justifying depended on the dignity or merit of faith they might perhaps be listened to; but we do not teach that faith justifies, on the ground of its having more worthiness, or occupying a higher station of honor, but because it receives the righteousness which is freely offered in the gospel. Greatness or dignity has nothing to do with this. Hence this passage gives Papists no more help, than if the Apostle had given the preference to faith above everything else.

Thus, Calvin’s argument has two steps. The first is to show that, even accepting that love is the ordering principle of good action, it does not follow that love is involved in effecting our justification. The second is to demonstrate that even if we accept that love is the greatest as such, it does not follow that it should help with justification, since being the greatest tout court does not entail being the greatest at everything. The first step of the argument, however, is easier to accept than the second. We might agree that if ϕ is the greatest it does not follow that ϕ is the greatest at every (or indeed any) p . Granted that the king is the greatest, it does not follow that he has any skill at all when it comes to ploughing fields. But Calvin asks us to grant that love is superior in every respect. And it does seem to follow from this claim that love should be greater than faith vis-à-vis justification, since if love were not greater than faith with respect to our justification, there would be at least one respect in which it was not superior. If this is what Calvin meant, he was on thin ice.

There is, however, another way of understanding Calvin’s argument that puts him on firmer ground. In the previous argument, I have assumed that ‘being superior in every respect’ entails being most effective. But this need not be what Calvin has in mind. Consider, for example, once more the ploughing king. It may be that he is able to undertake the task in a manner that is superior to his farmhands, without, for all that, being any better at achieving the desired outcome of the task. What it means to be superior at a task is not fixed by efficiency of achieving the outcome. Consider, in comparison, W. B. Gallie’s (1955) essay ‘Essentially Contested Concepts’. In this article, Gallie asks us to consider a championship of a particular sport in which ‘the champions’ each year are that team which are considered to be ‘the best’ at the sport. But each team, Gallie continues, emphasises a different aspect of the sport in their play. One team might exemplify elegance; another might present a paradigm of brute strength. Each team is competing not just to meet set standards of excellence within the game but, rather, to establish their own speciality as the standard of excellence. Thus, were the elegant team to be crowned ‘the champions’, they would thereby establish elegance as the standard of excellence within the sport, at least for that season. This example helps us to see that the concept ‘the best’ need not be fixed.

For this reason, it is at least logically coherent to suppose that love might be the best with respect to justification without having anything to do with bringing about that justification. On this reading, Calvin is trying to assert a distinction between ‘being the

best' and 'being the most efficacious', holding that it is coherent to suppose that love is superior to faith with respect to justification even if it is no more capable of bringing about change in the world.

At any rate, it is evident that Calvin has a distinctive way of squaring the doctrine of *sola fide* with Paul's claim that love is the highest. For Calvin does not deny that love is the greatest but rather attempts to undercut the Scholastic reading of this passage that infers that love effects justification, so as to return the reader to Paul's statement in Romans that so exercised Luther and which inspired his doctrine of *sola fide*.

To recall, however, Luther faced another problem: if faith brings with it confidence and security in salvation, what place is there for hope? If I am certain that I am to be saved, then what is there left to hope for, specifically? As we saw, Luther may have been able to dodge this criticism by claiming that the Christian hopes for the good of others. Since we have access to only our own faith, the certainty that might derive from that faith could not extend to the certainty in others' salvation. Thus, we can hope for them, since their salvation lies beyond the bounds of our conviction in our own salvation. Calvin, however, provides the resources for another solution: while we might admit that faith entails confidence and security in one's own salvation, it does not manifest in blithe certainty. Indeed, by the final revisions of the Institutes, Calvin had found a central role for temptation and doubt in true Christian faith. As Barbara Pitkin puts it:

Faith's certainty is not an unbroken peaceful repose; this is more likely to mark hypocritical overconfidence! Rather, the assurance of faith manifests itself in the experience of forsakenness, doubt, and the hiddenness of God. (Pitkin, p.142)

Thus, by Calvin's reckoning, the true Christian faith is one that cleaves to trust despite the difficulty in doing so and is, consequently, open to the difficulties in holding on to one's faith. Faith in God's saving power, then, brings with it hope in one's own salvation, since true faith is open to the slings and arrows of doubt and temptation, the presence of which undermines any easy conviction in the attainment of a future good.

Section Summary:

Martin Luther rejects metaphysical and philosophical systematicity on what he takes to be good pedagogic and scriptural grounds. Unlike either Augustine or Aquinas, then, he offers little in the way of structured answers to our three questions. Nonetheless, we can draw distinctive replies from his theology.

1. What is the relationship between love and the rest of human life, such that the former bestows value on the latter?

*Luther rejects the scholastic emphasis on the importance of love—drawn from a reading of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians—and installs **faith** as the central concept of his theology—drawn from Luther’s reading of Paul’s letter to the Romans. According to Luther, we are justified by faith alone, which is itself a work of God’s grace. Thus, by Luther’s lights, **God** bestows value on human life through the gracious provision of faith.*

2. What is the distinctive relationship between love, on the one hand, and faith and hope on the other?

*In the sermon in which Luther discusses 1 Corinthians 13 directly, Luther attempts to square his doctrine of sola fide with the passage that had putatively provided scriptural authority for the scholastic position Luther rejects. According to Luther’s sermon, love is part and parcel of faith and is the greatest only insofar as it is the longest in temporal duration (faith being restricted to this life). Hope does not receive much discussion in that sermon. However, elsewhere Luther signals that while we are sinners in fact, we are righteous in **hope**, the suggestion being that hope is operative to the extent that we can only understand ourselves as righteous by transcending what is empirically available to us.*

3. Are faith, hope, and love really virtues at all?

Luther is vociferous in his rejection of the language of the virtues, preferring instead (with Augustine) a language of grace. Here the emphasis is not on human action, with respect to its role in attaining grace, but the ways of responding appropriately to our powerlessness to attain righteousness by our own efforts. This lays the ground for a different sort of reformation virtue theology, in which are stated not dispositions of character necessary for the attainment of justification but, rather, excellences of character proper to the acknowledgement of our existential situation of powerlessness to attain to the good. Examples of such ‘virtues’ might be patience, humility, reticence and so on.

