

7 Virtue ethics

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A virtue is a trait of character or intellect which is in some way praiseworthy, admirable or desirable. When we refer to somebody's virtues, what we usually have in mind are relatively stable and effective dispositions to act in particular ways, as opposed to inclinations which are easily lost, or which do not consistently lead to corresponding kinds of action. And so, for example, someone who has the virtue of generosity will consistently respond in generous ways in a variety of situations, including those in which generosity is difficult or costly, in contrast to someone who is moved by pity to one uncharacteristically generous act, or someone whose generous impulses are frequently overcome by desires for self-indulgence. Today, the virtues are normally understood to be morally praiseworthy traits of character, but this has not always been the case; for example, many ancient and medieval writers considered intelligence and wit to be virtues.

Probably every society has identified certain human characteristics as being especially praiseworthy and worth cultivating, while also identifying others as vices, which are morally corrupt, contemptible or otherwise undesirable. These traditions of virtues, in turn, have frequently given rise to systematic reflection on what it means to be virtuous. Virtue ethics, understood as a process of systematic, critical reflection on the virtues and related topics, is particularly likely to emerge in conditions of social change, when received traditions of the virtues undergo development and criticism. These observations apply to Christian societies as much as to any others. From the outset, Christians have identified certain traits of character as virtues which are distinctively characteristic of their way of life, while condemning others as vices which undermine the life of the soul and the well-being of the community. At some points, these Christian virtue traditions have given rise to systematic theories of virtue in response to encounters with other traditions of virtue or to internal criticisms and developments.

What follows is an overview of the development of a Christian tradition of the virtues and of the theoretical reflections on virtue which have

emerged out of that tradition. This overview will necessarily be brief and schematic, but hopefully it will serve as a guide to a more in-depth study of different aspects of this rich and varied tradition.

SOURCES

Two sources have been formative for Christian reflection on the virtues, namely the ideals and theories of virtue which emerged in Greek antiquity and were further elaborated in the Hellenistic Roman empire, and the ideals of virtue set forth or implied in scripture.¹

In Athenian society, the heroic virtues which were appropriate to the warlike society of archaic Greece became increasingly problematic in the more settled, urban conditions of that society. These social changes, in turn, gave rise to systematic philosophical reflection on the virtues. The philosopher Socrates (469–399 BCE) is portrayed by his pupil Plato (c. 428–348 BCE) as someone who continually challenged the ideals of virtue cherished by his fellow-citizens, not in order to undermine the virtuous life, but to arrive at a more adequate conception of virtue.² It is difficult to say how far Socrates' views as expressed in Plato's dialogues should be taken as reflecting the position of Socrates himself, as opposed to reflecting Plato's own thought. However, a number of scholars consider it likely that the views expressed by 'Socrates' in the early dialogues do go back to the historical Socrates. On this basis, Socrates is thought to have held that virtue is a kind of wisdom or knowledge concerning what is truly good, possession of which is the only genuine human happiness. Furthermore, since all the virtues are forms of this wisdom, they are all essentially expressions of one quality, a view which came to be known as the unity of the virtues.

At any rate, Plato almost certainly took the starting points for his own theory of virtue from Socrates.³ Like Socrates, he understood virtue to consist in knowledge or insight into what is truly good, but he goes beyond his teacher to assert that this insight can only be attained through an immediate perception of the Forms of Beauty, Goodness, Justice and the other Forms. Thanks to this perception, the human person is enabled to bring the different components of the soul into right relation with one another, with reason governing the passions. Furthermore, he or she will be inspired by these Forms to attempt to create their images in human society through sustaining right relations with others. In an ideal society, philosophers (including women as well as men) would rule in accordance with their vision of the Forms, and other members of society would function in the way best suited to the talents of each individual under the direction of the

philosophers, with all working together harmoniously for the good of the whole. In this way, justice would be embodied in the society, just as the harmonious relation among the capacities of the soul embodies justice in the individual.

