

AQUINAS AND THE GIFTS: CONTEMPORARY CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PLACE OF THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE CHRISTIAN MORAL LIFE

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SUMMARY: I. *Introduction*. II. *Two modes, two theories*. 1. John of St. Thomas and the standard two modes account. 2. The Rival two modes account. 3. Evaluation. III. *The Gifts in the moral life: New proposals*. 1. Angela McKay Knobel: Natural and supernatural virtue. 2. José Noriega: The *instinctus rationis* and the *instinctus Spiritus Sancti*. 3. John M. Meinert: Grace and the gifts. 4. Andrew Pinsent: The Gifts as second-personal dispositions. 5. Animal instincts and the gifts. IV. *Concluding remarks*.

I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the preceding centuries the gifts of the Holy Spirit have received little attention within the ambit of moral theology. As one author has observed, “the most common historical response by far has been to ignore the existence and role of these attributes in Aquinas’s work.”¹ Some find them superfluous, indistinct from the infused virtues: Aquinas acknowledges this as a view held in his time; others like Scotus and more recently Odon Lottin concur.² Many relegate any treatment of the gifts to the areas of spiritual theology or mysticism. Manuals of moral theology from the last century often include the gifts among their contents but do little more than enumerate them.

Among those who have treated Thomas’s doctrine of the gifts, a common thread emerges in their understanding of the gifts, particularly regarding the place of the gifts in the moral life, that is, at what point they come into play, and when and how often they are needed. This interpretation of the gifts—represented by

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¹ A. PINSENT, *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas’s Ethics*, Routledge, New York 2012, 25.

² See *ST* I-II q. 68, a. 1; SCOTUS, *Ordinatio* III, suppl. Dist. 36, English translation in A.B. WOLTER, *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C. 1986, 237–252; and O. LOTTIN, *Morale fondamentale*, Desclée, Tournai 1954, 427–434.

the great commentator John of St. Thomas—remained largely unchallenged until the turn of the century when several authors decided to revisit the treatise on the gifts. Perhaps most notable among these authors is Angela McKay Knobel, who, inspired by an article of Servais Pinckaers, proposed a different interpretation of the gifts, claiming the bulk of the Thomist tradition had gotten Aquinas wrong on this point.³

Angela McKay Knobel and James W. Stroud have already delineated clearly the terms of this debate.⁴ In the following section, I offer a summary of the two accounts and evidence for McKay Knobel's interpretation, ultimately arguing for this position. This outline of the rival interpretations in section two provides the context for section three. The revival of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in moral theology prompted by Pinckaers, McKay Knobel and others has inspired a number of doctoral dissertations and monographs. Having established that Aquinas understands the gifts of the Holy Spirit to play an integral role in the Christian moral life, these authors, working from various perspectives, have sought to better understand this role, the relation of the gifts to other habits like the infused virtues, and their place in practical reason guided by grace. Section three offers a summary of the principal contributions of these authors: (1) Angela McKay Knobel, who considers the gifts in the context of Aquinas's accounts of natural and supernatural virtue; (2) José Noriega, who studies the *instinctus Spiritus Sancti* in the gifts in light of the *instinctus rationis*; (3) John M. Meinert, who reads the treatise on the gifts in light of the treatise on grace; (4) Andrew Pinsent, who offers a metaphor on the gifts that highlights their interpersonal or second-personal character; and finally (5) I offer the results of my own investigation, which studies the instinct of the Holy Spirit in light of animal instincts.

³ A. M. MCKAY, *The Infused and Acquired Virtues in Aquinas' Moral Philosophy*, PhD diss., The University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame 2004; and A. MCKAY KNOBEL, *Aquinas and the Infused Moral Virtues*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 2021. McKay Knobel was inspired by Pinckaers, who himself was inspired by Jan H. Walgrave. It is important to note that José Noriega—also following Walgrave and Pinckaers—developed a similar position regarding the place of the gifts in the moral life prior to and independent of McKay Knobel's work. His study will be the focus of special attention in section III. Despite the chronological precedence of Noriega's work, I choose to focus on McKay Knobel as representative of what will be termed the "rival two modes account" for two reasons: (a) recognizing that her proposal breaks from a long tradition of thought on the gifts, she directly confronts the traditional view represented by John of St. Thomas; and (b) her work on the gifts prompted several other dissertations or monographs on the gifts, each of which will be considered in the following sections.

⁴ James W. Stroud's outline of the two accounts can be found in J. W. STROUD, *Thomas Aquinas' Exposition of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit: Developments in His Thought and Rival Interpretations*, SThD diss., The Catholic University of America, 2012, chap. 2. See also J. W. STROUD, *Instinctus and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit: Explaining the Development in St. Thomas's Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, «Journal of Moral Theology» 8/2 (2019) 60–79.

II. TWO MODES, TWO THEORIES

The two interpretations of the gifts of the Holy Spirit have many points in common, painting the same basic picture: The gifts of the Holy Spirit are perfective attributes rooted in and bestowed together with the theological virtues. Because they presuppose grace and charity, they remain as long as charity remains, as long as the soul is in the state of grace; they will remain even in heaven. Unlike the gift of prophecy or other charisms, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are habits, which are given to all the baptized and not a select few. These habits are characterized by receptivity: in particular, they dispose the person to be moved by the *instinctus* of the Holy Spirit, which is often translated as the “impulse” or “prompting” of the Holy Spirit. The human agent needs these gifts of the Holy Spirit because reason, even when it is formed by the theological virtues, is insufficient for attaining the supernatural end.⁵ The *instinctus* of the Holy Spirit, moving us sweetly through the gifts, helps direct us to this end, and thus the activity of the gifts is often described as an illumination or a seeing.

While the two interpretations agree on a basic level about *what* the gifts of the Holy Spirit do, they differ greatly in their understanding of *when* and *how often* they act. At the heart of the contention between the two theories is their understanding of the relationship between the gifts and the infused virtues, which in turn depends on their understanding of the “modes” of human action. Both agree that there are two modes of human action in this life: a natural or human mode, and a divine or “above the human mode”; they differ, though, on how these modes are characterized and divided, that is, under which mode one is operating when acting with the acquired virtues, infused virtues, and gifts, respectively. I will follow Stroud in referring to John of St. Thomas’s division of the two modes of human action as the “standard two modes account” and McKay Knobel’s division as the “rival two modes account.”⁶

⁵ The terms “natural end” and “supernatural end” are helpful when analyzing and distinguishing between the activity of the acquired virtues and that of the infused virtues and the gifts. Moreover, they are used by Aquinas himself as well as his commentators, and thus when presenting Aquinas—whether directly citing his works or presenting him as he is understood by the tradition—they cannot be avoided.

The use of these terms runs the risk, however, of implying that the human person has two ends and perhaps two natures. For Aquinas, the human person has one nature and one true, ultimate end. Every person is called to participate in the divine life, a calling and an end that surpasses our purely natural capacities (and is thus fittingly termed “supernatural”). Any time the terms “natural end” or “connatural end” appear, they are used to refer to the kind of activity or ends one can pursue without the assistance of grace.

⁶ Before John of St. Thomas, similar views were proposed by John Capreolus, in *On the Virtues*, K. WHITE, R. CESSARIO (trads.), The Catholic University of America Press, Washington 2001, esp.

1. *John of St. Thomas and the standard two modes account*

Born João Poinso, the Portuguese Dominican so thoroughly assimilated Aquinas's thought that his contemporaries are said to have referred to him as "another Thomas," and he fittingly received the religious name John of St. Thomas.⁷ His great commentary on the *Summa Theologiae*, the *Cursus Theologicus*, was the fruit of more than twenty years of lecturing in theology. Though he did not complete the redaction of the text before his death, it was the last disputation he finished that would become his most famous: the treatise on the gifts of the Holy Spirit.⁸

Perhaps John of St. Thomas's most lasting—or at least most well-known—contribution to the theology of the gifts is his metaphor of the ship, which can be

299–324; as well as Thomas de Vio Cajetan, whom John of St. Thomas references explicitly, and whose theory of the three-fold movement of human action was pivotal to John of St. Thomas's reading of the gifts, as will be seen in what follows. Following John of St. Thomas are the two great Dominican commentators Ambroise Gardeil, see *Dons du Saint-Esprit*, in A. VACANT, E. MANGENOT, E. AMANN (eds.), *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, IV, Libraire Letouzey, Paris 1939, 1728–1781; *The Holy Spirit in Christian Life*, Blackfriars, London 1953; *The Gifts of the Holy Ghost in the Dominican Saints*, A. TOWNSEND (trad.), Bruce, Milwaukee 1937; and Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, see *Le mode suprahumain des dons du Saint-Esprit dans la Somme Théologique de S. Thomas*, «Vie Spirituelle» 8 (1932) 124–136; *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, M. T. DOYLE (trad.), I, Tan Books and Publishers, Rockford 1989, esp. 66–82, 223–240; *Christian Perfection and Contemplation: According to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. John of the Cross*, M. T. DOYLE (trad.), Tan Books and Publishers, Rockford, esp. 271–336. More recently are D. HUGHES, W. FARRELL, *Swift Victory: Essays on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, Sheed & Ward, New York 1955; M. M. PHILIPON, *Les dons du Saint-Esprit*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris 1964, esp. 145–148; and R. CESSARIO, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington 1996, 159–180, and *Introduction to Moral Theology*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington 2001, 205–212. Among these last few authors there can be found a growing emphasis on the importance of the gifts in the Christian moral life in all its phases (for example, Philipon follows Garrigou-Lagrange's division of the three ages of the spiritual life but delineates a role for the gifts in each phase, see Philipon, *Les Dons*, 149–154); however, they still follow John of St. Thomas in presenting two different modes of graced action: one with the infused virtues alone and another with the extraordinary help of the gifts. Finally, although his presentation of the character of the gifts as shaped by charity understood as friendship with God in many ways parallels the vision of the gifts outlined in section III.4 and III.5, Paul Wadell's understanding of when the gifts intervene in the moral life follows in the line of John of St. Thomas. See *Friends of God: Virtues and Gifts in Aquinas*, Peter Lang, New York 1991, 121–136.

