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CATHOLIC
PHILOSOPHICAL
QUARTERLY

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JOURNAL OF
THE AMERICAN
CATHOLIC
PHILOSOPHICAL
ASSOCIATION

Volume 86

Winter 2012

Issue No. 1

American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly

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The American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly participates in POIESIS: Philosophy Online Serials, and a full-text electronic version of the ACPQ is available to libraries that subscribe to the journal and to POIESIS. For more information, contact the Philosophy Documentation Center.

Yearly Subscriptions: Individual: \$35, Institutional: \$65, Single back issues: \$25

Editorial Offices: American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly (ACPQ)

University of St. Thomas-Philosophy Department

2115 Summit Avenue, Mail JRC 241, Saint Paul, MN 55105-1096

E-mail: ACPQ@stthomas.edu Phone: 651-962-5350; Fax: (651) 962-5340

American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly is published quarterly by the Philosophy Documentation Center

P. O. Box 7147, Charlottesville, VA 22906-7147

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to

American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly

P.O. Box 7147, Charlottesville, VA 22906-7147

Periodical-rate postage paid at Charlottesville, VA, and office of additional entry.

ACPQ is indexed in the Academic Search Premier, American Humanities Index, ArticleFirst, Article@INIST, Arts & Humanities Citation Index, Catholic Periodical and Literature Index, Current Abstracts, Current Contents/Arts & Humanities, Expanded Academic ASAP, FRANCIS, Humanities Index/Abstracts, Index Philosophicus, InfoTrac OneFile, International Bibliography of Periodical Literature (IBZ), International Bibliography of Book Reviews of Scholarly Literature (IBR), International Philosophical Bibliography, Periodicals Contents Index, Philosopher's Index, Religious and Theological Abstracts, the Russian Academy of Science Bibliographies, and Wilson OmniFile.

ISSN 1051-3558 (print)

American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly

(Formerly The New Scholasticism)

Volume 86

Issue No. 1

Winter 2012

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Holy Fear

Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung

Abstract. In this essay I will contend that there is something called holy fear, which expresses love for God. First I distinguish holy fear from certain types of unholy fear and from the type of fear regulated by the virtue of courage. Next, relying on the work of Thomas Aquinas, I consider the roles love and power play in holy and unholy fear and extend his analysis of the passion of fear by analogy to the capital vices. I conclude that this extension illuminates the moral significance of John Paul II's call not to be afraid and shows how this theme of his pontificate is inextricably linked to another great theme of his teaching, that of love as a gift of oneself.

"Brothers and sisters! Do not be afraid to welcome Christ and to accept his power."
—John Paul II, Homily at the first mass of his pontificate, October 22, 1978¹

I.

Introuction: "Do Not Be Afraid!" The reflections on fear in this essay were occasioned by a recurring theme in John Paul II's pontificate from its very inception: "Do not be afraid!" Given the prominence and frequency of this call in his preaching and teaching, one might reasonably wonder why John Paul II singled out fear as a moral or spiritual obstacle significant enough to deserve so much attention. While we might agree with him that there is good reason to think fear can be an obstacle to holy living, should we also think, upon hearing John Paul II's call *not* to be afraid, that Christian holiness involves a life free from fear? Or could there also be such things as healthy fear

¹The original text is in Italian: "*Fratelli e Sorelle! Non abbiate paura di accogliere Cristo e di accettare la sua potestà! Aiutate il Papa e tutti quanti vogliono servire Cristo e, con la potestà di Cristo, servire l'uomo e l'umanità intera! Non abbiate paura! Aprite, anzi, spalancate le porte a Cristo!*" ["Brothers and sisters! Do not be afraid to welcome Christ and to accept his power! Help the Pope and all those willing to serve Christ, and with the power of Christ, to serve man and all of humanity! Be not afraid! Open wide the doors to Christ!"] My thanks to Robert C. Miner for the translation.

and holy fear? Given the many sorts of fear we could imagine, to which type of fear does his command refer?

Fear certainly has both a dark and light side. Because fear is usually an uncomfortable and painful emotion,² it might be tempting to characterize it in mostly negative terms, as, for example, a necessary evil. But Aquinas also calls certain fears, such as our fear of death, natural: they are protective instincts, expressive of an inclination toward what is “suitable to our nature,” in this case, love of our own existence and bodily integrity, when we feel that good is threatened.³ Such fear often contributes to human wellbeing by heightening our attentiveness and quickening our responses to threats of danger.⁴

Natural fear may be essential in many cases to one’s physical survival, but not all fears contribute positively to one’s moral or spiritual wellbeing. Fears that arise from goods desired by the sensory appetite can sometimes help and sometimes hinder rational decision making and express disordered desires. The virtue of courage is a disposition that disciplines such fears and keeps them from interfering with our pursuit of the good. From the beginning of the Western tradition, Plato and Aristotle devoted much attention to the moral virtue of courage and its necessary role in a good human life. But neither of them thought moral goodness required us not to be afraid at all. Rather, the courageous person, in Aristotle’s words, “stands firm against the right things and fears the right things, for the right end, in the right way, at the right time, and is correspondingly confident . . . for the brave person’s actions and feelings accord with what something is worth, and follow what reason prescribes.”⁵ That is, to have the

²I use this term loosely, with Nicholas E. Lombardo’s warnings in mind regarding potential confusions between passions, affections, and emotions (the latter being a distinctively modern term). See *The Logic of Desire* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2011), 15–9.

³*Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, qu. 42, art. 3, see also qu. 30, art. 3 and qu. 94, art. 2 (translations of the *Summa* are by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province [New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1948; reprinted by Christian Classics, 1981], unless otherwise noted). Certain responses (e.g., natural inclinations) count as natural simply because their object is suitable (*conueniens*) to the nature of the subject; fear, however, requires some kind of apprehension of an object (as threatening), which limits it to the class of animals (*qua* percipient living things). Fear of “corruption” is natural (this would include death and damage to bodily injury, as well as the pain that commonly indicates and accompanies them), and such fear is common to all animals, because death is opposed to the nature of living things, and not merely to some good apprehended as desirable. Robert C. Miner rightly notes (*Thomas Aquinas on the Passions* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009], 216 n. 3) that natural fear need not include pain. In his discussion of martyrdom, Aquinas notes that the martyr will have to struggle against natural (and passional) fear in order to hold firm to the spiritual good of faithfulness to God.

⁴See the discussion in Craig Steven Titus, *Resilience and Aquinas’s Virtue of Fortitude* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press), 161–5.

⁵Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III.7, 1115b15–20, trans. Terence Irwin, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1999).

virtue of courage is to have one’s fears appropriately shaped by reason, rather than to let fear hold sway.⁶ Aquinas and the Christian tradition predominantly followed this line of thinking.

John Paul II, also, would surely want us to be courageous—his own experience of living under Communist rule is a testimony to the importance of that virtue. But the fears regulated by the virtue of courage do not yet capture all of the fears about which we should be morally concerned. That many of his admonitions link fear to love and power indicate that he also calls us to freedom from another type of fear, our susceptibility to which can show itself in the seven capital vices.

