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THE UNITY OF THE VIRTUES IN ABELARD'S *DIALOGUS*

Scott Davis

That a thinker discusses a topic is often noted, while how he discusses that topic is left insufficiently clear. A case in point is Peter Abelard, "who," D. E. Luscombe has claimed, "first in his time attempted a serious philosophical discussion of natural virtue and who first really put the human virtues upon the theological map."¹ Despite continuing interest in Abelard, and his ethics in particular, little has been done to illuminate what he takes a virtue to be, how the virtues are interrelated, and how Abelard's account compares to other treatments of the virtues. This paper attempts, if only in a preliminary fashion, to answer some of these questions, and to suggest what implications follow from those answers.

Only recently has extensive work on the details of medieval moral thought begun to be carried out by philosophers working in the analytic tradition. Thus we are greatly indebted to, and in some sense at the mercy of, scholars of the past, and one name holds a recognizable preeminence. That, of course, is Odon Lottin. Consequently, when Lottin, discussing the definition of the virtues in the 12th century, suggests that "Hugh of St. Victor marks the beginnings of a theological current, of Augustinian inspiration; [while] Peter Abelard inaugurates a more philosophical current, of Aristotelian origin,"² it bears the authority of an immense scholarship. If our concern is with the detailed workings of the virtues, however, it is not clear that this claim can be sustained. I propose to demonstrate this by contrasting Aristotle's account of the unity of the virtues with that found in Abelard's *Dialogue*.

What, for Aristotle, is a virtue? In the broadest sense, a virtue is an acquired disposition, which determines, in whole or in part, the character of an individual. It is not, of course, just any old disposition, but the sort which renders the individual in question good. Furthermore, possession of the virtue does not make that individual good in some merely adventitious way, as, for example, the way a dead swordfish might serve as a good weapon for repelling a mugger. Rather, a virtue renders the individual who possesses it good after its kind.

Aristotle is not primarily interested in the many and various virtues of all species, but in the virtues of human character, and the ways in which they contribute to living the good life. In particular, Aristotle asks us to reflect on the conditions that would have to be satisfied for us to say that a person deserved our praise for the life he had created, and the acts which constituted it. One criterion, plainly, is that the life be of a certain quality, but this is not sufficient. In a world of contingency and travail it may happen that I benefit myself and others in spite of my own lack of ability, or even in spite of my downright nastiness. But we do not dispense praise for dumb luck, much less thwarted meanness, and so Aristotle suggests that it is not enough that the acts which make up a life be of the right sort:

Rather, the agent must also be in the right state when he does them. First, he must know [that he is doing virtuous actions]; second, he must decide on them,

and decide on them for themselves; and third, he must also do them from a firm and unchanging state.³

These conditions are not different in essence from those to be met by any craftsman or skilled performer, and virtue, for Aristotle, is a craft. The person of virtue does not merely live the good life, he creates it, and those skills needed to shape that life are what we call the cardinal virtues.

What does it mean to think of virtue as a craft? I have already noted that it is acquired, rather than inborn, and this acquisition is a matter of training and practice. Less frequently recognized is the fact that when a virtue, or any other skill, is acquired, the agent acquires the ability to perceive what is congruent with that virtue, and thus what is needed for the success of a given enterprise. This is the case for any complex practice, but perhaps an example will help. Consider a major league third baseman. No matter how well he has learned the received wisdom about playing his position, it will do him no good at all unless, when the ball is hit, he anticipates, and reacts, and sizes up the situation. So, even if he gets to the ball there may be only a split second in which to decide whether or not to get the out at first or try for the double play. Though it may often look to be the case, this is not simply a matter of instinct, for at any given point the sequence of actions to be pursued is underdetermined and thus requires some act directed to one among a number of competing possibilities. And while being a great ballplayer typically requires great natural ability, the great plays display not the talent alone, but that natural ability perfected by virtue.

