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Journal of Beliefs & Values
Studies in Religion & Education

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cjbv20

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To cite this article: Timothy Pawl, Juliette L. Ratchford & Sarah A. Schnitker (2021) Growth in patience in Christian Moral Wisdom and contemporary positive psychology, Journal of Beliefs & Values, 42:3, 333-347, DOI: 10.1080/13617672.2020.1836897

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2020.1836897

Published online: 26 Oct 2020.

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JOURNAL OF BELIEFS & VALUES
2021, VOL. 42, NO. 3, 333–347
https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2020.1836897

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Growth in patience in Christian Moral Wisdom and contemporary positive psychology

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ABSTRACT
Moral education requires interdisciplinary engagement across philosophy, psychology, and education. Positive psychologists regularly acknowledge the breadth and depth of wisdom regarding the cultivation of virtues present in philosophical and religious texts and consult such writings when creating constructs, but they are less prone to integrate scientific findings with historical texts as inquiry proceeds. Thus, we provide a comparative analysis of the advice given in Lorenzo Scupoli's *The Spiritual Combat*, from traditional Christian moral wisdom literature and the research findings from positive psychology on the cultivation of the virtue of patience. Points of convergence relate to the utility of engaging activities that include cognitive reappraisal, habit formation through daily practice, activating positive motivation, prayer, mantra/transcendental meditation, and cultivating elevation through meditation on moral exemplars. Areas of divergence include the advisability of suppression, the role of motivation, and necessity of spiritual intervention, which suggest areas for future inquiry in moral education.

KEYWORDS
Patience; positive psychology; moral wisdom; Scupoli; virtue; moral education

The cultivation of virtues and character strengths has long been discussed in philosophical and religious historical texts, and the psychological study of virtue development has blossomed since the inception of the positive psychology movement in the late 1990s. Numerous efforts have been made to integrate psychological and philosophical approaches to virtue development. For example, Peterson and Seligman (2004) extensively reviewed philosophical and religious texts when creating their Values in Action taxonomy of character strengths and virtues. Despite such extensive interdisciplinary integration at the outset of scientific inquiry, fewer interdisciplinary teams continue the process of synthesising across disciplines as inquiry progresses (such as done by Church and Samelson 2017 for intellectual humility). The purpose of this article is to engage such integrative analysis that identifies points of convergence and divergence between historical sources and contemporary positive psychological science for cultivating the virtue of patience.

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Two traditions of inquiry with a shared goal

Our goal in this article is to compare the advice for growth in virtue found in Christian Moral Wisdom literature with the interventions proffered in contemporary psychological literature. These literatures are too expansive to be proficiently discussed in a single article. Christian tradition has produced, over the previous two thousand years, a rich collection of texts the purpose of which is to help the reader to grow in virtue. Similarly, psychological writers have produced, especially over the previous several decades, a rich collection of texts the purpose of which is to help the reader grow in virtue. We must focus, then, on a particular virtue – patience – and a subset of each literature. We choose to focus on the virtue of patience because we find a robust discussion of that virtue and its cultivation in both literatures.

For Christian Moral Wisdom, we will focus on *The Spiritual Combat* of Lorenzo Scupoli (1530–1610). We choose Scupoli for two reasons. First, his work is one of the most famous instances of the genre in all of history. It became popular immediately after publication and its influence spread over hundreds of editions in dozens of languages. Second, among the other famous instances of the genre (e.g. à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*), his work has the most in-depth discussion of growth in patience. He takes patience as an extended example, which makes his discussion of it more nuanced than we find in other authors in the Christian Moral Wisdom tradition. Concerning contemporary psychology, we will focus on positive psychology interventions, which offer evidence-based, concrete steps to take in order to grow in the virtue of patience. Such interventions are influential, having been used to enhance psychological well-being (Bolier et al. 2013) and decrease depressive symptoms (Sin and Lyubomirsky 2009).

