

*And All Shall Be Changed: Virtue in the New Creation*¹

Marshall Thompson
Florida State University

Abstract

Human mortality seems to play an important role in explaining the value of human virtues. Surely we most need the virtue of courage when our lives are endangered, we most need the virtue of justice when others' lives are threatened, and we most need the virtue of temperance when faced with goods—like food and drink—that harm our health by overindulgence. This dependency on mortality poses a serious problem for Christian ethics. If the ultimate explanation of the value of the virtues appeals to their role in ameliorating the harms that stem from limitations like mortality, then the virtues will lose much of their value in the new creation, where those limitations are no more. In this paper, I argue that this threat is serious, and that there is no good way to solve the problem as long as we try to explain the value of the virtues by appeal to the benefits they provide in our current state. I argue that, nevertheless the Christian ethicist can give a powerful alternative explanation of the ultimate value of the virtues. The virtues are not first and foremost the dispositions that allow us to improve the broken world we live in, but precisely those dispositions necessary for enjoying ideal or perfect conditions. I survey the four cardinal virtues and argue that each turns out to be necessary to enjoy one of the principal features of the new creation. Justice is necessary for enjoying the rightful equalities and hierarchies of the new creation, courage is necessary for enjoying the full bodily presence of God, temperance is necessary to enjoy any pleasures for an eternity, and prudence is necessary to enjoy the activity of paradise.

Is virtue still necessary for human flourishing once humans are clothed in immortality? It seems that we most need the virtue of courage when our lives are endangered, we most need the virtue of justice when others' lives are threatened, and we most need the virtue of temperance when faced with goods—like food and drink—that harm our health by overindulgence. But this raises

¹ This is a draft of a paper forthcoming in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*. If possible, please cite the published version. You can email me at mjthompson@fsu.edu for details.

a problem for the Christian ethicist: if virtue is most important when we are confronted with death, sorrow, crying, and pain, will virtue matter less once these former things are passed away? If love hath no greater manifestation, then has virtue peaked this side of eternity? And if not, what is the value of virtue in the new creation?

This paper develops in three parts. First, I present the worry that moral virtues are less significant in the new creation. Second, I explain why Christians should find that insignificance unacceptable. Third, I present a solution to the problem—arguing that the value of the virtues is chiefly explained by virtue enabling enjoyment of ideal conditions. I conclude by suggesting that my solution may have broader explanatory power and gesturing at directions for future work.²

Part 1: Decadent Virtues

In Chapter 6 of her book *Therapy of Desire*, Martha Nussbaum argues that the “structure” of human virtue is inseparable from “our finitude, and in particular our mortality.”³ The general claim about finitude, even apart from the particulars of mortality, is compelling. For example, consider the widow’s offering in Luke 21. The widow is more generous than the wealthy giver because she gave out of her poverty. The rich must give far more than the poor to exhibit the

² This paper has been significantly improved by the feedback of others.

I received helpful content suggestions during two presentations of this view. I first developed the view in conversation with my Fall 2018 Introduction to Philosophy class. I then presented the core ideas to those of the Florida State philosophy department who attended my lunchtime talk. Michael Bukoski deserves a special shout-out for the detailed feedback he provided both during and after my presentation. I also received helpful grammar and writing feedback from Dean Thompson, Jane Thompson and Mitali Perkins—those three, in addition to catching a frightening array of typos, improved the readability of the paper enormously.

I also am extremely grateful to Grace Thompson, John Schwenkler, Nick Cisneros, Paul Rezkalla, and Spencer Smith who each provided feedback on multiple drafts of the paper. Finally, my deepest thanks are due to Bob Bishop and Tucker Sigourney who read through at least five complete drafts of this paper and edited, at a conservative estimate, over seventy-five thousand words. There is no part of this paper that has not been significantly improved by Bob and Tucker.

³ 226. While I focus on the version of Nussbaum’s argument presented in *Therapy of Desire*, Nussbaum also argues for this conclusion in “Transcending Humanity” (pages 371-78, esp. 374-76), which is in turn an elaboration on theme in Part III of *The Fragility of Goodness*. All Nussbaum quotes are from *Therapy of Desire*, though no doubt there are times when my exposition of Nussbaum influenced by “Transcending Humanity”.

virtue of generosity. In the giving of ten dollars, a person with ten dollars to her name is more generous than a person with a thousand dollars to her name. Similarly, the millionaire who donates half a million dollars is more generous than the billionaire who donates the same amount.

The general principle is simple: the wealthier a person, the more generosity requires of her. There is a finitude to wealth that makes generosity a possibility for all givers. Suppose there were an infinitillionaire; such a person could never be financially generous because no amount of giving could ever be financially sacrificial. Financial generosity is structured by financial finitude.⁴ In turn, since other virtues play a role in human lives and since humans are finite creatures, it seems likely that in general human virtues are possible only for creatures with human limitations.

Beyond making virtue possible, finitude also seems like a condition of the virtues being valuable to us.⁵ For instance, it is unclear what value intellectual virtues would have for an omniscient being. And why would an omnipotent person need the self-discipline to acquire moral, emotional, or physical strength?

Most features of human finitude will remain in the new creation; resurrection makes us neither endlessly wealthy, omniscient, nor omnipotent.⁶ However, moving from a fallen to a

⁴ This raises interesting questions about the generosity of God; however, I leave them aside for purposes of this paper.

⁵ I am using 'value' here as a catchall term to mean that we have reason to care about possessing the virtues. Different arguments in this paper try to cash out value in different ways. Thus, I use various terms in different arguments so as to be as precise as possible. For example, I use the language of the virtues being 'necessary,' 'important,' and 'contributive' which descend in strength. If a virtue is necessary for something, it means some good cannot be obtained without the virtue. If virtue is important to a good, it means that virtue is a central or major contributor to that good. Similarly, when I get to my own position, I begin to differentiate final and instrumental goodness, as well as intrinsic and extrinsic goodness (see footnote 17 for further clarification).

⁶ There may be a sense in which resurrection makes us omniscient/omnipotent. Augustine at times gestures at the thought that in fully knowing God, the creator of everything, we come to know everything ourselves. Such considerations, while interesting, are left to the side in this paper.

perfected state does remove one central human limitation: our mortality. If our mortality is a condition on either possessing or valuing human virtues, then we have a troubling problem for Christian ethics. To see the force of the problem, consider the four cardinal virtues.

Courage

Nussbaum argues that mortality is necessary for human courage by examining literary portrayals of immortal lives. She concludes that the gods of Greek mythology are particularly apt examples of an immortal human life and argues that they are rightly portrayed without courage. Since “courage consists in a certain way of acting and reacting in the face of death,” and since the Greek gods do not face death, they can at most have a “pale simulacrum” of courage in their attitudes towards pain.⁷

Now, in the context of courage, Nussbaum’s conclusion is too strong. At most, Nussbaum shows that the Greek gods never act courageously, not that the gods are incapable of possessing courageous dispositions. Humans, too, who never face danger could be courageous if they would do the right thing were they, counterfactually, in dangerous situations. Similarly, immortal gods could be courageous if they would have risked their lives had they been mortal.⁸

However, this response only reveals how meaningless courage is to the gods. Our censure of cowardly gods amounts to the charge that they would act poorly were they beings radically unlike the beings they are—were they subject to limits to which they are not, and never will be, subject. What could motivate the gods to care about this accusation? Just as I would not be

⁷ *The Therapy of Desire*, 227.

⁸ One could salvage Nussbaum’s strong conclusion if acting virtuously is necessary to develop virtues. Because the gods cannot act courageously, they cannot develop courage and so can never be courageous. This move, however, means we cannot extend Nussbaum’s argument to the new creation. After all, even if we cannot develop new virtue in the new creation, we could still have the virtues we developed prior to our earthly deaths. Indeed, the fact that courage can only be developed here in the fallen world seems like an important premise for many versions of the soul-building theodicy.

moved by the criticism that I lack the physical abilities to hunt with a spear, the gods would not be moved by the charge that they are cowards given that they will never need courage.

One might respond that the gods still need courage to face other risks. I am rarely, if ever, in life-threatening situations, yet there are plenty of cases in which my cowardice stops my pursuit of the good. My cowardice manifests not in the inordinate safeguarding of my life, but rather in the inordinate safeguarding of my reputation, position, and happiness. If I am “courageous” in overcoming this cowardice, this stifled praise is itself damning for the significance of courage. Even if courage is still somewhat important to a veteran following retirement, still courage is less valuable than it was during active service. This problem is magnified when considering the new creation, as courage becomes less valuable with every new perfection of security and safety we append to our picture of paradise.

Justice

Nussbaum also argues that there may be tension between the levity of immortal interests and the seriousness of our desire for justice.