6: Paul Tillich

Towards the end of our discussion of Luther, we noted that there was potential scope for reconciling virtue theory and reformation theology. To recall, Luther’s quarrel with the virtue-theoretical framework centred on the latter’s emphasis on good action, in particular the suggestion that there was a role for human action in attaining justification.

We also noted a certain tension in Luther's account. For while Luther emphasises that there is nothing we can do to earn or attain justification, and even that the purview of human freedom is akin to that of a horse in the saddle, he nonetheless holds that there are good and bad ways of living in light of that acknowledged powerlessness: time and again Luther sings the praises of hope and humility while castigating his dissenters for haughtiness and hypocrisy. This tension becomes most paradoxically strained in those moments in which Luther urges a passive receptivity to God. This is paradoxical, if not outright incoherent, since receptivity is an exercise of agency: in receiving a guest, I am not merely the victim of a house invasion. To be sure, the form of agency involved in receptivity seems rather different from that involved in, say, making a cup of tea. Nonetheless, to be receiving is to be doing something; it is to exercise some form of agency. How, then, can receptivity be completely passive, as Luther suggests?

We suggested that Luther's difficulties may stem from the operative assumption that agency simply is activity, understood as the pursuit of determinate goals. We noted, however, that there is another plausible form of agency, less concerned with attaining moral excellence as achieving a better acknowledgement of one's existential situation. Such a form of agency is not geared towards undertaking morally excellent action in the world—and by that score not concerned to bring about justification—but, rather, with acknowledging powerlessness to attain the good. Might there be a role for a virtue theology of this nature, in which the goal is not to state those virtues that are conducive of morally good action but, rather, of a good acknowledgement of our finitude (leaving it as an open question what such an acknowledgement would consist in)? In this final section, we shall turn to the phenomenologically inspired work of Paul Tillich, whose theology of hope, love, and absolute faith may well be read as offering something of the sort of virtue theology we have just sketched.

How, then, could Tillich give answers to the questions with which we have been interrogating other theologians? And how might these answers be able to reconcile reformation theology with virtue theory? To begin with, we shall see what answer would give to our second question, namely: what is the relationship between faith, hope, and love? We shall ask this question first, since it is only once we have drawn out Tillich's account of the systematic relationship between these three that we will be in a position to answer the other two questions.

In his book *The Courage to Be* (2014), Paul Tillich develops an analysis of a distinctively Lutheran form of faith. According to Tillich, Luther's faith was a manifestation of what Tillich calls 'the courage to be' in the face of a particular form of anxiety, occasioned by the strictures of medieval preaching and theology. What is the courage to be, and what is the particularly Lutheran variety thereof?

Tillich claims that every finite being is what it is in distinction to what it is not. To recall a point made in our discussion of Aquinas's metaphysics, in order for a chair to be a chair it has to have a distinctive form of unity that separates it from non-chairs. Because any finite being is what it is in distinction from what it is not, Tillich holds, non-being is just as basic as being. Moreover, finite beings that are aware of their finitude are therefore faced with their non-being. Finite beings aware of their non-being are consequently in a position of anxiety, insofar as non-being appears (paradoxically) as both the condition on the possibility of their being as well as the ultimate threat to their

being.⁵³ Put very formally, Tillich holds that the courage to be is the self-affirmation of being in the face of anxiety over non-being by a being that is aware of its finitude.

Importantly, the type of 'courage' invoked is quite different from the virtue of fortitude we have encountered in discussions of the cardinal virtues. As we have seen, fortitude is one of a group of dispositions towards excellent action. We are fortitudinous insofar as we are capable of bearing up to dangers that threaten us in the pursuit of good action. The courage to be, however, is neither courage in the face of specific dangers, nor a disposition towards discrete actions, excellent or otherwise. Rather, it is a way of bearing up to the threat posed to one's existence as such, rather than any particular threat one might encounter within one's existence. Whereas we might need fortitude in order to deal with the specific threat posed by the tiger emerging from the closet, Tillich holds that we need the courage to be in order to deal with the threat posed by our mortality. As we shall see, this pushes Tillich's discussion of 'absolute faith' in a particular direction, not understood as a virtue of excellent action but, rather, a virtue of what we might call acknowledged finitude.⁵⁴ And it is for this reason that we might think of Tillich's theology as providing the resources for a virtue theology that acknowledges a different mode of agency, manifest primarily as a mode of relation to existence, rather than goal-directed activity. What, then, is the courage to be and what is the 'absolute faith' that grounds it?

Tillich holds that the threat of non-being has appeared in different ways throughout history. He also holds that this threat has, accordingly, presented different demands to any being that feels the need self-affirm in the face of its non-being, the form of the difference depending on the specific shape taken by the threat. After analysing the different expressions of the courage to be that he finds in Plato, Aquinas, the Stoics, Spinoza, and Nietzsche, Tillich turns his attention to Luther. Tillich holds that, for Luther, the threat of non-being manifested as the danger of death understood in a Lutheran manner. Given Luther's background in medieval theology, he understood death to be the wages of sin. Accordingly, by Tillich's reckoning the awareness of the threat of non-being manifested in profound guilt consciousness: for Tillich's Luther, the very fact of our mortality is a mark of our having been sinful. This specific form of the threat of non-being places a novel demand on anyone conscious of that threat: since the awareness of non-being constitutively involved an awareness of having fallen from grace and thus out of justification in the eyes of God, the affirmation of being can only take the decidedly paradoxical form of the affirmation of the being of that being that has fallen from its proper being. In other words, since we would attain our proper being through being justified, and given that hereditary sin has left us essentially in need of justification, to affirm our own being is to affirm the being of a being that is riddled with non-being: its fall from justification. It is for this reason, Tillich claims, that Luther was pushed to such paradoxical formulations as 'only the unjust is just' or, as Tillich puts it

⁵³ On this point, Tillich appears to have been influenced by the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger, especially the latter's analysis of the mood of anxiety in *Being and Time* (see Heidegger (1962) p.228ff) and the later lecture 'What is Metaphysics?' (Heidegger (1998)). In both cases, Heidegger claims that we experience anxiety in confrontation with no particular object but, rather, what he calls 'the nothing'. In response to anxiety, Heidegger claims, we may choose to be 'resolute' in submitting to the 'superior power' of being. Irrespective of the opacity of this language, it is plainly reflected in Tillich's discussion of the courage to be.