We need and acquire the virtues we do because of the way the world is. Humans are a natural kind, with specific physical, psychological and social requirements. To achieve and sustain these is to flourish after our kind.⁴ As we acquire the virtues, and as we grow more perfect in them through continual practice, the more we come to see the world aright. Given the proper training, and subjected to regular practice, the virtues shape our perceptions and dispose us to do what is in accord with them. An instance of this that is particularly illuminating occurs in Aristotle's discussion of temperance. This virtue he distinguishes from the similar trait of continence:

. . . the continent and the temperate person are both the sort to do nothing in conflict with reason because of bodily pleasures; but the continent person has base appetites, and the temperate person lacks them. The temperate person is the sort to find nothing pleasant that conflicts with reason; the continent is the sort to find such things pleasant but not to be led by them.⁵

The temperate person has internalized a genuine virtue, which has an epistemic aspect that enables him to see what is appropriate, so that when given the option of having another liter of wine, he simply is not interested, not because he is insensible to wine, or does not enjoy it, but simply because another liter is contrary to right reason. The continent person, on the other hand, finds himself in an intermediate position. He does not have the virtue, and so is tempted by the proffered wine, but at the same time he is aware that drinking any more is a bad idea. Were he in full possession of the virtue, reason and perception would be one, in no need of further guidance. Furthermore, his reactions to

stimuli would reflect that fact. But as it stands he is not a fully cognizant moral agent; he requires some external source of practical knowledge.

Virtues not only incline an agent to certain acts, but make it possible for the agent to recognize and initiate the act as well. How then, on this account, are the virtues unified? It would seem that for Aristotle the virtues are unified because of the way the world is. Possessing one virtue makes it possible to recognize what is fitting to another, which in turn makes it possible to practice the virtues and advance yet further; and the way the world is determines what is there to be seen. Aristotle contrasts his view with that of Socrates by noting that his predecessor held the virtues simply to be forms of knowledge, while he views them as informed, or united by practical knowledge.⁶ Thus, if I have made some progress in courage I will be able to see what is genuinely threatening, what must be done, and how I am best suited to doing it. But this will, in turn, enable me to see more of the world aright, as a person of prudence, which in its turn will lead to further fluency with temperance and justice. Conversely, a poor grounding in one virtue will undermine the stability of the others. Intemperance will distort judgement so that what courage requires will become obscure. Without courage it is hard, if not impossible to discern and to do what is just, and so on. The virtues are rather like a spiral, and to move up or down on one involves a concomittant movement with respect to the others.

For these reasons it makes little sense, in the Aristotelian context, to talk of, say, a courageous thief. The thief may be daring, or clever, but this should not be confused with virtue. Cleverness itself is a capacity "which is such as to be able to do the actions that tend to promote whatever goal is assumed and to achieve it."⁷ But if the goal is improper, then the cleverness is used basely. The thief has undertaken a course of action that is contrary to justice and right reason, and it will bring him, in due course, into conflict with the world he lives in. The courageous person, on the other hand, uses his cleverness and daring to overcome conflicts in his world and return the situation to a state of harmony.⁸ Much the same holds for the rest of the virtues, at least on the Aristotelian account. The person whose character is such that he deliberates well and typically reaches true conclusions about the goods to be pursued, and the manner of their pursuing is a person of practical wisdom, or prudence. Prudence informs and unifies the other virtues in the sense that being able to see what needs to be done precedes doing it, in principle if not in action.⁹

If we turn to Peter Abelard's understanding of the matter, how does it compare? Perhaps what led Lottin to place him in the Aristotelian tradition is the definition given of virtue by the philosopher in Abelard's *Dialogue*:

'Virtue,' they say 'is an excellent habit of the mind . . . we call 'habit' what Aristotle distinguished in the *Categories* when he locates the first species of quality in habit and disposition. For habit is a quality of a thing not present in it by nature but acquired by striving and deliberation, and which is difficult to alter.¹⁰

This certainly gives the appearance of Aristotelianism, but such a judgement would be premature. The philosopher has already noted, with the approval of the Christian, that the true sages despise earthly pleasures, and seek an inner tranquility of the soul as the highest good of life.¹¹ What the virtues do is render their possessors "precipui carnis domitores"

and thus enable them to escape the temptations of sin. This, combined with the fact that the true philosophers are "terrene felicitatis maximi contemptores," leads to inner tranquility because they are neither burdened by the guilt of their own actions, nor troubled by the evils that befall them. The virtues seem to be ways of controlling and distancing rather than crafting, and on this the Christian and the philosopher do not disagree. Consequently, when summing up the discussion so far, the Christian is made to say that both of them, "locate the supreme good of man or, as was said, the goal of the good, in the blessedness of a future life, and the route thereto in the virtues."¹² Whatever disagreement exists between them stems from conflicting understandings of the nature of the *summum bonum*, not the function of the virtues.

