

MacIntyre's Theistic Eudaimonism In a Fallen World

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The precepts of ethics now have to be understood not only as teleological injunctions, but also as expressions of a divinely ordained law. The table of virtues and vices has to be amended and added to and a concept of sin is added to the Aristotelian concept of error. The law of God requires a new kind of respect and awe. The true end of man can no longer be completely achieved in this world, but only in another.

—Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*¹

Introduction

As eudaimonists, Owen Flanagan and Alasdair MacIntyre both believe that the good life for human beings requires virtuous living, which is in accord with right reason. But as a naturalist, Flanagan's view of the virtues differs from MacIntyre's Thomism. In this paper, I make two kinds of arguments within an ethical framework: philosophical and theological. First, I argue that MacIntyre's theistic eudaimonism could be justified in a world where God exists, but Flanagan's ethical eudaimonism is inadequate in a world where the Abrahamic God exists. Secondly, I argue that MacIntyre's theistic eudaimonism coupled with his conception of the disunity of the virtues opens up the possibility for flourishing in a fallen world not in spite of suffering but in tandem with suffering.

1 The God Question

Imagine the possibility that God is standing behind a curtain and we are prevented from peeking behind it in order to make sure that he is in fact there. The mere prospect that God is real affects or changes how we understand ourselves and the world in which we live. For example, if the question of God's existence had never been brought up human beings would have continued to live in whatever ethical ways their socio-political culture entailed. But when the God question was raised people seem to have shifted in their thinking from self-governing creatures to God-governed creatures because that is how the majority of the population have been behaving for

¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 2007), 53.

thousands of years. The point I am trying to make is not that we ought to live ethical lives because we can prove with absolute certainty that God exists; rather, the point is that that we ought to live ethical lives because we cannot prove with absolute certainty whether or not God actually does exist. The prevailing intuition is that the question of God's existence exposes people to a viable option when it comes to ethics. That option is theistic eudaimonism.

2 Aristotle's Ethical Eudaimonism

Before I begin to describe theistic eudaimonism, particularly MacIntyre's Thomistic eudaimonism, it would be appropriate to discuss the type of eudaimonism that preceded it: Aristotle's ethical eudaimonism. To the ancient and medieval thinkers, the classical Greek term for *flourishing* is (*eudaimonia*), which is commonly translated as *happiness*, *blessedness*, or *well-being* and is "identified with *summum bonum*, the supreme or highest good, the objectively good life for humans."² "It is the state of being well and doing well in being well...."³ What makes the good life objective opposed to subjective is that happiness is a starting point *for the sake of* or *that aims at* an end.⁴ MacIntyre elucidates: "Every activity, every enquiry, every practice aims at some good; for by 'the good' or 'a good' we mean that at which human beings characteristically aim."⁵ According to Aristotle—arguably the most influential eudaimonist in history—the general agreement between people vis-à-vis "the good" is happiness "and [they] identify living well and

² David A. Horner, "The Pursuit of Happiness: Why Christian Ethics Should be Eudaimonistic," *Evangelical Philosophical Society* (November 2003): 4.

³ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 148.

⁴ See Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.12.1102a1 (cited as *NE*).

⁵ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 148.

doing well with being happy.”⁶ He goes on to say that even though the ethical consensus is eudaimonistic, “the many” and “the wise” disagree as to what this happiness is: “For the former think [happiness] is some plain and obvious thing, like pleasure, wealth, or honour.”⁷ They would fall into the category of subjective happiness. But for the latter, which includes Aristotle, happiness is broader than that. He sketches his portrait of *eudaimonia* to include morality and objective living, which is tantamount to “virtuous action” or making “the best of circumstances”⁸ (distinguishing his teleologically “thick” concept of *eudaimonia* from a teleologically “thin” concept of *eudaimonia*).⁹ In the penultimate chapter to Book 1 of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues that happiness is a “first principle.”¹⁰ The Greek word (*archē*) is translated into the English word *principle*, which in classical and biblical Greek means “beginning” or “starting point,” not the modern interpretation of “rule” or “law.” Thus, happiness is a starting point. But a starting point for what? As noted earlier it is for the sake of an end. At this point happiness as a starting point for the sake of an end sounds like a consequentialist (utilitarian) theory of action, which argues that the end *justifies* the means.¹¹ According to Julia Annas, however, that is highly improbable. In her book, *The Morality of Happiness*, she describes which teleological ethical

⁶ *NE* 1.4.1095a15 in *Introduction to Aristotle*, 2nd ed. trans. W. D. Ross, ed. Richard McKeon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 349.

⁷ *NE* 1.4.1095a20.

⁸ *NE* 1.10.1100b15, 1101a1. MacIntyre writes, “[T]he exercise of the virtues requires . . . a capacity to judge [prudently] and to do the right thing in the right place at the right time in the right way.” Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 2007), 150.

⁹ This notion of “thin” *eudaimonia* is borrowed from Julia Annas’ book, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁰ *NE* 1.12.1102a1.