If we extend the sense of fear even further, past dispositions of natural inclination and sensory appetite, we find the same pattern: in our relationship to God, too, fear can have both a detrimental and positive influence. For instance, according to the Christian tradition going back at least to Gregory the Great (540–604 A.D.), the seven capital vices, or deadly sins, are rooted in the sin of pride—our disordered tendency to usurp God’s position and power. Further investigation reveals, however, that a deep-seated sense of vulnerability and a fear of turning our lives over to God’s control can also drive us to over-grasp at power and lure us into these corruptions of human character.⁷ To find fear beneath these pervasive dispositions toward sin is, perhaps, a surprising discovery. We might have expected that other explanations—sheer cold-hearted selfishness for vices such as envy and wrath and greed, or excessive self-love for vices such as gluttony and lust—would suffice. Although these factors can certainly count in the explanation of how these vices arise, identifying the possible role of fear as an additional source of motivation can make the vices seem that much more human, even as it seems to indicate an increased level of susceptibility to them. This observation also makes pressing the question of how to distinguish healthy and helpful fears from excessive or disordered ones, especially in spiritual matters. My examination of fear’s role in our relationship to God will show that we can obey John Paul II’s call *not* to be afraid only if we have the right sort of fear—what I will refer to as “holy fear.”

In this essay, then, I will contend that there is something called holy fear, which expresses love for God. To do so, first, I will distinguish holy fear from

⁶For a further discussion of fear and courage, see my, “Power Made Perfect in Weakness: Aquinas’s Transformation of the Virtue of Courage,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 11 (2003): 147–80.

⁷Bruce Williams suggests this in his essay, “The Capital Vices in Contemporary Discourse,” *Angelicum* 84 (2007): 29–47, at 47; and I briefly outline how this might go for each of the vices (see n. 27) in *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos 2009), 183–4.

certain types of unholy fear and from the type of fear regulated by the virtue of courage. Next, relying on the work of Thomas Aquinas, I will consider the roles love and power play in holy and unholy fear and extend his analysis of the passion of fear by analogy to the capital vices. I conclude that this extension illuminates the moral significance of John Paul II's call not to be afraid and shows how this theme of his pontificate is inextricably linked to another great theme of his teaching, that of love as a gift of oneself.

II.

Finding Patterns in the Treatise on the Passions. Aquinas's most extensive treatment of fear is as a passion of the irascible appetite. An appetite is a power of the human soul to be moved by something good that we apprehend. There are two powers of the sensory appetite: the irascible and the concupiscible. The irascible power of the sensory appetite, specifically, is our power to respond to obstacles, difficulties, and pain when they stand in the way of our attaining something good. According to Aquinas, the irascible passions—or responses of the irascible appetite—include fear, daring, anger, hope, and despair. They all presuppose a world in which the things we want and need are threatened or blocked, or in which trying to acquire and hold on to good things involves difficulty, struggle, and pain. Aquinas thus says the irascible passions have a “complex object.” They are attitudes not toward good or evil simply, but rather evil-as-it-complicates-our-pursuit-of-the-good (or, the good as arduous). This means we cannot understand fear unless we hold both the evil obstacle *and* the good it threatens together in mind. Moreover, the irascible passions typically concern an uncertain future—future goods that we may fail to attain, future evils which loom ominously, or goods that we currently have but whose future possession is not secure. The irascible passions concern objects construed as goods we attain or retain only with difficulty and uncertainty; this class of passions in Aquinas is therefore a promising place to look for his insights into discomfort, anxiety, and similar emotions. His study of the passions also serves as essential background for understanding their moral management, which he discusses in the *secunda secundae* on the virtues and vices.⁸

⁸Anger's object is a present evil, seen in light of the future possibility of vindication. Later in the paper it will become clear that “holy fear” as I discuss it here applies only to the present life, when the complete and final attainment of God is not yet realized. Fear also applies when some good one has can be lost—in these cases, its possession in the future (and the security we take in that assurance) is a good that is uncertain or not yet attained. For Aquinas's fully nuanced answer to whether there can be holy (filial) fear in heaven, see *Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, qu. 19, art. 11, corpus, ad 1, and ad 3.

How one responds to difficulty or evil depends on what that evil is, of course, but it also depends on one's character. Aquinas, like Aristotle, thus assigns various virtues to direct and perfect the irascible passions. The virtues direct and perfect the expression of these passions in ways that help us to flourish fully as human beings. While Aquinas admits that the passions can interfere with moral goodness and human flourishing when they are not regulated, he nevertheless affirms that the passions are natural to and good for human beings.⁹ Our emotions can sharpen or warp our vision of the good, and they can aid or hinder our ability to reach it. Thus they are an important part of the moral life in their own right.

Aquinas, however, also extends his Aristotelian psychology of the passions to a further appetite—the will or “rational appetite.” As an appetite, the will is a power of the soul inclining us toward good (and away from evil), but, as a rational appetite, its object is some good or evil *as* apprehended by reason. Thus the will's direction comprehends what is directed by sensory apprehension, but not vice versa; its range of objects is more extensive and specifically includes God, a purely intelligible good. We find one example of Aquinas's extension of a sensory passion to the will in his account of sadness, in which feeling oppressed by a physical evil—for example, pain—becomes, by way of analogy, “sorrow” in the will. Sorrow applies when the will's inclinations and power of movement are dampened by an evil that reason apprehends. For example, Aquinas describes the capital vice of sloth as “sorrow over the divine good,” where this sorrow names the will's aversion to our participation in the divine nature, and not a sensory passion. Aquinas will make an analogous move in the case of fear, for,

to whatever the irascible and concupiscible power can be moved, the will also can be moved and to many other things as well . . . and therefore all the movements that are in the irascible and the concupiscible power with passion, such as love, joy, hope, and the like, can be in the will, but without passion.¹⁰

This means that fear can be occasioned by the apprehension of a material threat to one's bodily wellbeing, but it can also arise from the apprehension of objects accessible to reason's view—for example, the power of God.

Of the five irascible passions, Aquinas treats hope and despair as a pair, and likewise, fear and daring. I am going to discuss both pairs because in them we

⁹He thus takes an Aristotelian position against the Stoics; see, for example, *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, qu. 24, art. 2. He also takes a stand against contemporary positions that view passional or emotional responses with suspicions of their damaging effects on rationality.

¹⁰*Quaestiones disputatae de malo (On Evil)*, qu. 8, art. 3, trans. Jean Oesterle (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

find a pattern that will be important to understanding the moral significance of fear as a response to God.