To compare the strategies offered by Christian Moral Wisdom and positive psychology, we take the following steps. First, we compare the conceptualisation of patience across the bodies of work. If the concepts are not similar enough, we do not have grounds for claiming that they are both telling us about the same thing. In other words, we check to see whether we are comparing apples with apples. Convinced of the sameness of fruit, we then go on, in the next two sections, to describe the advice given in Christian Moral Wisdom and the interventions suggested in positive psychology. Following that, we compare and contrast the two, finding large and interesting overlap between the two approaches to growth in virtue as well as theoretically and empirically interesting points of divergence.

Conceptualisations of patience

The conceptualisation of patience in the Christian Moral Wisdom literature

For explication of the notion of patience at work in Christian Moral Wisdom literature, we look to influential earlier thinkers in the Christian Moral Wisdom tradition, tracing the concept across the centuries. We focus on Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274), who himself draws from many earlier thinkers in his exposition. Aquinas begins with Augustine; we will begin our own search there as well.

Augustine (354–430) writes in *On Patience*, juxtaposing the patience of God with the patience of humans:

> The patience of man, which is right and laudable and worthy of the name of virtue, is understood to be that by which we tolerate evil things with an even mind, that we may not with a mind uneven desert good things, through which we may arrive at better. (Augustine 1887, paragraph 2)

By patience, we tolerate with an even mind those things that we apprehend as bad, and we do so for the sake of not abandoning good things, which are instrumental for arriving at better things. For instance, you tolerate your child's recalcitrant petulance in completing her at-home pandemic schooling, calmly and coolly returning a gentle voice to the churlish grumps, so that the family dynamic is not ruined for the remainder of the afternoon. Aquinas glosses the language of 'an even mind' by noting that it is a mind not disturbed by sorrow.

Aquinas draws a similar idea out of the work of Gregory the Great (540–604). Aquinas (*ST* II–II q.136 a.4 ob1.) quotes Gregory the Great's 35th homily as saying 'patience consists in enduring evils inflicted by others'. To *endure*, here, is more than simply to live through. He means to endure *well*. And enduring well requires not losing one's mental evenness.

Aquinas goes on to describe the patient person. He writes:

> a man is said to be patient, … because he behaves in a praiseworthy manner by suffering [*patiendo*] things which hurt him here and now, in such a way as not to be inordinately saddened [*tristetur*] by them. (*ST* II-II q.136 a.4 ad 2.)

Here again the idea is that a patient person is patient precisely because she suffers through occurrent evils but is not inordinately saddened by them. He is not saying that a patient person is not saddened, just as elsewhere he does not say that a courageous person feels no fear or that a temperate person feels no appetite for food. Rather, the sadness is not inordinate. It does not lead a person to act against right reason. And what is the dictate of right reason here? As he approvingly cited Augustine saying earlier, it is to retain one's evenness of mind, and to do so for the sake of the good. For additional discussion of the traditional view of patience, see Pianalto (2017).

The conceptualisation of patience in positive psychology

Consider now the conceptualisation of patience offered in positive psychology. In that discipline, patience is defined as remaining calm in the face of frustration, suffering, or adversity for the sake of something beyond the self (Schnitker 2012; Schnitker, King, and Houltberg 2019a). Three types of patience have been identified in empirical research: daily hassles, interpersonal, and life hardships patience (Schnitker 2012). Each type of patience involves similar mechanisms for retaining that calm inner state (e.g. emotion regulation; self-control), but those mechanisms are employed towards different objects. The objects for daily hassles patience are minor frustrations or obstacles; for interpersonal patience they are other people or interpersonal relationships; for life hardships patience they are long-term difficulties or obstacles.