Plato's disciple Aristotle (384–322 BCE) is sceptical of the former's claim that the virtues are grounded in a vision of the Forms, an idea which Aristotle rejects for its lack (in his view) of conceptual clarity.⁴ Instead, he argues that we should analyse the virtues in terms of our best understanding of the distinctively human form of goodness, which he identifies as action in accordance with reason, or more specifically, practical wisdom, or equivalently, virtuous action.⁵ In contrast to Plato, Aristotle does not equate virtue with knowledge *tout court*, but considers it to include appropriate emotional responses as well as correct judgements.⁶ He asserts that the virtues are connected, since all of them depend in some way on practical wisdom, but not that they are all forms of one quality.⁷

The most distinctive aspect of Aristotle's theory of the virtues is his doctrine of the mean, according to which the virtues are stable dispositions leading to reactions and behaviour in accordance with a mean as that is determined by practical wisdom.⁸ Aristotle's mean is sometimes equated with moderation, but this is inaccurate; it is better understood in terms of the degree and kind of passions and actions appropriate to a particular situation. (In a given situation, the most appropriate response might consist in intense passion or drastic action; for example, extreme anger would be an appropriate response to the sight of someone torturing a child.) This line of analysis provides a way to distinguish true virtues from their similitudes, and thus to deal with the competing claims about virtue prevalent in Athenian society. For example, Aristotle offers an extended discussion of that pre-eminently heroic virtue, courage, in which he distinguishes true courage, grounded in reasoned judgements about the kinds of risks which a good person should undertake, from the skill of the professional soldier and the recklessness which (we might suspect) would have characterised warriors in archaic Greece.⁹

Among later classical philosophers, the most important for subsequent Christian reflection on the virtues is undoubtedly the Roman statesman and philosopher Cicero (106–43 BCE); indeed, his general influence on subsequent Christian ethics can scarcely be overstated.¹⁰ Although Cicero's reputation as an original philosopher is not high today, he is credited with finding ways to express Hellenistic philosophy in forms accessible to the Latin-speaking, practical-minded Roman world of his time. In the process, he developed an account of virtue, predominantly although not exclusively

Stoic in origin, which was to be formative for medieval Christian reflection on the virtues. Specifically, he endorsed the Aristotelian/Stoic view that virtue should be understood as a disposition to act in accordance with right reason.¹¹ He also offered a fourfold division of the virtues into practical wisdom or prudence, justice, courage and temperance, which, under the rubric of primary or cardinal virtues, was to be highly influential in the medieval period.¹² At the same time, he offered a critique of the Aristotelian view according to which practical wisdom is the primary virtue, arguing that we should assign this honour to justice instead.¹³ It is not hard to see that this reflects yet another shift in socially sanctioned ideals of virtue, away from the intellectual qualities prized by Athenian society and towards the ideals of justice and equitable administration cherished by the Romans.

It may seem surprising that so little has been said so far about the other primary source for Christian reflection on the virtues, namely scripture itself.¹⁴ Yet at first glance, the scriptures do not appear to have much to say about the virtues. In the Hebrew scriptures, there is no term corresponding to 'virtue', and while much attention is given to moral questions, these are generally answered by appeals to God's Law and the wisdom which it confers. Nonetheless, the Hebrew scriptures do present distinctive ideals of character, especially in the wisdom literature, which offers the exemplary types of the wise person and the fool as representative of personal characteristics which should be cultivated or shunned. Furthermore, the prophetic literature reflects an emphasis on interior disposition, seen in contrast to outward observance, which resembles the focus on character that we find in most accounts of the virtues.

Similarly, while the virtues do not form a central theme in the New Testament writings, these do offer some accounts of the character traits which are especially appropriate to, or inconsistent with, the Christian life. Paul offers a number of lists of such character traits, for example at Gal. 5:22ff, which have provided starting points for Christian reflection on the virtues up to the present day. However, his formulation of faith, hope and love as the guiding ideals of the Christian life has been even more important for Christian virtue ethics than these summary lists (1 Cor. 13:13). Subsequently, faith, hope and love came to be identified as the paradigmatic theological virtues, seen in contrast to the cardinal virtues. In addition, later Christian thinkers have drawn on New Testament images of Jesus and of the early church to identify other distinctively Christian virtues, for example, the humility which Jesus displayed in his human condition and the meekness which he showed towards his persecutors during his Passion and crucifixion.