First, then, hope and despair.¹¹ Both hope and despair start with desire, a term which Aquinas contrasts with “delight” or “joy” to indicate a good which is wanted but not yet possessed. Possession of it is thus a future good; desire is yearning that is forward-looking.¹² Unlike simple desires for something pleasant and good, for example, a nap or a warm shower, the passion of hope is what we have when what we desire becomes difficult to achieve. A warm shower is usually easy to get. An article of publishable quality, on the other hand, may be an object of hope. Writing a good paper requires mental work and intellectual difficulty, work that can be made even more difficult by external obstacles or difficulties—for example, if one is battling a severe head cold, or if one is a parent of small children who interrupt one’s sleep on a regular basis.¹³ Fulfilling the desire to publish articles of excellent quality is, in this example, not easy to achieve. We should also note that the painstaking nature of the work of researching and writing, especially while physically exhausted or during an illness, are not things anyone would choose for their own sake. We choose to endure both intrinsic and extrinsic difficulties and evils, in Aquinas’s words, “only for the sake of obtaining the end.”¹⁴ Hope has both these obstacles and the good in its sights. Hope reaches out for an object that is good, but the attainment of which is challenging; hence Aquinas’s description of its object: “an arduous and future good, difficult but possible to obtain.”¹⁵

Whether we respond with hope or despair turns on just how arduous we think attaining that good is. If the good we seek seems possible to get, even with great effort and struggle, then we feel hope. We are motivated to undertake the struggle, or to keep struggling, because the good is within reach. We feel despair,

¹¹Hope and despair name both irascible passions (in themselves, morally neutral) and a virtue and vice, for Aquinas. For a good summary of Aquinas’s view of the theological virtue of hope and the gift of fear, see Romanus Cessario, O.P., *The Virtues, or the Examined Life* (New York: Continuum, 2002), chap. 2. For a discussion of the vice of despair, see my chapter, “Aquinas on the Roots of Despair” in *Aquinas and the Virtues: Hope*, ed. R. E. Houser (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, forthcoming).

¹²*Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, qu. 40, art. 1. Socrates, in his conversation with Agathon, makes the same point in Plato’s *Symposium*. Desire is for a good which we lack and want to possess. He also argues that when we do possess some good we can still desire it, for our desire is to have the good as our own “forever,” and we still lack—in the present—the future possession of this good (Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff [Indianapolis, IN: Hackett 1979], 199D–200E, 206A).

¹³The evil in question can either be intrinsic or accidental to the activity of attaining the good sought.

¹⁴*Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, qu. 25, art. 3, ad 3.

¹⁵*Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, qu. 40, art. 1.

on the other hand, when the difficulty seems too great to overcome, and the good, therefore, does not seem attainable. This is why having the energy to take on difficulties is a sign of hope, while resignation and inactivity are characteristic of those who despair. There is no point to making an effort if the project is doomed or the desired end is impossible. Therefore the balance tilts from despair to hope based on our perception of possibility and the power we have at our disposal.

Aquinas notes that hope can come in two forms—a sense of possibility based on our own skill or power, and a sense of possibility based on the knowledge that we have help from others who are able to do what we cannot do on our own. His concept of hope does not therefore make a moral virtue of autonomous independence or an individualistic sense of power. The resources one has, or believes one has—everything from finances to physical strength to friends—will often make a great deal of difference when it comes to fostering or maintaining one’s hope.

In the *Summa* he distinguishes two senses of hope, based on these two sources of power available to us:

A thing may be possible in two ways, namely by one’s own power, or by another’s. Accordingly when one hopes to obtain something by one’s own power, one is not said to wait for it, but simply to hope for it. Properly speaking, one is said to await that which one hopes to get by another’s help as though to await [*expectare*] implied keeping one’s eyes on another [*ex alio spectare*]. . . . Therefore this movement of hope is sometimes called expectation.¹⁶

Aquinas means to include divine help in the category of “another’s help,” as he makes clear in his discussion of the theological virtue of hope: “Now a thing is possible for us in two ways: First, by ourselves, and secondly, by means of others, as stated in *EN* iii. Therefore, insofar as we hope for anything as being possible to us by means of the divine assistance, our hope attains God himself, on Whose help it leans.” Thus, the form of hope that relies on the power of another finds its highest expression in the theological virtue of hope, by which we rely on the assistance of God to reach our ultimate end.¹⁷

While hope and despair have an arduous future good as their object, fear and daring focus on an evil that is difficult to withstand or overcome.¹⁸ Daring

¹⁶*Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, qu. 40, art. 2.

¹⁷See *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, qu. 17, art. 1.

¹⁸Hope has the difficulty at hand, but its intentional and motivational focus is attainment of the good which is still far off; in Robert Miner’s words, it “bears the simplest and most direct relation to the good” (*Thomas Aquinas on the Passions* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009], 216). Fear has the good at hand, but desires to keep some evil that threatens it far off. Both are defined by their primary objectives: for hope, obtaining some good, for fear, warding off some

and fear are, roughly, our “fight or flight” responses.¹⁹ Because they are irascible passions, their objects are complex: both passions are prompted by an evil that we believe threatens some good we possess and value. As with hope and despair, the key difference between fear and daring is the agent’s sense of possibility. “Daring is aroused by things that make us think victory is possible,” according to Aquinas.²⁰ Daring causes us to fight against whatever is threatening us because we believe we can get rid of it or hold it off; as our desire to fight off or attack the evil in question, it depends on this judgment.²¹ Fear, on the other hand, makes us flee, because we judge that whatever we face is something we cannot handle. In Aquinas’s words, “Fear regards a future evil that surpasses the power of one that fears, so that it is irresistible.”²² Daring makes us want to fight because we think we can win, then, while fear instinctively inspires flight to cut our losses. Is it in our power to escape, ward off the danger, or conquer the difficulty? Our calculations of possibility make all the difference. Aquinas notes that here as with hope, judgments about power and possibility can also include the help of others. Which evils we judge possible to overcome often depends on how many allies and resources we can mobilize in our defense.

Aquinas also notes that the accuracy of our judgments and calculations can be an important factor in determining our fearfulness. In regards to both hope

evil. Lombardo notes the difficulty of distinguishing hope from daring—since both attempt to overcome evil or difficulty in pursuit of some good—and similarly fear from despair (*The Logic of Desire*, 69–70). Whether Aquinas’s account can satisfactorily distinguish their intentional objects or not, it does seem to me that the psychological states of the agent seem different: the fearful or daring agent has the threatening evil at the forefront of his or her attention (surmountable or not?), whereas the accent for the hopeful or despairing agent falls on the end or good (attainable or not?). This analysis also seems to fit the corresponding virtues and vices: for a more detailed discussion of the psychology of despair as a vice, see my chapter, “The Roots of Despair.”

¹⁹Another phenomenon that does not fit neatly into these two categories is paralyzing fear—the state in which one wants to flee but is unable to respond at all. This sort of emotional withdrawal might, with some further explanation, be subsumed under “flight.” However, since that argument would take us too far afield from the present discussion, I will leave it aside here.

²⁰*Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, qu. 45, art. 3.

²¹One might wonder what distinguishes hope and daring from optimism. Although I cannot argue for it here, a Thomistic reply would explain optimism as a matter of mood or temperament, while daring and hope can be both passions (momentary) and habits (deliberately cultivated by habituation). That said, it may be easier for an optimistic person than a pessimistic person to develop the right habits of judgment and feeling that constitute the virtue of hope. My own sense is that ordinary language often blurs the distinction between optimism and hope as a virtue. This reply is Thomistic, rather than Aquinas’s own, because his own account of the virtues includes the theological (and therefore infused) virtue of hope (see *Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, qu. 17), and not an acquired form of the virtue, unless one counts magnanimity (see IIa-IIae, qu. 129)—and according to some, this virtue also appears to require grace (see my “Aquinas’s Virtues of Acknowledged Dependence: A New Measure of Greatness,” *Faith and Philosophy* 21 [April 2004]: 214–27).

