Luther's Theological Anthropology:
A Decisive Break from Scholasticism

Cole Bender

Liberty University
School of Religion and Graduate School

A Draft Approved by Thesis Committee
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree of Master of Arts in Religious Studies

Lynchburg, Virginia
April 27, 2011

Abstract

     The debate between Martin Luther and the Medieval Scholastics was one of the most significant debates in both the Reformation as a movement and the development of western Christianity as a whole. While the debate is dominantly characterized in terms of the dispute over the doctrines of sin and grace, the dispute between Luther and the medieval scholastic theologians was not simply a dispute over these two central doctrines but was a clash of entire theological systems. Moreover, the dispute over the doctrine of man forms a more logically basic and decisive point of clash, as Luther constructs his positions on sin and justification in light of a specific anthropology which is radically different from the dominant scholastic anthropologies. By adopting a substantially Aristotelian anthropology, Aquinas and Scotus define the basic composition and nature of man in such a way that their respective resulting doctrine of sin leaves man's fundamental nature unchanged by the Fall, resulting in a doctrine of justification that still slips into the framework of merit. In contrast, Luther critiques this ontological focus in philosophical anthropology in favor of a theological anthropology that exhibits a relational, eschatological focus. This re-articulation of the doctrine of man allows Luther to affirm a more radical, existentially significant doctrine of sin and consequently controls his emphasis on and formulation of the doctrine of unmerited grace.

Dedication

For my parents, Curt and Marla Bender,
Who never cease teaching and encouraging me.

For my sister and brother-in-law, Emily and Joel Swearingen,
Who always remind me that scholarship without service is dead.

For my professors, Dr. Thomas Provenzola,
Dr. Craig Hinkson, and Dr. Edward Martin,
Who have impressed on me forever
The model of scholarship
And the love of learning.

For friends, classmates, and colleagues,
Without whom my best ideas would never have taken root.

Table of Contents

I. Introduction

In the formulation of his Reformation theology, Luther often wrote in response to specific theological issues, especially ecclesiological questions such as those relating to papal authority and the practice of the mass. While Luther published his theological insights in a somewhat piecemeal manner, tailoring his focus to the significant issues and controversies that arose, one must remember that the internal consistency of Luther's theology is not invalidated by the non-systematic nature of its publication and exposition.[1] The hallmark Reformation principles, *sola fide* and *sola scriptura*, are useful categories for conceiving of some of the major theological positions of the Reformers. However, as well-worn catchwords these terms have only a limited use, and they are inadequate descriptions of the contrast between Luther and medieval Christianity. My purpose in this paper is to demonstrate that the dispute between Luther and the medieval scholastic theologians was not simply a dispute over a few particular doctrines, important though they may be. Instead, the conflict between Luther and the scholastics is a conflict of entire theological systems—systems which disagree regarding even basic assumptions and doctrines. Luther constructs his positions on sin and justification in light of a specific anthropology which is radically different from the dominant scholastic anthropologies. Moreover, one's conception of man has a determinative influence on one's concept of sin and its effects as well as one's understanding of the process and elements of justification. What one believes about man's constitution is ultimately decisive for almost all other core doctrines. My central argument will be that the theological differences between Luther and the scholastics regarding sin and justification can be traced to a more basic difference regarding the nature of man.

---

[1] Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1988), 56.

In establishing this thesis, I will not attempt to summarize or explicate the doctrines of each major medieval theologian, for such a practice would likely require several lifetimes and many volumes to complete. Nor will I group all the scholastic thinkers into one group and attempt to summarize them as a unified whole, for such a practice would be reductive. Instead, I will isolate two key thinkers in the scholastic tradition, John Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas.[2] This choice requires some justification. First, as is well-known, Luther studied extensively in the Ockhamist tradition and, during his early years, particularly appreciated Gabriel Biel.[3] In light of this, a comparison of Luther's insights with the theology of the late-medieval nominalists might seem more appropriate. However, Luther's rejection of the semi-pelagianism of the Ockhamist theologians is already well-documented.[4] Luther's differences from Ockham and Biel need not be accented again. However, the earlier scholastics are not as susceptible to the charge of semi-pelagianism, and thus their disagreement with Luther's teaching may not be as readily apparent. Thus, a detailed examination of Luther's break from these theologians is warranted. Second, Aquinas and Scotus represent the Dominican and the Franciscan schools, two of the most dominant intellectual traditions in the Middle Ages, and, though their anthropologies are both heavily indebted to Aristotle, they give different accounts of which elements of the human person have greater eminence: Aquinas supporting the superiority of intellect to will, and Scotus championing the superiority of will to intellect. As such, the systems of Aquinas and Scotus have sufficient diversity of emphases and sufficient significance in the history of philosophy and theology to provide adequate reference points for our comparison. In spite of their diversity, however, both thinkers are heavily dependent on Aristotle's account of

---

[2] The biographical information which follows is well-known but may be found in Copleston and similar sources.
[3] Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 231ff.
[4] Ibid., 231ff. (cf. George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 64-66.)

the human person. Before we can outline this indebtedness and isolate the implications of this importation of Aristotelian anthropology into Christian thought, we must investigate the main features of Aristotle's anthropology and how his view of man is integrated into his comments on morality.

II. Aristotelianism[5]

A. Aristotle's Anthropology

Aristotle constructs his anthropology in light of concepts drawn from his general metaphysical system. Importantly for Aristotle, nature as a whole is both unified and teleological. As a total system, nature is made up of a universe of natural objects, objects which posses their own inclinations and tendencies because they possess a definite nature of their own.[6] Discussing the nature of an object is another way of referring to its form, and the form, as also the final cause of the thing, determines the end toward which the natural entity moves or develops.[7] While all entities are composites of form and matter, some entities are created by man (or other animals) and thus do not have *natures* that give them any intrinsic inclinations.

Aristotle uses the term 'soul' to describe all those natural entities which display life.[8] Because of this, he can affirm different *types* of souls, not reserving the term for the human soul alone. Life can be displayed in many processes, which Aristotle enumerates as "thinking or perception or local movement and rest, or movement in the sense of nutrition, decay and growth."[9] The soul is the source of these capacities or processes that display life, and the type of soul that a thing possesses is defined by the capacities and processes it displays.[10] Finally,

---

[5] This section presupposes a basic familiarity with the general outlines of Aristotle's philosophy.
[6] Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, Vol. 1: Greece and Rome* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 320.
[7] Ibid., 325.
[8] Aristotle, *On the Soul*, Book II, 413a21-23.
[9] Ibid., 413a24-25.
[10] Ibid., 413b10-12.

Aristotle sets up a hierarchy of powers of the soul. In this hierarchy, thought and calculation represent the highest level.[11] Different entities may thus have different types of soul, ranging from lesser to greater nobility. A plant has only the powers of nutrition, while an animal has the powers of locomotion and sensation as well. Each higher soul contains the powers of all the lower grades of soul.[12] Since rationality is the most noble power of the soul, the intellectual soul is the most noble of the souls and contains the lower powers within it.

The soul is thus a set of powers and capacities for the activities appropriate to an organism.[13] For Aristotle, the soul, as the form of the body, is what makes the human person a substance. In explaining Aristotle's notion of substance, Jonathan Lear introduces us to a technical term that Aristotle used: "[He] used the expression 'this something' as a term of art for a definite, ontologically independent bit of reality."[14] In other words, the soul is the essence of the body, and it gives the content of what it is to be that determinate thing.[15] The defining characteristics of man are wholly contained in the soul. For this reason, we may take Aristotle's theses regarding the soul of man as applying equally to man as a composite of both form and matter, for the body of man is wholly determined by the soul: "…the soul is the cause of its body alike in all three senses which we explicitly recognize. It is the source of movement, it is the end, it is the essence of the whole living body."[16] Moreover, since he rejected Plato's conception of the separate realm of the Forms, Aristotle affirms that the unity of soul and body is primary and basic, while it is only in rational reflection that the two are thought separately.[17] To be man is, in the well-known formulation, to be a rational animal, and as such, his defining capacities are

---

[11] Ibid., 414a29-415a14.
[12] Ibid.. 414a29-415a14.
[13] Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 99.
[14] Ibid., 97.
[15] Ibid., 98.
[16] Aristotle, *On the Soul*, Book II, 415b10-12.
[17] Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, 97.

reason and will. These concepts are pressed into service as cornerstones of Aristotle's ethical system. To this topic we now turn.

B. Aristotle's Ethics

The idea that Form can exist at different levels of actuality is a central premise for Aristotle's ethical system. A form need not exist as purely actualized but instead can exist at different degrees of potentiality and actuality.[18] Forms are dynamic entities, not static.[19] To understand this, consider the soul of a child, which as a soul is a complex form. That child possesses the same soul from infancy to death but nonetheless develops significantly in knowledge, judgment, etc. If, as an adult, the child learns masonry, then that set of skills, which was only a *potential* knowledge for the infant, has become an *active* knowledge in the soul of the adult man. Thus, while in its basic sense the Form is the actuality of the body, we must think of forms more as a bundle of potentialities that an entity may actualize during its development. With this theoretical framework in place, Aristotle casts his ethics in terms of developing moral virtues, which are habits that one actualizes in the soul.

The concept of virtue has a dual aspect for Aristotle, as there are both intellectual and moral virtues.[20] The intellectual excellences are philosophical and practical wisdom and understanding.[21] The moral excellences are liberality and temperance.[22] Frederick Copleston provides a more detailed analysis of the categories of virtue in Aristotle's ethics. The intellectual virtues are divided into categories based on the rational faculties. The scientific faculty deals with the necessary and non-contingent objects.[23] The calculative faculty deals with contingent

---

[18] Ibid., 19.
[19] Ibid., 33.
[20] Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, Vol. 1: Greece and Rome*, 344.
[21] *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book I, 1103a4-7.
[22] Ibid., 1103a4-7.
[23] Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, Vol. 1: Greece and Rome*, 343.

objects.[24] It is implied that the scientific faculty is productive of knowledge while the calculative

faculty is productive only of opinion.[25] The scientific faculty has two virtues: First, the virtue of

proof, whereby truths can be demonstrated, and second, the virtue of intuition, whereby the

universal is grasped through acquaintance with the particulars.[26] The calculative faculty has two

virtues: First, art, whereby things are made to fit a certain end, and second, practical wisdom,

which is a skill of taking correct actions toward the good in society by aid of a rule.[27] Practical

wisdom uses practical syllogisms, which use as premises a means and an end, concluding with

an action.[28] The use of practical wisdom involves a process of deliberation, and this deliberation

occupies a central place in Aristotle's account of virtue, desire, and choice.