Determining the supreme good rests in determining what law should be followed. The philosopher is an adherent of the natural law, which, as obtaining from creation, claims the greatest antiquity.¹³ The other options are either the Old Law of the Jews, or the New Law of the Christians. What role does law play in the theory of the virtues? The particular law to which you adhere determines what acts are appropriate for you. Thus the law serves as the source of practical knowledge. In the case of natural law this knowledge stems from the dictates of reason, which is permanently implanted in all.¹⁴ It is the role of prudence to heed the law, and to pass on the dictates of that law to the agent. This transforms the nature of prudence, so that

. . . prudence as well as faith or hope, which are common to evil men as well as to good men, are not to be called virtues as much as they are to be said to offer a certain guidance or inducement to the virtues.¹⁵

While the Aristotelian virtue is accounted for by a two-tiered analysis, in which act creates disposition, which inclines to acts that further clarify and reinforce the disposition, Abelard's understanding has three levels. At the first level is the law, which is the source of practical knowledge, indicating the acts to be performed. The act itself is indifferent, and determining appropriate praise or blame depends on determining the intention with which it is done, thus treating a three level analysis of moral agency. Consequently, while virtue and vice are intrinsically good and bad, respectively, other things

are so accidentally and through something else; for example, our actions, although they are indifferent in themselves, nevertheless are said to be good or evil on account of the intention from which they proceed. Consequently, when the same thing is done by different people or by the same person at different times, the same action is, nevertheless, often said to be good and evil because of the difference of intentions.¹⁶

How, on this account, do we construe the virtues? They can not relate directly to the acts, so they must relate to the intentions. Indeed, they are not simply habits, but habits of the soul¹⁷ which serve to maintain the correct intention, as dictated by the relevant law. Therefore, they are not so much crafts, in the Aristotelian sense, as they are disciplines. With knowledge rooted in the law, the role of virtue must be either to restrain or recall the

soul to its appointed place. This makes it even clearer why prudence is not a virtue: "discretio tam bonorum scilicet quam malorum prudentia dicitur."¹⁸

The knowledge exists independently of the intention. The virtue, for example temperance, counteracts inclinations at odds with the law, allowing the soul to sustain the correct intention. Consequently, in discussing the parts of temperance, Abelard uses the following language:

Frugality is the bridle on excess by which, for instance, we spurn the possession of that which is beyond what is necessary. Likewise, meekness is the bridle on anger, chastity on lust, and sobriety on gluttony.¹⁹

The epistemological component having been displaced into the law, virtue is a "bridle" that preserves the soul from consenting to the promptings of the flesh. Rather than enabling the agent to perceive the correct way of proceeding, they bring the tempted soul back in line, feet planted firmly on a well marked road. To put it slightly differently, Abelard's temperance is Aristotle's continence.²⁰

At this point two related questions present themselves. First, does Abelard's understanding of the virtues make Aristotle's sort of temperance attainable at all? Second, what sort of unity, if any, obtains among the virtues? The answer to the first question rests on the answer to the second.

By themselves, the cardinal virtues have no inherent unity for Abelard. Recall that prudence has already been unseated, and may be possessed either by the good person or the bad. This, of course, makes perfectly good sense if practical reason is seen as directed primarily by law; in learning the law I grasp that taking bribes is illegal, and also that Merv's offer constitutes a bribe, but whether or not I am disposed to take it remains up in the air. I could, it would seem, be prudent without being just at all.

The situation is further complicated, however, by the second level emphasis on intention, together with the third level neutrality of the acts themselves. It suffices for attributing justice to me if I will that justice be done, even if I do not actually succeed in carrying it out. Thus,

whoever is steadfast in this will which we have spoken of so that he cannot be easily moved from it is accomplished in the virtue of justice even if he has not yet been perfected in fortitude and temperance.²¹

I can be just, for Abelard, by steadfastly willing what I have independently learned to be demanded by the law. Fortitude and temperance are needed not for willing what is just, but for carrying out the act. Once again, Abelard speaks not the language of perception and craft, but uses the vocabulary of discipline. Fortitude is the "clippeum adversus timorem" and temperance the "frenum adversus cupiditatem" which the soul takes up "so that, strengthened by these virtues, we are able to carry out in deed, as far as in us lies, what we already will through the virtue of justice."²²

Contrast this with the Aristotelian account. If we think of virtue as a craft, what are the conditions for ascribing it to an individual? First, the agent has to have succeeded in producing acceptable artifacts. We need not require them to be perfect—what, after all,

would it mean to make a perfect, as opposed to an excellent pot—but they do have to achieve a certain standard. Furthermore, they must be produced on a fairly regular basis. Someone who produces one great pot and never again takes clay in hand is not necessarily a craftsman. His achievement might simply be a fluke. And if, on balance, the majority of attempts fail, we absolutely refuse to call the person a craftsman, despite the one great pot.