Political justice and private generosity are concerned with the allocation of resources like food, seen as necessary for life itself, and not simply for play or amusement. The profound seriousness and urgency of human thought about justice arises from the awareness that we all really need the things that justice distributes, and need them for life itself. If that need were removed, or made non-absolute, distribution would not matter, or not matter in the same way and to the same extent; and the virtue of justice would become optional or pointless accordingly. Aristotle is right to say that the idea of debates about justice and contract among the gods is a ridiculous idea . . .⁹

It is bad to cheat in games, but that badness is trifling next to oppression of the global poor.

Nussbaum’s thought is that the seriousness of justice assumes real need, which will not be present in paradise, and that this argument applies both to public justice *and* to private generosity. In Bishop Joseph Butler’s sermon on compassion, he echoes the latter application

⁹ *The Therapy of Desire*, 228.

and suggests that the new creation is “to be considered as a foreign country” that contains “no follies to be overlooked, no miseries to be pitied, no wants to be relieved,” and where compassion “will happily be lost, as there will be no objects to exercise it upon.”¹⁰

Thomas Aquinas, in contrast to Nussbaum, thinks that justice is the virtue that most obviously persists in our future immortal state because our lives will still “be subject to God,” and subjection to a superior is a component of justice.¹¹ Nussbaum and Aquinas are both deeply insightful thinkers, yet Aquinas seems to treat Nussbaum’s argument as obviously wrong. Who is correct?

We can explain this disagreement by making a distinction. Aquinas divides justice into commutative and distributive halves.¹² Commutative justice governs the mutual dealings between private persons; distributive justice governs the dealings between persons as members of a single community and shared common good. Breaking a promise, for example, is a commutative injustice, while allowing another to die of poverty is a distributive injustice. It is both a commutative and distributive injustice to allow another to die of poverty by refusing to pay them for their labor. Aquinas argues that our rightful subjection to God’s authority would continue for eternity; such a duty falls under commutative justice. Nussbaum, on the other hand, explicitly limits her argument to “political” or distributive justice. As such, though Aquinas and Nussbaum likely disagree about the persistence of the virtue of distributive justice in the new creation, Aquinas’s argument does not suggest that Nussbaum made an obvious mistake.

Is there any reason to think that commutative justice might also be less valuable after we die?

¹⁰ *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*, 59.

¹¹ *Summa Theologiae*, I-II q. 67 a. 1.

¹² II-II q. 61 a. 1.

Yes, at least if we focus on certain components of commutative justice. Take as an example the commutative obligations to keep promises. Much human good hangs on our ability to rely on one another's promises.¹³ But this seems especially true when considered in light of our mortality. First, in trusting others we become vulnerable to consequences if the other person breaks their promise. If humans are mortal, then one consequence I can become vulnerable to is death. Because death is a particularly serious consequence, that possibility means that more human good depends on promise-keeping than it would if death were not a possibility. Second, because we die, promising is one of the only ways to forward our causal influence past the point of our death. Thus, when expounding Anscombe's account of promise-keeping, Phillipa Foot uses death as a central illustration: "it is easy to see how much good hangs on the trustworthiness involved if one thinks, for instance, of the long dependency of the human young and what it means to parents to be able to rely on a promise securing the future of their children in case of their death."¹⁴ Death plays a significant role in increasing the importance of promise-keeping to human good. This suggests that some of the value of major aspects of commutative justice between human beings, such as promise keeping, is conditioned on mortality.

Temperance

Temperance seems particularly important for mortal creatures in two ways. First, the import is explained partially by the impact of intemperance on human health. Gluttony risks death in a straightforward way. We require "moderation" or temperance as the "management of appetite in a being for whom excesses of certain sorts can bring illness and eventually death."¹⁵

¹³ Anscombe, "On Promising and Its Justice, and Whether It Needs Be Respected In Foro Interno," 73–74.

¹⁴ *Natural Goodness*, 45.

¹⁵ Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 228.

Second, temperance's importance in a fallen world is greater than in a perfect paradise because occasions for intemperance may not exist in the new creation. We suggest to the intemperate that they avoid exposing themselves to temptation. For example, an American consumer is advised not to go grocery shopping while hungry. Why do we make this suggestion? Because the intemperance of the average American is less dangerous when there are few enticements to deviate from the good. This suggests temperance is less valuable in a world without temptations. Bishop Butler refers to a virtue's loss of value when discussing patience in his "Analogy of Religion," arguing "that there can be no scope for patience" in the new creation "when sorrow shall be no more."¹⁶ It is the same with temperance.

Prudence

Nussbaum does not discuss the virtue of prudence because her argument is that it is impossible for immortal creatures to *possess* certain virtues. Prudence is possible for immortal gods—even immortal creatures can make better or worse choices—so Nussbaum does not explore it. However, could prudence be *less valuable* in eternity, even if not impossible? A case may be made for this conclusion.

First, there are *prima facie* reasons to think prudence is less significant if mistakes do not result in death and suffering. We often commend prudence in times in which a bad decision could result in terrible consequences. For example, I am more concerned with a presidential candidate's wisdom than with the wisdom of the child who rakes my leaves. This difference is explained precisely by the dire consequences of a political leader's failure. We care most about prudence in high-stakes contexts. Prudence is therefore more valuable when mistakes cause greater harm. This is significant because it seems like there are few, if any, high-stakes contexts

¹⁶ *The Analogy of Religion*, 148.

we would face in the new creation. After all, no one will suffer, much less die, because of any mistake I make. Death and suffering will not follow imprudent decisions when death and suffering are no more.

Second, practical wisdom is the virtue by which we select means to the attainment of our rightful ends. Prudence is important this side of eternity because we are unlikely to obtain our good without it. But if the new creation entails that we have achieved our ultimate good—worshipping in the bodily presence of God—then prudence is no longer as valuable.¹⁷

Part 2: The Menace of Mensa

Can the Christian simply accept that the virtues lose much of their value in the new creation?

After all, there are many important and useful skills which are valuable only because of our fallen condition. We admire those who make the effort to become doctors and anesthesiologists, despite our awareness of the lower value those skills will have in a world without sickness and pain. Plenty of skills, from firefighting to grave robbing, are only valuable given our current mortality. Why not append virtue to the list?

Indeed, even if we accept that the virtues have an extrinsic value that depends upon our mortality, we can still understand the virtues as having final value as an ultimate end of mortal human life.¹⁸ There is remarkable final value in many of the concertos Bach produced, for

¹⁷ A final worry you might have about the value of prudence is that prudence acts as a master virtue. It is important because without prudence none of the other virtues help us achieve our ends. Thus, the courageous person may risk their life to save a stranger, but only if they can correctly reason about what heroic acts will likely succeed. In this way, if the other virtues are of less value, then prudence too is of less value. The reason I do not consider this argument in the paper is because it would be redundant. If I can successfully answer the objections to courage, justice and temperance, then this objection to prudence will be resolved as well.

¹⁸ Following Christine Korsgaard in “Two Distinctions in Goodness.” I am using ‘extrinsic’ as a contrast word with ‘intrinsic’ and ‘final’ as a contrast word with ‘instrumental.’ Something is extrinsically good if its goodness depends on something external to itself; it does not entail that the object is only valuable as a means to some further end. For example, I might find the possession of a treasured letter finally valuable, not just instrumentally valuable for containing useful advice, because it was the last letter my deceased parent sent me. While the letter is valuable for its own sake, its value depends on extrinsic facts and relations (my father dying when

example, but that value depends on the extrinsic facts of human auditory processing. If there were no rational creatures with auditory senses, then the production of beautiful music would not be an important end of human lives. No one thinks the dependence of music's value on auditory processing makes it less important as an end of auditory life. Thus, the extrinsic dependence of virtue's value on mortality is even less a problem for that value than is the extrinsic dependence of medicine's value on death. You might think that medicine is both extrinsically valuable and also merely instrumentally valuable as a means to keeping people from pain and death. By comparison, virtue could be extrinsically valuable and yet still a final end of human life.

The Preliminary Problems

While we can accept that the virtues are extrinsically valuable final ends, there are three reasons Christians should be unwilling to accept that virtue's value depends upon our mortality.

The Inverse Relation of Virtue and Age

First, the conclusion that the virtues lose their value in the new creation could entail that the value of the virtues tapers off with age. I would advise students not to study musical composition if I knew that all humans would go deaf in a year. Similarly, I could advise those near death not to lay up for themselves virtues on earth, where germs and storms destroy and where murderers break in and kill, if I knew that they were near a future without death or pain. However, the idea that we have less reason to be concerned with our character as we age should strike us as both profoundly counterintuitive and unrecognizable as a principle of Christian ethics.