Rational decision-making is essential for the ethical life because a good action must

include the *moral choice* of the individual to be good.[29] Aristotle argues that the appetitive or

desiring element of the soul is primarily irrational although it shares in reason because it listens

to and usually obeys reason.[30] Because of this, Aristotle must develop an account of choice that

synthesizes the desiring part of the mind with the rational part of the mind. The faculty of the

mind that allows this synthesis is the practical reason. For Aristotle, practical wisdom is the

gateway capacity for all the moral excellences. It is a necessary component of being good.[31]

The *right use* of practical wisdom can only take place when the person *develops a nature in*

accordance with virtue. Each individual has a capacity or potentiality for goodness of character

or virtue, but this capacity has to be trained and developed through actual virtuous living.[32] This

---

[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 344.
[29] Ibid., 345.
[30] *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book I, 1102b30-32.
[31] Ibid., 1144b30-1145a2.
[32] Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, Vol. 1: Greece and Rome*, 335.

is why Aristotle does not prescribe a list of specific rules that must be followed to be ethical. Each situation is unique, and the only thing that can be done is to shape each individual into an ethical *person* who is then capable of making an ethical decision when confronted with unique situations.[33] Moral habits produce inclinations to act in certain ways, and they produce the necessary practical wisdom to know how to act virtuously.[34] In short, virtues are states of the soul, and they are character-constitutive: "The virtues are stable states of the soul which enable a person to make the right decision about how to act in the circumstances and which motivate him so to act. It is these stable states of the soul that we think of as constituting a person's character."[35] Thus, the unifying element of virtuous acts, practical knowledge of virtue, and right desire is the *character* of a virtuous man.[36]

We must place special emphasis on several characteristics of the foregoing account. In the Aristotelian framework the moral habits and virtues have two central characteristics. First, they properly belong to the soul of the virtuous person. They are not additions from the outside but actual developments of the soul. Following on this, the second characteristic of the moral habits is that they are *natural* developments of the human soul. Aristotle's ethical views are distinctly teleological. More specifically, Aristotle's ethics depends on concepts from his metaphysics. Each living creature has a nature, and it is the natural function of this living creature to live out a life in accordance with this nature: "The end of human life is for man to realize his form to the fullest possible extent – and this Aristotle has identified with the chief good for man."[37] In short, Aristotle's ethical outlook presupposes that man has a certain nature

---

[33] Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, 157.
[34] Ibid., 166.
[35] Ibid., 164.
[36] Ibid., 171.
[37] Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, 163.

and that following this nature will produce harmony and good.[38] Therefore, the essence of the human soul determines the proper good of man and also contains the natural capacities to develop the virtues that will be productive of that good.

It is readily apparent that Aristotle's system cannot accommodate the category of sin. As with Plato, Aristotle's system forces us to affirm that the majority of immoral actions are simply errors of judgment flowing from ignorance of the proper good, not intentional rejection of the good. Jonathan Lear argues that this tension is most clear in Aristotle's political writings. If humans naturally tend toward the development of their form, then they should naturally develop into virtuous persons who construct good states. In spite of this, he felt that strict guidelines needed to be enforced to ensure the production of good and moral citizens, the production of which seemed rare to him in the Athens of his time.[39] Aristotle's experience confirmed that there were few good citizens and good states, and this fact could not be explained within his view of nature.[40]

In conclusion, we should summarize the results of this investigation with an eye toward our overall thesis. Aristotelianism seems to be at odds with classical Christianity at several key points. Aristotle effectively creates a naturalized teleology by making the form of an entity the standard of goodness for that entity and arguing that all possessors of a human soul naturally tend toward the Good. Furthermore, he constructs an account of the human person that cannot incorporate a category of sin or fallenness. For him, the human person, simply by possessing a human soul, should naturally tend toward the development of ethical virtues. When developed, these ethical virtues are natural parts of the human soul, proper attributes that really do belong to the person in which they develop. Here we see a clear link between Aristotle's anthropology and

---

[38] Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, Vol. 1: Greece and Rome*, 333.
[39] Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, 207-208.
[40] Ibid., 208.

certain tendencies in his moral philosophy. Aquinas and Scotus will incorporate much of Aristotle's metaphysics into their systems, albeit in service of Christian doctrine. The question is whether Aquinas and Scotus can construct doctrines of man, sin, and justification that do not fall into these same errors.

III. Aspects of Thomism[41]

A. Aquinas on the Nature of Human Beings

As a superbly systematic thinker, Aquinas attempts to synthesize elements of the Greek philosophical tradition with Christian theology in an attempt to achieve a unified anthropology. We will investigate this dual-leveled anthropology in stages and proceed to see how Aquinas applies this analysis to the discussion of virtue and sin. In his anthropology, Thomas makes use of the term 'person,' a designator that applies to both the members of the Trinity and individual human beings. The highest natural entities can all be termed 'persons': "*Person* signifies what is most perfect in all nature—that is, a subsistent individual of a rational nature."[42] Following the Aristotelian model, Aquinas refuses to equate a person with the soul, instead arguing that the whole human person is a composite of a specific type of soul with a specific type of matter.[43] However, the analysis that Thomas gives of the intellectual nature in man will be of decisive significance for his anthropology, so we may take his comments regarding the soul of man as vastly more significant than his references to the necessity and structure of the human body. In order to understand why this is the case, one must recall that in Aquinas's system all created

---

[41] Throughout this exposition, I will rely almost exclusively on the positions that Aquinas outlines in his *Summa Theologica*. I believe this to be justified. It represents perhaps his most thorough interaction with the themes under investigation and, as a systematic treatise, it is more likely to provide opportunities for observing the interaction of the doctrines in question. Additionally, a comprehensive examination of the development of these doctrines of Aquinas through his entire corpus would be well beyond the bounds of this paper.

[42] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, Q.29, A.3.

[43] Ibid., Ia, Q.75, A.4.

beings are a composite of existence and essence.[44] Within this composite, the essence of a thing

functions as a limit that determines to what extent that particular being participates in the fullness

of existence.[45] All creatures participate in existence, and the essences diversify creatures by

limiting them to a particular mode of existence.[46] Finally, existence is the source of all

perfections in Aquinas's metaphysics: "Existence is the most perfect of all things, for it is

compared to all things as that by which they are made actual; for nothing has actuality except so

far as it exists."[47] Since the defining perfections of a creature flow from its mode of existence,

the soul or essence determines those perfections by determining the mode of existence. Thus,

the proper inquiry into the uniqueness and perfection of man will investigate the structure,

powers, and perfections of the intellectual soul.

Echoing Aristotle, Aquinas identifies the soul of man as a principle of different acts:

nourishment, sensation, local movement, and understanding.[48] As an intellectual creature,

however, man surpasses the lower animals only in virtue of the power of understanding, which is

his proper and defining capacity.[49] Although the intellectual soul has many faculties or powers,

Aquinas argues for a real distinction between the soul and these powers.[50] The soul is not the

powers themselves but the subject in which the powers inhere.[51] This is not to say that the

powers of the soul are accidental properties. On the contrary, Aquinas argues that the soul's

---

[44] Ibid., Ia, Q.3, A.4.
[45] W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 80.
[46] Ibid., 83.
[47] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, Q.4, A.1.
[48] Ibid., Ia, Q.76, A.1.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, Vol. 2: Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 376.
[51] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, Q.77, A.1.

powers "flow from the essence of the soul, as from their principle…."[52] Since the intellectual powers are the powers by which man is defined, we will focus our analysis on them.

In a move that places him closer to the Augustinian tradition, Aquinas argues that the human soul has the power of intellect only by participation: "Now the human soul is called intellectual by reason of a participation in intellectual power…."[53] This higher power is God, and it is only by His illumination that the human soul has intellectual powers.[54] While this position would naturally seem to emphasize the radical dependency of the human person on God, Aquinas hedges against this tendency with several qualifications. First, although he characterizes this power as "derived" from God, who is the higher intellect, he does not go so far as to assert that the continued existence and use of this power is radically dependent on a certain relationship with God.[55] Second, he argues that the ability to participate in God's intellect in this way is an intrinsic and properly human power.[56] Third, and finally, the upshot of all this is that, even if the power of the intellect is derived from participation in God, the power to participate in God in this way is ultimately attributable to a power that properly belongs to the human soul.

The soul of man is marked by two primary powers: reason and will. In an absolute sense, the reason is a higher power than the will, for the reason apprehends the Good, which only becomes the object of the will by virtue of its having been in the intellect.[57] Although the intellect frequently directs the will, the will is capable of directing the intellect to apprehend this or that particular object.[58] Although there is a priority among these two powers, the will is not completely and in all cases subordinated to the reason. However, rationality is a necessary

---

[52] Ibid., Ia, Q.77, A.6.
[53] Ibid., Ia, Q.79, A.4.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., Ia, Q.82, A.3.
[58] Ibid., Ia. Q.82, A.4.

ground for free-will.[59] The will naturally inclines to many things because, even though it always

desires happiness, it may nonetheless desire different particular things that may be productive of

happiness.[60] When multiple acts seem to be productive of happiness, a man must use judgment

to choose between them, and this judgment is a rational act: "But because this judgment, in the

case of some particular act, is not from a natural instinct, but from some act of comparison in the

reason, therefore he acts from free judgment and retains the power of being inclined to various

things."[61] Rationality is thus necessary for free-will.

Thus far, we have only given the philosophical side of Aquinas's anthropology. In order

to fully understand his analysis of sin and justification, we must investigate his theological

account of the human person because the accounts of virtue and sin are directly based on a dual-

leveled conception of the human person, and the unity of the accounts of virtue and sin is directly

dependent on whether or not Aquinas is able to offer a unified anthropology that does justice to

the human person as simultaneously participating in the *natural* and *supernatural* orders.