¹¹ Admittedly for MacIntyre, the exercise of virtues appears to be a means-to-end enterprise, which is not clearly delineated by Aristotle. But MacIntyre does seem to tip his hat at Anthony Kenny’s commentary of the *NE* (1228a1): “ ‘It is the correctness of the end of the purposive choice of which virtue is the cause.’ ” MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 149. That is, the means by which to achieve the end is not contingent but necessary because virtue is necessarily correlated to the good and, in fact, it is the cause of it.

activity the ancients preferred and practiced. She argues that there is an “almost complete absence in ancient ethics of anything resembling consequentialist ideas.”¹² So what does this means-to-end relationship look like?

David A. Horner paints a colourful picture:

Actions done for the sake of the end of “living according to virtue,” for example, do not produce that end, or maximize it; rather they exemplify or express it – they are constituents of it. *Eudaimonia* is not thought of as a state or a set of consequences to be produced, as on utilitarianism, but rather a moral kind of life to be lived. There is an intrinsic moral connection between the moral end of flourishing and actions that are done for its sake. Thus, for eudaimonists, unlike utilitarians, some “means” to happiness are absolutely ruled out.¹³

So there are teleological ethical systems like utilitarianism that prescribe that the means maximize the end result, rather than exemplify it. But that is not so for eudaimonism.

Eudaimonists like Aristotle suggest that there is a necessary connection between *summum bonum* for human beings and doing the right thing. As MacIntyre makes clear, “Aristotle’s view is teleological, but it is not consequentialist.”¹⁴

3 Aquinas’ Theistic Eudaimonism

For Aristotle the fact that there is a necessary moral connection between *summum bonum* and doing the right thing means that the universal end as happiness is embodied through virtuous means by which “the man who is truly good and wise . . . always makes the best of circumstances.”¹⁵ For Aquinas, who—generally speaking—synthesized the traditions of

¹² Annas, 37.

¹³ Horner, 16.

¹⁴ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 150.

¹⁵ *NE* 1.10.1100b35 – 1101a36-7.

Aristotelianism and Augustinianism,¹⁶ also propounded that there is a necessary moral connection between the pursuit of happiness and doing the right thing; however, there are seminal differences between Aristotle's conception of *eudaimonia* and Aquinas'. I will discuss three below: (1) human nature, (2) *telos* and (3) virtues.

To some degree Aquinas inherited Augustine's Pauline doctrine of anthropology.¹⁷ "On Aquinas' account the Augustinian understanding of the Christian doctrine of human nature does not merely show that Aristotle's theory of practical life is incomplete, in the sense that it needs to be supplemented. It shows it to be incomplete in a way which involves radical defectiveness (see A. Donagan *Human Ends and Human Actions*, Milwaukee, 1985)."¹⁸ For Aristotle the description of the virtues of the *polis* are normative for human nature. Simply put, the *is* of the Greek city-state becomes the *ought*. But to Aquinas this reasoning is radically defective even though he "describes the norms of human nature as such, and expects to find them exemplified in human life in particular societies" because he "cannot treat the descriptive task with the confidence of Aristotle because he has a belief in original sin...."¹⁹ In other words, he does not share Aristotle's optimism for human nature. Furthermore, according to MacIntyre, "Aquinas was able to show how the will, conceived in Augustinian fashion, could both serve and mislead

¹⁶ Synthesizing these traditions was no simple task: "What Aquinas had to reckon with were two rival, incompatible and apparently incommensurable traditions, each with its own history and its own developed and developing mode of enquiry and each requiring its own institutionalizing embodiment in certain highly specific forms." Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1990), 116.

¹⁷ I say "to some degree" because Aquinas does not have the same Augustinian belief in "the wholesale corruption of human desires and choices [thus] he can treat human nature as it is a tolerably reliable guide to human nature as it ought to be. [And] as a Christian he, unlike Aristotle, although like the Stoics, treats human nature as one in all men." Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1996), 118.

¹⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1988), 193.

¹⁹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1996), 118. "[H]uman nature as it ought to be, not human nature as it is, is the norm." Ibid.

the mind, as conceived in Aristotelian fashion.”²⁰ In unregenerate human beings, there is a “collusion of the will in moral evil”:²¹ a will to choose to do evil;²² thus, people’s disobedience to the law is the result of *mala voluntas* (bad or defective will) not, as Aristotle believed, a result of *akrasia* (knowing the good and not doing it).²³ For Aquinas, each act of disobedience is a consequence of a corruption of reason by the force of some passion.²⁴ And this disobedience, which cannot be eradicated even by the most refined moral education, speaks to the “collusion of the will in moral evil....” And this moral evil stems from a defective human nature caused by original sin. For Aquinas, the only remedy is God’s grace.