Much the same holds for justice. An act may have laudable consequences, but unless I characteristically do such acts, knowingly and for themselves, I am not properly said to be just. And if all my attempts at justice go awry, it might be reasonable to say I am kind-hearted, but I am a bungler, not someone possessed of the virtue of justice—not, at least, for Aristotle.

With Abelard the case is not quite clear. Since he diminishes the importance of the completed act itself, it is difficult to understand what role it plays in our judgements. If the agent is just by virtue of willing what the law requires, and if the successful doing of the deed does not add to the praise or blame of the agent, what difference does it make? At points he suggests that they are done out of concern for the common good, but this idea remains undeveloped. The more fundamental view seems to be that we will them because they are dictated by the law.

I have argued, so far, that Abelard's vision of the virtues as disciplines does not possess unity in the Aristotelian sense. While it is true that prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude will all be present in the person whose goodness is perfect, they are not mutually interdependent. Indeed, since fortitude "is the virtue which makes us ready to undertake dangers or to endure hardships when the situation calls for it,"²³ it is perfectly plausible to attribute fortitude to a thief. He is vicious in willing, and undertaking, what is contrary to the law, but he is virtuous in his difficult and dangerous undertaking.

In fact, when the philosopher puts forward Cicero's doctrine of the unity of the virtues, the Christian strongly rejects it as "patentissime falsitatis insaniam."²⁴ It is patently absurd, he thinks, because it seems to imply that virtue is either all or nothing, and that people are either equally wicked or equally righteous. What might lead someone to think this? Here again, the contrast with Aristotle is instructive. On the peripatetic account the virtues are all present because they are all required to discern the nature of things, and thus to complete any activity successfully. But there is no external standard against which the act is measured, and so the Aristotelian has no difficulty granting that an act is just, while at the same time saying that it might have been better, or that another act might equally well have served. But if you think, as Abelard (and indeed as Cicero) seems to, that acts are mandated by an external law, and that to deviate from the law is *ipso facto* to produce a flawed action, then the steps to Cicero's paradox are fairly clear. True virtue measures up to the ideal; any deviation from the norm is a defect; to have a defect in one of the virtues is not to have that virtue; not to have a particular virtue renders someone defective in general. Something like this underlies Cicero's distinction later in *De officiis* between "true" morality and "everyday" morality.²⁵ The true is the perfect, which is seldom, if ever, attained. We must content ourselves with the knowledge that we are never, in this life, genuinely wise or virtuous.

I have, of course, just hinted at the fundamental source of the contrast between Aristotle and Abelard. Despite the superficially Aristotelian basis of Abelard's account, which misleads Lottin, the doctrine of the virtues which underlies his ethics is stoic. This is not

the place to mount a detailed analysis of the theory of the virtues in Latin stoicism,²⁶ but it will be useful to distinguish three aspects of stoic virtue that are operative in Abelard's account.

First, the stoic understanding of nature sees man as a soul in a body, rather than an embodied self-mover. This is important because, while the Aristotelian asks what he must do to thrive, the stoic already knows the answer: achieve the detachment necessary to attain the tranquility of the sage. When pondering the best way to go about their respective tasks the Aristotelian must consider his own particular upbringing, and the talents and abilities that he is best suited to actualize. For the stoic, on the other hand, vocational choices are by and large at the mercy of fortune, and a proper detachment will lead to substantial indifference to the vicissitudes of life in any event. What is necessary is to discipline the soul and the body to their allotted tasks, which are determined by the law of nature:

But since the most powerful influence in the choice of a career is exerted by Nature, and the next most powerful by fortune, we must, of course, take account of them both in deciding upon our calling in life; but, of the two, Nature claims the more attention.²⁷