As we have seen, man is an intellectual creature who surpasses the lower animals in

virtue of the power of understanding, which is his proper and defining capacity.[62] The

intellectual soul of man, however, is the lowest of the intellectual substances, falling below the

incorporeal angels.[63] While Aquinas uses the term 'nature' to describe many different entities

along the chain of being, he does not use the term in a univocal sense for all creatures. When

discussing human beings, Aquinas uses 'nature' in an analogical sense with the lower created

---

[59] Ibid., Ia, Q.83, A.1.
[60] Ibid., Ia, Q.82, A.2.
[61] Ibid., Ia, Q.83, A.1.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid., Ia, Q.76, A.5.

beings to illustrate that a human person's form gives a person powers which excel mere matter.[64]

Therefore, the human soul rests on the border of the natural and supernatural worlds and

participates in both: "There is yet another reason why the human soul abounds in a variety of

power;--because it is on the confines of spiritual and corporeal creatures; and therefore the

powers of both meet together in the soul."[65] In the Greek tradition, this union of the intellectual,

spiritual powers of the human soul with the physical appetites and desires of the corporeal

existence was largely considered a lamentable union, and, as in Plato's philosophy, the

materiality of human existence was to be transcended by greater participation in the intellectual

realm.[66]

When Aquinas adopts this idea from the Greeks, he argues that the relationship between

the body and soul is not one of inherent antagonism but is a natural union that is necessary for

the ultimate perfection of the whole person.[67] Since the potentiality of a human person is

determined by the nature of the human soul, the progression toward perfection will include a

teleological orientation to both natural and supernatural ends. Aquinas still maintains the

primacy of the intellectual over the corporeal, maintaining that bodily pleasures are only a

proximate and provisional end, whereas the final end of man is a spiritual union with God.[68]

Each person is intended to achieve natural happiness in this life and supernatural happiness in

ways that surpass this life. More importantly, since the perfect happiness that comes from union

with God is a happiness that surpasses human nature, it cannot be achieved by actions of human

---

[64] B. Ryosuke Inagaki, "Original Sin and Human Nature: A Consideration of the Concept of Nature in Thomas Aquinas," In *Nature in Medieval Thought: Some Approaches East and West,* Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters, Bd. 73 (Leiden: Brill, 2000): 112.
[65] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, Q.77, A.2.
[66] W. Norris Clarke, "Living on the Edge: The Human Person as 'Frontier Being' and Microcosm," In *International Philosophical Quarterly* 36.2 (1996): 185.
[67] Ibid., 193.
[68] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, Q.2, A.6; Q.3, A.8.

nature and must be accomplished directly by the power of God.[69] The rational nature of human beings transcends physical reality because it is "endowed with the capacity for grace as the supernatural…."[70]

In addition to focusing on the end of man in relation to the supernatural realm, Aquinas makes a few comments about the spiritual nature of man as marked by the *Imago Dei*. Aquinas argues that the image of God in man is a *spiritual* image, specifically the intellectual soul in man.[71] Aquinas distinguishes three stages at which the image of God can be found in individuals:

> "...we see that the image of God is in man in three ways. First, inasmuch as man possesses a natural aptitude for understanding and loving God; and this aptitude consists in the very nature of the mind, which is common to all men. Secondly, inasmuch as man actually or habitually knows and loves God, though imperfectly; and this image consists in the conformity of grace. Thirdly, inasmuch as man knows and loves God perfectly; and this image consists in the likeness of glory. …The first is found in all men, the second only in the just, the third only in the blessed."[72]

The second and third aspects of the *Imago Dei* will be addressed more fully in the sections on sin and justification, but it is important to recognize that Aquinas still defends that all men, even reprobate individuals, have a "natural aptitude for understanding and loving God."[73] This aptitude belongs to man *as man*, regardless of his theological standing before God. Here, as elsewhere, we will see Luther make a decisive break from Scholastic thought.

B. Aquinas on Virtue

Aquinas discusses virtue immediately before addressing sin in the *Summa*, and a proper understanding of his account of virtue is crucial to understanding his positions on sin and justification. Trading heavily on Aristotle's use of the categories of 'actuality' and 'potentiality,'

---

[69] Ibid., Q.5, A.6.
[70] Inagaki, "Original Sin and Human Nature: A Consideration of the Concept of Nature in Thomas Aquinas," 112.
[71] Ibid., Ia, Q.93, A.1-2.
[72] Ibid., Ia, Q.93, A.4.
[73] Ibid.

Aquinas argues that human beings can develop tendencies toward certain types of actions. The term for this, *habitus*, is often translated as "habits," but can also be appropriately translated as "dispositions."[74] One can direct the development of one's own soul, cultivating habits of behavior, dispositions toward certain actions, and even affections for certain things.[75] Aquinas uses these ideas extensively when he addresses the moral virtues.

For Aquinas, virtues are habits.[76] Virtue is a "perfection of a power" of the soul, and since each of these powers is usually a power for many actions and they are not in and of themselves determined to one particular action, a habit is needed to determine a power down to just one action.[77] This type of habit is what Aquinas terms 'virtue.'[78] These habits must be *good* because they are the perfection of a power, and all perfection is necessarily good.[79] After determining the nature of virtue, Aquinas moves on to a consideration of the subject in which virtue inheres. Virtue properly belongs to a power of the soul, and each virtue belongs to one power rather than many.[80] Both the intellective and appetitive aspects of the soul can be the subject of virtue, and virtue can be divided into two broad categories that correspond to these aspects of the soul: 1) virtues that give one an "aptness to do a good act," and 2) virtues that "confer not only aptness to act, but also the right use of that aptness."[81] Aquinas terms these two broad types of virtues as "intellectual" and "moral" virtues.[82]

However, Aquinas does not simply adopt Aristotle's account of virtue wholesale. He affirms Augustine's definition of virtue as well: "Virtue is a good quality of the mind, by which

---

[74] Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 225.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, Q.55, A.1.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.55, A.3.
[80] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.56, A.1-2.
[81] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.56, A.3.
[82] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.56, A.5.

we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us, without us."[83] The last part of the definition seems to point to a wholly different type of virtue, which Aquinas terms "infused virtue" and of which God is the "efficient cause."[84] Here Aquinas must recognize a distinction between "natural" virtues and "theological" or "infused virtues." For Aquinas, the acquisition and development of most virtues were natural to man, who is disposed in this way by "naturally known principles of both knowledge and action" which reside in the intellect.[85] However, the virtues of faith, hope, and charity (love), are *theological* virtues.[86] These virtues are oriented towards man's final end, which is beatitude, and since this end surpasses man's nature, it is necessary for God to infuse these "gratuitous virtues" by an act of grace.[87] A question remains as to whether or not Aquinas is able to sufficiently reconcile these two accounts into one unified discussion of virtue.

In "The Subversion of Virtue," Jean Porter criticizes Aquinas's attempt to synthesize the Greek and Christian conceptions of virtue. Porter argues that the classical tradition is at odds with the Christian tradition because the Greek conception is that the virtues either simply are identical to intellectual capacity or are entirely dependent on such intellectual capacity.[88] In contrast to this, Christian tradition teaches that all persons are equal insofar as they are all capable of living a virtuous life, but this seems to be at odds with Aristotle's assertions that the virtuous life requires practical wisdom and the intellectual capacities and good upbringing that make practical wisdom possible.[89] Porter claims that Aquinas does not develop a unity between these two accounts but instead adopts wholesale the full account of each type of virtue, affirming

---

[83] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.55, A.4.
[84] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.55, A.4.
[85] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.63, A.1.
[86] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.62, A.1.
[87] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.52, A.4.
[88] Jean Porter, "The Subversion of Virtue: Acquired and Infused Virtues in the *Summa theologiae*," In *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1992): 21.
[89] Ibid., 23.

a complete set of acquired moral virtues conforming to the Aristotelian emphases on right reason and habituation, and affirming another set of infused moral virtues conforming to the Christian emphases on one's relation to God's Law and on divine *infusion* instead of human acquisition.[90] Porter does briefly cite a distinction between the two sets of virtues, namely that infused virtues direct human action toward proper supernatural ends, and acquired virtues direct human action toward proper natural ends, but Porter believes that this distinction is not sufficient to clarify the relationship between the two sets of virtues. Thus, the duplication of the virtues and separation into two levels—acquired and infused—seems to do little more than muddy the waters: "…what becomes of the naturally acquired habits of virtue possessed by the individual who converts (or repents) in maturity, when her character is already formed, at least to some degree?"[91] To claim that the virtues simply direct a person to different ends (natural ends for the acquired virtues and supernatural ends for the infused virtues) does not answer the question of how these virtues can coexist and be unified in one human person. Are the acquired virtues replaced and superseded, or are the infused virtues simply added to them in a linear progression? Moreover, Porter believes that Aquinas's "synthesis" begs the question by assuming a distinction between the natural and the supernatural and basing his account of virtues on that assumption.[92]

While Porter's questions are natural ones, it is imperative that we not view Aquinas's account of virtue in a vacuum. When we consider his dual-leveled anthropology, it becomes clear how Aquinas unifies the acquired and infused virtues. Since man exists as part of both the natural and supernatural spheres, every human action takes on this same dual aspect, functioning

---

[90] Ibid., 32-33.
[91] Ibid., 38.
[92] Ibid.

within and oriented towards both spheres of one's existence.[93] Therefore, as the supernatural

ends of humanity are beyond the capacity of human nature, there must be a set of virtues that

directs one to those ends which are *not* acquired but are infused by grace yet still cover the full

range of human actions.[94] The infused virtues are not simply faith, hope, and charity but include

infused virtues corresponding to the acquired moral virtues:

> "Now all virtues, intellectual and moral, that are acquired by our actions, arise from
> certain natural principles pre-existing in us, as above stated (A.1; Q.51, A.1): instead of
> which natural principles, God bestows on us the theological virtues, whereby we are
> directed to a supernatural end, as stated (Q.62, A.1). Wherefore we need to receive from
> God other habits corresponding, in due proportion, to the theological virtues, which
> habits are to the theological virtues, what the moral and intellectual virtues are to the
> natural principles of virtue. …The theological virtues direct us sufficiently to our
> supernatural end, inchoatively: i.e. to God Himself immediately. But the soul needs
> further to be perfected by infused virtues in regard to other things, yet in relation to
> God."[95]

With this framework in place, we can return to Porter's criticisms of this account of virtue. The

first criticism is that Aquinas does not sufficiently explain the relation of the infused virtues to

the acquired virtues. The infused and acquired virtues, though governing the same actions, differ

insofar as they specify the morality of an action in relation to different ends. These two sets of

virtues do not strictly overlap because they are operating on different levels of being. There can

be no question of *replacing* the acquired virtues with the infused virtues because the human

person, as being properly ordered to *both* natural and supernatural ends, requires both sets of

virtues to achieve true moral living. Moreover, they do not strictly build on each other as though

there were a linear progression from the acquired virtues to the infused virtues. Because they are

directed at different ends, they cannot be in conflict or tension, and to argue otherwise would be

---

[93] Gerard Verbeke, "Man as a 'Frontier' according to Aquinas," In *Aquinas and Problems of His Time*. Edited by
 Gerhard Verbeke, and D. Verhels. Mediaevalia Lovaniensia, series 1, studia 5 (Louvain, Belgium: Leuven
 University Press, 1976): 215.
[94] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, Q.62, A.1
[95] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.63, A.3.

a category mistake. The dual-leveled account of the virtues is not an ad hoc unity but a unity determined and held together by Aquinas's anthropology. Whether or not his anthropology is correct, his account of the virtues is at least internally consistent with the broader structures of his philosophy. Porter's second criticism is that Aquinas's account only works if he presupposes a distinction between the natural and the supernatural order. However, this distinction would have been natural to Aquinas and received through both the philosophical and theological traditions of which he was a part.

C. Aquinas on Sin

Before discussing sin, Aquinas discusses the good and evil of human acts. Since Aquinas has previously equated what is good with whatever has being, he is forced to equate evil with a lack of being: "…so far as he is lacking in the fullness of being, so far is he lacking in goodness, and said to be evil…."[96] Aquinas refuses to equate evil with sin, however. While any lack whatsoever can be considered "evil," sin exists only in an action "done for a certain end, and lacking due order to that end."[97] The due order by which humans are to act for an end is determined by both human reason and the Eternal Law.[98] Aquinas here affirms a dual-definition of sin, similar to his dual-account of virtue, defining sin both in relation to natural ends as determined by human reason and in relation to supernatural ends as determined by the eternal law.