The *telos* (end or goal) for Aquinas is not the Aristotelian notion of fulfilling one’s nature via reasonable and virtuous living,²⁵ but the notion of culminating one’s journey into the “presence of God himself, into the good life and happy state which God himself is....”²⁶ God, who is perfectly happy, is the object of people’s happiness. That is, “God’s happiness is God; for him his very existence is an activity by which he is fulfilled from within and not from without; but man’s ultimate fulfilment comes by cleaving to God.”²⁷ Thus, humanity’s ultimate goal is to be with God. But because this life presents us with multifarious worldly preoccupations,

²⁰ MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, 124.

²¹ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* 181.

²² This is contrary to Augustine’s doctrine of the bondage of the will, whereby fallen humanity is not able not to sin (*non posse non peccare*).

²³ The concept of (natural and revealed) laws for Aquinas implies moral rules, which one must obey or follow to flourish. But for social contract theorists like John Rawls, laws are not the dominant focus. Rather, the political rights and values of all citizens for a just and fair society via an “overlapping consensus” are essential for the good life. See John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2001), 183.

²⁴ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* 181.

²⁵ Even though, for Aquinas, happiness in this life requires these things.

²⁶ Timothy McDermott, “Introductory Comment,” in *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, ed. Timothy McDermott (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1989), 169.

²⁷ *ST: A Concise Translation*, 176. See *Summa Theologica* I-II.Q.3.A.2 (cited as *ST*).

interruptions and distractions from “contemplating truth [the things of God]”²⁸ through reason, ultimate fulfilment and, thus, ultimate happiness, cannot be attained here and now, but in the eschaton. “In our present life we cannot [contemplate God] by a single continuous activity but only by many uninterrupted acts; God however has promised us perfect happiness in heaven, and in that happy state man’s spirit will be joined to God in one unbroken everlasting activity.”²⁹ We can, however, be partially happy in this life. But happiness, according to Aquinas, as well as Aristotle, is most likely unattainable for those who are “ill-born” or disabled, which implies that if happiness is attainable in this life for the disabled it is experienced *in spite of* suffering.³⁰ To be clear, the good life for Aristotle entails virtuous living (plus good luck, see footnote 27). But for Aquinas the closest we can come to the good life here on earth is to be engaged with heavenly things as much as possible, which entails enacting the cardinal virtues as well as the theological virtues.

²⁸ *ST I-II.Q.3.A.2.*

²⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, ed. Timothy McDermott (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1989), 176. See *ST I-II.Q.3.A.2.*

³⁰ See *NE 1.8.1099b5–6*. Aristotle also believes that “the man who is very ugly in appearance or . . . solitary and childless is not very likely to be happy.” *NE 1.8.1099b1*. Seemingly, happiness eludes a man whom—to no fault of his own—is born ugly and/or has no (“good”) children of his own. “Chance,” for Aristotle, predominantly determines happiness, since “many events happen by chance.” *NE 1.10.1100b20*. For example, if a man is lucky enough to be born healthy and handsome, and by chance attracts a suitable mate who bears him a handful of healthy and handsome children, whom are reared with good scruples, his chance for happiness skyrockets.

“A multitude of great events if they turn out well will make life happier (for not only are they themselves such as to add beauty to life, but the way a man deals with them may be noble and good).” But if a multitude of great events “turn out ill they crush and maim happiness; for they both bring pain with them and hinder many activities.” *NE 1.10.1100b25–30*. *Prima facie*, it appears that Aristotle is disqualifying sufferers from the prize of happiness. The fact is, however, he is merely making the astute observation that pain and suffering “hinder many [virtuous] activities,” that lead to happiness. This implies that people can experience both suffering and flourishing as a means-to-end relationship, however, unlikely.

Aquinas would agree that many ills make happiness in this life unlikely; however, he would disqualify “chance” or “luck” in playing any part of *summum bonum*. For Aquinas, God is providential and “. . . happiness must respond to the intrinsic needs of our nature . . . [but external] goods are largely a matter of external good luck,” (*ST: A Concise Translation*, 175) which have no part in happiness. See *ST I-II.Q.2A.4.*

The cardinal virtues are described as the four fundamental moral virtues from which all other virtues depend or “hinge.”³¹ Aquinas inherited the cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance) from Plato and Aristotle. But if virtues are dispositions to act well for Christians, then faith, hope, and charity needed to be added to the list.³² Of the four cardinal virtues, Aquinas ranks prudence first because it deals with the intellect. Prudence enables us to judge what is right and wrong in any situation.³³ Next, on his moral checklist, is justice, which is concerned with “whatever can be owed to others,”³⁴ including “what we owe to God in the way of honor, reverence, and worship.”³⁵ The third cardinal virtue is fortitude or courage. Fortitude is the “restraint of disordered affections,”³⁶ which enables us to overcome our fears in the face of troubles. Lastly, temperance or moderation enables us to restrain our desires or passions contrary to reason. According to Aquinas, “Another name for these virtues is the political or social virtues: they govern our natural human life, as we are by nature social or political animals.”³⁷

He goes on to say,

Beyond the human happiness attainable by and proportionate to man’s nature, there lies another attainable only by God’s power and by sharing God’s nature. To achieve this

³¹ The English word *cardinal* comes from the Latin word *cardo*, which means hinge or pivot.