⁷ See "Introduction to the 1951 Edition" in JOHN OF ST. THOMAS, *The Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, D. HUGHES (trad.), Cluny Media, Tacoma 2016, 21.

⁸ The treatise is found in JOHN OF ST. THOMAS, *Cursus theologicus in summa theologicam d. Thomae*, VI, Ludovicus Vives, Paris 1885. All English translations as well as the numbering are taken from the 2016 edition of *The Gifts of the Holy Spirit*.

moved forward either by laborious rowing (referring to operation under the virtues) or by a breeze filling the sails (operation under the gifts).⁹ At the basis of John of St. Thomas's understanding of the gifts and their relation to the virtues illustrated in the ship metaphor is Cajetan's presentation of the development of the moral life, which he divides into three stages of movements.¹⁰ Each of these movements in the person's progress toward the final end can be characterized by or distinguished according to the principle moving the soul to the good and the rule by which it is measured: In the first movement, the principle is "the human mind endowed with the natural light of reason and prudence," which is measured by human reason. This movement corresponds to the acquired virtues. In the second movement is "the human mind adorned with the light of grace and faith," which again is measured by human reason and corresponds to the infused virtues. Finally, in the third movement is "the human mind as it is impelled by the impulse of the Holy Spirit,"¹¹ which is measured by divine reason and corresponds to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The three-fold movement can be summarized as follows:

	<i>Habit</i>	<i>Principle</i>	<i>Rule</i>
(1)	Acquired virtues	Natural light of reason and prudence	Human reason
(2)	Infused virtues	Light of grace and faith	Human reason
(3)	Gifts of the Holy Spirit	<i>Instinctus</i> of the Holy Spirit	Divine reason

Within these three movements are *two modes*, established by the rule that governs and measures human action. The first and second movements—those corresponding to the operation of the acquired and the infused virtues—belong to the same mode because they are both governed by human reason:

The infused virtues are concerned with a supernatural end and because of this, they are more elevated than the acquired virtues. But even in the infused virtues the rule of action and manner of measuring action in relation to its proper objects and end is according to infused prudence, which regulates according to the ordinary rules and manner of understanding, inferred by the human process of reasoning.¹²

There exists therefore a difference of proportion or degree between the acquired and infused virtues: by reason of their object—the supernatural end—the infused

⁹ JOHN OF ST. THOMAS, *Gifts*, 77, n. 29.

¹⁰ THOMAS DE VIO CAJETAN, *Commentarius*, in THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae. In Opera omnia iussa edita leonis xiii p.m.*, VI, Typographia polygotta, Rome 1891, 448. John of St. Thomas makes explicit reference to Cajetan's three-fold movement in *Gifts*, 78, n. 30.

¹¹ JOHN OF ST. THOMAS, *Gifts*, 78, n. 30.

¹² *Ibidem*, 276, n. 23.

virtues are higher, but “are proportionately the same.”¹³ On John of St. Thomas’s view, even the theological virtues in the supernatural order “are always founded upon human reason and limited by human industry.”¹⁴

The second mode is that of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In this movement, one’s acts are also directed to the supernatural end, but proceed from the *instinctus* of the Holy Spirit and are under the rule of divine reason.¹⁵ The gifts, then, are given to perfect the virtues, “extending the virtues to things which through themselves they could not attain.”¹⁶ While the habit of the gifts are stable and permanent, present in all the faithful as long as sanctifying grace is present, the movement of the *instinctus* of the Holy Spirit is sporadic and infrequent.¹⁷ In John of St. Thomas’s understanding, activity under the second mode (which occurs in the third movement of the moral life) is ulterior to that of the infused moral and theological virtues; for this reason, it is found only in those advanced in the spiritual life.

2. *The Rival two modes account*

As indicated previously, John of St. Thomas’s interpretation of the gifts is arguably the most prevalent in moral and spiritual theology, especially in the Thomist commentatorial tradition. In 1991 the great Dominican moral theologian Servais Pinckaers challenged this view in an article on Aquinas’s doctrine of *instinctus*. He argues that this term *instinctus* is key to understanding Thomas’s doctrine of the gifts and that his choice of words—unexpected or perplexing as it might seem—is intentional and is meant to indicate that this movement of the Holy Spirit is a constant in the moral life rather than sporadic and exceptional.¹⁸ Angela McKay, in her thesis, “The Infused and Acquired Virtues in Aquinas’ Moral

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, 89, n. 58.

¹⁵ See, for example, *ibidem*, 55, n. 16.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 52, n. 12.

¹⁷ See, for example, *ibidem*, 90, n. 61, where he states, “The obedience and disposition which is a preparation for habitual subjection to the Holy Spirit should remain constant in the faithful. However, its exercise depends upon a motion and actual impulse which is not within the power of man.” Elsewhere, he writes that the exercise of the gifts is the foundation of mystical theology (77, n. 29) and that “such unusual acts are not to be found in all the just. Many live in simplicity according to a prosaic life devoid of extraordinary activities” (81, n. 36).

¹⁸ S. PINCKAERS, *Morality and the Movement of the Holy Spirit: Aquinas’s Doctrine of Instinctus*, C. S. TITUS (trad.), in J. BERKMAN, C. S. TITUS (eds.), *The Pinckaers Reader: Renewing Thomistic Moral Theology*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington 2005, 385–396. Originally published as *L’instinct et l’Esprit au coeur de l’éthique chrétienne*, in C. J. PINTO DE OLIVEIRA (ed.), *Novitas et veritas vitae: Aux sources du renouveau de la morale chrétienne*, Editions du Cerf, Paris 1991, 213–223. A 1969 article by Jan H. Walgrave on the same topic inspired Pinckaers to further investigate the importance of *instinctus* in the theology of the gifts: *Instinctus Spiritus*

Philosophy,” follows Pinckaers’ cue and in the context of treating the infused virtues in Aquinas outlines and argues for an alternative reading of the gifts and their role in the moral life, a reading which has since been taken up and expanded upon by other authors.¹⁹

Central to McKay Knobel’s understanding of the gifts, their relation to the infused virtues, and their place in the moral life is her division of the two modes of human action in contrast to John of St. Thomas. Like Cajetan and John of St. Thomas, she posits two modes of action in our pursuit of the final end, one under the rule of human reason and one under the rule of divine reason. She differs, though, in where the line is drawn between these two modes. According to McKay Knobel, the gifts of the Holy Spirit do not constitute their own mode set above the infused virtues; rather, in her account, the infused virtues are also under the rule of divine reason and thus fall into the second mode.²⁰ The dividing line between the two accounts can be depicted as follows:

THE STANDARD TWO MODES ACCOUNT

acquired virtues

(rule of human reason)

infused virtues

gifts of the Holy Spirit

(rule of divine reason)

Sancti: Een proeve tot Thomas-interpretatie, «Ephemerides Theologiae Lovanienses» 5 (1969) 417–431.

¹⁹ James W. Stroud, John M. Meinert, Andrew Pinsent, and my own work all rely directly on McKay Knobel’s dissertation. Other authors who have presented similar views of the gifts within the broader context of treating other themes in Thomistic philosophy and theology include J. I. JENKINS, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997, esp. 156–157, 188–192; E. LUIJTEN, *Sacramental Forgiveness as a Gift of God: Thomas Aquinas on the Sacrament of Penance*, Peeters Publishers, Louvain 2003, 71–75; J. RZIHA, *Perfecting Human Actions: St. Thomas Aquinas on Human Participation in Eternal Law*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington 2009, esp. 180–182, 244–255; and D. SPEZZANO, *The Glory of God’s Grace: Deification According to St. Thomas Aquinas*, Sapientia Press, Ave Maria 2015, 240–248.

²⁰ See A. M. MCKAY, *The Infused and Acquired Virtues in Aquinas’ Moral Philosophy*, 42–50 where she contrasts the standard two modes account with her own.

