

Is Aquinas's Envy Pagan?

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ENVY IS BAD AND OBVIOUSLY SO. Evidence for this is enshrined through story upon story in Scripture. Envy first affected Adam and Eve, Gregory the Great tells us, through the serpent. They became persuaded by the serpent to “feel” what the serpent feels, to share the devil’s heart. This first spark of envy set into motion the trajectory of salvation history, as the Book of Wisdom tells us: “By the envy [$\phi\theta\acute{o}\nu\omicron\varsigma$] of the devil, death entered the world.” (Wisdom 2:24). From this starting point come Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Rachel and Leah, and Joseph and his brothers. This whole trajectory is only the action in the Book of Genesis.

Turning to the New Testament, envy leads the chief priests to hand over Christ, according to both Matthew, “because of envy they had handed Him over” (Matthew 27:18) and Mark, “the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy” (Mark 15:10). The contention and division that envy breeds in the young Christian community becomes a running preoccupation of Paul. The opening salvo of the Letter to the Romans proclaims that God’s wrath is an appropriate response to habitual human sinfulness. God is justified in abandoning people to the consequences of their rebellion in “all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; [they are] gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful” (Romans 1:29–31). Likewise, Paul warns the Galatians: “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: immortality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God,” and then concludes, “Let us not be conceited, provoking another, envious of one another” (Galatians 5:19–21; 26). Paul is also troubled by the disparity between the content of the Gospel and the manner in which it is preached: “Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife” (Philippians 1:15).

The Church Fathers took this clear cue from Scripture, warning Christians of envy’s power to destroy charity’s communal bonds. John

Chrysostom advises that the baptized person should train herself to respond to others' successes with humility and praise, rather than envy: "Would you like to see God glorified by you? Then rejoice in your brother's progress and you will immediately give glory to God. Because his servant could conquer envy by rejoicing in the merits of others, God will be praised."¹ Leo the Great rehearses the story of our salvation as he links Christ's redemption with the devil's envy (*invidia*) in a pattern of how God draws forth some greater good from an evil: "Christ's inexpressible grace gave us blessings better than those the demon's envy had taken away."² Augustine calls envy "the diabolical sin," for there is nothing more averse to love than envy.³ Gregory the Great is an exceptional source on envy's evil. The envious man is consumed by this affliction, one which he imposes upon himself, trapped while "his mind, pining away, is wounded by its own pain and is tormented by the happiness of another."⁴ Those who are most near and like us become the target of our envy, "those whom we deem better than us in some respect."⁵ Once we fall into envy, it is not just a sin. It is a sin that carries its own punishment: "When the rottenness of the sore [of envy] corrupts the vanquished heart, the exterior signs indicate how gravely the madness stirs up the mind. One's color is affected by the pallor, the eyes are weighted down, the mind is inflamed, the limbs freeze up, there is frenzy in the thoughts, the teeth are grating."⁶ Envy also engenders other vices; in short, it is a deadly sin. Envy accompanies greed and pride: "The capital vices are conjoined by such a close connection that the one emerges from the other. For instance, the first offshoot of pride is vainglory, which, as it corrupts the oppressed mind, gives rise to envy; for as long as it craves the power of an empty name, it languishes with the fear that someone else will be able to acquire that power."⁷ Gregory draws upon the wells of scriptural evidence to inform his understanding, ultimately providing an account that constitutes one of the tradition's richest resources on envy's vileness.

The scriptural witness and the work of Gregory the Great become Thomas Aquinas's Christian sources for his own most extended treatment of envy in his mature work, the *Summa Theologiae*. They are used in equal measure in the *Secunda Secundae*, Question 36—eleven and ten times, respectively. (Other Christian thinkers such as

¹ John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Romanos* 71.5; PG 60, 448.

² Leo I, Sermon 73, 4; NPNF, Second Series, 12, 212.

³ Augustine, *Instructing Beginners in Faith*, 4.8; PL 40, 315–316.

⁴ Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job*, 5.46.85; PL 75, 728. Hereafter *Moralia*.

⁵ *Moralia*, Sect 84; PL 75, 727.

⁶ *Moralia*, Sect 85; PL 75, 728.

⁷ *Moralia*, 31.45.88; PL 76; 621.

Damascene and Augustine receive two mentions; Jerome, Isidore, and Cassian receive one.) Indeed, everything discussed from Gregory's account thus far becomes useful to Thomas in building his account of envy. Thomas has ample resources for constructing a traditionally and conspicuously Christian account of envy, both as a mortal sin and a capital vice.

Yet, Thomas frustrates expectations. In Question 36, one is struck rather by Thomas's disproportionate use of Aristotle to formulate his account of envy. He relies heavily on Aristotle in a multitude of ways: to lay out envy's ontology, its moral significance, its inner dynamics, its relation to the other passions such as desire and hatred, and its devolution into outright vice. Thomas adopts this material more or less directly from Aristotle without alteration, turning Aristotle into *the* primary source for his account of envy. As he pieces together this account, Thomas features Aristotle more prominently than even Scripture or Gregory the Great, naming Aristotle as an authority fourteen times. Despite his periodic citation of Gregory, Thomas offers few Christian glosses of envy within the constructive and substantive portions of his account. This further underscores Aristotle's towering presence. In sum, Thomas's writing on envy in Question 36 yields what appears an entirety—what we will call, for lack of a better term—"Pagan Envy," shorn of theological content.