³² Not to mention the fact that, for Aquinas, the deiform virtues are alien to human beings.

³³ According to MacIntyre, “Aquinas followed Aristotle in holding that the exercise of *prudentia* is required for the exercise of the other moral virtues (*Quaestiones Disputatae de Caritate* 3) and that it is the one moral virtue without which the intellectual virtues cannot be exercised (*S.T. Ia-IIae*, 57,5).” He goes on to say, “Yet there is a dimension to Aquinas’ discussion of *prudentia* which is not Aristotelian. *Prudentia* is exercised with a view to the ultimate end of human beings (*S.T. II-IIae*, 47,4), and it is the counterpart in human beings to that ordering of creatures to their ultimate end which is God’s providence (*S.T. Ia*, 22,1).” MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* 196.

³⁴ *ST: A Concise Translation*, 238. See *ST I-II.Q.60.A.3*.

³⁵ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* 188. Injustice for Aquinas is not the Augustinian notion of assimilating it to pride; rather, injustice is a distinctive vice and sin. Pride is “above all a willful refusal to give God what is due to him and to be subject to God.” *Ibid.*, 204.

³⁶ *ST: A Concise Translation*, 240. See *ST I-II.Q.61.A.3*.

³⁷ *Ibid.* See *ST I-II.Q.61.A.5*.

more than natural happiness we need God to give us the kind of start towards it, that our nature gives us towards human happiness. This start we call the theological or deiform virtues, directed to God, instilled by God, and revealed by God in the scriptures.... The object of these . . . is God himself as exceeding all natural knowledge.³⁸

The deiform virtues, of course, being faith, hope, and charity. But faith and hope imply imperfection, “since faith believes what it does not see, and hope moves towards something it does not possess.”³⁹ By the human standard of what one can see or possess, faith and hope fall short of virtue. But when one has faith and hope in something beyond human abilities, they exceed all human virtues. Faith precedes hope, and hope precedes charity. But charity is more perfect than faith and hope. So charity is the root of all virtue.⁴⁰

4 Philosophical Argument

4.1 MacIntyre’s Thomism vs. Flanagan’s Eudaimonics

MacIntyre converted from Aristotelianism to Aristotelian-Thomism because the Aristotelian virtues are incapable of perfecting human beings in order to facilitate their flourishing.⁴¹ This is partly because of Aristotle’s inadequate understanding of what the human *telos* is and partly because the natural virtues can only perfect when informed by love, which is a

³⁸ Ibid. *ST* I-II.Q.62.A.1.

³⁹ Ibid. *ST* I-II.Q.62.A.3.

⁴⁰ Ibid. It is important to note that in *ST* II-II.Q.23.A8., Aquinas says that “charity is called the *form* of the other virtues...” (emphasis mine). Nancey Murphy makes an insightful contribution in interpreting the *ST* when she calls into question using *root* and *form* as synonymous terms correlated with *charity*. In the *ST*, Aquinas does use both terms, but he uses them in different ways to flesh out different facets of *charity*. In his reply to his interlocutor, he uses *form*: “Charity is called the form of the other virtues not as being their exemplar or their essential form, but by way of efficient cause, *in so far as it sets the form on all*, in the aforesaid manner” (emphases mine). Murphy discusses the right way to understand Aquinas’ *form*. She says something like charity is the form of other virtues in that charity is what enables the other virtues to fulfil their purpose. So, charity *reforms* virtues. For example, courage without charity would be less than what true courage could be if it were completed by charity. She goes on to say that “the form provides the *telos*. So to be courageous in battle is one thing, [but] to be courageous for the sake of the gospel [is another]. In both cases, it is courage, but in the latter it has been redirected to its true purpose.” Conversation with Nancey Murphy via email, March 17, 2013.

⁴¹ In *Dependent Rational Animals*, MacIntyre describes his account of the virtues as that of a Thomistic Aristotelian. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), xi.

gift of grace.⁴² Charity that proceeds grace is “not founded principally on the virtue of a man”;⁴³ rather, it flows from the work of Christ via the Holy Spirit.⁴⁴ Owen Flanagan would most likely refer to this explanation of grace as fantastical. It is not that Flanagan relegates all religious virtues to hocus-pocus; in fact, he values the religious, but non-theistic virtues (viz. Buddhist virtues) that are substantiated by empiricism, but derogates the religious theistic virtues of, say, Christianity.