In a recent article, Andrew Downing criticizes Aquinas's dual-concept of sin for failing to unify both definitions of sin into one concept. Reflecting the same Aristotelian and Christian sources, Aquinas sometimes speaks of sin in theological terms as "a violation of God's law or as a rupture in the proper relationship between God and the believer," and he sometimes speaks of

---

[96] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.18, A.1.
[97] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.21, A.1.
[98] Ibid.

sin in philosophical terms as "an act contrary to the dictates of reason."[99] According to

Downing, Aquinas has a distinct tendency to prefer working with the philosophical conception,

and, since sin is thus defined as being contrary to nature, sin becomes understandable wholly in

terms of human reason.[100] Of course, as a theologian, Aquinas cannot neglect the supernatural

dimension of sin, and for this reason, Aquinas incorporates the Augustinian idea of sin as being

against the Eternal Law to supplement his more philosophical account of the natural dimension

of sin.[101] However, this attempt to define both the aspects of sin simply *assumes* that the natural

moral order and the supernatural religious orders are unified, an assumption that Downing argues

is unjustified.[102] Aquinas has not adequately demonstrated a close relationship between the

natural and supernatural aspects of sin, and juxtaposing the Aristotelian and Christian accounts

does not suffice as an explanation. Moreover, Downing argues that Aquinas cannot adopt an

Aristotelian framework of acquired virtues and simultaneously hold to an Augustinian,

theological definition of sin; for the theological definition of sin implies a human depravity that

is incommensurable with the natural development of human goodness that Aquinas seems to

affirm by adopting so much of the Aristotelian account.[103] Because of this tension, Downing

concludes that Aquinas's dual-leveled account of sin is internally incoherent.

With our prior discussion of Aquinas's anthropology and account of virtue, it becomes

clear that Downing's criticisms of the account of sin are off the mark. While it is true that

Aquinas does at some times speak of sin as being an act contrary to reason and at other times as

an act contrary to God's eternal law, there is no essential tension between these two concepts.

---

[99] Andrew Downing, "Sin and Its Relevance to Human Nature in the *Summa Theologiae*," In *The Heythrop Journal* 50 (2009): 793.
[100] Ibid., 795.
[101] Ibid., 796-797.
[102] Ibid., 799.
[103] Ibid., 799-800.

The account of sin exactly parallels the account of virtue insofar as both concepts are analyzed in relation to two distinct ends: natural and supernatural.[104] In relation to natural ends, sin can be defined as an act contrary to reason, and, in relation to supernatural ends, sin can be defined as an act contrary to God's law. Aquinas has one concept of sin, examined under a dual-aspect: "The theologian considers sin chiefly as an offense against God; and the moral philosopher, as something contrary to reason."[105] In order to have a fully-developed account of sin, Aquinas must present both viewpoints because God's decrees direct us in ways above human nature, and therefore a simple analysis of human reason will not reveal all the ways in which we might possibly do wrong.[106] Thus, the human will is governed by two rules, the human reason and the eternal law, but the eternal law is the properly basic rule because it is only by God's decree that human beings have the rational nature that they do and because the human reason does not have the capacity to direct one to supernatural ends.[107] Downing is therefore wrong to argue that Aquinas makes the whole of the moral order rationally knowable and reduces all sin to *merely* violations of human reason. Moreover, Aquinas does not simply juxtapose the Aristotelian account of vice with the Augustinian notion of sin. Instead, Aquinas radically re-casts the Aristotelian notion by emphasizing God's reason as the source and governing rule of human reason, thus making any violation of human reason also simultaneously an act contrary to God's decrees. Since the human person participates in both the natural and supernatural spheres of existence, the sinfulness of a human act must be described in relation to both realms. The anthropology that Aquinas defends provides for the unity of his accounts of virtue and sin.

---

[104] Eileen Sweeney, "Vice and Sin (Ia IIae, qq. 71-89)," In *The Ethics of Aquinas*, Edited by Stephen J. Pope (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002): 153.
[105] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, Q.71, A.6.
[106] Sweeney, "Vice and Sin (Ia IIae, qq. 71-89)," 152.
[107] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, Q.71, A.6; Q.19, A.4..

Even if Aquinas is not susceptible to this particular criticism, he is susceptible to more theological objections. In both cases, Aquinas defines 'sin' in terms of acts, not states. For him, the primary idea of sin is any word, deed, or desire contrary to the Eternal Law.[108] Sin is thus a quality that inheres in a particular action, and does not properly represent a state of being. Additionally, sin can have a limited effect on the powers of the soul, and, since the reason and the will are the central powers of the soul, both of these powers are subject to sin. This is because, for an act to have moral valence, it must be voluntary, and, since the will is the principle of moral acts, it must be the principle of sinful acts in addition to good acts.[109] The reason can also be the subject of sin in circumstances where it is ignorant of that which it should know or where it fails to direct the lower powers according to right reason.[110] Since will and reason are both subjected to sin, we must ask about the effects of sin on human nature. At this point, a tension arises in Aquinas's system. Sin does not destroy or diminish the principles of human nature or the powers of the human soul.[111] Reason and will are left completely intact insofar as their extent, power, and capabilities remain unchanged. The powers in themselves are unaffected, but instead what is lost is the human person's ability to wield the powers of the soul effectively and in subjection to God.[112]

While Aquinas seems to maintain that the actual metaphysical structures of the human person remain undiminished by sin (the powers of the soul, etc.), he does provide a place for viewing sin as a real privation of something in man. He argues that the "original justice" of the human person is completely lost.[113] This original justice was the gracious gift that subordinated

---

[108] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.71, A.6.
[109] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.74, A.1.
[110] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.74, A.5.
[111] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.85, A.1.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.

all the powers of the soul to the reason and further subordinated man's mind to the mind and will of God.[114] In order to maintain a consistent approach, Aquinas has to concede that this original justice and rectitude was in man purely by virtue of grace, not as an intrinsic part of man's nature or metaphysical composition.[115] Thus, while Aquinas is free to maintain that there is a meaningful sense in which sin is a privation of some good that human beings ought to have, it does not appear that he can maintain that this privation is a privation of anything properly belonging to the human nature.[116]

Additionally, Aquinas does admit that sin diminishes the human being's natural inclination to virtue, even though it is not completely destroyed.[117] The inclination to virtue can never be completely destroyed because the exercise of virtuous acts follows naturally upon the rational nature.[118] A virtuous act is that which accords with right reason, and so it would seem that, if the powers of reason and will are left undiminished by sin, then the inclination to virtuous action should remain undiminished as well. Aquinas responds that the diminution of virtue takes place because sin represents an obstacle to virtuous action, not because sin diminishes the source of virtuous action, which is the reason.[119] Concupiscence (inordinate desire) and lack of original justice are obstacles to the proper performance of virtue, but they do not represent a corruption of the capacity of the powers of the soul.[120]

It is clear from the preceding that Aquinas's anthropology has a decisive impact not only on the content of his doctrine of sin but also on the methods and framework he uses to synthesize

---

[114] Ibid., Ia, Q.95, A.1.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Aquinas does indicate, in Ia IIae, Q. 83, A.2, that the "soul, in respect of its essence, is the primary subject of original sin." It is not clear in what sense positive sense sin is actually *in* essence of the soul as its subject, but it is clear that, for Aquinas, it cannot corrupt human nature's formal structures and the good thereof (Ia IIae, Q. 85, A1-2).
[117] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.85, A.1.
[118] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.85, A.2.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.82, A.3.

his various influences into one coherent world-picture. The view of sin that he defends has several crucial implications. First, if sin is a type of privation, and if sin can be in the will and reason as subjects of sin, then sin would have to be a privation of those very powers, which Aquinas denies.[121] If sin is not simply the privation of those powers of the soul, then it would seem that it cannot be in those powers and must be the privation of something that does not belong to man in a metaphysical sense or that it must be some positive quality rather than a mere privation. Second, Aquinas cannot admit that sin fundamentally alters or corrupts human nature as such. As we have seen in his anthropology, he defines man in solely static, metaphysical terms. To be a human being is to have an intellectual soul—to have the powers of reason and will. If sin corrupts the reason and will, then a sinful person would cease to be rational and would *eo ipso* cease to be a person.[122] Since sinful persons are still human beings, it cannot be the case that sin affects the powers of reason and will. The limits of Aquinas's anthropology are decisive for his view of sin. Third, the summary implication of all this is that man after the Fall is not changed in his basic composition or abilities and still retains some inclination to virtue and some good in his nature. These tendencies reflect the influence of Aristotle and significantly affect Aquinas's doctrine of justification.

D. Aquinas on Justification

In his doctrine of justification, Aquinas is far more "reformed" than we may initially believe. Unlike later nominalists, he strongly emphasizes the priority of unearned grace in salvation. Although the human nature retains the ability to do specific good actions, it cannot love God above all other things without the help of grace.[123] More importantly, Aquinas affirms that man cannot prepare himself to receive grace. The disposition of the will to receive grace is a

---

[121] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q85, A.1, A.4.
[122] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.85, A.2.
[123] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.109, A.3.

"gratuitous gift" of God and not something attributable to man or earned by his good deeds.[124]

All preparation of the soul for grace is attributable to God: "…every preparation in man must be by the help of God moving the soul to good. And thus even the good movement of the free-will, whereby anyone is prepared for receiving the gift of grace is an act of the free-will moved by God."[125] This grace from God can take two basic forms. It can be either in the movement of the soul to receive grace, the first initiation on the part of God, or it can be in the infusion of virtues (the theological virtues discussed above) which, upon being bestowed by God, become man's own qualities of the soul which help him to live rightly.[126] This is his distinction between "operating" and "cooperating" grace. Brian Davies emphasizes that here, as in all cases, God is not just the primary cause but the *only* cause of his grace: "In [Aquinas's] view, grace is the result of God's action in me drawing me to himself. It is not just a help to me acting on my own. It is what there is when I am wholly the end product of what God is doing. And, for this reason, Aquinas insists that *only* God is the cause of grace."[127]

God justifies man by the grace whereby he turns man's will toward Himself.[128] The remission of sins is a result of justification, but the remission of guilt is conditioned on the infusion of grace.[129] Although Aquinas will later bring in questions of "merit" while discussing salvation, it is important to recognize that he believed justification to be instantaneous:

> "The justification of the ungodly is caused by the justifying grace of the Holy Spirit. …the justification of the ungodly is not successive, but instantaneous. …The entire justification of the ungodly consists as to its origin in the infusion of grace. For it is by grace that free-will is moved and sin is remitted. Now the infusion of grace takes place in an instant and without succession."[130]

---

[124] Ibid, Ia IIae, Q.109, A.6.
[125] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.112, A.2.
[126] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.109, A.1-2.
[127] Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 267.
[128] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, Q.113, A.1.
[129] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.113, A.2.
[130] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.113, A.7.