This account is puzzling. It runs against our intuitions about envy's importance for the Christian tradition. Envy is a capital vice, one of the seven deadly sins, an utmost offense against God, and, if one sticks to Question 36, the reader will search in vain for Thomas's appreciation of envy of the distinctly Christian kind. Rather, the reader must look to the larger framework of Thomas's writing on envy—its placement within the questions on charity (*ST* II-II qq. 23–46) as a vice opposed to spiritual joy. Only within this context does Thomas give his readers a framework for understanding envy as a theological vice. In these other questions, he affirms the critical threat that envy poses to the Christian life by describing its serial offenses against the greatest of virtues, charity. Thus, one must place Question 36 within the questions on charity as a whole to see decisively how envy threatens the edifice of the Christian life in a special way, captured by Gregory the Great's claim: "Even though the venom of our ancient enemy is infused into the human heart by every vice that is perpetrated, still, in the case of this particular type of wickedness the serpent stirs all his innards and spews forth the venom of engraving malice."⁸ Ultimately, Thomas sides with the Christian insight that envy poisons our relationships with others, God, and even ourselves.

⁸ *Moralia*, 5.46.85; PL 75, 728. Cited by Thomas, *ST* II-II q. 36, a. 4.

Thomas's questions on charity as a whole, including the single question on envy, transpose his concern from Aristotelian confines to a robustly "Christian Envy."

This essay first treats "pagan envy," then "Christian envy," and finally the relationship between the two, for an overall tri-partite structure. Taken in outline, it rehearses the way in which Aristotle's thought informs the key features of Thomas's account of envy. In so doing, it reveals Thomas's understanding of the interrelation between natural and supernatural wisdom on a microcosmic level. More than that, this essay tries to illuminate Thomas's contribution to the Christian intellectual tradition's suspicion of envy. Thomas assembles a structure that reveals the abundant ways that envy undoes the work Christ wrought in us, chewing up charity. It eats away at our relationships with others, indeed God, and even—if we can finally see it—ourselves. In this, Thomas echoes Cyprian of Carthage who wrote that,

If any one closely look into this he will find that nothing should be more guarded against by the Christian, nothing more carefully watched, than being taken captive by envy and malice, that none, entangled in the blind snares of a deceitful enemy, in that the brother is turned by envy to hatred of his brother, should himself be unwittingly destroyed by his own sword.⁹

In all, Thomas describes how envy is adept in setting us at odds with everyone: ourselves, others, even God. Charity is set at odds with envy as charity is a share in the divine life that would rightly order all of our relationships through the singular superabundance of divine love.

PAGAN ENVY

The numbers bear out the claim that Aristotle is the primary source for Thomas's writing on envy. The *Summa* is not the only place that this is true. In Thomas's writing on envy in *De Malo*, for example, the *Nicomachean Ethics* is the single most cited text, and it exceeds citations of Scripture when taken as a whole.¹⁰ In his constructive analyses ("sed contras," "responses," and "replies to objections"), Aristotle is the single most cited authority. In fact, the case for *De Malo* might be more complex than just this, since it is a disputation whose final form might incorporate counterarguments not present in the master's original. In that case, it is reasonable to conclude that Aristotle was as much, if not even more, present in Thomas's private disputations.¹¹

⁹ Cyprian, "The Treatises of Cyprian," 10.3; PL 13, 41.

¹⁰ Aquinas, *De Malo*, Question 10, "Envy."

¹¹ Brian Davies, "Introduction" to *On Evil*, trans. Richard Regan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 12.

This same pattern emerges in Thomas's most mature work, the *Summa*.¹² Thomas treats envy twice in the *Summa*. In his first installment, in the questions on the passions (*ST I-II* qq. 22–48), Thomas cites Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* the most, just one time more than the *Nicomachean Ethics*. And for the second time, when Thomas turns to envy at length in the questions on charity, once again he demonstrates his heavy reliance on Aristotle by citing Aristotle more times than Scripture. Every detail of Thomas's writing on envy—quantitative or substantive—confirms and supports this initial impression that Thomas is massively indebted to Aristotle on envy.¹³

Thomas relies first and foremost on Aristotle's anthropology to categorize envy. Thomas writes: "In *De Anima* 3 the Philosopher distinguishes two appetites, and he says that the higher appetite moves the lower appetite" (*ST I* q. 80, a. 2). Envy is both a passion and a vice of the will—both a movement of the sentient appetite and a principle of action of the intellectual appetite. Thomas uses Aristotle's differentiation of types to inform and structure his entire analysis of envy. In *De Malo*, Thomas writes about envy as a capital vice amongst others, and, in the *Summa*, he treats it twice: first in the *Prima Secunda* and then in the *Secunda Secundae*. Thomas's unflagging commitment to Aristotle's philosophical divisions informs his decision to treat envy twice, first as a passion and second as a habit.