It is the law of nature which gives us both our general and our particular character, and which, furthermore, establishes what is appropriate, virtuous and upright. How this is the case is unclear, but need not detain us here. Suffice it that nature dictates what is "honestum" or upright; nature establishes some sorts of acts as duties; and nature, along with fortune, makes it possible for us to cultivate the virtues necessary to doing our duties, and thus living the upright life. This extends into details, as for example the cultivating of the voice, in which

. . . we should aim to secure two properties for it: that it be clear, and that it be musical. We must, of course, look to Nature for both gifts. But distinctness may be improved by practice; the musical qualities, by imitating those who speak with smooth and articulate enunciation.²⁸

I cite this for two reasons. First, cultivating the voice is not simply a pleasant avocation, but a duty, if not perhaps the most pressing. Second, we know it to be a duty through our knowledge of nature and its law. From the study of the law of nature we learn all our duties, and their hierarchical relations.²⁹

It would be nice to stop here, concluding that Abelard is unable to generate a doctrine of the unity of the virtues as a result of adopting an essentially stoic theory, while refusing to countenance the possibility of perfection. This, unfortunately, would be only half of the story. For the Ciceronian account offered by the philosopher is augmented by the Christian. And the expansion is not just generically Christian, but specifically Augustinian.

Having rejected the unity of the cardinal virtues, the Christian retreats, and acknowledges that "if virtue is understood in the proper sense as that which obtains merit with God, charity alone must be called virtue."³⁰ This is in response to the philosopher's point that "your own great philosopher, Augustine, affirms, charity includes all the virtues

under one name."³¹ Augustine makes this point at a number of places, but one of the most interesting, for our purposes, occurs in *On the Morals of the Catholic Church*, where he writes:

If virtue leads to the blessed life, I affirm that virtue to be nothing other than the supreme love of God. For as I understand it, the fourfold distinction of the virtues stems from the affects of love itself . . . thus temperance is love giving itself wholly to that which is loved; fortitude, love tolerating with ease all things for the sake of that which is loved; justice, love serving only the beloved, and for that reason ruling properly; prudence, love safely distinguishing those things by which it may flourish from those by which it is impeded.³²

Note four things about Augustine's account of love as the source of virtue. Cicero's impersonal law of nature has been replaced by the divine will, which issues its commands to a soul lovingly disposed to do them. This love then becomes both the source and motive for virtue, and the virtues are not freestanding duties, but modes of service. Finally, the end is no longer a detachment that achieves tranquility in the face of earthly travail, but a supernatural end in which this love finds its fulfillment.³³

It is here, finally, that Abelard's Christian admits the possibility of the unity of the virtues. If virtue is that activity that acquires merit from God, then of course it must stem from love. And in this sense, anyone who has this love has all the virtues, as it were, *in nuce*. This has two consequences. On the one hand, it makes it possible to avoid the problem of the courageous thief. Since his courage is not directed by this love it does not obtain merit from God, and is not virtue properly so called. On the other hand, it allows us to explain why we do not attribute all virtues equally, even to those who do possess this love. For "just as all who have charity are not equally inflamed by it, nor do all prudent people have equal understanding, so all just persons are not equally just or all equally strong or temperate."³⁴ Distinctions of virtue reside not in the possession of one craft as opposed to another, nor the presence of one discipline without some other, but in a qualitative difference in ardor with which the soul pursues one form of loving service as opposed to another.

It is also here that we discover the possibility of attaining temperance in something like the Aristotelian sense. If the soul is inflamed with love, it loses the need for virtue as discipline and internalizes the law. My desire to serve is so great that I need no prompting; I am, in short, behaving like a saint. I say only temperance in something *like* the Aristotelian sense because the saint has not developed a perceptual ability that is part of the epistemic component of the virtue, but rather internalized a law received from elsewhere. So, when virtue is interpreted in the stoic *cum* Augustinian sense it is still not a craft. The epistemic component is located not in possession of the virtue itself, but in the law, be it natural or divine. This, of course, makes the agent dependent upon an external source of knowledge, which means that no matter how diligently it attempts to actualize its abilities, it cannot attain virtue if it is in error about the law. Though Abelard does not discuss it here, he is, logically speaking, as committed as Augustine to the view that pagan virtues are vices, in the sense that what is done in accord with them does not merit praise.³⁵