²²*Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, qu. 41, art. 4.

and daring, he mentions (but does not endorse) drunkenness as increasing one’s inclination to face problems and difficulties. Thus, an excess of the passions of hope and daring in the face of real danger may signal a moral flaw—even the vices of presumption and rashness²³—instead of a virtue: “Hope abounds in young people and drunkards,” he argues, because “through inexperience of obstacles and of their own shortcomings, [young people] easily count a thing as possible,” while drunkenness makes one “heedless of all dangers and shortcomings.”²⁴ Our grasp of the difficulty or evil that threatens, our knowledge of ourselves and the depths and limits of our resources, and our conviction about the value of the good we strive to achieve or protect will all be crucial to handling fear and daring well. Part of our power to deal with difficulty well therefore lies in the power of good judgment. In Aquinas’s accounts of the moral life, a supernatural or theological perspective in these areas will make a crucial difference to our calculations of possibility.

III.

Fear, Vulnerability, and Power. In his discussion of the irascible passions, it is striking that Aquinas spends four questions analyzing fear—far more than any others (for example, he treats hope and daring together in a single question).²⁵ One of the four cardinal virtues—courage—also primarily concerns the passion of fear.²⁶ And when Aquinas treats the virtue of hope, he says the gift of the Holy Spirit associated with it is the “gift of fear” and spends no less than twelve articles discussing this type of fear, devoting as much space to fear as to the entire discussion of hope.²⁷ Why the preoccupation with fear, in its various forms? Aquinas’s attention to fear challenges us to reflect on the roles our fears play in our moral and spiritual lives. Natural fear is an essential protective reaction; but fear as a passion can be properly ordered or disordered. What sort of

²³According to *Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, qu. 127, recklessness is an excess of daring, and thus opposed to fortitude, while IIa-IIae, qu. 21 and qu. 130 name as presumption an excessive estimation of what is in God’s power or ours, in contrast to the theological virtue of hope and the virtue of magnanimity, respectively. Aquinas does not question God’s omnipotence in qu. 21, but rather notes that it is a mistake to assume that God will forgive us even when we are unrepentant of our sin—this is to presume on his mercy without taking account of his justice.

²⁴*Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, qu. 40, art. 6 and qu. 45, art. 3, ad 1.

²⁵Aquinas treats hope and despair together in *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, qu. 40, fear in qu. 41–4, daring in qu. 45, and anger in qu. 46–8.

²⁶See *Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, qu. 123, art. 6.

²⁷He treats the virtue of hope in a total of twelve articles (*Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, qu. 17–8), and the gift of fear in another twelve (IIa-IIae, qu. 19). (The length of his discussion is but one possible indicator of the significance of the topic, although taken by itself, length is not a necessary or sufficient condition of significance. Part of the task of reading the *Summa theologiae* well, however, involves explaining why he spends more time on certain topics than others.)

things should and should not we fear? John Paul II's command—"Do not be afraid"—raises the question of ways fear can interfere with our response to God.

The most morally salient feature of Aquinas's analysis of fear as a passion is that it expresses our vulnerability. We are afraid because the evil or difficulty we see coming has the power to harm us, and we are not confident of our power to handle it or ward it off. Fear's hallmark object is a threatening evil that is "difficult or arduous, *as to be almost unavoidable*."²⁸ And "fear regards a future evil that surpasses the power of one that fears, so that it is irresistible."²⁹ The constant refrain in the questions on fear is that "[F]ear is of an evil *that is not in our power*" to avoid or ward off.³⁰

What are we afraid of? Aquinas's point from the treatise on the passions points to this general insight: our fears track our vulnerabilities; they are most likely to arise when we feel powerless. And this seems right. We do tend to feel better when we can do something about a problem, or deal with a threat on our own terms.³¹ Even more than the evil itself that we face, then, fear brings us face to face with our own inability to control what comes our way. Death, of course, is the limit case.

As I suggested in the introduction, this insight about the dynamics of fear and our response offers a new angle from which to consider the prideful root of the capital vices. Rather than understanding the vices simply as prideful self-assertion or willful disobedience, we can see them as defensive maneuvers—ways in which we respond to perceived threats and our own sense of vulnerability with disordered attempt to regain control. For example, if we find ourselves afraid we will not get what we need, or worry that we won't have enough, it makes sense to spend our energy on constant acquisition, pursuing abundance in order to achieve self-sufficiency. If this response is persistent and becomes habitual, it can become the vice of avarice. In cases we find ourselves afraid that justice will not be done or we won't get our just deserts unless we personally take charge of doling out vengeance in the way *we* see fit, our sense of vulnerability can feed the vice of wrath. If we are afraid that we will not be accepted by others, that we will not fit in or live up to others' expectations, and respond by hiding behind a falsely inflated reputation, we can fall prey to the vice of vainglory. If we are afraid we are not worth anything unless we are better than others, and we are afraid we cannot compete with them, so that we engineer their downfall, our

²⁸*Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, qu. 41, art. 2; emphasis added.

²⁹*Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, qu. 41, art. 4.

³⁰*Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, qu. 42, art. 3, ad 3; emphasis added.

³¹This is perhaps why those with terminal illnesses sometimes find the option of suicide more appealing than the endurance of unpredictable suffering for an uncertain duration. It became clear in cultural debates over physician assisted suicide a decade or so ago just how deeply ingrained the values of autonomy and control were.

strategy of response may lead to envy. If we are afraid we will always feel empty and needy, so that we overfill ourselves with pleasures we can supply for ourselves, gluttony becomes a temptation. Even lust can be prompted by fears that we are unlovable, which prompt a "safe" strategy of using people to gratify ourselves without ever giving ourselves in return. And sloth's reluctance to expend effort loving others, and especially God, may be a pattern of response to fears about what love will cost us.³² In these cases, naming pride as the source of the vices seems to be an oversimplified explanation, psychologically speaking. Naming fear as an explanatory factor is helpful especially for those whose bad habits seem to arise not primarily from arrogance but from its opposite. And this need not be merely a matter of individual temperament and character; those who are in positions of power may well be tempted to various vices by an overinflated sense of control, while those who are socially vulnerable or disempowered may more likely be disposed toward the same bad habits by a fearful route.³³

Acknowledging the significant and potentially disruptive role these sorts of fearful responses can play in our moral and spiritual lives, however, still leaves us to sort out their ambiguous character. When do they indicate symptoms of vice and when are they virtuous?

In Aquinas's analysis, all fear is characterized by shrinking back from the possible loss of some good. Because fear has a complex object, we cannot understand it unless we also know something about the good that seems threatened. This is also true when analyzing the vices: we find that there are at least two ways of going wrong in our love of the good. First, we can inordinately love certain good things. In Augustinian terms, this is a sort of idolatry—that is, replacing God's role in our fulfillment with some temporal good, and using that good to manufacture happiness for ourselves. Because they involve trying to fill an infinite desire with a finite good, these vices typically take the form of excess. In gluttony, for example, an absorption with present pleasure drowns out concern for one's bodily and spiritual wellbeing, not to mention real communion with

³²For an earlier and overly simple version of this analysis, see my *Glittering Vices*, 183–4.