Within the field of psychology, patience is studied as a virtue. Schnitker, King, and Houltberg (2019a) define virtues as 'hybrid personality units emerging when characteristic adaptations are given meaning by a transcendent narrative identity' (p. 276). Drawing upon basic emotion regulation abilities to deal with anger and sadness that

are socialised throughout childhood and adolescence (Morris et al. 2007), patience is a habitual way that people manage emotions that are somewhat malleable across adulthood through employing various strategies for regulation (e.g. cognitive reappraisal or expressive suppression; Gross and John 2003). Moreover, people are virtuous when these habits for regulating emotions are paired with a *transcendent identity*, wherein the person is deploying their patience for something beyond the self – whether that something is God/gods, ethical ideals, a moral community, etc. (MacIntyre 2007; Schnitker, King, and Houltberg 2019a).

Rather than focusing on the definition of patience, most positive psychology research has focused on links between patience and well-being outcomes, likely because of early concerns that patience might promote passivity or tolerance of harm that lead to ill-being rooted in the broader psychological community's value commitments to the importance of agency and alleviation of suffering. Thus, researchers' first task was to demonstrate the positive relations between patience and psychological wellness. Looking at these links between patience and well-being outcomes, we can see some evidence that the concept of patience in positive psychology has similar claimed benefits as the concept does in Christian Moral Wisdom.

Patience has been linked with life satisfaction generally as well as with more specific outcomes like higher self-control and lower depression (Schnitker 2012). Research also indicates that patience is positively linked to emotion regulation and meaning in life (Schnitker et al. 2017). These findings appear to extend into clinical samples as well. Schnitker et al. (2020) found that psychiatric patients at a spiritually integrated hospitalisation treatment program who increased in patience during their stay also decreased in symptoms of major depressive disorder.

Research indicates that patience promotes – and does not hinder – goal pursuit as well. Thomas and Schnitker (2017) conducted a longitudinal study on the goals that undergraduate students had for a semester. Students were required to list 10 goals and rate the meaningfulness, effort exerted, patience used, and progress satisfaction on each goal at 5 time points throughout a semester. Contrary to beliefs that equate patience with passivity, patience was unrelated to assertiveness entirely, indicating that patience is not simply passivity. Instead, people who pursued their goals with patience found those goals more meaningful and exerted more effort in such pursuit at subsequent measurement occasions. Thus, being patient bore fruit by influencing a person's subsequent goal pursuit to be more meaningful and effortful, which demonstrates the importance of cultivating patience.

Comparison of conceptualisations

Thus far, we have seen a similarity of both the concept of patience and the results of patience in Christian Moral Wisdom and positive psychology. That patience would be linked to self-control, as psychologists found, is plausible based on the Christian Moral Wisdom understanding of the concept because retaining of one's evenness of mind often requires self-control. Similarly, the link between patience and goal pursuit is also to be expected on the Christian Moral Wisdom interpretation of the concept. For as Augustine noted, patience is *for the sake of* goal pursuit – it is for the sake of not deserting a good, so as to attain a better.

Be that as it may, the two conceptions of patience may not overlap sufficiently. The conception from Christian Moral Wisdom focuses on sadness, whereas the conception from positive psychology focuses, not on sorrow, but on frustration, suffering, or adversity. At first glance, this discrepancy is problematic because Aquinas defined patience as the virtue that safeguards reason against sorrow. Sorrow and frustration are not the same emotion, so the virtues that safeguard against them should likewise differ.

Further analysis ameliorates this concern. First, the medieval notion of *tristitia*, here translated as *sorrow* or *sadness*, is not as far from frustration as we might have thought. Peter King (2011), in his *Aquinas on the Emotions*, translates *tristitia* as 'distress'. 'Distress', in contemporary language, is much closer to frustration than is mere sadness. Similarly, the contemporary psychological notion of patience also notes *suffering* as that which a person responds to in being patient.

Second, psychologists maintain patience involves regulation of a variety of emotional states encompassing both sadness and anger. Although not empirically tested, patience researchers conceptualise patience as falling between two vices: a reckless and impulsive response to suffering that is fuelled by anger or fear and a disengaged and apathetic response fuelled by sadness (Schnitker et al. 2020). Though a contentious idea, some emotion researchers contend emotions are not fundamentally distinct; rather appraisals of situations differentiate anger and sadness (Barrett 2006). Thus, separating regulation of the two would be a false dichotomy. Research shows that youth differ in their propensity to experience and ability to regulate anger and sadness separately (Zeman, Shipman, and Suveg 2002), but patience correlates with both (Shubert et al. 2020).