THE RIVAL TWO MODES ACCOUNT

acquired virtues (rule of human reason)

infused virtues

(rule of divine reason)

gifts of the Holy Spirit

This means that in McKay's account there are not three movements of human action but two. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are no longer considered a higher movement, ulterior to the infused virtues. There is only the human agent with his or her natural powers on the one hand and graced action on the other. The difference between the standard account and the rival two modes account in their division of the movements of human action can thus be depicted as follows:

THE STANDARD TWO MODES ACCOUNT

- (1) Man with his natural powers (acquired virtues)
- (2) Graced action under the rule of human reason (infused virtues)
- (3) Graced action under the rule of divine reason (gifts)

THE RIVAL TWO MODES ACCOUNT

- (1) Man with his natural powers (acquired virtues)
- (2) Graced action (infused virtues and gifts)

In the rival two modes account, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not conceived as stable habits given together with charity whose exercise, though, is ulterior and transient, reserved to mystics and those far advanced in the spiritual life. Rather, they are a constant, integral component of the Christian moral life from the initial outpouring of grace in baptism, inseparably tied to the infused virtues formed by charity. On this view, the gifts and the infused virtues operate together and grow together: as the gifts of wisdom and counsel and fortitude are perfected, so too are one's acts of charity and fortitude, and so forth.²¹

3. *Evaluation*

The debate over the modes of human action and the progressive stages or movements in the moral life has profound implications for the theology of the gifts

²¹ *Ibidem*, 40.

and for moral theology in general. Broadly speaking, the different accounts reflect different understandings of the necessity of grace and the possibilities of human activity unaided by grace. More specifically, if the gifts fall into a mode set apart from that of the infused virtues it means they are not integral to the Christian moral life but an extraordinary sort of action found only in advanced souls. On John of St. Thomas's view, because the gifts do not come into play until the third movement, they too easily become annexed to the upper echelons of the moral life, something reserved for the spiritual elite. The language he employs to describe the gifts—as adornments or crowns that gild the virtues—further ingrains the idea that they are not integral to the ordinary Christian life. They are therefore more at home in spiritual works than in the pages of moral theology texts. On McKay Knobel's view, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are intimately tied to the activity of the infused virtues and are active in all believers in the state of grace, a necessary component of meritorious activity.

The question is, who gets it right? How does St. Thomas understand the activity of the gifts in relation to the infused virtues? In the succeeding sections, I outline three arguments in favor of the rival two modes account: the first follows McKay Knobel's arguments, which draw from the treatise on the gifts in the *Prima Secundae*; in the second I offer further evidence from Aquinas's treatment of the individual gifts in the *Secunda Secundae*; and the third section follows James W. Stroud in examining the historical development of Aquinas's doctrine, which will both side in favor of the rival two modes account and shed some light on the prominence of the standard two modes account in the tradition.

a) The Treatise on the gifts

Following St. Thomas, both McKay Knobel and John of St. Thomas hold that human reason, even when the person is endowed with the theological virtues, is insufficient; where they differ is at what point in the moral life the virtues will prove themselves insufficient and thus need the further movement of the Holy Spirit in the gifts. On John of St. Thomas's view, one can proceed and advance in the theological life with the infused virtues alone. Ultimately, he is obliged to follow Aquinas in affirming that the gifts are necessary for salvation, but still holds that one can direct his or her acts towards the final supernatural end, that is, one can act as an adopted son or daughter of God and perform meritorious acts without the gifts.

McKay Knobel, on the other hand, argues that Aquinas's position is that reason—even when formed by the theological virtues—does not suffice for *any* meritorious act directed to the supernatural end, and is thus in continual need of

the gifts. She turns to the treatise on the gifts in the *Prima Secundae*, q. 68, a. 2, where Aquinas states:

But in matters directed to the supernatural end, to which man's reason moves him, according as it is, in a manner, and imperfectly, informed by the theological virtues, the motion of reason does not suffice, unless it receive in addition the prompting or motion of the Holy Spirit.²²

The passage just quoted would already appear to indicate that the need for the gifts is constant; Aquinas nowhere qualifies the insufficiency of man's reason in directing acts to the supernatural end, stating, for example, that it is insufficient in directing acts of a heroic or extraordinary kind, thus leaving the impression that it might be sufficient for more ordinary acts. In the response to objection 2, though, Aquinas leaves no doubt; he explicitly states that the need for the gifts is a constant in the Christian moral life: "By the theological and moral virtues, man is not so perfected in respect of his last end, as not to stand in *continual* need of being moved by the yet higher promptings of the Holy Spirit."²³ Furthermore, in the body of the article Aquinas compares the way the Christian needs the gifts to the way the moon needs the sun, which can never give off light by itself without the sun's illumination.²⁴ The idea, then, that the gifts are only needed occasionally, in difficult or extraordinary circumstances or reserved to advanced degrees in the spiritual life, appears to be untenable based on Aquinas's treatise of the gifts in the *Prima Secundae*.²⁵

²² *ST I-II* q. 68, a. 2: *Sed in ordine ad finem ultimum supernaturalem, ad quem ratio movet secundum quod est aequaliter et imperfecte formata per virtutes theologicas, non sufficit ipsa motio rationis, nisi desuper adsit instinctus et motio spiritus sancti.* See A. M. MCKAY, *Infused and Acquired Virtues*, 35.

²³ *ST I-II* q. 68, a. 2, ad 2, emphasis added: *per virtutes theologicas et morales non ita perficitur homo in ordine ad ultimum finem, quin semper indigeat moveri quodam superiori instinctu spiritus sancti.*

²⁴ See A. MCKAY KNOBEL, *Aquinas and the Infused Moral Virtues*, 69–72; and A. M. MCKAY, *Infused and Acquired Virtues*, 47–50. McKay Knobel also analyzes Aquinas's comparison between our need for the gifts and a medical student's need for guidance from a physician. In the latter work (pp. 49–50), she responds to Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange's interpretation of these analogies.

²⁵ In article 1 of the same question 68 Aquinas makes a distinction between the virtues and the gifts according to their measure or rule. This article is used both by proponents of the standard two modes thesis as well as those of the rival two modes thesis. McKay Knobel offers a convincing analysis of this article, showing that when Aquinas distinguishes between the virtues and gifts according to their rule, he is referring not to the infused virtues but the acquired virtues. See A. M. MCKAY, *Infused and Acquired Virtues*, 45–47. See also J. M. MEINERT, *The Love of God Poured Out: Grace and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in St. Thomas Aquinas*, Emmaus Academic, Steubenville 2018, 114–122, where he analyzes the manner in which Aquinas understands the

b) The Gifts in the *Secunda Secundae*

Aquinas's treatment of the individual gifts in the *Secunda Secundae* offers more information regarding the frequency with which he understands the gifts to operate as well as the point in one's spiritual life at which they begin to work. In a number of instances, Aquinas's description of a gift indicates that he understands it to operate in all Christians even at the beginning of the spiritual life, and therefore together with the infused virtues as opposed to an ulterior, extraordinary motion above and beyond the virtues. The two clearest examples are Aquinas's treatment of the gifts of wisdom and fear.

In *ST* II-II q. 45, a. 5, which asks whether wisdom is in all who have grace, Aquinas considers the objection (arg. 2) that the judgment proceeding from wisdom is limited to those in authority. He responds, affirming the presence of wisdom in *all* who have grace:

Although it belongs to those alone who are in authority to direct and judge other men, yet every man is competent to direct and judge his own actions.²⁶

And every person in the state of grace is competent to direct and judge his or her own actions *because* the gift of wisdom is operative in him or her. Moreover, we can be sure that Aquinas is referring not only to the presence of the habit of the gift of wisdom but to its motion as well: returning to q. 68, it is clear that our reason is insufficient in directing matters to the supernatural end—which is precisely the task of wisdom—“unless it receive in addition the *instinctus* or *motion* of the Holy Spirit.”²⁷ Every man is competent to direct and judge his actions in relation to the supernatural end because—or, perhaps better, insofar as—every man in the state of grace is moved by the gift of wisdom.²⁸

Aquinas does explicitly admit of a *degree* in the operation of the gift of wisdom among Christians, noting that we “obtain various degrees of wisdom through union with Divine things.”²⁹ Some receive a higher degree of wisdom so as to contemplate more deeply the divine mysteries. “This degree of wisdom is not

gifts to be necessary: Aquinas describes them as being indispensably and perpetually necessary, whereas John of St. Thomas takes them to be fittingly necessary.

²⁶ *ST* II-II q. 45, a. 5, ad 2.

²⁷ *ST* I-II q. 68, a. 1, emphasis added.

²⁸ Aquinas does qualify the operation of the gift of wisdom in every man in his response to objection 3: “Baptized idiots, like little children, have the habit of wisdom, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, but they have not the act, on account of the bodily impediment which hinders the use of reason in them” (*ST* II-II q. 45, a. 5, ad 3). This, however, does not create a problem for the argument above and fits within Aquinas's understanding of the gifts. For Aquinas, the gifts operate where the motion of reason is *insufficient*, not where the motion of reason is *absent*.