³³N. T. Wright also cites fear, broadly speaking, as an expression of our vulnerability as creatures that pervades human life: "[W]e eat, sleep, and breathe fear. We emerge from the warmth of the womb into the cold of the cosmos, and we're afraid of being alone, of being unloved, of being abandoned. We mix with other children, other teenagers, other young adults, and we're afraid of looking stupid, of being left behind in some race that we all seem to be automatically entered for. We contemplate jobs, and we're afraid that we mightn't get the one we really want and that if we get it we mightn't be able to do it properly. We contemplate marriage, and we're afraid both that we might never find the right person and that if we do marry it may turn out to be a disaster. . . . And these are just the big ones. . . . So you see why this command, 'Don't be afraid,' is one of the hardest of all to keep. . . . Can you imagine living without fear?" N. T. Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (London: SPCK, 1994), 67–8. Wright also notes here that "Do not be afraid" is the most frequent command given in Scripture.

others. While eating and being filled are genuine goods and genuinely pleasurable, gluttony's mistake is to love these goods too much, at the expense of other, greater goods.

Secondly, however, we can inordinately love ourselves and the control we have over acquiring and holding onto what we think is good. We cling to these goods, not just because we love them excessively, but also because they represent our hopes of providing and maintaining happiness for ourselves, on our own terms.³⁴ If they are things within our power to get for ourselves, then we feel as though we have control over our own happiness and wellbeing. This second description will be our focus here, because it captures the link between the seven capital vices and their fearful-prideful root.

We have said that the vices can be motivated by a wide range of fearful type responses, among other motivations: fear of want, fear of dishonor, fear of loneliness, fear of not being loved. But running through all of these motives, perhaps, we can identify a single thread. The lack of control, the feeling of powerlessness—that is something that scares us, too.³⁵ This deep sense of vulnerability in the human psyche that can easily be twisted into many forms of sin and moral failure. It is worth paying attention to especially in our relationship with God. In Robert Adams's words,

Why don't I want to hear God if he is telling me to follow [a given] course of action? Quite possibly because I am afraid. Perhaps the course of action is one that would risk offending people whom I fear to offend. . . . [W]hy am I afraid [of that]? Don't I believe that God will bless my obedience if I sincerely try to do his will? Don't I believe that he can bring greater good out of any disasters that befall me? Don't I believe that there is greater happiness to be found in venturing for God than in playing it safe for myself?³⁶

All seven capital vices are rooted in pride, according to the Christian tradition. And what is pride but a desire to be God-like—to have his power, and all the possibilities of designing and implementing our own conception of happiness for ourselves? Pride thrives on power—at least *assumed* power, *our own* power. Aquinas says that whatever is entirely subject to our own will and power cannot be an object of fear.³⁷ To be like God—who is all-powerful—can thus be our

³⁴See Scott MacDonald, "Petit Larceny, the Beginning of All Sin: Augustine's Theft of the Pears," *Faith and Philosophy* 20 (2003): 393–414, at 108, for an Augustinian articulation of this point.

³⁵Sometimes that takes the form of a viscerally felt passion; at other times it lies in the background, an implicit frame of reference from which we evaluate situations as threatening or not.

³⁶Robert Adams, "The Virtue of Faith," *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984): 3–15, at 9–10.

³⁷*Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, qu. 42, art. 3. If we take "entirely subject" strictly here, then only God could be free from all fear, for from a point of view that acknowledges creation and

attempt to be free of fear altogether. What better antidote than pride, then, to our fearful sense of powerlessness and to our fear of powerlessness itself?

The main trouble with our overly compensatory grasping for control is that a life in which all is safely under our control is a life that is not open to receiving gifts, to stumbling across unanticipated joys, to the surprising peace that comes only with letting go. Adams describes our "lust for control" this way: "I would like to be able to plan my life and have it go according to plan. Or if I want to have some room in my life for the unplanned, the spontaneous and surprising, I would like the spontaneity to be my own caprice, and the surprises of the sort that please me."³⁸ But what we miss most of all in our grasping for power is the gift of love. It must be received—the love of another cannot be forced, molded to our will, shaped by our own agenda—it must be accepted and welcomed as a gift. The more fear drives us to seek refuge in prideful control, the more it closes us off to love, the only thing that can really bring us joy.

The other difficulty with this strategy is that it is doomed to fail. Disappointingly, pridefully overestimating and overextending the range of our control tends to make things worse, not better.³⁹ As Boethius famously argued in the *Consolation of Philosophy*, our fears and anxieties are ratcheted up a notch when we insist on taking ultimate responsibility and relying on our own power alone. As afraid as we are of letting God have control of things, we might find ourselves even more anxious with our own hands on the steering wheel, with the power to make or break our own grasp of the good.⁴⁰ It takes a good dose of self-delusion to make a life devoted to fixing our own problems and meeting our own needs ultimately satisfying. If we choose the way of vice, then, we have to live in fear of the truth, which can shatter our carefully crafted illusions and the life we have built upon them.

IV.

The Gift of Fear. For all the temptations to pride our various fearful responses reveal and express, however, fear can also be a healthy reaction to evil, and even a holy response. What should we be afraid of? What sort of fears should we have?

providence, there is nothing that is completely subject to human control. Aquinas's own comment comes, notably, in the context of the *prima secundae*, in which he is discussing the role of human agency in the moral life (see *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, prologue—human acts as subject to our own power), not the *prima pars*, where God's acts of creation and governance are explicitly under consideration.

³⁸For a similar point, see Robert Adams, "The Virtue of Faith," 11.

³⁹I should emphasize, however, that a *healthy* sense of one's own power and the ability to direct one's own action is essential to human flourishing.

⁴⁰*Consolation of Philosophy*, Book III, Prose 5, trans. R. Green (New York: Library of Liberal Arts, 1962).

Across Aquinas's account of fear, what we do fear and what we should fear reveal our conception of the good. "Fear is born of love, for we fear the loss of what we love."⁴¹ Aquinas quotes this line from Augustine repeatedly every time he discusses fear.⁴² We fear because we love. We are vulnerable to threats and pain and difficulty because we care about something good that is threatened. The loss is counted a loss because we love something, and it pains us to see it ruined or taken away. The more some good feels like our own, the more fear we must face when it becomes vulnerable to loss.

When Aquinas discusses the virtue of hope, he links it to a gift of the Holy Spirit called "the gift of fear." His discussion of fear as a response to loss of goods of any sort now narrows to cases in which fear "makes us turn . . . to God or away from God."⁴³ This is the context in which he explains the distinction between holy and unholy fear. Aquinas here distinguishes three types of fear, on the basis of the good which is both loved and threatened in each case.

The first type—"worldly fear"—is the sort of fear felt when we base our happiness in the finite goods of this life and some evil threatens us with their loss.⁴⁴ Our *undue* or excessive attachment to worldly things as if they were ultimate—this disordered love—is the root of worldly fear.⁴⁵ As our look at the capital vices above showed, when we give certain temporal goods God's place as the source of happiness, fear of their loss can dominate our lives. Take money, for example. It may be prudent to invest for retirement, but to stake one's security and happiness on one's stock performances betrays the very motto historically printed on American currency, "In God we trust." If our loves are ordered thus, our fears may hold us back from trying a new, less lucrative career path on God's

⁴¹*Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, qu. 19, art. 3. Love is a disposing cause, not a cause *simpliciter*, because fear arises only under conditions when something we love is under threat. Aquinas argues that love is first of all the passions (Ia-IIae, qu. 25, art. 2–3).