Growing in patience

Scupoli on growth in patience

The key place Scupoli discusses patience in *The Spiritual Combat* is Chapter 13, entitled 'What the Will Must Do to Acquire Virtuous Habits'. There his lone, extended example is of patience. In discussing that example, he offers multiple steps that people ought to take to grow in the virtue of patience.

His first step in overcoming impatience and growing in the virtue of patience is *recollection*. He writes 'recollect yourself–examine what is passing through your mind' (2010, 41). The idea is to discern what is happening within yourself when you are subject to impatience. What is the cue that is causing the passions to rile up? He claims that the trouble with impatience is that the lower appetites attempt to control the will and the intellect. This sits well with the traditional notion of patience we presented above. People are impatient, we saw, when sorrow causes the mind to be 'uneven'.

The next step, after recollecting to diagnose the problem, is to stop the lower appetites from prevailing through *making an act of will*. When people feel the appetites riling up to impatience as a result of something, they ought to use their 'force of will to suppress it' (2010, 42).

The next step for Scupoli is *repetition*. He encourages readers to bring to mind again the instance that caused the impatience to begin to grow within them. And then, again, to perform another act of will against it. And if people feel a third pang of impatience – if the child takes off her gloves and throws them across the room *again* as you suit up the others

for the Minnesota tundra – perform yet another act of will. Summarising the importance of repetition, which he perhaps self-consciously repeats multiple times in the chapter, he writes,

> Briefly, if you want to equip your soul with virtue and acquire habitual sanctity, it is necessary to practice frequent acts of the virtue which is contrary to your vicious inclinations. (Scupoli 2010, 42)

Repetition of the behaviour needful to habituate the virtue is essential in the thought of Scupoli. This insight, that continual acts of a type lead to the formation of a disposition to act in such a manner, is central to the psychological literature on habituation (e.g. Verplanken 2018; Wood 2019).

Fourth, Scupoli notes that the *little occasions* to practice patience must be taken as much as the more significant occasions. For Scupoli, the smaller lead to the greater; they help people pull out the root of the weed of impatience. Again, this makes sense from a contemporary habit formation perspective. Habits are gained by means of repetition in stable contexts. The small, ordinary occasions for practice in patience come to us in our everyday lives, often in stable situations. The traffic is always bad at that intersection. This co-worker is always pokey at the photocopier. Repeatedly acting patiently in such stable situations will be the means by which to inculcate a habit of patience. Contrarily, repeatedly acting impatiently in such situations will inculcate a habit of impatience.

Finally, to attain greater patience, Scupoli encourages people to wish for further, even greater, instances in which to practice patience. Continuing his example of being patient in the face of contempt from others, he goes so far as to suggest that people *cultivate an affection* for the contempt which leads them to impatience, that people ought to seek out such situations. Why? Because 'certain virtues cannot be acquired without performing external acts corresponding to the interior dispositions' (2010, 43). The military does not train soldiers to be courageous in the classroom alone. The occasions are to be seen as desirable and sought out precisely because they are the means by which the great good of patience is cultivated.

Scupoli adds a warning immediately after encouraging people to desire and seek out the instances in which they are likely to be impatient. Whatever sources of impatience they seek, it ought not to be ones that provoke impulses of anger. Scupoli's goal is a virtuous life; imprudently risky attempts at such growth – attempts which skirt the coasts of other vices – have no room in his methodology.