Thomas also iterates Aristotle's understanding of the morality of the passions. Thomas's other potential sources are not as yielding on this point. His use of Aristotle, on the other hand, allows him to develop the interplay between passions, will, and reason. Aristotle writes in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, "It is not the one who becomes fearful or angry who is praised or blamed, rather, it is the one who becomes fearful or angry *in a certain way*."¹⁴ Thomas understands Aristotle's claim as distinguish between (a) passions in their own right and (b) passions insofar as they are subject to the rule of reason and will.¹⁵ Passions in their own right are morally neutral, isolated and

¹² *Summa Theologiae*, II-II q. 36; hereafter *ST*. For *ST I*, I use the English translation of the *Summa Theologiae* by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger, 1948); for *ST I-II*, and if indicated, *ST II-II*, trans. Alfred Freddoso, www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/summa-translation/TOC.htm; and for *ST II-II*, Robert Miner, *Questions on Love and Charity: Summa Theologiae, Secunda Secundae, Questions 23-46* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2016).

¹³ Since Thomas's earlier work on envy in *De Malo* has a comparatively nascent treatment of envy and does not offer a distinct contribution from the *Summa*, I streamline my considerations to follow by focusing solely on the latter.

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* II.5, quoted in *ST I-II* q. 24, a. 1, ad. 3.

¹⁵ *ST I-II* q. 24, a. 1, ad. 3. This acknowledges the distinction between passions (a) in their own right (*secundum se*) and (b) insofar as they are subject to the rule of reason

floating above human experience. Fear-as-such is neither good nor bad. Anger-as-such is neither good nor bad. This is the claim that (a) sets out: passions in their own right. Moving onto (b), passions insofar as they are subject to the rule of reason and will: we do not experience fear or anger as isolated and floating above human experience. Our fear and our anger are responses to the world in which we find ourselves. As *our* passions, we experience them as subject to the rule of reason and will. Although the passions are movements of a non-rational appetite, they bear moral significance because we are the kinds of beings that we are. We are tutored to expect that envy, merely as a passion that we experience moving through this world, shoulders serious moral weight.

Aristotle uses the metaphor of constitutional rule to characterize the dynamics between the passions and the intellectual soul. He writes in the *Politics*: “One finds in the animal both despotic rule (*despoticus principatus*) and constitutional rule (*politicus principatus*). For the soul rules the body with a despotic rule, whereas the intellect rules the appetite with a constitutional and royal rule.”¹⁶ The highest faculties of the human reign over the lower faculties. In turn, the lower either consent or rebel. Thomas adopts Aristotle’s metaphor: “Political and royal rule is that by which someone rules free men, who, even if they are subject to the rule of the leader, nonetheless have something of their own by which they are able to resist the leader’s command.”¹⁷ Thomas uses a curious phrase here, that of having “something of their own” (*habent aliquid proprium*), because he imagines the sentient appetite to have additional powers at its disposal—the power of imagining and power of our senses. For instance, we can heed the suggestions of imagination so closely that we choose to follow something pleasant that reason forbids or even resist something unpleasant that reason demands. Thus, the sentient appetite is a free subject that does not follow reason lockstep—compliant, docile, and tame. Rather, it maintains autonomy in the freedom to consent or rebel from reason’s regal decrees. If the passions of the sentient appetite consent to reason’s dictates, the whole kingdom of the self remains in good working order. If the passions rebel, disorder breaks out. The question arises: how does envy fit into this scheme? Is it possible for envy to obey reason, or is envy an inherent rebel, an unruly reaction of the sentient appetite?

For both Aristotle and Thomas, the basic ontology of the passions emphasizes their potential goodness. Yet they admit exceptions for passions that are good or bad in themselves. Aristotle reasons:

and will (*secundum quod subiacent imperio rationis et voluntatis*) in *ST I-II* q. 24, a. 1 co.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Politics*, I.2 cited in *ST I* q. 81, a. 3, ad. 2.

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Politics*, I.2.

Not every action nor every passion admits of a mean; for some have names that already imply badness, e.g. spite, shamelessness, envy, and in the case of actions, adultery, theft, murder; for all of these and suchlike things imply by their names that they are themselves bad, and not the excesses or deficiencies of them. It is not possible, then, ever to be right with regard to them; one must always be wrong. Nor does goodness or badness with regard to such things depend on committing adultery with the right woman, at the right time, and in the right way, but simply to do any of them is to go wrong.¹⁸

Thomas agrees. He explains that envy is always bad because it takes as its object something that is itself at variance with reason: sadness at the good of another (*tristitia de bono alterius*). Envy's fundamental movement is to withdraw from the genuine good of another. Were we to withdraw from a genuine evil, rather than from a genuine good, or to be drawn to a genuine good, rather than withdrawing, then these would be good passions. Envy is precisely the opposite. Sorry over the good of another is a withdrawal from a genuine good.

Returning to Aristotle and Thomas's shared structural metaphor of the passions as lowly subjects who may choose to consent or rebel from the regal decrees of reason, envy has no potential to be a loyal, dutiful subject as its object something at variance with reason—sorrow over the good of another. Envy is, thus, an anarchist outlaw. It cannot take its rightful place as a subject among other subjects who together seek to live in harmony for the greater good of the kingdom. Envy must be expelled from the kingdom altogether, a passion needing not so much moderation as eradication.