⁵⁴ In this connection, see MacIntyre's discussion of 'virtues of acknowledged dependence' (pp.119-128) in his *Dependent Rational Animals* (2002).

‘only the unacceptable is accepted’. Since we are unjustified in the eyes of God, to have the courage to affirm one’s being in the face of the threat of non-being of the sort encountered by Luther is to affirm one’s being despite one’s not being justified.

It is against this background, Tillich argues, that Luther’s doctrine of *sola fide* emerges as the ground for the affirmation of his being, despite his being unjustified. For, on Tillich’s analysis, Lutheran faith should properly be understood as the acceptance of acceptance despite one’s unacceptability.⁵⁵ To have faith is to comport oneself to God as accepting of us:

The encounter with God in Luther is not merely the basis for the courage to take upon oneself sin and condemnation, it is also the basis for taking upon oneself fate and death. For encountering God means encountering transcendent security and transcendent eternity. He who participates in God participates in eternity. But in order to participate in him you must be accepted by him and you must have accepted his acceptance of you. (Tillich, (2014) pp.157-6)⁵⁶

Tillich holds that in the modern era we are faced with a threat of non-being that is profounder still than that which faced Luther. As we have seen, Tillich holds that Luther had the courage to be despite the threat of guilt and death. But, on Tillich’s account, Luther’s specific form of anxiety thus presupposed a general confidence in an ultimate meaning that gives meaning to everything else. For us moderns, however, there has been a general collapse in the confidence that there is any such meaning at all. As he puts it:

The anxiety of meaninglessness is anxiety about the loss of an ultimate concern, of a meaning which gives meaning to all meanings. This anxiety is aroused by the loss of a spiritual centre, of an answer, however symbolic and indirect, to the question of the meaning of existence. (op. cit. p.45)

But why should the loss of belief in an ultimate meaning to existence be experienced as a threat? Might it not be experienced as rather liberating instead? In this connection, we might think of a recent bus-poster campaign by the British Humanist Association, in which Londoners were encouraged to accept that God probably does not exist and to ‘stop worrying and enjoy life’. According to Tillich, however, this campaign is rather too naïve, since the experience of the absence of an

⁵⁵ It is worth noting that affirmation and acceptance have importantly different sets of connotations. While affirmation seems quintessentially active (its root is in the latin ad- (to) firmus (strong)), acceptance seems to be much more passive: one accepts that which is given.

⁵⁶ At this point, it may appear that there is some reason to cast doubt on Tillich’s reading of Luther. As we have seen, Luther holds that there is nothing within the remit of human agency that can be in anyway effective in attaining justification. This claim does not sit too comfortably next to Tillich’s claim that, on Luther’s reckoning, we have to accept acceptance, insofar as Tillich is handing agency some minimal role in the acquisition of justification. This would be to mistake Tillich’s claim, however. Tillich is not claiming that we achieve justification by accepting our acceptance but, rather, the faith that is sufficient for justification—and which is not attained by our action—constitutively involves our acceptance of our being accepted despite our unacceptability: this just is what it is to trust in God, according to Tillich. Thus, Tillich does not argue that Luther does, after all, hold out some role for agency in the attainment of justification but, rather, that the faith by which we are justified involves a transformation of our agency.

ultimate meaning to existence threatens the possibility of what he calls ‘spiritual self-affirmation’.

Spiritual self-affirmation, Tillich claims, ‘occurs in every moment in which man lives creatively in the various spheres of meaning’ (op. cit. p.43).

Everyone who lives creatively in meanings affirms himself as a participant in these meanings. He affirms himself as receiving and transforming reality creatively. He loves himself as participating in the spiritual life and as loving its contents. He loves them because they are his own fulfilment and because they are actualised through him. The scientist loves both the truth he discovers and himself insofar as he discovers it. He is held by the content of his discovery. This is what one can call “spiritual self-affirmation” (op. cit. p.44)

But why is the spiritual self-affirmation of engagement with meaning threatened by the lack of an ultimate meaning? Tillich’s thought appears to be this. Since we can no longer put our faith in ultimate meaning, we can only rely on contingent practices to provide meaning to our existence. But since these practices are contingent, there is always the threat that they might lose their importance: for any given practice, it is always possible that it becomes ‘empty’, in Tillich’s terms. Meaninglessness is an absolute threat, of which emptiness is the relative threat, since without an absolute meaning to ground all meanings, any particular practice is susceptible to doubt and collapse into emptiness.

The anxiety of emptiness is aroused by the threat of nonbeing to the special contents of the spiritual life. A belief breaks down through external events or inner processes: one is cut off from creative participation in a sphere of culture, one feels frustrated about something which one had passionately affirmed, one is driven from devotion to one object to devotion to another and again on to another [...] Everything is tried and nothing satisfies. [...] Anxiously one turns away from all concrete contents and looks for an ultimate meaning, only to discover that it was precisely the loss of a spiritual centre which took away the meaning from the special contents of the spiritual life. But a spiritual centre cannot be produced intentionally, and the attempt to produce it only produces deeper anxiety. The anxiety of emptiness drives us to the abyss of meaninglessness. (op. cit. p.45)

Thus, Tillich seems to hold that since *any* given practice is susceptible to emptiness, it is possible that *every* given practice loses its hold on us.⁵⁷ In the face of such a universal collapse of meaning, how are we to get on with life? It is at this point that Tillich appeals to absolute faith as the ground for courage to be in the face of the threat of meaninglessness, that is, the possibility that no meaning will be found beyond contingent practices susceptible to emptiness.