²⁹ *ST* II-II q. 45, a. 5.

common to all that have sanctifying grace, but belongs rather to the gratuitous graces.”³⁰ There is, however, a minimum measure of wisdom in all believers, a measure that is “wanting to none who is without mortal sin through having sanctifying grace,” a measure that is necessary for their salvation.³¹

One finds a similar picture in Aquinas’s treatment of the gift of fear. He states that “fear is the beginning of the spiritual life,”³² again, not an operation found only in the mystics but in any and all believers setting out on the path of righteousness. As with wisdom, he observes various degrees of filial fear, which increases together with charity.³³ Describing initial fear, he states that

it belongs to the state of beginners, in whom there is a beginning of filial fear resulting from a beginning of charity, although they do not possess the perfection of filial fear, because they have not yet attained to the perfection of charity.³⁴

Fear, like wisdom, is clearly active—even if not perfectly so—from the outset of the Christian moral life; it is needed “in order to make a beginning” in following the divine law and ordering one’s life accordingly.³⁵

c) The Historical development of Aquinas’s doctrine

When one examines the *Summa*, the evidence is stacked heavily in favor of the rival two modes account. In defense of the standard two modes account, this position is not without support in Aquinas’s works; if one travels beyond the *Summa* into Aquinas’s earlier works, one finds St. Thomas positing the standard account in no unclear terms. In his commentaries on Isaiah, the *Sentences*, and Galatians, he explicitly places the infused virtues in the human mode or under

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ *Ibidem*. He notes specifically that it is “no more than suffices for their salvation”—a minimum measure indeed, yet, evidence that wisdom is operative to some degree in all those who are in the state of grace.

³² *ST II-II* q. 19, a. 12, arg. 1. This is placed in the mouth of the objector; however, it is not the idea that fear is the beginning of the spiritual life that Aquinas is contending with; rather, he is responding to the argument that the beatitude of poverty of spirit cannot correspond to fear precisely because fear is found at the beginning of the spiritual life and poverty of spirit denotes a perfection of that same life.

³³ *ST II-II* q. 19, a. 10: “Now filial fear must increase when charity increases, even as an effect increases with the increase of its cause.”

³⁴ *ST II-II* q. 19, a. 8.

³⁵ *ST II-II* q. 19, a. 7, explaining the manner in which “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps 110:10), he states that “since the regulation of human conduct by Divine law belongs to wisdom, in order to make a beginning, man must first of all fear God and submit himself to Him: for the result will be that in all things he will be ruled by God.”

the rule of human reason,³⁶ while the gifts are given for “higher acts” than the acts of the virtues, operating *supra humanum modum* (above the human mode) or *ultra humanum modum* (beyond the human mode).³⁷

Both accounts agree that (a) the standard two modes theory is representative of Aquinas’s earlier works, and (b) there is a development in Aquinas’s thought between the *Sentences* and the *Summa*. The disparity lies in whether Thomas’s mature works are to be read in continuity with his earlier thought, or if the former constitutes a departure from the latter. Proponents of the standard two modes account, of course, argue for continuity.³⁸ James W. Stroud, in his dissertation on the development of Aquinas’s thought on the gifts, argues that the *Summa* is indeed a rectification of his earlier thought, and that in many ways the two are incompatible.³⁹

In support of his position, Stroud observes that nowhere in the *Summa* does Aquinas indicate that the infused virtues follow the rule of human reason; rather, he affirms that the acquired virtues are under the rule of human reason and the infused virtues are under the rule of divine law.⁴⁰ In addition, the language of “human mode” and “above/beyond the human mode” (*supra/ultra humanum modum*) all but disappears,⁴¹ and the example of faith and the gift of understanding—where faith enables us to see things obscurely in a human mode and understanding enables us to see things transparently in a divine way—, which

³⁶ See, for example, *Sent* III d. 34, q. 1, a. 1, ad 2, and q. 1, aa. 2 and 3.

³⁷ Aquinas uses this language throughout his treatment of the gifts in the *Sentences* and repeats it almost verbatim approximately ten years later in his commentary on Galatians. See *Sent* III d. 34, q. 1, aa. 1–3; and *In Gal* c. 5, lect. 6, n. 329.

³⁸ Garrigou-Lagrange, for example, argues that the doctrine of the gifts remains the same; see *Le mode suprahumain*, 124–136. Edward D. O’Connor, in his appendix on the gifts in the Blackfriars edition of the *Summa*, does concede that “it would be going too far...to identify the theory of the commentary with that of the *Summa*,” but ultimately asserts that the “two expositions are fundamentally compatible” (*Appendix 4: The Evolution of St. Thomas’s Thought on the Gifts*, in THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, 24, Oxford University Press, New York 2006, 119).

³⁹ J. W. STROUD, *Thomas Aquinas’ Exposition of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit: Developments in His Thought and Rival Interpretations*, SThD diss., The Catholic University of America, 2012. See also J. W. STROUD, *Instinctus*.

⁴⁰ J. W. STROUD, *Aquinas’ Exposition*, 188 Some passages in the *Summa*, most notably I-II q. 68, a. 1, are put forth by the standard two modes account in support of their position that the infused virtues fall under the rule of human reason. Nowhere, though, does Aquinas explicitly make this claim. For a response to the standard two modes account’s interpretation of q. 68, a. 1, see A. M. MCKAY, *Infused and Acquired Virtues*, 45–47; and J. W. STROUD, *Aquinas’ Exposition*, 144–150.

⁴¹ J. W. STROUD, *Aquinas’ Exposition*, 187, 189. There is one exception: the language of “mode” appears in *ST* I-II q. 68, a. 1. Stroud, while acknowledging the similarity in language with Aquinas’s account of the gifts in *Sent* III d. 34, q. 1, a. 1, argues that “it would be misreading the text to assume that these two replies make the same point regarding the modes of human action” (J. W. STROUD, *Aquinas’ Exposition*, 189). For his full analysis of these texts, see pp. 189–193.

Aquinas uses repeatedly in his early treatment of the gifts, is absent from the *Summa*.⁴² Based on these developments, Stroud concludes that Aquinas significantly develops his thought, articulating a new, different doctrine of the gifts that rejects key elements of his earlier doctrine.⁴³ Therefore, while the standard two modes account is representative of Aquinas's earlier thought, there is ample evidence that Aquinas changes his position, a position better represented by the rival two modes account.⁴⁴

III. THE GIFTS IN THE MORAL LIFE: NEW PROPOSALS

As Stroud admits in his own evaluation of these two interpretations of the gifts, "Knowing that over seven hundred years of Thomist reflection has for the most part consistently interpreted St. Thomas according to the Standard Two Modes account, I tread very hesitantly in denying the validity of the Standard Two Modes account."⁴⁵ And yet the evidence outlined above shows that such a reconsideration is warranted. Nowhere in the *Summa* does Aquinas distinguish between two movements or levels in the sphere of graced action in this life. If a three-fold movement of human action is to be found in the *Summa* it is that of nature, grace, and glory.⁴⁶ And in this second movement, the life of grace during our pilgrim

⁴² See J. W. STROUD, *Aquinas' Exposition*, 193–194. Aquinas uses this example in *In Is* c. 11, lect. 2, n. 361; *Sent* III d. 34, q. 1, a. 1; and *In Gal* c. 5, lect. 6, n. 329.

⁴³ In addition to the above pieces of evidence, Stroud notes other differences and developments, including: the division of the gifts in relation to the virtues (in the *Sentences* there are no gifts corresponding to the theological virtues of hope and charity); in the *Summa* the theological virtues are only imperfect in our possession of them, not in themselves, as held previously; Aquinas no longer connects particular gifts to the contemplative and active lives in the same way he does in the *Sentences*; and his development of thought on the gifts parallels his development of thought on grace and faith, both of which are connected to his use of the term *instinctus* and a passage from Aristotle's *On Good Fortune*. See *Aquinas' Exposition*, 173–197 for a summary.

⁴⁴ It is perhaps opportune to say a word in defense of John of St. Thomas and the tradition that follows him. John of St. Thomas repeatedly underscores the interpersonal and affective character of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, elements that are essential to a proper understanding of the gifts, as will be argued in section III. Moreover, even John of St. Thomas's understanding of the division of the modes of human action, like the ages of the interior life outlined by his fellow Dominican Garrigou-Lagrange, points to the clearly observable reality of gradual growth or stages in the Christian life. This recognition, though, is not incompatible with the affirmation that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are active in all believers in the state of grace, even if only at a "minimum measure." A theology of the gifts, if it is to accurately represent the thought of St. Thomas, must account for both the operation of the gifts at a minimum measure at the outset of the spiritual life and for their continual growth and perfection, the latter of which will more closely resemble the mystical activity described by John of St. Thomas.

⁴⁵ J. W. STROUD, *Aquinas' Exposition*, 211.