To summarise, for Scupoli, people grow in patience by doing the following things:

(1) *Recollect* – reflect to determine the cues which cause feelings of impatience.
(2) *Make an act of will* – choose to suppress the negative feelings that arise from the cues to take away evenness of mind.
(3) *Repeat* – repeat making patient acts of will against the negative feelings.
(4) *Use Little Occasions* – make use of the little occasions for growth in patience.
(5) *Cultivate an Affection* – desire and seek out appropriate instances in which to make such repetitions of the relevant acts of will.

As we will show later, these steps align with the current literature on habit formation.

Positive psychology on growth in patience

Research in positive psychology indicates that patience interventions not only increase patience but also positively affect well-being. Schnitker (2012) conducted a patience intervention among undergraduates that included basic training in identifying emotions (i.e. recollecting emotions and their antecedents), mindfulness and loving-kindness meditative practice, and cognitive reappraisal exercises. Cognitive reappraisal is focused towards either increasing the experience of a positive emotion or decreasing the experience of a negative emotion (McRae, Ciesielski, and Gross 2012). Reappraisal exercises instruct participants to consider a recent event that involved some sort of emotional experience. During this contemplation – 'recollection' as Scupoli may term it – participants effortfully adopt a different perspective than the one that they currently possess so they make a cognitive change in how they view the event (Gross and John 2003). These exercises are intended to help people develop antecedent-focused emotion regulation; they are aimed towards changing the emotional response before that response is even engaged. This type of emotion regulation rarely occurs insularly; often it is within an interpersonal context that people develop these skills (Morris et al. 2007). In comparison to the control group, participants who received the emotion, meditation, and cognitive reappraisal intervention decreased in depression and increased in patience and positive affect (Schnitker 2012).

In a different study with college students, Lavelock et al. (2020) assigned participants to engage in a self-administered patience training workbook for four 30-min sessions across four weeks. The workbook focused on making SPACE for patience, which entails Serenity, Patient listening and perspective, Allowing boredom, Comfort with delays, and Enduring with perseverance. The workbook included exercises related to cultivating mindful awareness, savouring the present, viewing the past positively, coping with restraints on freedom, and practising flexibility. Participants demonstrated improvements in trait and state patience, communicative competence, and social support as well as decreased depressive symptoms.

Schnitker et al. (2017) further tested patience interventions among adolescents, assigning participants to one of three conditions: a nondominant hand exercise (e.g. using nondominant hand for a daily activities), a schedule tracking exercise (e.g. record actions from day), or a cognitive reappraisal exercise. Over the course of the intervention, adolescents in the nondominant hand and schedule tracking conditions – but not reappraisal – increased in patience, self-control, and well-being. Both of these exercises focus on concrete self-control-related skills. Research indicates that self-regulation develops normatively; that is, self-control increases with age (Bongers et al. 2003). Virtues, like patience, do not demonstrate the same normative patterns (Shubert et al. 2019). As self-control is a key mechanism of patience, interventions focused on enhancing self-control seem to, in turn, enhance patience (Schnitker et al. 2017).

Although studies on developing patience, as such, are limited, there are psychological studies on related topics that inform patience development. In particular, research on habit formation and goal pursuit using mental contrasting and implementation intentions are illuminating.

Habits are defined as the implicit associations between contexts and behavioural responses such that behaviours are automatically activated (Carden and Wood 2018).

Research suggests that habits are acquired through repeated learning (Wood and Rünger 2016), and it can take anywhere between 18 and 254 days to form a new habit (Lally et al. 2010). Preeminent habit researcher Wendy Wood (2019) suggests several strategies for forming habits in daily life, including creating a stable context for the habit to become activated, reducing friction for the new habit, using small rewards for behaviours, and repeating these steps until the behaviour becomes automatic. She also notes that it is easiest to change habits when there is a wholistic disruption in the environment (e.g. during a move, starting a new job), and advocates stacking new actions on to pre-existing habits. Such strategies and repetition of behaviours assists in automizing the process such that behaviours move from an explicit to implicit modality.