PATRISTIC AND EARLY MEDIEVAL ACCOUNTS OF VIRTUE

Among patristic authors, the bishop and theologian Augustine of Hippo (354–430) stands out for the extent and depth of his reflections on the virtues.¹⁵ Like those of the classical authors we have been considering, Augustine's theoretical reflections on virtue were driven by, and in turn helped to guide, his engagement with the ideals of virtue which he inherited from his society. In Augustine's case, this meant the ideals of virtue which informed the society of the later Roman empire, including justice, courage and a high-minded regard for one's reputation among other men and women of virtue. In the *City of God*, Augustine remarks that because the virtues of the pagans are not grounded in knowledge of the true God, they should be understood as vices, expressions of pride rather than true virtues.¹⁶ Taken in isolation this comment is misleading; Augustine hesitates to condemn the so-called virtues of the pagans as vicious without remainder, and he does acknowledge that they are praiseworthy in some respects. Nonetheless, he insists that the seeming virtues of the pagans cannot be true virtues, because they are not informed by knowledge and love of God, the only source of true goodness.

This re-evaluation of classical virtue correlates with Augustine's more theoretical analysis of true, that is to say Christian, virtue. Augustine follows both Plato and the Stoics in claiming that the virtues are all fundamentally expressions of one quality, but for him that quality is Christian love.¹⁷ This love bestows the ability to place all human affections in their right order, loving God above all, and loving creatures as expressions of God's goodness, within the parameters set by God's decrees. As his thought developed, Augustine became increasingly conscious that love of God leads naturally to love of the neighbour, whom we are called upon to regard as a potential companion in the enjoyment of divine goodness and to cherish for God's sake.

In the long term, Augustine probably had a greater impact on subsequent Christian virtue ethics than any other patristic author. However, in the short term his account of the virtues was probably less influential than the practical, pastorally oriented discussions of the virtues and vices offered by the monastic writer John Cassian (c. 360 – c.435) and Pope Gregory the Great (c. 540–604).¹⁸ Cassian wrote primarily for monks and ascetics, whereas Gregory was more concerned with offering guidelines for the pastoral care of lay Christians. But for both of them, the most urgent challenge of the Christian life is to identify and eliminate the vices which lead to sin. To aid the Christian in this task, the abbot or pastor needs some practical

knowledge of the virtues, understood as qualities which correct the vices. That is what both Cassian and Gregory attempt to provide, in the form of analytic lists of the most serious vices and the virtues which serve to correct them. Seen from the perspective of the sophistication and psychological insight of Augustine's analysis, this approach might appear to be a step backwards. Yet it met a real need, and it was much imitated in later patristic and medieval times. For example, in the *Summa virtutum de remediis anime*, a late-thirteenth-century pastoral handbook on which Chaucer drew in his *Parson's Tale*, the virtues are arranged in accordance with the seven deadly vices which they counteract; hence, humility is presented as the remedy for pride, charity is said to be the remedy for envy, and so forth.

In the early-medieval period, moral reflection was practically oriented, and the virtues did not receive extended theoretical analysis. Nonetheless, pastors and preachers continued to discuss the virtues and vices, together with related topics such as the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the beatitudes. As a result, by the time of the emergence of scholasticism in the twelfth century there was a considerable tradition of reflection on the virtues which invited reflection and synthetic analysis.

MEDIEVAL DEVELOPMENTS

In the eleventh century, Western Europe began to experience far-reaching social and economic changes, which were consolidated through reforms and innovations in religious and intellectual life. These social and institutional changes led to systematic reformulations of existing moral traditions, including centrally the Christian tradition of the virtues.¹⁹

In the early scholastic period, we find two contrasting approaches to the virtues, as exemplified by the writings of Peter Abelard (1074 – c. 1142) and Peter Lombard (c. 1100–60).²⁰ Abelard understood virtue in Aristotelian terms as a stable disposition which enables persons to act morally.²¹ In contrast, Peter Lombard proposed a strictly theological account of the virtues in his *Sentences*, a highly influential analytic compendium of key statements from patristic authorities. In this work, he defines virtue as a good quality of the mind which God brings about in us without our activity – a definition which takes its terms from Augustine's writings, although the formulation is Peter's own.²² As he goes on to explain, God brings about virtue in the soul, while we bring about the acts of virtue through our exercise of free will in cooperation with God's grace. Hence, there can be no true virtue without grace, and by implication there is no place in Christian theology for a distinctively philosophical analysis of the virtues.