⁴⁶ See, for example, *ST* I q. 12; q. 93, a. 4; I-II q. 65, a. 5.

journey on earth, the infused virtues and the gifts are bestowed together and lost together, giving the impression that they would function as a unit. Moreover, Aquinas understands these different sets of habits as flowing from grace in an orderly fashion, where the theological virtues are the origin of the gifts, but the gifts are the origin of the infused moral virtues, not an ulterior, optional perfection.⁴⁷

This understanding of the gifts and their relation to the infused virtues also better reflects and respects the general schema developed by Aquinas in the *Secunda Pars*. Many scholars have downplayed or simply ignored the various attributes that Aquinas adds to the Aristotelian schema—the infused virtues and the gifts, as well as the beatitudes and fruits—as though they are an awkward attempt by Aquinas to fit together disparate pieces of the Christian tradition, mentioning them only because earlier theologians had. Throughout the *Secunda Pars*, though, Aquinas treats the virtues–gifts–beatitudes–fruits as an organic unit; he develops an elaborate structure of the virtues, ending the treatment of each of the theological and cardinal virtues with a discussion of the corresponding gift, beatitude, and fruit.⁴⁸ For Aquinas, these additions are not a pious excursus but integral components of the Christian moral life. It is the task of the moral theologian, then, to elaborate their place and role in the sphere of graced action.

Precisely because centuries of Thomistic thought on the gifts understood them to be adventitious elements of the moral life, scholarship on their exact role in practical reason and their relation to other habits and powers of the soul is underdeveloped. In the last several decades, a number of authors have taken up this task. Each of these authors' works deserves to be studied in their entirety; what follows is an attempt to outline the principal contributions of each author to the study of the gifts, with a focus on their insights into the role of the gifts of the Holy Spirit within the graced dynamic of practical reason.

1. *Angela McKay Knobel: Natural and supernatural virtue*

As stated previously, Angela McKay Knobel considers the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the context of her primary focus: the infused virtues.⁴⁹ Working with the premise

⁴⁷ See *ST* II-II q. 19, a. 9, ad 4.

⁴⁸ Among others, it is perhaps Andrew Pinsent who most emphatically observes the unity of the virtues, gifts, beatitudes, and fruits. See A. PINSENT, *The Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit*, in DAVIES, BRIAN, STUMP, ELEONORE (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012, 475–488.

⁴⁹ The above consideration of McKay Knobel's position as representative of the "rival two modes account" relied primarily on her doctoral dissertation. She has since published various articles and most recently a book on the infused virtues, which also treats the gifts of the Holy Spirit: *Aquinas and the Infused Moral Virtues*. The present section relies primarily on her more developed thought in this book.

that grace does not destroy but fulfills our created nature, she turns to the natural workings of acquired virtue in order to understand their supernatural fulfillment or perfection in the infused habits. In particular, she examines the respective roles of the seeds of virtue, the natural light of reason, and the acquired moral virtues.

At the basis of Aquinas's account of natural virtue are the *semina* or seeds of virtue. These seeds, which are the first principles of practical reason, give us a proportion for or an "inception" of the end;⁵⁰ they contain in seed form the entirety of the natural law. Through the deliberation of reason we are able to make this general knowledge more concrete, to move from principles to conclusions. The moral virtues further aid reason's deliberation by inclining us to particular principles: the seeds of virtue (through the habit of synderesis) incline us to universal principles, and the moral virtues incline us to particular principles or ends, which are the more specific (but still fairly general) goals of the individual moral virtues, such as courage, temperance, fidelity, etc.⁵¹

In Aquinas's account of supernatural virtue we again find (a) principles that orient us to our end in a general way, and (b) the need to move from general principles to concrete actions. St. Thomas draws an analogy between the role of the seeds of virtue in the natural law and that of the theological virtues in the New Law.⁵² These virtues give us a proportion for and "'inception' of our supernatural fulfillment—a vague and incomplete knowledge of and desire for participation in the divine life."⁵³ Then, analogous to the role of the acquired virtues, God gives us infused moral virtues that aid the deliberation of reason and incline us to the ends of these virtues, and which have a new mode or measure: that of divine rule.⁵⁴

Why, then, does the Christian need the Gifts of the Holy Spirit? While reason has some capacity for moving from principles to concrete actions on the natural

⁵⁰ *De verit.* q. 14, a. 2. McKay Knobel translates Aquinas's *inchoatio* as inception; see *Aquinas and the Infused Moral Virtues*, 19–22.

⁵¹ See *Ibidem*, 28–36. The question of the virtues' contribution to the deliberation of reason is not without controversy. For a summary of the debate, see G. BUTERA, *Thomas Aquinas on Reason's Control of the Passions in the Virtue of Temperance*, PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 2001; and N. KAHM, *Aquinas on Emotion's Participation in Reason*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington 2019.

⁵² See, for example, *ST* I-II q. 62, a. 1 and 3, and q. 63, a. 3, arg. 3 and ad 3.

⁵³ A. MCKAY KNOBEL, *Aquinas and the Infused Moral Virtues*, 48. See also pp. 49–53, where she delineates the limits of this analogy, i.e. noting important differences between the seeds of virtue and the theological virtues. One notable difference is that the theological virtues are not only first principles or seeds of virtues but also virtues properly speaking.

⁵⁴ See, for example, *ST* I-II q. 63, a. 3. Again, there are limits to this analogy between the acquired virtues and the infused moral virtues. This is precisely the larger aim of McKay Knobel's work: the nature of the infused virtues and their relation to the acquired virtues. See *Aquinas and the Infused Moral Virtues*, esp. 54–68.

plane, unaided by grace, it is unable to move from these new supernatural principles (the infused virtues) to concrete actions because the person does not perfectly possess the theological virtues: “the motion of reason does not suffice unless it receive in addition the *instinctus* or motion of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁵ The gifts, therefore, are given by God to aid reason in rendering these new general principles specific, that is, in choosing concrete actions directed to the supernatural end. This divine aid guides reason without replacing or overriding it. “This is the peculiar effect of inspiration or of the gifts: to achieve the unity of action between the superior principle, which is God’s Spirit, and the interior principles which are the virtues, at the level of our free and reasonable will, at the source of our actions.”⁵⁶ The gifts of the Holy Spirit perfect all the powers of the soul—intellectual and appetitive—and in doing so, the *instinctus* of the Holy Spirit operating in the gifts “goes beyond what our reason and our appetites can do on their own and helps us to experience what we are otherwise unable to see or feel.”⁵⁷

2. José Noriega: *The instinctus rationis and the instinctus Spiritus Sancti*

José Noriega treats the gifts in the context of his broader study of the Holy Spirit and moral knowledge, «*Guiados por el Espíritu*». Like most authors who attempt to unpack Thomas’s understanding of the gifts, Noriega centers his attention on the meaning of the word *instinctus*, which defines the operation of the gifts in Aquinas’s mature thought. Among the various uses of *instinctus* across St. Thomas’s works, Noriega observes the parallel Aquinas draws between the *instinctus Spiritus Sancti* and what he calls the *instinctus rationis*: “In those matters where the instinct of reason is not sufficient and the instinct of the Holy Spirit is necessary, consequently, a gift is necessary.”⁵⁸ In other words, the instinct of the Holy Spirit must play a role analogous to that of the instinct of reason, either replacing or aiding its operation (Noriega will argue for the latter). Unfortunately, the term *instinctus rationis* is even more mysterious than *instinctus Spiritus Sancti*; formulated as such, *instinctus rationis* appears only once in the *Summa*, in the passage just cited.⁵⁹ Examining the term in the context of the whole of *ST I-II* q. 68, though, Noriega concludes that Aquinas understands the *instinctus rationis*

⁵⁵ *ST I-II* q. 68, a. 2.

⁵⁶ S. PINCKAERS, *Morality and the Movement*, 389. McKay Knobel cites this in *Aquinas and the Infused Moral Virtues*, 73. In her earlier work, she argues that “every act of infused virtue involves the simultaneous operation of the corresponding gift” (*Infused and Acquired Virtues*, 39, note 57).

⁵⁷ A. MCKAY KNOBEL, *Aquinas and the Infused Moral Virtues*, 74; see also 68–79.