Admittedly, in my argument in favour of MacIntyre’s theistic eudaimonism, I assume the existence of God. To be more accurate I assume the existence of the Judeo-Christian God. Given that assumption, is MacIntyre’s Thomism valid? I believe so. One reason is that what gives some people meaning and significance is sacrificing their own wellbeing for the wellbeing of others. In other words, altruism is meaningful. According to my understanding of the Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Islam, and Christianity—self-sacrifice is a virtue.⁴⁵ Allow me to explain this from a Christian perspective. The Bible commands Christians to value others above themselves. In context this Christian principle reads as follows: “³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil 2:3-4).⁴⁶ Part of what makes this passage intriguing is that it proscribes selfishness, while assuming the motivation of self-

⁴² MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* 182.

⁴³ *ST* II-II.Q.23.A.3.

⁴⁴ *ST* II-II.Q.23-44.

⁴⁵ This does not imply that self-sacrifice is the ultimate goal for humanity. For Judaism and Christianity self-sacrifice can be seen as a means to the end of delighting in God. In *Weight of Glory*, C. S. Lewis uses the terms *obedience* to duty and *desire* to fulfil one’s purpose to describe this means-to-end relationship for Christians. Humanity’s ultimate *desire* is to enjoy God, but a means that necessarily expresses this end goal is to become more like Christ in humble *obedience* through self-sacrifice. See C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: Harper One, 1976), 27-8. This duty-desire relation is both deontological and teleological; thus, it seems that Kant’s categorical imperative of “ought to duty” can and does play a part in desiring what is good.

⁴⁶ All biblical texts are taken from the ESV.

interest. Self-interest, rightly understood, is concerned about the wellbeing of others, as well as one's own wellbeing. So it is neither selfish nor selfless. Also, we should take note of what the Apostle Paul is not saying to the ancient Philippians and to modern Christians; he is not saying that we ought to count ourselves as insignificant. That would be disastrous!⁴⁷ He is saying, however, that we ought to "count others more significant than ourselves." This conscious state of humility enables us to act accordingly, which looks "to the interests of others," as well as our own. Consider this example: A young woman, both interested and talented in the arts, has a dream to open her own art gallery where she can display her work. But she is prevented from following her dream because she feels obligated to look after her father who can no longer care for himself. The question is, is she living a meaningful life by sacrificing her wellbeing for the wellbeing of others? The answer, according to Christianity, is "yes." And since MacIntyre's theistic eudaimonism entails that the ultimate aim for humanity is being in God's presence in heaven, then one's life is not wasted on earth via altruism.⁴⁸

An objection has been raised by Flanagan that says that there is no such thing as genuine altruism (i.e., psychological altruism).⁴⁹ Furthermore, there are only two neo-Darwinian ways to explain psychological altruism: (1) person-based reciprocal altruism (PBRA) or (2) gene-based kin altruism (GBKA). PBRA is represented by the famous idiom "I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine" and GBKA is encapsulated by the inability to incur cost for kin to favour shared

⁴⁷ I believe this explanation may be able to help redirect those well-meaning Christians who believe that humility means having a low self-esteem to a healthy view of self-interest. Unfortunately, many evils have been justified under this pretense of humility.

⁴⁸ However, if the Abrahamic God does not exist, then one cannot practice self-sacrifice and live a meaningful life. But the Abrahamic God does exist. Therefore, one can practice self-sacrifice and live a meaningful life.

⁴⁹ Flanagan's definition of genuine psychological altruism entails "incurring fitness costs for the good of the other for one's own sake, without any possibility of later reciprocation or help for one's genes." Owen Flanagan, *The Really Hard Problem: Meaning in a Material World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 47.

genes.⁵⁰ Because of his naturalist assumption, Flanagan believes these neo-Darwinian reasons are the only explanations for what seems to be altruism of narrow scope; however, Flanagan's understanding of true altruism suffers from a psychological myopia of which, fortunately, there are a myriad of cures (counterexamples). One counterexample that comes to mind is that of a brave bystander who runs into a burning building to save a child while dying in the process. What kind of reciprocation does this dead person incur? None. What gene does this dead person share with kin? None. Thus, psychological altruism remains a valid explanation for why some people risk their wellbeing (i.e., interests, talents, or life) for the wellbeing of others.

So where does Flanagan's ethical eudaimonism leave us in a world where the Abrahamic God exists? It leaves us dissatisfied with purely ethical non-theistic *eudaimonia*. Why? Because if God exists and he commands us to consider others more significant than ourselves, but we live believing that "incurring any real costs (to fitness) to benefit any other"⁵¹ is meaningless, then we have failed to obey the God who uses altruism (among other virtues) to fulfil our being in becoming more like Christ, which is to say, we have failed God, others, and even ourselves. Or, to put it another way, we have failed the divine and the human. I am not suggesting, however, that subscribing to Flanagan's ethical eudaimonism leaves us void of any meaning. Matter of fact, Flanagan's empirical eudaimonics could be justified in a world where God does not exist.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² We could derive how human beings should behave based on what we observe to be the case, phenomenologically. That is, just like Aristotle, we could derive *ought* from *is*. The inevitable push back from people like G. E. Moore would be that this rationale commits the "naturalistic fallacy." However, I believe MacIntyre to be correct in saying that Aristotle's ethic is not a fallacy at all. MacIntyre explains, "Human beings, like the members of all other species, have a specific nature; and that nature is such that they have certain aims and goals, such that they move by nature towards a specific *telos*. The good is defined in terms of their specific characteristics. Hence Aristotle's ethics, expounded as he expounds it, presupposes his metaphysical biology." MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 148.