Subsequently, most scholastics attempted to combine philosophical and theological perspectives on the virtues. One very common approach, exemplified by William of Auxerre (c. 1150–1231) in his *Summa aurea*, was to distinguish between the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, which are dependent on grace, and the political virtues, identified with the classical cardinal virtues, which are necessary for all social life. In William's view, the political virtues stem from the basic principles of the natural law. These in turn are known through a vision of God as supreme good which, in William's view, is present in every human soul.²³ William expressly attributes to Augustine the view that the fundamental principles of virtue are known through direct divine illumination; he is almost certainly wrong in his reading of Augustine, but it is nonetheless apparent that his theory reflects the strong influence of Augustinian and Platonic conceptions of virtue.²⁴ Because the principles of the political virtues are knowable to all persons, they are attainable without grace, and for this reason they cannot lead to salvation. Yet they do serve as a preparation for the theological virtues, and they provide a medium through which the theological virtues can be expressed in external acts.²⁵

We find a second approach to synthesising philosophical and theological perspectives on the virtues in the writings of Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–74), who offers the most influential scholastic theory of the virtues and their place in the Christian life. In his last theological treatise, the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas identifies Peter Lombard's Augustinian definition of virtue as the best definition overall: 'Virtue is a good quality of the mind, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God brings about in us, without us.'²⁶ However, he goes on in this article to say that the last clause applies only to the infused virtues, which God bestows on us without action on our part. In this way, he introduces a distinction between infused virtues, which have union with God as their direct or indirect aim, and acquired virtues, which are directed towards the attainment of the human good as discerned by reason.²⁷ This takes the place of the distinction between political and theological virtues as an organising principle, although Aquinas does comment briefly on the latter division.²⁸

The acquired virtues are identified with the cardinal virtues, which can be understood either as general qualities of moral goodness or as specific virtues with their own characteristic forms of expression.²⁹ However, the infused virtues include not only the theological virtues, but also infused cardinal virtues, which are specifically different from their acquired counterparts because they are directed towards a different end.³⁰ While on Aquinas' view no one can attain salvation without the infused virtues, he also holds

that those virtues which are acquired by human effort are genuine virtues, albeit in a limited sense.³¹

Like Abelard, Aquinas follows Aristotle in the view that a virtue is a stable disposition which inclines the person to act in one way rather than another.³² Earlier, he had explained that such dispositions are necessary for the rational creature to be capable of action at all; for example, the basic human capacity for speech will not enable a person actually to speak until he or she has learned a language.³³ As this example suggests, the virtues include intellectual capabilities, such as knowledge, which are morally neutral.³⁴ The virtues which shape the passions and the will, and the intellect insofar as it is oriented to action, are of course moral qualities.³⁵ Each distinct faculty of the soul has its corresponding virtue, identified with one of the four cardinal virtues. Prudence or practical wisdom, which is strictly speaking a virtue of the practical intellect, enables the agent to choose in accordance with her overall conception of goodness; justice orients the will towards the common good; fortitude shapes the irascible passions in such a way as to resist obstacles to attaining what is truly good; and temperance shapes the passions of desire in such a way that the agent desires what is truly in accordance with the overall good.³⁶ The theological virtues are likewise associated with specific faculties; faith is a virtue of the intellect, while hope and charity are virtues of the will.³⁷ Aquinas also follows Aristotle in holding that the virtues are connected; all of them presuppose prudence for their exercise, and in the case of the infused virtues they presuppose charity as well.³⁸

So far, we have focused on academic discussions of the virtues. However, throughout the later medieval period the virtues were also a favourite theme for literary works, preaching and practical pastoral advice. These treatments of the virtues tended to employ the older schema of the virtues as correctives to the vices, yet in the writings of Chaucer and Dante this old schema took on unprecedented beauty and power.