Significance, Suffering, and Souls

Second, much of Christian tradition has taught that the presence of suffering is, at least in part, a divine grace ordained for the development of virtue. Christian philosophers, for instance, have

he did, who wrote the letter, etc.). In contrast, something is instrumentally valuable if it is not valuable for its own sake, but only as a means to a further end. It is not an end-in-itself.

argued that soul-building is one of the chief explanations for why God allows evil. And even without endorsing a soul-building theodicy, the pastoral thought that one can achieve comfort by recognizing the refining power of suffering is prominent in Christian teaching. Understanding suffering as a means to the development of virtue plays an important role in enabling the Christian to see even suffering as a part of divine grace.

If virtue's value depends upon suffering and death, suffering and death cannot be understood as gracious means to virtue. A coach might put her athletes through a grueling practice. If the players ask why it is so difficult, then she could rightly respond that the grueling nature of the practice is necessary to equip them with certain physical and mental dispositions. However, this is only a good response if those mental and physical dispositions are valuable for competitions. If these dispositions are not helpful for external success, but rather *merely* help one perform better in grueling workouts, then the athletes are left without a good justification for the workout's difficulty.¹⁹ A similar circularity exists in the view of earthly suffering as a divine grace for purposes of character refinement if it turns out virtues are extrinsically valuable only in light of our earthly suffering.

¹⁹ You might think the way certain people workout is a clear counterexample to my claim here. While many workout either to improve performance in competition, or to improve physical health, others seem to simply pursue their own excellence in the workouts—take those who try to beat their personal records in running, and seem to do so just for its own sake.

This can plausibly show that exercise can, at times, be a final, rather than instrumental, good. However, I do not think it is a plausible candidate for an intrinsic good. To see why, just note how bizarre the behavior would be if it was a practice that we did not think tied to any good outside the practice—for example, someone who works diligently to coat different shapes with lemon juice so they can become faster and faster at coating shapes with lemon juice. This behavior is unintelligible in a way that fanatical exercise is not, precisely because the lemon coater is pursuing a skill that does not seem to relate to any external good at all.

Perhaps exercise is an end in itself, but it is only an end in itself because physical excellence is in turn tied to other forms of human wellbeing.

Elegance is Everything

Finally, if the value of the virtues depends on our mortality, we are left with a less elegant overall Christian account of the world. For most Christian accounts, both salvation and sanctification follow upon faithful conversion, but if virtue is primarily valuable because we will die, then once we are saved the value of sanctification begins to disappear. God grants us courage to face death, but only after we have acquired a faith that assures us death has lost its sting. God grants us temperance, but he grants it only to those who will be raised with an imperishable body. On this account, God holding out sanctification till after justification is like a doctor refusing to prescribe any symptomatic treatment until the cure has taken place.

Why, then, is sanctification so central to the Christian life? We are ultimately destined for a life without suffering and death, and our ultimate good is found on that distant shore. We will spend an eternity in a perfected state and only a brief time in a fallen world. Why then does it seem so important for Christianity that we become equipped to handle *this life* well? If the virtues are ultimately important for our lives in the new creation, then it is easy to explain the Christian focus on virtue. But if the virtues are primarily valuable for our lives now, then we lack a compelling explanation to counter Nussbaum's conclusion that the need for virtue expires with us.

There are at least three stories one might tell to reconcile Christianity with the conclusion that the virtues lose much of their value in the new creation. All three fail.

Story One: That They Might Enter into Joy

First, a Christian could argue that we can explain the value of the virtues, even as we approach death, because they are an entry condition into paradise. Neglecting virtue as one gets older would be like neglecting SAT prep as one enters junior year and justifying this choice by pointing out you won't need to take the SAT in college. It is important that we have our souls

refined, not so we can be virtuous in paradise, but so we can deserve to enter paradise at all. Even *sola*-thumping Protestants will acknowledge that only those with a regenerate faith enter salvation. The virtues this side of mortality, according to this story, are entry conditions for obtaining everlasting life and have no value afterwards.

However, a picture on which the virtues are *merely* valuable as entry conditions renders those very entry conditions arbitrary. Consider two possible organizations: Mensa and Pensa. Both Mensa and Pensa have a strict IQ entry requirement; only someone deemed a genius on certain standardized tests can join. The difference between Mensa and Pensa is that Mensa meetings consist of intellectual discussions and puzzles, while Pensa is a billiards club where members spend most of their time discussing celebrity gossip. To enjoy and contribute to the Mensa meetings a certain intelligence is actually required whereas the same is not true of Pensa. If you asked someone why they were studying so hard for IQ tests, they could explain that they were trying to get into Pensa. However, that explanation would only answer your first question by raising a far more mystifying one: why does Pensa insist on such an entry condition at all?

Trying to ground the value of the virtues in eternity by reference to entry conditions does not advance the debate in any meaningful way. Unless we have some reason to think these are fitting entry conditions (based on the value meeting those conditions will have after entry) we will not have an adequate explanation of the value of the virtues. Any appeal to some good-making feature of demanding virtue, for instance the good of divine justice, would circularly assume the virtues are ultimately valuable and therefore a fitting object of demand.

Story Two: Away, Away with These Instruments

The Christian might next object that it is only the lower instrumental value of the virtues that passes away with our mortality. The final value of the virtues persists, and it is that final value

that should chiefly motivate our concern with virtue. After all, if virtues were only instrumentally valuable, then those who are secure might be justified in remaining cowardly—a clearly unacceptable conclusion. The fact that the virtues are less instrumentally valuable in the new creation should not concern us any more than the fact that courage is less instrumentally valuable to those who are physically safe. The concern over a loss of instrumentality is irrelevant, this story argues, because it was never the instrumental value of the virtues that mattered.

The problem with this second story is we could reconstruct Nussbaum's challenge at another level. Rather than saying the virtue of courage loses its value because it is no longer instrumentally useful, we could instead demand an explanation for why courage has final value for a creature who has no need of courage. How might our imagined interlocutor answer this demand for an explanation of the final value of the virtues?

Those who hold this view could provide two sorts of explanations. First, they could provide a Platonic explanation according to which virtues correspond with a metaphysically independent goodness, and thus in acquiring these virtues we more fully participate in the good. The Christian version of this Platonism would maintain something like the following: God himself possesses these virtues, though perhaps only analogically, and thus when we acquire these virtues we grow closer in nature and unity to God.²⁰ What is distinctive to these Platonic arguments is that they treat the final goodness of the virtues as an intrinsic feature of the virtues. The extent to which you are courageous is the extent to which you resemble God, and the extent to which you resemble God is the extent to which you are good.

²⁰ Arguments of this sort can be found in Adams' "Finite and Infinite Goods" 13–14; and Alston's "What Euthyphro Should Have Said" (that piece by Alston is also extremely similar to what he says in "Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists")

Second, they could provide an Aristotelian explanation according to which the virtues are the excellencies of a distinctively human life because they are the dispositions which are essentially involved in our flourishing. A human is both a rational creature and a creature that experiences fear. Thus, for humans to be able to thrive consistently, we must find a way for our fears to cooperate with our rational judgements. The cooperation between our reason and fear is the virtue of courage. Rosalind Hursthouse, for instance, explains the value of the virtues by arguing that they are the most reliable bet for how to achieve happiness (though the virtues are neither necessary, nor sufficient for that end). Phillipa Foot, in contrast, explains the value of the virtues by appealing to the Aristotelian necessities that accompany our form of life. Judgements like ‘the good human keeps her promises’ are just like judgements of the form ‘a good bobcat breeds in spring.’ They are a way of picking out a distinctive form of logical thought that attaches to our understanding of life-forms. What is distinctive in these Aristotelian arguments is that they treat the final goodness of the virtues as an extrinsic feature of the virtues. Courage is valuable because courage happens to be a part of the good life. However, for another form of life courage would not be a virtue at all.

Neither the Platonic nor the Aristotelian versions of this second story will be able to answer Nussbaum’s argument that the value of virtue disappears in immortality.

Troubles in Platodise

There are two problems with Platonic attempts to secure the final value of the virtues in resurrected life by appealing to divine nature. First, if we cannot secure the value of the virtues in a mortal human’s life, a fortiori we cannot secure an account of what courage is in the divine life. If it is hard to understand what relevance courage could have for a creature who can never die, how are we going to fix the problem by appealing to the role of courage for an impassible deity? The Platonic response is intended to show that we can still value the virtues in the new creation

even if Nussbaum's argument succeeds in showing the virtues lose their instrumental value. However, if Nussbaum's argument is successful, it will undermine one of the key premises of this Platonic response—namely, that God is courageous. Thus, the Platonic response of virtues being finally valuable because they make us more like God will succeed only if we already have good reason to doubt Nussbaum's conclusion, rendering it unhelpful as a way to reconcile Nussbaum's conclusion with Christianity.²¹

There is one way this argument could still advance the debate. Some Platonists might reject Nussbaum's arguments for the strong conclusion—that it is impossible for us and for God to possess the virtues in the new creation—but might still accept my arguments for the weaker conclusion—that the virtues lack instrumental value in the new creation. Those in that position could argue God possesses the virtues as a brute fact of his nature and use that brute fact to explain the final goodness of our possession of the virtues in the next life.