⁵⁷ We might have reason to dispute this inference. Consider the following argument: Whether or not some given practice is susceptible to emptiness may be context specific. Suppose that for any human being, there is necessarily at least one meaningful practice in which she is engaged. Suppose, further, that for the particular human being ϕ , there is only one meaningful practice (Q) in which she is engaged. She might as well have been engaged with practice S, but she just so happens to be engaged in Q. Further, another particular human being ϕ is engaged with two practices (Q & S). In the second case, Q is susceptible to emptiness, since there is at least one other meaningful practice in play. In the first case, however, Q is not susceptible to emptiness, despite being contingent (presuming that ϕ is randomly assigned Q, over S).

Tillich holds that since the threat of meaningless relates to every contingent practice and 'special content', no particular practice or determinate content to faith can secure us against the threat of meaninglessness. The thought seems to be that, given that the contingency of any practice entails that it might lose its hold on us, no contingent practice can ground meaning absolutely, since *that* practice might come to stand in need of grounding. For this reason, Tillich holds, if we are to affirm ourselves in the face of the total collapse of meaning, given an experience of the emptiness of all practices and other 'spheres of meaning', we could only do so on the basis of a faith that transcends all that which it is supposed to secure. Thus, according to Tillich:

The faith which creates the courage to take them [radical doubt and meaninglessness] into itself has no special content. It is simply faith, undirected, absolute. It is undefinable, since everything defined is dissolved by doubt and meaninglessness. (op. cit. pp.162-3)

Now, although Tillich claims that there is no definable content to absolute faith, since he holds that any such content would be contingent and particular and therefore subject to the threat of emptiness posed by the threat of meaninglessness (and so would by that score be unable to ground a self-affirmation in the face of such a threat), he nonetheless holds that it does have content. This undefinable content is what he calls the 'God above God', of which the only proper symbolic representation is 'being-itself'.

At this point, Tillich finds himself pressing up against the limits of language, so to speak, forced into paradoxical, riddling formulations. Consider, for example, the following two statements:

The God above the God of theism is present, although hidden (op. cit. 172)

Absolute faith, or the state of being grasped by the God beyond God, is not a state which appears beside other states of the mind. It never is something separated and definite, an event which could be isolated and described. It is always a movement in, with, and under other states of the mind. It is the situation on the boundary of man's possibilities. It is this boundary. Therefore it is both the courage of despair and the courage in and above every courage. It is not a place where one can live, it is without the safety of words and concepts, it is without a name, a church, a cult, a theology. But it is moving in the depth of all of them. It is the power of being, in which they participate and of which they are fragmentary expressions. (op. cit. 173-4)

Despite the difficulty of this language, it is understandable that Tillich would feel pushed in this direction by the argument he has been pursuing, rather than being expressive of a wilful obscurantism: If the content of absolute faith is a God that transcends any God that could be grasped by a theism, as Tillich claims, then that content is by definition indefinable within the strictures of a theological account: were that content describable within such an account it would not be a God transcendent of a God of theism, but another variety thereof. Accordingly, if God above God can be described at all, He can

only be so described by linguistic gestures that point to the limits of language: 'being-itself'.⁵⁸

Nonetheless, by pushing the concept of faith this far, Tillich's account faces a particular difficulty. As we have seen, Tillich is driven to the concept of absolute faith by the need to find a ground for the affirmation of being in the face of the threat of non-being posed by meaninglessness. But if the ground for such an affirmation is the faith in God as 'being-itself', which is (paradoxically enough) by definition indefinable, it may appear that Tillich has conceded too much to meaninglessness, so to speak. If 'being-itself' has no 'special content', what is to distinguish it from the meaninglessness of the void? One might suppose, with Hegel, that the concept of being-itself is so empty as to be indistinguishable from the concept of nothingness. But if there is nothing to ground such a distinction, how can being-itself be the content of a faith that can ground an affirmation of being?

We might read Tillich's theology of hope and love as answering precisely this problem. For, as we shall see, absolute faith constitutively involves hope as a moment of its structure and is interdependent with love. Absolute faith may not have any special content nor any determinate 'direction', as Tillich holds, but it does nonetheless involve a hopeful anticipation of reunion. Thus, even granted that absolute faith may not be distinguishable from meaninglessness in terms of its content, it may still be distinguishable from despair with respect to the former's 'movement', which is accounted for by its necessary relationship to hope and love. Whereas scepticism over meaning lands itself in despair, absolute faith is hopeful towards loving reunion.

To see how Tillich conceives of love, hope, and their connection to faith, we have to turn to his magnum opus *Systematic Theology*. Let us begin with love. According to Tillich, although faith is logically prior to love, the latter nonetheless necessarily accompanies faith. This is for the following reason: 'Faith is the state of being grasped by the transcendent unity of the unambiguous life—it embodies love as the state of being taken into that transcendent unity' (Tillich (1963) p.129). Faith is logically primary over love, since nothing can be taken in without first being grasped. Love is a necessary accompaniment to faith, however, insofar as grasping entails taking in that which is grasped.⁵⁹

To understand what Tillich is getting at, we have to first understand the situation that Tillich understands us to be in prior to the irruption of faith, namely: estrangement. To be estranged is, in a word, to be separated from the ground of one's being. In theological terms, if we think of the ground of our being as God, estrangement is that situation in which one is separated from God.⁶⁰ Tillich holds that we are essentially

⁵⁸ Tillich insists that it is protestant theology that has most fully grasped the paradoxical character of theology (Tillich, (2014) p.172). However, as Stephen Mulhall (2015) has recently argued, a movement in the 20th Century called 'Grammatical Thomism' reads Aquinas as having remarkably similar insights. For example, Anselm himself was pushed to paradoxical formulations that strain both sense and patience, such as: 'To be God is to be to-be' (See Mulhall, p.54ff).