CHRISTIAN VIRTUE ETHICS IN THE MODERN PERIOD

Interest in the virtues began to wane with the advent of the modern period in the fifteenth century. This 'turn from the virtues' reflected the theological critiques of Martin Luther (1483–1546) and other reformers, as well as the thoroughgoing rejection of virtue ethics by modern natural-law thinkers beginning with Grotius (1583–1645).³⁹ (In these latter critiques, we see the beginnings of a sharp dichotomy between virtue and law which was unknown to the ancients and the medieval scholastics, but which has

shaped so much recent work on the virtues.) More fundamentally, the turn from virtue-oriented approaches to ethics reflected the growing complexity of modern moral discourse, which could not readily be accommodated within the traditional schemas of virtues and vices.⁴⁰

Yet during this period, the virtues were not altogether neglected, either by moral philosophers or by theologians. The moral-sense theorists, who attempted to account for morality in terms of natural sentiments of approval or disapproval, suggested a new way of thinking about the virtues.⁴¹ This approach was fully developed by the most significant of these theorists, David Hume (1711–76). According to Hume, morality is grounded in feelings of approval and disapproval towards motives for action (one's own or another's), such as courage, generosity or parental affection. He explicitly links these motives with virtues, which he takes to be dispositions to respond and act in particular ways. He goes on to argue that the passions and desires which give rise to the virtues do not depend directly on reason, which differs from the passions precisely in that it cannot move us to action. This represents a break with the dominant classical and medieval understanding of the virtues, according to which they are always at least informed by rational judgements even if they do not consist in knowledge or reasonableness alone. However, Hume does grant that one important class of virtues depends on reason indirectly, namely artificial virtues such as justice, which presuppose rational social conventions for their origin and exercise.

Hume's reputation as an anti-theological philosopher has perhaps led theologians to underestimate his importance for virtue ethics. Yet his account of the virtues continues to be influential among moral philosophers, and deserves consideration by anyone interested in the virtues.⁴² The moral-sense approach to ethics also gave rise to one of the most interesting theological theories of virtue in the modern period, namely *The Nature of True Virtue*, written by the Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703–58).

Edwards follows Hume and the other moral-sense theorists in the view that moral judgements are founded in sentiment rather than reason.⁴³ This sentiment he describes as a sense of delight in the presence of virtue, described by him as a kind of beauty of disposition and action. So far, his account of virtue is reminiscent of Hume's, but the distinctiveness of his theory becomes apparent in what comes next. According to Edwards, the beauty of virtue can be understood on two levels, which correspond to two distinct stances of the will. On one level, it consists of harmony and proportion, expressed in human relationships by justice. On another level, virtue is

understood as benevolence towards Being in general, which necessarily implies love of God as the supreme and infinite Being. Love of virtue in the first sense, that is, natural virtue, is not salvific. Yet this natural virtue is a genuine excellence, and it is subsumed and transformed rather than being destroyed by the love of Being as such. Virtue in this latter sense is true virtue, the expression of grace in the human heart, and as such it is an effect and sign, although not a cause, of election.

Still more important from the standpoint of theological virtue ethics is the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), considered by many to be the originator of modern Protestant theology.⁴⁴ According to him, all genuine religion stems from an awareness of the infinite and eternal ground of finite realities, together with a sense of our absolute dependence on that divine reality. For the Christian, this sense of dependence on the divine is expressed in terms of the role of Jesus Christ as the mediator between us and God, although Schleiermacher does not claim that this is the only possible expression for an authentic religious sense.

Schleiermacher's most significant contribution to virtue ethics probably lies in this overall theology, which has inspired a theological ethics of piety or Christian disposition among both English-speaking and German theologians.⁴⁵ At the same time, his explicit theory of virtue is also worthy of note. In his view, ethical reasoning necessarily incorporates three ideas, namely the highest good, duty and virtue. Although these ideas are interconnected, each provides a distinctive perspective on moral reasoning. In particular, he interprets virtue as a capacity which enables the individual to understand and to act upon the concrete implications of the moral law. In this respect, his concept of virtue is very similar to the Aristotelian idea of practical wisdom, an idea which is not otherwise much represented until recently in modern moral reflection.

The classical antecedents of Schleiermacher's theory of virtue become even clearer when we turn to his analysis of specific forms of virtue. He analyses particular virtues in terms of a taxonomy of the basic structures of human action and experience. Action is always either internal or external, directed either towards the acquisition of symbolic knowledge within the agent, or towards bringing about something in the outside world. Human existence more generally considered is structured by reason and sensuality, which sometimes work together and sometimes conflict. Hence, the capacity for action will sometimes take the form of reason struggling with sensuality, while at other times it will be expressed through the operation of reason as informed by sensuality, in which case reason becomes a power of inspiration. This analysis leads to a fourfold division of the

virtues: the capacity for symbolic knowledge generates wisdom when it is inspired, and it is expressed in reflectiveness or mental temperance when it reflects reason's control of sensuality; the power of external action gives rise to love when it is inspired, and to fortitude when the agent's rational control of sensuality is expressed in external actions. In this way, Schleiermacher reformulates the traditional cardinal virtues.

CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGICAL VIRTUE ETHICS

During the early part of the twentieth century, virtue was not a major theme among either Catholic or Protestant theologians. Among Catholics, the lack of interest in the virtues stemmed from an emphasis on the natural law understood as a set of rules which came to dominate Catholic moral theology after the Council of Trent. In contrast, virtue ethics was an important theme in the nineteenth century, thanks to the work of Schleiermacher, Albrecht Ritschl and others.⁴⁶ But the critiques of Karl Barth and other neo-orthodox theologians in the early twentieth century led many Protestants to reject the central themes of liberal evangelism, including its emphasis on virtue.

However, throughout the twentieth century, a number of theologians, both Catholic and Protestant, rediscovered traditions of virtues and virtue ethics as a resource for theological ethics. In fact, there were several efforts to retrieve the idea of virtue for Christian theology which were more or less distinct from one another.

The first of these came about as part of a wider effort to free Catholic moral theology from what was seen as an overly legalistic emphasis on the natural law. The best-known and most influential of the theologians involved in this effort was Bernard Häring.⁴⁷ For Häring, the Christian moral life leads naturally to a cultivation of the sense of God's presence. Hence, ordinary Christian moral duties are inseparable from the practice of some form of spirituality, and, correlatively, spiritual practices are not just for those who are seeking a higher perfection. By the same token, the moral life cannot be reduced to the observance of moral laws. Häring develops his vision of the Christian moral life by drawing on Aquinas' claim that the virtues, especially the theological virtues, are the principles through which grace becomes active. Similarly, the Jesuit moral theologian Gerard Gilleman attempted to retrieve Aquinas' account of charity as the root of the Christian moral and spiritual life.⁴⁸

A second effort to retrieve virtue ethics has been predominantly philosophical rather than theological, but it has had a widespread influence

among theologians. This movement originated in the pioneering work of Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot and Iris Murdoch, and it began to attract widespread attention through Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*.⁴⁹ In this book, he argued that moral discourse today consists of fragmented survivals from earlier moral traditions, and that that is why it is so acrimonious and unsatisfying. Coherence in moral discourse requires a more or less unified moral tradition, in which ideals of virtue will necessarily play a central role. Subsequently, a growing number of philosophers have turned their attention to the virtues and related topics, including the moral significance of the emotions and the importance of particular communities and traditions for moral judgement.

Since the early 1970s there has been a further revival of interest in virtue ethics among both Protestant and Catholic theologians. One strand of this most recent revival has developed in tandem with a growing interest in the recovery of Aquinas' moral thought among both Catholic and Protestant theologians.⁵⁰ Another strand takes its starting points from the work of the U.S. theologian Stanley Hauerwas, for whom the ideas of virtue and character, rather than moral rules, provide the most appropriate framework for reflection on the Christian moral life.⁵¹ According to him, the Christian community is rooted in ideals of non-violence and communal solidarity quite different from those which prevail in the dominant culture, and Christian ethics should reflect these differences by focusing on the virtues which enable the individual to live in a truly Christian fashion. Hence, Hauerwas places considerable emphasis on retrieving a particular tradition of virtues. Among Protestant scholars on the Continent, there has been less interest in the virtues until recently. This situation is changing, however, as German theologians rediscover those aspects of Lutheran and Reformed theology which are more friendly to the idea of virtue, in particular its emphasis on the active dispositions through which God's grace works in individual lives and in the community.⁵²

There is some tendency among theologians to assume that the only options for developing a Christian virtue ethics are those presented by the Aristotelian/Thomistic tradition and the communitarian approach of Hauerwas and his followers. Yet, as this summary indicates, Christian virtue ethics comprises many different approaches. Similarly, theologians today are turning to virtue ethics out of a variety of different concerns. For this reason, it would be a mistake to assume that there is one definitive form of virtue ethics, or even that all virtue ethicists would agree about the meaning and implications of the concept of virtue. For many of these ethicists, there is a critical difference between virtue ethics and an approach to morality