⁴²There is some theologically disputed territory here, perhaps even between Augustine and Aquinas, on whether our love of God—the ultimate and perfect good—disposes to fear. Augustine argues that our love of God, unlike our love of our friends, is protected from loss and grief (*Confessions* IV.ix). The inference can be drawn that our relationship with God is a good that, once possessed, cannot be lost. Aquinas thinks that our relationship with God (in the form of charity) is a good that can be lost in this life through mortal sin. However, even those who do not admit the possibility of mortal sin can understand "loss" in terms of a threat of damage to or loss of closeness within the relationship, even if total loss of the relationship itself is not possible. Aquinas would frame this secondary kind of loss or damage in terms of venial sin.

⁴³*Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, qu. 19, art. 2.

⁴⁴This idea is implicit, for example, in Augustine's critique of the philosophers' views of happiness in *City of God*, XIX.iv ff.

⁴⁵The wrong kind of fear "arises from worldly love as an evil root" (*Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, qu. 19, art. 3). This analysis presumes that there is also a healthy or virtuous value and attachment, along with right fear and sorrow at their damage or loss. But in this passage Aquinas uses the term "worldly love" to designate a disordered love of such things.

leading. They may even lead us to hard-hearted hoarding in the face of others' great need. In short, worldly fears turn us away from love of God and love of others. Or, to take another example, we may stake our happiness on our own physical health and beauty, going to great lengths to keep up appearances with exercise, dieting, and cosmetic enhancements. But if this is happiness, then our fear of aging, born of our vanity, can drive us to spend billions on the cosmetic industry while neglecting adequate health care for the aged.

Worldly fear—in the pejorative sense Aquinas uses it here—is, as Augustine famously argued, a sign that we have invested eternal hope in the ephemeral. These hopes will always be disappointed, and our anxieties and fears will never be put to rest, because finite things are always vulnerable to loss.⁴⁶ As Aquinas notes, this type of fear is always a sign of disordered love, usually one that cuts us off from relationship with God altogether.

By contrast, the other two types of fear—"servile fear" and "filial fear"—apply within the context of a possible relationship to God. As Aquinas puts it, both servile and filial fear involve a fear of evil that can "turn [us] to God" so that we "adhere to him."⁴⁷ Distinguishing these last two types is crucial to understanding fear's relationship to both love and power, and marking a subtler difference between holy and unholy fear.

Servile fear, first of all, has as its primary focus a relationship of power. Its name is meant to invoke the image of a master-servant relationship. In servile fear, we fear God's power to punish us when we do something to offend him. Just as hope regards as good both the object we want to attain and the person who has the power to help us get it, servile fear applies to the evil of punishment and the person (God) who has the power to inflict it. Servile fear, strictly speaking, applies when "the punishment is feared as the greatest evil, which is the case with one who is devoid of charity."⁴⁸ A similar fear can also serve as a propaedeutic to a right relationship, as when we initially obey God out of fear of being punished, but as a result of many obedient acts, gradually acquire good habits and come to know and love God. In this case, the threat of punishment, while still feared, is not feared as the ultimate evil. Instead, it turns us toward obedience and a relationship with God, and therefore can be consistent with charity, which loves God as the greatest good.⁴⁹ In this latter case, Aquinas is

⁴⁶See for example, *Confessions* IV.x.

⁴⁷*Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, qu. 19, art. 2.

⁴⁸*Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, qu. 19, art. 4.

⁴⁹*Ibid.* This distinction parallels the effects of an Aristotelian civic education, in which the sanctions of the law are meant to supplement parental power enforcing conformity to virtue in action. The hoped for end is that habituation in acts of virtue (initially motivated by fear of punishment) will eventuate in the formation of moral character in the one subject to power and punishment, such that that one will reflectively endorse the intrinsic worth of those actions,

reluctant to call it “servile fear” proper, but rather fear of punishment or even “initial fear,” an imperfect form of filial fear.⁵⁰ The key feature of servile fear for our purposes is the motivation to avoid the evil of punishment inflicted by a God more powerful than we are.

In filial fear, however, the relationship is primarily characterized as one of love between two persons. In this case, we do not so much fear the punishment due our offense but rather the offense’s damage or diminishment of the relationship to one we love. Even if we are still assured of God’s love and forgiveness, our sin offends him and damages the communion between us. Fear of this damage Aquinas names “filial fear” after the parent-child bond, which he takes to be primarily a relationship of love. Filial fear thus marks the love relationship between God and his children that Aquinas calls charity.⁵¹ The parent is certainly more powerful than the child, but the child’s relationship to the parent is founded on love and affection, not fear of the imposition of punishment. The child is not therefore primarily responding to an external threat from someone more powerful than she is, as is the case with servile fear. Instead, her filial fear arises from an internal inclination to love that binds two people together.⁵² Her love for God is freely given, in stark contrast to servile fear’s external compulsion. The one with filial fear shrinks from anything that she could do that would undermine the love between herself and her beloved parent. While both types of fear can motivate obedience, servile fear thus involves wanting to maintain a safe distance from God, in virtue of his power to punish, whereas filial fear results from not wanting to do anything that would distance oneself from him.

Both fears involve facing a threat to something loved. Both arise because we are invested deeply in something and we see the damage or loss of that good as a threatening evil. But what we fear, what sorts of evils we are willing to endure, and why we are afraid are very different in each case. Servile fear loves and seeks to protect the self. Grounded in a recognition of and respect for the difference of power between the two parties, it is characterized by a self-protective stance.⁵³ Servile fear seeks above all its own good; self-love is its ultimate motivation.⁵⁴

eventually doing them from virtue and as the virtuous person would do them, rather than performing acts with merely external conformity to the demands of law and virtue. As Aristotle notes, however, sometimes this process of moral education works, and sometimes it fails. In the latter case, the citizen remains motivated to act in conformity to virtue only out of fear of punishment. See M. Burnyeat, “Aristotle on Learning to be Good,” in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, ed. A. O. Rorty (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 69–92, and *Nicomachean Ethics* X.9.

⁵⁰*Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, qu. 19, art. 2, ad 4 and qu. 19, art. 8.

⁵¹Aquinas himself uses the parent-child analogy to describe filial fear: “it becomes a child to fear offending its father” (*Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, qu. 19, art. 2).

⁵²*Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, qu. 19, art. 4.

⁵³*Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, qu. 19, art. 2, ad 3.

⁵⁴*Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, qu. 19, art. 6.

Filial fear, on the other hand, loves and seeks above all else to protect the relationship; this is why charity, or friendship with God, is essential to it.⁵⁵ Because it is grounded in a freely given love that brings two people together, it is characterized by an openness to the claims of the other. The good to be protected is one that both parties share—the relationship of love itself.

V.