⁵⁹ This statement appears, however, to be in some tension with the claim that faith is the acceptance of acceptance: if love is acceptance, sure it is 'prior' to the acceptance of acceptance?

⁶⁰ This is, plainly, not an uncontroversial position. In contrast, one might hold that the world is everything that is the case and that we are part of that such that there is no gap at all between us and the ground of our being. Tillich may be influenced on this point by Heidegger's insistence that we are essentially not at home in the world. Heidegger claims that in order for anything to appear as something or other, it must appear as fulfilling a prior understanding of being. But being, Heidegger claims, is not itself a being. Therefore, in order for anything to appear as anything, our understanding has to transcend that which appears. This means that

estranged: estrangement is the existential condition we find ourselves in. This condition has three structural features: unbelief, hubris, and concupiscence.

Human beings are unbelieving, on Tillich's account, not through failing to give assent to the doctrine of Christianity but, rather, insofar as they are turned away from God. Tillich holds that we are the sort of being that has 'ultimate concern', that is: we are fundamentally oriented to the world in terms of how it matters to us. The ultimate concern of the estranged individual is turned away from God. In this sense, God becomes 'decentred' from the world of the person who is estranged.

In such a position, in which God is no longer the object of one's ultimate concern, one is able to take for oneself the place of God as the object at the centre of one's activities and relationships. This is what Tillich calls hubris: the reorienting of ultimate concern onto oneself, given that God is no longer at the centre of one's world. On Tillich's account, then, not only are we separated from God through turning away from Him (unbelief), we further compound the separation through turning in on ourselves, making our own good the centre of all our concerns and activities (hubris).

The final structural feature of estrangement, as Tillich has it, is concupiscence. Tillich resists tendencies he finds in Augustine, Luther and Freud to identify concupiscence with aberrant sexual desire. Tillich holds that from the position of hubristic unbelief, we retain a desire for absolute unity with the ground of our being. But since we are separated from the ground of our being—God—we are separated from that which could fulfil that desire. The desire for absolute unity, no longer able to be fulfilled on account of our separation from God, is directed towards a generally consumptive attitude towards the world. In concupiscence, we try to draw the world into ourselves from a position of unbelieving hubris, in order to satisfy a desire for unity that we are unable to fulfil by ourselves.

Now, Tillich holds that there is no way that the estranged person can overcome her estrangement from the position of a self-enclosed desire to draw the world into herself. Thus, in keeping with Luther, Tillich holds that we can only be saved from estrangement by an irruption into our estrangement by the ground of our being from which we are estranged. This is the primary role of faith: faith is the irruption into estrangement by the ground of our being. But faith is only one side of the coin. According to Tillich, no irruption could by itself displace the human from the centre of its world and replace the human with God. Rather, what we also need is to be taken in by the ground of our being. This is the role that love plays, on Tillich's account: the retrieval of estranged humanity from a state of separation to a reunion with the ground of its being, given an irruption into self-centredness by faith:

Faith logically precedes love, because faith is, so to speak, the human reaction to the Spiritual Presence's breaking into the human spirit; it is the ecstatic acceptance of the divine Spirit's breaking-up of the finite mind's tendency to rest in its own self-sufficiency. This view affirms Luther's statement that faith is receiving and nothing but receiving. At the same time, the Catholic-Augustinian emphasis on love is asserted with equal strength, by virtue of the insight into the essential inseparability of love and faith in the participation in the transcendent unity of unambiguous life. In this view, love is more

we are essentially in an uncanny position: both necessarily in the world with other people and with entities, but also necessarily transcendent of that world, such that anything can appear as anything at all. For a recent treatment of Heidegger on uncanniness, see Withy (2015)

than a consequence of faith, albeit a necessary one; it is one side of the ecstatic state of being of which faith is the other. (135)

Thus, according to Tillich, love is simply the other side of faith: where faith is the acceptance of the acceptance of the God beyond God, love is the movement towards union with that which is accepting. While we might think of faith as breaking the human's absolute concern with itself—and so as counteracting unbelief—love reorients the individual's absolute concern to God, thereby retrieving the human being from hubris.

Thus, on Tillich's account, faith is not a propositional attitude, affirming the existence of 'being itself'; rather, it is the dynamic opening up of the human by the ground of its being, which opening-up precedes its loving reception by that very ground. Absolute faith, has this, at least, to distinguish it from despair over meaninglessness: absolute faith directs the individual's existence towards an overcoming of estrangement towards the ground of its being, whereas a despair over nothingness, on Tillich's account, simply reaffirms that estrangement.⁶¹

The tight connection between faith and love, however, might make us wonder what has happened to hope: after all, and as we have seen, successive generations of theologians have taken Paul's reference to faith, hope, and love in 1 Corinthians as evidence that at least faith and hope are on a par, even if love is 'the highest'. Tillich is aware of this difficulty and addresses it directly:

Why does this presentation of the fundamental creation of the divine Spirit not add hope to faith and love rather than consider it as the third element of faith, that is, as the anticipatory direction of faith? The answer is that if hope were considered systematically (and not only homiletically, as in Paul's formula) as a third creation of the Spirit, its standing in man would be on a par with faith. It would be an independent act of anticipatory expectation whose relation to faith would be ambiguous. It would fall under the attitude of "believing that," an attitude which is in sharp contrast with the meaning of "faith." Hope is either an element of faith or a pre-Spiritual "work" of the human mind. (135)

Thus, according to Tillich, hope is not on a par with faith and love. The reason he gives is that if it were systematically on the same level as the other two, then there would be an 'ambiguous' relation between faith and hope. But there can be no place for an essentially ambiguous relationship in the unambiguous unity of reconciliation of the human with the ground of its being. For this reason, Tillich holds that hope must be a mere structural feature of faith, rather than a structural equal. Why, then, does Tillich hold that the relation between faith and hope would be ambiguous, if the two were on the same structural level?