based on rules. For them, the moral life should be understood in terms of dispositions of character and prudential judgement, rather than in obedience to clearly formulated moral laws. For others, virtue ethics is valuable because it provides a framework for reflection on the place of knowledge, will and the passions in the moral life. Those who take this approach recognise the importance of responsiveness and judgement in the moral life, but they do not necessarily draw a sharp dichotomy between virtue and rule-based approaches to morality. A growing number of theologians are following Hauerwas' lead by reflecting on the specific virtues which are particularly characteristic of the Christian life, and, similarly, some Protestant theologians are beginning to explore virtue ethics as a way of formulating some individual and communal aspects of the experience of God's grace. Although the most recent revival of virtue ethics has already produced much distinguished work, the Christian tradition of the virtues still offers many unexplored possibilities for theological ethics.

Notes

- 1 For an illuminating overview of reflection on virtue in the ancient world, see Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 47–134; for a discussion which emphasises the social contexts for this reflection, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984 (second ed.), pp. 121–164.
- 2 In what follows, I draw on Terence Irwin, *Classical Thought*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 68–84. For examples of Socrates' method as applied to moral questions, see Plato's *Euthyphro* 4b–e, 5c–d, and *Laches* 191a and following; for his claim that the virtues are all a form of knowledge, and therefore all expressions of one quality, see for example *Laches* 198a–99c; for the equation of wisdom and happiness, see for example *Euthydemus* 280b, 281 d–e.
- 3 For my account of Plato's theory of virtue, I rely on Irwin, *Classical Thought*, pp. 85–117, and Gregory Vlastos, *Studies in Greek Philosophy II: Socrates, Plato, and Their Tradition*, Daniel W. Graham, editor, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, pp. 69–146. Many examples could be offered for the claims summarised here; for an example of a passage which brings together many of the leading themes of Plato's thought, see the parable of the cave, *Republic* 514a–520e.
- 4 *Nicomachean Ethics* 1096a 10–1096b 15.
- 5 *NE* 1098a 10–15, 1144b 1–1145a 14; for more on Aristotle's account of reason and virtue, see Richard Sorabji, 'Aristotle on the Role of Intellect in Virtue' in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, editor, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980, pp. 201–200.
- 6 *NE* 1102a 5–1103a 10.
- 7 *NE* 1144b 15–30.
- 8 *NE* 1106b 35–1107 a 25; for further discussion, see J. O. Urmson, 'Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean' in Rorty, ed., pp. 157–170.

- 9 *NE* 1116a 15–117a 29. However, he is not the first to apply an analysis of the virtues to the task of distinguishing true and false courage; see Plato's *Laches* 191a–193e.
- 10 In what follows, I draw extensively on Maria L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, Vol. 1: *Stoicism in Classical Latin Literature*, Leiden: Brill, 1990, pp. 61–79 and 85–89.
- 11 *De inventione* II, LII 159.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 *De officiis* I, 157–158.
- 14 For a helpful discussion of the concept of virtue in scripture, particularly in the Hebrew Bible, see John Barton, 'Virtue in the Bible', *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 1999, 12.1, pp. 12–22.
- 15 For an especially illuminating account of Augustine's theory of virtue seen in relation to its classical antecedents, see John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 148–202.
- 16 *De Civitate Dei* 19.25.
- 17 *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae* I 15.25.
- 18 I rely here on Siegfried Wenzel, 'Introduction' in *Summa virtutum de remediis anime*, S. Wenzel, editor, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984, pp. 2–12.
- 19 The best account of the development of reflection on the virtues in the medieval period is provided by the essays collected in Odon Lottin, *Psychologie et morale aux XII et XIII siècles*, vol. III, part 2.1 and part 2.2, Louvain: Abbaye du Mont César, 1949; for a more recent and very illuminating discussion, focused primarily on the later medieval period, see Bonnie Kent, *Virtues of the Will: The Transformation of Ethics in the Late Thirteenth Century*, Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995.
- 20 On Abelard and Peter Lombard, see Lottin, *Psychologie et morale*, 2.1, pp. 100–104; for a more detailed account of Abelard's theory of virtue, see John Marenbon, *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 282–287.
- 21 *Dialogus inter philosophum, judaeum et christianum*, PL 178, 1651 C – 1652 A.
- 22 *Libri II Sent.* 27.1.
- 23 *Summa aurea* III 18 intro, 18.4.
- 24 *SA* III 18.4.
- 25 *SA* III 19 intro.
- 26 *Summa theologiae* I–II 55.4, quoting II *Sentences* 27.5.
- 27 *ST* I–II 63.3.
- 28 *ST* I–II 61.5.
- 29 *ST* I–II 61.1.
- 30 *ST* I–II 63.3, 4.
- 31 *ST* I–II 62.1, 2.
- 32 *ST* I–II 55.1.
- 33 *ST* I–II 49.4.
- 34 *ST* I–II 56.3; 57.1; 58.3.
- 35 *ST* I–II 58.1.
- 36 *ST* I–II 59.2; 60.3–5.
- 37 *ST* II–II 4.2; 18.1; 24.1.