The similarities between Aquinas and the Reformers regarding justification end here. Aquinas seems to indicate that the grace infused in us can be lost: "Now the effect of the Divine love in us, which is taken away by sin, is grace, whereby a man is made worthy of eternal life, from which sin shuts him out."[131] Here the framework necessary for salvation by merit begins to develop. If God's grace can be lost, then we are only worthy of eternal life when we actually possess God's grace and have done what is necessary to prevent ourselves from losing it. Aware of the dangers of a works-righteousness, Aquinas denies that man can merit God's initial grace by either works or the quality of his nature.[132] Aquinas does admit that man can acquire a "congruent" merit in virtue of the fact that his good works proceed from the free-will congruently with the action of the Holy Spirit, but we must remember that even that act of the free-will is attributable to God's unearned grace.[133]

Although Aquinas's emphasis on the priority of God's grace places him much closer to the Reformers than many later medieval theologians, he still cannot escape vestiges of a merit-based salvation. Steven Ozment perceptively observes that for Aquinas that "saving charity must be a voluntary act arising from a disposition man *could* call his own."[134] Even if the infused theological virtues are works of grace, they nonetheless *become* properly man's. Grace is not simply God's power working in a person but is an actual capacity for righteousness that becomes part of man.[135] By possessing these virtues of grace, man merits eternal life. For Aquinas, eternal life is something given to man as something he *deserves*, even if the virtues by which he deserves it are ultimately bestowed by God. Ultimately, the use of an Aristotelian anthropology

---

[131] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.113, A.2.
[132] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.114, A.5.
[133] Ibid., Ia IIae, Q.114, A.3.
[134] Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe*, 31.
[135] Ibid., 31-32.

has led Aquinas into a doctrine of sin that leaves man's fundamental nature unchanged by the Fall and a doctrine of justification that still slips into the framework of merit. We can observe these tendencies in Duns Scotus as well, the Franciscan counterpart to Aquinas.

IV. Aspects of Scotism

A. Scotus's Anthropology

In his anthropology, Scotus shares much in common with Aquinas. Scotus adopts the broad outlines of Aristotelianism, arguing that man can be generally described as a composite of soul and body.[136] While Aquinas holds that the soul is both the spiritual soul and the form of the body, Scotus follows the Augustinian tradition by affirming the existence of a form of the body in addition to the soul.[137] Despite this difference, Scotus's affirmation of multiple forms in the human composite does not substantially change his overall anthropology. He still affirms the unity of the human person, and, along with Aquinas, he affirms that the intellectual soul is the specific form of man.[138] Rationality is the defining characteristic of man and is thereby that which separates him from all lower beings.[139] Following Aquinas, Scotus argues that the lower functions of the human person, such as the vegetative and sensitive powers, are attributable to the intellective soul.[140] Man is by nature rational, and the most noble powers of the rational soul are intellect and will.[141]

Thus far, Scotus has merely re-presented the common elements of most medieval anthropologies. At this point, he diverges from Thomism. While Aquinas seems to give

---

[136] Bernardine Bonansea, *Man and His Approach to God in John Duns Scotus* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), 11.

[137] Efrem Bettoni, *Duns Scotus: The Basic Principles of His Philosophy*, Translated and Edited by Bernardine Bonansea (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), 70-71.

[138] Bonansea, *Man and His Approach to God in John Duns Scotus*, 20.

[139] Ibid., 20-21.

[140] Bettoni, *Duns Scotus: The Basic Principles of His Philosophy*, 70.

[141] Bonansea, *Man and His Approach to God in John Duns Scotus*, 52.

preference to the intellect as the superior power, Scotus gives preference to the will as a superior power.[142] The intellect would seem to have a logical priority over the will as any act of will must be preceded by an act of the intellect, for the will cannot desire something that is not present to it as an object of knowledge.[143] Scotus responds that, even if an act of the intellect is a necessary condition for an act of will, it is not a complete cause or the primary efficient cause of the act of the will.[144] The will is a partial cause of the acts of the intellect, and the intellect is a partial cause of the acts of will.[145] The superiority of the will derives from the fact that it directs all the powers of the soul, something attested by one's own self-consciousness.[146] Additionally, Scotus believes that man's will is naturally rational in and of itself.[147] This conclusion will have a significant impact on his estimation of the capacities of the will to seek the Good.

In Scotus's anthropology, the will has two aspects. First, the will is foremost free, and the necessary presupposition of this claim is that the will is self-determining.[148] The will is a sort of "unmoved mover" that moves itself from a state of indeterminacy regarding many actions to a state of determination toward one specific act.[149] Second, as an intrinsically rational faculty, it has a natural inclination to the good, but this natural inclination does not hamper the freedom of the will to determine itself.[150] The will naturally seeks the good in two ways. In the first way, the will seeks the good in the perfection of the will.[151] This idea of the inclination of the will is roughly equivalent to the Aristotelian-Thomistic assertion that all creatures tend toward the

---

[142] Ibid., 51.
[143] Bettoni, *Duns Scotus: The Basic Principles of His Philosophy*, 82.
[144] Ibid., 83.
[145] Bonansea, *Man and His Approach to God in John Duns Scotus*, 82.
[146] Bettoni, *Duns Scotus: The Basic Principles of His Philosophy*, 84.
[147] Ibid., 86.
[148] Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* III, suppl., dist. 46, in Alan Wolter, *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality*, Translated and Selected by Alan Wolter (Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 1997), 153.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Bonansea, *Man and His Approach to God in John Duns Scotus*, 54.
[151] Alan Wolter, *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality*, Translated and Selected by Alan Wolter (Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 1997), 39.

perfection of their form. Form is the principle of Being, which is convertible with the Good, and

therefore the self-actualization of a creature is itself a pursuit of the Good. In a second way, the

will seeks the good in itself and absolutely, regardless of the potential advantage to the willing

creature.[152] By affirming this ability of the will to love the Good absolutely, Scotus is able to

affirm that the will has a natural ability to love God above all other goods, even without divinely

infused virtues.[153] However, while man may be able to perform an act of love without the divine

infusion of virtue, this act does not yet merit salvation. We will discuss this further in

connection with Scotus's doctrines of sin and justification.

In the case of virtues, Scotus agrees with Aquinas insofar as the infusion and

development of virtues requires divine action.[154] However, the infused virtues are still only a

perfection of man's nature, for man is by nature pre-disposed to receive these virtues.[155] In

addition, it seems that the will can produce its own virtues by determining itself repeatedly to

good acts.[156] Finally, by developing virtues, the will acquires the ability to carry out meritorious

actions.[157] Scotus thus attributes significantly more power to the will than does Aquinas, and

Scotus's affirmation that the will can at times develop its own virtues seems to attenuate the

relevance of the divine dispensation of grace. We must now investigate how Scotus

characterizes the effects of sin.

B. Scotus's Doctrine of Sin

Scotus defends man's natural ability to love God above all else. In the *Ordinatio*, he

outlines this argument explicitly:

---

[152] Ibid., 39-40.
[153] Ibid., 40.
[154] Ibid., 81.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* III, suppl., dist. 33, in Wolter, *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality*, 227.
[157] Ibid., 228.

"Natural reason reveals to an intellectual creature that something must be loved in the highest measure, because among all objects, acts, and habits that are essentially ordered to one another, there is something supreme, and thus there is some love that is highest and also some object that is supremely lovable. But natural reason reveals nothing other than infinite good to be such, for if it did, charity would then incline one to the opposite of what right reason dictates, and thus charity would not be a virtue. Therefore, natural reason dictates that the infinite good be loved above all. Consequently, the will can do this by its purely natural endowments, for the intellect could not rightly dictate something to the will that the natural will could not tend towards or carry out naturally."[158]

Given this fact, and given the will's ability to develop its own virtues, why does Scotus affirm that the virtues, such as charity, are infused by God? In short, Scotus concedes that his system of thought provides no reason why such a supposition is necessary: "…one cannot prove by natural reason that such habits are infused, but this is only held on faith."[159] Moreover, the extent to which God infuses the virtue of charity in a person is directly proportional to that person's own natural ability for charity.[160] When God bestows grace, He does not *create* a reality in the person that previously did not exist. He does not institute the ability to love, as Aquinas argued. Instead, God merely adds to the ability already found in the person. This principle is determinative for how Scotus views the effects of sin.

Richard Cross describes Scotus's concept of sin as wholly forensic. No sinful quality inheres in the sinner, and sinfulness brings about no real change the person: "Sin is just a lack of rectitude in an *act*, not in a *person*."[161] Since the soul is created by God, nothing created can destroy the rectitude that it has originally, not even the performance of a sinful act.[162] A morally bad trait or habit *can* exist and inhere in a person, but this is not the same as *sinfulness*.[163]

---

[158] Ibid., *Ordinatio* III, suppl., dist. 27.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 95.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid., 96.

Sinfulness is simply the fact that God wills to hold us guilty for moral failures. In this sense, it is completely forensic.

Scotus argues that sin does not corrupt anything positive in man. Sin only prevents the dispensation of a grace that man should have.[164] This original justice was a supernatural gift that prevented man's appetites from warring against each other and helped him tend to love God.[165] However, man's natural ability to pursue the good and love God above all else is left entirely unchanged. The only effect of sin is to reject this dispensation of added grace to increase these natural abilities of man. Albrecht Ritschl quotes Scotus on this point:

> "The taking away of guilt and the bestowal of grace do not constitute *one* real change, for the former is not a real change at all. They would, it is true, possess that oneness, were actual sin an essential corruption of nature, or the negation of anything properly positive in man. In that case the removal of guilt would be equivalent to the restoration of that reality which had been taken away by guilt. But sin does not take away any existent good thing, it only does away with what ought to have existed…."[166]

For Scotus, to be in sin is no more than to be lacking this grace from God. We are guilty on this count, not because of something that inheres in us, like an evil principle, or because of some misrelation between God and man, but simply because God wills for us to have the supernatural gift of original justice, and since we do not have this gift because of sin, God holds us to be guilty for this moral failing.[167] Because Scotus assigns extensive, self-sufficient powers to the human soul, he cannot construct a doctrine of sin that allows for real corruption of those faculties without destroying the reality that the sinner is still a human person. This doctrine makes sin much less serious than on the Thomistic conception, and the natural result becomes a potentially semi-Pelagian view of justification.

---

[164] Albrect Ritschl, *Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, Translated by John Black (Edinburg: Edmonston and Douglas, 1872), 85.

[165] Cross, *Duns Scotus*, 98-99.

[166] Duns Scotus, cited in Ritschl, *Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, 85.

[167] Cross, *Duns Scotus*, 100.

C. Scotus's Doctrine of Justification

In outlining his concept of salvation, Scotus makes a distinction between predestination for salvation and meriting eternal life. One is predestined for grace, and, in cooperation with that grace, one does actions that merit eternal life. This performance of meritorious actions is synonymous with justification. Scotus takes great pains to point out that God's decision to predestine the sinner for salvation precedes merits or the possession of the disposition of love: "For he has elected the soul itself prior to its having the disposition of love. Thus, he wants the soul's beatitude first, and because of that – after that – he wants it to have the disposition of love, by which it can obtain beatitude…."[168] God wills the end, salvation, before he wills the means to the end, which are grace, faith, and meritorious works.[169] Moreover, this original sanctifying grace is given on the merits of Christ alone.[170] Here Scotus has sidestepped some of the clear pitfalls of Pelagianism, asserting the primacy of a free and unmerited grace in the salvation process. However, Scotus still affirms that, after the dispensation of this original grace, man must perform meritorious acts in order to be truly justified and be worthy of eternal life.