Tillich's reason appears to be that if hope were not a structural feature of the comportment of faith, it would have to be something like a propositional attitude: 'believing that' ... some future good will come. But such an attitude is, according to Tillich, in stark contrast to the attitude that is characteristic of faith: the former is an attitude of the mind towards a propositional content; the latter is a comportment of one's entire existence towards the acceptance of acceptance despite one's

⁶¹ Note that this difference only holds given that we agree with Tillich's controversial claim that we find ourselves estranged from the ground of our being.

unacceptability. Since there is such a striking difference between hope and faith, so considered, if hope were as such described there would be a deep ambiguity between faith and love—inseparable structures of comportment—and hope—mental attitude towards a proposition.

We might still wonder whether Tillich's relegation of hope to a mere structural feature of faith solves the problem of ambiguity, however. If hope and faith are really so different, how is the ambiguity overcome by making the former a component of the latter? Would that not instead simply relocate the ambiguity to the centre of faith, leaving the latter inherently unstable? But if this is *not* a problem—if faith is not made inherently ambiguous by having hope as an internal moment—then why not accept that hope is on the same level as faith and love?

At any rate, given that hope is not structurally on the same level as faith and love, what is the role for hope within faith? Tillich is precise. According to him, there are three structural features of faith, of which hope is the third:

Considered as material concept⁶², faith has three elements: first, the element of being opened by the Spiritual presence; second, the element of accepting it in spite of the infinite gap between the divine Spirit and the human spirit; and third, the element of expecting final participation in the transcendent unity of unambiguous life. These elements are within one another; they do not follow one after the other, but they are present wherever faith occurs. The first element is faith in its receptive character, its mere passivity in relation to the divine Spirit. The second element is faith in its paradoxical character, its courageous standing in the Spiritual Presence. The third element characterises faith as anticipatory, its quality as hope for the fulfilling creativity of the divine spirit. (133)

Thus, hope is not a propositional attitude towards a determinate content but, rather, the anticipatory aspect of faith. Hope is, in other words, that within faith that accounts for our trust in fulfilment.⁶³

We are now in a position to answer the second of our two questions: what is the relationship between faith, hope, and love? On Tillich's account, faith and hope are interdependent since hope is a structural moment of faith. Moreover, faith logically precedes love. Faith is the irruption of being-itself into the self-centred estrangement of human beings, which then makes possible love, namely, the retrieval of absolute concern by being-itself to its proper object: God above God. Hope, on Tillich's account, is not on the same structural level as faith and love but, rather, is a structural feature of faith: by Tillich's lights, hope is the anticipation of the unambiguous reconciliation with the ground of our being. Now that we have seen something of the structural relationship between faith, hope, and love, on Tillich's account, we are able to address the other two of our questions. Firstly, how does Tillich explain the priority of love, in Paul's letter?

At several points, Tillich explicitly presents his systematic theology as a reconciliation of the Protestant and Catholic sides of the dispute around the

⁶² A material concept, according to Tillich, is distinct from a formal concept. A formal concept of faith would cover all instances of faith, no matter the religion. A material concept of faith, however, is that which is particular. For instance, the material concept of faith in Christianity is 'being grasped by the New Being as it is manifest in Jesus as the Christ'. (see Systematic Theology vol.3 pp.130-131).

⁶³ However, if hope is not an assent to a propositional content, then why is it so ambiguous with respect to faith and love?

reformation. According to Tillich, while Luther was quite right to assert the importance of faith—since it is logically prior to love—Augustine and those other who emphasised love were also quite right to do so:

This view affirms Luther's statement that faith is receiving and nothing but receiving. At the same time, the Catholic Augustinian emphasis on love is asserted with equal strength, by virtue of the insight into the essential inseparability of love and faith in the participation in the transcendent unity of unambiguous life. In this view, love is more than a consequence of faith, albeit a necessary one; it is one side of the ecstatic state of being of which faith is the other. A distortion of this relation occurs only if the acts of love are understood as conditioning the act by which the Spiritual Presence takes hold of man. The Protestant principle—that in relation to God everything is done by God—remains the weapon against such a distortion. (vol. 3, p.135)

On one way of reading this, Tillich is refusing to decide between faith and love: he holds that both faith and love are equally great, since they are both necessary to our reconciliation with the ground of our being. On this reading, Tillich resolves the difficulty by rowing back on the strength of the claim as it appears in Paul. This reading is plainly unsatisfactory, however, since it as yet offers no explanation as to why Tillich thinks Paul would single out love as the highest, if faith is—systematically regarded—on a par with love.

On another way of reading Tillich, however, we are able to preserve both the interdependence of faith and love and the claim that love is the highest. As we have seen, Tillich holds that faith is logically prior to love but culminates in it. Faith is one side of the movement of which the end is reconciliation of the human with the ground of its being. Since the reconciliation of the human being with the ground of its being is the culmination of the movement of which faith and love are both necessary, and since love is the reception of the human being by the ground of its being, love is the highest in the sense that it is the final end of the overcoming of estrangement. On this reading, love is the greatest insofar as it is the proper stipulation of the end of the movement of which faith and love are dialectical and inseparable pairs.