Whereas habits are conceptualised as automatic actions separated from motivation, developing patience also requires motivated, intentional pursuit of goals. For these more intentional goal-directed behaviours, research on the mental contrasting and implementation intentions approach to goal pursuit is informative (Oettingen and Gollwitzer 2010). With this approach, the first step in goal pursuit involves engagement in a thought exercise whereby people imagine the desired future state once they achieve their goal (e.g. becoming more patient) and then contrast the current reality with the desired future state (e.g. regularly losing their temper). The mental contrasting process helps to energise action while also helping to identify obstacles. Then, people form implementation intentions for specific goal-related behaviours. Implementation intentions are very specific plans for how the goal-related action will be activated by environmental cues and are often written as if-then statements. Often, the if-then statements involve planning for a variety of occasions wherein people may experience obstacles to their goals. For example, someone struggling with road rage might form the intention, 'If I start to feel my heart race when in traffic, then I will take 10 deep breaths to calm myself.' By connecting specific behaviours with particular internal or external cues, implementation intentions help automatise actions (Gollwitzer 1999). Research suggest that using the mental contrasting and implementation intention approach to goal pursuit can greatly enhance behavioural outcomes (e.g. enhancing study activities by 60% in adolescents; Duckworth et al. 2011).

Comparison of advice for growth in patience

As is evident from descriptions of advice outlined by Christian Moral Wisdom and positive psychology, there is much convergence between the two. However, there are also points of divergence relating to the advisability of emotion suppression as a strategy for cultivating patience, the scope of patience, and the causes of patience.

Points of convergence

We observe multiple isomorphisms between aspects of the patience interventions in contemporary psychology and the steps that Scupoli outlines: *1) Recollect, 2) Make an act of will, 3) Repeat, 4) Use little occasions, and 5) Cultivate an affection*. Each of these five steps is reflected in psychological literature. The first two steps, *recollect* and *make an act of will*, are paralleled in the emotion regulation strategy of cognitive reappraisal. Cognitive reappraisal requires a person to reflect on a situation. Scupoli calls for people

to recollect the situation in which they were impatient. In Scupoli's second step, people are required to make an act of will regarding their negative feelings that arose from the situation. With cognitive reappraisal, people engage those same negative feelings, intentionally transforming them to lessen their emotional impact (Gross and John 2003). This allows the person to reflect on the situation in a positive light.

Much like Scupoli calls people to *repeat* their behaviours to ingrain them into their daily patterns, psychology research reveals that *habituation* is the way to develop and ingrain new practices. Such habituation requires repetition over numerous days for it to become an automatic, implicit process (Wood and Rünger 2016). Mental contrasting and implementation intentions are reflected in Scupoli's *using little occasions* to grow in patience. Much like this fourth step, these practices involve forethought and intentionality as people plan ahead for obstacles that may occur in the pursuit of their goals (Oettingen and Gollwitzer 2010). Likewise, the mental contrasting procedures note the importance of activating positive motivation to engage in goal pursuit, which aligns with *cultivating an affection* prescribed by Scupoli.

Points of divergence

Consider, now, the differences between the advice offered by Scupoli and the advice offered in contemporary patience interventions.

The advisability of suppression

Scupoli recommends direct attempts to suppress negative feelings. For instance, Scupoli (2010) states that when people recall what his made them impatient, they should 'mobilize the entire force of your will to suppress[1]' the underlying emotion" (p. 42). Similarly, he writes:

> Through the rejection of evil desires, and the suspension of even the good ones until we have suppressed[2] the motivations of self-love, we shall preserve perfect tranquillity [*sic*] of mind. (p. 83)

On the contrary, psychologists tend to warn against the use of suppression as an emotion regulation strategy.