⁵⁸ *ST I-II* q. 68, a. 2, my translation: *Unde in his in quibus non sufficit instinctus rationis, sed est necessarius spiritus sancti instinctus, per consequens est necessarium donum.*

⁵⁹ Outside of the *Summa*, it appears only in *De verit.* q. 14, a. 10, arg. 7, and q. 24, a. 12.

to be synonymous with *iudicium rationis*, *motio rationis*, *imperium rationis*, and *impetus rationis*.⁶⁰

Considering the movement to good action on the natural plane, Noriega explains that we find two *instinctus* at work in the human person, playing distinct but complementary roles: first is the *instinctus naturae*, that impulse in the natural inclinations which moves one to recognize as good naturally given or fixed ends not chosen by the person; and second is the *instinctus rationis* or *imperium rationis*, the command of reason, by which one chooses a particular good so as to perform a concrete action. There is a reciprocal relation between these two instincts: without the first principles one would not recognize any particular good as *good*; but without the actual judgment of reason in a given circumstance, one would not be able to recognize a *particular* good as good.⁶¹

What does this mean for the gifts if the *instinctus Spiritus Sancti* is the graced analogate of—or operates together with—the *instinctus rationis*? The consequences for our practical reason, says Noriega, are great:

For man to recognize a good as fitting in relation to his own inclinations, the human tendential system informed by charity must be activated from within himself in relation to the particular good presented. Man needs an “impulse” by which he can recognize that act as good for him in relation to the tendencies he finds activated in himself.⁶²

While the instinct of faith and the habits of the theological virtues give us new tendencies, we need the gifts in order to choose and perform any concrete act in relation to these tendencies. Just as the *instinctus rationis* or the judgment of reason is necessary to identify and choose a concrete good in relation to the natural inclinations, the gifts, says Noriega, allow the person to be moved by the Spirit so as to “recognize, desire and choose a specific particular good in relation to the supernatural end of his or her active tendencies: the gifts thus constitute

⁶⁰ See J. NORIEGA, «*Guiados por el Espíritu*»: *El Espíritu Santo y el conocimiento moral en Tomás de Aquino*, SThD diss., Pontificia Università Lateranense, Roma 2000, 483. Noriega outlines no argument for concluding that these terms are synonymous. He does, though, cite a number of texts that parallel Aquinas’s reasoning and language in *ST* I-II q. 68, a. 2, where he asserts that the *instinctus Spiritus Sancti* is needed where the *instinctus rationis* is insufficient. The difficulty in Noriega’s argument is in its reliance on the vague *instinctus rationis*. Aquinas uses this term only three times, each time referring to distinct but related ideas. Moreover, a number of the passages Noriega cites to support his equating *instinctus rationis* with *iudicium rationis*, *motio rationis*, *imperium rationis*, and *impetus rationis* could be interpreted in a manner that does not necessitate this equation. That being said, as will be seen in what follows, Noriega’s conclusions complement those of McKay Knobel and also find confirmation in the proposals of the other authors that will follow.

⁶¹ See *ibidem*, 483.

⁶² *Ibidem*, 487. All citations of Noriega’s work are my own translation.

the ‘moral sensibility’ of the Christian.”⁶³ And this activity of the gifts works in tandem with that of the infused virtues in an “organic unity of dynamisms,” both necessary in the production of a meritorious act.⁶⁴ Aquinas, argues Noriega, “does not ‘oppose’ virtues and gifts but integrates them, as both are necessary in the production of the act.”⁶⁵

3. *John M. Meinert: Grace and the gifts*

John M. Meinert’s study of the gifts operates on the premise that if we want to better understand the *instinctus Spiritus Sancti* and the gifts in general, we must read the treatise on the gifts side-by-side with the treatise on grace.⁶⁶ Aquinas did not intend for the various sections of the *Summa* to be read and understood piecemeal, in isolation from one another; and it is especially important that these two areas—grace and the gifts—be studied together. Through this side-by-side study, Meinert concludes that the *instinctus Spiritus Sancti* operating in the gifts is the same supernatural or graced motion that the tradition calls actual grace, or more specifically, the kind of actual grace called common *auxilium*.⁶⁷ In other words, when Aquinas is speaking of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, he has in mind the movement of common *auxilium* in the believer and vice versa. This divine *auxilium* is the movement of grace outlined by Aquinas in *ST* I-II q. 109, a. 9: a motion post-justification, that is, in those who have already received the gift of habitual grace, and it is described as something needed in order to act righteously.

What does the identification of these two graced motions mean for the study of the gifts of the Holy Spirit? It means, argues Meinert, that our knowledge of the gifts is not limited to those instances where Aquinas explicitly treats them; it means that all we know about common *auxilium* can be applied to the gifts.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, 488. It is noted that Noriega’s presentation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit goes far beyond that which is outlined in the paragraphs above. As he states in the conclusion of his introductory section on the role of the gifts in our moral knowledge, one must study the individual gifts in order to outline the concrete way in which each one influences practical reason.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, 491.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, 490.

⁶⁶ His study on the gifts is in his book *The Love of God Poured Out*. While the present summary focuses on the implications of the treatise on grace for the study of the gifts, it is noted that Meinert’s study also outlines the implications of the study of the gifts for open questions in the theology of grace. See esp. ch. 3 of his work.

⁶⁷ Aquinas only once explicitly draws a connection between the motion of the gifts and divine *auxilium* (*ST* II-II q. 19, a. 9, ad 1). Meinert asserts that the identification between the two is implicit in Aquinas’s thought. He bases his argument on a study of Aquinas’s use of Romans 8:14 (which Aquinas employs to explain the activity of the gifts) and on the similarities between the treatment of common *auxilium* in *ST* I-II q. 109, a. 9 and the treatment of the gifts in *ST* I-II q. 68 and elsewhere. For Meinert’s full argument, see *The Love of God Poured Out*, 98–113.

In short, it means that, like common *auxilium*, the *instinctus Spiritus Sancti* in the gifts must have the following basic characteristics: it is a supernatural motion, which activates a supernatural capacity—activating the believer as secondary cause; this motion enables the believer to act well and to act at all in relation to the supernatural end; it is healing and elevating; it is operative and cooperative; it guards the believer against temptation; and it will remain in heaven.⁶⁸

Of particular import is Meinert's consideration of operative and cooperative grace in relation to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Operative and cooperative graces are formally one grace; they are distinguished by their effects on the will: in operative grace, God alone acts, and with cooperative grace, both God and the believer act. As Meinert explains, "prior to justification, the operative actual graces given by God to convert are prevented from being cooperative in the strict sense by the will's indisposition."⁶⁹ This is where the gifts as healing and elevating and the gifts as habits comes into play: the gifts heal the person's indisposition to God's motion; they are described as making the believer "amenable" or "disposed to" the *instinctus Spiritus Sancti* and thus to the motion of divine *auxilium*.⁷⁰ The habits of the gifts enable believers to be "well—" or "sweetly" moved by the gifts, moved according to their proper mode, "without prejudice to their free will."⁷¹ The motion of grace—*auxilium* or the *instinctus Spiritus Sancti*—that would otherwise be operative becomes "co-operative" in the habit of the gifts.

At the heart of the gifts' activity, then, is giving the believer the capacity for action under cooperative grace. This in turn confirms the indispensable role of the gifts in meritorious action, which is the effect of cooperating grace⁷²; without cooperative grace there is no merit. It also tells us something about the moment or moments at which the gifts operate. Aquinas states the following about the movements of operative and cooperative grace:

One thing is said to cooperate with another not merely when it is a secondary agent under a principal agent, but when it helps to the end intended. Now man is helped by God to will the good, through the means of operating grace. And hence, the end being already intended, grace cooperates with us.⁷³

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, 113. For Meinert's full outline of the implications for the gifts based on this identification between *auxilium* and the *instinctus Spiritus Sancti*, see pp. 113–155.

⁶⁹ J. M. MEINERT, *The Love of God Poured Out*, 18.

⁷⁰ See *ST* I-II q. 68, a. 3.

⁷¹ *ST* II-II q. 52, a. 1, ad 3. See also *ST* I-II q. 68, a. 1; q. 110, a. 2; II-II q. 8, a. 5; q. 52, a. 1; and J. M. MEINERT, *The Love of God Poured Out*, 127–132.

⁷² *ST* I-II q. 113, prologue.

⁷³ *ST*, I-II q. 111, a. 2, ad 3.

Cooperative grace—and therefore the gifts of the Holy Spirit—concern the willing of means.⁷⁴ The operation of the gifts supposes the orientation to the supernatural end through the theological virtues; the gifts, then, operate at the moment when one is choosing a particular good directed to that end. And because this movement of grace is co-operative, it is clear that the *instinctus Spiritus Sancti* does not override or replace the activity of reason but accompanies and assists it.

4. *Andrew Pinsent: The Gifts as second-personal dispositions*

The primary focus of Andrew Pinsent's studies of the virtues, gifts, beatitudes, and fruits is to develop a fitting metaphorical understanding of their activity.⁷⁵ "Even in the most dry and abstract discourse, such associations will exert a powerful influence on the imagination. In particular, erroneous metaphors will distort understanding as a result of a kind of cognitive dissonance."⁷⁶ Already existing metaphors, of course, draw from one's conceptual understanding; one must therefore form a solid conceptual skeleton before attempting to put flesh on it through a metaphor.

Pinsent identifies a number of common approaches to the virtues and gifts that will ultimately obscure a proper understanding of Aquinas's approach to these habits: First, many scholars tend to read Aquinas in a strict Aristotelian lens, which carries with it the tendency to view things like the gifts, beatitudes, and fruits as "extrinsic additions," as though Aquinas was simply sprinkling a little grace on top of Aristotle's framework.⁷⁷ Second, virtues are often treated in isolation, but when Aquinas treats the virtues, he typically does so in what Pinsent

⁷⁴ Elsewhere, Aquinas identifies operative grace with the interior act of the will and cooperative grace with the exterior act (*ST* I-II q. 111, a. 2). There is debate over whether the exterior act—and therefore cooperative grace—corresponds to the choice of means or the bodily execution of the act or both. Bernard Lonergan outlines the position of different commentators and considers five possibilities regarding Aquinas's identification of the interior and exterior act before concluding that the exterior act refers to both the bodily execution and the act of will commanding the execution. See B. LONERGAN, F. E. CROWE – R. M. DORAN (eds.), *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, I, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2000, 132–142. The above conclusions about the gifts operating at the moment of choosing the means rests in part on Lonergan's interpretation of cooperative grace, an interpretation that is contested by others. These conclusions and their implications for the role of the gifts in choosing concrete actions or means, though, are supported by McKay Knoble's and José Noriega's studies of the gifts and will be further supported by the study of the gifts from the perspective of animal instincts. This body of evidence in turn offers support for Lonergan's interpretation of cooperative grace.