Even if we set aside the explanatory inelegancies of making the goodness of courage brute in a way that could have instead made cowardice a brute good, this solution still will not work. To see why, we need to turn to my second argument. There are presumably many ways we could resemble God, some of which are more and less relevant considering the sort of creatures we are. If there were a species that never experienced fear, perhaps a super-evolved species of ant, the virtues of that creature would probably resemble different features of God. Such

²¹ Robert Adams, a defender of the sort of Christian Platonism I am suggesting, does suggest two reasons to doubt Nussbaum's conclusion in his book *Finite and Infinite Goods*. First, he argues that the virtues only need involve "fragmentary resemblance" and so for those virtues that "seem to depend on our finitude, and . . . our mortality," we need only resemble God in "what we care about, and the strength and effectiveness of our caring" (31). Second, he suggests that there might be "analogues in God of some of the limitations of human life. "For one thing, God may have taken on finitude in the incarnation, and even beyond the incarnation "the act of creating might carry with it a liability to frustration."

As I discussed in Part I of this paper, I am already inclined to reject Nussbaum's strong conclusion that finitude is necessary to possess, rather than value, the virtues. I expect something like Adams' arguments succeed as a response to Nussbaum, and thus will focus my attention on the second issue with the Platonic solution.

creatures, which never see their personal good as separable from the good of the colony, might be able to resemble the unity of life and purpose that God partakes in within the trinity, and so would have the virtue of ‘trinitarian cooperation’ rather than courage. Within the Platonic story, we still need to explain why it is bad for us to lack courage, and not bad for the ants to lack courage. The most natural explanation is that courage plays a positive role in our form of life but does not in the ant’s form of life.

To put this problem another way, note that the virtues are only one of many ways that we can resemble God. God is a great artistic creator, and certainly the production of great art is a final, and likely even intrinsic, good. Nevertheless, I am more concerned that I develop temperance than that I develop great artistic skill. Similarly, God has a deep understanding of the underlying nature of our world, and certainly the careful study of scientific reality is a final, and likely even intrinsic, good. Nevertheless, I am more concerned that my children develop into just people than that they develop into great scientists.

The virtues are a special subset of all the ways we can resemble God. They are not optional for a human life like other finally and intrinsically good resemblances. Thus, the Platonist must provide an explanation for this special significance of the virtues, and the only obvious explanation is that virtues are necessary for a good human life in a way those other excellencies are not. Thus, if Nussbaum’s argument shows those virtues are not necessary once death is no more, the Platonic rebuttal cannot differentiate the non-optional virtues from other ways we can resemble God in the new creation.²²

²² While I was revising this paper, I discovered that in *A Theory of Virtue*, Robert Adams defends a Platonic account of the sort I am sketching and explicitly extends moral virtue to include “concern for quality in intellectual and aesthetic pursuits for their own sake” (20). He acknowledges that “good taste” is a “minor” moral virtue, but it is a moral virtue nonetheless (21).

Adams acknowledges that there is an asymmetry between the standard moral virtues (like justice) and aesthetic virtues. You can be morally good without good taste, though you cannot be morally good without justice—

Resisting Aristotle

It is easier to see why the Aristotelian approach to the virtues will not provide a way to counter Nussbaum's conclusion. While Aristotelian accounts maintain the final value of the virtues, they acknowledge that virtue's value is extrinsic and depends on the role those virtues play in human lives.²³ As such, we are unable to draw the clean distinction between the 'intrinsic' and the 'instrumental' in the way we were able to in the Platonic account. Courage, says the Aristotelian, is a finally good feature of a human life—even if that very courage leads to a painful death—because courage somehow relates to life's flourishing.

Courage is a finally valuable virtue, this story argues, only because courage makes a human life go well. However, if Nussbaum is right, courage only makes a human life go well because we are mortal creatures. Thus, if we are no longer mortal in the new creation, then this radical sort of change seems to alter what sort of dispositions have final value for our lives.

Our Aristotelian interlocuter might counter that we remain human even in the new creation. And thus, distinctively human virtues are still final goods, even if we happen to be in a situation where they don't benefit us (just as temperance can be a finally good virtue, even when stranded on a desert island where it serves no role in preventing overindulgence). There are two

despite good taste and justice both being moral virtues (21-22, 36). Put another way, deficiencies in some virtues constitute vice (e.g. a deficiency in self-control constitutes the vice of incontinence), but deficiencies in other virtues do not (37).

Adams explains this asymmetry by arguing that our interests in cultural goods, such as philosophy or art, require us to relate well to other people (because our interest in those subjects involves a desire that people participate in those goods)—those with aesthetic virtues don't just value the existence of great art, but great art witnessed and enjoyed by people (45-6). This asymmetry entails that one cannot properly love art without properly loving people who enjoy the art. One can, however, properly love people without properly loving the art those people enjoy (46).

This solution is inadequate, and Adams even seems to acknowledge as much (47). It may be true that good taste requires justice while justice does not require good taste. But surely the fact that injustice vitiates taste does no explanatory work in explaining why justice is a non-optional virtue. If good taste were entirely independent of justice, it would still be the case that injustice and cowardice are moral vices. Justice and cowardice are vices in their own right and on their own. Thus, the dependency of good taste on justice cannot explain the asymmetry.

Adams concludes that even if his explanation is incomplete, other accounts "are no better off" (47). As such, I will return to this asymmetry after I have presented my own solution in footnote 26.

²³ Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, chaps. 8 & 9; Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 44-47.

problems with this rejoinder. First, what constitutes a virtue can change across periods of a creature's life. The dispositions that constitute excellence in infancy, for example polyphasic sleeping, do not constitute excellence in adulthood. It seems like the sort of metamorphosis we undergo in death and resurrection is at least as significant as the change we undergo in puberty. Second, if we are holding our nature constant across death, then why does what makes a pre-death life go well define the final goods for a post-resurrection life? Rather, shouldn't a post-resurrection life define the final goods for a pre-death life? After all, it is only in the new creation that we achieve our final telos, which seems to suggest we should look to our post-resurrection life in order to identify the finally good virtues.

Story Three: Approximations

A Christian might finally object that the pre-death virtues could simply be effective approximations of some other dispositions we will require in the new creation. Butler suggests, in the discussion of patience I mentioned earlier, "there can be no scope for patience, when sorrow shall be no more: but there may be need of a temper of mind, which shall have been formed by patience."²⁴ On this view, patience is a virtue needed for this life, but patience bears a striking resemblance to 'patience 2.0', some unknown disposition that will be needed for the next. And because we are not yet in the next life, the development of patience here and now may be the best way to develop patience 2.0. While Butler never extends this treatment to other virtues, such an extension seems plausible.

The trouble with this solution is that it is blurry—and bad vision is a notorious problem for needle-threading. If courage is too similar to courage 2.0, then Nussbaum's argument will apply to courage 2.0 as well. If courage is too dissimilar to courage 2.0, then courage 2.0 is not a

²⁴ *The Analogy of Religion*, 202.

plausible explanation of the value of courage. Either way, Nussbaum's argument presents a problem. For Butler's solution to succeed, we must, for each original virtue, postulate a virtue 2.0 at just the right conceptual distance. This solution is vague to the point of being unhelpful. By hypothesis, we cannot give much explanation of what the virtue 2.0s are like, since were they the sort of thing we could currently understand then presumably God would have directly instructed us in the development of virtue 2.0 during this life. We are left with a dubious punt to the unknown as a solution to Nussbaum's challenge.

Part 3: The Seven Irksome Sins

Virtues involve complex dispositions governing both how we act and what we enjoy. When philosophers talk about the value of the virtues, they tend to focus on the difference that virtue makes in how we act. Virtuous actions, in turn, seem to make the biggest difference in conditions of suffering and need. For example, the generous tend to give more to others than the selfish do, and generous giving tends to be most needed when others are in conditions like poverty.

Virtues however dispose us to more than merely actions. In particular, the virtuous differ from the vicious in what they enjoy. The virtuous tend to enjoy the good features of the world, while the vicious enjoy very particular deviations from the good. For example, a generous friend will tend to rejoice over news of my promotion. In contrast, an envious friend may grow bitter upon hearing the same news.

While the benefits of virtuous *action* are most clear in non-ideal conditions, the benefits of virtuous *enjoyment* are clearest in good, or ideal, conditions. The virtuous are disposed to enjoy the good, and so we should expect a correlation between goodness and the enjoyment of the virtuous.