Gross and John (2003) define suppression as, 'a form of response modulation that involves inhibiting ongoing emotion-expressive behavior' (p. 349). Whereas psychologists view cognitive reappraisal as a highly adaptive emotion regulation, data show that suppression is largely counterproductive because it is often associated with the experience of *greater* negative emotion and lesser positive emotion among those who chronically deploy it as a strategy (Gross and John 2003). Similarly, experimental research suggests that suppression of emotions may actually lead to ironic effects whereby people feel the emotion they are trying to suppress even more strongly than baseline if they are under cognitive load (e.g. distracted, fatigued; Wegner, Erber, and Zanakos 1993), especially if they are prone to struggle with high levels of negative emotions (Dalgleish et al. 2009). Moreover, experimental instructions to suppress emotions disrupted communication between unacquainted women and increased blood pressure for both the suppressors and their conversation partners (Butler et al. 2003). Research indicates that patience interventions may enhance cognitive

reappraisal without having much effect on expressive suppression (Schnitker 2012). Therefore, psychological research suggests modern readers might want to avoid the suppression directives provided by Scupoli and instead engage cognitive reappraisal as their primary emotion regulation strategy.

Even though Scupoli (2010) advocates suppression, he seems aware that it may lead to ironic effects in some specific instances, such as when tempted by lust. He comments that focusing on the negative outcomes of lust and attempting to suppress it might be ineffective:

> These considerations are not appropriate to the situation and, instead of freeing us from danger, they frequently only increase it. If the understanding drives away evil thoughts, these reflections naturally call them back … In attempting to dissipate them by their contraries, we merely renew the impure ideas and unconsciously imprint them still deeper (p. 60).

In these instances, he instead tells readers, 'do not exert yourself in driving them away', but rather to 'be satisfied with meditation on the life and death of our Saviour' (p. 60). Thus, Scupoli seems not to prescribe suppression in all circumstances.

Moreover, some research suggests that the suppression advocated by Scupoli may not have had the same level of deleterious effects for his contemporaneous readers. Research examining the effects of emotion suppression across cultures found that habitual suppression among women with predominately European values was associated with *greater* negative emotional experience than that of women who held Asian values (Butler, Lee, and Gross 2007). Moreover, the negative social effects from experimental manipulation assigning women to use suppression (e.g. hostile behaviour, lower responsiveness, negative partner-perceptions) were attenuated for women with Asian values. However, the negative social consequences of emotional suppression were not eliminated for women with Asian values, and suppression uniformly reduced emotional disclosure, smiling, laughing, and affiliation in an in-person interaction with a stranger regardless of cultural values. Also, other research suggest that suppression activates the cardiovascular system equally across ethnic groups (e.g. African American, Chinese American, European American, Mexican American; Roberts, Levenson, and Gross 2008). Although we cannot sample participants from Scupoli's cultural context, these studies suggest that the negative effects of emotion suppression found in modern people were attenuated but perhaps not eliminated.

The role of motivation

Scupoli and contemporary positive psychology also differ in the scope of activities that count as demonstrating patience. According to Christian Moral Wisdom, an act is not an act of patience if it is done for an unjust or impure motive. Augustine provides as an example the highway men who lie sleeplessly in wait through the rainy, muddy night, due to desire for money (he refers to it as lust). Such men appear to be behaving patiently, but are not, insofar as they are acting for a bad end. Augustine writes:

> When therefore you shall see any man suffer anything patiently, do not straightway praise it as patience; for this is only shown by the cause of suffering. When it is a good cause, then is it true patience: when that is not polluted by lust, then is this distinguished from falsity. (Augustine 1887, para 5)[3]

Why does Augustine think that no one can use patience for an immoral reason? It lies in his understanding of what a virtue is. As we saw above, Augustine thinks of patience as a virtue, and he defines virtue as 'a good quality of the mind, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use' (as cited in Aquinas 1981).[4] The third condition in this conceptualisation of virtue rules out it being *patience* that these highway men are using. Whatever character trait is being employed, using it to unjustly take the goods of another is bad use. Thus, patience, as a virtue, cannot be used for bad ends.

In psychology, though, the motivations and end goals of the agents are not typically taken into consideration when determining whether the activity is an activity of patience. This is because contemporary psychology has not historically included a common notion of human morality by which to measure whether an action is moral or immoral. As such, contemporary psychologists do not have the tools required to distinguish acts of patience from those that merely appear to be acts of patience.