What are the practical consequences of adopting this account of the virtues rather than the Aristotelian one? There is, first, the distancing of the intention from the action. There is, furthermore, a divorcing of habitual activity from ascriptions of virtues; the more distant the action from the intention, the less it can play a role in shaping the intentions and the dispositions to which those intentions give rise. To put this another way: For Aristotle the intentions are dependent on the dispositions, which are dependent on the actions that create them; for Abelard, and the Augustinian tradition in general, the actions are dependent on the dispositions, which are in turn dependent on the desire to serve God lovingly. The character of an agent is not something which is shaped by interaction with the world, and which manifests itself in the life a person shapes for himself. It is, rather, a function of a relation to God, and the life an agent desires and anticipates for himself.

Why, finally, is it of any interest to determine the details of medieval moral thought, about the virtues or anything else? There is, of course, the historical interest in discovering relations amongst traditions, and in getting the history right: after all, if this analysis is sound Abelard is, pace Lottin, solidly situated in the Augustinian tradition. There is also the philosophical task of presenting different options in moral theory and working out their implications. If, for example, the Aristotelian and the Augustinian traditions are different in their structure an attempt to combine them, as in the case of Thomas Aquinas, is fraught with hidden dangers. And finally, to understand the historical and philosophical traditions that have shaped our moral thought may be a necessary precursor to evaluating our options for the future. For while Alasdair MacIntyre, to cite a controversial example, has made interesting and suggestive remarks about Abelard,³⁶ he fails to locate him accurately in the tradition, and this may undermine not only his account of Abelard, but his account of the tradition of virtue in general, and what possibilities it offers for the future. Good ethics may have to wait until we have produced good history. But this, of course, is a subject for another time.

NOTES

¹Peter Abelard, *Ethics*, ed. and trans. D. E. Luscombe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. xxv.

²Odon Lottin, *Psychologie et Morale aux 12me et 13me Sicles* (Louvain: Abbaye du Mont Cesar, 1949), vol. 3, pt. 1, p. 100. I have supplied the translation from the French.

³Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985), 2.4.1105a30-35.

⁴The term 'flourishing' as a translation for Aristotle's *eudaimonia* entered the common parlance from Elizabeth Anscombe's classic "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33 (1958), 1-19. It has been developed particularly fruitfully in John H. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

⁵*Nichomachean Ethics* 7,9, 1151b35-1152a4. The 'continent' person is *enkrates*, while the temperate person is the one who possesses *sophrosune*.

⁶*Nichomachean Ethics* 6,13, 1144b25-30.

⁷*Nichomachean Ethics* 6,12, 1144a15-28.

