

Three Christian Understandings of the Virtues

	Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE)	Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE)	Stanley Hauerwas (1940-present) [a contemporary challenge]
<i>How do we come to know truth?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - either through <i>reason</i> (which is frail) or through <i>authority</i> (which is natural) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - similarly to Augustine, we can know truth through reason and faith, where faith is the supernatural perfection of knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - we come to know the truth by committing ourselves to a tradition in which it is lived; this tradition is the Christian church
<i>What is happiness?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - when the chief good of human beings is both loved and possessed - <i>unhappiness</i>₁: not having what you love (likened to torture) - <i>unhappiness</i>₂: having what you love but it is hurtful (likened to being cheated) - <i>unhappiness</i>₃: not loving the good thing you have (linked to disease) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - for Aquinas, the human being is a rational animal, therefore happiness involves the perfection of the rational soul - all beings act for their good (at least their perceived good), and it is reason's job both to identify real goods and to prioritize them rightly in the search for the highest good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - for Hauerwas, this is not the first question a Christian should ask; rather the Christian should ask how do I live as a faithful disciple to the way of Jesus. - Christians need some way of overcoming the form of thinking that assumes happiness is a Gospel concern
<i>What is the nature of the chief good for human beings?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - it must be the truly highest good and not just an apparent highest good - it must not be able to be lost against one's will 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - as for Augustine, Aquinas understands God to be the highest good - all good things, insofar as they exist, are good; so in some sense, goodness and being are equivalent terms differing only in idea - God is the chief good because God is the basis on which we understand particular beings and particular goods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the most human beings can hope for in this life is to be faithful disciples - his position does not posit a different good from Augustine or Aquinas but rather a different set of questions
<i>What is the nature of the human being (such that we can know the good)?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the human being is a unity of body and soul - the soul is the good of the body because it gives life - God is the good of both because it is in following after God that the soul finds something higher than itself and more perfect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the human being is a unity of a rational soul animating a body - the human being has the capacity to know its potentialities or powers and to understand ideas of better and worse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - for Hauerwas, the modern person is in an essentially different place from that of Augustine and Aquinas because we are living after the Enlightenment and its glorification of the autonomous (self-ruling) free subject - the Christian must counter this by recognizing life as gift

<p><i>What is virtue and how is it produced?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Virtue is perfect love of God - virtue is produced when the soul follows after or imitates something better than itself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - virtue is a perfection of a natural power that occurs through habituated action - virtues are divided most basically into intellectual and moral virtue on the one hand; and acquired and infused virtues on the other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - virtue is the result of committing oneself to the community that takes the Gospel as its narrative to answer questions of goodness and moral formation
<p><i>How are the virtues enumerated?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - all virtues are forms of love - <i>temperance</i>: “love giving itself entirely to that which is loved” - <i>fortitude</i>: love readily bearing all things for the sake of the loved object” - <i>justice</i>: “love serving only the loved object and therefore ruling rightly” - <i>prudence</i>: “love distinguishing with sagacity between what hinders and what helps it” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - all virtues are perfected by the infused virtue of charity - <i>temperance</i>: involves the perfection of the concupiscible or desiring powers - <i>fortitude</i>: involves the perfection of the irascible or competitive powers - <i>justice</i>: involves the perfection of the will (rational appetite) which is likened to right order (internal and external) - <i>prudence</i>: involves the perfection of the intellectual power of practical reason, but is also taken to be the guiding moral virtue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hauerwas does not dispute the enumeration, but holds that Aquinas’ account, holding that all the virtues are unified in the person who holds God as the highest good, is not sufficient to confront the basic puzzle of modern life: how to offer a rival account to autonomy as the highest good and liberal democratic polity as the highest form of life
<p><i>What is the basic danger for human beings in cultivating virtue?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recall that for Augustine, the basic human problem is pride (putting oneself in place of God, and loving lower goods in place of the highest good) - Therefore, Augustine emphasizes that “God then alone is to be loved; and all this world, that is, all sensible things, are to be despised—while, however, they are to be used as this life requires.” - This also means for human beings, one must love one’s neighbor “that he [or she] may love God with a perfect affection. For you do not love him as yourself, unless you draw try to draw him to that good which you are yourself pursuing.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aquinas recognized a number of significant moral problems but perhaps the most significant two are habit and irrationality - We easily become habituated into bad behaviors such that we acquire bad traits of character (vices) and these a frequently the result of reason becoming clouded by passion or not reasoning correctly about how our lower goods are ordered to the highest good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the basic danger for cultivating virtues is in thinking that we can understand them apart from the witness of the Church - the correlative danger for Christians is that they succumb to the idea that liberal democratic society has distinctive virtues (respect for the choices of others, tolerance, non-coercion, civic participation) that are coordinate with the Gospel