- 38 ST1-II 65.1.
- 39 For Grotius' critique of virtue, see J. B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 75–78.
- 40 This point is argued in J. B. Schneewind, 'The Misfortunes of Virtue', *Ethics*, 1990, 101, pp. 42–63.
- 41 For an account of the recovery of virtue among the moral-sense theorists, see Schneewind, *Invention of Autonomy*, pp. 285–309; for an account of Hume's theory of virtue, see *ibid.*, 1998, pp. 354–377.
- 42 For a good example of a contemporary appropriation of Hume's theory of the virtues, see the essays collected in Annette C. Baier, *Moral Prejudices: Essays on Ethics*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994.
- 43 In my account of Edwards' theory of virtue, I draw extensively on William K. Frankena's foreword in Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960 (originally published 1765), pp. v–xiii; the main lines of that theory are set forth by Edwards in the first chapter of that book, pp. 1–13.
- 44 For a very helpful overview of Schleiermacher's theology, see B. A. Gerrish, *A Prince of the Church: Schleiermacher and the Beginnings of Modern Theology*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984; in my account of his account of virtue, I depend on John Wallhauser, 'Schleiermacher's Critique of Ethical Reason: Toward a Systematic Ethics', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 1989, 17.2, pp. 25–40, and Eilert Herms, 'Virtue: A Neglected Concept in Protestant Ethics', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 1982, 35, pp. 481–495.
- 45 Most notably, James Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, vol. 1: *Theology and Ethics*, and vol. II: *Ethics and Theology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981 and 1984, and Konrad Stock, *Grundlegung der protestantischen Tugendlehre*, Gutersloh: Chr. Kaiser/Gutersloher Verlagshaus, 1995.
- 46 On the turn from virtue ethics in twentieth-century Protestant thought, and prospects for its revival, see Herms, 'Virtue'.
- 47 Bernhard Häring, *Law of Christ: Moral Theology for Priests and Laity*, two volumes, translated by Edwin Kaiser, Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1965; for a good summary of his basic position, see vol. 2, 3.
- 48 Gerard Gillemann, *The Primacy of Charity in Moral Theology*, translated by William F. Ryan and André Vachon, Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1959.
- 49 Anscombe's highly influential essay 'Modern Moral Philosophy' was first published in 1958; it is reprinted as in G. E. M. Anscombe, *Ethics, Religion and Politics: Collected Philosophical Papers*, vol. III, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981, pp. 26–42. In addition, see the essays collected in Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978; Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, New York: Methuen, 1970; and MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.
- 50 See for example Giuseppe Abba, *Lex et Virtus: Studi sull'evoluzione della dottrina morale di san Tommaso d'Aquino*, Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1983; Diana Fritz Cates, *Choosing to Feel: Virtue, Friendship, and Compassion for Friends*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996; James Keenan, *Goodness and Rightness in Thomas Aquinas's 'Summa Theologiae'*, Washington, DC:

- Georgetown University Press, 1992; Daniel Mark Nelson, *The Priority of Prudence: Virtue and Natural Law in Thomas Aquinas and Its Implications for Modern Ethics*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992; Jean Porter, *The Recovery of Virtue: The Relevance of Aquinas for Christian Ethics*, Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, and London: SPCK, 1990; and Martin Rhonheimer, *Praktische Vernunft und Vernunftigkeit der Praxis*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994.
- 51 Hauerwas' writings are very extensive. Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, and London: SCM Press, 1981, provides a good statement of his overall views, and S. Hauerwas and C. Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997, offers a more recent statement of his views, together with some indication of the directions in which others are developing his ideas.
- 52 See in particular Stock, *Grundlegung*.