It is not surprising that when philosophers like Nussbaum look for the value of the virtues in the new creation, they look for potential need of virtuous action. That is the natural place to look, because in our world the advantage of virtue is most clearly seen in action. For example, if you think about the primary evils caused by injustice, you rightly focus on the horrors done to those who suffer injustice, rather than the inability of the unjust to enjoy certain pleasures.²⁵ Further, because the virtuous are pained more by news of injustice than the vicious, the prevalence of ill-news in our world means the virtuous are often pained disproportionately as a consequence of their justice.

However, while it is unsurprising that philosophers look for advantages of virtuous action in the new creation, it is still the wrong place to look. In the new creation, the unjust will no longer abandon others to hunger and chains; when earth is made as heaven, the coward will not stand idle before bullying and harassment; and indeed, upon reaching that distant shore, the glutton will no longer indulge in injurious consumption, even if it is an injury done only to himself. The new creation differs from our world in being ideal, and actions tend to be most needed in non-ideal conditions.

If we look to the difference that virtue makes in what we *enjoy*, it becomes clear why the virtues are centrally important to our lives in the new creation. The ideal conditions of the new creation are good conditions that can only be enjoyed by the virtuous. Consider envy as an example. The envious person desires what is properly someone else's. My desire that a thief return my bike does not constitute envy, nor does the impoverished's desire that the wealthy send

²⁵ This focus on the evils that befall those who suffer, rather than do, injustice is the morally correct focus to have. First, because we have meaningful influence over the material conditions of those who suffer in a way we do not over the character of the vicious. Second, because God has disclosed himself as identifying, in a special sense, with those who suffer injustice—with the poor, the widow and the imprisoned. Thus, even if you agree with Plato's arguments in *The Gorgias* and *The Republic* that it is better to suffer than to do injustice, still you should focus your assistance on those who suffer injustice.

them aid. Desire for possession only rises to the level of envy when you desire what should be someone else's.²⁶ In the new creation everything will be justly distributed, as such the envious will be eternally dissatisfied while the generous will be perpetually content.

We can generalize the problem into the dilemma of the vicious. In the new creation, everything will be as it ought. And while the virtuous are disposed to enjoy that way of being, the vicious will desire things be different. Either the vicious cannot shape the world after their desire, and thus are left with ever-present dissatisfaction and unhappiness, or the vicious *can* shape the world after their image (in certain highly limited ways) and to the extent that their will is efficacious they will be driven out of unity with the good activity of salvation. Thus, the value of the virtues in the new creation is simple: the virtues are simply those dispositions of character that render enjoyable one's participation in the activity of salvation in ideal conditions.²⁷

Each cardinal virtue is necessary to enjoy one of the ideal features of the new creation.

²⁶ DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 43.

²⁷ In footnote 221 I argued that Adams' Platonic account cannot explain the asymmetry between the non-optional dispositions like courage and the optional dispositions like good taste. At this point, you might worry that my account has the same explanatory problem. Surely those with poor artistic taste or poor scientific wonder will be unable to enjoy certain ideal features of the new creation (such as the new creation's ideal beauty).

To explain this asymmetry, we need to note the difference between a lack of a particular enjoyment and finding something positively unenjoyable or distressing. If I lack good taste, I may lose out on some enjoyment of the beauty of the new creation. But there is no positive distress that pollutes my enjoyment of other goods. Consider an example. I have little architectural appreciation. Thus, if I am worshipping in a cathedral, I may miss out on the enjoyment of the beautiful building. In contrast, my architecturally talented friend may be sensitive to the majesty of the building and so enjoy something I miss. Nevertheless, my lack of positive enjoyment does nothing to prevent my enjoyment of other good things. Now consider a contrasting example. Suppose my friend is impatient. If we are worshipping in a cathedral, my friend will find the service positively unenjoyable. It will be unpleasant to be there for so long. This unpleasantness will, in turn, infect other sources of potential enjoyment. My impatient friend will likely be unable to even enjoy the architecture because boredom drives out such enjoyment.

My position is that the virtues are *necessary* to enjoy the ideal conditions of the new creation. If you lack the virtues, you don't just miss out on one source of enjoyment. Instead there is something positively unenjoyable or distressing about the state that you are in. In contrasts, other excellencies like good musical taste might give me further or unique sources of enjoyment, but the lack of that excellence does not make anything unenjoyable. Thus, we can explain the asymmetry between virtues and other excellencies by which we resemble God.

Now, poor aesthetic taste can make things unenjoyable. For example, those without an appreciation of good wine often positively dislike wine. Still, it will not be the case that those who dislike wine are unable to enjoy paradise. After all, the new creation is unlikely to be systematically characterized by the forced drinking of wine. The virtues, unlike a taste for good wine, respond to those ideal conditions which pervade the new creation.

Distributive Justice

In what distinctive way will the just, in contrast to the unjust, be able to enjoy the new creation?

To answer this question, we should begin by considering a stereotypically unjust person in paradise (a harrowing of heaven, if you will).

Would a racist person be able to enjoy paradise? While racism would not perfectly pollute all sources of happiness, the racist person would be unable to enjoy fully the just equality of the new creation. No matter how much they receive, the racist person would be endlessly troubled that he is not receiving more, in either resources or status, than the otherwise equal person of a different race next to him.²⁸ For example, a white racist does not merely desire the happiness or status of white people, but a happiness or status greater than that shared by black people. Personal racism involves a desire for a wrongful superiority and hierarchy. This desire makes equality itself feel like insult and degradation.

Two features will further exasperate the dissatisfaction of the racist person. First, the racist person will likely see that he is not even treated the same as the people of other races. The consistent testimony of scripture is that the new creation will be characterized, not by perfect equality of status, but by an inversion of the status of those on earth—the first shall be last. The racist would likely have a lowly position in the divine kingdom, magnifying the feeling of indignity, ill-use, and dissatisfaction.

Second, the racist person will not just be united in a hierarchy with those he considers unworthy. Instead, he will be bound together with them in an insoluble metaphysical unity, and the racist person finds interaction with people of other races contaminating. This attitude

²⁸ You might object that as long as your good is satisfied, racism would not cause you to resent the equal good of another. However, it seems in general this is not how we respond to goods. I can be perfectly content with my salary until I realize someone putting in less work in the vineyard is making the same amount as myself.

manifests itself in resistance and opposition to various types of social and legal unions, such as interracial marriage. However, a unity far more radical than marriage is involved for all people in the new creation. According to Christian eschatology the saved will all be united as the body and bride of Christ.

We are now in a position to identify the dilemma of the vicious in the context of distributive justice. The new creation will be characterized by a rightful hierarchy. The unjust will not desire to enter into that hierarchy. We are left with two possibilities. It may be that the racist person will be unable to separate himself from the radical unity and rightful equality of the new creation, in which case he will be eternally in a state he finds insulting and demeaning. Or else it may be that the racist person *will* be able to separate himself from the radical unity and the rightful equality of the new creation, in which case he will resist full participation in his ultimate good—participation as a member of Christ’s body.

With the example of racism in mind, we can generalize the reason for thinking that being distributively just is necessary for full enjoyment of the new creation. The external distribution of goods and status in the new creation will be the rightful distribution. Distributive injustice causes the vicious to desire unjust distributions because they are motivated by favoritism. This will either cause the unjust to refuse to participate in their own place in the new creation or will lead to participation eternally marred by dissatisfaction.

Commutative Justice

Can we also explain commutative justice as necessary to enjoy participation in the rightful hierarchy of heaven? The difficulty in giving such an explanation stems from the fact that commutative justice does not have the same sort of unity as distributive justice. Commutative justice, because it concerns what we owe to one another as private citizens, is difficult to delimit.

I owe obligations of filial piety, of promise-keeping, of respect to excellence, of gratitude, of friendliness, of liberality, and the list can go on. Even Aquinas seems to have had a difficult time organizing the components of justice—he spends more than 40 questions trying to organize those virtues similar enough to justice to be annexed under its heading.²⁹ While many of these annexed virtues are clearly necessary for full enjoyment of the new creation (such as deference to rightful authority), other related virtues may seem unnecessary (such as promise-keeping).

In this section, I will focus on those components of commutative justice which seem to less naturally translate to the new creation. Thus, I will table virtues like deference to God's commands, and instead focus on those virtues which chiefly govern our interactions with other people: *dulia*, gratitude, truthfulness, friendliness and liberality.³⁰

Dulia

Aquinas contrasts the virtues of *dulia* and obedience with the vice of disobedience.³¹ It is easy to see why the vice of disobedience would be a problem in the perfect hierarchy of the new creation, and thus why the virtue of obedience would be necessary to fully enjoy salvation. Here on earth, being disobedient may be beneficial, such as when those in authority command poorly. However, in the new creation the disobedient will only receive perfect commands that conduce perfectly to their good. Either the disobedient will grudgingly follow the commands, always resenting the authority and restriction, or they will break the commands, and so take actions that undermine their good. The obedient, in contrast, will be able to participate in the best activities of the new creation and do so happily.