Once the initial grace has been received, the intrinsic worth or merit of the individual is what then makes him worthy of eternal life.[171] God cannot reward someone who is unworthy, and so man must change in order for God to accept him. The change from unrighteousness to righteousness is properly an act of man, even though it incorporates necessary elements of God's grace.[172] This conclusion requires explanation. A meritorious act involves two components: the

---

[168] Duns Scotus, *Lectura* I 17, Paragraph 102. Translated by A. Vos, H. Veldhuis, E. Dekker, N.W. Den Bok, and A.J. Beck. In *Duns Scotus on Divine Love: Texts and Commentary on Goodness and Freedom, God and Humans*. Edited by A. Vos, et al. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), 105-107.

[169] Cross, *Duns Scotus*, 101-102.

[170] Ibid., 106.

[171] Ritschl, *Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, 82.

[172] Ibid.

human willing and the divine infused virtue of charity.[173] This habit of grace (charity) is both

supernatural and infused freely by God: "The other requirement in an act [for it to be

meritorious] is its relationship to a supernatural form which renders the person or operative

power acceptable and is assumed to be grace or charity."[174] The charity that the will naturally

possesses is not sufficient for merit, and by this qualification Scotus again avoids a blatant

Pelagianism. Albrecht Ritschl emphasizes this distinction: "The principal thing in merit thus

proceeds from God, though this is not equivalent to saying that it is God Himself who merits."[175]

The disposition of love is the main reason that God accepts the act as meritorious, so in regards

to God's acceptance, the will is not primary, even if the will is primary in regards to the

performance of the act.[176] In this it is clear that Scotus is not as far from Luther's reformation

theology as might be thought. He clearly emphasizes the primacy of an unmerited grace in the

process of salvation.

However, in his further discussion of merit, Scotus makes an emphasis on human merit in

the process of justification that both Aquinas and Luther would reject. First, the meritorious act

has two concurring causes, the disposition of love and the will, and, in regards to the

performance of the act, the human will functions independently of the infused virtue of charity:

> "…I say that in order to elicit the act of love which is meritorious, the will and the
> disposition of love concur as two partial agents. They concur as two agents which are
> perfect in their respective causality. This means that the causality of the one agent is not
> derived from the other, and that one agent does not perfect the other in its acting
> according to its causality."[177]

---

[173] Ibid., 81-82.
[174] Duns Scotus, *Quodlibet* 17, n.4 (Wadding 12:461). In *Duns Scotus*. Written by Richard Cross (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 108.
[175] Ritschl, *Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, 84.
[176] Duns Scotus, *Lectura* I 17, Paragraph 91, cited in ODL, 103.
[177] Scotus, *Lectura* I 17, Paragraph 71. In *Duns Scotus on Divine Love*, 91.

Thus, the human cooperation in the meritorious act is a necessary condition of producing the act, and it is not derived from or dependent on the dispensation of grace. Second, the action of the will is not just independent of the infused habit of love, it also has primacy over the disposition of love in producing the meritorious act because, if the opposite were true, and the will was moved by the disposition of love, then the will would not be free.[178] In short, even though the disposition of love is an infused supernatural habit, the will has direct control over the exercise of that habit: "Moreover, a disposition is something which someone who has it can use when he wants…when having a disposition it is in our power to use that disposition. Now, although love is a supernatural disposition, that does not change its character as a disposition."[179] Thus, Scotus clearly affirms an element of human cooperation in the process of achieving merit, an element not reducible to the active working of God's grace. Aquinas would part company with Scotus on this point, for Aquinas argues that the possession of the infused habit of grace is not a sufficient condition for the performance of meritorious actions, but in addition the Holy Spirit must also use a direct and active grace to move us to perform meritorious acts. Scotus denies that this type of active grace is necessary and affirms that the possession of an infused habit of grace is sufficient for performing meritorious actions.[180]

At a certain level, Scotus has preserved an emphasis on divine grace. The quality of infused grace *must* inhere in a person's soul in order for that person to be justified. It is a necessary and sufficient condition of justification.[181] However, this formulation is not sufficient to safeguard Scotus's position from error, for we see that a meritorious act by the sinner is still also a *necessary* condition of receiving sanctifying grace, the performance of which can still be

---

[178] Ibid., *Lectura* I 17, Paragraph 73. In *Duns Scotus on Divine Love*, 93.
[179] Ibid., *Lectura* I 17, Paragraph 75.
[180] Cross, *Duns Scotus*, 111.
[181] Ibid., 107.

elicited through the natural use of the human will.[182] Scotus thus tries to provide a sort of middle way. The meritorious act in itself is attributable to the human will as the determining cause, for without this element the meritorious act would not belong to the person. What makes the act truly meritorious, however, is the charity that God infuses by grace.[183]

While Scotus attempts to avoid a semi-Pelagian view of justification, this attempt seems to fail at several levels. First, Scotus explicitly affirms a merit-based system of salvation where persons are awarded eternal life on the basis of virtues and actions that are properly theirs and not wholly attributable to the grace of God alone. The infused virtue of love really does inhere in a person as *their* possession. The will still has the direct control over the use of the infused habit of love, and the human will is capable of functioning as an independent cause in eliciting a meritorious act. This is precisely the type of works-righteousness that Luther rejects. Second, Scotus's doctrines seem to strongly undercut the relevance of God's infusion of the habit of love for achieving merit. As indicated above, Scotus argues that God infuses charity in direct proportion to the extent of charity already found in a given person. If a person has developed only a very small amount of love naturally, then God's dispensation of love in proportion to that will only increase the person's total love a small amount. It is conceivable that a person with a small natural love and a small infusion of love would still have less love than a more saintly person would naturally. In this case, it would seem that the person with less love is able to merit salvation while the person with more love cannot, simply because there is no divine infusion of love present. But this consequence seems to be out of keeping with Scotus's emphasis on divine justice. Moreover, the infusion of grace is not logically necessary, as the "meritorious" nature of man's works is somewhat arbitrary. The meritorious character of the act does not inhere in the

---

[182] Ibid., 106-107.
[183] Ritschl, *Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, 82.

act but inheres in its relation to the divine will, specifically in the fact that God freely accepts it and wills to reward it as meritorious.[184] Third, Scotus appears to make God's infusion of virtue dependent on the intrinsic merit of a person. God dispenses grace to those who love naturally, and He even gives grace in proportion to that person's natural development of love. In the end, Scotus has an explicitly works-based system of righteousness in which the real effects of sin are significantly downplayed and in which the grace of God has only a nominally significant role in justification. Luther outlines a radically different concept of justification, and with it he introduces radically different concepts of sin and man. While Luther does not wholly reject the Aristotelian metaphysical analysis of man, he does subordinate these analyses to a higher analysis of man, a theological analysis that defines man at an even more fundamental level.

V. Aspects of Lutheranism

A. Luther's Anthropology

A complete account of Luther's anthropology and its connections with his doctrines of sin and justification is well beyond the bounds of this paper. In light of this, I propose to focus on three aspects of Luther's theology primarily as they are outlined in several of his disputations. In the disputations, Luther presents his views in a more rigorous and logical form, and, because they were used in a university setting, they represent some of his strongest denunciations of the scholastics, which it is the purpose of this paper to discuss. As a preview of the discussion, it will be helpful to mention that Luther's anthropology can be termed "existential" in at least three senses. First, he seldom discusses isolated aspects of the person but is instead focused on the condition and tendencies of the person *as a whole*. Second, Luther never discusses man in the abstract; for abstract man does not exist. Man is always either under the power of God or Satan,

---

[184] Scotus, *Lectura* I 17, Paragraph 89, In *Duns Scotus on Divine Love*, 101.

either redeemed or damned. Third, Luther's central definitions of man are *relational*. The essence of a contingent being is based on how that being is related to God as the eternal Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

Luther does not reject the Scholastic analyses of man wholesale. On the contrary, he accepts the validity of large elements of the ontological descriptions of man that Aquinas and Scotus give, but only to a point. In *The Disputation Concerning Man*, he accepts that man is a rational animal, a composite of soul and body, with certain faculties consequent on the possession of an intellectual soul.[185] Moreover, Luther concedes, in line with the tradition, that the faculty of reason is not only the essential difference that separates man from animals but also the best earthly characteristic of the human person.[186] Thus, Luther agrees not only that man is a frontier being between the natural and supernatural worlds because he is a union of soul and body but also that, from a philosophical perspective, the ontology of the soul that Aquinas lays out is basically correct.[187]

Purely philosophical anthropology has its place, but it captures only one aspect of man: "…this definition describes man only as a mortal and in relation to this life."[188] The significance of Luther's reservation is easily overlooked. As we have seen, the Scholastics typically viewed the powers of the soul as functioning automatically and relatively autonomously. They have their own essential direction and function, and the powers of the soul carry these functions out naturally. For Luther, the powers of the soul are never powers unto themselves. The direction of the reason and will, the way in which those powers are used, is determined by a higher unity that

---

[185] Martin Luther, *Disputation Concerning Man*, Translated by Lewis Spitz, In *Luther's Works*, Vol. 34, edited by Lewis Spitz, (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 137.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Walther Von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, Translated by Herbert Bouman (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976), 59.
[188] Ibid.

is determinative for man. The powers of the soul cannot be investigated by themselves but must be "viewed existentially within the context of a total anthropology."[189]

At this point, Luther highlights the significance of the doctrine of Creation for his anthropology. Man is a contingent being, created and sustained by God, and, because of this, the only way to understand man as whole and complete being is to conceive of man in relation to this origin.[190] Creation is not a one-time action in which God merely instituted the world and gave it an initial impetus. No contingent being has its own existence, and so God must continually use His power to sustain the very being of all that has been created.[191] Not just the *fact* of reality but the *nature* of reality depends on God's continual sustaining power and will.[192] Applied to Luther's anthropology, this would indicate that man has no intrinsic properties. Bernhard Lohse frames the conclusion in less stark terms: "Not even the so-called natural gifts and activities [of man] are to be understood apart from this activity of the Spirit."[193] This conclusion may seem too strong. Surely man has *some* intrinsic or essential properties. However, the term 'intrinsic' gives a connotation that the property belongs to the creature in and of itself, independently of the sustaining work of God. What Luther is denying is that any of man's capacities are properly *his* in this sense. They are not powers that man has in virtue of his own autonomous existence. They are gifts of God as contingent as the very being of anything created. This view of creation is the essential backdrop for Luther's understanding of the human person. One can only properly define man when he is viewed as a whole in his relation to God;

---

[189] Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, Translated and Edited by Roy Harrisville (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 47.
[190] Luther, *Disputation Concerning Man*, 138.
[191] Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, Translated by Robert Schultz (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1966), 105.
[192] Ibid., 105-106.
[193] Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 236.

for only in that relation can the powers of the soul, the elements of the ontological definition of man, be seen in their proper context.