In usual fashion, Aristotle uses envy's near neighbors to clarify the notion of envy itself.¹⁹ There are several other conditions that resemble envy that are not envy-as-such. For instance, what if someone has obtained a genuine good fortune that may bring harm to one's compatriots? In this case, one feels not so much sorrow over that good as fear that one's confreres may be harmed. This "ceases to

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.6, trans. Terence Irwin, 2nd ed. (Indiana: Hackett, 1999).

¹⁹ Gabriele Taylor builds on Aristotle to distinguish between different types of envy itself: "object-envy" (or admiring envy) for which there are not exclusive goods, versus "state-envy" for which there are winners and losers; state-envy is more vicious. Sub-types of state-envy include its emulative and destructive types: "emulative-state-envy" by which we improve our standing with respect to another, versus "destructive-state-envy" by which we wish to spoil the other's elevation; destructive-state-envy is the worst, though emulative-state-envy with a particular (rather than general) object is as destructive. These types are not easily distinguished or distinguishable given the messiness of our interior lives. Here the point is to note how readily envy lends itself to destruction. Gabriele Taylor, "Envy and Jealousy: Emotions and Vices," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (1988): 233–49; here 234–8.

become envy,” writes Aristotle, “and becomes fear.”²⁰ Or for instance, what if one sorrows over the undeserved good fortune of another?²¹ Aristotle calls this righteous indignation (*nemesis*) and holds it in high regard. He writes, “It is our duty both to feel sympathy and pity for unmerited distress, and to feel indignation at unmerited prosperity; for whatever is undeserved is unjust, and that is why we ascribe indignation even to the gods.”²²

Another example concerns jealousy (*zelus*). The case for jealousy is complex, in part because our everyday language conflates jealousy and envy. Admittedly, they are similar. Jealousy and envy both involve a person’s relationship to something she regards as good—perhaps a material possession, a position of relative power, a particular relationship, or some personal characteristic. Yet, the terms differ. Jealousy involves an imagined or actual threat to something one holds dear or (hopes to) hold dear. In jealousy, one is concerned with losing something one loves or (hopes to) love. By contrast, envy involves one’s feeling deprived in comparison to another. In envy, one is concerned to eliminate the discrepancy itself.²³ Aristotle sums these up as he writes that jealousy “is a good feeling felt by good persons, whereas envy is a bad feeling felt by bad persons. [Jealousy] makes us take steps to secure the good things in question, envy makes us take steps to stop our neighbor having them.”²⁴ Thomas iterates each of Aristotle’s conditions that resemble envy, adding only that with jealousy, Christians do well to distinguish between spiritual and temporal goods. Spiritual jealousy is great, and temporal jealousy is sometimes acceptable. This is a sliver within Thomas’s actual writing on envy where he adds to Aristotle by introducing a Christian distinction. Yet the matter pertains to jealousy rather than envy.

Unlike jealousy, envy is unqualifiedly bad because it sets us against our neighbor’s good. Envy involves comparison, and we envy only those people who we want to equal or surpass. Those are, according to Aristotle, “those who are near us in time, place, age, or reputation.... We do not compete with men who lived a hundred centuries ago, or those not yet born, or the dead, or those who dwell near the Pillars of Hercules, or those whom, in our opinion or that of others, we take to be far below or far above us.”²⁵ Thomas renders Aristotle’s social observations in an idiom that is updated for his contemporaries. He writes: “No one, unless he is insane, seeks to equal or surpass in glory

²⁰ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* II 9.22–3, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (New York: Dover Publications, 2004).

²¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.7.

²² Aristotle, *Rhetoric* II 9.13–6.

²³ Gabriele Taylor, “Envy and Jealousy,” 233–4. Cf. Luke Purshouse, “Jealousy in Relation to Envy,” *Erkenntnis* 60.2 (March 2004): 179–204.

²⁴ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, II 11.34–6. Roberts translates *zelus* as “emulation.”

²⁵ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* II. 10.6, 9–12.

those who are greater than him by much, for example, a common man vis-à-vis a king, or even a king vis-à-vis a common man, whom he surpasses by much. Hence a person does not envy those who are far removed from him by time or place or condition” (*ST II-II* q. 36, a. 1, ad. 2). In short, potters envy potters.

Envy, to Aristotle’s mind, is fundamentally a social vice. It destroys right relationships with neighbors. Thomas, in an unexpected turn, elaborates this aspect of envy in terms of charity. He writes: “The object of each—of both charity and envy—is our neighbor’s good, but according to contrary motions. For charity rejoices over our neighbor’s good, whereas envy sorrows over the same good” (*ST II-II* q. 36, a. 3). Thomas cites 1 John 3:14 in his support: “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren” (*ST II-II* q. 36, a. 3). This is precisely a moment when Thomas might offer a theological rendering of envy, or, at the very least, he might add a theological gloss, by alluding to how envy betrays the fuller Triune life in which we have been made participants by destroying our relationship with God.

Thomas disappoints on this score. He does not take a long-overdue theological turn. Instead, he takes the opportunity to remark on the inherent badness of envy itself. Then, he devotes his attention to an example that invokes people of varying moral excellence: the moral exemplar, very good people, and then ordinary folks. Their overall moral excellence is inversely proportional to their envy. Although this segue into examples does not pursue a theological line, it is still illustrative because it traces the dynamics of envy to help readers better understand how envy is destructive in more than one way (*ST II-II* q. 36, a. 4, ad. 3).