Holy Fear and Self-Giving Love. It is not, then, a moral requirement that we never experience fear. Love that tracks the true good will yield the right sort of fear and the right degree of fear. This rootedness in well-ordered love makes fear virtuous and holy.

We can see fear’s different forms operating on several levels at once in the treatise on courage, where Aquinas defends martyrdom as an exemplary act of this virtue. The martyr’s act of endurance shows how a courageous person must stand firm against her fear of bodily pain or death. In her act of courage, the martyr endures death in order to remain loyal to the truth of faith.⁵⁶ Her endurance of death by itself cannot be the whole story about courage, for Aquinas says that there is nothing about enduring suffering or death that is choiceworthy or virtuous in itself. Thus it is essential that the martyr’s love for God and the loyalty her love inspires is the end for the sake of which she endures bodily persecution and death. She prefers the preservation of her relationship with God to the preservation of her own life. In this her love is rightly ordered: the intensity of her love for God, the greatest good, enables her to endure the loss of the good of her own life.

One fear the courageous martyr must face, therefore, operates at the level of the natural inclination and the irascible passions: she must stand firm against her fear of losing the good of her own bodily well-being and even her life. Aquinas calls death the greatest of all temporal evils on the grounds that life is necessary for enjoying all other temporal goods. A virtuous person would appreciate this loss because her life has been devoted to worthwhile activities and friendships which must now be sacrificed. The martyr’s natural and healthy fear of losing the good of one’s life, however, must be overcome or withstood. Fear functions at these lower levels as a potential obstacle to a morally good act; hence, she needs courage to follow reason’s judgment about the good in spite of her fear. Her love of her own life would become disordered or selfish if it trumped the

⁵⁵God is loved for his own sake in charity, although love of oneself is also included in charity, since by charity one loves all that God loves, including oneself—see *Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, qu. 19, art. 6 and IIa-IIae, qu. 25, art. 4 and 12.

⁵⁶*Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, qu. 124, art. 5.

love of greater goods—including her love for God, the requirements of fidelity to him, and her own spiritual and eternal well-being.

On another level, however, the martyr is also *motivated* by fear—in this case, filial fear—for she is unwilling to endure the separation from God that would come with the sin of denying the truth of faith. This fear is not one that she must stand firm against or overcome, but rather one that aids her act of courage and expresses her greatest love. In this case, her love for God makes her fear damage to her relationship with him more than anything else. Her filial fear aligns with her greatest love, in contrast to the case of the natural fears and irascible passions, where fear operates as a potential obstacle to attaining the good. Aquinas says, “There are certain things, viz. sinful deeds, which no fear [—even a natural fear of death—] should drive us to do.”⁵⁷ The martyr’s filial fear prompts her to choose avoiding sin over avoiding death because the former and not the latter will estrange her from the God she loves. What the martyr sees, through the eyes of love, is that the greatest good at stake is the preservation of her relationship with God, and this she rightly desires above all else. Her holy fear makes her shrink from anything that would interfere with that good.

At all levels of Aquinas’s moral psychology, then, fear is a sign of love. If one never cares about anything or anyone, one will never feel threatened or fearful about the loss of those goods. Aquinas thus calls love the disposing cause of fear and the martyr’s act “proof of the greatest charity.”⁵⁸ Both courage and holy fear manifest an unwillingness to let anything interfere with attainment of the highest good. Thus both are grounded in rightly ordered love. But while in cases of courageous acts, fear poses a threat to the good and must be held in check, in holy fear, the greatness of one’s fear *increases* in proportion to one’s love.⁵⁹ At the first level, great love for God overcomes great fear; at the second level, the greater our love for God, the greater fear that love inspires.

We are more familiar with the type of fear encountered in acts of courage. As difficult as the martyr’s sacrifice is, there is something reassuring about this and other acts of courage. The martyr’s inner strength, born of love and empowered by grace, is able to resist capitulating in the face of multiple threats. Why? Because if love for God is one’s greatest love, then one has as one’s ally and friend the most powerful defender of the good. What the martyr shows us is that, empowered by the promise of divine assistance and ultimate victory, love can conquer fear. Love for God gives us power and possibility beyond our own imagining, even in the face of the worst sort of fear. Great love can conquer great fear. Love is power.

⁵⁷*Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, qu. 19, art. 3, ad 3.

⁵⁸*Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, qu. 43, art. 1; IIa-IIae, qu. 124, art. 3.

⁵⁹*Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, qu. 19, art. 10.

Holy fear, on the other hand, is both less familiar and less reassuring. For love also insists on making us vulnerable. In fact, there’s an important sense in which love exposes us to greater vulnerability. This is the other side of understanding love as a disposing cause of fear. And this is a theme we can consistently find in John Paul II’s teachings about fear: “Do not be afraid to meet Jesus . . . Do not be afraid to open your hearts to Christ . . . Do not be afraid to welcome Christ and accept his power . . . Do not be afraid of this love that places clear demands on people . . . Do not be afraid of what he may ask of you . . . Do not be afraid of life . . . Do not be afraid to set out on new paths of total self-giving.”⁶⁰ The curious thing here is that he makes it sound like embracing God’s love for us is something we’re afraid of. How can that be?

In my work on the vice of sloth, I have argued that this vice is not about laziness, but about resistance to the demands of opening ourselves to the transforming power of God’s love.⁶¹ When we are slothful, we want the comfort of being God’s own, but are reluctant to give up our old familiar habits and loves and risk being changed into the people that God wants us to be. One is reminded of Augustine’s struggle with lust: “[Lord,] I prayed to you for chastity and said, ‘Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet.’ I was afraid you might hear my prayer quickly, and that you might too rapidly heal me of the disease of lust which I preferred to satisfy than suppress.”⁶² Or as Adams puts it, “The fears that are obstacles to my [trusting God] are not only fears of being let down by God; there are also fears of the frustration of my sinful desires. Perhaps to some extent I do not want to trust God because I sense that that threatens some idolatry that I have been cherishing.”⁶³

A slothful tendency to hold love’s demands at arm’s length therefore can also be rooted in fear—fear of the need to give up sinful loves. The command not to be afraid also comprehends this sort of unholy fear. Our fear of letting God recreate us is rooted in our love of our old sinful natures, with all of their

⁶⁰Address to the Catholic youth at Bern, Switzerland (June 5, 2004); Homily on John Paul II’s visit to Cuba (January 23, 1998); Homily on the 25th Anniversary of John Paul II’s election to the pontificate (October 16, 1993); Apostolic Letter *Dilecti Amici* (March 31, 1985); Address to youth in Auckland, New Zealand (November 22, 1986); Address to French and Roman youth (March 20, 1997); Third World Meeting with Families (October 14, 2000); World Youth Day XIX (April 1, 2004). I am not trying to argue that this fear of vulnerability is the only type of fear John Paul II means to include in his command; I mean that this sort of fear, which may not come to mind as readily as the passion of fear, is also an important part of his moral concern, as indicated by the quotations above.

⁶¹“Resistance to the Demands of Love: Aquinas on the Vice of *Acedia*,” *Thomist* 68 (April 2004): 173–204; “Aquinas on the Vice of Sloth: Three Interpretive Issues,” *Thomist* 75 (January 2011); and *Glittering Vices*, chap. 4.