With this framework in mind, we can see that Luther eschews the traditional philosophical practice of making "being" the most basic concept or category when constructing his anthropology. Luther critiques this usual ontological focus in philosophy in favor of a relational, eschatological focus. The being of a thing is not determined by an essence but by the relation of that thing to a final end and purpose: "Genuine metaphysics would have to proceed from the principle that creatures are creatures which dare not be absolutized in their being. They are not self-contained."[194] Focusing on a purely ontological thinking will result in a theology of glory and a misunderstanding of sin and justification. If the category of "being" is allowed to encompass both God and man, then a flawed analogy will be established that reduces the difference between God and man to the mere difference between the infinite and the finite.[195] When discussing God, Luther considers His highest and most basic attribute to be His freedom or self-sufficiency, a state of pure independence.[196] When discussing man, Luther considers his most basic attribute to be his radical contingency or dependence on God. Thus, the more relational, theological categories of self-sufficiency and dependency seem to be the most essential in Luther's discussion of the relationship between God and man, and therefore, Luther relegates ontological speculation and the category of "being" to a lower order.

Man's being is defined relationally, and, as radically dependent, he is always in *some* relation to God. That relation to God is always either one of sinful rebellion or one of repentant submission. These two opposed relations are determinative for the nature of man, and again, as a *theological* basis for his anthropology, Luther argues that they are more basic than the Scholastic

---

[194] Von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 69-70.
[195] Ibid., 150.
[196] Ibid., 34.

ontological definitions of man. Luther titles these two relations as "flesh" and "spirit."[197] Man,

insofar as he is in rebellion against God, is essentially flesh and, insofar as he is repentant and

submissive to God, is essentially spirit. Paul Althaus summarizes Luther's distinction:

> "The distinction between 'spirit' and 'flesh' is completely different from the division of man into spirit, soul, and body which may be found in Scripture (1 Thess. 5:23). This latter distinction is primarily anthropological, the former is theological. It does not differentiate pieces or parts of human nature but describes the quality of that nature's relationship to God. It thus refers to the entire man, that is, to spirit, soul, and body at one and the same time. On all three levels man can be either 'spirit' or 'flesh,' that is, either good or evil."[198]

By defining man holistically and as first and foremost a contingent being in a certain relation to

God, Luther incorporates the best elements of the Scholastic philosophical anthropologies into a

higher theological anthropology. In so doing, Luther opens the way for significantly different

conceptions of sin and justification.

B. Luther's Doctrine of Sin

The Scholastics tend to define sin primarily in terms of a quality of an act. Sin is the

absence of a rectitude or condition that would make a certain act good or meritorious. One only

commits sins. In contrast to this, Luther draws on concepts from his anthropology and asserts

that sin is a state of being.[199] Here is the application of Luther's distinction between "flesh" and

"spirit" as basic descriptions of man: Man *is* a sinner. To be in sin is thus a basic description of

the whole person, not just a description of certain acts.[200] Lohse describes Luther's concept of

sin succinctly: "…the nature of sin is ultimately unbelief, the lack of trust in God, the absence of

love for God. …Thus sin is the desire to set oneself in place of God, not allowing God to be

---

[197] Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 153.
[198] Ibid., 153-154.
[199] Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 71.
[200] Martin Luther, *Disputation Concerning Justification*, Translated by Lewis Spitz, In *Luther's Works*, Vol. 34, edited by Lewis Spitz, (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 153.

one's God."[201] Since man's relationship with God is determinative for his entire being, this state

of sin will have a controlling effect on the range and direction of the powers of the soul.

Luther explicitly affirms that the rational powers of the human soul are diminished by

sin.[202] However, he does not believe that these powers are completely erased. The intellect and

will remain as such, but rather than freely pursuing God as the ultimate good, they are directed

toward evil and are wholly under the power of sin:

> "Since these things stand firm and that most beautiful and most excellent of all creatures,
> which reason is even after sin, remains under the power of the devil, it must still be
> concluded that the whole man and every man…nevertheless is and remains guilty of sin
> and death, under the power of Satan."[203]

Luther emphasizes this corruption of the powers of the soul in his *Disputation Against Scholastic*

Theology. There he argues that reason and will are both directed toward sin, and they are

directed in this way *by man's nature*, which is the nature of "flesh": "In brief, man by nature has

neither correct precept nor good will."[204] Since man's "nature" is not something static and

unchanging but rather something dynamic and radically dependent on his relation to God, Luther

can affirm that sin represents a radical change of man's nature, not simply a privation of some

powers of the soul or a loss of original righteousness. Man is like a ship with the Devil at the

helm. The sails, rudder, hull, and wheelhouse are damaged yet still partly intact. However, they

are not his to use as he pleases. All the elements necessary to sail a true course are present, but

they are not in man's control, and he is inexorably set on a course to perdition.

If sin drastically changes the nature of a human person, what becomes of the image of

God in that individual? Aquinas and Scotus tend to characterize the image of God primarily in

---

[201] Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 250.
[202] Luther, *Disputation Concerning Justification*, 155.
[203] Luther, *Disputation Concerning Man*, 139.
[204] Martin Luther, *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*, Translated by Harold Grimm, In *Luther's Works*, Vol.
31, edited by Harold Grimm, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1957), 11.

terms of the ontological dimension of the human person. To be in the image of God means to have intellect and will. Because their analyses do not progress to the higher theological dimension of man, both thinkers cannot easily accommodate both a strong conception of sin that corrupts the powers of the soul and the view that the image of God is somewhat preserved even in sinners. For Luther, all these powers of the soul (memory, intellect, and will) are completely corrupted by sin.[205] However, these powers of the soul are corrupted to the point of being unusable, but they are not completely lost, for then the sinner would cease to be human.[206] Luther carefully affirms that man's powers of the soul remain in the sinful person, even if the corruption that is sin has put those powers beyond our active control.[207] Man still retains intellect and will as *passive* capacities by which we can receive the grace that God actively gives to us in redemption.[208] This passive capacity still remains to distinguish man from the rest of the created universe, but this passive capacity can *only* be actualized relationally by an unmerited act of God. Here more than anywhere else, we see how Luther transcends the Aristotelian anthropologies of his predecessors. Because of his multi-leveled anthropology, Luther is able to affirm two essential things regarding sin's effects on man. First, sin does not *destroy* man's nature, if man's nature is considered in the Aristotelian, ontological sense as the possession of an intellectual soul. Even sinful man still possesses the same soul with the same powers, albeit having lost control of those powers to sin. Second, sin radically changes man's nature, if man's nature is considered theologically as being a creature in a certain relationship with God, one of

---

[205] Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, 1:26 [W, XLII, 45-46]. In *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5*. Translated by George Schick. In *Luther's Works*. Vol. 1, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 61.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 256.
[208] Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 157.

either submission or rebellion. These two affirmations are lynchpins for Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone and his assault on the medieval conceptions of merit.

While Aquinas and Scotus viewed the image of God in man in ontological terms, relating it to the faculties of reason and will, Luther understood the image of God in relational terms, and this affects his view of the effects of sin. In the *Lectures on Genesis*, he gives a few comments that clarify the relation between the image of God and sin. Although he is not completely clear, Luther seems to imply that there can be a sense in which the image is lost after the Fall because sin entails the loss of the right relationship with God. We were created to be in a particular fellowship with God, and this relationality is the divine image when considered from a theological, relational perspective.[209] However, Luther qualifies this statement. In our current state, we are under condemnation and sin, and therefore, we cannot understand the image in a positive sense because the understanding has been so corrupted. The actual content of the image is foreign to us. We do not have a view of this fully-restored relationship from the inside, and so we can conceive of it only in formal terms.[210] Thus, Luther cannot describe the image of God and its qualities in any more specific terms. It does not appear that Luther claims that all aspects of the image are completely lost after the Fall. It may be instructive to offer a distinction between the image of God considered in its theological-relational aspect and in its ontological aspect. Luther seems to be arguing that the relational aspect of the image suffers a clean break in the rebellion of the whole individual against God, but he appears to leave room for an ontological concept of the image—perhaps describable as the possession of intellect and will— which would be severely diminished and distorted as a result of sin but not entirely lost. However, as we have said, he is skeptical about our ability to describe these possible aspects of

---

[209] Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, 1:26 [W, XLII, 46-47]. In *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5*, 62-63.
[210] Ibid.

the image accurately and believes that, given the noetic effects of sin, no such ontological description of the image should be given definitively. The result of Luther's point is that the loss of the relational aspect of the image through sin destroys any possibility of a direct and unbroken communication with God through either action or contemplation: "Religious speculations and holiness by works are two consequences of a single human desire—the desire for an unbroken and direct communion with God."[211] God's judgment for sin, among other things, involves a decisive break in the relation to man, and this judgment is reality-constitutive.[212] The higher abilities of the soul have been corrupted and henceforth the understanding of the supernatural is only given to faith through grace. Faith and grace, which are simply two ways of describing one work of God, become key concepts in Luther's formulation of the doctrine of justification.

C. Luther's Doctrine of Justification

The amount of scholarly material on Luther's concept of justification is staggering. Nothing approaching a comprehensive account of this doctrine or even an aspect of it is possible here. In lieu of this, I will confine myself to indicating a few broad points in Luther's view which illustrate his differences from the Scholastic views already discussed. Since man's powers are completely under the control of the sinful nature, man cannot in any way prepare himself for grace or cultivate any disposition toward righteousness.[213] Man is justified by faith alone. Such is the standard summary of the Reformation doctrine that Luther propounds.

Luther's emphasis on justification by faith can only be understood on a careful investigation of his concept of faith. We will begin with two negative delimitations of the concept of faith in Luther. First, faith is neither a power of the soul nor does it arise from the

---

[211] Von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 20.
[212] Ibid., 115.
[213] Luther, *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*, 11.

powers of the soul.[214] In contrast to the formulations of Aquinas and Scotus, faith is not a supernatural habit implanted in the human soul; it is not a power that becomes the proper possession of the individual. The broader implication is that faith is not a quality which inheres in the faithful person in the same way that a virtue inheres in the virtuous person under the Aristotlian system. A second limitation on the concept of faith is that faith is not something that can be derived from experience.[215] Luther always regarded Hebrews 11:1 as clearly defining faith as dealing with things unseen, and thus not something that could be abstracted from experience or derived from experience by some process of human reasoning.[216] Thus, faith is not simply a completion of human nature by the addition of supernatural quality, nor can it be considered a type of supernatural "experience" that exists in a linear progression from or direct analogy with experience of the natural realm.