²⁹ *Summa Theologiae*, II-II q. 80-122.

³⁰ II-II q. 102-119.

³¹ *Dulia* can be roughly defined as right respect and esteem of worthy persons, such as saints.

Can we say something equally compelling about *Dulia*? I believe we can. *Dulia* is also necessary to enjoy the heavenly hierarchy. Contrast two characteristic ways people respond to those they consider their superiors. First, consider the adoring fan, overjoyed to be in the presence of someone she respects and admires. There is almost nowhere else the devoted fan would rather be than in the presence of the person she adores. Second, consider the resentful critic. This critic is bitter and self-deceived, insisting, against all the evidence, that she is 'just as good' as her superior.

Will the adoring fan or the resentful critic more fully enjoy her place in the heavenly hierarchy? Clearly, the adoring fan will. The fan finds the presence of those who are recognizably superior pleasurable in a way the resentful critic cannot. Further, the fan's greater *dulia* explains her greater enjoyment. Those who esteem their superiors are those who enjoy the presence of those they find superior.

There is a danger of moving too far beyond the fan, past *dulia*, and into secular idolatry or sycophantic worship of the unworthy. The secular idolater would also be unable to enjoy the new creation. This is because the secular idolater will be disinclined to enjoy the fullness of the heavenly hierarchy. Just as a foolish fan, who cannot recognize the superiority of the Beatles to their favorite second-rate band, is unable to enter fully into the deepest musical enjoyments, so too the secular idolater will be unable to fully enter into the deepest enjoyment of the hierarchy of heaven.

Gratitude

Aquinas contrasts the virtue of gratitude with the vices of ingratitude and vengeance. Now, why think gratitude would enhance one's ability to enjoy the heavenly hierarchy? Because only the grateful will be able to fully enjoy their own place in that hierarchy. All the many and varied

goods we receive as part of our status in the new creation are free gifts given to us by God, and the grateful enjoy the use of gifts more deeply than the ungracious.

There is an enjoyment that comes when you see something you own as a gift given you by someone you love or respect. I am more likely to enjoy and engage with a book my mentor gave me than I would have had I purchased that same book on Amazon; parents often cherish gifts created by their children far more than anyone else would cherish that same object purchased at an estate sale; and lovers will treasure jewelry given by their beloveds more than that same jewelry given by ex-partners. Being able to recognize our place in the new creation as a gift given by our beloved savior imbues our enjoyment of that place in an alchemical way.

The ungrateful will not be able to enter fully into that enjoyment. This tends to happen in one of three ways. First, the ungrateful might be unwilling to recognize their position as a gift. They deceive themselves into thinking they are where they are merely in virtue of merit. Thus, they lose out on the enjoyment of their position qua gift. Second, the ungrateful recognize their place is a gift, and resent that fact and so refuse to accept the gift on offer. Thus, they refuse to enter into all the goods of the new creation and instead hold back to avoid being indebted to another. Third, they embrace these gifts but retain that resentment of needing to accept these things as gifts. Thus, their ability to enjoy their position is polluted by the constant resentment they experience. Therefore, the vicious, in this case the ungrateful, are unable to fully enjoy the new creation, either because they do not enter into the activity of the new creation (by refusing the divine gifts or by failing to enjoy them as gifts) or because the experience of that activity is polluted by resentment.

Truthfulness

Aquinas contrasts the virtue of truthfulness with the vices of lying, hypocrisy, boasting, and false modesty. In general, Aquinas's treatment of truthfulness concerns honest self-disclosure about

oneself. Boasting and false modesty, for instance, both explicitly involve false pronouncements about one's own virtue. Aquinas explains that "it belongs to the virtue of truth that a person openly show his true self in outward signs."³² Why is honest self-disclosure necessary to enjoy one's position in the new creation? Because enjoyment comes in finding approval of oneself following full and honest self-disclosure. You might feel a smug sense of superiority having received an A on a plagiarized paper, but you will miss out on a feeling of proper pride at being truthfully told of the excellence of your work.

The untruthful then face our old dilemma of the vicious. Either the untruthful are able to hide who they really are, and thus hide their position in the heavenly hierarchy (for it seems that your place in the hierarchy is reflective of the life you have lived). In that case, the untruthful will be unable to receive that approval we all crave. Or they will be unable to hide who they are, leaving themselves persistently upset at having their own past failings and faults made known to others. The extent to which we are horrified about parts of us, things we would never want anyone else to know, is the extent to which we will be inclined to hypocrisy. Thus, the untruthful are those who cannot enjoy the prospect of being fully known by others.

Friendliness

Aquinas contrasts the virtue of friendliness with the vices of flattery and quarreling. When Aquinas talks about friendliness, he is not talking about friendships, of virtue or otherwise, but is instead talking about the outward signs of congeniality and affability that we bear to those with whom we interact. In this way, the friendly person is one who is "affable to the congregation of the poor" even when she herself is not poor.³³ Friendliness, therefore, describes the disposition

³² *Summa Theologiae*, II-II q. 111 a1.

³³ II-II q. 114 a1.

with which we act towards everyone, not just those with whom we are similar and share interests.

Why think friendliness is important to enjoy the heavenly hierarchy? The most obvious reason is that we will not be able to self-segregate into groups of the like-minded in the fashion we do here on earth. We will end up rubbing shoulders with a far greater variety of God's kingdom than we tend to within our earthly hierarchies (where professors regularly talk to professors, students with students, members of the upper class with members of the upper class etc.). The hierarchy of heaven will not stratify us, if it stratifies us at all, in the same way our current society is stratified.

In the new creation the friendly and affable will be able to enjoy this varied company far more than the flatterer or the querulous. If you find yourself in a group of strangers, it is easy to tell who in that group is particularly friendly: you look around to see who is enjoying the random company. The friendly are willing to enter into activity with those who are different from themselves far more willingly, and they enjoy that activity far more deeply, than the querulous do. Either the vicious will refuse to enter into the activity of the new creation because they are unwilling to enter into activity with those who are different from them, or when entering in, they will be unable to fully enjoy that activity because they tend to only enjoy the company of those with whom they are similar.

Liberality

Aquinas contrasts the virtue of liberality with the vices of avarice and prodigality. The liberal are ones who value their own possession in accordance with the measure of their need. They are not wasteful with resources that really are necessary for their good (as the prodigal person is), nor do they selfishly store up for themselves resources beyond what conduces to their good. Aquinas treats this desire in accord with the measure of one's need as central to the concept of liberality:

Consequently the human good in them consists in a determinate measure, namely that a person seek to possess material wealth to the degree that it is necessary to a life suited to his station. The sin is to go beyond this measure, namely the will to acquire or to hoard material goods excessively. The meaning of avarice, defined as *unchecked love to possess*, involves this and so avarice clearly is sinful.³⁴

The avaricious are concerned with possessing more than conduces to their own good, the prodigal less.

There are two ways that liberality will be necessary to enjoy the ideal conditions of the heavenly hierarchy. First, the vicious will desire either to possess more than conduces to their good, or less than conduces to their good. If the vicious are able to act on their desire, then they will end up with an amount of possession that is not perfectly suitable to their need, harming their wellbeing. If, on the other hand, the vicious are unable to act upon this desire, then they will end up with a persistent dissatisfaction with their inability to possess more, or their inability to show off by giving away more than everyone else.

Second, and more fundamentally, both the prodigal and the avaricious are characterized by an excessive self-focus. Covetous people will focus on themselves as the possessor of things, while prodigal people will focus on themselves as the giver of things. In both cases, you gain enjoyment when you yourself take center stage. This inordinate self-focus makes it far more difficult to enjoy the goods of the heavenly hierarchy. When you are not concerned that all needs are met, but instead that you are the one who provides what others need, then it is impossible to be satisfied in a world where other's needs are met without your assistance. Similarly, the avaricious do not experience joy at others finally having what they need and deserve. As such, covetous people are limited in sources of happiness to the goods they themselves have received.

³⁴ II-II q. 118 a1. Emphasis original.

Those people characterized by the virtue of liberality lack this inordinate self-focus. They are pleased at the whole right distribution of goods in the heavenly hierarchy, even those goods from which they do not directly benefit and which they had no hand in providing. The sheer scope of their enjoyment is thus opened up by living in a world where each individual person's right place in the heavenly hierarchy is an independent source of joy.

Courage

If the virtue of justice is necessary to enjoy the rightful equalities and hierarchies of the new creation, what is the virtue of courage necessary to enjoy? Courage is necessary to enjoy the bodily presence of God. It is only the courageous who will both be sensible to the majesty and holiness of God and yet still be able to enjoy his presence.