Thomas moves through his examples pedagogically. He starts with the moral exemplar. The exemplar’s passions are completely in line with her reason. She does not feel a shade of adultery’s concupiscence or a spark of homicide’s anger. She does not feel a shred of envy. Indeed, she does not feel envy at all.²⁶ The point is that it matters not only whether we do or do not act on our envy but also whether we feel any envy at all. Envy is an excellent case to show that we are morally responsible not only for how we act on our passions but also for the very passions that we feel!

Second, we have those we might call very good people—people who are arguably better than most of us. Very good people are likely to have what Thomas calls an “incomplete” motion of envy. This is the case when such a person has the very first flash of envy that arises

²⁶ Perhaps the only example we have of a perfect human is Jesus Christ as man? He had the capacity for evil—and indeed felt many shades of sorrow—but never envy.

in us from our being naturally sensual beings but whose reason presently overrides this little start. (Thomas considers this kind of envy as morally culpable as the envy of little children who, as sensual beings, do not have the benefit of the use of reason.) Such would be the envy of the saints. Envy in very good people amounts to a venial sin, almost a natural consequence of having a sensitive appetite whatsoever.

Finally, envy for the majority of us is sinister, complex, and merits elaboration. Our envy has a natural, discernible trajectory as it completes a total arc from inception, to middle, to rest. Thomas calls this a “complete” motion of envy. Its first stage is underway when we set out to lessen the glory of another, “either in hiding, and so there is a whispering campaign, or clearly, and so there is detraction” (*ST II-II* q. 36, a. 4, ad. 3). Usually our efforts concentrate on spoiling our neighbor’s possession of a good. Say, for example, that I envy a colleague’s facility with ancient languages. My colleague is so fluent that she contests an expert’s translation of an abstruse passage, and, in so doing, she may even help everyone else see that my skills in ancient languages are comparatively weak. Doubtless I wish that she were as bad (or worse) at ancient languages than me. Sometimes that may be enough. It may suffice in our envy to simply spoil another’s possession of a good, with the demon on our shoulder consoling us, “As long as that jerk doesn’t have it, I’m okay.”²⁷

Next the arc has a middle, and this depends on what happens to our neighbor and her good. If our neighbor has indeed experienced setback, we move from affliction over our neighbor’s triumphs to triumph over our neighbor’s affliction. Thomas regards this “joy at another’s misfortune,” what we call *schadenfreude*, as the daughter of envy (*ST II-II* q. 36, a. 4, ad. 3). Next there is the condition where we are unable to diminish our neighbor’s glory, where our nasty efforts have had no effect. This middle stage means we go on envying, likely with increased intensity.

Then comes the terminus of the arc of envy as it turns into abiding and deep hatred. Here envy becomes self-defeating. It turns from our wanting not only for our neighbor to be deprived of the good, to our wanting the good itself to be harmed. Our desires so transform at this point that they become incomprehensible. We now belittle the goodness of the exact good we are after. Or we vitiate the goodness of everything else surrounding that good, thereby depreciating its value.

²⁷ Many a scholar has confessed to me that envy is an especially prevalent vice among academics. Envy has to do with external goods that are, by nature, scarce and limited. The competition for these goods might have been made even more acute by the economic downturn of 2008, which put the squeeze on desirable employment and the resources that make rigorous peer-reviewed (and university press) publishing possible.

Or we would rather the good be destroyed than another have it. At this final stage, we become ready to disregard, devalue, or destroy the goodness of the good we so desperately desire. This is the way in which envy spoils the good it covets. Gabriele Taylor adds: "If envy spoils the good it covets then the desires of the envious are doomed to failure; they can never achieve the position they hanker after. The situation of the envious would necessarily be a hopeless one. No wonder, then, that it should be thought of as a deadly sin, leading to the death of the soul."²⁸ Pause to consider that this claim is curious coming from an Aristotelian—to invoke the tradition of deadly sins without the resources to explain what they might mean within the framework she offers.

Does Thomas have anything more to add here, namely, everything from the tradition on envy's sinfulness? In short, no. At this point, we have a coherent précis of Thomas's writing on envy from the *Summa Theologiae, Secunda Secundae*, Question 36. Thus far, despite his occasional citation of Gregory the Great or Scripture, there is little in his actual constructive account of envy that either reflects or bears out his own Christian convictions. What we have so far is not simply a basic exposition of Thomas on envy, but an illustration that Thomas adumbrates the crucial fundamental features of envy drawing on Aristotle, primarily and, dare we say, exclusively at each and every step. We find no elemental concepts that fit ill with Aristotle's, no basic parts missing, no feature unaccounted for. Thomas and Aristotle are lockstep thus far, and, having encompassed envy's Aristotelian cast, it appears that this is all there is for envy.

CHRISTIAN ENVY

Thomas implies a single ancillary conclusion that is crucial for understanding the full trajectory of envy. It comes only at the very end of his treatment on envy—in the last reply in the last article in the last question. This is where he considers the whole impulse of envy, from beginning to end. He writes, "The terminus is in hatred itself, since just as a good that gives pleasure causes love, so does sorrow cause hatred" (*ST II-II* q. 36, a. 4, ad. 3). In this final moment, he sends his reader from Question 36 on envy back two questions to Question 34 on hatred.