⁷⁵ His studies of the gifts include A. PINSENT, *The Gifts and Fruits*; and A. PINSENT, *Second-Person*.

⁷⁶ A. PINSENT, *Second-Person*, 12.

⁷⁷ A. PINSENT, *The Gifts and Fruits*, 475.

terms the VGBF structure, that is, he treats the virtues, gifts, beatitudes, and fruits together. This suggests, argues Pinsent, “that an interpretation of Aquinas’s virtue ethics is incomplete without taking some account of the gifts, beatitudes, and fruits.”⁷⁸ Third, the acquired and infused virtues are often distinguished by their respective matter, or by a difference in degree or proportion (as though the infused virtues are simply “higher” or “stronger” versions of their acquired counterparts), but, the infused and acquired virtues are distinguished according to the rule by which they are measured, as outlined in the previous considerations of the standard and rival two modes accounts. This means that there is a difference in species or kind between the acquired and infused virtues.⁷⁹

Because the acquired and infused virtues differ in species, metaphors of height are misleading: such a metaphor “makes it natural to think of the two categories of virtues, acquired and infused, as being proportionally equivalent.”⁸⁰ This is the shortcoming of John of St. Thomas’s well-known ship metaphor: he compares the laborious rowing of oarsmen to the acquired and infused virtues and the breeze in the sails to the gifts of the Holy Spirit.⁸¹ The problematic implication “is that the work of human zeal and industry and gift-based movement are different in degree not in kind.”⁸² Moreover, this vision follows the standard two modes account’s division of human action where the acquired and infused virtues both fall under the rule of human reason and the gifts operate at a higher level under the rule of divine reason.

In place of the classic ship metaphor, Pinsent suggests that we turn to metaphors for the gifts that have two features: sight and interpersonal or second–personal relationship. Looking at Aquinas’s treatment of the gifts, Pinsent observes several features: the gifts appear to enable a kind of immediate understanding, a non–discursive apprehension or judgment; and they do so because the believer is in union with God. For example, the gift of knowledge is described as a participated likeness of God’s knowledge, which is non-discursive; God makes sure judgments through simple intuition.⁸³ And some of the vices opposed to the

⁷⁸ A. PINSENT, *Second-Person*, 24.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, 14–17.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, 11.

⁸¹ JOHN OF ST. THOMAS, *Gifts*, 77, n. 29.

⁸² A. PINSENT, *Second-Person*, 36. In pp. 36–37 Pinsent delineates other issues with the ship metaphor. He does acknowledge that the metaphor is effective in that the blowing of the breeze does not override human industry but works with it; however, he ultimately concludes that the shortcomings of the metaphor outweigh this positive feature. In particular, he notes that, according to the metaphor, the ship propelled forward by the oars without the assistance of the wind is not only pursuing the same end as the ship propelled by the wind but is *capable* of pursuing that same end, albeit with varying degrees of effort.

⁸³ *ST* II-II q. 9, a. 1, ad 1.

gifts are described as a “blindness” or a “dullness of sense.”⁸⁴ Regarding the interpersonal character of the gifts, Aquinas states that wisdom is more excellent than its acquired counterpart because it “attains to God more intimately by a kind of union of the soul with Him.”⁸⁵ In other words, the gift is set apart from the acquired virtue because it flows from relationship with God. Considering these characteristics of the gifts, Pinsent concludes that the activity of the gifts can be understood as an appropriation or sharing of God’s stance towards an object through an intimate union with Him.⁸⁶

In this vein, Pinsent puts forth the metaphor of joint attention from the field of social cognition.⁸⁷ In basic terms, joint attention is the idea that the experience of looking at an object alone (a painting, for example), is qualitatively different than looking at the object with someone you know. Brandom Dahm offers the helpful example of bringing a non-Catholic friend to Mass: “I am now aware of the liturgy and homily through their beliefs, concerns, histories, and sensitivities in a way I’m normally not. I share a stance with them: I see the Mass through their eyes.”⁸⁸ For persons with autism, joint attention does not come naturally: they are described as being unaffected by those around them; autistic children do not intuitively look when their mother points at something.⁸⁹ This, says Pinsent, describes the human person without the gifts of the Holy Spirit; we lack the disposition (the habit of the gifts) to be affected or well-moved by God (in the *instinctus Spiritus Sancti*). The gifts, born of our union with God through charity, enable us to be sweetly moved by God and to begin to appropriate his stance towards reality.⁹⁰

5. *Animal instincts and the gifts*

In addition to and in line with the above perspectives, I propose reading Thomas’s treatment of the gifts of the Holy Spirit through the lens of animal instincts.⁹¹ Choosing this category of instincts might seem vain or even counterproductive given that Aquinas repeatedly distinguishes the way in which humans are moved

⁸⁴ See *ST* II-II q. 15, aa. 1–4; and q. 46, a. 1.

⁸⁵ *ST* II-II q. 45, a. 4, ad 1.

⁸⁶ A. PINSENT, *Second-Person*, 39–41.

⁸⁷ See *ibidem*, 41–43 and 47–49.

⁸⁸ B. DAHM, *Friendship with the Holy Spirit*, «Pentecost, Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics» (2015) 31–32.

⁸⁹ A. PINSENT, *Second-Person*, 43–47.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, 47–50.

⁹¹ For my full treatment of the subject, see E. REICHERT, *Divine Optics: The Gifts of the Holy Spirit and their Role in Practical Reason in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, SThD diss., The Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, 2021.

to action from the way in which animals are moved. In fact, Pinckaers argues against pursuing this course, fearing that we might think of our activity under the Holy Spirit's instinct as blind and determined if we compare it to the activity of animals.⁹² And yet, in Aquinas's commentary on Romans 8:14 ("whosoever are led by the Spirit"), he explicitly draws a parallel between the manner in which a person is led by the Spirit and the way in which animals are moved by instinct.⁹³ Perplexing as it may seem at first glance, Aquinas points us to animal instincts to explain this instinct of the Holy Spirit; this in turn points us to the study of Aquinas's understanding of the estimative power, the faculty by which animals operate under instinct.

Like the five senses and the common sense, the estimative power is a faculty of sensitive apprehension. The former powers take in "the raw sense data," things like color, shape, motion, etc. The apprehensions of these powers are called "forms." The estimative power, as well as its human counterpart the cogitative power, apprehends what are called "intentions," not to be confused with those "intentions" we speak of when we are referring to motives of action.⁹⁴ These intentions are apprehensions that transcend the raw sense data gathered by the five senses; they are interpretations of it: Instead of seeing a grey, rectangular moving thing, through the cogitative power I apprehend a "wolf." Through the estimative power the sheep apprehends a "threat." These apprehensions are arrived at non-discursively: we don't reason to them; we just "see" them.⁹⁵

Both the estimative and the cogitative powers apprehend intentions, but there are a number of important differences between the two in their operation. While the apprehensions of the cogitative power in the human being are developed over time through learning and experience (and are therefore vulnerable to error), the apprehensions of the estimative power are not learned. This is because the estimative power operates under the motion of instinct. Aquinas ultimately attributes these instinctual apprehensions to the divine intellect, which is why they are always (or almost always) correct and put the animal in right relation to the world around it.⁹⁶

What do these observations about the activity of the estimative power mean for our understanding of the gifts? The apprehension of intentions through

⁹² S. PINCKAERS, *Morality and the Movement*, 390.

⁹³ *In Rom* c. 8, lect. 3, n. 635. Aquinas repeatedly references Rom 8:14 in his explanation of the activity of the gifts. See, for example, in the treatise on the gifts, *ST* I-II q. 68, a. 2.

⁹⁴ For Aquinas's summary treatment of the exterior and interior senses, see *ST* I q. 78, aa. 3–4.

⁹⁵ See *In De anima* II c. 13, 183–190. See also R. PASNAU, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature: A Philosophical Study of Summa theologiae Ia 75–89*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, 274.

⁹⁶ See *ST* I-II q. 40, a. 3, corpus and ad 1.

the estimative and cogitative powers can be described as a “seeing as” or “seeing according to an interpretation.”⁹⁷ The cogitative power apprehends intentions according to the personality, qualities, or habits of the person perceiving the object. The estimative power apprehends intentions according to the instincts of the animal. The gifts too are an interpretative or subjective seeing, but they are not apprehensions according to the personality of the person nor according to animal instincts; rather, they are apprehensions according to the instinct of the Holy Spirit himself. Because the gifts are akin to the estimative and cogitative powers, because they enable the apprehension of intentions, they enable us to “see as”; and because they are the gifts of the *Holy Spirit*, that is, because they dispose us to his own instinct, they enable us to “see as” the Holy Spirit sees or *see as God sees*.⁹⁸ And like the operation of instinct in animals, these divine instincts enable us to perceive things correctly in a way that orders us to our proper end. They put us in right relation to the world around us (visible and invisible).