Courage falls between the vicious extremes of cowardice and fearlessness (or foolhardiness). This can make the argument dialectically complex. Many potential reasons to think that cowardice would be bad in the new creation, such as the fact that the fear of God would drive us from his presence, would seem to entail that the fearless would be best situated to enjoy the new creation. Because of this dialectical complexity, I will start by looking at both cowardice and fearlessness separately, and then try to weave together the lesson about why courage is necessary for enjoyment of God's presence.

Cowardice

Cowards struggle when they face danger or evil. But there is no longer any danger of judgement in the new creation, and God is certainly not evil. So why then do we need courage to stand before God in the new creation? First, one thing courage does is ensure that your rational judgement correctly controls what you fear. So, one manifestation of cowardice is the inability of your reason to control your appetitive fear. Even if there is no rational basis for fear in the new creation, the coward could still fear irrationally. After all, many who fear flying are not

comforted when told flying is safe, nor do I cease to be frightened while in a haunted house even though I *know* the whole thing is made up.

The clichéd refrain that we ‘fear the unknown’ gestures at an important tendency of appetitive fear. We tend to fear that which we cannot understand, and God is well beyond our comprehension. As such, the person who lacks control over their appetitive fear will be unable to enjoy the presence of God in much the same way that a child who is afraid of the dark is unable to enjoy stargazing.

There is also a second, and deeper, reason we need courage to enjoy standing before God. My first argument was that even if we had nothing to rationally fear in God after judgement, we would still require courage to keep our appetitive fears in check. However, we still will have a rational ground for fear after judgement. We all recall Mr. Beaver’s lesson that you cannot move from a premise about God’s goodness to the conclusion that God is safe.³⁵

Aquinas and Psalm 19:9 agree with Mr. Beaver—both maintain that fear of the lord endures forever.³⁶ Aquinas distinguishes servile fear of God—a fear we have only while under judgement—from filial fear, the sort of fear a child rightfully feels towards a loving parent, and argues that only filial fear will remain in the new creation. Why would there be filial fear of God?³⁷ When we trust someone whom we cannot understand, as a child trusts her parents, courage is still necessary because the unknowability of the other person precludes us from setting limits on what we will be required to endure—even for our own good. Note the difference between my trust in a friend and a child’s trust in her parents. If I trust one of my friends to

³⁵ Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 80.

³⁶ *Summa Theologiae*, ST II-II q. 19 a. 11.

³⁷ While the conclusion that filial fear remains in the new creation seems well attested by Church tradition, the explanations of why filial fear continues are often unclear. I find even Aquinas’s explanation of the phenomena unconvincing. As such, I’m far more confident in the conclusion that filial fear continues than I am in any given explanation, including my own, of why filial fear continues.

pursue my own good, I can generally predict what they will end up doing. After all, my friend and I are similar in how much we understand about the world. The child has no similar parity with a parent. She has no idea how her parents see the world, and thus has no way to limit rationally how much her parents might ask of her. The last time our imagined child went to the doctor's office she was given a painful injection; who knows what will have to be faced next time? She may trust her parents, but that does not mean she does not still rightly fear the pain they might require her to endure. Nevertheless, if she is courageous, she will be able to face that fear, confident in her knowledge that what she endures ultimately tends to her good. That same filial fear should characterize our relation to God, even in the new creation. God's ways are so far above our ways that we have no idea what God will decide we must endure for our own good. Given this, we should rightly fear God because even potential pain and difficulty are fearful things. Our knowledge of God's goodness means we should endure that which we fear, but courage is necessary to enjoy doing so.

If it is right to think that God is a terrifying and awful being to behold, and yet beholding God is also the greatest possible good for a human creature, then it follows that courage is necessary to enjoy the ultimate human good. Cowardice will either drive me away from my ultimate good by rendering me unable to worship before the throne of God or will infect my experience of that worship by allowing fear, rather than love or reason, to direct my attention. Either way, vice renders me unable to enjoy good in an ideal state.

Fearlessness

What is the advantage of being courageous rather than fearless? Seemingly the courageous and the fearless will both be able to stand before God.

The problem for the fearless is that fearlessness is a manifestation of a harmful insensibility. In his treatment of fearlessness, Aquinas argues that if I do not fear my own death it

must be explained in one of three ways: by insufficient love of my own life, by “a swelled head” in thinking myself too good to be threatened, or by my “sheer dim-wittedness” in being insensible to the threats around me.³⁸ Given that God is God, it is a similar failing to not fear him at all. We could be fearless before a fearsome God only if we are insensible to his love or majesty. Because the fearless are insensible to God’s glory and grace, they stand in God’s presence only because they cannot grasp the full significance of that act of standing. This insensibility means that the fearless are unable to enjoy the full depth of the presence of God. They will have at most a shallow understanding of what it is to be in God’s presence.³⁹

In eternity, then, courage is necessary to fully enjoy the presence of God. On the one hand, we must be sensible to God’s fearful nature to experience the full enjoyment of salvation, but on the other hand, only the courageous will be able to enjoy that fear to the fullest.

Temperance

If the virtue of justice is necessary to enjoy the rightful equality and hierarchy of paradise, and courage is necessary to enjoy the bodily presence of the Lord, what feature of the new creation is temperance necessary to enjoy? Ultimately, the eternality of immortal life makes temperance necessary.

Temperance involves a moderation of appetite. In developed nations, we tend to worry about how intemperance harms us when we overconsume. Both obesity and alcoholism, for example, harm the health by intemperate consumption. However, temperance also plays an important role in helping us enjoy our consumption. Temperance helps us to enjoy what we are consuming without being constantly bothered by inordinate desires for more. Thus, Christ

³⁸ *Summa Theologiae* II-II q. 126 a1.

³⁹ If there is a natural human desire to be in the presence of a good and loving God, that might explain some people’s peculiar enjoyment of horror movies. It is a corrupted manifestation of that desire to experience fear in context of true and assured ultimate safety.

recommends fasting, not as a form of effective weight loss, but as a way to develop a character that is properly satisfied with what one has. Temperance is valuable, not just when we have too much to eat, but also when we have too little to eat. Hunger makes it challenging to live well. However, it is a far greater challenge to the intemperate than it is to the temperate.

How does this help us establish the eternal value of temperance? After all, it seems likely there will no longer be any hunger in the new creation, and thus we seem to have no need of a virtue that equips us to be happy even in situations of serious lack. But the tendency of intemperance is to grow. The problem with indulging in intemperate appetite is not just that it will have harmful health consequences, but also that once indulgence becomes the norm it will take ever-increasing indulgence to provide the same levels of satisfaction.

Imagine one snobbish grumbler and one appreciative person attending a meal. The appreciative diner will be able to enjoy everything that is served, taking some pleasure in the mediocre food and great pleasure in exquisite food. The grumbler, in contrast, will be unable to take any pleasure in the mediocre food and will find the exquisite food merely passable. Intemperance grows over time. Aquinas, in his discussion of intemperance warns that when unbridled, “lust gathers strength” and quotes Augustine as saying that lust “becomes custom when given way to, and custom becomes compulsion when not resisted.”⁴⁰

When you extend this process for an eternity the result is eternal dissatisfaction. This leaves us again with the dilemma of the vicious. Either indulgences will be limited and kept from increasing, in which case the intemperate will be dissatisfied eternally by always wanting a little more than they have, or else the intemperate will be able to indulge a little extra each time, and so will be stuck with an unsustainable eternal growth of appetite. The intemperate by nature

⁴⁰ *Summa Theologiae* II-II q. 142 a2.

grow dissatisfied with what has already been consumed. No matter how varied the gustatory pleasures of the new creation are, there simply cannot be new pleasures forever, at least not pleasures, like new foods, that would satisfy the intemperate.⁴¹ Temperance is the key to the eternal enjoyment of unchanging pleasures.

Prudence

If justice is necessary to enjoy the equality and hierarchy of the heavenly kingdom, courage is necessary to enjoy the presence of God, and temperance is necessary for eternal enjoyment, then prudence is necessary for our enjoyment of the new creation because participation in the new creation will be a matter of activity.

Earlier, we presented two reasons why prudence seems less valuable in the new creation. First, prudence is concerned with picking the right means to our ends; since the new creation is our ultimate end, once it is satisfied, prudence will no longer be needed. Second, prudence is valuable principally for the avoidance of bad consequences, but there are fewer (or no) bad consequences in the new creation. Both arguments, however, are only plausible if we see our final end as a state of passivity rather than activity.