Even though they cannot make normative judgements about the morality of particular actions with scientific tools, psychologists studying the development of virtues have begun to recognise the importance of moral or transcendent motivations. Indeed, several psychological virtue theories and definitions have begun to include motivations as essential components and advocate measures that assess moral or transcendent motivation (Fleeson et al. 2014; Lapsley and Narvaez 2008; Nucci 2019; Schnitker, King, and Houltberg 2019a). Moreover, longitudinal and experimental studies suggest that transcendent, prosocial, or spiritual motivations facilitate the development of virtues like patience (Schnitker et al. 2020) and self-control (Yeager et al. 2014). Thus, even though there is divergence between Scupoli and modern psychologists concerning the necessity of moral motivation for virtuous action, psychologists are beginning to better incorporate motivational measures in research in a way that allows them to at least show the utility of moral motivation.

The necessity of spiritual intervention

Consider the third difference between Christian Moral Wisdom literature and contemporary positive psychology. The standard view of the Christian Moral Wisdom literature is that people cannot be patient without God's gift of grace. As Augustine (1887, paragraph 12) writes:

> concerning true patience, worthy of the name of this virtue, whence it is to be had, must now be inquired. For there are some who attribute it to the strength of the human will, not which it has by Divine assistance, but which it has of free-will. Now this error is a proud one.

Aquinas, too, claims that there is no patience without God's gift of grace. Contemporary positive psychology, on the other hand, does not typically require a divine gift for a person's features to count as virtues. What to make of this difference?

It is true that contemporary psychology does not posit God's activity as a necessary condition for achieving patience. But then again, contemporary psychology does not rule it out, either. So far as we can tell, contemporary psychology is intentionally agnostic on such supernatural attributions. As such, this is not an irreconcilable disagreement between the two.

Psychologists do, however, study the effects of beliefs about God and supernatural powers on virtues like patience. In a sample of elite athletes, researchers found that intrinsic religiousness, which includes items related to the positive presence of the divine in daily life,

was indirectly related to higher patience through increased meaning in life and cognitive reappraisal. However, belief in a highly perfectionistic God was indirectly related to lower patience and higher anxiety through self-worth contingent on performance and fear of failure (Schnitker et al. 2019b). Likewise, the bulk of literature studying the psychology of religion and spirituality suggests that beliefs about God may enhance well-being outcomes, but, by a similar vein, may inhibit well-being. Psychologists are also beginning to explore how beliefs in divine grace might affect human flourishing (Emmons et al. 2017). Future studies in this area will yield interesting data on how people's beliefs about grace (though not the actual presence of God's grace) affect the cultivation of patience.

Conclusion

We noted that the steps that Lorenzo Scupoli spells out for growth in patience in his *The Spiritual Combat* have many similarities to intervention activities corroborated by positive psychologists. They both suggest engaging in activities that include cognitive reappraisal, habit formation through daily practice, activating positive motivation, prayer, mantra/transcendental meditation, and cultivating elevation through meditation on moral exemplars. However, divergence related to the advisability of suppression, the role of motivation, and necessity of spiritual intervention suggest useful avenues for future philosophical, theological, and psychological inquiry.

Notes

1. *Reprimere* is the word in the original Italian translated as 'supress.'
2. *Represso* is the word in the original Italian translated as 'suppressed.'
3. Aquinas follows Augustine's lead here, too, in *ST* II–II q.136 a.1 ad.2.
4. This quotation comes from Aquinas's (1981) discussion of virtue at *ST* I–II Q. 55 a.4, where he is citing Augustine. Augustine actually adds a final condition to the definition, 'which God works in us, without us.' Aquinas reads this addition as applying only to the *theological* virtues of faith, hope, and love.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the John Templeton Foundation [61012, 2018-21]; the opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the John Templeton Foundation.

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