In this earlier question, Question 34, Thomas devotes an article to the claim that hatred arises from envy. He iterates the point that envy causes hatred—that the good of our neighbor becomes sorrowful and consequently hateful. He goes further still in the question on hatred. He describes how our hatred turns from hatred of our neighbor's good,

²⁸ Taylor, "Envy and Jealousy," 241.

to hatred of the good of our neighbor, that is, to hatred of our neighbor herself. To wit, envy begins in sorrow by focusing on the good of our neighbor and ends in hatred by focusing on our neighbor herself. The passion of hatred is not skilled at differentiating its objects. Indeed, Thomas admits that reasoning about hatred is other than reasoning about other passions (*ST II-II* q. 34, a. 6, ad. 2).

There is more. Neither envy nor hatred stops at our neighbor. For hatred of neighbor is bound up in hatred of God. Thomas writes: “Because envy of our neighbor is the mother of the hatred that is directed toward him, it consequently becomes the cause of hatred that is directed toward God” (*ST II-II* q. 34, a. 6, ad. 2). This is the complete movement of envy. It stops not only at hatred of the envied good (in Question 36) but encompasses hatred of the envied neighbor and hatred of God (in Question 34).

Once one starts to read the questions on charity adjacent to the question on envy, it is hard to know when to stop, and so, despite relying on Aristotle as his primary source, Thomas gives us a distinctively Christian account of envy. His account encompasses the total range and consequences of envy by situating it within a theological frame of reference. Its all-encompassing scope, moreover, implies that accounts of envy that lack this frame remain incomplete. This frame of reference is so definitive for envy that one cannot find a remedy for envy outside of it. In so conceiving envy, it has no cure other than charity.

In effect, Thomas shifts the entire frame for envy from Aristotle to Christianity by including his question on envy (Question 36) in his questions on charity (Questions 23–46). Envy is a vice opposed to charity, which means that what was once an ordinary vice of character for Aristotle is now changed in kind and degree. Envy opposes, obstructs, and destroys our relationship with God as expressed in the inner dynamics of charity. Charity is the virtue by which God creates in us the capacity to love God and our neighbor and ourselves in God (*ST II-II* q. 25). These three aspects of the single virtue of charity are inverted in envy.

Our neighbor stands as the most obvious casualty of envy. It was said above that the object of each—of both envy and charity—is our neighbor’s good but according to contrary motions since charity rejoices in our neighbor’s good whereas envy sorrows over that same good (*ST II-II* q. 36, a. 3). Envy collapses in on itself in spiritual sorrow (*ST II-II* q. 28). Charity discovers in our neighbor’s good the cause for the highest spiritual pleasure in joy. Envy seeks to spoil our neighbor’s possession of the good and devolves into hatred of our neighbor’s good altogether. Charity seeks to befriend all and is drawn into building up our neighbor’s good. Envy is our impoverishment by our neighbor’s good, because we are losers in a world of scarcity. Charity enriches us in the good of our neighbor, for our neighbor’s

good is a genuine intensification of our own abundant good. Envy gives us a specious good as our idol, asking us to honor deranged desire. Charity addresses our deepest longing with a joy that is completely full, even superabundant, and gives us more than suffices for our desire (*ST II-II* q. 28, a. 3). Envy is a hell on earth that we fashion, and, although we find it odious, we make ourselves at home. Charity points us heavenward as a foretaste of our ultimate blessedness, an increase in the joyful intensity of our participation in the Triune life. In all, depending on whether we are against or for our neighbor, comes sorrow or joy, destruction or edification, poverty or abundance, longing or fulfillment, hell or heaven.

Envy and charity are as much about us as about our neighbor. Our response to our neighbor's good says volumes about how we see ourselves.²⁹ When we give ourselves over to the convoluted logic of envy, we pin our problems on our neighbor. Our neighbor's good poses a threat to us only because we are lacking in some way ourselves. As envying selves, we see ourselves as limited and inferior, haunted by a sense of inadequacy and shortcomings. "The rational and straightforward response to this situation," writes Gabriele Taylor, "would be for [the envying self] to try to achieve that good, or, where this is not possible, come to terms with herself by finding other grounds for self-esteem. The envy-response runs counter to measures such as these by directing attention away from the supposed defect and focusing on the other's possession."³⁰ Envy is a misguided means of protecting ourselves. By shifting our critical gaze from the problem that lies in ourselves to an external threat, we further enact our own inadequacy. The self we protect in envy—the limited and inferior version of self, the self, marked by deficiencies and shortcomings—is not even worthy of that effort. Ironically, the envy-response moves us further away from what we truly desire, which is a self that is worthy of being loved unconditionally.³¹

From this vantage point, we are poised to appreciate Thomas's bold claim that envy's errant loves, desires, and pleasures are set aright by God. God is the one true unconditional lover. God, out of God's abundant love, gives us the capacity to love rightly. This is a process of transformation, and this transformation is radical. This is not a matter of taking our natural loves and pushing them further along their original path, nor is it taking our loves and then adding something more. Rather God's gift of charity so transforms our natural loves that it creates our very capacity to receive it (*ST II-II* q. 23, a. 2). Charity is our participation in a life not known to us before, the divine life,

²⁹ Taylor, "Envy and Jealousy," 243.