With these caveats in place, what then is the positive relationship between faith and justification for Luther? First, faith does not acquire justification, as though faith were itself a work that merited God's approval.[217] Faith is the form in which salvation is received. God *gives* faith, and this faith just *is* salvation and justification. This point of view destroys any question of reciprocity or merit regarding salvation and affirms that man contributes nothing to his own salvation. Second, the repentance that is an integral element of faith depends on a proper view of man. The 18th thesis of the *Heidelberg Disputation* states the following: "It is certain that man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ."[218] To have faith in God is simultaneously to reject all faith and confidence in one's self and works.

---

[214] Von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 91-92.
[215] Ibid., 99.
[216] Ibid., 36.
[217] Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 261.
[218] Martin Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation*, Translated by Harold Grimm, In *Luther's Works*, Vol. 31, edited by Harold Grimm, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1957), 51.

Faith in God is only possible on this condition: that a person recognize himself and his works as being intrinsically worthless.[219]

Another consequence of Luther's anthropology distinguishes him even further from the Scholastic view. Contra Aquinas and Scotus, Luther argues that faith does not complete nature but is instead contrary to nature: "It is up to God alone to give faith contrary to nature, and ability to believe contrary to reason. That I love God is the work of God alone."[220] Since Luther has defined the nature of man holistically, the nature of the sinner is completely sinful. God's justification of the sinner is not a completion or perfection of that nature but an entirely new creation with a new nature.

Finally, Luther's concept of "alien righteousness" is the most decisive break from both Thomism and Scotism. Both great scholastics held to a largely Aristotelian virtue-based account of righteousness. Even if God originally infused man with the unmerited virtue of charity by which man loves God above all else, man nonetheless had to develop those virtues and, on the basis of man's virtue, he was considered righteous and merited eternal life. On Luther's view, justification takes place when the believer is imputed Christ's righteousness.[221] It is an "alien" righteousness that is neither the product of man's works nor a property or quality of man's soul that he owns and develops through his own efforts.[222] Righteousness is not given to us in the sense that we are enabled by God to *produce* our own righteousness, but instead we are given Christ's righteousness as a free gift such that it is our possession but not our product.[223] Paul Althaus emphasizes the implications of this view for sanctification:

---

[219] Ibid., 53.
[220] Luther, *Disputation Concerning Justification*, 160.
[221] Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, 260-261.
[222] Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 227.
[223] Luther, *Disputation Concerning Justification*, 178.

"This means that passive righteousness is not more and more replaced and limited by active righteousness, the alien righteousness is not more and more replaced by man's own. Man, including the Christian man, remains a sinner his whole life long and cannot possibly live and have worth before God except through this alien righteousness, the imputation of Christ's righteousness."[224]

Man does not become more and more righteous in himself through the development of virtues. Thus he does not develop an intrinsic holiness with which to merit eternal life.

It is clear that Luther's conception of justification is thoroughly Christocentric insofar as he emphasizes the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer as the necessary positive content of justification. However, it is not immediately clear what this imputation involves if it is to have more significance and force than simply a forensic declaration. We have already seen that justification is not brought about through the bestowal of an inherent trait but through incorporation into the reality of Christ.[225] Under Luther's anthropology, the relationship of the individual to God is the most basic constituent of the person and is wholly reality-constitutive. Under sin, the reality of the relationship is that God and man are opposed and the world which is experienced outside faith is one of condemnation. Justification is an in-breaking of Christ into the reality of the world condemned and incorporating the sinner into a new reality, the reality of Christ.[226] When commenting on Galatians 2:20, Luther attempts to describe this process and argues that the life of the believer, and consequently the basis for justification, is wholly based on incorporation into Christ. Although it cannot adequately be described, it involves recognizing that, for the believer, there is no such thing as an independent "I" outside of Christ but that, at the deepest level of reality, the believer and Christ are united and inseparable.[227] This is not to say

---

[224] Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 229.
[225] Von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 116.
[226] Ibid., 115.
[227] Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians, 1535*, 2:20 [W, XL, 282-283]. In *Lectures on Galatians, 1535: Chapters 1-4*. Translated by Jaroslav Pelikan. In *Luther's Works*. Vol. 26, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Walter Hansen (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 167.

that the mind of the believer and the mind of Christ are merged into one subjective

consciousness, but that their identities are so intertwined that even God cannot but see the

believer and Christ "as one person."[228] Christ's righteousness can thus be said to be truly mine

even if it is nonetheless wholly Christ's:

> "But so far as justification is concerned, Christ and I must be so closely attached that He
> lives in me and I in Him. …Because He lives in me, whatever grace, righteousness, life,
> peace, and salvation there is in me is all Christ's; nevertheless, it is mine as well, by the
> cementing and attachment that are through faith, by which we become as one body in the
> Spirit."[229]

This incorporation into Christ is nothing other than justification and, since it involves the

restoration of this relationship to God, justification also entails a restoration of the image of God:

"And so the Gospel brings it about that we are formed once more according to that familiar and

indeed better image, because we are born again into eternal life or rather into the hope of eternal

life by faith, that we may live in God and with God and be one with Him, as Christ says (John

17:21)."[230] Thus, Luther's doctrine of justification represents a complete break from all merit-

based concepts of justification in the Scholastics, even the moderate positions of Aquinas which

reflect the influence of Augustine, and the clearly relational and theological elements of his

anthropology have a decisive impact on how he formulates his concepts of sin and justification.

VI. Conclusion

The foregoing analysis has sought to establish two parallel theses. First, the clash

between Scholastic conceptions of justification and Luther's conception of justification is not an

isolated theological debate. Luther's Reformation theology is a complete system with unity and

depth, and it stands against the trends of medieval theology as a whole, not simply in particular

doctrines. Even though the doctrine of justification is, for Luther, the most important doctrine, it

---

[228] Ibid., 2:20 [W, XL, 283-285], In *Lectures on Galatians, 1535,* 168.
[229] Ibid., 2:20 [W, XL, 282-285], In *Lectures on Galatians, 1535,* 167-168.
[230] Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, 1:26 [W, XLII, 47-48]. In *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5,* 64.

is not formulated in isolation but must be considered in conjunction with the entirety of one's theological system, incorporating insights from the doctrines of creation, man, and sin. In tracing the development of doctrine, we can more easily see the connections between various doctrines and develop an eye for the harmony and unity of philosophical and theological systems. Second, the contrast between Luther and the Scholastics also represents a contrast between Luther and Aristotle. It is undeniable that the use of philosophical categories in theology is often desirable for illuminating our understanding but can also introduce misleading influences into theological reasoning. While I tend to consider that the incorporation of Aristotelian moral philosophy into the Christian doctrines of sin and justification was an error, the argument of this paper does not depend on that conclusion. The defense of Luther's theology in contrast to his Catholic opponents and the other Reformers is not my present concern. Even those who view the incorporation of Aristotelianism into Christian thought as a good and proper move can benefit from careful scrutiny of the power that such ideas have to influence broad and diverse aspects of Christian doctrine. Whether for good or for ill, the philosophical insights and categories we adopt will almost always have strong reverberations throughout the entirety of our theology.

Works Cited

Althaus, Paul. *The Theology of Martin Luther*. Translated by Robert Schultz. Philadelphia, PA:

　　Fortress Press, 1966.

Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*. Vol. 1 and 2. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican

　　Province. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1981.

Aristotle. *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*. Vol. 1 and 2.

　　Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

Bettoni, Efrem. *Duns Scotus: The Basic Principles of His Philosophy*. Translated and Edited by

　　Bernardine Bonansea. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979.

Bonansea, Bernardine. *Man and His Approach to God in John Duns Scotus*. Lanham, MD:

　　University Press of America, 1983.

Clarke, W. Norris. "Living on the Edge: The Human Person as 'Frontier Being' and

　　Microcosm." *International Philosophical Quarterly* 36.2 (1996): 183-199.

＿＿＿＿＿＿. *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics*. Notre Dame,

　　IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001.

Copleston, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy, Vol. 1: Greece and Rome*. New York:

　　Doubleday, 1962.

＿＿＿＿＿＿. *A History of Philosophy, Vol. 2: Medieval Philosophy*. New York: Doubleday,

　　1962.

Cross, Richard. *Duns Scotus*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Davies, Brian. *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.

Downing, Andrew. "Sin and Its Relevance to Human Nature in the *Summa Theologiae*." *The*

　　Heythrop Journal 50 (2009): 793-805.

George, Timothy. *Theology of the Reformers*. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1988.

Lear, Jonathan. *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Inagaki, B. Ryosuke. "Original Sin and Human Nature: A Consideration of the Concept of Nature in Thomas Aquinas." In *Nature in Medieval Thought: Some Approaches East and West,* Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters, Bd. 73 (Leiden: Brill, 2000): 111-123.

Lohse, Bernhard. *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*. Translated and Edited by Roy Harrisville. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999.

Luther, Martin. *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*. Translated by Harold Grimm. In *Luther's Works*. Vol. 31, edited by Harold Grimm, 3-17, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1957.

_____. *Disputation Concerning Justification*. Translated by Lewis Spitz. In *Luther's Works*. Vol. 34, edited by Lewis Spitz, 145-197, Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1960.

_____. *Disputation Concerning Man*. Translated by Lewis Spitz. In *Luther's Works*. Vol. 34, edited by Lewis Spitz, 133-145, Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1960.

_____. *Heidelberg Disputation*. Translated by Harold Grimm. In *Luther's Works*. Vol. 31, edited by Harold Grimm, 35-71, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1957.

_____. *Lectures on Galatians, 1535: Chapters 1-4*. Translated by Jaroslav Pelikan. In *Luther's Works*. Vol. 26, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Walter Hansen. Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1963.

_____. *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5*. Translated by George Schick. In *Luther's Works*. Vol. 1, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan. Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1958.

Ozment, Steven. *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980.

Porter, Jean. "The Subversion of Virtue: Acquired and Infused Virtues in the *Summa theologiae*." *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1992): 19-41.

Ritschl, Albrect. *Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*. Translated by John Black. Edinburg: Edmonston and Douglas, 1872.

Scotus, Duns. Selections from *Lectura* I. In *Duns Scotus on Divine Love: Texts and Commentary on Goodness and Freedom, God and Humans*. Edited by A. Vos, H. Veldhuis, E. Dekker, N.W. Den Bok, and A.J. Beck. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003.

_____. Selections from *Ordinatio III*. In *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality*. Translated and Selected by Alan Wolter. Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 1997.

_____. Selections from *Quodlibet* 17, n.4 (Wadding 12:461). In *Duns Scotus*. Written by Richard Cross. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Sweeney, Eileen. "Vice and Sin (Ia IIae, qq. 71-89)." In *The Ethics of Aquinas*, Edited by Stephen J. Pope (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002): 151-168.

Verbeke, Gerard. "Man as a 'Frontier' according to Aquinas." In *Aquinas and Problems of His Time*. Edited by Gerhard Verbeke, and D. Verhels. Mediaevalia Lovaniensia, series 1, studia 5 (Louvain, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1976): 195-223.

Von Loewenich, Walther. *Luther's Theology of the Cross*. Translated by Herbert Bouman.

Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976.

Wolter, Alan. *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality*. Translated and Selected by Alan Wolter.

Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 1997.