Eudaimonics—the activity of systematically gathering what is known about the nature, causes, and constituents of well-being, as well as to advance flourishing—is empirical because one starts with a hypothesis about what makes a person healthy or happy and then asks questions as to what makes up the well-functioning form in order to know how much, say, courage is required to achieve flourishing; then, one tests these ideas to reach a confirmed hypothesis.⁵³ The Buddhist confirmed hypothesis for human flourishing, which Flanagan endorses, taxonomizes mental states into wholesome/unwholesome versus virtuous/vicious. Buddhism’s cardinal, wholesome mental states or “Four Divine Abodes” (*brahmaviharas*) are as follows: (1) loving-kindness (*metta*), (2) compassion (*karuna*), (3) appreciative joy (*mudita*), and (4) equanimity (*upekkha*), which encapsulates the bodhisattva’s vow to “liberate all sentient beings from suffering (the work of ‘compassion’) and to bring happiness in its stead (the work of ‘loving-kindness’).”⁵⁴ What strike me as interesting are the similarities between Buddhist wholesome mental states and Christian virtues.

Christianity also espouses loving-kindness (1 Cor 13:4), compassion (2 Cor 1:3-7), appreciative joy (Phil 1:3-4), and equanimity (Mt 25:34-40). However, the Buddhist and Christian virtues differ in that these Christian virtues are first theological and then moral; whereas, the Buddhist “virtues” are not based on a god of ultimate reality. Moreover, as Christians, we are encouraged to not only displace suffering as much as possible, but to also suffer with those who suffer (2 Cor 1:6-7), opposed to the bodhisattva’s vow to supplant all suffering with happiness.⁵⁵ Buddhist and Christian seminal differences about reality lie in their

⁵³ Flanagan, 4, 12.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁵⁵ In the Second Corinthians passage, Paul seems to be making the case that God, the Father, comforts us when we share in the sufferings of Christ via sharing in the sufferings of others.

underlying assumptions about suffering. For Christianity, suffering will never fully be eradicated in this (fallen) world; it is only in heaven that all suffering will be vanquished. For (Mahayana) Buddhism, suffering could be eradicated in this (disharmonious) world if everyone embodied the bodhisattva's vow to liberate sentient beings from *samsara* (repeating cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth—reincarnation). Without actually holding to a literal account of a bodhisattva or bodhisattvas, Flanagan gravitates to the “Four Divine Abodes” because it complements the thesis of his book, *The Really Hard Problem*; whereby, he asserts that there can in fact be meaning in a material world. And to this I applaud his efforts and agree that one can live a meaningful life without the existence of the Abrahamic God as long as one does not practice self-sacrifice.

In the next section, I make a connection between the disunity of the virtues and MacIntyre's theistic eudaimonism, which opens up the possibility for Christians to suffer and flourish simultaneously.

5 Theological Argument

5.1 The Unity of the Virtues

Plato's belief about the relationship between virtues is in diametrical opposition to the tragic account. The Platonic account entails that “virtue cannot be in conflict with virtue. [That is] there cannot be rival goods at war with each other.”⁵⁶ The Platonic conception of the unity of virtues is “reiterated both by Aristotle and by Aquinas.... The presupposition which all three share is that there exists a cosmic order which dictates the place of each virtue in a total harmonious scheme of human life.”⁵⁷ Thus, both Aristotle and Aquinas hold that “virtue cannot

⁵⁶ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 142.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

be in conflict with virtue.”⁵⁸ I would like to draw attention to the presupposition that all three share: “there exists a cosmic order which dictates the place of each virtue in a total harmonious scheme of human life.” Admittedly, there seems to be something true about this assertion, but there also appears to be something false. (Not at the same time of course; otherwise, I have cornered myself into a bonafide contradiction.) What appears to be true is that prior to sin, suffering, or vice, a cosmic order (God) had dictated the harmonious placement of each virtue in humanity; however, once sin entered the world, so did suffering and vice, not to mention the disunity of the virtues. It was sin that caused virtue to be in conflict with virtue. Allow me to explain. Before humanity rebelled against God’s plan for its flourishing by being fulfilled by Godself, the virtues available to them, such as joy, peace, love, obedience, etc., did not find conflict with each other because there was nothing to disrupt their harmonious relations. Disunity in the virtues implies suffering, and suffering implies sin.⁵⁹ Actually, some of the virtues that we call virtues today, I believe, did not exist prior to the Fall. Simply put, the Fall brought certain virtues, as well as all vices, into existence. Take for example, courage. What reason or need was there for humanity to think or act bravely prior to its rebellion? Adam and Eve did not fear God, each other, and/or God’s creation (viz. animals) prior to Genesis, chapter three. It was not until they disobeyed their Flourisher that they felt afraid and hid from him (cf. Gn 3:8-10). From that

⁵⁸ If there is a conflict, however, it is not because of the (God-given) virtues, but rather because of human sin: “Aquinas’ point of view, like Aristotle’s, precludes tragedy that is not the outcome of human flaws, of sin and error.” Ibid., 179.