Are faith, hope, and love virtues, on Tillich's understanding? On the one hand, it may seem that Tillich would answer this question with a resounding 'no'. The references to virtue in the three volumes of *Systematic Theology* as well as *The Courage to Be* are few and far between and what discussion there is of the concept of virtue is focused on the concept of courage as it figures in Ancient Greek thought. Tillich plainly wants to distinguish the Greek sense of courage from his own. We have already noted that he has good reason to insist on the separation: if the self-affirmation of being in the face of the threat of non-being is an expression of courage, it is not an expression of a disposition towards excellent, discrete actions in the same sense that the theological virtues are understood as such in Aquinas. It is, rather, expressive of a general mode of comportment towards one's existential situation as such. On the other hand, however, it is difficult to see how the courage to be could have *existential import* without making *some* positive difference to the way in which we go about doing things. But if there *is* some positive difference to action that is made by the courage to be (and faith, hope, and love with respect to that courage), it would seem that we might lose the ground for affirming the difference between the Thomist theological virtues and the courage to be, as understood by Tillich.

As a way out of this problem, Tillich might respond as follows. The scholastics were too eager to see the virtues as those excellences of character that disposed the agent to action sufficient for attaining the ethical good. They were thus blind to the specific existential situation we find ourselves in: being unable to attain to justification by our own powers. In response to this, we need not dispense of the language of virtue wholesale. What we need is an account of excellences of character that does not presuppose the agent's ability to *attain* justification. Rather, we should aim for an account of the virtues more properly attuned to the distinctive sort of being we are: the virtues, on this way of thinking, would be those excellences of action for a being that is unable to attain to the good by its own powers. This may be what is provided by an account of the sort that Tillich provides. Faith, hope, and love are virtues, by these lights, insofar as they are excellences of character that dispose us towards the best sort of action that a human can attain: they are expressive of a transparent grasp of our distinctive existential situation. To be sure, they are not virtues of the sort described by the scholastics, on the Reformers' picture of the latter: an account of such virtues does not suppose we are able to attain justification by our own efforts. But this is no reason to suppose they are not *virtues*: the scholastics, so portrayed, were too optimistic about what excellent human action might *be*; once we adjust our ambitions, we can correspondingly reform our catalogue of virtues.

Now, none of this is decisive and there remain problems with Tillich's account that we shall discuss some more in the next section but which we cannot settle here. Nonetheless, our discussion has allowed us to frame Tillich's theology as an example of the sort of reformation virtue-theology that might be in the offing, despite Luther's rejection of the language of the virtues.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Why pick Tillich, over anyone else who might have offered an attempt to develop a virtue theology of acknowledged finitude? Part of the reason for focusing on Tillich lies on his discussion of the courage to be. In our previous Green Papers—and as I shall discuss briefly in the next sections—we have proffered the hypothesis that those who experience themselves to be powerless experience themselves to have lost the power to be themselves. We have focused on Tillich here to explore the possibility of helpful congruence between Tillich's account and our own hypothesis.

Section Summary:

How does Tillich answer our three questions?

1. What is the relationship between love and the rest of human life, such that the former bestows value on the latter?

According to Tillich, love is necessarily co-present with faith. Whereas faith is the irruption of the ground of our being into human self-centredness, such that the individual no longer takes herself to be the object of absolute concern, love recovers the absolute concern of the individual and reorients it to its proper object: being-itself, or God-above-God.

2. What is the distinctive relationship between love, on the one hand, and faith and hope on the other?

Faith and love are conceptual pairs: where faith is the opening up of the individual towards being received by being-itself, love is the receiving of the individual by being-itself. Hope, on this understanding, is a structural moment of faith. Hope is, thus, not on the same structural level as love and faith. Hope is the anticipatory moment of faith, anticipatory of reception by love.

3. Are faith, hope, and love really virtues at all?

*While Tillich plainly wishes to distinguish faith, hope, and love from the virtues as conceived by Aristotle and the scholastics, there is still a way of understanding them as virtues. On this reformed conception of virtue, faith, hope, and love are virtues **insofar as** they are excellences of character that demonstrates a transparent grasp of its own existential situation such that the individual is able to live well in light of her inability to attain the ethical good by herself.*

7: Conclusion

In this Green Paper we have surveyed a number of the most prominent figures in the history of the reception of faith, hope, and love as virtues in the theological tradition. We have seen that the question of what virtue is, and whether faith, hope, and love are properly considered virtues, has been divisive and indeed decisive in the development of Christian understandings of human agency in relation to the divine. In conclusion, we can briefly survey the prospects of one way of taking forward the discussion.⁶⁵

One of the emerging themes of this paper is the question of whether or not faith, hope, and love should be considered virtues at all. As we have seen, the major point of dispute has been over the question of what is attainable by human beings through their own power. If virtue theory necessarily entails that humans are able to attain the ethical good by their own power, and if the ethical good is the state of being justified before God, then reformists have a legitimate complaint: virtue theology could not but play

⁶⁵ I do not mean suggest that the only viable or most promising way of pursuing the discussion is along the post-Lutheran lines that I outline below: there may be other routes available. For brevity's sake, however, we shall have to be content with sketching just one possibility.

down the role of God's grace. But virtue theology need not have such an optimistic view of human power. If there could be a virtue theology that held that the best humans can attain by their own power is still short of the attainment of justification, then there is a possibility of a post-Lutheran virtue theology. Such a theology would turn away from the attempt to stipulate those virtues that *dispose the agent towards action sufficient for justification* and turn instead to the attempt to understand those virtues that allow the agent to live as well as possible *in light of* her inability to attain justification.⁶⁶ While we sketched this possibility towards the close of our discussion of Luther, we approached Tillich as offering some steps towards this kind of 'reformed virtue theology'. Many aspects of Tillich's approach are obscure and questionable, however, and our discussion has left a number of questions outstanding.