⁶²*Confessions* VIII.vii, trans. H. Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁶³Robert Adams, “The Virtue of Faith,” 11.

comfortable familiarity. From this perspective, loving God wholeheartedly and letting his power change us could be a terrifying prospect, a major risk. The slothful person takes seriously the great hymn text, "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all," and refuses to accept the demands of a love that requires, in John Paul II's words, "a total gift of oneself."⁶⁴

The surrender required by this love, whether it requires bodily surrender—as in the martyr's case—or a surrender of the heart and will, brings us back to the love of control discussed earlier. We are afraid to let God have control over our lives, and it is fear of losing power over ourselves and our happiness that lies behind our clinging to our sinful nature and its practices. Who can imagine what love of God will require us to give up? Adams suggests that "the lust for control" is chief among the motives behind our lack of trust in God, and "the supreme threat to our control . . . is God himself."⁶⁵ To accept the power of God's love means giving up our own claims to power, however weak and illusory they in fact are. Paradoxically, to claim the power of love requires vulnerability and the willingness to relinquish power over our own lives.

Even more than facing an external threat, then, confronting this internal threat is how unholy fear, rooted in an unholy love of self, presents itself as a moral obstacle. Overcoming our fear of dying to self is the spiritual analogue of the martyr's act. It stands in contrast to the holy fear that would risk anything rather than face separation from God and his love. In fact, the martyr's act of giving up her bodily life is a sign of a deeper surrender of self. Adams enables us to draw a connection between the two levels of the martyr's act:

God demands of us the greatest trust, the acceptance of the most complete dependence. In death [God] confronts each of us with a total loss of control over our own destiny. . . . But in relying not on ourselves, "but on God who raises the dead" (II Corinthians 1:9), St. Paul and many other Christians testify that they have experienced [God's] love and power in a way that they would not give up in exchange for control over their own destiny.⁶⁶

The martyr not only surrenders her bodily life, but willingly gives herself completely to God—gives Him full control over herself and her good.

⁶⁴Isaac Watts, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," 1701, in *Psalter Hymnal* (Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications, 1987), #384. As far as I am aware, the "gift of self" is first discussed at length (primarily in the context of sexual love) in Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1981), 95–100, 249–55. As with the challenge to "Be not afraid!" however, it was a recurring theme in his pontificate as well.

⁶⁵Robert Adams, "The Virtue of Faith," 11–2.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 14.

And so we return to the link between pride and fear. Pride is an inordinate love of self, asserted against a wholehearted love of and submission to God. In his *Disputed Questions on Evil*, Aquinas thus describes the "gift of [holy] fear [as] the contrary of pride."⁶⁷ If love means self-surrender, self-giving, self-sacrifice, then pride will clearly prompt fear of it. Aquinas initially defined fear as withdrawal from threats to ourselves and our good. Fear is designed to serve self-preservation. Self-preservation and self-protection are certainly good things, rightly desired. But when it is a sinful self we are protecting from the transforming power of God's love, our very instincts to self-preservation are the real threat. Our prideful fear of giving ourselves wholly to God and our unholy self-love must be replaced by holy fear and the full, free gift of ourselves to God in love.

VI.

Conclusion. As evil and threatening as the world may be, therefore, we may find that the greatest threat and our greatest vulnerability lie within. What are we more afraid of—offending God, or giving up control of our own lives? Losing God's love, or relinquishing our attachment to our own dearly loved sinful self? This is the challenge John Paul II set before us: "Do not be afraid, then, when love makes demands. Do not be afraid of what [God] may ask of you." We're very comfortable with the thought that God will rescue us from evil and difficulty with his great power, that he can help us overcome our fear. It is ironic that his love for us can cause even greater fear than his power can assuage. The very love that gives rise to the holy fear that is the antidote to fear of any external threat is the love that perhaps we fear most. Choosing self-giving love over self-protecting pride brings its own risks—the threat of having to die to self—the sort of martyrdom to which all are called. Only holy fear can face this sort of death.

Whatever the obstacles, evils, or difficulties we face, and the responses of fear they trigger, the moral difference will be made, ultimately, by what love we place at the center of things, and whether we love God enough to trust him with everything—even ourselves. When we face more than we can handle, when the odds are overwhelming, when difficulty and pain undermine our fragile hold, then our sense of possibility has to be larger than ourselves and our own power. But the gifts of God's power and love require the relinquishment of our own desires for control and the free gift of ourselves in return. Accepting God's love and power will require letting go of worldly and prideful fears—fears of not being lauded and loved by those with the wrong kind of power, fears of not fitting in or not being successful or happy on our own terms, fear of surrendering

⁶⁷*De Malo*. III. VIII. art. 3.

control over our own lives, fears of not being everything that *we* wanted to be. A total gift of ourselves in love will require, instead, nothing less than holy fear. John Paul II's great challenge—"Do not be afraid!"—can thus be understood as a command to love God, if we dare.⁶⁸

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Trichotomizing the Standard Twofold Model of Thomistic Eudaimonism: A Solution to a Logical Problem

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Abstract. Aquinas's eudaimonism is normally interpreted as twofold in the sense of it dividing into the imperfect, natural happiness of Aristotle and the perfect, supernatural happiness of Augustine. I argue in this work that Aquinas is logically committed to a third type of happiness that, in light of the standard view, renders his eudaimonism threefold. The paper begins with an overview of the standard twofold model of Aquinas's eudaimonism; it then turns to the model's logical problem whose solution requires the postulation of a third type of happiness. In the second part of the paper, two clarificatory issues are addressed, several objections are considered, and in closing, I explain why Aquinas's commitment to a third type of happiness offers the Christian wayfarer grounds for a new optimism.

[H]appiness is twofold, one perfect, the other imperfect.¹

—St. Thomas Aquinas

For Aquinas, happiness is either perfect or imperfect, and so, on his view, happiness is twofold. According to the standard interpretation, this means that Aquinas divides happiness into the Aristotelian variety, which is imperfect and attainable in this life through acquired virtue, and the Augustinian variety, which is perfect and attainable only in the afterlife

¹Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, qu. 3, art. 6, c.; hereafter cited as *ST*: "[D]uplex est hominis beatitudo, una perfecta, et alia imperfecta." Latin quotations of Aquinas are from *Summae theologiae*, Leonine edition, vols. 4, 6, 10 of *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia* (Rome: Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1888–1899); *De ente et essentia*, Leonine edition, vol. 43 of *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia* (Rome: Editori di San Tommaso, 1976); and *Summa contra gentiles*, Leonine edition, vol. 13 of *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia* (Rome: Typis Riccardi Garroni, 1918). For English translations of the *Summa theologiae*, I have relied on *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vols. 2, 4 (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1948; repr., Notre Dame: Christian Classics, 1981). Italics in both the English and Latin quotations of this work can be assumed to be in the original passages unless otherwise noted.

⁶⁸I would like to express my gratitude to two anonymous reviewers. Their comments were essential to improving this essay. I delivered a much earlier version of this essay at Boston College as part of a conference on "The Intellectual Legacy of John Paul II," in March 2006. My thanks to Laura Garcia for organizing that conference and for her comments on that early draft of the paper.