⁵⁹ What I mean by “disunity in the virtues implies suffering” is that *prudentia* (the wisdom to choose the right virtue to practice in each circumstance) takes time to cultivate. At first, it is extremely difficult to choose between competing virtues. In other words, when one devotes himself or herself to virtuous living he or she has to suffer through trials and errors before learning to choose wisely.

When I say, “suffering implies sin,” I do not mean that everyone who suffers directly causes himself or herself suffering by some previous vicious thought or act. I do mean, however, that the general cause of suffering is sin if we trace suffering back to its origin.

moment forward humanity began to cultivate courage in a fearful and fallen world in order to try to regain its previous spiritual and moral state of *eudaimonia*.

5.2 The Disunity of the Virtues

The tragic account best represented by Sophocles entails that “[t]here are indeed crucial conflicts in which different virtues appear as making rival and incompatible claims upon us.”⁶⁰ MacIntyre is a Sophoclean in this regard. He parts company with Aristotle and Aquinas when he says, “It seems to be clear that there can be rival conceptions of the virtues, rival accounts of what a virtue is. And it seems to be equally clear that there can be disputes over whether a particular quality is to be accounted a virtue or a vice.”⁶¹ Two virtues I consider to be duelling virtues are obedience and caution.⁶² The virtue of obedience (viz. religious obedience) entails obeying divine commands, which may result in injury via persecution for one’s beliefs. The virtue of caution entails attending to safety, not injury. The disharmony is obvious, especially for Christians who are taught to expect injury for living true to their beliefs: “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted....” (2 Tim 3:12) How can a Christian, who takes these virtues seriously, not invoke moral and cognitive dissonance? My quandary as a Christian is that I find myself struggling between these two virtues in a fallen world whenever I speak to zealous believers of different religions, particularly radical Muslims. Anxious thoughts that flood my mind include: What if I say something that makes them want to injure or persecute me or my family; or, what if I disobey God by refusing to tell them about his redeeming love

⁶⁰ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 143.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁶² I am not using *virtue* as a median between two extremes like Aristotle, but rather as an inter-cultural moral conception. Every culture to some extent practices obeying natural, legal, or divine laws, as well as avoiding needless dangers. I am following Flanagan’s lead in advancing wide reflective equilibrium as a meta-norm for objective flourishing. See Flanagan’s *The Really Hard Problem*, 126-27, 139, 141, and 145.

because I think them immoral and, thus, I do not believe they deserve forgiveness. The fact that these virtues conflict implies that they conflict within human beings; that is, the disunity of virtues causes human suffering to some degree.

So what is the connection between the disunity of the virtues and MacIntyre's theistic eudaimonism as they relate to *summum bonum*?⁶³ Suffering in a moral sense is inevitable, not just because of vices but, as we have seen, also within the realm of virtues, particularly the disunity of the virtues. And suffering is also inevitable within a Christian ethic, including MacIntyre's theistic eudaimonism (a Christian ethical theory of happiness), which would value, unless noted otherwise, the Pauline conception of godly living (see 2 Tim 3:12). Thus, suffering is inevitable via virtuous living, which includes the disunity of the virtues, and suffering is also inevitable via godly living, which includes religious persecution in obedience to God. And both virtuous living and godly living are essential to living the good life as Christians. Thus, *summum bonum*, in a fallen world, involves both happiness *and* suffering, not happiness *in spite of* suffering (as Aristotle and Aquinas believe).⁶⁴

In the final section below, I suggest that the ethical account of flourishing *and* suffering that I have deduced from MacIntyre's theistic eudaimonism coupled with his conception of the disunity of the virtues comes closer to a possible interpretation of Christ's ethical account of flourishing than Aquinas' ethical account of flourishing *in spite of* suffering.

⁶³ I use the terms *MacIntyre's theistic eudaimonism* and *MacIntyre's Thomism* interchangeably except when I speak of MacIntyre's conception of the disunity of the virtues. In that case, I am referring specifically to *MacIntyre's theistic eudaimonism* because his conception of the disunity of the virtues differs from Aquinas' conception of the unity of the virtues.

⁶⁴ To be clear I am not saying that MacIntyre believes this or even that he would approve of this argument. I am simply making the observation that according to MacIntyre's moral and spiritual principles, Christians could be justified in believing that in a fallen world when they suffer in obedience to God via religious persecution they can also flourish.