While we have sketched in broad outlines the shape a reformed virtue-theology might take, we have left unanswered what specific virtues would be addressed by such a theology and the character of those virtues in distinction from the virtues discussed by scholastic thinkers. This is problematic, however, since without a specification of the object of study of a post-Lutheran virtue theology, it is not clear that it presents a distinctive alternative to scholastic virtue theology. We have already seen something of this problem emerging from our discussion of Tillich: if there are virtues that help us live as well as possible in light of our powerlessness to attain justification, then they must make some difference to how we live our lives: they must help us live better than we would without exercising such virtues. But if so, in what way are they different from the virtues which rely on our own power alone? A post-Lutheran virtue theology of the sort we have sketched above, then, would face the question of whether the 'virtues' that are the object of its study really are distinctive and, if so, on what grounds the distinction is to be drawn.

Secondly, such a project would have to defend criticisms of the entire problematic with which it is concerned. As we have seen, reformed virtue theology is motivated by the assumption that humans are not able to attain *justification* by themselves. In the examples we have surveyed, this presumption follows from the specifics of Christian belief: both the standard we cannot meet (justification) and the explanation for our inability to meet it (we are essentially fallen beings) are specific to the Christian faith. If Christianity is rejected, however, is there any reason to suppose that a reformed virtue *ethics*, not based on theological assumptions, is either possible or desirable?⁶⁷

There are two directions from which a reformed virtue ethics might be criticised, given a rejection of the Christian framework. Firstly, those recommending pre-Christian ethics might insist on the possibility, if only as a matter of principle, that the ethical good is within the reach of human activity. For such thinkers, the rejection of the

⁶⁶ This is not to say that there need be any deep incompatibility between the two sorts of virtue theory. One might hold that there is a role for both a virtue theology that stipulates those excellences of character that are infused by God and, thus, beyond the reach of human attainment as well as a virtue theology that stipulates those excellences of character viz. the acknowledgement of the powerlessness of human agency to attain the ethical good. Of course, an orthodox Lutheran might insist that we must abandon the scholastic project altogether. I do not mean to settle the matter here, however.

⁶⁷ MacIntyre's notion of 'virtues of acknowledged dependence' proceeds from the thought that the individual human being is not able to attain the good by her action alone. The Christian accounts we have been surveying are more radical still: they hold that even in the best human society human beings as a group would be unable to attain virtue by themselves. Thus, while MacIntyre might have a secular way of defending his own form of ethics, this is not available to the theologians we have been discussing.

Christian framework undercuts the problematic that a reformation virtue ethics would be designed to address. Since the ethical good is no longer identified with anything dependent on divine action, the sort of virtue ethics we have sketched above could at best have only limited application, relevant only to those cases in which individuals find themselves contingently unable to attain the good that they could have been able to reach.

Secondly, those defending *post-Christian* ethics might also find reason to complain. Such ethicists might find ground for dispute despite wishing to hold on something of the ethical pessimism of much Christian theology. Theodor Adorno, for example, held that the world as a whole is wrong, such that '[w]rong life cannot be lived rightly' (Adorno (2005), p.39). This has nothing to do with our relationship to God but, rather, historical developments of western culture. Despite sharing in the ethical pessimism characteristic of Christian theology, however, Adorno's secular transformation of the problem leads him to recommend very different responses to those we find in Christian ethics: according to one way of reading Adorno, hope masks the badness of the world and love is nigh on impossible.⁶⁸ Along similar lines, Nietzsche thinks that as *theological virtues faith, hope and love* stand in the way of human excellence. In a secular context, we might ask if there is any viable positive role for *faith, hope, and love*, or whether these three are to be treated as so much jetsam or even obstacles, along with other plush icons of wishful thinking.

Thus, the project of a reformed virtue ethics faces the following key questions:

1. What virtues (if any) are specific to a reformed virtue ethics?
2. Is reformed virtue ethics genuinely different from scholastic virtue ethics, or does it simply rearticulate or extend the catalogue of virtues that we find in, for example, Aquinas?
3. Does the project of reformed virtue ethics have any relevance in a secular age? Specifically:
4. If we do not accept that we are essentially fallen beings, or that we have a supernatural *telos*, is there any justification for this project?
5. If we accept some secular standard of human flourishing, or some secular form of ethical pessimism, are faith, hope, and love appropriate ways of responding to the human condition, without appeal to God?

While we cannot answer these questions here, we can at least begin to outline the sort of response we might offer to the fourth question, so as to defend the relevance of a project that would seek to identify and elaborate virtues of powerlessness independently of theological assumptions.

In the first year of our project, we developed an analysis of experiences of powerlessness. In the first Green Paper, we discussed the main features of experiences of powerlessness in end-of-life care; in the second Green Paper, we pursued a phenomenological analysis of these results. Through these two papers, we developed the hypothesis that experiences of powerlessness involve the loss of what we called the 'power to be oneself'. According to this hypothesis, those who experience themselves to be powerless not only lose the ability to do this or that discrete task: they

⁶⁸ For support of the former claim, see Habermas pp.106-130. For support of the latter, see Adorno's 'On Kierkegaard's Doctrine of Love'

lose a grasp of how to be themselves. Under normal circumstances we are able to pursue those possibilities that appear to be *good*, that matter to us and strike us as worthwhile. Those who experience themselves to be powerless, however, find themselves unable to pursue those ways of being that matter to them, which strike them as good and appealing. Accordingly, they find themselves unable to be themselves, since they cannot undertake those possibilities that appear as worth pursuing.

Regardless of the details of this proposal, if we are right then there genuinely are conditions in which agents find themselves unable to attain an apparent good. This is not a metaphysical position. Rather, it is phenomenological claim: it is possible to experience oneself as being powerless to act for the apparent good, just in case the circumstances of one's situation undermine one's ability to be oneself. If that is right, then there is a place for an ethics of the sort we have outlined above, independently of theological commitments. While remaining agnostic on the question of whether human beings are capable of attaining the good by their own power, on the basis of a phenomenology of powerlessness we might suppose that it is at least *possible* to find oneself powerless to act for the apparent good. If this is right, then there is a role for an ethics that responds to that possibility. We shall take up this line of enquiry in our future research.

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