Some of the ends we have in life are passive states. For example, if you ask someone to teach you how to reattach a button, then once your button is reattached you no longer have use for that practical skill (supposing you do not expect to need to reattach a button again). However, many of our ends are active states. Thus, if you want to be good enough to play baseball for your school, then you won't cease to care about your baseball skills once you qualify. You want those

⁴¹ It is worth mentioning, just quickly, why the other extreme opposed to temperance, namely insensibility, would also undermine enjoyment of the new creation. The reason for this is straightforward. The insensible are unable to see what is good and pleasurable about good and pleasurable things. Because happiness consists, at least partly, in the proper enjoyment of good things, the insensible are thus unable to experience many of the primary joys of the new creation.

skills so that you can play baseball well, and thus you value your baseball skills just as much once you are selected for the team and start playing. Similarly, if I am concerned with being a good potential spouse, I don't give up that concern at my wedding. At that point, the characteristics of being a good spouse become even more important. I didn't want to be in the passive state of 'being married,' instead I wanted to excel at the activity of marriage. We can extend this analogy to talk of the new creation. We do not value prudential excellence and practical wisdom just so that we can get to the new creation. We chiefly value practical wisdom so that we can excel in and enjoy activity while there.

If you want to be an active participant in the projects of God, it will be important that you be able to excel at those activities. Bach and I could not meaningfully coauthor a piece of music because I cannot contribute positively to any musical project with Bach. This stems from my lack of musical wisdom. Similarly, if we want to participate in God's new creation, and not just passively receive goods, we will need practical wisdom.⁴² Those who lack prudence will either be forced to stay out of many of the activities of salvation, or else will participate but be unable to see themselves as true partners (in the same way I could not see myself as a true partner of Bach in the production of music). If skill and excellence are required to conduct music for a concert at the Kennedy center, how much more will it be required to produce music in the throne room of God? If skill and excellence are required to run a restaurant here on earth, how much more will skill and excellence be required to produce a celebratory feast attended by our Savior?

⁴² This discussion is, of necessity, vague. While I expect many of the activities of the new creation will be the same as the activities here on earth (producing art, cooking food, worshipping God, engaging in competition, studying nature, etc.) I do not know that for certain.

While mistakes in the new creation will no longer result in death, that does not mean our activities are thereby less important. Instead, the ideal conditions of the new creation should enlarge the importance and significance of our projects and activities.

Imprudence, then, also exhibits the dilemma of the vicious. Either the imprudent will be mere spectators within the new creation, and so lose out on their chief good of participatory activity with God, or else they will nominally participate, but be unable to make a real difference in the contribution. Either way, the imprudent lose out on the special enjoyment of a good world that they had a role in shaping.

God does not want us to be mere passive receptacles of happiness. Instead, God intends that we take pleasure in a good world that we had a hand in making. There is a special savor in eating good bread that you helped bake, and it is one of His great graces that God does not just give us good bread but gives us that special savor by teaching us to help in the kitchen. As such, the imprudent will lose out on a final enjoyment. They can enjoy the ideal state in which they find themselves, but they cannot enjoy it as an ideal state which they helped build.

Conclusion

Nussbaum presents a serious challenge to Christian ethics. According to the standard action-mediated way of thinking about the value of the virtues, the virtues lose most of their value once humans enter immortality. This forces the Christian ethicist to find an alternative way of understanding the value of the virtues. That alternative is provided by identifying virtues with those dispositions necessary to enjoy ideal conditions.

Given the space limitations of a single article, I have only used this alternative approach to respond to Nussbaum's challenge. The account would be strengthened, however, if it could be

shown to have broader explanatory power. Thus, I will conclude by noting four places in ethics and philosophy of religion where I believe further explanatory work can be done by this account.

First, if the virtues are necessary to enjoy ideal conditions, that could help establish the rationality of virtue. On a merely secular picture it seems likely that at least sometimes an individual life is best served by vice. In contrast, on many religious pictures it seems like virtue is always the right choice, but only because God is animated by a troubling retributivism (that seems to be in at least some tension with divine forgiveness and mercy). If, instead, all humans are destined for an ideal condition that is enjoyable only to the extent one is virtuous, it becomes easier to see how one is always best served by virtue. God ensures that enjoyment proportions to virtue, not via strict retributivism, but simply by establishing a perfect kingdom.

Second, this account suggests a way to fill in a troubling lacuna in Christian Aristotelianism. Many Christian ethicists—myself included—are inclined towards a neo-Aristotelianism that defines ‘goodness’ in terms of species-specific excellencies. The problem for the *Christian* Aristotelian is to integrate that view of goodness with the Goodness of God, a goodness which seems far more Platonic.

If the virtues are ultimately necessary for flourishing not in just any conditions, but in ideal (or good) conditions, then it suggests a plausible way to integrate Christian Aristotelianism and Christian Platonism. Human good is defined by those dispositions necessary for human flourishing in certain conditions, and goodness of those conditions is cashed out in a species-independent Platonic fashion. I don’t think it is coincidental that the cardinal virtues are necessary to enjoy four conditions so closely connected to Being. (The presence of God involves unity with being itself. The rightful hierarchies and equalities of the heavenly Kingdom involve an ordering in terms of the great chain of being. The eternity of immortal life involves the

maximal temporal extension of our being. And activity opposes passivity as the being of life/agency.)

Third, this account suggests a non-retributive way to cash out the doctrines of paradise, purgatory, and damnation. The new creation will be an immediate paradise to the virtuous, since they, and they alone, can fully enjoy the conditions in which they reside. By contrast, the new creation will be eternally unenjoyable to those trapped in vice. Finally, the new creation will be presently (but only temporarily) unenjoyable to those still in the process of sanctification; at the culmination of sanctification, those in purgatory enter seamlessly into joy.

Finally, this account suggests a way to explain the heavenly hierarchy of the saved. According to Christ, the greatest in the heavenly kingdom will be those who were servants of all on earth. One way to explain that hierarchy is by stipulating that each person will receive different goods in the new creation—God will lavish special gifts on his most virtuous sons and daughters. This would explain the hierarchy, but there is something unintuitive in picturing God as holding back any good thing from any member of the Church. What reason does God have to be stingy? None at all. Perhaps the hierarchy is better understood because the more virtuous can more fully *enjoy* those gifts that God generously lavishes on all.

A picture of this sort concludes C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*. All the friends of Narnia have finally entered the new Narnia. All of them see and experience the same good world. Yet, in this very equality, Lucy, the most faithful and virtuous, experiences new Narnia differently:

[Tirian] looked round again and could hardly believe his eyes. There was the blue sky overhead, and grassy country spreading as far as he could see in every direction, and his new friends all round him laughing.

"It seems, then," said Tirian, smiling himself, "that the stable seen from within and the stable seen from without are two different places."

"Yes," said the Lord Digory. "Its inside is bigger than its outside."

"Yes," said Queen Lucy. "In our world too, a stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world." It was the first time she had spoken, and from the thrill in her voice, Tirian now knew why. *She was drinking everything in even more deeply than the others. She had been too happy to speak.*

Works Cited

- Adams, Robert Merrihew. *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008.
- . “Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics.” Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Alston, William. “Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists.” In *Divine Nature and Human Language: Essays in Philosophical Theology*. Cornell Paperbacks. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.
- . “What Euthyphro Should Have Said.” In *Philosophy of Religion: A Reader and Guide*, edited by William Lane Craig, 283–99. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2002.
- Anscombe, G. E. M. “On Promising and Its Justice, and Whether It Needs Be Respected In Foro Interno.” *Crítica: Revista Hispanoamericana de Filosofía* 3, no. 7/8 (1969): 61–83.
- Butler, Joseph. *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature. To Which Are Added Two Brief Dissertations: I. Of Personal Identity. II. Of the Nature of Virtue*. 3rd ed. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. London: Gale, 1740.
- Butler, Joseph, and David McNaughton. *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel: And Other Writings on Ethics*. First edition. British Moral Philosophers. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- DeYoung, Rebecca Konyndyk. *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Brazos Press, 2009.
- Foot, Philippa. *Natural Goodness*. Oxford University Press, 2001.
<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/0198235089.001.0001/acprof-9780198235088>.
- Hursthouse, Rosalind. *On Virtue Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
<http://www.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0612/2001036048-t.html>.
- Korsgaard, Christine M. “Two Distinctions in Goodness.” *The Philosophical Review* 92, no. 2 (April 1983): 169. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2184924>.
- Lewis, C. S. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 2010. http://ebook.3m.com/library/BCPL-document_id-udr89.
- Nussbaum, Martha. *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. Rev. ed. Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- . “Transcending Humanity.” In *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*, 365–92. New York, NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992.
- . *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*. 4. print. and 1. paperback print. Martin Classical Lectures, N.s., 2. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1996.
- Thomas. *Summa Theologiae: Latin Text and English Translation, Introductions, Notes, Appendices, and Glossaries*. Translated by Blackfriars. 60 vols. Cambridge: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1975.