³⁰ Taylor, "Envy and Jealousy," 243.

³¹ Taylor, "Envy and Jealousy," 244.

and, through this gift of participation, we can finally make good our relationships with our neighbors and ourselves.

Charity gives us even better names to call our neighbors: our brothers and sisters in God. The love of the Father and the Son is the same by which we love our brothers and sisters. This love is depicted by Thomas in a beautiful simile: “As the vision by which light is seen, and that by which color is seen are the same species ... so too the act by which we love God and the act by which we love our neighbor are the same species” (*ST II-II* q. 25, a. 1). That is to say, there is a single habit of charity expressed in love of God and love of our brothers and sisters in God. Whereas envy sets us against the neighbor’s good, indiscriminate self-giving love runs in the opposite direction. Such love blurs the lines between our brother and sister’s good and our own good. Such love erases the boundaries of other and self that are foundational for envy to gain any traction. Thomas would affirm Gregory the Great’s insight that “[i]f the soul be wholly ravished in love of the heavenly land, it is also thoroughly rooted in the love of our neighbor, and that without any mixture of envy.”³² So too, Thomas would echo John Chrysostom’s advice that the baptized person should regard others’ successes as their own: “Would you like to see God glorified by you? Then rejoice in your brother’s progress and you will immediately give glory to God.”³³ All good contributes to our single common good: God.

This single habit of charity—already encompassing love of God and love of our brothers and sisters in God—extends even unto us (*ST II-II* q. 25, aa. 1, 4). Thomas returns to the language of friendship that he uses to introduce charity to reflect on love of self (*ST II-II* q. 23; *II-II* q. 25, a. 4). Just as God befriends us in charity, and we love our friends in charity, we are to love ourselves as our friends. Whereas envy would have us see a fundamentally defective self, charity sees a self that is esteemed by and is worthy of God’s love.

Overall, Thomas’s work on envy under the umbrella of the questions on charity participates in and contributes to the Christian intellectual tradition. Through his systematic juxtaposition of this vice and this virtue, he clarifies the numerous ways that envy injures charity. Envy opposes the greatest of virtues and, in its opposition, destroys our greatest gift. Envy eats away at the bond of charity, turning love of our neighbor, ourselves, and God into hatred of our neighbor, ourselves, and God. Envy kills charity.³⁴

³² *Moralia*, 86; PL, 75, 729.

³³ John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Romanos*, No. 71, 5; PG, 60, 448.

³⁴ *Moralia*, 5.46.85; PL, 75, 728: “By the bad quality of envy, even strong deeds of virtue go for nought before the eyes of God. Since the rotting of the bones from envy is the spoiling of strong things, even.”

THE CURE FOR ENVY

Thomas's treatment of the cure for envy gives us a further and final glimpse into the movement and action of envy. More than this, it helps explain how Aristotle's account of envy relates to Thomas's theological account. In Thomas's thinking, the cure for envy lies in the perfection of charity within us.³⁵ Thomas calls this cure *spirituale gaudium*, "spiritual joy" (*ST* II-II q. 34 Preface).³⁶ Thomas portrays envy as a vice opposed to charity generally and *spirituale gaudium* specifically. Whereas charity is the virtue that perfects our will, spiritual joy is the affection that expresses this completion. Joy is categorized as a fruit of the Holy Spirit and an act (or effect) of charity (*ST* II-II q. 28, a. 1).

Much like the passions, the affection of joy is not inherently good or bad. Thus, its kinds include spiritual joy, natural joy, and even the joy that demons experience after a fashion (*ST* I q. 64, a. 3). The difference between these notions of joy is not one of degree but of kind. "Spiritual joy" takes as its object God. In the Christian understanding, God is Joy. God's joy is "full," (*impleatur*) and God alone enjoys God in a way in which it is worthy to rejoice. God's joy is infinite and worthy of the infinite goodness of God. God's joy is complete, absolutely speaking. God is the basis for all our joy. Without God, there is no joy whatsoever—natural or supernatural.³⁷ God's gift of charity makes us capable of joy. Thomas uses the language of "participation" to designate that our share of joy is a share in God. True joy measures the extent of our participation in God. As our joy becomes complete, it culminates all of our loves, sets to rest all our restless desires, and satisfies in true delight. This joy is the exaltation of our whole being in charity.

By using charity as a framework for envy, Thomas reminds us that we are embodied creatures whose destiny of friendship with God comes to fruition in a life suffused with joy. This speaks volumes for

³⁵ Thomas's work on this score sounds novel only because it sits at odds with cures presented in contemporary pastoral missives, neo-Aristotelian thinking, and other current interpretations of Thomas cited above. In fact, Thomas simply echoes the sum of Christian tradition on the cure being charity/joy: from the Church Fathers—including Cyprian of Carthage, John Chrysostom, Augustine, and Gregory the Great—through Thomas to later medieval thinkers—including Dante, Langland, Gower, and Chaucer.

³⁶ See Sheryl Overmyer, "Grace-Perfecting Nature: The Interior Effect of Charity in Joy, Peace, and Mercy," *Questions on Love and Charity* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2016): 355–72.