- ⁸What about the case of the thief who succeeds in living out a pleasant life? Isn't it illusory, and a case of wishful thinking to imagine that the good guys always triumph over the bad. Certainly it would be, but this does not effect Aristotle's point. If the criminal succeeds in avoiding conflict and destruction it is a function of the vagaries of an imperfect world, populated by imperfect societies. There is no guarantee that justice will be served, but Aristotle is concerned with how people might deliberate as to a course of life. It is of the nature of wicked actions to create conflict, and thus their success cannot be predicted. They cannot be proper objects of deliberation.
- ⁹A friendly reader worries that this account of prudence makes the unity of the virtues appear too much like a "taffy-pull." I am sensitive to this objection, but am not completely clear on how better to express the point. It is central to my thesis, and to Aristotle's, that prudence is not a theoretical investigation of human nature (cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 6, 7-9). To this end Aristotle notes that practical wisdom concerns particulars, and is closer to perception (1142a25-30). Furthermore, I want to avoid the typically "stoic" understanding of virtue in which prudence becomes acknowledgement of a practical conclusion deduced from the law of nature. This, as I go on to argue, removes the epistemic component from the act itself, and is radically unaristotelian. As I hope to show elsewhere, much of our confusion about the nature of the virtues stems from the fact that the greatest interpreter of Aristotle's ethics, St. Thomas, is also an inheritor of the tradition in which I situate Abelard. A Thomist account of prudence which avoids most of these difficulties may be found in J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), in particular pp. 23-31.
- ¹⁰*Dialogus inter Philosophum, Judaeum et Christianum*, ed. Rudolph Thomas (Stuttgart: Friedrich Fromann Verlag, 1970), pp. 115-16, ll. 1986-1992: Virtus, inquit, est habitus animi optimus . . . habitum vero hunc dicimus, quem Aristoteles in *Categoriis* distinxit, cum in habitu et dispositione primam qualitatis speciem comprehendit. Est igitur habitus qualitas rei non naturaliter insita, sed studio ac deliberatione conquisita et difficile mobilis. The translation is that of Pierre J. Payer, *Peter Abelard: A Dialogue of a Philosopher with a Jew, and a Christian* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1979), p. 109.
- ¹¹*Dialogus*, p. 99, ll. 1528-1533: Non ut plerique estimant carnalium illecebrarum inhonestum et turpem oblectionem, sed quandum interiorem anime tranquillitatem, qua inter adversa et prospera manet quieta et propriis bonis contenta, dum nulla eam peccati mordeat conscientia. Absit enim, ut philosophi, terrene felicitatis maximi contemptores et precipui carnis domitores, in huius vite turpitudinibus summum bonum constituerent. . . .
- ¹²*Dialogus*, p. 104, ll. 1665-1668: Ecce ad hoc disputatio nostra perducta est, ut summum hominis bonum sive ipsum, ut dictum est, finem boni future vite beatitudinem et, qua illuc pervenitur, viam virtutes ponamus. Translation from Payer, p. 95.
- ¹³*Dialogus*, p. 98, ll. 1511-1518: Sed quia iuxta superioris conductum propositi confundende sunt nostre cum vestris sententiae, ut potiora valeamus eligere, et tu ex antiquitate legis naturalis primum tibi locum vendicasti tuum est, qui priore, ut dicis, lege, hoc est naturali. . . .
- ¹⁴*Dialogus*, p. 124, ll. 2220-2223: Naturale quidem ius est, quod opere complendum esse ipsa, que omnibus naturaliter inest, ratio persuadet et iccirco apud omnes permanet. . . .
- ¹⁵*Dialogus*, p. 118, ll. 2059-2061: Prudentia itaque sicut fides vel spes, que malis eque ut bonis hominibus conveniunt, non tam virtutes dicende sunt quam ducatum quendam vel incitamentum ad virtutes prebere. Translation from Payer, p. 112.
- ¹⁶*Dialogus*, p. 117, ll. 2023-2030: Quedam et enim bona vel mala ex se ipsis proprie et quasi substantialiter dicuntur utpote virtutes ipse vel vitia; quedam vero per accidens et per aliud. Veluti operum nostrorum actiones, cum in se sint indifferentes, ex intentione tamen, ex qua procedunt, bone dicuntur aut male. Unde et sepe, cum idem a diversis agitur vel ab eodem in diversis temporibus, pro diversitate tamen intentionum idem opus bonum dicitur atque malum. Translation from Payer, p. 111.
- ¹⁷*Dialogus*, p. 115, l. 1986: Virtus, inquit, est habitus animi optimus.
- ¹⁸*Dialogus*, p. 117, ll. 2033-2034.
- ¹⁹*Dialogus*, p. 126, ll. 2266-2269: Frugalitas vero est superflue profusionis frenum, per quam vedelicet supra, quam necessarium

est, possidere respuimus. Sic et mansuetudo frenum est ire et castitas luxurie et sobrietas gule. Translation from Payer, p. 121.

²⁰I have developed this point further in a related piece, "The Structure and Function of the Virtues in Augustine's Moral Theology," forthcoming in the *Proceedings of the International Congress of Augustinian Studies*. The contrast of Aristotelian temperance with the Augustinian/Abelardian notion was first developed in my graduate seminar at Columbia University. It owes much to the seminar in general, and to Mr. James Wetzel in particular.

²¹*Dialogus*, p. 119, ll. 2088-2091: Quisquis igitur in hac constans est voluntate, quam diximus, ut videlicet ab ea facile dimoveri non possit, virtute pollet iustitie, etiam si fortitudine et temperantia nondum sit consummatus. Translation from Payer, p. 113.

²²*Dialogus*, p. 120, ll. 2098-2101: Unde adversus timorem fortitudo clipeum, adversus cupiditatem temperantia sumit frenum, ut que scilicet per virtutem iustitie iam volumus, per has etiam roborati, implere potentes simus, quantum in nobis est. Translation from Payer, p. 114.