I would like to add that I believe the reason why Aristotle and Aquinas' accounts of flourishing are *in spite of* suffering, opposed to an account of flourishing *and* suffering, is possibly because of their belief in the unity of the virtues. It seems that they would agree that one cannot be both happy and conflicted over competing virtues. Simply put, for Aristotle and Aquinas, the happy life and the tragic life cannot simultaneously co-exist.

5.3 Suffering as Flourishing

Christ's beatific vision for humanity entails suffering in a fallen world. In the Beatitudes (supreme happiness), Jesus opens up the possibility for happiness for all people not in spite of their circumstances but because of them.⁶⁵ For example, Christ teaches, "Blessed are the poor in spirit... [and] blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:3, 10). Jesus uses the Greek word *makarios*, which is translated into the English word *blessed*, which is (nearly) synonymous with *happiness*. Michael J. Wilkins contributes to the interpretation of verse three: "The 'poor' are those who have encountered unfortunate circumstances from an economic point of view (19:21; 26:11), but also persons who are spiritually and emotionally oppressed, disillusioned, and in need of God's help."⁶⁶ Wilkins moves to say vis-à-vis verse ten: "Persecution can take the form of physical or verbal abuse."⁶⁷ These Beatitudes can then be amalgamated and interpreted as saying: "Happy are those who suffer from economic, emotional, spiritual, physical, and verbal distresses, and cry out to God." There is an obvious relation of identity that Christ makes between happiness and suffering via employing the plural "to be" verb *are*. Put logically, *x* is *y*, where *x* is happiness and *y* are those

⁶⁵ And not just for the elite as Aristotle's happiness entails.

⁶⁶ D. A. Carson agrees. In Old Testament times, "God's people were often referred to as 'the poor' or 'the poor of the Lord,' owing to their extreme economic distress. This distress often came about because of oppression." He goes on to say, "Some of the various Hebrew words for 'poor' can also mean 'lowly,' or 'humble'..." D. A. Carson, *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: And His Confrontation with the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978), 17. Isaiah 66:2b comes to mind vis-à-vis the meaning of verse three: "...[T]his is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word."

⁶⁷ Michael J. Wilkins, "Matthew: The NIV Application Commentary," in *The NIV Application Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 205, 211. Carson adds, "The blessing [in verse ten] is restricted to those who suffer persecution *because of righteousness* (cf. 1 Peter 3:1f.; 4:12-16). The believers described in this passage are those determined to live as Jesus lived" (italics his). Carson, 28. And to live righteously implies obedience to live as Jesus lived, which *results* in persecution. I say this because I do not believe that there is anything inherently good or righteous about *persecution* per say or, for that matter, about being socially and/or economically oppressed; however, I do believe that in a fallen world God uses things like persecution and/or oppression to fulfill his purposes of conforming Christians to the image of his Son, not to mention to prescribe, what Carson calls, "The Norms of the Kingdom." Ibid., 17.

who suffer. Generally speaking, theologians are split as to whether the Beatitudes should be interpreted descriptively or prescriptively. That is, one camp believes that the Beatitudes are pronouncements of what Jesus has observed to be the case and the other camp believes that they are ethical norms to live by. I side with the latter. Without getting into an exegetical excursus of the Sermon on the Mount, which is not the point of this paper, I suggest that there also may be a causal relation between happiness and suffering. That is, those people who are blessed are blessed *because of* their circumstances or sufferings. In any case, it is necessary but not sufficient that the good life for Christians involves inevitable suffering in a fallen world.⁶⁸

The ethical account I have associated with MacIntyre's theistic eudaimonism, which makes room for suffering *and* flourishing, seems to be moving in the direction towards my interpretation of Christ's ethical account, which enables all people who experience meekness and religious persecution, among other things, to be blessed or happy *because of* suffering, versus Aquinas' ethical account, which allows for flourishing *in spite of* suffering, which seems to be moving in the opposite direction from Christ's beatific vision for humanity in a world saturated with sin and suffering.

Conclusion

Assuming the existence of God, I have argued that MacIntyre's theistic eudaimonism is justified in a world where God exists because one can sacrifice his or her interests, talents, and life, for the sake of others and have lived meaningfully. I have also argued that Flanagan's ethical eudaimonism is inadequate in a world where the Abrahamic God exists because it fails to attribute meaning to genuine altruism, which is a valid psychological option among motivating

⁶⁸ I say necessary but *not sufficient* because the good life for Christians does not only entail suffering, say, via religious persecution in obedience to God, but also via embodying the fruit of the Spirit, say, of love, joy, peace, etc. See Gal 5:22-23.

factors for human beings. Lastly, I have argued that MacIntyre's theistic eudaimonism coupled with his conception of the disunity of the virtues opens up the possibility for flourishing in a fallen world not in spite of suffering but in tandem with suffering because MacIntyre's spiritual and moral principles necessarily involve happiness and suffering.

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