³⁷ Without God, indeed, there would be nothing whatsoever. For discussion of this claim as it draws on Thomas's metaphysical ontology and use of analogical language, see Overmyer, "Three More Jigs in the Puzzle: The Unity of Analogy, Beatitude and Virtue in Thomas' *Summa Theologiae*," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15, no. 4 (2013): 374–93.

a particular vision of the Christian life—one of abounding, overflowing joy. Moreover, it speaks to a vision of the perfection of the *Imago Dei* in us. Thomas cites Psalm 85:3: “My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God” (*ST I-II* q. 24, a. 3). His treatment of envy, both as opposed to the joy of charity and envy as a passion itself, reminds us that our passions are essential in our pursuit and enjoyment of God. We should not only be moved by our will but also by our sentient appetite, not only by charity but also by joy. We must feel rightly, in short.

With this distinctively Christian cure for the deadly sin of envy, one wonders if Thomas intends an analogue of this cure for Aristotle’s envy. Does Thomas mean for something like natural joy to be a cure for pagan envy? Throughout the *Summa*, Thomas depends heavily upon analogical reasoning, which is especially conspicuous in its other parts: in the naming of God (*Prima Pars*) and in his treatment of happiness and the virtues (*Prima Secundae*).³⁸ Throughout these parts he is concerned with the conceptual complexity that connects our language and reality concerning God and us. He reflects that complexity through the immensely fruitful categories of imperfect/perfect, applied analogically. For example, whereas “perfect beatitude” designates God strictly speaking, “imperfect beatitude” refers to the way in which we know and love God. From this established primary meaning, this analogy can be extended to how our beatitude can be attained: whereas perfect eschatological beatitude cannot be had in this life, imperfect beatitude pertains to our flourishing as we are wayfarers. Whereas our supernatural end is attained in the infused virtues in perfect beatitude, our natural end is attained in the acquired virtues in imperfect beatitude.

It would be of little surprise to Thomas were we to extend this mode of reasoning to the cures of envy. We might say that our supernatural end is attained in spiritual joy as “perfect joy,” while our natural end is attained in natural joy as “imperfect joy.” Spiritual joy is for us the complete and total meaning of joy, whereas natural joy is an incomplete and partial meaning. Both kinds of envy find their respective cures in corresponding kinds of joy. Yet, analogical reasoning cannot proceed without a primary referent or reality, reminding us that the basis for all joys, including natural joy, is God.

The logic applies equally well, albeit differently to envy, because envy is not a perfection, rather it names the absence of one. This is where the threat of envy in all its forms becomes clearer. Perfect beatitude is threatened by Christian envy *and* what we have called pagan envy, conveying that the threat that envy poses for Christians to attaining their end is even more all-encompassing and greater than for non-Christians. This intensification of the stakes of envy echoes the

³⁸ Overmyer, “Three More Jigs in the Puzzle,” 380–9.

abiding concern of Scripture and the Church Fathers. Recall that Cyprian of Carthage is concerned that envy turns to hatred of one's brother, as a man becomes "entangled in the blind snares of the deceitful enemy" whereby he "should himself be unwittingly destroyed by his own sword."³⁹ Leo the Great tells salvation history as an unfolding of Christ's work that finally defeats the devil's envy.⁴⁰ And Gregory the Great tells us how envy breaks the bonds of charity within the community, leading to other vices in its deadly undoing of divine love.⁴¹ And Thomas? He situates his treatment of envy within a larger metaphysical-ontological structure that reveals the many ways in which envy is a grave threat to the love of Christ.

This full account of envy by Thomas reaches well beyond Question 36 alone. In fact, as Thomas presents envy, he does not separate out pagan envy and Christian envy. Rather Question 36 is taken up into the whole sweep of the questions on charity. Thomas gives an integrated and complete account of the scope of pagan envy as taken up into a theological framework. When Thomas writes of envy, even if seeming pagan through our myopic and selective reading habits, its true and absolute meaning refers to neighbor and God.

Thomas does not merely augment Aristotle's account of envy by "addition"—addition of God, of loving one's neighbor as oneself, of loving ourselves as God loves us, of a divine joy that is sheer gift, of our participation in the divine life. What happens in Thomas's writing on envy is not augmentation but transformation. As he integrates his understanding of pagan envy into Christian envy, he transforms it by permanently changing the stakes. Our envy never harms only our neighbor and ourselves but also and always harms our relationship to God. This means that Aristotle's fundamental human notion of what takes place in envy no longer suffices because all the human passions and habitual principles for action are in some way touched by the divine life. Perhaps then there is no real moment where Thomas's own meaning for envy is "pagan"? For Thomas, to write or speak of envy is to invoke the ways in which we frustrate true human flourishing—not merely in *eudaimonia*—but in charity and joy.⁴² **M**

³⁹ Cyprian of Carthage, "The Treatises of Cyprian," X.3; PL, 13, 41.

⁴⁰ Leo I, Sermon LXXIII, No. 4; NPNF 212.

⁴¹ *Moralia*, Sect 85; PL, 75, 728.

⁴² With thanks to the fellow participants of the *New Wine, New Wineskins* conference of 2015, and Sean Larsen. This project was assisted by a grant from the Faculty Research and Development Program, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, DePaul University.