²³*Dialogus*, p. 120, ll. 2109-2111: Hec est ea virtus, que promptos nos efficit ad suscipienda pericula vel tolerandos labores, prout opportunum est. Translation from Payer, p. 114.

²⁴*Dialogus*, p. 109, ll. 1795-1796.

²⁵*De officiis*, 3,4,17.

²⁶There is some relevant discussion in Davis, *op. cit.* The most recent, and most exhaustive discussion of the influence of stoic thought in Latin antiquity and the early church fathers is now to be found in Marcia L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985). Colish is particularly useful for her summaries, discussions of the secondary literature, and bibliography, though she does not attempt the sort of reconstruction and analysis of the workings of the virtues I am attempting to carry out in this paper.

²⁷*De officiis*, 1,33,121: Ad hanc autem rationem quoniam maximam vim natura habet, fortuna proximam, utriusque omnino habenda ratio est in deligendo genere vite, sed nature magis. Trans. Walter Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913).

²⁸*De officiis*, 1,37,133: in voce autem duo sequamur, ut clara sit, ut suavis, utrumque omnino a natura petendum est, verum alterum exercitatio augebit, alterum imitatio presse loquentium et leniter.

²⁹Most importantly, for Cicero, we learn that our first duty is to the state, and that contemplation and cultivation are lesser vocations, not to be practiced to the detriment of civic service. This last lesson Abelard knows from *De officiis*, of course, but he also knows it from Macrobius's commentary on the "somnium Scipionis." The point is important to keep in mind, for when Abelard cites Plotinus' fourfold division of the virtues at *Dialogus*, ll. 1880-1886, it is not evidence for a neoplatonic account of the virtues, any more than his citation of Aristotle is genuinely peripatetic. The distinction is already imbedded in a thoroughly stoic context.

³⁰*Dialogus*, p. 110, ll. 1824-1826: si proprie virtus intelligatur, que videlicet meritum apud Deum optinet, sola caritas virtus appellanda est. Translation from Payer, p. 102.

³¹*Dialogus*, p. 109, ll. 1804-1806: Omnes quippe virtutes, ut vester ille maximus astruit philosophus Augustinus, uno nomine Karitas comprehendit. Translation from Payer, p. 101.

³²Quod si virtus ad beatam vitam nos ducit, nihil omnino esse virtutem affirmaverim, nisi summum amorem Dei. Namque illud quod quadripartita dicitur virtus, ex ipsius amoris vario quodam affectu, quantum intelligo, dicitur . . . ut temperantia sit amor integrum se prebens ei quod amatur; fortitudo, amor facile tolerans omnia propter quodamatur; iustitia, amor soli amato serviens, et propterea recte dominans; purdencia, amor ea quibus adjuvatur ab eis quibus impeditur, sagaciter seligens. *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin*, vol. 1, ed. B. Roland-Gosselin, 2nd. ed. (Paris: Desclé de Brouwer, 1949), pp.

174-76. I have supplied the translation. Abelard discusses this passage at *Sic et Non*, Q. 137.

³⁷These issues are discussed in more detail in Davis, *op. cit.*, as well as in the following: John Langan, "Augustine on the Unity and the Interconnection of the Virtues," *Harvard Theological Review* 72 (1979), pp. 81-95; Oliver O. Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); *idem.*, "Usus and Fruitio in Augustine. De Doctrina Christiana I," *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 33 (1982), pp. 361-397. I do not of course wish to suggest that Langan or O'Donovan would agree with my analysis.

³⁴*Dialogus*, p. 110, ll. 1828-1831: Sed sicut omnes, qui habent caritatem, non equaliter ea succensi sunt, nec omnes prudentes equaliter intelligunt, ita nec omnes iusti equaliter iusti sunt aut omnes equaliter fortes vel temperantes. Translation from Payer, p. 102.

³⁵Cf. Augustine, *City of God*, 19.25. Abelard's most detailed discussion of this matter comes in his *Commentaria in epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, ed. Eligius Buytaert (Turnholt: Brepols, 1969), but I have not as yet made a careful analysis of the issues there. It seems that pagans can be saved in theory, but only on the condition that they have somehow come to believe, and to love God. But I'm still not sure about this. One of the most acute studies of Abelard in English is Richard E. Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love: A Critical Analysis of the Soteriology of Peter Abailard* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), which throws some light on these topics.

³⁶Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), pp. 168-171.

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