These conclusions about the activity of the gifts are consistent with the logic behind Aquinas’s oft-cited claim that “as a man is, so the end appears to him”: at baptism we become partakers of the divine nature and thus we fittingly begin to see as a Divine Person sees.⁹⁹ With the qualitative change in our person comes

⁹⁷ Robert Pasnau, borrowing Wittgenstein’s terminology, describes the apprehension of intentions as “seeing as”: *Aquinas on Human Nature*, 276–277.

⁹⁸ In her earlier work, McKay Knobel describes the gifts as enabling the believer to “see in the light of grace” (*Infused and Acquired Virtues*, 38). She later argues that the metaphor of sight is “inadequate” because the gifts also affect our appetites (*Aquinas and the Infused Moral Virtues*, 73–74). McKay Knobel is right to insist on the affective character of the gifts: they perfect not only the intellectual powers but also the appetitive powers; moreover, Aquinas repeatedly speaks of the gifts igniting and directing the passions in his biblical commentaries. I argue that the metaphor of sight is nevertheless fitting. A passion is a “movement of the sensitive appetite *when we imagine good or evil*” (*ST I-II q. 22, a. 3, s.c.*, emphasis added); this means that behind every passion there is a perception. It is one’s perception (the apprehension or judgment of the cogitative power) that prompts and specifies the passions. A change in perception, then, results in a change in passion. If the Holy Spirit is to have an effect on our passions, it is fitting that this be preceded by a change in perception or vision, even if this change is undetectable to the believer. Most perceptions that prompt passions are unconscious to the person at the moment of experiencing the passion (though in many cases these perceptions can be articulated upon reflection); this is why Aquinas describes the judgments of the cogitative power as a “seeing” and as immediate; see *In De anima* II c. 13, 183–190.

⁹⁹ See, for example, *ST I q. 83, a. 1, arg. 5* and *ad 5*. This passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics* is often cited in the context of the passions and virtuous habits, but Aquinas also conceives it more broadly: the quality of man that shapes his perception of the good depends on natural dispositions as well as acquired dispositions, namely the virtues, but also on graced dispositions, namely the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In fact, Aquinas explicitly references this passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics* in two of his biblical commentaries that concern the activity of the gifts: 1 Corinthians 2 (see c. 2, lect. 3, n. 113) and Romans 8 (see c. 8, lect. 1, n. 616).

an altered perception of the good. The outpouring of grace at baptism gives us the ability—albeit very limited—to see as God sees, which gradually increases with the growth of charity and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The comparison of the estimative power to the gifts also corroborates and illuminates other aspects of the gifts: like the estimative power, the gifts concern judgments of particulars and enable correct judgments thereof;¹⁰⁰ the estimative and cogitative powers prompt and specify the passions, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit ignite and direct the passions;¹⁰¹ and, finally, Aquinas speaks of the gifts in terms of sense language, as though the gifts constitute a spiritual sense, which, like the estimative and cogitative powers, constitute a “higher sense” that enables the believer to transcend or see beyond the raw sense data before her.¹⁰²

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

As evidenced in the preceding sections, there is considerable convergence among the authors attempting to delineate the place of the gifts in the moral life and their role in practical reason. Though each author approaches the gifts from a different angle or perspective, certain common threads emerge: The gifts assist reason in deliberating about concrete actions, because reason, even when formed by the theological virtues, is incapable of rendering these new supernatural principles specific without the aid of the *instinctus Spiritus Sancti*; that is, reason must be

¹⁰⁰ Both the estimative and cogitative powers facilitate judgments of particulars. In the operation of practical reason, the cogitative power is necessary in the specification of the minor premise in the practical syllogism. To move from a universal premise like “It is good to honor one’s parents,” the cogitative power is necessary in apprehending that “I am a daughter” and “*this act* here and now is honorable to my parents.” This offers further evidence for the conclusions of McKay Knobel, Noriega, and Meinert outlined above that the gifts of the Holy Spirit operate at the moment of choosing a concrete means to an end.

¹⁰¹ The estimative power specifies only the irascible passions; the cogitative power specifies all the passions, at least those that are psychosomatic and not merely corporeal. See D. D. DE HAAN, *Moral Perception and the Function of the Vis Cogitativa in Thomas Aquinas’s Doctrine of Antecedent and Consequent Passions*, «Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale» 25 (2014) 318–320. In his treatment of the gifts in the *Secunda pars*, Aquinas makes it clear that the gifts perfect not only the intellectual powers but also the appetitive faculties. And in his biblical commentaries, Aquinas consistently points to the affective dimension of the gifts. See, for example, *In Rom* c. 8, lect. 1, n. 602, and *In Gal* c. 5, lect. 4, n. 308.

¹⁰² This is a consistent characteristic of Aquinas’s description of the gifts’ activity in the biblical commentaries. He states that those who are led by the Spirit “have a right sense in spiritual matters” (*In Rom* c. 8, lect. 1, n. 616). He describes folly and fatuity, which are opposed to the gift of wisdom, as follows: “folly implies apathy in the heart and dullness in the senses, while fatuity denotes entire privation of the spiritual sense” (*ST* II-II q. 46, a. 1). Wisdom, then, in overcoming folly, must give the believer a keen spiritual sense.

aided by the gifts in order to choose a particular good or concrete virtuous action ordered to the supernatural end. The gifts are not separate from or ulterior to the infused moral virtues; rather, they operate in tandem. The gifts as habits enable cooperative activity: through the gifts the believer is disposed to be well moved by the instinct of the Holy Spirit, and through the infused virtues the believer is disposed to be well moved by his or her own reason. The cooperation of the infused virtues and gifts, then, guarantees the cooperation of the human and the divine. And this cooperative activity of the virtues and gifts, of the human and the divine—which must always be thought of in interpersonal terms—gives the believer the capacity to see as God sees, and by this vision freely order his or her thoughts, passions, and actions to God.

The works outlined in these pages are valuable contributions to the recovery and further development of Thomas's mature thought on the gifts; yet, there looms a broader question: Did St. Thomas get it right? Does his understanding of the gifts accurately represent graced activity in the Christian moral life? While more recent Magisterial documents on the Holy Spirit have chosen not "to favor any particular solution of questions which are still open,"¹⁰³ they certainly portray the Holy Spirit as active in all the faithful and not just those who are far advanced in the spiritual life.¹⁰⁴ Is this specifically the activity of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, or is it to be attributed to the Holy Spirit in a more general way, reserving the activity of the gifts to particular persons or occasions? The Second Vatican Council called for a renewal in moral theology that would "shed light on the loftiness of the calling of the faithful in Christ and the obligation that is theirs of bearing fruit in charity for the life of the world."¹⁰⁵ And Paul VI proclaimed that "the Christology and particularly the ecclesiology of the Council must be succeeded by a new study of and devotion to the Holy Spirit, precisely as the indispensable complement to the teaching of the Council."¹⁰⁶ A return to St. Thomas's mature

¹⁰³ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Dominum et vivificantem*, 18-05-1986, n. 2.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, LEO XIII, Encyclical Letter *Divinum illud munus*, 09-05-1897, esp. nn. 7–9. Although Pope Leo XIII speaks of gifts of the Holy Spirit being excited in our minds and hearts "from time to time," he also states that "without these there is no beginning of a good life, no progress, no arriving at eternal salvation" (n. 9); in other words, he conceives them as active from beginning to end. So too Pius XII states that "not even the smallest act conducive to salvation can be performed except in the Holy Spirit" (PIUS XII, Encyclical Letter *Mystici corporis*, 29-06-1943, n. 68). Likewise, John Paul II's *Dominum et vivificantem* makes no distinction between a life of grace for the "average" faithful and another for those who operate under the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Without specifying in detail what is specific to the activity of the gifts (as distinct from the activity of the Holy Spirit in general), he does quote St. Bonaventure saying that "all good things are produced" by virtue of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (n. 42).

¹⁰⁵ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree *Optatam totius*, 28-10-1965, n. 16.

¹⁰⁶ PAUL VI, *General Audience*, 06-06-1973.

doctrine of the gifts—as well as the works of those authors attempting to unpack and further develop Thomas’s doctrine—is a promising avenue in this endeavor.

ABSTRACT

This study offers a *status quaestionis* of recent contributions to Thomas Aquinas’s understanding of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This article first outlines two schools of thought or interpretations of Aquinas’s account of the gifts in relation to the acquired and infused virtues: the “standard two modes account” represented by John of St. Thomas and the “rival two modes account” represented by Angela McKay Knobel. The latter account, which arguably represents Aquinas’s mature thought, envisions the gifts of the Holy Spirit as a necessary element in all meritorious activity and therefore integral to the Christian moral life. In this vein, a handful of contemporary authors have attempted to better delineate the role of the gifts within the dynamic of practical reason. The principal contributions of these authors—Angela McKay Knobel, José Noriega, John M. Meinert, and Andrew Pinsent—are outlined.